Centro Legal de la Raza focuses on leadership, equity, and access by providing guidance and mentorship to local youth with Youth Law Academy and Diversity Legal Pipeline programs. They create community empowerment by advocating for positive change in local and state governments, creating meaningful dialogue on issues, emphasizing community-based bilingual lawyering, and providing direct legal services for the community.

POSITIONALITY STATEMENT
My high school is located about 15 minutes from the United States-Mexico border. As a result, our school is also nestled around several low-income, largely immigrant communities. My high school’s demographics are mostly people of color, with 70% of my peers and faculty ethnically categorized as Latinx. Our communities are tight-knit, sharing the experience of a border diaspora while actively trying to make strong connections to our cultural roots. While our community ties are strong, the resources and opportunities offered within our schools are lacking. While in the midst of a pandemic, students had to deal with online learning, a shortage of teachers, counselors, and other faculty. We were left with a total of four counselors for a student body of over 2,000 students, which was especially detrimental to juniors and seniors who were preparing to apply to college and other career ventures. Even before the fiascos of the
2019-2020 school year, there wasn’t much emphasis on preparing students for college until late junior year. The majority of our school’s post-graduation expectations were to attend community college, enlist in the U.S. Army, or start working full-time. Resources available on preparing for the SAT, financial aid, and applying to college were sparse and many students had few resources when it came time to apply. If we were unprepared before for the college application process and post-secondary opportunities, these events left us unimaginably worse.

My background as a first-generation student and a daughter of Mexican-American immigrants allow me to see the significance of Youth Law Academy. First-generation students face the pressure of aspiring for professional careers, figuring out what networking is, building a resume, navigating the LSAT, or simply feeling behind when peers seem to hold so much information that is unknown to first-generation students. Youth Law Academy’s meaningful work and contribution to their community is something that I recognize can have a profound impact on youth. While looking back at my experience before Stanford, I know a pipeline could’ve helped me and many of the other first-generation students at my high school. Having gone through many of the issues prospective and current participants of the pipeline have experienced, I knew working at Youth Law Academy would be a rewarding experience.

In order to connect and empathize with Youth Law Academy students, my personal experiences and background are exceedingly important. A current college student can enhance the program’s direction. It’s beneficial to have a team member that can give insight to topics that are important to the current youth and what can get them most engaged. Furthermore, a program that focuses specifically on high school students can benefit from a college student’s knowledge
and experience with the current college application process. It can be a great resource to high schoolers on preparing or doing the college application process.

One of the privileges that I need to be cognizant of and work on is that I am not an Oakland resident and have no connection to the community. I am unaffected by the local issues while doing remote work. This can be problematic because I am largely unaware of the issues specific to the Oakland community that lead to a need for a Youth Law Pipeline. Thus, if any issues arise or students may need help in some form, I may need to know or fully understand the situation. In order to address this, I plan to do extra research in order to discover some of the issues and history regarding education equity in the East Bay.

SOCIAL CHANGE ISSUE

Centro Legal de la Raza was founded in the historic area of Fruitvale and Oakland. It was there that a group of Berkeley Law Students founded Centro Legal in 1969. During that time Oakland and Berkeley were epicenters of a larger activism movement. Many activist historic organizations like the Black Panther Party were founded in the area. The community supported the Civil Rights Movement, Free Speech Movement, and the Anti-War Movement. These law students were involved in many of the movements themselves with Civil Rights, Chicano, and MEChA movements. They decided that they wanted to build a law firm that addressed the needs of the community and its members.

Some of the guiding principles that Centro Legal de La Raza employs come from the Civil Rights Movement. Founded out of that era, heart, passion, and fire really aid their mission and goals now. The goal of Centro is to be adapting and consistently changing. Centro
emphasizes the ability to be responsive to community needs. Their practice areas stay consistent with immigrant rights, tenants rights, and workers rights. Centro Legal has now evolved into one of the largest organizations that provide direct legal services in order to empower the community. Not only do they provide legal services but they have also invested in various diversity initiatives. Diversity and Legal Pipeline and Youth Law Academy serve to not only diversify the legal system but provide access to those systems for marginalized communities. They are building and supporting the next generation of student leaders to tackle and help solve the issues that are pressing their communities.

Centro Legal de la Raza serves the communities of Fruitvale, Oakland, and others in the East Bay. This area has been hit by many issues over the years. This community was formed by the effects of redlining and residential zoning that forced many into this one area (Ekberg 21). Primarily people of color and low income individuals were forced to live in this area as they couldn't afford or were not legally allowed to live anywhere else. As a result, Fruitvale has been a largely immigrant, working class, and low income community. Thus, many of the issues that affect Fruitvale disproportionately affect marginalized individuals.

This area also faces issues of environmental racism due to local industries and factories. Fruitvale students from Oakland Middle School studied soil on their school ground that was 500ppm above the EPA’s limit (McBride 1). These levels of lead have been found to negatively affect students' health and learning abilities. Additionally, Oakland has had issues for decades on police violence and accountability. There have been several casualties over the years caused by
police and a record of corruption. Issues with law enforcement have bled into the education system. The school to prison pipeline is perpetuated by local law enforcement.

One of the many issues that plagues low-income and communities of color like Fruitvale is educational inequity. This social issue is layered, as it is caused by issues like poverty, redlining, and other socioeconomic inequities. The underfunding and under-resourcing of schools in marginalized communities has been happening since the inception of public education (Bernstein 46). Specific laws have allowed educational inequity to thrive. For example, public schools are sustained through the funding of a local tax base and are at the disposition of local residents. Thus, school funding is reliant on the surrounding residents’ income brackets and the value of their homes. The article “U.S. education system” critiques a common practice of parents selectively choosing where to live or buy a home depending on the quality index of the nearby school (p.195). As a result, there is a lack of school choice and quality control for lower-income families because of their inability to move into higher income areas. This policy still has legacies in Oakland today, which preserves and increases socio-economic segregation within the education system.

Fruitvale policies that segregated and pushed minorities to only be allowed in certain neighborhoods had the same effect on its schools. Students are negatively affected by the predominance of schools that do not offer high quality academics and support. These under-resourced schools do not provide the academic skill set or support necessary to succeed in college (Nowicki et al. 16). Additionally, many of the students from Oakland are from first-generation and/or working-class families that don't have the resources to aid with the college application process, how to go to law school, etc. Without access to these valuable
resources and tools at school, students are unlikely to find ways to access them itself. Many students don't even realize specific opportunities exist because of lack of quality counseling. Goodwin et al. stress that counselors are “the single most important school-based professional for improving college-going out rates" (p. 4). The lack of a “school-based professional” at under-resourced schools magnifies the importance of an outside organization or diversity pipeline like Youth Law Academy supporting students.

The lack of resources in schools and marginalized communities can be tied to Conflict Theory. Conflict theories make the assumption that societies have structural divisions and inequalities that lead to group conflicts (Wells 431). Although it is usually informed through a Marxist perspective of class structures, the theory is highly relevant to education inequity. Conflict theorists can attribute education to a fundamental role in racial stratification and developing class hierarchies (Chernoff 146). Despite academic ability, students of low economic status are usually not awarded the same opportunities as students of higher status. To conflict theorists, the educational system was constructed to mimic economic models of the labor force thus placing students to retain their social positions (Bowles & Gintis 11). Thus, a diversity pipeline like Youth Law Academy can break this cycle of social and racial stratification for the community they serve. On a small scale, the program is an avenue for upward mobility by creating a pathway to a legal profession.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Throughout the summer, my work with Centro Legal de la Raza varied with tasks ranging from curriculum development to outreach. This summer I had the privilege of working with local lawyers and community organizers while researching the legal system, social justice, and gaining
meaningful experience and knowledge of diversity pipelines. Our work focused on developing the pipeline to engage youth in civil rights and further their understanding of the legal system.

At the inception of the summer, my work revolved around updating student profiles and contact information. With this task, I had the chance of speaking directly to the students and their parents. This allowed me to become familiar with the students that were involved with the program. I was able to learn more about who my work impacted and also introduce myself to the students. We also focused on brainstorming outreach and recruitment strategies. That included updating the interview questions to adapt to what the team was looking for in potential program candidates. I also was responsible for aiding with onboarding documents by reaching to students and parents that we had accepted for the upcoming class. This task allowed me to become familiar with new softwares like Zoho Sign and revising the content under the agreement contract each family had to sign. Additionally, our team had goals of growing and reaching out to more people about the opportunity that Youth Law Academy can offer local youth. We decided we needed to reach out to local school districts and update contacts. Part of my task was to compile a list of staff and personnel that would be relevant to Youth Law Academy’s program. This meant individually looking for social science teachers, counselors, resource center directors, and leaders in each school. Aside from this outreach strategy, we wanted to implement a more innovative approach. An approach that seemed effective to complement local youth is to build a social media campaign. With social media we had the possibility of reaching more students directly and growing engagement around the program.

A more intensive responsibility for me this summer was developing a curriculum largely surrounding concepts relating to social justice and law. This meant updating past lessons by
adding more group and collaborative activities. Besides updating past lessons, I also created new lessons that were highly engaging and informative for students. The goal was to research and build an interactive lesson plan that would be used in a two hour class either by Law Clerks or Jr./Sr. Associates. Issues like health care justice and immigration law were personally chosen but always shared with the team for insight. I would create a planned draft then continue to create a slideshow with text, pictures, and a personal theme that was relevant to the lesson’s topic. The task of curriculum development was one that I was excited about especially with some experience in the past. As a past president of my high schools’ M.E.Ch.A. club, I would lead and create weekly lesson plans revolving around social justice and Latinx history. This was a positive experience that I could attribute to successfully developing an important aspect of Youth Law Academy.

CRITICAL REFLECTION

When working with Youth Law Academy, one of the areas that brought me to reflect the most was curriculum development. This area of work had me constantly thinking about the possibility of being a future educator. It also brought an even greater appreciation for teachers and their effort despite being grossly underpaid and overworked. The process of creating an engaging lesson plan that needs to last X amount of hours is not a simple feat. It required looking for the right amount of text-to-image ratio, the balance of teaching to group activities, and heavy research that many don't accredit to teaching. Research was at the forefront of curriculum development. I had to not only research the content but also the pedagogy behind my lesson plans. I had to be clear on how the instructor would teach the lesson throughout the year especially since I would not be working with Youth Law Academy during the year. On each slide
I had to think ahead of what was significant within each slide and how I wanted each slide to be conveyed. Each lesson I developed required meticulous planning, thinking, and efficient decision-making on what content was appropriate.

The substantial amount of possible bias when developing curriculum was something that I overlooked. Specifically when discussing heavily politicized topics such as immigration, pedagogy and content can be weaponized. The amount of bias that an educator can have on a topic by shifting the perspective or being selective on what information to show. That signifies that anti bias training and learning is more important than ever in educational institutions. As Jinnie Spliegler states in “Anti-Bias Education and the Importance of Teaching About Systemic Oppression,”

The goal of anti-bias learning is not to become free of bias, because we know that bias is universal, and we all have biases… However, through a process of willingly and consistently recognizing bias and actively taking steps to address it, like anti-bias education, we can challenge and overcome bias. (1)

Another activity that brought more reflection than anticipated are weekly meetings. Despite it being a customary checkup, the weekly staff meetings are one of the things I miss the most from my time this summer with Youth Law Academy. The most memorable being the warm up questions and casual conversation as ourselves rather than as role/worker. A distinct memory from the meeting this summer took place on the day that Roe v. Wade was struck down. We all recognized that it was a time to share our thoughts and take a moment to step away from the work that led us to that meet up. It was even more important to support each other on what
this decision could mean for our society. This taught me that “workplace bonds”, regardless of
the capitalistic irony, is one of the most important things you can have for a successful
organization. Human connection will always persevere.

Above all, the biggest takeaway for me was simply learning. It was learning about issues
behind curriculum development, successfully coordinating an organization, the process of
building a lesson plan, the content that I had to research and display to students, discovering my
role and positionality, learning from my fellow team members, and so many other learning
opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Youth Law Academy addresses several layered socio economic issues, one of them being
educational inequity. This program addresses the educational issues that under resourced
communities face by providing a source that can bring students resources. Providing students
these resources can then propel them to a career that many had not imagined or perhaps did not
believe they could achieve due to underlying systemic barriers. While successfully building a
career pipeline, Youth Law Academy can attempt to break institutional barriers within the legal
field. The students that are able to reach their goals can be catalysts for others by bringing more
diversity and representation in an important field like law. The effect that Youth Law Academy
can have on its youth and community has reinforced the direction that I want to take with my
time and future. I want to keep doing meaningful work regardless of what position or place that
puts me in.
REFERENCES


Nowicki, Jacqueline M., and US Government Accountability Office. “K-12 Education: Public High Schools with More Students in Poverty and Smaller Schools Provide Fewer Academic Offerings to Prepare for College. Report to the Ranking Member, Committee


APPENDIX
How for-profit prison corporations shape immigrant detention and deportation policies

Nearly two-thirds of all immigrant detainees are held by the Corrections Corporation of America, or CCA, and the Geo Group Inc. to whom the government pays about $752 million per year. The money is not always spent on running the detention facilities; in fact, the companies often use the profits for lobbying purposes. In 2005, the companies spent $15.8 million on lobbying and other political activities, an increase of 26% since 2000.

How it Works:

1. Congress imposes a detention bed quota upon ICE that requires the agency to jail a predetermined number of immigrants—approximately 34,000 people on any given day—solely because of immigration status.

2. Money allocated for this quota lines the pockets of private prison corporations, which are now contracted for 62 percent of ICE detention beds. It costs taxpayers close to $2 billion to maintain this arbitrary, ineffective, and inhumane system.

3. CCA and GEO lobby the federal government—including lobbying DHS, which oversees federal contracts for immigration detention centers.

4. For-profit prison corporations see enormous financial growth when federal policies encourage result in heightened criminalization of immigrants.

5. The increased profits that go to private prison corporations when more people get incarcerated for immigration violations are passed on to company shareholders and executives.

More grim border numbers suggest Team Biden has simply given up

Beware: Mexico To Unleash Massive Wave of 70,000 Migrants Toward U.S. Border in Unnoticeable ‘Ant Operation’

Mexican border agents quitting over influx of ‘more violent’ migrants

Border agents arrest more MS-13 gang members, sex offenders trying to illegally enter US

Feds plan to dump immigrants in cities away from border: officials

Biden border policy pits US babies against migrant infants: immigration expert Andrew ‘Art’ Arthur
Root Causes of Health Care Inequity

Health inequity is created by human-made systems and structures that privilege certain groups and underserve or actively oppress others. This occurs through the unequal distribution of power and resources.

These structures include:
- Racism
- Sexism
- Classism
- Xenophobia
- Ableism

People perpetuate these systems:
- Institutionally: how organizations and governments set their laws, policies, and practices
- Interpersonally: how people behave toward each other
- Internally: how people view themselves

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Remain in Mexico Policy (M.P.P.)

The controversial Trump-era Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) or “Remain in Mexico” program prevents asylum seekers from waiting in the U.S. during their case, instead forcing them to return to Mexico and exposing them to dangerous conditions in border cities for months. This has led to thousands of people waiting in border cities while waiting to be able to apply for asylum at a port of entry. Less than 1% of migrants have succeeded in overcoming these new hurdles, effectively eviscerating asylum law protections.

- 521 / 42,012 people have been granted asylum under M.P.P.
- Only 7.5% of individuals subject to MPP ever managed to hire a lawyer
- 70,000 migrants were returned to Mexico to wait for their hearings.