

Hello, my name is Melanie West. I am a PhD candidate in ethnic studies at the University of California, San Diego. As a soon to be professor in ethnic studies, who has already taught a dozen courses over the span of my career, I have learned a great deal about anti-racism and how it can be successfully implemented in the university.

My field, ethnic studies, represents a body of research born from student protests beginning in 1968 at San Francisco State University and at the Berkeley and Santa Barbara campuses of the University of California. At the dawn of the 1970s, students of color and white allies demanded affordable higher education, changes in curriculum, the employment of professors of color, and the creation of ethnic studies programs. Through civil disobedience and appealing to the university, these brave students ushered in the start of multicultural reform in higher education. This movement then produced my own ethnic studies department and a disruption of Eurocentric curricula and racist power structures that monopolized our colleges and universities. The work of these brave students and the faculty that provided their allyship then built an entire field of study from a foundation of anti-racism work in the university.

According to the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre, anti-racism can be defined as the “active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably” ([www.aclrc.com/antiracism](http://www.aclrc.com/antiracism)). I want to work in community with Nazareth this MLK Day, to continue conducting anti-racism work in the university.

I began my academic career in 2010 at Nazareth College. Ten years ago, I was a studio art major on Nazareth’s campus. My former experience as a student became the catalyst that committed me to anti-racism. At Nazareth I learned how to protest, how to organize with faculty,

and how to be an ally to communities whose experiences I do not have. The lessons I learned at Nazareth became indispensable to me as an alumni and shaped my career.

As a Black, queer woman my understanding of allyship has always been rooted in the work of the Black poet and activist Audre Lorde. Although Lorde did not use the word ally, as a Black, lesbian woman, she advocated strongly for basing her anti-racism work in the understanding that there has never been a single issue struggle. No one can be free until all of us are free. Extending this to anti-racism means that all systems of inequality, whether based on race, gender, sex, class, ability or nationality must be changed so that power can be redistributed equitably.

Presently, our nation has been experiencing a surge in hate crimes, xenophobia, police brutality, unlawful deaths, and campaigns to attack and destroy a myriad of policies that support the most marginalized within our nation from multiple and intersecting backgrounds that have historically faced oppression. During Nazareth's upcoming MLK Day Celebration, I want to work with students and faculty to envision how Nazareth can continue to grow as a university committed to an understanding of anti-racism that acknowledges that all systems of oppression are connected and must be contested.

During MLK Day, we will discuss what steps are required to commit to anti-racism in the context of the university and beyond campus. We will discuss how to unpack intersecting experiences of marginality and privilege. We will discuss how the university has never existed in a vacuum and has always been shaped by various cultural, political, and historical processes, while also having the ability to shape these elements itself. I will root many of these discussions in my experience as a student. At Nazareth I learned firsthand how a university can be an active space for learning how to implement the lifelong commitment to anti-racism.