

*A lot has happened in the past week. We need young people's leadership and organizing power now more than ever! Are you with us?*

November 7, 2016

## Friend—

You're going to love this.

Late last year, a Providence high school student smuggled a history textbook out of class, and into the Providence Student Union (PSU) office.

The reason? Students like Lee—pictured at right—felt that the textbooks failed to address the unique contributions of Indigenous, Black, Latinx, Asian, and other peoples to the history of the United States. (The smuggling was because there aren't enough copies for students to take home.)



*PSU student leader Lee speaks at Ethnic Studies rally, January 2016.*

A page-by-page analysis confirmed our suspicions: **Although Providence's student body is 91% people of color, less than 10% of the textbook directly or indirectly addresses their role in and impact on our nation's history.**

We weren't surprised. The students' research reinforced what we already knew: our education system serves as a tool for cultural assimilation, preparation for low-wage, low-skill jobs, pro-militarist indoctrination, and a school-to-prison pipeline that feeds de facto modern slavery and lines corporate pockets. We knew that the school system is designed, intentionally or not, to prevent students like Lee from succeeding.

Equipped with this information, stories from student leaders, and support from the A.J. Muste Memorial Institute, PSU rallied in January 2016, demanding relevant and engaging Ethnic Studies courses for all Providence high school students. Chanting "Our History Matters!," students and community members flooded the steps of the Providence School Department and drew national attention to the issue of just representation in the school curriculum.

This wasn't the first time PSU has taken a stand. Back in 2013 and 2014, students demanded an end to high-stakes standardized testing, which would have prevented up to 60% of Providence students from graduating high school. **With A.J. Muste's help, our creative actions and constant pressure ended the use of high-stakes testing in Rhode Island, forever.**

After that and other victories, the Providence school district knew not to mess with our student leaders: **Providence's first Ethnic Studies courses launched in five public high schools this September.** Now hundreds of students each year will take relevant and engaging courses that delve into their own histories and explicitly explore systems of power and oppression. We believe these are the first for-credit Ethnic Studies courses to be offered in New England high schools. And we're just getting started.

(over, please)

## A.J. Muste Memorial Institute

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This #OurHistoryMatters campaign is one piece of a renewed national movement to ensure that diversity, inclusion, and representation are explicitly linked with power, justice, and equity.

**You know how critical this work is.**

This year, we have seen violent narratives against women, immigrants, and people of color normalized by our media and politicians. We wake up almost daily to new stories and videos of police brutality—just one of many signs of an emboldened white supremacist movement.

**It's clear: we need A.J. Muste's work more than ever.**

When you chip in to support the Muste Institute, you participate in an over 40-year tradition of nonviolent resistance. You throw a wrench into the ongoing militarization of our communities, our borders, and our lives. You defend our planet, decolonize education, and invest in brave, bold actions for justice. You challenge arbitrary authority, and train the organizers who will lead untold movements into the future.



*Providence Student Union organizing for Ethnic Studies.*

This work is powered by young leaders like Lee. The Muste Institute understands the importance of youth-led organizing. That's why it makes grants to PSU, and to projects like these:

- **Youth Rise Texas**, helping young people impacted by a parent's incarceration or deportation to stand together and organize for change.
- **Freedom University Georgia**, empowering youth to end Georgia's ban on undocumented students in its higher education system.
- **Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane**, building the capacity, skills, analysis, and relationships of young activists so they can increase their success and longevity as social justice leaders.

**You make this work possible.** Each time you donate to the Muste Institute, your precious support goes directly to the efforts of youth leaders like Lee, and to so many others taking nonviolent action in every corner of the globe.

**Turn your values into action.** Stand with me, with young people, and with hundreds of other supporters who, like you, have sustained the Muste Institute over decades as part of your ongoing commitment to nonviolent activism. Make a year-end gift to the A. J. Muste Memorial Institute, and keep the fight going and growing.

Forward!

Zack Mezera  
Providence Student Union  
Executive Director

P.S. Contributions to the Muste Institute are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Donate online ([ajmuste.org](http://ajmuste.org)) or mail your check to A.J. Muste Memorial Institute, 168 Canal Street, New York, NY 10013.