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## Affective Communities of Empathy, or How Latinx Picture Books Help Us Overcome Hate

This paper examines the role of emotions in the context of social justice and activism. Specifically, I look at the ways picture books *Separate Is Never Equal* (2014) by Duncan Tonatiuh and *From North to South / Del Norte al Sur* (2013) by René Colato Laínez construct affective communities that deploy empathy, fairness, and love as counter-affects to racist emotions. As Sara Ahmed notes in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, “emotions *do things*, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachment” (117). In this way, emotions play a key role in how we understand social identities, largely due to how we experience and process inclusions and exclusions of social identities. My argument, thus, is that affective communities are an important theoretical model for understanding the ways race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, as well as cultural and national belonging intersect.

When we think of deconstructing oppressions, our first step is often toward logic and reason. And yet, as we know from everyday life, racism, sexism, and homophobia are propagated through anger, fear, and hatred. *Separate Is Never Equal*, based on the historical 1947 *Mendez v. Westminster School District* court case, details the role of emotions in excluding Mexican-American children from schools. In the Mendez family’s quest to end the segregation of Mexican-American children in California, they must counter charges that Mexican Americans are dirty and disease-ridden. This rhetoric deployed to marginalize certain groups is widespread, namely because the emotion of disgust is visceral—triggering a response to isolate and exclude. *Separate Is Never Equal* counters these emotions of disgust with the emotions of fairness and empathy, a kind of counter-affect that draws readers into allegiances based on social justice imperatives. In this regard, the picture book signals that just as segregation was defeated by deconstructing the emotions that informed the law, so too can other oppressions be countered and defeated.

*From North to South* likewise calls our attention to the role of emotions in countering exclusionary rhetoric but in the present-day context of parent deportation experienced by many US-citizen children. Like *Separate Is Never Equal*, *From North to South* deploys emotions (love and empathy) as a counter-affect to narratives of hate that argue for deportation. Such “legal” notions fall apart when readers are faced with young José, a child who misses his mother. By enlisting a community of like-hearted readers *From North to South* activates emotions, encouraging readers to imagine themselves as activists whose purpose is to resist the breaking up of families. In this, we see how readers form affective communities that “have each other’s backs.” It is via counter-emotions developed through the reading process that communities of empathy are cultivated and activism grown.

This paper looks at how communities of empathy are kindled at a writer’s words and an artist’s images. Hearts thus enflamed embolden action. It is my argument that the arc of the moral universe bends precisely because of such activism.