California Listenin': A Reflection on the Healing Power of Community Storytelling

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Abstract

This paper is a critical reflection on a service-learning experience involving digital storytelling as a form of public engagement and community service. It is organized into themes that help illuminate the process: background and preparation, working "in the field," and outcomes and assessments of the venture overall. The paper's expected contribution lies in the examples from the field that speak to the healing power of community storytelling and listening, especially in unsettled times.

On a Saturday morning at the height of summer in 2018, I am up early and headed to campus. After a quick stop for coffee, I climb back into the long, white 12-passenger van and head off to rendezvous with a group of my students at the University of California, Davis, where I have taught for more than two decades. Soon, we will be on our way to the day's work site. Our destination? The city of Stockton, located about an hour southeast of campus. There, we will help produce a local community digital storytelling workshop at the César Chavez Central Library. As we had done on several occasions in recent weeks, we were prepared to lend our hands, eyes, attention, care, and skills to the work set before us.

This class, Topics in African Diaspora Studies: Digital Storytelling and Community-Engaged Scholarship, was the first in which I had taken students off campus to work out in the field. As such, it was an exhilarating experience for me, much as I assumed—or at least hoped—it would be for them. We were contributing to the California Listens project, a community partnership featuring a series of workshops offered in public library branches throughout the state. Through this partnership, we helped create space for everyday Californians to bring their stories, share them, and listen to the stories of others in a supportive environment. In these spaces, each participant ultimately produced a short video to be exhibited online and preserved in a permanent archive of California voices from the period. In recent years, my university has increased its investment in and encouragement for community-engaged scholarship, and this class was part of my ongoing effort to further that initiative.

Although it may not have been articulated or codified in terms of a formal philosophy of education, such as that commonly attributed to Dewey and others (Giles & Eyler, 1994; Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997; Pacho, 2015), individuals and organizations in the African American community have conducted what today is considered "engaged" scholarship—blending education, activism, and an ethic of racial uplift and mutual aid—since at least as far back as the turn of the twentieth century (Stevens, 2003). My courses in the African American and African Studies Department emphasize the ethos and practices of mutual aid and community engagement as cornerstones of the history of African Americans. What's more, at the time of the class experience recounted in this article, our department had not offered many classes in which students could work with off-campus community members in the context of a partnership with a noncampus agency. For those reasons, I wanted students to see the continuity of the traditions we had studied that had shaped the foundations of ethnic studies as a community-engaged scholarship project (Yep & Mitchell, 2017). Likewise, I wanted them to have an opportunity to participate in those traditions as part of their educational experience.

In this report from the field, I reflect on this service-learning experience, which reinforced my belief in the healing power of community storytelling and listening. These gatherings are especially meaningful and impactful during troubled times, when so many are affected by natural disasters, social and political polarization, and a cultural climate of general divisiveness. Such circumstances characterized the summer in which this generative collaboration took place.

Literatures Informing This Work

Central to the course was my belief in the power of public storytelling as an act of community building, an act of service, and an effective

pedagogical tool. Romero, in "The Power of Stories to Build Partnerships and Shape Change" (2013), demonstrated the usefulness of public storytelling to community building and ultimately to efforts directed at social change. The article detailed the experience of compiling written stories from members of a school that were subsequently made into a community book project, the coproduction of which provided space for diverse voices to be heard. Conrad (2013) identified several purposes of digital storytelling, including outreach, activism, education, and the archiving of local history. He also identified the importance of the *story circle* to these gatherings, which will be discussed in greater detail later. Others have discussed the usefulness of digital storytelling in fostering community (Fields & Diaz, 2008), in teaching intercultural communication skills (Blithe, 2016), and in exploring and appreciating diasporic identities in higher education (Benick, 2012). Still others have pointed to digital storytelling as "a signature pedagogy for the new humanities" (Benmayor, 2008) and as a powerful strategy for promoting student engagement and strengthening 21st-century classroom skills (Blithe et al., 2015; Niemi & Multisilta, 2016; Robin, 2008; Sadik, 2008).

In "We Need to Talk about Race" (2014), Harries examined the connection between what she referred to as the "silencing" of race—that is, the conservative, official denial of the existence of systemic racism and the effects of this denial on the possibilities for naming and resisting racist behaviors in everyday micro-level interactions. Her analysis of the issue points to a need for spaces and opportunities for people affected by the reality of racism to share their experiences, articulate their concerns, and come away feeling as though they have been heard. Although Harries's focus was on the United Kingdom, the problems and needs associated with public discussions about race certainly resonate with similar concerns here in the United States. The work of the public storytelling workshops discussed in this article might be seen as one way of providing such spaces and opportunities and facilitating such exchanges at the face-to-face level in communities across the nation. These workshops might be useful in raising awareness, if not empathy, among those whose everyday experiences are not explicitly affected by racism (and who may not think racism is still a relevant topic in so-called "post-racial" societies such as the United Kingdom and the United States). The workshops may also be a source of healing for those who experience racial trauma and for whom public expression and support would be valuable in working through various forms of trauma.

Finally, *The Akron Story Circle Project: Rethinking Race in Classroom and Community* (Behrman et al., 2017) deserves special mention for its pedagogical use of the story circle as a setting for interdisciplinary conversations and thinking about race and racial conflict. The work of the faculty, students, and community members who participated in this 8-year project demonstrates the transformative power of storytelling in the classroom, on stage, as a catalyst for artwork, and for increased understanding among people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. This text is an important resource for those seeking to implement similar types of interventions using story circles as a valuable tool.

Preparation for the Field

StoryCenter and California Listens

California Listens was a collaboration between the California State Library system and the nonprofit organization StoryCenter. StoryCenter is perhaps best known for the work that Joe Lambert, StoryCenter's cofounder and director, has done to further the practice of community-based digital storytelling. Digital stories in the form of 2- to 3-minute videos are the products—the "deliverables"—that come out of the 2-day workshops at the heart of StoryCenter's practice. These workshops are one of StoryCenter's primary mechanisms for interfacing with the public. These community-based events are facilitated by StoryCenter staff who lead participants through "Seven Steps" of the digital storytelling process, as explicated in *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community* (Lambert, 2018). In the seven-step process, each participant shares a personal story in the context of a story circle, receives feedback from other participants and workshop facilitators, writes and edits their story down to a target of about 300- to 350-word "scripts" that they will later record as their digital story's voiceover, and learns how to use video editing software to make the short films with music or other sound effects. The final hour of the workshops is used for the screening of all the stories created by session participants.

I was introduced to this process as a participant in a series of workshops in the spring and summer of 2017 at StoryCenter. Since completing the workshops, I have sought additional ways to continue learning the digital storytelling methodology by adapting it to my pedagogical

practice as well as using it in a new research project collecting stories of elderly African Americans who migrated to California as part of the Great Migration. This migration project was conducted under an exemption from my campus institutional review board. The exemption included my students' participation in, and my use of their reflections on, the service-learning experience discussed in this article. My ongoing partnership with StoryCenter is what encouraged me to link the Digital Storytelling and Community-Engaged Scholarship class with StoryCenter's work in the context of the larger California Listens project.

In the first few days of the summer session class, I presented the "Seven Steps" to the students (10 undergraduates and two graduates) in the form of a lecture/discussion. I also led them through the hands-on process of applying those steps to make their own digital stories to screen and share. I drew upon an adaptation of former Kentucky poet laureate George Ella Lyon's poem "Where I'm From" (1993) as a prompt because I have found it to be an effective way of entering the conversation about students' own positionalities and backgrounds. It serves as a kind of "pre-flection," to use a term borrowed from Jacoby (2015). It is a way of making sure students are aware of their own biases and privileges (or lack thereof) relative to community members they might be working with and serving. I was trying to help them become aware of the possibility that the community members they would encounter in the field might be quite different from what they expected and that they would need to be ready to work with anyone who showed up.

In all, I used these first 2 weeks to set the stage for the process students would follow when working with community members off campus. But perhaps most importantly, those first weeks also helped us build our own sense of community as a class, preparing us to shift gears as we headed out into the field.

"Into the Field"

Yolo, California: July 13 and 20

On our first day out, we traveled from campus in search of the little town of Yolo, California. I had several students riding in my car (our van reservation hadn't been approved in time for this first outing). The library itself was located inside a trailer that was parked on the grounds of the original Carnegie library, which was in the process of being either renovated or turned into a museum. On this and the following Friday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., the library was closed to the public, and we had it all to ourselves to produce the 2-day workshops.

After a short wait, Sue the librarian opened the trailer and allowed us to enter. Community members began to arrive and mingle over coffee, muffins, and other light refreshments. Before the workshop proper began, the students and I, a StoryCenter staff member, and StoryCenter's student intern met in another room to be briefed on what to expect during the day ahead. When the appointed time arrived, we began with everyone seated around the tables that had been pushed together into the center of the trailer. Prior to the gathering date, each of the 10 participants had received an email instructing them to come with an idea for a story (or two). They were also encouraged to bring along between five and 10 photographs or other objects that they might use to help visually illustrate their narrative. After the usual round of introductions, we immediately entered into the story circle, in which each participant shares the account they plan to develop into a digital story.

The single most important part of the entire process is the story circle. In the story circle, each person is given equal time to tell their story with the full attention of all others present. No one is to interrupt, challenge, or "disagree" with the storyteller's narrative. It is their story to tell. If someone else knows about the events being recounted, they may use their turn to speak to tell their version of events. Story topics ran the gamut. One person told of an incident on a California Indian reservation or "allotment." Another described their experience of finally coming to terms with a long-overdue diagnosis of mental illness. Another story centered on a veteran's history of work within a fraternal organization that serves children with life-threatening illnesses.

More than one of the stories shared in the Yolo community workshops centered on storytellers' experiences of the wildfires from the previous year (2017), which had contributed to a fire season that was, at the time, the worst in California's history. Wildfires have come to occupy an increasing amount of California's resources, time, and attention in recent years. They have also come to exert an enormous influence on the lives of the individuals and families who have lived through them and found themselves displaced, either temporarily or permanently, from their homes. The California Listens project and other StoryCenter projects collected fire stories from people in the Northern California counties of

Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Shasta, and Sonoma as well as Central/Southern California regions such as Ventura County and the enclave of Montecito, just south of Santa Barbara on the central coast.

In one story recounted by a Yolo community member, called "Burnadette," a young woman remembered being awakened by her mother and wondering why the sun was setting on the wrong side of the house—only to realize the family's ranch was on fire. In the feedback segment of the story circle, where we all commented on what we had just heard, someone suggested the name "*Burn*-adette" for the sheep that the storyteller had saved from being burned alive by dragging her to safety through thick smoke and flames. This was not the only feedback given in response to the storyteller's narrative, but it does help illustrate the generative character of the story circle and the cocreative nature of the final products, which originated from individual storytellers' ideas and the varied types of feedback that listeners offered.

In the story "Allotted," another participant spoke of her experience as an Indigenous American girl living on land allotted to her family by the United States government through the Dawes Act of 1887. This story and others were deeply personal. They also connected and personalized much larger historical contexts, offering a window into the experience of being present for notable events and an understanding of how such experiences shaped the storytellers' understanding of themselves and the events—sometimes years after those events had concluded. These stories remain as part of an archive of pivotal or formative events not only in the lives of these individual Californians but also in the record of life in recent years in the state's history. As such, they are part of an archive of collective memory of events during this period.

Sacramento, California: July 25–26

The 2-day workshop in Sacramento was held at the main branch of the Sacramento Public Library. Once all eight of our community participants had arrived the first morning, we once again opened the workshop with introductions and began the story circle phase of the process. In the story circle, we listened intently to stories about family, relationships, leaving, and returning home. One storyteller spoke of the effects of surviving multiple near-death experiences ("The End of Me"). Another related how she had grown as a result of the trauma of being subjected to and fighting back against racism and sexual harassment in the workplace ("Standing Tall"), while the #MeToo movement was gaining momentum and providing additional context in and outside of our workshops during that summer.

As we had seen in previous weeks' workshops, some stories were far more emotionally charged than others, but all were of deep significance to the storytellers themselves because each reflected their individual experience. We were there to help them transform their stories from the oral form in which they were initially shared into writing, and we then helped edit them down into the script that would serve as the narration to each of their digital stories. By the end of the workshop, we had worked closely with all of the participants to combine those written scripts with images and sound to bring out the unique tone and character of the stories they shared. Screening each of the digital stories, it seemed that the experience was a gratifying one for the participants as well as for the students (and for me), for StoryCenter staff, and for library staff.

Stockton, California: July 27–28

Some of the most profound levels of group bonding and support I have ever experienced emerged in response to stories shared in the Stockton workshop. There were 11 community participants. Once they had all arrived and we began introductions and the story circle, it quickly became clear that this workshop would be different from the others we had participated in over the past few weeks. One person shared a story of narrowly escaping being killed by a motorist, another what it was like to travel the world only to end up—happily—back in the same small San Joaquin Valley town they had been so desperate to leave behind. Another participant shared her story of what it meant to her as an African American woman to be the first poet laureate of the City of Stockton ("Becoming Poet Laureate"). In the story "My Mother Was a Bridge," another storyteller shared what it was like to follow in her mother's and grandmother's footsteps as a third-generation female pastor in the overwhelmingly male-dominated world of leadership in the Black Church in Stockton and nationally.

But the story "Still Here" remains with me as I think about the power of storytelling as a form of community building, mutual support, and individual and collective healing. It was the story of one woman's anticipation of childbirth, the commencement of labor, and the grief following the stillbirth of her daughter, one of her six children. She was a woman of deep faith who related that she had come to the workshop to try to tell the story

that she had not even felt comfortable sharing within her faith community. Her completed video speaks of the fact that there is not even a name for people who have lost children (like there is the term "orphan" for children whose parents have died). I remember her story so well because I worked closely with her to help her "get it out." In fact, her story was the very first one we recorded on the first day of the Stockton workshop, which is notable because, in my experience with these public workshops, the majority of participants are not ready to record until the morning of the second day. It spoke to the sense of urgency with which this storyteller was able to move through the process of bringing her digital story to fruition.

After the final take of her audio recording, she seemed to have changed; during the story circle that morning, she almost whispered when she talked. But after telling her story (leaving all of us in tears), the healing seemed to come from the women in the room, especially some of the older women who revealed that they had also lost children when they were younger. That morning we took part in something powerful that continues to reaffirm my commitment to advancing the work of community storytelling and, most of all, listening.

Each workshop is composed of different people coming together for the express purpose of telling their own stories, so each workshop naturally, organically, has its own tenor. This distinctive mood derives from the unique culture that emerges as individuals become a community, even if for a brief moment in time and in bounded space. Thus, the Stockton workshop felt even more qualitatively distinct because of the emotional gravitas and the intimacy of the stories being shared. Again, these are gatherings of strangers who have been intentional about coming together to tell their own stories. But in the process, they also provide emotional support and create space for the possibility of healing through listening and responding to the stories told. More than any of the other workshops that summer, the Stockton workshop most clearly illustrated just how enriching the experience of public storytelling can be for everyone involved.

Reflections and Outcomes

The Critical Role of Critical Reflection

According to Jacoby (2014), critical reflection is "the process of analyzing, reconsidering, and questioning one's experiences within a broad context of issues and content knowledge" (p. 26). It is *the* essential element of service-learning, intentionally connecting the practice of service to the kind of transformative, educative power that can come from service in a learning context. Jacoby further explained:

> Reflection is so fundamental to the concept and practice of service-learning that it is not an understatement that *there can be no service-learning without reflection*. Essential and irreplaceable, reflection is indeed the hyphen that intentionally and purposefully connects the service and the learning. One can do service and one can learn, but reflection is the process through which the service and the learning can become transformative. It is through critical reflection that we open ourselves to become changed in meaningful ways by what we do, whom we meet, what we know, and what we seek to know. (p. 50)

Although I learned many things in this process, ultimately it was what emerged through the students' engagement, experiences, and reflections that stood out most clearly for me as the instructor of this class. In all of the workshops, students supported community members through the process of producing their digital stories in several specific ways. First, they served as listeners in the critical story circle segment of the workshops, during which each community participant had their first opportunity to share their story. They also provided feedback to those storytellers who requested it. The storytellers determined the type of feedback they wanted, and they commonly asked for help finding the "moment," the "focus," or clarity on their story's meaning and how they might want to convey it. Storytellers also just described what they experienced, such as what feelings, thoughts, and emotions the stories brought up for them. Affirming appreciation and the value of community members' stories was another important part of the process. In several cases, community participants expressed that they felt *heard* for the first time (and many included us in the end credits of their finished products). This part of the workshop, when each participant reflects on what they heard in the story circle, is when the story becomes clear for each storyteller and for rest of us as the first "audience."

Beyond the story circle, students also provided editorial support. They paired with individual participants to write and edit their

stories into script form, and after scripts were completed, students offered technical assistance in the recording, gathering, and uploading of elements (visual and sound files, etc.) into the video editing software. Once there, they consulted with the storytellers, helping them make editorial and artistic decisions as well as providing hands-on help using the software when needed. Some participants were more comfortable with computers than others, so the degree of help needed varied from person to person. All in all, the students provided assistance wherever they were needed. They also had to exercise project management skills in order to meet the appointed deadline for the final products to be completed and shared to a common computer location. From there, the finished digital stories were shared in the final screening at the end of the workshop.

In addition to their actual work with community members, I assigned students the task of keeping a journal (their "field report") of their own experiences, thoughts, and any insights gained from doing this work within the communities we visited. At the end of the service activity, they were given the option of either writing a final paper or producing a second digital story in which they reflected on the overall experience and considered what they gained (or did not gain) from it. We screened the reflection films on the last day of the class just before our final "debrief." While most students chose to make a second digital story, a few did choose to respond in the form of a final paper. The objective was to give students options in terms of how they could reflect upon their experiences, as suggested by Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede (1996). Below, I share and highlight some of the students' insights from this process in their own words.

Student Reflections on Their Experiences

In one of the reflection papers, an African American student from a large metropolitan area in California—someone who was particularly sensitive to their positionality relative to some of the community members attending the workshops—processed their impressions of the first day's experience in this way:

> The majority of people who participated in the workshop at the Yolo Public Library were older White women; some lived in Yolo for many years. Since we were working in such a small town, many of the participants knew each other before the workshop. It was interesting to listen to their perspectives; some acknowledged their privilege of race and class by speaking out on it while others told their stories remaining blind to their advantages. I was able to recognize historical events when listening to these stories such as the Dawes Act, Fair Housing Act, GI Bill, redlining, and Jim Crow. When creating their digital stories, we helped the storytellers refrain from censoring themselves or changing words in hopes for a better understanding from the audience. We encouraged original language to preserve the character and context of the story and provided background information before the screening to fulfill any needed context. For some people it was difficult to create a digital story due to a limited number of pictures or changes to their story which affected the relevance of the materials brought to express it. Instead of seeing these situations as a disadvantage, they served as an opportunity for creativity and the digital stories turned out just fine. (Student 1, "Field Report")

As an instructor, I can think of few better outcomes than to be present with students when they realize for themselves how much they have learned in one (or more) of my classes. There was an unexpected element of reinforcement of in-class learning in these workshop-based interactions with the public. We are not always there when our students have these moments of recognition. At the conclusion of the 6-week class, after we had worked in three different locations over the course of 4 weeks, the same student wrote in their final reflection script (which they made into another digital story):

> After facilitating workshops, I was able to learn the true meaning of not judging a book by its cover, especially when working in the town of Yolo. This experience changed me in the sense that I will no longer think of all people of privilege as intentionally insensitive. I plan to take advantage of more opportunities like this and I also plan to continue this work by taking time out to intentionally listen to more people's stories. I feel that this process is beneficial since it allows people to find pride in their

> identity and experiences. This process also allowed for better understanding between community members, and the experience was life changing. (Student 1, "The Process" Digital Story [Final Reflection] Script)

Reflecting on their own experience of the process, another African American student wrote about their initial expectations of whom they would be working with and how those expectations were met with disappointment. The disappointment had provided an opportunity to push through to get the work done, but it also allowed the student to gain new insights about the power of community-based storytelling. They reflected:

> Initially, I figured that this experience would allow me to interact with mostly people of color who were in a younger age group, but instead there were majority older people, and my first experience with the Yolo library workshop disappointed me at first glance due to the lack of diversity within the group of community members. However, after completing the Yolo workshop I realize that everyone's story is important, and as the old saying goes, you can't judge a book by its cover. … I felt that the experience of working with the community allowed me to appreciate the fact that everyone has a story and that everyone deserves to be heard, and it was truly a privilege being able to assist other people with telling their stories; some stories which have never been told before. … Ultimately, this class has shown me how important it is to validate each other's experiences, voices, and to make sure that we are keeping record of all the stories that are being told and passed on. (Student 2, "Final Reflection" Paper)

Another member of the class, an African American student-athlete, offered an insightful final reflection on his time in Yolo. Like others in the class, he acknowledged that the small town, located so close to our campus yet so unfamiliar to most of us until the morning we arrived, sprang to mind as he evaluated his overall experience:

> I had never been to Yolo, but I had the sense it had been a small town in which everyone pretty much knows each other. Well, it turns out I was right, the people we would be helping create their own stories were older people, majority white, and had all lived very close or near Yolo. … Next, I didn't know the perspective that these community had of people of color, that didn't look like them especially with their age and upbringings. … As the story circle began, it created a sense of identity to these community members and it helped me understand that these people, regardless of what they look like, want their voices to be heard. And I just thought of how awesome and interesting it was to experience something like that when people can go from not knowing each other at all to feeling unified as a community after their story has been told. (Student 3, "Final Reflection" Paper)

As is clear in these students' written interpretations of their experiences, there had been an initial sense of trepidation about the people they might encounter, especially in terms of race and ethnicity. But all the students in the class expressed an understanding of the power of listening to another human being's experience, their story. They reflected on helping to "bring forth" and transform those stories into finished products—of which all participants could be proud—through the process of digital storytelling.

It was in their critical reflections that we get to the real learning outcomes and the efficacy of service-learning as training for the public good. It is also where students saw for themselves that they had indeed both learned their coursework and contributed to people in communities that differed so markedly from their own. I found this concept particularly important due to my experience of working toward increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in my university. It has sometimes seemed that practitioners (hopefully unintentionally) have operated from a "deficit" paradigm in which students from "underrepresented minority" backgrounds are spoken of as though they are "poor, benighted children from the ghetto" in need of enlightenment and alteration. Unfortunately, in my work with students over the years, I have heard them express that being subjected to this type of attitude from their advisers, mentors, and even faculty has contributed to feelings of isolation, imposter syndrome, and the sense that they are merely "visitors" rather than really a part of the campus community. But in our service-learning experience, my students came to realize not only

that they had gained academic knowledge and skills but also that their sense of community service had empowered them to empower others to tell their stories and have them be heard—even those who may be privileged in certain ways relative to the students' own backgrounds. In a politically polarized social and political context like the one in which we did our work, these insights about their own self-efficacy will, I hope, serve students well in their future pursuits.

In the final analysis, my students learned about positionality in ways they may not have anticipated at the outset of the course. Our group was made up of university undergraduates and graduate students, including some from countries and cultural backgrounds that were completely different from those of the community members they served, and one with a physical disability that did not lessen his ability to participate and contribute to the work. We were, with the exception of one of us, people of color. Students were diverse in their backgrounds; for instance, one student was a student-athlete, one worked as a bartender at night, and another was visually impaired. Students also differed in their expectations of what they might encounter when leaving the safety of the university to work with real people sharing stories of real-world experiences. This "hands-on" experience was quite different from more traditional courses focused on reading, sitting through lectures, and writing about historical events. Students learned, for themselves, that they could work with and help people whose own positionality might have been initially off-putting. They came to realize that they had something to offer. By centering our attention on the work of helping community participants tell their stories in the ways they wanted to tell them, students and storytellers found common ground, which proved most effective.

Concluding Thoughts: The Healing Power of Public Storytelling

Our work with StoryCenter and the public libraries as part of the California Listens project took place amid statewide natural disasters, societal upheaval, and national social and political division. We shared spaces with community members and worked closely together against a backdrop of massive wildfires that affected thousands, street protests demanding social justice in the wake of police killings of unarmed citizens of color, the #MeToo movement that brought renewed urgency and attention to sexual harassment in the workplace, and several other instances of social and political unrest. Thus, there was a significant need for public spaces in which individuals could share their personal stories with strangers who might also benefit from listening and appreciating just how differently some of us are living within the same communities and society. The California Listens project, including the participation of my class, served the people of California by offering public libraries as sanctuaries—"safe spaces"—for the sharing of deeply personal experiences in times when participants wanted and needed to speak and be heard. These were healing spaces, indeed. What's more, the healing power of community storytelling derives not only from the telling of one's story but also from being listened to and feeling like one has been heard. There is also great power in developing and/or strengthening a practice of deep listening—that is, listening without disputation, valuation, or correction. To be sure, this is work of the heart and not (only) the head.

Whether verbally or in their end credits (or both), all of the community participants expressed gratitude to StoryCenter and the public library staff, to my students, and to me for helping them produce their digital stories over the 2-day period of each workshop. And as I have seen on so many occasions in doing this work, a deep sense of community emerged from having spent so many hours together working closely in intense emotional, but also creative, work. Physical and emotional fatigue notwithstanding, saying goodbye was always an event as the workshops concluded: Participants lingered, took selfies together (we also took a group photo to document the experience), embraced one another, and went their separate ways. Those of us who remained cleaned up the spaces and packed up all the equipment. My experience as both a participant and an observer of these encounters confirms the assertions of others who have found that story-based community work is valuable for the public good, especially in moments of political and social division or collective trauma.

In terms of limitations and suggestions for future research, I recommend a more systematic study of workshop participants' perceptions of the degree to which the workshops benefited their mental health, gave them a sense of relief in sharing personal stories with strangers, and improved their ability to cope with adverse situations they experienced. It might also be interesting to ask storytellers whether they thought that, through listening, they were able to develop or increase their ability to empathize

with people whose experiences and backgrounds were so dramatically different from theirs. Those interested in student learning outcomes, especially over the long term, might also follow up to hear the students' thoughts on whether their participation in these workshops benefited them. Certainly, future participatory researchers interested in the long-term effects (if any) or the power of public storytelling would do well to take up these questions as part of their inquiries into the practices described in this article.

The California Listens project existed before and after our participation in it, and I believe my students and I profited from it alongside the community members with whom we worked. Together, we helped create a record of a specific moment in California's history, contributing to an archive for future generations. The California Listens partnership and service-learning experience afforded me, as an instructor, the opportunity to integrate digital storytelling into my portfolio of community-engaged pedagogical tools as well as digital humanities research methodologies for use in other work. Our participation allowed my students and me to share an educational experience with outcomes that I hope will shape the course of their lives as citizens long after they have left the university. I also hope they will continue this work, serving their communities by holding space for public storytelling and listening.

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