WHY LATINA/O? WHY ACADEMY?

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In considering the formation of The Latina/o Academy of Arts and Sciences, two basic questions must be confronted. The first involves the rationale for organizing around a racial or ethnic category. The second has to do with the necessity of organizing ourselves as university-based researchers and teachers who are concerned with the welfare of Latina/o peoples in the United States.

WHY LATINA/O?

Some scholars may feel discomfited by the idea of organizing a project around an ethnic or racial group—especially one as internally diverse as the group of people designated by the term "Latina/o" or "Hispanic." For one thing, scholarship on race and ethnicity is becoming increasingly comparative across groups,\(^1\) as many scholars find it limiting to try to understand race and/or ethnicity from the perspective of just one ethno-racial group. As a consequence, institutional entities like Stanford's Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity (established in 1996) are becoming increasingly common across the country.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Comprador studies of race and ethnicity are a relatively recent phenomenon. The late Berkeley historian Ronald Takaki was perhaps the first to take a comparative approach to understanding race and ethnicity. The reviews of Takaki's 1979 book *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in the Nineteenth Century* make a point of how new his comparative approach was to the study of race and ethnicity. See George M. Fredrickson, Book Review, 67 THE J. AM. HIST. 42-43 (1980). Fredrickson writes that Takaki's approach differed from that of previous historians of racism in the 19th century, who had "tended to treat the white perception of each non-white group in isolation." Id. at 42. See also Editor, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* by Ronald T. Takaki, KIRKUS REVIEWS (Oct. 26, 1979), available at http://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/non-fiction/ronald-t-takaki/iron-cages-race-and-culture-in-nineteenth-century/. According to the Kirkus review, studies of American attitudes toward minority races had, up to that point, "centered on one specific race, be it blacks, Indians, Asians, or Mexicans." Id.


\(^2\) Over the past twenty years, and especially within the past decade, a number of research and teaching centers, research institutes, and undergraduate majors or concentrations that take the comparative study of race and ethnicity as a central part of their mission have been established at colleges and universities across the country. A partial listing of centers and research institutes, along with the year in which they were established, would include the following: The Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America at Brown University (est. 1988), The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University (est. 2003), and Center for the Study of Race, Culture, and Politics at UCLA (est. 2006), among others. Many other universities and colleges now offer undergraduate majors or concentrations...
The significant diversity within the so-called “Latina/o community” poses a legitimate challenge to any attempt to lump all the different ethnicities (Puerto Rican, Mexican American, Cuban American, Dominican American, Honduran American, Colombian American, Panamanian American and so forth) together. Given the different historical trajectories of our ancestral countries and our differing modes of incorporation into the mainland of the United States, our experiences are far from common. Puerto Ricans, for example, are citizens of the United States. As a result, even though people who live on the island are not represented in the United States Congress and do not have the right to vote for the President, they are not challenged by immigration restrictions. The situation is very different for a significant proportion of people of Central American and Mexican heritage who are living in this country. Because such a large percentage of recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America has been undocumented, immigration status is a significant source of stress in the lives of people from those communities. Latina/os also do not share a language. Some of us speak only English, some only Spanish, and others an indigenous language; yet others are multi-lingual, speaking some combination of all three. Our foods are various. We practice a multitude of different religions, listen to a wide range of musical genres, and celebrate different independence days. Even the United States government, which created us as a single ethnic group in the 1980 census with the creation of the census category “Hispanic,” recognizes that we are a multi-racial group. There is, in short, nothing intrinsic to our cultural or biological beings that binds us together.

The organizers of the Latina/o Academy recognize this diversity and have no interest in denying or doing away with it. At the same time, we recognize that Latina/os have been, and still are, constituted by a wide range of institutions and people as a single ethno-racial group. The U.S. census, the educational system, the legal system, advertisers, television markets, and sometimes even Latina/os ourselves, all participate in this ongoing social process. We are called “Hispanic” or “Latina/o,” “Illegal Alien,”

that are explicitly comparative across groups, among which are the following: Comparative Studies in Race/Ethnicity, Class and Gender at San José State University, American Studies Interdisciplinary Cluster in Comparative Race and Ethnicity at Tufts University, American Studies concentration in Race and Ethnicity at the University of Virginia, Interdisciplinary Concentration on Race and Ethnicity at Barnard, Comparative Ethnic Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

1 Ignatia-De La Rosa v. United States, 417 F.3d 145 (1st Cir. 2005).


4 While the term “Illegal alien” is a technical legal term denoting a person who is in the United States without proper immigration documentation, over time it has become a racial slur directed at Latina/os—most often workers who are poor and/or visibly non-white—who are assumed (primarily by whites) to be here in the United States illegally. A good illustration of the meanings this term has taken on, and the anti-Latina/o bias it implies, can be found at ILLEGALALIENS.US.

5 “Spics,” and a whole host of other designations, some having to do with our national origins, and others having to do with our perceived racial characteristics. We are told to go back where we came from—even when where we came from is here in the United States—and accused of crossing the border to have “anchor babies” in order to take advantage of this country’s social welfare benefits. The hostility directed toward Mexican Americans and Central Americans by legislation, such as Arizona S.B. 1070 and Arizona H.B. 2281, is sometimes extended to Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans and other Latina/o Americans by those people unable to tell us apart, and the scientific and aesthetic contributions of our ancestral societies and cultures are belittled, overlooked, appropriated, or simply dismissed by those whose focus remains conditioned by a Eurocentric worldview.

6 Latina/os are frequently assumed to be less intelligent, less motivated, more violent, less talented (except, perhaps, in baseball!), and certainly more
emotional than people of other ethno-racial groups. We are, in other words, subjected together. Collectively, our communities are under siege, and whether we like it or not, we are being constituted in common.

**Why Academy?**

The primary reason why it makes sense to organize as university-based teachers and researchers is that the response to our common subjection as Latina/o needs to take place on multiple fronts: we are being attacked in every realm so we must respond in every realm. The academy is certainly not the only arena in which we have to struggle; it may not even be the most urgent. But it is an important realm in which we must also respond to the challenges Latina/o face.

Contrary to the belief of a few starry-eyed student activists, academia is not a rarefied locale separate from “the real world.” The academic is the real world, as much as political organizations, community centers, and the barrio are the real world. And, very importantly, the academy is where university-based teachers and researchers are located. As academics, we are best situated to know where we can and should have an impact on changing those ideas and practices developed and communicated within academia that denigrate Latina/o peoples and keep many in positions of subordination.

Second, Latina/o cannot take our position in the academy for granted, either as students or as faculty. In the wake of the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, and during the heyday of the ethnic civil rights movements, non-white peoples (as well as white women) made significant gains in access to higher education. According to educational researchers, there was a short period in the mid-1970s during which college attendance rates, as percentages of the population, were actually equivalent for white, black and Latina/o students. This was at a point in our national history when the gap in resources available to schools in different communities—resources such as funding and access to qualified teachers—was smaller than ever before. Since then, the gaps in resources and college attendance rates have widened measurably. If Latina/o do not want to be consigned to the status of a permanent underclass, we need to make sure that we are educated in a way that allows us to be full participating members of the United States economy.

As faculty members, Latina/o are part of an endangered demographic group. At the author’s own university, Stanford University, the Latina/o faculty is gradually aging out. As her colleagues near retirement age, it is not at all clear that they will be replaced with other Latina/os, either in their departments or elsewhere in the university. In fact, Latina/os as a group are barely maintaining a presence in the professoriate even as our population in the country is growing rapidly. According to data released in November 2010 by the California State Department of Education, Latina/os now make up a majority of California’s public school students. Furthermore, demographers estimate that by 2050 over half of the population of the United States will be non-white, with a significant portion of that growth coming from the various Latina/o ethnic communities. The fact that Latina/o’s educational attainment is declining at the same time that our population in the United States is growing has disturbing implications, not only for the well-being of our own children, but also for the educational and economic well-being of our nation as a whole.

Third, knowledge matters. People are motivated to act according to what they perceive to be right, beautiful, and true. According to research psychologists Melissa Williams and Jennifer Eberhardt, for example, people are significantly less motivated to be friends with someone of another race if they hold the mistaken belief that race is a biological fact of nature. If, on the other hand, people correctly understand race to be a historically produced social system of distinction that is continually made and remade via humans’ daily interactions with each other and the institutions they have created, they are more willing to extend themselves across the racial barrier.

Humans have long made social distinctions and noticed phenotypical differences between their own and other groups. Yet it is the scientific production of the idea of biological races from the 17th century forward, much of it conducted within universities, which served to legitimate the race-based slavery and exploitation that accompanied European and then American im-

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13. Id. at 298-99.

14. See RICHARD FEY, *LATINOS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: MANY ENROLL, TOO FEW GRADU- ATE*, PEW HISPANIC CENTER (Sept. 5, 2002), http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/11.pdf. According to this Pew Hispanic Center Report, “only 1.9 percent of . . . Latino high school graduates [as compared to 3.5 percent of white and 3.0 percent of African Americans in the 25-34 year age bracket] are pursuing graduate studies. Latinos have the lowest rates of graduate school enrollment of any major racial/ethnic group . . . and this is true regardless of whether they come from an immigrant family or not.” Id. at 8-9.


19. Id.
perialism up through the 20th century. This is just one example of how ideas produced as knowledge within academia affect the everyday behaviors that shape our social worlds. For this reason, producing and disseminating accurate knowledge about topics (such as race) that have the potential to negatively affect the life opportunities and well-being of Latina/os and other outsider groups must be one of our highest priorities.

For all these reasons, the academy is a crucial realm within which Latina/os and other outsider groups must organize proactively and productively.

ARIZONA’S DESIRE TO ELIMINATE ETHNIC STUDIES PROGRAMS:
A TIME TO TAKE THE “PILL” AND TO ENGAGE LATINO STUDENTS
IN CRITICAL EDUCATION ABOUT THEIR HISTORY

Lupe S. Salinas*

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Paulo Freire, the famous Brazilian educator:

Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the ‘practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.2

This Freirian philosophy served as a primary catalyst in the creation of an ethnic studies program known as the Mexican American Studies Department (MASD) in Tucson, Arizona.3 The MASD seeks to attain an “equitable educational ecology” which offers academic rigor and a chance for students to develop a critical consciousness. The program advances what the founders call “Critically Compassionate Intellectualism,”4 or CCI, a model which sponsors a curriculum that challenges the status quo, follows the teachings and philosophy of Freire, and concentrates on student-teacher interactions that promote authentic caring.

MASD implemented CCI in 2003. Through the program, Latino students attain a “Latino academic identity and an enhanced level of academic

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1 The University of California at Los Angeles created the Paulo Freire Institute a few years ago, leading to the formation of the California Association of Freirian Educators (CAFE), which conducted its Ninth Annual Conference in 2010. See Paul Freire Institute, UCLA, http://www.paulofreireinstitute.org/ (last visited on Feb. 22, 2011).


4 Id.