

Article

MOVING FROM THE MARGINS TO WHERE? THREE DECADES OF LATINO/A STUDIES

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Abstract

In the US higher education system Latino/a Studies is primarily practiced in three types of settings. As Enclaves Latino/a Studies are marginalized, underfunded academic units that are politically tolerated, but disparaged within their respective institutions. In the Transgressive setting, the units have acquired a degree of intellectual authority and political standing within their respective institutions. The third setting, Absorption, is characterized by an effort to absorb Latino Studies into American Studies or centers on race and ethnicity. The progression from Enclave to Absorption is not unilinear, and all three states of Latino Studies can be found in universities throughout the United States. However, the progression also denotes the academic evolution of Latino Studies, its continued relevance for students and the recognition that this emerging academic field has a role in the university's mission. How Latino/a Studies is positioned in the university will figure prominently in the future development of the field.

Keywords

Latino/a Studies; ethnic; Chicano; Puerto Rican Studies





Latino Studies has evolved from its insurrectionary and somewhat turbulent origins as Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies into its current incarnation as a multidisciplinary academic field that explores the diversity of localized and transnational experiences of Latin American and Caribbean national origin populations in the United States. In this essay, I draw a distinction between Latino Studies as a field of study and Latino Studies as an academic unit of instruction and research in the university. It is evident that as an academic field Latino Studies has matured in terms of the quantity and quality of the scholarship produced, the numbers of programs of instruction, the formation of professional associations, the publication of specialized journals, the growing numbers of doctorates minted each year in Latino and Latina-related subject matter, and other achievements. In the process the field has attained increased academic legitimacy and more universities have targeted hires specifically in Latino Studies.

The development of Latino Studies as academic units has not fared as favorably. As is the case with most race and ethnic studies, Latino Studies has a contested, and in some cases still undefined, status in the academy. The academy's response to Latino Studies has varied widely. As a consequence, Latino/a Studies academic units are configured in a multitude of forms. Hundreds of programs, departments, centers, and institutes have been established in the last three decades. Some academic units enjoy autonomy in hiring and in curriculum design and operate with respectable budgets, while others are merely paper programs with part-time directors. Some are exclusively research-based centers and others provide limited undergraduate instruction.

While the majority are somewhere within this range, Latino Studies has been and tends to be practiced in three types of institutional settings. I have labeled these settings or positions Enclave, Transgressive, and Absorption. This essay discusses the settings in which Latino/a Studies is practiced in the academy, but it does so in the context of tracing its development as an academic field during the last three decades. The pivotal issue of the moment for Latino/a Studies is how it will be positioned in the years to come. What types of institutional arrangements are universities devising to incorporate Latino Studies scholarship into its research and teaching mission? What will be the consequences of these decisions for the development of Latino Studies as an academic field? How Latino Studies is positioned as an academic unit will figure prominently in the development of the field and the nature of its contribution to fulfilling the mission of the university.

Three settings in which Latino Studies is practiced

The first setting is the Enclave. In this setting Chicano, Mexican American and Puerto Rican Studies units operate as marginalized, underfunded programs or departments that were politically tolerated, but academically disparaged within their respective institutions. They tend to concentrate their intellectual efforts on exploring the history and development of specific Latino populations, and are primarily undergraduate instructional units. Virtually all the units established in the late 1960s and early 1970s fit this categorization.

I have inelegantly called the second setting Transgressive. Here the academic ethnic studies units have acquired a degree of intellectual authority and political standing within their respective institutions. These units tend to be called Latino Studies, Latin American and Latino Studies, or Chicano and Latino Studies. They have broadened their original lines of inquiry and tend to situate the analysis of a particular national origin group in the broader Latino context. These units have generally been successful in coupling their instruction and research goals to the university's intellectual life, and have overcome attempts to relegate them to the periphery. Some units advance a comparative study of the divergent US Latino/a experiences, while others extend their scope of inquiry to examine the hemispheric and transnational features of Latinidad.

The third setting is an effort by the university administration to redefine the academic function of Latino Studies and to manage its incorporation into hierarchically ordered centers for research and instruction. These are most commonly American Studies Programs and Centers for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. This setting represents the absorption of Latino Studies into a larger race- and ethnic-based academic initiative that usually incorporates African American, Asian American, and Native American Studies. Latinos are conceptualized as a racialized minority whose experience can be productively compared with those of other racialized minorities in the United States. Instruction and research in Latino Studies tend to reflect the institutional bias for discipline-based modes of knowing.

The different settings, Enclave, Transgressive, and Absorption, also reflect the academic evolution of Latino Studies as it is perceived by its practitioners and the academy, and can serve as the basis for mapping out an intellectual and political history of the development of the field since its inception in the late 1960s. In the following pages I will describe the academic characteristics and normative underpinnings of each of these settings as they relate to the issue of multiple positioning of Latino/a Studies in the academy. Ultimately, I am interested in explaining the

gradual shift from a virtually universal hostility and rejection of Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies, the precursors of contemporary Latino Studies, to the current situation in which a growing number of universities are exploring alternative forms of incorporating Latino/a-based knowledge into their academic mission.

Nationally, the three Latino Studies settings (Enclave, Transgressive, and Absorption) operate coterminously. An array of internal and external forces and actors, as well as the specific institutional history, in large measure explain the particular form Latino/a Studies takes in any given institution. The development of Latino Studies as autonomous sites of instruction and research is not unilinear, appears to be institutionally specific, and is not necessarily correlated to its scholarly advance. The process of moving from the margins entails substantial cooperation and coordination between Latino/a Studies practitioners and administrators and faculty in traditional departments. However, the process can be reversed. Departments and programs can always be downgraded, eliminated, or merged into other units.

The university's attitude toward Latino Studies has gradually changed from apprehension and hostility to an acknowledgment of the field's growing scholarly import. In the formative years, administrators and faculty were content to let Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies subsist on the margins, hoping that ethnic studies would erode into complete irrelevancy. These units were tolerated because administrators were certain that ethnic studies could never counter the institutional power of the discipline-based departments nor ever attain the academic rigor to challenge their epistemological moorings. Discipline-based ways of knowing were thought to be inviolable, and the political imperative for the creation of ethnic studies was thought to be transitory. Yet, despite the inhospitable greeting, Puerto Rican and Chicano Studies endured and helped pave the way for Latino and Latina Studies. What explains the staying power of an academic endeavor that was once perceived to have merely a fleeting and inconsequential impact on US higher education?

The reason simply is that Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies produced scholarship of academic excellence. It has developed academically viable curricula and consistently enrolled large numbers of students in its courses. Student activism has also served to sustain existing programs and remains one of the more powerful forces for the creation of new Latino/a Studies programs. In the 1960s, university and college education was a privilege and inaccessible to the vast majority of students of color, virtually all of whom were from the working class. Working-class and poor students launched the first militant campaigns to restructure the urban public universities in order to include ethnic studies instruction and research. However, the struggle was not only to achieve educational



diversity. Given the entrenched racism, Chicano and Puerto Rican leaders realized the indispensability of these programs for retention by improving the self-image, confidence, and academic capabilities of those poor urban youth who were fortunate enough to attend college. The struggle for Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies was steeped in political urgency and would have a major impact on the advancement of their communities.

As the Latino population grew and became increasingly diversified in terms of national origin, social class, and demographic characteristics, the necessity of research and instruction on this population became more pressing and the content more varied. Thirty years ago university administrators could not have envisioned the phenomenal growth of a Latino/a college student population, let alone one that would continue to demand Latino Studies instruction. Yet in the absence of student political activism and protests, academic bureaucrats chose to ignore the growing social and educational importance of providing Latino Studies instruction. In fact, during the 1990s, the refusal of university administrators to consider seriously the reasonable student calls for Latino Studies provoked strikes, building takeovers, and militant activities in a number of Ivy League colleges and prestigious research universities (Flores, 1997). The intensity and determination of some of these protests by Latina and Latino students, many from a more privileged socioeconomic stratum than the rebels of the 1960s, surprised university officials. This resolve has convinced recalcitrant academic bureaucrats that the demand for Latino-focused instruction is not a transitory political phenomenon.

Despite the development of the field, it is evident that most research universities have not embraced Latino/a Studies as academic citizens of equal standing to the disciplines. In far too many universities and colleges Latino Studies programs are denied the resources and autonomy to develop into viable academic units. Latino Studies practitioners are often treated as second-class citizens because their research is perceived as lacking academic rigor and tangential to the momentous scholarly concerns of the university. In research universities ethnic studies scholarship is unjustly portrayed as a form of particularistic knowledge unsuited for social science theory building and hopelessly narrow in its focus. Ironically, the need for more comparative and hemispherically contextualized studies of the changing transnational dynamics of this racialized minority is more pressing now than in the 1960s. Yet, lamentably, far too many universities and colleges still hesitate to rethink their bias-laden preconception that Latino Studies is seldom more than a questionable intellectual endeavor that aims to celebrate the history of purportedly victimized minorities while chastising the dominant society. Latino Studies scholars occasionally criticize the university as a woefully antiquated institution, where power is highly centralized and exercised by



predominately white male administrators who are legally accountable to anonymous and untouchable boards of governors.

However, relations between Latino Studies scholars and academic administrators have not always been acrimonious; neither are they destined to be hobbled by ethnic and cultural misunderstanding. The vast majority of Latino Studies practitioners agree that the university is not a monolithic and immutable entity that is incapable of comprehending the moral and normative imperatives of its academic decisions. No two universities are ever alike, and often a unique combination of factors makes one institution a more propitious environment for ethnic studies than another. Public colleges in urban settings are subjected to a particular set of instructional demands and political pressures that differ from those in elite private universities, and consequently are, in principle, more amenable to support ethnic and race studies programs. In some institutions, the legacy of progressive multiculturalism was to democratize the university by exposing the visceral hostility of the hegemonic tradition-bound disciplines to the intellectually valid enterprise of ethnic and race studies. Women's studies and race and ethnic studies scholars exposed the forms in which the university practiced sexism and racism. Part of the legacy of this political activism is that the racial and gender hierarchies of the academy are slowly eroding. These changes have created in some institutions an intellectual climate that supports a more prominent role for Latino Studies.

Nonetheless, the role of Latino Studies in higher education remains a controversial issue for a large number of universities. Advocates for Latino Studies still envision themselves as engaged in a campaign to democratize the academy by broadening the scope of inquiry and instruction. However, now, 30 years after the student sit ins and building takeovers, Latino Studies (and ethnic and race studies in general) has generated new scholarship that reinterprets important episodes and processes of US history and society, produced an array of innovations in curricula, design and culturally sensitive pedagogy, developed interdisciplinary research initiatives that generate new ways of knowing, and experimented with novel methods of delivering university generated knowledge to the community. In the process, Latino Studies has posed epistemic challenges to the hegemony of the disciplines. The increased numbers of job announcements for Latino Studies positions, the revitalization of some programs, the announcement of new Latino Studies initiatives, and the rather aggressive recruitment for senior Latino Studies scholars that is taking place suggest that academic administrators are beginning to realize the growing importance of Latino Studies. The issue, which bears repeating, is how will Latino Studies be positioned in the university in the years to come.

The making of an academic field

Although a number of studies are available, a detailed, historically grounded comparative analysis of the beginnings and evolution of Chicano, Mexican American, and Puerto Rican Studies needs to be written. In 1968, the first Chicano Studies Department was established in California State College, Los Angeles, as a result of vigorous demands and strikes by the United Mexican American Students (Muñoz, 1989: 130). In March 1969, the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education organized a conference at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The participants drafted Plan de Santa Barbara for college level instruction on the Chicano/a experience in the US and outlined the elements of a new academic enterprise that linked the creation of knowledge with community empowerment. The organizers wrote, 'We recognize that without strategic use of education, an education that places value on what we value, we will not realize our destiny.' Higher education was to be employed 'for the development of our community', which necessitated that the 'university work for our people.' The conference also resulted in the unification of regional Chicano student organizations into the national Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Atzlán (MEChA), which assumed a leadership role in promoting Chicano Studies. Soon other programs and departments were established in the California State University system. According to Carlos Muñoz Jr, 'Chicano Studies was and is largely a California product.' By 1984, 19 Chicano Studies programs had been founded in the University of California and California State University systems (Muñoz, 1984: 5-6). In 1970, the University of Texas Austin established the Center for Mexican American Studies. The current Center for Chicano-Boricua Studies at Wayne State began as the Latino En Marcha Leadership program in 1971.

In April 1969, the Black and Puerto Rican Student Community took over the walled-in South Campus of the City College of New York and closed the university until the board of trustees agreed to establish a School of Black and Puerto Rican Studies. The Puerto Rican Student Union issued a pronouncement, 'Somos Puertorriqueños y Estamos Despertando,' in 1969 that vowed 'to bring the services of the university to the community which is denied the knowledge beyond those "ivy walls" that are made to keep the majority of the people ignorant.' The same year the New York City Board of Education provided priority funding for Black and Puerto Rican Studies in the City University of New York (CUNY) (Bonilla *et al.*, 1982). The establishment of other departments and programs followed quickly. In 1970, Livingston College of Rutgers University established the first Puerto Rican Studies Program

in New Jersey. By 1973, 17 CUNY units had established Puerto Rican Studies programs and departments. Programs were established in a number of SUNY campuses and private institutions. In 1973, CUNY established the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños as a research unit with a permanent staff of professional research associates. The Centro was the product of the demands of a politicized social movement that was linked to the struggles of other racialized communities.

Significantly, for many among this generation, the search for a liberating education is closely linked to the parallel struggles of Black and Chicano people. With the Chicano, Puerto Rican youth share a struggle to maintain a language, culture and win political autonomy in the face of institutions that have little love or compassion for a people that speak Spanish. (CPRSR, 1997)

Chicano Studies did not abruptly appear on the academic scene in the late 1960s. The path-breaking research of George Sánchez, Julián Samora, Ernesto Galarza, and Américo Paredes recast the Chicano subject as a politically conscious agent who struggled against the institutions of class and racial oppression. While the scholarship offered a much needed alternative interpretation, the implicit assimilationist discourse that it sanctioned was rejected by a youthful movement that advocated systemic reform of educational institutions and identified the preservation of cultural nationalism as fundamental to this goal (Muñoz, 1997).

A point of departure for the scholarship in this formative stage in the development of Latino Studies was a critique of the epistemological foundations of the social sciences and historical inquiry, and a repudiation of canonical claims of value neutrality in the pursuit of knowledge. The university was implicated as a crucial component of an overarching structure of racial and class oppression. Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies disavowed the assimilationist discourse and eschewed social science positivism as a static and ahistorical mode of analysis ill-suited to the task of reclaiming a history long denied (Vazquez, 1995). To counter the racism of the university, which expounded an ideology of assimilation but practiced the politics of exclusion, Chicanos and Puerto Ricans adopted an essentialist posture and viewed with deep skepticism the process of negotiation and compromise practiced by these institutions.

Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies emphasized a radical historiography of colonialism and territorial conquest and displacement, racialization of subject peoples and their economic exploitation, denial of equal citizenship, and a quest for symbols and practices of resistance and national affirmation. Given that Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans

had been systematically excluded from the historical narrative of the United States, the pioneering scholarship questioned long-standing preconceptions regarding their contributions to building this society. Rodolfo Acuña's 1972 path-breaking study recast long-established depictions of Chicanos as passive subjects who aspired to be assimilated into the dominant society (1972). He documented a history of the Chicano resistance to the onslaught of Anglo colonization and displacement, and portrayed Chicano/as as agents in the making of their own history. A new narrative that centrally inserted Chicanos into the history of the Western United States was a vital antidote to the sanitized renditions of Manifest Destiny. According to Alberto Camarillo, the purpose of these early historical works was 'the recovery and reconstruction of an ignored and obscured past' – which challenged a 'history in which people of Mexican origin in the Southwest were cast into the shadows if not altogether omitted from historical consideration' (1999). Almost two decades ago Renato Rosaldo, of Stanford University, observed that Chicano Studies 'shared in the broader endeavor of combating ideological, political, and economic forms of oppression confronted by their research subjects.' In addition to the critique of history as practiced in the academy, Chicano and Chicana scholars confronted the racially biased methodology of social science inquiry as practiced in the academy, and were committed to undertake applied research on education, migrant workers, and health-care delivery (Rosaldo, 1985: 27).

Frank Bonilla, the founding director of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, observed that the Puerto Rican Studies research agenda 'meant a rejection of the defeatist visions of Puerto Rican reality promulgated in academic research' (Bonilla *et al.*, 1982: 72). Puerto Rican Studies exists, he argued, because enough Puerto Ricans 'reject any version of education or learning that does not forthrightly affirm that our freedom as a people is a vital concern and an attainable goal' (1987: 17). In an article on the origins of Puerto Rican Studies I wrote,

Those of us who view pedagogy as inherently political recognized that our task was to reinterpret the distorted and culturally denigrated history of our community, to directly repudiate entrenched notions that our community consisted of a passive and subservient people, and to demolish the racist stereotypes which demeaned our past and discredited our presence in the United States. (Cabán, 1985: 7)

Historical rediscovery, national affirmation, and knowledge for political empowerment and community development fueled the incipient intellectual project of creating a new Puerto Rican and Chicano subject who was imbued with agency and capable of using the existing institution.

This formative stage of the field was also characterized by a search for appropriate paradigms that could be deployed to theorize the conditions of Chicanos/as as displaced and Puerto Ricans as colonized people. Chicanos refashioned Blauner's concept of internal colonialism to explicate the array of institutions and practices that subjugated the Chicano community (García, 1996; Moore, 1997; Gutiérrez, 2000). By the early 1970s, the Center for Puerto Rican Studies began to theorize the relation between capitalist development, colonialism, and migration to comprehend the 'massive presence of Puerto Ricans in the United States' and their collective condition as a cheap, disposable proletariat in metropolitan labor markets (History Task Force, 1979: 7).

Although often informed by Marxist and structural analysis, much of the academic production of this period (late-1960s to mid-1980s) failed to interrogate adequately the practice and mechanism of race, gender, and sexual orientation oppression within the national formation. Neither was the scholarship sufficiently comparative in approach, and it often opted for an analytical perspective that explored the relations between the oppressor and the oppressed as recalcitrant oppositional binaries whose behavior was racially motivated. Political analysis relied on a discursive practice that essentialized both actors, and discouraged more nuanced thinking on strategies of resistance to the assimilationist power of the university. The reliance on historical and political analysis, as opposed to other disciplinary-based perspectives, to generate an understanding of the conditions of Puerto Ricans and Chicanos reflected the dominance of males as the intellectual workers of this early era of Latino Studies (Blea, 1988: 3). Major theoretical and political challenges to male-centered, nationalistic discourse would be launched in the 1980s and 1990s, initially by feminists, and subsequently by queer scholars who explored the intersections of sexual orientation with other counter hegemonic discourses and practices of identity formation (Davalos, 2001).

The early Puerto Rican and Chicano Studies scholarship shared many of the same normative concerns and analytical perspectives, but they differed in one significant area. Whereas the Chicano historiography and the emerging social science literature primarily explored the Chicano experience in the US, early Puerto Rican Studies was heavily invested in reinterpreting the economic history of Puerto Rico under US colonial domination. Sociologist Clara Rodríguez observes that prior to the 1970s the literature was 'reflective (and in some cases supportive) of Puerto Rico's colonial relationship.' During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the bulk of the literature was critical of US colonialism, 'and attempted to deconstruct the earlier literature and contextualize Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans' (1994). However, research and theorizing soon focused on

the nexus between colonialism, capitalist development, and migration to the United States.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Latino Studies achieved significant academic maturation and professional development. The philanthropic foundations were important in training a cohort of Latino scholars. The Ford, Rockefeller, Compton, and Mellon Foundations awarded fellowships, which were critical in building Latino-based scholarship. The Inter-University Project on Latino Research (established in 1983) promoted collaboration among Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Latino research centers and initiated and conducted a wide range of interdisciplinary and comparative Latino-focused research, much of it conceived to be policy relevant. The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute and the Julian Samora Research Institute were established during the mid-1980s and further amplified Latino research capabilities (see Conde, 2001). These research centers attempted to deliver on early movement goals to undertake policy-relevant research that could be utilized to empower the Latino community. These fellowships and research initiatives served to validate academically the presence of Latinos and Latinas and their scholarship in the academy.

Latinos established national professional associations in order to facilitate the sharing of research, to create intellectual communities and to enhance the academic development of the field. The National Association of Chicano and Chicana Studies (NACCS) was established in 1973, while the Puerto Rican Studies Association was established much later in 1992. In the early 1990s, the Latin American Studies Association set up a permanent Latino Studies section in recognition of the growing importance of US Latino populations in Latin American political, economic and social dynamics. A number of journals on Latino and Chicano Studies were published. These included the highly regarded *Atzlán*, established over three decades ago. Other publications include the *Latino Studies Journal*, *The Centro Journal* (originally the *Boletín*), and *The Latino Review of Books* (now the *Latino/a Research Review*). This publication, *Latino Studies*, under the editorship of Suzanne Oboler, is the most recent interdisciplinary scholarly journal in the field.

The rapid expansion of the Cuban and Dominican college age populations in Florida and New York City generated demand for research centers and undergraduate programs that explored the histories of these communities in the United States as well as in their home countries. In 1991, Florida International University established the Cuban Research Institute, which supports, generates, and disseminates research on both Cuba and Cuban Americans. A new scholarship on the Cuban American experience is evolving that is indicative of a sea change in the academic community's self-perception (see Fernández, 1992).

Second-generation Cuban American scholars are not as inclined as the émigrés of the 1959 revolution to view themselves as an exile community. Their scholarship has focused on issues of identity, exile politics, community development, Cuban Americans in US foreign policy-making, and women as economic agents. By the early 1990s, the large Dominican population of New York City was beginning to exercise its growing commercial and political influence. The Dominican Studies Institute (DSI) was established in 1994 in response to pressure from the Council of Dominican Educators for CUNY to create an institute to address the glaring gap of knowledge on the Dominican community. Current research focuses on the socio-economic characteristics of Dominican communities, the characteristics of the migration experience, transnational community formation, the construction of national identity, and the impact of returning migrants on the Dominican Republic.

During the 1990s, Latino/a Studies underwent considerable redefinition. A new generation of scholars employed the analytical tools and conceptualizations of diverse disciplinary traditions to broaden the scope of historical inquiry and theorizing on the Latino/a experience. The scholarship included postmodernism and more theoretically nuanced applications of historical materialist analysis. The national unity that was perceived as indispensable to advance *La Causa* gave way to the reality that no national origin group was homogeneous; that all these formations were socially constructed and riddled by class, racial, gendered and sexual orientation divisions. The notion of ethnic identity became profoundly complicated and contested.

Latina feminist scholarship was an early and important intellectual challenge to the essentialist and male-centered orientation of the early Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies research. Chicana feminists shattered the male-imposed notion that nationalism supersedes and subsumes internal differences. They revealed that the monolithic, hegemonic construction of Chicano identity was not only male derivative, but was an exclusionary formulation that imposed a gendered division of intellectual labor (Montoya, 2000). As it questioned the established chronicles of the western experience and colonial practice, Latina feminism offered a gender-based reconsideration of the historical narratives of the Chicano, Mexican American and Puerto Rican experiences. In particular, the work of Chicana scholars Antonia Castañeda, Deena González, Vicki Ruiz, Norma Alarcón, and Gloria Anzaldúa exposed the male centrism of Chicano history through their explorations of the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Citizenship, civil rights, language rights and identity occupied the concerns of sizable contingents of Latino/a scholars. Empirical studies on Latino/a political behavior, immigration and naturalization were also

published with increased regularity. Political scientist John García identified the ‘major themes of conceptual and analytical import’ of Latino Studies to political science as culture and identity, community, social structures, empowerment, and coalition formation. He maintained ‘that public policy continues to be a primary focus and concern of Latino Studies scholars’ (1997). The import of education research for policy prescriptions is particularly relevant here.

By the early 1990s, Latino and Latina Studies was evolving along at least the following five tracks: (1) the new history that emphasized the areas of urban communities, women, and political and institutional histories (Camarillo, 1999), and the frontera or border as an analytical and theoretical construct; (2) literary and cultural studies that made major contributions to the discourse of identity and racial formations, sexual subjectivity, analysis of cultural production, and cross border identities; (3) politics and political economy, with a focus on political participation and electoral behavior, economic justice and labor markets, social movements, immigration, Diaspora studies, and legal citizenship; (4) interdisciplinary scholarship on social constructions of identity, critical race studies, sexual subjectivities, language and cultural citizenship; (5) feminist scholarship that has informed all these analytical and theoretical concerns with new gendered perspectives.

Virginia Sánchez Korrol observed of the new historically oriented scholarship, ‘the result was a historical interpretation that conferred agency on US Latinos, bringing them out of the shadows and on to center stage where their reality contrasted and contested the dominant Anglo experience’ (1996). Ramón Gutiérrez, however, cautions ‘if the old Chicano history depended on certitude, on objectivity, ... on the facts gathered in a systematic and unbiased fashion to reveal the truth... “the new” Chicana and Chicano historical writings have been presented as a narrative prose discourse that is invented, constructed and positioned in relationship to power’ (2000: 106–107).

During the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s postmodern scholarship generated a critical rethinking of the social construction of identities and made evident the artificiality of cultural, racial uniformity within Latinidad. More recently, a new generation of scholars has embarked on theoretical and empirical explorations of sexual orientation and relationship to identity, transnationalism, and popular culture, the politics of language usage and bilingualism, Latino cultural studies, local electoral politics and mass political behavior, and analyses of the impact of national economic changes on Latino communities.

This intellectual effervescence did not occur in a vacuum. The impact of globalization, Caribbean and Central and South American immigration, the growth of US Latino populations and their heightened electoral



importance, the development of information technologies, and growth of the college age Latino student population were among the more notable changes that compelled many universities to rethink the role of Latino Studies (see Cabán, 1999). The paradox of growing economic and political interdependence between Latino communities in the United States and their countries of origin heightened policy interest (Bonilla *et al.*, 1998).

Enclaves

The pioneering Chicano/Mexican American and Puerto Rican Studies programs of the 1960s and early 1970s are archetypes of the Enclaves. The term enclave is an apt metaphor, which nicely characterizes the first of the three settings in which Latino Studies is practiced. An enclave is ‘a territory enclosed within a foreign territory, or a region inhabited by a particular race or set apart for a special purpose’ (Webster’s 3rd. International Dictionary). Indeed, the academic community portrayed these programs as inhabited by an exotic and alien group of students who were engaged in ritualistic learning to recapture or create a storied, most likely fictionalized, past. They were described as purveyors of sectarian nationalism who preached a history of victimization and hostility toward ‘white America.’ The departments were energized with a sense of purpose that inscribed their intellectual work with very real political urgency. Surely Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies could be portrayed as an invasive movement whose objective was to transform the hegemony of a system of knowledge creation that demeaned the Latino/a experience when it was not ignoring it. The preamble of NACCS captures this sense of critical intellectual inquiry and political engagement. Its organizing principles underscore the use of ‘committed, critical and rigorous research to further the political actualization’ of the community.

These enclaves were academic sites that scrutinized and challenged the dominion of the traditional disciplines and university-sanctioned knowledge. The status of Puerto Rican and Chicano Studies as academic interlopers, who were marginal to the serious work of the university, gave them autonomy to experiment with alternative pedagogies, new curriculum models, interdisciplinarity, critical perspectives on knowledge creation and unique partnering arrangements with community organizations. Rather than being moribund, intellectually barren units, Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies were spaces of academic effervescence, animated by a synergy of intellectually committed students, progressive faculty, and empowered communities. These units were forged, it must be remembered, from a social movement that was national in scope and grounded in morally incontestable principles of inclusion and equality. The faculty, staff, and students envisioned themselves as forming part of a



national community of Chicano and Puerto Rican activists (labor unions, community organizations, student associations) who were engaged on a variety of fronts to achieve political access, social justice, and civil rights.

Throughout the 1970s, Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies, often decried as short-lived concessions to a tempestuous and boisterous minority population, loomed for academic administrators as a potentially permanent feature of the university. Opponents often maligned Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies units as self-imposed intellectual ghettos. They were portrayed as enclaves that harbored alienated and suspicious academic denizens who had chosen to withdraw from the enlightened university community. Purportedly, Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies inhibited their students' intellectual growth by insulating them from the university's vibrant academic life. The discursive attack was based on the fiction that Chicanos and Puerto Ricans had chosen segregation, and that they willfully harbored a parochialism that was counterproductive to racial and ethnic harmony. However, ghettos are created by people who have been victims of racism and who are denied full access and participation in their society. Ghettos are the consequence of social policies based on denial of full citizenship and economic justice, and are often the only alternative spaces for people who aspire to realize their human potentiality.

As Latino Studies labored in relative obscurity, it gradually built a political base that would make any attempt to dislodge the programs politically very costly. Many of these programs were housed in public universities and they successfully forged political alliances not only with progressive sectors in the university, but with community-based organizations. These programs established strong bonds with Latino/a student organizations, and drew support from Chicano and Puerto Rican alumni, many of whom were leaders in their communities. Despite the poverty of resources, onerous teaching load and oppressive service requirements, Latino Studies programs fulfilled their academic mission. Students not only continued to enroll in their courses, but were prepared to challenge efforts to dismantle or downsize these valued academic units. Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies were able to persevere and actualize their mission as alternative sites of knowledge production and instruction. They were pivotal for long-term community development because of their positive effect on student retention and because they educated a politically conscious and intellectually prepared leadership.

Despite these achievements the scholarly repertoire during this formative period, particularly in the social sciences, was thin. F. Chris García in early 1973 lamented the 'problem of inadequate reading materials,' and complained of the absence of a textbook on Chicano politics (1973: 6). A decade later another leading figure of Chicano Studies, Carlos Muñoz, observed that 'the development of Chicano Studies has been a largely



uneven process. The field is characterized by a diversity of perspectives, approaches, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies' (1984: 17). Puerto Rican Studies research, although more limited in volume, was nonetheless characterized by similar intellectual divergence and competing analytical concerns. It was further complicated by the emotionally charged question of whether the Puerto Rican nation resided on the island or included the economic migrants who resided in the United States.

Notwithstanding the impressive academic and institutional development of Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies throughout the decade of the 1970s, few were the universities that accepted the validity of the field. The majority of Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies units were neglected and relegated to the margins of the university's intellectual life (see García, 1996). Lamentably, even today many Latino Studies units labor in the backwaters of the university and are still portrayed as academic artifacts of an earlier period of political turmoil. Latino Studies Units also sustain the image of liberal universities that are committed to affirmative action and serve to mollify a Latino student body that is always perceived as potentially volatile.

In the mid-1990s Ignacio Garcia described Chicano Studies as confronting a critical juncture that will decide whether it will 'retake its place as an agent for change or simply become a step child of the academic ivory tower.' Chicano Studies faces a crucial choice: either to stay 'underfunded, understaffed, and considered only peripheral or marginal in importance as an academic field,' or to be incorporated into larger ethnic studies programs through a variety of arrangements. Both options will result in the eventual erosion, and possible scrapping of Chicano Studies, according to Garcia. The option he advocates is to establish adequately funded and staffed Chicano Studies departments (1996: 181). He believes that the autonomous department structure will enhance the development of Chicano Studies, provide effective teaching, and serve as a resource for the community. Yet, it is precisely this model that is criticized by discipline-based scholars and by university administrators as anachronistic. Moreover, emerging scholars trained in the traditional disciplines, but with research and expertise in Latino Studies, are not necessarily inclined to seek single ethnic studies departmental appointments. The trend nationally is for joint appointments across ethnic studies programs and academic departments.

Some observations on ethnic studies departments and Latino Studies

Ethnic Studies departments (ESDs) are umbrella academic units that incorporate nominally autonomous programs in African American, Asian



American, Native American, and Chicano Studies. Latino/a Studies programs have rarely been established in these departments. Ethnic Studies departments differ from centers for race and ethnicity (CREs) and American Studies (AS) in notable ways. A conceptual premise of many ESDs is that the history of racialized minorities in the United States is distinguished by oppression and exclusion, and in the case of Native Americans by a policy of extermination. CREs and AS privilege comparative analysis and theorizing that eschews the reality of entrenched racism as a permanent structural attribute of this society. They proffer an assimilationist discourse. Often citing a history of ‘successful’ assimilation of European ethnic minorities, CREs tend to deny the centrality of race in defining the limits of access, representation, and equity in US society. Although the different nationalities of white Europeans experienced intense racism, ultimately their whiteness guaranteed their eventual incorporation into the hierarchy of social and racial power. Ethnic Studies practitioners emphasize that it is precisely the contradiction between a mythologized discourse of assimilation and systematic exclusion that makes the history of racialized minorities in this country distinctive.

ESDs were established by university administrators in response to the national wave of activism and challenges by students of color. The question as to why some universities set up independent Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies academic units, and others set up the multiethnic/race studies departments that incorporated Raza and Chicano Studies is important given what it may reveal about the array of institutional, demographic, and organizational variables that led to the different outcomes. The vast majority of ESDs were established in California and most are still located in the West. Two of the oldest standing Ethnic Studies academic units are the College of Ethnic Studies, San Francisco State University, and the Ethnic Studies Department, University of California-Berkeley, both established in 1969. By the mid-1970s, the intellectual justification and organizational rationale for consolidating single ethnic and race studies programs into ESDs were discussed in a number of universities (Gutiérrez, 1994: 162–163). During the 1970s and 1980s dozens of ESDs were established. ESDs are primarily undergraduate teaching units, although Berkeley offers graduate degrees. These units have continued to evolve, reflecting the growing academic significance of the varied scholarship on the racialized minorities of the United States, as well as the rapidly changing student demographics that led to demand for more of these academic units.

Many academic administrators envisioned that ESDs would fulfill the universities’ commitment to affirmative action and diversity. ESDs were recruitment and retention devices for ‘minority’ students. Astute academic bureaucrats were also motivated to promote ESDs to preempt student demands to establish autonomous Asian American,



Native American, African American, and Chicano/Latino Studies departments. The concept of integrated ESDs was appealing to progressive, and cost-conscious, academic bureaucrats, and seemed to enjoy the support of faculty and students eager to break from the orthodoxy, and whiteness, of the traditional departments. However, many ESDs, particularly those that were denied adequate funding, were often plagued by internal rifts. Differences in hiring priorities among the subprograms, tensions over resource allocation, and clashes over pedagogical and curriculum content issues were not uncommon. Given the political necessity of maintaining parity among the subprograms, decisions were not necessarily made on the basis of academically sound considerations. In some instances epistemological clashes, contrasting analytical perspectives, and a variety of other complications severely weakened ESDs as intellectual forces on campus. ESDs experienced much of the same marginalization, budgetary hardships, and limited capacity to advance their academic interests in hostile institutional settings as did Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies.

While disciplinary clashes in the academy are commonplace, and reach the status of legend for some departments, they seldom threaten to undermine the department or bring into question the academic legitimacy of the discipline. However, given the vulnerability of Ethnic Studies units, the impact of such conflict on their development was significant. These structural and intellectual problems further eroded the fragile legitimacy of some ESDs in their institutions and all but guaranteed their marginalization from university decision-making. Johnella Butler, former chairperson of the American Ethnic Studies department in the University of Washington, identified three major problems within Ethnic Studies: (1) *resource issues*: ‘battles between different ethnicities in the department for restricted resources;’ (2) *disciplinary priorities*: ‘the debate between the sociological and humanities aspects of ethnic studies;’ (3) *Quality of professoriate*: ‘and the dilution of Ethnic Studies departments due to a disregard for qualifications in selecting faculty’ (Keyes). Another prominent scholar in the field observed that as a result of consolidation of ethnic and race studies units into a single department ‘instructional budgets are reduced... decision making and autonomy are compromised and need to be constantly negotiated, and the symbolic visibility of these fields of study is reduced’ (Aparicio, 1999: 5).

By the early 1990s a number of ESDs abandoned the umbrella structure of the early period that emphasized directed research and instruction in specific racial and ethnic groups, and reconfigured their curriculum to emphasize comparative analysis and impact of global forces. The University of California, San Diego, established an ESD in 1991 that was designed to overcome many of the conceptual clashes and

organizational limitations of the older ESDs (Gutiérrez, 1994: 164). The department is representative of a new approach that seeks to promote comparative research, but still adheres to many of the normative considerations that were central to the earlier ethnic studies academic project (see Marable, 2001: 52–54). In 1996, the University of Colorado established an ESD, which contained a Chicano Studies subprogram. The department was the ‘natural outgrowth’ of the Center for Studies of Race and Ethnicity in America, which was initiated in 1987 and endeavors to provide a ‘cohesive framework for the study of racial and ethnic groups.’ The tendency for ESDs to promote collaborative research and teaching is suggestive of the increasing emphasis that universities are placing on comparative analysis of race and ethnicity in the United States. Moreover, the comparative approach within a departmental structure does foster interdisciplinarity among ethnic- and race-specific programs. ESDs that are well funded and supported by the university do have the possibility of stimulating genuine interdisciplinary research on racialized communities. However, it is difficult to project whether such integrated units will become the norm in the near future. More specifically, the prospects for effecting such a reformulation of ethnic studies will be affected by a series of factors particular to the institution. Any reconceptualization of the academic orientation of the ESDs that is initiated by the university’s administration will likely precipitate challenges by skeptical faculty. Particularly, in a post-9/11 climate, which is increasingly less tolerant of difference, tradition-bound faculty and wary administrators will not be inclined to enhance the resources of academic units that are not perceived to be promoting assimilation and political orthodoxy.

Transgressive Latino Studies

Although the 1980s was a period of retrenchment in which affirmative action was systematically assaulted, it was also a decade of continued scholarly productivity in Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies – albeit at a reduced level.¹ The established analytical frameworks of the 1960s were re-evaluated and the normative and ideological underpinnings of the prevailing schools of thought were internally debated. Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies programs had survived the initial politically turbulent periods, and persevered despite the neglect and often open hostility they encountered. The Ford Foundation Fellowship for Minorities was a critically important program that financed the training of hundreds of young scholars of color during the politically conservative era of the Ronald Reagan presidency.

The nucleus for building a unified research agenda was being formed in the early 1980s. In a July 1982 memo to the Ford Foundation, Frank

1 Rosaldo (1985) does report a rising productivity in Chicano Studies from 1970 to 1981, ‘when it dropped off, perhaps reflecting the fate of affirmative action in the Reagan era.’ He employs publications as the measure of productivity.

Bonilla observed,

I believe there is unity around the urgent need for fresh, objective information about the situation of Hispanics in the US that is attentive to the particularities of each national origin group. There is consensus as well around the idea that the capabilities for that undertaking is now present within our own ranks, should be managed and implemented by teams of scholars and political activists already engaged in such work within our communities, and should be used to strengthen institutions and enlarge the experience and training of young Hispanics with a commitment to carry that work forward in the future. There is great concern about how that new knowledge may be brought to bear effectively in policy formation and in producing genuine change in behalf of Hispanics. (Quoted by Cabán, 1985: 38)

By the early 1990s, the Latino-focused scholarship engaged virtually all the social sciences and humanities and clearly was transgressing into the areas of knowledge production over which the traditional disciplines claimed sovereignty. The Transgressive state underscores the development of Puerto Rican and Chicano Studies beyond their original set of concerns, and signals that Latino-based research was beginning to insinuate itself into the mainstream of the university's intellectual life. However, this process has been uneven, since most universities are not receptive to enlarging their commitment to Latino-related instruction at the cost of other academic initiatives. Moreover, as Frances Aparicio observes, 'tensions between mainstreaming and identity politics, community-based research and theoretical connections, and nationalism and pan-Latinidad have internally informed ... the slow growth of the field' (1999: 4). Despite the academic maturation and growth of the Latino scholarly community, Latino Studies was still an unwelcome stranger in much of academe. A decade ago Refugio Rochin and Adaljiza Sosa Riddell commented that although Chicano Studies 'have made much progress in terms of creating insightful literature and innovative knowledge, Chicano Studies programs have continued to face severe pressure from people advocating their demise' (1992: 132).

Naturally, Chicano Studies attained a higher level of academic acceptance and achieved a firmer foothold in the academy than did Puerto Rican Studies. In large measure this was the consequence of the sheer volume of Chicano scholarship and its contribution to rethinking important discourses on American history, particularly the conquest and remaking of the West. The role of Puerto Ricans in the formation of US society was less acknowledged and understood than that of Mexican Americans and Chicano/as. Research into the political history and social

formation of the US-based Puerto Rican population was still in its infancy in the mid-1980s.

The development of Latino scholarship during the 1990s was also notable for the diversity of its intellectual production: postmodernist critiques of static paradigms that had guided the early research, increasingly sophisticated theoretical challenges to the patriarchal structure of intellectual authority, the growing affinity of many of its practitioners for literary cultural studies, and increased attention to the impact of transnationalism and globalization on community development. These diverse intellectual influences fueled interest in exploring the intersections of distinct national origin groups in the United States. Scholars began to contemplate an overarching non-essentialist rubric of *Latinidad* as a process of identity formation that, while respectful of national origin differences, nonetheless identified points of historical, cultural and economic commonality and affinity of Latin American and Caribbean origin US populations. This manifested itself in an openness among many Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies practitioners to the concept of Latino Studies that incorporated not only the Chicano and Puerto Rican experience, but Cuban, Dominican, Central, and South American Diaspora experiences as well.

What characterizes the Transgressive state is the variety of arrangements put into effect to broaden the scope of Latino Studies inquiry and instruction and to enhance the opportunities for pan-Latino comparative studies. Some units have broadened their curriculum and research focus to include other Latin American or Caribbean national origin populations; examples include Chicano/Latino Studies academic units or Puerto Rican and Latino units (Brooklyn College of CUNY, University of California State – Northridge). In 1996, UC Berkeley changed the name of its Chicano Studies program to Chicano/Latino Studies. The tendency in the Midwest has been to set up joint Chicano/Puerto Rican or more commonly Latino Studies programs (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Indiana University, Notre Dame University).

Another recurrent program title is Latino and Latin American and/or Caribbean Studies, which seeks to bridge ethnic and area studies and promote ‘more integrated hemispheric approaches and reconceptualizations of these fields’ (Acosta-Belen, 2001: 240). The Latin American and Latino Studies Department of UC Santa Cruz is by far the largest of these units that examines how ‘both Latin American and US Latino communities are being transformed by globalization at the same time as deep historical legacies continue to be very present.’² The Center for Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies of the City University of New York (CUNY), established in 2001, aims to develop a university-wide research capability in this area.

2 Department Web page. URL: <http://www.lals.ucsc.edu/program.html>

The attempt to formulate a unified framework to study the intersections of Latino and Latin American Studies is relatively recent. For almost two decades, Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies and Latin American Studies worked in virtual isolation from each other. This separation was partially a result of the radically different histories of these academic fields. Latin American Studies quickly emerged as an academic field that was privileged by the university because of generous funding from the national security state for area studies in the 1960s. In contrast, Puerto Rican and Chicano Studies literally forced their way into the academy and were imbued with a militancy that challenged the university's legitimacy as a site of learning. In fact, Latin American Studies was initially implicated as a state-sanctioned program to generate understanding of Latin America polities in order to extend US influence in the region.

However, during the mid-1980s divisions erupted between progressive Latin American Studies scholars who abhorred the plight and suffering of Latin American populations and policy-oriented academic professionals who endorsed the foreign policy objectives and economic policies of the United States in the region. The political values of this new generation of progressive Latin American scholars resonated with Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies scholars who also opposed US intervention and militarism. The gradual emergence of Latino Studies, with its emphasis on comparison and transnationalism, on immigration and diasporic communities, also facilitated academic collaboration with Latin American Studies practitioners. Despite the evident differences between Latino Studies and Latin American Studies, some departments have advanced the development of a unified field of Latino and Latin American Studies. The realization that borders and territories are not the exclusive markers of political and national identities, nor pose barriers to capital and labor mobility, enhances the prospects for continued collaboration.

During the culture wars of the 1990s Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies were criticized for failing to abandon their antiquated analytical frameworks and for lacking the requisite cosmopolitanism to embark on cutting edge research. Proponents were accused of refusing to acknowledge that their status as a racialized minority is a historically specific condition that can change as it has for European minorities. Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies programs were faulted for being too narrow in their focus of research and instruction, lacking a comparative and contemporary perspective to explain the diversity of the Latino experience, and failing to draw connections to the history of other racial groups and minorities in the United States and globally. The authors of a Columbia University study make this one of the key grounds for opposing autonomous ethnic studies units and creating a center under one director. For studies of racialized minorities to become influential at Columbia,



Ethnic Studies must be guided by ‘the principles underpinning the pedagogical and research missions of the university... should not exist in intellectual isolation... must be free of any intellectual orthodoxy... must be open to all of the campus community’ (Columbia University). Some question the utility of programs that engage the experiences of one racialized minority for understanding the complexity of the contemporary United States. Administrators argue that these societal changes justify consolidation in order to structure more extensive curricula and to build a critical mass of faculty with research and teaching interests in Latin American and Latino issues.

Consolidation of ethnic studies programs (pan-Latino) or linkage (Latin American and Latino) is also promoted by a faculty who desire to fortify their program’s often tenuous moorings. Proponents of Latino Studies see the heuristic utility of contextualizing the analysis of specific national origin populations by reference to the diversity of the Latin American and Caribbean origin population of the US. Some Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies programs and departments justified their move into Latino Studies and Latin American Studies by citing the academic needs of a growing and diversified national origin composition of the student body. Jesse Vázquez describes the ‘curricular adaptations’ of various departments in the CUNY system to accommodate newer Caribbean and Latin American immigrants as ‘a kind of Darwinian ability that has allowed for the continued survival of many ‘ (1989: 15). Some of these strategies are necessary, but there are potential pitfalls. By arguing for expansion on the basis of demographic diversity, some programs unwittingly play into the hands of their opponents who have always believed they are political expediences and service-oriented units with a shallow intellectual foundation.

The absorption of Latino Studies

There are two variations in this third state of Latino Studies which I have called absorption:

The first is the aggregation of a variety of ethnic studies programs (Chicano, Latino, African American, Asian American, and Native American) in one administrative unit that does not privilege any one racialized minority, but which visualizes the history of these minorities as part of the collective American ethnic and racial experience.³ These are the American Studies programs.

The second is the absorption of ethnic studies programs under an umbrella structure that promotes comparative interdisciplinary research. These are the centers for the study of race and ethnicity. The predominant feature in both is the representation of Latinos and Latinas as a racialized

³ The issues discussed in this section are more fully explored in Cabán (Forthcoming).

analytical category whose history and characteristics can best be understood through comparative analysis with other ethnic and racial categories. Under both settings Latino Studies is converted into a subprogram of a larger academic undertaking, and experiences a significant loss of autonomy in key areas of hiring, academic programming and curriculum development. Similarly, its visibility is diminished and its capacity to advocate for expansion of Latino-based scholarship is circumscribed by the requirements of the larger units to which it is assigned. Moreover, Latinidad is theorized as a racialized social construction equivalent to other ethnicities, and which has a historical specificity that can be transcended.

American Studies is undergoing an intellectual reassessment that pits proponents of an approach that celebrates American exceptionalism, universalistic values and liberalism, and renders a triumphalist disquisition on the evolution and contemporary situation of the United States, against a new generation of critical scholars who challenge this approach, which is predicated on assimilationist discourse. Some American Studies programs have responded to the critique by including studies of race and ethnicity as the core conceptualization of an emergent paradigm on the American experience. In contrast, the academic objective of centers for race and ethnicity vary by institution, but ideally it is to explore, in a comparative framework, the historical formation of racialized minority populations in order to generate a new knowledge of broad applicability, and in the process challenge orthodox ways of knowing that are entrenched in the traditional disciplines.

According to proponents of the centers and American Studies, their comparative approach employs the analytical tools and conceptual innovations which are vital to gain knowledge about demographic and cultural change in the US. This paradigmatic contribution is purportedly beyond the capabilities of Latino Studies and the other ethnic and race studies fields. Moreover, proponents of these centers believe that ethnic studies scholarship has reached a level of academic maturation beyond which it cannot advance. However, it has not been demonstrated that the absorption of ethnic studies into centers and American Studies programs will yield superior research and conceptual advances. It is precisely because Latino Studies has made significant academic advances that institutional interest persists in absorbing this field into larger academic units.

The agglomeration of ethnic and race studies subprograms within centers and American Studies does not guarantee academic collaboration or provide the intellectual coherence to produce qualitatively superior scholarship. This may very well be an empirical question, as much a function of the academic leadership, institutional resources, and other structural attributes of the centers in question. The ascendancy of centers for the study of race and ethnicity and the campaign to reclaim a central

role for American Studies in the intellectual fabric of the university have taken place with particular alacrity in the elite institutions. A number of these institutions have established centers for the study of race and ethnicity since 1988, including the University of Chicago (1996), Brown (1988), Columbia (1999), and Stanford (1996). In 1993, Colorado State University established the Center for Applied Studies in American Ethnicity. Princeton revitalized its American Studies Program in 1997. 'Cornell University received a \$1.4 million grant from the Mellon Foundation (2001) for various projects, which included among its "key goals" the transformation of American Studies that gives ethnic American Studies a critical place in the field' (Cornell University News Release January 19, 2001).

The perseverance of Latina and Latino scholarship and persistent student demands were undoubtedly perplexing and a source of frustration for academic bureaucrats. Conscious that the establishment of Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies in the 1960s was a historic mistake that university administrators would never repeat, but facing continued political pressure, administrators responded by establishing centers for the Study of Race and Ethnicity and more 'inclusive' American Studies programs. Politically, the aim was to 'pacify' ethnic studies by containing them 'within the confines of a more nationalist' project typified by American Studies (Sánchez, 2000: 41). These academic units were portrayed as the more appropriate institutional settings for research and teaching on the 'American ethnic experience.'

However, American Studies, always an amorphous and unstructured academic field, was itself under assault by scholars of color who launched vibrant critiques of the field. The American Studies Association became a site of contestation as well as mediation for these debates. Sean Wilentz, director of Princeton University's American Studies, made a revealing observation when he reported that a major controversy facing American Studies was 'how to respond to the rising ethnic studies movement' (Wilentz, 1996). According to George Sánchez, as a result of criticisms by scholars of color a new American Studies paradigm was emerging, which aspires to undertake a novel re-examination of multicultural US society (Sánchez, 2000: 43). The conflictual state of affairs between American and ethnic studies, which according to the ASA was often manipulated by university administrations, prompted the Association in 1998 to convene a workshop on 'American Studies and Ethnic Studies: Conflict, Collaboration, Synergy,' with the aim of identifying sources of collaboration between them (American Studies Program Newsletter, 1998).

The University of Southern California adopted a novel approach to moderate the intellectual antagonism between these fields by merging them into the Center for American Studies and Ethnicity (2001) and by establishing a program under its auspices that offered majors in American



Studies, African American Studies, Asian American Studies, and Chicano/Latino Studies. However, the preferred approach was to subsume ethnic studies within American Studies or to absorb them into Centers for the study of race and ethnicity. In 1994, the Committee on Diversity and Liberal Education of Princeton University recommended that the university address the rapidly expanding student demands for ethnic studies instruction by expanding the focus of its American Studies program 'to encompass studies of the comparative experience of the peoples of America, broadly defined.' In making a case for his program, Wilentz lauded his own vision of American Studies because it provides 'the opportunity to examine American culture from a broader, international perspective, to combat the provincialism that too often besets both American and Ethnic Studies.' Wilentz commended Schlesinger's admonishment that 'a fixation on ethnic differences presents a distorted picture of the United States as a country that is all "pluribus" and no "unum." He accused the study of ethnicity of 'blaming Western rationality, universalism, and humanism for the subjugation of non-whites... by whites.' For this reason ethnic groups were urged to 'defend their cultures from assimilation into a hegemonic mainstream "American" civilization' (Wilentz, 1996). His discourse saturated as it was with remarkable hubris, elicited a reasonable, but forceful response from Jesse M. Vázquez, president of the National Association for Ethnic Studies. Vázquez faulted Wilentz for his 'distortions, revisionist claims, and characterizations of ethnic studies as superfluous and simplistic and for promoting an analytical perspectives that ignores 'the urgency of lives that have been and continue to be shattered daily because of the way race, ethnicity, class, and gender play out in American society' (1993).

American Studies and the race and ethnicity centers differ from Latino and Ethnic Studies in that the former are conceived as interdisciplinary teaching and research units that do not have the normative commitment to activist scholarship, transformative politics and community development that were central tenets of the Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies movements. Implicit in this process of absorption is the use of evaluative standards that emanate from the traditions and priorities of the disciplines to assess the academic merit of ethnic studies scholarship. Presumably, absorption will import the much needed academic respectability that Ethnic Studies lacks according to its detractors. Those Latino and ethnic studies programs, unlike those that are autonomous academic units, will be portrayed as having matured and outgrown the politicized advocacy and celebratory rendition of communal particularism that purportedly still afflicts the rest of the field. The merger will reputedly bestow 'respectability' to Latino Studies and accelerate its professionalization.



The tendency for centers and American Studies programs to promote cross ethnic/race inquiry and instruction poses the danger of essentializing the Latino experience by portraying it as an amalgam of distinct historical experiences. Frances Aparicio alerts us to a parallel process in the academy when administrators deploy the rubric of Latino Studies to ‘erase and diminish the spaces that Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies carved’ (1999: 5). If deployed uncritically, the Latino label can result in sanitizing a history of political activism and critical engagement that is the legacy of the struggles of the 1960s. Suzanne Oboler cautioned that theorizing ethnicity requires first an appreciation for the ‘dynamics forged by the *articulated interaction* of class, race, and gender in shaping people’s access to citizenship rights and political inclusion;’ and second, an appreciation of the ‘transnational context’ in which national and ethnic identities ‘are being reconstituted and shaped in the United States’ (Oboler, 1995).

These warnings also make evident the indispensability of investing Latino Studies programs, departments, and centers with autonomy in decision-making arenas. Rather than advocating separate examinations of each of the national origin populations that are encapsulated in the term Latino, autonomous Latino Studies programs hold out the potential of embarking on rigorous comparative inquiry of the social construction of Latinidad as it is experienced across time and location. However, if Latino Studies programs are to be successful and relevant to legions of students, they will need to retain the normative values that defined their transformative goals, and obtain the academic authority that traditional disciplines possess (hiring, promotion and tenure, curriculum development, discretion over budgets, etc.).

Conclusion

The rethinking of the role of ethnic studies in higher education is taking place during a period of US global supremacy and unilateralism in world affairs. A triumphalist discourse attributes this supremacy to the superiority of US institutions and way of life. As they acknowledge the vibrant cultural and ethnic diversity of the country, national leaders are reasserting a singular patriotic credo that likens loyalty to the government with patriotism, and which equates dissent with disloyalty. The current re-emergence of American exceptionalism is degrading constitutional liberties and citizenship rights. In the post-9/11 context, difference and diversity are tolerated to the extent that they do not clash with an ideology of political conformity.

The debate on ethnic studies is framed in terms reminiscent of this discourse on difference and conformity. Within the university, the questions of how to manage difference and who defines curriculum content and faculty priorities have been central to the development of



race and ethnic studies. Many academic administrators still ponder whether Ethnic Studies programs nurture and defend difference or whether they can promote an assimilationist discourse that, while celebrating cultural and folkloric distinctiveness, adheres to the goals and priorities central to the university.

An earlier phase of US global pre-eminence at the turn of the 19th century was attributed to the country's democratic institutions, efficient capitalist economy, and the superior moral fiber of its people. Ultimately, greatness was attributable to a core set of values that was rooted in a deeply held conviction of racial and sociocultural Anglo-Saxon superiority. National greatness was explicitly associated with male-gendered whiteness. However, the profound demographic changes during the last two decades of the 20th century have altered the racial composition of this society as the percentage of the white population continued to decline and exposed the hollowness of a racially constituted discourse of US supremacy.

How does one explain the contemporary reassertion of US global predominance when the so-called minorities may soon comprise a third of the national population? A new discourse in keeping with the contemporary demographic changes is being shaped. It is not whiteness that makes America great, but its unique array of values, experiences, and institutions that derive from its specific history as an Anglo-Saxon nation. Historically, US elites have taken comfort in the extraordinary power of civil society and its key institutions to socialize new immigrant populations into the norms of political and economic behavior, and to legitimate the prevailing hierarchy of power. However, when these benign institutions fail to 'make Americans,' the US state has demonstrated time and again its willingness to enforce conformity and compliance.

That is why efforts of new arrivals to preserve their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness, of racialized minorities to rediscover and expose a history that contradicts the central tenets of US exceptionalism, and of activists who daily challenge the practice of race, gender, and sexual orientation oppression pose a threat to the carefully constructed ideology of US greatness, which is still based on a barely disguised discourse of white supremacy. The success with which Latino/as have nurtured a cultural identity and maintained symbolic, as well as real, ties to their countries of origin is an affront to those who believe in the intrinsic superiority of 'American' values. Consequently, Latino/as are often depicted as an undifferentiated mass of foreigners whose first language is Spanish and who nurture the anti-democratic cultural values and anti-Western social practices of their countries of origin. In this context, conservative forces have sought to deprive immigrant Latinos of state-mandated benefits or restrict the citizenship rights of Latinos. These voices proclaim that universities should not provide Latinos the opportunity to

study their experience since this only serves to foment balkanization and undermine national unity. For many who fear the growing influence of racialized minorities, Ethnic Studies programs and departments are seen as nurturing values that are antithetical to their notions of *E Pluribus Unum*.

Yet the history of ethnic and race studies refutes the thesis that careful and critically engaged scholarship on the experience of racialized minorities in this country leads to balkanization, alienation, and social tensions. A monolithic discourse that seeks to eradicate difference, or subsume difference, invariably is more destabilizing than an alternative approach that recognizes and values the reality of difference, but which explores the prospects and opportunities for building unity and strength from this difference.

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