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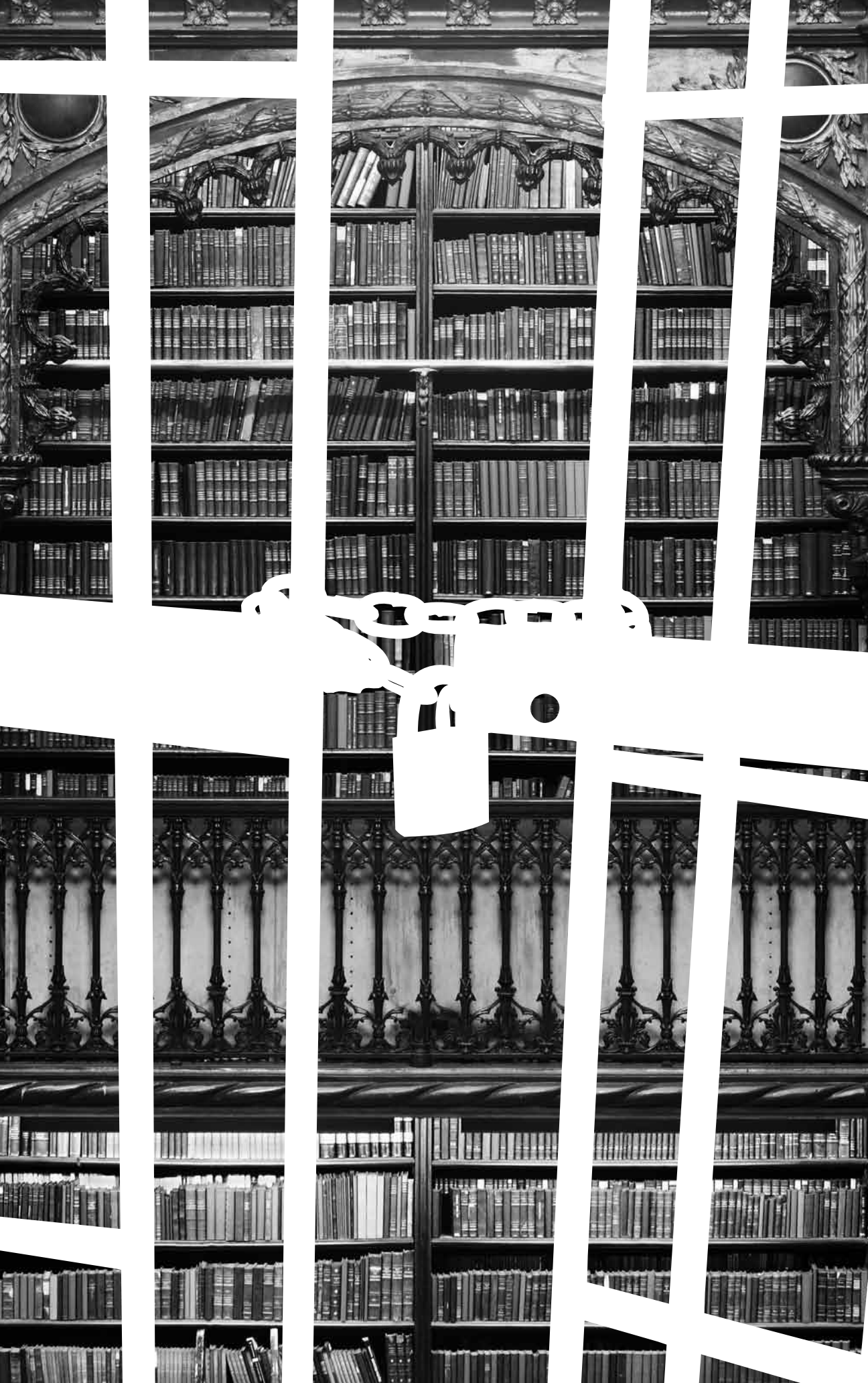
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PUERTO RICAN STUDIES: CHANGING ISLANDS OF KNOWLEDGE

PEDRO CABÁN

ABSTRACT

This essay discusses the factors that help explain the paradox of Puerto Rican Studies; on one hand the sustained institutional resistance to the establishment of viable Puerto Rican Studies academic units, and on the other, the growing acceptance of Puerto Rican Studies scholarship as a viable contributor to multidisciplinary research and teaching. The essay reviews the context in which Puerto Rican Studies units were established and discusses the array of factors that curtailed their institutional development. It also traces the trajectory of Puerto Rican Studies scholarship. It summarizes the diverse research priorities and competing intellectual currents in the prevailing scholarship. During the last four decades Puerto Rican Studies scholarship has acquired a measure of academic legitimacy and in the process has generated productive scholarly engagements with other disciplines. [Key Words: Puerto Rican Studies, Ethnic Studies, university, academia, development, Puerto Rican scholarship]

IN OCTOBER 2004, THE PUERTO RICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION

held its 6th Conference, entitled Three Decades of Puerto Rican Studies.

The organizers wanted to “provoke a critical stocktaking of the state of the field in the context of the growing salience in academe of interdisciplinary studies.”

They also envisioned a conference that would reflect on “the institutional development, intellectual maturation, and distinctive challenges” the field currently faces.¹ This essay will address these two themes by discussing the discrepancy between the continued marginalization of Puerto Rican Studies as academic units and the growing legitimacy of Puerto Rican Studies as an academic field.

Thirty-five years after the New York City Board of Higher Education resolved to “promote the development of Puerto Rican Studies and to give it special funding priority,” the programs and departments of Puerto Rican Studies continue to be underfunded and are often considered marginal to the mission of the university (Cabán 1985). Even those Puerto Rican Studies units that have sought to break from an externally imposed isolation by reforming their curricula to include instruction on other Hispanic Caribbean peoples and, more broadly, the Latino experience, have not materially strengthened their academic standing within their institutions. Many Puerto Rican Studies academic units continue to labor under substandard conditions comparable to those of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Given that race and ethnic studies are not academic priorities, the CUNY administration has resisted allocating scarce resources to increase the faculty strength and instructional capabilities of Puerto Rican Studies units.

Paradoxically, in contrast to the waning importance of Puerto Rican Studies academic units, Puerto Rican Studies scholarship has gained acceptance in some academic fields and disciplines. The scholarly output in the field, as measured by the number of doctoral dissertations, books, journal articles, and funding support for research, is impressive and continues to improve. The library of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños continues to expand its collection of primary and secondary materials, and demand for its services is robust. Moreover, the Centro has reclaimed its prominence as a site for intellectual collaboration and dissemination of research findings, and regularly publishes a refereed journal of notable academic quality.

In this essay I discuss some of the factors that help explain the paradox of Puerto Rican Studies: on one hand, the sustained institutional resistance to its academic units; and on the other, the growing acceptance of its scholarship.

In the first section I review the context in which Puerto Rican Studies units were established and discuss the array of factors and forces that curtailed their institutional development. In the second part I trace the trajectory of Puerto Rican Studies scholarship. I highlight the competing intellectual currents in the field and note the diverse research priorities of the prevailing scholarship. It is undeniable that Puerto Rican Studies scholarship has gained a measure of legitimacy in certain disciplines. But has this come at the expense of earlier goals to employ knowledge to empower the community?

PARADOXICALLY, IN CONTRAST TO THE WANING IMPORTANCE OF PUERTO RICAN STUDIES ACADEMIC UNITS, PUERTO RICAN STUDIES SCHOLARSHIP HAS GAINED ACCEPTANCE IN SOME ACADEMIC FIELDS AND DISCIPLINES.

The Trajectory of Puerto Rican Studies Departments

After disruptive student protests and building takeovers in 1969, beleaguered CUNY administrators, anxious to mollify militant Black and Puerto Rican students, established race and ethnic studies programs. This political activism and mobilization erupted during a unique historical moment of widespread opposition to the U.S. state. The civil rights movement and a national campaign against the Vietnam War created an environment favorable for the localized struggles of Black and Puerto Rican communities against the racist policies of the public authorities (Torres 1998). In New York, “a troubled city beset by poverty and ethnic division,” this confluence of national and local political forces set the context for a systemic challenge to the legitimacy of public higher education institutions (Kihss 1969b: 64).

CUNY’s senior colleges (Queens, Brooklyn, and the City College of New York) were the sites of student building takeovers and mass demonstrations.² The Black and Puerto Rican student community of CCNY occupied the administration building in early 1969 and issued non-negotiable demands for curricula and admissions reforms. The students gave “notice to university officials ... that we are wholly dissatisfied with racist conditions currently existing on the City College Campus—conditions that deny the very existence of the Black and Puerto Rican community” (Aquino Bermúdez 1975: 288; Kihss 1969a). Among their demands was the establishment of a separate school of ethnic studies. Other uprisings in Queens College and Brooklyn College convinced administrators to accede to student demands for programs of study in Black and Puerto Rican history and culture (Jewish and Italian studies were also approved in some campuses).

Although the Board of Higher Education approved plans for programs and departments at CCNY, Bronx Community, Hunter, Lehman, Richmond, and John Jay, it decided that “Black and Puerto Rican Studies shall not be organized as separate degree-granting schools within colleges” (Fraser 1969: 44). Nevertheless, momentum for Puerto Rican Studies carried over to other CUNY campuses, and by 1973 seventeen colleges had race and ethnic studies academic units that offered courses in Puerto Rican Studies (Nieves et al. 1987). During the same period the number of Puerto Rican Studies courses increased from 35 to 155. The instructional staff increased from 247 to 537 from 1970 to 1975, but still accounted for only 2.4 percent of CUNY’s total instructional staff (Rodríguez Fraticelli 1989: 24). Puerto Rican Studies programs were eventually established in Rutgers University, Fordham University, and a number of SUNY campuses as well.

Puerto Rican Studies programs were conceived as part of a much larger project to democratize the university and deploy its resources for community empowerment. Activists envisioned that Puerto Rican Studies units would operate as autonomous academic centers from which to launch a systematic and sustained critique on how university knowledge was created. This knowledge, they argued, was deployed to preserve and rationalize the oppression of racialized communities (Sánchez and Stevens Arroyo 1987).³ Black, Chicano, and Puerto Rican students articulated a coherent and consistent demand across the nation’s campuses. The goal, they said, of

ethnic studies is to invest people with the power to act and change, power to assume direction for their own lives and to alter the prevailing societal structure so we can all share what is justly ours. (Vázquez 1989: 10)

The Black and Puerto Rican student community called for restoring the City College of New York’s original mission to provide higher education to the children of the working class, primarily immigrant, population of New York City. By the late 1960s CUNY had been virtually transformed into an exclusive institution accessible only to city’s most academically prepared students, the vast majority of whom were drawn from the urban white middle class. CUNY was heavily subsidized by taxes on a working class that was increasingly racialized, poor, and politically marginalized. Black and Puerto Rican student militants demanded that CUNY reclaim its historic role as an egalitarian public university accessible to all, and that it adopt standards of accountability and service to the community. In 1970, after adopting open admissions and non-tuition policies, CUNY was one of the few channels of upward social mobility for the children of New York’s poor and working class. Johnetta Cole, president emeritus of Spellman College, identified these programs “as the intellectual wing of a political movement” (Rodríguez 1992: 77).

Although the Board of Higher Education (BHE) succumbed to student militancy, it established poorly funded Puerto Rican Studies programs with a bare minimum of faculty and resources. In announcing the decision to establish these programs, CCNY president Dr. Robert E. Marshak emphasized that the rationale for their establishment was politically motivated and not intellectually grounded. Marshak hoped that “as a result of the creation of these departments there will be a general relaxation on the campus and ... [thus] these departments will enable students to achieve an ethnic or group identity about which they feel so strongly” (CCNY 1971: 41).

The State's Fiscal Assault on CUNY

These were significant but fragile victories that were quickly reversed in the aftermath of the U.S. defeat in Vietnam and the severe fiscal crisis of the state that followed. Regarding this reversal of fortunes Frank Bonilla observed:

The wave of white guilt and the unpreparedness of university administrators to deal with student and community militancy that produced some early partial victories is a thing of the past. We are facing a well-planned, concerted reaction intended to restore the academy to its pre-1968 state. (Bonilla 1975)

The New York City fiscal meltdown of 1975–1977 emboldened state and city officials to slash funding for public higher education. Hostos, Medgar Evers, York, and John Jay College, all of which enrolled an overwhelming proportion of African American and Puerto Rican students, were slated to be closed or demoted to two-year community colleges (Breasted 1976: 30). Puerto Rican Studies, the politically more vulnerable of the programs, was particularly affected. In 1975 Chancellor Robert Kibbee targeted these programs “as prime candidates for elimination.” By 1976, six programs on black and Puerto Rican Studies had been eliminated, and the full-time faculty had been reduced from 56 to 35 in seven of the remaining units (Nieves et al. 1987: 7). In 1976, tuition on CUNY students was imposed, ending a 129-year policy of free tuition (Saxon 1976: 21). A Hunter College student newspaper noted that the steady erosion of public financing commenced when the CUNY student population became predominately Black and Latino. Critics of CUNY decried open admissions and the establishment of Black and Puerto Rican Studies for causing the deterioration of the academic standing of the once vaunted CUNY system.

THE MORAL AND POLITICAL IMPERATIVE THAT GAVE RISE TO PUERTO RICAN STUDIES WAS OVERWHELMED BY THE MAGNITUDE OF THE FISCAL CRISIS AND THE STATE LEGISLATURE'S ASSAULT ON CUNY.

The struggle to save Puerto Rican Studies programs was eclipsed during this tumultuous period of massive budget cutting, layoffs of instructional staff, threats to either shut down or demote colleges serving primarily the poor Black and Latino communities, elimination of free tuition, and ongoing challenges to open admissions. The moral and political imperative that gave rise to Puerto Rican Studies was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the fiscal crisis and the state

legislature's assault on CUNY. The state threatened to eviscerate the working class gains and frustrate the ongoing democratization of public higher education.

The impact of the budget crisis was severe; in the spring of 1975 CUNY shut down for two weeks. Open enrollments were effectively terminated for the senior colleges through reinstated admissions requirements that approximated national norms. In 1976 classes were cancelled, graduation suspended, salaries for staff were reduced, and tenure was broken in some units and departments. The loss of 2,300 positions disproportionately fell on Black and Latino professors-untenured and adjunct—in June 1975 (Hunter 1975: 37). The Puerto Rican academic community, suffered greatly from the budgetary crisis and ideological attacks against race and ethnic studies. Puerto Rican enrollments in the CUNY system, an important recruitment base for many of these programs, declined from 18,570 to 16,518 students in 1975 and 1986. During the same period the size of the Puerto Rican professorate was diminished by 45.5 percent, from 303 to 165 full-time faculty members (Rodríguez Fraticelli 1989: 25, 28). By 1984 the CUNY system operated fourteen ethnic/race studies academic units that contained significant Puerto Rican Studies content. Three units were degree-granting Puerto Rican Studies academic departments. The remaining units had a variety of designations, which included Puerto Rican and Latin American Studies, Black and Hispanic Studies, and Latin American and Caribbean Studies. Fifty-four full-time faculty taught the Puerto Rican Studies curriculum across the CUNY system (Rodríguez 1986).

ADMINISTRATORS AND FACULTY OPPOSED TO RACE AND ETHNIC STUDIES PORTRAYED PUERTO RICAN STUDIES AS EXOTIC, IF NOT QUIXOTIC, AND THUS EXPENDABLE.

During the height of the fiscal assault on CUNY, opponents of open admissions and free tuition sought to discredit the university by challenging its academic viability. Open admissions opponents bemoaned the shift in student composition from a primarily white male student body with strong academic records, to one comprised of a majority of poor, working-class non-white students who purportedly lacked en masse the requisite academic preparation to attend the university.⁴ New York State provided emergency assistance but with the stipulation that CUNY end free tuition and impose more restrictive entrance policies. Camille Rodríguez, Director of Higher Education Research at the Centro, observed, “CUNY has a very special mission that since 1976 we see being abandoned. Minorities and poor working class white students are effectively being locked out of the system” (Goodstein 1991: A10).

As underfinanced and late entrants into the university, individual Puerto Rican Studies units may not have had the bureaucratic knowledge or political

clout to protect themselves from the draconic cuts. Ideologically assailed since its inception, Puerto Rican Studies could draw on few allies. In general, Puerto Rican and Black studies units had difficulty coalescing with progressive faculty to confront the assault on public education. Moreover, the very structure of the sprawling public university impeded Puerto Rican Studies from building CUNY-wide alliances to confront budget-slashing administrators. Progressive sectors viewed the struggle for ethnic studies as “minor skirmishes in a more far reaching struggle to bring the universities’ external transactions” back to its liberal traditions (Bonilla, Campos and Flores 1984: 71).

Administrators and faculty opposed to race and ethnic studies portrayed Puerto Rican Studies as exotic, if not quixotic, and thus expendable. Attempts were routinely made to gain autonomy over critical resources such as faculty lines and curriculum development. Puerto Rican Studies was portrayed as harboring separatist, nationalist, and essentialist tendencies. Many faculty were convinced that if they were not closely supervised, Puerto Rican Studies units would build parochial academic ghettos if granted these resources.

As CUNY struggled to overcome its financial crisis, the vital linkages between the Puerto Rican community and the academic programs, a critical component of the 1960s student movement, eroded. Student and faculty advocates lost a valuable ally to counter the threat to Puerto Rican Studies. At its inception Puerto Rican Studies programs sustained dynamic ties to the “communities, which nurtured their beginnings.” According to Jesse Vázquez, the notion that Puerto Rican Studies could sustain ties to their communities was perceived by some “as utopian and perhaps dysfunctional in the face of the larger social, political and demographic shifts that are shaping the university of the 1980s” (Vázquez 1989: 9).

The legacy of student activism of the late 1960s was not forgotten by future generations of Black and Puerto Rican students. During the protracted budget crisis from the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s, students across the CUNY system militantly protested the tuition increases and budget cuts. In the April 1991 protests, which the *Washington Post* described as the “biggest student rebellion here since the 1960s,” students occupied buildings in nine of CUNY’s 21 campuses. Police were ordered to evict students (Goodstein 1991: A10; Nieves 1991: B2). Although protesting students did not have the same objectives as the student movement of the 1960s, they were keenly aware of gross racial inequalities in the CUNY system. Black and Puerto Rican student activists “demanded minority candidates in the search for a new chancellor, a Hispanic President for Herbert H. Lehman College,” and called for more courses on the history of racialized communities and for more Black and Latino professors (Lee 1990: 1).

The financial difficulties of the CUNY system lingered through the better part of the 1990s, and Puerto Rican Studies programs that survived the retrenchment languished during this period. In a number of cases some of these units made innovative adaptations to adjust to the changing times. The 1990s were a period of consolidation of ethnic studies units, reworking of their academic mission, and adoption of new curriculum on the history of new Latin American and Caribbean populations in New York. On balance, however, during the 1980s and 1990s the investment in Puerto Rican Studies units was minimal, even during good budgetary periods. Very few units were authorized to hire more than three or four

faculty—hardly a critical mass. The assault on CUNY served to deepen the sense of isolation and further stigmatized Puerto Rican Studies units.

For many budget-strapped administrators and frustrated department heads, Black and Puerto Rican Studies were an anachronistic legacy of a disquieting period of social ferment and political activism. They believed that these programs had no place in the university and should have been dismantled during the turbulence of the fiscal crisis. By the mid-1990s the political climate was favorable for the CUNY administration to strike at one of the most visible and successful programs for the study of racialized communities. In Juan Flores's piercing description, "the iron hand of fiscal constraints and shifting ideological priorities is at work slashing, reducing and consolidating existing Latino and Asian American programs and services" (Flores 1997). In March 1996, CCNY President Yolanda Moses announced that she would downgrade the race and ethnic studies departments in City College to academic programs. Moses reported that she acted on the recommendations of the College-wide Retrenchment Committee, and because of continued budgetary shortfalls. Some CCNY faculty doubted the veracity of the justification and believed that Chancellor Anne Reynolds had orchestrated the closing of these academic departments to deprive the controversial Afrocentric scholar, Leonard Jefferies, an institutional base for his provocative activities (Stout 1996: B4; Arenson 1996: B3). Although the decision was controversial, it did not precipitate any visible student protest. For some this was an ironic development, given that CCNY was the center of the Puerto Rican Student Union's political activism and militancy in 1969.

Some units outside of the CUNY system stood as notable exceptions to this general pattern of neglect. During the early 1990s Rutgers University decided to rebuild its moribund Puerto Rican and Hispanic Caribbean Studies Department. The Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences invested in the department, and at one point the unit employed six tenured and tenure-track professors, a number of annual appointments and advanced doctoral students as adjunct instructors, and maintained an active visiting professorship program with the University of Puerto Rico. Unfortunately, by 2002 the department had been seriously damaged by internal dissent, an unjust tenure denial, faculty defections, deep budget cuts, and by a university administration that ignored the recommendations of an external review team.⁵ However, by 2005 under a new, and dynamic leadership the department was rapidly reemerging as an important academic unit at Rutgers. Renamed as the Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies Department, the unit attracted outstanding young and established scholars and developed a highly regarded research profile that complemented a robust teaching program.

SUNY Albany provides a contrasting experience. The faculty was able to expand from a small Puerto Rican Studies program and build a Department of Latin American and Caribbean Studies with approximately 20 full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty; the department offers graduate degrees. Over the course of two decades the faculty developed and implemented an ambitious and well-conceived strategy to establish an interdisciplinary teaching and research unit that provided students with the opportunity to explore the intersections of area and ethnic studies. According to Edna Acosta-Bélen, one of the architects of this strategy, the unity of area and ethnic studies was achieved "by focusing on the transnational linkages between the U.S. Latino populations and their countries of

origin, and by emphasizing areas like immigration and transnationalism.”⁶ Given its role in graduate education and history of collaboration with other academic units, the department was relatively well insulated from the draconian budget cuts that SUNY imposed on many units.

The Neoconservative Attack

In the early 1990s neoconservatives launched a well-orchestrated ideological attack against race and ethnic studies in higher education. These programs were targeted because they purportedly fomented academic balkanization and spawned national disunity (Schlesinger 1992). These conservative scholars perceived that multiculturalism, which was gaining liberal adherents, would fortify the power base of programs of study on racialized communities. The consolidation of this assault on race and ethnic studies occurred after the pacification of multiculturalism, and after its conversion into a discourse on the necessity for diversity and racial tolerance.

The culture wars of the 1990s were characterized by the emergence and decline of progressive multiculturalism. Multiculturalism initially criticized an educational practice that legitimated an ethnocentric discourse that privileged Anglo-Saxon values and institutions. Its critique of traditional scholarship for failing to critically interrogate the racial and ethnic dimensions of the development of the United States initially resonated with Puerto Rican Studies practitioners. However, by the mid-1990s, the critical edge of multiculturalism had been blunted into a discourse that celebrated diversity.

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Although it offered an innocuous challenge to the traditional disciplines, the counter attack against multiculturalism by the defenders of the canon was pronounced. To discredit multiculturalism, its critics sought to conflate it with ethnic and race studies, and implicate the latter as culprits in a conspiracy to shatter the liberal western intellectual traditions of the university (Takaki 2001). One acute observer noted that the attacks “either explicitly or implicitly acknowledged that multiculturalism is a discourse about race, and have frequently asserted that there are close and disturbing links between multiculturalism, affirmative action and threats to freedom of speech (Carby 1992).

Arthur Schlesinger, Diane Ravitch, Dinesh D'Souza, Ward Connerly, and a host of other neoconservative intellectuals signaled out ethnic studies, particularly African American Studies, for censure (Vázquez 1992, 1993). The National Association of Scholars accused “minority studies courses” of excoriating “our society [for] its alleged oppression of women, blacks, and others.” Their paramount interest “lies in attacking the West and its institutions” (National Association of Scholars). Neoconservatives faulted advocates of a “deconstructionist multiculturalism” who “deny the desirability of shared intellectual standards” and who see these standards “as masks for the will to political power of dominant, hegemonic groups” (Gutman 1994: 18–20). Ethnic and race studies programs were portrayed as purveyors of retrograde identity politics that not only threatened the hallowed enlightenment tradition of the Western university, but also undermined the Left (Kelly 1997). The neoconservative attack was effective, for it deepened the breach between multicultural advocates and race and ethnic studies scholars, and dulled multiculturalism’s early critical edge.

Neoconservatives resurrected hackneyed charges that Latino/a Studies and African American Studies were intellectually unjustifiable. They were accused once again of dwelling on the victimization of racialized minorities, of advocating racial and ethnic disharmony, and of deliberately promoting the balkanization of the academy and society. Intentionally misconstrued and racist notions were propagated and deployed to discredit the academic validity of the ethnic and race studies. The neoconservative *National Review* portrayed race and ethnic studies programs as a new humanities field that justified its “entry into the realm of the disciplined intellect” by arguing for “the mere presence of a new sort of human being, formerly excluded,” which “hardly constituted a persuasive argument” (Neusner 1984: 42). University of California Regent Ward Connerly called for investigating ethnic studies for “possible political bias, lack of substance, and ‘feel good’ celebrationism” (Jorgensen 1998: 13). An editorial in the *Daily Spectator*, the Columbia University student newspaper, echoed these ideas: “Forming separate departments and programs devoted entirely to a specific ideology and racial group ultimately sets up ghettos that confine scholarship and students to a particular intellectual space” (Continetti 2002).

These neoconservative opponents of race and ethnic studies feared the university was losing the moral authority necessary to sustain the legitimacy of a narrative that privileged whiteness and Anglo-Saxon values. The virulence of the ideologically skewed attack was a measure of the degree to which scholarship on racialized communities had influenced the academic content and mission of the university. The threat that ethnic and race studies poses for the university today is reminiscent of the challenges it posed three decades ago, when administrators fought a losing battle to prevent their establishment. In the early 1970s Frank Bonilla and Emilio González observed that much more was at stake for the university than what administrators dismissed as

a simple assault by primitives on an institution these intruders do not understand. Were the matter as simple as some would like, the sense of threat the established order of disciplines, research domains and lines of organization would, of course, not be felt so deeply. (1973: 230)

By the mid-1990s multiculturalism was reformulated as an alternative to the purportedly ideological, essentialist, and separatist tendencies of ethnic and race studies. Multiculturalism emphasized cultural diversity without an analysis of power

in its racial and gendered dimensions. Its specific implementation by educators converted multiculturalism “into an expression and consolidation of white privilege” (Aparicio 1994). This approach appealed to liberal scholars anxious to reclaim an academic space that appeared on the verge of being captured by activist scholars of color.

Multiculturalism was introduced as a measured, nonideological, and universalistic approach to studying race and ethnicity. It purportedly stood in reasoned opposition to programs of study on racialized communities that were pilloried for lacking the dispassionate, objective norms of social inquiry that are the hallmarks of serious scholarship. According to the authors of a study, the field of American Studies embraced multiculturalism. By the late 1990s “research on multicultural themes” accounted for more than half of the pages of the *American Studies Quarterly*, the journal of the American Studies Association. This was a “remarkable trend” according to the authors of the study (Griffin and Tempenis 2002).

THE NEW, FUZZIER MULTICULTURALISM, UNLIKE RACE AND ETHNIC STUDIES, DID NOT ENGAGE THE ANALYSIS OF THE RACIAL DIMENSIONS OF POWER AND CONFLICT IN THE UNITED STATES.

From the ashes of the highly politicized culture wars, multiculturalism was recast as a discourse on the value of promoting cultural pluralism. The university was portrayed as a neutral site of discourse and value-free knowledge production. While the university was not completely devoid of the racism that plagued the wider society, it was a critical venue for scholars to pursue solutions to racism. The new, fuzzier multiculturalism, unlike race and ethnic studies, did not engage the analysis of the racial dimensions of power and conflict in the United States. It was based on assumptions of consensus and assimilation that are central to a universalistic liberal democratic perspective, particularly as practiced in the U.S. (McLaren 1997; San Juan 2002).

Jesse Vázquez observed that on the surface multiculturalism appeared to advance reforms that were the objectives of ethnic studies. Multiculturalism seemed to harmonize with the research of Puerto Rican Studies scholars who sought to demystify the production of the university-based knowledge and expose the institution’s racially constituted bias. Multiculturalism “appear(s) to address some of the same issues and concerns that prompted the nation’s racial/ethnic minorities to enter the university in the first place.” However, Puerto Rico scholars noted that multiculturalism failed to adequately interrogate the racialized, class, and gendered dimensions of domination, nor did it advance a transformative agenda. Multiculturalism was also considered devoid of the activism of ethnic studies.

Frances Aparicio warned that “multiculturalism in its gradual institutionalization is failing to address the power (or lack thereof) of knowledge(s) to create social change. The enduring achievements of ethnic/race and gender and women’s studies were precisely to teach that producing knowledge cannot remain dichotomized from social issues and from personal lives.” Moreover, she cautioned that multiculturalism has served to defuse the oppositional thrust of ethnic studies by “recanonicalizing” this scholarship through the practice of “hypervalorizing” the intellectual production of selected Latino/a literary figures (Aparicio 1994: 579, 582). Vázquez agreed that if this new perspective were not challenged, it could potentially undermine and co-opt the more progressive Puerto Rican and Latino scholarship (Vázquez 1988, 1989). Angela Davis objected that “a multiculturalism that does not acknowledge the political character of culture will not... lead toward the dismantling of racist, sexist, homophobic, economically exploitative institutions” (San Juan 2002: 136).

Innovation and Adaptation

During the 1980s and 1990s, a period of profound change for the public higher education in New York, a number of Puerto Rican Studies units made curriculum changes in an attempt to adjust the changed circumstances. The shifting demographics of the Latino student population, more rigorous standards for faculty promotion and tenure, pressures to sustain high enrollments, budgetary reductions, and fiscal crises, demands to service the extra-academic needs of a changing student immigrant population, the imperative to resist efforts at intellectual and academic isolation, and diverse other forces compelled Puerto Rican Studies units to reassess their academic mission. Painfully conscious of their marginal status, some Puerto Rican Studies units sought to capitalize on the rapidly changing Latino demographics in the metropolitan region to enhance their status.⁷ Most units changed their departmental name and offered new courses on the broader Hispanic Caribbean and its people. Moreover, the growing practice among Chicano studies units to develop a research and teaching profile in Latino Studies, as well as the establishment and reconfiguration of various academic units into Latino and Latin American Studies in the Midwest and California, encouraged Puerto Rican Studies units in the CUNY system to effect similar reforms. This retooling was designed in part to make a more convincing case for academic relevance and for increased resources if not simply survival.

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Throughout the CUNY system, when Puerto Rican Studies units were not being downsized or eliminated, they were being renamed. By the end of the century academic units that were exclusively concerned with the Puerto Rican experience had disappeared. The nine remaining CUNY academic units that provided instruction in Puerto Rican Studies adopted program titles that ranged from Puerto Rican and Latino Studies (Brooklyn College) to Latin American and Puerto Rican Studies (Lehman College). In the mid-1980s Rutgers University's small Department of Puerto Rican Studies was renamed Puerto Rican and Hispanic Caribbean Studies. In the summer of 1986 the Department of Puerto Rican Studies at CCNY was changed to Latin American and Hispanic Caribbean Studies. In 2003, seven years after the department had been downgraded, the unit was renamed Latin American and Latino Studies.⁸

The fate of Puerto Rican Studies units was particularly susceptible to the changing Latino demographics. The change in title enacted by the various programs reflected a pragmatic response by the faculty in these units to address the academic needs of an increasingly heterogeneous Latino student population. In 1992 CUNY administration adopted the federal practice of collapsing the Mexican American and Puerto Rican ethnic labels into the socially constructed category of Hispanic, and stopped employing "Puerto Rican" as an ethnic category choice in the student application form. By 1998 "Puerto Rican" had been eliminated as a category and substituted by "Hispanic." The rationale to support academic units that specialized in instruction and research on the Puerto Rican experience, a racialized community whose numerical influence in New York was steadily declining and whose militancy had waned, became increasingly tenuous.

Historically Puerto Rican Studies units have been exceedingly vulnerable to shifting administrative priorities, the abilities of its departmental leadership, internal collegiality, and a host of other influences. While traditional departments are also subject to a similar array of forces, these institutionalized units are not as susceptible as Puerto Rican studies. It is doubtful that administrators would permit mainstream academic departments to suffer a level of faculty depletion or internal disruption sufficient to jeopardize their ability to deliver instruction. In contrast, protecting the viability of Puerto Rican Studies units has rarely been a priority for administrators. Their low priority is particularly apparent, given that hiring of full-time faculty in Puerto Rican studies units has been at a standstill for almost a decade.

Bureaucratically besieged, academically stigmatized, habitually underfunded, and perennially overburdened with service and teaching demands, Puerto Rican Studies units admittedly were not the ideal academic home for the new generation of Puerto Rican scholars who entered the university in the late 1980s and 1990s. In fact, administrators have been exceedingly chary about allocating faculty lines to Puerto Rican Studies units. However, during the last few years, either because of public pressure to diversify the racial/ethnic profile of a professoriate that is predominately white and male, or a belief that diversity enhances the educational experience for all students, universities have hired Puerto Rican and Latino scholars in non-ethnic studies units. Administrators demonstrate a preference to authorize hires of faculty of color to teach courses on race and ethnicity in the traditional departments, rather than increase faculty strength of Black and Puerto Rican Studies units.⁹

Evolution of a Field: From Disrepute to Respectability

In the last ten years a new generation of Puerto Rican scholar has entered the academy, many of whom are trained in the most prestigious universities in the nation. This cadre of scholars is responsible for advances in scholarship, which have fundamentally rewritten the rich history of the Puerto Rican presence in the continental U.S., in its gendered, racial, class, and positional complexities. In the process, Puerto Rican Studies has entered into dialogues with emerging fields and multicultural sectors within traditional departments.

Puerto Rican studies scholarship has attained a measure of acceptance since its inception as an anti-hegemonic and transformative intellectual project pushed by a politically conscious, anti-racist university student and community movement. The foundational origins of Puerto Rican Studies were heavily influenced by an anti-colonial, nationalist discourse that rejected portrayals of Puerto Ricans as a subject and passive people; a people who purportedly were incapable of altering the array of forces that so decisively influenced their lives.¹⁰ The Puerto Rican Studies movement forcefully challenged the university to establish “a research agenda grounded in progressive social objectives” (Cabán 1998). For activists, the university was deeply implicated in rationalizing the oppression of Puerto Ricans and other racialized people. An oppositional scholarship would “expose [the] distortions of Puerto Rican reality that are so pervasive in the most common interpretations of social phenomenon given by social scientists and ... uncover the reasons for those distortions” (Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños 1975: iv). Frances Aparicio elegantly summarized the 1960s and 1970s agenda of Puerto Rican Studies movement, writing that it,

first, would problematize the relationship between power and knowledge; secondly, that [it] would serve as spaces for decolonization through an alternative and culturally-based production of knowledge and through critical, radical pedagogies; and third, that [it] would dismantle individualism through collective work; finally, more than producing articulations between academia and the community, it would strive to make the non-academic community a central subject and agent in the production of Latino scholarship. (1999)

In an article on the origins of Puerto Rican Studies I wrote the following: “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” (Cabán 2003). The transformation of the institutions of higher education, its “content, practice and focus as it related to disenfranchised sectors of society,” was an explicit goal of the Puerto Rican Studies movement (Vázquez 1989). Writing about the Black student movement, Charles Hamilton identified critiques that virtually duplicated those of Puerto Rican student activists. Black students “perceive higher education—especially in the social sciences, history and the humanities—as essentially racist in its cognitive values, its research, its conclusions.” They demanded “autonomous control” because it was impossible for “the same people who were instrumental in developing a racist curriculum,” to lead innovation in higher education which they sought (Hamilton 1970: 16).

It is customary, but erroneous, to depict the origins of Puerto Rican Studies scholarship and praxis with the founding of Puerto Rican Studies programs and

departments. Research on the Puerto Rican condition in the United States, as well as the colonial experience, obviously predates the creation of these departments. Clara Rodríguez reviewed and evaluated the most prominent English language books written by North American scholars before 1970 on Puerto Rican subject matter. She described the scholarship on U.S. control of Puerto Rico as uniformly biased since the “colonial relationship is obfuscated or depicted as benign, creating more opportunities than obstacles to progress,” and the work is punctuated “with unquestioned myths, sins of omission and commission, and distortions and suppression of evidence concerning their historical relationship with the United States” (Rodríguez 1994: 5). Rodríguez also evaluated the community studies scholarship and faulted this work because it adopted an “an assimilationist, immigrant paradigm” that was an inappropriate conceptual apparatus to capture the relationship between Puerto Rican colonial experience and the racialized status of Puerto Ricans living in U.S. society (Rodríguez 1994: 13).

IT IS CUSTOMARY, BUT ERRONEOUS, TO DEPICT THE ORIGINS OF PUERTO RICAN STUDIES SCHOLARSHIP AND PRAXIS WITH THE FOUNDING OF PUERTO RICAN STUDIES PROGRAMS AND DEPARTMENTS.

The U.S. based scholarship primarily rendered a celebratory and triumphalist portrayal of U.S. colonialism. Some works tended to discredit the independence and nationalist movements as comprised of anti-“American” ideologues that employed violence to achieve their goals. Social scientists also examined the acculturation, assimilation, and adaptation of Puerto Ricans to U.S. society. This research, which focused primarily on the populations in the urban centers of the Northeast, often suffered from serious analytical liabilities and flawed conclusions because of its presumption that traditional Puerto Rican culture and values were ill suited to the efficiency and rationality of contemporary U.S. society. It was not uncommon for some of this research to apprehend the “Puerto Rican subject” as a socially maladjusted individual lacking the requisite cultural capital to assimilate productively into the dominant culture (Lewis 1982). The National Institute of Mental Health and other U.S. government agencies funded research on the social and cultural etiology of Puerto Rican mental health well into the 1990s.¹¹

In another article Rodríguez described the post-1970 Puerto Rican Studies literature as consisting of the history of Puerto Rico, Puerto Rican migration to the U.S., the experience of Puerto Ricans as a racialized community in the U.S., and the “assimilation or minoritization of Puerto Ricans in the U.S.” (Rodríguez 1990). In an important assessment of the field, Vázquez

(1992: 1044) enumerated the wide range of analytical concerns and explanatory frameworks that Puerto Rican Studies scholars addressed through the early 1990s. In addition to basic research in the social sciences and humanities, policy-oriented and -applied research, primarily in education and in language policy, generated substantial interest.¹²

The Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños devised an ambitious research agenda that incorporated young progressive scholars into task forces in higher education, culture and arts, history and migration, language policy, and film. The Centro's work focused on "two vital areas of Puerto Rican life—Puerto Rican culture and migration" (Bonilla, Campos and Flores 1984: 73). The History Task Force pursued a highly original project on the determinants of post-World War II Puerto Rican migration to the United States. Its work revealed the organic relationship between the expulsion of redundant labor as a corrective to the structural unemployment generated by U.S.-financed capitalist development (the phenomenon of relative surplus population). The Centro's research examined how export-led industrialization redefined Puerto Rico's insertion into the circuits of U.S. production, and its relationship to unprecedented demographic dislocations of its people (History Task Force 1979). Its research extended the work of economic historians associated with the Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Puertorriqueña (CEREP), and other progressive historians and political economists in Puerto Rico. An intellectual partnership linked the Centro's research on capitalist development and labor migration to Puerto Rican-based scholarship on labor history and colonialism that were informed by historical materialism. The Centro's research further problematized the analysis of the colonial economy by revealing the organic bond between capital inflows and the removal of excess labor through migration.

The influence of Marxist thought on scholarship on the political economy of Puerto Rico was pronounced. Much of the literature was avowedly sympathetic to independence, critical of U.S. colonial policy, and steeped in cultural nationalism. Yet, despite its much needed revisionist interpretation of the Puerto Rican reality, Marxist-inspired scholarship uncritically operated within a male centric, deracialized concept of the nation. As a consequence, the Puerto Rican nation acquired a popular, but fictional, representation, as an undifferentiated and homogeneous subject people, who were unified in their militant opposition to the federal government for denying the people of Puerto Rican self-determination.

Despite the significance of this important revisionist history, it focused almost exclusively on the period predating the mass migration of Puerto Rican to the U.S. Moreover, with a couple of notable exceptions (such as the work of Maldonado Denis) the scholarship on post-World War II Puerto Rico rarely examined the transnational dynamics of the diaspora, particularly the economic and political function of the U.S. resident Puerto Rican population in sustaining the colony. The representation of Puerto Rican history primarily as an insular-based phenomenon was a serious curricula limitation.¹³ What was needed was a scholarship on the unfolding history of the Puerto Rican communities in the United States. During the 1980s, Puerto Rican scholars, including Edna Acosta-Belén, Juan Flores, Felix Padilla, Clara Rodríguez, and Virginia Sánchez Karrol, among others, addressed this research lacunae and explored the U.S.–Puerto Rican experience in its racialized and class dimensions.¹⁴

New Theories, New Realities

Since the late 1980s Puerto Rican scholarship has embarked on new directions that are fundamentally redefining the field. This scholarship challenges notions that the political and social behavior of the Puerto Rican diaspora is derivative of the colonial legacy.¹⁵ The scholarship does acknowledge Puerto Rican exceptionalism, e.g., a colonial subject who is vested with a second-class citizenship. However, it emphasizes a new Puerto Rican positionality as a racialized community that is imbued with agency and a spatial presence and permanence. Insights from new areas of theoretical inquiry have refashioned the scope of Puerto Rican Studies and positioned the field to engage other intellectual traditions and discourses on Latino subjectivities. Puerto Rican Studies units have incorporated this scholarship into new curricula in an effort to address the altered educational expectations of a changing Latino student population.

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Community struggles for social and environmental justice in Puerto Rico continue to arouse an activist impulse among Puerto Rican scholars. The campaign to evict the U.S. Navy from Vieques is illustrative of the power of insular issues to galvanize the Puerto Rican community in the United States into political action. Concerned scholars participated in a social movement of community-based organizations, labor unions, and local political leaders that were mobilized in solidarity with the Viequesens. Through educational and media activities, the academic community helped counter a U.S. government propaganda campaign designed to discredit a legitimate environmental popular movement.

Paradoxically, although Puerto Rican Studies units failed to enhance their standing during the 1990s, the intellectual production of Puerto Rican scholars began to gain adherents among some traditional disciplines. The increasing regularity with which scholarship on the Puerto Rican experience is published in referred journals and university presses partially explains this favorable outcome. Additionally, Puerto Rican Studies scholarship is a fundamental constituent of the emergent Latino academic literature, and is not perceived as esoteric and

oppositional as it was during the 1960s. Moreover, the emergence of new fields of theoretical inquiry, such as subaltern, postcolonial, and critical race studies, the profound influence of poststructuralism, and advances in feminist and sexuality theory provide opportunities for Puerto Rican Studies scholars to engage in discursive practices that cut across groups of national origin. This in turn has created new opportunities for Puerto Rican Studies scholars to pursue comparative inquiry on the Latino experience and to engage colleagues in the disciplines who embrace these new developments in social and cultural theory.

THIS PERCEIVED SHIFT FROM A NATIONALIST AND POLITICALLY BASED SCHOLARSHIP TO THEORY BUILDING IS EVIDENCED BY THE INCORPORATION OF PUERTO RICAN AND LATINO SCHOLARSHIP INTO THE CORPUS OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY, COMPARATIVE ETHNIC/RACE STUDIES, AMERICAN STUDIES, AND CULTURAL AND POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

Many scholars employed these interpretive and analytical frameworks to reexamine the Puerto Rican experience with the aim of generating new knowledge of the variegated impact of colonialism and its diaspora.¹⁶ In the process, the partiality of the earlier scholarship to a male-centric, and heterosexualist construction of the nation state was effectively deconstructed. The presumption that a homogeneous cultural nationalism was essential to liberatory and anti-colonial struggles is heavily contested. This view has been challenged by nuanced and complicated formulations of the distinctive cultural practices of a Puerto Rican people whose identity formation was forged in the highly racialized social system of the United States. While the overarching binary of empire and colony still informs a liberatory and anti-imperialist agenda, its centrality as a mobilizing discourse has given way to more discrete loci of struggles (environmental justice, citizenship, affirmative action, language policy, etc.). The new theoretical developments in social and cultural theory, as well as the demographic reconfiguration of the Latino communities resulting from Latin American immigration, has altered the scope of inquiry, the political project, normative orientations, and discursive practice of the vintage Puerto Rican Studies scholarship.

Cultural nationalism was constitutive of the Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies movements of the 1960s and 1970s. However, in the context of these new theoretical and political advances, Flores (1997) observed, “the presumed seamlessness and discreteness of group identities characteristic of earlier Latino perspectives have given way to more complex, interactive and transgressive notions of hybrid and multiple positionalities.”¹⁷ This perceived shift from a nationalist and politically based scholarship to theory building is evidenced by the incorporation of Puerto Rican and Latino scholarship into the corpus of critical race theory, comparative ethnic/race studies, American studies, and cultural and postcolonial studies (Aparicio 1999: 14). In the context of globalization—conceived as a process that has intensified interactions and movement of peoples across national borders—the insights from postcolonial theory and multicultural discourses are, according to Flores, “invaluable because they allow us to span the full range of Latino positionalities under the complex transitional conditions of our time” (1997: 211).

Naturally, the degree of receptivity Puerto Rican scholarship is accorded varies widely from discipline to discipline. Certain disciplines have been adverse to hiring faculty whose research and publications agenda is on Puerto Rican-related matters. Those departments with faculty who have embraced multiculturalism are more receptive to these scholarly incursions. Political science and economics, with their veneration for rational choice analysis and quantitative methods, have generally not welcomed scholars who embark on a critical political economy analysis of U.S. colonialism, who critically interrogate the structures of racial oppression, or who explore the impact of racialization on citizenship and democratic practice—all of which are concerns addressed in much of the work of Puerto Rican social scientists.

The biennial meeting of the Puerto Rican Studies Association has evolved into the preeminent venue for disseminating the diverse scholarship that typifies this still young academic field. A temporal mapping of the conference panels is a heuristic device to gauge the evolution of the field. As an interdisciplinary academic initiative, the Puerto Rican Studies Association remains as dynamic and transgressive as it was when the organization was founded in 1992. The PRSA conferences provide an environment for cross-generational discourse, and are one of the few forums for sustained dialogue between scholars in the metropolis and colony. Since its inaugural conference, the majority of panels have explored a consistent set of themes. These cluster around issues of language and identity construction, gender, culture, literature, migration, education policy, politics, and the colonial condition. In addition, topical panels that critically interrogate important political and social issues are typically organized.

While these broad themes continue to attract attention, other themes have garnered increased interest; these include sexuality, religious expressions, music and performance, popular culture, citizenship and Puerto Rican politics in the U.S., relations with other Latino constituencies, and the analysis of Puerto Rican Studies as knowledge and praxis. In addition, empirical and ethnographic studies of Puerto Rican communities in the Midwest are also a focus of growing interest. Finally, scholars are beginning to explore how Puerto Rican Studies intersects with and is differentiated from Latino Studies. The field is characterized by a virtual absence of Neo-Marxist analysis of the political economy of colonialism, nor does it sustain the dynamic relationship with communities that was a key element of the 1960s student movement.¹⁸ Panels on the Puerto Rican experience in the United States dominate conferences. This new work defies the still all too pervasive characterization that Puerto Rican Studies scholarship lacks originality, analytical rigor, and theoretical sophistication.¹⁹

Conclusion

While many Puerto Rican Studies units have languished or have had to remake themselves to survive institutionally, as an academic field Puerto Rican Studies has achieved a measure of legitimacy in some disciplines. This is surprising given the general hostility to Puerto Rican Studies when it forced its way into the university curriculum. Since Puerto Rican Studies units are institutionally marginalized and have a limited number of faculty lines, scholars engaged in the field are more likely to be employed in discipline—based academic departments or ethnic studies units. Given the limited hiring opportunities in Puerto Rican Studies units, newly minted Ph.Ds tend to be recruited by academic units interested in multicultural education and racial diversity.

Despite these consequential advances, Puerto Rican Studies units still are generally unable to surmount a university culture that has been unyielding in its refusal to acknowledge their academic validity. Why have administrators resisted empowering Puerto Rican Studies departments with the requisite resources and autonomy that would permit them to build their scholarly profile and presence in the university? One compelling reason, because it speaks to the reality of institutional racism, is that the Puerto Rican professoriate was judged unqualified to objectively assess the quality of the intellectual production in their own field of Puerto Rican Studies. The faculty was initially portrayed as academically ill-prepared and lacking comprehension of the workings of the university. Administrators believed that Puerto Rican faculty could not grasp the criteria the university employed to assess academic excellence. They feared that Puerto Rican faculty could not “police” their field and protect the institution from mediocrity. Only the traditional departments are thought capable of making valid independent judgments on scholarly merit.

Faculty lines are the most precious resource academic units possess. Administrators zealously guard these lines and apportion them judiciously. Those academic units that increase their enrollments and are successful in effecting the professional advancement of their faculty are able to garner university resources, including authorizations to hire faculty. Denied faculty resources commensurate with their mission, most Puerto Rican Studies units confront very real impediments to growth. Given that they are virtually coerced into functioning as academic service units, it is paradoxical that they were simultaneously criticized for balkanizing the university. While Puerto Rican Studies was cynically accused of creating academic ghettos and narrow-mindedly shunning collaboration with other units, the accusers chose to overlook that traditional departments in effect functioned as ghettos given their hostility to interdisciplinarity and propensity to privilege discipline-based knowledge.

Despite this opposition to Puerto Rican Studies units, educational and political trends nationally generated a dynamic that forcefully validated research on racialized and oppressed communities. Moreover, since multiculturalism was accorded a seat at the academic table, it has opened a space for instruction in Puerto Rican Studies as part of a broader diversity initiative. But even more importantly, research on the Puerto Rican experience continued to be published. The institutional hostility toward Puerto Rican Studies neither prevented doctoral students from pursuing research on the Puerto Rican experience, nor eroded the willingness of the professoriate to publish in this area.

Political considerations, couched as they invariably are in academic rationalizations, are significant in explaining what might merely be conjunctural

incursions by Puerto Rican scholarship. The founding Puerto Rican Studies units advocated a form of scholarship that was imbued with political urgency and intertwined with public engagement. For traditional scholars this was anathema, and their political opposition to an intellectual project took the form of rejecting Puerto Rican Studies as lacking academic substance and seriousness. While Puerto Rican scholarship is occasionally subject to unjustified criticism as politicized, on balance it is no longer perceived as a threat to the canon.

Moreover, changes internal to the field may also explain this development. Independence and self-determination for Puerto Rico no longer have the same critical urgency characteristic of an earlier scholarship. Neither does the exploration of racial victimization of Puerto Ricans in the United States as a function of colonial oppression command comparable interest. It may well be that the political realities and developments in Puerto Rico and the United States make these concerns anachronistic, if not simply improper, for serious academic inquiry. Similarly the indispensability of linking academic labor with community empowerment and holding the public research university accountable, two central tenets of the Puerto Rican Studies movement, appear to have dissipated.

In light of this denouement, some Puerto Rican scholars aver that contemporary scholarship generally lacks the critical oppositional stance that challenged university-sanctioned, racially biased knowledge production. Others assert that Puerto Rican Studies retains this commitment albeit as part of a larger Latino studies social movement that promotes racial justice and progressive policies within the academy and beyond. Yet it cannot be denied that during the course of thirty-five years, the type of scholarship and the issues explored relative to the Puerto Rican experience increasingly bear the hallmarks of academic respectability. Contemporary Puerto Rican Studies scholarship is theoretically rich and engages diverse intellectual currents. This engagement generates new prospects for productive scholarly synergies between Puerto Rican Studies and other academic units. These new contexts and changing priorities are important for apprehending what appears to be a heightened and long overdue level of academic respectability for Puerto Rican Studies scholarship.

NOTES

¹ See http://www.puertorican-studies.org/call_for_papers_2003.htm.

² See Serrano (1998) for a history of this period from the perspective of student militants.

³ The sentiments were forcefully expressed by Puerto Rican students whose “purpose in the schools” were: to bring the services of the university to the community which is denied the knowledge behind those “ivy walls” because of jive requirements, that are made to keep the majority of the people ignorant and make a minority of the people think they are together and can rule over others because they know more (PRSU 1969: 17).

⁴ See reactions by Fox Piven (1993), and Wiesen Cook and Cooper (1994).

⁵ In a speech commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Department of Puerto Rican and Hispanic Caribbean Studies, in what can only be described as an event steeped in irony, Dr. María Josefa Canino (2000) observed about the tenure denial: “We as academics and as a university community need to question the criteria used to reach such a negative judgment. We need to censure a committee whose experience and knowledge of the non- traditional intersections of disciplines is at best limited, and whose representativeness and intellectual responsiveness to the interests of ethnic studies leave a great deal to be desired.”

6 Personal communication with Dr. Edna Acosta-Bélen, Chairperson, Department of Latin American and Hispanic Caribbean Studies, SUNY-Albany, 5 May 2004.

7 Vázquez (1989: 14) notes that some programs changed titles and content of courses to respond to the growth of the Latino college age population in CUNY.

8 Personal correspondence, Dr. Gabriel Haslip-Rivera, Director, Latin American and Latino Studies Program, CUNY, 14 April 2004.

9 In 1994, the CCNY administration approved increasing the number of black studies offered outside the Black Studies Department that was chaired by the controversial Afrocentric Professor Leonard Jeffries. This was portrayed as in “effect an alternative black studies program” designed to undermine Jeffries’ political base. Enrollments in the Black Studies Department declined from 1000 in 1990 to 750 in Fall 1995 (Stout 1996).

10 For a good summary see Vázquez (1995).

11 Two Hispanic Research Centers were established with funding from the National Institute of Mental Health. One of these was set up at the Bronx campus of Fordham University. The Fordham Hispanic Research Center (HRC) was strategically situated near large populations of poor Puerto Ricans. This center supported research on the epidemiology of a variety of environmentally generated mental disorders. See Santiago-Irizarry (2001) for a critical portrayal of how medical health practitioners employed essentialized notions of Latino ethnicity to treat culturally situated beliefs as pathologies.

12 For a representative work see Cordasco and Bucchioni (1982). Originally published in 1968, the book came out in a third revised edition in 1982. The Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños set up Language Policy and Education task forces (see Romo 1990).

13 For a discussion of curriculum development in Puerto Rican Studies see Vázquez (1987).

14 The edited volume by Jennings and Rivera (1984) was one of the first works on Puerto Rican political engagement in local level politics in the United States. More recently Cruz (1998, 2003) has advanced the scholarship on Puerto Rican urban political behavior in the United States.

15 See Acosta-Belén, et al. (2000), for a concise but comprehensive summary of the achievements of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the U.S. in various realms of endeavor, including higher education.

16 A good introduction to an early postmodernist reading of Puerto Rico as a postcolonial dilemma (paradox) is the “Dossier Puerto Rico,” published in *Social Text* (Spring 1994). Juan Flores and María Milagros López, observe in their introduction, “We encounter the conceptualization of Puerto Rico as a location where new versions of the postmodern subject may be in formation. Puerto Rico’s problematic relation to notions of modernity ... makes it an appropriate though unexpected site for such an emergence” (1994: 93).

17 Gutiérrez (1993) observes how the superficially constituted imaginary of community that was the legacy of the Chicano movement was essentially demolished by a postmodernist critique that exposed its multiple contradictions and silencing of women.

18 A number of scholars would agree with Aparicio’s observation that the quest for individual academic legitimation has “definitely displaced the oppositional goals of a decolonizing pedagogical practice and of community empowerment” (1999: 15). But it is also important to note that the segmentation of Puerto Rican Studies into discrete relatively isolated units, which were not viable in terms of their bureaucratic, financial and faculty resources and overburdened, as well, by a plethora of demands, undermined their capacity to realize the principal task of contributing to the intellectual empowerment of our community (Cabán 1985: 10). Moreover, the professional training for academic careers systematically and persistently devalues activist scholarship, and views political engagement with communities as counterproductive, if not damaging, to advancement in the academy.

19 Vázquez bitingly comments, “If American scholars study American culture and society through American studies, then it is considered serious scholarship. However, when a Puerto Rican research studies the Puerto Rican culture—any aspect of it—it is not seen as quite scholarly enough.” (1992: 1043).

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