

Fall 2003

From Challenge to Absorption: The Changing Face of Latino Studies

Pedro Caban

University at Albany, State University of New York, pcaban@albany.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/lacs_fac_scholar



Part of the [Latin American Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Caban, Pedro, "From Challenge to Absorption: The Changing Face of Latino Studies" (2003). *Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino Studies Faculty Scholarship*. 3.

http://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/lacs_fac_scholar/3

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino Studies at Scholars Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino Studies Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Scholars Archive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@albany.edu.



From Challenge to Absorption:

The Changing Face of Latina and Latino Studies

PEDRO A. CABÁN

ABSTRACT

Over the last three decades Latino studies scholarship has gained increased academic acceptance. However, many administrators continue to doubt the wisdom of sustaining autonomous Latino studies departments, and are devising alternative approaches for incorporating Latino-based knowledge into the university's mission. This article discusses the academy's response to the emergence of Latino studies and explores a range of consequences for the field of two institutional arrangements that universities appear to privilege: the horizontal fusion with Latin American Studies, and a vertical absorption into centers for the study of race and ethnic or absorption into American studies. [Key words: Puerto Rican Studies, Chicano Studies, Latino Studies, Ethnic Studies]

PC

In the late 1960s Chicano and Puerto Rican students and community activists embarked on a political struggle for inclusion and representation in the university. Demanding a critical role in reclaiming and recasting their historical memory, they sought a space from which to embark on new explorations, unfettered by the disciplinary orthodoxies steeped in stereotypical constructions of Mexican American and Puerto Rican identity, which portrayed these people as subjects and never as agents. The momentous outcome of this movement was a myriad of dispersed, underfunded, and marginalized academic departments in Chicano and Puerto Rican studies. Conceived as ethnic enclaves or ghettos of academic insignificance that were destined for failure, these units accepted the imposed isolation as safe haven. These were liberated zones in which new scholarship was crafted that challenged the academic orthodoxies of their period. These programs were not bound by what many considered the conventions of academic professionalism and depoliticized positivism, but in fact saw their mission as devising new research questions, challenging curricula, and devising innovative pedagogy. Many of these ethnic studies pioneers were imbued with the same spirit of resistance, affirmation, and advocacy that propelled the brown berets and Young Lords to a prominent role in the civil rights movement. These earlier practitioners in Puerto Rican and Chicano studies saw their academic task as politically urgent and socially imperative. We can trace the founding of the Latino studies field to these insurrectionary origins.¹

From Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies to Latino Studies

A definitional clarification is probably in order at this point. For the purposes of advancing my argument, I use the terms Latino studies and Chicano/Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Dominican studies interchangeably when referring to the current situation. I employ the term Latino studies as a concept that permits me to broadly define a body of intellectual work by scholars who have examined the historical formation and development of identifiable racialized minority populations in the United States. As Juan Flores notes, the Latino studies concept “allows for some space to mediate issues of inclusion and solidarity sometimes strained in nationality-specific situations.”² This is not to deny that tensions and strains exist between different Latin American- and Caribbean-origin scholarly communities. It is useful to recall that in the 1960s and through the 1970s Latino studies did not exist as a recognizable field. Virtually all the programs focused almost exclusively on the Mexican-American/Chicano or the Puerto Rican experience.³

While setting up academic units that specialized in the study of oppressed racial and ethnic populations of the United States was unprecedented in the academy, these units were seemingly set up to fail. Since they were politically vulnerable, their presence was tentative and they were marginal to the vibrant intellectual debates that engrossed the attention of the centers of power in the university. Yet the act of constituting ethnic and race studies departments and programs meant the academy, for whatever reason, had conferred its imprimatur on this previously neglected area. In the process, it implicitly legitimized race and ethnic studies as areas of research and instruction. The act of officially validating ethnic studies did encourage many Latino students to pursue graduate research in the Chicano and Puerto Rican experience.

Tenuous as its origins are, Latino studies is steadily producing new knowledge of recognized quality and increasing import. After two decades of seemingly subversive academic work on the margins, the intellectual production of Latina and Latino

scholars has attained a measure of academic validation. The voluminous and ever-expanding literature, thousands of doctoral dissertations, scores of undergraduate programs, nationally based research centers, professional journals and associations, and the slowly growing professoriat engaged in Latino-based research all attest to the growth of the field. Latino studies caucuses and sections in professional associations, such as the Latin American Studies Association and American Political Science Association, attest to the presence of a critical mass of scholarship and to the resourcefulness of Latino studies practitioners in advancing the development of the field. The ambitious Inter-University Project on Latino Research, which was founded in 1984, was the source of innovative scholarship and expanded the field's visibility. More recently, the Smithsonian Center for Latino Initiatives is drawing national attention to the noteworthy intellectual and artistic achievements of the Latino community. Numerous conferences, symposia and workshops that critically examine the diverse content, analytic perspectives, and conceptual mappings in Latino studies stand as a further indication of the evolving status of the field.

Although its intellectual production has been impressive, particularly in the last decade, some question whether Latino studies has evolved into a coherent academic field. Is Latino studies a composite of discrete and often unrelated scholarship that is loosely bound by its emphasis on investigating a particular ethnic/racial population? Early Latino studies scholarship was primarily a multidisciplinary endeavor intended to discover and organize knowledge; it was an enterprise that analytically and methodologically appeared to resemble area studies specialization. While both area and ethnic studies generated new understanding of “foreign populations,” in the case of ethnic studies Puerto Ricans and Chicanos were ironically perceived as foreign in a domestic sense.⁴ A plausible case can be made that neither ethnic studies nor area studies had a firm theoretical foundation.⁵

But here the similarities ended since Puerto Rican and Chicano studies constituted new approaches to knowing, and posed challenges in regard to how the disciplines analyzed and interpreted the subordinate relation of racialized minorities in the U.S. Moreover, while the field of area studies was generously supported by the federal government and its scholarship was validated by the academy, the arrival of ethnic studies on the academic scene was contentious and was all but spurned.⁶ During the last decade, however, the coalescence of various forces has imposed novel challenges on ethnic studies, including Chicano/Mexican American and Puerto Rican studies. Globalization, particularly its hemispheric components—NAFTA and the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas—as well as Latin American and Caribbean immigration, the imposition of neoliberal social policies domestically, the societal attack on affirmative action and needs-based admissions, fiscal austerity and ideological conservatism in the university, profound developments in social theory and methodologies of interdisciplinary work, and the erosion of Latin American area studies are only a few developments prompting the university to reassess the core mission of many ethnic studies programs.⁷ In the process some programs, departments and centers are rethinking the paradigmatic boundaries of the field. What once were programmatically distinctive borders between area and ethnic studies are now being systematically challenged, and some are arguing retrospectively that the distinctions were artificially constituted.

While Latino studies continues to nurture normative concerns central to Chicano and Puerto Rican studies, currently it sustains a more ambitious academic enterprise. Latino studies is increasingly comparative and interdisciplinary in its approach,

inclusive of the experiences of peoples of Latin American and Caribbean origins, and transnational in its orientation.⁸ Conceptions of Chicano and Puerto Rican populations as relatively homogeneous and self-contained societies have given way to nuanced formulations that acknowledge the multiplicity of identities and the continuously evolving character of Caribbean and Latin American diaspora communities. The rethinking of Latino studies is unfolding in the context of an ambitious reassessment of the role of race/ethnic studies and traditional area studies in social sciences and humanities.

It seems to me that the critical issue Latino studies faces is whether such studies can be seen as an agglomeration of different historical, political, and cultural narratives of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans and more recent entrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, or whether it is an intellectual endeavor much greater than the sum of its parts? Latino studies scholarship contributes to virtually all intellectual currents. The corpus of scholarly work that focuses on the Latino experience ranges from cultural studies to rational choice analysis of political behavior, from sexual orientation to regional economic restructuring, from racialization to immigration. With such diverse and rich scholarly production some question whether any definitional unity can be imposed on Latino studies. Is the loose rubric of *Latinidad* sufficient to bring coherence to this academic diversity?

It is not the purpose of this paper to respond to these queries, but I raise them to indicate that one of the absorbing intellectual projects of the moment is rethinking ethnic studies in the context of momentous changes during the last decade in society and the academy. My primary interest here is to discuss the diverse institutional responses to Latino studies both as a field of ethnic specific knowledge and an academic unit of the university.

In addition to the internal dynamics that are driving a vibrant intellectual debate on how to define the field, Latino studies confronts another challenge. Latino studies has evolved to the point that a number of university administrations consider it as an increasingly credible, if unseasoned and immature, field of academic inquiry. Yet this assessment is tempered by a lingering suspicion among the canon keepers that Latino studies still harbors many activists who have not abandoned the transformative mission that was the hallmark of the Chicano and Puerto Rican student movement. Consequently, the academy's reaction has been uneven. Some universities have embraced the field and are attempting to establish Latino studies programs of national prominence in their institutions. Other universities have resisted the efforts of Puerto Rican and Chicano studies to expand into Latino studies programs, hoping that if they are kept small and underfunded they will remain marginal actors on campus. But there is no doubt that Latino studies is at a critical juncture. Its very success (the volume and quality of its scholarship, increasing number of scholars with expertise in the area, continually expanding student demand, etc.) has motivated administrators to rethink the role of Latino studies.

In certain cases the university has reclaimed the space it relinquished to Puerto Rican and Chicano student activists in the 1970s and is attempting to devise an intellectually valid nexus between Latino studies and other academic units. In some instances Mexican American, Chicano, and Puerto Rican studies faculty are working with administrators to identify where Latino studies can make the most effective contribution to the mission of the university. The Crossing Borders: Revisiting Area Studies Ford Foundation Project has provided opportunities for Latino studies practitioners to rethink ethnic studies in ways that maximize the collaborative

research endeavors. Indicative of this interest in rethinking Latino studies in the context of a broad-based assessment of comparative inquiry was the University of California at Santa Cruz conference "Latino/Latin American/Chicano Studies and the Rethinking of Area/Ethnic Studies." Increasingly, Latino studies scholarship is the focus of conferences that explore the broad contemporary social and political processes transfiguring American society and the development of the field and its role in the university. As I will discuss below, the intellectual stock taking of ethnic studies generates challenges and tensions for the field.

Positioning Latino Studies

Two conferences held in the 1999/2000 academic year merit brief discussion because the distinct conceptual approaches that framed these meetings serve to highlight the healthy intellectual tensions in the field. Harvard University convened a conference entitled "Latinos in the 21st Century: Mapping the Research Agenda." The Cornell University conference was called "Emerging Trends and Interdisciplinary Discourses in Latino Studies." It is significant that these conferences, each of which endeavored to comprehensively examine the Latino studies field, are among the first to be organized in elite east coast universities. The Harvard conference was held under the auspices of the politically influential and internationally recognized David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies. The initiative at Cornell University was organized by its small Latino Studies Program, which I briefly directed that year.

Harvard's conference focused primarily on specific research themes, while Cornell's conference was designed to stimulate a conceptually grounded discussion of different tendencies within this emerging field. Harvard invited more than two dozen scholars from throughout the United States to engage its faculty and students in a dialogue that examined a range of issues of critical importance to the Latino community and government. Among the most salient issues were immigration, race relations, labor markets, family and health issues, civil and human rights, culture and citizenship, and language and education policy. In addition to this broad-based discussion on issues of policy relevance for the Latino community, the conference enjoined a preliminary exploration of the links between Latino studies and American studies.

The purpose of the Cornell conference was to critically assess key features of the emergence and transformation of Latino studies, and to explore how the field is being positioned in the academy. It initiated a dialogue on the intersections between Latino studies and the disciplines. The conference explored four salient themes: (1) contributions to the disciplines, influence on new academic discourses, new perspectives on research and public policy; (2) research priorities and recent intellectual trajectories; (3) constructions of Latino identity and rethinking the discourse on race relations in the United States; and (4) institutional responses to the inclusion of Latino-related research and instruction.

Conferences such as these provide continuing evidence of the intellectual vibrancy of the field and the highly diversified research agenda that it supports. They also identify and help define new areas of academic inquiry and theorizing engendered by Latino studies scholarship. Latino-based research engages the innovative work of other disciplines and reassesses these in light of the specificity of the Latino experience in the U.S. In the process a more nuanced reading emerges from this collaboration at the margins. Latino studies has contributed to cultural and

postcolonial studies, gender studies and feminist theory, lesbian and gay studies, and comparative literary studies. In turn it has benefited from this cross-fertilization, which has challenged many of the nation-specific, deracialized, male-centered constructs that initially informed the field. Latino studies has also enlivened the traditional social science departments, for its research stimulates disciplinary reflection and reassessment, and generates new areas of inquiry.

The research priorities of many Latino studies practitioners are informed by normative concerns for the economic, political, and social conditions of the rapidly evolving Latino population. This is a broad research agenda that focuses on issues of poverty and unemployment; language policy and citizenship rights; the legal system and the administration of justice; public health, drug addiction, and environmental racism; educational access and retention; regional economic change, labor markets, and immigration; naturalization and political participation—to name some of the most salient policy-oriented concerns. The body of scholarship in these issue areas has expanded our understanding of the differential impact of public policy on the material and social conditions of Latino populations, and the effect the growing Latino presence has on state systems and the policy process.

Harvard and Cornell took differing approaches in their respective conferences, revealing a fundamental tension in the Latino studies field: the institutionally difficult task of where to position Latino studies administratively and academically in the university. The administrative and academic distinctions are very closely related. The administrative positioning of Latino studies pertains to the issue of what unit will have the primary responsibility for the intellectual work and pedagogical responsibilities in Latino studies. Will Latino studies have autonomy as an independent site of knowledge creation? Or will it function as a component of a larger unit which operates with a specific set of research priorities and conceptual apparatus? Related here are questions of resource allocation, faculty hiring, and curriculum development.

By academic positioning I refer to the agents of validation. Who will determine and apply the criteria for evaluating and recognizing professional contributions in Latino studies? Will critical decisions regarding the quality and import of research and intellectual production reside in the traditional departments? Or will administrators rely on the judgment of Latino studies specialists, who tend to be interdisciplinary and less restrained by disciplinary boundaries?

Bearing in mind this distinction between politics of place and politics of validation, in the following pages I discuss two related themes. First, I broadly review how the university reacted to the abrupt, almost militant, arrival of Chicano and Puerto Rican studies, and discuss how the legacy of institutional responses to ethnic studies continues to influence the university's current posture toward Latino studies. We need to explore the implications of the growing national tendency in the academy to steer Latino studies into locations where they are subject to disciplinary regulation or close administrative oversight and intervention. We also need to reflect on the implications for the field of growing professionalization of Latino studies faculty—including their adherence to research priorities and methodological approaches sanctioned by the disciplines.

Second, I note the different arrangements faculty and administrations have devised to incorporate Latino studies into the mission of the university, and discuss future directions and trends. Will Latino studies nationally develop into autonomous sites of knowledge production and instruction, as is the case in a number of

universities in California and Texas? In the process, will Latino studies evolve into an interdisciplinary field of studies that generates specific knowledge about a particular ethnic group—a domestic variant of Latin American area studies? Or will the preferred arrangement be to merge Latino studies with Latin American studies, as it is in a growing number of universities? Other locales for Latino studies are also possible, including centers for the study of race and ethnicity, or absorption into American studies. It is also possible that existing Chicano, Mexican American, or Puerto Rican studies departments will gradually disappear as academic interests and resources shift to immigration studies, cultural studies, and comparative studies of race and ethnicity.

Projecting the future institutional development of Latino studies is a obviously a highly speculative endeavor, but the exercise is meaningful because it serves to identify critical issues that proponents of Latino studies must contend with in the coming years.

First Theme: The Arrival of Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies

What follows are my thoughts on how university administrations initially responded to the development of ethnic studies, particularly Puerto Rican and Chicano/Mexican American programs. These observations reflect the situation during the first couple of decades after the founding of these programs. While it is certain that nationally the academy has of late exhibited more tolerance toward Latino and ethnic studies, the same underlying preoccupation that inspired its resistance in the 1970s is still present. Ethnic and race studies entered the academy as a concession by university authorities to the demands of militant and organized community activists and students. Puerto Rican and Chicano students wanted to expose the public university's proclivity to systematically deny admission to legions of students of colors. They also were determined to challenge the university's ideological role as an elite site of knowledge production that sustained the prevailing racially constituted structure of privilege and power. The meaning and purpose of the early Chicano and Puerto Rican studies programs within the overall mission of the academy were never examined by administrators—this is not surprising as most dismissed these endeavors as victimization studies with no conceivable academic merit. Nonetheless, administrators consciously capitalized on these programs as cost-effective instruments that would aid the university in perfunctorily fulfilling some undefined notion of racial and ethnic inclusion. In the process the voices of discontent would be muffled since the university could reassert its adherence to liberalism. Rarely were Puerto Rican and Chicano studies programs envisioned as prospective members of the academic community and contributors to its mission. Their role was perceived as symbolic and celebratory of the university's openness, and their presence in the university was calculated to be epiphenomenal—fleeting, transitory and inconsequential to the mission of the university.

Although they were often perceived as a regrettable political necessity, these programs were further debilitated by accusations that their presence diminished the scholarly virtue of the university. For administrators who cultivated the image of the university as a rigorous and dispassionate site of scientific knowledge production and instruction, the likely damage attributed to ethnic studies had to be minimized. While the political realities that were forcing ethnic studies on the academy could not be ignored, the university did what was necessary to avoid being tarnished by these academic vandals, who were often portrayed as vitriolic purveyors of

victimization theories and lacking the sophistication to appreciate the hallowed scholarly traditions of the university. It is not a coincidence that the most enduring resistance to the establishment of ethnic studies departments and programs has consistently been from elite universities. Only within the last decade have some of these universities relented and established academic departments and centers in African American studies, but they continue to oppose comparable units for Latino studies. This exclusion is not because of a dearth or scholarship. It reflects the reality that African American community, despite being victimized by unrelenting racism, can still muster superior political, economic, and cultural resources than the heterogeneous Latino population.

Initially the university's response to the advent of ethnic studies was a blend of disinterest, neglect, and willful marginalization. This brusque welcome to the academy was intended to communicate the university's hope and expectation that ethnic studies would not survive the political moment that gave rise to them. University administrations routinely denied Puerto Rican and Chicano studies programs the requisite resources in order to forestall an alternative scholarship and pedagogy. Instead of developing ethnic studies as a coherent academic endeavor, administrators preferred to scatter practitioners of Puerto Rican/Chicano studies throughout various departments willing to accept them, sometimes going as far as providing departments inducements to admit at least one of these scholars. The aim was to hire a member of the underrepresented minority to provide instruction in the history of the underrepresented minority. Moreover, the traditional departments would, if necessary, guard against radicalism and arrest antidisciplinary tendencies of an overly enthusiastic ethnic studies assistant professor. Hiring Latinos in the departments would be a less costly and more politically manageable approach than setting up academic units in ethnic studies. Latino scholars who eschewed scholarship that challenged the normalcy of the discipline were tolerated, and occasionally rewarded for their "collegiality." This hiring plan, it was thought, would satisfy the affirmative action goal of promoting racial and national origin diversity and adequately respond to persistent calls for race and ethnic studies instruction.

But as a strategy providing discipline-based coverage of the Latino experience and increasing the ranks of Latino scholars, this practice resulted in only limited success. The prevalent reaction of social sciences departments was denial of the validity of Latino-related scholarship, unless deemed to possess the academic pedigree the departments acknowledged as their own. Widespread opposition and, in many instances, barely veiled hostility to ethnic studies compelled reluctant public universities to hire a critical mass of Puerto Rican and Chicano professors and set up programs, centers, and departments in the 1970s and 1980s.

During the last decade administrators have revived the earlier practice of placing Latino/a scholars in mainstream departments and require that they teach a course or two on the Latino experience. This practice is especially apparent in the elite private and public institutions. Administrators have unambiguously reaffirmed that only the established academic departments possess the array of intellectual capabilities, technical expertise, and epistemological competence to assess the scholarly merits of Latino scholarship. For many administrators the judgment of the department regarding standards of academic excellence is sacrosanct. It is indeed ironic that admittance to Latino studies, a field that is inherently interdisciplinary, is conditional on obtaining the consent of academic departments that privilege discipline-based knowledge. Given their history as defenders and definers of the content of their

discipline, it is not surprising that departments continue to be the most obstinate opponents to the body of scholarship that questions the epistemological underpinnings and research proclivities of the disciplines. Consequently, departments have with distressing frequency not recommended hiring Latino scholars whose intellectual production falls outside the spectrum of their identity as champions of positivist social inquiry, value neutrality, and professionalism.⁹

In most institutions the development of an interdisciplinary field of knowledge and the hiring of the required scholars are intentionally held captive to the exigency of the departments. This is a condition that administrations justify because, as Columbia University's Vice President for Art and Sciences David Cohen has stated, "hiring through departments assures that Columbia gets faculty members who are qualified in the expertise of an entire department." This type of hiring model "also provides more quality assurance."¹⁰ Alternative assessment panels, such as ad hoc committees comprised of faculty with expertise in ethnic studies, are not considered appropriate. Many universities entered the third millennium with an ossified institutional perspective steeped in the antiquated realities of 19th-century imperial America that concealed its own diverse ethnic and racial composition.

In those universities and colleges that have chosen to establish Latino studies programs, the practice has often been to constrain their growth as independent centers of critical inquiry and to induce them to cultivate an identity as service providers to Latino students. By no means is this a universal response, but given the development of the field, it is discouraging how frequently Latino studies programs are cast as academic interlopers. In these instances Latino studies programs often stand as symbols of the university's commitment to a multicultural academic enterprise, and as student pacifiers that dispense funds for culture-affirming activities. The celebratory rituals of marginality and victimization practiced by some proponents of ethnic studies are sanctioned by the university, since this type of activity does not aim to challenge or transform. In this case Latino studies programs are safely tucked away in the periphery, where they cannot disrupt the core intellectual and commercial endeavors of the university. This practice appears most pronounced in elite private universities, which wish to avoid at all costs the public embarrassment of vociferous and angry students of color demanding that they be acknowledged. Cultural houses, generous financing for minority student activities, and visiting appointments are small costs for the well-endowed elite university to sustain the patina of multicultural harmony.

The stand-alone Latino studies programs are seldom portrayed as capable of operating as sites of autonomous knowledge creation. The creation of knowledge is after all a serious undertaking, one validated and rewarded almost exclusively by the disciplines. Escapades into interdisciplinary musings are no substitute for scientific precision and the intellectual rigor enforced by the disciplines. That appears to be the message the university has communicated to those well-intentioned, but sadly misinformed, proponents for Latino studies programs. Yet this marginality is not preordained. By restricting resources, university administrations tend to perpetuate the existence of Latino studies units on the margins. For example, the limited resources that are dispensed to these programs often frustrate their leadership. Given their precarious financial condition and the routine refusal by administrators to mitigate these conditions, department chairs and program directors are often portrayed as ineffectual and incapable of exercising academic leadership. In conditions of scarcity where intellectual resources and energy are focused

on maintaining minimal operations, the potential for cleavages and divisions within the unit is heightened.

The university often willingly creates the conditions for the realization of a self-fulfilling prophecy: Latino studies is portrayed as contentious, politicized, lacking academic rigor, and devoid of internal coherence. Starved of the resources necessary to embark on serious academic enterprises, including hiring new faculty, with its directors continuously engaged in often fruitless campaigns for resources and the few faculty swamped with service and teaching requirements, many Latino studies programs are debilitated and unable to extricate themselves from the intellectual margins of the university.

Obviously this is not an attractive academic environment for many promising Latino scholars. Given this condition, individuals who may have a normative commitment to the ethnic studies enterprise reluctantly avoid these troubled units, and instead seek appointments in academic departments, where they believe they can more productively undertake their research. But unfortunately, traditional departments still tend to be either indifferent to or suspicious of ethnic studies scholarship. Surprisingly, despite this problematic state of affairs, highly talented graduate students continue to undertake Latino-related research. For many the normative commitment to undertake research that aims to alter favorably the portrayal and conditions of Latinos and Latinas in the United States, or to influence the policy process, is a powerful inducement that enhances the attraction of a career in the academy.

Notwithstanding a legacy of resistance by mainstream departments, the most prestigious universities continue to mint doctoral degrees in Latino-related subject matter. The increasing professionalization of the field, particularly the extent and quality of its scholarship, generates an intriguing paradox for the university. Having consistently sought to portray ethnic studies scholarship as marginal to its mission, the university is pressured to rethink this attitude. The university cannot persist in ignoring the progressive scholarly advance of Latino studies and can ill afford to disregard its contributions to its educational mission. This paradox has two dimensions. First, the university continues to nurture the notion that Latino studies lacks coherence, is too narrow and essentialist, promotes academic balkanization, and is inherently politicized and overly responsive to the demands of misguided student activists. Consequently, it denies Latino studies programs those powers it delegates to academic departments, implying that to do so would constitute an abdication of the university's responsibility to sustain the standards of academic excellence. Moreover, to grant Latino studies departmental status would be to diminish the university's ability to control the content and direction of its academic mission.

Second, while these universities acknowledge the need to include Latino studies subject matter in their curriculum and research programs, they are dissatisfied with previous and often existing arrangements, such as programs and departments. However, until recently many universities have resisted creating new administrative structures to promote interdisciplinary and comparative research on ethnic/race specific populations. Beleaguered, fiscally cautious university officials lament that their ability to act is always bounded by the demands of diverse constituencies, contractual obligations, and institutional imperatives. The most prominent conflicting demands that relate to Latino studies issues are the university's responsibility to serve as incubator of new knowledge and its need to control the

content and direction of knowledge production. Indeed, the university is seen as reacting to demands for ethnic studies programs from a student population that is increasingly composed of students of color. Moreover the administration overwhelmingly endorses the insistence of academic departments that they alone retain the competence to assess the academic excellence of ethnic studies scholarship.

Theme Two: Rethinking Modes of Inclusion

While Puerto Rican and Chicano/Mexican American studies have been around since the late 1960s, the Latino studies mini-phenomenon is of recent vintage. It is the legacy of successful campaigns that led to the establishment of Chicano and Puerto Rican studies programs and departments decades ago. The growing interest in Latino studies is related to the growth and differentiation of the Latin American and Caribbean-origin populations in the United States. Latin American and Caribbean migration has propelled demographic changes of great magnitude, revealed the fragility of borders, ethnically/racially recast urban areas, and intensified interdependency between the United States and Latin America. As a result, Latino studies has assumed public policy relevance, and research in the subject is gaining increased salience.

But these same forces of change have generated a reaction against Latino studies. Some influential individuals propagate fears that the ethnic and racial diversity fueled by the massive migration of the last decade will dilute the integrity of American society. Educational programs that provide instruction and research on ethnic and racial constituencies are often portrayed as divisive and antipathetic to national unity. California Regent Ward Connerly, who led the campaign to dismantle affirmative action, has accused ethnic studies programs of being highly politicized and has questioned their usefulness. According to the *Brown University Herald*, Connerly opined that many ethnic studies programs are "a flat-out waste," creating students who are "angry, believers more in ethnocentrism."¹¹ A decade earlier the noted historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. published an influential monograph that warned against the threat that African American studies in particular, and ethnic studies in general, posed for the American idea of community and the liberal education. He is not alone in promoting the notion that ethnic studies promotes the "balkanization" of the United States.¹²

Despite these alarmist critics, the demonstrated and ongoing contributions of Latino studies research to understanding contemporary U.S. society are undeniable. For this reason Latino studies may indeed face a critical juncture in the years to come. Yet the history of the field as an independent site of intellectual production, one that has often resisted the positivist impulses of traditional academic units, continues to be a source of concern for the university. The resolution of these tensions is an important issue for the university, but how it chooses to do so will vary. A number of factors will affect the particular response, but three important considerations are the particular histories of the Latino studies units, the geographical location of these units, and the standing of the university (i.e., whether it is an Ivy League institution, AAU affiliate, Carnegie Research I school, etc.).

The difference between an academic department and program is no small matter. Departments make all the personnel recommendations for recruitment and promotion, and they decide how to allocate faculty resources for instruction and research. In some universities, programs have recently obtained tenure rights and hiring autonomy. Because they possess a faculty and because tenure effectively

resides in the departments, these units tend to be much more powerful academic agents within the university than are programs. University administrators have proven much more inclined to authorize Latino studies program and research center development, than they are disposed to fund autonomous academic departments.

While much of the early scholarship focused almost exclusively on the distinctiveness of the Chicano and Puerto Rican experiences, over the last decade the research, publications and creative work have been more comparative, comprehensive, and transnational in their treatment of the Latino experience than previously. The comparative analyses are not grounded on the perception of uniformity of historical formation, or commonality of linguistic and cultural practices. Quite the contrary, the practitioners of Latino studies who are on the cusp of the most innovative work acknowledge the particularities of the distinct Latin American and Caribbean national origin populations and refuse to essentialize this experience. What is relatively common for most of the Latino populations is the experience of economic subordination and poverty, institutionalized racism and discrimination in employment and educational opportunities, political marginalization and impediments to citizenship rights, and history of migration.

Three distinctive analytical and conceptual approaches to Latino studies have evolved over the years. Departments that focus on Caribbean societies and their diasporas to the United States have been established exclusively in the northeast. Puerto Rican studies departments and programs were established almost three decades ago. More recently, the Cuban Research Institute in Florida and the Dominican Studies Institute in New York were established in public universities. Second, Chicano and Mexican American studies programs, departments, and research centers predominate in California, Texas, and the Southwest. Some have expanded their curriculum to provide a comparative treatment of the Latino experience. Finally, midwest universities and colleges have been more oriented to Latino-related research, in part because of the presence of Mexican American and Puerto Rican populations in urban settings. The conceptual focus of Latino studies as an integrated field of study that engages the comparative analysis of distinct United States populations of Latin American and Caribbean origin has been more effectively promoted in the east and midwest.

Efforts by some universities to block the development of Puerto Rican studies were somewhat successful in the northeast. For example, despite the enormity of the City University and State University systems of New York, only a handful of Puerto Rican studies departments and programs were established. In contrast, efforts to limit Chicano and Mexican American studies academic units were resisted rather effectively in California and Texas. The sheer size of the Mexican American scholarly community and the political clout of the Mexican American population help explain the establishment and maintenance of reputable Mexican American and Chicano research centers, programs, and departments. But even in California one can see a hierarchy of responses. The quantity of scholarly and artistic output has helped Mexican American and Chicano studies establish a firm footing in the academy. Moreover, the population in the West Coast and Southwest is not only overwhelmingly Mexican American, but has been an indelible part of the history of this nation. Indeed, this population preceded the arrival of the Pilgrims, whom Carlos Fuentes called the first truly illegal aliens in what is now the United States. The Mexican American community has the demographic weight, political resources, historical claims, and academic presence sufficient to appropriate a permanent space in many universities and colleges.

In Stanford and the nine-campus University of California system, the tendency has been to set up research centers and undergraduate programs in Chicano studies. But only the Santa Barbara campus among the units of the University of California system has a Chicano studies department. This is fitting since Santa Barbara was the site where the intellectual model for Chicano studies was developed in 1969.¹³ The Berkeley campus has a Department of Ethnic Studies, which incorporates Chicano studies. This year the Santa Cruz branch elevated Latin American and Latino studies from program status to departmental status. Santa Cruz also houses a Chicano/Latino research institute.

Chicano studies departments have been established in greater numbers the less well-endowed California State University system. While Chicano studies programs still dominate, interest in Latino studies has recently increased. California State University at Long Beach has a Chicano and Latino Studies Department, and recently the Northridge Campus Chicano/Chicanas Studies Department has established a Central American Studies Program. Also in California, the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute operates within the Claremont Graduate University. In the southwest and Texas, a number of Mexican American studies programs and research centers have been established, the most prominent being the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas, Austin.

In contrast, Puerto Rican studies has had a much more tenuous and highly contested presence in the academy. Despite their impressive scholarly output and demand for their services, Puerto Rican studies departments were unable to broaden their academic moorings significantly beyond the tri-state area of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. In part this was because the subject population was small and concentrated in these regions. Moreover, given the virtual absence of scholarship on Puerto Rican communities in the United States, the departments focused almost exclusively on the history and dynamics of the island of Puerto Rico. Conceptual difficulties also plagued the early formation of Puerto Rican studies. Given Puerto Rico's status as a territorial possession of the United States, Puerto Rican studies was always a hybrid academic enterprise. Should Puerto Rican studies research emphasize the diaspora or the colony? Were there two nations—one people subjugated by colonialism and another displaced population victimized by class oppression and racism in the United States? As the scholarship gradually expanded, more emphasis was placed on the diaspora community, and the relationship between migration and public policy. Eventually the fragile political and historical foundations for this false duality in conceptualizing the Puerto Rican experience collapsed.

However, due to their specialized research and teaching mission on the Puerto Rican experience, and the community's economic and political marginalization, Puerto Rican studies departments were vulnerable to changing demographics and administrative priorities. Some departments justify their decision to continue broadening their instructional content to include the histories and experiences of new Latino migrant populations. Some adopted specific service functions as bilingual training programs to complement their traditional academic role. The departments thus responded adequately to university needs to service new immigrant populations. But in doing so, the research productivity of faculty was seriously compromised since the university administrators seldom increased the instructional resources to offset the increased burdens on the small, understaffed units.

Some examples will illustrate the tendency toward the Latinization of Puerto Rican studies and the development of a comparative perspective. In the mid-1980s,

the Rutgers University Department of Puerto Rican Studies was renamed the Department of Puerto Rican and Hispanic Caribbean Studies in response to an external review committee's recommendations. More recently, after extensive community discussions and meetings, the decision to change the department's name to Latino/a and Caribbean Studies was suspended. Brooklyn College's Puerto Rican Studies Department appended Latino studies to its name. Similar changes have taken place in other CUNY campuses. However, in City College, the epicenter of the Puerto Rican studies movement in New York, the Puerto Rican Studies Department and other ethnic/race departments were eliminated and converted to programs by Chancellor Ann Reynolds. In Fordham University the Puerto Rican studies program underwent a gradual transition to Latin American and Latino studies. In SUNY at Albany, Puerto Rican studies was converted into Latin American and Caribbean studies. SUNY also houses the Center for Latino, Latin American and Caribbean Studies. The University of Connecticut established the Puerto Rican and Latino Studies Institute, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst has recently set up a Latin American and Latino Studies Program.

While the logic to extend teaching coverage to other Latino populations was driven by budgetary considerations and the need to demonstrate relevance to beleaguered and anxious university administrators, Puerto Rican studies was equipped to effect this change without much internal disruption. Puerto Rican studies was, and continues to be, genuinely interdisciplinary in its focus. Time and again it has proved receptive to exploring the utility and appropriateness of innovative scholarship to fulfill its academic mission. Puerto Rican studies was not hobbled by entrenched political forces that espoused nationalist or essentialist positions. Consequently, it proved amenable to establishing a Latino studies component within its departmental structure or, in some cases, subsuming its identity within the broader pan-Latino studies rubric. In addition, Latino studies emerged in the east coast in part because of the fragility of Puerto Rican studies and the economic vulnerability and political marginality of the Puerto Rican community.

It is in the Midwest that Latino studies has achieved a firm grounding. The venerable Center for Chicano-Boricua Studies of Wayne State University has been teaching students for over three decades. The Julian Samora Research Institute at Michigan State University has been a nationally recognized center for research on Mexican American and Latino issues. Other important programs include the Latino Studies Program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Latin American and Latino Studies Program at the University of Illinois, Chicago campus. Notre Dame University currently houses the important InterUniversity Project on Latino Research under the auspices of the Institute for Latino Studies. DePaul University also has a Latino Studies Program. Recently, Indiana University has established a Latino Studies Program.

Vertical and Horizontal Fusion

By appropriating a space within the university, Chicano and Puerto Rican studies paved the way over three decades ago for Latino studies today. Sufficient numbers of Puerto Rican and Chicano studies scholars were able to earn the requisite credentials, to generate academic work of impeccable quality, and eventually to cross the threshold into tenureship. Given this development, there is a growing awareness that this nontraditional scholarship has established a beachhead in the academy. In a number of instances, nationally respected departments have acknowledged

and rewarded this emerging scholarship by tenuring colleagues engaged in Latino-related scholarship. Major funding agencies, particularly the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, impart further academic validation through their support for innovative applied and basic research on the Latino condition.

However, in the current fiscal and political climate, the university will tend to resist expending resources on faculty, instruction and research capabilities for Latino studies units, unless they are merged or consolidated with other academic units. Administrators are still hampered by the notion that Latino studies is too narrowly focused and incapable of generating scholarship of broad applicability and insight. The specificity of the Latino/a condition is widely perceived as divergent from the homogenizing cultural and social currents of this society. Implicit in this reaction is the belief that inclusion, absorption, indeed Americanization, will be hindered by validating and explicating the experiences of racialized minorities, which promotes a sense of victimization and rejection of the assimilation values of the society. This belief, combined with the heightened salience of Latino studies research, has motivated some universities to explore ways to induce the fusion of Latino studies with other academic programs.

The fusion of Latino studies has two tracks, which seem on the surface to be mutually exclusive. One track, which I call horizontal, is Latino and Latin American studies, and the other track, which I identify as vertical, is the global and pan-ethnic comparative approach favored by American and hemispheric studies, as well as the centers for race and ethnic study. By fusion I mean the process of merging existing Latino studies units with other academic units under one administrative structure. Fusion is also a process where the national origin specific departments (Chicano and Puerto Rican) expand their scope of instruction to respond to the educational aspirations of recently established immigrant communities that trace their origins to Latin America or the Caribbean. For example, the recasting of Puerto Rican studies as Caribbean or Latino studies and the broadening of Chicano studies to include coverage on Latino populations are instances of this fusion. Another example is the practice in some universities for Spanish language departments and English departments to develop a Latino literatures subfield. As Mexican American and Puerto Rican studies programs and departments evolve comparative analytical perspectives and become Latino oriented, the prospects for this type of fusion intensify. Other examples of the fusion of academic fields are the Latin American and Latino studies programs and departments that populate midwestern universities. Linkages between area studies and ethnic studies are becoming increasingly popular. This type of horizontal fusion provides conditions for program decision-making autonomy over personnel and curricula issues. Horizontal fusion gives faculty the latitude to pursue Latino-based research agendas. Central administration or traditional department oversight in critical areas of curricula, collaborative research, and academic programs are weakened with this type of institutional arrangement.

Parallel to process is vertical fusion, characteristic of the Centers for the Study of Race and Ethnicity that undertake a comparative approach to the historically oppressed populations of the United States. Stanford, Brown, and Columbia each have established such centers. In calling for such a center at Columbia University, the President's Advisory Committee on Ethnic Committee Studies observed:

As subjects of inquiry, racialized minorities in the American context can only be understood by taking a broadly comparative, historical, and international perspective. Comparisons to the history and experience of other groups in America are needed to convey a sense of the trajectories of ethnic experiences in the United States.

But a domestic focus is insufficient. Concepts of race and ethnicity are not exclusively American.¹⁴

According to the committee, the comprehension of *Latinidad* in the United States requires an analytic approach that is comparative, global, and historically grounded. The ethnic studies academic enterprise is not simply an aggregation of distinctive experiences of racialized minorities but an analytical approach that envisions race as one component that should not be privileged above class, gender, sexuality, and nation.¹⁵ The committee calls for a broadly collaborative approach in order to generate knowledge about racialized minorities that will be of heuristic utility. Similar motivations underlie the recent debates on the role of ethnic studies in the American studies field. With the support of the Mellon Foundation, American studies at Cornell University is undergoing a self-examination, leading toward a transformation that positions ethnic and race studies at the center of the field. Cornell University has used the funds to award postdoctoral fellowships that examine race and ethnicity in the conceptualization of a new American studies. The recent interest in promoting hemispheric studies centers in certain institutions possibly portends another means for inserting Latino studies into a broader analytic framework.

These are some of the diverse responses to calls for inclusion of Latino studies into the mission of the university. It is important to understand the terms and content of that incorporation. I will conclude by reviewing the paradox that Latino studies will probably confront in the immediate future. According to the proponents of the global approach, vertical fusion creates much greater opportunities for developing theoretical work on the dynamics of oppression of racialized minorities. Globalizing the study of the Latino experience will, according to these advocates, protect against academic ghettoization, celebrating victimization, or balkanization that they claim limits the development of ethnic studies. Moreover, they argue that, by overcoming the parochialism and essentialism that Latino studies programs purportedly suffer from, genuine opportunities emerge for critically rethinking discipline-based ways of knowing. Implicit in this formulation is the longstanding bias that the university is a neutral site of knowledge, and for ethnic studies to take their proper place in this lofty enterprise, it must shed its penchant to politicize and polemicize academic work.

Advocates for Latino studies accept the utility of comparative, historically grounded, transnationally focused examinations of the Latino experience in the United States. But they question whether the incorporation of Latino studies into the comprehensive, umbrella-like centers for the study of race and ethnic, or absorption within American studies will substantially reformulate the way people do Latino studies. Such concerns are expressed by Francis Aparicio, who asks, "How do we negotiate our integration into higher education without having to renounce the oppositional values that guided our initial efforts in higher education and that, ironically, have had a major impact in the ideological and interdisciplinary trends of higher education today?"¹⁶ Will the Latino studies field be distinguished by its distinctive research questions, innovative research methodologies, challenges to the

traditional concerns of the disciplines, and community-based policy focus?

Will the emphasis on comparative assessment that questions the centrality of race and ethnicity in shaping the identity and capacity of Latino constituencies lead to a decontextualized and historically limited analysis? Can we impute with certainty that race is but merely one phenomenon comparable in its explanatory force to gender, class, and sexuality in forging the Latino experience in the United States? The global approach undoubtedly promotes professionalization of ethnic studies in ways that may undermine the normative commitment that has attracted so many Latinas and Latinos into the academy. For some adherents of Latino studies, this type of global fusion foretells the erasure of an academic tradition borne of struggle for access to knowledge and new forms of knowing. It means acceptance into but not transformation of the centers of intellectual production. Proponents of ethnic studies argue that homogenizing the experiences of racialized minorities through university sanctioned and controlled spaces of academic production means relinquishing its critical claim that the university is not neutral, that it has historically functioned as an agent for legitimizing and sustaining the structures of power and privilege.

Maintaining a critical, but constructive, political analysis may well be essential in order for Latino studies to negotiate the contrasting professionalizing pressures of the university and the social claims for access and relevance of its students and community. University administrators are unjustified in their fear that perpetuating Latino studies provides succor for the separatists and breeds balkanization. The vast majority of race and ethnic studies departments have proved time and again that they are indispensable agencies that foster the social and economic inclusion of historically underrepresented people of color. In the process, these centers of instruction and research generate complex and refined analysis of American society and the role of its racialized communities.

30

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An earlier version of this paper was presented at an Interdisciplinary Workshop on Transborder Peoples and the Intersection between Latino Studies and Latin American Studies, Indiana University, June 1–2, 2001. I would like to thank Lourdes Gouveia, Suzanne Oboler, Vilma-Santiago Irizarry, and Carmen Whalen for comments on earlier versions of this draft. I also thank the anonymous reviewers of *CENTRO Journal* for their insightful comments.

NOTES

- ¹ See Juan Zevallos' interview of Frances Aparicio regarding Latino cultural studies in *Cronicas*, 28 June 1999. <http://www.andes.missouri.edu/andes/cronicas/>.
- ² See Juan Flores, "Latino Studies: New Contexts, New Concepts," *Harvard Educational Review* 67.2, 2(Summer 1997), 212.
- ³ For Puerto Rican Studies see M. Sánchez and A. Stevens-Arroyo, ed., *Toward A Renaissance of Puerto Rican Studies*, (Highland Lakes: Atlantic Research and Publications, 1987), Frank Bonilla, Ricardo Campos, and Juan Flores, "Puerto Rican Studies: Promptings for the Academy and the Left," in Bertell Ollman and Edward Vernoff (eds.), *The Left Academy: Marxist Scholarship on American Campuses*, (New York: Praeger, 1986), 67–101. For a discussion on the development of Chicano Studies, see Eugene E. García, Francisco A. Lomelí, and Isidro D. Ortiz, (eds.), *Chicano Studies: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1984); especially Carlos Muñoz, "The Development of Chicano Studies, 1968–1981," and Ricardo Romo and Raymond Paredes, *New Directions in Chicano Scholarship*. (La Jolla: Chicano Studies Program, University of California, San Diego, 1978). A more recent study is Dennis J. Bixler-Márquez, et al., (eds.), *Chicano Studies: Surveys and Analysis*, (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1997).
- ⁴ The term is also the title of a recent publication, Christina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall (eds.), *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).
- ⁵ David Ludden, "Area Studies in the Age of Globalization," University of Pennsylvania 1/25/98 (<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~dludden/areast2.htm>).
- ⁶ See Pedro Cabán, "Latino and Latin American Studies: The New Synthesis," in Frank Bonilla, et al. *Borderless Borders*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1998), 195–216.
- ⁷ See Juan Flores, "Latino Studies: New Contexts, New Concepts"; also Cabán, "Latino and Latin American Studies: The New Synthesis."
- ⁸ See Suzanne Oboler, "Anecdotes of Citizen's Dishonor in the Age of Cultural Racism: Toward a (Trans)national Approach to Latino Studies," in *Discourse: Latina/o Discourse in Academe*, 21.3 (Fall 1999), 19–41.
- ⁹ A knowledgeable and perceptive Columbia University student recently identified three rationalizations academic departments employ to reject Latino and Ethnic Studies scholarship; (1) the study of racialized groups by ethnic studies research is not considered valuable by traditional departments; (2) ethnic studies provides a direct challenge and critique of traditional work, and (3), the diverse intellectual background of ethnic studies professors and the interdisciplinary nature of their work. Jeff Senter, *Columbia Spectator* April 30, 2001 (<http://www.columbiaspectator.com/Opinion/article.asp?articleID=2503>).
- ¹⁰ *Columbia Spectator*, April 11, 2001 (<http://www.columbiaspectator.com/News/article.asp?articleID=2326>).
- ¹¹ <http://www.browndailyherald.com/Stories>.
- ¹² Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1991).
- ¹³ What many consider the founding document of Chicano Studies, *El Plan de Santa*

Barbara, was published here in October 1969. This was the product of efforts of students, faculty, staff, and community activists who met for a three-day conference in April of that year. The conference was convened by the Chicano Coordinating Committee on Higher Education.

- ¹⁴ President's Advisory Committee on Ethnic Committee Studies, Guidelines and Recommendations, Columbia University, February 1997.
- ¹⁵ This is the vision articulated by Gary Okihiro, the Center's director: "The vision I have for the center involves not an aggregation of ethnic studies units, but an engagement of them across racial lines." See *Columbia Spectator*, May 10, 2000 (<http://www.columbiaspectator.com/News/article.asp?articleID=28>).
- ¹⁶ "Reading the 'Latino' in Latino Studies: Toward Re-imagining Our Academic Location," in *Discourse: Latina/o Discourse in Academe*, 21.3 (Fall 1999), 3–18.