Editorial

Latino studies/Latinidades – Under construction ...

Latino Studies (2013) 11, 129–130. doi:10.1057/lst.2013.10

Ten years ago, in the inaugural issue of *Latino Studies*, founding editor Suzanne Oboler made the following observation about Central Americans in the United States: “This is an increasingly significant group in the US context, about which very little research is currently available, in spite of its growing numbers. Still, its presence is yet another reminder of both the increasing diversity within the Latino population, and the unabating impact of the United States in the causes and consequences of transnational migration in the hemisphere.” While there is more research on Central Americans in the United States now than there was a decade ago, Oboler’s statement is still valid. In that 2003 issue, Arturo Arias contributed a much-cited article that examined why Central Americans remain invisible both in conceptualizations of Latinidades and discussions of marginalized communities in the United States. He discussed their “strategic non-identity” in the context of Central America’s subordinate position to Mexico and that population’s all-too-frequent undocumented status in the United States. The underrepresentation of US Central Americans in our envisioning of Latinidades and in the field Latino Studies is a persisting challenge that deserves our attention. As Arturo Arias and Claudia Milian, the guest editors of this special issue note, in the last 10 years we have indeed seen a rise in the number of scholarly articles and books, literary works and cultural representations in films of Central American Americans. *Latino Studies* has addressed this gap with the publication of essays by prominent and emerging scholars focused on US Central Americans including Cecilia Menjivar, Kelli Lyon-Johnson, Ana Patricia Rodríguez, Yajaira M. Padilla and Arturo Arias. But there is still much to be done in this area. So we are pleased to present this special issue featuring bold and innovative interventions that will usher in a new phase in the study of US Central Americans.

In mainstream media and the minds of too many, “Latino” is synonymous with “Mexican” and all the stereotypical connotations that go along with that category. If this classification is broadened at all, it is usually limited to the long-established Latino trinity: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans. Central Americans and their specific history in the United States remain invisible. As Arias

and Milian point out in their introduction, the Central American migration to the United States can be identified as early as the mid-1850s, but it is only in the past four decades, particularly after the civil wars of the 1980s in the region, and the ensuing mass migration north, that the growth of this population has been recognized. However, as a March 2013 report by the Migration Policy Institute points out, Central American migration continues at a significant rate. Between 2000 and 2010, the Central American immigrant population in the United States grew from 2 million to 3 million people, rendering them the fastest growing Latin American immigrant population in the United States in this period. While in 1960, Central American immigrants' share of the total immigrant population in the United States was 1 per cent, by 2011 it was almost 8 per cent; and Central Americans accounted for almost 15 per cent of all Latin American immigrants in the United States. The countries with highest rates of migration in the region were El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The report also notes that Central American immigrants tend to be young and to live in poverty. In fact, 1.5 million children under the age of 18 live in a home with at least one Central American-born parent.¹ Clearly, this community will continue to have a growing impact for many years to come and we need to understand its place both in the United States and in our interpretations and constructions of Latinidades, particularly in terms of what we can learn about the politics of economic and political refugee status, diasporic and transnational indigeneity, and the trauma and repercussions of multiple crossings.

This special issue then is an invitation to our readers to engage with new perspectives on Central American Americans. It includes essays that analyze literary texts and other cultural productions, alongside contributions that examine the ramifications of immigration laws on US Central Americans, and also document specific strategies of resistance to US policies. As Yajaira M. Padilla suggests in this volume, hopefully, the work will motivate us to consider "how the Central American presence is transforming the country's multicultural milieu." I anticipate, as well, that the content of this special issue will inspire us to continue the ongoing work of broadening our conceptualizations and understandings of Latin American migration into the United States and the complex range of Latinidades that result from this migration.

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1 The MPI report, "Central American Immigrants in the United States" is available at www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?id=938.