Editorial

Common sense?

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Commonsense notions are often found to be untrue. Familiar, oft-repeated narratives, upon closer examination, may turn out to be not only doubtful, but also patently false. Recent events across the Americas call into question two propositions heavily promoted in Western democracies: that police protect and serve citizens, and that no one is above the law. We expect the police to assist us, and the discourse around police enforcement is couched in the language of safety, protection, and freedom. However, as we have witnessed again and again, systems seemingly set up to serve all citizens fail a significant portion of the population. From Ferguson to Cleveland, to Staten Island, from Anaheim to Ayotzinapa, we have seen that often, people of color have reason to fear rather than trust the very institutions that are charged with our protection. Their stories are all too recognizable: Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Manuel Díaz and Joe Azevedo, as well as the forty-three missing Mexican students, all died due to criminal actions by the police, and instead of being held accountable by the justice system, laws protecting citizens are flouted regularly. Rather than providing safety, too often, the police function as an occupying force in communities of color. And they do so with impunity.

As I considered the articles in this issue, I was struck by the fact that a thread that links all of the articles is that they too contest prevailing narratives and challenge seemingly commonsense notions around pivotal concerns. Like the ongoing massive protests across the Americas that give testament to the glaring contradiction between rhetoric and reality concerning the actions of the police, the articles before you disrupt assumptions around subjects such as citizenship, social class, authorship, race relations and sexuality. They invite us to look again and reconsider familiar interpretations and beliefs.

Two articles in this volume examine how Latinos are unsettling long-held notions about citizenship. Jill Anderson's article confronts dominant discourses of illegality. She demonstrates how deported youth in a call center in Mexico City reframe their perceptions of gang members once they occupy a space of illegality with them, simply because they have crossed the border. Similarly labeled as criminals, the youth come to comprehend the harsh repercussions of such

dehumanizing labeling. In this way, the criminalization of the deported youth leads them to question not only their own status, but also that of others demonized and excluded from the shelter of citizenship due to their shared “criminality.” This connection gives birth to new grounds for solidarity.

In a similar vein, Arely Zimmerman exposes how Central American activists who spend years fighting for legitimacy through citizenship, often come to a much more expansive definition of citizenship than that promoted by the state. These activists make claims for membership in the community despite their often ambiguous and uncertain status in the United States and their decades-long struggle for legitimacy. Even for those who finally acquire legal status, their newly constructed definition privileges social and political participation, over abstract and judicial interpretations of citizenship.

Also challenging legalistic, taken-for-granted assumptions, Marisol Negrón disrupts the notion that copyright law can fairly assess authorship, and in essence our cultural patrimony. She challenges the claim that Rubén Blades is the sole author of “El Cantante,” an iconic song made famous by Hector Lavoe. Through a riveting exploration of the song’s history, she sheds light on the limitations of legal renderings of authorship, and makes the compelling case that more than words on the page matter when determining the creators of cultural products. She asserts that other factors, such as performance, improvisation and the material trajectory of cultural artifacts such as songs, complicate simplistic conventions that currently dictate the attribution of authorship.

The next three articles, likewise invite readers to reassess ideas often taken for granted. Jody Vallejo makes evident that acquiring middle-class status does not guarantee Latinos access to a discrimination-free life. Skin color, language and cultural background may still mark one as an outsider, and subject one to varying levels of racism. In the white-collar workplaces Vallejo examines, Mexican Americans experience acts of subtle and not so subtle microaggressions that clarify that although they have achieved middle-class status, they have not necessarily crossed over the white racial boundary. This is especially the case for Mexican Americans who are not far removed from a working-class background. Their experiences underscore the reality that though socially mobile, they are not automatically eligible for the social and economic benefits that accrue to middle-class whites.

Jay Pastrana’s research calls into question narratives that present the Latino family as inherently anti-gay. The prevailing viewpoint is that Latinos are more homophobic and less likely to discuss sexuality than other groups. Pastrana’s research finds that familism, as measured in this article, does not necessarily serve as a barrier to visibility for LGBT Latinos; rather it is an important factor that strongly predicts their degree of outness. His research presents other counter-intuitive findings such as that Latino youth are less likely to be out than older people, and that religion does not seem to be an important factor in whether or not Latinos come out.

Finally, moving to the world of literary fiction, Carmen Lamas presents a provocative and original reading of Martín Morúa Delgado's turn of the century novels. She cogently argues that previous critics have misread Morúa's novels, *Sofía* and *La familia Unzuazu*, specifically concerning the intended audience for these works. Many critics have understood Morúa's work as speaking to the white Cuban elite. Using his biography as supporting evidence, Lamas asserts that Morúa's intent was to educate black readers across the Americas concerning the problematics of US conceptions of race. Rather than categorizing Morúa as primarily a Latin American writer, since both the author and many of his readers traveled between Cuba and the United States (some finding themselves permanently exiled in the United States), Lamas argues for recovering and incorporating this author within both Latino and American studies.

Thus, these skilled authors call upon us to question prevalent notions and consider alternative approaches, opening our eyes and handsomely rewarding us with exciting, new perspectives.

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