Editorial

It is an honor to share the joy of launching this inaugural issue! *Latino Studies* has come together in the spirit of both learning and affirmation – the culmination of our collective efforts to create a journal focusing specifically on the experience of Latinas and Latinos in the United States. Certainly, as our mission statement suggests, one of our aims is to provide a space of learning and exchange – a space through which we can educate ourselves and one another on the disparate geopolitical and economic realities of Chicano/as, of Puerto Ricans, and the other populations of Latin American descent currently living in this society. Our purpose is also to establish a research agenda that can effectively integrate innovative theoretical perspectives, scholarly approaches and different ways of understanding the diverse experiences of Latinas and Latinos – their life histories, socio-economic and political needs and action, and cultural forms of affirmation – in the context of the national and hemispheric realities of our times. It is our wish and hope that *Latino Studies* become a forum, grounded in rigorous scholarship and informed dialogue and debate, where the national and international scholarly community can fully engage and address research and theoretical issues of concern to Latinas and Latinos in the United States and the Americas as a whole.

The underlying assumptions guiding the editorial direction of this journal are rooted in the history and origins of our field. Unlike the movement-based development of Chicano and Chicana Studies and Puerto Rican Studies, the relatively recent emergence of Latino/a Studies, as a distinct field of inquiry in its own right, is largely a development in response to the government's imposition of a label, 'Hispanic,' in the mid-1970s. This policy, in effect, obscured the experiences of two distinct communities of US citizens (Chicano/as and Puerto Ricans), dismissing the specificity of their respective histories, and favoring what we could call an 'equal opportunity' categorization for all national-origin groups of Latin American descent, irrespective of their time or way of arrival, the cause of migration, their country of origin or political status in the United States.

Many useful parallels can and indeed should be drawn between the African American and Latino and Latina experiences in the United States. Yet the fact that there is no single unifying condition (comparable, for example, to the impact of slavery on African Americans) that could serve as springboard for the study and understanding of the US Latino/a experience has militated against the establishment of a comprehensive research agenda.

Latino Studies has come together in the spirit of learning because we need to do more to foster vigorously the research agenda among scholars across the country; because as yet we do not necessarily share a common historical, political, or socio-cultural understanding of the complexities of the various population groups we study under the rubric of ‘hispanics’ or ‘Latinos’ in the United States. ‘Latinos’ are not and should not be seen as a mere sum-total of the Chicano/a, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, Central, and South American national-origin populations: rather ‘Latino/a’ is a created identity, forged by the interaction among all these groups – an interaction constructed through both alliance and struggle; through the recognition of commonalities as well as the acknowledgement of differences; and, above all, through the belief in and the quest for justice.

We need only remember the history of the movements of Chicano/as and Puertorriqueño/as to see the courage and sacrifices of *las pioneras y los pioneros* who bequeathed to us the spirit of affirmation also embedded in this journal. We owe to them our field’s firm historical foundation in sound research, a proven ground on which we can confirm our commitment to justice, equality, *dignidad*, as we move forward to chart the future directions of scholarship.

This first issue of *Latino Studies* was created through and in the spirit of dialogue and debate. In early March, 2002, the members of the Advisory and Editorial Boards and other scholars – Chicano/as, Puertorriqueño/as Cubano/as, Dominicano/as, Centro y Sudamericano/as – came together for the first time in a historic two-day conference. Our aim was to discuss the state of the field, to lay out some of the parameters, to acknowledge through scholarly presentations and debates, what we both know and can come to share with each other. We are proud to be able to publish excerpts of that dialogue in this and in the journal’s next issue. The lead essays we present here, by Pedro Cabán, Devon Peña, Frances Aparicio, and Silvio Torres-Saillant, and the commentaries by their respective respondents – Deena J. González, Felix Masud-Piloto, Vilma Santiago-Irizarry, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Marc Zimmerman, Anani Dzidzienyo, and Tanya K. Hernández – capture some of the main concerns we believe should be included in our discussions and analyses, as we continue to debate, define, and institutionalize our field. We hope that readers will also participate in these discussions, sending us comments and responses to these and other essays in each Volume. We will gather some of this commentary in *El Forum*, as ‘letters to the editor.’

In the inaugural issue, we are also publishing an essay by Arturo Arias, currently president of the Latin American Studies Association, on the identity formation of ‘Central American-Americans.’ This is an increasingly significant group in the U.S. 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/a population, and the unabating impact of the United States in the causes and consequences of transnational migration in the hemisphere.

In our ongoing effort to bridge the gap between the lived experience of the diverse Latino communities across the country, and the production of knowledge about it, we are also publishing in this issue, our first contributions to our section on *VIVENCIAS: Reports from the field*. This section, presented with ‘pessimism of the intelligence but optimism of the will,’ aims to inform and analyze from an activist perspective, the challenging realities that Latino/as confront in their daily lives at the local level. These *vivencias* often escape the attention of, or are deliberately neglected by, the national media, and hence remain unknown to the larger scholarly community of Latino/as and others around the country. The first contribution, a poem by Elvia Arriola, details the ‘exploit and murder processing zone’ of the maquila factories on the US Mexico border; the second, by Irasema Coronado, decries *Las Colonias*, unplanned housing developments where many ‘forgotten Americans’ live, lacking basic services. It is an area of social inequality in the heart of the richest country in the world, and that is reminiscent of the urban poverty of the poorest areas of Latin America – yet another paradoxical example of the growing commonalities around the hemisphere.... We urge our readers to submit short reports and analytical accounts such as these, aimed at documenting and informing us all of significant local issues and events of interest and concern to the Latino community nationwide.

Finally, in addition to our first book review, this first issue also includes a brief statement by David Muñoz-Armstrong, the winner of the competition we sponsored last Spring among artists nationwide, for our journal’s logo. We want to congratulate and to thank David for creating a logo *que marca presencia*, and which captures so accurately the spirit of affirmation of this journal!

Latino Studies is largely the result of the vision of Frances Aparicio, Professor and Chair of the Latin American and Latino Studies Program at the University of Illinois at Chicago, who recognized the need for it and spared no efforts to make it a reality; of the generosity of Stanley Fish, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, of the University of Illinois at Chicago, without whom this journal would not have been possible; and of the unwavering support of our journal’s Publisher, David Bull. Acknowledgements and thanks to David Bull for all the help and advice he has unstintingly provided. Our deep appreciation also to Frances Aparicio and to Stanley Fish, both of whom are now consulting

editors of *Latino Studies*, for their foresight in recognizing the importance of this venue for the national scholarly community.

Saludos!

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