



Preserving our commitment to activism, agency, and community

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At the annual meeting of the Latin American Studies Association this past May, *Latino Studies* celebrated its twentieth anniversary with a roundtable discussion of the founding, evolution, and key values of the journal. With this issue, I'm delighted and deeply honored to announce that I've accepted the role of editor-in-chief, following in the footsteps of giants: founding editor Suzanne Oboler and consulting editor Frances Aparicio (the new president of the Latino Studies Association, to whom we owe the creation of and initial funding for *Latino Studies*) as well as former editor Lourdes Torres, who has stepped down after ten dedicated years of continuing to develop *Latino Studies* into the premier interdisciplinary journal that it is today. Needless to say, it is humbling to be in such company, and I only hope that I can continue to build on the field-shaping work of my predecessors, to protect the journal's core principles, and to move us into the future as we face challenges we are only beginning to understand.

I am aided in this work not only by Suzanne, Frances, and Lourdes, but by the dedicated editorial board—Silvio Torres-Saillant, Marisa Alicea, and Vilma Ortiz—who, despite their long service, have agreed to stay on to see me through this transition; by our phenomenal managing editor, Maria Isabel Ochoa-Alvarez, who will guide me as I master systems and best practices; and by an esteemed advisory board featuring scholars from across the nation and beyond. I will be calling on the board to offer its best wisdom as we take this opportunity to consider how we can capitalize on our past success while responding to new developments.

I am thrilled to be bringing *Latino Studies* to the University of Kansas (KU), where I've been teaching and working since 1997. Housing the journal in Kansas maintains its strong ties with the Midwest—starting with its inaugural issue and continuing under the stewardship of Lourdes Torres at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois. While the long-standing presence of Latino/a/x people in New York, Florida, California, and the Southwest is well-recognized, the same is not true for Latino/a/xs in the “Heartland,” which continues to be imagined in popular

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culture as predominantly white and rural. Indeed, the Latina/o/x Studies Association announced in its 2022 Call for Papers that, “by holding the 2022 Conference in South Bend, Indiana—a city in the rural Midwest with an established Latina/o/x community—we...encourage participants to engage with scholars, community organizers, and activists beyond the traditional geocultural areas (West Coast, Southwest, East Coast, Florida) more often engaged in our field.” Basing *Latino Studies* in Kansas goes a long way toward correcting the erasure of Latino/a/x people from the Midwest. I am both proud and grateful that KU has expressed a sincere commitment toward supporting the journal’s budget, with funding from units across the university, including the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the Office of Research, the Office of International Affairs, the Office of Graduate Studies, the Hall Center for the Humanities, the Institute for Policy and Social Research, the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies ... and, of course, my home department, English. This support makes clear that, stereotypes of the *Wizard of Oz* image of Kansas aside, Latino studies has a flourishing home in the Heartland.

Latino Studies is rare among scholarly journals in that, from its beginnings, it has insisted on mentoring younger scholars through the review and publication process to produce their best possible work and to make it truly interdisciplinary in scope so that it speaks to the broadest possible audiences—rather than on gatekeeping and exclusion. The result is the entire field rises, with a greater diversity of scholarly voices making a meaningful impact on the body of scholarship, and with important work being produced that speaks directly to issues of inequity, social justice, and the needs of Latino communities. I might venture to say that the journal *Latino Studies* has helped the *field* of Latino studies to achieve institutional prominence and recognition, from its early days, when academic programs tended to be focused on Chicano/a/x or Puerto Rican studies, to now, when the need for wider conversations is generally acknowledged. The core values of mentorship, interdisciplinarity, and social justice research are at the heart of *Latino Studies*, and I plan to sustain our commitment to them—even while we consider possible ways of improving key metrics, such as time from submission to decision and rates of citation, so that our work reaches ever further. In consideration of global inequities with regard to information access, I also remain committed, like our previous editors, to pursuing increased possibilities for open access to the research we publish. In short—to put a twist on a cliché—the more (some) things stay the same, the more we will also want to consider change.

In the articles that constitute this issue, *Latino Studies*’ core commitment to research on social justice struggles is once again apparent. In “Critical relationalities: Centering Indigenous land, presence, and sovereignty in immigrant/migrant rights discourses,” Raquel A. González Mádrigal argues forcefully that im/migrant rights struggles are incomplete and imbalanced if they fail to center Indigenous rights, including Indigenous sovereignty over ancestral lands at the contested US-Mexico border. The concepts of “sovereignty”—or the right to communal self-determination and self-legislation on these lands—and “sanctuary,” referring to spaces that attempt to protect immigrants from deportation, are rarely imagined in tandem; yet, as González Mádrigal powerfully illustrates, they need to be understood as intersectional concepts, since the US nation-state as a product of settler colonialism



enacts and enforces immigration law without regard to, and thus in erasure of, Indigenous presence on and stewardship of tribal lands divided by the border. To refuse settler colonial imperatives by insisting on the primary claim of Indigenous people is also, then, to refuse the right of the US nation-state to legislate who may or may not enter into or reside on Native lands, and to instead grant primacy to Indigenous world views that acknowledge the right of all people to migrate. Further, the arbitrary consideration of immigrant rights as apart from Indigenous rights erases the experience of the hundreds of Indigenous people who cross the border and on whom violence is enacted by the nation-state.

In “‘It felt like hitting rock bottom’: A qualitative exploration of the mental health impacts of immigration enforcement and discrimination on US-citizen, Mexican children,” Jamile Tellez Lieberman provides an on-the-ground look at the ways in which enforcement efforts, deportations (of parents), and the threat of deportation affect citizen Latina/o/x youth. In support of other findings that have suggested the trauma experienced by children, both citizens and undocumented, who are confronted with immigration enforcement efforts that affect them and their families, Lieberman’s research discusses evidence of psychological distress among US-born Latinx/a/o children, including acute anxiety, extreme stress, and hypervigilance. Such findings once again force us to consider deeply the effect of current “security” practices on our children’s health and well-being.

“Cuentos y consejos: Migrant agency in the FM4 Paso Libre,” by Michaela Django Walsh and “Healing our histories through otros saberes: Activism and food justice” by Lani Cupchoy both explore the rich possibilities for agency and activism through everyday and routine practices that push against stereotypes of victimization. Walsh presents ways in which Central American migrants who found themselves at FM4 Paso Libre, a casa de migrante in Mexico, preserved and invoked their connection to the homes they had traveled from, shared small acts of kindness and solidarity with each other, and offered advice and “survival strategies” for ways to make it through the perilous journey north. In both Walsh and Cupchoy’s articles, one means by which migrants exhibit agency is through foodways, with Walsh discussing how smells and tastes can evoke a sense of continuing connectedness to home, and Cupchoy using autoethnographic methods and centering Indigenous knowledges about food, herbs, and healing, passed down intergenerationally through stories, to illuminate an initiative originated by her mother in the Montebello Unified public school system in Los Angeles County, California, which enrolls a substantial immigrant student population. The program, which received national attention, engaged students with an extensive, multiyear garden project with emphases on environmental sustainability and healthy eating. The garden initiative can itself be understood as a form of activism, a claiming of agency to shape and transform the current places of Latino communities.

The fifth article of the volume, “How many Latino studies programs are there? Tracking programmatic growth, stagnation, and invisibility 1960–2020,” by G. Cristina Mora, Nicholas Vargas, and Dominic Cedillo, addresses a different form of activism: it investigates the legacy of educational activist efforts to begin Chicano, Latino, and Puerto Rican studies programs in the 1960s and 1970s. Tracing the creation of new programs in the decades since this founding period, the authors find a



significant stagnation of new program growth, with no clear increase in resources nationally being dedicated to such programs despite the clear increase in Latino/a/x student populations. The articles also find that recent programs have rhetorically marketed themselves in terms of cultural and historical knowledge, creating a certain distance from the more explicit social justice goals of programs founded in the earlier period.

The Supreme Court decision this past June dismantling affirmative action in colleges and universities, as well as the national trend toward cutting support for DEI efforts and ethnic studies programs, underscores the continuing importance of activism for equity and social justice in higher education. Arguably, our efforts begin with knowledge itself; we need to understand past and present conditions of institutional inequity that continue to need redress. The articles in this volume illuminate some of the varied and different routes to activism; *Latino Studies* itself is also one of those routes, disseminating knowledge that will help us address the needs of our communities. As I step into my new role, I am proud to be involved in such an enterprise.

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