



# JSRI

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## **Truth and Objectivity and Chicano History**

*by Rodolfo F. Acuña*  
*California State University, Northridge*

**Occasional Paper No. 9**  
*December 1997*



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## **About the Author:**

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# Truth and Objectivity and Chicano History

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*Artwork by*  
Nora Chapa Mendoza, March 1996

The Julian Samora Research Institute is the Midwest's premier policy research and outreach center to the Hispanic community. The Institute's mission includes:

- *Generation of a program of research and evaluation to examine the social, economic, educational, and political condition of Latino communities.*
- *Transmission of research findings to academic institutions, government officials, community leaders, and private sector executives through publications, public policy seminars, workshops, and consultations.*
- *Provision of technical expertise and support to Latino communities in an effort to develop policy responses to local problems.*
- *Development of Latino faculty, including support for the development of curriculum and scholarship for Chicano/Latino Studies.*

# Truth and Objectivity and Chicano History

The theme of this chapter is my perception of my own research as it relates to truth and objectivity. I warn the reader that my remarks come at the climax of a 5-year lawsuit against the University of California, Santa Barbara during which I suffered through two dozen or so pretentious depositions of learned scholars, who one after the other pontificated that the mission of the university was the search for truth through scholarly objectivity. The ordeal made it clearer than ever that it was not a matter of truth that separated me from the learned scholars who had attacked my work, but that we were in different universes, viewing life through two separate paradigms. What was scholarship to them had very little to do with truth and objectivity and much more to do with class interests and elitism and the arrogance of a race who is used to being right.

My own paradigm was formed by my particular experiences. Unlike most of the defendants in the case, I am not a total product of the institution. As I have often said, I am a night school Ph.D. who was not trained in a single discipline. I received my bachelor's degree at a time when there was still considerable controversy regarding the degree in social studies, which I received in order to become a high school teacher. My master's degree was in history, and three of my four areas of study were in U.S. history. Fortune would have it that I wandered into a Ph.D. program in Latin American Studies, where three of my six areas were in history, although I was forced also to take literature courses. Over the next five years, I taught full time, was active in the community, raised a family, and successfully pursued my studies.

This experience had disparate results. I developed an arrogance of my own in realizing that many of my fellow students could not have survived in my circumstances. I was also resentful at seeing Euroamericans get awards that they did not need, resentful at being excluded from these awards because, according to my professors, I already knew Spanish, but, at the same time, I felt a sort of accomplishment, a sort of feeling of superiority that I was a night school Ph.D. I made it despite the fact that my mother went to the first grade and my father to the sixth, whereas my colleagues made it because of the education of their parents.

In the 1960's, any kind of study program, Latin American, American or Asian Studies, was looked down upon. Scholars disapproved of mixing disparate disciplines. They let you know that your diploma did not say "history" on it although most of my training was in history, (some 90 of my 120 graduate units were in history). In turn, Latin Americanists resented you because you were of Mexican extraction. Today, area studies programs like Latin American studies remain in the hands of Euroamerican scholars and elite foreign students with only an occasional Chicano student wandering into their film festivals. They remain outside the mainstream, a sort of training ground for American imperialism. The antipathy toward ethnic studies programs are some of the legacies of this past.

Aside from being interdisciplinary and being dominated by the "other," the methodological eclecticism of most ethnic and women studies works offends purists. Traditional scholars view these emerging disciplines as lacking a consistent theoretical framework. They see the act of borrowing from other fields as empiricist, opportunist, and, worse, journalistic. In reality, the critics just don't understand the universe that ethnic studies' scholars are exploring; their World War II paradigms do not allow them to understand what the truth is.

Despite the fact that most Euroamerican scholars are prisoners of an eighth grade version of history, or paradigm of what the world is about, I believe that it is possible to write good history, and that a measure of truth can be approached when the scholar knows the subject matter and has sufficient skills to interpret it. History is simply an understandable narrative based on facts. Good history reduces everything to its lowest common denominator to allow the historian to deduce what facts are most reliable in his or her narrative. In other words, good history is driven by the facts and it tells a good story. What makes it part of the social sciences is the careful accumulation and examination of knowledge, and its logical definition.

Don Ramon Ruiz turned me on to an excellent little book by Edward Hallett Carr, *What Is History?* It should be read and reread by historians of all colors. Carr readily admits that there is no "objective" historical truth. He makes it clear that history represents a point of view. At the same time, he criticizes

German Historian Leopold Von Ranke for his mechanical retelling of the past, and the positivist claim that history is a science. Carr advocates a “common-sense view of history. History consists of a corpus of ascertained facts,” he says, which in itself is a chore since “The historian is necessarily selective.” The historian’s life experiences play a determined role in the selection of the facts, which may prevent him or her from understanding the truths of others.

### **Objectivity in Chicana/o History?**

A basic weakness in Chicana/o Studies is the way it developed. Historically, most disciplines have evolved as teaching fields, with research fields formed around that teaching experience. Generally, the teacher evolved into a scholar based on a broad grasp of their knowledge in the field gained through teaching. This was not the case with Chicana/o studies, which today consists of scholars from disparate disciplines and departments. The result is that many of the new scholars have a narrow vision of the field, looking at it from the vantage point of their selective research. This situation also puts different disciplines and their methods into competition, and prevents the asking of simple questions, such as *What is Chicana/o Studies?*

In my view, in order for Chicano/a studies to develop there must be a common community called a department — where the different disciplines organically interrelate. Where the individual scholars shed their loyalty to the disciplines that they were trained in. Without this community, you have a body of scholars studying Chicanas/os — which is different from Chicana/o Studies.

Without this integration, the result is that we have various scholars studying Chicanas/os through their own distinct discipline. This produces Chicana/o historians or Chicana/o sociologists, who by the virtue of their ethnicity, supposedly become Chicana/o studies specialists.

As mentioned, in the case of Chicana/o studies, its development as a field of study has been haphazard. Knowledge is accumulated and refined by scholars in disparate disciplines with very little communication between them. Without really intending to do so, scholars create a struggle for survival of the fittest between the various disciplines instead of creating a new field. This leads to a preoccupation with criticiz-

ing each other and the lack of rigor for the others’ methodologies. This struggle is compounded by the age of the scholars, who as they get older become more loyal to their particular discipline. The result is that within the field Chicana/o Studies, different disciplines intellectually encroach upon each other’s space.

A related problem is that many Chicana/o scholars have gone from Kindergarten through Ph.D. in an institution. While they come from Mexican or Central American working class homes, they are more socialized by the institution than they are by life experiences which allow them to interpret the body of knowledge known as Chicana/o studies. The result is a sociologist who does not bother to have contact with working class Chicanas/os, does not speak Spanish or generalizes about the group based on a limited sampling of, let’s say forty interviews. He or she forgets that the facts and not methods produce historical knowledge.

Who is a Chicana/o expert? Some scholars believe that anyone who has a Spanish surname is an expert in Chicana/o Studies — a fallacy that has seriously impaired the development of their discipline. I have had numerous Chicano and Chicana scholars visit me at Northridge, and tell me, “I was just hired at so and so university; I don’t know anything about Chicano studies, and the department makes it a prerequisite that I teach a class in Chicano history (or political science, etc.). Please help me!”

The reality is that there has been very little interdisciplinary work in Chicana/o Studies. Indeed, even the National Association for Chicana/o Studies (NACS) is just a nesting place for the swallows to return annually to Aztlán. Fewer senior scholars are attending NACS each year and very little intellectual socialization takes place. Senior scholars prefer to attend sessions in their “real” discipline. A few years back, for instance, NACS held its convention in the same month as the American Sociological Association Convention — and guess where the Chicana/o sociologists ended up?

Chicano/a scholars have to come to grips with the fact that to belong to a traditional field of study does not necessarily make one part of Chicana/o Studies, which involves the integration of other disciplines. I do not say this to offend anyone. It is just an attempt to further define academic space. It is my own feeling that every discipline forms its own culture, which is forged by the interactions of the members of a com-

munity of scholars. Unfortunately, Chicana/o Studies, unlike women's studies, is not forging that culture — either intellectually or spatially. Indeed, there are few Chicana/o Studies departments in the U.S. One of them is at Northridge, and that department is limited because its primary focus is the development of a teaching discipline, not a research discipline.

Chicana/o history as part of Chicana/o studies differs from Chicano history. Chicano studies history is political. It follows in the tradition of African American and Feminist Studies. It recognizes that objectivity is a weapon used by those in power to control the “other.” The aim of Chicana/o studies history is not to reinvent another reality, but to seek to find facts that challenge Eurocentric interests. By its very nature, Chicana/o studies history is skeptical about the established truth — it is not confrontational, however for the sake of being confrontational.

### **The Myth of Truth and Objectivity**

In order to break out of the present antiquated paradigms that control academe, Chicanos and Chicanas must demythicize Euroamerican higher education. In the course of reviewing 300 files of full professors at the University of California, Santa Barbara, I learned that there were no Nobel laureates among them, and few were outstanding scholars. Few reviewers cared about teaching. The reviews that I read were not scholarly, and were based on the biases of the reviewers, who had a petulance for what they termed “cutting edge” research. While I am under a court order not to specifically discuss individual personnel records, I can make generalizations about the files as well as discuss the testimony of the defendants. Suffice to say, that what I found was that most reviewing agencies at UCSB placed more value on the study of penile implants than they did on the study of Mexicans and other Latinos.

At this point, I do not want to discuss my case against the University of Santa Barbara in detail. The facts are that I applied for a position in Chicana/o studies and was rejected. The reviewing agencies above the departmental level attacked my research as journalistic and non-academic, even claiming that I lied, for instance, when I said that the United States was to blame for the war with Mexico. After four years in the courts, a jury found that the university

was guilty of age discrimination, though my political claim was thrown out because of the statute of limitations and my race and national origins claim dismissed by a federal judge. The case cost the UC system about \$5 million.

What I want to concentrate on at this point is the reviewers and their quest for truth and objectivity. Take historian Jeffrey Russell, the chair of the Committee on Academic Personnel, who testified the role of the scholar is the search for truth, but that “absolute truth is whatever would exist in the mind of God, to which we have no access... we cannot even hope to get close to it [absolute truth].” In a March 7, 1991 lecture, Russell said, “The purpose of the University is to proclaim the intricate mystery and glory of God...” In reviewing my work he claimed that it was Marxist because I used terms such as “hegemony” and “subjugated people.” It was Russell who attempted to appoint Otis Graham Jr. to chair the ad hoc (secret) committee that reviewed my academic credentials.

Graham was a founder of the Federation of American Immigration Reform (FAIR). To give the reader a measure of Graham's objectivity, the April 30, 1995 edition of *The Arizona Republic* quoted Graham as saying:

*We're quickly learning what the Israelis learned about borders and citizenship. We're going to have to get awfully tough, and it's going to be unpleasant. But that's the consequence of living next door to a failed society with a bunch of failed societies below it.*

Graham was not eventually appointed, for whatever reason, but his friend, Historian Robert Kelley, was. In a 1986 textbook written by him, we found frequent references to Mexican immigrants as “wet-backs.” Kelley throughout the process held himself out as a friend of Mexicans and an expert on Chicanos.

Another reviewer, and a member of the Ad Hoc Committee, was Wallace Chafe, a renowned linguist, an expert in Native American languages, and a former Central Intelligence Agency member, who testified:

*(By Mr. Miguel Caballero, Attorney)*

Q. *Do you consider Noam Chomsky, professor at MIT, a scholar in linguistics?*

A. Yes.

Q. *Would you consider some of his work polemical?*

A. His non-scholarly work, that is to say, his work outside of linguistics is extremely polemical. His work within linguistics, yeah, it's a kind of polemical within the field as he takes very strong positions.

Q. *Is his polemical work scholarship in the linguistics fields?*

A. I suppose you know that I disagree with him violently on a number of things, and one of them is the way he presents things.

Q. *Is his work scholarship in the linguistics field polemical work?*

A. I know what you are getting at. I actually think that I hope he is not going to read this. Some of it is not responsible scholarship.

Q. *But some of the polemical work is scholarship?*

A. Well, you see I have very strong feelings about this work and I know what you'd like me to say, that his work is scholarship and it is polemical at the same time.

Q. *I'd like you to tell me the truth.*

A. I think in some ways he is kind of a Charlatan. I don't want that passed around.

Q. *Do you have scholars in the field of par linguistics who believe that his polemical work is scholarship?*

A. Yes.

This same eminent scholar stated that the committee was very flexible in evaluating my work. When questioned by my counsel as to why the committee completely disregarded extramural letters from some of the most knowledgeable scholars in the field, he testified:

(By Mr. Caballero)

Q. *If the entire Chicano Studies scholarly community said that Dr. Acuña's work was scholarship, you have stated that you still would have reviewed the work and made your own determination on it?*

A. That's exactly right.

Other depositions betrayed the same biases as Russell and Chafe. Interestingly, what the consensus seemed to be was that in order to be objective that the scholar had to present all sides. Ian Ross, a biologist, when asked if when writing about the Holocaust, both sides had to be given, responded "yes." The ramifications of this go without saying. They also strongly suggest that scholarship is biased.

### Who's Truth?

My reading of personnel files of Euroamerican and Chicana/o scholars at UCSB confirmed what many Chicana/o scholars have been saying for some time. Euroamerican scholars deal, not from knowledge of, but from assumptions that they have of Chicanas/os. Even though the discourse regarding truth and objectivity is a ruse — in my opinion it is important to maintain standards. There must be guidelines or total anarchy results, and the weakest become victims. Moreover, just because one has been the victim of distortions, this does not give one the license to invent or manipulate the facts. Above all, I believe that there is right and wrong, and that a lack of standards disadvantages the poor more than the rich. It is humanly impossible to be totally objective or totally identify the truth, however, it is possible to establish a coherent record. One of the tasks of the Chicana/o studies historian is to help the public to overcome the presumption that members of the Academy are objective. Institutions of higher learning are pillars of the state, which must be unmasked.

I concede that many scholars try to be objective. The problem is that they are prisoners of their profession and culture which are tightly controlled by a system of rewards and punishment. Historians, like other members of the academy, are controlled by the academic review process, which allows the academy to socially control its members by defining the truth. This definition establishes its own moral authority by predetermining the entire discourse. In the end, like culture, it operates to control scholars (and public



alike), who from an early age are conditioned to believe prescribed definitions of truth and objectivity. As Feminist philosopher Sandra Harding in *The Science Question in Feminism* so aptly puts it, “[T]he story stresses epistemological determinism — a form of idealism: the scientific conception of nature and inquiry, the information that science produces has been the prime progressive mover in modern social history.”

*The question is, should Chicana/o studies scholars start with the accepted truth?*

In Los Angeles, we have crisscrossing freeways that take Angelenos to work and then back to their homes — to the malls and back to their homes — to the music center and back to their homes. Angelenos of different class and racial backgrounds don’t see each other except on the freeways. Similarly, most scholars divide their worlds between the campus and their homes. Societal problems are learned through local newspapers — and occasionally through television. Even minority scholars need atlases to find their way to surrounding ghettos or barrios. The academics’ world is what is on their campuses, on their freeways, and in their homes. Their life experiences are their friends, their colleagues and their graduate students. While some are sympathetic to minorities, their non-inclusion in society is an abstraction. They see nothing. They hear nothing. They smell nothing. It never occurs to them to look around their campus and to ask why they see no scholars of color. They see no obligation to take the lead in integrating their university or their departments — although the majority will support resolutions supporting affirmative action.

Most scholars would admit that scholarship is not free of political and cultural biases. But they will insist that “knowledge” is constantly revised through a process of peer criticism and review that keeps its distance from the world. It never occurs to them that, by excluding other knowledge, the result is tainted.

Like other institutions, the university has a life of its own — a culture that has developed over centuries. Scholars in research institutions are very well paid and rewarded. They maintain autonomy over what is taught, and control the resources of the institution by staying out of the political arena, and are rewarded by the government and the industrial complex. Like federal judges, they have life time appointments called tenure. They bolster their claims for

promotion by building in review processes to justify merit increases to the point where many full professors at the University of California make in excess of \$100,000 (UC takes this process to the extreme — to the point where many professors at other institutions refuse to write letters). Reviews take place almost at every step of the way, toilet trained from a lowly assistant professor to majestic full professor rank (some 20 steps in all). Reviews occur about every two years at the UC. The university says that this review process insures that scholarly integrity is maintained. Does it?

There’s another way of looking at the university review process. Because it is so closely linked to the rewarding of a faculty, it often promotes conformity, opportunism, and intellectual incest. Down the line you know you are going to be reviewed, so it is to the scholar’s advantage to be “collegial” — a “good citizen” as some reviewers like to say — especially as you approach the upper limits of the professorial ranks. As historian Page Smith commented about candidates who opposed reform at his institution, thus agreeing with the dominant reviewers — they are commonly applauded for their “objectivity.”

Many professors also live in university towns in close proximity to each other. They socialize with one another and intellectually banter with one another at social events. They eat at the faculty club, their children date. And in the process, they recycle each other’s ideas, biases, and even worse, tolerate each other’s prejudices. These intellectual affairs often cross over class, race, and even gender lines, with faculties becoming institutionalized and professionalized. In other words, they bond.

Within the halls of academe, scholarship thus becomes a political weapon. The universities are neo-liberal, and they reflect the attitudes of the general public. In recent years, as the faculties have gotten older, these communities have also gotten more conservative. Indeed, a goodly number of 1960’s scholars who opposed the Vietnam War and bled for minorities are today’s nativists, defending Western Civilization. The overwhelming majority of these professors are white, male, and come from middle and upper-middle class families. Most have been educated in U.S. or Europe academies. They look at the world through the same lens; their knowledge is derived through common sources. And it seems consistent to them to have

a text on “World Literature,” with 90% of its selections from Europe, or to have a Spanish Department staffed entirely by Spaniards or Spanish speaking gringos. You might say, then, that they look at societal themes through a Eurocentric prism.

What I am striving for is not impartiality, but a form of fairness that implies balance. It also implies that I apply knowledge for the benefit of those whom I study — Chicanos and other Latinos. With this said, hopefully I would recognize injustice to any group. I respect no flag, however. I don’t believe that, if there is a truth or if there is objectivity, that patriotism should be made a prerequisite to being believed. And while I recognize the failures of Marxism, I do not flee from my duty to condemn the excesses of capitalism, which oppresses the have-nots. Marxism has always been more cultural than scientific methodology.

In my own works, my historical narratives are not designed to prove the Mexicans in the U.S. are right — or that they have a monopoly on the truth. They are, at most, imperfect stories of Mexicans in the U.S. They critique the dominant society — raising questions of possible biases and flaws in the Euroamerican culture that contribute to the failures of Mexicans, or the failure of the document paradigm to interpret today’s racially diverse society.

In dealing with the theme of objectivity, we have to ask whether American universities have ever been the Eden constructed by conservative scholars. The Academy has been the dominion of upperclass scholars, who can afford the luxury of advanced education. World Civilization courses reflect what these ruling classes have always required students to know. With the change of clientele’s from a White middle-class student body to more Third World and working-class students, changes should be expected.

In a manner, a demythization of the scholar is taking place. A survey sponsored by the *Journal of American History* speaks about a “cultural memory” encompassing the way the different groups in U.S. society use, accumulate and perceive history. It is one of the few studies that reaches out to the public in an attempt to discern what history making is all about—going beyond what Carl Becker called “Every Man His Own Historian.” It is a fascinating study that

deals with family history, which is mostly handed down through word of mouth or through family photo albums and family reunions. The study is inclusive, in that it takes into account the responses of African Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans and of course the dominant society.

I was surprised with some of the results, especially that museums had the highest credibility among respondents of all colors. I personally have been at war with museums, particularly the Gene Autry Museum of the West, for some time. Nevertheless, all the respondent groups held museums as the most reliable source for true history. People who took part in an event also enjoyed a high credibility index, while history teachers were listed as less credible. From my experience, this is also happening in the field of Chicana/o studies and Chicano area studies where students and public alike are questioning the source of knowledge of many Chicana/o scholars.

### **Truth and Objectivity and Moral Authority**

I have always questioned the old historian’s tale that a function of history is to understand the present more deeply. While it is true that the historian accomplishes this task first by seeking to identify the distinctive “essence” of past events, it is just as true that it is impossible for a historian or other social scientists to understand the past without knowing the present. I have always believed that part of the craft is to know people, especially those who we are studying. I am a firm advocate of having a grasp of qualitative knowledge. There is no substitute for facts. Many historians, however, say that it is essential to trace the evidence of the essence in history by employing the concepts such as “paradigm analysis” and “paradigm shifts,” which are borrowed from Thomas Kuhn, an American philosopher of science, in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*.

Kuhn at the height of his popularity in the 1960’s and again in the 70’s popularized “paradigms,” the theory that in every field of study the established order sets structural guidelines that influence the thinking and actions of its scientists and social scientists. This concept holds that in this context existing paradigms restrict the growth and expansion of new and competing models.

Kuhn defined a paradigm as a set of theories, standards, methods, and beliefs, which are accepted as the norm by most scientists in a particular field of study. According to Kuhn, paradigm shifts occur in times of extreme agitation and change, they require a fundamental shift in mind-sets of practitioners at all levels of an organization. Very often, complete changes in attitudes do not occur because many of the leaders do not fully understand the complexities of the concept of paradigms or qualitative change that is needed.

The thesis of Kuhn and his followers is that human beings cannot think abstractly without paradigms. Intellectual and scientific advancement is possible only if and when a paradigm has become incapable of explaining newly discovered facts. The old paradigm is thus displaced by yet another paradigm to interpret facts. For example, students of international relations may be incapable of interpreting international affairs using “the cold war paradigm.” Or, for that matter, to think of the variables of race, gender and even class in present-day society with the time-worn paradigms. A case in point are Chicanas/os who were not part of the race equation three decades ago.

Logically, a new paradigm would be necessary to search out and understand developments in U.S. society since World War II. The “clash of cultures,” taking place in society, for example, cannot be reduced to an understanding of family values. In this context, ethnic and women studies’ models advance paradigms for understanding and carrying on relations between a culturally diverse society. The U.S. is not the same in 1996 as it was in 1900 or 1950. In this scheme, the various ethnic paradigms would compete with the prevailing paradigm and with each other to deconstruct culture as static concept and reality.

Chicana/o Studies is not responding to the challenges implicit in this paradigmatic methodology in our changing society. Chicana/o scholars mechanically apply variables such as gender, class and race, using the outdated methodologies of their individual disciplines. Chicana/o Studies has barely kept pace with the semantic shift from a society that used a monoracial, noncultural model. By the very nature of change, these cultures and ideas are destined to clash. History shows that the old model is incapable of interpreting this new reality.

It is unreasonable for social scientists to pretend that civilization has stood still since 1950. It cannot be presumed that White middle and upper-class males are the only ones capable of interpreting society. A true understanding of what causes cultural stresses and strains can only be understood through the inclusion of new knowledge, and a new model for interpreting. In other words, there is no monolithic U.S. society. There is no such thing as color blind. The different realities of the multiple citizens in the U.S. demand a construct to match them, and to explain how these citizens think and see other populations and cultures. Only in this way can we interpret how the emerging forces are impacting political and cultural systems. Diverse cultural norms, values, and ideas are clashing today. How do the clashes affect American values and the interests of the diverse peoples?

The cultural and ideological war that is consuming the U.S. and the rest of the world has to be dated, chronicled, and assessed. Supporters of Kuhn’s paradigm shift would surely argue that these events cannot be decoded with the dominant paradigm. If it was adequate, society would have already found solutions to its problems. Instead we are a society that is stuck with a cold war model, both domestically and internationally. The construct of the “other” is ever present, with the controlling ideology determining paradigms which defend western civilization.

Whether Americans want to admit it or not, we are dealing with a permanent and fundamental clash of cultures in the U.S. It will not get better. It is a problem that will not dissolve with time. Ideas are important to the peaceful solution of this culture war. In order to arrive at the solutions the inclusion of other knowledge and ways of looking at things is absolutely necessary. As in the case of foreign affairs, U.S. society has historical baggage that it must deal with. The collapse in 1989 of the Soviet economy did not erase a history of colonialism by the West. The growing gap between rich and poor in this country also confirms many historical accounts of racism in the U.S.

The U.S. made erroneous assessments in foreign policy, disregarding geography, history, and geopolitics. The U.S. did not misunderstand foreign idea systems. “American thinkers thus bypassed the

incontestable truth that ideas, regardless of their merits, do not die as readily as the humans who conceived them, and that their life spans can therefore not be predicted or fully controlled even though they can be influenced.” Just as self-evident is that the U.S., even with the changes produced by the civil rights movement, is not committed to a class and race proof society. There are fault lines separating ethnically and racially diverse peoples.

For the Chicana/o scholar, the reality that a “paradigm shift,” or cultural revolution is taking place should be elementary. New disciplines or “discourses” continually emerge and establish themselves. The parameters that we construct in our minds, the use of language and statistics in Chicana/o studies must be made more inclusive. A single paradigm will not solve the riddle nor result in justice — only a better understanding of social interactions will. In this process it is important that “shared paradigms... [be] committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice.” Definitions must be debated to fully understand what is happening.

This culture war will intensify as diverse cultures, with diverse languages and diverse types of discourse clamor for attention, sometimes peacefully and sometimes confrontationally. This makes the necessity for communication and common definitions critical. The solution goes beyond tolerance, beyond the present multicultural solutions.

Are traditionalists correct that identity politics and multiculturalism divide the nation into antagonistic and irreconcilable fragments? The fact is that scientists and social scientists have always operated within theories and conventions that have changed through time. The fact that there is division is just proof of the inadequacy of present paradigms to interpret today’s society.

University of Chicago historian Peter Novick, author of *That Noble Dream: the “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession*, shows that the historical profession has never been objective. Novick points out that it was not until the 1880’s that scholars claimed professional status for historians. The founding fathers of the profession, who held the field under sway for many years, guarded the canons of the profession. They resisted new ideas and changes called for by younger scholars.

Novick’s work is controversial because he takes apart the assumption that there is truth and that historians have strived to obtain it. Using private papers never before used, Novick presents the reader with a work that is exhaustive. His book documents the lives and works of historians, showing how fluctuations impacted the teaching and the writing of historians, as well as their conduct toward each other.

According to Novick, the profession of History was an Anglo-Saxon enterprise, with members largely coming from this race. These members determined that institutions and ideas of value were of Anglo-Saxon origins. Novick says that bias among the early historians was “near unanimous.” Members of the profession were slow to accept, and they resisted the entrance of Jews into the profession. Indeed, many made casual slurs about them. Novick exposes overt anti-Semitism in the correspondence of leading historians. “Truth and objectivity” was used more as a litmus test than an ideal. Through the years, scholars such as Charles Beard, Carl Becker, William Appleman Williams, and others have been purged because they did not meet the litmus test.

## Choices

Scholars more often seek the path of least resistance. Like the law, the reality is that the academy has the ability to reward or punish scholars. It is a power that the Chicana/o community does not have. In academe, as in the rest of society, scholars respond to reward and punishment. The only hold that the community has to influence scholars to do right or wrong is the common ethnicity of its members. And then one must care what that community thinks of him or her.

In the spring of 1969, Chicanas/os wrote the “Plan of Santa Barbara,” reputedly to implement Chicana/o Studies nationally. Aside from obvious omissions from the Plan, such as the failure to adequately address the woman’s question, the framers seriously underestimated the coopting power of the Academy. They believed that Chicana/o scholars were sufficiently bonded to their community so that their choices would be driven by this bond. However, history has shown that skin color does not offset class interests.

As stated earlier, the ability of Chicana/o scholars to resist the social control of the academy when the latter’s interests conflict with those of the com-

munity defines their moral authority. Class and racial differences in both universes make the survival of moral authority within both universes very difficult. Good citizenship in these universes has different definitions. Part of the problem when speaking about Chicanos and other Latinos is the lack of a political infrastructure to influence the superstructure. The Latina/o community does not have the moral authority to protect its interests within academe because the Chicana/o or Latino scholar must depend on the approval of the majority in order to have moral authority among scholars. Within academe, it is almost impossible for the lone Chicana/o scholar within a universe of White male scholars to have any moral authority — to affect a quantitative or qualitative shift or to tell truth from myth. He or she is thus easily controlled.

There are exceptions. My colleagues and students remind me that I have always been independent and spoken my mind without fear of retaliation from the institution and/or the community. I remind them, however, that I have a unique situation. First, I teach at a teaching university, which attracted many excellent researchers who were refugees from research institutions in the 1960's. This gave me political space. Most important, I was a full professor at the age of 36, and founding chair of a Department of Chicana/o Studies which today has 22 positions. The latter have given me a considerable degree of independence, and I can afford to be vocal, and thus accumulate moral authority in the outside community.

Not all Chicana/o scholars achieve this degree of independence. Independence hinges on the material conditions that allow this freedom. Since personal ambition drives their judgments, they often take the path of least resistance and make choices based on circumstances that promote Eurocentric interests. It is easy for Chicana/o scholars to rationalize that they have to get tenure or be promoted in order to be independent. Chicana/o scholars are often not conscious of the fact that they are making choices. Thus the scholars are frustrated when their credibility and then moral authority suffer among their own. They sincerely believe that they made sacrifices to become a Ph.D., therefore they should be appreciated, and do not understand when they are not. A good example of this is my friend, Associate-Vice Chancellor Ray Paredes of the UCLA, who has opposed a core department in Chicana/o Studies, and is then bitter because students and community activists criticize him.

By the time they receive their doctorates, most Chicana/o scholars have spent more time in academe than they have with their families or childhood friends. Professors and colleagues become surrogate family members during their school years. They are their role models, images of what they will become in the future. Once they enter the profession, it is natural that they turn to this community for approval. They are further conditioned in mainstream departments. The prevailing ideas, traditions and culture influence what they think in a manner that goes beyond the threat of rewards and punishment. Scholars choose to live by certain set of rules because they fear the disapproval of their social group. They see themselves as moral beings who want to do the right thing as they perceive it.

The fact is that Kuhn's paradigm shift, whether defined in quantitative or qualitative terms, cannot take place without the sufficient moral authority of the Chicana/o studies paradigm or community of scholars to challenge the existing truth. Within the Chicana/o community there has never been sufficient moral cohesiveness, let alone authority, to force this change. This conflict has tested the moral authority of many of us.

## Conclusion

There is very little debate occurring on the questions raised in this essay. The lack of debate shows a certain weakness in the Chicana/o scholarly community. Unlike in African-American and women studies, there is a dearth of literature on the topic of what is Chicana/o studies. I would like to conclude by summarizing two currents of thoughts running through the Chicana/o community at the present time.

Two recent critiques of Chicana/o studies are Ignacio M. García's *Juncture In The Road: Chicano Studies Since 'El Plan De Santa Barbara* (Maciel and Ortiz 1996), and Adela de la Torre's (*Los Angeles Times*, 1996), "Perspective On Ethnic Studies; Activism Isn't Enough Any More; Scholarship And Intellectual Rigor Are Required If Programs Are To Move Into The Academic Mainstream." They represent opposite polls of the discourse: García is a historian with roots in the 1960's who as a journalist wrote about the Chicano Movement. Though from the same generation García's formation differs from De la Torre in that he's always enjoyed close links with the Chicano community.

García writes that Chicano studies is “a field of inquiry and a stimulus for social and political change is nearing a critical juncture, which will determine both its direction as an academic discipline and its contribution to the struggle for civil rights in the Mexican American community,” adding that Chicano studies is faced with three options: **1)** that Chicano studies become integrated into the larger ethnic studies programs, have their courses cross-listed with core departments, or become diffused by Chicano scholars having joint appointments; **2)** for Chicano studies programs to accept the status quo, remain understaffed, underfunded, and marginalized; **3)** to fight for departmental status, providing the needed autonomy to develop as a discipline. This third option includes the building of departments that are problem/solution oriented.

The article traces the development of Chicano studies, (Ignacio makes some errors, for instance, saying that the program at California State Los Angeles was the first department. Indeed, it was the first program, but it received departmental status after San Fernando Valley State College (later California State University at Northridge), from the Plan of Santa Barbara to the founding of the National Association of [sic] Chicano Studies (NACS). Ignacio credits the student movement MECHA (the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanos de Aztlán) for bringing about Chicano studies. A basic flaw in his narrative is that he focuses on events outside California; it also suffers from the lack of primary sources.

García’s view of Chicano Studies is definitely nationalist, to wit, his statement that the shift from activist scholarship has been challenged by:

*Post-modern sectarianism, lesbian feminism, neo-Marxism, and a militant form of Latinoism... Many centers find themselves challenged by non-Chicano Latino scholars who want to promote their interests. They argue that Latino groups have a common experience with racism and poverty in American society.*

García states that neo-Marxism offers little in terms of workable paradigms. While he compliments the fact that Chicana scholars have been more fervent than Chicano scholars, García says that some have limited themselves to attacking Chicanos. He criticizes some feminists for moving the focus of the study of Chicano studies away from the community.

This theme of community-centered research is at the nexus of García’s critique.

García is especially critical of NACS for not combating opportunism or Hispanic revisionism. For García, the faculties of many Chicano studies programs are opportunist, which he attributes to the “‘lure’ of tenure, promotion, and success in academia.” García promotes identity politics, calling for a regaining of the perspective of the “Plan of Santa Barbara,” returning to a master plan.

García correctly points out that most young scholars come out of a different experience. Unabashedly he calls for a reeducation of Chicano studies scholars and organizations, calling for the formation of smaller groups to address micro-concerns. García wants Chicano studies to remain a Chicano venture, advocating a separation of different Latino groups into their own programs.

De la Torre’s perspective on Chicano studies is the 180-degree opposite of García’s. She is an agricultural economist by training, with a decided neo-liberal perspective of Chicano studies which she meandered into. Although she did her undergraduate studies during the movement years, she chose not to participate. She joined Chicano Studies at California State University-Long Beach via the Department of Economics at that institution. De la Torre had problems at Long Beach with students and this experience has influenced her views. Her article suggests that she continues to have problems with students and the community at the University of Arizona where she is now director of the Mexican American Studies Center:

*As my first semester ends at the University of Arizona, I have just begun to understand the depth of the perils faced by directors of ethnic studies programs. Unlike more traditional departments, these programs emerged from the civil rights unrest of the 60’s and reflect, more often than not, the rhetoric of that era. It was a time when ethnic and racial authenticity were the criteria for entrance into these programs, and scholarly accomplishment meant little. Unfortunately, this legacy has created a fundamental contradiction as new scholars emerge with sterling credentials and academic legitimacy.*

Unfortunately, the article was written for a mass audience in the Los Angeles Times, addressed to a public that is hypercritical of Chicana/o Studies, and, in the aftermath of California's Proposition 209, poised to launch a campaign to eliminate all ethnic studies programs.

The article was also self-serving. Although de la Torre has a thin publishing record, she compared herself, in good positivist fashion, to more established scholars:

*People like Henry Louis Gates at Harvard, Ronald Takaki at UC, Berkeley and Renato Rosaldo at Stanford are significant scholars involved in academic centers devoted to ethnic and racial issues. But at other centers, many of those in charge chafe at the mention of scholarship having more weight than activist authenticity.*

De la Torre continues,

*When I became director of the Mexican-American Studies and Research Center here, the curriculum and lack of full-time faculty meant there was little structure or accountability to either the students or the administration... My own review of student records found that more than 40% of the majors in this program could not pass the minimum writing requirements for the upper division, and these students were graduating without remediation or recommendations for writing intervention.*

She then attributes the failure of ethnic studies programs to its activist roots and the fact that they were products of civil unrest. "Any changes in ethnic studies have political implications for the distribution of power within and outside the university." She then goes on to say,

*Critics of ethnic studies programs are correct when they assert that curricula do not reflect the intellectual rigor of established disciplines. This is because of lack of expertise and scholarship in the area during the 1960's and into the 1970's.*

De la Torre makes exceptions, stating that there is dynamic academic concerns over the issues of multiculturalism, diversity and race relations [which] created a dynamic dialogue across traditional disciplines and ethnic studies programs. This was captured symbolically when Harvard University established a highly visible African-American studies program with Gates and other top scholars in the field.

Most damning, de la Torre dismisses the history of racism in higher education.

*It is not surprising that administrators across the country have begun to review their ethnic studies programs. Often, as here at the University of Arizona, the path to transform a program from mediocrity to excellence requires challenging the status quo of political brokers from the past so that the program could meet the demands of an elite institution.*

(Hello! Someone forgot to tell de la Torre that the University of Arizona and California State University, Long Beach are not Harvard. And, that most state universities admit, whether brown, black, purple, or white, a high number of students with remediation problems. In addition, there is a class difference between the institutions she cites.) It is also fair to point out that these institutions would not hire her with her publishing record.

*If ethnic studies is to achieve credibility in academia as well as in society, leaders must shift away from the rhetoric of the 1960's to the substantive merit of the scholarship. Minorities are not victims of the system but masters of their own destiny. We must develop a scholarship and understanding of the issues that face minority populations so that we can provide students and faculty with requisite skills to work together.*

The problem with this is that de la Torre is adopting the neo-liberal rationality that affirmative action stigmatizes students, carrying it, one step further, she infers that Chicano and Black students have not been exploited by racism, and assumes that ethnic studies' programs are not concerned with teaching writing skills. de la Torre continues:

*The battle for the soul of ethnic studies is between those who want to maintain isolation, cultural nationalism and the litmus test of authenticity based on political values and others who view diversity of opinion, diversity of scholars and academic rigor as keys to success. In the context of many ethnic studies programs, this latter point of view is seen as threatening because it implies that "outsiders" may gain entry to the insiders' politically gained spots.*

Again, de la Torre is assuming that every activist got a job in ethnic studies programs. The reality is that most of the activists did not benefit from Chicano studies since their education was often delayed or terminated by their activism. Positions, for the most part, went to persons like de la Torre who contributed very little to the struggle. For her to say that "if ethnic studies programs do not open their intellectual doors, the promise of intellectual equality becomes merely an illusion in the academy and we will continue to tokenize our scholars" is a bit disingenuous. De la Torre is not a young scholar, and the question can be asked, where was she for the better part of the 1980's? Where is her scholarship? Her article, although calling for "critical dialogue," is elitist, saying that her generation, without any struggle will make their arrangements with the administration who will act differently because she does not have the burden of having come from the 1960's — you know — one of those "tenured radicals," is a bit naive.

I have serious reservations about both García's and de la Torre's articles. As mentioned, de la Torre is neo-liberal in her rationale. I think that she is over-reacting because she has been marginalized within the field itself. Ideologically she has had some problems. For instance, she was criticized for her views on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). She wrote that Chicanas/os should take advantage of the opportunities brought about by it. De la Torre believes that Chicanos should join the managerial ranks of the capitalist system. Views that should be tolerated within the paradigm of Chicano studies, but should not exclude other points of view by creating her distorted assumptions. In short, her assumptions are very compatible with the American paradigm and those who would eliminate Chicano studies for many of the same reasons that she advances.

In comparing García and de la Torre, the truth, I think, is somewhere in the middle. I agree with García that the nexus for any Chicana/o studies program must be the community. The status quo is intolerable and the blame for the failure of most ethnic studies programs are the academies, not the few Chicana/o professors at the institutions, as de la Torre infers. Both the teaching and research fields of Chicana/o studies will never fully develop without a department.

I disagree that the model should necessarily be the "Plan of Santa Barbara." I was there; it was written in 1969. It was a different time. The truth is, very few programs followed this very idealistic plan, that inadequately addresses many of today's issues. Students and Chicana/o scholars should write their own plan, if that's what they want.

The National Association for Chicana/o Studies (NACS) is also not a vehicle for activism. If we want a national organizations subdivided into smaller units to advance political and social goals we should construct another organization. NACS should be a free forum to discuss differences, introduce new ideas, new knowledge, and challenge the neo-liberal American paradigm (whose virtues many of our brethren still adhere to). A neutral place where the de la Torres and the Garcías can exchange knowledge.

I completely disagree with Ignacio that the arguments of lesbian feminism take up too much of the space at NACS. If Chicanos are supposed to deal with the issue of race, how can we talk about racial equality, if we shut out other voices in our community who are discriminated against? My position on "neo-Marxism" is that its critique of capitalism is essential for de-mythicizing the American paradigm. For a personal point of view, Marxism still offers "workable paradigms." And it would be wrong to exclude Marxists from a dialogue.

García mixes fact and assumptions. I agree that opportunism exists in many Chicano studies' programs, and that the "lure" of tenure, promotion, and success in academia are principal factors. I, however, disagree with García pointing the finger at the really young scholars who are in their 20's and attempting to grasp situations that we were fortunate enough to experience. García is correct that identity politics are a part of Chicano studies; however, should they be the sole focus? Lastly, the reality in places like Los



Angeles is that there are large numbers of working-class Central Americans who historically and genetically share a history of colonialism with Mexicans, and it is ethical and moral suicide to exclude them. A dialogue should be opened, not shut.

In sum, it is fair to say that Chicana/o studies are very complex. To be fair, we must admit that the development of Chicana/o studies even as a teaching field has been uneven, with most research universities in the dark ages in this respect. Even so, the practitioners are not totally in agreement as to what is to be done; indeed, even they make assumptions. Unfortunately, Chicana/o scholars today are themselves locked in a universe where truth and objectivity is still defined by an American paradigm that still wants to interpret the world through an eighth grade vision of history.

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