

# Latina/o Studies: The Continuing Need for New Paradigms

Joan Moore

Occasional Paper No. 29

December 1997

## ABSTRACT

Latina/o Studies was recognized as a formal field of study in the late 1960's in the Chicano Southwest and in Puerto Rican New York. The origins of the various Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies programs at that time lay less in a slow evolution of scholarly interests than in the urgent demands of angry students and a few faculty members who insisted that universities begin to meet the educational needs of Latina/os. In addition to the concerns of activists, intellectual issues were of critical importance to sociologists who were among the founding fathers and mothers of these programs. The study of race and ethnicity has been a major specialty within American sociology for the past century, but in the 1960's few sociologists who were not directly involved with Latina/os knew or cared about them. This should not be too surprising, since almost all sociologists at that time were white. There is a dramatic difference between the ways in which sociologists conceptualized Latina/os before and after the rise of Latina/os studies. The earlier paradigms, which emphasized assimilation, were alienating to a number of Latina/os, as the personal documents of several sociologists indicate. One of the great strengths of Latina/os studies is its interdisciplinary nature, the interaction of economists, anthropologists, political scientists, and humanists working together with sociologists on topics of high priority to Latina/o studies.