

Towards a New Chicana/o History: An Introductory Overview

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of the proceedings at the conference, “Towards a New Chicana/o History,” held at Michigan State University, April 22-23, 1996. The report frames the academic discipline of Chicana/o History as simultaneously a social movement, and presents a 13-point agenda for the discipline as a shared political and academic enterprise. A creative tension is identified between two evolutionary stages of the discipline: the founding stage, invented to challenge mainstream United States historiography and confrontational in nature; and the developmental stage, which retains the traditional belief that Chicana/o History is still marginalized by the mainstream field, but increasingly finds common ground thematically and methodologically with mainstream scholars. To stimulate discussion, participants were sent an essay by Ignacio García, a scholar of the founding stage, who believes that the field is being fatally weakened by scholars who have either lost or never had an “ideological connection with the original premises of Chicano Studies.” Participants were also asked to address one of the following themes: the synergy between Chicana/o and Mexican History; the evolution and future path of Chicana/o History; a comparison of thematic and methodological variations, especially between the Southwest and Midwest; and different perspectives on Chicana/o and Ethnic Studies. The report is divided into thematic sections that summarize the papers presented at the conference. These sections include: “The Historical Background and Evolution of Chicana/o History,” “Competing Versions of Chicana/o History,” “Two Applications of the Term ‘Chicano,’” “Re-inventing Chicana/o History,” and “Research Redefines Chicana/o History.”