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Forward

Sonia Hernandez

University of Texas at Pan American, mas@utpa.edu

Marci McMahon

University of Texas - Pan American, mcmahonmr@utpa.edu

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Foreword

Sonia Hernández and Marci R. McMahon

This special issue of *Río Bravo: A Journal of the Borderlands* highlights a series of essays and creative work presented at the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) Tejas Foco conference at the University of Texas, Pan American in the Río Grande Valley in South Texas in February 2013. As co-chairs of the conference, we conceived of the 2013 NACCS Tejas Foco theme – “Chican@ Studies ¡Ahora!: Community-Based Pedagogies, Scholarship, and Activism” – as a response to the attacks on Chicana/o and Ethnic Studies programs and communities in Arizona, Texas, and Georgia in Summer 2010. We therefore used the conference to create a space to showcase Chicana/o and Latina/o studies scholarship, activism, and creative work and the way such work must be informed by community-based knowledge. Such community-based knowledge counters the rhetoric of Mexican-origin peoples as outsiders to the nation and as passive recipients of historical circumstances, but instead emphasizes agency and activism. In this special issue of *Río Bravo*, newly housed in the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas-Pan American, we bring together scholarly essays, pedagogical reflections, and creative work rooted in the production of knowledge by Mexican American peoples and communities in the Rio Grande Valley and Texas broadly; the pieces also spotlight the growing demographics of Mexican American and Latina/o communities in places including Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

The first section, “**Charting History, Memory, Community, and Activism,**” presents Mexican-origin peoples as agents of knowledge production in the U.S. Southwest. The essay “Braceros, Mexicans, Americans, and Schools” by Francisco Guajardo, et al. emphasizes the acts that Bracero workers – Mexican contract workers who participated in an international labor

agreement between the United States and Mexico between 1942 and 1964 – displayed in negotiating certain circumstances specific to their work. Joel Zapata’s “Women’s Grassroots Revitalization of South El Paso: La Mujer Obrera’s Challenge to Gentrification and Urban Neglect” turns our attention to the activist labor of La Mujer Obrera, a grassroots workers coalition in El Paso, who in 2007 mobilized to develop the economy of South El Paso and the surrounding communities at a grassroots level by harnessing the local Mexican and Mexican American culture to create markets and art spaces. Irán Barrera and John Gonzalez’s “Older Mexican-Americans’ Perceptions of Mental Distress” centers the knowledge and perceptions of elderly Mexican Americans who experience mental distress; they argue that such knowledge must be central to health professionals approach to this community. Lupe Flores’s “Over Both Edges: Coyotaje, Militarization and Liminality in Everyday Life on Ranchos Along The South Texas-Mexican Border” explores coyotes, a community typically vilified in the media via stereotypical/nativist images as people who must be kept out of the U.S. nation-state.” Instead, Flores “highlight[s] the liminal experiences people live through as coyotaje manifests in a border region that is increasingly policed and militarized.”

The last two essays of this section specifically explore educational curriculum and institutional spaces in the Rio Grande Valley that have sought to eliminate and erase Mexican American culture and identity. Deborah Cole and Robert Johnson’s essay “ ‘How to Tame a Wild Tongue’: Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera and the 1960s era Speech Test and Speech Classes at Pan American College” utilizes interviews to explore the speech test administered at Pan American college for several decades up through the mid-1970s. The essay “highlights the institutional biases Mexican-American students faced at border colleges in the 1960s and places Anzaldúa’s famous outcry against linguistic colonization in a more specific historical context.” Eric Wiley’s “Play Selection in the Department of Speech and Drama at Pan

American University in the 1970s and 1980s: Twenty Years of Excluding Latino Plays” examines Pan American University and University of Texas- Pan American’s production history of hundred and fifty fully-length plays over a twenty-year period, from 1970 to 1990, to reveal the remarkable exclusion of Mexican-American and Mexicano experiences in the institution’s production history; his essay illuminates the historical context in which the school’s theatre faculty decided year after year to exclude Latina/o plays from their theatre seasons.

The next section, **“Dossier – Chicana/o Literary Studies and Artistry,”** features scholarly and creative work that centers Mexican American experiences of nation, race, gender, and sexuality within the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Lyon Rathbun’s “Américo Paredes and His Audiences” analyzes Paredes’s life and writings to explore how Paredes “acted as a cultural intermediary in addressing both Mexican and Anglo audiences.” Javier Villarreal’s poems “¡Viva la vida!,” “Aleluya,” and “Pláticas con mi madre” take inspiration from the borderlands and reminds us of the power of poetry. Further, Marina Malli’s “Subverting the Telenovela: Redefining Gender in Cisneros’s “Woman Hollering Creek” and Islas’s *The Rain God*” examines how texts by Sandra Cisneros and Arturo Islas utilize the genre of the telenovela to reformulate patriarchal and heteronormative discourses. This section closes with Marianita Escamilla’s poem “Five Strands” that invoke expressions of community through lived experiences.

The final section, **“Reflections on Pedagogy and Education,”** features the work of educators whose classrooms incorporate Mexican American literature, culture, and history in educational and theater curriculum in post-secondary settings, sometimes with ease, sometimes with pain, and sometimes with affirming outcomes. These essays illustrate the way in which educators negotiate what takes place in their classrooms when engaging curricular material

that centers the Mexican American experience and/or how to approach any material from a cultural perspective. Britt Haraway's "Polite Shakespeare Only: Teaching Chican@ Texts and *The Tempest* in Texas after the Attempts to Dismantle Mexican American Studies Programs" confronts the efforts in Texas to dismantle or defund Mexican American Studies programs; his essay argues against current political education platforms that call for a decreased emphasis of critical thinking. Instead, Haraway "calls for an increased critical engagement with history using texts such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (removed from Arizona's MAS programs) in conjunction with Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Alurista's *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*." Roxanne Schroeder-Arce's "Juntos Podemos: Devising Theater as Community-Based Pedagogy" reflects upon a devising workshop that she and two UTPA professors facilitated with fifteen students from UTPA and UT Austin during the conference; the workshop centered, exposed, and affirmed the gendered and linguistic experiences of the diverse workshop participants. Josephine Méndez-Negrete's "Pedagogical Conocimientos: Self and Other in Interaction" illustrates the process of conocimiento in the context of instruction and at a roundtable/workshop that took place at the conference. Méndez -Negrete explains, "Conocimiento is a process that unfolds in the context of unearthing knowledge in relationship to the daily life we engage with others as we come to Self-knowledge." Elena de Costa's "Community-Based Projects and the Performing and Visual Arts: Promoting Cultural Dialogue" explores student learning outcomes from a theatre/ photography project for a Spanish class in Waukesha, Wisconsin (a city with the fastest growing Latino ethnic community in Waukesha County) guided by community-based participatory research (CBPR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) principles. Dagoberto Eli Ramírez's "Towards Implementing Culturally Relevant Curriculum: How 17 Words Inspired Research" examines the rhetoric of the Texas Association of School Boards' Update 93 in spring 2012 that calls for

use of culturally relevant materials in school districts' implementation of their instructional programs. Using a qualitative case study approach in a Texas district, Ramírez investigates how and to what degree educational leadership shapes implementation of Update 93's culturally relevant curriculum policy. In the concluding essay to this section, Justin D. García's "Whose Latino/a Studies? Teaching Latinidad as a Güero on a Predominantly Anglo, Socially Conservative Campus" uses Millersville University of Pennsylvania, a public state-owned university in the northeastern United States, as a case study to discuss some of the common challenges that arise when attempting to teach Latino Studies, Anthropology, and other social science and humanities courses, as well as discussing why cultural diversity is often divisive and emotional material. He also provides examples of effective classroom exercises when teaching Latinidad. Together, the essays in this section reveal the continued challenges in Mexican American, Latina/o, and cultural pedagogy, yet also point to alternatives in engaging and promoting this type of pedagogy and critical thinking.

This special issue reminds us of the historic challenges that confront the Mexican American community/ies, broadly speaking and the work ahead of us. However, as these essays reveal, there is a great need and great hope for Mexican American Studies pedagogies and critical work. Despite the attacks and despite the struggle for funding, Mexican American Studies continues to grow. To echo our conference theme and this journal's theme, it is the community that should take center-stage in what we do in this field.

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