

Teaching Race and Space Through Asian American and Latino Performance Poetry: I Was Born with Two Tongues' *Broken Speak* and Sonido Ink(quieto)'s *Chicano, Illnoize*

By Jane Hseu

Teaching undergraduate students to analyze race and space in their local environment is critical because students should understand how the relationship between the two factors enables such conditions as segregation, identity formation, and cultural contact and exchange. Contemporary Asian American and Latino/a performance poetry are useful texts through which instructors can teach students how to examine the representation of race in specific local spaces. As Asian Americans and Latino/as are often considered "middleman minorities," how race and space appear in these poetic traditions can help us better understand these concepts in relation to and beyond the historical black/white binary construction of race in the US. In this essay, I present ways to teach two works released in CD format in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century—I Was Born with Two Tongues' *Broken Speak* (1999) and Sonido Ink(quieto)'s *Chicano, Illnoize* (2001)—in terms of dominant themes, formal analysis, and different media formats that express the artists' respective visions of Asian American and Chicano/a identity in Chicago and the Midwest. Specifically, I argue that the two recordings offer strikingly different views of Chicano/a and Asian American identity in Chicago: While *Chicano, Illnoize* celebrates the Mexican American neighborhood of Pilsen as a cultural and spiritual home for Chicano/as in Chicago, *Broken Speak* emphasizes the melancholic fragmentation of the Asian American subject in Chicago and the US.

Since I teach at Dominican University, located about ten miles west of Chicago's downtown, teaching these recordings helps my students analyze the ways in which Asian American and Chicano/a identities are represented in relation to their particular local environment and spaces. Instructors teaching both in and outside of the Chicagoland and Midwest area can use the analysis and methods I present here for teaching these two works. Instructors can also explore relationships between these local racial developments and perspectives and broader regional, national, and global issues. Furthermore, because race, identity, and space are such common themes in contemporary multicultural performance poetry, the methodology presented here of emphasizing a local lens on national and global issues can also be applied to other works that engage with different locations.

Teaching about Asian American and Latino/a identities in Chicago and the Midwest makes an intervention in ethnic studies and popular views that focus attention on Asian Americans and Latino/as on the two coasts. The Midwest region, or

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“Heartland,” of the US is often presumed to be racially homogenous or divided along a black/white binary of race. While African Americans understandably have a visible history and culture in Chicago, such as in the city’s legacy of the blues, the city’s substantial Asian and Latino/a populations are much less known in the broader US imagination, despite Chicago’s having had a significant Asian and Latino/a population since the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century and the dramatic increase in these populations in recent decades. Presenting students with specific demographic data and the histories of these racial groups corrects erroneous presumptions and gives them an accurate material context for analysis. In 2000, Chicago had the second largest Mexican population after Los Angeles (Mihalopoulos and Osnos). In the 2010 census, Chicago’s Mexican population fell to fourth largest (after LA, San Antonio, and Houston), yet the 2010 numbers also show that Latinos constitute nearly a third of Chicago’s population, just under the percentages of non-Latino whites and blacks (US Census).¹ Although the 2010 census shows Asians as constituting only 5.5% of Chicago’s population, Cook County, which includes Chicago, is the 8th largest Asian American county in the US, having a larger Asian American population than both King County, Washington, which contains Seattle, and even more surprising, San Francisco County (“O.C. has third highest”).² Furthermore, in the state of Illinois, while the non-Latino black and non-Latino white population declined slightly from 2000-2010, Asians were the fastest growing racial group with a growth rate of 38%, with Latino/as not far behind at 32.5% (Institute of Government and Public Affairs). Considering these noteworthy demographic numbers and developments revises our view of the locations of Asian American and Latino/a populations in the US and focuses our attention on the area between the coasts in terms of analyzing Asian American and Latino/a identities and artistic expression.

Chicago also has a prominent poetry scene that continues to thrive: *Poetry Magazine* was founded in the city in 1912, and the lively performance poetry circuit was inspired by Chicagoan Marc Smith’s founding of the poetry slam in 1985 at the Get Me High Lounge. The legacy of slam poetry is evident in the city’s many venues for performance poetry. Multicultural performances are promoted by organizations such as the Guild Complex, which hosts Palabra Pura, a bilingual reading series that features Latino/a poets, and events that pair a Latino/a poet with an African American poet to foster cross-cultural dialogue. Excursions to see live performances, events bringing guest poets to campus, and the encouraging of budding student poets to share their own work in class supplement in-class textual analysis with live performance and connect students with local artistic movements and resources.

Sonido Ink(quieto), a self-described “Chicano poetry band” consisting of seven Mexican American individuals, included two main female vocalists/poets, Brenda Cárdenas and Aidé Rodríguez, and several musicians, including a turntablist. The Spanglish name of the band translates as “restless sound” and combines the Spanish words for sound and restless (*inquieta*) with the “ink” of writing. Its home base for recording was the predominantly Mexican American neighborhood of Pilsen on Chicago’s Southwest Side, which figures prominently in the lyrics, artwork, and liner notes of *Chicano, Illnoize*. After releasing their CD and performing locally and nationally, the group disbanded to pursue other artistic paths. Brenda Cárdenas’s work has had the

¹ Latinos constitute 28.9% of Chicago’s population, of which about 75% is Mexican, while non-Latino whites constitute 31.7% and blacks 32.9% of the city’s population (U.S. Census Bureau).

² The top seven counties are all in California, New York, and Hawai’i.

most visible and academically acclaimed success: Cárdenas is the author of two poetry collections; the editor of an anthology of Latina poets in the Midwest; Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; and the 2010-2012 Milwaukee Poet Laureate. In addition to the audio recordings of the CD, the printed lyrics / poems also appear on the liner notes. Several of the works are also available in audio format and written text on Brenda Cárdenas's digital page in *The Book of Voices* on the e-poets network. The eponymous poem "Sonido Ink(quieto)" is also included in the performance poetry anthology *bum rush the page: a def poetry jam* (2001), edited by Tony Medina and Louis Reyes Rivera. In the classroom, instructors can use both the written texts and audio recordings and compare the varied nature and effects of these different media formats of the same work.

Sonido Ink(quieto) focuses on a single Chicano/a, Mexican American ethnic identity rather than a pan-Latino/a identity—as evidenced in the CD's title, *Chicano, Illnoize*. And in a city and region strongly associated with racialized spaces—Chicago is commonly noted to be one of the most racially segregated cities in the US—Sonido explicitly locates Chicano/a identity in Chicago in the Near Southwest community of Pilsen, the cultural, social, and political heart of Mexican American Chicago, which is about 80% Latino, mostly Mexican, although there are indications that the number of Latinos has decreased in the last ten years and the number of white professionals has increased due to gentrification (Paral). The liner notes also recognize the significance of Little Village, the other major Mexican American neighborhood adjoining Pilsen, and the South Side, the location of Chicago's historic Black Belt where African Americans settled after migrating from the South and also of a historic and contemporary Chicano/a neighborhood. Since the spatial and racial imaginary of Chicago divides the city into North and South Sides that correspond with white and black, as well as upper and lower class, by invoking the South Side, Sonido highlights its identification with African Americans and the designations that mark Latinos as part of the South and Southwest Sides of the city, as well as a working-class identity. The recording's title, *Chicano, Illnoize*, redefines a city and region (Midwest) historically marked as black and white, and the subtitle, *The Blue Island Sessions*, refers to one of Pilsen's main streets. "Illnoize" also invokes a hip hop influence and emphasizes noise and sound. The CD was recorded at Radio Arte, WRTE 90.5 FM, the bilingual youth radio station run by the National Museum of Mexican Art, the cultural center of Pilsen and Mexican Chicago, and the largest museum of Mexican art in the US. The CD also acknowledges Café Jumping Bean, a central meeting place in Pilsen said to be the daily hangout of Cárdenas, a Milwaukee native, during her years living in Pilsen ("Brenda Cárdenas"). Various visual signifiers of Pilsen adorn the CD and liner notes, especially on the lyrics page of the eponymous track, "Sonido Ink(quieto)."

Pilsen's energetic cultural mestizaje is emphasized as one of pleasure, jouissance, and vibrancy in its specific location in Chicago. Cárdenas' poems and commanding alto voice dominate *Chicano, Illnoize* and contribute to the overall impact of the recording as a highly rhythmic, energetic, and forceful performance. Cárdenas' poetry fuses lively Latin rhythms with a hip hop sensibility, its energy generated by the continuous re-mixing of cultures. This re-mixing is central in the aptly titled song, "Al Mestizaje," or mixed cultures, which sums up the mixture of musical styles and languages that characterize the CD. In this poem, Cárdenas uses the first-person narrative voice that Susan Somers-Willett characterizes as the narrative voice typically used in slam poetry to "authenticate" the voices of racial minorities. However, Cárdenas does shift, as many of the poems in the CD do, the first-person "I" to a communal "we" that can indicate

the voices of the two Chicana female poets, herself and Rodriguez, and thus Chicana women, and also signify the communal identity of Chicanos in Pilsen. The first lines of the song invoke the mixing of English, Spanish, and Spanglish in the lyrics: “In mi gente's hips, el clave/ and from mi gente's lips, sale . . . So if you can't dig la mezcla, ¡chale!” Cárdenas exhorts the clave rhythms of her people's hips, and the cultural mixtures expressed through their lips; and if one can't dig the mixture, forget it! Standard English and Spanish mix with the vernacular English term “dig” and the vernacular Spanish “chale,” part of the *caló* vernacular invented by pachucos, young urban Chicano men, in the 1940s. Rather than maintain the bilingualism that presumes separation between languages, Cárdenas writes of her poems as interlingual, wherein English and Spanish combine within the very sentence or word (“Brenda Cárdenas”).

As aforementioned, interlingualism is one major aspect of Pilsen and Chicano/a culture's vibrant energy:

Es Indio, Africana, Gitana, Americano,
 Europeo con nada feo y todo vale:
 El papalote, el aguacate, el tecolote, el cacahuate,
 y las rucas en sus troques parqueando con los chucos.

In my translation, the lines read: [el mestizaje] “is Indian, African, Gypsy, American; European, without ugliness and including all: the kite, the avocado, the owl, the peanut—and the homegirls parked in their pickups with their homeboys.” The constantly changing and whirling energy of *mestizaje* is embodied in the multiplicity of the wordplay of various valences of languages and vernaculars. Not only is Standard Spanish used here, but a regional Mexican Spanish in the words *papalote* and *tecolote*, and the *caló* vernacular appears in the terms *rucas*, *troques* and *parqueando* (Spanglish terms that build off the English bases of “trucks” and “parking”), and *chucos*, short for *pachucos*.

This forceful sense of *mestizaje* reaches an apex in the group's signature song, “Sonido Ink(quieto).” The song is a testimonial anthem to the group's and Chicano/as' grounding in and re-creation of the Chicago cityscape of Pilsen. The lyrics, co-performed by Cárdenas and Rodriguez, again utilize the narrative address of the “we”; however, this song specifically uses the communal form to name and claim the gritty streets of Pilsen:

We rise over two-flats,
 skyscrapers, liquor stores.
 Our acrobatic musical scores
 jump, dodge, skip in plurals
 like niños playing hopscotch
 in front of murals --
 a graffiti of limbs. They are
 satellites with their own
 songs and prisms of flight.

We are caught
 between cornfields and prickly pears.

The song and lyrics claim the sounds and images endemic to Pilsen—not the glamour of downtown but the two-flats and liquor stores. Graffiti is invoked both as a sign of the urban underclass and the artistic vibrancy of Pilsen in its street art and murals, and the art’s conflation with the children’s playful bodies indicates the continuity of Pilsen’s future. The image of children playing in a Chitown Mexican American neighborhood also resonates with Sandra Cisneros’s *House on Mango Street*, which depicts a vibrant Mexican American neighborhood in Chicago through a child’s perspective. The passages above claim a specifically Chicano/a regional Midwestern sensibility of the cornfields, although also linked to the cultural continuity of the “prickly pears” of the US Southwest and Mexico. While this forceful, joyful claiming of Chicano/a Chicago is to resist the “world that wants to spin/ without us, lose us in the vortex/ of inequity, passivity” and to resist “invisibility,” the song, as does the CD, does not emphasize the wounds and sorrows of oppression, but rather the overall mood of the CD is one of *jouissance*, pleasure, and sensuality.

In addition to the thematic representation of the energy and pleasure of Pilsen and Chicano/a identity evidenced in the written text of “Sonido Ink(quieto),” the audio recording of the work also exhibits this vibrant *mestizaje*. The audio recording highlights the instrumental aspects of the song that do not appear in the printed text and exhibits the ways in which Sonido mixes musical genres. The various genres include hip hop, existent in the DJ’s scratching turntables and the sample of the rapper’s incitements “do that shit” and “here we go again” in the opening and closing of the song. The jazzy, plaintive wail of the saxophone hovers over the electric guitar and bass and drums that evince a DIY sound and aesthetic akin to both the jazz underlying spoken word of the 1950s and 1960s—one of the roots of contemporary performance poetry—and garage/punk rock. The use of hip hop and jazz speaks to the influence of African American musical forms and the proximity of the African American South Side to Pilsen. Sonido’s irreverent mix of hip hop, jazz, and punk also creates an innovative musical *mestizaje* that draws its subversive potential from these three forms that are all in their own ways associated with aesthetic and political resistance.

Instructors can also have students do a close reading and formal analysis of literary devices used in the poems to show how form helps express racial and spatial themes and affects the poems’ impact. The continuous use of internal rhyme and end rhyme, including many rhyming couplets, gives the poems rhythms that are also reminiscent of the rhyming couplets of rap lyrics, as evidenced in the following stanzas from “Sonido Ink(quieto)”:

Somos gritos reclaiming mitos . . .
 [W]e mix bilingual syllables
 into bass and treble decibels,
 drink vasos de ink
 and bowls of sound
 to feed the beat
 that scorches the quiet of defeat. . . .
 Create and stay alive,
 inkreible, nunca invisible

Thus the rhyme scheme also evidences the influence of African American hip hop aesthetics in the culturally hybrid poems. A close reading of the above lines also foregrounds the previously discussed interlingualism of the poems wherein Spanish

and English are mixed within the sentence, and students can discuss what impact this has on the often monolingual aspect of American literature and how these interlingual lines may differ in impact from lines written only in English. Lastly, the rich lines from “Sonido Ink(quieto)” above also demonstrate a complex layering of metaphors that paint a vivid picture of the environment: “Our acrobatic musical scores/ jump, dodge, skip in plurals/ like niños playing hopscotch/ in front of murals--/ a graffiti of limbs.” These lines compare Sonido’s songs to the local children’s play, and Sonido’s music, the children, and the neighborhood’s signature murals are fused together to symbolize the energy and rhythms of the mestiza aesthetics of Pilsen.

Chicano, Illnoize’s energetic and pleasurable celebration of the Chicano/a space of Pilsen contrasts greatly with *Broken Speak’s* focus on a more national than local Asian American identity and a tone of racial protest that emphasizes melancholy and suffering instead of pleasure. *I Was Born with Two Tongues* consists of four poets—Anida Yoeu Ali (then Esguerra), Emily Chang, Marlon Esguerra, and Dennis Kim—with different ethnic heritages: Ali is Cambodian and Muslim, Chang is Chinese, Esguerra is Filipino, and Kim is Korean. *Two Tongues* performed live and toured nationally and their one CD release, *Broken Speak*, had a national impact, especially in the Asian American community. The group recorded and performed from a home base in Chicago; the members also have roots in or completed college in the Chicago area: Esguerra was born and raised in the now trendy Wicker Park neighborhood when it was still working-class and graduated from Columbia College Chicago; Kim is from the north side; Ali grew up in Chicago and graduated from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; and Chang graduated from the University of Chicago. After disbanding, the members of the group have pursued independent careers in art (Ali); acting, writing, and producing (Chang); teaching (Esguerra); and spoken word and hip hop (Kim).

Broken Speak’s tone of racial protest is framed by opening and closing pieces that use Asian cultural, musical, and spiritual forms to create a reflective and meditative mood. These framing songs include Kim’s “Han,” which references the Korean cultural trait of internal grief or unreleased “suffering caused by injustice” (qtd. in Chu 97); “para sa isangmahal,” which is the Tagalog term for “one love”; and the concluding song, “hymn,” which is a meditative reflection on the members’ religious traditions including Christianity and Islam. The songs within this framing express anger at and resistance to stereotypes and oppression based on race, ethnicity, gender, language, and religion. In contrast to the meditative quietness of the framing pieces, presumably the forms that the group members use for spiritual sustenance, the middle pieces release anger and emotion in loud outbursts and explosive expressions, especially in the rather gendered aspects of the male Kim’s and Esguerra’s often satire-infused expressions of protest and female Ali’s and Chang’s shouts and wails. In contrast to Sonido’s highly locally-based content and spatialization, *Two Tongues’* protest centers on a national critique of racial, ethnic, and gender-based oppression evident in such songs titled “inAmerica,” “hyphenation,” and “excuse me, ameriKa.”

In “race and i’m running,” the written text of which is reproduced in Esguerra’s chapbook *Goodnight Nobody*, Esguerra and Kim riff on the dual meanings of the terms race—as a designation and contest—to highlight Asian Americans’ position as the “perpetual foreigner” and not fully American: “it’s just another poem about race/ and why i’m still runnin’ / in a land that doesn’t want me . . . if it’s a race and i’m still runnin’ / then where is that goddamn finish line?” Rather than emphasize local spaces, the song focuses on protesting the national image of Asian Americans, evidenced in the

ending of the song that lists stereotypes of Asian Americans predominant in the “mind’s eye of America.”

Furthermore, this predominant tone of suffering and melancholy due to oppression is specifically emphasized in one of the recording’s standout pieces, Marlon Esguerra’s “morning papers.” The first-person narrative, confessional poem testifies to Esguerra’s observation of his Filipino immigrant father’s racial wounding as a result of his Filipino-accented English, and expresses the impact of the father’s wounding on the son’s sense of alienation in the city. The specific Chicago spatial references, instead of indicating a grounding ethn racial environment, present spaces of racial alienation. One of the father’s first jobs as an immigrant in 1969 is as a bellhop at the Palmer House Hilton, the expensive and ornate historic hotel in downtown Chicago, wherein

his accent was so thick
and he being so tongue tied
they laughed him clear out of the lobby
out of the graveyard shift
into our living room table
into a secondhand dictionary
into the back of a newspaper
into a crossword puzzle.

The crossword puzzle in the “morning papers” of the title is the means by which the Filipino father repeatedly and desperately tries to learn American English, learning both language and cultural references through this mundane vehicle. The climactic event of the poem involves an encounter at a corner store with blue-collar whites who verbally assault the father by calling him a “jap” and then refine their slurs to refer to his apparent mixed race appearance, then calling him a “Rican-chink-mut” and “spic.” Notably, in their racial epithets, the men lump the father in with both Asian and Latin American immigrants who in their view, in this poem set in the 1980s, have taken over all the jobs and the country. The son, upset, embarrassed, and disempowered by his father’s wounds and silences, wants his “papa to bust out kali sticks/ slice them clear into bridgeport”—the historic South Side white ethnic enclave known for being the base of Irish American politicians such as the Daley dynasty and notorious for its historic racism against people of color. Ironically, today Bridgeport is increasingly home to Asian Americans and Latino/as in part due to its proximity to Pilsen/Little Village and Chinatown. The white men’s harassment evokes the discourse of the “yellow peril” in the 1980s in which fear of Japanese economic ascendancy resurrected the view of Japanese Americans and other Asian Americans as racial others (“Orientals”) and “perpetual foreigners” who constitute a threat to the US. The most infamous manifestation of this fear and anger is the 1982 murder of Chinese American Vincent Chin, notably in the Midwest city of Detroit, by two white laid-off autoworkers who mistook Chin to be Japanese and so blamed him for the decline of the auto industry and loss of their jobs.

In addition to the CD recording, Esguerra performed “morning papers” on HBO’s Def Poetry Jam, the performance poetry series created by Russell Simmons and hosted by Mos Def, and the video is readily available on YouTube. This visual, in addition to the aural and textual, representation of the work is another medium and format that instructors can analyze with their students. Discussing the aural, oral, visual, and physical aspects of the video performance enables analysis of the different

value judgments accorded to the voiced “American” accent of the son and the Filipino accent of the father. Esguerra weaves and distinguishes between these two voices and accents—and the political power ascribed to them—in a dialogue between the father and son that mimicks the father’s accent and also highlights the difficulty of language: “anak, what’s a four letter word for—to hit a snag?/ slip, i said/ maybe trip, i said./ sometimes fall/ over words.” The inclusion of the Tagalog term for son, “anak,” also inserts the question of the status of languages other than English in a nation with English-Only biases; the term also points to different valences accorded to other languages, such as the intimacy of the term in the father’s native tongue. The emotionalism of Esguerra’s performance evident in his voice and face also heightens the sense of the son’s shame, anger, and frustration at his father’s subordination.

Studying formal and poetic devices of the written text of “morning papers” also enhances the thematic elements of the poem. While the CD does not contain the printed poem, the text of “morning papers” is available in the anthology *City Kids, City Schools* and through Esguerra’s chapbooks.³ Esguerra writes, “every morning for fifteen years/ he created a brew/ mixed sanko with syntax/ american common knowledge with coffee.” The alliteration of sanko and syntax, as well as common knowledge and coffee, equates American English with the everyday manifestations of speech and US pop and consumer culture. Undertaking a close reading of the ways literary devices help express the poem’s themes and impact the reader allows students to see how the printed text enables this kind of analysis in relation to an aural/oral/visual emphasis that plays close attention to the sound of the words, the performative aural sound of different accents, and the emotional expressions of Esguerra’s face in conveying his feelings about his father’s subordination. Thus, the comparison of the poem conveyed in two different media—video and print—highlights for students the possibilities and boundaries of different forms of communication and expression.

In summary, while “morning papers,” like other poems in *Broken Speak*, seeks to speak resistance to oppression by making visible racist stereotypes and incidents, the mood of suffering and melancholic wounding contrasts with the enjoyment, liveliness, and pleasure of *Chicano, Illnoize*. Asian American identity appears more fragmented than the Chicano/a identity expressed in Sonido’s work based on the politics of ethnicity and space in Chicago. One of the reasons for the increased fragmentation, which also contributes to *Broken Speak*’s cultural hybridization, is the different Asian ethnic backgrounds of the members and the use of several Asian ethnic cultural and musical traditions, as well as multiple Asian languages, rather than only Spanish in its many varieties. With the many different ethnic groups making up Asian American Chicago, instead of a centralized location, there are dispersed and separate Asian American neighborhoods such as Chinatown, Southeast Asian Uptown, Filipinos on the North Side, South Asian Devon Avenue, and the Northwest Side Korean community. The pan-Asian American racial critique is thus located on the national level instead of Sonido’s highly localized expressions that focus on Mexican American ethnicity without addressing other major Latino/a communities of Chicago such as the Puerto Rican community. Nevertheless, the local and the national context are both significant here in that examining *Broken Speak* through a local lens makes evident the way in which the recording uses sparse local references to articulate a more national critique, while a

³ *Goodnight Nobody* and *The 13-Year Plan [an oldies & b-sides remix]*. Upon my request, Esguerra created *13-Year Plan* for my Asian American literature class.

sustained local perspective demonstrates how *Chicano, Illnoize* celebrates a specific local community in the broader context of Chicano/a nationalism in the US.

Regardless of differences in tone and the politics of spatialization in the two recordings, in terms of the groups invoking aspects of being Asian American and Latino/a “middlemen minorities” in a city shaped by black/white race relations, antagonisms, and segregation, both groups actively use African American poetic and musical forms as a countercultural element in the spaces and sounds of Chicago. As previously discussed, *Chicano, Illnoize* invokes the African American South Side of Chicago not only in terms of space, but also in its use of the African American influences of jazz and hip hop both in its musical and poetic forms. Two Tongues also uses jazz rhythms, hip hop beats, and rap stylings, especially in Kim’s lyrics—Kim is also a member of the acclaimed multiracial Chicago independent rap/hip hop group, Typical Cats. As part of the topic of resistance in a racist America, Two Tongues includes a song for Mumia Abu-Jamal, the African American journalist questionably sentenced to death for the murder of a white Philadelphia police officer. Darius Savage, the bassist who plays on *Broken Speak*, is African American. The tendency of both groups—through thematic, musical, and linguistic forms—to identify with African American culture shows a progressive tendency that resists, as Eileen O’Brien states in her book on the racial “middle” of Asian Americans and Latino/as, hewing to an idea of color-blindness in the US. Both groups evidence a countercultural attitude and practice not just within American but also within Asian American and Latino/a identities.

In conclusion, instructors can use *Broken Speak* and *Chicano, Illnoize* to teach students ways of analyzing and interpreting the representation of Asian American and Chicano/a identities in local, regional, and national spaces. As aforementioned, focusing on these two works and the Midwest draws much-needed attention to Asian Americans and Latino/as in the Midwest region. The recent wave of scholarly publications on Asian Americans and Latino/as in the Midwest also attests to the necessity and currency of such perspectives.⁴ The analysis and methods presented in this essay also emphasize a *comparative* racial and spatial approach that considers racial and ethnic minority groups in relation to one another, rather than in isolation. This comparative analysis is especially useful because different minority groups may co-exist in the same area, have contact or conflicts with each other, or cross borders both geographic and cultural. Instructors can present the specific relational analysis of Asian Americans and Latino/as I lay out here along with the connections, resonances, and comparisons they find in considering the two recordings together. Finally, while these recordings and online resources may seem to some ephemeral in comparison with more canonical Asian American and Chicano/a literary works, using local contemporary performance poetry in the classroom helps students, wherever they are situated, analyze their local environments and the vernacular expressive forms emerging from these local spaces, along with the multimedia tools that saturate and facilitate their understandings of their everyday lives. Because the nature of performance poetry requires poets’ heightened awareness of and engagement with their audience, the

⁴ Two recent books have been published on Chinese American Chicago: Huping Ling’s *Chinese Chicago: Race, Transnational Migration, and Community Since 1870* (Stanford University Press, 2012) and Shanshan Lan’s *Diaspora and Class Consciousness: Chinese Immigrant Workers in Multiracial Chicago* (Routledge, 2011). The number of books on Latino/a Chicago is more pronounced: nearly a dozen scholarly books have been published in the last five years on Latino/a Chicago, a number of which are part of the University of Illinois Press’s book series on Latinos in Chicago and the Midwest.

immediacy and relevancy of Asian American and Latino/a performance poetry can deepen students' examination of literature, their communities, and the social issues that affect and transform their lives.

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