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# A Companion to Latina/o Studies

Edited by

Juan Flores and Renato Rosaldo

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*Greater Mexico, the United States and the Erotics of Culture* (1998). Another book-in-progress is called *Neither Friends, Nor Strangers: Mexicans and Anglos in the Literary Making of Texas*.

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**Alejandro Portes** was born in Havana, Cuba, and came to the United States in 1960. He was educated at the University of Havana, the Catholic University of Argentina, and Creighton University. He received his MA and PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is Howard Harrison and Gabrielle Snyder Beck Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Migration and Development at Princeton University. He is the author of some 220 articles and chapters on national development, international migration, Latin American and Caribbean urbanization, and economic sociology. His books include *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami* (1993), co-authored with Alex Stepick, and *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (1996). His current research is on the adaptation process of the immigrant second generation and the rise of transnational immigrant communities in the United States. His recent books, co-authored with Rubén G. Rumbaut, are *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* and *Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America* (2001).

**Raquel Z. Rivera** was born and raised in Puerto Rico. She received a BA in Development Studies from Brown University, an MA in Puerto Rican Studies from the Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, and a PhD in Sociology from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She is a Research Fellow at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, New York. Her book *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone* was published in 2003. She is presently co-editing an anthology with Deborah Pacini Hernandez and Wayne Marshall entitled *Reading Reggaeton*. She has lived in New York City since 1994 and is a resident of El Barrio (East Harlem).

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**Rosaldo:** *Ensayos en antropología crítica*, was recently published in Mexico. He has edited a collection, *Cultural Citizenship in Island Southeast Asia*, and also co-edited collections, *The Incas and the Aztecs, 1400–1800*, *Creativity/Anthropology*, and *The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader*. Written in English and Spanish, his first collection of poetry, *Prayer to Spider Woman/Rezo a la mujer araña*, won an American Book Award, 2004. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

**Nelly Rosario** was born in the Dominican Republic and raised in Brooklyn, New York. She holds a BS in Engineering from MIT and an MFA from Columbia University, where she is currently Adjunct Assistant Professor. The *Village Voice Literary Supplement* named her a 2001 “Writer on the Verge,” and her debut novel *Song of the Water Saints* won a 2002 PEN Open Book Award. Rosario’s work has appeared in various anthologies and publications, including the *New York Times*, *meridians*, *New Labor Forum*, and *Gumbo*. She is currently at work on a second novel set in a future New York City.

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**Ramón Saldívar** grew up in Brownsville, Texas. He received his BA from the University of Texas at Austin and his PhD at Yale University. He is Professor of English at Stanford University. His books include *Figural Language in the Novel: The Flowers of Speech from Cervantes to Joyce* (1984), *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference* (1990), and *The Borderlands of Culture: Américo Paredes*

and the Transnational Imaginary (2006). He works on nineteenth and twentieth-century comparative literary studies, the history of the novel, cultural studies, borderland studies, and US Latina/o studies. His current research focuses on the ethnic *bildungsroman* and historical novel.

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**Edwin Torres** was born in the Bronx, New York. He has taught his workshop “Brainlingo: Writing the Voice of the Body” at Naropa Institute, St. Marks Poetry Project, and Bard College, among others. His books include *The PoPedology of an Ambient Language* (2006) and *The All-Union Day of the Shock Worker*. His CD “Holy Kid” was part of the Whitney Museum’s “Last American Century” exhibition.

**Silvio Torres-Saillant**, a native of the Dominican Republic, grew up in a working-class neighborhood in the northern city of Santiago de los Caballeros. Arriving in New York City in 1973, he worked mostly in shoe factories while he pursued his studies. He received a BA in Mass Media with minors in Latin, Romance Languages, and English from Brooklyn College, CUNY, a Diploma in Ancient Greek from the CUNY Graduate Center, and a PhD in Comparative Literature from New York University. He is an Associate Professor of English at Syracuse University, where he also heads the Latino-Latin American Studies Program. He has co-edited, co-authored, or authored seven books in Latino and Caribbean Studies, including *Caribbean Poetics* (1997), *The Dominican Americans* (1998), and *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* (2006), in addition to publishing numerous journal essays and book chapters.

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# Editors' Foreword

Latina/o studies emerged from social movements and political struggles rather than from a purely cerebral rumination about what was needed in the academy. The late 1960s and early 1970s were a period of hunger strikes, farmworkers' marches, student walkouts, and the wider context of the civil rights movement and protests against the war in Viet Nam. These struggles, their sheer presence and their specific demands, compelled a number of universities and colleges to establish programs and departments in Chicana/o studies and Puerto Rican studies. They also provided an agenda for the new field of study. And this tie to Latina/o communities with accountability to their social needs and struggles has remained a central philosophical tenet of the field to the present day.

Latina/o studies scholars in this early period saw themselves as committed and oppositional; they were doing engaged research and were committed to scholarship that was relevant not only to the academy but also, and particularly, to the *barrio* and to the *comunidad* outside the university. Key concerns that guided this work were empowerment, self-determination, and social justice. Scholarly research aspired to work in the service of the social movement.

In its initial years Latina/o studies, particularly Chicana/o studies, developed the concept of internal colonialism. This body of work viewed the westward expansion of the United States over the nineteenth century as a process of colonization over a region that until the War of 1848 had been Mexican territory. It also viewed the subsequent history of Mexicans in the United States as a process of incorporation of a colonized people. This perspective has enriched subsequent studies. On the one hand, historians of the western part of the United States have further refined the research questions first posed in Latina/o studies as they have explored the role of Native Americans, African Americans, and Latinas/os in the making of the West. On the other hand, the notion of internal colonialism subsequently developed into a series of studies in political economy with a historical perspective exemplified by the work of Mario Barrera and David Montejano.

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Opposition to colonialism has also been the guiding impulse in Puerto Rican studies since the outset as *independentista* scholars from the Island and in the mainland contributed to set the early agenda. Emphasis was placed on the persistence of colonial relations in the history of Puerto Rico, before and after the turning point of 1898, while researchers in the diaspora analyzed subordination and rampant discrimination suffered by Puerto Ricans in the US. For many researchers and activists of the period, colonial oppression in Puerto Rican life constituted a single unified system spanning the divide between homeland and diaspora, and conditioning the migration experience as a totality. Political economy and history focusing on the migratory and community formation process were the central fields of social analysis, as is evident in the work of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños at the City University of New York as well as in the studies of such scholars such as Clara Rodríguez, Virginia Sánchez-Korrol, and Edna Acosta-Belén in the diaspora and Manuel Maldonado Denis and José Luis González from the Island.

The concept of culture has been central to Latina/o studies, from the early critical assaults by Octavio Romano on an anthropological concept that he characterized as static and homogeneous. Founding scholar Américo Paredes assumed a more subtle critical stance toward the concept of culture in his research. His notion of culture encompassed historical change and inequalities of power as he explored jokes, sayings, legends, *corridos*, racial insults, and other central phenomena of folk culture in the geographical area he called Greater Mexico. The Puerto Rican writers and critics José Luis González and Arcadio Díaz Quiñones provided an early impetus for a more nuanced understanding of Puerto Rican cultural experience in the diaspora, but the outburst of Nuyorican poetry, Latin dance music, and the struggle over bilingualism were what set the distinctive parameters of a new cultural analysis.

In this period much research involved the creation of an archive. In literary and cultural studies, researchers often had to uncover the critical texts that they were going to analyze. This material had been passed over by previous investigators. Thus Latina/o scholars were compelled to be both archivist and critic, uncovering the text and offering an interpretation. A similar phenomenon occurred in historical studies. Because the basic spadework had not been done, Latina/o studies historians were pioneers who were working without precedent. In Puerto Rican studies, the early testimonial memoirs of Bernardo Vega and Jesús Colón provided key insight into the course of community life in the early decades prior to the mass migration of the 1950s and 1960s, and have served as the main resource for scholars doing historical research on Puerto Ricans in the US. From the late 1980s to the present the Recovering the Hispanic Literary Heritage project continues to unearth and publish important literary and documentary texts from the earlier periods.

Applied research was also critical. People explored issues in education, such as the high drop-out rate of Latina/o students and the problem of school failure as well as the demand for bilingual education. The issues in healthcare had to do

with the exceptionally high rates of particular diseases and other indicators of neglect of Latinas/os by medical services, as well as excessive interventions such as involuntary sterilization programs. Inadequate housing and residential segregation were major foci of research. Researchers also attended to income disparities with Latinas/os being over-represented in low-income categories. These scholars also developed the notion of the segmentation of the labor force, in effect a form of apartheid in the distribution of jobs.

Despite the deep continuities between the early years and more recent scholarly concerns, there have been some significant shifts over the decades, which have brought new issues and challenges to the Latina/o studies agenda. Feminist scholarship entered Latina/o studies with a redefinition of identity and brought a realization that prior analyses often unconsciously assumed a male subject and thereby omitted half the population. The next phase in this process was the introduction of queer theory and the recognition of the necessity of taking into account the sexuality as well as the gender of the subject. Two books especially critical within and beyond Latina/o studies were Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/ La Frontera* and *This Bridge Called My Back* edited by Cherrie Moraga and Anzaldúa.

In the wider circles of feminist and queer studies Latina/o contributions have always underscored the centrality of race and the limitations of assuming a white middle-class subject. At the same time Latina/o studies has explored in historical and sociological ways how race operates within Latina/o communities and how their relations with other communities of color as well as the dominant white society are predicated on race.

If the early 1970s were predominantly nationalist in their orientation, later periods have added the dimension of transnationalism. In recent years the concept of transnational communities has underscored the sense in which family, kinship, and household can best be understood as sets of relations in the home country and in the United States. In addition, political and economic changes in one country can have deep consequences for people in the other country. At the same time historical research on Latina/o communities in the United States has explored settlements dating from the sixteenth century and thus show in detailed ways that by no means all Latinas/os are immigrants.

In the cultural realm there has been new emphasis on theories and practices of performance, increased attention to cultural representation, and consideration of the commodification of culture. In part these concerns grow from an analysis of how the Latina/o population explosion has led to marketing efforts to target Latinas/os for such matters as corporate sales and political campaigns. Indeed the very notion of a Latina/o population in the United States is in part an artifact of such corporate and voting efforts as well as a consequence of coalition politics.

Thus, while the issues surrounding Latina/o identity remain at the center of Latina/o studies research, those issues have become significantly complicated by the huge demographic increase and the dispersal and diversification of Latina/o

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communities. In addition to the traditional and growing Chicana/o, Puerto Rican, and Cuban groups, the present generation has seen the rapid and incremental presence of communities of immigrants from a wide range of Latin American and Caribbean nations, most notably Dominicans, Salvadorans, Colombians, Ecuadorians, and Nicaraguans. The idea of a pan-Latina/o identity has been the subject of lively and at times contentious debate in the Latina/o studies literature of the past fifteen or twenty years, as is evident in the writings of Suzanne Oboler, Martha Giménez, Carlos Muñoz, and others. Questions of language, religion, immigrant or resident minority experience, and the pressing issue of race have been at the heart of these debates.

Recent studies of how Latinas/os conceive of their racial identities and how other groups categorize them in racial terms (racialization and racism) have extended discussions of race in the United States beyond the dichotomy of black and white. Shades of difference marked by the category of mixedness and the poles of African origins as well as indigenous roots complicate what once seemed a settled picture, one in which Latinas/os often did not appear. As evident in some of the contributions to the present volume, recent writings on Latinas/os and race have often involved a critique of a celebratory *mestizaje* concept which can suggest a wishful racial harmony that conceals anti-black and anti-indigenous racism among Latinas/os.

A paramount fact of recent studies in literature and expressive culture has been the renaissance in Latina/o literary, performance, and visual arts. The explosion in the arts has been less widely noticed than the sudden growth in the Latina/o population in the United States. Scholars of Latina/o arts thus have a rich body of contemporary literary production to study. The talented and highly trained artists of the past twenty years include such writers as Cristina García, Sandra Cisneros, Julia Álvarez, Denise Chávez, Víctor Hernández Cruz, Helena María Viramontes, and Junot Díaz. Corresponding literary critics and scholars of expressive culture include José David Saldívar, Arturo Sánchez Sandoval, Paula Moya, Shifra Goldman, María Herrera-Sobek, Norma Alarcón; Ruth Glasser, José Limón, and José Muñoz.

Critical scholarly and creative work in Latina/o studies has contributed in crucial ways to the increase in social knowledge. US Latina/o experience has foregrounded the need for a transnational understanding of group experience, that is, the need to transcend and navigate political and other imposed borders of a national and geographic kind. Since its inception, Latina/o studies scholars and cultural workers have shown how understanding Chicana/o, Nuyorican, or other US-based Latina/o social life and culture necessitates a connection with traditions and practices in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and other countries of origin, as well as the migration process itself. Further, the trajectory of Latina/o studies as an area demonstrates the complex relationship between discretely demarcated ethnic or national groups and a composite, pan-ethnic construction, in this case "Latino" or "Hispanic." Already in the earlier decades of the emergence of Latina/o studies, the salience and limitations of terms like "la raza" and "brown

people" drew the attention of students of the varied group experiences. In the present generation the broad currency of the terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" has generated searching debate about the use and abuse of such labels. Although the potential for coalition politics and intergroup solidarity is strongly affirmed, suspicion is also voiced in the face of corporate and electoral strategies that spuriously advertise pan-Latino visions of unity and sameness.

Issues of bilingualism and immigration have also been at the heart of the Latina/o studies intellectual and political agenda, and here too the field has contributed significantly to broader social knowledge. Both as speech practice and as language policy, and even as regards poetic and literary voices, the lived reality of Latina/o bilingual expression, and more broadly of biculturalism, have provided a rich and dynamic case for incisive sociolinguistic and stylistic analysis by such authors as Ana Celia Zentella, Guadalupe Valdés, and Doris Sommer. The longstanding and increasingly heated debates over immigrant rights and policies center in our times on the example of Latinas/os, and attest to the structured relations of economic and political power in the hemisphere. From the perspective of Latina/o studies, these debates raise in a cogent way the question of who/what is an immigrant – given that many Latinas/os are actually not immigrants – as well as the question as to who/what is an American, that is, the meaning of citizenship.

With the proliferation of anthologies, readers, encyclopedias, edited volumes and the range of "recovery" work of compiling and making available historical documents, we are witnessing the burgeoning of a new field of intellectual endeavor which carries pressing social relevance to a broad US public. To mention a few, there are the helpful collections of key texts, such as *The Latino Studies Reader*, *Barrios and Borderlands*, *The Latino/a Condition*, *Challenging Fronteras*, *Latino/a Thought*, *Latinos Remaking America*, *Growing Up Latino*, and *The Latino Reader*, all published in the 1990s. A widely used volume like *Challenging Fronteras* is representative of this active anthological work in its careful selection of important essays on a wide range of Latino groups and experiences, and grouping them in major thematic areas, such as the conceptualization of Latinidad, the immigration process and its consequences, the issue of ethnic identity, and the experience of women in the labor force. The compilation offers the reader an array of different points of access to Latin life and struggles from a multidisciplinary and ideologically diverse perspective. The other anthologies mentioned above generally follow similar principles of organization and selection.

The present collection, *A Companion to Latina/o Studies*, offers a sampler of this rich output of new scholarship by some of the leading Latina/o scholars. In compiling this volume, we have asked contributors to reflect on their scholarly practice and contribution in short and in many cases more personal essays. We have turned to both established academics and some creative writers, some seasoned scholars and some relative newcomers, but in all cases we were interested in assembling a group that was representative of the diversity of the field as regards gender, region, intellectual discipline, and critical style. We have even

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included two poems with accompanying commentary, as well as several memoirs of an autobiographical nature.

The result – the harvest of our outreach effort – is what we hope is an exciting, consistently engaging, and highly varied group of writings that offer a sense of the range and complexity characteristic of our field. While some of the sections in this *Companion* remain thematic in conception, we have also sought to group some according to the kind of reflection they exemplify: *Vidas*, centered on the telling of life stories; *Actos*, advocating certain critical practices or methods; and *En la Lucha*, addressing institutional struggles in the production of knowledge. Our aim is to suggest new ways of thinking the field, by breaking out of the customary thematic clusters and juxtaposing seemingly unrelated intellectual exercises. With the dramatic changes in the very object of analysis of Latina/o studies in recent decades, it strikes us as timely to strike out in new directions and to be redefining our field as we carry on our collective research project.

Our fondest hope is that the present collection of recent Latina/o studies work may serve as a “companion,” as un/a compañera/o for scholars, students, and the general readership in the effort to advance the field and assure its ongoing tie to communities in struggles for justice and equality in challenging times. We think of the *Companion to Latina/o Studies* as an act of sharing, a gathering place of intellectual concerns and analysis that attest to our unbroken commitment to engaged critical inquiry as a guide to social action.

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We are also delighted to have been given permission by two poets to republish their much admired verse. “El Louie” by José Montoya is a canonical classic in Chicana/o literature and “I Wanted To Say Hello To The Salseros But My Hair Was A Mess” by New York Puerto Rican poet, Edwin Torres, uses humor to challenge an inherited self-image.

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11. Antonia I. Castañeda, “Language and Other Lethal Weapons: Cultural Politics and the Rites of Children as Translators of Culture.” Pp. 201–14 in Avery Gordn and Christopher Newfield (eds.), *Mapping Multiculturalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. Reproduced by permission of University of Minnesota Press.
13. Nelly Rosario, “On Becoming.” Pp. 156–64 in Meri Nana-Ama Danquah (ed.), *Becoming American: Personal Essays by First Generation American Women*. New York: Hyperion, 2000. Reproduced by permission of the author.
15. Vicki Ruiz, “Coloring Class: Racial Constructions in Twentieth-Century Chicana/o Historiography.” Originally published as “Morena/o, blanca/o y café con leche: Racial Constructions in Twentieth-Century Chicana/o Historiography.” Pp. 343–60 in *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 20: 2 (2004). Reproduced by permission of University of California Press.
16. José Montoya, “El Louie.” Reproduced by permission of the author.
18. Virginia Sánchez Korrol, “The Star in My Compass.” Originally published as “The Star in My Compass: Claiming Intellectual Space in the American

## Acknowledgments

Landscape.” In Vicki L. Ruiz and John R. Chávez (eds.), *Memories and Migrations: Mapping Boricua and Chicana Histories*. Copyright 2007 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. Used with permission of the University of Illinois Press.

33. Nezahualcoyotl, “Though it be jade it falls apart.” P. 80 in Miguel Leon-Portilla (trans.), *Fifteen Poets of the Aztec World*. Copyright 1992 by the University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. Reprinted by permission.

34. Edwin Torres, “How I Learned To Love Salseros When My Hair Was A Mess.” *Longshot* 22 (1999). Reprinted by permission of *Longshot*.

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PART

ONE

# Latinidades

