

# American Cultural Studies 314: Contemporary Latino/a Issues Syllabus - Spring 2010

**Dr. Larry Estrada**

## Course Description

Latinos/Latinas are the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States, made up of diverse peoples from Latin America and the Caribbean, former Latin American territories incorporated into the United States, and successive generations of their offspring. Most are U.S. born, though many retain cultural, linguistic, and economic connections to immediate or ancestral countries and regions. Ethnicity plays a major role in the history and formation of the United States, so understanding its effects on the lives and identities of Latino/as requires careful consideration of both historic and current struggles, migrations, and accomplishments.

There is further rationale for examining these issues in Washington state, which experienced a fivefold increase in the Latino/a population between 1970-2000, nearly double the rate of growth for the United States as a whole. Growth in Whatcom County is even more significant; in 2002, Latino/as comprise 5.7% of county population, compared to 2.5% in 1990. Commensurate with these trends and with rising educational aspirations, the number of Latino/Hispanic applicants to Western Washington University has more than doubled since 2000. Given such changes, there is pressing need for greater understanding of issues of ancestry, identity, mobility, and equity. In turn, such preparation helps ensure more effective civic participation in developing enlightened social, immigration, and educational policies.

This course will familiarize students with theoretical approaches, empirical research, and policy issues relating to the social and historical conditions of Latino/as. We will recurrently formulate critical questions. For example, are most Latino/as immigrants, poor, conservative? How is it that Latino/as continue to be categorically regarded as newcomers? Why, despite numbering nearly 40 million, have they nonetheless been largely invisible in dominant political and economic circles? This endeavor allows us to address common misperceptions as well as paradoxes, and in so doing begin to discern the needs, goals, and expertise represented within this varied population.

Our primary goal is a deeper understanding of diversity, demography, and destinies. By examining the conditions of adaptation, and particularly the implications of exclusion or inclusion, the course critically assesses the close ties that Latino/as have with the multiple dimensions of immigration and borders of many kinds. Ultimately, our exploration of the coexistent dynamics of separation and syncretism, and continuity and change, enables us to affirm and benefit from the many Latino/a voices and lives that are shaping learning, literature, and leadership today.

## Resources

Chavez, Leo. 2008. *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens and the Nation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Morales, Ed. 2002. *Living in Spanglish: The Search for Latino Identity in America*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

Romero, Mary, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Vilma Ortiz, eds. 1997. *Challenging Fronteras: Structuring Latina and Latino Lives in the U.S.* New York: Routledge.

Suarez-Orozco, Marcelo M., and Mariela M. Paez, eds. 2002. *Latinos: Remaking America*. Berkeley: University of California.

Further readings on e-reserve, reserve, or Blackboard (included those listed under schedule). We will also draw on a variety of films, media excerpts, and speakers.

### Additional Resources

Acuña, Rodolfo F. 1996. *Anything but Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles*. New York: Verso.

Arreola, Daniel D., ed. 2004. *Hispanic Spaces, Latino Places: Community and Cultural Diversity in Contemporary America*. Austin: University of Texas.

Falconi, Jose Luis, et al, eds. 2007. *The Other Latinos: Central and South Americans in the United States*. Cambridge: Harvard University.

Farr, Marcia. 2006. *Rancheros in Chicagoacán*. Austin: University of Texas.

Garcia, Cristina. ed. 2006. *Bordering Fires: The Vintage Book of Contemporary Mexican and Chicano/a Literature*. New York: Vintage.

Heyck, Denis Lynn Daly. 1994. *Barrios and Borderlands: Cultures of Latinos and Latinas in the United States*. New York: Routledge.

Loucky, James, and Marilyn Moors, eds. 2000. *The Maya Diaspora: Guatemalan Roots, New American Lives*. Philadelphia: Temple University.

Smith, Robert Courtney. 2006. *Mexican New York*. Berkeley: University of California.

Suro, Roberto. 1999. *Strangers Among Us: Latino Lives in a Changing America*. New York: Random House.

Thompson, Gabriel. 2007. *There's No José Here: Following the Lives of Mexican Immigrants*. New York: Nation Books.

## **Class Dynamics and Assignments**

As far as possible, we will use an empirical approach to examine the issues we address. Some ideas and information may be disconcerting, and every effort will be made to encourage tolerance as well as openness to different perspectives and experiences. A dynamic class also requires commitment of all participants, evidenced through engaged participation, respectful listening, active individual and group research, and consistent attendance. Everyone has the opportunity and obligation to fully engage all learning exercises, to ask probing questions, and to integrate readings into class discussions.

Participation: 20% Active participation includes: contributing to discussion, posing critical questions from readings, sharing resources (including from alternative and dominant media), and consistent attendance (no more than two absences).

Reflective Writing: 30% Three short (250-300 word) reflection essays will enable students to probe and personalize issues considered through readings and class discussions.

Policy research: 30% Students will engage in two pilot research exercises, and are encouraged to work in pairs to do this. First, you will consider a current ethnography or case study (for example, under "Additional resources"), focusing on the characteristics and challenges of an emerging or maturing Latino/a community. Second, investigate a contemporary controversy – for example, dual citizenship, racialization of incarceration or financial lending practices, bilingualism, border securitization, and so forth. Results of both research endeavors will be presented as part of a lesson to the class, as well as through a written research paper. You may do this individually or as co-authored collaboration, either co-authored or with introduction and conclusions/implications that enclose related individual research papers.

Extending learning beyond the classroom: 20% Each student is responsible for seeking ways to extend our learning beyond academics. This can occur by exploring how our readings are reflected locally, seeking out people to interview, contributing to curriculum development/dissemination, engaging in an internship, and community involvement or volunteering (eg, Community to Community; Sea Mar; MEChA).

## **Weekly Course Schedule (in addition to selected readings, text assignments TBA)**

### Week 1 - Introduction

roots of diversity – of culture, identity, political power

Latinization of the United States

statistics and stereotypes, nomenclature and nuances

*reading*: Arreola, Daniel D. Montero-Sieburth, Martha, and Edwin Meléndez. 2007. "The Changing Demographics of Latinos" and "The New Nativism and Latinos in a Changing Society." *In Latinos in a Changing Society*. Montero-Sieburth, Martha, and Edwin Meléndez, eds. Westport CT: Praeger.

### Week 2 – Here, There, Everywhere

continuing importance of national origins and multiple identities

Latin American legacies: indigenous, Iberian, international  
*films*: "A Chinese Writes to the Aztecs"; "Through Mexican Eyes"  
*reading*: (excerpts) Rodriguez, Gregory. 2007. *Mongrels, Bastards, Orphans, and Vagabonds: Mexican Immigration and the Future of Race in America*. New York: Random House.

### Week 3 - Politics of Ethnicity

Latino, Latina; Xican@; Mexican-American...

generational differences – mobility, education, identity

*reading*: (selections) Latin American Perspectives. 2006. *The Politics of Ethnic Construction: Hispanic, Chicano, Latino...? Thematic issue*: 19(4).

*Reflection paper #1*: "What is Latino?" (note that the question is not "who")

### Week 4 - Attitudes, Actions, and Reactions

a history of inclusion and exclusion

prejudice, racism and discrimination

racial/ethnic/linguistic categories & implications for social and political mobility

*reading*: Lovato, Roberto. 2007. "No Laughing Matter: Anti-Latino Humor has Entered the Mainstream." *The Progressive* 71(11):38-39.

### Week 5 – Hyphenated Americans, Hybrid Cultures?

Mexican Americans – the oldest and largest community

rooted in annexation, renewed through migration

Central Americans, Caribbean Americans, South Americans

*reading*: Rivera, Gaspar. 2004. "Introduction" and "Conclusion." *In Mexican Indigenous Migrants in the United States*. San Diego: Center for Mexico-US Relations.

*Reflection paper #2*: Dilemmas of diversity (draw on "Ask a Mexican," Gustavo Arellano's weekly column in the Orange County Register).

### Week 6 - Borderblur

what/whose border? - the border crossed us

how migration and immigration shape Latino/a realities and futures

transnational dynamics

*reading*: Waldinger, Roger. 2007. "Between Here and There: How Attached are Latino Immigrants to their Native Country?" Pew Hispanic Center, Report - October 25 Report.

### Week 7 – Opportunities and Challenges

from immigrants to ethnic communities

political participation, professions, prospects

*reading*: Zlolinski, Christian. 2008. "Political Mobilization and Activism among Latinos/as in the United States." *In Latino/a Sourcebook*; H. Rodríguez, R. Saenz and C. Menjivar, eds. New York: Springer.

*Reflection paper #3*: "Más que solo una fiesta..." (Probe what you learned through participation in, and further investigation of, Cinco de Mayo events on campus and off)

### Week 8 – The Power of Time and Place

generations shaping their futures

empowerment: past and present policies vs. current cultural and intellectual resources

*reading*: Tienda, Marta, and Faith Mitchell. 2006. "Uncertain Destinies." Pp. 115-127. *In Multiple Origins, Uncertain Destinies: Hispanics and the American Future*. Washington: National Research Council.

*Research report*: investigate and report on key insights into an emerging or maturing Latino/a community, drawing on a recent ethnography or case studies (Add. resources).

### Week 9 – Education: Preschool to Post-graduate

historical, cultural, and sociopolitical dimensions of schooling experience

(dis)continuities between home and school

promoting academic repertoires: contributions of social structure & cultural participation

*reading*: Pedraza, Silvia. 2000. "Beyond Black and White: Latinos and Social Science Research on Immigration, Race and Ethnicity in America." *Social Science History* 24: 697-726.

### Week 10 – Where We are From, Where We are Going

*student research/advocacy projects/presentations*