

Reports from “Imagining Latina/o Studies: Past, Present, and Future”

“Imagining Latina/o Studies”: Perspectives on the First International Latina/o Studies Initiative Conference



Rhetoric and Latina/o Politics Doodle by Brian Herrera. CC BY-NC-ND.

It's not everyday that new professional and academic organizations are formed. That's why the decision to join together in a new association, made by over 500 scholars gathered in Chicago for the “Imagining Latina/o Studies: Past, Present, and Future” Conference on July 17, 2014, was a historic moment. As the Program Committee, composed of leading scholars in multiple fields from all regions of the country, stated in the program:

With this conference we hope to spotlight the dynamic work being carried out in a range of disciplines with a particular focus on the interdisciplinary impulse that shapes and motivates work produced under the banner of Latina/o Studies. We recognize the decades-long history and crucial work of national-origin studies, such as Chicana/o Studies and Puerto Rican Studies, from which many of us have emerged; and we further ask how might we conceptualize the field so that it reflects the complex histories, social formations, and cultural production of Latinas/os even while seeking to imagine a larger sense of belonging that might transcend nationalisms?

Fourteen sessions, with eight to ten panels in each session, took place over the three days of this gathering, providing a wealth of rigorous and creative scholarship as well as insights on pedagogy in this interdisciplinary field. The growing establishment of Latina/o Studies Departments in colleges and universities across the country was evident at the gathering, as well as valuable regional networks of Latina/o Studies scholars in many parts of the country. Another indication of the significance of this professional gathering was the participation of eleven academic presses and four

academic journals in the book exhibit. Eighteen (18) of the forty-one (41) ads in the program booklet were from Latina/o Studies Departments, programs, journals and presses based in the Midwest, representing a significant new trend in the field. Conference organizers allowed all participants to join in the work of creating a new association by scheduling business meetings over the lunch period. Participants either picked up something to go or took advantage of a limited number of conference free lunches and joined in the business discussions, voting to form a new association, discussing possible names for the new group, deciding on an initial leadership and governance structure, and establishing a Coordinating Committee to guide the next steps. The new Coordinating Committee includes: Elena Machado, Carmen Lamas, Deb Vargas, Raúl Coronado, and Isabel Porras. Along with Frances Aparicio and Lourdes Torres, who will not continue on the Coordinating Committee, this group worked together to organize the events. Included here are some of the comments and observations of those who participated in the conference. The colorful notes/doodles on conference sessions of Brian Herrera, in Theater at Princeton University – used with his permission — also provide additional commentary here.

From Adriana Estill, English, Carleton College, Minnesota



Dominican Transnational Performativity Doodle by Brian Herrera. CC BY-NC-ND.

On Thursday morning, July 17, 2014, I was one of “those people” — the members of the audience in a conference session that get thanked because they came out so early. (In this case at 8:00 a.m.) But on that Thursday morning, “those people” were out in droves. The excitement was palpable at the session “Latina/o Representation in Mass Media and Popular Culture,” not only because the papers were riveting and engaging, but because we knew — I knew — that this was a historic moment. The energy at the Palmer Hotel in Chicago was unflagging, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day. Even our business meetings occupied a crowded Empire ballroom. Things that I deeply appreciated about the inaugural conference of a new Latina/o Studies Association:

- feeling like I was “at home,” that people could understand the basic motivation for my work and that, maybe more importantly, they saw me;
- hearing exciting new ideas insistently framed in relation to past Latin@, Chican@ and Puertorriqueñ@ scholarship. There was no amnesia here;
- the sense of empowerment. Here, in this space (unlike at my home institution), it felt like our ideas, our curricula, our Latina/o Studies initiatives, and our scholarship could, should, and can matter. Part of this feeling stemmed from hearing about the amazing work that colleagues are doing, but part came from feeling heard in a number of different arenas.

Things that I hope we'll work on in this new organization:

- I saw the photo of our amazing conference organizers recently. Out of 10 (?) people, only one was cisgender male. I'd like to make sure that service to our association doesn't fall primarily on cisgender female shoulders, given historical imbalances in that arena.
- In that vein, a number of sessions that I attended that had “feminism” or “Latina” as one of the organizing rationale drew mainly cisgender women. Two thoughts: men involved in Latin@ studies should care about these issues; are we thinking deeply about masculinities?

Last but not least, a number of scholars used twitter at this conference, mainly to help get out the word on the sessions they attended. It was exciting to watch the ideas circulate not just in the rooms they were uttered, but out in “the open,” ready to be engaged by wider publics. And [Iván Chaar López has archived](#) our #LSCHI2014 in order to preserve those conversations for the archives.

From Luz Baez, M.A., Studies of the Americas, CUNY/City College of New York

First, I congratulate the Conference organizers for coordinating, what was in my estimation, a very successful event. Each panelist was distinguished and presented research in their field of study passionately and eloquently. It was enlightening to hear about the research each is conducting in their field. There were several that resonated loudly and peak further interest in the subject matter, specifically how the construct of race has evolved and developed in a different space as Latina/os migrate to the South specifically Alabama, Mississippi and Florida; how inequality in media representation distorts the Latino/a image, and creates identity confusion and economic disparities; and, finally, the impact that the Treyvon Martin and George Zimmerman case had on the Latino/a community. The benefits I received from attending the conference are countless and will further assist me in the development of my research. Thanks again to the Organizers. I look forward to the next Latino/a Studies Conference.

From Diana Rivera, Librarian and Archivist, Michigan State University



1st Business Meeting Doodle by Brian Herrera. CC BY-NC-ND.

I attended the Latino Studies Conference in Chicago from July 17 to July 19, 2014. It was the launching of the Latina/o Studies Association; an idea discussed throughout the previous year at national-origin studies conferences (whose focus are Latin American Studies, Puerto Rican Studies and Chicana and Chicano Studies) and the American Studies Association, the Modern Language Association, the Organization of American Historians and the Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage conferences. The new organization will meet biennially and discuss the shifting landscape of Latina/os (including Chicana/os) in the humanities, social sciences and professional schools. My presentation, in a roundtable/workshop on *Mujeres Talk*, discussed Chicana and Latina blogs generally, and the work I have done as an associate editor of *Mujeres Talk*, which is a unique format with a two-editor review of submitted and solicited posts. Ohio State University Libraries is the hosting institution for the blog. Sessions I attended included:

- Latina/o Representation in Mass Media and Popular Culture
- Roundtable on Latina/o History in the American Midwest
- Roundtable on Libraries, Institutional Pressures and Cultural Politics
- Latin@ in the Upper Midwest and Canada
- Printing Latinidad: The Power of Paper in Latina/o Art
- Roundtable – La Bloga Contributors in Person: Talk about Blogging, Writing, Publishing
- Theorizing an Alternative Ethos of Preservation: Land, Space and Place in Latina/o Literature and Culture

- Roundtable – Archive as Social Practice, Contestation, Queer Gesture, and Chisme

Librarians from Stanford University, UC San Diego and I moved a motion forward to have librarians as part of the executive leadership structure of the new organization to educate, improve and establish a continued library/archives use among the new faculty entering the ranks of academia. It was a conversation that was well received.

To reach the Coordinating Committee for a new Latina/o Studies Association use the [Contact Form](#) on their [website](#), or look up “Latina/o Studies Initiative” on Facebook.

This entry was posted in [Latina/o Studies](#), [Latina/os in Midwest](#), [Professionalization](#) and tagged [#LSCHI2014](#), [Carmen Lamas](#), [Deb Vargas](#), [Elena Machado](#), [Frances Aparicio](#), [Imagining Latina/o Studies](#), [Isabel Porras](#), [Latina/o Representation in Mass Media and Popular Culture](#), [Latino Studies Conference](#), [Lourdes Torres](#), [LSA Conference Chicago](#), [Raúl Coronado](#) on [July 29, 2014](#) by [mujerestalk](#).