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## **Chicana/o Latina/o Law Review**

### **Title**

Introduction: The Ties that Bind

### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/26r4v7xv>

### **Journal**

Chicana/o Latina/o Law Review, 19(1)

### **ISSN**

1061-8899

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### **Publication Date**

1998

### **DOI**

10.5070/C7191021096

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## THE TIES THAT BIND

DEVON W. CARBADO†

What precisely is one asserting when one claims to be Latina/o? A political identity, an experiential identity, or both? Is the Latina/o identity racial, or ethnic, or cultural? Is it even ideologically or ontologically manageable? My father happens to be an African Cubano. My mother is Jamaican. I was born and raised in England. Am I a Latino? Or am I finally “just Black”?<sup>1</sup>

But you may be asking, why be binary? Identity is never an either/or proposition. Perhaps I am a “Black Latino.” If so, doesn’t the “Black” preceding “Latino” signify some lesser claim to Latino identity (I’ve never heard a Latino referred to as a Brown Latino, though I have heard Latinas/os referred to as Brown-skinned)? Doesn’t Blackness here function as a qualifier, presupposing an identity that is “just Latina/o?” At any rate, who decides the question of who is and who is not a Latina/o. Who regulates the borders of this identity and by what criteria? Finally, what role does and/or should LatCrit Theory (“LCT”) play in representing and giving content to this pan-ethnic, multiracial, multinational, multicultural identity?

The politics of Latina/o identity formation is enormously important to LCT. After all, LCT has, as one of its theoretical starting

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1. I use “just Black” here to problematize the tendency of critical race theorists, including LatCrit theorists, to articulate Blackness as “just” a race. While it is widely recognized that the Asian American community and the Latina/o community reflect the political organization of distinct ethnicities and nationalities under an umbrella identity, few people pay attention to, or even acknowledge, the multiethnic and multinational nature and historical origin of the Black community. Anthony Farley makes the point a little differently:

Blacks, like Latinos or Asian Pacific Americans, are neither an ‘ethnicity’ nor a ‘race.’ We too may opt to consider ourselves an amalgamation of national origins—a ‘conflation’ of national origins. We, especially, have been forcibly thematized as an amalgamation of national origins. What could more cruelly highlight this obvious fact than the Middle Passage? All manner of nations went into the wombs of those terrible ships to be born again ‘as blacks’ after a transatlantic labor-of-hate.

Anthony Paul Farley, *All Flesh Shall See it Together*, 19 CHICANO-LATINO L. REV. 163, 167 (1998).

points, the notion that *la comunidad Latina* is meaningful and ascertainable. Thus, part of LCT's political project is to articulate a vision of social justice that responds to and attempts to ameliorate the subordinated status of Latinas/os. Each of the essays in this cluster manifests this political commitment. More than that, the essays raise, and sometimes answer, provocative questions about identity formation and politics in Latina/o communities. What follows is an introduction to, and a brief comment on, each of the essays.

In *Who Are We?*, Enrique Carrasco probes the question of how LCT might facilitate an understanding of Latina/o identity.<sup>2</sup> He identifies two theoretical approaches that LatCrit theorists might employ. In one approach, the critical theorist situates herself "atop a rooftop."<sup>3</sup> From this location she is able to view the issues affecting the Latina/o community ostensibly from a position of detachment and objectivity.<sup>4</sup> Carrasco rightly finds this "top-down" approach unsatisfying. His main quarrel is epistemological. More specifically, he questions whether an objective standpoint exists and wonders whether such a standpoint is even desirable.<sup>5</sup> As a voyeur, how does one understand the specific needs of the community? And as an individual located outside a community, how does one become a representative voice or subject for that community? The rooftop position, in other words, raises serious questions about authenticity.<sup>6</sup>

Instead of situating herself on the "rooftop," the critical theorist might locate herself on the "street"—i.e., in the community.<sup>7</sup> The significance of this location is twofold. For one thing, by situating herself in the community, the critical theorist becomes a member (rather than an observer) of that community. For another, her presence in the community plays a constituting role, helping to shape and (re)define not only the community but her own identity as well.<sup>8</sup>

Carrasco recognizes, however, that the theoretical position of the "street" is problematic as well. The "street" may be politically constraining, limiting one's ability to imagine possibilities outside of the context-specific realities of community life. Still, Carrasco in-

2. Enrique Carrasco, *Who Are We?*, 19 CHICANO-LATINO L. REV. 331 (1998).

3. *Id.* at 333.

4. *Id.*

5. *Id.* at 333-34.

6. A related problem with the "rooftop" approach is that it privileges individualistic, rather than intersubjective ways of knowing. "How," Carrasco asks, "could we persuade *la comunidad Latina* or other communities with which we must interact that, because we've been stationed high above the messy fray of living, we are correct when concluding that activists and scholars are misguided by insisting upon, or not clarifying their position with respect to, the liberal view of a rights-carrying individual as opposed to an intersubjective conception of the self that promotes ethnocultural group rights?" *Id.* at 332.

7. *Id.*

8. *See id.* at 333 & 336.

sists, LCT should reflect and be informed by community-based experiences. As he puts it, “[o]ur teleological quests through life—our search for a morally-informed vision of the good life—is, essentially, a narrative informed by communal experiences.”<sup>9</sup>

Carrasco’s preference for community-based and community informed political action is not (for me) controversial. Yet the notion of Latina/o-based political engagements is. As Carrasco observes, “we bring different, sometimes conflicting, viewpoints and agendas to [LCT]. While we might agree that anti-essentialism is ‘essential’ to critical analysis, the history of division among *la comunidad Latina* understandably raises doubts about the future of our collective efforts.”<sup>10</sup> This observation has profound implications for LCT. To be sure, the fact of difference and tension within *la comunidad Latina*, does not mean that Latinas/os do not (or cannot) exist as a political community. Few would deny the political existence of the “Black community,” even as *some* of us recognize the ideological, religious, and ethnic diversity within this group. My point here is that Carrasco’s comments about intra Latina/o difference, conflict, and division invites LatCrit scholars to continue to probe the political question of what makes one a Latina/o.

Pat Chew’s essay, *Constructing Our Selves/Our Families: Comments on LatCrit Theory*, provides an indication of what is potentially problematic about the category Latina/o through a discussion of her parents’ rejection of the Asian-American label (a pan-ethnic, multi-lingual, socially constructed identity).<sup>11</sup> According to Chew, her parents “would view the label as political, and hence undesirable. Second, they would react viscerally, ‘How can you group me with Japanese Americans?’ (My mother recounts proudly how she protested against the Japanese invasion of China). My parents would reject the label ‘Asian Americans.’”<sup>12</sup> Chew’s parents understand the politically constructed nature of Asian American identity. They understand that, much like Latina/o identity, the Asian American identity conflates disparate and distinct cultures—cultures with pre-American experiences and histories, cultures which were and/or are sometimes at war with each other, and cultures which are not easily subsumed under an umbrella identity.

But if Chew’s essay reveals why the category Latina/o is racially, culturally, and metaphysically contestable, it also reveals why the category might make political sense. To some degree, our identity is a product of how we experience, and are experienced by, oth-

9. *Id.* at 335.

10. *Id.* at 331.

11. Pat Chew, *Constructing Our Selves/Our Families: Comments on LatCrit Theory*, 19 CHICANO-LATINO L. REV. 297, 297-98 (1998).

12. *Id.*

ers. One of Chew's shopping experiences helps to explain what I mean:

I was doing my weekly grocery shopping at a large Pittsburgh store. As I was pushing my cart, busily selecting apples—I was oblivious to my Asian-American-ness. That aspect of my identity seemed irrelevant to what I was doing, and I would have presumed “invisible” to me and others. Yet another customer, a well-dressed middle-aged woman, apparently was not oblivious to my ethnicity. She approached me courteously, and asked with a cadence reserved for children and foreigners, “Do-you-know-where-the milk-is?”<sup>13</sup>

In this incident, Chew is reminded that she cannot escape her racial signification. That is, she cannot step outside of what her Chinese American identity signifies. She is reminded that her non-whiteness has particular and historically rooted social meanings, one of which is “foreignness.”

Significantly, in telling the story Chew does not particularize her racial identity as Chinese American. Chew's narrative suggests that it was her “Asian-ness” that the woman experienced and responded to: “I looked Asian to her, and that apparently triggered an association with ‘foreigner’ and not understanding English easily.”<sup>14</sup> However, had Chew been Japanese or Korean American, the woman would still have employed a “slow cadence reserved for children and foreigners” to engage her. Undoubtedly, Chew understands this. Indeed, I think it is precisely this understanding that informed (at least in part) Chew's decision to construct herself as an Asian (rather than a Chinese) American in relaying the incident. Presumably, Chew recognizes that while there are indeed differences among people who identify as Asian Americans (as there are with people who identify as Latina/o), the category is meaningful as it is based on an awareness of, and constitutes a response to, the pan-ethnic and racial thematizations<sup>15</sup> of Asian Americans as, for example, foreigners.

LatCrit theorists recognize that the identities we assume and assert are, to some degree, externally imposed. Indeed, as Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol argues in *Building Bridges III—Personal Narratives, Incoherent Paradigms, and Plural Citizens*, part of LCT's political project is to challenge and contest the external representations of Latinas/os.<sup>16</sup> This suggests to me that it is controver-

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13. *Id.* at 298.

14. *Id.*

15. For a discussion of the ways in which the Blackness is “thematized” to facilitate white race pleasure, see Anthony Paul Farley, *The Black Body as Fetish Object*, 76 OR. L. REV. 457 (1997).

16. Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol, *Building Bridges III—Personal Narratives, Incoherent Paradigms, and Plural Citizens*, 19 CHICANO-LATINO L. REV. 303 (1998)

sial whether, for example, because Mexican and El Salvadorian Americans are treated similarly in American law and social policy and discriminated against in related ways, they should embrace an homogenizing identity label. Put differently, it is not entirely clear that, because these two distinct groups are socially constructed—categorized—as one cultural/racial/ethnic group, they should acquiesce to, legitimize, or reify this categorization through the assertion of an umbrella identity.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps these two groups should organize as a political community against racism and white supremacy, but that is not exactly the same thing as constituting an identity around something other than shared oppression. It is my impression that the assertion of Latina/o identity is more than an assertion of shared oppression (and I don't mean to suggest that shared oppression is an illegitimate or unimportant basis for constituting a group identity). The assertion of Latina/o identity is, at least sometimes, an assertion of values, culture, and history.

Hernández-Truyol's essay is not intended to give content to the Latina/o identity, however, for she has carefully explored this very difficult issue elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Her purpose in *Building Bridges III* is to articulate the interconnections between and amongst subordinated groups. More specifically, her paper "explores bridge building among communities of color with the purposes of creating, maintaining, and developing alliances."<sup>19</sup> Her point of entry into this discussion is a critique of the so-called Black/White paradigm for conceptualizing race. Under this paradigm, it is argued, questions of race and racial injustice are conceptualized exclusively or predominantly in terms of Black and White. As a result, the argument goes, Black racial experiences are privileged in discussions about race while the experiences of other racial minorities are marginalized. One linguistic manifestation of the Black/White paradigm is the phrase "Blacks and other minorities." "Other minorities" becomes a catch-all for people of color who are not Black. This phrase, it is argued, facilitates the construction of Blacks as the paradigmatic, racially subordinated group.

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[hereinafter *Building Bridges III*].

17. On some level, this argument proves too much and could be invoked to raise question about whether the assertion of Black identity, for example, constitutes an acquiescence to and reification of the social constructions of Blackness. More disturbingly, the argument seems to suggest that group-based assertions of identity in response to group based subordination legitimizes (or at least helps to perpetuate) the social constructions of the group, and these social constructions facilitate the group's subordination.

18. See Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol, *Building Bridges—Latinas and Latinos at the Crossroads: Realities, Rhetoric and Replacement*, 25 COLUM. HUM. RTS. L. REV. 369 (1994).

19. *Building Bridges III*, supra note 16, at 310.

I am sympathetic to the concerns that inform the Black/White paradigm critique. That is to say, I agree with the argument that those of us addressing questions of racial justice in our work—academic and non-academic—should not have as our explicit or implicit starting point the notion that racial subordination and Black subordination are one and the same thing. All of us must struggle with and take seriously the reality that America is multiracial and multiethnic. However, taking multiracial issues seriously does not mean that our discussions about race must always have a multiracial focus. We can, should, and sometimes must racially particularize our political engagements. What taking multiracial issues seriously does mean (at bottom), I think, is that we cannot assume that a Black-centered antiracist practice will ameliorate the racial subordination of other people of color. We cannot assume, in other words, that racism against “non-Black” people of color is related epiphenomenally to racism against Black people.

That said, I have not always been pleased with the way in which the Black/White paradigm critique is framed, and I am exploring this issue in another paper.<sup>20</sup> Suffice it to say here that discussions of the Black/White paradigm should not be employed to suggest, explicitly or implicitly, that America has grappled fully with the nature and extent of racism against Black people. Nor should the Black/White paradigm critique ignore the social, political, and economic consequences of occupying one end—the negative and subordinated end—of the White/Black polarity.

Hernández-Truyol’s concern with coalition building among people of color raises the question of whether people of color do and/or can constitute a political community. She answers the question (perhaps a little too easily) in the affirmative. She recognizes that there are important differences between and amongst minority groups,<sup>21</sup> but argues that “there are . . . some fascinating points of convergence.”<sup>22</sup> She urges us to consider the ways in which the Black/White paradigm connects people of color:

Latinas/os and Asian Americans share a lot . . . in the sense that . . . both groups are considered neither Black nor White—at least not as the binary concept of race is constructed in this country. In addition, an increasing number of Blacks—ranging from Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Jamaican, Haitian, and from many African nation-states—do not neatly fit into the infrastructure of a paradigm that focuses on the common knowledge about

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20. Devon W. Carbado, Anthony P. Farley, & Jennifer Russell, *What’s Wrong With the Critique of the Black/White Paradigm* (a work-in-progress).

21. *Building Bridges III*, *supra* note 16, at 320-22.

22. *Id.* at 324.

skin color and excludes and obscures coexisting realities of culture and language.<sup>23</sup>

Hernández-Truyol presents other examples of how people of color are interconnected, including, but not limited to, experiences with language or accent discrimination and "outsiderness status."

I am persuaded that people of color are connected in the way that Hernández-Truyol suggests. It is not clear to me, however, that the connections she identifies are a sufficient basis for the constitution of an *identity*-based political community. Racial, cultural, and ethnic differences amongst people of color continue to trump, or at least obscure, the ways in which their minority status connects them. This might explain why there are very few examples of meaningful coalition building amongst and between people of color—even on college campuses. I want to be careful to point out that I am not suggesting that people of color cannot constitute a political community. What I do mean to suggest, though, is that we cannot hope for meaningful coalition building among people of color unless we explore the ways in which each minority group is differently situated with respect to racism and how this difference corresponds to particular forms of subordination with particular social, economic, and political consequences. This is a hard issue to explore, for it invites us to engage in a discussion about hierarchies of oppression. Nevertheless, I do believe this discussion is one we ought to have—openly and honestly. Hernández-Truyol might agree with this, at least to some degree. She writes:

In order to promote understanding of the margins, this work proposes that we continuously engage in, and regularly practice, *polilocal hermeneutics*, a process in which we keep firmly planted holds on all defining aspects of identity and community, in which the sources of knowledge . . . are "collective, interactive, inter-subjective, and networked." Only by engaging in such multilingual, multicultural, multiracial discourses within ourselves and between and among our various and varied communities . . . will we be able to understand and work within our cultural, racial, gender, sexuality, ethnic, [and] religious differences. . . .<sup>24</sup>

Hernández-Truyol's commitment "to promote an understanding of the margins" is shared by Gerald López. In his essay, *Learning About Latinos*, López stresses the importance of studying, appreciating, and articulating the contours of Latino life.<sup>25</sup> "To really matter, Latinos must be recognized."<sup>26</sup> To be recognized, Latinas/os must be visible. To be visible Latinas/os must move (be moved) be-

23. *Id.* at 324.

24. *Id.* at 310-11.

25. Gerald López, *Learning About Latinos*, 19 CHICANO-LATINO L. REV. 363 (1998).

26. *Id.* at 363.



yond “the shadowy category ‘blacks and other minorities.’”<sup>27</sup> And how exactly is this to be accomplished? López suggests that it be done through information dissemination: “We need more novels, more short stories, more plays. We need more telenovelas, more concerts, more feature length movies. We need more histories, more biographies, more memoirs, in print and on the small screen. We need more ethnographies, more surveys, more impossible-to-categorize-but-illuminating accounts of Latino life.”<sup>28</sup>

But “more is not always better.”<sup>29</sup> There are inherent dangers in producing and distributing “more” information about Latinas/os. We have to be concerned about methodology—the way in which information is gathered; the accuracy of the information; the potential (mis)uses of the information; whether the information will expose Latina/o “dirty laundry”; the extent to which the information might undermine a political cause. López recognizes these potential “pitfalls.”<sup>30</sup> He argues, however, that they are outweighed by the importance of learning about Latinas/os—“in all our complexity.”<sup>31</sup> Rather than avoiding or “denying the hazards we perhaps inevitably confront in producing and pushing knowledge about Latinos, we should regularly expose them. Instead of running from our own failings in the course of our professional work and everyday lives, we should face them down.”<sup>32</sup>

That we should acknowledge and confront “our own failings” seems to me entirely right. Nor would I quarrel with the idea that we should expose the potential dangers of distributing information about Latinas/os. Much more controversial, it seems to me, is the notion that the production of knowledge about Latinas/os—any and all knowledge, “good” and “bad” facts—is a sufficiently important political value to override concerns about the extent to which such information can be appropriated and employed to further subordinate Latinas/os—to “delay, cripple, and even halt the march toward making Latinos matter.”<sup>33</sup>

“[T]hat’s just the nature of the beast,”<sup>34</sup> suggests López. And indeed, it is. But to say that the production of knowledge carries with it certain risks is not to say that those risks should always and in every context be subordinate to the production and dissemination of knowledge. One ought to engage in a cost/benefit analysis. The nature of the risk might very well outweigh the potential importance

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27. *Id.*

28. *Id.* at 367.

29. *Id.* at 368.

30. *Id.*

31. *Id.* at 363.

32. *Id.* at 369.

33. *Id.*

34. *Id.*

of distributing the information. After all, the goal is to make Latinas/os matter, not facilitate Latina/o subordination, and it is entirely possible that the distribution of certain information will accomplish the latter.

Engaging in a cost/benefit analysis is not going to be easy, however. As López observes, "we'll never . . . know exactly how frequently or how much [certain kinds of information about Latinas/o] undermine our collective ambitions."<sup>35</sup> We should be cautious, therefore, about limiting or restricting the flow of information. But nor can we know whether and to what extent the distribution of certain information about Latinas/os will contribute towards making Latinas/os matter. In other words, we will have imperfect information with respect to both the cost and the benefits—the liberating and subordinating potential—of disseminating information about Latinas/os. All we can do, then, is make the best cost/benefit judgments our circumstances permit. History and experience will help us, though we will certainly make mistakes.

That said, I do think that antiracist discourse is too often informed by a politics of respectability, the notion that people of color cannot afford to "air their dirty laundry" or reveal their "dirty little secrets." As a result, certain intracommunity problems (e.g., domestic abuse)<sup>36</sup> are not discussed. López's privileging of information dissemination over the risks incidental thereto is perhaps a response to the politics of respectability. Still, I think he pushes the information distribution point a little too far. We should *always* be concerned with the potential political misuses of information, and the distribution of information *should* be subordinate to this concern. In some instances this will mean distributing the information and exposing the potential misuses. In others contexts it will mean suppressing the information.

As an indication of the promises and perils of disseminating information about Latinas/os, López refers to the findings and interpretations of the Latino National Political Survey (LNPS). Ostensibly, the survey reflected Latinas/os speaking for themselves.<sup>37</sup> López suggests, however, that notwithstanding the public fuss and fanfare surrounding the publication of the survey, the "nation's knowledge of Latinos remained rudimentary at best."<sup>38</sup> The media's interpretation of the survey distorted Latinas/os' perspectives on key social policy questions. "Take immigration policy. Survey data

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35. *Id.*

36. For an indication of the way the politics of respectability is manifested in Black antiracist discourse, see Devon W. Carbado, *The Construction of O.J. Simpson as a Racial Victim*, 32 HARV. C.R.-C.L. L. REV. 49, 99-103 (1997).

37. *Id.* at 373.

38. *Id.* at 371.

showed significant Latino majorities agreed with the statement '[t]here are too many immigrants coming to this country'. . . . As a result, the LNPS almost instantly became a handy citation for anyone wishing to document Latino support for an assortment of anti-immigration policies. . . . "<sup>39</sup>

According to López, there was insufficient evidence to support the idea that Latinas/os favor anti-immigration measures.<sup>40</sup> He rightly argues that agreeing with the statement "there is too much immigration" is not the same thing as endorsing "a proposal to constitutionally obliterate citizenship by birth."<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the LNPS data itself offered another story about Latinas/os and immigration. "Only 7 of 1584 Latinos responding [to the survey] named immigration as the most important national problem; only 15 of 1587 (14 from among the 292 Cubans surveyed (4.4%) listed immigration as the most important local problem. As both a national and a local problem, immigration ranked far behind 'social problems' and 'economics.'"<sup>42</sup> This data was ignored by the media, presumably because it would have undermined the stereotype-breaking data purportedly suggesting that Latinas/os are anti-immigration.<sup>43</sup> López does not "assign a single ideological explanation for the media's [distorted] coverage"<sup>44</sup> of the LNPS, and he makes a point of noting that the authors—themselves Latinos—were implicated in the stories the LNPS was employed to advance.<sup>45</sup>

If, as López suggests, we learn very little about Latinas/os from the LNPS<sup>46</sup>—which surveyed 2817 Latinos (Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cubans)—how are we to learn about Latinos at all? What methodologies should we employ? According to López, there is no single methodology for the production of knowledge about Latinas/os, but as we engage this project, we should avoid "becoming enmeshed in the . . . sequence of caricatures and counter-caricatures that dominates so much contemporary thinking."<sup>47</sup> Moreover, we should strive to be intellectually and politically honest, allowing our findings to inform our politics and being mindful of and critical about the ways in which our politics inform the interpretation of our findings.

39. *Id.* at 375.

40. *Id.*

41. *Id.*

42. *Id.*

43. *Id.* at 378.

44. *Id.* at 383.

45. *Id.* at 383-84.

46. López maintains that notwithstanding his criticism of the LNPS, it is an important starting point. He adds that the LNPS "remains in some ways underappreciated." *Id.* at 413.

47. *Id.* at 384.

Finally, with respect to giving content to Latina/o identity, López suggests that we explore not only how language, history, race, and assimilation shape Latina/o identity, but also how citizenship and political community are implicated in the notion of a Latina/o community. López contends that we cannot begin to understand the label “Latina/o” unless we come to terms with the heterogeneous nature of citizenship and the multidimensional nature of identity. It is not inconsistent or particularly remarkable for a person to identify as a Mexican-American in one context, a Latina in another, a Mexican in yet another, and an American in another still. Nor is it surprising that a person might prefer to call herself a Mexican rather than Latina. This preference does not negate the existence of a Latina consciousness or community.

But is the assertion of a Latina/o consciousness, identity, and community politically valuable? Should it be encouraged? Each of the preceding essays implicitly answers these questions in the affirmative. In *LatCrit y la Des-Colonización Nuestra: Taking Colón Out*, Luz Guerra answers them with a “maybe.” Guerra argues that Latina/o identity is constructed on or around the exclusion and marginalization of Native peoples’ histories and experiences.<sup>48</sup> “The term ‘Latino,’” Guerra argues, “implies [that LatCrit theorists will take] a [political] path that is non-indigenous.”<sup>49</sup> To situate Native Peoples within the Latina/o context is to ignore their pre-colonial history. Guerra raises the pointed question of whether “‘Latinoism’ [has] colluded with the mythology of Colón-ization to the exclusion of Native peoples?”<sup>50</sup> Her essay implicitly suggests that Latina/o is both a colonized and colonizing identity. To decolonize Latina/o identity, Guerra urges us to explore “our relationship to ‘conquest’, ‘subjugation,’ and to the indigenous peoples of the world through a de-colonized lens.”<sup>51</sup> Guerra is not perfectly clear on what she means by this, except to say that we should take our cues from certain Native thinkers.<sup>52</sup>

LatCrit scholars need to consider seriously the fundamental question that Guerra’s essay presents: Does the assertion of a Latina/o identity necessarily marginalize Native peoples? Asked differently, does the Latina/o identity operate—functionally if not intentionally—on a politics of exclusion? LatCrit scholars have been rigorous about asserting a Latina/o identity in the context of discussions about race, in part to destabilize and call in to question the so-

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48. Luz Guerra, *LatCrit la Des-Colonización Nuestra: Taking Colón Out*, 19 CHICANO-LATINO L. REV. 351 (1998).

49. *Id.* at 353.

50. *Id.* at 355-56.

51. *Id.* at 359.

52. *Id.* at 359-60.

called Black/White paradigm. This intervention has helped to generate thoughtful discussions about the ways in which outsider discourses "redeploy" structures of subordination.<sup>53</sup> Guerra wants us to examine whether LCT—an outsider discourse—redeploys structures of subordination vis-à-vis Native peoples.

Guadalupe T. Luna's "Zoo Island:" *LatCrit Theory, "Don Pepe" and Senora Peralta*, is the final essay in this cluster.<sup>54</sup> Like Guerra, Luna is concerned with exploring the relationship between colonialism and the formation of Latina/o—or, more specifically here, Chicana/o—identity. According to Luna, we cannot understand Chicana/o identity unless we understand the role conquest has played in shaping and defining Chicana/o lives.<sup>55</sup> The general claim she advances is that the law has functioned systematically to subordinate Chicanas/os.<sup>56</sup> She develops this thesis employing cases involving land disputes between "Anglo-Americans" and Chicanas/os. More than illustrating the uneven application of the law, the cases she discusses reveal how judges construct Chicana/o identities in opposition to "Anglo-American" identity—citizen vs. resident; settler vs. dependant worker—<sup>57</sup> to "disenfranchise[] Chicanas and Chicanos from their property interests."<sup>58</sup> Luna's essay reminds us that law can (and historically has) function(ed) to legitimize, protect, and preserve white social expectations.<sup>59</sup>

Cumulatively, the essays in this cluster suggest that part of LCT's political project must continue to involve defining and redefining Latina/o identity. This makes sense. The project of defining oneself and one's community is liberating, consciousness-raising, and potentially transgressive. These definitions can help us understand that we are more than the social meanings attributed to our identities.

But neither self- nor community definitions are easy. As this cluster of essays reveal, our identities are, on some level, unmanageable—fluid, contingent, and contestable. In the end, we will

53. See Eric K. Yamamoto, *Critical Race Praxis; Race Theory and Political Lawyering Practice in Post Civil Rights America*, 95 MICH. L. REV. 821, 891. Yamamoto's argument is that people of color can, and sometimes do, engage in discriminatory practices against other people of color. For a full indication of what is meant by the term "structures of subordination," see Elizabeth M. Iglesias, *Structures of Subordination: Women of Color at the Intersection of Title VII and the NLRA. Not!*, 28 HARV. C.R.-C.L. L. REV. 395 (1993).

54. Guadalupe T. Luna, "Zoo Island:" *LatCrit Theory, "Don Pepe" and Senora Peralta*, 19 CHICANO-LATINO L. REV. 339 (1998).

55. *Id.* at 340-41.

56. *Id.*

57. *Id.* at 345-49.

58. *Id.* at 340.

59. See generally Cheryl Harris, *Whiteness as Property*, 106 HARV. L. REV. 1709 (1993).

never be able to articulate a definitive and unproblematic definition of “who we are.” This should not immobilize us, however, but rather function as the starting point for our understanding of and theorizing about identity.

