

A NATION IN YOUR HEART:
LATINO POLITICAL IDENTITY AND THE QUEST FOR UNITY

by

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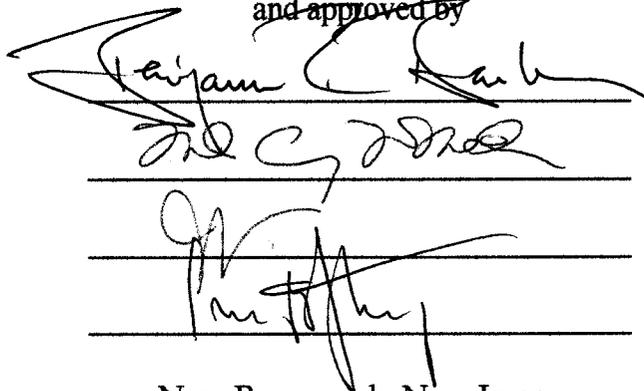
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and approved by



The image shows three handwritten signatures, each written over a horizontal line. The top signature is the most prominent and appears to be 'Benjamin R. Barber'. The middle signature is less legible but seems to be 'Christina Isabel Beltran'. The bottom signature is also less legible but appears to be another name.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation constructs a conversation about the nature of democratic civic practices through an analysis of Latino politics and its theoretical foundations. Drawing on canonical political theory, contemporary democratic theory, literature, social-movement scholarship, feminist theory, and race theory, “A Nation in Your Heart” examines how Latino civic elites in the United States perceive and negotiate the relationship between identity and political agreement. I argue that the political orientation of Latino politics can be more fully understood when characterized as *Rousseauian* in its criticisms and commitments.

While both Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Latino civic elites combine a passionate opposition to inequality with a commitment to participatory democracy, they also exhibit the more problematic desire to jettison conflict through their demands for group unity. Both Rousseau and Latino politics display a pervasive anxiety about political speech and the agonism that occurs when citizens deliberate together. The problem of deliberative

speech leads both to cultivate civic practices emphasizing *identification* over public conversation.

In the dissertation's second half, I look at two recent developments in Latino political discourse that appear to challenge the Rousseauian tendencies of Latino politics: the emergence of a "pan-ethnic" Latino identity and the concept of "the borderlands" and its hybrid Latino inhabitants. I contend that despite the apparent acceptance of diversity within the Latino body politic, pan-ethnic political practices continue to celebrate a Rousseauian definition of membership, emphasizing identification and equating group unity and harmony with civic health. This transformation from diversity to harmony is theorized as a necessary precondition for pan-ethnic politics—without it, Latino elites are unable to invoke the representative "we." Similarly, by tracing a genealogy of hybridity, I show how the supposedly "fluid" and "shifting" hybrid subject of Latino political discourse is actually properly ordered and deeply constrained.

"A Nation in Your Heart" concludes by contending that the theoretical legacy of Rousseau represents a site of both opportunity and risk for Latino politics. I conclude by proposing a new approach to political identity in which political subjectivity is recognized as inescapably fragmented and in which contestation is understood as foundational to democratic citizenship.

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I regret that my mother, Margie Beltran, did not live to see this project to completion. However, I am comforted by the fact that she never for a moment doubted I would finish. I am also grateful to my father, Pete Beltran, whose commitment to participatory democracy and social justice made him my first teacher of politics.

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a woman of invention and audacity whose love of books and conversation opened
her horizons and mine. Her belief in possibilities gave me the tools to craft my life.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

A NATION IN YOUR HEART:

LATINO POLITICAL IDENTITY AND THE QUEST FOR UNITY

The language of modern-day liberalism — with its emphasis on negative rights, individualism, and self-interest — is not one of passionate civic attachments. Less an art and more of a shield, liberal citizenship has functioned more as a guarantor of rights than a set of participatory practices. As Benjamin Barber has noted, liberal democracy is concerned more “to keep men safely apart rather than bring them fruitfully together.”¹ But while liberal democracy may offer a relatively “thin” notion of political community, it has demonstrated an impressive ability to maintain stability and legitimacy in the face of disagreement and political conflict. Though its solutions have historically sought to *manage* rather than *transform* civic disagreement, liberalism accepts the ongoing existence of conflict.

In America, concern over political disagreement can be seen in the theoretical and practical assumptions of the Federalists, whose writings and constitutional arrangements express a pervasive anxiety regarding the instability, irrationality, and violence engendered by a democratic and participatory engagement with politics. For the Federalists, human action is fundamentally driven by passion, prejudice, and self-

¹ Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) 4.

interest.² History recounts an unending series of political societies destroyed by internal strife. In order to protect society from repeating past mistakes, the system of government created must recognize the inevitability of disagreement, creating institutional structures capable of checking and channeling conflict. Setting up a political system that requires its citizens to be virtuous participants is too dangerous; better to create a government that keeps its citizens at a distance than so close that they could destroy it.

Political disagreement has always been a central concern in both the theory and practice of democracy. Such concern is understandable, for to disagree strongly about politics is to feel passionately about politics. The commitment to questions of public and collective life is a dangerous enterprise, fraught with risk and unintended consequences.³ World history has shown that civil war, violent nationalism, and balkanization are very real threats to democratic life. Seen from this perspective, America's liberal regime of federalism and representative government has been a resounding success. But its success has come at a cost: A majority of citizens are disengaged from political life. Liberalism's capacity to channel conflict, and its willingness to trade participation for stability, have left us with a largely uninformed and disempowered citizenry. Cynicism, suspicion, and isolation are the defining characteristics of the American political landscape.

² *The Federalist*, ed. Jacob E. Cooke (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), No. 10 [Madison] and 51 [Madison].

³ In recent years, contemporary political theorists have explored canonical political theory's fear of agonistic politics and discussed its various attempts to eliminate conflict, resistance, and struggle from the public realm. See Benjamin Barber's *The Conquest of Politics: Liberal Philosophy in Democratic Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Norman Jacobson's, *Pride & Solace: The Functions and Limits of Political Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); and Sheldon Wolin's essay "Political Theory as Vocation" in *Machiavelli and the Nature of Political Thought*, ed. Martin Fleisher (New York: Atheneum Press, 1972). In this vein, political theorist Bonnie Honig has argued that the project of political theory often functions "less as an exploration of politics than a series of devices for its displacement. See Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

But if the space for “passionate politics” has been seen as lacking in liberalism, it has found a place of prominence in the politics of identity. Today, passionate politics has become identity politics. Often focused on the social, cultural, and economic inequalities rooted in race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, identity politics offers a form of civic engagement that is passionate, performative, and familial — an approach to public life that stands in stark contrast to the procedural and institutional emphasis of liberalism. But if identity politics offers the promise of a politics that is more transformative and constitutive of one’s identity than that of liberalism, is it then better at dealing with agonistic political conflict? How is political disagreement being theorized within identity politics? What is the relationship between identity and political agreement? Does identity politics harbor its own problematic understanding of political disagreement, or does it offer a more promising alternative critique?

In order to explore and answer these questions, this research examines the nature of democratic civic practices through an analysis of Latino politics.⁴ More specifically, this research is an exploration of how U.S. Latino political elites (activists, elected officials, and intellectuals) perceive and negotiate the relationship between identity and political agreement. In looking at Latino political thought and practice, I ask: How does political agreement come into being, and how is it being theorized within Latino politics? What are the necessary preconditions for political agreement, and how does identity complicate and/or encourage political agreement? And how is political *disagreement* being theorized by Latino civic elites? Does Latino politics — in both its scholarship and practice —

⁴ Throughout this dissertation, I use the terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” interchangeably to refer to individuals living in the United States, who trace their ancestry to the Spanish-speaking regions of Latin America and the Caribbean. When discussing a particular ethnic group, I will refer to them by national origin (Mexican-American/Chicano; Cuban, Puerto Rican, etc.)

conflate identity with political agreement? If so, what are the political and theoretical costs of such conflation?

It's my belief that how we theorize identity and agreement shapes the expectations and vision of what political action and deliberation are supposed to look like. Given the fact that identity has come to be so central to America's politics, how it is theorized matters. Its implications matter.

PART I

THE PROJECT

The fundamental claim of this dissertation is that the theoretical assumptions surrounding Latino identity politics leave inadequate space for political disagreement. Beginning with the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements of the late 1960s and '70s and continuing into today, Latino political discourse has displayed a tendency to conflate the relationship between identity and political agreement — shared experience, history, and culture are assumed to produce a shared political perspective. What goes unexplored is how racial identities are both produced and politicized in this process. Moreover, the nature of political agreement and disagreement is obscured.

To explore the democratic problematic raised by Latino political practices, I turn to political philosophy, particularly the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Through a careful reading of its criticisms and commitments, I demonstrate that the political orientation of Latino politics can be characterized as deeply Rousseauian. Indeed, Latino political discourse appears to “play out” many of Rousseau's theoretical assumptions. His critique of modernity, his insistence that legitimate political authority requires the regular

participation of free and equal subjects, and his attempts to “denaturalize” the inequalities produced by convention and historical circumstance are themes that animate the discursive terrain of Chicano and Puerto Rican movement thought and practice. Even more significantly, movement activists consistently displayed the Rousseauian tendency to combine passionate opposition to inequality with a commitment to participatory democracy. Yet while movement politics shares Rousseau’s democratic and participatory ethos, it also reflects his mistrusts of political deliberation and the dissension that erupts when members of the civic body engage in political debate and conversation with one another. Participants and observers often portray deliberative practices that expose or produce conflict as signifying the deterioration of the healthy public assembly.

Because public speech is understood as fraught with risk and uncertainty, movement activists reconceived citizenship in Rousseauian terms — as a set of oppositional practices that were participatory yet primarily non-deliberative. This non-discursive form of civic contact is most fully embodied in Rousseau’s concept of *identification*. For Rousseau, civic practices promoting identification are capable of transcending disagreement, uniting subjects who are naturally separate and independent while simultaneously avoiding the pitfalls of sociability, dependency, and pride.

Rousseau’s concept of identification is indispensable when it comes to understanding the democratic strength and weaknesses of the Chicano movement. Moreover, I find the Rousseauian distinction between *participation* and *deliberation* a particularly productive way of conceptualizing the theoretical impulses of Latino politics and identity politics more generally. Contemporary scholars of new social movements often celebrate the

participatory impulses of identity politics.⁵ But in their focus on the grass roots and mass participation, they inadequately theorize the deliberative (or non-deliberative) practices of the movements they celebrate. The result is that participation and deliberation are essentially conflated. By turning to Rousseau to explore the fissures and tensions between deliberation and participation, this research seeks to improve our understanding of how movements founded on a radical vision of participatory democracy can also display the counterintuitive desire to eliminate dissent.

The first half of the dissertation analyzes the Chicano and Puerto Rican social movements of the late 1960s and '70s, showing how Latinos civic elites displayed a Rousseauian approach to agreement and disagreement. In the second half of the dissertation, I examine the ways in which contemporary Latino political discourse both challenges and affirms its Rousseauian tendencies.

By putting issues of Latino political practice into an explicit and sustained conversation with political theory, I hope to situate the strengths and weaknesses of Latino identity politics within our shared democratic tradition. In the Rousseauian drive toward identification, we gain a better understanding of the power and attraction underlying identity politics — the promise of participatory civic spaces that offer familiarity, immediacy, and mutual recognition. Moreover, we come to understand the depth of this yearning, not only in identity politics but in political life more generally. In this way, Rousseau helps to situate Latino identity politics within a shared democratic tradition; we come to see how many of the successes and failures of Chicano and Puerto

⁵ See *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) by Iris Marion Young and William Flores *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

Rican politics are contemporary articulations of larger theoretical dilemmas. Instead of seeing identity politics as fundamentally *outside* the larger tradition of modern political thought, Rousseau exposes how the issues and demands of Chicano and Latino subjects are surprisingly familiar, new articulations of old desires. It's my belief that the Rousseauian elements of Latino political discourse represent both positive and problematic possibilities. In other words, Rousseau's political theory represents a site of both opportunity and risk for Latino politics.

I am interested neither in vindicating nor vilifying the politics of identity. Rather, I seek to more fully understand the weaknesses of these movements as well as what civic needs are being fulfilled. It's my contention that identity politics ultimately reflects the needs and weaknesses of democratic life and that Rousseau's political thought is one of the most productive and underutilized ways of exploring these questions.

PART II

IDENTITY AND THE NATURE OF POLITICAL AGREEMENT AND DISAGREEMENT

That marginalized groups would politicize and transform identity into a site of agency as well as injury is not surprising; discriminatory practices based on these very categories had already politicized these identities and exposed their potential for mobilization. Shared experience, history, and culture led various groups to see identity as the central category to organize themselves politically. This tendency makes sense given the fact that the initial organizing impetus often came from a particular identity being negatively targeted. Faced with Jim Crow laws or an English-only campaign, groups have always organized themselves around the characteristics coming under attack. Put somewhat

differently, identity politics owes its emergence to the experience of civic marginalization, discrimination, and a lack of power and resources. I note this because this research takes as its starting point the belief that the move toward identity has been a legitimate and understandable strategy for civic voice and entry. Moreover, by exposing group-based inequality, identity politics provides people with a sense of shared history and a basis for collective politics. Politically, invoking the representative “we” has been a powerful way to authorize one’s public voice. Anyone whose been involved in identity politics can attest to its power.

But despite its achievements, the self-conscious deployment of identity also carries with it a number of problems and consequences that must also be grappled with. One of which has been the tendency of identity politics to veer toward essentialism — to both politicize identities while simultaneously rendering politics invisible or seemingly superfluous.

For a number of reasons, Latino identity politics (particularly Chicano and Puerto Rican identity) present a particularly rich site for exploration. Any discussion of identity politics that fails to focus on a particular group will result in overly broad statements and amorphous conclusions. The language of identity is a language of particulars: particular histories, particular languages, and particular cultural practices. It’s clear that to speak of “identity politics” is to speak too broadly; only through an in-depth exploration of a particular group can problems and issues be adequately explored. However, I also believe that the study of identity and political agreement through the lens of Latino politics will provide theoretical and practical insights that will resonate in a broader context.

Latino political practices offer an intriguing site for research because they operate in ways that both participate in and exceed the boundaries of identity politics. As a “mestizo” people, Latinos (with varying levels of intensity) partake of cultural practices that can be identified as Spanish, Indian, and African. This fluidity of identity is also demonstrated by the ability of Latinos to function at the interstices of multiple identity-based discourses — identifying and mobilizing as both a racial and an ethnic group. Latinos in the United States share a common language and a variety of cultural practices, yet they are also an increasingly diverse body, coming from all over the Americas and settling throughout the nation. The result is that different segments of the population understand themselves variously as victims of colonization, indigenous inhabitants of stolen lands, and proud members of striving immigrant groups.⁶ That these categories are not only multiple but intertwined only points to this group’s unexplored political complexity.

Yet despite their large numbers and potential as a site of intriguing explorations into the nature of identity and democracy, Latinos as a political community have been underresearched, as a number of scholars have noted.⁷ According to political scientist

⁶ For more on Latinos as striving immigrants, see Linda Chavez’s *Out of the Barrio: Toward a New Politics of Hispanic Assimilation* (New York: BasicBooks, 1991). Conservative author Chavez argues that Latinos are simply another ethnic group in a long line of ethnic groups (such as Italians, Jews, Greeks, etc.) who ought to construct an ethnic identity based on previous patterns of assimilation and integration.

For scholarship on Latinos as victims of colonialism, see Mario Barrera’s *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979) and Tomás Almaguer’s “Toward the Study of Chicano Colonialism,” in *Aztlán* 2 no. 1 (Spring 1971): 7-20. Both authors argue that barrios in the United States function as an “internal colony” while emphasizing the unique historical factors that shaped Latino (particularly Chicano) experience. In contrast to Chavez, Barrera and Almaguer stress the *differences* between the Chicano experience and other ethnic groups in American society.

⁷ See Tony Affigne, “Latino Politics in the United States: An Introduction” in *PS: Political Science and Politics*, September 2000, Vol. XXXIII, No. 3.; Manuel Avalos, “A Report to the Executive Council of the Western Political Science Association,” Western Political Science Association (Salt Lake City: Utah, 1989); F. Chris García, ed. *La Causa Política: A Chicano Politics Reader* (Notre Dame: University of

Rodney Hero, “despite their numbers, Latinos in the United States have not received much attention in political science research, and there has been little effort to bring together or systematically discuss the implications of the analyses that do exist.”⁸ Most research on Latinos in the field of political science has addressed issues of representation and institutional participation. Emerging primarily from the field of American politics, this research is generally empirical in approach, focusing on the participation rates of Latinos, voting patterns, and ability to elect Latinos to public office. This research often seeks to explain the low voting rates of Latinos and the lack of Latinos elected to public office. It focuses on the obstacles to Latino political advancement (language barriers, citizenship requirements, racism, poverty) and offers various solutions to the problem of underrepresentation (redistricting, affirmative action, increased social spending, increased community control, etc.).⁹

The scarcity of research concerning Latino politics is particularly glaring in the field of political theory.¹⁰ One of the primary goals of my research is to begin the process of

Notre Dame Press, 1974) and *Latinos and the Political System* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); and Ernest Wilson III, “Why Political Scientists Don’t Study Black Politics but Historians and Sociologists Do,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 18, no. 3 (Summer): 600-606.

⁸ Rodney E. Hero, *Latinos and the U.S. Political System: Two-Tiered Pluralism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992) 1.

⁹ Significant texts that deal with this aspect of Latino politics include Frank Baird’s *Mexican Americans: Political Power, Influence or Resource* (Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1977); Rudolfo O. de la Garza’s, *Latino Voices: Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban Perspectives on American Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992) and *Barrio Ballots: Latino Politics in the 1990 Elections* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Louis DeSipio’s *Counting on the Latino Vote: Latinos as a New Electorate* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996); James Jennings and Monte Rivera’s *Puerto Rican Politics in Urban America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1984); Rodney E. Hero’s *Latinos and the U.S. Political System: Two-Tiered Pluralism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); and Roberto Villarreal’s *Latinos and Political Coalitions: Political Empowerment for the 1990’s* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

¹⁰ Some of the most theoretically sophisticated work on Latino identity in the United States is occurring in the field of English and comparative literature. This work can be characterized as poststructuralist in approach, often drawing from the work of Michel Foucault, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Jacques Derrida. While I find this body of work to be significant and theoretically stimulating, it tends to focus (not surprisingly) on issues of power and language rather than issues of community and collective self-rule.

addressing this gap by turning to canonical political theory to explore the contours of Latino political thought and practice in the United States. Because the study of political theory has for the most part been ignored in the study of Latino politics, a number of questions have gone unexamined. For example, anxiety over political disagreement and concern regarding the necessary preconditions for agreement is a central theme in Western political thought; identity politics (and Latino politics in particular) shares this anxiety, while playing it out in both old and new ways. I turn to Rousseau in order to see how Latino politics draws from this legacy, and when and where it diverges.

I do not situate Latino politics within the context of canonical political theory out of a desire simply to perform a creative intellectual exercise. Instead, this research is based on a deep concern regarding the current status of Latinos in America's civic life. The Census Bureau estimates that there were 35.3 million Latinos in the United States in 2000, 12.5 percent of the population.¹¹ Latinos now roughly equal African-Americans as the country's largest minority group and are expected to become the largest minority population in the coming decade.¹² By 2050, Latinos will likely comprise nearly one-fourth of the total U.S. population.¹³ Yet numbers in and of themselves, of course, do not equal power or resources. This has been especially true in the case of Latinos. In 1999, the poverty rate among Latinos was 22.8 percent — almost twice that of the national

¹¹ "The Hispanic Population" Census 2000 Brief by Betsy Guzmán (issued May 2001). U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports (Washington, D.D: GPO, 2001).

¹² The 2000 Census estimated that there were 36.4 million blacks in the United States, making them 12.9 percent of the U.S. population. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports (Washington, D.D: GPO, 2001).

¹³ Lizette Alvarez, "For Hispanic Lawmakers, Time to Take the Offensive," *The New York Times* (August 25, 1997), A14.

average.¹⁴ Overall, Latinos have less formal education than the national average; of Latinos over 25 years of age, only 56 percent have graduated from high school, and a mere 11 percent have graduated from college.¹⁵ Overall, the data on Latinos shows a large and growing population combined with low levels of educational attainment and high levels of poverty. Politically, Latinos represent the fastest-growing segment of the American electorate, yet they continue to suffer from low levels of voting and poor representation in positions of political power and influence.¹⁶ No Latino has served in the U.S. Senate since New Mexican voters rejected Joseph Montoya's 1976 bid for re-election. Nor is there currently any Latino in a governor's mansion (except the governor of Puerto Rico). Currently, there are 21 Latinos elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, making the House the highest elected position held by a Latino in this country.¹⁷ As a group, Latinos are clearly in need of the kind of social and political resources that political power provides. Yet it is my contention that many of the political and theoretical assumptions for Latino advancement are mistaken and insufficient. This

¹⁴ The national poverty rate for the general population was 11.8 percent in 1999 (compared to 22.8 percent for Latinos). Bureau of the Census, <<http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2000/cb00-158.html>> 2001.

¹⁵ Nationally, 83 percent and 25 percent of the same age group have graduated from high school and college respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b). Hispanic educational attainment is also related to place of birth. In 1999, only 44 percent of foreign-born Hispanic adults 25 years and older were high school graduates, compared to 70 percent of U.S.-born Hispanic adults (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b). The dropout rate for foreign-born Hispanics ages 16 to 24 is more than twice the dropout rate for U.S.-born Hispanics in the same age range. See Chapter 6, "Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, SAMHSA. (<http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2001/cb01-81.html>).

¹⁶ Guy Gugliotta, "Translating Distrust Into Votes, Democrats are trying to Play Up the GOP's Negative Image Among Latinos," *The Washington Post National Weekly Edition* (January 12, 1998), p. 11. Also see *Ethnic Ironies: Latino Politics in the 1992 Election*, ed. Rudolfo O. de la Garza and Louis DeSipio (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

¹⁷ Geoffrey Fox, *Hispanic Nation: Culture, Politics, and the Constructing of Identity* (Secaucus: Birch Lane Press, 1996), 166.

research offers an alternative approach for understanding Latino political practices and attempts to put forward new strategies for political advancement.

In situating my project, I should note that the goal of my research is not to provide an exhaustive account of the political and discursive practices of each Latino subgroup living in the United States. Instead, my analysis centers on two groups, Chicanos/Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans. I choose this focus for a number of reasons. Very little has been written about the political behavior of Central and South Americans in the United States, and generating that sort of research is beyond the scope of my project. By contrast, there is a significant (though small) body of research on Chicanos and Puerto Ricans that could benefit from a more theoretical analysis. Another, more significant reason is demographics — Chicanos and Puerto Ricans comprise the oldest and largest communities of U.S. Latinos (of the 34 million Latinos in the United States, 26 million are Mexican and 4 million are Puerto Rican). In addition to accounting for a majority (over 70 percent) of all U.S. Latinos, the two groups are also the most geographically dispersed throughout the nation.¹⁸

More importantly, the history and civic practices of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans established the assumptions and practices that set the political terms for Latinos as a group. The Chicano and Puerto Rican movements of the late 1960s and '70s focused national attention on Latinos as a group; the movements were crucial to introducing Latinos into the American public sphere as political and historical subjects. These two movements also produced the largest group of Latino civic elites. This collection of

¹⁸ Cubans, Central and South American sub-groups (Dominicans, Ecuadorians, Colombians, etc.) continue to be concentrated in a relatively small number of cities, as well as being much smaller in terms of national population.

activists, academics, and professionals continue to exert the most influence on Latino politics at the national level. Even at the state and local level, Chicano and Puerto Rican civic elites continue to head the vast majority of institutions serving the wider Latino community. Put somewhat differently, the political history, assumptions, and strategies of the two oldest and largest Latino subgroups created the discursive framework for all the groups that followed.

It's my belief that the study of Latino politics has much to contribute to the field of political theory, both by posing new questions to canonical texts and by putting old questions in a new light. If Sheldon Wolin is correct in his claim that political theory is often motivated by crisis and concern, then certainly the political situation of Latinos in the United States is an area of research rich with theoretical possibility.¹⁹

PART III

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Chapter Two offers an overview of the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements of the late 1960s and '70s. I argue that movement discourse demonstrated a number of unexamined assumptions about the nature of community, the political effects of shared culture, and the nature of conflict and political agreement.²⁰ Particular attention is paid to the concept of ethnic *unity* as an animating concept in movement thought and practice. In this chapter, I show how both movements left deep and lasting impressions on Latino

¹⁹ Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), and "Political Theory as Vocation."

²⁰ Interestingly, scholarly research on these movements has shown a tendency to reproduce the very assumptions and impulses it claims to analyze. I examine this tendency toward the conclusion of the chapter.

political thought and practice and that contemporary Latino civic elites continue to embody both the strengths and weaknesses of this era.

The chapter concludes with the assertion that political theory offers an alternative approach to the study of Latino politics — and that this approach is particularly well suited to analyzing the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements. Chapter Three is an attempt at just such an alternative: Turning to the political theory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, I examine the impulses and assumptions that underlie the movement's approach to politics. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Rousseau and movement advocates both celebrate the political possibility of public gatherings, mass participation, and other forms of public spectacle, putting forward a language of politics that challenges the reliance on self-interest, rational choice, and bureaucratic expertise displayed in modern liberalism.

In the second half of the dissertation, I look at two of the most significant developments in contemporary Latino political discourse, both of which initially appear to challenge the Rousseauian impulse that emerged during the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements. These are: the emergence of a “pan-ethnic” Latino political identity and the concept of “the borderlands” and its hybrid Latino inhabitants. Analyzing these emerging discourses, I conclude that pan-ethnicity and hybridity ultimately reinscribe the theoretical impulses they originally appear to challenge.

Initially, bringing together diverse Spanish-origin subgroups (Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Central and South Americans) and constructing a “pan-ethnic” identity from this multiplicity would seem to require an acceptance of internal conflict and unfamiliarity unimaginable in a Rousseauian context. Moreover, pan-ethnic

politics inevitably reveals contending notions of the common good that appear persistent and ongoing — a political situation that movement activists consistently sought to avoid. Overall, the rise of pan-ethnic politics would seem to imply that the influence of the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements with its Rousseauian characteristics are on the wane and a new, less nationalistic and more pragmatic approach is in ascendance. In Chapter Four, I analyze this shift in Latino politics, considering the rationale for theorizing Latinos as a collective and emergent group within American political society and exploring the theoretical assumptions that underlie attempts to construct a “pan-ethnic” vision of political membership. Reviewing a number of significant texts that deal with the question of “pan-ethnic” Latino politics, as well as the results of the Latino National Political Survey (LNPS), I explore the contradictory impulses at the heart of the “pan-ethnic” impulse.

Research on the political values, attitudes, and behaviors of Latinos in the United States consistently demonstrates that there does not currently exist a pan-ethnic *political* community with a unified and recognizable set of “Latino political interests.” In fact, rather than showing a cohesive political community, the results of the Latino National Political Survey stated that Latinos do not view themselves as having common political concerns, with noncitizens being even less likely to report similarities between various pairs of Latino national-origin groups.²¹ Yet despite the results of this data, scholars and practitioners of Latino politics continue to be animated by the belief that a legislative agenda can be constructed that will favor *all* Hispanics — regardless of class, region,

²¹ *Latino Voices: Mexican, Puerto-Rican, and Cuban Perspectives on American Politics* by Rodolfo O. de la Garza, Louis DeSipio, F. Chris Garcia, John Garcia, and Angelo Falcon (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 144.

ideology, and ethnic origin. Why does this approach to Latino politics persist? Why do Latino civic elites continue to believe in the necessity of a united Latino political community to achieve their interests? In this chapter, I insist that the impulse toward pan-ethnic unity is the result of two very disparate forces: the logic of interest-group liberalism and the ongoing Rousseauian ethos of Latino politics. Despite the apparent acceptance of diversity within the Latino body politic, pan-ethnic political practices continue to celebrate a Rousseauian definition of membership, emphasizing identification and equating group unity and harmony with civic health. Chapter Four shows how this transformation from diversity to harmony is theorized as a necessary precondition for pan-ethnic politics; without it, Latino political elites are unable to invoke the representative “we.”

Chapter Five looks at another significant development in contemporary Latino political discourse: the concept of “the borderlands” and the hybrid Latino subjects that inhabit this new discursive terrain. In the chapter, I explore why theorizing “hybridity” has become increasingly popular among scholars of critical race theory, particularly those studying Latina/o identity. Like the emergence of pan-ethnic identity, recent theorizing of the hybrid subject seems to run counter to the claim that Rousseauian impulses continue to animate Latino political thought. In the acceptance of contending and contradictory loyalties, the hybrid subject seems to challenge the Rousseauian demand for properly ordered subjects whose membership is no longer in question.

Recent theorizing of the hybrid or “bordered” subjects (most notably by theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa) clearly breaks new ground in Latino political thought — in

particular, the critique of gender and sexuality. Nevertheless, I maintain that the recent emphasis on hybridity continues to reflect earlier movement narratives of identity. By constructing a genealogy of hybridity, Chapter Five examines how movement nationalists invoked *mestizaje* to produce a politicized subjectivity for Chicanos and Puerto Ricans during the 1960s and '70s. By tracing the discursive origins of hybridity, I show how the vision of *mestizaje* articulated by movement-era nationalists functions as the basis for more recent notions of hybridity put forward by contemporary theorists of Latino identity. Furthermore, this supposedly “fluid” and “shifting” hybrid subject is, in fact, deeply constrained. For without proper ordering, hybrid subjects run the risk of becoming *too* fluid and *too* shifting. If this occurs, subjects lose critical agency and their capacity to invoke the necessary racial and political narratives. Ultimately, rather than challenging our belief in “innocent knowledge” and stable categories of identity, theories of hybridity in Latino political discourse continue to be embedded in a discourse of essentialism, proper ordering, and privileged knowledge.

The dissertation’s final chapter analyzes both the possibilities and limitations of the Rousseauian impulse in Latino politics. During the movement heyday, Chicano and Puerto Rican politics displayed a Rousseauian commitment to democratic participation and the belief that political life must necessarily exceed the realm of the legislative assembly. In his critique of modernity, Rousseau rightly recognized the limits of liberal social contract theory as articulated by theorists like John Locke and Thomas Hobbes. For Rousseau, neither Hobbes’ fear nor Locke’s rule of law creates the adequate preconditions for the “general willing” necessary for successful civil society. But today, contemporary Latino politics is losing its Rousseauian commitment to participatory

democracy while maintaining its Rousseauian aversion to disagreement and contentious deliberation. Contemporary Latino political thought continues to be concerned with civil rights, socioeconomic issues, culture, and identity, but it is no longer based on mass participation, leaving us with a political ethos that is rapidly becoming both non-participatory *and* non-deliberative.

A Nation in Your Heart concludes by arguing that contemporary Latino civic elites should recall the power of public gatherings and revitalize the Rousseauian emphasis on mass participation that characterized movement politics. However, this newfound cultivation of democratic crowds should develop a more inclusive and multi-racial approach to its emotive civic encounters. By cultivating practices that promote identification while simultaneously problematizing the concept of ethnic unity, contemporary Latino politics might be able to maintain the power of its Rousseauian convictions while avoiding the pitfalls that plagued movement politics. Simultaneously, Latino civic elites must also resist the Rousseauian aversion to disagreement and contentious deliberation. Drawing from the insights of theorists Norman Jacobson, Bonnie Honig, K. Anthony Appiah, and Felix Padilla, I propose a new approach to political identity in which political subjectivity is recognized as inescapably fragmented and contestation is understood as foundational to democratic citizenship. In place of unity, I put forward a new, more explicitly political understanding of identity, one based on shared principles and shared beliefs — a political vision that accepts the presence of some and the absence of others. In this vision of politics, energy is directed at building majorities based on shared political visions of social justice rather than the solace (but ultimate frustration) of equating political agreement with identity.

CONCLUSION

In writing about Latino politics, I recognize that my own work may be guilty of some of my own criticisms. In sketching out the contours of Latino politics, choices were made about its focus and some political practices were emphasized over others. No work can fully capture the various tendencies and impulses of a political community, and mine is certainly no exception. But I hope that this research is able to explore various political tendencies without essentializing my subject, and to theorize some of the impulses in identity politics — even as we recognize the fluidity and continual transformations of these politicized identities.

Ultimately, the dream of Latino unity is a dream of community without conflict and, thus, a world without politics. Rather than expend political energy constructing meta-narratives that assume underlying cohesion, those committed to Latino political advancement must create new political narratives that accept contestation as the very nature of democratic citizenship.

CHAPTER 2

PASSIONATE POLITICS:

THE CHICANO AND PUERTO RICAN MOVEMENTS

During the late 1960s and '70s, Mexican-American and Puerto Rican activists began to put forward a politically charged critique of American politics. Revealing a paradoxical mix of cultural nationalism, liberal reformism, radical critique, and romantic idealism, the Chicano and Puerto Ricans movements created a new political vocabulary — one that emphasized fraternity (*hermanidad*), resistance, recognition, cultural pride, and authenticity. The ethos and practices of these movements are still politically potent, and in the following chapters, I explore how Latino civic elites continue to embody both the strengths and weaknesses of this era.

Unlike the civil rights struggles of African-Americans or the protest politics surrounding the Vietnam War, the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements represent a decidedly unknown aspect of 1960s New Left radicalism. Outside of the communities themselves, the names, places, and events of these two movements are virtually unknown. But over the past quarter century, a number of scholars have sought to explain the movements and place their actions and ideology in historical and political context. However, it's my contention that much of this research involves a number of unexamined assumptions — about the nature of community, the political effects of shared culture and experience, and the nature of political agreement and disagreement. And nowhere is the issue of naturalized categories more apparent than in the unexamined assumptions regarding Chicano and Puerto Rican unity. In this chapter, I discuss the role that ethnic

unity has played in both the politics of these two movements and in recent movement scholarship. I also argue that this vision of unity powerfully shaped activists of the '60s and '70s and continues to inform contemporary Latino politics.

Scholars of Chicano and Puerto Rican politics have consistently noted that while both movements were relatively brief, a disproportionate number of political leaders, academics, and artists emerged from their ranks.¹ According to Rudolfo de la Garza, today's Chicano political elites are part of a new "political generation" created by the Chicano movement. For de la Garza, a new "political generation" is shaped by a shared experience of social upheaval that leads to a collective reevaluation of social norms and values.² Contemporary Chicano elites share political attitudes and behaviors due to this formative experience of collective political socialization.³ Echoing de la Garza, Ignacio García argues that the overall ethos of the movement "remains intact among Mexican American politicians, academicians, intellectuals, artists and social workers today."⁴ Similarly, Andrés Torres and José Velázquez characterize Puerto Rican movement activists as continuing to shape contemporary Puerto Rican politics and culture. In the preface of *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices From the Diaspora*, Torres and Velázquez describe the movement's legacy:

This is a generation that has produced leaders in civic, religious, and labor organizations and has even propelled a few elected officials into local and national government. And

¹ See Ignacio García, *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos Among Mexican-Americans* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), Carlos Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso, 1989), and Rudolfo O. de la Garza "The Political Socialization of Chicano Elites: A Generational Approach," *Social Science Quarterly* 65 (June 1984): 290-307.

² Rudolfo O. de la Garza, "Chicano Elites and National Policymaking, 1977-1980: Passive or Active Representatives," *Latinos and the Political System*, ed. F. Chris Garcia (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) 315.

³ De la Garza, "Chicano Elites" 315.

⁴ García 16.

yes, some even have made their mark in the corporate world...they are a significant force in cultural, advocacy, electoral and community-building strategies wherever there are concentrations of Latinos. They direct social service agencies.... They teach in schools and colleges.... As musicians, artists, and writers, they are leading a renaissance in the arts.... They counsel youth and run health programs...operate cultural and educational programs...and help to strengthen labor unions and organize for workers' rights.⁵

Beyond the cultivation of a significant sociopolitical class, both movements produced a institutions that continue to dominate and shape Latino political and cultural discourse. Chicano and Puerto Rican studies programs have continued to play a key role in providing Latinos with a "civic education" that both politicizes and produces particular conceptions of Latino identity and subjectivity. National political organizations such as the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund, National Council of La Raza, Institute for Puerto Rican Policy, and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus all trace their political roots to the movements and continue to dominate Latino political discourse.

With their emphasis on mass participation, social justice, radical democracy, and community, the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements were very much a part of New Left politics in the United States. Indeed, as I mentioned at the start of this chapter, one of the goals of this research is to call attention to the significant but little-known role played by Chicanos and Puerto Ricans in the New Left.⁶ Like other segments of the New Left, the Chicano and Puerto Ricans movements were profoundly influenced by the civil rights movement. Both groups were part of the anti-war movement. Moreover, both were

⁵ Andrés Torres and José Velázquez, "Preface," eds. Andrés Torres and José Velázquez, *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices From the Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998) xiii.

⁶ As Carlos Muñoz has noted, while the literature on student radicalism in the 1960s has grown dramatically, *nonwhite* student radicalism and protest is generally missing. According to Muñoz, "[t]he history of that decade has been largely presented as a history of white middle-class youth radicalism and protest." Muñoz 2.

youth-oriented, with students often making up the majority of its ranks.⁷ Yet despite such similarities and overlapping commitments, the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements were *distinct* from the politics of the New Left. In order to understand the theoretical legacy of these movements, analyzing these differences is equally important. More specifically, it is issues of *class*, *race*, and *territory* that distinguish the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements from their New Left counterparts.

In *The Rise and Fall of the American Left*, author Patrick Diggins describes three interrelated developments that provide the historical setting for the rise of the New Left: “the economic context of affluence and guilt, the political context of disillusionment and powerlessness, and the cultural context of alienation and anxiety.”⁸ Diggins continues:

Generations of Americans, especially those of the thirties and forties, had lived under the shadow of depression and war, in periods of scarcity and deprivation, and even teenagers of the postwar era were reminded by their parents of the hardships of the past. But middle-class parents of the fifties enjoyed unprecedented prosperity and abundance, and their children grew up to take for granted endless material satisfaction and remained innocent to the very notion of scarcity, whether of money, jobs, housing, or other comforts that previous generations had to earn. Accepting as given what others had to strive for, the hidden of the sixties were the first generation to feel free to move beyond the yoke of necessity.⁹

Contrasting the Old Left with the New, Diggins notes, “The historical context of the Old Left was the abundance of poverty; that of the New Left, the poverty of abundance.”¹⁰ In

⁷ According to John Patrick Diggins, this focus on students led members of the New Left to do much its major organizing on college campuses. Unlike the Old Left, with its organizing centered on workers and unions, the New Left did the bulk of its organizing on the college campus. Given this focus on colleges and universities, it’s not surprising that protests and confrontations often demanded direct involvement in the governance of academic institutions (See Diggins, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left* [New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992] 248). This focus on the university was shared by Chicano and Puerto Rican activists, with Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies and Student Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Programs being central to their projects. See *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, reprinted in *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* 191-202.

⁸ Diggins 219.

⁹ Diggins 245-246.

¹⁰ Diggins 232.

contrast to affluence and prosperity of the New Left, the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements were driven by a leadership and membership that were predominantly working-class. For Chicano and Puerto Rican activists, prosperity was not assured; issues of racism and poverty were the reality of friends and families. Given this orientation, the movements were far less engaged with the counterculture (and its emphasis on personal growth and transformation) than their white, middle-class counterparts.

In a related vein, members of the New Left often saw themselves as explicitly breaking free from the values of their parents generation. In his book *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, New Left scholar Todd Gitlin describes this “generational cleavage in the making.” He writes: “In a culture devoted to the celebration of middle-class security, they labeled it smugness and expressed solidarity with people who were systematically excluded from a fair share of prosperity.”¹¹

In contrast to the familial and cultural estrangement expressed by many members of the New Left, Chicano and Puerto Rican activists often embraced the culture and history of previous generations. Movement activists approached culture and tradition not as relics of the past but as crucial to their newfound racial pride. Put somewhat differently, identification with the *barrio* (as opposed to alienation from the suburbs) is the historical and political context of the Chicano and Puerto Rican left.

Perhaps most importantly, the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements were distinct in terms of the politics of *territory*. Unlike any other segment of the New Left, Chicanos and Puerto Ricans were engaged in a politics powerfully shaped by issues of land and membership. Mexicans initially joined the United States through conquest, with the loss

¹¹ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987) 27.

of the Mexican-American War and the 1848 signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This history of indigenous presence and loss had an enormous influence on the Chicano movement and continues to influence contemporary Latino political and cultural discourse. Similarly, the colonial history between the United States and Puerto Rico continues to shape discussions about the commonwealth. The political status of Puerto Rico was a central issue during the Puerto Rican movement and remains a contentious topic both here and on the island. Ultimately, both movements are politically and culturally enmeshed in a discourse of borders and citizenship that is crucial to their respective political projects.

Movement scholars tend to portray Chicano and Puerto Rican politics in the late 1960s and '70s as something to both emulate and build upon, making these movements a kind of template for Latino politics in the twenty-first century. Because contemporary Latino politics continues to negotiate a political landscape shaped in large part by the political goals and assumptions of the movement era, Part I of this chapter provides a brief history of the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements. My goal is to trace some of the main issues, organizations, events, and leaders that characterize the two movements. Part II examines the principles and political impulses that both movements share. Part III explores the relationship between nationalism, feminism, and unity in the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements and the way in which unity represents the dominant impulse in movement politics. Part IV concludes with a brief examination of how movement research seems to reflect the very principles and political impulses it claims to examine. I conclude with a discussion of some alternative approaches to theorizing these

movements, showing how such an approach creates new opportunities for putting Chicano and Puerto Rican politics into a broader conversation with democratic theory.

PART I: MOVEMENTS

THE CHICANO MOVEMENT

The Chicano movement has been described as “the most traumatic and profound social movement to ever occur among Mexicans on the U.S. side of the Rio Grande,” leading to a fundamental shift in the way Mexican-Americans saw themselves, practiced their politics, and related to American society.¹² Characterized by intense political activity and (at times) a militant cultural nationalism, the movement’s heyday was relatively brief, beginning around 1965 and declining after 1975. But during that tumultuous decade, it involved thousands of participants and encompassed a number of distinct (though related) issues.

Prior to the movement, particularly in the years between 1920 and 1960, Mexican-American politics was decidedly liberal in character. During this period, assimilation, integration, and participation in electoral politics were the norms governing Mexican-American politics in the United States. The focus was on individual advancement and the pursuit of self-interest, what historian Mario Barrera calls the “egalitarian ideal” in Mexican-American politics. Organizations like the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), American G.I. Forum, and the Pan American Progressive Association fought discrimination by encouraging voter turnout and working through the courts. Internally, these organizations also placed a strong emphasis on loyalty, assimilation,

¹² García 3.

leadership development, and youth programs. The LULAC program, for example, emphasized “our unquestionable loyalty to the ideals, principles and citizenship of the United States of America.”¹³ These themes were often echoed in the *LULAC News*, the group’s official newspaper. In his 1939 article “Our Americanism,” LULAC member Ezequiel Salinas wrote that LULAC members would “accept no theory...adhere to no doctrine...follow no ideology which does not carry the star spangled symbol as its standard.”¹⁴

Mexican-American civic elites sought political and socioeconomic advancement not by building mass movements or promoting community cohesion but through strengthening their ties to the Democratic Party and other traditional bastions of political power. Mexican-American politics during this era was dominated by businessmen and other members of the Mexican-American middle class.¹⁵ LULAC sought explicitly to distinguish its middle-class membership from the influx of recent Mexican newcomers.¹⁶ A liberal organization that fought on behalf of the poorer segments of the population (including *braceros* and other migrant workers), LULAC nevertheless restricted its membership to American citizens. This emphasis on citizenship was also central to the

¹³ Juan Gómez-Quíñones, *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990) 62.

¹⁴ Benjamin Márquez, *LULAC: The Evolution of a Mexican American Political Organization* (Austin: University of Texas, 1993) 20.

¹⁵ This is not to say that there wasn’t a leftist presence in the Mexican-American community during this era. Activists like Josefina Fierro de Bright and Luisa Moreno founded the Spanish-Speaking Congress in 1938. The Spanish-Speaking Congress represented the attempt of some members of this generation to form a working-class movement in coalition with other progressive liberals. But the largest and most visible organizations during this era were liberal-centrist (LULAC, American G.I. Forum, etc.). For more information about this era, see Mario García’s *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, & Identity: 1930-1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹⁶ Mario Barrera, “The Historical Evolution of Chicano Ethnic Goals: A Bibliographic Essay.” *Sage Race Relation Abstracts* 10, 1988: 10.

American G.I. Forum, an organization dedicated to assisting Mexican-American veterans of war.¹⁷ Emphasizing the relationship between service and membership, the G.I. Forum invoked patriotic symbols and rhetoric to secure benefits and defend Mexican-American civil rights.

Despite the efforts of middle-class leaders and activists, by the late 1960s, ongoing discrimination and widespread inequality left Mexican-Americans disillusioned with the “egalitarian ideal” and its emphasis on Americanism, assimilation, and individualism. For example, while LULAC won significant victories in the courts in the late 1940s over *de jure* school segregation, during the 1960s *de facto* segregation continued to be the reality for the majority of Mexican American youth.¹⁸ The high school dropout rate was still over 50 percent for Mexican-Americans, with a majority of students attending overcrowded, under funded schools. Mexican-American history and literature was virtually absent from school curriculums, and most schools had few if any Mexican-American teachers or administrators.¹⁹

Frustration and discontent was also growing among the leadership of LULAC, American G.I. Forum, and other middle-class organizations during this period. Lack of upward mobility in the Democratic Party and other institutions, lack of Democratic support for Mexican-American candidates and the party’s habit of taking the Mexican-American vote for granted all contributed to a sense of disillusionment among civic

¹⁷ The American G.I. Forum was organized after a funeral home in Texas refused burial services for a Mexican-American veteran, Felix Longoria. Anger over the incident led to the founding of the organization by Dr. Hector García, attorney Gus García, and a group of Mexican-American veterans in 1949. See Gómez-Quifiones 60.

¹⁸ Muñoz 47-48.

¹⁹ Muñoz 64-65.

elites.²⁰ Moreover, despite the prevalence of poverty and racial discrimination among Mexicans, Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty did not prioritize Mexican-Americans, choosing to focus on poverty among African-Americans and rural whites. By the late 1960s, Mexican-Americans continued to face serious barriers to socioeconomic advancement despite efforts to prove themselves loyal and legitimate members of the American polity. The rise of the Chicano movement, then, was a reaction to ongoing inequality as well as the earlier strategies of Mexican-American civic elites.

Frustrated and dissatisfied with the assimilationist politics of their elders, and inspired by the *campesino* workers of the United Farm Workers of America (UFW), the black civil rights movement, antiwar protests, and national liberation struggles in the Third World, Chicano students emerged as some of the most politicized and active segments of the community. Unlike the earlier generation of middle-class leaders, movement activists emphasized protest and grass roots participation. For Chicano students, fighting for citizenship rights meant organizing rallies, sit-ins, marches, "blow-outs," and demonstrations, both on the campus and in the streets. In 1968, for example, more than a thousand students walked out of Abraham Lincoln High School in East Los Angeles to protest staggeringly high dropout rates, inadequate facilities, and a tracking system that steered them toward unskilled, low-paying jobs. These walkouts (or "blowouts," as they were dubbed by the organizers) lasted eight days and ultimately involved more than 3,500 Chicano high school students. The protests disrupted the nation's largest school district and captured front-page headlines and national attention.²¹ A year later, nearly

²⁰ Muñoz 55.

²¹ In terms of numbers, the student strike represented "the first major mass protest ever undertaken by Mexican-Americans" (Muñoz xi). Three months after the blowouts, thirteen of the strike organizers were

1,500 young people attended the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver. Organized by Corky Gonzales and sponsored by Crusade for Justice, his Denver-based Chicano civil-rights organization, the conference's goal was to unite the student movement and connect college students to *barrio* youth. Across the United States, Chicano students protested the Vietnam War, fought for Chicano studies programs, and demanded "better educational and social opportunities for their communities and for their generation."²²

It was also at the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference that the concept of *Aztlán* became a rallying cry of movement politics. Both a symbolic and geographical site, *Aztlán* entered the cultural discourse of the movement when *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (The Spiritual Plan of *Aztlán*) was introduced and read aloud at the Denver conference.²³ *Aztlán* is composed of the territory Mexico ceded in 1848 in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: the Southwestern part of the United States. In the *Plan*, the Chicano is called on to recognize his Aztec origins and claim as the Mexican territories lost to the United States in 1848. Representing "the spiritual union of the Chicanos," *Aztlán* "signaled a unifying point of cohesion through which [Chicanos] could define the foundations for an

indicted by the LA County grand jury for conspiracy to "willfully disturb the peace and quiet" of the city of LA and disrupt the education process. The defendants became known as the Los Angeles 13, and their trial marked the early use of conspiracy charges leveled against activists. Later that same year, the Chicago 7 would become another group of activists charged with conspiracy, for their protest activities at the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

²² Suzanne Oboler, *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) 64.

²³ *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*. In *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland*, eds., Rudolfo Anaya and Francisco Lomeli (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989) 1-5.

identity.”²⁴ It’s for this reason that Aztlán has been described as “the single most distinguishing metaphor for Chicano activism.”²⁵

More than a brief burst of youthful radicalism, the Chicano movement represented a radical shift in group consciousness that was shaped by labor activism, property rights, electoral activism, and cultural production through the arts. In California, César Chavez, along with Dolores Huerta, founded the National Farm Workers Association, later to become the United Farm Workers of America. Throughout the Southwest, Chavez and the UFW organized the largely (though not exclusively) Mexican farm workers through strikes, nationally publicized pilgrimages, hunger strikes, and consumer boycotts, in an effort to win labor contracts from growers, improve labor conditions, and better the lives of migrant farm workers. In New Mexico, Reies López Tijerina founded the Alianza Federal de Mercedes (Federated Alliance of Land Grants), an organization dedicated to restoring ownership of common-use land (*ejidos*) taken from Mexican individuals and small farming communities left landless as a result of the Mexican-American War.²⁶ In Texas, Jose Angel Gutierrez founded La Raza Unida, an independent political party that won control of the Crystal City city council. The 1970 electoral victory of La Raza Unida marked the first time the Chicanos of Crystal City had political control of their community’s schools since the 1846-48 war.²⁷ Culturally, the movement was also crucial to bringing about an artistic renaissance: Chicano cultural production in art, music, and

²⁴ Luis Leal, “In Search of Aztlán,” *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* 8.

²⁵ Jorge Klor de Alva, “Aztlán, Borinquen and Hispanic Nationalism,” *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* 149.

²⁶ Oboler 61-62.

²⁷ Oboler 67-68.

literature exploded during the late 1960s and early '70s with many prominent muralists, musicians, poets, playwrights, and writers emerging during this period.²⁸

One of the Chicano movement's most striking elements is its heterogeneity. Rural farm workers, urban youth, disenfranchised land-grant owners, university students, artists, community activists — at times, the movement seemed to embody the historical, regional, and social diversity of the Chicano body politic. Yet within this broad spectrum of issues and actions, the movement was characterized by tremendous overlap and interconnected involvement. Nowhere was this overlap more apparent than within the student movement, where issues of self-identity, personal experience, and historical memory were understood as crucial components of a progressive politics.²⁹ Through their support of and involvement with the United Farm Workers, Chicano students whose parents and grandparents had worked in the fields now had a political context that transformed family history into class consciousness and a newfound political identity. Similarly, awareness of and participation in organizations like La Raza Unida and the Alianza led to a newfound consciousness and identity — students whose families had been residents of the Southwest since the seventeenth century developed a political critique of their historical past that now involved an understanding of themselves as indigenous (as opposed to immigrants) to the southwestern United States.

²⁸ Some examples of this cultural renaissance include musical bands such as Santana, Malo, War, and La Onda Chicana; authors such as Rudolfo Anaya, Tomás Rivera, and Oscar "Zeta" Acosta; playwrights such as Luis Valdez (founder of Teatro Campesino); poets such as Alurista, José Montoya, and Jimmy Santiago Baca; and art collectives such as the Royal Chicano Air Force.

²⁹ Given the significance of the student movement to the Chicano movement's ideological development and overall success, my research focuses on student-led organizations and the significant political and theoretical documents produced by, for, and about Chicano students, including the previously discussed *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (1969), *El Plan de Santa Barbara* (1969), and the political poem/manifesto "Yo Soy Joaquín/I Am Joaquín" (1967).

In contrast to the earlier focus on assimilation and integration, Chicano politics of the late 1960s and '70s can be best understood through the emerging ideology of cultural nationalism or *Chicanismo*. According to Ignacio García, *Chicanismo* can be understood as a “militant version of self-help and racial solidarity.”³⁰ Focusing on racial pride and the celebration of cultural difference, Chicano cultural nationalists sought to transcend social and class divisions by emphasizing a shared history of racial discrimination and extolling the virtues of a shared indigenous past.³¹ Instead of promoting pluralism and the politics of liberal individualism, *Chicanismo* stressed self-determination and communal empowerment. Defiant and combative, movement leaders disparaged the emphasis on loyalty and patriotism put forward by an earlier generation of Mexican-American activists. Authenticity and fear of “cultural disintegration” were the concerns of this new generation of activists.

THE PUERTO RICAN MOVEMENT

While Chicano activists were mobilizing in California and throughout the Southwest, three thousand miles away, Puerto Rican radicals were building a social movement that emphasized cultural pride, community control, direct action, and decolonization. And as with the Chicano movement, the revolutionary nationalism of activists in the 1960s and '70s transformed Puerto Rican politics.

As with their Chicano counterparts in the Southwest, Puerto Rican politics in the 1950s was dominated by the community's more moderate and middle-class members. According to scholar Roberto Rodríguez-Morazzani, assimilation was the dominant

³⁰ García 3.

strategy of politically active Puerto Ricans during the 1950s and early '60s.³² Prior to World War II, however, Puerto Ricans had a long and rich history of political radicalism in the United States. Based primarily in New York City, Puerto Rican politics was dominated by leftist nationalists organizing for independence and against Spanish colonialism.³³ Following the Spanish-American war (when the island of Puerto Rico was ceded to the United States) and the passage of the Jones Act in 1917 (which imposed U.S. citizenship on the people of Puerto Rico), Puerto Ricans began to migrate to the United States in ever-greater numbers.

This generation of Puerto Ricans was powerfully influenced by the growing presence of cigar makers (*tabaqueros*) and their participation in socialist and labor politics.³⁴ Not only were cigar makers skilled-craftsmen, they participated in the tradition of factory readings, in which a reader was hired to read to the workers while they did their work.³⁵

³¹ García 3.

³² Roberto Rodríguez-Morazzani, "Political Cultures of the Puerto Rican Left in the United States," *The Puerto Rican Movement*, 33.

³³ Angelo Falcon, "A History of Puerto Rican Politics in New York City: 1860s to 1945," eds., James Jennings and Monte Rivera, *Puerto Rican Politics in Urban America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1984) 19.

³⁴ By 1894, there were 3,000 cigar factories in New York City. In 1916, *tabaqueros* made up 60 percent of the Puerto Rican population in the city. By 1918, there were more than 4,500 Puerto Ricans in cigarmaker unions in New York. See Falcon 23.

³⁵ The intellectual and political impact of the lector tradition is powerfully portrayed by Bernardo Vega in *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega*. Describing his experience in 1916 working at the cigar factory "El Morito" on 86th Street off Third Avenue in Manhattan, he writes:

"El Morito" seemed like a university. At the time the official "reader" was Fernando García. He would read to us for one hour in the morning and one in the afternoon. He dedicated the morning session to current news and events of the day.... The afternoon sessions were devoted to more substantial readings of a political and literary nature. A Committee on Reading suggested the books to be read, and their recommendations were voted on by all the workers in the shop. The readings alternated between works of philosophical, political, or scientific interest, and novels, chosen from the writings of Zola, Dumas, Victor Hugo, Flaubert, Jules Verne, Pierre Loti, Vargas Vila, Pérez Galdós, Palacio Valdés, Dostoyevski, Gogol, Gorky or Tolstoy. All these authors were well known to the cigarworkers at the time.

The tradition of the *lectors* and their involvement in the labor movement made the *tabaqueros* “the most educated and politically advanced sector of the Puerto Rican working class.”³⁶ Cigar workers were active in various independence, socialist, and labor organizations, including the American Federation of Labor and the Socialist Labor Party.³⁷

Following World War I, working-class radicalism among Puerto Ricans began to decline. War demobilization led to a large number of layoffs, and many cigar makers were forced into household production. Even more significantly, mechanization of the cigar industry and the move of cigar factories away from New York to New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and other locations led to the de-skilling and dispersal of cigar workers. Following the Depression and World War II, the remainder of the Puerto Rican left fell victim to McCarthyism and the general shift to a more conservative national political climate. The terrorist attacks on President Harry Truman and on congressmen in the U.S. House of Representatives by Puerto Rican nationalists in 1950 and 1954 also made supporting Puerto Rican independence and other radical causes less acceptable

It used to be that a factory reader would choose the texts himself, and they were mostly light reading, like the novels of Pérez Escrich, Luis Val, and the like. But as they developed politically, the workers had more and more to say in the selection. Their preference for works of social theory won out. From then on the readings were most often from books by Gustave LeBon, Ludwig Buchner, Darwin, Marx, Engels, Bakunin....

The practice [of factory readings] began in the factories of Viñas & Co., in Bejucal, Cuba, around 1864.... Emigrants to Key West and Tampa introduced the practice into the United States around 1869.... In Puerto Rico the practice spread with the development of cigar production, and it was Cubans and Puerto Ricans who brought it to New York. It is safe to say that there were no factories with Hispanic cigarworkers without a reader. Things were different in the English-speaking shops where, as far as I know, no such readings took place. (21-22)

³⁶ Juan Flores, “Translator’s preface,” in *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega* x.

³⁷ Falcon 23.

politically.³⁸ Following the attacks, Puerto Rican nationalists and socialists were placed under increased surveillance, and FBI agents visited the homes of suspected terrorists. During the period, many Puerto Rican civic elites sought to distance themselves from these violent events and from the independence movement and left-wing politics more generally.³⁹

Massive immigration to the mainland also changed the Puerto Rican political climate in the United States. The enormous influx of postwar immigration displaced the earlier community of leftists, transforming this former majority into a minority of the Puerto Rican community in New York. With the dissolution of this earlier political culture and community, Puerto Rican politics became more moderate, less tied to labor unions, and less focused on the grass roots. According to Roberto Rodriguez-Morazzani, “the world with which the newly arrived Puerto Rican worker came into contact resembled less and less the world of working-class political culture that the *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega* described so vividly.”⁴⁰ By the early 1960s, the majority of Puerto Ricans were unfamiliar with this radical past. Not until the emergence of the Puerto Rican movement would this early history be recuperated, as activists sought to link their struggle with the oppositional politics of an earlier era.

³⁸ In 1950, Puerto Rican nationalists attacked the Blair House in Washington, D.C., in an effort to assassinate President Truman (who was living at Blair House while the White House was being remodeled). Truman was unhurt, but the incident drew global attention to Puerto Rican nationalism. Following the assassination attempt, in 1954, three Puerto Rican nationalists fired eight shots from the gallery of the House of Representatives. Five congressmen were injured, and the nationalists (led by Lolita Lebron) were captured and sent to prison.

³⁹ See Rodríguez-Morazzani 32 and Sherrie Bayer, “Puerto Rican Politics in New York City: The Post-World War II Period,” eds., James Jennings and Monte Rivera, *Puerto Rican Politics in Urban America* 45.

⁴⁰ Rodríguez-Morazzani 33.

The Puerto Rican movement of the 1960s and '70s can be defined by its consistent calls for a radical transformation of U.S. society while simultaneously promoting the independence of Puerto Rico.⁴¹ Known as *El Nuevo Despertar*, this “New Awakening” of Puerto Rican radicalism was inspired and shaped by the growing militancy abroad and at home. Black power, youth unrest (particularly against the Vietnam War), the War on Poverty, national liberation struggles in the Third World, Chicano and Native American militancy, gay and lesbian rights, and second-wave feminism are all part of the context that shaped the movement. Some of the most significant organizations that emerged during this period include the Young Lords Party, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, El Comité-MINP (Puerto Rican National Left Movement), the Puerto Rican Student Union, the Movement for National Liberation, the Armed Forces for National Liberation, the Nationalist Party, and the Puerto Rican Independence Party.⁴² Of the various organizations that comprised the Puerto Rican movement, the Young Lords Party (YLP) left the most lasting legacy. In “Resources of Hope: Imagining the Young Lords and the Politics of Memory,” sociologist Agustín Laó describes the Lords as “the most visible actors of the U.S. Puerto Rican left of the sixties.”⁴³ Given their significance, my discussion of the Puerto Rican movement will focus on the practices and writings of the Young Lords Party and its leaders.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Andrés Torres, “Political Radicalism in the Diaspora,” *The Puerto Rican Movement* 5.

⁴² Torres, “Political Radicalism” 5.

⁴³ Agustín Laó, “Resources of Hope: Imagining the Young Lords and the Politics of Memory,” *Centro* 8, no. 1 (1995) 35.

⁴⁴ My analysis of the significance of the Young Lords Party to the Puerto Rican movement is based in part on Laó’s claim that the activism and mass resistance that characterized the YLP “left a mark” on the collective memory of U.S.-raised Puerto Ricans. Laó cites a number of recent examples in which Puerto Rican activists lay claim to the historical mantle of the Young Lords — “I remembered the young leaders of the CUNY student strikes of the early nineties claiming to be acting in the spirit of the Young Lords; the

Like the Chicano movement, the Puerto Rican left was a small but heterogeneous portion of the community. Describing the membership of the Young Lords, for example, former activist Iris Morales describes the organization as being composed of “former prison inmates, recovering heroin addicts and alcoholics, college students and high school drop-outs, young factory and hospital workers, parents and Vietnam veterans.”⁴⁵ But unlike Chicanos, who had large and concentrated population centers (both urban and rural) throughout the southwestern United States, the Puerto Rican community was much smaller in number, primarily urban and concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest (particularly New York City and Chicago).

Ideologically, the Young Lords described themselves as a socialist organization. As a “revolutionary nationalist party,” their main goal was the “self-determination” and “liberation” of Puerto Ricans “on the island and inside the United States.”⁴⁶ In practice, the Young Lords based much of their organizing on “serve the people programs,” including free breakfast and clothing programs, door-to-door testing for lead poisoning and tuberculosis, and “liberation” schools that taught Spanish and Puerto Rican history to barrio children. The Young Lords organized conferences and marches, fought with city officials to improve garbage pickup, and occupied city hospitals and churches to expose the substandard conditions experienced by many mainland Puerto Ricans.⁴⁷ In doing this, the YLP built a significant mass base of support in the Puerto Rican community.

Latino anti-Gulf War group in Brooklyn called Young Latinos for Peace, honoring the acronym YLP (Young Lords Party); and recent newspaper articles on two East Harlem gangs (Netas & Latin Kings) who, admittedly inspired by the Lords, moved their ranks to work in a local electoral campaign.” (Laó 35)

⁴⁵ Iris Morales, “PALANTE, SIEMPRE PALANTE! The Young Lords,” *The Puerto Rican Movement* 215.

⁴⁶ Laó 41.

⁴⁷ Morales 215.

During its heyday, the Young Lords had a large and active base in New York with branches in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut, and on the island of Puerto Rico,⁴⁸ as well as ties to Puerto Rican groups in Massachusetts, Ohio, and Michigan. In New York City, the organization published a bilingual newspaper (*Pa'lante*) and produced its own radio show on WBAI.⁴⁹ Its effectiveness in using the mass media helped the Young Lords to organize some of the largest and most successful demonstrations of the Puerto Rican left (including the historic march of ten thousand from *El Barrio* in Harlem to the United Nations in 1970 to protest police brutality and the colonial status of Puerto Rico).⁵⁰

While Chicanos in the Southwest sought to emulate the paramilitary style of the Black Panthers by forming groups like the Brown Berets, it was Puerto Rican organizations like the Young Lords that most self-consciously modeled themselves on the Black Power movement. Following their “rule of the most oppressed,” the YLP saw African-Americans as the center of revolutionary politics in the United States. Writes YLP Minister of Information Pablo “Yoruba” Guzmán:

We know that the number-one group that's leading that struggle are Black people, 'cause Black people — if we remember the rule that says the most oppressed will take the vanguard role in the struggle — Black people, man, have gone through the most shit.... So we must build the Puerto Rican-Black alliance.... Actually, the first group in America we had a formal coalition with was the Black Panther Party.⁵¹

This cultural and political solidarity between African-Americans and Puerto Ricans is not surprising; indeed, a number of scholars have noted the “long and profound”

⁴⁸ Morales 220-222.

⁴⁹ Pablo Guzmán, “La Vida Pura: A Lord of the Barrio,” *The Puerto Rican Movement* 158.

⁵⁰ Basilio Serrano, “‘Rifle, Cañon, y Escopeta!’: A Chronicle of the Puerto Rican Student Union,” *The Puerto Rican Movement* 133.

relationship the two groups have shared. According to Juan Flores, “New York Puerto Ricans have been at close living and working quarters with Blacks, perhaps closer than any other national group in the history of this country.”⁵² Moreover, the Afro-Caribbean origins of Puerto Ricans makes them a people who have had to continually negotiate the black-white racial divide, both in the United States and in Puerto Rico. In the organization’s analysis of race, the YLP explored the differences between *Afro-Boricuas* (Puerto Rican blacks) and *Jibaros* (light-skinned Creoles). This distinction between light- and dark-skinned Puerto Ricans was captured in Guzmán’s claim that “before they called me spic, they called me nigger.”⁵³ The resignation of Young Lords leader Denise Oliver and her subsequent membership in the Black Panther Party is testimony to the close and interconnected political and racial relationship between Puerto Rican and African-American leftists during this period.⁵⁴

PART II

CHICANISMO Y EL NUEVO DESPERTAR:

THE SHARED VISION OF THE CHICANO AND PUERTO RICAN MOVEMENTS

While both movements placed a strong emphasis on nationalism, Chicano and Puerto Rican activists simultaneously displayed enormous ideological diversity, with liberals, socialists, feminists, and communists making a home for themselves in both movements. According to Ignacio García, this tendency to draw freely from an array of

⁵¹ Young Lords Party and Michael Abramson, *Pálante: Young Lords Party* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971) 80.

⁵² Juan Flores, *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* (Arte Público Press, 1993) 183.

⁵³ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 73.

⁵⁴ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 12, Laó 43.

theories and ideologies was a consistent feature of movement politics. For García, *chicanismo* was the culmination and coalescing of various philosophical and historical currents that existed in the Mexican-American political community. The ethos of *chicanismo* involved a radical shift in group consciousness, but as a political philosophy, it was far from coherent, developing through an uneven and evolutionary process.⁵⁵ The same can be said for the Puerto Rican movement, in which the ideology of its participants evolved over time and many resisted identifying with any particular political philosophy.

But despite the ideological heterogeneity that characterized both movements, Puerto Rican and Chicano politics shared a number of political impulses. In the following section, I offer an analysis of the three principles I see as defining both movements: a critique of racism and inequality; an emphasis on community control (i.e., communal advancement and the critique of individualism); and a focus on mass participation and direct action.

Undergirding all three of these principles was the commitment to ethnic unity. In fact, it's my contention that group unity was the *fundamental* principle animating the other three. In both Chicano and Puerto Rican movement thought, group unity was conceived as the precondition for political agency and advancement.

The Critique of Racism and Social Inequality

The movement's critique of racism and social inequality was the product of years of frustration and disappointment, as generations of Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans fought in vain for social and economic equality. As noted earlier, prior to the Chicano

⁵⁵ García 4.

movement, Mexican-American political organizations practiced politics in the liberal paradigm. From the 1920s through the early '60s, Mexican-American political elites fought discrimination by arguing that once Mexican-Americans had achieved socioeconomic and political equality, they too would be free to pursue their interests based on their individual abilities. Puerto Rican civic elites pursued a similar strategy. The early radicalism of Puerto Rican political life had been replaced with civic elites who were more middle-class and politically moderate. By the late 1960s, however, both Chicanos and Puerto Ricans were experiencing rising expectations generated from the gains of the civil rights movement, combined with frustration regarding continued socioeconomic inequality and the slow pace of change.

For Chicanos, the rise of César Chavez and the United Farm Workers was a major catalyst in linking Chicano identity to the fight against racism and economic inequality. Prior to the movement, Mexican-Americans had often viewed their historical experience as agricultural laborers as a source of shame and embarrassment. And at a time when elites were trying to portray Mexican-Americans as Americanized and middle-class (or at least aspiring middle-class), agricultural workers existed at the other end of the economic and civic continuum. Farm workers were the least educated and poorest segments of the community. And the fact that a number of farm workers were not even U.S. citizens made their civic status only more tenuous. But by the 1960s, the very qualities that had made farm workers politically problematic for an earlier generation of Mexican-American civic elites was what made them one of the most prominent and enduring symbols of the Chicano movement. Once a source of shame, farm workers became the embodiment of both cultural pride and activist outrage. With the UFW's ascendancy,

Chicano activists cultivated a political and ideological vocabulary that transformed a history of economic exploitation into a site of racial pride and politicized class consciousness.

Members of the UFW inspired movement activists with their commitment to social justice and economic equality. And while he personally shunned nationalism, Chavez was nevertheless able to situate the farm workers' struggle in a democratic narrative that was attentive to the racial and cultural implications of unionizing a predominantly Mexican labor force. The UFW's analysis is apparent in this passage of *El Plan de Delano*, a manifesto published during a 1966 California grape strike. Discussing the pilgrimage to Sacramento, it states:

We are conscious of the historical significance of our Pilgrimage. It is clearly evident that our path travels through a valley well known to all Mexican farm workers. We all know these towns of Delano, Fresno, Madera, Modesto, Stockton, and Sacramento, because along this very same road, in this very same valley the Mexican race has sacrificed itself for the last hundred years. Our sweat and our blood have fallen on this land to make other men rich....

We are suffering. We have suffered unnumbered ills and crimes in the name of the Law of the land. Our men, women, and children have suffered not only the basic brutality of stoop labor, and the most obvious injustices of the system; they have also suffered the desperation of knowing that that system caters to the greed of callous men and not to our needs.

Now we will suffer for the purpose of ending the poverty, the misery, and the injustice, with the hope that our children will not be exploited as we have been. They have imposed hungers on us, and now we hunger for justice. We draw strength from the very despair in which we have been forced to live. WE SHALL ENDURE!⁵⁶

By making the farm-worker struggle not merely an effort at unionization but a fight to acknowledge and redeem generations of Mexicans who struggled and suffered in the fields, Chicanos from a wide array of class and regional backgrounds came to identify with the farm workers and claim the UFW struggle as their own.

In addition to the farm workers' struggle, the growing critique of racial identity and social inequality can also be seen through the political campaigns that Puerto Rican and Chicano activists chose to wage. The first major issue addressed by the Young Lords Party, for example, was the issue of public sanitation. To protest inadequate trash pickup and the grossly insufficient number of trash cans in East Harlem, YLP members began to clean up the streets of *El Barrio* on weekends and piled the garbage in the middle of the street so that it blocked traffic and had to be picked up by the New York Sanitation Department.⁵⁷ Known as the Garbage Offensive, Puerto Rican activists argued that sanitation was an issue not only of public health and neighborhood activism but of social inequality and the relationship between survival and the unequal distribution of resources. As one YLP activist put it:

Bullets and bombs aren't the only ways to kill people. Bad hospitals kill our people. Rotten, forgotten buildings kill our people. Garbage and disease kill our people.⁵⁸

The critique of racial and economic inequality was also present in the cultural production of Latino artists during this period, with many artists displaying a newly politicized style of expression. Racial identity, cultural pride, and social inequality were the topics most consistently addressed in the music, murals, literature, and theater of the movement period. The oft-cited poem "Puerto Rican Obituary" is representative of this developing aesthetic. It begins:

They worked
The were always on time
They were never late
They never spoke back

⁵⁶ "El Plan de Delano," reprinted in *Chicano Manifesto* by Armando Rendon (New York: Macmillan Co. 1971) 327-328.

⁵⁷ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 8

⁵⁸ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 89.

When they were insulted
 They worked
 They never went on strike
 Without permission
 They never took days off
 That were on the calendar
 They worked
 Ten days a week
 And were paid for five
 They worked
 They worked
 They worked
 And they died
 They died broke
 They died owing
 They died never knowing
 What the front entrance
 Of the first national bank
 looks like...

Here lies Juan
 Here lies Miguel
 Here lies Milagros
 Here lies Olga
 Here lies Manuel
 Who died yesterday today
 And will die again tomorrow
 Always broke
 Always owing
 Never knowing
 They are beautiful
 people
 Never knowing
 The geography of their complexion.

Puerto Rico is a beautiful place
 Puertorriqueños are a beautiful race⁵⁹

Poetry like “Puerto Rican Obituary” highlights another significant aspect of movement thought: the shift from cultural shame to ethnic pride. Unlike earlier critiques of prejudice and discrimination, the rhetoric and writings of the movement often focused on the emotional and psychic damage of racism. The need to overcome internalized

⁵⁹ Pedro Pietri, “Puerto Rican Obituary,” *The Puerto Ricans: Their History, Culture, and Society*, ed. Adalberto López (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1980) 433, 438.

shame and self-hate is a consistent theme in movement rhetoric and writings. In the poem “Yo Soy Joaquín,” Corky Gonzales describes this phenomenon when he writes:

I stand here looking back,
and now I see
the present...
in a country that has wiped out
all of my history,
stifled all my pride,
in a country that has placed a
different weight of indignity upon
my
age-
old
burdened back.
Inferiority
is the new load⁶⁰

In addition to poetry, many of the autobiographical pieces written by activists during this period address the ways in which racism and economic inequality combined to shape their feelings about themselves and their respective communities. Describing her childhood, YLP member Iris Morales writes:

When I went to school I was placed in a class where I was the only Puerto Rican. That helped me a lot in one sense and it fucked me up in another. The way that it helped me was that I began to see contradictions. Like, we lived on the West Side, a liberal white community, and all the white kids would go home one way, and I would go home another.... They talked about going away to camp, and I would talk about going to *El Barrio* for the summer. I got to see these contradictions very young, but as a result I became timid and felt inferior. I became very ashamed of my family, because they weren't what it was to be American.

You know, we lived in a typical kind of ghetto apartment — no hot water. Sometimes we would go for days without taking a bath, and I would see myself next to the other kids and feel that I was dirty, because I was not white.... I started blaming my parents for not giving me anything better. I started hating them — feeling it was their fault and that they were stupid and that if they'd really worked hard they could have gotten something better, rather than realizing that they were just being victimized and that there was no place for them to go, there was nothing for them to do.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Rodolfo Gonzales, *Yo Soy Joaquín/I Am Joaquín: An Epic Poem* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972) 51.

⁶¹ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 25-26.

Like many movement activists, it was through developing a political critique that Morales was able to find value in her ethnicity, her family, and her community. Through her participation in the movement, what was once denigrated was now of value. Moreover, the movement's analysis of racism and inequality meant that Chicanos and Puerto Ricans no longer had to prove their worthiness to the dominant culture. Instead, Anglo society had to prove itself to Chicanos and Puerto Ricans. While asking for political support from non-Chicanos, Corky Gonzales stated that "there is no desire or hope for Mexican absorption into [Anglo] American society as it now exists."⁶² In *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, this new perspective is clearly apparent. The *Plan* states:

For decades Mexican people in the United States struggled to realize the "American Dream." And some — a few — have. But the cost, the ultimate cost of assimilation, required turning away from *el barrio* and *la colonia*. In the meantime, due to the racist structure of this society, to our essentially different life style, and to the socio-economic functions assigned to our community by Anglo-American society — as suppliers of cheap labor and a dumping ground for the small-time capitalist entrepreneur — the *barrio* and *colonia* remained exploited, impoverished, and marginal.⁶³

According to Berkeley professor Carlos Muñoz, the Chicano movement was a quest for identity, and this search — and the dilemmas it posed — are key to understanding the Chicano student movement.⁶⁴ As multiracial peoples of indigenous, European, and African descent, both Chicanos and Puerto Ricans exceeded traditional categories of race and ethnicity. Yet prior to the movement, moderate Mexican-American and Puerto Rican organizations often sought to distance themselves from the non-white aspects of Latino culture. In a similar vein, socialist organizations that attracted radical Latinos often stressed *class* at the expense of any sustained analysis of race or culture. Movement

⁶² Gonzales, *Los Angeles Free Press*, November 10, 1967, 6.

⁶³ *El Plan de Santa Barbara* reprinted in *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* by Carlos Muñoz, Jr. (London: Verso, 1989) 191.

activists effectively challenged these previous paradigms, making cultural pride and ethnic unity fundamental to their demands for political rights and inclusion. According to Mario Barrera, the movement represented a distinct new ideological phase in which community, identity, and ethnic equality “were not only raised simultaneously, but were intimately linked.”⁶⁵

The critique of racism and political and economic inequality put forward by movement activists probably represents one of the most important and successful aspects of the movement’s legacy. The movement’s approach to identity convinced a generation of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans that they didn’t have to choose between racial pride and social equality. And finally, the collective act of exposing conditions, speaking out against economic exploitation, and drawing attention to issues of social injustice resonated powerfully with large segments of the Chicano and Puerto Rican communities. As Iris Morales notes, “The Young Lords raised consciousness through bold public actions that focused on the exploitation suffered by our community. Even those who disagreed with our tactics had to agree the injustices we pointed to were clear.... The organization touched people of conscience in our community.”⁶⁶

But while both movements put forward a powerful critique of the problems facing Chicanos and Puerto Ricans, they proved less effective when trying to transform their critique into an effective political strategy. In other words, movement activists were far

⁶⁴ Muñoz 61.

⁶⁵ Mario Barrera, “The Historical Evolution of Chicano Ethnic Goals: A Bibliographic Essay,” *Sage Race Relation Abstracts* 10 (1988): 23.

⁶⁶ Morales 215.

more successful as voices of opposition than as creators of substantive political and economic alternatives.

Community Control, Group Advancement, and the Problem of Individualism

El Plan de Santa Barbara also demonstrates a second principle of the movement: the celebration of community and the critique of American individualism.

In both movements, Chicano and Puerto Rican activists continually stressed the importance of community control of local institutions, arguing that oppression and inequality would never end until Chicanos and Puerto Ricans controlled the institutions that directly affected community life.⁶⁷ This analysis of community control is present in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, one of the earliest political manifestos to emerge from the Chicano movement. *El Plan* states:

2. ECONOMY: economic control of our lives and our communities can only come about by driving the exploiter out of our communities, our pueblos, and our lands and by controlling and developing our own talents, sweat, and resources.... Institutions in our community which do not serve the people have no place in the community. The institutions belong to the people.⁶⁸

The Young Lords' thirteen-point platform makes almost identical demands:

6. WE WANT COMMUNITY CONTROL OF OUR INSTITUTIONS AND LAND.
We want control of our communities by our people and programs to guarantee that all institutions serve the needs of our people. People's control of police, health services, churches, schools, housing, transportation, and welfare are needed. We want an end to attacks on our land by urban renewal, highway destruction, and university corporations.
LAND BELONGS TO ALL THE PEOPLE!

For Chicano and Puerto Ricans, substandard housing, inferior health care, failing schools, dangerous and exploitative working conditions, and inadequate civil rights protection all helped encourage a nationalist critique among activists that institutions

⁶⁷ Barrera 23.

controlled by non-Latinos could not be trusted. In other words, material encounters with social inequality and racism led these movements to their critique of community control.

The demand for community control also highlights a related shift in perspective — the vision of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans as a distinct, separate, and cohesive community. In contrast to earlier narratives of advancement that presumed leaving the barrio in order to assimilate into the broader community, movement rhetoric stressed internal transformation and *group* advancement. In the Young Lords Party, even those who were *not* from the barrio were encouraged to take their place alongside the Latino working class. Describing the political trajectory of one Lord leader, Pablo Guzmán writes:

Denise had joined the Party in October of 1969, when she was twenty-three. Before, she had attended the State University at Old Westbury, the last of several universities she had attended, all filled with empty promises. Denise had been raised in a “Black Bourgeois” (really middle class) family, but she knew that reality was in the ghetto, with the people on the streets, and the workers who came home late for little pay. This is where Denise made her home.⁶⁹

No longer a place to escape, the *barrio* became a place to sustain. Moreover, the rhetoric of group advancement and community maintenance was at its most forceful in the writing of those segments of the community most likely to leave. As the example of YLP member Denise Oliver showed, university students were portrayed as having particularly deep and powerful obligations to the community. *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, for example, was written by Chicano graduate students and professors regarding the relationship between the movement and higher education. Discussing the responsibilities that college students have to the broader community, it states:

MEChA [a Chicano student organization] must bring to the mind of every young Chicano that the liberation of his people from prejudice and oppression is in his hands and this

⁶⁸ *El Plan Espiritual Aztlán*. In *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* 2-3.

⁶⁹ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 12.

responsibility is greater than personal achievement and more meaningful than degrees, especially if they are earned at the expense of his identity and cultural integrity.⁷⁰

The focus no longer on social mobility and advancement, in *El Plan de Santa Barbara* a university education is refigured as an opportunity to better serve one's community. One leaves in order to return.

In examining the political philosophies of these two movements, what becomes abundantly clear is that both viewed American society and culture as defined by its overemphasis on the individual at the expense of the community. Describing the YLP's vision of the Puerto Rican community, Pablo Guzmán offers this critique of American individualism. He writes:

We're brought up to be individuals who look out solely for themselves. In school we're taught that the first law of nature is self-preservation. We say that's bullshit — the first law of nature is preservation of the group, because as long as your nation exists, then you exist. See, people often run the line down to me, "Well, you know, you've got some brains — you could make it." Yeah, I could make it, I could — me, myself, Pablo "Yoruba" Guzmán. I could be into law, I could be into public relations, a number of fields I could have gone into, right. But that same thing does not hold true for my people. I become the exception rather than the rule, and we're trying to make a society where opportunity is the rule for everybody.⁷¹

As stated above, the YLP's emphasis on group advancement provides a compelling counternarrative to the politics of liberal individualism. Guzmán's critique also leads to the final point about the movement's approach to community: the need to identify and live in solidarity with those at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. The Young Lords leadership, for example, chose the name of their organization knowing that it was originally coined in 1959 by a Puerto Rican street gang in Chicago.⁷² For the YLP, the name reflected its identity as an organization that sought to create a "unity of the street

⁷⁰ *El Plan de Santa Barbara* reprinted in *Youth, Identity, Power* 196.

⁷¹ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 57.

⁷² Laó 36.

people with students of working class background.”⁷³ Similarly, Chicanos in the Southwest were also aware of the class implications of their own naming practices. Discussing the newfound choice to self-identify as “Chicano,” the writers of *El Plan de Santa Barbara* state:

Culturally, the word *Chicano*, in the past a pejorative and class-bound adjective, has now become the root idea of a new cultural identity for our people. It also reveals a growing solidarity and the development of a common social praxis. The widespread use of the term *Chicano* today signals a rebirth of pride and confidence.⁷⁴

In addition to their support for César Chavez and the farm workers’ struggle, Chicano activists consistently displayed solidarity with and compassion for “the poor, the imprisoned, the abused, and even the misguided criminal element.”⁷⁵ For Puerto Rican activists like the YLP, this stance was also linked to their more Marxist orientation. According to Guzmán, “it’s a law of revolution that the most oppressed group takes the leadership position.”⁷⁶ For the YLP, the most oppressed within the Puerto Rican community were “the street people: prostitutes, junkies, two-bit pushers, hustlers, welfare mothers” who fought for revolution “because they’ve got nothing to lose.”⁷⁷ It was this “bottom-up” strategy of community that led the YLP to organize the Inmates Liberation Front, which sought to organize and politicize Puerto Rican inmates.⁷⁸

The desire among movement activists to identify with the most oppressed and despised segments of their communities represents a powerful call for democratic

⁷³ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 9.

⁷⁴ *El Plan de Santa Barbara* 191-2.

⁷⁵ García 133.

⁷⁶ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 79.

⁷⁷ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 79.

⁷⁸ Laó 40.

inclusion and cross-class solidarity. Moreover, this shift was a self-conscious inversion of the approach taken by the previous generation of Latino civic elites, who sought to avoid the stigma of poverty by emphasizing their constituents' middle-class status.

But this "bottom-up" strategy also led movement activists to romanticize disadvantaged and disempowered Latinos, portraying them as the community's most "authentic" members. Personal experience with poverty became a precondition to political credibility for movement activists, with many members becoming increasingly defensive about coming from assimilated and/or middle-class backgrounds. Instead of negotiating the class and cultural diversity of the community, movement activists (like their predecessors) continued to privilege a particular class status in ways that delegitimated and silenced various political beliefs within the community.

Like the attempt to identify with those at the socioeconomic bottom, the movement's emphasis on community control had a similar double-edged function in movement discourse. On one level, community control represented the democratic desire for autonomy and self-sufficiency. For movement activists, community control was a much-needed response to institutions that had historically neglected Latinos, treating them as dependent, unimportant, and/or civically incompetent. In this context, community control was more than a claim for local power. Instead, as Agustín Laó notes, it was "a radical democratic demand for self-management on behalf of those who work and those who are serviced."⁷⁹ However, community control *also* presumed that Chicano and Puerto Rican communities were always coherent and concentrated — monolithic communities with few "outsiders." In fact, many communities were more racially diverse and less spatially

⁷⁹ Laó 40.

concentrated than portrayed by movement rhetoric. During the 1960s and '70s, Andrés Torres notes, Puerto Ricans as a group were clearly politically disempowered and experiencing racism and poverty, but they were also simultaneously experiencing increasing signs of assimilation, including greater English-language usage, the gradual adoption of U.S. customs and traditions, and an increase in marriages to non-Puerto Ricans.⁸⁰ However, the ideology of community control and self-help didn't take this reality of racially mixed communities and internal cultural diversity into consideration. Instead, movement activists often chose to rhetorically produce a more homogenous vision of the community rather than grapple with this more complex reality.

Even more significantly, the nationalistic thrust of community control sometimes produced a form of self-reliance that demonized those outside the community, creating a form of politics premised on the *non*-participation of non-Latinos. Moreover, the emphasis on localism and self-determination often made multiracial activism in the *barrios* suspect. This was particularly true for the Chicano movement. In its consistent call to “drive the exploiter out of our communities” and control and develop “our own talents, sweat, and resources,”⁸¹ *El Plan de Aztlán* was silent on the possible role played by non-Latino progressives. Rather than calling for the multiracial solidarity of radicals and progressives, community control became a nationalistic discourse that narrowed the definition of citizenship for both Latinos and non-Latinos. By portraying all those “outside” the community as politically suspect, movement activists undermined the possibility of mutuality and collective responsibility so crucial for democratic discourse.

⁸⁰ Andrés Torres, “Political Radicalism in the Diaspora” 13.

Mass Participation and Direct Action

In order to empower and politicize the community from the bottom up, Chicano and Puerto activists developed a particularly performative and participatory style of politics. And it is this approach to organizing that brings us to the third principle of movement politics.

The Chicano and Puerto Rican movements were responsible for some of the largest political gatherings of Latinos ever organized within the United States. Some of the most significant events of this era include:

- March to the United Nations (October 30, 1970): More than 10,000 Puerto Ricans and their supporters marched to U.N. headquarters in order to denounce U.S. police brutality and colonialism in Puerto Rico.⁸²
- The 250-mile march to Sacramento organized by the National Farm Workers Association⁸³ (March–April 1966): Organized to build support for a farm-worker union and build mass support for the workers' struggle, the twenty-one-day march involved more than 10,000 participants and led to negotiated contracts with a number of California's largest wine-grape producers.⁸⁴

⁸¹ *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* 2.

⁸² YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 13 and Serrano 133.

⁸³ The NFWA later became the United Farm Workers organization.

⁸⁴ Renato Rosaldo, Robert A. Calvert, and Gustav L. Seligmann, eds., *Chicano: The Evolution of a People* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1973) 140-142.

- The Chicano Moratorium Against the War (August 29, 1970): In Laguna Park in East Los Angeles, more than 30,000 Chicanos rallied to protest the Vietnam War. The Moratorium was one of the era's largest antiwar rallies.⁸⁵
- The National Day of Solidarity (October 27, 1974): 20,000 people gathered in New York at Madison Square Garden to express support for the independence of Puerto Rico.⁸⁶

Such mass mobilizations reflected a commitment to direct action and grass-roots participation that was at the heart of movement politics. Moreover, such mass-based political activity was viewed as a crucial aspect of politicizing Chicano and Puerto Rican communities. For movement activists, participation and political consciousness were viewed as having a dialectical relationship with one another. Describing the process, *El Plan de Santa Barbara* states:

Political mobilization is directly dependent on political consciousness. As political consciousness develops, the potential for political action increases.... Action is the best organizer. During and immediately following direct action of any type — demonstrations, marches, rallies, or even symposiums and speeches — new faces will often surface and this is where much of the recruiting should be done.... Each new members must be given a responsibility as soon as possible and fitted into the scheme of things according to his or her best talents and interests.⁸⁷

Not only was participation a necessary aspect of raising consciousness within the community it was also a way of distinguishing their activism from the perceived elitism and sectarianism of white radicalism. “Unlike some on the New Left who specialized in

⁸⁵ Unfortunately, the rally ended violently when Los Angeles police attacked the crowd without provocation. Hundreds were injured, and three Chicanos were killed, including *L.A. Times* journalist Ruben Salazar. The police riot provoked the first violent outburst of Mexican-Americans in a major U.S. city as thousands of protesters burned businesses and automobiles on Whittier Boulevard, one of the major thoroughfares in East Los Angeles. (See Muñoz 86).

⁸⁶ José Velázquez, “Coming Full Circle: The Puerto Rican Socialist Party, U.S. Branch,” *The Puerto Rican Movement* 53-54.

⁸⁷ *El Plan de Santa Barbara* 194, 197.

trying to out-argue each other,” wrote Pablo Guzmán in *The Village Voice*, “we [the Young Lords Party] had a community base.”⁸⁸ Describing one experience while organizing in the community, Guzmán writes:

When I first got involved in a street action and I saw this old lady throw a bottle at a pig, I mean, that did it.... I said, if this old woman can throw that bottle, then look out, they've had it. I had this flash, you know, that it's inevitable we're going to win.... I mean, when I see brothers off the block, hustlers, you know, talking about, “I got to deal with my male chauvinism,” when I see that — man, I feel like we can do anything.⁸⁹

For activists like Guzmán, political legitimacy was tied to the belief that a majority of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans shared and supported the movement's political platform and critique. Mass participation, then, was necessary for validating claims that the movement represented the political will of the community.

But while this approach to participation was suffused with a kind of ideological optimism and a democratic belief that majorities matter, it also painted movement activists into a difficult political corner. For it meant that movement activists staked their political legitimacy on being the majority. For without the support of the “old ladies” and the “brothers,” movement activism might become uncomfortably similar to their white counterparts in the New Left. Therefore, when movement activists found themselves in the minority, they argued that this minority status was unnatural and temporary — members of the community simply needed to have their “consciousness raised” through “political education.” What movement activists were unable to envision was a politics in which they could represent a minority opinion among Chicanos or Puerto Ricans and still

⁸⁸ Pablo Guzmán, “La Vida Pura” 158.

⁸⁹ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 58.

be valid politically.⁹⁰ Ultimately, for movement activists, organizing successful mass mobilizations was not simply desirable — it was crucial to *legitimizing* movement politics.

The emphasis on participation and mass mobilization was also significant because it provided members of the community with an opportunity to *witness* one another politically. Rallies, marches, sit-ins, and parades were all events that put participants in the gaze of one another, helping to generate a sense of pride among its participants. Describing the gathering of 1,500 students at the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in 1969, Maria Varela captures the emotional impact of this assembly. She writes:

“Conference” is a poor word to describe those five days.... It was in reality a fiesta: days of celebrating what sings in the blood of a people who, taught to believe they are ugly, discover the true beauty in their souls during years of occupation and intimidation.... [T]his affirmation grew into a *grito*, a roar among the people gathered in the auditorium of the Crusade’s Center.⁹¹

For Varela, one of the most crucial aspects of the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference was that it helped participants overcome the sense of cultural inferiority and self-hate produced by internalized racism. In Varela’s characterization, participants of the conference were not gathering *for* something so much as they were gathering *as* something. In other words, these large-scale, grass-roots gatherings reflected the desire of activists to understand themselves as engaging in a politics of *presence*.⁹²

In looking back on these mass gatherings, what becomes apparent is that the success of these events is premised in large part on the fact that these events involve broadly defined issues that had widespread support (opposition to police brutality, support for

⁹⁰ The movement’s belief that majorities confer political legitimacy is still at play in contemporary “pan-ethnic” Latino politics. I explore this legacy of the movement more fully in Chapter Five.

⁹¹ Muñoz 78.

farm workers, ending colonialism, opposing an unpopular war). Mass mobilizations such as the Chicano Moratorium and the National Day of Solidarity were powerfully participatory, yet they also managed to avoid the problems of political disagreement that often emerged in smaller, more deliberative settings.⁹³ Moreover, because these large-scale events were organized around broad themes, the political meaning of these gatherings was both multiple and fragmented. And because of the ideologically diffuse nature of the events, large numbers of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans were able to participate despite the fact that they often did not agree on the nature of the problem or its solution. Ultimately, large numbers of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans were able to participate precisely because these events were more about protesting current conditions than they were about a shared vision of the future.

PART III: EL PUEBLO UNIDO

NATIONALISM, FEMINISM, AND THE POLITICS OF UNITY

Discernable within each of the principles discussed above is the belief that group *unity* was necessary for Chicano and Puerto Rican advancement. Racism and social inequality, for example, were collective experiences presumed to unite Latinos, thereby promoting a shared political perspective. In their critique of individualism and group advancement, movement activists asserted their belief that ethnicity (as opposed to shared class interests) was the essential component of political community. And finally, participation in large-scale, mass mobilizations was the practice that would allow Chicanos and Puerto Ricans to display the unity that direct action produced.

⁹² I analyze this emphasis on *presence* in more depth in Chapter Three.

This unitary impulse was shaped in large part by the nationalist ethos that shaped Chicano and Puerto Rican politics during this period. Both movements shared a general belief that nationalism was about advancing the collective and material interests of those united by a common nationality. But while both Chicano and Puerto Rican activism were powerfully informed by nationalism, the movements differed in how they interpreted and enacted nationalist principles. The vast majority of Chicano activists, for example, were not ideologically committed to nation-building or separatism. The emphasis on *Aztlán* as the Chicano homeland, for example, was an attempt to connect Chicanos to their indigenous past while simultaneously reminding them of the colonial implications of the 1848 Mexican-American War. *Aztlán*, then, represented a mythic narrative suffused with nationalist sentiment that informed the Chicano movement rather than a serious call for the creation of a separate and sovereign state.

In contrast to the Chicano experience, the Puerto Rican movement *did* call for the political independence of Puerto Rico and an end to the island's colonial status. But support for Puerto Rican independence did not mean that Puerto Ricans in the United States would have to return to the island. Instead, like Chicanos, Puerto Ricans understood themselves to be a national minority in need of self-determination and community control *within* the United States as well.

In the following section, I explore the relationship between nationalism and unity in the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements. My contention is that the unitary impulse apparent in the Chicano movement is different from the unitary politics of the Puerto Rican movement, in part because they differ in their respective nationalist philosophies.

⁹³ I discuss this issue of participation versus deliberation more fully in Chapter Three.

In the Chicano movement, shared culture was seen as the primary precondition for a shared political perspective, while for Puerto Rican activists, movement politics was more explicitly Marxist and anti-capitalist in perspective. These two forms can be characterized as *cultural* versus *revolutionary* nationalism. But despite their different perspectives, in both movements, group unity ultimately emerges as a dominant principle.

I conclude this section with a discussion of Latina feminism and its relationship to movement politics. Feminists active in the movement were often attacked for raising gender issues and accused of being divisive and undermining the unity of the movement. In analyzing the role of Latina feminists, I argue that even though Latinas were viciously attacked under the guise of the group unity, movement feminists did not challenge the legitimacy of this concept. Thus, even while feminists experienced firsthand how the demand for unity silenced debate and rendered disagreement illegitimate, so strong was this trope in movement politics that even feminists were unable and/or unwilling to resist this concept. Instead, Latinas argued that feminism would *increase* group unity rather than undermine it. In other words, Latina feminists operated from the belief that group unity was still the discourse with the most political legitimacy.

Cultural Nationalism in the Chicano Movement: Unity as Ideology

According to Carlos Muñoz, the most common ideological orientation of the Chicano movement was nationalism with “a heavy emphasis on cultural identification and cultural issues.”⁹⁴ Under the heading “Nationalism,” *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* states:

⁹⁴ Muñoz 101.

Nationalism as the key to organization transcends all religious, political, class and economic factors or boundaries. Nationalism is the common denominator that all members of La Raza can agree on.⁹⁵

In the nationalist philosophy of *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, ethnicity is what defines one's identity and loyalty. In a speech by movement leader Corky Gonzales, he explains how a nationalist philosophy is capable of uniting the Chicano community. Gonzales states:

What are the common denominators that unite the people? The key common denominator is nationalism.... If Tony is a socialist, if my brother here is an independent, if my sister is a Republican — she might hit me later — if one of the others is a Democrat and one is a communist, and one from the Socialist Labor Party, what do we have in common? Nothing. We've been fighting over parties across the kitchen table, wives are Republicans and husbands are Democrats, sometimes, and we argue over a bunch of garbage. And the same Republicans and Democrats are having cocktails together at the same bar and playing golf together and kissing each other behind the scenes.

So you tell me, what is the common denominator that will touch the barrio, the campo and the ranchitos? Are we going to go down there with some tremendous words of intellectualism which they cannot relate to...the revolution of 15 or 20 years from now is not going to feed a hungry child today.

So what is the common denominator we use? It is nationalism.⁹⁶

What is significant about the nationalist ethos of Gonzales and *El Plan Espiritual Aztlán* is their shared belief that culture and shared historical experience are sufficient to produce political agreement. Unity would emerge through culture and national origin rather than shared class interests. In Gonzales' vision of nationalism, there is a pre-existing "core" set of cultural and philosophical values that can be "discovered" and that will serve all Chicanos equally well. Specific political beliefs are characterized as insignificant abstractions — "tremendous words of intellectualism...a bunch of garbage"

⁹⁵ *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* 2.

⁹⁶ Rudolfo Gonzales, "Chicano Nationalism: The Key to Unity for La Raza" *Chicano: The Evolution of a People*, eds. Renato Rosaldo, Robert A. Calvert, and Gustav L. Seligmann (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1973) 425-426.

— that fade in the face of shared identity and experience. Partisanship is meaningless: Republicans and Democrats are figured as “the same animal with two-heads that feeds from the same trough.”⁹⁷

In the nationalist politics of the movement, Chicano unity is intimately linked to political agency. The politics of unity demand that differences be set aside differences in order to achieve common goals. Describing the unity produced by nationalism, *El Plan* states:

El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán sets the theme that the Chicanos (La Raza de Bronze) must use their nationalism as the key or common denominator for mass mobilization and organization. Once we are committed to the idea and philosophy of *El Plan de Aztlán*, we can only conclude that social, economic, cultural and political independence is the only road to total liberation from oppression, exploitation, and racism. Our struggle then must be for the control of our barrios, campos, pueblos, lands, our economy, our cultural, and our political life. *El Plan* commits all levels of Chicano society — the barrio, the campo, the rancho, the writer, the teacher, the worker, the professional — to la Causa.”⁹⁸

In *El Plan*, the group unity produced by nationalism represents the “common denominator” that will lead to “mass mobilization and organization.” Nationalism (rather than any particular ideology) is what mobilizes Chicano society (“the writer, the teacher, the worker, the professional”). Unity is what mobilizes to move Chicanos forward; unity is what will make the group effective and successful.

The creation of La Raza Unida Party in 1970 is a prime example of the belief that shared cultural identity is a sufficient basis for political action and mobilization. As the name itself makes clear, La Raza Unida was founded on the principle that Chicanos share a set of interests that transcend ideology and partisanship. Excerpts from a position paper by Armando Navarro (a graduate student and principal organizer of the Riverside–San

⁹⁷ *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* 3.

⁹⁸ *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* 2.

Bernadino–Upland chapter) are notable because of its many stated and unstated ideological and political claims. Navarro writes:

La Raza Unida must become more than a political organization. It must symbolize the creation of a nation within a nation, a spiritual unification for effective action of all persons of Mexican descent in the United States. One principle dominates La Raza Unida thought — that the destiny of each Chicano is linked immutably to the destinies of every other Chicano....

Unity will only be achieved by the formation of an evolutionary doctrine which is compatible with the philosophy, culture and life style of La Raza. This doctrine will seek to synthesize the diverse perspectives of La Raza so that ultimately one dominant perspective will prevail.⁹⁹

As Carlos Muñoz notes, “very little was done to develop [La Raza Unida’s] theory or ideology.”¹⁰⁰ This lack of ideological development is clearly apparent in Navarro’s position paper. It’s never made clear or explicit just what type of “evolutionary doctrine” would be “compatible with the philosophy, culture and life style of La Raza.” Instead, Navarro’s understanding of cultural identity veers into essentialism; his rhetoric politicizes Chicano identity while simultaneously rendering politics invisible or superfluous. Chicano identity is posited as sufficient foundation for creating the “one dominant perspective” that will eventually prevail. Here again, unity is equated with cultural identity rather than ideology.

Puerto Rican Revolutionary Nationalism: Unity *Through* Ideology

According to Agustín Laó, in the various writings of the Young Lords, members make a distinction between *cultural* nationalism and *revolutionary* nationalism.

According to Pablo Guzmán:

⁹⁹ Muñoz 120.

¹⁰⁰ Muñoz 101.

Now, there are some people who would say that there's a contradiction in being a revolutionary nationalist — in fact, they say you can't be a Nationalist and a Socialist at the same time. Well, that's wrong. See, for these people I would quote Mao, where he says that loving your people and your country and fighting to liberate your people is the best way to aid the struggle of all peoples around the world. It's ridiculous to say you're an internationalist and you're going to struggle for all oppressed people, without picking a particular segment of people you're gonna work in...revolutionary nationalism — that is the kind of nationalism that says, "Yes, we are proud to be Puerto Rican, we are proud to be number one — but we want everybody else to be number one too, and we're gonna help everyone else be number one." See, 'cause the other kind of nationalism is reactionary nationalism — where you say, "Well, I'm number one. Fuck everybody else."¹⁰¹

The YLP understood itself as a revolutionary nationalist party with an internationalist vision. Grounded in Mao's critique of nationalism and Frantz Fanon's analysis of colonialism, as well as Lenin's writings on imperialism and the national question, the nationalism of the YLP was much more ideologically explicit than that of Chicano leaders like Corky Gonzales.

Yet despite the differences in ideological clarity, a unitary impulse is present in both Chicano and Puerto nationalism. For the Young Lords, revolutionary nationalism was linked to a "personal and collective decolonization that transcends mere cultural self-affirmation."¹⁰² For the Lords, cultural liberation requires a process of decolonization that transforms one's "colonized mentality" and internalized racism, sexism, and self-hate. According to Laó, the YLP's anti-colonial discourse was based on a notion of "false consciousness" that functioned to "justify the role of the party in enlightening (raising the consciousness) of the masses and giving them a track and a horizon."¹⁰³ The belief in "false consciousness" and in themselves as members of a vanguard party was an ideological combination that allowed the Young Lords to view political disagreement as

¹⁰¹ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 83.

¹⁰² Laó 41.

¹⁰³ Laó 41.

something *external* to the Puerto Rican community (internalized racism, police agents, colonial brainwashing, etc.). The YLP saw a lack of unity as representing an inability to follow “the correct line,” rather than an array of legitimate viewpoints. Following Marx, the Young Lords envisioned the Puerto Rican proletariat as the universal class. The YLP also developed a strategy of revolution premised on broad-based unity. According to Pablo Guzmán, “[O]ur analysis has shown that the correct method of bringing about revolution is to isolate the enemy to as small a number as possible and unite the greatest number of people.”¹⁰⁴ In this way, the Young Lords sought to unite the lumpen elements of the Puerto Rican community, the working class, students, and the “petit bourgeois” into a united, revolutionary, class-conscious majority.

The YLP’s revolutionary nationalism displayed a belief in the importance of cultural specificity driven by an underlying commitment to political unity. Describing the state of the movement, Guzmán writes:

At first many of us felt why have a Young Lords Party when there existed a Black Panther Party, and wouldn’t it be to our advantage to try to consolidate our efforts into getting Third World people into something that already existed? It became apparent to us that that would be impractical, because we wouldn’t be recognizing the national question. We felt we each had to organize where we were at — so that Chicanos were gonna have to organize Chicanos, Blacks were gonna have to organize Blacks, Puerto Ricans Puerto Ricans, etc., until we came to that level where we could deal with one umbrella organization that could speak for everybody. But until we eliminate the racism that separates everybody, that will not be possible.¹⁰⁵

What’s fascinating about this passage is the way that issues of pragmatism, ideology, and unity all make themselves present. For the YLP, racism is the unnatural and external barrier to Third World unity. But once the external barrier of racism is overcome, the YLP posits a vision of “one umbrella organization” capable of “speaking for everybody.”

¹⁰⁴ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 78-79.

¹⁰⁵ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 75.

In the Young Lords' internationalist vision, once racism is eradicated, the underlying unity of interest will make itself apparent.

Initially, the YLP subscribed to the "Divided Nation" thesis, a theory that linked the liberation of Puerto Ricans in the United States with the struggle for independence of Puerto Rico as a sovereign nation-state. According to the thesis, Puerto Rico was a divided nation with one-third of Puerto Ricans living in the United States and two-thirds living in Puerto Rico.¹⁰⁶ This vision of Puerto Rican unity is apparent in the organization's description of the opening of the first YLP branch in Puerto Rico. The Central Committee writes:

In January 1971, we announced that we were going to open a branch in Puerto Rico. This came after fighting for a year and a half in the united states of amerikkka, in the belly of the monster.

You see, one-third of the Puerto Rican Nation is in the united states, and two-thirds of our people are in Puerto Rico. We always knew in our minds and our hearts that the Party would be expanding to Puerto Rico.... We saw right from the beginning that one of the first steps in our struggle for National Liberation would be the uniting of our nation.

And now it's done. The one-third and the two-thirds are together. We've opened two branches in Puerto Rico — one in Aquadilla, the home of Julio Roldan, and the other in El Caño....

[W]e will win. Because our compañeras and compañeros everywhere are together. They are strong, dedicated, and filled with love.¹⁰⁷

According to the "Divided Nation" thesis, the political interests of Puerto Ricans are the same both on and off the island. Puerto Ricans on the island and in the United States are understood as an organic whole divided by the external and unnatural divide of colonialism.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Morales 221.

¹⁰⁷ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 158.

¹⁰⁸ This desire to construct an progressive narrative of resistance and unity is visible in the Young Lords history of Puerto Rico. According to Laó, the "genealogy of anti-colonial resistance" constructed by YLP

When the move to Puerto Rico proved politically unsuccessful, Central Committee member Pablo Guzmán argued that Puerto Ricans were an “oppressed national minority” in the United States.¹⁰⁹ For the Young Lords, Puerto Ricans were understood as both a national minority within the North American “multinational working class” and a colonized people on the island. In this way, Puerto Rican identity can be seen as oscillating in ambiguity “between the national subject and the colonized subaltern.”¹¹⁰ But even as Puerto Rican subjectivity straddled the national and the subaltern, the Puerto Rican community was consistently envisioned as a community of hearts. Familial and expressive, the YLP portrayed members of the community as “compañeras and compañeros everywhere together...strong, dedicated, and filled with love.” This romantic imagery is best summed up in the organization’s slogan of U.S.-island unity: “*tengo a Puerto Rico en mi corazón.*”¹¹¹ Not merely a political question, the status of the island is an issue as much about the head as about the heart.

In contrast to the Chicano movement’s ideologically diffuse ethnic populism, the main organizations of the Puerto Rican movement were self-consciously socialist. Moreover, the Young Lords also practiced a form of “democratic centralism,” whereby the Central Committee made all the major decisions and set the direction of the organization. According to Iris Morales, this emphasis on strict adherence to Central

historians involves an ideologically selective reading of Puerto Rican political history (including what Laó describes as an “acrobatic historical jump” between “El Grito de Lares” in 1868 and the Nationalist Party of the 1930s. Laó also describes the Young Lords as practicing a “conspiracy theory of imperial power” to explain the lack of success of the Nationalist Party in Puerto Rico. (Laó 41)

¹⁰⁹ Morales 222.

¹¹⁰ Laó 41.

¹¹¹ “Puerto Rico is in my heart.”

Committee directives “frequently stifled member creativity and initiative.”¹¹² This increasing concern with ideological clarity — with having the “correct line” — reached a peak in 1973 when the YLP transformed itself into the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization, a Maoist Third World party.¹¹³ In their belief that ideological unity was the key to achieving revolutionary change, the Young Lords leadership sought a strict definition of what constituted legitimate political interests. Such a unitary narrative meant that there was little room for competing political claims.¹¹⁴ As Iris Morales notes,

When members raised differences of opinion with ideology or tactics or leaders, they were often subjected to name-calling and labeled “opportunists.” The Central Committee even falsely accused some members of being police agents. During the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers’ phase, the ruling group maintained control by accusing everyone who disagreed with them of being agents and collaborators. The accusations lost credibility and allowed real agents to continue to operate in the movement unexposed.¹¹⁵

Not surprisingly, public support diminished as the former Young Lords Party ceased its grass-roots activism and degenerated into another segment of the socialist left consumed by sectarian infighting.

Unity and the Challenge of Latina Feminism

I remember when I first joined the party, the Central Committee and the officers would give a lot of speeches, and whenever they would be talking to people in the community, they would say, “And you *brothers* must be warriors! And we *men* must struggle together in the revolution!” You know, sisters were never mentioned. When any of us would point

¹¹² Morales 221

¹¹³ Laó describes a shift degeneration from a “popular radical left” to a “strict ideological left.” (Laó 43)

¹¹⁴ According to Laó, the YLP’s tendency to conflate “party with people” was linked to the organization’s desire for an “unmediated relationship between state and capital” that left little space for difference and contradiction. (Laó 41)

¹¹⁵ Morales 221.

that out, we would get, like, jumped on. They would say, “Oh, that’s that Women’s Lib stuff.”¹¹⁶

— Denise Oliver, Young Lords Party

As with other women of the New Left, it was the experience of encountering sexism in the context of social justice movements that fueled the feminist critique. In the context of the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements, Latina feminism emerged as a challenge to traditional gender dynamics understood as oppressive and disempowering to Latinas.

Movement feminists criticized the way both movements celebrated traditional cultural practices while ignoring (or condoning) the oppressive conditions women faced under such patriarchal conditions. Chicano nationalists, for example, often waxed nostalgic about the warmth and intimacy of *la familia* but failed to examine the emotional, economic, and social costs of this arrangement for female members of the family. According to sociologist Alma Garcia, men in the movement often portrayed the “ideal woman” as strong and long-suffering.¹¹⁷ In this narrative, the ideal Chicana was willing to endure social injustice while simultaneously maintaining the family as a safe haven, thus assuring the survival of Chicano culture.¹¹⁸ For Chicana feminists like Adaljiza Sosa Riddell, the real danger of these stereotypes involves the “large numbers of Chicanas and Chicanos who have come to accept these descriptions and syndromes as part of their daily lives.”¹¹⁹

The presence of a feminist perspective within these movements exposed deep disagreements regarding women’s liberation. Feminists were consistently accused of

¹¹⁶ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 52.

¹¹⁷ Alma Garcia, ed., *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 6.

¹¹⁸ Alma Garcia 6.

¹¹⁹ Adaljiza Sosa Riddell, “Chicanas and El Movimiento,” *Chicana Feminist Thought* 93.

dividing the movement. Angela Jorge, for example, notes that raising the concerns of black Puerto Rican women is often viewed as an unacceptable act, “since it will be perceived as divisive precisely at a time when the Puerto Rican people need to be united.”¹²⁰ Latina activists who challenged traditional gender relations were accused of being lesbians, “white identified,” narcissistic, and anti-family. This was particularly characteristic of the Chicano movement.

Chicana Feminists: *Vendidas* vs. Loyalists

In his speech “Chicano Nationalism: The Key to Unity for La Raza,” movement leader Corky Gonzales offers his concerns regarding the growing feminist presence in the movement. He states:

[O]ne of the problems I see, as one of the grass roots people that come out of the *barrios*, as someone who worked in the fields, is that I recognize too much of an influence of white European thinking in the discussion. I hope that our Chicana sisters can understand that they can be front runners in the revolution, they can be in the leadership of any social movement, but I pray to God that they do not lose their *Chicanisma* or their womanhood and become a frigid *gringa*. So I’m for equality, but I still want to see some sex in our women.¹²¹

In his characterization of Chicana feminists, Gonzales invokes his own cultural authenticity within the community (“one of the grass roots people,” “someone who worked in the fields”) in order to contrast this to the “European thinking” of *femenistas*. For Gonzales, feminism is understood as a destructive force coming from *outside* the Chicano community.

¹²⁰ Angela Jorge, “The Black Puerto Rican Woman in Contemporary American Society,” ed., Edna Acosta-Belén, *The Puerto Rican Woman: Perspectives on Culture, History, and Society* (New York: Praeger, 1979) 135.

¹²¹ Corky Gonzales, “Chicano Nationalism” 424-425.

Interestingly, men like Gonzales were not the only ones speaking out against feminism. For while women were a large and active presence from the movement's inception, many Chicana activists were *not* feminists.¹²² Instead, Chicanas in the movement were split between feminists and "loyalists." The loyalists were anti-feminists who argued that Chicanas should not organize around gender-specific issues. For loyalists, the subjugation of Chicanas was part of the larger problem of Chicano oppression. When inequality between men and women *did* occur, it was the fault of a racist society that oppressed men economically and socially. Loyalists consistently portrayed feminism as an divisive ideology, alien to Chicano culture and distracting the movement from the "real issues." As one loyalist wrote:

I am concerned with the direction that the Chicanas are taking in the movement. Words such as liberation, sexism, male chauvinism...plus the theme of individualism is a concept of the Anglo society; terms prevalent in the Anglo Woman's movement. The *familia* has always been the strength in our culture. But it seems evident...that [you] are not concerned with the *familia* but are influenced by the Anglo Woman's movement.¹²³

A related accusation leveled by loyalists was that the individualistic tendencies feminists harbored would divide the community as feminists put their own personal development over the advancement of the community. According to movement feminist Anna NietoGomez, Chicanas in search of a new identity or new role in society were accused of being engaged in an "Anglo bourgeois trip" and not to be trusted.¹²⁴ As one loyalist put it:

¹²² At the first Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, for example, a workshop on the status of Chicanas emerged with a resolution supported by the majority of women stating that "it was the consensus of the group that the Chicana woman does not want to be liberated." The infamous resolution from the Colorado conference appalled feminists and led to increased debate regarding the status of women in the movement. See "The Women of La Raza" by Enriqueta Longeaux y Vasquez, *Chicana Feminist Thought* 29.

¹²³ Alfredo Mirande and Evangelina Enríquez, *La Chicana: The Mexican American Woman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 237.

¹²⁴ Anna NietoGomez, "La Femenista," *Chicana Feminist Thought* 88.

And since when does a Chicana need identity? If you are a real Chicana then no one regardless of their degrees needs to tell you about it. The only ones who need identity are the *vendidas* [sell-outs], the *falsas* [false ones], and the opportunists. The time has come for the Chicanas to examine the direction they wish to take. Yes, we need recognition. Our men must give this to us. But there is danger in the manner we are seeking it... We are going to have to decide what we value more, the culture or the individual (as Anglos do)? I hope it's not too late.¹²⁵

In the Chicano movement, feminists were consistently accused of representing a destructive force coming from *outside* the community. In other words, Chicana feminists were not simply wrong about gender relations, they were *falsas* (false ones) — no longer legitimate members of the community.

Accused of being cultural traitors creating conflict and fragmentation, Chicana feminists were often on the defensive. In part to prove that they weren't "white identified," *femenistas* devoted a great deal of energy to criticizing the mainstream feminist movement (dismissed as the "Anglo Woman's Movement"). For example, NietoGomez insists that "[t]he conflict between the feminists and the loyalists is the result of not clearly defining the differences and similarities between the Anglo and Chicana feminist movements."¹²⁶ According to NietoGomez,

Historical differences determine the relationship between the Anglo woman and the Chicana woman. The Anglo woman is a product of Protestant and imperialistic Anglo-European capitalism.... The middle-class Anglo woman only shares with the Chicana the fact that they are both women. But they are women of different ethnic, cultural and class status. All these factors determine the different political positions of these women.¹²⁷

In her effort to convince critics of the differences between Chicana and white feminists, NietoGomez produces a monolithic vision of Anglo women. Ironically, the loyalist struggle complicates NietoGomez's claim that differences in "ethnic, cultural,

¹²⁵ Anonymous, "Chicanas Take Wrong Direction," *Popo Femenil*, Chicano Student Newspaper, Special Edition, California State University at Northridge, May 1974, 13.

¹²⁶ NietoGomez, "La Femenista" 90.

¹²⁷ NietoGomez, "La Femenista" 91.

and class status” are crucial to determining “the different political positions of these women.” The *femenistas*, after all, share “ethnic, cultural, and class status” with the loyalists. But despite common culture and experience, NietoGomez admits that, “The loyalists do not recognize sexism as a legitimate issue in the Chicano movement” while “*femenistas* see sexism as an integrated part of the Chicana’s struggle in conjunction with her fight against racism.”¹²⁸ Yet despite such deep-seated conflict, NietoGomez continues to presume that members of the movement are ultimately united in their vision of Chicano liberation.

Despite the tendency to essentialize white women, the critique of the mainstream women’s movement put forward by Chicana feminists was often thoughtful and penetrating. Criticizing the movement’s tendency to emphasize gender at the expense of race and class, NietoGomez notes, “the Anglo-headed popular movement has only viewed Chicanas as potential members of the ranks of women because all women are oppressed by the sexist attitudes against them. It has then ignored the issues the Chicana must contend with as a member of a minority, culturally different lower income group. In so doing, it has ignored how the Chicana’s social and economic status as a woman is severely determined by her race as well as her sex.”¹²⁹ Chicana feminists criticized the women’s movement for both its conservative and radical tendencies. On the one hand, *femenistas* found the demand for female equality insufficient, since female inclusion did not nothing to challenge the socioeconomic status quo. On the other hand, Chicana feminists also opposed the separatist tendencies of some radical feminists, arguing that Chicano men were not the enemy but part of a shared community that needed to be

¹²⁸ NietoGomez, “La Femenista” 90.

educated and struggled with. In an analysis of mainstream feminism, Adaljiza Sosa Riddell captures the multiplicity of the Chicana feminist critique. She writes:

Many Chicanas find the Women's Liberation movement largely irrelevant because more often than not is a move for strictly women's rights. While women's rights advocates are asking for a share of the "American" pie, Chicanas (and Chicanos) are asking for something other than parity. The end which is desired by Chicanas in the restoration of control over a way of life, a culture, an existence. For a Chicana to break with this goal is to break with her past, her present, and her people. For this reason, the concerns expressed by Chicanas for their own needs within the *Movimiento* cannot be considered a threat to the unity of the *Movimiento* itself.¹³⁰

Sosa Riddell's critique also reveals the effort by Chicana feminists to lay claim to a feminist tradition *within* Chicano culture. By emphasizing Chicana leadership and involvement in Chicano political history, *femenistas* sought to portray feminism as an indigenous — as opposed to an alien and divisive — feature of the community. In the essay "Our Feminist Heritage," Marta Cotera gives an overview of Mexicana/Chicana political history, arguing that, "Chicana feminist activities have been intricately interwoven into the entire fabric of the Chicano civil rights movement from 1848 to the present."¹³¹

By insisting that feminism had its roots in Chicano culture, Chicana feminists sought to counter claims that they were being influenced by the "Anglo Woman's Movement." Moreover, by laying claim to their own cultural authenticity, *femenistas* argued that the social and political empowerment of women would make the community *more* united, not less.

Despite the fact that the call to group unity was one of the most effective ways of isolating feminists and de-legitimizing the feminist critique, Chicana feminists never

¹²⁹ NietoGomez, "La Femenista" 87.

¹³⁰ Adaljiza Sosa Riddell, "Chicanas and El Movimiento," *Chicana Feminist Thought* 94.

sought to undermine the idea of unity as an ideal. *Femenistas* certainly had good reason to abandon this principle — they could have cited their experience to show how nationalist narratives of unity treat agreement and community as organic and disagreement as alien and destructive. Instead, Chicanas constructed their own narrative of feminism as the basis for community cohesion, arguing that the movement would become *more* unified once feminist demands were met. Like their anti-feminist counterparts, Chicana feminists continued to believe in the fundamental unity of the Chicano community. For feminists, once women's oppression was overcome, men and women would be a healthy, unified whole seeking the liberation of their people. For loyalists, once the community expelled European norms and Anglo cultural practices and returned to their cultural roots, the animating concept of *familia* would produce the unified whole. In both narratives, division is unnatural and external to the community.

Puerto Rican Feminists: Uncertain Alliances

Like their feminist counterparts in the Chicano movement, Puerto Rican women were initially criticized for demanding that the movement address issues of sexism and women's oppression. And like Chicanos who celebrated the traditional patriarchal family, Puerto Rican activists also sought to appropriate cultural practices for radical purposes. In the Young Lords, for example, *machismo* was initially portrayed as a progressive force in Latino culture.¹³² Feminists, however, argued that *machismo* would never be a progressive or revolutionary tendency in Puerto Rican politics. According to YLP

¹³¹ Marta Cotera, "Our Feminist Heritage," *Chicana Feminist Thought* 42.

¹³² Point 5 of the Young Lords Party 13-Point Program and Platform initially read: "We want equality for women. *Machismo* must be revolutionary and not oppressive." (YLP and Abramson 52).

member Denise Oliver, “[s]aying ‘revolutionary machismo’ is like saying ‘revolutionary fascism’ or ‘revolutionary racism’ — it’s a contradiction.”¹³³

The critique of the mainstream women’s movement put forward by Puerto Rican feminists was more nuanced and ideologically grounded than in the Chicano movement.¹³⁴ Describing the possibility of solidarity with members of the women’s movement, Oliver writes:

Now in the Women’s Liberation Movement, you have different women from different classes (although primarily from the middle class) some of whom are very reformist, some of whom just want to turn the tables and just be the capitalist oppressors of everybody else, and a large number really, who are revolutionaries.

We say right on to any women who are revolutionaries.... We support them, and they should support us in our struggle.¹³⁵

Rather than essentializing white women as NietoGomez does, Oliver explores the ideological diversity that characterized the women’s movement. But despite their willingness to make common cause, Puerto Rican feminists also expressed concerns regarding the women’s liberation movement. Like Chicana feminists, women in the Young Lords were opposed to gender separatism in the women’s movement. Oliver writes,

The basic criticism that we have our sisters in Women’s Liberation is that they shouldn’t isolate themselves, because in isolating yourselves from your brothers, you’re making the struggle separate.... I don’t believe that a group of women should get together just to educate themselves and not go out and educate the brothers.¹³⁶

¹³³ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 52.

¹³⁴ For example, Chicana feminists and loyalists both referred to the women’s movement as the “Anglo Women’s Movement” while women in the Young Lords spoke of the “Women’s Liberation Movement.” See YLP and Abramson 50.

¹³⁵ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 50.

¹³⁶ YLP and Abramson, *Pálante* 51.

With this goal of community education in mind, the YLP formed caucuses for both women and men to discuss women's oppression, sexism, and the role of women in the revolution. The organization's support for women's rights eventually led the YLP leadership to speak out in favor of gay and lesbian liberation.¹³⁷

When looking at the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements, it's clear that Puerto Rican women were far more successful in integrating feminism into their struggle. Unlike Chicana feminists, the Puerto Rican movement did not have to contend with a large and organized anti-feminist element among its women activists. Moreover, as self-described revolutionaries, the Young Lords were willing to challenge traditional cultural norms, while the Chicano movement sought to unite itself politically around a shared *cultural* identity. This emphasis led Chicano anti-feminists to accuse *femenistas* of cultural and political betrayal.

But despite their differences, it's important to note that neither movement challenged the legitimacy of unity as a guiding political principle. Like their male counterparts, Latina activists in both the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements believed in the fundamental unity of the Chicano and Puerto Rican people and that ethnicity was the site of their primary allegiance. Both feminists and anti-feminists saw political disagreement

¹³⁷ Young Lords Minister of Information Pablo Guzmán describes the move from women's rights to gay liberation. He writes,

[T]he second thing that made perhaps a greater impact on us was when we first heard about Gay Liberation. That's a whole other trip because we found out it's a lot quicker for people to accept the fact that sisters should be in front of the struggle, than saying that we're gonna have gay people in the Party.... Now I'm not gay, but maybe I should be. It would probably give me a better outlook on a whole lot of things.... Being gay is not the problem; the problem is that people do not understand what gay means.... The Gay struggle really rounds out the individual.... See, there is a biological division in sex right — however, this society has created a false division based on this thing called gender. Gender is a false idea, because gender is merely traits that have been attributed through the years to a man or a woman.... Because certain traits have been assigned to people historically by society, we've actually developed as half-people, as half-real. We're saying that to be totally real, it would be healthy for a man, if he wanted to cry, to go ahead and cry.

within their respective communities as external and unnatural — the result of “false consciousness,” “police agents,” or inauthentic, culturally suspect sellouts.

Politically, the implications of this impulse are profound. Instead of viewing *both* white women and Latino men as potential (though not guaranteed) allies, Puerto Rican and Chicana feminists were ideologically compelled to privilege race over gender. For feminists in these movements, disagreement with Latino men was something to be *overcome*, since a natural unity lay beneath the disagreements. Conflict with white feminists was often viewed as *confirming* the fact that these women were not part of a shared community. This was particularly true for Chicana feminists: For Chicanas to embrace the idea of a transracial solidarity that cut across class lines would have exposed them to charges that they were “white identified” — an accusation many Chicanas were defensive about. For *femenistas*, suspicion and hostility to white feminism was a sign of cultural authenticity, crucial to the belief in the inherent unity of the Chicano people. In this way, the politics of group unity *narrowed* — rather than enlarged — the political alternatives available to Latina feminists.

PART IV: INTERPRETING THE LEGACY

THE LIMITATIONS OF MOVEMENT SCHOLARSHIP

Given that group unity is a defining preoccupation of movement politics, one would assume that movement scholars would have made it central to their analysis.

Interestingly, this has not been the case. Instead, movement scholarship exhibits a

It would also be healthy for a woman to pick up the gun, to use the gun. (YLP and Abramson, *Pálante*, 46-47).

tendency to *naturalize* (rather than theorize) questions of unity and the related issues of community, identity, and experience.

In these final pages, I discuss what I see as some of the central themes present in movement scholarship. It's my contention that movement scholarship has been indispensable in shedding much-needed light on the histories and internal workings of these organizations, but by inadequately theorizing the unitary impulse, movement scholars make problematic assumptions about the nature of membership and the role of shared experience in generating political agency and determining political alliances and coalitions.

Legitimation and Decline: Naturalizing Unity

One consistent claim made by movement scholars is that the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements were seriously weakened by their lack of unity, and that future Latino empowerment will require improved ability in this area.¹³⁸ The tendency to criticize the movement for its tendency toward localism and ideological diversity is present in Ignacio García's *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos*. He writes:

Rather than one or two unifying individuals and organizations, the Chicano Movement was a collective of heterogeneous community and campus activists.... This prevented

¹³⁸ Lack of unity is certainly not the only reason given for the decline of these movements. In researching *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*, author Carlos Muñoz obtained F.B.I. documents that describe how movement organizations were targets of political surveillance and infiltration by police and the F.B.I. agents. For Muñoz, the role of J. Edgar Hoover's COINTELPRO program played a significant role in the decline of the Chicano student movement (see p. 172). These movements were also sometimes victims of their own success. Affirmative action, Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies Programs, and an increase in anti-poverty programs in low-income communities were all movement demands that had mobilized Chicano and Puerto Rican communities. The end of the war in Vietnam was another positive development that simultaneously removed a significant factor that mobilized and radicalized youth movements in the United States.

Nevertheless, despite the many challenges faced by Chicano and Puerto Rican activists, movement scholars are in consistent agreement that the lack of group unity is one of the most significant reasons for the political decline that occurred in the mid-1970s.

activists from agreeing on which change should come first or even what they approach to the struggle should be. The varying degrees of urgency they felt toward the different problems produced different goals and plans.... There were those who transcended these political multidivisions, but without a national organization, or widely disseminated publication, they were unable to create a greater organizational homogeneity within the Movement.... The lack of a national structure, a dominant leader, and an explicit ideology made it impossible to retain solidarity among such diverse groups.¹³⁹

In a similar vein, Juan Gómez-Quiñones argues in *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990*, that during the movement, the Mexican-American community too often allowed “class divisions and negative negotiation” to “mitigate political gains.”¹⁴⁰ Like García, Gómez-Quiñones bemoans the fact that “[t]hough there were a number of major organizations and attempts made in coordinating them, there was no major progress toward creating an overall umbrella organization.”¹⁴¹

Gómez-Quiñones concludes *Chicano Politics* by arguing that what is needed in Chicano politics today is “not ad-hoc activity but agreement on programs, tactical guidelines, and generally recognized national political vehicles — in sum, program and organization.”¹⁴² According to Gómez-Quiñones, the issue is *not* the potential political strength of the Mexican community, since “[t]he strength is there.” The problem is that Mexicans “have been divided in many ways, which dilutes political strength.”¹⁴³ Ultimately, Gómez-Quiñones argues that what remains to be done “is to recognize and *deal with* the heterogeneity within the Mexican community, understanding that workers compose its majority.”¹⁴⁴ Echoing Gómez-Quiñones, García approvingly cites

¹³⁹ García, *Chicanismo* 86-87 and 142-143.

¹⁴⁰ Gómez-Quiñones 5.

¹⁴¹ Gómez-Quiñones 181.

¹⁴² Gómez-Quiñones 213.

¹⁴³ Gómez-Quiñones 213.

¹⁴⁴ Gómez-Quiñones 214 (italics mine).

contemporary organizations that seek to promote unity among Mexican-American officials in Texas. For García, these elected officials seemed to have learned the necessary lessons from the movement — by attempting to transcend their divisions, these Chicanos are “now part of the statewide group of Mexican American elected officials seeking to speak with a collective ‘Hispanic’ voice on behalf of the *comunidad*.”¹⁴⁵

In examining movement scholarship, the issue is not so much the validity of claims made so much as it is their failure to problematize their political and theoretical assumptions. García and Gómez-Quiñones often point to real organizational and ideological weaknesses, and they offer astute analysis regarding many of these issues. My concern is with the fact that these texts never challenge or problematize the dream of group unity. For example, these scholars celebrate the fact that movement politics consistently emphasized the grass-roots, the local, and the participatory side of political action but are troubled by the ideological heterogeneity revealed by mass mobilizations.¹⁴⁶ Nowhere is diversity of political thought seen as a potential asset. Seen in this light, Gómez-Quiñones’ choice of words in his conclusion are apt. In *Chicano Politics*, political heterogeneity is understood as something to be “dealt with.” Ideological diversity is to be “overcome,” not embraced. In a similar vein, García also identifies heterogeneity with the dilution of political power — Latino empowerment will occur only when the community is able to speak with a “collective Hispanic voice” on behalf of the entire community.

¹⁴⁵ García 131.

¹⁴⁶ Unlike African-Americans in the 1950s and early 1960s, Chicanos and Puerto Ricans did not have a central issue (like Jim Crow segregation and the denial of voting rights) that could unite localities around a central issue or cause.

By naturalizing unity and treating it as a political prerequisite, neither scholar is able to fully theorize the costs and implications of these assumptions. For example, Iris Morales argues in her essay “Palante, Siempre Palante!” that “[t]he strength of Young Lords Organization was in transcending our differences and understanding the power of collective action.”¹⁴⁷ For Morales, unity is a commonsense and unproblematic marker of political health and efficacy. But perhaps the desire to transcend difference that Morales finds so inspiring is related to why the organization devolved into a narrow, sectarian organization that left little space for democratic dissent. Similarly, by theorizing unity, García and Gómez-Quíñones might have been able to consider the possibility that it was the effort to force unity on such a diverse political community that led to the ideological incoherence they find so troubling. But by consistently celebrating and naturalizing unity, none of these scholars is able to seriously consider the possible benefits of an ethnic community with *multiple* political ideologies — that accepting a diversity of priorities and agendas could lead to more productive deliberation and clearer politics.

CONCLUSION

Too often, movement scholarship has participated in the very impulses it seeks to examine. Given the goals and commitments of its authors, this is unsurprising.¹⁴⁸

However, the political assumptions and practices of the Chicano and Puerto Rican

¹⁴⁷ Morales 215.

¹⁴⁸ Like other social-movement scholarship, the study of Chicano and Puerto Rican politics is grounded in the activist-scholar tradition common to the New Left. Many movement scholars are themselves former activists — Andrés Torres (editor of *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices From the Diaspora*) was a member of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP) in the 1970s. And in *Youth, Identity, Power*, author Carlos Muñoz opens his book with an account of his own involvement as a leading activist in the movement. Similarly, in *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans*, author Ignacio García emphasizes his involvement as a member of La Raza Unida in Texas.

movements demand something beyond legitimation and description. What is needed is a new vocabulary.

I turn to political theory in order to examine and analyze the practices and assumptions within movement politics (and Latino politics more generally). And in doing this, I believe that we are better able to understand a set of impulses that would otherwise appear merely contradictory and ideologically incoherent. But through using this new lens, we come to see the logic behind the impulses. We also come to see how the assumptions and practices of the movement do not simply reflect tendencies within ethnic politics — instead, they reflect something larger. They reflect the contradictions and challenges of democracy.

CHAPTER 3

BETWEEN WEeping AND WORDS:

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU AND MOVEMENT POLITICS

When looking at the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements, we are confronted with political practices and assumptions both attractive and disturbing. The movements' passionate opposition to social inequality, the vivid critique of individualism, the unwillingness to leave anyone behind — this ethos speaks to our own recognition that America's democracy has not served all its people equally well. Moreover, the inclusive and celebratory gatherings that took place during the movements seem to highlight the desire of citizens to experience democratic politics as a form of participation in which they feel a part of something larger than themselves.

But even as the movements appeal to our democratic sensibilities, they give us pause. For in the movements' powerful vision of community cohesion, we find an unwillingness to accept the legitimacy of internal dissent so essential to deliberative politics. The belief that a unified political perspective could emerge from shared culture was powerfully inclusive, but it also turned disagreement into betrayal. The movements' perception of conflict as something external and unnatural to the community meant that those who challenged norms and traditions became culturally and politically suspect. The attack on Latina feminists discussed in Chapter Two is a prime example of this phenomenon: Feminists were vilified and lesbians silenced, in the name of community, unity, and *familia*.

Even the most participatory element of these movements — the rallies, marches, and other mass gatherings of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans — reflect a deep and abiding anxiety regarding the risks of political speech. The movements' politics of direct action and mass mobilization was indeed participatory, but it sought to avoid the problems of political disagreement that emerge in more deliberative settings. The mass gatherings of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans seem to privilege emotion over rational discourse; instead of civic practices that furthered democratic discourse, movement activists engaged in a flurry of passion and spectacle.

And so we find ourselves at an impasse. We know that the ethos and practices of these two movements continue to shape contemporary Latino politics. But given our ambivalence, how are we to interpret this legacy? What should we celebrate? What should we resist?

One approach would be to simply denounce the non-deliberative practices of the movements as dangerous and anti-democratic. According to this argument, contemporary Latino politics should continue the movements' legacy of fighting against social inequality and excessive individualism while avoiding the emotive and performative practices that undermine deliberative democracy.¹ Seen from this perspective, the shift away from protest politics and toward a more professionalized interest-group approach is a positive development in contemporary Latino politics. The realm of public policy should prove less vulnerable to inciting the kind of nationalistic fervor that undermined movement politics.

¹ When I speak of deliberation, I am referring to the dialogue and debate that occurs *between* political subjects. A deliberative politics occurs within the space of public conversation and contestation between members of the civic body.

What limits this approach is the assumption that participatory practices that emphasize shared presence and performance threaten reasonable and democratic deliberation. The participatory legacy of the movements gets reduced to a cautionary tale about the pitfalls that plague identity politics. And by focusing only on its dangers, the question of what democratic needs are fulfilled through such passionate practices goes unexplored. In this chapter, I seek a fuller understanding of the movements' paradoxical legacy, examining the impulses and assumptions that underlie their approach to politics. Rather than presuming that movement practices are inherently anti-democratic, this research turns to the field of political theory to develop a more nuanced understanding of movement practices and the complex needs such practices fulfill. To examine to what extent the movement's desires can be reconciled with deliberative political practices, I use the political thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

In turning to Rousseau, I do not mean to imply that Latino activists were sitting in cafés discussing the theoretical and organizational implications of *The Social Contract*. Chicanos and Puerto Ricans in the 1960s and '70s neither explicitly nor intentionally invoked Rousseau. Nor do I think that he himself would necessarily support these movements. Identity politics, after all, is often described as the politics of difference, while Rousseau's politics has been described by one scholar as “not about the *encounter* with difference but about the *overcoming* of difference.”² More than likely, Rousseau would understand the nationalist politics of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans as an obstacle to civic unity — a challenge to the fraternity and solidarity necessary for discovering the general will at the heart of the American polity.

² James Miller, *Rousseau: Dreamer of Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984)160 (italics mine).

But perhaps the relationship between Rousseau and identity politics is not quite as antagonistic as it initially appears. One of Rousseau's great strengths as a theorist, after all, was his recognition that passion and identification are necessary preconditions for "general willing." Throughout his discussions of Sparta, Poland, and Geneva, Rousseau stresses the way the general is anchored by the specific. For him, the general will can exist only among a *people*. So despite various incongruities, it's my contention that Rousseau's political theory has something important to say about identity politics, particularly Latino identity politics.

Throughout this chapter, I draw on Rousseau's concept of *identification* to better understand the paradoxical practices that comprise movement politics. For Rousseau, identification represents a form of authentic contact between subjects premised on familiarity, affection, transparency, and confirmation. The impulses and assumptions of movement politics can be more fully understood if we conceive Chicano and Puerto Rican activists as practicing a *Rousseauian* form of politics — emphasizing identification through civic practices that were passionate, performative, and familial

The relationship between identification, deliberation, and public speech is another significant element of the Rousseauian impulse in Latino politics. A deep and abiding anxiety regarding political speech infuses both traditions; deliberative practices that uncover difference and conflict are characterized as damaging and dangerous, confirmation of political decline and decay. Yet while Rousseau's depiction of public speech is always characterized by risk, the practice itself is not always corrosive. Public speech among members of the political body *can* succeed, so long as deliberation and identification co-exist. Rousseau articulates precisely this type of deliberative public

speech in his depiction of the *circles* of Geneva in *Letter to d'Alembert*. In the *circles*, public speech is simultaneously deliberative and transparent, uniting listeners while simultaneously transcending the problems of division, artifice, and intrigue. This desire to produce conditions whereby public speech actually sustains identification is also present in movement politics. However in movement discourse, transparency and public speech are reconciled through the performative practice of Chicano and Puerto Rican poetry.

Despite the desire to reconcile speech and identification, both Rousseau and movement activists continued to display an ongoing aversion to deliberative practices that produced vigorous contestation. Because politicized public speech continues to be perceived as dangerous and destabilizing, both Rousseau and movement activists sought non-discursive forms of civic contact emphasizing identification. In Rousseau, this non-discursive form of civic identification is most fully embodied by the *festival*. The festival, or public spectacle, represents an ideal context for citizens to identify passionately with one another and experience themselves as a *moi commun*.³ The Rousseauian festival is a form of civic engagement capable of transcending self-interest, a merging of the body politic that feels both mystical and intimate. This impulse toward intimacy and identification is equally essential to movement politics. The fiestas, *flor y canto* events, marches, rallies, and other mass gatherings of the late 1960s and early '70s can be best understood as employing a Rousseauian conception of political community, one that sought to bind the Latino body politic together by emphasizing unity and a conception of civic life as "an affair of the heart."⁴

³ A common self.

⁴ Daniel Cullen, *Freedom in Rousseau's Political Philosophy* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993) 24.

Rousseau's political philosophy is indispensable to understanding the democratic strengths and weaknesses of the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements. Exploring the Rousseauian drive toward identification, we gain a better understanding of the power and attraction underlying identity politics — the promise of participatory civic spaces that offer familiarity, immediacy, mutual recognition, and the possibility of intimate public speech. Reading Rousseau, we come to understand the depth of this yearning, not only in identity politics but in political life more generally. By putting Rousseau in conversation with movement politics, we come to recognize both the democratic and anti-democratic implications of identification. Ultimately, by approaching these movements through Rousseau, we gain a better understanding of how movements founded on a radical vision of participatory democracy can simultaneously display a desire to erase dissent and conflict.

PART I: SUBJECTIVITY

A STRANGER TO HIMSELF:

ROUSSEAU'S SOCIAL MAN AND THE MOVEMENT CRITIQUE OF ASSIMILATION

Rousseau's characterization of modern man living a life of alienation, dependency, and duplicity has been described as one of the earliest and clearest statements of man in bourgeois society.⁵ Inflamed by *amour propre* (pride) and motivated by fear, social man is concerned with appearance and "comfortable self-preservation."⁶ No longer the free and self-sufficient animal he was in the state of nature, modern man lives in a state of

⁵ Karl Lowith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth Century Thought*, trans. David E. Green (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964) 235.

ever-increasing desire, dependent on others to help fulfill his needs. And while modern man's dependency is both physical and emotional, Rousseau is particularly concerned with modern man's dependency on the approval of others. Contrasting the dependent state of modern man with the independence of savage man, he writes:

[T]he savage lives within himself; the sociable man always outside of himself, knows how to live only in the opinion of others; and it is, so to speak, from their judgment alone that he draws the sentiment of his own existence.⁷

According to Rousseau, modernity can be characterized by this unhealthy state of mutual dependency in which one's survival and success is contingent on the ability to attract the consideration of others: "rich, he needs their services; poor, he needs their help.... He must therefore incessantly seek to interest them in his fate."⁸ Under such conditions, modern man is compelled "to appear to be other than what one in fact was."⁹ The "natural yet engaging manners" of modern subjects — their civility and amiability — are merely "exterior appearance." Custom and decorum may make man *appear* more civilized, but in fact, it's a mask for hypocrisy as he tries to get others interested in either helping or serving him.¹⁰

Rousseau's modern subject is an *in-between* figure, lacking both the internal unity and self-sufficiency of natural man as well as the sense of a *moi commun* that comes with identifying with and devoting oneself to the polity. According to political theorist Werner Danhauser, it is this "in-betweenness" that is central to the problem of bourgeois man —

⁶ Allan Bloom, "Intro," *Emile* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: BasicBooks, 1979) 5.

⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, trans. Roger D. and Judith R. Masters, ed. Roger D. Masters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964) 179.

⁸ Rousseau, *The Second Discourse* 156.

⁹ Rousseau, *The Second Discourse* 155.

¹⁰ Rousseau, *The Second Discourse* 156.

he is both between and beneath natural man and citizen. Lacking unity, “he is a battlefield for contradictory impulses.”¹¹ Corrupted by his disordered desires, Rousseau’s modern man is alienated and divided. He is lost, even to himself:

Always in contradiction with himself, always floating between his inclinations and his duties, he will never be either man or citizen. He will be good for neither himself nor for others. He will be one of these men of our days: a Frenchman, an Englishman, a bourgeois. He will be nothing.¹²

According to Allan Bloom, Rousseau’s bourgeois subject is one who “when dealing with others, thinks only of himself, and on the other hand, in his understanding of himself, thinks only of others. He is a role player.”¹³

Interestingly, scholars of Rousseau have been unaware that in the 1960s, movement narratives of racial identity and assimilation began to articulate a strongly Rousseauian vision of authentic and harmonious subjects. During the late 1960s and early ’70s, Chicano and Puerto Rican activists echoed Rousseau’s critique of social man in their own narratives of racial identity and assimilation. In the identity narratives that characterize the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements, the assimilated subject is also portrayed as living outside himself, dependent on the unhealthy approval of others. Chicano activist and playwright Luis Valdez describes the assimilated Chicano in these terms:

These...ex-raza...have solved their Mexican contradictions with a pungent dose of Americanism, and are more concerned with status, money and bad breath than with their ultimate destiny. In a generation or two they will melt into the American pot and be no more.¹⁴

¹¹ Werner Danhauser, “The Problem of the Bourgeois,” *The Legacy of Rousseau*, eds. Clifford Orwin and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997) 4.

¹² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: BasicBooks, 1979) 40.

¹³ Allan Bloom, “Intro,” *Emile*, 5.

¹⁴ Luis Valdez, “The Tale Of The Raza,” *Chicano: The Evolution of a People*, eds. Renato Rosaldo, Robert A. Calvert, and Gustav L. Seligmann (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1973) 293.

Like Rousseau's bourgeois, the assimilated subject was portrayed as living outside himself, dependent on the unhealthy approval of others. Movement poet Pedro Pietri depicts this type of damage and divided subjectivity in his poem "Puerto Rican Obituary." He writes:

Juan
 Milagros
 Olga
 Manuel
 All died yesterday today
 And will die again tomorrow
 Dreaming
 Dreaming about Queens
 Clean cut lily white
 neighborhood
 Puerto Ricanless scene
 Thirty thousand dollar home
 The first spics on the block
 Proud to belong to a community
 Of gringos who want them lynched
 Proud to be a long distance away
 From the sacred phrase: Qué Pasa?¹⁵

Movement narratives consistently link assimilation to self-interest and material advancement. Pietri describes his characters as being primarily concerned with status and money ("Dreaming about Queens/... Thirty thousand dollar home"). Such acquisitive and individualistic subjects are blind to the contempt they face in their attempts to gain the approval of white society ("Proud to belong to a community/Of gringos who want them lynched"). This understanding of assimilation is equally present the political platform of the movement:

Chicanismo involves a crucial distinction in political consciousness between a Mexican American and a Chicano mentality. The Mexican American is a person who lacks respect

¹⁵ Pedro Pietri, "Puerto Rican Obituary," *The Puerto Ricans: Their History, Culture, and Society*, ed. Adalberto López (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1980) 435.

for his cultural and ethnic heritage. Unsure of himself, he seeks assimilation as a way out of his “degraded” social status.¹⁶

Like bourgeois man, the acculturated Latino is a between-figure. Alienated from his fellow Chicanos and Puerto Ricans and discriminated against by Anglos, he is portrayed as caught between two communities. And by never fully fitting into any one community, his marginality places him beneath either identity. Like Rousseau’s bourgeois, the assimilated Latino in movement discourse is a stranger to himself.

Wrongheaded Approval: The Pleasures & Dangers of Disordered Identity

Describing modern man, Rousseau portrays a subject in decline. Alienated and divided, Rousseau’s modern subject exists in a state of perpetual desire and discomfort. However, as feminist political theorist Linda Zerilli rightly notes, Rousseau’s political theory is constantly imperiled by the possibility that subjects might *enjoy* the encounter with dependency and disorder. According to Zerilli, the real danger of Rousseau’s courtier lies in the *pleasure* he takes in playing to the female gaze.¹⁷ For if the Rousseauian subject fails to strictly adhere to the code of gender differences, all is lost: “[t]here will not be any citizens because there will not be any men.”¹⁸

¹⁶ *El Plan de Santa Barbara* reprinted in *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* by Carlos Muñoz, Jr. (London: Verso, 1989) 194.

¹⁷ Linda Zerilli, *Signifying Woman: Culture and Chaos in Rousseau, Burke, and Mill* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1994) 17. According to Zerilli:

There is a profound sense in his [Rousseau’s] writings that gender boundaries must be carefully fabricated and maintained because they have no solid foundation in nature, because what announces ‘man’ or ‘woman’ is not anatomical differences but instead an arbitrary system of signs that stands in permanent danger of collapsing into a frightening ambiguity of meaning and a loss of manly constitution. (Zerilli 17).

¹⁸ Zerilli 18.

Rousseau's fear — that the boundaries between identities are unstable and in danger of collapse (and that there might be satisfaction in such transgression and disorder) — is powerfully echoed in movement discourse. However, for Chicano and Puerto Rican activists, this anxiety was primarily situated around issues of assimilation and the instability of race.¹⁹ Movement activists not only criticized the assimilated subject, they also spoke of the allure and temptation of acculturation. In the book *Chicano Manifesto*, journalist Armando Rendon includes such an experience in an autobiographical sketch entitled "A Personal Manifesto." Like many movement writers, Rendon's treats assimilation as a story of loss, desire, redemption, and return:

I nearly fell victim to the Anglo.... When at the age of ten I went with my mother to California, to the San Francisco Bay Area...I had my first real opportunity to strip myself completely of my heritage.... By the time I graduated from high school and prepared to enter college, the break was nearly complete. Seldom during college did I admit to being a Mexican American.... My ancestry had become a shadow, fainter and fainter about me. I felt no particular allegiance to it, drew no inspiration from it, and elected generally to let it fade away.... I clicked with the Anglo mind-set in college, mastered it, you might say. I even became editor of the campus biweekly newspaper as a junior, and editor of the literary magazine as a senior.... The point of my "success," of course, was that I had been assimilated; I had bought the white man's world. After getting my diploma I was set to launch out into a career in newspaper reporting and writing. There was no thought in my mind of serving my people, telling their story, or making anything right for anybody but myself. Instead I had dreams of Pulitzer Prizes, syndicated columns, foreign correspondent assignments, front page stories — that was for me. Then something happened.²⁰

In Rendon's account, assimilation is experienced as a mixture of alienation, guilt, and pleasure. Like Rousseau's bourgeois man, Rendon portrays himself as powerfully other-regarding, a role player continually seeking the approval of others. He recognizes his former self as atomistic and self-interested: He criticizes himself for having "no thought

¹⁹ The use of mestizo or hybrid identities is one way that Latino political discourse has sought to affirm miscegenation and acculturation. But the boundaries of this hybrid identity were still well ordered and clearly defined. Without such ordering, the mestizo subject ran the risk of cultural corruption and assimilation. I discuss this process in more detail in chapter 5.

²⁰ Armando Rendon, *Chicano Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1971) 320, 322.

in my mind of serving my people, telling their story, or making anything right for anybody but myself.” Yet underlying this discomfort is a certain pride in his ability to “master” the Anglo mind-set. Rendon’s pleasure in his success as a newspaper and literary editor echoes his earlier delight as a child when he discovers that his ethnic identity could be reimagined and redefined. Rendon, after all, describes his childhood experience in Northern California as one of discovery — a newfound “opportunity” to “strip myself completely of my heritage.” But intermingled in his guilty pleasure is enormous anxiety. Rendon is fearful of his ancestry becoming “a shadow, fainter and fainter about me.”

As discussed in Chapter Two, nationalist ideology often portrayed culture as a set of pre-existing values and practices that were both stable and natural.²¹ But nationalist accounts of assimilation challenge this very conception of themselves. In movement accounts of assimilation, the Latino subject is far from anchored in culture. Instead, he is in constant danger of “losing himself” or “disappearing” into Anglo society. This fear — that the boundaries between identities are deeply unstable — is the anxiety that haunts movement discourse. The assimilated subject is portrayed as divided, caught between and beneath both Anglo and Latino culture. But perhaps the larger fear that underlies movement discourse is that the assimilated subject *could* enter in — that disappearance into the dominant culture is all too possible. In other words, the problem isn’t that Latino subjects can never fit — it is that they may find both pleasure and possibility in such fitting in. For if the Latino subject finds pleasure in “losing himself,” in “stripping himself of his heritage,” then the very meaning of his political identity is thrown into

²¹ For nationalists, the belief that political unity would emerge out of shared culture required approaching culture as a set of practices and beliefs that were simultaneously accessible and immutable.

question. Assimilation then, represents the collapse of both culture and politics in movement discourse, robbing the Latino subject of its ability to invoke a politicized racial identity.

Rousseau's critique of social man provides a new angle for understanding the problem of political subjectivity in identity-driven political movements. For Rousseau, social man exists in a state of alienation and disordered desire, unable to perform the duties of a citizen. His drive for approval and reputation alienates him from his fellow citizens; he comes to view them as either opportunity or barrier. Similarly, the assimilated subject is also a political problem for Latino politics. In movement discourse, the assimilated man appears incapable of either serving his polity or overcoming his self-interest.

Advocates of assimilation like historian Arthur Schlesinger and communitarian theorist Amitai Etzioni argue that assimilation is the precondition for political membership. In contrast to Chicano and Puerto Rican movement activists who portrayed assimilation as a marker of invisibility and loss, scholars like Schlesinger and Etzioni share a concern that resistance to assimilation in the United States is weakening our collective capacity to sustain a common set of core values.²² For these scholars, recent critiques of assimilation seem to signify an unwillingness to acknowledge any sense of shared history or destiny. Etzioni explains:

Communitarians are concerned with maintaining a supracommunity, a community of communities—the American society.... The supracommunity can be well sustained and

²² See Arthur M. Schlesinger's, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (Knoxville: Whittle Direct Books, 1991) and Amitai Etzioni's *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996).

readily accommodate subgroup differences — as long as these do not threaten a limited set of core values and shared bonds.²³

Scholars like Schlesinger and Etzioni frame assimilation in terms of rights and responsibilities — in order to partake of the benefits and rights of the polity, subjects are required to restrain and properly rank their narrow cultural or ethnic selves. Without such ranking and restraint, Americans will fall prey to a balkanized society with nothing to bind us. Citing the descent into tribalism and civil war in places like the Balkans, India, the former Soviet Union, Ireland, and Somalia, critics of identity politics seek to link “excessive” multiculturalism in America with these international examples of balkanization. Describing America, Schlesinger writes:

The national ideal had once been *e pluribus unum*. Are we now to belittle *unum* and glorify *pluribus*? Will the center hold? Or will the melting pot yield to the tower of babble?²⁴

In his claim that “[t]he contemporary ideal is shifting from assimilation to ethnicity, from integration to separatism,” Schlesinger seeks to draw parallels between American identity politics and the violent nationalism and ethnic conflicts occurring throughout the world.²⁵

He writes:

The bonds of cohesion in our society are sufficiently fragile, or so it seems to me, that it makes no sense to strain them by encouraging and exalting cultural and linguistic apartheid.²⁶

For Schlesinger, the ties that bind citizens are made vulnerable and dangerously frayed by the America’s racial and ethnic diversity. Perceived through a Rousseauian lens, however, the question of assimilation becomes a very different kind of political

²³ Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community: The Reinvention of American Society* (New York: Touchstone, 1993) 160.

²⁴ Schlesinger 82.

²⁵ Schlesinger 82.

problem. No longer simply a story of refusing membership, the resistance to assimilation can also be understood as a way of embodying and enacting one's civic identity. In movement narratives, resistance to assimilation requires constant vigilance. Unhealthy temptations were to be resisted and overcome in order to stay true to one's racial and political identity. In this way, resistance to assimilation reflected a belief among movement activists that political freedom was a process of discipline and self-mastery. More importantly, activists did *not* share Etzioni and Schlesinger's belief that America suffers from cultural erosion. If anything, American culture was seen as imperial and homogenizing. In movement discourse, America's dominant culture appeared massive, capable of swallowing everything it came into contact with. Like the subjects in Rousseau's *The Government of Poland*, Chicano and Puerto Rican activists saw themselves as all too digestible. Furthermore, such absorption was perceived not so much as gaining membership as losing agency (and visibility). For both Rousseau's Poles and the Chicanos and Puerto Ricans of the movement, the dominant culture seemed in little need of additional support. Instead, strategies were needed to keep from being consumed. Moreover, as Zerilli reminds us, the Rousseauian subject is also strongly attracted to this very possibility. That these subjects may find pleasure in their disordered state is yet another insight gained through putting this Rousseauian dilemma into conversation with movement-based narratives of Latino subjectivity. But by failing to theorize the complexities of such resistance, scholars like Schlesinger and Etzioni remain trapped in tired debates that either celebrate or denigrate the rise of identity politics, unable to grasp the political and theoretical impact of the anti-assimilationist critique.

²⁶ Schlesinger 82.

PART II: IDENTIFICATION

“NOT OUR MINDS BUT OUR FEELINGS”

The assimilated subject of Latino movement discourse and Rousseau’s social man both suffer from an unhealthy relationship with themselves and with their fellow citizens. Neither are capable of experiencing healthy and authentic contact with their compatriots. For both Rousseau and movement activists, such disordered subjectivity represents a serious political problem. Given this crisis of subjectivity, how *should* subjects relate to one another? What is the ideal in these two traditions?

I insist that only by turning to the concept of *identification* can we understand how subjectivity and community function in Rousseau’s political theory. In his open letter dedicated to the city of Geneva, identification is the defining characteristic of his idealized political community:

If I had to choose my birthplace, I would have chosen... a state where, all the individuals knowing one another, neither the obscure maneuvers of vice nor the modesty of virtue could be hidden from the notice and judgment of the public, and where the sweet habit of seeing and knowing one another turned love of the fatherland into love of the citizens rather than love of the soil.²⁷

For Rousseau, political membership is at its best when it emerges through bonds of affection — in Rousseau’s Geneva, citizenship and patriotism are characterized not by “love of the soil” but “love of the citizens.” Moreover, identification involves a form of civic contact premised on *authenticity*. Community is defined by the absence of duplicity; here we find no break between seeming and being. Citizens continually appear before one another, yet the virtues and vices of its citizens are not “hidden from the notice and

²⁷ Rousseau, “Dedication to the Second Discourse,” *The First and Second Discourses* 79.

judgment of the public.” Instead, Rousseau’s subjects identify with their fellow citizens and the shared polity. At its best, such identification produces well-ordered subjects capable of perceiving and enacting the common good.

In identifying with one another, the Rousseauian subject experiences his fellow human beings in ways that are closer to the state of nature. More specifically, identification is related to Rousseau’s notion of *pitié*. In the *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau characterizes primitive man as driven by two fundamental desires: *amour de soi* (self-preservation) and *pitié* (pity or compassion). According to Rousseau, it is *pitié* that forms the basis of man’s goodness, what political theorist Clifford Orwin describes as “the only pure natural morality.”²⁸ Prior to both rationality and speech, *pitié* is “a natural repugnance to see any sensitive being perish or suffer, principally our fellow men.”²⁹ As an emotive impulse based on identification rather than the “subtle arguments” of rational speech, Rousseau viewed *pitié* as a virtue “all the more universal and useful to man because it precedes in him the use of all reflection.”³⁰ For him, *pitié* — this instinctual aversion to the suffering of others — is what impels savage man to see outside himself. And it is this natural impulse that allows Rousseau to characterize natural man as neither wantonly aggressive nor inherently social.³¹ Moreover, because it is instinctual, *pitié* moves us even when we have no personal connection in such suffering. Yet by

²⁸ Clifford Orwin, “Rousseau and the Discovery of Political Compassion,” *The Legacy of Rousseau* 297.

²⁹ Rousseau, *Second Discourse* 130.

³⁰ In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau writes:

[P]ity... carries us without reflection to the aid of those whom we see suffer... it is in this natural sentiment rather than in subtle arguments, that we must seek the cause of the repugnance every man would feel in doing evil. (Rousseau, *Second Discourse* 133).

³¹ The “conjunction and combination” of self-preservation and natural pity means there is no need for Rousseau to introduce sociability as a principle of natural man’s nature (see the *Second Discourse* 95).

identifying with such suffering, the Rousseauian subject exposes the limitations of using self-interest to define primitive man.³²

For Rousseau, the true self is not the rational self. *Pitié* — not reason — forms the basis of our goodness. We are less our minds than our feelings.³³ In contrast to *pitié*, which Rousseau characterizes as natural and innate, reason is recently acquired and morally inconsistent. According to Rousseau, reason “engenders vanity and reflection fortifies it; reason turns man back upon himself, it separates him from all that bothers and afflicts him.”³⁴ In a well-known passage describing the philosopher’s response to witnessing a violent attack, Rousseau writes:

His fellow-man can be murdered with impunity right under his window; he has only to put his hands over his ears and argue with himself a bit to prevent nature, which revolts within him, from identifying him with the man who is being assassinated. Savage man does not have this admirable talent, and for want of reason he is always seen heedlessly yielding to the first sentiment of humanity.³⁵

For Rousseau, “reason divides men; only sentiment reliably unites them.”³⁶ The claim here is not that reason is negative or unnecessary; instead, Rousseau is making a more

³² One of the most memorable examples of the power of natural pity, even on modern man, is in this evocative passage from the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau writes:

One sees with pleasure the author of the *Fable of the Bees*, forced to recognize man as a compassionate and sensitive being, departing from his cold and subtle style in the example he gives in order to offer us the pathetic image of imprisoned man who sees outside a wild beast tearing a child from his mother’s breast, breaking his weak limbs in its murderous teeth, and ripping apart with its claws the palpitating entrails of this child. What horrible agitation must be felt by this witness of an event in which he takes no personal interest! What anguish must be suffer at this sight, unable to bring help to the fainting mother or the dying child.

Such is the pure movement of nature prior to all reflection. (Rousseau, *Second Discourse* 130-131).

³³ Arthur M. Melzer, “Rousseau and the Modern Cult of Sincerity,” *The Legacy of Rousseau* 289.

³⁴ Rousseau, *Second Discourse* 132.

³⁵ Rousseau, *Second Discourse* 132.

³⁶ Orwin, “Rousseau and the Discovery of Political Compassion” 299.

subtle point about the *limitations* of rationality.³⁷ In the second *Discourse*, we are reminded that one of the most distinguishing features of modernity has been its ability to justify and intellectualize war, inequality, and other forms of political violence.

For Rousseau, identification not only generates a sense of mutual recognition and affirmation — it is capable of becoming a form of *resistance*. In *The Government of Poland*, for example, identification becomes a strategy of opposition and self-determination. Pessimistic about the ability of the Polish people to resist Russian domination, Rousseau asks: How can the Poles remain “free” even under Russian occupation? Rousseau’s solution is that the Polish people “establish the republic in the Poles’ own hearts” so that they can maintain a cohesive identity no matter what their oppressors may do.³⁸ “You cannot possibly keep them from swallowing you,” writes Rousseau, “see to it, at least, that they shall not be able to digest you.”³⁹

In Chicano political discourse, efforts to produce a similar sense of internal cohesion and oppositional politics can be seen in the rhetorical use of *familia* and *hermanidad*:

It is important that every Chicano student on campus be made to feel that he has a place on that campus and that he has a feeling of *familia* with his Chicano brothers.... Above all the feeling of *hermanidad* must prevail so that the organization is more to the members than just a club or a clique.⁴⁰

In movement discourse, *hermanidad* means more than *brotherhood*; it signifies belonging, recognition, internal harmony, and freedom from alienation. When romantic narratives of *familia* are dominant, political membership becomes constitutive of one’s

³⁷ As Orwin notes, “It is not merely that Enlightenment thought overestimates the possibilities of reason, but that it underestimates those of sentiment.” (Orwin, “Rousseau and the Discovery of Political Compassion” 299).

³⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Government of Poland*, trans. Wilmoore Kendall (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985) 10.

³⁹ Rousseau, *Poland* 11.

cultural identity; Chicano and Puerto Rican activists understood themselves as linked to their fellow Latinos through a sense of affection and familiarity. However, this sense of partiality and internal cohesion was defined by the belief that the civic space *outside* the Latino community was simultaneously hostile and homogenizing. So like Rousseau's claim in the *Poland* that the Polish people must construct a distinct and separate identity that sets them apart from their fellow Europeans, movement activists promoted a strategy of identity maintenance that stressed resistance to the political practices of the dominant citizenry.

Chicano activist Corky Gonzales's notion of *familia* is predicated upon Chicanos cultivating what Rousseau describes in the *Poland* as "an instinctive distaste for mingling" with those people outside the community.⁴¹ In this way, movement discourse conflates political membership with cultural identity, producing a vision of a politics synonymous with identification, renunciation, participation, harmony, and blood.⁴²

Describing the process in which unity emerges through repudiation, Gonzales writes:

[I]n our group [The Crusade for Justice], we have dropped all the parliamentary procedure bull, we dropped all the *gringo* type of government, and we have a *concilio de la familia*.⁴³

⁴⁰ *El Plan de Santa Barbara* reprinted in *Youth, Identity, Power* 198.

⁴¹ Rousseau writes:

You must maintain or revive (as the case may be) your ancient customs and introduce suitable new ones that will also be purely Polish...they would endear Poland to its citizens and develop in them an instinctive distaste for mingling with the peoples of other countries. (Rousseau, *Poland* 14).

⁴² Interestingly, in his *Dedication to Geneva*, Rousseau invokes family over city when he refers to his fellow Genevans not only as citizens but as "brothers" since "the bonds of blood as well as the laws unite almost all of us." (Rousseau, *Second Discourse* 83).

⁴³ Rudolfo "Corky" Gonzales, "Chicano Nationalism: The Key to Unity for La Raza," *Chicano: The Evolution of a People*, eds. Renato Rosaldo, Robert A. Calvert, and Gustav L. Seligmann (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1973) 426.

Chicano nationalists invoked *familia* and *hermanidad* in the belief that such emotive sentiment was the safest and surest route to a united political community. Like Rousseau, movement activists questioned the assumption that the common good would emerge through debates over competing political ideologies. As discussed in Chapter Two, nationalist leaders like Corky Gonzales characterized such debates as insignificant abstractions: “tremendous words of intellectualism...a bunch of garbage.”⁴⁴ For Gonzales, debates about political priorities weren’t the answer; instead, Chicanos needed to be animated by an overriding sense of *familia*:

Five years ago, we were saying that we needed to create a cultural renaissance, a cultural revival of who we were...when you can understand that you can love yourselves for the contributions of your people, for the nobility of your heroes, for everything that we have done.... When you have that cultural awareness, then you can create your own economic base. Then you can get yourselves together....

And we are all the same family. When we can stand up as one, there is nothing that can destroy us. To survive we have to start controlling our own destiny, creating our own economic power. To do that, you first have to learn to love each other. You have to love yourself before you can love someone else. When you do that, then you can share; but you can’t share anything if you are part of this competitive society. In fact, you end up cutting each other’s throats....

I just want to say that we can accomplish liberation. We can bring ourselves together as a *familia*.⁴⁵

For Gonzales, a deliberative assessment of shared interests would not bring about Chicano liberation. Like Rousseau, Gonzales envisioned reason as a vital human faculty but not the key to the deepest aspects of the self. Instead, Gonzales offers movement activists a Rousseauian approach to political membership. For Gonzales, it’s not enough for citizens to be convinced that they have obligations to the community — they need to *feel* these obligations as part of who they are. In other words, identification is crucial to

⁴⁴ Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzales, “Chicano Nationalism” 425-426.

the cultivation of a political community for which people are willing to make sacrifices. A sense of *moi commun* can occur only when subjects are able to experience themselves as part of something larger than themselves. For Gonzales, it was through shared culture and familial identification that Chicanos would come to transform themselves and their society. Once the foundation of *familia* was established, Chicanos would become capable of discerning the movement's political priorities and agenda.

Movement activists echo Rousseau's assertion that the wrong forms of intellectual development can distort man's capacity for moral action. Describing the dangers of conflating morality with instruction, Young Lords Party member David Perez makes this Rousseauian insight:

We don't want our children to go through this school system...a school system that dehumanizes us to the point where we can watch someone killed in the street and not feel pain and not feel the need to intervene, that teaches us it's dog-eat-dog in America.⁴⁶

Like *pitié*, identification is an emotive and participatory encounter between subjects that transcends the problems of intrigue and artifice.⁴⁷ Identification requires both community and contact, but like *pitié*, it tempers dependency and unhealthy comparisons. Unlike *pitié*, however, identification is a form of authentic contact between subjects who share not simply a common humanity but a common *civic* membership. In this way, identification produces a sense of unity and fellow-feeling among members of a polity, what political scientist Daniel Cullen describes as "a union of hearts." For Rousseau, such a union of hearts represents civic life at its healthiest and most satisfying.

⁴⁵ Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, "Arizona State University Speech," October 14, 1970. *Message to Aztlán: Selected Writings of Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2001), 38, 52, 55.

⁴⁶ Young Lords Party and Michael Abramson *Pálante: Young Lords Party* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971) 67.

⁴⁷ Cullen 118.

In Rousseau's state of nature, *pitié* is the natural impulse that produces a sense of compassion and mutuality in savage man while simultaneously avoiding the pitfalls of sociability, envy, dependency, and *amour propre*. In other words, *pitié* is the emotive sentiment that connects humans *qua* humans. Instinctual and expansive, *pitié* excludes no one. Rousseau's notion of *identification* on the other hand, is a significantly more bounded and restrictive sentiment.

In making such familial identification their civic ideal, both Rousseau and movement activists put forward an understanding of political agreement that is as indispensable as it is problematic. For movement activists, a Rousseauian notion of citizenship involved familial practices that were participatory yet primarily non-deliberative. In making identification the necessary characteristic of a vibrant and successful political community, both Rousseau and the movements put forward a vision of participatory democracy that privileges unity over deliberation, consensus over contentious debate and public speech.

The equation of harmony with civic health is most clearly seen in Rousseau's portrayal of the general will in *The Social Contract*, and it is to this concept that I now turn.

PART III: THE GENERAL WILL

THE BIRTH OF A PEOPLE: COMMUNITY, CONFLICT AND COLLECTIVE OVERCOMING

Notions of "will" and "general" are central to Rousseau's moral and political philosophy. As theorist Patrick Riley notes, without will, "there is no self-determination,

no moral causality, no obligation.”⁴⁸ Without generality, the will may become “capricious, egoistic, self-loving” — in a word, “willful.”⁴⁹ Unable to produce, perceive, or pursue a common good, subjects lacking a general will are able only to obey.⁵⁰

Rather than the dominance of private and partial wills, Rousseau’s general will exists when duty and interest converge. Characterized by unity and reciprocity, the general will is by definition a moral and collective body. Rousseau describes this process by invoking an image of almost mathematical efficiency:

There is often a great difference between the will of all and the general will. The latter considers only the common interests; the former considers private interests, and is only a sum of private wills. But take away from these same wills the pluses and minuses that cancel each other out, and the remaining sum of the differences is the general will.⁵¹

The birth of a general will seems to mark a moment of collective recognition and communal identification whereby a people comes to recognize and understand itself. Such recognition however, is far from natural — subjects must struggle to master their private desires in order to both produce and perceive the general will. Rousseau explains:

If there were no different interests, the common interest, which would never encounter any obstacle, would scarcely be felt. Everything would run smoothly by itself and politics would cease to be an art.⁵²

For Rousseau, the general will exists only when the internal contradictions produced by “different interests” are able to be overcome — produced through the clash and contestation of partial and multiple wills. Rousseau emphasizes a rigorous civic education

⁴⁸ Patrick Riley, *The General Will Before Rousseau: The Transformation of the Divine Into the Civic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) 241.

⁴⁹ Riley 241.

⁵⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Social Contract*, trans. Judith R. Masters, ed. Roger D. Masters (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1978) 59.

⁵¹ Rousseau, *Social Contract* 61.

⁵² Rousseau, *Social Contract* 61.

precisely because this ability to generalize must be *created*. As Riley notes, because “men do not naturally or originally think of themselves as part of a greater whole; they must be brought to this non-natural belief.”⁵³

As understood by Rousseau, the general will can exist only among a *people*. This linking of cultural specificity to anchor what is generalizable is a particularly Rousseauian interpretation of the larger general will tradition. He sought to produce “a general will that is peculiar to some particular nation, not a universal will for the good of the whole human race.”⁵⁴ As Riley explains:

Rousseau’s *volonté générale* — of Rome, of Sparta, of Geneva — is a great deal more *particulière*; indeed in the *Gouvernement de Pologne* Rousseau insists on the importance of national peculiarities and particularities that should not be submerged in cosmopolitan universalism.⁵⁵

It is Rousseau’s interpretation of the general will that leads him to criticize Christianity and its ability to function as a civic religion. Unlike the civic religion of Rome or Sparta, Christianity inspires universal notions of humanity rather than the more particular sentiment of patriotism. From Rousseau’s perspective, Christianity makes better men than citizens. Riley explains:

In the end, for Rousseau, no *morale universelle* — either a Christian one based on charity or a Diderotian one based on passion silencing reason — can help in the transformation of natural men into denatured citizens. The *générale* must be somewhat *particulière*.⁵⁶

Movement Conferences and the General Will

⁵³ Riley 212.

⁵⁴ Riley 210.

⁵⁵ Riley 204.

⁵⁶ Riley 211

To explore how a Rousseauian notion of the general will might occur in practice, I turn now to two seminal events of the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements: the 1969 National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver and the 1970 Columbia University Conference in New York City. It's my belief that these conferences can best be understood as Rousseauian gatherings that sought to produce a general will for the movement and its people.

Organized by Corky Gonzales and his organization, the Crusade for Justice, the National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference brought together more than 1,500 students and community activists, emerging as one of the most significant events in movement history. Held at El Centro de la Crusada, the conference focused on two issues: social revolution and cultural identity. The conference brought together a strikingly diverse group of young people to discuss community issues and politics — “students, nonstudents, militant youth from the street gangs (*vatos locos*), and exconvicts (*pintos*).”⁵⁷ According to historian Ignacio García, Gonzales’ greatest accomplishment at the conference was to offer Chicano youth and activists a national identity: “Never before had so many Chicano youth come together to explore their identity and talk about change.”⁵⁸

Like the Denver gathering, the conference at Columbia University brought together a socially diverse cross-section of the Puerto Rican community — student and community activists, young professionals, and barrio youth. Organized by the Young Lords Party in collaboration with the Puerto Rican Student Union, the conference was held on

⁵⁷ Muñoz 75.

⁵⁸ Ignacio García, *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican-Americans* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1997) 94-95.

September 22 and 23, 1970, to coincide with the 102nd anniversary of El Grito de Lares (the first armed uprising for the national independence of Puerto Rico). Bringing together more than 1,000 participants from across the country, the issues addressed included opposition to the draft, college financial aid, support for political prisoners, and the independence of Puerto Rico.⁵⁹

Movement conferences were an exercise in general willing, a Rousseauian attempt to produce collective recognition and communal identification. During the proceedings, participants sought to overcome disagreement and individual differences through a process of internal and collective struggle. Moreover, the presence of a broad range of activists represented the necessary obstacle required for the general will to emerge. Participant diversity *gave* the conference its politics — a Rousseauian general will could be produced only through the transformation of students, street gangs, activists, and artists into a collective capable of seeing themselves as acting with one body and with one mind. In other words, for the general will to be a truly *political* transformation, internal contradictions and a multiplicity of interests were necessary at its inception.

During the weeklong Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, participants were told they had an obligation to struggle against the self-interested egoism that pervaded American culture. Ethnic studies scholar Carlos Muñoz explains:

Gonzales and his followers stressed the need for students and youth to play a revolutionary role in the movement. Conference participants were told that previous generations of students, after completing academic programs and becoming professionals, had abdicated their responsibility to their people, to their *familia de La Raza*. This abdication of responsibility was attributed to the fact that Mexican American students had been Americanized by the schools, that they had been conditioned to accept

⁵⁹ Basilio Serrano, “‘Rifle, Cañon, y Escopeta!’: A Chronicle of the Puerto Rican Student Union” *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices From the Diaspora*, eds. Andrés Torres and José Velázquez (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998) 132.

the dominant values of American society, particularly individualism, at the expense of their Mexican identity.⁶⁰

For Gonzales, the assembly of Chicano youth could become a “people” only if they were able to master their private desires in order to both produce and perceive the general will. The common good of the community was to be put before the social and economic advancement of individual Chicanos. Movement rhetoric consistently called for a “new breed” of Chicanos capable of recognizing and understanding themselves as a people. Similarly, at the Columbia conference “attendees were reminded that they were responsible for carrying on the legacy of struggle, which dated back more than a hundred years to El Grito de Lares.”⁶¹ Like their Chicano counterparts, Puerto Rican activists claimed a historic legacy of resistance while simultaneously announcing the birth of a “new people.” At the Denver conference, this image of cultural and political rebirth was made most explicit when *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (The Spiritual Plan of Aztlán) was introduced and read aloud at the general assembly. Written by Chicano poet Alurista, the *Plan* calls on Chicanos to recognize their indigenous origins and reclaim Aztlán as the Mexican territories lost in the Mexican-American War of 1848. It reads:

In the spirit of a *new people* that is conscious not only of its proud historical heritage but also of the brutal “gringo” invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán...declare that the call of our blood is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny.... With our hearts in our hands and our hands in the soil, we declare the independence of our mestizo nation...⁶² (emphasis mine)

The rhetorical power of *El Plan de Aztlán* reflects the important role *identification* played in producing subjects capable of general willing. While both conferences involved

⁶⁰ Muñoz 76.

⁶¹ Serrano 132.

a good deal of deliberation (various workshops passed resolutions as well as a list of national demands and organizational goals), both scholars and participants consistently emphasize the moments of mass identification that occurred. In Colorado, conference participants were housed together at the La Crusada building and fed by people from Denver's Mexican-American community; participants spent their days in gatherings large and small — they attended workshops, listened to speeches, and participated in panels. At night, the gatherings continued with poetry readings, singing, and dancing.⁶³ Participants described the experience as “euphoric.”⁶⁴ Similarly, the New York conference concluded on its second day with participants marching from Morningside Heights (the home of Columbia University) to Plaza Borinquenia in the South Bronx. By concluding the conference with songs, chants, and speeches, the Columbia conference ended on a note of mass celebration, participatory protest, and identification.⁶⁵

The liberty conceived in *The Social Contract* involves a kind of social transformation — transforming each individual “from a solitary being into part of a greater whole.”⁶⁶ Some scholars take this image of transformation even further, describing the Rousseauian social contract as involving the “death” of the individual as a distinct unity and followed by his “rebirth” as a member of “a moral and collective body.”⁶⁷ What each of these

⁶² *El Plan Espiritual Aztlán*. In *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland*, eds., Rudolfo Anaya and Francisco Lomeli (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989) 1.

⁶³ Muñoz, p. 78.

⁶⁴ Ignacio García 94.

⁶⁵ Serrano 132. This gathering of Puerto Rican movement activists to commemorate *El Grito de Lares* eventually became an annual event.

⁶⁶ Robert Wokler, “Rousseau and his critics on the fanciful liberties we have lost,” *Rousseau and Liberty*, ed. Robert Wokler (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995) 190.

⁶⁷ Bertrand de Jouvenel, “Essai sur la politique de Rousseau.” Quoted in Daniel Cullen’s *Freedom in Rousseau’s Political Philosophy* 11.

depictions share is an understanding of Rousseauian citizenship as a re-creation of one's sense of self, followed by a new, heightened consciousness. Movement conferences sought just such a transformation. During the youth conferences in Denver and New York, the general will of the movement was produced through Rousseauian moments of mass identification. And while not every individual experienced the conferences the same way, a heightened sense of "peoplehood" clearly emerged from these gatherings. Here we see Rousseau's mathematical imagery at play: Differences of gender, class, region, and generation "canceled each other out" until all that remained was their collective identity — their general will. Through conflict, collective recognition, and renunciation, Chicano and Puerto Rican youth left the conference imbued with a powerful sense of commitment to the collective liberation of their people.

While discussion and debate play a role in the process of producing the general will, *identification* is even more crucial. As discussed in Part II, the ties that bind men are not forged primarily through careful logic and reasoned deliberation. In the Rousseauian assembly, it's primarily through the emotive impulse of identification that subjects come to see outside themselves and feel the mutuality of their lives.

When thinking about producing and perceiving the general will, it's important to understand that, for Rousseau, this ability is not developed exclusively (or even primarily) within the public assembly. Rather, the capacity for general willing is learned in a number of ways that don't involve the struggle between citizens in the public realm. Instead, the Rousseauian general will is often produced through education, mores, tradition, and civic rituals. In this way, the preconditions for general willing are generally established *prior* to the convening of the assembly. This is one of the reasons Chicano

and Puerto Rican studies is so crucial to movement discourse — it was a form of civic education premised on the Rousseauian belief that the ability to generalize must be created.

A significant shift occurs, however, in the move from *producing* to *sustaining* the general will. Here, we see an increased emphasis on harmony in the assembly and a newfound concern regarding disagreement and contentious public speech. From its inception, then, we see that while deliberation and debate are central to producing the general will, these are not the practices that truly sustain the general will.

In Rousseau's depiction, the strength of the general will is visible through harmony and a lack of dissension.⁶⁸ Describing the well-functioning assembly, Rousseau writes:

[A]ll the mechanisms of the State are vigorous and simple, its maxims are clear and luminous, it has no tangled contradictory interests; the common good is clearly apparent everywhere and requires only good sense to be perceived.⁶⁹

According to political scientist George Graham, Rousseau conceived of consensus — as expressed by the general will — as an “ideal type” of political discourse. “Rousseau did not expect to achieve full agreement in any society,” Graham writes, “but he presents the ideal type as the proper goal for every society.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ This joining of democracy and harmony—democracy and *stability*—is an example of how Rousseau transformed the debate surrounding democracy and the nature of political agreement. Prior to Rousseau, democracy was more commonly portrayed in terms of chaos, violence, and mob rule. In *Rousseau: Dreamer of Democracy*, James Miller discusses Rousseau's impact in recasting the terms of debate. He writes:

Formerly the picture of disunity and decadence...democracy now connoted harmony and regeneration.... [D]emocracy became the name for “popular sovereignty...the promise of a personally fulfilling freedom, exercised in cooperation with others. (Miller 202).

⁶⁹ Rousseau, *Social Contract* 108.

⁷⁰ George Graham, “Rousseau's Concept of Consensus,” *Political Science Quarterly* 85 (March 1970) 94.

As Rousseau's description makes clear, civic health in the assembly is expressed through unanimity. "Everything that disrupts the social bond of unity is useless," he writes, "[a]ll institutions which set a man in contradiction with himself are of no worth"⁷¹ For Rousseau, the general will's dominance is threatened by tumultuous contestation and a multiplicity of views. He writes:

The more harmony there is in the assemblies, that is, the closer opinions come to obtaining unanimous support, the more dominant as well is the general will. But long debates, dissensions, and tumult indicate the ascendance of private interests and the decline of the state.⁷²

In the Rousseauian assembly, it is the absence of both conflict and conversation that signifies civic health. In contrast to the quiet harmony displayed when the general will is dominant, excessive public speech (exhibited by "dissension," disagreement, and "long debates") characterizes the corrupt assembly. He writes:

[W]hen the social tie begins to slacken and the State to grow weak; when private interests start to make themselves felt and small societies to influence the large one, the common interest changes and is faced with opponents; unanimity no longer prevails in the votes; the general will is no longer the will of all; contradictions and debates arise and the best advice is not accepted without disputes.⁷³

The Rousseauian belief that contestation and a multiplicity of viewpoints represent a decline in the general will is all too visible in the events following the National Chicano Liberation Conference, particularly in the debates surrounding Latina feminism. At the Denver conference, a workshop on the status of Chicanas emerged with a resolution supported by the majority of women stating that "it was the consensus of the group that

⁷¹ Rousseau, *Social Contract* 128.

⁷² Rousseau, *Social Contract* 109.

⁷³ Rousseau, *Social Contract* 108.

the Chicana woman does *not* want to be liberated”⁷⁴ (italics mine) Interestingly, for many conference participants, this resolution was understood not as anti-feminist but as a statement of the unanimity and the civic health of the Chicano people. From the perspective of these activists, women at the conference recognized that they shared a common fate with their people. Instead of focusing on their own “narrow issues” that might potentially divide them, Chicanas at the conference overcame their differences and recognized their larger interests — hence the ascendancy of the general will. In the following months, however, an increasing number of Chicanas began to speak out against the Denver resolution, leading to increased debate regarding the status of women in the movement.

From a Rousseauian perspective, we can now see why movement activists generally interpreted this increase in debate and dissent as a sign of decline and civic decay. For many movement activists, the National Youth Liberation Conference marked the cultural and political rebirth of the Chicano people. For these activists, the general will was created at the Denver conference, and the movement’s task was to enlarge and deepen its dominance. This goal, however, was threatened by the rising feminist presence in the movement. Despite the feminist claim that confronting sexism would ultimately *increase* unity and enlarge the sphere of agreement, many movement activists maintained a Rousseauian tendency to equate harmony and identification with the strength of the general will and to view the rise of contentious speech as signifying corrosive division and the loss of civic agency.

⁷⁴ Enriqueta Longeaux y Vasquez, “The Women of La Raza,” *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Writings*, ed. Alma García (New York: Routledge, 1997) 29.

The Rousseauian elements of the movement made it difficult for feminists to effectively argue their case. In movement politics, the general will was understood as produced through identification, while the debates with feminists involved disagreement and debate. In the latter case, *speech* was paramount. However, in Rousseau's characterization of the public assembly, speech between subjects is fraught with risk.

PART IV: SPEECH

HARMONY, TRANSPARENCY AND THE PROBLEM OF DELIBERATION

Chicana feminists believed that vigorous and contentious debate was necessary to achieving the general will of the Chicano people. In this way, feminists privileged reasoned deliberation and public speech as crucial to the process of general willing. However, this shift away from identification and toward contentious public speech rubbed uncomfortably against a movement whose Rousseauian tendencies made emphasizing agonistic speech highly problematic.

For Rousseau, interactions between assembled subjects can all too easily devolve into inequality and lost virtue.⁷⁵ Nor is this simply a problem that emerges in modernity.

Depicting the gatherings of early man in his *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality*, Rousseau writes:

People grew accustomed to assembling in front of the huts or around a large tree.... Each one began to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself, and public esteem had value. The one who sang or danced the best, the handsomest, the strongest, the most

⁷⁵ For Rousseau, public gatherings have the tendency to inflame man's *amour propre* (pride) — the sociability of the assembly inflames man's desire to see and be seen ("to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself"). Moreover, if not properly constituted, the assembly has the tendency to expose and exacerbate differences of ability and social location. The result is unhealthy competition, inequality and the increased dependency on others for approval and approbation.

adroit, or the most eloquent became the most highly considered; and that was the first step toward inequality and, at the same time, toward vice.⁷⁶

It's interesting to note that the inequalities that surround speech are characterized as particularly dangerous for Rousseau ("the most eloquent became the most highly considered; and that was the first step toward inequality and, at the same time, toward vice"). For Rousseau, corruption in the assembly is signified by an *excess* of speech. Such excess is linked to Rousseau's critique of ornamentation. In the *Discourses*, ornamentation of dress and décor is posited against the virtue of simplicity:

It is in the rustic clothes of a farmer and not beneath the gilt of a courtier that strength and vigor of the body will be found.... The good man is an athlete who likes to compete in the nude. He disdains all those vile ornaments which would hamper the use of his strength, most of which were invented only to hide some deformity.⁷⁷

For Rousseau, eloquence represents a kind of verbal ornamentation — a form of deception as well as a kind of alienation.⁷⁸ And like ornamentation, eloquence seems to *produce* the very weaknesses and deformities it seeks to mask. Ornamentation increases the distance between seeming and being (appearance versus reality). And just as immorality and corruption are equated with the gilt of the courtier's clothes, so too is eloquence associated with "ambition, hate, flattery, and falsehood."⁷⁹

Because deliberative practices between citizens expose difference, inequality, and disagreement, Rousseau's vision of the popular assembly is more about shared *presence* than shared decision-making. For him, once the general will comes into existence, the public assembly represents the civic site where this will is articulated and confirmed

⁷⁶ Rousseau, *Second Discourse* 149.

⁷⁷ Rousseau, *First Discourse* 37.

⁷⁸ Rousseau, *First Discourse* 46.

⁷⁹ Rousseau, *First Discourse* 48.

rather than produced. In this way, the assembly is envisioned as a political body that *expresses* rather than *produces* political agreement. For Rousseau, the general will is produced through education, mores, tradition, and civic rituals — not the dialogical struggle between citizens in the public realm. This is why in a healthy regime, the general will can be found even in silence. Describing this process, Rousseau writes:

If, when an adequately informed people deliberates, the citizens were to have no communication among themselves, the general will would always result from the large number of small differences, and the deliberation would always be good.⁸⁰

According to Cullen, Rousseau's discussion of deliberation without communication, involves “a peculiar conception of democratic deliberation” that reconceives deliberation as a “mutual exercise in silent examination,” isolating each citizen from the influence of others.⁸¹ Because the preconditions for general willing have been established *prior* to the convening of the assembly, dialogue *between* citizens is superfluous. In fact, because the healthy assembly is the site where previously socialized subjects gather, excessive and unnecessary public discourse could actually undermine and obscure the subjects’ ability to distinguish the general will from self-interest or the will of all.

As political theorist Judith N. Shklar correctly notes, Rousseau’s assemblies “do not govern and do not frame policies.” Instead, “[t]he popular assemblies exist to preserve the republic, not to alter or adapt its laws.” The primary purpose of the assemblies is to express confidence or dissatisfaction, to reconfirm original laws and to socialize the citizen by “identifying directly and constantly with the polity.”⁸² Instead of being the space where contending notions of the good are debated and fought out, the popular

⁸⁰ Rousseau, *Social Contract* 61.

⁸¹ Cullen 29.

assembly of *The Social Contract* is a “defensive body in which the people do not so much forge their identity in the process of establishing consensus, as *preserve* it against the inevitable tendency of partial associations, and partial identities, to displace it.” For Shklar, Rousseau’s assembly *socializes* its citizens, encouraging them to identify “directly and constantly with the polity.”⁸³

Because public speech in the popular assembly is so unstable and prone to factionalism and inequality, Rousseau turns to civic practices capable of “filtering out” the conflict associated with political speech.⁸⁴ In his desire to produce a sense of unity and fellow-feeling among members of the civic body, he seeks deliberative practices that transcend the problems of intrigue and artifice. This desire is apparent in Rousseau whenever he speaks about the “heart” of the citizen.

The heart is important to Rousseau not as a signifier of merely private sentiment but as something in need of civic education.⁸⁵ This view of the heart as the “engine” of civic life can be seen in the final chapter of Book I of *The Social Contract*, when Rousseau concludes his delineation of the various types of law (political, civil, and criminal) by stating:

⁸² Judith Shklar, *Men & Citizens: A Study of Rousseau’s Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) 20.

⁸³ Shklar, *Men & Citizens* 20.

⁸⁴ Interestingly, the problem faced by Rousseau was confronted quite differently in our own liberal framework. Like Rousseau, the American founders also feared factionalism and disruption. However, their solution was representative government—a political system based on distance, separation, and self-interest. Many scholars have noted how the American system of representation is premised on a lack of faith—as well as a kind of fear—of its citizenry (see Hannah Arendt, Benjamin Barber, and Michael Sandel). Rousseau, however, was a political philosopher of multiple inclinations—committed not only to avoiding political dissension but to a vibrant definition of participatory democracy and self-sovereignty.

⁸⁵ Lester Crocker, *Rousseau’s “Social Contract”*: *An Interpretive Essay* (Cleveland: Case Western University Press, 1968) 139.

To these three types of laws is added a fourth, the most important of all; which is not engraved on marble or bronze, but in the hearts of the citizens; which is the true constitution of the State; which gains fresh force each day; which...preserves a people in the spirit of its institutions, and imperceptible substitutes the force of habit for that of authority.⁸⁶

For Rousseau, public speech among members of the political body would succeed if it involved this sort of “union of hearts” — a space where deliberation and identification could co-exist. This belief in the possibility of communication without dissimulation represents Rousseau’s dream of *transparency*.⁸⁷ According to political theorist Tracy Strong, Rousseau harbors a vision of relations among men in which “there is no possibility to take the speaker as other than that person is.”⁸⁸ When public speech is transparent, “there is no disjuncture between emotion and expression, between weeping and words, between meaning and saying.”⁸⁹ For Rousseau, transparency represents a mode of communication “without dissimulation.”⁹⁰

In movement politics, the speaking of Spanish was a Rousseauian attempt to achieve transparency and a “union of hearts.” Armando Rendon’s portrayal of language in *Chicano Manifesto* is typical in this regard; in this passage, the speaking of Spanish is portrayed in romantic and familial terms. He writes:

I did well in the elementary grades and learned English quickly. Spanish was off limits in school anyway, and teachers and relatives taught me early that my mother tongue would be of no help in making good grades and becoming a success. Yet Spanish was the language I used in playing and arguing with friends. Spanish was the language I spoke with my *abuelita*, my dear grandmother, as I ate *atole* on those cold mornings when I used to wake at dawn to her clattering dishes in the tiny kitchen.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Rousseau, *Social Contract* 77.

⁸⁷ Tracy Strong, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Politics of the Ordinary* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994) 55.

⁸⁸ Strong 61.

⁸⁹ Strong 61.

⁹⁰ Cullen 24.

⁹¹ Rendon 320-321.

In this movement treatise, Rendon invokes Spanish as a way of marking public (assimilated) life from the more familial and authentic experiences of his childhood.

Later in the text, the loss of Spanish is used to signify his increasing cultural and political alienation from the Chicano community. He explains:

I remember a summertime visit home a few years ago after living on the West Coast. At an evening gathering of almost the whole family—uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, my abuelita...someone brought out a Mexican card game, the Lotería El Diablito, similar to bingo.... The word for tree was called: Arbol! It completed a row; I had won. Then to check my card I had to name each figure again. When I said the word for tree, it didn't come out at all as I wanted it to: AR-BOWL with the accent on the last syllable and sounding like an Anglo tourist. There was some all-around kidding of me and good-natured laughter over the incident, and it passed.

But if I had not been speaking much Spanish up until then, I spoke even less afterward.... By the time I graduated from high school and prepared to enter college, the break was nearly complete. Seldom during college did I admit to being Mexican American.⁹²

For Rendon, the loss of Spanish was a loss of identity. Moreover, if Spanish was at the “heart” of both his personal and political identity, then losing Spanish also meant that Rendon had lost the very “engine” of his civic life. Later, in describing his re-entry into the Chicano political community as a journalist in Sacramento, the *rediscovery* of Spanish is crucial to this newfound consciousness:

It was my own people who rescued me. There is a large Chicano population in Sacramento, today one of the most activist in northern California...together we found each other. My job soon brought me into contact with many Chicanos as well as the recently immigrated Mexicans.... I rediscovered my own people, or perhaps they redeemed me...for the first time in many years I became reimmersed in a tough, macho ambiente (an entirely Mexican male environment). Only Spanish was spoken. The effect was shattering. It was as if my tongue, after being struck dumb as a child, had been loosened.⁹³

For Rendon, Spanish evolves from being the familial language of his childhood to a form of public speech that offers the promise of transparency. In his discussions with other

⁹² Rendon 323.

⁹³ Rendon 323.

Chicano and Mexicano men, Rendon reconciles public speech with the Rousseauian desire for “communication without dissimulation.”

The linking of Spanish with the “heart” was so successful in movement discourse that its presence is even apparent in the more conservative Latino political narratives that emerged in the post-movement era. In his 1982 memoir *Hunger of Memory*, essayist Richard Rodriguez argues against bilingual education while waxing rhapsodic about the emotive power of Spanish in his childhood. Like earlier movement authors, Rodriguez equates Spanish with transparency. In a passage that evokes sexual release almost as much as familial affection, he writes:

I remember many nights when my father would come back from work, and I'd hear him call out to my mother in Spanish, sounding relieved. In Spanish, he'd sound light and free notes he never could manage in English. Some nights I'd jump up just at hearing his voice. With *mis hermanos* I would come running into the room where he was with my mother. Our laughing (so deep was the pleasure!) became screaming. Like others who know the pain of public alienation, we transformed the knowledge of our public separateness and made it consoling — the reminder of intimacy. Excited, we joined our voices in a celebration of sounds. *We are speaking now the way we never speak out in public. We are alone — together...*

Some nights, no one seemed willing to loosen the hold sounds had on us. At dinner, we invented new words. (Ours sounded Spanish, but made sense only to us.) We pieced together new words by taking, say, an English verb and giving it Spanish endings.... Tongues explored the edges of words, especially the fat vowels. And we happily sounded that military drum roll, the twirling roar of the Spanish *r*. Family language: my family's sounds. The voices of my parents and sister and brother.... Voices singing and sighing, rising, straining, then surging, teeming with pleasure that burst syllables into fragments of laughter. At times it seemed there was steady quiet only when, from another room, the rustling whispers of my parents faded and I moved closer to sleep.⁹⁴

Like Rendon, Rodriguez shares the Rousseauian belief that the heart is in need of civic education. Unlike Rendon, however, Rodriguez sees Spanish as a powerfully *private* language that keeps Chicanos from fully participating in the social and political life of America. For Rodriguez, Chicano hearts must renounce the private (Spanish) for

the public (English). But despite their very different views on language policy, Rodriguez shares the movement's assumption that Spanish is deeply implicated in civic life — a signifier of both intimacy and transparency.

By linking deliberation to transparency, Rousseau was able to articulate a form of public speech that was both political and emotive — capable of uniting the listeners and transcending the problems so often produced by intrigue and eloquence. In *Letter to d'Alembert*, Rousseau invokes the *circles* of Geneva as a civic institution that engages in public speech yet is capable of being both deliberative and transparent.

For Rousseau, the *circles* of Geneva are an example of public speech and fact-to-face deliberation that bind men together in a free and healthy polity. In describing this institution, Rousseau writes:

The *circles* are societies of twelve to fifteen persons who...meet and there each gives himself without restraint to the amusements of his taste; they gamble, chat, read, drink and smoke.... Also they often go walking together, and the amusements they provide for themselves are exercises fit to cause and maintain a robust body.... In a word, these decent and innocent institutions combine everything which can contribute to making friends, citizens, and soldiers out of the same men, and, in consequence, everything which is most appropriate to a free people.⁹⁵

Theorist James Miller describes the circles as a form of “healthy interactions” where men come to see themselves “not as anonymous neighbors, but as thoughtful compatriots.”⁹⁶

Most importantly, the circles are spaces in which transparency and deliberation can co-exist. Describing the deliberative practices of the circles, Rousseau writes:

Our *circles* still preserve some image of ancient morals [manners] among us...the men...can devote themselves to grave and serious discourse without fear of ridicule.

⁹⁴ Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1982) 18.

⁹⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre*, trans. Allan Bloom. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960) 99, 105.

⁹⁶ Miller 35.

They dare to speak of country and virtue without passing for windbags; they even dare to be themselves without being enslaved to the maxims of a magpie. If the turn of conversation becomes less polished, reasons take on more weight; they are not satisfied by jokes or compliments. They cannot get away with fine phrases for answers. They do not humor one another in dispute; each, feeling himself attacked by all the forces of his adversary, is obliged to use all his own to defend himself; it is thus that the mind gains precision and vigor. If some licentious remarks are mixed in with all this, one ought not to take umbrage at it. The least vulgar are not always the most decent, and this language, a bit rustic, is still preferable to the more studied style.⁹⁷

Like Rendon's gatherings of Spanish-speaking men, in the circles, men "dare to be themselves," secure in the knowledge that they can speak freely and "without fear of ridicule." Yet within the security of this setting, the circles also involve rigorous and occasionally contentious debate. Because the circles are characterized by transparency, "compliments" and "fine phrases" will not suffice. Instead, attacks by one's adversaries must be fended off through the "precision and vigor" of one's argument.

Yet despite the intensity of the interactions, when analyzing the deliberative character of the circles, what becomes apparent is how safe, constrained, and familial the dialogue is. In Rousseau's characterization of the *circles*, language is innocent. Opinions are exchanged and defended, but deliberative dialogue never transforms one's view, never changes one's mind — because for Rousseau, to be transformed by another's speech is to be vulnerable to domination; it means one is no longer "everything for himself."⁹⁸ Instead of transformation, Rousseau offers transparency. In the *circles*, the discussion and debate may sometimes be heated, even vulgar — but it is also relaxed and intimate, "cordial and frank."⁹⁹ Speech is fraternal rather than formal, personal rather than public. This is no discourse between strangers. This is speech without subterfuge or hidden

⁹⁷ Rousseau, *Letter to d'Alembert* 105.

⁹⁸ Miller 36.

⁹⁹ Miller 109.

agendas, speech stripped of the contingencies and dangers of politics. In this state of transparent relations, the claims of each are recognized and taken seriously. "Here," writes Miller, "alienation is unknown"¹⁰⁰

In his conception of democratic deliberation, Rousseau demands an exceptionally high level of intimacy in order to create the preconditions for transparency. In doing this, the democratic possibilities of deliberation are deeply constrained. Even at his most deliberative, Rousseau is unable to envision democratic dialogue capable of productive contestation among subjects who share membership but not affection.

In *Letter to d'Alembert*, Rousseau invokes the *circles* of Geneva as a civic institution that engages in public speech yet is capable of being both deliberative and transparent. In Chicano and Puerto Rican discourse, transparency and public speech are reconciled through the use of Spanish and (even more effectively) through the performative practice of movement poetry.

¹⁰⁰ Miller 36.

Movement Poetry—Rituals of Public Speech

It is said that MOTECUHZOMA ILHUICAMINA

Sent

An expedition

looking for the Northern

Mythical land

wherefrom the Aztecs came

la Tierra de Aztlán

mythical land for those

who dream of roses and

swallow thorns

or for those who swallow thorns

in powdered milk

feeling guilty about smelling flowers

about looking for Aztlán¹⁰¹

—Alurista, “Poem in Lieu of Preface” (1970)

As a cultural practice, movement poetry represents public speech at its most political and its most performative. According to Rafael Pérez-Torres, from its inception, movement poetry has been intimately linked to the political struggles of a people. As such, “its utterances mark a collective position.”¹⁰² Poetry — both the writing and the performing of it — was central to this process of identity production and identification.¹⁰³ Movement poetry was akin to Rousseau’s *circles*; both operate from a civic agenda that wants its respective political membership to see themselves in terms that are familial and intimate. Like the *circles*, the poetic practices of the movement represent an expressive form of public speech capable of both uniting listeners and transcending divisive political disagreement.

¹⁰¹ Alurista, “Poem in Lieu of a Preface,” *Festival de Flor y Canto*, eds. Alurista, F.A. Cervantes, Juan Gomez-Quiñones (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1976) 3.

¹⁰² Rafael Pérez-Torres, *Movements in Chicano Poetry: Against Myths, Against Margins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 216.

¹⁰³ In addition to poetry, art—particularly in the form of public murals—was another public, political, and emotive yet non-deliberative practice that emerged out of the Movement. Inspired by Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, the muralist movement “transcended historical facts and provided a new view of La Raza.” Murals provided Chicanos with a revised history in which they could see themselves as both heroic and larger than life.

Most importantly, poetry is a public speech act that is simultaneously political *and* non-deliberative. By this, I mean that it is emotive but not dialogical. Unlike the *circles* of Geneva, poetry does not involve conversation (and possibly contestation) between its members. Instead, the practice of movement poetry required a listening subject and a speaking subject. But because both subjects are presumed to be united by culture and experience, it is a relationship based on identification rather than deliberation. The connection between movement poetry and the *circles* is most apparent in this context of identification, affection, and membership.

Because it exists in the realm of rhetoric, movement poetry is an expressive form of discourse that seeks to transcend the disjuncture that Tracy Strong describes — between emotion and expression, weeping and words, meaning and saying. In this way, the Rousseauian ideal of transparency animates Chicano and Puerto Rican poetic practices. For those anxious about deliberation and disagreement, Movement poetry is a particularly attractive form of discourse — political and participatory yet capable of avoiding divisive dialogue and debate. According to Ignacio García, movement poetic practices provided a general ethos “capable of meaning most things to most activists and their followers.”¹⁰⁴ By operating within the realm of the symbolic, poetry can politicize its listeners while evading contradiction and conflict. Moreover, in its reliance upon mythic memory and legends, movement poetry locates itself outside the parameters of traditional history, thereby avoiding another site of potential disagreement.

Little attention has been paid to the fact that the most significant Chicano and Puerto Rican organizations turned to poetry to mark their entry into the public realm. In 1969,

¹⁰⁴ Ignacio García 105.

the Young Lords made its first public appearance, with Felipe Luciano speaking on the need for more revolutionary action and (accompanied by congas) performing his poem “Jíbaro, My Pretty Nigger.”¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Corky Gonzales wrote his most famous poem, “Yo Soy Joaquín,” for his organization, the Crusade for Justice, performing it at the 1969 National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference.

A great deal of “classic” movement poetry has a strong civic impulse — it seeks to be both educative and socializing.¹⁰⁶ Poets like Gonzales, Alurista, and Pedro Pietri saw their poetry as an organizing tool that served an “agitprop function.”¹⁰⁷ According to Gonzales, “Yo Soy Joaquín” was written “first and foremost for the Chicano Movement.”¹⁰⁸ Written in 1967, “Joaquín” traces the Chicano struggle through a historical overview of Mexican/Chicano history.¹⁰⁹ Distributed by mimeographed copy and recited at conferences, fiestas, rallies, and strikes, “Yo Soy Joaquín” has been described as “an expression of Chicano political philosophy, self-discovery and the epic story of a people.”¹¹⁰

One of the central characteristic of movement poetic practices has been its commitment to public performance and public ritual. In her book *Chicano Poetry: A Critical Introduction*, scholar Cordelia Candelaria describes the significance of ritual for Chicano poetics: “Both in its overt replication of a communal rite through the

¹⁰⁵ Agustín Laó, “Resources of Hope: Imagining the Young Lords and the Politics of Memory,” *Centro* 8, no. 1 (1995) 36.

¹⁰⁶ Pérez-Torres 47.

¹⁰⁷ Pérez-Torres 100.

¹⁰⁸ Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, “Preface,” *Yo Soy Joaquín/I Am Joaquín: An Epic Poem* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972) 3.

¹⁰⁹ Pérez-Torres 47.

¹¹⁰ Muñoz 52.

poem/performance and in its recognition of an ethnopoetic tradition.... Chicano poetry is most fully comprehensible within a context of ritual.”¹¹¹ Because public ritual is linked to the performative, movement poetry “is often meant to be spoken rather than read.”¹¹² For this reason, Chicano poetry was and is often performed as an event.¹¹³ “Yo Soy Joaquín,” for example, was recited for years before it found its way into book form.¹¹⁴

Because it was most often performed for community groups, movement poetry was not an anonymous performance to entertain strangers. Like Rousseau’s *circles*, it was public speech that was fraternal and familial. The speaking of Spanish was yet another aspect of Chicano poetics that combined transparency and ritual. As noted in my earlier discussion of language and the Rousseauian “heart,” reclaiming Spanish served to connect movement activists to both their politics and their people. According to literary scholar Hector Calderón, movement artists and writers chose public forms of expression that could be enjoyed in an oral, communal setting: “A new pride in the language was reflected by writers who have continually returned to the lived speech act to capture in print the oral quality of Chicano Spanish and English vernaculars.”¹¹⁵

Politically, movement poetry served as a way of constructing personal speech acts for public purposes — of unifying and inspiring its listeners. In its non-deliberative structure, poetry is capable of engaging in public, political speech without risking disagreement and

¹¹¹ Cordelia Candelaria, *Chicano Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986) 77.

¹¹² Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, “Alurista’s Poetics: The Oral, the Bilingual, the Pre-Columbian,” *Modern Chicano Writers: A Collection of Critical Essays*, eds. Joseph Sommers and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1979) 118.

¹¹³ This commitment to community readings endures today; poetry readings continue to be a staple of Chicano student conferences, political rallies, and marches.

¹¹⁴ Pérez-Torres 175.

¹¹⁵ Calderón 218.

divisiveness. Like the circles, movement poetry is a participatory form of civic speech as powerful as it is constrained.

Given Rousseau's well-known hostility to the theater in *Letter to d'Alembert*, one might well assume that the performative aspect of movement poetry would be seen in a similarly negative light. As noted earlier, Rousseau had serious concerns regarding the risks posed by theatrical performance. In the theaters of Paris, the audience is moved, but for Rousseau, these emotions are premised on manipulation rather than authentic experience. Actors do not behave as citizens; instead of a display of brotherhood and authentic connection, they pretend and manipulate. Given the dissembling nature of the theater, how can movement poetic practices escape the Rousseauian critique of performance?

Movement poetic practices are akin to the one form of theater to which Rousseau gives qualified praise: the theater of ancient Greece. And like Greek theater, movement poetry "relies on political themes that invokes national traditions."¹¹⁶ Movement poetry often involves a retelling of a significant historical event or an ode to a Puerto Rican, Chicano, or Mexican leader (César Chavez, Pedro Albizu Campos, Emiliano Zapata, etc.). Like Greek theater, movement poems featured tales of resistance and cultural affirmation. Rather than identifying with lovers, villains, and corrupt sophisticates — as they do in the theater of Paris — both Greek and Latino subjects attended performances that encouraged identification with their fellow citizens and their shared civic history.

Equally important, both the poetic tradition of the movement and Greek theater sought to minimize the distance between audience and actor. *Flor y canto* events, for

¹¹⁶ Christopher Kelly, "Rousseau and the Case against (and for) the Arts," *The Legacy of Rousseau* 31.

example, often involved a portion of the performance dedicated to audience participation: Audience members were encouraged to perform a poem, tell a story, or sing a song. Movement poetic practices involve precisely the type of public performance that Rousseau celebrates — a form of performances in which the separation between spectator and actor comes closest to being overcome.

PART V: THE FESTIVAL

“THE BACCHANALIA OF THE POLITICAL”:

SPECTACLE AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTIFICATION

On October 30, 1970, ten thousand people filed down the avenues of Manhattan from *El Barrio* to United Nations Plaza to show support for Puerto Rican independence and to protest the condition of Puerto Ricans on the mainland.¹¹⁷ That same year in California, more than thirty thousand Chicanos gathered in Laguna Park in East Los Angeles to protest the Vietnam War (making the August 29 Moratorium Against the War one of the largest antiwar rallies held during that era).¹¹⁸ Four years later, on October 27, 1974, Puerto Rican activists mobilized twenty thousand people for the “National Day of Solidarity” at Madison Square Garden.¹¹⁹ At each of these massive demonstrations, participants articulated a Rousseauian notion of civic festival and public performance.

¹¹⁷ The march to the U.N. occurred on October 30, 1970, to commemorate the anniversary of the 1950 Nationalist uprising in Juyuya, Puerto Rico (see Serrano 132, and Láo 40).

¹¹⁸ Unfortunately, the rally ended violently when Los Angeles police attacked the crowd without provocation. Hundreds were injured and three Chicanos were killed, including L.A. Times journalist Ruben Salazar. The police riot provoked the first violent outburst of Mexican Americans in a major U.S. city as thousands of protesters burned businesses and automobiles on Whittier Boulevard, one of the major thoroughfares in East L.A. (See Muñoz 86).

¹¹⁹ José Velázquez, “Coming Full Circle: The Puerto Rican Socialist Party, U.S. Branch,” *The Puerto Rican Movement* 54.

For Rousseau, it's through identification that subjects become capable of recognizing and enacting the common good. This form of civic identification is most fully embodied by the *festival*. The Rousseauian festival is capable of melding “abstract principles of political right with the enthusiasm of communal identification” — what Tracy Strong describes as “the bacchanalia of the political.”¹²⁰ Public festivals, dances, and competitions represent an ideal context for subjects to identify passionately with one another. “[L]et the spectators become an entertainment to themselves,” writes Rousseau in *Letter to d'Alembert*, “make them actors themselves; do it so that each sees and loves himself in the others so that all will be better united.”¹²¹ In Rousseau's political theory, the festival also functions as a way of solving the problem of generality — of having citizens “perceive the general when they look at political questions and avoid being ‘blinded’ by their particular interests.”¹²² According to Jean Starobinski, “The exaltation of the collective festival has the same structure as the general will of the *Social Contract*. . . . [T]he festival accomplishes on the level of feeling what the general will aims at on the level of political right.”¹²³ The games and ceremonies of Rousseauian festival sought to transform the weak and divided subject into a citizen *animated* by an inner strength derived from his sense of being “part of a greater whole and of having a ‘patria’ that is genuinely his.”¹²⁴ James Miller explains:

For one glorious instant, the festival re baptizes society as one “big family.” In the collective euphoria, individual reserve is swept aside, “all live on the most intimate

¹²⁰ Strong 62.

¹²¹ Rousseau, *Letter to d'Alembert* 126.

¹²² Cullen 10.

¹²³ Jean Starobinski, “Rousseau and Modern Tyranny,” *New York Review of Books* (November 29, 1973) 20.

¹²⁴ Shklar *Men & Citizens* 160.

terms.”... At the height of the celebration, differences momentarily melt, and the individual experiences the delicious sensation of abandoning himself to the collective spirit.¹²⁵

Because it requires that every citizen feel the eyes of his fellow countrymen upon him, the festival is deeply participatory, as performative as it is democratic. At the festival “no one is a mere spectator; each is an actor who identifies himself with all.”¹²⁶

In a famous footnote to *Letter to d’Alembert*, Rousseau captures the power of public spectacle:

I remember having been struck in my childhood by a rather simple entertainment, the impression of which has nevertheless always stayed with me in spite of time and variety of experience. The regiment of Saint-Gervais had done its exercises...gathered after supper in the St. Gervais square and started dancing all together, officers and soldiers, around the fountain, to the basin of which the drummers, the fifers and the torch bearers had mounted. A dance of men...five or six hundred men in uniform, holding one another by the hand and forming a long ribbon which wound around, serpent-like, in cadence and without confusion...the excellence of tunes which animated them, the sound of the drums, the glare of the torches, a certain military pomp in the midst of pleasure, all this created a very lively sensation that could not be experienced coldly. It was late; the women were in bed; all of them got up. Soon the windows were full of female spectators who gave a new zeal to the actors; they could not long confine themselves to their windows and they came down; the wives came to their husbands, the servants brought wine; even the children, awakened by the noise, ran half-clothed amidst their fathers and mothers. The dance was suspended; now there were only embraces, laughs, healths, and caresses.... My father, embracing me, was seized with trembling which I think I still feel and share. “Jean-Jacques,” he said to me, “love your country. Do you see these good Genevans? They are all friends, they are all brothers; joy and concord reign in their midst. You are a Genevan; one day you will see other peoples; but even if you should travel as much as your father, you will not find their likes.”... I am well aware that this entertainment, which moved me so, would be without appeal for countless others; one must have eyes made for seeing it and a heart made for feeling it. No, the only pure joy is public joy, and the true sentiments of nature reign only over the people.¹²⁷

In contrast to the passivity of the Paris theater, Rousseau’s civic festival requires participation. As Rousseau indicates in his story of “soldiers dancing,” the audience is *part* of the spectacle. According to Strong, Rousseau’s footnote in the *Letter* represents a

¹²⁵ Miller 35.

¹²⁶ Cullen 135.

¹²⁷ Rousseau, *Letter to d’Alembert* 135-36.

“festival without invidiousness.”¹²⁸ In Rousseau's idealized recollection, the dance is both “coordinated and formless,” spontaneous yet cohesive. Strong rightly notes the significance of Rousseau’s father embracing him and naming him as a citizen at the culmination of the dance (“You are a Genevan”) and the way in which “unity” — a unity of both emotion and movement — represents the “paradigm of citizenship” in Rousseau’s anecdote.¹²⁹ For Strong, the festival represents the civic space where “words, music and action together provide the model of what community is for Rousseau.”¹³⁰

The fiestas, *flor y cantos* (music and poetry events), marches, rallies, sit-ins, takeovers, and other mass gatherings of the late 1960s and early '70s all employed a Rousseauian conception of political community that sought to meld abstract rights “with the enthusiasm of communal identification.”¹³¹ Both the Rousseauian festival and movement gatherings sought to overcome what was perceived as a weak and divided subjectivity, transforming it into a new civic consciousness that symbolized membership in part of a greater whole. For scholars of the Puerto Rican movement, it was “the dramatic actions, colorized by the Afros, dark glasses and dashikis dancing to the rhythm of Latin Soul” that most powerfully capture the movement’s spirit of “popular power and liberation.”¹³² Like the Rousseauian festival, movement gatherings functioned as a civic space where together, words, music, and action provide a model of community and authentic contact among its members. Like Rousseau’s festival, the movement’s massive

¹²⁸ Strong 62.

¹²⁹ Strong 62-3.

¹³⁰ Strong 61.

¹³¹ Strong 10.

¹³² Láo 35.

rallies and demonstrations sought to make the community “into a sort of constant spectacle in which all the citizens are participants.”¹³³ Describing her experience at one movement gathering, Chicana activist Marta Varela explains:

“Conference” is a poor word to describe those five days.... It was in reality a fiesta: days of celebrating what sings in the blood of a people who, taught to believe they are ugly, discover the true beauty in their souls during years of occupation and intimidation.... [T]his affirmation grew into a *grito*, a roar among the people gathered in the auditorium of the Crusade’s Center.¹³⁴

By providing members of the community with the opportunity to *witness* one another politically, movement gatherings articulated a participatory ethos emphasizing the power of shared display in common public space. Conferences, marches, sit-ins, and parades were all events that put participants in the gaze of one another, helping to generate a sense of pride among its participants.¹³⁵ In Varela’s characterization, participants of the conference were not gathering *for* something so much as they were gathering *as* something. In other words, these large-scale, grass-roots gatherings reflected the desire of activists to understand themselves as engaging in a politics of *presence*. And by putting participants in the gaze of one another, subjects generated the unity of emotion and movement that characterizes the Rousseauian festival.

An important aspect of the Rousseauian festival is its *inclusive* character: “[T]he festivals...encompass the entire community in one intoxicating bacchanalian whirl, breaking down the boundaries that define the particularity of each individual. It is here that the truth of the whole is forged and reaffirmed. Wives and children, domestic and foreign residents, all flock together in a civic communion celebrating events and

¹³³ Kelly 32.

¹³⁴ Muñoz 78.

institutions that define their life in common.”¹³⁶ In the context of the festival, those who are traditionally outside the public sphere can enter and join in this “civic communion.”¹³⁷ According to Latin Americanist Ilan Stavans, such inclusivity is characteristic of the festival in Latin-American culture: “what characterizes the Latino fiesta is the possibility of dissolving racial, cultural, and social boundaries. The fiesta opens up the spirit and allows for alliances that otherwise could not take place.”¹³⁸ Undocumented workers, prisoners (*pintos*), children, grandparents, those who speak English and those who do not — all can participate; all are part of the civic body.

As an alternative form of democratic participation, the Rousseauian festival emphasizes group harmony and mass participation by reconciling civic harmony and participation through its capacity to transcend the confines of public speech. As Varela’s quote makes clear, one of the most crucial aspects of the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference was that it helped participants overcome the sense of cultural inferiority and self-hate produced by internalized racism. Seen in this light, the mass gatherings of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans take on new meaning. Movement gatherings were politically significant less for the policy issues discussed or the agendas constructed and more for these moments of mutual identification. Like Rousseau’s festivals, the Movement’s conferences, marches, and fiestas represent an attempt at “uniting the affections” so that political subjects would be more capable and more inclined toward “general willing” than

¹³⁵ For Varela, one of the most crucial aspects of the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference was that it helped participants overcome the sense of cultural inferiority and self-hate produced by internalized racism.

¹³⁶ Miller 35.

¹³⁷ In the *Letter to d’Alembert*’s famous footnote, for example, the festival reaches its emotional zenith when the wives and children enter and join in the spectacle.

¹³⁸ Ilan Stavans, *The Hispanic Condition: Reflections on Culture & Identity in America* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1995)100-101.

they would otherwise be. And while some festivals are explicitly political while others are not, it is always a powerfully *public* act. For in every incarnation, the festival puts citizens into the gaze of one another. For Rousseau and movement activists, the festival enacts alternate conceptions of democratic participation through practices that are passionate, performative, and familial. Its democratic impulse is implied in the belief that while not everyone deliberates over public policy, *everyone* is capable of meaningful contact between his or her fellow citizens.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this project, it has been my contention that the political thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau helps to illuminate the underlying logic of movement politics. But in examining the theoretical underpinnings of movement discourse, we gain a deeper understanding of Rousseau as well. Using the movement as a lens to understand political theory helps bring Rousseau's ideas and themes to life; the courtiers of Paris, the *circles* of Geneva, and the festivals of Poland take on new meaning while abstract concepts like the general will become increasingly relevant to our contemporary collective existence.

Interestingly, Rousseau's detractors often make accusations that sound strikingly similar to critics of identity politics: Rousseau is too emotional; his theory emphasizes sentiment over reason, making it dangerously irrational; his celebration of the festivals emphasizes spectacle in ways that are hazardous to the polity. Lurking in all these criticisms is the pervasive fear of the mob. For these scholars, Rousseau is more totalitarian than democrat; more the Terror than the Rights of Man. And these criticisms seem to reappear in the opposition to identity politics as well. But to view spectacle, mass

gatherings, and passionate identification as simply anti-democratic is to misunderstand Rousseau and democratic life more broadly. Rousseau alerts us to how civic practices emphasizing sentiment, imagination, and identification are powerfully implicated in how subjects make democratic commitments, participate collectively, and resist inequality.

One of Rousseau's great strengths was this recognition that passion and identification were necessary preconditions for "general willing." In his critique of modernity, Rousseau reminds us of the *difficulty* involved in producing subjects with the capacity to will the general. For Rousseau, neither science nor rationality produce and undergird the common good. Instead, "human understanding owes much to the passions...it is impossible to conceive why one who had neither desires nor fears would go to the trouble of reasoning."¹³⁹ This appreciation of the connection between passionate participation and the construction of a common good is one reason why Rousseau remains one of our most forceful theorists of democracy.

As this chapter illustrates, the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements articulated a Rousseauian conception of political community; in their efforts to combine a critique of socioeconomic inequality with a commitment to participatory democracy, movement participants sought to bind their communities together by presenting civic life as an affair of the heart. Like Rousseau, movement activists understood democracy less in terms of institutional structures than as an enterprise characterized by both intensity and intimacy.

Nevertheless, a Rousseauian commitment to participatory democracy that is coexistent with an aversion toward political deliberation and public contestation has profound implications for both the political theory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the

¹³⁹ Rousseau, *Second Discourse* 115-116.

theory and practice of movement politics. Rousseau reminds us of the significance of passionate identification, particularly in creating the conditions for general willing. But once the general will is produced, Rousseau fails to provide an adequate language of productive conflict. According to Patrick Riley, this is the tension between Rousseau's belief in the socially constructed nature of the general will and its uncertain temporal status once created. Rousseau seems to harbor a hope that "at the end of political time (so to speak) men would finally be citizens and would will only the common good in virtue of what they had learned *over* time; at the end of political time, they might actually be free and not just 'forced to be free.'"¹⁴⁰ In other words, the tension between will and the authority that generalizes might be only a provisional problem. Riley explains:

At the end of political time, the general will one has as a citizen would have become a kind of second nature, approaching the true naturalness of *volonté générale* in Malebranche's divine *modus operandi*. "Approaching," however, is the strongest term one can use, and the relation of will to the educative authority that generalizes it remains a central problem in Rousseau — the more so because he ordinarily denied that there is any natural authority on earth.... At the end of civic time, when men have been denatured and transformed into citizens, they will finally have civic knowledge and a general will, just as adults finally have the moral knowledge and the independence that they (necessarily) lacked as children.¹⁴¹

Though the general will emerged through conflict, its maintenance is premised on collective agreement and harmony. Following its establishment, the popular assembly is no longer conceived as the space where contending notions of the good are debated and fought out. Instead, the assembly emerges as a "defensive body in which the people do not so much forge their identity in the process of establishing consensus, as *preserve* it against the inevitable tendency of partial associations, and partial identities, to displace

¹⁴⁰ Riley 247.

¹⁴¹ Riley 247-248.

it.”¹⁴² The festival and other forms of spontaneous unanimity produce an idealized notion of community without the risk of disagreement. Instead, the Rousseauian assembly *socializes* its citizens, encouraging them to identify “directly and constantly with the polity.”¹⁴³ In other words, the assembly becomes a political body that primarily *expresses* rather than *produces* political agreement.

In their tendency to conceive of the assembly as a Rousseauian space of confirmation rather than deliberation, movement activists understood public gatherings as the space where unity was both embodied and expressed. Chicano and Puerto Rican subjects who had been properly socialized via Chicano and Puerto Rican studies and participation in movement politics (cultural events, marches, protests, etc.) sought to identify “directly and constantly” with the Latino polity. The power of this practice was its ability to make movement politics and its gatherings a site of resistance against apathy and self-hate. But by making the assembly a site of preservation and confirmation, the movement denied itself a crucial space of democratic discourse. By demanding that the movement gatherings express their health and vibrancy primarily through expressions of unity, the civic practices of the movement shut down critical space for critique and conversation, limiting the movement’s ability to develop politically. Instead, disagreement and contestation were understood as the behavior of “sell-outs,” enemies, and infiltrators.

When looking at movement gatherings, a central problem is made clear: The Rousseauian assembly is limited by the desire to escape the contingency inherent in a vigorous conception of civic life. Rousseau and movement activists were certainly right

¹⁴² Cullen 118.

¹⁴³ Judith Shklar, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Equality,” *Rousseau for Our Time*, spec. issue of *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* (Summer 1978) 20.

to recognize that a democratic disposition is not forged exclusively in the public assembly. Nevertheless, the assembly represents civic space at its most public — the site where strangers engage in the act of self-government through dialogue and debate. To narrow the assembly's function so that it becomes primarily a space of emotive confirmation, identification, public performance, and enforced harmony is to rob the polity of one of its most vibrant sites for deliberative democracy. Rousseau helps us understand the democratic possibilities of identification and the power and necessity of civic practices that seek to create conditions of immediacy and presence. On the other hand, as our examination of the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements has made clear, the tendency to privilege unity over disagreement shows us how an overreliance on identification can also threaten democratic development.

The fact that identification is as necessary as it is dangerous reminds us that democracy is a practice, a process, a way of living — an art rather than a science. The varied practices that are necessary for democracy are the same practices that can simultaneously turn against it. Simply put, the practices that are necessary for democracy, that enable and enrich democracy — can also undermine democracy. The task for participatory democrats involves developing civic practices where democracy, deliberation, and identification can productively coexist. In the case of the movement, a Rousseauian conception of political community sought to bind the Chicano and Puerto Rican body politic together by emphasizing unity, participation, and teaching subjects the art of identifying with one another. Unfortunately, the Rousseauian impulse was less capable of teaching the equally necessary art of agonistic and democratic contestation.

CHAPTER 4

EL PUEBLO UNIDO:

LATINO POLITICS AND THE PAN-ETHNIC IMPERATIVE

By the late 1970s, the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements were in steep decline. Characterizing the 1980s, both scholars and activists note the shift away from mass participation and the politics of protest.¹ By the 1990s, scholars were characterizing Latino leaders as “politically moderate, knowledgeable of the dominant political system, relatively young, well educated, politically articulate and visible and accessible to the media.”²

According to political scientist Isidro Ortiz, in the post-movement era, the leadership of the major Latino political organizations was no longer reliant on the involvement of a local, mass-based membership.³ Instead, organizations such as the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund and the National Council of La Raza developed a more “professionalized” rather than “participatory” approach to politics: Membership today consists largely of political elites who “carry out the organization’s activities and rely upon corporate contributions for the resources necessary to maintain the organization.”⁴ In contrast to the militant nationalism of the movement, activists and leaders in the 1980s became increasingly engaged in a new strategy of “corporate

¹ See Roberto Villarreal and Norma Hernandez, eds. *Latinos and Political Coalitions: Political Empowerment for the 1990's* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) and F. Chris García, ed. *Latinos and the Political System* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), and Juan Gómez-Quifiones, *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990).

² Villarreal and Hernandez, “Introduction,” xviii.

³ Isidro D. Ortiz, “Chicana/o Organizational Politics and Strategies in the Era of Retrenchment,” *Chicanas/Chicanos at the Crossroads: Social, Economic, and Political Change*, eds. David Maciel and Isidro D. Ortiz (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996) 123.

accommodation.”⁵ As they struggled to protect programmatic gains in the face of Reaganomics, national Latino advocacy increasingly turned to the corporate sector for additional funding. According to Ortiz, this dependency on corporate funding led the major Latino advocacy organizations to become “amplifiers of corporate deeds,” facilitating corporate efforts to reshape public opinion in their favor.

The 1980s also marked another shift in the discursive terrain of post-movement politics. No longer characterized as members of regionally defined subgroups, Chicanos and Puerto Ricans were increasingly characterized in *pan-ethnic* terms. The emergence of a pan-ethnic political identity is one of the most significant developments in contemporary Latino political discourse.

Initially, the rise of pan-ethnicity appears to challenge the Rousseauian impulses so evident during the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements. Constructing a cohesive identity from a multiplicity of Spanish-origin subgroups requires an acceptance of internal diversity and dissimilarity that seems unimaginable in a Rousseauian context. Revealing contending notions of the good that appear persistent and ongoing, pan-ethnic politics would seem to produce a political situation that movement activists consistently sought to avoid. Moreover, for Rousseau, it is cultural specificity that anchors what is generalizable.⁶ Seen in this light, pan-ethnicity seems to challenge Rousseau’s claim that the general will can exist only among a *people*. Overall, the rise of pan-ethnic politics

⁴ Ortiz 117.

⁵ Ortiz 123.

⁶ As Patrick Riley notes, “Diderot’s *nominal généralité* is in fact a *morale universelle* (to use his own term); it relates to the whole *genre humain* and seems to extend even to ‘honor among thieves.’ Rousseau’s *volonté générale* — of Rome, of Sparta, of Geneva — is a great deal more *particulière*; indeed, in the *Gouvernement de Pologne* Rousseau insists on the importance of national peculiarities and particularities

would seem to imply that the influence of the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements, with their Rousseauian characteristics, are on the wane and a new, less nationalistic and more pragmatic approach, is in ascendance.

In this chapter, I examine the theoretical assumptions that underlie a pan-ethnic vision of political membership, reviewing some of the most significant texts dealing with pan-ethnicity, including the results of the Latino National Political Survey, the first national survey measuring the political values, attitudes, and behaviors of U.S. Latinos.

The contemporary impulse toward pan-ethnicity is the result of forces both external and internal to Latino politics. Internally, the impulse toward pan-ethnic unity is a continuation of a movement ethos that sees group unity as essential to political agency and empowerment. To examine this tendency, I look at the experience of La Raza Unida Party (LRUP). The creation of LRUP in 1970 is a prime example of the movement's belief that shared cultural identity could serve as the basis for political cohesion, mobilization, and success in the electoral arena. Externally, racial politics at the federal level has had a profound effect on Latino civic elites. More specifically, the African-American political experience has fundamentally shaped the politics of race in the United States. In order to compete for federal resources, Latino political organizations are compelled to present Latinos in ways that closely mirror a form of racial politics whose paradigm is African-American. The politics of pan-ethnicity make this mirroring more possible, allowing Latinos to characterize themselves as a national minority rather than as several regionally defined subgroups.

that should not be submerged in a cosmopolitan universalism." See "Rousseau's General Will," *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*, ed. Patrick Riley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 141.

Even more significantly, despite the apparent acceptance of diversity within the Latino body politic, it's my contention that the discourse surrounding pan-ethnicity fundamentally *enacts* the Rousseauian tension between a general will that is both artificially produced and naturally pre-existent, requiring subjects both denatured and autonomous. In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau acknowledges the socially constructed nature of the general will while simultaneously stressing the organic character of such agreement.⁷ Rousseau's insistence that the common good is forged by denatured subjects is made problematic and contradictory by his claim that organic and pre-existing conditions are what allow subjects to "find" or perceive the general will. This Rousseauian tension is equally apparent in the emerging discourse on Latino pan-

⁷ Describing the process in which citizens come to produce and perceive the general will, Rousseau writes:

"If there were no different interests, the common interest, which would never encounter any obstacle, would scarcely be felt. Everything would run smoothly by itself and politics would cease to be an art." [See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Social Contract*, trans. Judith R. Masters, ed. Roger D. Masters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978) 61]

Later, elaborating on the socially constructed character of this process, Rousseau writes:

"One who dares to undertake the founding of a people should feel that he is capable of changing human nature, so to speak; of transforming each individual, who by himself is a perfect and solitary whole, into a part of a larger whole from which this individual receives, in a sense, his life and his being; of altering man's constitution in order to strengthen it; of substituting a partial and moral existence for the physical and independent existence we have all received from nature. He must, in short, take away man's own forces in order to give him forces that are foreign to him and that he cannot make use of without the help of others. The more these natural forces are dead and destroyed, and the acquired ones great and lasting, the more the institution as well is solid and perfect." (*Social Contract* 68).

At other times, however, Rousseau focuses on territorial size, population, wealth, religion — features and conditions that create *natural* consensus, thereby facilitating political agreement. Describing the importance of such organic conditions, Rousseau writes:

"The constitution of a State is made truly solid and enduring when matters of expediency are so well satisfied that natural relationships and the laws always agree on the same points, and the latter only secure, accompany, and rectify, so to speak, the former. But if the legislator makes a mistake about his objective and adopts a different principle from the one arising from the nature of things...the laws will imperceptibly weaken, the constitution will be altered, and the State will not cease being agitated until it is either destroyed or changed, and invincible nature has regained its dominion." (*Social Contract* 76).

ethnicity, for embedded in the very idea of pan-ethnicity lies the tension between the organic and the artificial.

Understood as a form of *coalition*, pan-ethnicity requires a certain level of collective overcoming to see outside one's ethnic specific subgroup and recognize one's pan-ethnic identity. For both Rousseau and Latino civic elites, political processes that forge artificial consensus are necessary in order for subjects to become capable of mutual recognition and general willing. Yet like Rousseau, Latino civic elites obscure the socially constructed character of political agreement by speaking of a natural and pre-existing unity that lies at the core of pan-ethnic politics. In other words, this move — between the forged and the found — stands as a central problem both in the political philosophy of Rousseau and in the political thought of contemporary Latino elites.

Interestingly, the development of a pan-ethnic *Latino* (as opposed to ethnic-specific) form of identity politics also exacerbates a Rousseauian tendency discussed in chapter three — the propensity to view public speech with suspicion and apprehension. The regional, historical, cultural, and economic differences among Mexicans, Cubans, Salvadorans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and others naturally increase the likelihood of dissent and contentious speech between Latino political subjects. Paradoxically, however, the Rousseauian impulses of Latino civic elites led them to perceive internal conflict as destructive to the political interests of Latinos as an emergent group, aggravating anxiety over deliberative political practices. Given this understanding of disagreement, it's not surprising that contemporary Latino political elites worry about internal conflict emerging within more deliberative settings. This, then, is the contradictory impulse at the heart of the "pan-ethnic" impulse: it reinscribes the very impulses that it initially appears

to challenge. Pan-ethnic political practices continue to celebrate a Rousseauian definition of membership that equates group unity and harmony with civic health. This transformation — from diversity to harmony — is theorized as a necessary precondition for pan-ethnic politics; without it, Latino political elites are unable to invoke the representative “we.”

During the movement heyday, Chicano and Puerto Rican politics displayed a Rousseauian commitment to democratic participation and the belief that political life must necessarily exceed the realm of the legislative assembly. The rallies, “blow-outs,” *teatros*, and poetry readings all provided the Chicano and Puerto Rican body politic with a civic education that stressed community involvement and social responsibility. But today, while Latino politics continues to be concerned with civil rights, socioeconomic issues, culture, and identity, it is no longer based on mass participation, leaving us with a political ethos that is becoming both nonparticipatory *and* nondeliberative. In other words, contemporary Latino politics is losing its Rousseauian commitment to participatory democracy while maintaining its Rousseauian aversion to disagreement and contentious deliberation.

PART I: THE NAME GAME

“HISPANICS,” “LATINOS,” AND THE RISE OF PAN-ETHNIC POLITICS

Throughout the 1990s, a seemingly endless stream of articles proclaimed that the 21st century would be the Hispanic century. “Latinos are the fastest-growing group in the country,” wrote *The Economist* in 1998, “[a]nd increasingly, the future lies with them.”⁸

⁸ “America’s Latinos: The keenest recruits to the dream,” *The Economist* 25 Apr. 1998: 25.

Thirty-five million strong and growing four times faster than the general population, the Hispanic population is expected to increase to 53 million, or one in six Americans, by 2020.⁹ Nowhere is this tale of emergence more explicit than in the realm of politics, where the possibility of Latino potential is most pronounced. As *The Wall Street Journal* notes: “Latinos are America’s fastest-growing voting bloc... [T]heir large numbers in America’s four largest states — California, Texas, New York and Florida — mean that they may hold the balance in the next several presidential elections.”¹⁰ According to the California-based Latino Issues Forum (LIF), a nonpartisan public-policy and advocacy institute, Latino civic participation has increased dramatically over the past decade. In 1992, 40 percent of registered Latinos voted in the presidential election; in 1996, 72 percent went to the polls — a 75 percent increase in only four years.¹¹ According to LIF executive director Guillermo Rodriguez, “Latinos are the margin of victory in close races,” and candidates who want to win “must target the Latino community.”¹² Prospective presidential candidates have heeded the LIF’s message: Republican and Democratic have both made courting Hispanic voters a central part of their electoral strategy. Latinos, it appears, are the millennial minority.

In all of these narratives, the precondition for national emergence and influence is the idea of Latino *pan-ethnicity*. Describing Latinos in his 1996 book *Hispanic Nation*, Geoffrey Fox writes:

⁹ Michael Barone, “How Hispanics Are Americanizing,” *Wall Street Journal* 6 Feb. 1998.

¹⁰ Michael Barone, “How Hispanics Are Americanizing,” *Wall Street Journal* 6 Feb. 1998.

¹¹ “The New Margin of Victory: The Latino Vote in 1998,” *Latino Issues Forum/News Release* 27 May 1998: 4.

¹² *Latino Issues Forum/News Release* 27 May 1998: 6.

A new ethnic identity is being constructed in the United States: the Hispanic nation. Overcoming age-old racial, regional, and political differences, Americans of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban and other Spanish-language origins are beginning to imagine themselves as a single ethnic community — which by the turn of the century may become the largest and most influential minority.¹³

A number of political scientists studying Latinos seem to share Fox's analysis. In "The Hispanic Community — A Growing Force to Be Reckoned With," Neal R. Pierce and Jerry Hagstrom echo Fox in their claim regarding the political significance of Latino pan-ethnicity. They write:

From Miami to the Rio Grande, from the migrant labor camps to the big cities where 85 percent of America's Hispanics now live, the burgeoning Hispanic community is becoming increasingly powerful and is preparing to take American domestic and foreign policy in new and uncharted directions.¹⁴

In the political narratives of Fox and Pierce and Hagstrom, the assumption is that Latinos in the United States share not only cultural and linguistic characteristics but a shared *political* perspective as well. But is this really the case? Is there actually such a thing as a pan-ethnic "Latino" political perspective? Can we speak of "Hispanics" or "Latinos" as separate ethnic identities? Moreover, what political and theoretical assumptions undergird efforts to unite persons of Spanish origin under a "pan-Hispanic" umbrella label? What are the political implications of efforts to expand group identity beyond national group boundaries?

There is certainly a history in the United States of various Spanish-origin subgroups organizing and identifying across national lines. This was particularly true in Chicago and New York, where the groups lived and worked in close proximity. According to historian Virginia Sánchez Korrol, Puerto Ricans residing in New York City were

¹³ Geoffrey Fox, *Hispanic Nation: Culture, Politics, and the Constructing of Identity* (Secaucus: Birch Lane Press, 1996).

identifying themselves as Latinos or Hispanics at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁵

Describing the pan-ethnic atmosphere of New York City prior to World War II, Korrol writes:

New York hispanos read Spanish-language newspapers, saw Mexican and Argentine films, listened to Spanish-language radio stations, formed associations that promoted language, culture, and civic concerns, and danced and listened to Latino music.¹⁶

Such pan-ethnic practices were often explicitly political as well. Revolutionary poet and activist José Martí, for example, founded the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano* (the Cuban Revolutionary Party) in New York City in 1892. The *Partido* organized a *Sección de Puerto Rico* (Puerto Rican section) that “united the two Caribbean nationalities in a joint struggle against Spanish colonialism.”¹⁷ That such alliances were occurring over a century ago is a valuable reminder that pan-ethnic practices are not new. What *is* new, however, is the discursive context of contemporary discussions surrounding pan-ethnicity. As sociologist Juan Flores notes, by the 1990s, the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” assumed “an emotive charge and connotative complexity unknown in their previous historical usages.”¹⁸ No longer an example of cross-cultural interaction or self-conscious political solidarity, recent discussions have tended to approach pan-ethnicity as a mass-based internal phenomenon whereby the vast majority of each subgroup is presumed to share a common political and cultural consciousness.

¹⁴ F. Chris García, ed. *Latinos and the Political System* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) 11.

¹⁵ Virginia Sánchez Korrol, “Latinismo Among Early Puerto Rican Migrants in New York City: A Sociohistoric Interpretation,” *The Hispanic Experience in the United States: Contemporary Issues and Perspectives*, eds. Edna Acosta-Belén and Barbara R. Sjostrom (New York: Praeger, 1988) 151.

¹⁶ Sánchez Korrol 152.

¹⁷ Juan Flores, “Pan-Latino/Trans-Latino: Puerto Ricans in the ‘New Nueva York,’” *Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) 148.

¹⁸ Juan Flores 149.

The Power to Name: Federal Policy and the Creation of “Hispanics”

According to Suzanne Oboler, it was U.S. government resources defined in ethnic terms that led to the recent rise of pan-ethnicity.¹⁹ In 1970, the Hispanic-origin question was added to the census questionnaire at the behest of the Nixon White House.²⁰ In 1976, Congress passed the Roybal Act, which required the census bureau and other federal statistical agencies to produce separate counts of persons of Hispanic origin.²¹ The production of Latinos as a pan-ethnic community was further reinforced in 1980, when the Hispanic-origin questions was added to the short form of the census, which is the form mailed to every American household.²² In other words, like other marginalized groups (women, gays and lesbians, Asian-Americans), the democratic and public-policy initiatives implemented in the aftermath of the civil-rights movement become the strategic and legislative blueprint for Latino politics in the United States.

The shift from ethnic-specific labeling to pan-ethnicity has not been free from criticism. Many activists and scholars have questioned this federally established grouping of Spanish-speaking subgroups under the ethnic label “Hispanic.”²³ For many scholars of the various ethnic-specific groups, the label is simply too vague to have any real

¹⁹ Suzanne Oboler, *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) 5.

²⁰ Peter Skerry, *Counting on the Census? Race, Group Identity, and the Evasion of Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000) 37-38. According to Skerry, a Mexican-American member of the U.S. Interagency Committee on Mexican American Affairs demanded that a specific Hispanic-origin question be included on the census. The White House (which had recently inaugurated Hispanic Heritage Week) was eager to court this pool of voters, so the question was quickly added.

²¹ Skerry 38.

²² Skerry 38.

²³ Hispanic is the generic term used by the Bureau of the Census to identify persons of Spanish surname. It is also the term often used to identify the Spanish-language minority in the United States.

descriptive power. According to sociologist Martha Giménez, the label “Hispanic” represents a flawed statistical construct that “has hardly any relation to the real world.”²⁴ In her 1989 essay on Latino pan-ethnicity and public health, Giménez asked, “What can this or any other ‘umbrella’ term identify? What is the meaning of the data gathered about this population?”²⁵ Giménez writes:

The problem facing social scientists and public health specialists in trying to make sense of the data collected by federal, state, and other agencies is the problem not only of comparability but of meaning.... To speak about “Hispanic” fertility, child-rearing habits, health, subculture, migration patterns, etc. is to engage in empty talk, at best, or in stereotyping. The heterogeneity of national origin groups, in turn, undermines generalizations about the entire group.²⁶

Giménez’s point is especially well taken as it applies to politics. If pan-ethnicity is a flawed paradigm for analyzing public-health issues such as reproductive and child-rearing habits, it becomes even more problematic when trying to assess something like “Latino political interests” or a “Hispanic political viewpoint.”

Giménez’s concerns regarding the homogenizing effect of the term “Hispanic” is echoed by other scholars. As C. Nelson and Marta Tienda note, “Hispanic” combines “colonized natives and their offspring, foreigners and political refugees under one ethnic umbrella.” Similarly, Suzanne Oboler argues that “the ethnic label Hispanic obscures rather than clarifies the varied social and political experiences in U.S. society of more than 23 million citizens, residents, refugees, and immigrants with ties to Caribbean and Central and South American countries.”²⁷ Given this diversity, it’s hardly surprising that scholars like Giménez and Nelson and Tienda criticize “Hispanic” for being merely a

²⁴ Martha Giménez, “Latino/Hispanic — who needs a name? The case against a standard terminology,” *International Journal of Health Services* 19 (1989) 559.

²⁵ Giménez 559

²⁶ Giménez 560

“heuristic device” that is “questionable on theoretical grounds.”²⁸ For these academic researchers, “Hispanic” creates what Latin American scholar Edna Acosta-Belén describes as “a false image of homogeneity and unity” that “mystifies” the various cultural, racial, and class differences and disparities among individual groups.²⁹

This erasure of specificity is not only descriptively and methodologically problematic — it has political implications as well. Oboler, for example, argues that the specificity of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans (their history and social movements) in the late 1960s and early '70s was rendered invisible by the emergence of the label “Hispanic.” According to Oboler, “following the 1960s movements by both [Puerto Ricans and Chicanos], their respective experiences as historical minorities in the United States were in fact thrown back into invisibility through the emergence of the label Hispanic in the early 1970s.”³⁰ The historical and cultural legacies of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans were therefore “largely dissipated by the fusion of the two group into a newly created ‘ethnic group’ with a new notion of its heritage and identity in the United States.” Rather than signifying a new national and public recognition of these populations and their particular histories and political struggles and issues, the creation of a Hispanic ethnic community in the United States “essentially erased the respective civil rights movements of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans.”³¹

²⁷ Oboler 2.

²⁸ C. Nelson and Marta Tienda, pp. 49-74, 1985. (Cited in Oboler 3)

²⁹ Edna Acosta-Belén and Barbara Sjostrom, eds. *The Hispanic Experience in the United States: Contemporary Issues and Perspectives* (New York: Praeger, 1988) 84

³⁰ Oboler 15.

³¹ Oboler 83.

Oboler's critique regarding the political implications of the "Hispanic" label as well as the timing of its emergence, points to another significant criticism — namely, that "Hispanic" has been *externally* imposed, by federal agencies and governmental institutions whose motives and agenda are viewed as suspect by a significant number of Latino activists and intellectuals. Anthropologist Jorge Klor de Alva, for example, is critical of the many institutions and individuals who lump all Latinos together. For de Alva, "[t]he mass media, advertising firms, government agencies, and the non-Hispanic population attempt to simplify their responses to the burgeoning Spanish-speaking population by obscuring their substantial differences through collective labels (like 'Hispanic') and stereotypical assumptions concerning their supposed common cultures and socioeconomic conditions."³² In a similar vein, sociologist José Calderon criticizes "Hispanic" as a term that "has apparently been imposed from the outside, rather than developing from the cohesion of the groups themselves."³³ Historian Juan Gomez-Quiñones echoes Calderon's analysis when he describes the label "Hispanic" as a "transparent ploy, undercutting the ethnic revitalization movement. It quickly became the preferred term by bureaucrats, academics, business, and media."³⁴

For critics like Oboler, Calderon, and Gomez- Quiñones, "Hispanic" represents another instance in which the various subgroups have been denied their history and the power to name themselves. "Chicano," "Boricua," and "Nuyorican" were ethnic labels that emerged out of radical social movements. To self-identify in these terms was to

³² Jorge Klor de Alva, "Aztlán, Borinquen and Hispanic Nationalism," *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland*, eds. Rudolfo Anaya and Francisco Lomelí (Albuquerque: El Norte Publications/Academia, 1989) 107.

³³ José Calderón, "'Hispanic' and 'Latino': The Viability of Categories for Panethnic Unity" *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 19, No. 4, Fall 1992, 42.

signal both racial pride and political consciousness. “Hispanic” had no such progressive connotations. In fact, among many former movement activists and sympathizers, to adopt “Hispanic” was viewed as a politically conservative stance.³⁵ Calderon, for example, describes self-proclaimed “Hispanics” as often having “a stake in protecting their property and managerial positions and were unwilling to affiliate with a political identity that might jeopardize them.”³⁶ For critics like Calderon, “Hispanic” is problematic not so much for its conceptual inaccuracy as for the perceived ideological agenda behind the term.

Interestingly, many of the same scholars who criticize the grouping of Spanish-speaking subgroups under “Hispanic” are not entirely opposed to the pan-ethnic impulse. Calderon argues that “Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans have such distinct historical experiences and cultural, socioeconomic, and political backgrounds that a distinct Hispanic identity is unlikely.”³⁷ Yet he also insists that “Panethnic unity among Latino groups is becoming a reality and a necessity.”³⁸ For him, the crucial difference lies in using “Latino” to construct a pan-ethnic politics. “[T]he term Latino does show the capacity for developing some panethnic unity,” writes Calderon. “Although the Latino groups in the United States are somewhat diverse even internally, commonalities may sometimes be found around particular issues reflecting similar conditions of

³⁴ Juan Gomez-Quifones 185.

³⁵ For many critics, the word “Hispanic” over-emphasizes the European (Spanish) over the indigenous aspects of Spanish-speaking society.

³⁶ Calderón 42-43.

³⁷ Calderon 42.

³⁸ Calderon 42.

inequality.”³⁹ Political scientists Roberto Villarreal and Howard Neighbor make a similar distinction. They write:

The term Hispanic...has come to be used to identify the Spanish language minority in the United States and, by the Bureau of the Census, to identify persons of Spanish surname.... However, because it specifically refers to Iberian old world cultural origins and because the sub-ethnic minorities which it covers are so dissimilar in demography and political interests, the term has only limited relevance in defining the political movement which is the object of concern in this book.

Finally, there is the term Latino, which has come into favor in recent years to identify persons of Latin American origins. Without an old world flavor, the term is applicable to the new world cultures of Hispanics (and Portuguese). It has particular value in identifying political movements that go beyond Mexican American but which are indigenous to the Americas.⁴⁰

For Calderon, Villarreal, Neighbor, and other critics of “Hispanic,” what is in question is not the legitimacy of grouping *per se* but rather *who* is doing the grouping. Critical of lumping together all Spanish-speaking subgroups under “Hispanic,” these scholars do support a more progressive pan-ethnicity based on a self-created Latino identity.

Nevertheless, the conceptual and empirical problems surrounding pan-ethnicity are equally problematic regardless of the term one uses. Embracing “Latino” does nothing to resolve the dissimilarities in attitude, region, and class that Giménez so rightly identifies. Claiming a collective identity rather than having one imposed by federal and state bureaucracy is a significant improvement, but the challenges remain. Yet critics of Hispanic identity often embrace “Latinismo” as though it somehow transcends the political problematic produced by the pan-ethnic imperative. By failing to analyze the impulse *itself*, scholars of pan-ethnicity continue to assume that the right collective name is the key to uniting and empowering this disparate group of political subjects. Despite

³⁹ Calderon 43.

declarations of diversity, the pan-ethnic impulse continues to attract scholars and activists with its political possibilities.

But while the logic of Latino pan-ethnic politics is clear, the actual *existence* of a pan-ethnic Latino political community is far less certain. At the conclusion of his book *Latinos and the Political System*, F. Chris Garcia expressed this sense of uncertainty when he wrote:

With regard to alliances, it is not entirely clear that the various nationality groups within the Latino rubric actually constitutes a cohesive “community.” Certainly, Mexican-Americans, Cuban-Americans, Puerto Ricans and other Spanish ancestry groups have a great deal in common, including language and other cultural manifestations.... Yet it is also evident that there are significant differences between each of the groups’ historical, demographic, and socioeconomic circumstances. *Indeed, although we have done so, one cannot speak with complete confidence about a unified Latino political community.* Much research is needed to clarify the precise parameters of political and cultural identifications within and among Latino groups, how these groups feel about themselves and other Latino groups, as well as their identification with the United States political community.⁴¹ (italics mine)

Garcia’s research following the publication of *Latinos in the Political System* — the Latino National Political Survey — would give credence to some of his earlier concerns, highlighting the gap between the vision of a pan-ethnic political community versus the disparate viewpoints that characterize this population.

PART II: IMAGINED COMMUNITY MEETS POLITICAL REALITY

This dissonance between the dream of pan-ethnic identity versus actual attitudes and behavior was made explicit with the publication of the results of the Latino National Political Survey in 1992. The goal of the LNPS was to collect basic data describing “the

⁴⁰ Roberto Villarreal and Howard Neighbor, “Introduction,” eds. Roberto Villarreal, Norma Hernandez, and Howard Neighbor *Latino Empowerment: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Greenwood Press, 1988) xxi.

⁴¹ F. Chris Garcia 499-500.

political values, attitudes and behaviors of the Mexican-, Puerto Rican, and Cuban-origin populations in the United States.”⁴² Prior to the LNPS, the general dearth of reliable national data meant that both Latinos and non-Latinos were often guilty of making unsubstantiated claims regarding these populations. By providing reliable data, LNPS researchers sought to empower Latinos in the United States by providing information that more accurately and effectively addressed the concerns of these groups.⁴³

The findings of the LNPS surprised many Latino political scholars, activists, and elected officials. According to Louis DeSipio (an LNPS researcher and author of *Counting on the Latino Vote: Latinos as a New Electorate*), the findings tell us that “[m]easuring ethnicity’s meaning for Latinos has the added complexity of the possible irrelevance of the pan-ethnic identity to the national-origin groups that make up the pan-ethnic whole.”⁴⁴ According to DeSipio, “Latinos did *not* view themselves as having common political concerns,” with noncitizens being even *less* likely to report similarities between various pairs of Latino national-origin groups. No more than 14 percent of any group reported that another Latino group was “very similar” to themselves.⁴⁵ “Citizens and noncitizens alike reported that Latinos shared a ‘somewhat’ similar culture,” but “Latinos themselves did not see common political or cultural bonds.”⁴⁶ The LNPS

⁴² Rodolfo O. de la Garza, Louis DeSipio, F. Chris Garcia, John Garcia, and Angelo Falcon, *Latino Voices: Mexican, Puerto-Rican, and Cuban Perspectives on American Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 4. The survey began in August 1989 and ended in April 1990.

⁴³ De la Garza et al, *Latino Voices* 16.

⁴⁴ Louis DeSipio, *Counting on the Latino Vote: Latinos as a New Electorate* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996) 176.

⁴⁵ This was Mexican-Americans saying they had common political concerns with Puerto-Ricans. See *Latino Voices* 144.

⁴⁶ DeSipio 176-177.

showed that the three subgroups “overwhelmingly prefer to identify in national-origin terms” and that “more respondents prefer to be called ‘American’ than Latino.”⁴⁷

According to DeSipio, the absence of pan-ethnic bonds emerges in part from the “low level of contact among the Latino national origin groups.” The LNPS showed that vast majorities of the three big groups did not interact with other Latinos other than their own national-origin group — 15 percent or less of each group reported “a lot” of contact with Latino groups other than their own.⁴⁸

The lack of contact between Latino subgroups highlights the continued regional concentration of ethnic-specific groups (Mexican-Americans in the West and Southwest, Cubans in Florida, Puerto Ricans in the Northeast) and the theoretical and political insufficiency of “nationalizing” narratives that ignore or downplay this demographic reality. Moreover, even in regions where the various Latinos experience relatively high levels of cross-group contact, research prior to the LNPS continued to show significant differences in political behavior and attitude between subgroups. Examining the political behavior of Puerto Ricans and other Latinos in New York City, for example, author James Jennings states that: “Comparison of political and social attitudes of different Latino groups seems to suggest major differences between Cubans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans.”⁴⁹ Citing research by Dale Nelson, political scientist James Jennings writes: “the term ‘Hispanic’ political attitudes was of little conceptual help in describing

⁴⁷ de la Garza et al, *Latino Voices* 13.

⁴⁸ DeSipio 177.

⁴⁹ James Jennings, “Future Directions for Puerto Rican Politics in the U.S. and Puerto Rico,” *Latinos and the Political System* 495.

the attitudes analyzed, at least in reference to Puerto Ricans, Cubans and Dominicans in New York City.”⁵⁰

Interestingly, the affinities *between* Latino sub-groups were even *lower* as compared to other racial or ethnic groups: “Mexican-American citizens, for example, reported that they were personally closer to Anglos and African-Americans than they were to either Puerto-Ricans or those of Cuban ancestry. Puerto Ricans were closer to Anglos than to those of Mexican or Cuban ancestry. They ranked African-Americans equally to those of Mexican ancestry in terms of closeness.”⁵¹ Significantly, none of the Latino groups reported negative perceptions of other Latinos; instead, neutrality was the most common response. According to DeSipio, “[t]his neutrality...reflects the lack of awareness of other Latinos...and leads to a lack of perception of a common political or cultural agenda, thereby reducing the likelihood of a mass-based Latino identity, at least in the near future.”⁵² DeSipio notes that while more individuals might be identifying and describing themselves as “Latino,” the use of this broad, common identifier does not currently denote “an overtly political manifestation.”⁵³ Suzanne Oboler’s research of Latino immigrants substantiates DeSipio’s claim that “it cannot be assumed that all believe that they have to have a common identity in the U.S. public sphere with people of other nationalities who are labeled Hispanics.”⁵⁴ Instead, “differences in social and racial backgrounds, personal life experiences, and political beliefs are key to understanding not

⁵⁰ Jennings 495.

⁵¹ DeSipio 177.

⁵² DeSipio 177

⁵³ DeSipio 177.

⁵⁴ Oboler xiv.

only the meaning of the ethnic label Hispanic in people's lives but also Latinos' decisions to participate actively under an umbrella term in movements for social justice in the United States."⁵⁵

Yet despite the fact that Latinos did not see themselves as having common political concerns, the LNPS *did* find that the three groups did have some significant shared views on some domestic policy issues. According to the authors:

They [Latinos] favor increased government spending on health and crime and drug control; education; the environment; child services; and bilingual education. They also overwhelmingly look to government to solve the problems that most concern them. Thus, large majorities of each group support what may reasonably be called core elements of a liberal domestic agenda... [E]xpanding this agenda beyond these issues would be problematic, however, because the groups differ regarding their attitudes toward most other domestic issues.... Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans have a great deal in common, but they also differ in significant ways on important issues. Thus, there may be a Hispanic political community, but its parameters do not fit any existing presuppositions.⁵⁶

In order for pan-ethnicity numbers to be politically meaningful and successful, Latinos must understand themselves as a political community with shared values and interests.

But ultimately, the authors and researchers of the LNPS conclude:

Overall, these groups do not constitute a political community. They clearly agree on some key questions, but they disagree on others. Indeed, sometimes a particular group more closely resembles Anglos than any of the other Latino populations.⁵⁷

The results of the LNPS seriously undermine the claim that there currently exists a "Latino political community" with a pre-existing and discernable political agenda. Whether described as "Hispanic" by governmental bureaucracies or "Latino" by progressives and/or former activists of the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements, neither term seems to have captured the political hearts and minds of these populations.

⁵⁵ Oboler xiv

⁵⁶ de la Garza et al, 14.

⁵⁷ de la Garza et al, 16.

LNPS scholars agree that, overall, Latinos in the United States currently lack a shared sense of the common good. Put in Rousseauian terms, the Latino masses are characterized here as *not* having a general will. However, the LNPS researchers do not rule out such a will in the future. In this sense, Latinos are portrayed by LNPS scholars as a *potential* community: Subjects could come to believe themselves as having a shared fate. Such awareness, however, is not natural, fixed, or guaranteed. In this way, the LNPS researchers harbor a somewhat Rousseauian notion of sovereignty. We see this depiction in Book II of the *Social Contract*. Defining sovereignty, Rousseau writes:

I say, therefore, that sovereignty, being only the exercise of the general will, can never be alienated, and that the sovereign, which is only the collective being, can only be represented by itself. Power can be perfectly well be transferred, but not will.⁵⁸

For Rousseau, sovereignty is both contingent and performative; it exists only in its enactment. What matters is our present sense of what we share in common. For LNPS scholars, this uncertainty is sometimes portrayed in rather hopeful terms: While Latinos *today* may not see themselves as a common people, they might *tomorrow*.

Rousseauian Dilemmas: Natural Consensus vs. Denatured Subjects

As we've seen, the discourse on pan-ethnicity seems to veer between presumptions of a common consciousness that is both natural and shared and an insistence on diversity, whereby the various Latino subgroups are portrayed as lacking any natural consensus that binds them together. On the one hand, authors like Geoffrey Fox argue that pan-ethnicity represents a new ethnic identity and consciousness among Hispanics in the United States, while LNPS scholars use national survey data to argue against the very proposition put

⁵⁸ Rousseau, *Social Contract* 59. See also 102.

forward by Fox and others. Interestingly, this movement between an identity understood as artificially produced versus an identity that is culturally innate can sometimes be seen within a single discourse: Scholars who claim that the term “Hispanic” represents an external imposition that obscures real differences simultaneously speak of “Latino” identity as based upon pre-existing conditions capable of uniting Latinos into a single political community.

Enmeshed in a discourse whose tortured logic is never fully resolved, pan-ethnicity highlights the problem of how a political community comes into being. More than a question of coalition and identity politics, pan-ethnicity is emblematic of the larger question of how subjects are made politically autonomous yet capable of collective action. To examine these larger questions, I turn again to Rousseau. For I contend that the tensions that emerge in pan-ethnic politics are akin to the Rousseauian struggle to generalize the will.

I am drawn to Rousseau not because he resolves these questions (for he does not). Rather, I believe that Rousseau helps us develop a richer understanding of the relationship between the artificial and the natural. More than most, Rousseau’s political theory seems to “tack” between these issues of volition and (educative) authority.

For Rousseau, generalizing the will is both crucial and difficult, “as difficult as squaring the circle.”⁵⁹ As Patrick Riley notes, because *freedom* is a central concern for Rousseau, his theory of the general will requires that one denature particularistic beings

⁵⁹ Riley 124.

without destroying their autonomy.⁶⁰ The voluntaristic aspect of such a project is crucial.

Describing the founding of a people, Rousseau writes:

In order for an emerging people to appreciate the healthy maxims of politics, and follow the fundamental rules of statecraft, the effect would have to become the cause; the social spirit, which should be the result of the institution, would have to preside over the founding of the institution itself; and men would have to be prior to laws what they ought to become by means of laws. Since the legislator is therefore unable to use either force or reasoning, he must necessarily have recourse to another order of authority, which can win over without violence and persuade without convincing.⁶¹

In this passage, we see Rousseau grappling with the need to *construct* institutions — a process that recognizes their artificial character — and the need for conditions of commonality (what Rousseau calls “the social spirit”). But prior to the creation of the civic institutions, how can such a spirit exist? This is the paradox. For Rousseau, this dilemma cannot be resolved by either “force or reasoning.” Instead, Rousseau calls for an alternative form of authority, one that can “win over without violence” and “persuade without convincing.” But what does this mean? What does such a form of “nonauthoritarian authority” look like?

For Rousseau, *education* is the form of authority that holds the key to making men “what they ought to be.”⁶² “Public enlightenment,” writes Rousseau, “results in the union of understanding and will in the social body.”⁶³ As Riley notes, “[i]t is no accident that education (domestic and civic) is everything in Rousseau.”⁶⁴

Like Rousseau, Latino civic elites have consistently viewed education as a form of democratic socialization that transcends the dangers of domination while teaching subject

⁶⁰ Riley 124.

⁶¹ Rousseau, *Social Contract* 68.

⁶² Riley 126.

⁶³ Rousseau, *Social Contract* 67.

to perceive their connections and commonality. During the early 1970s, for example, civic education was crucial to the organizing philosophy of La Raza Unida, the Texas-based Chicano political party discussed later in this chapter.

While LNPS scholars focus on the latent potential of Latinos as a pan-ethnic political community, other Latino elites continue to characterize pan-ethnic political unity as a political *reality*. Respected political activists and significant and serious scholars continues to be animated by the belief in a unified and recognizable set of “Latino political interests” and the necessity of a united Latino political community to achieve these interests.⁶⁵ Why, in the face of LNPS data, does this depiction of natural consensus among Latinos persist? The reasons, I believe, are twofold.

Following the civil-rights movement, Latino political elites sought to present themselves as a politically cohesive national minority group similar to African-Americans. Portraying Latino voters as a potential bloc or swing vote in highly contested elections is a crucial element of echoing the African-American paradigm. Moreover, because they believe that high levels of group cohesion and political unity are characteristic of black politics, Latino civic elites have put enormous political energy into discovering a recognizable set of “Latino political interests” and stressing the necessity of a united Latino political community to achieve these interests.

⁶⁴ Riley 126.

⁶⁵ Later in this paper, I look to Maurilio Vigil’s *Hispanics in Congress* as a recent example of this tendency to presume pan-ethnic consciousness in Latino political discourse. Other texts that share this presumption include *The Hispanic Condition: Reflections on Culture & Identity in America* by Ilan Stavans (New York: HarperCollins, 1995); *Latinos Unidos: From Cultural Diversity to the Politics of Solidarity* by Enrique (Henry) Trueba (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); *Barrios and Borderlands: Cultures of Latinos and Latinas in the United States* by Denis Lynn Daly Heyck, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994) and *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space and Rights* by William Flores and Rina Benmayor, eds. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

While external inducements to present themselves as a united and cohesive voting bloc are clearly central to the pan-ethnic impulse, this continuing vision of pan-ethnic unity also has its roots in the Chicano and Puerto Rican social movements and the cultural nationalism that dominated during that period. The creation of La Raza Unida Party in 1970 is a prime example of the movement's tendency to link unity to political agency and empowerment. As the name itself makes clear, La Raza Unida was founded on the principle that Chicanos share a set of interests that somehow exceed the realm of ideology and partisanship and that shared cultural identity is the basis for political action and mobilization. The prevalence and persistence of unity in contemporary Latino civic culture can be seen in the pan-ethnic politics of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. Among Latino civic elites, group unity continues to represent a kind of ideological ethos that — precisely because it *is* ideological — does not easily yield to opposing or contradictory data.

PART III: INSPIRATION, ENVY, AND RESENTMENT:

AFRICAN-AMERICAN POLITICS AND THE RISE OF PAN-ETHNICITY

In *The Ethnic Factor: How America's Minorities Decide Elections*, Mark Levy and Michael Kramer discuss the significance of bloc voting and the political influence that ethnic voters can wield as voting blocs. Levy and Kramer note that “each vote counts, and no vote contributes to victory or defeat than any other. However, certain votes and particularly those which can be influenced in blocs, have the effect of counting for more than their numbers in closely contested elections.”⁶⁶ For Levy and Kramer, it is African-

⁶⁶ Mark Levy and Michael Kramer, *The Ethnic Factor: How America's Minorities Decide Elections* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972) 13-14.

Americans who represent the model of effective ethnic bloc voting (“blacks are showing the way to effective minority use of political muscle.”)⁶⁷ Not surprisingly, the authors do not hesitate in encouraging “other ethnics to follow the black example... [T]he black use of electoral power is the example all ethnics should soon be following.”⁶⁸ They write:

[I]t is the black Americans who are showing the way politically. His success has been substantial, and our overriding hope is that his lead will be followed by other ethnic Americans so that they too may fully realize their potential political power and utilize that power constructively.⁶⁹

Latino political elites have historically echoed Levy and Kramer’s analysis of ethnic voting — equating political power with ethnic bloc voting. This statement from Ronnie Lopez, executive assistant to former Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt, is typical in this regard:

If we’re going to be the largest minority, we’ll be like a river runs and changes course.... But unless we’re able to grab that river with a dam so we can use the water, it serves no purpose.⁷⁰

Latino political elites like Lopez confront an interest-group paradigm that rewards national over regional interests and cohesive voting blocs that can be quickly mobilized around a recognizable set of issues. Given that African-Americans have been the racial prototype for how to demand power and resources at the federal level, the pan-ethnic impulse makes strategic sense.⁷¹ Uniting persons of Spanish origin under a “pan-ethnic”

⁶⁷ Levy and Kramer 24.

⁶⁸ Levy and Kramer 23-24.

⁶⁹ Levy and Kramer 9

⁷⁰ Neil Pierce and Jerry Hagstrom, “The Hispanic Community: A Growing Force to Be Reckoned With,” *Latinos and the Political System* 14.

⁷¹ Interestingly, prior to the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements, Latinos sought to portray themselves as *unlike* African-Americans and more akin to white ethnic groups like Italian or Irish (see chapter 2). By the mid-1960s, however, Latinos began to consistently define themselves as a non-white minority in need of federal assistance and protections similar to that of African-Americans. No longer a group to distance oneself from, African-Americans became the racial group to emulate.

umbrella expands the population and geographical base for Hispanics/Latinos, thereby projecting Latinos into the national arena.⁷² For example, defining Latinos as a “pan-ethnic” community during the late 1990s significantly increased the population base, from approximately 20 million Mexican-Americans/Chicanos to more than 35 million Latinos.⁷³ By defining themselves as a national minority group, Latinos are better able to secure both federal resources and national exposure.⁷⁴ Strategically, then, a “pan-ethnic” identity allows Latino civic elites to more easily present Latino voters as a potential bloc or swing vote in highly contested elections. This statement by the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (a coalition of major Hispanic national organizations) is typical in this regard. It states:

By the year 2050, Hispanics are projected to account for 25 percent of the U.S. population. The effects of this dramatic growth are being felt everywhere. In the political arena, Hispanics will be decisive voters in eleven key states with 217 of the 270 electoral votes needed to win the presidential election.⁷⁵

For the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, invoking pan-ethnicity allows them to portray Latino voters as a potentially ethnically unified body of voters. Such characterizations of cohesiveness implicitly echoes the political practice of black voters. Moreover, such comparisons are self-consciously explicit as well. In describing the rapid growth of Spanish-origin subgroups, Latino civic elites consistently contrast the growth

⁷² John A. Garcia, “The Chicano Movement: Its Legacy for Politics and Policy,” *Chicanas/Chicanos at the Crossroads* 92.

⁷³ John Garcia 101.

⁷⁴ After the passage of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965, for example, Latino activists and elected officials lobbied for extensions in the VRA to designate Latinos as linguistic minorities. According to John Garcia, “[i]t was only after passage of the VRA extensions of 1970 and 1975 with their designation of linguistic minorities that Chicanos could make effective use of this legislation. Organizations such as the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) and the Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project (SWVREP) initiated litigation to alter election systems, improve access to voter registration, and challenge redistricting plans.” See John Garcia 94-95.

of the Latino electorate with that of African-Americans, emphasizing how Latinos will soon overtake African-Americans as the nation's largest minority. Such articulations of demographic displacement and political replacement reflect the varied and conflicting reactions that emerge when Latino civic elites confront the black political experience. Emotionally, the history of African-American politics has tended to produce a potent combination of envy, inspiration, and resentment among Latino civic elites. During the movement heyday, for example, Chicano and Puerto Rican activists were inspired by the Black Power movement, often emulating its radical and performative politics. The Black Panther Party inspired the dramatic militancy of both the Brown Berets and the Young Lords. Yet such emulation and inspiration has been tinged with resentment regarding the ongoing invisibility of the history of racism against Latinos. Interestingly, Latino activists often countered such invisibility by constructing racial narratives that more closely approximated the very group they felt overshadowed by. In their efforts to gain recognition, Latino civic elites deployed African-American racial narratives in order to expose the racial violence perpetuated upon Chicanos and Puerto Ricans. Describing the conditions of Mexican-Americans in the Southwest, Lopez asserts:

The Mexican-American has been the black man of the Southwest.... There have been rapings and lynchings. We couldn't use swimming pools. People's land was taken from them.⁷⁶

This desire for visibility and recognition is as organizational as it is historical.

Discussing the role of National Council of La Raza in providing data and information to policymakers, for example, president Raul Yzaguirre says: "It is important that Hispanic

⁷⁵ Executive Summary of the Hispanic Public Policy Agenda published by the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (2000) 1.

⁷⁶ Garcia 12.

groups become household names for Hispanics just as the NAACP and the Urban League are for blacks.”⁷⁷ By invoking the NAACP and the Urban League, Yzaguirre articulates his desire that Latinos have the same moral claim on public consciousness that African-Americans have. In their efforts to gain both community recognition and national standing, Latino civic elites like Yzaguirre often voice this combination of competition and emulation, making it a persistent theme of contemporary Latino politics.

It’s important to note that such emulation is not merely strategic. The rise of pan-ethnic politics also reflects the homogenizing effects of racism experienced by both African-Americans and Latinos. Like African-Americans, a racialized “otherness” has been applied to the diverse communities of Latinos living in the United States. In other words, Latino pan-ethnicity was inadvertently fostered by a climate of xenophobia in which the regional and cultural history of all people of Latin American descent was erased. As Suzanne Oboler notes, despite internal and racial group differences, “people of Latin American descent in the United States have long been perceived homogeneously as ‘foreign’ to the image of ‘being American’ ...regardless of the time and mode of their incorporation into the United States or their subsequent status as citizens of this nation.”⁷⁸ Given this type of broad-based discrimination, it’s not surprising that Latinos would see pan-ethnicity as a productive response to prejudice and racial stereotyping.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Raul Yzaguirre, “Keys to Hispanic Empowerment,” *Latinos and Political Coalitions* 181.

⁷⁸ Oboler 17-18. This type of racist homogenization also occurred prior to the pan-ethnic experience. In his seminal book *North From Mexico*, author Carey McWilliams discusses the way that Mexican-Americans, regardless of their socioeconomic class, regional history, or citizenship status, were discriminated against as a generalized foreign Other. Describing the California Gold Rush of 1849, McWilliams writes: “whether residents of twenty years’ standing or immigrants of one week, all the Spanish-speaking were lumped together as interlopers and greasers.” See Carey McWilliams, *North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1948) 132.

⁷⁹ Latinos are not the only multi-ethnic group in the United States to recognize the emotional power of pan-ethnicity. Eric Liu, in his discussion of Asian-American pan-ethnicity, describes pan-Asian identity as a

In this sense, pan-ethnic identification represents an effort to expose group-based inequality, providing people with a shared history of racial struggle and a basis for collective politics.

Because they believe that high levels of group cohesion and political unity are characteristic of African-American politics, contemporary Latino political activists put enormous political energy into discovering a recognizable set of “Latino political interests” and stressing the necessity of a united Latino political community to achieve these interests. However, the unitary impulse displayed by contemporary Latino civic elites is not simply the result of external political conditions — it also has its roots in the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements. The rise of La Raza Unida Party in 1970 represents a particularly useful example of the this tendency. It’s my contention that the unitary impulse displayed by movement organizations like La Raza Unida represents a central and ongoing component of Latino political discourse, with contemporary Latino academics and political elites continuing to equate unity with political empowerment.

By turning to La Raza Unida, I seek to show that the Rousseauian tendency to approach political agreement as socially produced one moment, and natural the next, is not a strictly pan-ethnic phenomenon. In fact, while Chicano and Puerto Rican movement activists tended to view political agreement and group unity in familial and organic terms, they also undermined this claim by emphasizing seeking out performative and educative practices that maintained a Rousseauian emphasis on “nonauthoritarian authority.” Interestingly, despite the fact that movement thought tended to *naturalize* political

form of “self-defense.” Pan-Asian solidarity “is an affirming counter-statement to the narrative in which yellow people are either foreigners or footnotes. It is a bulwark against bigotry.” Eric Liu, *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker* (New York: Random House, 1998) 63.

agreement, this era focused much *more* attention on participatory and educative practices than later advocates of pan-ethnic politics. In other words, despite today's emphasis on the potential electoral power of this increasingly pan-ethnic pool of Latino voters, Latino civic elites offer few educative civic practices — far fewer than their movement counterparts in La Raza Unida.

PART IV: EL PUEBLO UNIDO

GROUP UNITY AND LA RAZA UNIDA PARTY

Like much movement organizing, the rise of La Raza Unida was inspired by elements of the Black Power movement. Describing the origins of MAYO — the Mexican American Youth Organization (and precursor organization to La Raza Unida Party) — founder Mario Compean recalls:

We talked a lot about what was going on with the Black Movement...the farm workers' movement...César Chávez in California, and other events. We discussed leaders like [Stokely] Carmichael, Martin Luther King, and others. We also discussed some of the recognized leaders in the Chicano community in Texas and particularly San Antonio...and organizations such as LULAC and the American G.I. Forum.⁸⁰

According to historian Ignacio García, the founding members of MAYO were very aware of the influence of African-American thought and practice on their organizational vision. In his book *United We Win: The Rise and Fall of La Raza Unida Party*, García describes how the founding members of MAYO combined black and Chicano politics to develop their vision of a new organization:

The five began to read books on political theory and works by black nationalists such as Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, and Malcolm X. The group also followed the newspaper accounts of what was happening with the Alianza de Pueblos Libres of Reies López Tijerina in New Mexico and the Crusade for Justice of Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales in Colorado.... The five...were attracted to organizations such as the Students for a

⁸⁰ Ignacio Garcia, *United We Win: The Rise and Fall of La Raza Unida Party* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989) 16.

Democratic Society, a white anti-war group, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating committee, a black activist movement, as possible models for Mexican-Americans.⁸¹

In addition to Black Power, the ideological roots of La Raza Unida Party can be traced to the National Chicano Youth Conference held in Denver in 1969. At the conference, participants called for the creation of “an independent local, regional, and national political party.”⁸² The creation of such a party was a central demand in the political manifesto *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*.⁸³ It states:

POLITICAL LIBERATION can only come about through independent action on our part, since the two-part system is the same animal with heads that feeds from the same trough. Where we are a majority, we will control; where we are a minority, we will represent a pressure group; nationally, we will represent one party: La Familia de la Raza!⁸⁴

As *El Plan* makes clear, movement activists equated political liberation with racially unified bloc voting. In the manifesto, politically conscious Chicanos share a common political perspective capable of being mobilized in the electoral arena.

Two weeks after the Denver conference, a MAYO chapter in Texas decided to begin the process of laying the groundwork for an independent Chicano political party by organizing to elect members of MAYO to the local school board in Crystal City, Texas.⁸⁵ The goal of MAYO activists was to form a mass-based political party that could become

⁸¹ Ignacio Garcia 17.

⁸² Luis Leal, “In Search of Aztlán,” *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* 11.

⁸³ *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* is one of the most significant political manifestos to emerge from both the movement and the Denver conference. For more on *El Plan*, see chapters 2 and 3.

⁸⁴ *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* reprinted in *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* 3-4

⁸⁵ A small, rural community of some 10,000 people, 80 percent of whom were Mexican-American, Crystal City was a city particularly ripe for Chicano political activity. Moreover, 1969 was not the first time Mexican Americans had attempted to gain political control of Crystal City. In 1963, Mexican-Americans (with the support of the local unions and Mexican-American civil-rights organizations) won control of the city council, making it the first time in the history of Texas that Mexican-Americans held political power over the white minority population. Two years later, however, Mexican-American domination of the council came to an end when the Mexican-American incumbents lost the election. See Carlos Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso, 1989) 99-100.

a viable alternative to the two major political parties in Texas. Gaining control of community institutions like school boards was the first step; eventually, they would seek to win elections and gain political control of city and county governments throughout rural south Texas.⁸⁶ José Angel Gutiérrez was selected as the chief coordinator of the emerging political party. Gutiérrez had recently dropped out of the law school at the University of Houston and was a political-science graduate student at St. Mary's University in San Antonio. A veteran activist of the Chicano movement, he had also grown up in Crystal City. The other leader of the Crystal City effort was Compeán, a former migrant farm worker in his late twenties who was then a freshman political-science major at St. Mary's.⁸⁷ In winter 1969, a successful student strike at a Crystal City high school provided the political base to officially launch El Partido de la Raza Unida in January of 1970.⁸⁸ That year, the party put up three candidates (including Gutiérrez) for the school board and two candidates for city council. The Gutiérrez-led ticket swept the three seats with 55 percent of the vote. A week later, the two candidates for city council won with 60 percent of the vote.⁸⁹ When two Mexican-American incumbents — one on the school board and one on city council — shifted allegiance from the Democratic Party to La Raza Unida, Chicanos officially had political control of the city.⁹⁰ For the first time

⁸⁶ Muñoz 101.

⁸⁷ Ignacio García 15-16.

⁸⁸ The student strike began as a protest against discrimination in the schools and led to nearly 65 percent of the student population boycotting classes. As a result of the boycott, parents, students and activists formed Ciudadanos Unidos, a grassroots political organization in Crystal City. Ignacio García 47.

⁸⁹ Ignacio García 59

⁹⁰ Ignacio García 59

in Texas history, Mexican-Americans controlled the schools in a heavily Mexican town.⁹¹

For movement activists, the electoral victory in Crystal City was symbolic of a new era of Chicano political empowerment — an example of both successful grassroots mobilization and institutional power politics. Describing its impact, political scientist Carlos Muñoz writes:

These victories — interpreted as a “Chicano takeover” of the town — stimulated interest in La Raza Unida Party in other areas. A MAYO national conference in Mission, Texas in December 1969 placed top priority on the development of the party. MAYO chapters were to dedicate themselves enthusiastically to the organization of party chapters throughout the state. By 1971, La Raza Unida Party had replaced MAYO as the leading organization in Texas grass-roots organizing. Chapters had also begun to emerge in Colorado, California, and other areas.⁹²

Following Crystal City, the party grew rapidly, particularly in the southwestern United States. An unanticipated result of this sudden increase in membership was a newfound urgency regarding the goals and platform of the party. Almost immediately, serious disputes arose regarding party philosophy and electoral strategies. This conflict was exemplified by the struggle for national leadership between José Angel Gutiérrez and Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales at the first national La Raza Unida conference in 1972. Conference participants gathered in El Paso to establish themselves as a national organization and determine the party’s role in that year’s presidential election. However, as Muñoz notes, the Texas convention was overshadowed by the power struggle between Gonzales and Gutiérrez, each of whom wanted to be elected national chairman of the party.

⁹¹ Muñoz 101

⁹² Muñoz 101

Under the leadership of Gutiérrez in Texas, the party was driven by a more pragmatic, non-ideological approach that focused on winning elections and negotiating with the Democrats and Republicans to acquire resources for the Chicano community. In Colorado, however, the party was under the leadership of Corky Gonzales, the founder of Crusade for Justice and author of the poem/manifesto *Yo Soy Joaquín*. He was less focused than Gutiérrez on winning elections, seeing the party instead as a revolutionary vanguard whose main emphasis should be on political education of the Chicano community. Gonzales also advocated a no-compromise policy with the two major political parties. Rather than actively choose between the two approaches to party-building, delegates sought reconciliation between the two camps. Muñoz describes the results of this unity-driven approach:

The convention delegates gave Gutiérrez the national chairmanship and made Gonzales vice-chairman — an impossible working arrangement. The display of unity after the election proved to be strictly show. El Congreso de Aztlán, the national organizational structure that was established at the convention, failed to materialize. There was in fact no basis of unity on which to build a national organization.⁹³

Hoping to smooth over differences that emerged at the El Paso conference, land-grant activist Reies López Tijerina called for another meeting in Albuquerque in October 1972. Calling it the National Congress for Land and Cultural Reform, the theme of the conference was “Unity Before Ideas, Leaders or Organizations.”⁹⁴ But despite the non-ideological tone of the conference, disagreements plagued both the conference and the party. Gonzales refused to attend because the guest list included government bureaucrats

⁹³ Muñoz 113.

⁹⁴ Ignacio García 135.

and other non-movement politicians.⁹⁵ Tijerina was attacked for inviting moderate Mexican-American political leaders and ultimately walked out of his own conference, as did most of the other participants, leaving the meeting in disarray.⁹⁶ In the following years, the national infrastructure of La Raza Unida slowly crumbled, and in 1979, the last few remaining members held a final meeting.⁹⁷

Ultimately, the only significant electoral victories for La Raza Unida occurred where the party began — in the state of Texas. Its biggest victories were all in South Texas and the Winter Garden area in such communities as Crystal City, Cotulla, Kyle, Hebronville, Edcouch-Elsa, Robstown, Beeville, Carrizo Springs, and Marathon.⁹⁸ The party found itself subject to disparate impulses that were never resolved. The emphasis on electoral politics required the organization to expend most of its financial and organizational resources on running viable local campaigns. Not surprisingly, the professionalization of an electorally driven party inevitably alienated radicals who saw the party less in terms of electoral politics than as a cadre of revolutionary activists dedicated to raising the political consciousness of the community. For this segment of the party, elections were less about winning seats than about opportunities for mass political education. And because the party never achieved widespread agreement regarding the political priorities of the party, the conflict was generally destructive and unproductive. Moreover, the party's ultimate goals remained vague. As one former member noted, "I never really

⁹⁵ F. Arturo Rosales, *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1996) 242.

⁹⁶ F. Arturo Rosales 242.

⁹⁷ F. Arturo Rosales 242.

⁹⁸ F. Arturo Rosales 245

understood what we meant by ‘self-determination.’ Was it revolution or a nation within a nation?”⁹⁹

But despite the many setbacks and ultimate demise of the party, La Raza Unida is often remembered in positive terms. In an editorial, the *Corpus Christi Caller* commented on the party’s demise:

The work of La Raza Unida has [not] been in vain. On the contrary, it succeeded in raising the political consciousness of a people who had for too long been ignored in the decision-making process. It awakened pride in people who had been scorned by an insensitive ruling clique.¹⁰⁰

The Failure of La Raza Unida Party:

Pragmatic Radicalism and Romantic Familialism

La Raza Unida Party viewed Chicanos as sharing cultural commonalities capable of producing natural consensus. For La Raza Unida, the general will was understood as something organic and pre-existing. In this way, the party de-emphasized the Rousseauian idea of artificial consensus and denatured subjects, choosing instead to focus on another element of Rousseau’s thought: the idea that political agreement is the result of particular conditions of commonality. For La Raza Unida, this agreement resulted from a shared sense of culture and identity among Chicanos.

Like the manifesto it emerged from, La Raza Unida consistently called for “the political unity of the Chicano people.”¹⁰¹ In fact, unity is the first organizational goal listed in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*. It states:

⁹⁹ Ignacio García 224.

¹⁰⁰ *Corpus Christi Caller*, 24 Feb. 1981.

¹⁰¹ Muñoz 25.

UNITY in the thinking of our people concerning the barrios, the pueblo, the campo, the land, the poor, the middle class, the professional — all committed to the liberation of La Raza.¹⁰²

The *Plan* presents a vision of political community characterized by total agreement (“Unity in the thinking of our people”). For the authors of *El Plan*, the Chicano community is envisioned as a site in which certain core values are beyond the realm of diversity and disagreement. In the rhetorical realm of the *Plan*, the multiplicity of Chicano social locations inevitably gives way to a united Chicano perspective. The economic and social diversity of Chicanos is named (the barrios, the pueblo, the campo...the poor, the middle class, the professional”), but in the end, a deeper unity of identity prevails (“all committed to the liberation of La Raza.”).

Because the idea for a Chicano political party came out of *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, it’s unsurprising that the organization struggled with questions of ideology. According to García, party leaders “wanted a new system based on a cultural nationalism that was not as yet defined in terms of political processes and economic institutions.”¹⁰³ During the Crystal City campaign, the ideological orientation of the organization had been primarily oppositional — La Raza Unida candidates denounced the Democratic and Republican parties for ignoring the needs of Mexican-American voters and the unequal distribution of resources. However, the question of what the organization actually stood *for* remained unclear and undeveloped. Describing the party platform of La Raza Unida in Texas, Muñoz writes:

[T]he party had four objectives. The first was “to replace the existing system with a humanistic alternative which shall maintain equal representation of all people.” The second, was “to create a government which serves the needs of individual communities,

¹⁰² *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* 2.

¹⁰³ Ignacio García 54.

yet is beneficial to the general populace.” Third was the creation of “a political movement dedicated to ending the causes of poverty, misery and injustice so that future generations can live a life free from exploitation.” The fourth was “to abolish racist practices within the existing social, educational, economic and political system so that physical and cultural genocidal practices against minorities will be discontinued.” These basic objectives are to be accomplished through adherence to the concepts of *carnalismo* and *la familia*.¹⁰⁴

The emphasis on group unity was also linked to an emphasis on pragmatism. From its founding, the party tended to emphasize practical questions of strategy, tactics, and organization. According to Ignacio García, the leaders of La Raza Unida were “pragmatic radicals” who placed importance on getting immediate results.¹⁰⁵ Party leaders tended to view ideological debates with suspicion, indicative of the dogmatism and sectarianism exhibited by much of the radical left. In one of the main documents outlining the party’s political program, author and party founder José Angel Gutiérrez writes:

I realize that books in themselves do not end oppression. In line with this realization I have omitted discussion of ideology and philosophy. My purpose is not to describe the philosophical underpinnings of the U. S. of A. This book is a limited manual on how to deal with the racist, imperialist, colonized society of white people. Chicanos cannot live by theory alone; we must pick up the tools of our liberation. This book is a tool.¹⁰⁶

The political pragmatism of La Raza Unida was also linked to a romantic familialism common to movement politics. As discussed in chapter 3, there is a long tradition of invoking the familial to produce a sense of harmony and internal cohesion in movement thought. At a La Raza Conference held at Merritt College in Oakland, California, José Angel Gutiérrez invoked this familial rhetoric while simultaneously articulating La Raza Unida’s “pragmatic radicalism” by insisting that he opposed approaching problems by looking at ideologies. He declared:

¹⁰⁴ Muñoz 102.

¹⁰⁵ Ignacio García 54.

¹⁰⁶ José Angel Gutiérrez, *A Gringo Manual on How to Handle Mexicans* (Crystal City: publisher unknown, 1973) iv.

We [already] have one the extremist ideologies and strongest alignments that we can use — *el carnalismo* and *hermanidad*.... *En nuestra familia, cuando hay pego, todos estamos juntos* (In our family, when there is trouble, we stand together)... [W]e [in Crystal City] try to address ourselves to actual problem solving. And the only solutions that you are going to come up with are solutions you find at home.¹⁰⁸

In both its familial and pragmatic incarnations, the emphasis on unity in movement discourse represents a conscious and consistent attempt to avoid debates and decisions regarding ideology. Nevertheless, the organization soon found itself enmeshed in debates regarding the party's philosophy and direction. Various La Raza Unida chapters adopted and emphasized an array of principles "ranging from cultural nationalism to revolutionary nationalism to liberal reformism."¹⁰⁹ In Northern California, for example, LRUP chapters had a strongly Marxist orientation, while in New Mexico, the ideology of members tended toward "revolutionary nationalism but with a greater commitment to electoral organizing and more emphasis on coalition building."¹¹⁰ Ironically, the attempt to transcend ideology only produced the increased ideological heterogeneity among party activists. For party leaders, such philosophical diversity was a barrier to be overcome. Speaking in Houston in 1974, José Angel Gutiérrez castigated party members for the hodgepodge of viewpoints displayed within the organization:

We've been oppressed so long, and been stepped on by so many people, that we have too many streams of prostituted thought. We have too many ideologies. They range...from the cultural nationalists who would like to see us in Mayan and Aztec dress, to the super militants who wear buttons like boy scouts wear merit badges.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Ignacio García 99.

¹⁰⁸ Ignacio García 99.

¹⁰⁹ Muñoz 114.

¹¹⁰ Ignacio García 142.

¹¹¹ Ignacio García 133.

For Gutiérrez, multiplicity was a sign of oppression and self-destruction. And because unity was understood as a familial impulse crucial to the creation of a political agenda, little space existed for legitimate disagreement. Instead, disagreement is understood as the denial of self-determination. This approach to politics leads to a seemingly contradictory practice: the claim that Chicanos are an organic and united political community — combined with a vicious internal politics that demonizes those it disagrees with. This Corky Gonzales quote is typical in this regard:

[W]e have to understand principle. And the man who says we can do it within the system — who says, “Honest, you can, look at me, I have a \$20,000-a-year job” — he’s the man who was last year’s militant and this year’s OEO employee (Office of Economic Opportunity). And now he’s keeping his mouth shut and he ain’t marching anymore. We have to understand that he’s not a revolutionary, that he’s a counter-revolutionary. He’s not an ally, he becomes an enemy because he’s contaminated. You can’t walk into a house full of disease with a bottle full of mercurochrome and cure the disease without getting sick yourself.¹¹²

Gonzales’s analysis leaves little space for democratic debate. Instead, disagreement is treated as pathology. Since group unity is organic, division is external and, hence, unnatural. In the politics of unity, someone or something must be found and blamed for divisions and disagreements. Hence Gutiérrez’s claim that ideological diversity represents an excess of “prostituted thought” while Gonzales sees Chicanos who work within the system as being “contaminated” — co-opted and made “sick” by the external disease of Anglo culture.

Scholars of La Raza Unida all acknowledge that the party lacked ideological coherency. According to Carlos Muñoz, “the most difficult problem in trying to establish

¹¹² Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzales, “Chicano Nationalism: The Key to Unity for La Raza,” *Chicano: The Evolution of a People*, eds. Renato Rosaldo, Robert A. Calvert, and Gustav L. Seligmann (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1973) 427.

the party as a permanent institution...was its inability to achieve ideological unity.”¹¹³ For Muñoz, the vagueness of the party’s long-term goals and its inability to establish ideological consensus ultimately produced a liberal, reformist agenda couched in radical presentation.¹¹⁴ In *United We Win*, Ignacio García agrees with Muñoz that “[i]deologically, the chapters never found common ground, and thus, there was no encompassing platform or political document acceptable to the majority.”¹¹⁵ Yet while García faults the party for lacking a clear philosophy and direction, he also argues that Muñoz’s theoretical framework is too conceptually stringent and that the life span of the organization was too brief (less than eight years) to judge the ideological orientation of the organization. “[T]he life span of most of the party chapters,” writes García, “is simply not enough time by which to judge whether La Raza Unida Party had, or better put, *would have had* an ideology.”¹¹⁶ Both authors, however, see ideological confusion as constituting a major obstacle to the party’s development.

What Muñoz and García fail to understand is that the party’s lack of ideological clarity was not simply an organizational weakness — it was fundamental to the organization’s understanding of itself. The party’s nationalist ethos was predicated on the belief that culture and racial identification would transcend ideology. Constructing a political strategy that no longer equated political agreement with identity would be to call the organization’s very existence into question. To acknowledge that Chicanos were divided by contending economic interests and philosophical beliefs involved accepting

¹¹³ Muñoz 123.

¹¹⁴ Muñoz 103.

¹¹⁵ Ignacio García 222

¹¹⁶ Ignacio García xv.

the idea that the Chicano community was inescapably fragmented politically — an untenable realization.

When looking at the political trajectory of La Raza Unida, it would be easy to believe that the only results of the party's unitary impulses were ideological incoherence and political failure. Yet such a view would miss much of what made the organization politically meaningful. For while the impulse towards group unity was deeply problematic, it also inspired an array of civic practices that deserve analysis and attention. In particular, the party's unitary impulse was responsible for a culture of mass participation and cross-class identification. In chapter 3, I characterized such civic practices as *Rousseauian* in their commitment to democratic participation and identification. More specifically, while La Raza Unida understood Chicanos to be an organic political community, this narrative of natural consensus was complicated by a Rousseauian emphasis on *education* as crucial for raising consciousness. It's my contention that civic practices emphasizing consciousness-raising represent a particularly Rousseauian form of educative non-authoritarian authority. Put somewhat differently, the mass gatherings of La Raza Unida Party often embodied a Rousseauian form of authority that sought to "persuade without convincing."¹¹⁷

A Politics of Presence:

Mass Gatherings and Cross-Class Participation in La Raza Unida

¹¹⁷ Rousseau, *Social Contract* 69.

Public gatherings were a crucial component of Raza Unida's approach to electoral politics. Moreover, the party's efforts at fund-raising¹¹⁸ and campaigning exemplify how grass-roots participation were often understood as a form of civic education capable of making citizens who are both free and able to perceive the public good. Describing the campaign stops of Ramsey Muñiz (La Raza Unida's candidate for Texas governor in 1972), García portrays the atmosphere at these events:

Instead of large halls for rallies, Muñiz and the other candidates attended numerous backyard gatherings that drew as many as two hundred and fifty people. They were much like the *tarteadas*,¹¹⁹ with music, food, and often performances by Chicano theater groups.... Often, professors or university students made educational presentations to *concientizar* (sensitize) the crowds about their history, their past, struggles, and their culture. Participants received them well, particularly those in the lower classes, who saw their own lives lauded and glorified by young scholars anxious to organize them into a voting bloc.¹²⁰

La Raza Unida's approach to consciousness-raising — as exemplified in the educational presentations made by Chicano professors and university students — is best understood not as mere voter mobilization but as a Rousseauian attempt to produce a new sense of themselves as a people. In Rousseau's terms, the party sought to transform "each individual, who by himself is a perfect and solitary whole, into a part of a larger whole from which this individual receives, in a sense, his life and his being; of altering man's constitution in order to strengthen it."¹²¹ The election itself became secondary as workers, parents, musicians, poets, faculty, actors, and students joined together in these civic festivals.

¹¹⁸ Because the party was continually short of funds, each campaign stop had to pay for itself by selling food, alcohol, and passing the hat at various campaign stops.

¹¹⁹ Afternoon fiestas that can include from one or two family picnics to whole neighborhood gatherings.

¹²⁰ Ignacio García 126.

¹²¹ Rousseau, *Social Contract* 68.

The 1972 National Conference in El Paso was another example of the complex relationship between unity, education, participation, and public gatherings. Describing the El Paso conference, García writes:

[T]he convention generated a euphoria among Chicano activists.... People came to El Paso from every known Chicano community in the country, and from places of which southwestern Chicanos had never heard. Delegates from Minnesota, Illinois, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Washington, Rhode Island, Maryland, Washington D.C., and other states joined delegates from the “traditional” Chicano states to form a mass of more than three thousand Raza Unida party followers. They came in every conceivable way, hitching rides, car pooling, in buses, and in caravans. Some came alone; others brought the entire family. Some had money to stay in hotels, others had relatives or friends in El Paso, and still others hoped for a corner in which to place their sleeping bags.

Women comprised nearly half of those attending, and there were quite a few older people. The ideologies were as diverse as the financial and social circumstances. Nonetheless, most were drawn by the promise of unity and the hopes that La Raza had finally come into its own.... More than a political odyssey, it was a pilgrimage, and everyone the travelers met on the road represented a brother or sister in *La Causa*.¹²²

For the 3,000 participants, the national conference represented the opportunity to witness one another politically. Moreover, because the participants were all Chicano, the conference seemed to represent a civic space of fundamental racial equality. According to scholar Geraint Parry, it was just such conditions of presumed equality that Rousseau believed were necessary for reconciling an education for autonomy with an education for community.¹²³ Parry writes:

In settled conditions of equality, Rousseau argues, there will be less occasion for the emergence of a politics of interests and factions. Citizens will enjoy a shared experience that they draw on when considering the general needs of the community. Such experience arms each citizen with a general will stronger than the particular will that tends to triumph in modern unequal societies.¹²⁴

¹²² Ignacio García 104-105.

¹²³ Geraint Parry, “Emile: Learning to Be Men, Women, and Citizens,” *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau* 267.

¹²⁴ Parry 266.

For participants, the party's national conference was envisioned as a gathering of equals whose shared cultural experience would allow them to more easily perceive the general will. And while the conference failed to achieve agreement among its participants, the theoretical presumptions of equality, identity, unity, and education remained.

Interestingly, the internal diversity of the conference was not seen as an impediment. In fact, such diversity in beliefs, class, age, region, and gender made the gathering all the more significant — for without such diversity, group unity would have little political purchase. The initial existence of heterogeneity was required in order to establish the claim that one's Chicano identity was capable of transcending ideology.

Related to this cross-class diversity was La Raza Unida's commitment to the Chicano working class. The party focused its organizing around those who had been left out of the political mainstream, a constituency made up of "the poor, uneducated, and (up to that point) electorally apathetic citizens."¹²⁵ Beyond mobilization, La Raza Unida also sought to run candidates who were themselves members of the community's working class. The 1970 election in Crystal City exemplifies this approach: The four candidates recruited by José Angel Gutiérrez were all working-class. Running for the school board was Mike Pérez, a dance-hall operator, and Arturo Gonzales, a twenty-one-year-old gas-station attendant. The candidates for city council were Pablo Puente, a manager of a local auto-parts store, and Ventura Gonzales, a worker at the Del Monte packing and cannery plant just outside Crystal City.¹²⁶ According to García, the party worked explicitly to promote members of the Chicano community "who did not fit the Anglos' model of a

¹²⁵ Ignacio García 71.

candidate.”¹²⁷ Not surprisingly, the opposition argued that Crystal City needed “responsible men for responsible jobs,” arguing that “[p]oor migrant farm workers, dance hall operators, gas-station attendants, and young radicals were not the right people to govern the city.”¹²⁸

Such inclusive and participatory strategies in the realm of electoral politics remains a valuable legacy of La Raza Unida. Moreover, such inclusivity was also related to a powerful sense of obligation as well. José Angel Gutiérrez, for example, argued that organizers had a responsibility to return home and agitate in their own community.

Describing this principle, Gutiérrez wrote:

Our young Chicanos must learn and accept the fact that not to return [is] in effect saying, My people and my town are not worth going back to.... I wonder how our young, educated and bright Chicanos can think of joining VISTA or the Peace Corps or the army and not see that the struggle is where they come from.¹²⁹

For La Raza Unida, the politics of unity signified the desire to construct a political language capable of challenging the narrow self-interest and individualism pervading American liberalism. The desire to make sure that Chicanos who were middle-class or college-educated maintain a commitment and connection to those still suffering in the face of socioeconomic inequality is another aspect of the party’s “class-based” notion of group unity. The movement produced a body of activist (and academic) literature that claims that Chicanos — regardless of class, gender, or region — shared a common

¹²⁶ Pablo Puente was initially disqualified by the city attorney because he did not own property, as the city charter required. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund managed to get him back on the ballot in time for the election. See Ignacio García 57.

¹²⁷ Ignacio García 74.

¹²⁸ Ignacio García 58.

¹²⁹ Ignacio García 41.

destiny with *campesinos*, gang members, welfare mothers, and the undocumented.¹³⁰

This language of unity, then, gestures toward a politics of shared destiny with the working-class members of the community. It is a democratic ethos, reflecting a concern with conditions faced by the *majority* of Latinos in the United States.

The tendency to identify with those on the bottom of America's economic and social hierarchy represents one of the most radical aspects of movement thought. In its racial narrative, movement thought makes a compelling argument that subjectivity cannot be properly imagined unless it is in terms of others. And in a nation as ahistorical, individualistic, and market-driven as the United States, political narratives that emphasize membership, collective responsibility, history, and tradition are sorely needed. But this "class-based" notion of the common good" performed a double-edged function in movement discourse. Depending on how it was invoked and deployed, it was capable of producing both radical political solidarity and a fetishizing of the disadvantaged. More importantly, this vision of cross-class unity *naturalized* an ideological stance that needed to be *argued for*. By naturalizing cross-class unity, significant and legitimate political differences surrounding issues of class and the nature of capitalism were evaded.

Unfortunately, today's pan-ethnic organizations have jettisoned one of the most productive aspects of La Raza Unida: the Rousseauian commitment to democratic gatherings, civic education, and performative participation. Because the LRUP's commitment to cross-class unity required a politics of presence; participatory public

¹³⁰ Describing this ethos, Ignacio García writes:

"The Raza Unida Party inspired a whole generation of Mexican Americans to participate in the electoral process on a scale never before attempted. It aroused a strong feeling of compassion, and many became involved in service to their barrios and to forgotten segments of the population such as farm workers, school dropouts, welfare families, ex-convicts, and others who desperately needed a helping hand." Ignacio García 231.

gatherings were necessary to produce a sense of linked fate between middle-class and working-class Chicanos. For the LRUP, race and class consciousness was intimately linked to grass-roots participation. Moreover, these public gatherings were a powerfully Rousseauian form of civic education. Mass events represented a non-authoritarian form of authority — a Rousseauian attempt to “win over without violence” and “persuade without convincing.”¹³¹ Such educative authority sought to generalize the will by creating conditions in which subjects were made free over the course of experience and time. By contrast, today’s pan-ethnic organizations are primarily concerned with projecting Latinos into the national arena so that they may secure federal resources and gain national exposure similar to that of African-Americans. In other words, pan-ethnicity’s focus on representation and national recognition is far less dependent on mass gatherings and participatory civic education at the local level. And finally, the movement’s emphasis on cross-class unity has been eclipsed by the emphasis on unity across pan-ethnic subgroups. So while a unitary impulse continues to define Latino political thought, the form of its initial multiplicity has shifted.

The new politics of “Latino empowerment” certainly has much to recommend it — it allows Latino political elites to be effective in a political arena in which liberalism is the dominant ideology and politics is institutional, representative, and electorally focused. But without its Rousseauian commitment to inclusive and participatory practices, contemporary pan-ethnic politics now functions more as an interest group than a social movement. Yet despite this shift, contemporary pan-ethnic politics continues to echo movement discourse in its ongoing belief that political mobilization can be based on a

¹³¹ Rousseau, *Social Contract* 68.

shared cultural identity and that internal disagreement is synonymous with failure, a sign of pathology.

The continued emphasis on unity within Latino political discourse can be most clearly seen in the pan-ethnic practices of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC). In turning to the recent efforts of the caucus, I hope to generate insights into how the logic of interest-group politics combines with movement thought to shape the political assumptions of contemporary Latino civic elites.

PART V: THE CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS

In the preface of Maurilio Vigil's 1996 book *Hispanics in Congress: A Historical and Political Survey*, the author emphasizes that a significant element of the book is its examination of "the role and impact of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus."¹³² Founded in December 1976 as a legislative service organization of the House of Representatives, the CHC describes itself as, "members of Congress of Hispanic descent...dedicated to voicing and advancing, through the legislative process, issues affecting Hispanic Americans in the United States."¹³³ According to their website, "the CHC seeks to address "national and international issues that have a particular impact on the Hispanic community." Given the existence of such issues, "[t]he function of the Caucus is to serve as a forum for the Hispanic Members of Congress to coalesce around a collective legislative agenda."¹³⁴

¹³² Maurilio E. Vigil, "Preface," *Hispanics in Congress: A Historical and Political Survey* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996) vii.

¹³³ The Congressional Hispanic Caucus website — <http://www.chci.org> ("About the CHC").

¹³⁴ <http://www.chci.org>.

In the 1990s, Vigil characterizes Hispanics in Congress as “a microcosm, a reflection of the diversity of the Hispanic people of the United States. Mexican-Americans, Cubans and Puerto Ricans from different parts of the country and reflecting different partisan and ideological orientations are represented.”¹³⁵ Vigil’s recognition of the ideological and regional diversity of the Latino congressional delegation makes his analysis of the CHC all the more intriguing. Describing the CHC’s organizational intent, he writes:

The objectives of the caucus were to advance the interests of Hispanics through public policies and to enhance public awareness of Hispanic issues and problems. It was envisioned as a bipartisan group of Congressmen with a common commitment to developing a united Congressional effort on behalf of Hispanic Americans.¹³⁶

In the writings of both Vigil and the CHC, a series of assumptions about politics and identity go unexamined. In each statement, there exists the presumption that a “collective legislative agenda” can be constructed that will favor *all* Hispanics, regardless of class, region, ideology, of ethnic origin. Neither Vigil nor the CHC clearly or coherently articulate what “Hispanic issues” are or what constitute “the interests of Hispanics.” Instead, both the CHC and Vigil assume that these interests are already somehow known, understood, and agreed upon.¹³⁷ The belief and desire for a pan-ethnic political agenda

¹³⁵ Vigil 85.

¹³⁶ Vigil 87.

¹³⁷ Twenty-five years after the founding of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda continues to organize Latinos based on the belief that a pan-ethnic political agenda can serve all Latinos equally well. Describing their mission, the association states:

The National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA) was founded in 1991 as a non-partisan coalition of major Hispanic national organizations, as well as distinguished Hispanic leaders from across the nation. The NHLA represents all major ethnic groups in the Hispanic community: Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans, and Americans whose countries of origin are in the Caribbean and Central and/or South America. Governing the NHLA is a 37-member board comprised on the chief executive officers of 31 national Hispanic organizations, along with elected officials, corporate executives, and other prominent Hispanic professionals. NHLA’s mission calls for a spirit of unity among Latinos nationwide to provide the Hispanic community with greater visibility and a clearer, stronger voice in our country’s affairs. NHLA seeks a consensus among Hispanic leaders to help frame policy and promote public awareness of the major issues facing Latinos nationally. (NHLA Mission Statement. Congressional Scorecard, 106th Congress, Second Session. 2000)

that will serve all Latinos equally well echo repeatedly in Vigil's analysis of the CHC. For both him and the CHC itself, Latinos are understood to share a common political perspective capable of being mobilized in the electoral arena.

The objectives of the caucus are surprisingly *apolitical* in tone. Like the "pragmatic radicalism" of José Angel Gutiérrez, the CHC opposes approaching problems ideologically. Instead, like Gutiérrez, it emphasizes practical questions of strategy, tactics, organization, the importance of recognition, and immediate and tangible results.

Given this emphasis on pragmatism, the bipartisan status of the CHC makes sense. Within Latino political discourse, nonpartisanship has been understood as allowing for a broader community base to be built, thus allowing more Latinos to "unite" around an agenda. During the Chicano movement, for example, cultural identity was understood as exceeding the traditional lines of ideology and party, as both Democrats and Republicans were viewed as unable and/or unwilling to serve the interests of the Chicano community. Later, with the rise of pan-ethnic politics, nonpartisanship was linked to the potential power of Latinos as swing voters in closely contested elections.

For Vigil and the CHC, however, nonpartisanship goes beyond the tactical; in their analysis, Latino interests somehow *transcend* ideology and party. Furthermore, this belief that "Latino interests" somehow "exceed" ideology and party politics is characteristic of the vast majority of Latino advocacy groups. The CHC, National Council of La Raza, National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, Mexican American Political Association, and National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials all emphasize their nonpartisan political status. For the CHC, the need to bring together the full range of Latino institutional and ideological forces is treated as a central requirement for Latino

political and legislative advancement. Put somewhat differently, the politics of both nonpartisanship and bipartisanship are related to the politics of unity and the tendency to speak of “Latino interests and issues” as transparent terms that require neither articulation nor clarification.

Like La Raza Unida, the CHC is driven by a belief that evading ideological debates increases the potential for unified action and flexibility. In reality, Latino elites are embracing a form of unexamined multiplicity that ultimately has led to political conflict and paralysis. Because “Hispanic interests” have never been adequately articulated and agreed upon, the CHC has been unable to achieve its pragmatic agenda.

Hispanics in Congress: Disunity in Action

In his analysis, Vigil focuses on the *difficulty* the CHC has in functioning as a cohesive and united body. He discusses various significant pieces of legislation that the caucus has worked on (including the Simpson-Mazzoli Immigration Bill in 1983, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, and NAFTA in 1993) and the legislators’ consistent inability to achieve consensus. Vigil writes:

Historically, the greatest difficulty of the Caucus has been that its members have pursued their own individual agendas whether based on constituency interests, personal goals, ideological or other interests, rather than pursuing a common agenda on Hispanic concerns.¹³⁸

[T]he Caucus had difficulty in achieving agreement as to priorities, programs and policies that affect Hispanics. The Caucus has been unable to arrive at a coherent national Hispanic policy or to develop the necessary legislative agenda and the unity to carry it out...[b]ecause of the different personalities, backgrounds and philosophies of the members....¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Vigil 92.

¹³⁹ Vigil 88.

It is apparent that the CHC presently lacks a decision-making mechanism to develop a specific and coherent program of legislation for Hispanics, for presentation to the Congress.¹⁴⁰

For Vigil, unity is a marker of political commitment and proper political socialization: Latino members of Congress behave like active representatives when trying to unify themselves. Like La Raza Unida and other nationalistic movement narratives, Latino (as opposed to Chicano) identity is understood as somehow more “fundamental” than ideology. Underneath the “personalities, backgrounds and philosophies” of Latino members of Congress exists a unity based on common cultural characteristics capable of grounding a “coherent program of legislation for Hispanics.” Vigil assumes that, deep down, identity produces a nugget of agreement that can (and must) be “dug out” if Latinos are to have political agency and power.

Vigil concludes his analysis by noting that “the CHC has not yet achieved the desired visibility as a collective spokesman for Hispanic Americans.” But he finds encouragement in recent elections of Hispanic representatives who have then joined the CHC. Vigil notes that the new members have provided a “greater ideological and regional mix that more accurately reflects the diversity of America’s Hispanic population.”¹⁴¹

At this point, Vigil’s critique of the CHC harbors two contradictory impulses: the desire for a unified agenda that can claim to speak for the entire Latino body politic, and the desire to represent the diversity of Latinos as a group. What Vigil seems to ignore is that to truly represent Latino political diversity is to undermine the unity of the CHC and the dream of a single “Hispanic agenda.”

¹⁴⁰ Vigil 97.

The contending desire for both broad representation and group unity reveals the contradiction at the heart of the pan-ethnic impulse. Since ethnic-group unity is seen as necessary for political presence, recognition, and agency, maintaining a united front becomes paramount. But all too often, the “pan-ethnic” group shares only the broadest of intentions; any effort to forge a deeper level of agreement both produces and uncovers disagreement. And when disagreement over legislative policy and political priorities occurs — as it inevitably will — it is understood as a political failure. Therefore, the object of CHC gatherings is not to gain a broad view of Latino political opinions, learn from each other, and develop principled spaces for disagreement. Rather, the goal is to develop meta-narratives that promise political closure. Diversity is celebrated as its starting point (the caucus includes “Republicans from Florida” along with “liberal to moderate Democrats”), but unity is the necessary endpoint. A multiplicity of political viewpoints comes in, but a unifying “national Hispanic policy” that represents “Hispanic interests” is what must emerge. Furthermore, in order for the output to be truly legitimate, this diversity is *required* at the starting point, for only then can Latino political elites invoke the power and authority of the representative “we.” On one level, this desire to bring together everyone from across the political spectrum represents the positive desire to make the conversation inclusive and democratic. Seen in this light, the politics of unity represents efforts to not demonize those with whom we disagree. But this desire also mistakes the nature of political agreement and the role of ideology in constructing one’s political identity.

¹⁴¹ Vigil 95.

At the conclusion of *Hispanics in Congress*, Vigil presents suggestions regarding how the CHC should function and how the group could be most effective. He writes,

[I]t is vital that the Caucus present a united front on any issue it addresses. Even the slightest hint of internal dissent will greatly diminish its effectiveness in persuading other congressmen that the Caucus position truly represents the Hispanic position.

The inability of the CHC to present a united front on a variety of issues deprives it of a very important strategic tool... [U]nity is important because of its potential influence on the other 418 Congressmen, some of whom have sizable Hispanic constituencies or who may be sensitive to Hispanic concerns.

It is unlikely that all the members of the Hispanic Caucus will achieve consensus on all or even the most important issues to Hispanics. It is more likely that the different personalities, partisanship and political ideologies, constituency interests and personal agendas of the individual members, will undermine the unity of the Hispanic Caucus. However, the extent to which the individual members can rise above these differences and come together, on the basis of common, cultural, linguistic and surname characteristics, will determine the collective future of Hispanics in American politics.¹⁴²

What is striking about Vigil's analysis is the way it both trivializes and demeans politics.

“[P]artisanship...political ideologies [and] constituency interests” are put on par with “personalities” and “personal agendas.” Because “[e]ven the slightest hint of internal dissent” represents political failure, profound differences in political viewpoints are characterized as recalcitrant pettiness. In the end, Vigil can hope only that Latino members of Congress will be big enough to “rise above” their differences and “come together, on the basis of common, cultural, linguistic and surname characteristics.”

CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that the majority of Latinos in the United States do *not* see themselves as a cohesive political community with shared values and interests, Latino civic elites continue to be guided by the idea that political agency and advancement

¹⁴² Vigil 97.

requires a unified agenda capable of encompassing the needs of this deeply diverse collective. Despite results like those of the Latino National Political Survey, civic elites continue to find solace in the dream of Latino unity.

At its best, the impulse toward unity in Latino political thought is based on the belief that racism, racial identity, and class create ties and obligations that exceed and challenge the language of self-interest. In this way, efforts at “pan-Hispanic” unity represent the belief that Latino subjects are marked and constituted by historical circumstance. The racial and class narratives of Latino political thought argue that Latino subjects are not unencumbered and free-floating but, rather, marked and constituted by historical circumstance. Indeed, Latino political thought insists that the self is situated in and constituted by culture, language, and membership. The politics of group unity displays these “cross-class” commitments, seeking a political language wherein the Cuban businessman, the Chicana gang member, the Puerto Rican autoworker, and the Salvadoran immigrant recognize each other as part of a shared political community. In this vision of unity, no one is forgotten, demonized, or denied. This desire to create an inclusive Latino political community recognizes that too many communities are still struggling for political and social equality. Framed in this way, one can clearly recognize that the dream of “pan-ethnic unity” has attractive elements embedded within it, particularly its implicit critique of the narrow individualism and social atomism that often dominate American politics.

Unfortunately, these worthwhile impulses in the discourse of pan-ethnic unity come anchored to more troubling moments as well. In particular, the dream of unity is predicated on a dangerous political fantasy that misunderstands not only politics but the

very idea of shared agreement and solidarity. A group that is united must be united *around* something. It requires shared ideas, beliefs, and strategies. In other words, the politics of solidarity must be *forged*, not found; meaningful political unity is contingent upon shared principles and beliefs rather than shared “cultural, linguistic and surname characteristics.”¹⁴³ Real unity requires real politics and real issues. But the current approach to Latino unity fails to comprehend the nature of political community; it theorizes Latino community politics as a site of mutual identification capable of transcending ideological contestation. Because the attempt to transcend politics only hides and confuses politics, such an analysis has actually *hindered* Latino political advancement and the development of a progressive Latino political agenda.

Even more significantly, the attempt to be nonpartisan and non-ideological is necessarily non-deliberative and anti-political: The desire for some pre-political point of cohesion leads both scholars and practitioners of Latino politics to deny the legitimate disagreements that emerge through political dialogue and debate. Asian-American writer Eric Liu describes this process as a kind of multicultural “quintuple melting pot” that functions not unlike the assimilationist (and often discredited) melting-pot myth. In the “quintuple melting pot,” the goal is to “liquefy the differences within racial groups” and “solidify those among them.”¹⁴⁴ In both cases, discipline is celebrated over diversity, and democratic conversation is constrained.

By limiting democratic conversation, both La Raza Unida and the pan-ethnic Congressional Hispanic Caucus share the Rousseauian concern with agonistic public speech discussed in the previous chapter. For in his desire to keep citizens as free as they

¹⁴³ Vigil 95.

were prior to entering the social contract, Rousseau ultimately relies on education as the fundamental method of denaturing without domination. As Parry notes, Rousseau's general will demands "deliberation uncontaminated by the personal or sectional interests of others and unaffected by their rhetoric and arts of persuasion."¹⁴⁵ In this way, Rousseau seeks to generalize the will without resorting to speech practices that dominate or persuade. But in favoring education over collective deliberation and debate, both Rousseau and Latino civic elites seek a form of transformation whereby denatured citizens achieve educative maturity over time and contingency is transcended. As Patrick Riley notes, Rousseau tries to anchor the general will at the end of education, when "informed, independent choice must finally be possible."¹⁴⁶ This desire to use education to mark the end of political time is powerfully articulated at the end of *Emile*, when our protagonist tells his tutor: "What course have I chosen! To remain what you have made me and voluntarily to add no other chains to the one with which nature and laws burden me."¹⁴⁷ In the *Emile*, nature and choice are reconciled through a form of emancipatory education; Emile emerges from his education capable of choice, denatured but free.

Yet despite such efforts, failure is never overcome. Even Rousseau's best attempt at education can be read as failure: In *Émile et Sophie, ou Les Solitaires*, the unfinished sequel to *Emile*, Sophie is seduced by Parisian society and the marriage destroyed.¹⁴⁸ Rousseau's carefully constructed account of subjectivity gives way to a more complex

¹⁴⁴ Liu 71.

¹⁴⁵ Parry 266.

¹⁴⁶ Riley 125

¹⁴⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: BasicBooks, 1979) 471.

¹⁴⁸ Parry 263.

tale of failure. The precarious status of even the best-educated subjects speaks to the unresolved tensions within Rousseau's thought. Moreover, this paradox helps us recognize a parallel problem within Latino political thought. Latino civic elites share Rousseau's concern regarding how subjects achieve a transformation of consciousness. In Rousseau, we are reminded that education is crucial to this process. Ultimately, however, education is unable to overcome contingency.

Latinos in the United States represent diverse communities that are transforming themselves into new and vibrant formations each day. That shared cultural and linguistic attributes are currently producing new pan-ethnic Latino identities is undeniable. Spanish and English-language television, advertising campaigns, and the publishing and entertainment industry are all participants in the current process of producing a Latino consumer who regularly crosses the lines of national origin. Somewhere today in Texas, a Chicana is reading *Latina Magazine* and listening to the new album by Jennifer Lopez (a *Nuyorican* whose album was produced by Emilio Estevan, the Cuban-American producer and husband of Gloria Estefan). That this vibrant cultural crossover and pan-Latino identification is happening is not in doubt. But pan-ethnic *cultural* practices are not pan-ethnic *political* practices. This is not agreement on legislation or public policy, and it does a disservice to both culture and politics to conflate the two.

In the end, the dream of pan-ethnic unity is a dream of community without conflict and, thus, a world without politics. Once "we" finally "know" who we are, once we have "overcome" our differences and disagreements, then we will achieve political agency, then we will have a civic voice. But perhaps there's a need to consider a new, more explicitly political understanding of identity, one based on shared principles and shared

beliefs — a new political vision that accepts the presence of some and the absence of others.

Rethinking the dream of unity would mean forsaking the solace that comes with envisioning Latinos as a cohesive political community. It would also mean coming to terms with the fact that Latino interests are not only varied but actively in competition and conflict with one another.¹⁴⁹ However, by coming to understand internal multiplicity as both fluid and ongoing, Latino civic elites could abandon the struggle to produce a single “Latino agenda” based on “Hispanic interests.” And by separating culture from politics, and by emphasizing agreement over inclusion, Latino civic elites would gain the freedom to forge coalitions based primarily on ideas and beliefs rather than similar “cultural, linguistic and surname characteristics.”¹⁵⁰

Such a move won’t be easy. Most Latino civic elites continue to see cultivating group unity as a necessary step toward Latino empowerment. For these actors, to relinquish the ethnically authorized “we” may initially feel like a retreat into invisibility, a loss of collective agency. But real empowerment can occur only when Latino civic elites are able to recognize and accept the diversity and multiplicity they have long sought to transcend.

Turning to Rousseau reminds us that our capacity for unity through educated, autonomous, and independent choice is always in question, always unstable. This loss of consensus is Rousseau’s fear and (as I hope I’ve shown) the fear of Latino civic elites.

¹⁴⁹ A good example of this is the needs of small business versus the working poor. Increases in the minimum wage and providing health care are both in the interest of the Latino working class, but would create new economic burdens on Latino small business owners. But because Latino civic elites have felt compelled to stress unity, they have been ill equipped to discuss this internal tension. Instead, the politics of unity has compelled Latino civic elites to voice broad platitudes about “economic empowerment” rather than explicitly address such contradictions. Not surprisingly, it is the working poor who are most hurt by these evasions and inability to engage in serious democratic deliberation and contestation.

¹⁵⁰ Vigil 95.

Yet neither Rousseau nor Latino civic elites are able to escape the possibility of failure — that what we hold as common can all too easily disappear.

Such contingency, however, is democracy's promise, because uncertainty is also possibility. Subjects may surprise us in their ability to perceive and produce a common good. Such commonality is never guaranteed, but neither is it permanently out of reach.

CHAPTER 5

HYBRIDS AND HIERARCHIES:

THEORIZING MESTIZAJE IN LATINO POLITICAL DISCOURSE

In the previous chapter, I sought to expose the unitary impulse that lies at the heart of contemporary pan-ethnic politics. I argued that despite acknowledgments of subgroup diversity, Latino civic elites erase this very multiplicity in their quest for agency and recognition. In this chapter, I turn to another recent development in Latino political thought: the concept of “the borderlands” and the hybrid Latino subjects that inhabit this new discursive terrain.

Like the emergence of pan-ethnic politics, recent theorizing of hybridity and its related concept of the borderlands seems to undermine my assertion that unity continues to dominate Latino political discourse. Emphasizing multiplicity and fluidity over stability and singularity, the hybrid subject appears to challenge unitary notions of race and culture by embodying the blending of two or more diverse cultures and traditions. And in contrast to the belief that uncovering differences among members of the social body is damaging and potentially dangerous, theorists of hybridity and the borderlands characterize conflict and contradiction as crucial to their emancipatory project. Not surprisingly, given its anti-essentialist approach, notions of hybridity and borders have become increasingly popular among scholars of identity — particularly those engaged in critical race theory, feminism, postmodernism, and Latino studies.¹

¹ Given these interests and concerns, it is not surprising that connections have been noted between postmodernism and theories of the hybrid subject. In the writings of postmodernists, subjectivity is problematized and deconstructed so that every subject position is understood as embedded in networks of

When analyzing the recent emergence of pan-ethnicity and hybridity, one could perhaps argue that a significant split has occurred in Latino theory and practice — with unity dominating the practical realm of Latino politics while multiplicity has come to characterize contemporary theorizing of Latino identity. It's my contention, however, that this is not the case. Instead of highlighting the contradictory and incomplete nature of subjectivity, contemporary theories of *mestizaje* continue to invoke shared experience as a fundamental precondition for political agency and knowledge. In other words, rather than challenging our belief in stable categories of identity, theorists of hybridity continue to be embedded in a unitary discourse of essentialism, proper ordering, and authenticity. Scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa create an alternate conception of subjectivity that elevates certain notions of alterity while reifying the existing categories of both dominant and subaltern subjects. In this approach, *mestizaje* becomes a kind of foundational or "fixed" notion of identity that forecloses more radical approaches to identity and subjectivity.

In order to understand this development, I construct a genealogy of hybridity, examining the ways in which hybridity has historically been invoked. By tracing the discursive origins of hybridity, I seek to show how earlier visions of *mestizaje* serve as the basis for more recent notions of hybridity put forward by contemporary theorists of Latino identity.²

power and history. Such an approach challenges the hegemony of dominant discourses and their claim to what Anthony Appiah describes as a certain "exclusivity of insight." See Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is the Post- in Post-modernism the Post- in Post-colonial?" *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (Winter 1991) 342; Rosa Linda Fregoso and Angie Chabram, "Chicana/o Cultural Representations: Reframing Alternative Critical Discourses" *Cultural Studies* 4 (1990); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Who Claims Alterity?" in *Remaking History*, Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani, eds. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989); and Rafael Pérez-Torres, "Migratory Readings: Chicana/o Literary Criticism and the Postmodern" in *Movements in Chicano Poetry: Against Myths, Against Margins* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

² In this chapter, I use two terms relatively interchangeably: *hybrid* and *mestizaje*. I define *hybrid* as a subject who embodies the blending of two diverse cultures or traditions. I define *mestizaje* as the particular mixture of Indian, black, and Spanish that produces Mexican ethnicity and identity. *Mestizas* and *mestizos*,

Recent theorizing on hybridity and the “borderlands” (most notably by feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa) clearly break new ground in Latino political thought — particularly in its critique of gender and sexuality. Nevertheless, it’s my contention that current approaches to theorizing hybridity choose privileged knowledge over the more difficult challenge of considering the emancipatory possibilities of subjects who tend toward contradiction, partiality, and incompleteness.

PART I: HYBRIDITY & MESTIZAJE

POSTMODERN VISIONS AND PRE-COLUMBIAN MOTIFS IN

BORDERLANDS/LA FRONTERA: THE NEW MESTIZA

According to Ilan Stavans, Latinos in the United States “have decided to consciously embrace an ambiguous, labyrinthine identity as a cultural signature.”³ Anzaldúa describes this new definition of subjectivity as a “mestiza identity,” partaking in cultural practices that (with varying levels of intensity) identify with both its Spanish and Indian roots. This fluidity of identity is demonstrated by the ability of Chicanos to function at the interstices of multiple identity-based discourses — occupying the position of both conqueror and conquered. For scholars of postcoloniality and postmodernism such as Rafael Pérez-

then, represent a particular type of hybrid identity. In addition, I share Rafael Pérez-Torres’s critique of *mestizaje* — that “[s]tructures involved with invasion, diaspora, commercial exchange, xenophobia, and genocide create mestizaje.” For Pérez-Torres, “[m]estizaje cannot be separated from the histories of rape and violation from which it emerges,” conditions of “conjunction, enrichment, violation, conquest, fusion, and violence.” (Rafael Pérez-Torres, *Movements in Chicano Poetry: Against Myths, Against Margins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 211-212.

³ Ilan Stavans, *The Hispanic Condition: Reflections on Culture & Identity in America* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995) 13.

Torres, this bordered subject has a “constructively decentered subjectivity: a marginality that is both critical and powerful, multiplicitous and in flux.”⁴

In feminist theory, hybrid or bordered identities are understood as capable of articulating a new notion of subjectivity premised on multiplicity and shifting identities. According to feminist political theorist Shane Phelan, the *mestiza* appears as “an inappropriate/inappropriated other,” one who “challenges existing categories by her refusal/inability to fit within them.”⁵ For feminist theorists, hybridity and *mestizaje* represent a form of identity production and performance that challenges essentialism and the belief in a stable and unified subjectivity.

The hybrid subject gained prominence in the 1980s, as postmodern, feminist, and postcolonial theorists sought out alternative approaches to theorizing identity and experience. For feminists and Latino scholars of identity, one of the most significant texts that popularized the idea of hybridity was Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. As the title indicates, her theoretical framework is premised on *borders* — both the physical border of the Texas–U.S. Southwest/Mexico border and the psychological, sexual, linguistic, and spiritual borders that function in Anzaldúa’s existence as a lesbian, Chicana-Tejana, working-class academic. She writes:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line...a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.⁶

⁴ Rafael Pérez-Torres 141.

⁵ Shane Phelan, *Getting Specific: Postmodern Lesbian Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) 57.

⁶ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987) 3.

More than delineating a topography of her personal identity, Anzaldúa is making theoretical claims intended to resonate with a broader audience. She writes:

[T]he Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.⁷

Anzaldúa's theoretical framework undermines the tendency toward rigid boundaries, theorizing new sites in which agency and ambiguity can co-exist. In fact, Anzaldúa moves beyond coexistence, creating a dialectic that allows for new possibilities and a new consciousness: a *mestiza* consciousness.

Throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa insists that because of material reality and collective history, Chicanos *as a people* have an intimate knowledge of the borderlands ("Nosotros los Chicanos straddle the borderlands"⁸). Chicanos inhabit the Southwest, communities that border Mexico and once *were* Mexico. Beyond geography, a Chicano confronts internalized borders as he or she is made to feel like "a Mexican among Americans and an American among Mexicans." Chicanos develop a border *language*, one that is neither Spanish nor English but a hybrid, a new language. And finally, Chicanos are a border *race*, the bastard offspring of Spanish colonialism and Indian subjugation. From their origins, Chicanos are a hybrid, unable to be fully "home" with either the Spanish father or the Indian mother. Instead, the *mestizaje* constitutes a new racial category, one in which culture emerges from conquest. For Anzaldúa, Chicanos can claim material experience in seeing how borders transform and create new categories.

⁷ Anzaldúa, "Preface."

⁸ Anzaldúa 62.

In a radical move of feminist theorizing, Anzaldúa articulates a Chicana feminist identity, drawing from pre-Columbian religious symbols and myths that were initially invoked in the 1960s by Chicano cultural nationalists such as Alurista and Corky Gonzales. Given the history of sexism and homophobia among these early cultural nationalists, Anzaldúa's feminist appropriation appears all the more bold.⁹ Citing feminist theorists such as Norma Alarcón, Rafael Pérez-Torres describes how Anzaldúa "appropriates the techniques developed by the founding Chicano fathers who enlisted mythical figures to consolidate cultural identity and pride."¹⁰ According to Pérez-Torres, Anzaldúa "assumes the patriarchal privilege of naming and identifying, but in order to name her own experience and to foreground female figures."¹¹ Citing figures of Aztec-Mexica culture like *Coatlíque* and *Tonantsi*, Anzaldúa constructs a set of pre-Cortesian feminist myths that challenges what she sees as patriarchal mythic narratives of *indigenismo* that erase the sexuality and "dark guises" of female deities like *Tlazolteotl*, *Coatlalopeuh*, and *Cihuacoatl*.¹²

For Anzaldúa, a feminist *mestizaje* involves a break with what she sees as patriarchal dualities between cultural figures like *la Virgen de Guadalupe* and *La Malinche*.¹³ In

⁹ For a discussion of sexism in the Chicano movement, see *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, Alma García, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁰ Pérez-Torres 54. Also see Norma Alarcón, "Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of 'The' Native Woman" in *Cultural Studies* 4 (1990) 248-256.

¹¹ Pérez-Torres 54.

¹² For a thorough exploration of Anzaldúa's use of pre-Cortesian narratives for feminist purposes, see Chapters 3 and 4 of *Borderlands*, "Entering the Serpent" and "The Coatlique State."

¹³ La Malinche is popular name for the historical/mythical figure of Malintzin Tenepal, translator, adviser, and mistress to the Spanish conqueror of Mexico, Hernan Cortés. Malintzin is considered the mother of the mestizo people. But as Cherríe Moraga notes, "unlike La Virgen de Guadalupe, she is not revered as the Virgin Mother, but rather slandered as... a sell-out to the white race. Upon her shoulders rests the full blame for the 'bastardization' of the indigenous people of Mexico." See Moraga's *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (Boston: South End Press, 1983) 99.

contrast to the sexist dichotomy of virgin/whore, Anzaldúa presents the Aztec goddess Coatlique as a feminist archetype. For Anzaldúa, Coatlique “depicts the contradictory.... Like Medusa, the Gorgon, she is a symbol of the fusion of opposites: the eagle and the serpent, heaven and the underworld, life and death, mobility and immobility, beauty and horror.”¹⁴ For Anzaldúa, Coatlique represents the radical pluralism inherent in this *mestiza* subjectivity; a subjectivity in which “nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned.”¹⁵ The new *mestiza* not only “sustains contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else.”¹⁶

The appeal of Anzaldúa’s theory of the borderlands is that it challenges the myth of the autonomous, coherent, and stable subject, a subject who is able to fully occupy a single, unproblematic category. Instead, *Borderlands* attempts to provide a theoretical space, a discursive “home” for an identity recognized as multiple, fluid, and contradictory. And while other feminist theorists have theorized subjects that destabilize categories and occupy multiple subject positions, few have created a theoretical framework as accessible and emotionally gripping as Anzaldúa’s *mestiza*. She writes:

The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode.... [N]ot only does she sustain contradictions, she turns them into something else.... In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts...and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm.... The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended.¹⁷

¹⁴ Anzaldúa 47.

¹⁵ Anzaldúa 79.

¹⁶ Anzaldúa 79.

¹⁷ Anzaldúa 79-80.

In the fifteen years since its publication, *Borderlands* has emerged as a widely cited and enormously influential text. Excerpts regularly appear in edited volumes dealing with postcolonialism, feminist theory, and Latino studies. Because it moves so seamlessly between issues of race, gender, sexuality, and class, *Borderlands* is used in a wide array of courses, from freshman English to graduate seminars on postmodern feminism.

Despite the fact that *Borderlands* is in many ways viewed as a foundational text regarding the concept of hybridity and *mestizaje*, Anzaldúa recognizes that she is participating in a historical and ideological tradition that extends back at least as far as José Vasconcelos's book *La Raza Cósmica*, published in 1926. Anzaldúa invokes Vasconcelos's evolutionary theory of race when she writes:

Vasconcelos, Mexican philosopher, envisaged *una raza mestiza, una mezcla de razas afines, una raza de color — la primera raza síntesis del globo*. He called it a cosmic race, *la raza cósmica*, a fifth race embracing the four major races of the world. Opposite to the theory of the pure Aryan, and to the policy of racial purity that white America practices, his theory is one of inclusivity. At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly "crossing over," this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination, an "alien" consciousness is presently in the making — a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is the consciousness of the Borderlands.¹⁸

Anzaldúa's appropriation of Vasconcelos's theory of *mestizaje* is evident from the first page of *Borderlands*. In the book's preface, she writes: "Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element. There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind, in being 'worked' on. I have the sense that certain 'faculties' — not just in me but in every border resident, colored or non-colored — and in

¹⁸ Anzaldúa 77.

dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened.”¹⁹ As does Vasconcelos, Anzaldúa sees hybridity as a site not only of possibility but of privileged insight and advanced evolution.

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa names Vasconcelos as a foundational figure in the theorizing of *mestizaje* and border consciousness. But the philosopher is not the only foundational figure invoked in the book. Anzaldúa’s claim for a politicized notion of hybridity, combined with pre-Cortesian mythmaking, is also deeply indebted to nationalist discourse from the late 1960s and early ’70s — particularly Corky Gonzales’s epic poem of the movement, *Yo Soy Joaquín/I Am Joaquín*, and *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (a document primarily written and conceived by movement poet Alurista). In *Joaquín*, hybridity and *mestizaje* became central to how Chicanos articulated a vision of themselves in the late 1960s that retains currency today. In Latino political discourse, *Joaquín* represents a vision of hybridity and *mestizaje* that is central for more recent notions of hybridity put forward by writers such as Anzaldúa. In *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (The Spiritual Plan of Aztlán), Aztlán emerged as a cultural and geographic homeland that linked Chicano identity to its pre-Cortesian past. Recent theorizing of the “borderlands” has its roots in these earlier narratives of Aztlán. Within *Yo Soy Joaquín* and *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, we can begin to see many of the tropes and tendencies that have come to shape Chicano subjectivity.

PART II: FROM HYBRIDITY TO AUTHENTICITY

MESTIZO IDENTITY IN *YO SOY JOAQUÍN*

¹⁹ Anzaldúa “Preface.”

Corky Gonzales — poet, activist, former professional boxer and founder of the Crusade for Justice, a Denver-based Chicano civil-rights organization — composed *Yo Soy Joaquín* in 1967. Written “first and foremost for the Chicano Movement,” *Joaquín* “traces Chicano struggle through a historical overview of Mexican/Chicano history.”²⁰ *Joaquín* became required reading in Chicano-studies courses, helping to politicize a generation of Chicano students. The poem was performed by Teatro Campesino (the Luis Valdez-founded theater group of the United Farm Workers) and was eventually made into a short Teatro Campesino film.

In an introduction to the 1972 Bantam edition, Gonzales describes *Joaquín* as “a social statement, a conclusion of our *mestizaje*, a welding of the oppressor (Spaniard) and the oppressed (Indian).”²¹ Throughout the text, he emphasizes that Chicanos must come to terms with the violence and inequities of their history so as to develop “an honest, clear conclusion of who we were, who we are, and where we are going.”²² For Gonzales, in order to comprehend Chicano history and identity, one must realize that “the villains and the heroes had to ride together.”²³ Setting the stage for theorists such as Anzaldúa, he constructs a vision of *mestizo* subjectivity in which the Chicano subject lacks “innocent origins.”

Yo Soy Joaquín opens with the creation of Chicano people out of the conquest of the Aztec empire by Spain. In this passage, Gonzales sets the foundation for Mexican miscegenation — *mestizaje* is represented by conquest, resistance and blood:

²⁰ Pérez-Torres 47.

²¹ Rodolfo Gonzales, *I Am Joaquín/Yo Soy Joaquín* (New York: Bantam, 1972 [1967]) 1.

²² Gonzales 1.

²³ Gonzales 1.

I am Cuahémoc,
 proud and noble, leader of men,
 king of an empire
 civilized beyond the dreams
 of the gachupín Cortés
 who also is the blood,
 the image of myself.
 I am the Maya prince
 I am Nezahualcóyotl
 great leaders of the Chichimecas
 I am the sword of flame of Cortés
 the despot
 And
 I am the eagle and serpent of
 the Aztec civilization.²⁴

In this section of the poem, Gonzales produces a seamless narrative in which the Mexican people are figured as noble kings and Mayan princes as well as the Spanish despot Cortés, who is also “the blood, the image of myself.” Here, Gonzales constructs a history of *mestizaje* in which Mexicans/Chicanos must confront a history in which they were both “tyrant and slave.”²⁵

Later in the text, the multiplicity and fluidity that emerges out of a hybrid identity comes to signify political choices and alliances. Mexican history is portrayed as the history of a people, but it is a people divided as much by ideology as by *mestizaje*.

Gonzales writes:

I ride with revolutionists
 against myself.
 I am the Rurales,
 course and brutal,
 I am the mountain Indian,
 superior over all...
 I have been the bloody revolution,
 the victor,
 the vanquished.
 I have killed
 and been killed.

²⁴ Gonzales 16.

²⁵ Gonzales 19.

I am the despots Díaz and Huerta
and the apostle of democracy,
Francisco Madero.²⁶

In this passage, Mexican identity is divided, but it is a division of politics — of revolutionaries versus counterrevolutionaries, of democrats versus despots. In this instance, the contending pulls and contradictions of culture and identity are understood as more explicitly ideological rather than biological. This is the space of choice as well as culture.

As the poem moves towards its conclusion, a significant shift subjectivity occurs: The poem ceases to refer to Mexicans in Mexico and shifts to the history of Mexican-Americans (Chicanos) in the United States. At this point, *Joaquín* begins to speak to a *second* conquest — the Mexican-American War and the loss of the Mexican territories to the United States in 1848:

My knees are caked with mud.
My hands callused from the hoe.
I have made the Anglo rich,
yet
equality is but a word —
the Treaty of Hidalgo has been broken
and is but another treacherous promise.
My land is lost
and stolen.
My culture has been raped.
I lengthen the line at the welfare door
and fill the jails with crime.
These then
are the rewards
this society has
for sons of chiefs
and kings
and bloody revolutionists.”²⁷

²⁶ Gonzales 40.

²⁷ Gonzales 66, 69.

At this point, the internal multiplicity and plurality that characterizes Mexican identity earlier in the poem begins to give way to *unity* in the face of an external enemy (Anglo America). In this passage, Chicanos *as a people* are experiencing collective victimization in the United States. The earlier plurality of actions and ideology that characterized the history of *mestizaje* in Mexico (the struggle between Spanish conquest and Indian subjugation, between democrats and despots) gives way to singular experience and social location (“my knees are caked with mud.... My culture has been raped”). When Gonzales writes, “These then/are the rewards/this society has/for sons of chiefs/and kings/and bloody revolutionists,” he constructs a discourse of Chicano identity that simultaneously claims and coalesces its Spanish kings and its Indian chiefs. Together, the blood of these “chiefs and kings” produces the *mestizo* revolutionists who died for democracy.

According to Juan Bruce-Novoa in *Chicano Poetry: A Response to Chaos*, when the poem turns to American society, it offers a choice, “separatism or assimilation...the choice is between fidelity to the fathers’ ways or remaining in Gringo modern society.”²⁸ According to Bruce-Novoa, the poem demands a withdrawal from the latter:

I stand here looking back,
and now I see the present,
and still
I am the campesino,
I am the fat political coyote—
I, of the same name,
Joaquín
In a country that has wiped out
all my history...
I look at myself
and see part of me
who rejects my father and my mother
and dissolves into the melting pot

²⁸ Juan Bruce-Novoa, *Chicano Poetry: A Response to Chaos* (Austin: University of Texas Press) 51.

to disappear in shame.
 I sometimes
 sell my brother out
 and reclaim him
 for my own when society gives me
 token leadership
 in society's own name.²⁹

At this point in the poem, the mixing and miscegenation necessary for the creation of *mestizaje* ceases, and a process of separatism and cultural maintenance begins. Bruce-Novoa notes that, “[t]he poet’s categorical denunciation of assimilation/miscegenation in the United States raises the question of why it is valid in Mexico and not here.”³⁰ For Corky Gonzales, the plurality inherent in Mexican identity allows Chicanos to claim both the bloody glory of Spain and the spiritual and cultural authenticity of indigenous tribes from ancient Mexico. But in the United States, to engage in assimilation/miscegenation with Anglo America would be to legitimate the “second conquest” of 1848. Gonzales constructs a narrative of Chicano identity that must now maintain his Spanish/Indian hybridity in order to reinforce his status as a subject defined by resistance. Here we see no space for plurality; to mix is to disappear, to “dissolve into the melting pot” and “disappear in shame.” Assimilation is loss and negation; it requires rejecting “my father and my mother.” Membership is betrayal — “I [Joaquín]” must “sell my brother out” only to “reclaim him” in order to gain “token leadership” from Anglo society. In Gonzales’s poem, membership in Anglo society involves a renunciation of one’s racial and sociopolitical identity. This *mestizaje* would merge into assimilation, and the Chicano subject would no longer be able to invoke a radical and politicized racial identity.

²⁹ Gonzales 51-52.

³⁰ Bruce-Novoa 60.

Indigenismo and the “Hierarchy of Hybridity”

According to Rafael Pérez-Torres, Chicano cultural production has often sought to “activate and articulate an identity through an appeal to the glories of past indigenous civilizations.”³¹ This is certainly true of Gonzales’s poem, in which Chicano hybridity is understood as the privileging of the indigenous over the Spanish. In *Joaquín, mestizaje* is conceived as a form of subjectivity that involves what I call a *hierarchy of hybridity*. In the poem, Spanish heritage is acknowledged and recognized, but it is the Indian that is the source of pride and collective identity — it is pre-Columbian cultural motifs that are invoked to instill a sense of cultural pride in the Chicano reader/listener. Cortés, after all, is “the despot.” while Indians are “leaders, kings and princes.”³² Bruce-Novoa notes that “[i]t would be absurd” to propose that *Joaquín* gives “equal value” to the varied sociocultural elements of *mestizaje*.³³ In Gonzales’ narrative of *mestizaje*, indigenous ancestry is the site of group unity and collective resistance, signifying an appeal to the past that could “link together all Chicanos despite their heterogeneity.”³⁴

This privileging of the indigenous side of *mestiza* identity is clearly present in the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa. Her feminist reinterpretation of pre-Cortesian female deities like Coatlique and Tonantsi demands a *mestiza* consciousness that privileges indigenous myth and ritual. Describing the role of art in pre-Cortesian times, Anzaldúa writes:

³¹ Pérez-Torres 48.

³² Gonzales 16.

³³ Bruce-Novoa 53.

³⁴ J. Jorge Klor de Alva, “California Chicano Literature and Pre-Columbian Motifs: Foil and Fetish,” in *Confluencia* (Spring 1986), Vol. 1, No. 2, 18.

[M]y people, the Indians, did not split the artistic from the functional, the sacred from the secular, art from everyday life. The religious, the social and aesthetic purposes of art were all intertwined. Before the Conquest, poets gathered to play music, dance, sing and read poetry in open-air places.³⁵

In her chapter “*Tlilli, Tlapalli: the Path of the Red and Black Ink*,” Anzaldúa invokes Mesoamerican themes when describing her own relationship to writing as an aesthetic practice. Describing her own creative process, Anzaldúa writes:

In looking at this book that I’m almost finished writing, I see a mosaic pattern (Aztec-like) emerging, a weaving pattern, thin here, thick there.... This almost finished product seems an assemblage, a montage, a beaded work with several leitmotifs and with a central core, now appearing, now disappearing.... It is a rebellious, willful entity, a precocious girl-child forced to grow up too quickly, rough, unyielding, with pieces of feathers sticking out here and there, fur, twigs, clay. My child, but now for much longer. This female being is angry, sad, joyful, is *Coatlíque*, dove, horse, serpent, cactus. My “stories” are acts encapsulated in time, “enacted” every time they are spoken aloud or read silently. I like to think of them as performances and not as inert or “dead” objects (as the aesthetics of Western culture think of art works).... Western art is always whole and always “in power.” It is individual (not communal). It is “psychological” in that it spins its energies between itself and its witness.... Ethnocentrism is the tyranny of Western aesthetics.³⁶

For Anzaldúa, writing in the borderlands requires a return to indigenous approaches to cultural production. Anzaldúa’s aesthetic references almost all involve pre-Columbian symbols: beads, feathers, fur, twigs, clay, serpent, cactus. The radical and revolutionary potential of *mestiza* consciousness can occur only if the border subject writes in a oppositional stance against “Western” or “ethnocentric” practices. According to anthropologist J. Jorge Klor de Alva, the use of symbols and ideas from Mexico’s ancient past function not only as a search for collective identity but as a *foil* to criticize and critique Anglo society.³⁷ This is certainly the case with Anzaldúa’s writing — indigenous practices are placed in opposition to “ethnocentrism” and “Western aesthetics” and

³⁵ Anzaldúa 66.

³⁶ Anzaldúa 66-67.

³⁷ See Klor de Alva, “Chicano Literature and Pre-Columbian Motifs” 24.

characterized in exclusively negative terms. In her critique of European art and “Western aesthetics,” art of the West is portrayed as monolithically bad — violent, hyperrational, sterile — while the artistic practices of non-Western cultures is monolithically good. In this way, Anzaldúa is guilty of what Klor de Alva describes as the “fetishistic way” that Chicanos often treat Mesoamerican themes. According to Klor de Alva, Chicano writers have often oversimplified the ideologies and symbols of ancient Mexico, coming close to caricaturing the “highly complex and greatly enigmatic codes that veil the meanings of the original texts.”³⁸

In both the nationalist ethos of Gonzales and the feminist ethos of Anzaldúa, Chicanos have access to a common indigenous identity that exists cross-culturally and through time. Moreover, if the hybrid Chicano subject is not properly ordered, it loses its capacity to invoke the necessary discourse of resistance, spiritualism, alterity, and endurance characteristic of *indigenismo*.³⁹ Anzaldúa alludes to this hierarchy in her *Borderlands* preface when she writes: “Living on borders and in margins, keeping *intact* one’s shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element” (italics mine). For Anzaldúa, the new *mestiza* must negotiate the terrain of the borderlands; with too much slippage, her subjectivity is no longer “intact.” The Chicano may lack “innocent origins,” but in order to maintain one’s border status (one’s “green card” of authenticity, so to speak), both Anzaldúa and Gonzales require that one maintain the proper hierarchy of hybridity.

³⁸ Klor de Alva, “Chicano Literature and Pre-Columbian Motifs” 24.

³⁹ *Indigenismo* is a term used to describe practices that emphasize indigenous culture, myth, and history.

PART III: AZTLÁN

FROM HOMELAND TO BORDERLAND

According to Pérez-Torres, in *Yo Soy Joaquín* the United States is “never home, only a menace from which ‘Joaquín’ recoils.”⁴⁰ This tension between a land of menace and a yearning for site of solace becomes what Pérez-Torres describes as the poem’s “unspoken vision” of Aztlán.

According to Luis Leal, *Aztlán* has multiple meanings. Initially, the story of Aztlán was a pre-Cortesian myth of origin.⁴¹ But during the Chicano movement, Aztlán came to represent the geographic region known as the Southwestern part of the United States, composed of the territory that Mexico ceded in 1848 in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Finally and most importantly, Aztlán came to symbolize “the spiritual union of the Chicanos, something that is carried within the heart, no matter where they may live or where they may find themselves.”⁴² As a narrative of home and identity, Aztlán mirrors the contradictions of Chicano subjectivity. Like Chicanos themselves, Aztlán is *from* but not *in* Mexico, *in* but not *of* the United States. Aztlán is portrayed not as a return to Mexico but as the spiritual and territorial embodiment of Chicano aspirations. As such, it is a homeland narrative well-suited to its hybrid subjects.

⁴⁰ Pérez-Torres 74.

⁴¹ As Luis Leal writes: According to the Nahuatl myth, the Aztecs were the last remaining tribe of seven, and they were advised by their god Huitzilopochtli to leave Aztlán in search of the promised land, which they would know by an eagle sitting on a cactus devouring a serpent. Later the Aztecs (whose name is derived from Aztlán) remembered the region or their origin as an earthly paradise. Already in the fifteenth century Moctezuma Ilhuicamina (ruler from 1440 to 1469) sent his priests in search of Aztlán. See Luis Leal, “In Search of Aztlán” in *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), Rudolfo Anaya and Francisco Lomeli (eds.) 8.

⁴² Luis Leal, “In Search of Aztlán” in *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* 8.

In the 1960s, Chicano activists reappropriated Aztlán as their homeland, and it became a rallying cry of the movement. The concept of Aztlán “signaled a unifying point of cohesion through which [Chicanos] could define the foundations for an identity.”⁴³ This new interpretation of Aztlán owes its re-emergence to Alurista, who, during the fall of 1968, spoke about Aztlán in a Chicano studies course at San Diego State. As Leal notes, prior to 1969, “no one talked about Aztlán.”⁴⁴ This was soon to change: Aztlán officially entered Chicano cultural discourse when Alurista’s *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* was introduced and read aloud at the National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver in March 1969.⁴⁵ In the *Plan*, the Chicano is called on to recognize his Aztec origins and claim Aztlán as the Mexican territories lost to the United States in 1848. Following the 1969 conference, *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* was published and widely disseminated among Chicano activists. And by the early 1970s, the relationship between Chicano identity and Aztlán was fully established in Chicano cultural and political discourse.

The *Plan*’s opening statement represents the text at its most ideological, as well as its most mythopoetic:

In the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud historical heritage but also of the brutal “gringo” invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán from whence came our forefathers, reclaiming the land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our people of the sun, declare that the call of our blood is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny. We are free and sovereign to determine those tasks which are justly called for by our house, our land, the sweat of our brows, and by our hearts. Aztlán belongs to those who plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops and not foreign Europeans. We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the bronze continents.

⁴³ Rudolfo Anaya and Francisco Lomeli, “Introduction” in *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* ii.

⁴⁴ Luis Leal 11.

⁴⁵ Luis Leal 11.

Brotherhood unites us, and love for our brothers makes us a people whose time has come and who struggles against the foreigner “gabacho” who exploits our riches and destroys our culture. With our hearts in our hands and our hands in the soil, we declare the independence of our mestizo nation. We are a bronze people with a bronze culture. Before the world, before all of North America, before all our brothers in the bronze continent, we are a nation, we are a union of free pueblos, we are Aztlán.⁴⁶

In *El Plan*, Aztlán is portrayed as a space of blood and belonging (“Brotherhood unites us, and love for our brothers makes us a people”). In Aztlán, those who work the land *own* the land (“Aztlán belongs to those who plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops and not foreign Europeans.”). Ultimately, Aztlán represents a utopian impulse in Chicano discourse in which alienation and internal conflict are unknown.

In many ways, *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* represents the ideological and rhetorical resolution to *Yo Soy Joaquín*. As discussed earlier, in Gonzales’s poem, the plurality and internal contradictions that characterize *mestizaje* give way to a Chicano subject whose multiplicity and contradictions are erased in the face of Anglo victimization. And despite its status as a homeland for Chicanos — a people who are both Mexican *and* American — the hybridity of Aztlán does not include Europeans. While “Joaquín” must confront his violent legacy of Indian subjugation and Spanish conquest, in *El Plan* the European is simply expelled (“We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the bronze continents”). The privileging of indigenous origins that begins in *Joaquín* concludes with the *denial* of European roots in Alurista’s conception of *mestizaje* in *El Plan*.

As a mythic narrative, Alurista’s reconceptualization of Aztlán has certainly been successful. Politically, Aztlán functioned as an imaginative and powerful metaphor for Chicano unity. According to scholar Elyette Andouard-Labarthe, “The symbol of Aztlán had the power to legitimize the struggles.... [I]t was a compensatory symbolic

⁴⁶ *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* in *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* 1.

mechanism, fusing poetic-symbolic unity to sociocultural concerns. The Chicanos who were divided by history, found in it an ancestral territory and a common destiny.”⁴⁷ J. Jorge Klor de Alva describes the appropriation of Aztlán as “the most brilliant political maneuver of the Chicano cultural nationalists.” Under no other sign or symbol from the left, right, or center “were as many Chicanos mobilized and as much enthusiasm galvanized into political action — except for the concept of Chicanismo itself.”⁴⁸ Klor de Alva notes that in a movement hungry for symbols, Aztlán is “still the single most distinguishing metaphor for Chicano activism.... [T]he term adorns countless poems, novels, painting, and organizations which display it as both a sign of their content and a mark of their political ideology.”⁴⁹

While Aztlán has clearly been an influential and effective symbol, it also represents a more troubling side of Chicano political discourse. For example, two groups that were clearly absent from the symbolic space of nationalist mythmaking were feminists and gays and lesbians. According to Pérez-Torres, the nationalist invocations of Aztlán “erased the differences, tensions and ruptures amongst Chicanos.”⁵⁰ For Pérez-Torres, the narrative of Aztlán was “a necessary and constructive” step during the nationalist movement. But he is also aware that this attempt to “fix a space limiting and bounding” Chicano identity disenfranchised those whose needs were not met by nationalist movements.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the continued power and “symbolic space” taken up by

⁴⁷ Elyette Andouard-Labarthe, “The Vicissitudes of Aztlán” *Confluencia* 5 (Spring 1990) 83.

⁴⁸ J. Jorge Klor de Alva, “Aztlán, Borinquen and Hispanic Nationalism in the United States,” in *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* 149.

⁴⁹ Klor de Alva, “Aztlán, Borinquen and Hispanic Nationalism” 149.

⁵⁰ Pérez-Torres 93.

⁵¹ Pérez-Torres 34.

Aztlán is in large part why, eighteen years after its publication, Gloria Anzaldúa would appropriate and reconceptualize the concept of Aztlán by transforming it from *homeland* to *borderland*.

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa sought to articulate a new metaphorical and literal region that would offer a more complex and liberating vision of Chicano subjectivity. In her poem “To Live in the Borderlands Means You,” her vision of the borderlands stands in contrast to the nationalist narrative of Alurista. Anzaldúa writes:

To live in the Borderlands means you
 are neither *hispana india negra española*
ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed
 caught in the crossfire between camps
 while carrying all five races on your back
 not knowing which side to turn to, run from;
 To live in the Borderlands means knowing
 that the india in you, betrayed for 500 years,
 is no longer speaking to you,
 that mexicanas call you *rajetas*,
 that denying the Anglo inside you
 is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black;
Cuando vives en la frontera
 people walk through you, the wind steals your voice,
 you're a *burra, buey*, scapegoat,
 forerunner of a new race,
 half and half — both woman and man, neither —
 a new gender;
 To live in the Borderlands means to
 put chile in the borscht,
 eat whole wheat tortillas,
 speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent;
 be stopped by *la migra* at the border checkpoints;
 To live in the Borderlands means you fight hard to
 resist the gold elixir beckoning from the bottle,
 the pull of the gun barrel,
 the rope crushing the hollow of your throat;
 In the Borderlands
 you are the battleground
 where enemies are kin to each other;
 you are at home, a stranger,
 the border disputes have been settled
 the volley of shots have shattered the truce
 you are wounded, lost in action
 dead, fighting back;

To live in the Borderlands means
 the mill with the razor white teeth wants to shred off
 your olive-red skin, crush out the kernel, your heart
 pound you pinch you roll you out
 smelling like white bread but dead;
 To survive the Borderlands
 you must live *sin fronteras*
 be a crossroads⁵²

According to Pérez-Torres, Anzaldúa's vision of the borderlands represents a "metaphorical and literal space where worlds blend and cross."⁵³ In Anzaldúa's poem, the borderland is a "zone of transition and not belonging.... The borderland stands as that region...where all the contradictions of living among and between worlds manifests itself."⁵⁴ Unlike *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán's* hyper-masculine call to brotherhood, the Chicano subject of the borderlands is "both woman and man, neither — a new gender." "To live in the borderlands," writes Pérez-Torres, "means transgressing the rigid definitions of sexual, racial, and gender definitions."⁵⁵

Anzaldúa's borderland is always both home and not home. Rather than a dream of origins and belonging, her poem is an articulation of strategies and "advice on how to negotiate through the ruptured terrain of the borderland."⁵⁶ This vision of home as a discontinuous and unstable region represents another significant contrast to Alurista's vision of a homeland where one can live in a state of indigenous purity, free from alienation. For Pérez-Torres, Anzaldúa's "bordered" subjectivity reconceptualizes Chicano/a identity, allowing a multiplicity of subject positions to emerge. In this way, the

⁵² Anzaldúa 194-195.

⁵³ Pérez-Torres 35.

⁵⁴ Pérez-Torres 95.

⁵⁵ Pérez-Torres 95.

⁵⁶ Pérez-Torres 95-96.

transformation of Aztlán from homeland to borderland can be seen as a deeply liberating move in Latino cultural discourse.

PART IV: ESSENTIALISM IN THE BORDERLANDS

THE DEMOCRATIC LIMITS OF MESTIZA CONSCIOUSNESS

Anzaldúa's challenge to the sexism and narrow cultural nationalism of writers such as Alurista and Rodolfo Gonzales has led Pérez-Torres and other scholars to approach her work as the progressive continuation of earlier, more essentialist notions of identity. For Pérez-Torres, Anzaldúa resolves the problem of nationalist notions of subjectivity produced by movement activists during the late 1960s and '70s.

Anzaldúa's feminist appropriation of hybridity has also influenced emerging work on gender and sexuality. In her 1994 book *Getting Specific: Postmodern Lesbian Politics*, Shane Phelan looks to Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" as a potentially productive site of theorizing for white lesbians and feminists.⁵⁷ For Phelan, Anzaldúa transforms the new *mestizas*' multiple sites of marginality into a set of new possibilities for connection and social change. Anzaldúa's conception of community as always enmeshed in a web of contending loyalties and commitments is what Phelan sees as valuable for lesbian conceptions of political community. In a chapter exploring the connections between lesbian identity and *mestizaje*, Phelan describes the subjectivity of the new *mestiza* as signifying a "tolerance for ambiguity and contradictions." In Anzaldúa, Phelan finds a

⁵⁷ See chapter four of *Getting Specific*, "Lesbians and Mestizas: Appropriation and Equivalence," 57-75.

oppositional discourse in which conflict is accepted as “necessary and fruitful rather than threatening.”⁵⁸

Getting Specific is an excellent example of the potential for innovative theorizing using the concepts *mestizaje* and hybridity. My concern, therefore, is not Phelan’s effort to reconceive lesbian subjectivity and political community — it’s that Anzaldúa’s own theory of hybridity and *mestizaje* is incapable of grounding Phelan’s radical project. Anzaldúa constructs a *mestiza* identity whose experience gives her privileged insight and knowledge. The subjectivity of others is never called into question; in fact, it requires the *stability* of others to authorize the author’s own radical location as “bridge” to the various communities she inhabits. Anzaldúa’s understanding of *mestiza* subjectivity is still too invested in earlier nationalist narratives of *mestizaje* and their conceptions of monolithic stable Anglo subjects. *Mestizas* are in flux, Others are not; *mestizas* represent the next step forward, while Other subjectivities are rigid and incapable of evolution.

For Phelan, the power of *mestiza* consciousness lies in its “refusal of dualisms and boundaries that have worked to limit and separate us, from one another, and from the fullness of our selves.”⁵⁹ This simultaneous state of displacement and connection can be seen when Anzaldúa makes the claim:

As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Phelan 72.

⁵⁹ Phelan 72.

⁶⁰ Anzaldúa 80-81.

According to Phelan, because they belong even when “their own people deny it,” Anzaldúa’s new *mestiza* challenges the dream of transparent belonging that animates some sectors of the lesbian political community. “Rather than being marginal, rather perhaps even than being liminal,” Phelan writes, “lesbians are central to the societies that repudiate them. We are not accepted as lesbians, but our not being accepted does not entail that there is a somewhere else we really belong. It is tempting to think we must fully belong somewhere, but the temptation must be resisted.”⁶¹ Citing the past quarter-century of lesbian organizing, Phelan argues that the expectation that the lesbian community always be made up of “allies and friends, and supporters of each other” will inevitably fail.⁶² “With such expectations, conflicts can only be understood as betrayal, and opposition can only mean exclusion.”⁶³

In thinking about “the analogy between lesbianism and *mestizaje* as loci of oppression and oppositional culture,” she wants to create a productive space in which Anzaldúa’s ideas and analysis can be theorized.⁶⁴ Part of what makes Phelan’s political and theoretical impulses so promising and possible is her understanding of the history of appropriation and cultural imperialism that has plagued Anglo theorizing of racial identity and experience. But while Phelan is attentive to questions of appropriation and anthropology, she is unwilling to stop theorizing the works of women of color on the basis that such interpretations are always “hegemonic acts of appropriation.”⁶⁵ Instead,

⁶¹ Phelan 67.

⁶² Phelan 74.

⁶³ Phelan 74.

⁶⁴ Phelan 68.

⁶⁵ Phelan 69.

she rightly refuses this line of thinking — she wants to “get specific” without abandoning “analogy and metaphor.”⁶⁶

Phelan celebrates the *mestiza*'s role as a bridge-builder and the way that Anzaldúa's notion of “bridging” functions as a political strategy. Anzaldúa's “new mestiza” is characterized by her inability to hold “concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries” — for *la mestiza*, “[r]igidity means death.”⁶⁷ A symbol of fusion and hybrid, exile and global community, her *mestiza* is “the officiating priestess at the crossroads.”⁶⁸ Anzaldúa writes,

[T]he future will belong to the mestiza. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures.... The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war.⁶⁹

Phelan understands Anzaldúa's approach to bridging as similar to her own strategy of specificity; both represent practices that seek a space of “community without sameness.”⁷⁰ For Phelan, bridging avoids the “romantic politics of reconciliation” and acknowledges the “inequalities of power” that produce boundaries between political subjects.⁷¹ The *mestiza* does not dispute the historical or contemporary reality of

⁶⁶ Phelan 72.

⁶⁷ Anzaldúa 79.

⁶⁸ Anzaldúa 80.

⁶⁹ Anzaldúa 80.

⁷⁰ Phelan 70.

⁷¹ Phelan 72-73.

designations like class, nation, sex, and race, but “she does operate constantly to undermine their unitary solidities.”⁷²

But in her desire to construct a more productive theory of agonistic alliances and politicized community, Phelan rehabilitates Anzaldúa too much, inadequately theorizing her tendencies toward essentialism and her reification of categories. Anzaldúa’s theory of bridging, for example, involves not only an acceptance of conflict and vulnerability — it involves unitary subjects who require the assistance of more evolved hybrid subjects. Implicit in Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* consciousness is the belief that it is only through a life in exile, in the borderlands, that women and men will ever be able to evolve beyond the destructive pattern of dualistic thinking and exclusive categories. Describing *mestiza* consciousness as society’s last, best hope, she writes,

We are the people who leap in the dark, we are the people on the knees of the gods. In our very flesh, (r)evolution works out the clash of cultures. It makes us crazy constantly, but if the center holds, we’ve made some kind of evolutionary step forward.⁷³

Anzaldúa seeks to establish a theoretical framework that creates subjects that are fluid, multiple, and contradictory. But in her effort to challenge racist and patriarchal narratives that portray the *mestiza*, the queer, and the indigenous as denigrated and damaged subjects, Anzaldúa constructs a feminist reinterpretation of Vasconcelos’s notion of *la raza cósmica* — a narrative of privileged multiplicity and advanced evolution. This tendency to privilege the experience of marginal subjects is particularly apparent when she describes her concept of “*la facultad*.”

For Anzaldúa, “*la facultad*” represents a higher level of consciousness to which border subjects have privileged access. The experience of life on the margins, life without

⁷² Phelan 75.

a stable “home” — yet, as Phelan points out, also a life in which the potential for home is everywhere — seems to allow the development of a privileged knowledge to which all border people have access. This experiential knowledge seems to eventually evolve into a mystical gift. Experience leads to magic:

Those who are pushed out of the tribe for being different are likely to become more sensitized.... Those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world are more apt to develop this sense. Those who are pounced on the most have it the strongest — the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign.... It’s a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate. It is latent in all of us.

I walk into a house and I know whether it is empty or occupied. I feel the lingering charge in the air of a recent fight or lovemaking or depression.... I can tell how others feel by the way they smell, where others are by the air pressure on my skin. I can spot the love or greed or generosity lodged in the tissues of another.⁷⁴

When analyzing who has access to “*la facultad*” and the evolving consciousness of *la mestiza*, Anzaldúa sees the experience of homosexuality as providing another particularly powerful location to cross cultures and to bridge communities. The ability to act as a mediator and bridge-builder is another privileged site that can authorize speech. She writes:

Being the *supreme* crossers of cultures, homosexuals have strong bonds with queer white, Black, Asian, Native American, Latino, and with the queer in Italy, Australia and *the rest of the planet*. We come from all colors, all classes, all races, all time periods. *Our role is to link people with each other.... Colored homosexuals have more knowledge of other cultures....* People, listen to what your *jotería* is saying.... *The mestizo and the queer exist at this time and point on the evolutionary continuum for a purpose.*⁷⁵ (emphasis mine)

This move — creating a monolithic, already-constituted identity — functions as the precondition for Anzaldúa’s claim of experience as the basis for a privileged knowledge.

⁷³ Anzaldúa 81.

⁷⁴ Anzaldúa 38-39.

⁷⁵ Anzaldúa 84-85.

Feminist scholar Christina Crosby discusses the problems of establishing an epistemology based on “who I am determines what and how I know.” She writes,

[H]ow do I know who I am? That’s obvious: I am my differences, which have been given to me by history. In this circle, the differences which seem to refract and undo a substantive identity actually reflect a multifaceted, modified but all-too-recognizable subject.⁷⁶

Bat-Ami Bar On makes a similar argument in her essay, “Marginality and Epistemic Privilege.” “Epistemic privilege becomes a function of the distance from the center,” writes Bar On, “[p]resumably, the more distant one is from the center, the more advantageous one’s point of view.”⁷⁷ According to Bar On, feminist theory has embraced a notion of epistemic privilege (most clearly seen in the feminist standpoint theory of Nancy Hartsock) whereby oppression authorizes both agency and insight. From this perspective, Anzaldúa’s affinities with standpoint theory and her commitment to epistemic privilege become clear. Despite celebrations of multiplicity and the tearing down of dichotomies, Anzaldúa’s situates her subaltern subjects at the more advanced stage of the “evolutionary continuum” — endowing them with a “natural” knowledge produced by their distance from a center of power understood as both singular and monolithic. Such peripheralization allows Anzaldúa to authorize her queer and mestizo subjects to embrace their unique ability to both translate and mediate between dominant subjects understood as unified and singular.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Christine Crosby, “Dealing with Differences,” *Feminists Theorize The Political*, eds. Judith Butler and Joan Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992) 137.

⁷⁷ Bat-Ami Bar On “Marginality and Epistemic Privilege,” *Feminist Epistemologies*, eds. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (New York: Routledge, 1992) 89.

⁷⁸ Despite her eloquent arguments for the tearing down of dichotomies, Anzaldúa is often guilty of essentialism and stereotype. These quotes *Borderlands* are typical and all too prevalent throughout the text:

Nudge a Mexican and she or he will break out with a story.

Phelan is correct to recognize that the dream of “full and uncomplicated belonging” is premised on a belief in a “unitary, harmonious self” that requires eliminating any obstacles to unity. But Phelan’s analysis is incomplete: Anzaldúa may undermine the “unitary solidity” of women of color, gay men, and lesbians, but the unitary conception of dominant groups is equally necessary to her theory. For ultimately, her very language of borders implies stability on either side. Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* reinforces modernist notions of the subject in order to posit a fluid subject that works against it. And because the mutually constitutive quality of subjectivity is undertheorized, Anzaldúa is able to envision a time when oppressed subjects will have access to their “true selves.” She describes this utopian vision when she writes:

I seek an exoneration...a seeing of ourselves *in our true guises* and not as *the false racial personality* that has been given to us and that we have given to ourselves. I seek our woman’s face, *our true features...free of the tainted biases of male dominance.*⁷⁹
(emphasis mine)

Unlike the earlier nationalist narratives of Corky Gonzales and Alurista, Anzaldúa’s theory of *mestiza consciousness* allows for internal conflict and debate. But rather than the *new mestiza* being a critical site whose historical experience reveals the destabilized, socially constructed subjectivity that all human subjects face, Chicano hybridity is created in opposition to the unquestioned existence of autonomous, self-contained

The whites in power want us people of color to barricade ourselves behind our separate tribal walls so they can pick us off one at a time with their hidden weapons.

Our mothers taught us well...men aren’t to be trusted, they are selfish and act like children. Mothers made sure we didn’t walk into a room of brothers or fathers or uncles in nightgowns or shorts. We were never alone with men, not even those of our own family.

Chicanas feel uncomfortable talking in Spanish to Latinas, afraid of their censure.

Culture is made by those in power — men. Males make the rules and women transmit them.

(Anzaldúa 86, 16-18, 58, 65).

⁷⁹ Anzaldúa 87.

subjects. In her theory of bridging, Anzaldúa chooses privileged knowledge over any radical reconception of subjectivity. If the stability of all subjects were called into question, the “new mestiza” would lose a critical site of agency. If dominant subjectivities weren’t stable, her privileged role as mediator and “bridge maker” would be lost.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps there is no identity so perfect, so seamless, so well-fitted to her that she could wear it, be it, perform and live it without resentment, without sadness, without yearning, without guilt, hatred and even violence.⁸⁰

Within Latino political thought, hybridity emerged as a theoretical paradigm that allowed for multiplicity and contradiction while simultaneously legitimating and giving voice to subjects who historically lacked the power and authority to make claims in the public realm. This approach to identity, however, confronts certain theoretical and political challenges: How do you legitimate and include marginalized subjects and their claims without essentializing them? How do you stay attentive to difference yet maintain the capacity to challenge and critique the experiences of those whose identities are not necessarily your own? How do you grapple with inequality while creating the necessary space for contestation?

Added to this is the realization that the problem of privileged knowledge claims is a problem not simply for identity politics. While these issues and questions are certainly at the forefront of feminist and Third World scholarship, they are also questions that inform political and democratic theory. For at its best, democratic community presumes the

⁸⁰ Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) 183.

possibility of mutual transformation — a transformation forged through dialogue and debate. If citizens treat their respective experiences as a form of privileged knowledge — as “uncontestable evidence” — then democratic politics is seriously constrained. This is the danger of the essentialist impulse: It treats some citizens as inherently incapable of the shared understanding necessary for turning strangers into democratic interlocutors. And how can we engage in political deliberation if the claim to experience seeks to locate itself beyond the reach of contestation and challenge?

For scholars like Phelan and Pérez-Torres, Anzaldúa’s theory of *mestiza* consciousness promises a compelling vision of democratic partiality in conjunction with a multicultural narrative of subjectivity that recognizes historical specificity and inequality. For these scholars, hybridity offers a solution to the narrow nationalism and separatism present in certain segments of identity politics. Unfortunately, this well-intentioned desire to challenge earlier, more essentialist impulses within identity politics leads them to ignore and erase those very moments within Anzaldúa.

This is not to say that Anzaldúa’s work has been neither positive nor significant. She has been pivotal to conceptualizing *mestizaje* as a site of complex multiplicity that challenges earlier nationalist frameworks. In *Yo Soy Joaquín*, *mestizaje* initially involved multiplicity, guilt, and innocence, but ultimately, Corky Gonzales produced a new narrative of supremacy, authenticity, and hyper-masculinity. In her critique of this masculinist narrative, Anzaldúa has played a crucial role in displacing traditional gender roles and deepening our understanding of Chicana/o subjectivity. Nevertheless, Anzaldúa’s feminist appropriation of Gonzales and Alurista involves unexpected baggage — namely, the fetishizing of indigenous practices and a dominant subjectivity whose

stability and coherence undergirds the multiplicity and fluidity of Chicana/o hybridity. And while Gonzales's excessive machismo is no longer apparent, the logic of hybridity continues to be enmeshed in a complex new paradigm of racial authenticity and epistemic privilege.

The problematic baggage that emerges from Anzaldúa's appropriation of nationalist narratives leaves us with a number of questions: How do appropriative practices function? Is appropriation a successful political and theoretical strategy for marginalized subjects? More specifically, can one appropriate the myths and icons of a particular discourse without also laying claim to the historical pathologies that emerge from such longings? The unresolved impulses of Anzaldúa's new *mestiza* leaves these questions unanswered. And despite hybridity's promise, Latino political thought still lacks a theoretical paradigm in which subjectivity is recognized as inescapably fragmented and contestation is understood as foundational to democratic citizenship.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION:

LEAVING HOME: AGENDA-BUILDING IN AN AGE OF UNCERTAINTY

For the past thirty-five years, Latino politics in the United States has offered an alternative to liberal approaches to conflict by emphasizing a set of practices and assumptions aimed at social transformation. Offering an effective and gripping theory of political community, Latino civic elites challenged liberalism by arguing that the self can be imagined only in terms of others.¹ Arguing that subjectivity is always already constituted by history, tradition, and membership, Latino political thought has sought to counter liberalism's tendency to see subjects as distinct and different from their choices and commitments.

But despite this emphasis on mutually constitutive subjectivity and participation, was the discourse surrounding Latino politics any better than liberalism in confronting political conflict? To answer this question, I turned to political theory, particularly the political philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. As a political theorist, I saw Latino political thought as deeply Rousseauian in its participatory vision of collective transformation. In turning to Rousseau, I hoped to see whether the status of conflict within Latino thought and practice was reflective of identity-based practices in particular, or whether they were inherent to the challenges of democratic life more broadly.

¹ According to Michael Sandel, this form of "deontological liberalism" is most fully articulated in the work of John Rawls. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls portrays the subject as an "autonomous chooser of ends," leading him to assign an absolute moral priority to the subject over its ends. For Rawls, one's self-identity and subjectivity exists *prior* to the ends that it chooses. According to Sandel, the Rawlsian subject is an "antecedently individuated subject" whose subjectivity is "fixed prior to experience." See Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 19, 55.

In examining how Latino civic elites approach the relationship between identity and political agreement, I've been particularly interested in two contradictory desires: the longing for a passionate and participatory politics that generates a sense of mass identification and unity, coupled with the desire to avoid political conflict and agonistic speech encounters. As this dissertation has shown, Latino political discourse is a particularly rich site for examining this tension between political unity and participatory democracy. Such paradoxical longings, however, do not simply reflect Latino political culture. Rather, the simultaneous desire to experience politics as a celebration of emotion and shared public action while evading deep disagreement is part of a larger conversation about the nature of democracy and civic membership. Turning to Rousseau, we see how crucial it is to generate the union of will and understanding necessary for collective action.² Public gatherings where citizens experience themselves as part of a communal whole can have a profound effect on how subjects come to understand themselves politically. It is often the memory of such emotive encounters that sustains political actors through the tedious, frustrating, and disillusioning aspects of civic engagement.

Yet in turning to Rousseau, we become aware of just how fraught such practices are. For in their capacity to "persuade without convincing," performative mass gatherings run the risk of making other civic practices appear insufficient and unsatisfying. If identification is understood as the "ideal type" of political discourse, the quotidian work of democratic citizenship becomes all the more difficult to sustain. Angry and disillusioned about the emergence of disagreement and agonistic speech within a political

² In recent years, the yearning for a transformative politics of presence can be seen in events like the 1994 Million Man March, the 2000 Million Mom March, and the rise of WTO protests throughout Europe and North America.

community, subjects envision and demand a civic life devoid of conflict, defined primarily in terms of unity, inspiration, and intensity. Rather than sustaining civic life, the unity of Rousseauian identification renders everything else a disappointment.

As I stated at the start of this project, how we theorize identity and agreement shapes our expectations and vision of what political action and deliberation are supposed to look like. With this in mind, Rousseauian identification must be theorized as a necessary (though incomplete) aspect of civic life. In the absence of such theorizing, the Rousseauian politics of participation and identification runs the risk of becoming a corrosive rather than sustaining force in democratic life.

The danger of undertheorizing the meaning of mass identification and unity has been particularly apparent following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Many Americans were moved by the emotive outpouring of national unity that emerged immediately following this catastrophic event. Such unity stood in contrast to the apathy and partisan discord that usually characterizes American politics. Criticizing the current state of American politics, citizens expressed a desire for meaningful membership and leaders who “stand for something.” Yet by conceiving unity as our democratic ideal, vigorous public disagreement quickly came to be seen as a sign of deterioration and disloyalty. Sadly, America’s civic elite did little to help citizens understand the crucial relationship between agonistic debate and democracy. Democratic Party leaders, in particular, appeared caught in a discourse that made gestures of unity a precondition for political legitimacy. With unity as the national fetish, contentious speech was increasingly portrayed as a sign of “partisan bickering” that reflected an unwillingness to strive for national unity. In accepting this demonization of conflict and agonistic speech,

Democrats embraced a strategy of accommodation, silence, and self-censorship, while disillusioned citizens expressed disappointment in the inability of our elected officials to maintain unity in the wake of 9/11.

As our post-9/11 political climate makes clear, the yearning for group unity and the denigration of political disagreement and contentious public speech are not problems exclusive to Latino politics. In forging links between democratic theory and the study of Latino politics, I've come to believe that the recent turn toward identity-based political practices is neither the cause of our current dilemma nor the answer to our problems. While Latino political discourse *does* offers a vision of politics more transformative than that of liberalism, it too falters in the face of agonistic political conflict. Therefore, in looking at the history of Latino political thought and practice, contemporary Latino civic elites inherit a theoretical legacy they can neither fully embrace nor repudiate. Instead, they confront a legacy in need of negotiation. In this final chapter, I offer some suggestions regarding what practices or assumptions should be maintained and reconfigured and which need to be resisted.

To begin this process, I turn to the writings of philosopher Anthony Appiah. When looking at the problems and possibilities of identity politics, Appiah offers not so much a strategic blueprint as a particular kind of democratic and theoretical *temperament*. In his ability to balance his concern with racial justice with his insistence on the unique moral personalities of individuals, Appiah shares the Rousseauian concern with autonomy and the problem of being mastered by others. For both Rousseau and Appiah, the challenge lies in securing both freedom *and* membership. For Appiah, the solution lies in moving away from an emphasis on unity and authenticity, working instead on recognizing (rather

than resolving) the internal contradictions that characterize both community and individual subjectivity. It's my belief that any new approach to theorizing Latino subjectivity would do well to cultivate Appiah's ability to resist unity while keeping issues of autonomy and group identity in play.

PART I

“NOT TOO TIGHTLY SCRIPTED”: RESISTING THE IMPERIALISM OF IDENTITY

In his book with Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race*, Appiah analyzes both the positive and problematic political practices that function alongside the emergence of “large collective identities.” According to Appiah, collective identities “provide what we might call life scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories.”³ And while Appiah resists any notion of authenticity (“a real self buried in there, the self one has to dig out and express”), he insists that one *cannot* “simply make up of any self I choose.” Instead, “[w]e make up selves from a tool kit of options made available by our culture and society.... We do make choices, but we don't determine the options among which we choose.”⁴ For Appiah, it is the presence of these racialized life scripts that continue to shape our presence in the public realm. He writes:

The old restrictions suggested life scripts...but they were negative ones. In order to construct a life with dignity, it seems natural to take the collective identity and construct positive life scripts instead. So the Black Power movement creates new life scripts that give meaning to resistance and to challenging dominant paradigms. Additionally, one will seek dignity in life not *despite* the fact of being black (or gay or whatever), because

³ K. Anthony Appiah, “Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections,” K. Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutman, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 97.

⁴ Appiah 96.

that would assume that being black counts as being negatively against one's dignity. Instead, one will ask to be respected *as a black*.⁵

Appiah admits he is sympathetic to this counter-discourse of group identity and racial pride — acknowledging that such a discourse may have been historically and strategically necessary. However, he goes on to argue that “I think we need to go on to the next necessary step, which is to ask whether the identities constructed in this way are ones we can all be happy with in the longer run.”⁶ In particular, Appiah is concerned with the tendency of collective identities to “‘go imperial,’ dominating not only people of other identities, but the other identities, whose shape is exactly what makes each of us what we individually and distinctively are.”⁷ He writes:

It is at this point that someone who takes autonomy seriously will want to ask whether we have not replaced one kind of tyranny with another. If I had to choose between Uncle Tom and Black Power, I would, of course, choose the latter. But I would like not to have to choose. I would like other options.⁸

For Appiah, one's racial identity can be the basis of resistance to racism, but such a strategy must guard against the tendency to make one's ethnoracial identity “the obsessive focus, the be-all and end-all, of the lives of those who identify with them...let us not let our racial identities subject us to new tyrannies.”⁹ According to Appiah, theorizing identity and racial justice today requires a political vocabulary grounded in something other than injury, authenticity, unity, or experience. In this vein, he encourages his readers to “live with fractured identities; engage in identity play; find solidarity, yes,

⁵ Appiah 98.

⁶ Appiah 99.

⁷ Appiah 103.

⁸ Appiah 99.

⁹ Appiah 103-104.

but recognize contingency, and above all, practice irony.”¹⁰ Calling for “a work of the imagination that we need to begin,” he writes:

I look forward to taking up, along with others, the fruitful imaginative work of constructing collective identities for a democratic nation in a world of democratic nations; work that must go hand in hand with cultivating democracy here and encouraging it everywhere else. About the identities that will be useful in this project, let me say only this: the identities we need will have to recognize *both* the centrality of difference within human identity *and* the fundamental moral unity of humanity.¹¹

Allowing the contradictions and complexities to emerge *within* one’s stated community denaturalizes the connection between what we are and what we believe. And by problematizing this connection, we open ourselves up to the possibility of identification and connection with others who *don’t* share our race or ethnicity. Such is the work of an identity politics that is simultaneously a democratic politics.

PART II

INTERROGATING THE SUBJECT: FEMINIST STRATEGIES AND LATINO SUBJECTIVITY

In order to embrace Appiah’s suggestion to “live with fractured identities” and “engage in identity play,” Latino civic elites must develop new approaches to theorizing the Latino subject. As I have tried to show, the foundational status accorded to the Latino subject has made it difficult to interrogate. Latino civic elites have consistently approached Latino identity as a category both unquestioned and unquestionable. Rather than engaging the construction of the subject as a political problematic, Latino politics tends to presume that shared experience, history, and culture produce a shared political perspective. During the 1960s and ’70s, this subject was politicized in ways both racial and ideological — Chicanos and Puerto Ricans were defined as revolutionary subjects

¹⁰ Appiah 104.

who rejected self-interest in the name of community. But in every instance, efforts to unify this constituency by identifying and articulating a common identity simultaneously authorized the exclusions of alternative conceptions of the identity in question. Those who *resisted* the descriptive content of Chicano or Puerto Rican identity put forward by movement activists (such as political moderates and conservatives, feminists, and/or gay and lesbian activists) were named as “sellouts,” “white-identified,” “inauthentic,” or suffering from “false consciousness.” Later efforts to characterize this subject in more inclusive terms led to the articulation of Latino *pan-ethnicity*. More ethnically and ideologically diverse than previous definitions, the shift toward pan-ethnicity initially seemed to mark an “opening up” of the category in question. Instead, embedded in the inclusiveness of pan-ethnic practices was the desire to produce a totalizing concept that continued to treat identity as foundational. Despite the newfound emphasis on internal diversity, the pan-ethnic impulse fails to relieve the category of its foundationalist weight — expanded beyond its ethnic specific designation (Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican, etc.), the category itself remained unexamined.

As discussed in the previous chapter, even recent feminist theorizing of the Latina subject in terms of the *new mestiza* constructs a subject whose fluidity and complexity relies on a notion of epistemic privilege that authorizes speech by linking agency with experience. No longer subject to investigation, the experience of *mestizaje* emerges as yet another category that reflects rather than constitutes a Latina feminist identity.

And so we are faced with a dilemma. Politically, it seems imperative to speak of a group of people who share a collective identity as “Latinos.” The legitimacy derived from

¹¹ Appiah 105.

invoking the representative “we” authorizes one’s public presence in powerful ways, particularly when such collective claims exist in the context of historical marginalization and silence. Nonetheless, as this dissertation shows, experiential claims that make identity the privileged signifier often produce deeply problematic outcomes. As Appiah rightly notes, the shared experience presumed to serve as the foundation for group unity also functions to *discipline* and *exclude* a variety of actions and claims. For in order to have identity do the political work of authorizing speech and uniting subjects, not everything can count as experience.

Given all this, what new political paradigm can replace the dream of a united Latino political community? In many ways, theorists of Latino identity face a challenge similar to that of feminists during the “category of woman” debates of the 1980s and ’90s. Like the yearning in the Chicano and Puerto Rican movements for unity and *hermanidad*, the feminist movement was animated by a dream of sisterhood. During the ’70s, second-wave feminists envisioned a community of like-minded women, wielding a creative and collective form of power that would transcend the destructive practices of the patriarchy. This dream of innocence and certainty was undermined by working-class women, women of color, and lesbians — all of whom experienced feminist power as alienating and oppressive as opposed to emancipatory. In response to these criticisms, ’80s feminist theory focused on questions of *difference* and making the category of woman more inclusive. Such efforts, however, only highlighted the inability of any definition to fully capture the deep diversity of women’s experience and political needs. The possibility of forging a collective agenda seemed to run up against a feminism unable to speak of anything other than its own never-ending internal specificity.

It was postmodern feminists in the 1990s who shifted the debate away from the search for the category or practice that would unite all women and toward analysis of the *political construction* of the category itself. Recognizing that political communities are always implicated in dynamics of power, Judith Butler insists that “[i]dentity categories are never merely descriptive, but always normative, and as such, exclusionary.”¹² In other words, the task of feminism involves grappling with the fact that “the category of women *produces* what it claims to *represent*.”¹³ Arguing that feminists can no longer seek recourse to an unproblematized women’s “experience,” postmodern feminists called for reconceiving the category as “permanently open, permanently contested, permanently contingent, in order not to foreclose in advance future claims for inclusion.”¹⁴ Writes

Butler:

To take the construction of the subject as a political problematic is not the same as doing away with the subject; to deconstruct the subject is not to negate or throw away the concept; on the contrary, deconstruction implies only that we suspend all commitments...and that we consider the linguistic functions it serves in the consolidation and concealment of authority. To deconstruct is not to negate or dismiss, but to call into question and, perhaps most importantly, to open up a term, like the subject, to a reusage or redeployment that previously has not been authorized.¹⁵

It’s my contention that the political nature of Latino identity must also be reconceived in a similar manner — as a site of permanent political contest. To reconceptualize Latino identity as a site of ongoing resignifiability is to understand “Latino” identity as always historically and discursively constructed. Rather than striving to uncover the unitary core that binds all Latinos (i.e., language, religion, family, culture, etc.), scholars theorizing

¹² Judith Butler, “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of ‘Postmodernism,’” eds. Judith Butler and Joan Scott, *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 15-16.

¹³ Butler 17.

¹⁴ Butler 8.

¹⁵ Butler 15.

Latino political identity should instead embrace (rather than resist or deny) the instability of the category. Moreover, recognizing that every category is rooted in power and exclusion allows us to avoid situating Latino identity in terms of innocence and epistemic privilege. Moreover, such recognition would make it easier to confront and theorize issues of political disagreement and membership.

I turn now to three approaches to actually “enacting” Latino identity as a site of instability and democratic possibility. Some of these practices embrace previous aspects of Latino political discourse; others represent a new direction for Latino political practice. They are: Rousseauian performance, agonistic deliberation, and situational identity.

PART III

VISIBILITY AND PERFORMANCE: THE POWER AND PROMISE OF ROUSSEAUIAN GATHERINGS

Describing Samuel Delany’s autobiography *The Motion of Light in Water*, feminist theorist Joan Scott analyzes Delany’s description of his first visit to the St. Marks bathhouse in 1963. For Delany, publicly encountering a multiplicity of gay men was transformative. Scott writes:

Watching the scene [in the bathhouse] establishes for Delany a fact that flew in the face of the prevailing representation of homosexuals in the 1950s as isolated perverts, subjects gone awry. The “apprehension of massed bodies” gave him...a “sense of political power.”¹⁶

According to Scott, the issue of *visibility* is crucial to Delany’s project. Public witnessing became an embodied form of breaking silence, a form of publicity that “challenges

¹⁶ Joan Scott, “Experience,” *Feminists Theorize the Political* 22-23.

prevailing notions, and opens new possibilities.” This politics of presence is understood as revealing something “that existed but had been suppressed.”¹⁷ Visibility, then, produced a shared sense of agency in subjects who had historically found the public realm to be a site of silence, alienation, and invisibility. The very act of shared public performance renders visible institutions and practices that had previously been hidden from history. For Delaney, it was the physical visibility of large numbers of gay men that produced an exhilarating sense of agency — “a sense of participation in a movement.”¹⁸

As in Delaney’s encounter at the bathhouse, Chicano and Puerto Rican activists experienced public performance as both confirmation and revelation. The Chicano and Puerto Rican movements taught its members that to gather in the public realm was to *claim* it: The marches, fiestas, poetry, and *teatro* events that characterized movement politics gave activists a sense of themselves as a people with agency. Through witnessing one another politically, movement participants produced a counter-discourse to prevailing notions of Latino apathy and quiescence. This shared experience of visibility and public action gave Latinos access to a civic vocabulary far richer than any they had had in the past. Self-interest and rights were now supplemented by a lived practice of mutual recognition and civic performance.

It’s my contention that Latino civic elites should recall the power of public gatherings and revitalize the Rousseauian emphasis on mass participation that characterized movement politics. However, this newfound cultivation of democratic crowds should develop a more inclusive and multiracial approach to its emotive civic encounters. By cultivating practices that promote identification while simultaneously problematizing the

¹⁷ Scott 23.

dream of ethnic unity, contemporary Latino politics might be able to maintain the power of public performance without falling prey to the pitfalls that plagued movement politics.

A multiracial, cross-class vision of democratic life — more than most — requires participatory and performative practices. In such a polity, we need to *feel* our mutuality. It's here that Rousseau's insights again become apparent. For Rousseau, mutual understanding and identification was real but fleeting. Like sovereignty, it's characterized by contingency; it exists only through enactment. But it is only through these moments that subjects experience the sense of *moi commun* that makes them capable of willing the general, of seeing their commonness. Visibility and public performance, then, become practices of identification recognized as vitally necessary (though not sufficient) aspects of democratic membership.

Promoting a civic culture with an emphasis on mass gatherings and other forms of shared public visibility won't be easy. In fact, our own nation seems to be moving in the opposite direction, with social and spatial insulation increasing throughout the country. Gated communities, suburban sprawl, and the ongoing privatization of public space all make democratic public space both more necessary and less available. Moreover, post-September 11 anxiety about terrorism has Americans viewing public space and the multiracial and/or working-class crowd as something to fear rather than something to embrace. If America become increasingly determined to "kill the crowd" in the name of national security, fewer and fewer spaces will exist for people to physically enact their civic identity.

¹⁸ Scott 23.

Yet despite such challenges, a democratic civic culture must grapple with issues of embodied visibility. Despite the postmodern realization that race and other forms of identity are socially constructed, bodies continue to matter. As theorist Susan Bickford notes:

To argue that who we are and how we attend to each other as citizens should somehow disregard social identities is to overlook that the connection between what we are and who are can be an empowering one. Our group identities may subject us to stereotyped attention, but they are often also where we “draw our strength to live and our reasons for acting.” Our color, ethnicity, gender, class, or religion may be a constitutive part of our public identity because they are the contexts in which we learned to speak and think the languages that shape us and enable us to give voice to our unique selves. And it is within particular social groups that we first are paid attention to, and learn to attend to others.¹⁹

For Bickford, our social identities constitute a “political fact” — and such facts require negotiation rather than evasion. Because bodies matter, transcendence is not an option.

PART IV

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY: RECONCILING PERFORMANCE AND AGONISTIC SPEECH

Because performative visibility and identification are necessary but insufficient, contemporary Latino politics must cultivate a more deliberative and internally agonistic approach to politics. To accomplish this, contemporary Latino political thought should engage the growing body of scholarship focusing on issues of public conversation and contestation. Various terms “deliberative democracy,” “discursive democracy,” or “communicative democracy,” the core of this theoretical project is an insistence that democracies should promote significant citizen deliberation within political institutions and in the public sphere about matters of common concern, even when the large size of

¹⁹ Susan Bickford, “In the Presence of Others: Arendt and Anzaldúa on the Paradox of Public Appearance,” ed. Bonnie Honig, *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995) 320.

most modern democratic states necessitates the continued use of representative institutions.²⁰ For Latino politics, the work of feminists in the field of democratic theory is of particular interest. Reconciling emotive and deliberative political practices, theorist Iris Marion Young, for example, argues against theorists of deliberative democracy who bar emotional, passionate, and embodied speech from the realm of legitimate public deliberation. For Young, such a narrow approach to deliberation produces a form of democratic life that is both exclusionary and impoverished, even when formal equality has been established.²¹ Young calls for “communicative democracy,” a form of deliberative democracy that acknowledges and accepts the multiple, sometimes disorderly ways that citizens participate in political life. According to Young, subjects should value not only rational-critical arguments but also words and rituals of greeting, stories and narratives, and rhetoric, which includes the use of figures of speech and

²⁰ Some of the most important works on deliberative democracy include: Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Seyla Benhabib, *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Joseph Bessette, *The Mild Voice of Reason: Deliberative Democracy and American Constitutional Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Susan Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict, and Citizenship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); John Dryzek, *Discursive Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Democracy on Trial* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995); James Fishkin, *Democracy and Deliberation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. I, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996); Thomas Spragens, *Reason and Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Iris Marion Young, “Justice and Communicative Democracy,” ed. Roger S. Gottlieb, *Radical Philosophy: Tradition, Counter-Tradition, Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); “Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy,” ed. Seyla Benhabib, *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²¹ Iris Marion Young, “Justice and Communicative Democracy,” 125-129; *Inclusion and Democracy*, 63.

symbols, and the use of performative forms of communication, such as political art and actions of protesters.²²

By insisting on the necessity of dialogue and debate, theorists of deliberative democracy provide contemporary Latino political discourse with a much-needed supplement to their current vocabulary of participation. Emphasizing deliberation allows Latino politics to cultivate democratic talk that is civil, agonistic, and critical. And while some scholars of deliberative democracy view passionate speech in primarily negative terms,²³ others, like Young, are more attentive to the many ways that subjects are capable of experiencing self-government as a fruitful combination of reflective conversation, contestation, *and* public performance.

Though a sociologist rather than a theorist of deliberative democracy, Felix Padilla echoes Young in his efforts to engage questions of both performance and political speech. He recognizes Latino subjectivity as *situational* — as the simultaneous site of powerful identification *and* inescapable fragmentation. In doing this, Padilla offers another strategy for avoiding the “imperialism of identity” that Appiah and others warn against.

PART V

SITUATIONAL IDENTITY: POLITICIZING COMMUNITY

In *Latino Ethnic Consciousness*, Padilla examines the idea of Hispanic or Latino identity as distinct and separate from the individual ethnic identity of Mexican-

²² See Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, chapter two.

²³ See Spragens, *Reason and Democracy*; Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*; and Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Democracy on Trial*.

Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and other Spanish-speaking groups.²⁴ Rather than theorizing Latino identity as stable and/or natural, Padilla begins to approach Latino identity as the site of instability and multiplicity. In his study of Chicago's Mexican-American and Puerto Rican populations, Padilla found that Latino ethnic identification is *situationally* specific, emerging only under particular political circumstances. According to Padilla, the "Latino-conscious person" sees himself as a Latino sometimes and as Cuban, Puerto Rican, and the like at other times.²⁵ He writes:

[I]nstead of representing the more common historically fixed or inherited type of group form and identity, as in the anthropological sense, Latino or Hispanic group identification and solidarity have emerged over time as part of the process of intergroup relations and communication between two or more Spanish-speaking groups.²⁶

Because it is not based on one "genuine national/cultural heritage," the cultural symbols of Latino identity are "quite fluid and not fixed in space or time."²⁷ Moreover, this newfound Latino identity has "relatively little" to do with Latin America. Instead, Padilla characterizes this emergent group identity as "largely a phenomenon of American urban life...aroused by the encounter of the Spanish-speaking with systems of racism and inequality in this society."²⁸ In his research, Padilla highlights the *performative* aspects of Latino identity — its emergence in the context of "multigroup contact and interaction" across the boundaries of one's own group.²⁹ In Chicago, it was "community organizing, or other similar kinds of group associations" that brought forth Latino ethnic identity and solidarity among Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans.³⁰

²⁴ Felix Padilla, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985) 1.

²⁵ Padilla 61-62.

²⁶ Padilla 61.

²⁷ Padilla 141.

²⁸ Padilla 144-145.

²⁹ Padilla 155.

³⁰ Padilla 155.

Unfortunately, Padilla doesn't take his theory of "situated selves" as far as he could. While highlighting the contingent and socially constructed nature of Latino pan-ethnicity, he fails to do the same when theorizing individual ethnic sub-groups. Even more significantly, Padilla never extends his notion of situational identity beyond Latinos. Instead, by presuming internal unity and coherency within each subgroup, he is unable to recognize subjectivity as inescapably fragmented and capable of unexpected configurations. And by failing to theorize the relational and unstable nature of subjectivity more generally, his theory falters. However, Padilla's politicization of Latino subjectivity and his insistence on multiplicity marks a significant shift from more essentialist notions of identity.

CONCLUSION

The fundamental claim of this dissertation is that Latino political elites are entangled in a profoundly inadequate approach to contestation and political membership. By turning to political theory, I've sought to challenge the very idea of a coherent Latino agenda and political community (with its pre-existing set of "Latino interests" that can be found and defended). By refusing to let the dream of "Latino unity" animate our politics, it's my hope that Latino political thought and practice will see its multiple agendas and contending interests as something to be embraced rather than transcended or merely tolerated.

Padilla's approach to Latino identity as "situational" allows us to move away from notions of organic unity and toward a more explicitly *political* understanding of identity based on shared goals, principles, and beliefs. Such an approach is more willing to grant legitimacy to political practices that involve the presence of *some* Latinos but not others.

Rather than constructing racialized meta-narratives that presume underlying cohesion, political energy can be directed at forging alliances with those who share a common political vision.

Such an approach does not mean abandoning the pragmatic political needs of subjects positioned as Latino in our society. Nor does it mean denying the racism and discrimination that Latinos have experienced as a group. As Butler reminds us, to deconstruct the subject does not mean to negate the subject. Problematizing the category “Latino” does not mean that we will be unable to engage in “Latino politics” — given how Latinos have been historically and politically situated, it’s likely that a number of political issues will continue to be of particular concern to Latino majorities. However, by no longer grounding Latino politics within some undertheorized notion of “experience,” subjects can speak in terms of meaningful political and cultural specificity. Instead of “Latino economic empowerment,” for example, activists can organize for worker’s rights, or the needs of undocumented immigrants, or the needs of small-business owners. By letting this diversity of interests flourish, perhaps Latino “empowerment” can finally become a politically meaningful possibility and not just a slogan of homogeneity.

Political agreement is always simultaneously natural and created. The line between what I have been *made* to be and what I fundamentally *am* is blurry. More than most, Rousseau sought to grapple with this process of simultaneously overcoming and coming into oneself. This story of overcoming and return is particularly powerful for those who understand themselves as having been transformed by their involvement in politics. The discourse surrounding Latino politics is a case in point. And like Rousseau, Latino civic elites sought to anchor this transformation with an emphasis on education and culture.

Yet neither Rousseau nor Latino civic elites were able to win their battle over contingency. Neither linear nor progressive, the process of civic transformation is as uncertain as it is necessary. For Latino politics, this realization means that we must seek out new theories that both challenge and supplement the Rousseauian approach to unity and social transformation.

The dream of unity is enormously seductive. Within Latino politics, the promise of unity has signified total recognition and unimpeded agency, the power of the many guided by a single will. In its place, I can offer no solace. Because it envisions a community devoid of politics, nothing I can offer will satisfy this yearning. Like Appiah, Young, and others, all I can offer is a vision of democracy — the possibility that human beings can be transformed through the shared practice of acting and speaking together.

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- 1992-2003 RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
 Ph.D. in Political Science. Major Field: Political Theory
 Minor Fields: Women & Politics and American Government

TEACHING

- 2001-PRESENT HAVERFORD COLLEGE, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
 Political Science Department
Courses Taught: Democratic Theory: Membership, Citizenship,
 and Community; Feminist Political Theory; Latino Politics in the
 United States; Introduction to Political Theory; Political Wisdom:
 From Plato to Poststructuralism; Political Theory: From Theory
 to Practice
- 2000-2001 HAVERFORD COLLEGE, SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE/VISITING
 INSTRUCTOR
Political Science Department
 Course Taught: Democratic Theory: Membership, Citizenship,
 and Community, Fall 2000

1996-2000	RUTGERS UNIVERSITY, INSTRUCTOR <u>Political Science Department</u>
Summer 2000	Democratic Political Philosophy
Summer 1999	Urban Politics
Summer 1998	Urban Politics/Citizenship and Service Education
Summer 1997	Urban Politics
Summer 1996	Urban Politics
Spring 1996	Urban Politics
Fall 1995	American Government (teaching assistant to Prof. Ross Baker) <u>English Department</u>
1997-1998	Expository Writing
1998-1999	Expository Writing

FELLOWSHIPS

1992-1997	RUTGERS UNIVERSITY, TRUSTEE'S FELLOWSHIP Awarded by the Minority Advancement Program. The Graduate School, New Brunswick.
1999-2000	RUTGERS UNIVERSITY, DISSERTATION FELLOWSHIP FOR DOCTORAL STUDY Awarded by the Department of Political Science and the Graduate School, New Brunswick.

PUBLICATIONS

“Hybrids and Hierarchies: Theorizing *Mestizaje* in Chicano Political Discourse” in
Political Research Quarterly (forthcoming)