

# Keywords for Latina/o Studies

Edited by

Deborah R. Vargas, Nancy Raquel Mirabal, and

Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes

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(*Where Is Latin American/Latino Art* (Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts, San Francisco, 2008) used a variety of curatorial frameworks to present Latina/o art forms as a multitude of conceptual and formal approaches, at times at odds with each other (Gonzalez, Fox, and Noriega 2008).

Criticism and reflections on Latina/o art have to negotiate a dual (or even multiple) reality of transnational identity while still understanding how the local or regional inform the works of many artists. There have been numerous critiques of the overemphasis on Latina/o artists and movements in California, New York, Texas, and Florida, leaving under-acknowledged the role of Latinas/os in the Midwest, Pacific Northwest, and even the South (Herrera 2008).

Art is by and large a creative expression, but the arbiters of meaning and value oftentimes delineate what is deemed to be art. When art is formally codified, or recognized and identified, as such, in general, determining factors are “funding sources, public exhibitions, art collection, and critical discourse” (Noriega 1999, 187). While both Latina/o and Latin American artists as well as those who investigate their work have fought for inclusion and representation, the outcome for each field has differed dramatically. There are concerns and struggles in both the Latin American and Latina/o art historical fields that overlap, as reflected in the title for the aforementioned ICAA’s critical anthology *Resisting Categories: Latin American and/or Latino?*, but there are also differences in vantage point. Structures of validation and legitimization will function differently because, as Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (2013) articulates, “Latino Arts have been mainly created and disseminated apart from official cultural patronage and institutions.” This points to an apparent paradox concerning the presence of Latina/o artists, especially those whose practices are not easily integrated into the mainstream.

#### 4

### Assimilation

Catherine S. Ramírez

Assimilation has long functioned as the *telos* in narratives about the American experience and as an organizing rubric in U.S. immigration history, the social sciences, particularly sociology, and public policy (Alba and Nee 2007). Immigrants and their U.S.-born descendants are expected to blend into and to find acceptance, if not success, in the mainstream. Indeed, assimilation is often linked to the American dream. Those who do not assimilate or who are deemed inassimilable are generally regarded and treated as outsiders or failed citizens.

Assimilation is the process whereby the boundary between mainstream and margin blurs, disappears, or paradoxically, is reinforced. While the term is commonly used in the United States in relation to immigrants, it may also be applied to any group not deemed part of the mainstream, such as religious, linguistic, and sexual minorities, and to the production, circulation, and consumption of cultural practices and products (for example, Mexican food, such as burritos and guacamole). In this latter sense, “to assimilate” is synonymous with “to mainstream” or “to cross over.” In many instances of assimilation, formerly distinguishable groups, practices, or products eradicate, blend into, or transform one another, becoming more similar in the process. However, in others, the dominant group absorbs a minority or minoritized group as its distinct, constitutive, and subordinate other.

The paradoxical process by which a person or group assimilates or is assimilated as an outsider is known

as differential inclusion (De Genova, Mezzadra, and Pickles 2015). Examples of differential inclusion can be found in the U.S. Supreme Court cases of *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831), *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), and *Downes v. Bidwell* (1901), which respectively saw the incorporation of the Cherokee as “wards” of a “guardian” state (*Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* 30 U. S. 2), African Americans as members of “a subordinate and inferior class of beings” (*Dred Scott v. Sandford* 60 U. S. 404–405) and the island of Puerto Rico as “foreign . . . in a domestic sense” (*Downes v. Bidwell* 182 U. S. 341). The figure of the model minority also exemplifies differential inclusion. Lisa Sun-Hee Park argues that the model minority does not enjoy “full citizenship rights . . . but rather, a secondary set of rights reserved for particular minorities who ‘behave’ appropriately and stay in their designated subsidiary space without complaint” (2015, 17). In his memoir *Hunger for Memory* (1982), Richard Rodriguez, the son of Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrants, rails against bilingual education, affirmative action, and identity politics in a plea for assimilation and colorblindness. Yet this former Berkeley PhD student and expert in British Renaissance literature enters the mainstream not as a bona fide American writer, but as a model minority and, paradoxically, a “representative ‘Hispanic’ subject” (Schmidt Camacho 2008, 206).

The sociologist Robert E. Park and his colleagues at the University of Chicago have been credited with theorizing the concept of assimilation in the early twentieth century. While the Chicago School’s influence on American social sciences is apparent, the concept predates its members’ publications and is implicit in earlier practices, policies, institutions, and narratives, such as proposals to deport putatively unassimilable African Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and efforts to “civilize” Native Americans in the nineteenth and twentieth. In the early twenty-first century,

“assimilation,” “acculturation,” “incorporation,” and “integration” are often used interchangeably. However, a number of scholars are careful to distinguish those terms from one another. For example, acculturation (the minority’s adoption of the dominant language, dress, diet, habitus, and so on), incorporation (for example, through naturalization), and integration (the opposite of exclusion or segregation) may be stages in the assimilation process and are not necessarily the same as assimilation in and of itself.

During the first half of the twentieth century, “assimilation” in the United States was synonymous with “Americanization” and “Anglo-conformity,” terms that signaled the dissolution of the immigrant’s or minority group’s culture within and by an Anglo-Protestant mainstream. With the civil rights and Black Power movements and surge in ethnic revivalism among Americans of all stripes, the imperative to assimilate into a dominant Anglo-Protestant culture appeared to wane in the last decades of the twentieth century. Scholars questioned what had come to be known as the “assimilation model” (Morawska 1994) and proffered instead the “bumpy line” (Gans 1992) theory of assimilation, foregrounding the retention of the immigrant group’s native language and customs in the host society. In “Is Assimilation Dead?” the sociologist Nathan Glazer (1993) declared assimilation a failure, not only because the ideologies of pluralism and multiculturalism had eclipsed it, he argued, but because African Americans remained socially and economically marginalized.

The title of Glazer’s article notwithstanding, Americans never abandoned the concept of assimilation altogether. Since the 1940s, the ideologies of pluralism and multiculturalism have allowed many to assimilate into the mainstream as so-called ethnic or hyphenated Americans (Roediger 2005; Jacobson 2008). As scholars in critical whiteness studies have demonstrated, one

way “provisional whites,” like the Irish in the nineteenth century and Italians in the twentieth, became bona fide Americans was by actively distancing themselves from blacks and other groups branded “colored,” such as the Chinese and Mexicans (Hochschild 1995; Jacobson 1998; Roediger 1999).

Assertions that a group is unable or unwilling to assimilate bring into relief assimilation’s relationship to citizenship and race. For example, some Americans opposed extending citizenship to Mexicans domiciled in the Mexican Cession and to Puerto Ricans because they considered those groups physically, culturally, and morally unfit for the responsibilities of U.S. democracy during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In short, they considered Mexicans and Puerto Ricans non-white. As a number of laws—from the 1790 Naturalization Act on—stressed, U.S. citizenship was supposed to be the purview and property of whites. Ultimately, Article VIII of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the 1848 treaty that ended the Mexican American War, made Mexicans eligible for U.S. citizenship, while the Jones Act of 1917 conferred U.S. citizenship on Puerto Ricans. The extension of citizenship to these groups rendered them whites, if only in name and not in practice. It also prompted a generation of Latina/o activists to fight for full citizenship by claiming whiteness during the first half of the twentieth century (Foley 1997; Guglielmo 2006; Haney López 2006).

Despite their nominal whiteness, Latinas/os have long been seen and treated as foreigners in the United States. For example, many Mexican Americans were derided as “greasers” or “beaners” by white Americans and as *pochos* by Mexicans throughout the twentieth century. *Pocho* originally meant faded, overripe, or expired, but in Mexican Spanish, it came to refer to an Americanized Mexican or Mexican American. Historically, it has been pejorative. Rather than highlight biculturalism,

cultural hybridity, or transculturation—the last a term coined by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1995) to signify the merging and converging of cultures—the label has been associated with alienation and cultural and linguistic loss and degradation on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. However, in the last decades of the twentieth century, Latina/o cultural workers began to ascribe new, affirmative meaning to *pocho*, just as an earlier generation had reclaimed the erstwhile invective *Chicano*.

In the early twenty-first century, doubts about Latina/o immigrants’ ability to be good Americans have resurfaced, with some immigration restrictionists insisting that those who enter or remain in the United States without authorization are undeserving of regularization (whether it be through permanent residency or naturalization) and that the U.S.-born children of undocumented immigrants, so-called anchor babies, should not be eligible for birthright citizenship as provided by the Fourteenth Amendment. Because they have long been associated with undocumented migration and temporary labor and because of the proximity of their homeland to the United States, Mexicans are deemed especially unassimilable. They are also seen as a threat to Anglo-Protestant culture and institutions, with some cultural commentators lamenting the “browning” of the United States and warning about a *reconquista* of the lands once held by Mexico (Hanson 2003; Huntington 2004b). The political scientist Adrián Félix (2008) has labeled Mexicans’ perceived inability and/or unwillingness to assimilate “Mexican exceptionalism.”

Concepts like differential inclusion and Mexican exceptionalism signal that assimilation in the United States can be a partial and contradictory process. Social actors are frequently assimilated in or by one social arena, but excluded from or by another. For instance, undocumented workers are, by and large, well

integrated in the U.S. economy in the early twenty-first century. At the same time, those workers are not formally assimilated by the state. In many cases, they are actively excluded and persecuted by the state. Often, undocumented workers’ inclusion in the market depends on and derives from their exclusion in other social arenas.

Similarly, some undocumented individuals, especially those who arrived in the United States at a young age, have acculturated. They speak English without a foreign accent, generally do not wear distinctive signs of foreignness, such as turbans or *huipiles*, and participate in mainstream society—for example, as students or soldiers. Many of these immigrants call themselves and are called “undocumented Americans” and/or “DREAMers,” a reference to the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, which was first introduced in 2001 in the United States legislature but has not been passed (Vargas 2013). Especially if they grew up in the United States unaware of their undocumented status, many pass as Americans and feel American, signaling the performative and affective aspects of assimilation. Yet as “illegal aliens,” they are marginalized, particularly in the market, and are vulnerable to exploitation and deportation.

Where DREAMers have been upheld as valuable and vital members of American society who lack formal citizenship, the alien citizen is a U.S. citizen by virtue of her/his birth in that country, but is presumed to be and is treated as foreign (Ngai 2004). The concept of alien citizenship points to the simultaneity of formal membership in the polity and de facto or de jure marginalization or exclusion. The historian Mae M. Ngai maintains that Mexican Americans’ association with temporary labor in the United States—a tradition going back to the Bracero Program—has rendered them alien citizens.

The figures of the undocumented American, DREAMer, alien citizen, and bracero expose the

discrepancy between economic and social integration and membership in the polity, between citizenship as process or practice (what some scholars call “cultural citizenship”) and citizenship as legal status (Rosaldo 1994; Coll 2010; Glenn 2011). Moreover, they point to intersectionality (the nexus of social identities, categories, and relationships, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality) and show that inclusion at one level of society can reinforce and even be predicated on marginalization in or exclusion at another.

Like differential inclusion, the concepts of segmented assimilation and racial naturalization draw attention to assimilation as a vexed process. Segmented assimilation, as theorized by the sociologists Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou (1993), posits that individuals and groups assimilate into a particular segment of society, not necessarily the mainstream. While some individuals and groups have assimilated and continue to assimilate into the white mainstream in the United States, others are barred from it due to differences that are perceived as insurmountable. These individuals and groups may be incorporated into other segments of the population, such as “ethnic niches” and “enclaves” or racial minority groups (Kasinitz, Battle, and Miyares 2001). For example, black immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America and their descendants may assimilate and be assimilated as African Americans, a process the critical race scholar Devon W. Carbado (2005) terms “racial naturalization.” His concept highlights the ways in which some groups are violently included in the United States via racial subordination and exclusion from the white mainstream.

“Assimilation” is an important term in Latina/o studies, but not so much because it should function as a lens for narrating and interpreting Latina/o history or the so-called Latina/o experience. Nor should assimilation be dismissed as a force to be resisted so that a beleaguered,

static, or enduring cultural identity can be uncovered and rescued. Rather, assimilation merits critical attention because of the ways in which it points to differential inclusion, segmented assimilation, and racial naturalization—in short, inclusion in a tiered society rife with inequalities. Assimilation illuminates belonging just as much as it sheds lights on marginalization and exclusion. Finally, assimilation allows us to understand the dynamism of culture and society and the complex relationship between social structures and social agents. Assimilation is often a two-way process, albeit an uneven one (Zolberg and Woon 1999). Latinas/os will continue to transform the United States just as the United States continues to transform Latinas/os.

## 5 Barrio

Gina M. Pérez

At its most basic level, “barrio” refers to a place—a neighborhood, community, enclave, and/or region—that is familiar to many and evokes a range of affective responses. Unlike the term *colonia*, which conjures ideas of semi-rural spatial formations, barrios are often imagined as decidedly urban spaces—as dense enclaves, which are familiar features of American cities (Sánchez Korrol 1994; D. Diaz 2005; Vigil 2008; Ward 2010). They are places born out of histories of segregation, uneven development, conflict, and marginalization; but they are also the precious spaces that affirm cultural identities, nurture popular cultural production, and provide sanctuary for people with long histories of displacement, land loss, repression, and collective struggle. In this way, barrios share a great deal in common with African American ghettos. According to Diego Vigil, both spaces derived from people’s experiences of having to “settle in inferior places that were spatially separate and socially distanced from the dominant majority group” (2008, 366; also see D. Diaz 2005). This spatial and social isolation exacerbated economic, political, and social marginalization and contributed to powerful narratives of racial and cultural difference, which both stigmatized residents and justified their continued marginalization. But as many scholars, artists, and activists have noted, “There is another side of this view of segregation” (Beveridge 2008, 358). This involves individuals making a conscious choice to live in spaces that circumvent, as much as possible, their stigmatization by whites and

to pursue opportunities to “develop on their own in their own communities” (Beveridge 2008, 358; also see Jackson 2001). It is precisely this other side of barrio life—as a space for cultural affirmation, ethnic solidarity, collective determination, and nostalgia—that leads its residents to defend and preserve these spaces in the face of powerful stigmatizing forces. As Raúl Villa notes, the barrio is “a complex and contradictory social space” (2000, 8). In short, *el barrio* is simultaneously a place, space, and metaphor with a range of meanings for scholars, policy makers, residents, and artists (Pérez, Guridy, and Burgos 2011).

Cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago have long histories of barrio formation, which share important structural similarities as well as notable differences. As with African American ghettos and Chinese enclaves, racism, residential segregation, poverty, and social marginalization were structural forces giving shape to barrios beginning in the late nineteenth century. In Los Angeles, for example, Mexican residents were relegated to “ecologically inferior neighborhoods” like East Los Angeles as a result of land loss, demographic shifts, and public policy measures, which racially marked and socially isolated Mexican residents in the city (Vigil 2008, 366; Villa 2000; D. Diaz 2005). Similar histories of dispossession and displacement also led to the formation of El Barrio (also known as East Harlem or Spanish Harlem) in New York City, with the initial arrival of thousands of Puerto Rican migrants in the early twentieth century; in the post-World War II era, the barrio grew rapidly as a result of U.S.-led industrialization and economic and social displacement in Puerto Rico (Sánchez Korrol 1994; Dávila 2004). While specific geopolitical and economic forces set populations in motion to U.S. cities, barrios developed as a result of specific policies on the local, state, and federal levels, which not only caused and codified racial segregation, but also reflected patterns

of unequal urban development that contributed to the proliferation of substandard and limited housing stock and poor schooling, as well as severely circumscribing people’s economic mobility (Logan and Molotch 1987; Fernández 2011; Pérez, Guridy, and Burgos 2011). In the popular imagination, early twentieth-century barrios were replete with social pathologies, disorder, and disease. Similarly stigmatized, their residents were the object of policy interventions aimed at ameliorating social ills through, for example, public health campaigns and Americanization efforts. These efforts often focused on women as potential agents of change in the name of protecting the broader public from social and physical ills originating in barrios and their residents (Ruiz 1998; Briggs 2002b; Molina 2006; Mckiernan-González 2012). Thus, while the specific plans and policies that led to the creation of diminished social and economic mobility were increasingly invisible to the broader public, barrio residents were increasingly visible, stigmatized, and regarded as a problem that needed to be solved.

Despite negative characterizations, barrios are spaces where meaningful communities, social networks, cultural institutions, businesses, and social organizations are created and sustained. They are places that offer “some security in the midst of the city’s social and economic turmoil” (Griswold del Castillo 1979, 150) and “preserve the integrity of [people’s] cultural place-identity within and against the often hostile space regulation of dominant urbanism” (Villa 2000, 5). As Arlene Dávila observes, places like El Barrio (Spanish Harlem) in New York City have a kind of preciousness not only because they are the spaces where people have worked, engaged in collective struggles, and built communities, but also because through these efforts, residents have “imbued space with meanings and memories” (2004, 64). For many scholars, *el barrio* is a unique and critical space to nurture distinctive forms of cultural