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## (Se) construire dans l'interlangue : perspectives transatlantiques sur le multilinguisme

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## Introduction

À la fois espace de transition, espace frontalier qui marque la différence entre les deux territoires qu'il sépare mais aussi espace de mise en relation, d'échange et d'interaction, l'interlangue joue un rôle fondamental dans les dynamiques de construction identitaire et nationale. Conçue par Selinker en 1972 comme un système linguistique transitoire entre deux systèmes linguistiques<sup>1</sup>, l'interlangue se définit à présent comme la capacité permanente d'individus bi- ou plurilingues à fonctionner entre les langues et les modes de pensée qui les accompagnent. Le plurilinguisme, comme le souligne Claire Kramsch avec justesse<sup>2</sup>, ne saurait dès lors se concevoir comme la simple juxtaposition de plusieurs monolinguisms, mais plutôt comme la mise en relation d'un discours à un autre, d'une manière de parler et de penser à une autre. En France comme aux États-Unis, le plurilinguisme est de ce fait tout à la fois objet de convoitise et d'inquiétude dans les cercles éducatifs.

Cette réflexion sur l'interlangue s'inscrit dans un contexte plus général de multilinguisme /multiculturalisme avec une circulation de populations de langues et cultures variées qui se retrouvent à l'école. Celle-ci joue aujourd'hui un rôle important dans le processus de construction identitaire citoyenne. Lieu privilégié de construction des interlangues, lieu de rencontres de langues et cultures de plus en plus diverses, l'école constitue un terrain d'observation des enjeux psycholinguistiques et sociolinguistiques liés aux contacts des langues-cultures. L'évolution de la

1.- Larry Selinker, « Interlanguage », *IRAL*, vol. X, n°3, August 1972, p. 209-231.

2.- Claire Kramsch a développé ses idées et exposé le fruit de ses recherches dans nombre d'ouvrages sur la question. On consultera ainsi avec profit *The Multilingual Subject* (Oxford University Press, 2009), *Language and Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1998), *Redefining the Boundaries of Language Study* (Boston, Heinle and Heinle, 1995), *Context and Culture in Language Teaching* (Oxford University Press, 1993), *Text and Context : Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Language Study* (co-edited with Sally McConnell-Ginet, Lexington, MA, D.C. Heath, 1991) ou encore *Foreign Language Research in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (co-edited with Kees de Boot and Ralph Ginsberg, Utrecht, Benjamin, 1991).

## Bad Subjects: HB 2281, Chicano Studies, and Assimilation

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Catherine Ramirez

It is education that has altered my life. Carried me far.  
I write this autobiography as the history of my schooling.  
To admit the change in my life I must speak of years as a  
student, of losses, of gains<sup>1</sup>.

Richard Rodriguez's autobiography, *Hunger for Memory* (1983), illuminates Latinos' vexed relationship to the American school, a coercive, if not violent, mechanism of assimilation, and at the same time, a catalyst of personal and social transformation. While United States educational institutions have helped reproduce exclusion and inequality, they have also served as a vital platform for social reform and, in some instances, radical change. A few important ways the school has helped usher in social change are via desegregation efforts, implemented by legal decisions such as *Alvarez v. Lemon Grove School District* (1931) and *Mendez v. Westminster School District* (1946); also by the establishment of Chicano studies at high schools and post-secondary institutions beginning in the late 1960s; and more recently, by activism around the *Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act*.

*Alvarez, Mendez*, Chicano studies, and the DREAM Act are part of a long, vibrant, and ongoing struggle for social justice by and for Latinos in the United States. Yet, the struggle for Chicano studies differs considerably from these other efforts, in huge part because it aims to produce a very different kind of subject. While *Alvarez, Mendez*, and the DREAM Act have called for the transformation of Mexicans into Americans and the incorporation of "Mexican Americans" and undocumented immigrants in the American polity, Chicano and, increasingly, Latino studies prompts students to trace the mutable boundaries of that polity and to look

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1.- Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory*, New York, Bantam Books, 1983, p. 5-6.

beyond it. Often this field challenges official histories that uphold the United States as a peaceful and egalitarian meritocracy. And where the public school has endeavored to produce loyal and compliant citizens, however subordinated, Chicano studies strives to produce subjects with a keen knowledge of American legacies of expansion, exploitation, exclusion, and struggle. For the creators and supporters of *Arizona's House Bill 2281* (HB 2281), which Governor Jan Brewer signed into law on May 11, 2010, Chicano studies is a bad subject that produces bad subjects.

This essay dwells on some of the subjects of Chicano studies. Taking my cue from Louis Althusser<sup>2</sup>, I define subject not only as an object of study, but as a social or historical actor, a bearer of consciousness, and an effect – in other words, a producer and product of “social formations, language, political apparatuses”, and ideology<sup>3</sup>. The subjects that concern me include HB 2281, its history, and the fight against it. I touch on the history of Ethnic and Chicano studies, with a focus on the Mexican American Studies Department of Tucson Unified School District (TUSD), HB 2281's primary target, and the ways in which Chicano studies overlaps with and diverges from previous and ongoing struggles around education. Furthermore, I examine the ways this field reconciles these other struggles' assimilative thrust by redefining and looking beyond the United States and Americanness. Yet rather than dismiss assimilation, I aim to show why it, too, is an important subject of and for Chicano studies<sup>4</sup>. Like alterity, resistance, and agency – key subjects of Chicano studies and ethnic studies in general – assimilation can shed light on power. By examining power and the ways in which Mexicans, Chicanos, and Latinos have been subjects of it, my hope is that Chicano studies will show us how to transform it.

Without naming Chicano studies or TUSD's Mexican American Studies Department, HB 2281 mandates “that public school pupils [...] be taught to treat and value each other as individuals and not be taught to resent or hate other races or classes of people”. It bans “courses or classes that [...] promote the overthrow of the United States government[,] [p]romote resentment toward a race or class of people[,] [a]re designed particularly for pupils of a particular ethnic group[,] [or] [a]dvocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals<sup>5</sup>”. Districts that fail to comply with the law, which went into effect on December 31, 2010, lose ten percent of their state funding every month.

As Sandra Soto and Miranda Joseph have pointed out, HB 2281 contrasts individualism with Ethnic Studies linking the latter “to ‘resentment’ and ‘hate,’ as though

people who do not subscribe to individualism are necessarily prone to hatred?” Yet what exactly is Ethnic Studies? And is it really motivated by resentment, hatred, and the desire to see ethnic solidarity topple individualism?

Without a doubt, Ethnic Studies is a vast and heterogeneous field, one that is not limited to a particular discipline, method, source, question, or institutional space. It is not easy to pin down, but at the risk of oversimplifying the debate, I offer the following definition: Ethnic Studies is, among other things, an intellectual project that foregrounds the analysis of race, a broad and mutable category in and of itself, and power. Contrary to assertions that it is divisive and un-American, it “very intentionally include[s] historically marginalized communities” in narratives about this country and our place in the world<sup>6</sup>. That said, Ethnic Studies is not a celebration of people of color and our contributions to American history, culture, and society. It is not sensitivity training, nor does or should it guarantee a safe space for minority students. After all, the pursuit of knowledge can involve discomfort, if not pain. While it has the power to validate knowledge, Ethnic Studies, as an academically based project, does not set out to make anyone feel good or bad, but to inform and to empower. To do so, it teaches critical thinking via “a systematic analysis of power<sup>7</sup>”. And Ethnic Studies is not, in the words of Gary Okihiro, “an intellectual form of [...] affirmative action for people of color,” but studies have shown that it often improves minority students' academic performance<sup>8</sup>. Christine Sleeter, the education scholar, notes: “Students of color experience racism; ethnic studies does not introduce them to that concept. [...] Rather, by taking racism and culture seriously, Ethnic Studies attempt[s] to give students the tools to navigate racially hostile systems,” and these are tools that serve many of them well, both within and beyond educational institutions<sup>9</sup>.

Ethnic Studies arose as a rejoinder to Eurocentric curricula, their oversights, and inaccuracies, and the lack of students, faculty, and administrators of color in American educational institutions. Most narrations of this field's origins and evolution begin with the 1968-69 Third World Liberation Front strike at San Francisco State and the establishment of the Department of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley in 1969<sup>10</sup>. By the 1990s, there were over 700 programs and departments all over the country<sup>11</sup>. Yet, as Sleeter has observed, “Ethnic Studies has a much longer history [...] building on pioneering works such as the writings of Carter G. Woodson

2.– Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses, Notes towards an Investigation”, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1971, p. 127-186.

3.– Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p. xxxiv.

4.– Dara Orenstein, “Void for Vagueness: Mexicans and the Collapse of Miscegenation Law in California”, *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 74, No. 3, 2005, p. 370.

5.– [www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/hb2281s.pdf](http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/hb2281s.pdf)

6.– *Ibid.*

7.– Sandra K. Soto and Miranda Joseph, “Neoliberalism and the Battle over Ethnic Studies in Arizona,” *NEA Higher Education Journal*, fall 2010, p. 50.

8.– Christine E. Sleeter, *The Academic and Social Value of Ethnic Studies: A Research Review*, Washington, DC, National Education Association, 2011, p. 5.

9.– C. Sleeter, *op. cit.*, p.18.

10.– Gary Y. Okihiro, “The Future of Ethnic Studies,” *The Chronicle Review*, July 4, 2010.

11.– C. Sleeter, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

12.– See, for example, Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “Ethnic Studies in US Higher Education: History, Development, and Goals,” *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, second edition (eds. James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks), San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2004, p. 869-881.

13.– *Ibid.*, p. 870.

(1933) and W. E. B. DuBois (1903), freedom schools of the 1960s, Black independent schools and Afrocentric public schools [...] tribal schools [...] and language immersion schools<sup>14</sup>.

Similarly, Chicano Studies emerged from the Chicano student movement, a longstanding, broad-based, and multidimensional effort to transform American educational institutions and the education of people of Mexican descent in the United States<sup>15</sup>. The engine and fruit of this movement included student organizations, such as Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (also known as MEChA, which was formed at University of California Santa Barbara in 1969); high school “blow outs”, during which students walked out of schools to protest racist policies and to demand Chicano Studies and the hiring of Mexican-American teachers and administrators; and the establishment of Chicano studies at colleges and universities<sup>16</sup>. In 1968, California State College, Los Angeles, launched the first Mexican American Studies Department<sup>17</sup>. Two years later, the academic journal, *Aztlán*, was established at the University of California, Los Angeles, and in 1972, the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies was founded<sup>18</sup>.

Over the years Ethnic Studies has changed. Today, the best scholarship in this field looks at the articulation of race, power, and other social categories and relationships – through the approach called intersectionality, in other words<sup>19</sup>. As Okiihiro observes, “For a new generation of Ethnic Studies scholars, the focus is not just [...] on the relations between White and non-White people but on relations among, and here I would add, *within* communities of color<sup>20</sup>”. This is not to say that Whites and Whiteness are not part of Ethnic Studies. Indeed, the field of critical Whiteness studies exposes Whiteness as a racial formation and traces the deliberate and all too often violent construction and policing of group identities, such as Americanness<sup>21</sup>.

14.– C. Sleeter, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

15.– Carlos Muñoz, Jr. upholds the 1934 YMCA-sponsored Mexican American Youth Conference in Los Angeles as a seed of the Chicano student movement of the 1960s and 1970s. See *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*, London, Verso, 1989, p. 29.

16.– C. Muñoz, *op. cit.*, p. 58, p. 79; Maylei Blackwell, *Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2011, p. 44.

17.– C. Muñoz, *op. cit.*, p.130.

18.– C. Muñoz, *op. cit.*, p.149. Also see Amici Curiae Brief of the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies, *Acosta et al. v. John Huppenthal*, Case No. CV-10-623-TUC-AWT, United States District (filed March 7, 2012), p. 31-32.

19.– The legal scholar, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, is often credited with coining the term intersectionality in her landmark essay, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, 1991, p. 1241-1299.

20.– G. Okiihiro, *op. cit.*

21.– A combination of Ethnic Studies and critical race theory (itself a blend of critical theory and legal studies), critical Whiteness studies approaches whiteness as a social construction. A handful of important publications in this interdisciplinary, self-consciously anti-racist field: David Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, London, Verso, 1991, Noel Ignatiev’s *How the Irish Became White*, New York, Routledge, 1995, Karen Brodtkin’s *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America*, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1998, and Mathew Fryc Jacobson’s *Whiteness*

Rather than recognize Americanness as yet another group, solidarity, or at times, chauvinism, HB 2281 and its advocates privilege this category as a given. They assert that those who dare to relativize Americanness by studying other groups are disrespectful, if not downright treasonable. In 2008, two years before HB 2281 became law, Ethnic Studies opponents introduced SB 1108, a Homeland Security bill that would have prohibited Arizona public schools, including universities, from offering classes that “denigrate, disparage or overtly encourage dissent from the values of American democracy and Western civilization<sup>22</sup>”. Additionally, this bill sought to ban student organizations “based in whole or in part on race-based criteria,” namely, MEChA<sup>23</sup>. Although SB 1108 never made it past the House, it set the stage for HB 2281 and State Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal’s March 2012 threat to dismantle Mexican American studies at the university level<sup>24</sup>.

Finally, even though Ethnic Studies has long been concerned with the international and the imperial, scholars “working within diasporic, transnational, and postcolonial frameworks [have been] steadily globalizing Ethnic Studies in ways that distinguish it from international affairs or area studies” since the 1990s<sup>25</sup>. Scholarship here tends to emphasize the movement of people, things, and ideas and the limits of the nation-state via concepts like diaspora, the Black Atlantic, and the border<sup>26</sup>.

Located roughly 100 kilometers from the US-Mexico border, TUSD is the only school district in the United States to boast a “full-fledged” ethnic studies program, of which African American Studies, Native American Studies, Pan-Asian Studies, and Mexican American Studies are departments<sup>27</sup>. Mexican American Studies was established in 1998, in part as a response to a 1978 federally mandated desegregation order<sup>28</sup>. In 1974, African American and Mexican American students success-

*of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1998.

22.– Quoted by Nicholas B. Lundholm, “Cutting Class: Why Arizona’s Ethnic Studies Ban Won’t Ban Ethnic Studies”, *Arizona Law Review*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2011, p. 1053.

23.– *Ibid.*

24.– *Ibid.*, 1054. Also see Augustine R. Romero, “At War with the State in Order to Save the Lives of Our Children: The Battle to Save Ethnic Studies in Arizona”, *The Black Scholar*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2010, p. 13. Roque Planas, “Arizona Official Considers Targeting Mexican American Studies in University,” *Fox News Latino*, March 28, 2012 (<http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/politics/2012/03/28/arizona-official-considers-targeting-mexican-american-studies-in-university/>).

25.– Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “Ethnic Studies in US Higher Education: History, Development, and Goals”, *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, second edition (eds. James A. Banks & Cherry A. McGee Banks), San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004, p. 879.

26.– Regarding diaspora and the Black Atlantic, see, for example, Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1993. Regarding the concept of the borderlands, see Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, San Francisco, Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987.

27.– C. Sleeter, *op. cit.*, p. 7; <http://tUSD1.org/contents/depart/studentequity/ethnicstudies.asp>; also see N. Lundholm, *op. cit.*, p. 1042.

28.– *Mendoza v. Tucson Sch. Dist. No. 1*, 623 F. 2<sup>nd</sup> 1338, 1341 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1980). Also see Amici Curiae, Brief of the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies, *Acosta et al. v. John*

fully sued TUSD for intentional segregation and discrimination on the basis of race and national origin<sup>29</sup>. The district remained under the supervision of the federal court desegregation agreement until 2009. This controversial court order “included an emphasis on expanding [TUSD’s] Ethnic Studies departments<sup>30</sup>”. Ironically, given their proclaimed demands for fairness and colorblindness, opponents of the Mexican American Studies Department are not only defying this court order, they are also attempting to undo a response to and remedy for a long history of inequity in TUSD.

In his defense of Mexican American Studies, Congressman Raúl Grijalva of Tucson aligned that department with Americanness, particularly multiculturalism, in a May 15, 2011 op-ed piece in the *Arizona Daily Star*. According to Grijalva, this department has done

a very American thing: It’s taught students to value themselves, to value their families, to value who they are, to know who they are, and to be proud of that heritage. This country celebrates and acknowledges its diversity – in this respect, Mexican Americans are no different than Italian Americans or Polish Americans. We’re all Americans, and our families all came from somewhere<sup>31</sup>.

Grijalva’s assimilationist strategy is reminiscent of that of *Alvarez v. Lemon Grove School District* and *Mendez v. Westminster School District*, two legal cases that emphasized Mexican Americans’ Americanness. In both, Mexican immigrant, Mexican American, and Latino parents in southern California underscored that the vast majority of students denied admission to so-called “white schools” and redirected to patently inferior “Mexican” ones were nonetheless US citizens<sup>32</sup>. In 1931, the court ruled in *Alvarez* that Mexican pupils were not only US citizens, but “Caucasian” ones as well. As such, they couldn’t be segregated under state law<sup>33</sup>. This case successfully challenged the practice of segregating Mexican Americans, but fell short of defying the institution of segregation. Hindsight (or what historians call

*Huppenthal*, 5; Romero, 8; and Julian Kunnie, “Apartheid in Arizona? HB 2281 and Arizona’s Denial of Human Rights of Peoples of Color,” *The Black Scholar*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2010, 17.

29.– *Fisher-Mendoza v. Tucson Unified School District* (No. 10-1124), United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit (filed July 19, 2011), 9776.

30.– D. Anthony Clark & Tamilia D. Reed, “A Future We Wish to See: Racialized Communities Studies after White Racial Anxiety and Resentment,” *The Black Scholar*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2010, p. 37.

31.– Raúl Grijalva, “Political Fight over Ethnic Studies Should Never Have Been Ignited at All,” *Arizona Daily Star*, May 15, 2011.

32.– *Superior Court of the State of California, San Diego County, Writ of Mandate*, February 13, 1931, quoted in Robert R. Alvarez, Jr., “The Lemon Grove Incident: The Nation’s First Successful Desegregation Court Case,” *Journal of San Diego History*, vol. 32, no. 2, spring 1986, p. 116-135. Also see <http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/86spring/lemongrove.htm> (accessed May 20, 2013).

33.– Leonel Sanchez, “Lemon Grove Incident’ Remembered 80 Years Later,” *Lemon Grove Patch*, March 21, 2011, <http://lemongrove.patch.com/articles/lemon-grove-incident-remembered-80-years-later> (accessed August 1, 2011).

presentism) reveals a painful irony: while *Alvarez* most certainly represented a blow to segregation, the insistence that Mexicans were Caucasian and not, in the words of the court, “Oriental,” “Negro,” or “Indian,” maintained white supremacy<sup>34</sup>.

Fifteen years later, the segregation of Mexican-American children in California’s public schools would be challenged again when Gonzalo Méndez, a naturalized US citizen from Mexico, and his wife, Felcita Méndez, a Puerto Rican (and, therefore, a US citizen), initiated a lawsuit after their children were denied admission to their neighborhood school in Orange County and subsequently redirected to the more distant “Mexican” school<sup>35</sup>. In 1946, the court ruled that the segregation of Mexican pupils amounted to a denial of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The following year, Governor Earl Warren repealed all school codes mandating segregation in California. In 1954, *Mendez* would “assume [...] national significance” as a precursor to *Brown v. Board of Education*<sup>36</sup>.

Today, the struggle for equal opportunity in education continues via the DREAM Act<sup>37</sup>. By legalizing those who are illegal and transforming aliens into citizens, this legislation has more than a little in common with *Alvarez* and *Mendez*. If we define assimilation as the opposite of segregation or as integration, incorporation, or acculturation, terms that are sometimes used as synonyms in the United States, then all three efforts share assimilation as a goal<sup>38</sup>. By rejecting Mexican Americans’ status as alien citizens – US citizens “presumed to be foreign by the mainstream of American culture and, at times, by the state” – *Alvarez* and *Mendez* sought to assimilate Mexican Americans as full citizens, individuals with access to the state’s resources, including its protection<sup>39</sup>. And while DREAMers are not Americans in name (that is, they lack US citizenship), two justifications for their formal incorporation are their participation in the mainstream and their acculturation – in other words, their Americanness.

Likewise, Grijalva’s rousing defense of TUSD’s Mexican American Studies Department invokes assimilation in its emphasis on mimesis, the blurring or disap-

34.– The Oxford Dictionary defines presentism as “uncritical adherence to present-day attitudes, especially the tendency to interpret past events in terms of modern values and concepts”. See [http://oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/presentism](http://oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/presentism) (accessed September 18, 2013).

35.– Jennifer McCormick and César J. Ayala, “Felcita ‘La Prieta’ Méndez (1916-1998) and the End of Latino School Segregation in California,” *Centro Journal*, vol. 19, no. 2, fall 2007, p.13-35.

36.– *Ibid.*

37.– First introduced in the US Senate on August 1, 2001, the DREAM Act seeks to offer a path to legal permanent residency or citizenship to undocumented immigrants who have graduated from high school or completed two years of military service or college in good standing. For more information, see <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d111:H.R.1751>: and <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d111:S3992> (accessed January 7, 2013).

38.– Susan K. Brown and Frank D. Bean, “Assimilation Models, Old and New: Explaining a Long-term Process,” *Migration Information Source*, 2006, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=442> (accessed May 7, 2012).

39.– I take the concept of the alien citizen from Mae M. Ngai’s *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2005, 2.

pearance of a boundary distinguishing “us” from “them”. In the Congressman’s own words: “Mexican Americans are no different than Italian Americans or Polish Americans”. Ethnic Studies therefore does show us that, yes, Mexican Americans do have much in common with Italian Americans and Polish Americans. And sometimes they do not, and that should be acceptable in a diverse and tolerant society.

Grijalva’s plea for Mexican American Studies also invokes assimilation by bringing into play ethnicity and whiteness. His comparison of Mexican Americans with Italian Americans and Polish Americans, two ethnic, as opposed to racial, groups, is, in all likelihood, strategic and warrants scrutiny. Since the 1940s, the ideologies of pluralism and multiculturalism have allowed some Americans – namely, white ones – to assimilate into the mainstream; first, as so-called ethnic Americans and then as Americans, plain and simple. As scholars in critical Whiteness studies have shown, erstwhile “temporary Negroes” and “provisional” whites, such as Italian Americans and Polish Americans, became bona fide (that is, white) Americans by actively distancing themselves from and defining themselves against people of color, particularly blacks, Mexicans, and Chinese<sup>40</sup>. This process of whitening, what Matthew Frye Jacobson terms “racial alchemy”, is assimilation in the United States<sup>41</sup>.

What if Grijalva had likened Mexican Americans to a non-white group, not to Italian Americans and Polish Americans but to, say, Haitian Americans and Korean Americans? Would his words have had the same meaning, intention, or effect? If his goal was to claim Americanness for Mexican Americans, then the answer to this question is probably no, given the longstanding link between whiteness and Americanness, a connection going back to the Naturalization Act of 1790, which limited naturalization “to free white person[s]”<sup>42</sup>. Until the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, blacks, even those who were free, were non-citizens. And although the Naturalization Act of July 14, 1870 made “aliens of African nativity” and “persons of African descent,” along with “free white persons”, eligible for naturalization<sup>43</sup>, blacks were still “seen as anticitizens, as ‘enemies rather than the members of the social compact’”, in David Roediger’s words<sup>44</sup>. Jim Crow, the era of *de jure* and *de facto* racial segregation in the United States (1876-1965), followed by high rates of incarceration and disenfranchisement – what Michelle Alexander

40.– “Temporary negroes” is from D. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, London, Verso, 1991, p. 13. “Provisional” whites is from Matthew F. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 8.

41.– Matthew F. Jacobson, *op. cit.*

42.– <http://rs6.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collid=llsl&fileName=001/llsl001.db&recNum=226> (accessed May 7, 2012).

43.– Natalia Molina, “In a Race All Their Own’: The Quest to Make Mexicans Ineligible for US Citizenship”, *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 79, no. 2, May 2010, p. 174. Regarding Section 2169, also see Lucy E. Salyer, “Baptism by Fire: Race, Military Service, and US Citizenship Policy, 1918-1935”, *Journal of American History*, vol. 91, no. 3, 2004, p. 847-876. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 abolished all racial qualifications for naturalization.

44.– D. Roediger, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

aply calls “the new Jim Crow” – have continued to exclude them from the polity<sup>45</sup>. They have been assimilated, but as constitutive and subordinated other.

Because of the links between whiteness and citizenship and the links between citizenship and rights, it should come as no surprise that so many groups in the United States, from the Irish in the nineteenth century, to Mexicans in the twentieth and twenty-first, have grappled for whiteness. Yet unlike the Irish and their descendants, Mexicans’ status as white remains tenuous. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo extended “the title and rights” of US citizenship to Mexicans residing in the Mexican Cession in 1848, a time when only whites could be US citizens<sup>46</sup>. However, scholars in Chicano studies show us the ways in which *de jure* and *de facto* efforts have rendered people of Mexican descent in the United States “non-white”<sup>47</sup>. Additionally, some of these scholars have enumerated the ways in which Mexicans, including the plaintiffs in *Abvarez* and *Méndez*, “fought on many fronts to continue being classified as white”<sup>48</sup>. That Grijalva would revisit this strategy in the twenty-first century underscores the enduring bond between whiteness and Americanness and the exigencies of assimilation.

Ethnic studies probes this bond and highlights these exigencies. Indeed, one could say it was founded on and because of them. It shows that marginalization and exclusion did not end with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or Barack Obama’s election as president in 2008. Instead of burying “the history of American racism within a larger narrative of inevitable American progress” and treating “race relations as a linear trajectory of improvement”, Ethnic Studies approaches race and racial

45.– Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, New York, The New Press, 2012.

46.– These words from the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo are from David J. Weber, ed., *Foreigners in Their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1973, p. 164.

47.– According to Molina, “non-white”, a third racial category (after white and black), emerged with “[t]wo important Supreme Court decisions, *Ozawa v. United States* (1922) and *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923). See Molina, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

48.– *Ibid.*, p. 191. Regarding Mexicans’ efforts to claim whiteness, also see Michael Calderón-Zaks, “Debated Whiteness amid World Events: Mexican and Mexican American Subjectivity and the US’s Relationship with the Americas, 1924-1936”, *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2011, p. 325-359; Neil Foley, “Becoming Hispanic: Mexican Americans and the Faustian Pact with Whiteness”, in *Reflexiones 1997: New Directions in Mexican American Studies* (ed. Neil Foley), Austin, University of Texas Press, 1997, p. 53-70; Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997); David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995); Ian Haney-López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York, New York University Press, 1996); Patrick Lukens, *A Quiet Victory for Latino Rights: FDR and the Controversy over “Whiteness”* (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2012); Anthony Macias, *Mexican American Mojo: Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles, 1935-1968* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2008); Francisco A. Rosales, *Pobre Raza! Violence, Justice, and Mobilization among México Lindo Immigrants, 1900-1936* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1999). For a more recent study, see Paula D. McClain, et al., “Racial Distancing in a Southern City: Latino Immigrants’ Views of Black Americans”, *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 68, no. 3, 2006, p. 571-584.



struggles as “a messy and continual struggle over power”, an ebb and flow of progress and retreat (think, for example, of Reconstruction, the era following the US Civil War during which blacks were emancipated and granted US citizenship and the right to vote, and Jim Crow, of the institutionalization of bilingual education and the backlash against it)<sup>49</sup>.

And while *Alvarez, Mendez*, and the DREAM Act set their sights on changing, however slightly, the United States and the conception of the so-called category “American” – a courageous, admirable, and necessary pursuit – Ethnic Studies, and in particular transnational Ethnic Studies, does not limit its scope to the nation-state or formal citizenship. Instead, many scholars in this dynamic field examine nations without states and dare to explore a multiplicity of citizenships (formal and informal alike). Some of the most exciting scholarship calls for, in the words of Alicia Schmidt Camacho, “rights beyond citizenship [...] to honor the membership of migrants in US society, and to recognize our bonds of community beyond the limited borders of the nation<sup>50</sup>”. By providing a space for heterodox explorations, troubling questions, and unpopular proposals, Ethnic Studies recognizes and envisions alternate subjects, those that fall outside familiar, albeit contested categories, such as “American”, “citizen” or “individual”.

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49.– R. L. Hughes, “A Hint of Whiteness: History Textbooks and Social Construction of Race in the Wake of the Sixties”, *Social Studies*, vol. 98, no. 5 (Sept-Oct 2007), p. 203.

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