

The Fourth Movement: Founder’s Letter for *Latinx Writing and Rhetoric Studies*

Iris D. Ruiz

University of California Merced, on land of the Yokuts and Miwuk native people.¹

Writing this introductory letter as a founding member of this journal gives me wondrous and chontzin feelings of gratification. This first issue of *Latinx Writing and Rhetoric Studies* (LWRS) has special significance in that the inaugural issue is guest edited by Drs. Isabel Baca and Yndalecio Isaac Hinojosa, fellow NCTE/CCCC Latinx Caucus members.

From the perspective of a former member of twenty years and a co-chair of the NCTE/CCCC Latinx Caucus (2015-18), I must say that getting to this point has proven to have been a journey of camaraderie, self-reflection, activism, and transformation. Often, Caucus members would discuss in listserv discussions and at CCCC meetings the politics of citation. We noticed that while we were playing fairly; we were also playing on an unequal playing field, and through past leaders, like Felipe de Ortega y Gasca, we understood that these citation politics had a history that was at least fifty years old. I won’t go into too much detail about this history, but I will say that the publication of the first issue of LWRS is timely in that it accompanies a recently published historical book about and by the Caucus: *Viva Nuestra Caucus: Rewriting the Forgotten Pages of our Caucus* (2019), now available through Parlor Press with the help of Dr. Stephen Parks, a longtime advocate for the Latinx Caucus. This historical record documents how we engaged deeply to recover these matters, and in doing so, we pursued the documentation of our archival presence in the field since at least 1968. I encourage our readers to check out that history. This issue also includes

some very important history in the introduction that was shared with us by Cecelia Milanes, former co-chair of the CCCC Latinx Caucus and lead editor of “Capirotada.” Milanes provides our audience a glimpse of what the Caucus has been up to for the past few decades as we have celebrated each other’s accomplishments even while we’ve been underrepresented.

Still, today, it is very important for the Caucus to continue to self-represent and advocate for publication venues within the field of Rhet/Comp. Notable about this journal is that it is the first one in the field to possess an all Latinx editorial board and to concentrate solely on Latinx issues related to literacy, writing studies, rhetoric, and pedagogy through various means of aesthetic and creative expression. We are in the midst of a political climate, for example, that has painted a very negative picture of Latinx identities within the United States while the Latinx population is growing as the largest minoritized ethnic group in the United States. This journal is meant to be seen as providing a counter-vision to these negative cultural images in service to creating a better-informed “cultural imaginary.” It is meant to serve as a space where we, as engaged and informed citizens, can speak back with scholarly inquiry and creative expression to the current political backlash against Latinxs and to matters that are important to Latinxs.

There are many examples that the editorial group and contributors could cite to demonstrate this necessity to highlight and showcase our work and the progress that is yet to come with the help of an accomplished Latinx scholars editorial board. Since 2008, the battle for Mexican American Studies and HB 2281, has shown conservative school board officials possess an unfounded fear toward consciousness raising curricula and pedagogy. Barrio Pedagogy, for example, laid the critical foundation for Mexican American Studies in Tucson, Arizona but was rejected by John Huppenthal and Tom Horne. Our history with struggle for cultural knowledge goes back much further than 2008, however. For example, Latinx civil rights student organizations, such as MEChA and even our Caucus, have been partially predicated upon a reclamation of MesoAmerican culture and history. Like other activist groups, such as The Black Panther Party seeking to claim a nationalist identity, MEChA demanded a recognition of the southwestern United States as their ancestral homeland, “Aztlán,”² since 1969, and an end to the inferior and demeaning perceptions commonly held about them by xenophobic, racist white people.

Today, many “identity” based political groups, such as MEChA and our Latinx Caucus, are thought of by some as being unnecessary “safe spaces” that claim “victimhood” status and who do not want to play a part in American meritocratic culture and/or the “pull-yourself up by your own bootstraps” mentality. Stephen

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Miller, current Senior Advisor for Policy for the Trump Administration, for example, advises the president on important matters related to immigration policy, the Dream Act, DACA, and Latinx, Aztlan-seeking and dwelling populations. There is documentation that illustrates his disdain for student activist groups, such as MEChA, UNIDOS, the Black Student Unions, and other identity-based groups, and for those who identified as Mexican, Mexican-American, and/or Chicana/o/x (Gumble, 2018). However, what people like Miller need to accept and become open to is that Latinx gente have a culture that departs from settler-colonial cultural understandings, and white people also have a culture that needs to be reclaimed (Dutch, Irish, Welsh, Danish, and English, among many others). The historical and cultural dismissal is still evident today in that settler-colonial schools have failed to account for MesoAmerican cultural accomplishments, memories, epistemologies, ways of knowing, writing, reading, healing, and other cultural attributes in a much-needed Ethnic Studies curriculum. Without highlighting or at least teaching these attributes, forms, or experiences, there continues to be a clear disregard for those who have suffered from colonial trauma and a resistance to allowing colonized populations to re-discover their history, humanity, and existence within the North American, South American, and Central American imaginary, or as José Martí would call it, “Nuestra América.” It seems to be faulty reasoning to assume that Latinx’ attempts at cultural reclamation and sustainability is in inherent dialogue with and opposition to the “American” culture and that it is anti-American propaganda.

Building from the Naui Ollin (four movement) Mexica philosophy as a foundation for Barrio Pedagogy, I’d like to briefly consider how one learns resilience while experiencing political angst through activism and community. When I began my service as co-chair, I immediately began the process of deep self-reflection about my role, about the Caucus membership, about the civil rights struggle, about OUR place within the academy, and about my being a colonized Latina, now representative of many other gente with colonial pasts. I began to reflect on what all of this meant to me and about how intimidation and crass behavior would be obstacles to overcome. The precious knowledge I gained from these self-reflections manifested into a vision for the Caucus: greater representation, greater visibility, and a visibly greater group identity both offline and online. We set out to increase our precious knowledge as a collective, so on a path toward further knowledge attainment, we began to study what had happened in the past, where we were headed, and how NCTE and CCCC represented us and valued us. With that goal in mind, the Caucus went to Oregon in 2017 and held another spectacular workshop, “Latinxs Taking Action In and Out of the Academy,” with local activists, poets, writers, peers, and artists, musicians who

performed culturally conscious rhetorics. We wanted to celebrate and showcase the Latinx voice and presence in Portland, Oregon.

The lesson gained in Portland was something I documented and wrote about in *Latino Rebels* (2017). In a nutshell, there were clear examples, which I videotaped, of a continued distance between the Latinx Caucus workshop and the broader CCCC conference proceedings. “Latinxs Taking Action In and Out of the Academy” showcased local activists, poets, writers, peers, and even musicians performing culturally conscious rhetorics to showcase the Latinx voice and presence in Portland, Oregon. I think as a more seasoned Caucus leader, I was compelled to start decolonizing this divide--the way I saw how it affected members, myself, and those not present. In short, I tried to call attention to this divide in a conference review that I wrote and published “rogue” through *Latino Rebels*.

I began to seriously work with decolonial theory and practice in 2015, roughly the same year that I was voted in as the Latinx Caucus co-chair along with Raúl Sánchez. I became interested in this work when I wanted to problematize what it meant to occupy the problematic trope of the “student of color.” Doing so was the early stage for creating our edited collection *Decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition: New Latinx Keywords for Theory and Pedagogy* (2016), a collection of “decolonized keywords” to mentor emerging scholars and provide a venue to publish and expose more of our Latinx “gente.” We were invited to present at the Conference on Community Writing in the fall of 2017, where Steven Alvarez, Candace de Leon-Zepeda, and Jose Cortez spoke about the empowering process of being able to write for this collection from a decolonial lens. In addition, we saw the Caucus continue to grow. We gained and were sharing precious knowledge, the second movement.

In 1968, the Caucus was only a handful of people struggling with many of the same issues we experience today. Now, we have over 100 members, and we are experiencing a Latinx literary and scholarly renaissance that I will refer to as the third movement of the Nahuí Ollin: Huitzilopochtli. Within the past decade, it is apparent that we’ve discovered our “will to act” in addition to our previous moments of deep self-reflection (Tezcatlipoca), gaining precious knowledge (Quetzalcoatl). I predict that as with the fourth movement of the Nahuí Ollin, our Caucus is now moving into the fourth state of transformation (Xipe Totec) (Arce, 2016).

More recently our activism has been visible through our work on anti-racism and against white supremacy. In 2018, we voted to boycott CCCC 2018 in Kansas City, Missouri. We initiated what became the Joint Caucus Statement on the NAACP Travel Advisory, and we contributed to the Joint Caucus Response as well. Without going into too much detail with these documents, because they speak for themselves,

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we witnessed our initial will to act and to speak about the CCCC organization's responses to our concerns with the creation of the Social Justice Action Committee (SJAC) and the SJAC all-conference event that we feel emulates our regular Wednesday workshops where we invite local activists, writers, poets, musicians, and scholars. We also recently added our joint bibliography to CompPile. *LWRS* is the continuance of our transformative potential, our Xipe Totec, through which we will continue to seek transformative change through collective action, self-representation, and actualization, and we welcome everyone aboard!

Endnotes

1. Land acknowledgement – Diversity statement: University of California, Merced. (2020). Retrieved February 26, 2020, from <https://diversity.ucmerced.edu/accountability/policies-principles/diversity-statement>
2. “Aztlán,” is the mythical homeland of all MesoAmerican people who reside on both sides of the United States and Mexican border but were colonized by the Spanish in the 1500's and by the English and other European settlers in 1848. These people claim indigenous roots to this geographical territory that was once the location of the fierce and intelligent Mexica, Aztec, Mayan, Mixtec, Toltec and other tribes who intermixed and were said to live harmoniously in the region before colonization. While “Aztlán” is largely regarded as a mythical homeland, its location is debated and is thought to be most of the southwestern United States.

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About the Author

Iris D. Ruiz earned her Ph.D. from the University of California San Diego and is a Lecturer at the University of California Merced. Noteworthy publications in rhetoric and composition include *Reclaiming Composition for Chicanos/as and Other Ethnic Minorities: A Critical History and Pedagogy* (2016), *Decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition: New Latinx Keywords for Theory and Practice* (2016), and *Viva Nuestro Caucus: Rewriting the Forgotten Pages of our Caucus* (2020).

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