Gálvez, Alyshia

Rerseña de “A Companion to Latino Studies” de Juan Flores and Renato Rosaldo

The City University of New York
New York, Estados Unidos

Available in: http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=37721248013
A Companion to Latino Studies

Edited by Juan Flores and Renato Rosaldo
560 pages; $189.95 [cloth]

REVIEWER: Alyshia Gálvez, The City University of New York—Lehman College

A Companion to Latina/o Studies was recently launched with much fanfare with a
day-long conference at New York University’s Department of Social and Cultural
Analysis, home to the newly formed Program in Latino Studies. Latino/a Studies
scholars from all over the New York area came together to congratulate the editors
and contributors for this mammoth volume, as well as to hear presentations by some
of the authors. While NYU is not, perhaps, the place anyone might have expected
it to occur, it is there that a convergence has occurred in which leading scholars
in West Coast and East Coast Latino/a Studies have come together and mapped
out a path for the 21st century. Juan Flores and Renato Rosaldo personify this
convergence, although they are not alone. This book is a snapshot of what Latino/a
Studies looks like at the moment of this historic convergence.

As a faculty member of the nation’s first Puerto Rican studies department,
at Lehman College/City University of New York, I spend much of my time teaching
courses such as Latino/as in the United States and Latino/as in New York City, and I
will focus much of my attention in this review on the pedagogical applicability of
A Companion to Latina/o Studies. Given the admiration and affection for both Renato
and Juan in Latino/a studies circles, I have no doubt that scholars in Latino/a studies
will eagerly read this volume and that they will profit by such reading. The question
I had when it was released, and which I have heard echoed among colleagues, is,
can I teach with it?

One rather significant barrier to answering “Yes” to that question is the cost
of the book. To date, Blackwell has released the book only in hardcover at the
prohibitive cost of $189.95. This price is certainly too high for most of us to consider
assigning the book to our undergraduates. However, Rosaldo assures me that
Blackwell promised to release the book in paperback after an initial hardcover
run aimed mainly at library acquisitions and that this release may be imminent.
The book’s chapters may also be offered for downloading on Blackwell’s website.
Either of these developments will put the book within reach of more students and
enable more widespread course adoption.

A Companion to Latina/o Studies is framed by its editors as a “sampler of [the] rich
output of new scholarship by some of the leading Latina/o scholars” (p. xxv), and
“an act of sharing, a gathering place of intellectual concerns and analysis that attest
to our unbroken commitment to engaged critical inquiry as a guide to social action”
(p. xxvi). The book offers a nearly overwhelming forty-five short essays averaging
ten to twelve pages each. In the Editors’ Foreword, Rosaldo and Flores frustrate
this reader’s desire for a theoretically proactive introduction—a clear, well-lit path
into what is on first glance an obviously complex and varied terrain of writings.
Instead, they offer a very brief history of the origins of Latina/o studies within social
movements and political struggles, highlighting the field’s ground-laying work by
generations of scholars contributing to “an increase in social knowledge” (p. xxiv).
They mention some of the many anthologies and readers that have emerged,
especially in the last decade. These books offer “multidisciplinary and ideologically
diverse perspectives” on Latina/o studies, and without going deeply into their rationale
for doing so, Flores and Rosaldo write that for this volume they “asked contributors
to reflect on their scholarly practice and contribution in short and in many cases more
personal essays” (p. xxv).

Flores and Rosaldo briefly outline the structure of the book: *vidas*, centered on
the telling of life stories; *actos*, advocating certain critical practices or methods;
and *en la lucha*, addressing institutional struggles in the production of knowledge.
For the first half of my reading of the *Companion*, I found the lack of a more robust
introduction or organizational framework frustrating. While I enjoyed the essays,
it seemed that such a large compilation should offer the reader more assistance in
navigating through it, more guidance about what one might glean from each essay.
Having spent the last semester using one of the anthologies the editors mention
in my teaching, I wondered how I could use this book in a course without more
of an organizational framework that could make sense in a semester-long class.
The rough categories into which the essays are grouped do not provide a
sufficiently textured categorization for navigating the book, and I could imagine
students might get lost within the essays. Further, without a detailed outline of the
essays, a reader who does not know each of the authors’ works might be at a loss in
helping students organize their use of the book. Like the editors themselves, it is
easy to get lost in the essays, a situation that necessitates reorganizing the order of
the chapters to suit the thematic units of a typical syllabus.

However, of course, Flores and Rosaldo have reasons for organizing the book as
they did, and the virtues of its organization become clear in the reading of its contents.
Without proscribing a single, narrow path through the book’s essays, Flores and
Rosaldo offer multiple pathways into the knotty territory that is Latina/o studies,
a field that has come into its own replete with contradictory theoretical perspectives,
diverse view points, regional variation, cross-cutting disciplinary angles, all joined
together by a coherent commitment to “critical inquiry as a guide to social action.”

Despite my reservations, I highly recommend the adoption of this book for
undergraduate courses as well as graduate courses and was quite impressed by how
accessible, in fact, the essays are. This book accomplishes something which, to my
knowledge, no other Latino/a studies anthology has done: it not only addresses
most of the major thematic areas of interest in the field, but also offers the reader
incredible insight into how the authors came to be interested in the topics which
consume their academic lives. These personal trajectories feature events that are
funny, tragic, moving, and infuriating; all of them are compelling. Some of the
standouts among these essays are “Language and Other Lethal Weapons” by
Antonia Castañeda, “How I Learned to Love the Salseros When My Hair Was a
Mess” by Edwin Torres, “The Star in My Compass” by Virginia Sánchez Korrol,
“On Becoming” by Nelly Rosario, and “Of Heretics and Interlopers” by Arturo
Madrid. The format of short, personal essays by big name (and a few emerging)
scholars has the potential to be inspiring and engaging for undergraduate students.
Moreover, this immediacy does not come at the expense of theoretical and analytical
contributions. Rather than the typical framing of academic writing as authoritative
exposition, these essays convey powerfully the why of what they do. While Latino/a
Studies has always defied a false separation of theory and practice, this volume
offers a powerful example of just what an alternative approach looks like. For those
of us in Latino/a studies departments who are concerned to present well-balanced
sylabus, this could only previously be achieved by complementing a multidisciplinary (mostly social science) anthology with a novel or two, a memoir, and some films and poetry. The effect, I believe, is that students sometimes come to falsely assume that poets and novelists feel, whereas scholars come to their topics solely from cerebral motivations. The passion, commitment to social justice, and, sometimes, personal trauma that inspire many scholars to work in their chosen fields is too often obscured by the conventions of academic prose. Here, in cogent, short essays, scholars describe how they came to be passionate about community problem solving (López), oral history (Broyles González), and the critique of colonialist discourse (Negrón-Montaner), to name only a few examples. But they also sketch out the central terms of debate in each of their areas of research, activism, or art. By discussing terms and concepts that are staples in Latino/a studies syllabi, including mine, such as racialization, language ideology, de/segregation, homoerotic desire, patriarchy, transnationalism, Latinidad, and critical practice, among other subjects, without pedantry, but in the context of personal and community histories, convivencia, and activism, the terms take on powerful meanings. For students, this could provide unprecedented pathways into scholarly practice, allowing them to learn why the scholars we require them to read do what they do, without simply expecting them to ingest the final product of scholarly labors, decontextualized from the very human stories of their creation.

In sum, I very highly recommend this text for adoption in any number of interdisciplinary Latino/a studies courses for both undergraduates and graduates. In spite of a few gaps (very little about the middle class, virtually nothing on Cubans, too little about South and Central American groups, almost nothing about the rise of non-progressive Latino politics, not enough about health), the rich and textured approach offered to dozens of other topics, especially language, racialization, segregation, colonialism and neocolonialism, labor, immigration, education, Latino pan-ethnicity, demography, music, border studies, poetry, even telecommunications, more than compensates for these gaps and makes this book a welcome compendium—one that is sure to draw in new generations of scholars.

---

**Atlas ambiental de Puerto Rico**

By Tania del Mar López Marrero and Nancy Villanueva Colón
San Juan: La Editorial, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2006
160 pages: $39.95 [cloth]

**REVIEWER:** **Ricardo Pérez,** Eastern Connecticut State University

In recent years, a great number of publications have addressed a wide variety of themes pertaining to Puerto Rican affairs both in the island and in the United States. While many of these publications have looked at general aspects, such as migration, political and cultural history, and electoral politics, which are widely known to most Puerto Ricans, others have focused on more specific themes, such as the environment, that have been—until now—largely understudied. The majority of these publications have been favorably reviewed in this journal, which indicates the quality of the recent works in the vibrant field of Puerto Rican studies. To this growing list of publications we can now add the *Atlas ambiental de Puerto Rico*, published in 2006 by the University
A Companion to Latina/o Studies is a collection of 40 original essays written by leading scholars in the field, dedicated to exploring the question of what 'Latino/a' is. Brings together in one volume a diverse range of original essays by established and emerging scholars in the field of Latina/o Studies. Offers a timely reference to the issues, topics, and approaches to the study of US Latinos, now the largest minority population in the United States. Explores the depth of creative scholarship in this field, including theories of latinismo, immigration, and political. A Companion to Latina/o Studies book. Read reviews from world's largest community for readers. A Companion to Latina/o Studies is a collection of 40 original essays written by leading scholars in the field, dedicated to exploring the question of what 'Latino/a' is. Brings together in one volume a diverse range of original essays by established and emerging scholars in the field of Latina/o Studies. Offers a timely reference to the issues, topics, and approaches to A Companion to Latina/o Studies. A Chicano scholar, Renato Rosaldo is Lucy Stern Professor Emeritus at Stanford where he taught for many years, and he now teaches at NYU where he was founding Director of the Latino Studies Program. A Companion to Latina/o Studies is a collection of 40 original essays written by leading scholars in the field, dedicated to exploring the question of what 'Latino/a' is.