PART I

ORIGINS AND THEORIES
Latino/a thought may be approached from diverse philosophical, historical, and political perspectives. As presented here, Latino/a political thought emerges out a struggle against absolute power. First, it was the American continental struggle against the monarchies, which was started by the English Americans, followed by the Haitians and then the rest of Spanish Americans. After the overthrow of the European crowns, there has been a continental quest for democracy, an effort to establish democratic societies that are governed by the people. Similarly, within the United States, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans have struggled in their own particular quest for equity and social justice along with other ethnic minorities. An important point driving this discussion is that despite current arguments to the contrary, this is what all people in the American continent have in common. The American Dream is a continental Americano Dream, not the exclusive dream of the Anglo Saxon Protestant, as retired Harvard professor Samuel P. Huntington claims (see chapters 4 and part V.B). Arguably, this is a human dream but that is another discussion.

From the Nationalization of Philosophy to the Ethnicization of Social Science

When the subject of Latina or Latino political thought comes up, many people, even in academia, tend to wonder if there is a unique Latino/a thought that is part of a Latino/a philosophy. Is there a Latin American philosophy
with its own philosophers and specific philosophies? Because one of the themes of this reader is the notion of invisibility that is created by power relations, it is not only pertinent but also necessary to make it perfectly clear: There is, in fact, a history of Latin American philosophy, a collection of the reflections on the same philosophical questions that have challenged philosophers throughout human history and across cultures and countries, namely, the meaning of life (ethics), identity and purpose (social philosophy), the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and reality (ontology).

In effect, approximately from 1880 to 1960 there was a deliberate effort in Latin America (and in other non-European countries), to create a national philosophy, as part of the struggle against European and U.S. imperialism. For example, Gao argues that, just like the Germans, French, British, and Americans have Idealism, Rationalism, Empiricism, and Pragmatism philosophies, respectively, the Spanish-speaking people have Emotivismo (Emotionism or a philosophy based on emotion). The name comes from the preference for the intuitive and for the aesthetic form to express its philosophical thought, such as the poem, the letter, the essay. Spanish-speaking philosophers have shown no inclination for developing grand, systematic political philosophies. Their focus has been on the immediate issues that impact their societies. In Mexico, Antonio Caso, Samuel Ramos, José Vasconcelos, and Octavio Paz, among others, are associated with la filosofía de lo mexicano (the philosophy of that which is Mexican). Not coincidentally, about the time that this project of nationalization of philosophy was abandoned, a similar project emerged in the United States with the ethnicization of the social sciences (Chicano sociology, anthropology, political science, etc.; see chapter 4 for a discussion of power and knowledge relations and the social sciences).

Within Latin American political thought, one finds a wide historical and political spectrum. It ranges from scholasticism to Enlightenment. On the one hand, there are liberal democratic ideas such as those that led to Mexican independencia in 1821 and the Mexican Constitutions of 1854 and 1917 and the constitutions of Cuba in 1900 and Puerto Rico in 1950. On the other hand, one finds the conservative and racist ideas of the positivists, known as los científicos, in the nineteenth century and that is associated with U.S.-backed militarist, reactionary, and elitist politics of the twentieth century. Marxism and Socialism continue to be predominant in Latin America. Liberation theology is a unique Latin American philosophy, a combination of Catholicism and Marxism. As for Latinos/as in the United States, three major Latin American philosophers, who have influenced Cuban Americans, Puerto Ricans, and U.S. Mexicans are José Martí, Eugenio Maria de Hostos, and Ricardo Flores Magón, respectively.
The National Question: Nationalism and Transnationalism

Words like nationalization, ethnicization, imperialism, and others that will appear in various texts as nation, nationality, nationalism, and colonial are essential for the understanding of Latino/a thought (and political thought in general) and thus require clarification from the outset.

Imagine ancient history when the world was populated by hundreds of “nations,” that is, groups of people, clans, tribes, who share common customs, origins, histories, and languages. The word nation comes from the Latin natio, which means birth or race; from nasci, to be born; literally, “where you are born,” your home turf. In the Greek language, the word for nation is ethnos. Therefore, nations are equal to ethnic groups, equal to tribes, such as the Anglos, the Saxons (yes, they used to be two different tribes), the Franks, the Navajo, and the Maya. There is an implication here of blood ties, of one big family, like with the concept found in discussions of cultural nationalism: Puerto Ricans claim an ethno-nation and the rainbow familia; Chicanos claim carnalismo (literally flesh of my flesh); and there the ever present cubanidad). For white supremacists, like the Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), it is the notion of the purity of the blood line. Whether real or imagined, blood ties among a people, lead to notions of justice and vengeance: such as avenging those who have shed the blood of a family member. The nation and the blood ties of its members are a central factor in present day conflicts all over the world, such as in the Middle East and in rural feuds and among urban gang members.

When some nations reach a particular level of economic and technological development, they conquer and possess other nations to create a city-state or polis (as in political system) as the Greeks called it. The Maya kingdom and the Roman and British empires are other examples. When this happens, the nations that are conquered become colonies and they are said to have lost their sovereignty, that is, the right to self-determination, the right to make their own decisions; or they may become integrated into the dominant nation, the metro-polis (literally, the huge city-state). By the eighteenth century, the word nation started to be used in the sense of country or nation-state, that is, a state that contains other nations. England, for example, turned so many independent nations, into colonies, it was said that the sun never set on the British Empire. One positive aspect of empires is that they allowed for linguistic and cultural differences among their subjects (as long as they paid tribute). The United States, has also “incorporated” Northern Mexico, Puerto Rico (as a Commonwealth), and Guam, the Marianas, Samoa, and many Indian nations, such as the Navajo and the Apache and at
one time, the Philippines and Cuba. “The national question” is precisely the relation of domination exercised by one nation over another.4

Now, that the term state has been added to nation, let us define it. Think of the state as the invention of a political machine, a form of government that not only replaced the empires and monarchies in the seventeenth century, but also tends to homogenize and normalize populations through the imposition of one language and one culture. Another important characteristic is that the nation-state grants individual human bodies legal status through citizenship, it gives them a nationality. Thus, newspapers identify individuals as Mexican or Canadian nationals, which is another way of saying that they belong to those two particular nation-states.

There is a crucial difference between nationality and nationalism, and it must be addressed to avoid confusion. Nationalism describes the feeling of patriotism, or extreme, perhaps even fanatical loyalty to a particular nation or nation-state. Thus, an indigenous person in the Americas may feel her or his first loyalty is to their nation-tribe, not to the Mexican or U.S. nation-state. There are examples all over the world in which particular nations are not happy being owned by nation-states, and they want to be independent from them. It is in this sense that we may speak of black, Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Cuban nationalism. There is, however, another kind of nationalism, like the one that arises in the United States in times of economic distress and leads many U.S. Americans (including blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican Americans) to turn against those who fit the label of “foreigners,” or “immigrants” that is, those that do not belong to “the Nation.”

This, too, is the horizon where the “national question” comes into focus. Thus, one is always a national (of one country) but one chooses to be a nationalist (that is, the degree of critical commitment or patriotic devotion).

The national question may also involve issues of class. Do all U.S. Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans feel attached to a political nationalism in the same way? Or, on the contrary, are there different nationalisms among the wealthy, the middle, and the working classes? Is nationalism just a tool to get political concessions, part of a quest for economic democracy? Who really wants to stay and who wants to go? Or is it a matter of changing the U.S. society? Finally, as noted by Jorge Duany and Cherríe Moraga, the national question may also involve issues of race and gender.5

In the United States, there is a situation in which Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans were originally incorporated into the United States through military conquest, and now these populations have been augmented by migration so they are the largest cultural minority in the United States. Presently it seems, however, that they are not being integrated into the po-
itical life of the country, and they feel they are being exploited because of their national origin. This situation leads some U.S. Americans to wonder, which country these Latinos/as consider to be their patria, their fatherland, in other words, to which nation are they loyal? Are U.S. Mexicans plotting to take back the land the U.S. took from Mexico? Indeed, Chicano militants like the Brown Berets (see chapter 10) allude to this possibility as does El Plan of Aztlán. And Puerto Rican independentistas, continue to advocate for a free Puerto Rico. Would they be better off breaking away from the United States? Ultimately, though, as the articles in this book indicate most Latinos/as do not agree with these political positions. Ultimately, these questions are raised by politicians to get votes or by hate-mongers on both sides of the political spectrum to use Latinos/as as political pawns.

Nationalism emerges as an antidote to colonialism. Previously we said that empires extend their dominion over other free nations. Once those nations lose their sovereignty, the right to make their own decisions, they become colonies of the empire. When the feelings of nationalism in a colony reach a particular level of intensity, they may lead to a war of independence. Keep in mind that, theoretically, only genuine nations can achieve independence; this means that there must be a set of historical, territorial, and economic conditions to sustain the struggle. This is what happened when the United States (and later India and many other former colonies) broke away from England, and Latin American countries severed their ties with Spain. It is in this context that some Puerto Ricans want independence from the United States and that Fidel Castro broke relations with the United States. Basques in Spain and France and Kurds in Iraq and Turkey, are examples of nationalist movements. They are also examples of what some Puerto Rican scholars call ethno-nation, that is, people who are dispersed among two or more nations. The same goes for the Cuban people.

Cuba and Puerto Rico are islands off the coast of the United States, and so they fit the picture of colonial possessions overseas. But what about American Indians, African Africans, and Mexican Americans? Are they also colonial subjects in colonies that are inside the United States? Is this a new kind of internal colonialism or neocolonialism, as Flores and Bailey argue? Do these involuntary territorial and cultural citizens have a sense of nationality, that is, just a “cultural nationalist” identification with their country of origin (with its food, music, dance, fiestas, and other traditions)? Or do they have a sense of nationalism, that is, a stronger political loyalty “with their people” than with the “people of the United States”? And if it is the latter, have they reached the point defined in the Declaration of Independence when “it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have
connected them with another”? This is, in effect, the claim made in the Brown Beret National Policies (see chapter 10) and by retired Harvard professor Samuel P. Huntington. The jury is still out, however. In the 1970s Federico A. Cervantes, made some critical observations regarding the status of a Chicano nation as a genuine nation and questions the existence of a widespread Chicano nationalism. Most recently, however, Ramón A. Gutierrez argues that the theory of internal colonialism played an important role in radicalizing Chicano students and challenging the social injustices committed against the Mexican Americans as colonial subjects. The same point and counterpoint regarding Puerto Ricans is provided by the “Young Lords Party 13-Point Program and Platform” and the piece by Ramón Grosfoguel in this reader.

Thus, in the twenty-first century the national question as a vehicle for the pursuit of social justice, remains on the table. Now, however, the global economic system challenges the authority of the nation-states not only through the control of capital but also turning citizens into consumers and by forcing many people to migrate; this, incidentally, not unlike early capitalism that forced people off the land and into the cities (see chapters 26 and part V.B). One result of these new developments is the creation of transnational, political, and cultural identities (see chapter 25).

**History, Remembering, and Justice**

We can look at history as moving in a straight line and try to trace influences from the past to the present. Or we can look at history as eternal recurrence, as a constant struggle that takes different forms in different time periods, with different vocabulary, and different actors. Incidentally, the film *Groundhog Day*, exemplifies this in the life of an individual who wakes up every day to experience the same events as the previous day with minor variations. The purpose in this case is his personal improvement. Not all historians or philosophers, however, see history as teleological, as having a telos, a specific end or purpose. If we look at history as a linear development, how far back do you go in tracing the roots of Latino thought? Do we include the Aztecs, Taínos, Arawaks, or Siboneys (the indigenous people of Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba)? Some do. Does this mean that when Latinas/os have to take political action, they consider their pre-Colombian, colonial, or other legacies or do they react pragmatically, according to a given situation? If we take the case of the Chicano movement of the 1960s, we see heavy use of pre-Columbian, particularly Aztec, symbolism. Yet some Chicano scholars and activists apparently did not see their immediate predecessors from the 1900’s. As José Limón’s points out (chapter 7) some scholars and activists
were convinced that the Chicano movement was a brand-new political radical, feminist, militant, quasi-separatist movement. It seems, then that history does not necessarily move in a straight line and that there are gaps of political consciousness. The important point here is that aware or not, consciously or unconsciously, the struggle for democracy continues in one form or another.

This leads to the notion that history repeats itself. One explanation of this remembering of injustices comes from Greek mythology (see Part V.B). The *Furies* are three Goddesses that are in charge of the home and the body, blood relatives, the clan, and the tribe. They are the keepers of the memory of past injustices and revenge (an eye for an eye). After much bloodshed, they agree with the God Apollo to follow the rules of the government (he represents the city-state and the law, which also favors amnesia of past wrongs). As a precedent of the social contract, the Furies’ message can be paraphrased as: “We will give up our rights to seek justice by our own hand and follow the law of the state, as long as there is justice. If there is no justice, we will come out to avenge those that have been wronged.”

Latino/a thought, therefore, may be located within a rich philosophical and historical context that can be defined as a quest for democracy. Ultimately, though, the key questions remain: Why are things the way they are and who has the power to change them? The answers and explanations cover a wide range. Some say, “God wants it that way.” For others the answer lies on to the enforcement of the social contract and human rights. Some value private enterprise (anyone can succeed if they want to) as the key to prosperity, whereas others see it as leading to global capitalism with its appropriation of labor, and thus the equivalent of the exploitation of people. Along the same lines, what some see as the exercise of freedom and free will, others see as the manipulation of values and language as a means to extract more value from people to increase the accumulation of wealth and capital (see chapter 4). Specifically directed to Latinos/as (and other ethnic minorities in other countries), the same questions have led to explanations that include notions of “cultural deficiency” (there is something wrong with their culture), “internal colony” (our human and territorial resources are being exploited within the United States) and “class struggle” (we are being exploited because we are workers not because we are Latinos/as).
Although acknowledging this rich historical and philosophical legacy, this reader considers Latino political thought as the result of the actions by Latinos/as as they relate to the U.S. government and the dominant U.S. culture; actions, furthermore, that are based on their corresponding material conditions, and with the goal of achieving social equity and justice. Examples of these manifold actions range from uprisings in the nineteenth century, to membership in political organizations, to voting, proposing and opposing laws, protest demonstrations, boycotts, and the production of representations, images, writings (philosophy, poetry, plans, strategies), and other actions that ultimately impact the human body. Most recently the status of Latinos/as in the United States has been affected by the anti-immigrant sentiment and laws designed to restrict the rights of undocumented people, especially Mexicans to rent or shop. Century-old questions continue to linger, such as the political status of Puerto Rico. Another perennial question surrounds the conflicts regarding the status of U.S.-Cuba diplomatic relations and especially of Guantanamo Bay.

These issues, questions, and policies affect Latino/a human bodies both in the United States and also in their countries of origin. Latino/a thought then, deals with a quest for democracy and justice; justice in terms of the respect for the established law, justice in terms of the abuses based on light-skin supremacy, justice based on an equitable distribution of wealth, and justice in terms of respect for the individual as moral and physical entity with cultural and gender differences. But this is not only about Latinos/as in the United States, it is about all continental Americans and, more generally, about human rights. We are living at a time of interrelated crises: There is a war against terrorism and the consequent assault on civil liberties; there is a growing inequality of income and wealth; and there is increasing fragmentation of civil society into separate identities. Therefore, it is especially urgent that we reflect on what we know and that we focus on reducing the gap between our knowledge and our actions.

**Human Rights and Economic Democracy**

When we speak of human rights we are speaking of human rights within a legal structure, within a nation-state, this is the liberal democratic definition of human rights. Thus, the human rights we talk about are based on the liberal democratic nation-state that is based on a political democracy. But there is another definition of human rights based on the right of self-preservation. It is the Furies. That is when you take justice into your own hands, when you take an eye for an eye.
The right of self-preservation, depends on an economic democracy, on the well-being of the human body and the health of the ecology that sustains it. It is no coincidence that democracy has flourished among “the people of plenty.” It is precisely the economic wealth of the United States and not some sort of divine right or Manifest Destiny that has led to the establishment of a political democracy.

The concept of right rests on the notion of an authority that will enforce these rights. Within a country, there is a legal authority that oversees equality and justice. When that fails, the human body itself becomes the ultimate authority. Patrick Henry: “Give me liberty or give me death!” Or the protesters: “No justice, no peace.” More pointedly, the difference between the ballot box and a suicide bomber is the difference between these two kinds of human rights.

If this analysis is correct, then the preservation of the liberal democratic notion of human rights has depended thus far on the authority provided by political democracy. To the extent that the authority of political democracy is threatened by the growing influence of a corporate global economy, so are legal human rights. This is evident in the breakdown of civil society, that is the notion of we the people into gang, ethnic, national, or religious rivalries leading up to terrorism and genocide. One way or another, through legal or personal means, human bodies do claim justice. The problem is not necessarily the corporations or the global economy, but their production ultimately depends on the cheapest labor, turns citizens into consumers, and the economic inequality they create in turn distorts the functioning of our political institutions.

One possible solution to the preservation of human rights is to reach the next step of democratic evolution that is economic democracy. As a people, in a democratic fashion, we the people need to set a bottom income and a ceiling to the wealth that can be acquired. That is an economic democracy. Failing that, in view of the diminishing resources that sustain our current way of life, Nature itself will do it for us. Then we will have “the world without us” as Alan Wiseman tells us in his bestseller book, The World Without Us.

Clearly, there is a political bias in the framing and the contents of this reader and the question of political balance needs to be addressed. There are, of course, other political explanations for the difficulty in establishing working democracies and how to achieve social justice and readers are encouraged to explore them. Most of these explanations, however, are readily available in public discourse and mass media. It is precisely the point of this reader to revisit knowledge, theories, and explanations that are not part of the mainstream.
Additional caveats are in order. What we are attempting to do here is like an archaeological dig, a reconstruction of a discourse of Latino/a political thought. There is no attempt at completeness; depending on the individual reader, there may be missing pieces of information, necessary authorities, explanations, and theories. As for moral relativism (the philosophy that truth is in the eye of the beholder) in the approach taken in this reader, there is an attempt to make a distinction between the ideals of truth, honor, love, equality, and democracy and the appropriation of these ideals for political purposes, for self-interest, or what we call “games of truth.” In this scenario, moreover, there are no pure identities for victims or victimizers, there are no ethnic or racial, class, or gender essences.

To facilitate the understanding of Latino/a thought, Part I includes an interactive exploration of a general historical context through the poem I Am Joaquin (chapter 1). Though the historical record clearly shows a strong dose of anti-Latino/a sentiment among U.S. Americans, there is no room for anyone to take the moral high ground. We all conspire for justice and for our own subjection. The point of studying political thought is not to feel guilty about what happened in the past, but to feel responsible for what may happen in the future, and to develop strategies for action. There are three major methods of analyses of power: liberalism, Marxism, and power/knowledge analysis (chapters 2, 3, 4). The first two include charts to help clarify the text. Liberalism is critically important in a time of increasing divisions and tensions among ethnic and cultural groups in the United States and particularly the hostility against Latinos/as. It points out that Spanish Americans and English Americans have a common political birth based on their struggle against absolute power and for social justice (despite arguments to the contrary by retired Harvard professor Samuel P. Huntington). Marxism argues that this commonality, this quest for democracy, has been obscured by a lack of economic democracy and other forms of discrimination based on gender and race. Based on class analysis, Apodaca’s piece (chapter 3) presents a detailed description and explanation for this situation. In “Chicanology,” Vázquez expands the liberal democratic and the class struggle explanation to include an analysis of power/knowledge relations. Here and throughout the reader, we focus our gaze not only on what has been said but also on the illegitimate knowledges that are hidden behind the horizon of a dominant United States and now a global political-economic culture.

Going beyond philosophy and theory, Part I concludes with a brief examination of the birth of U.S. Latinos, specifically Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans, and Puerto Ricans as (in)voluntary, territorial, and cultural U.S. citizens. This choice is guided by the fact that similar to African Americans
and American Indians, they were incorporated into the United States through the use of force or military intervention. The permutation and transformation of the relations of each one of these groups with the U.S. government and the dominant society are detailed by the various texts in the rest of the reader.

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Notes and Suggestions for Further Research


9. For a range of leftist theories attempting to explain why Latinos/as in the United States are not on an equal socioeconomic level with other U.S. citizens and what reformist or revolutionary strategies and tactics are proposed to achieve a satisfactory level of equality, see the pamphlet by Antonio Rios-Bustamante, Mexicans in the United States and the National Question: Current Polemics and Organizational Positions (Santa Barbara, CA: Editorial La Causa, 1978).


