

## TESTIMONIANDO: A Latina/Chicana Critical Feminist Approach to Racism in College

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*Recent controversies about immigration and affirmative action on college campuses are examples of the pervasiveness of racial conflicts in institutions of higher learning. This article uses Latina Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis to explore the effects of an anti-immigrant event that took place in a public university. Two testimonios are presented and analyzed to illustrate how a Latina student (estudiante) and professor (profesora) responded to this racist event. Using these women's experiences as pedagogy, the article provides examples of how students and professors can help college campuses heal from the wounds of racism to promote a climate of inclusiveness and equity for Latinas/os. [Key words: racism, anti-racism, higher education, critical theory, Chicana feminist theory, Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis, Chicana/Latina pedagogy]*

In 2005 the Young Conservatives of Texas (YCT) sponsored an event called “Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day” in the designated “free-speech area” of a Texas public university considered one of the top 100 schools for Hispanic students (Lopez-Isa 2006). Members of the YCT wore orange t-shirts with slogans that read “Illegal Immigrant” and “Catch me if U can.” They ran around the university’s campus asking spectators to capture them for the reward of a 100 Grand candy bar. While some felt that the event was offensive, YCT members denied any racist intentions. According to the organizers, the event was intended to raise awareness about “illegal” immigration. As the YCT’s publicity coordinator told a reporter, “If it offends you...just walk by” (Zabel 2005). For many members of this university community it was difficult to simply dismiss this event. The YCT’s claim that the purpose of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day was to educate, contrasted how this message was delivered. The sensationalistic and caricature-

like delivery showed a lack of understanding of the complexities of immigration, leaving students, faculty, and staff puzzled that such a simplistic and disrespectful portrayal was taking place in an institution of higher learning. This was not the first time that the YCT was involved in a contentious campus incident. Other public universities in Texas and around the country have seen affirmative action bake sales and racially offensive costume parties.<sup>i</sup>

In fact, incidents of racism in universities across the U.S. are not new. Controversies related to minority student enrollment, recruitment of minority faculty, incorporation of minority voices into the curriculum, and affirmative action are just a few examples of the constancy of issues related to race in institutions of higher learning (Altbach 1991; Brown 2004; Harvey 1998). What is unique about recent events, such as Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day, is the prevalence of a “sophisticated guise” of racism (Hurtado 1992). That is, the language of democratic values and protection of individual rights is used to hide the privileges of the dominant group. Indeed, many university students consider these kinds of conflicts part of the college experience; yet dismissive statements, similar to the one made by the YCT publicity coordinator, are often accepted as free speech and are unchallenged because of it. Sylvia Hurtado (1992) examined student perceptions of campus racial climates across various institutions of higher learning and found that one in four students attending four-year institutions perceive racial conflict to be considerable.

In the case of Latinas/os, the sophisticated guise serves to further cloud the prevalence of racial conflict in discussions about immigration and educational equity in higher education. The sophisticated guise was at work in Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day as the mockery of undocumented immigrants was justified under freedom of speech and the effects on the campus community

were dismissed. In this paper we focus on the case of *Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day* to unpack the sophisticated guise of racism. We use Chicana Feminist Theory and Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis to analyze the effects of events like *Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day*, provide a new interpretation and significance of *testimonio*, and emphasize the importance of Chicana epistemologies for working through the consequences of racism in college campuses. We also rely on participatory research to incorporate the knowledge of Latina faculty and students to inquiries about race in higher education. We use *testimonio* to illustrate how the everyday cultural wealth of Latinas can be used proactively.

Even though recent racist incidents on college campuses rely on explicit pejorative imagery, most universities minimize their racist connotations and view them as isolated events. As a result, “it sometimes appears that few on campus realize the impact of racial issues. Academic administrators and faculty for the most part, see racial issues in isolation, as individual crises to be dealt with on an ad hoc basis rather than as a nexus of issues which require careful analysis” (Altabach 1991, 4). Despite their endurance, when it comes to racism, most universities fail to acknowledge its existence and find it difficult to come up with sustained and effective ways to discuss and address it (Harvey 1998). In universities across the country, responses to incidents like *Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day* are more likely to condemn those who protest against racism and often result in the exoneration of those responsible for racist assaults (Hirsch 1991). Although most universities have integrated diversity into their vision and mission, most faculty and students of color feel that much remains to be done to improve attitudes related to race in their campuses (Brown 2004). In the case of *Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day*, exoneration was provided under free speech while Latina/o students, faculty, and staff took on the task of explaining the harm caused by the event. We use Chicana Feminist Theory and analysis to name and explain the harm caused to a Latina

student (estudiante) and Latina professor (profesora). In addition, we rely on testimonio as a method to delve into the effects of racism.

When it comes to racist incidents similar to Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day those who are victimized often call for redress, yet those not belonging to the targeted group view the words or images that are part of racist attacks as harmless or unfortunate (Villanueva 1996). We use testimonio to explore how Latinas/os experience racist events like Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day and to challenge dominant interpretations of its effects. The testimonios we present here are not testaments to what happened during the event itself; rather, these testimonios are reflections and responses to the event and give witness to the climate of harm and fear resulting from Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day.

We justify our unique use of testimonio as a method to uncover racism by relying on Latina Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis. We use these theoretical tools to analyze the relevance of bearing witness to the consequences of racist campus events. As we will explain in the next section of the paper, we interpret testimonio as a Chicana Feminist methodological intervention and draw on the content of the testimonios presented here to suggest relevant pedagogical solutions that are firmly grounded in the reality, rather than dismissal of racism as a way to foster a climate of equity and diversity in institutions of higher learning (Arriola 1998; Bernal and Villalpando 2002). Our use and interpretation of testimonio in relation to the consequences of racist campus events contributes to existing feminist and critical scholarship about Latinas in higher education by conveying their experiences of racism as counterstories or counternarratives (Latina Feminist Group 2001; Knight et al. 2004), providing a historical analysis of the institutionalization of white supremacy, and documenting the endurance of racial conflict and racism against Latinas/os in universities

(Chávez and Padilla 1995). Furthermore, our analysis of testimonios led to discussions about how we could translate what we learned into practices to benefit our own campus community. We, therefore, conclude with some examples in the form of consejos, or “nurturing advice,” to illustrate the actions the authors have taken to counter the effects of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day.

### **Methods**

The testimonios included in this paper were the result of numerous informal discussions among a group of Latinas who played various roles at the university and who wanted to undo the long-term effects of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day. These informal meetings started immediately after the event took place and lasted about a year. The meetings were organized on an as-needed basis, weekly or monthly, and were used to share information about discussions and activities related to Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day and diversity issues on campus. The meetings were a response to racist exclusionary practices, the chilly climate on campus, and the lack of power held in the participants’ hands. The meetings lasted from one to several hours as the women ate lunch or took a coffee break. The authors were invited to these meetings because of their expertise in Latina/o education, close connections with students, and leadership at the university. Similar to many community colleges and four-year institutions, the public university where Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day took place is experiencing a steady increase in the enrollment of students of color, particularly Latinas/os (Santiago 2007). During the time of the incident, out of over 31,000 students, 9.6 percent of the enrolled student population were Latinas/os, 67.9 percent white, 10.7 percent African American, .8 percent Native American, and 4.1 percent Asian. According to the 2004 University Fact Book, Latina/o student enrollment increased by 145 percent since 1991. Like many of the Latina/o faculty (forty-five total) and staff on campus, the authors of this paper were involved at the time of the incident in research and

mentoring programs related to recruitment and retention of Latina/o students. In addition, they taught courses and participated in committees that address issues related to students and faculty of color at the university.

As we attended the meetings with the women, we realized that beyond sharing information they were using testimonio to give witness and come to terms with the effects of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day. Specifically, they spoke about the chilly racial climate on campus, the fear and harm caused by the event, the denial of racism, and the need for healing and action. We asked the women to write down their experiences, and we then analyzed the narratives collectively. The testimonios included in this article are not an account of what took place during the event; actually, the women who speak did not witness it. However, they participated in events that followed. The testimonios included in this article, therefore, bear witness to some of the effects of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day while providing examples of how Latinas drew on their cultural wealth to survive them. The women used testimonio as a means to “bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure” (Latina Feminist Group 2001, 2). Inscribing these experiences into history has implications for understanding how Latinas challenge the effects of racism. The use of testimonio and personal narratives also has a long tradition in Latin America and among Latina and Chicana feminists as a vehicle of political feminist praxis (Latina Feminist Group 2001). Unlike traditional testimonial narratives, the testimonios presented here do not bear witness to the actual events that took place on that day, but instead convey the chilling climate and the aftermath experienced by the women. Our methodology for collecting and analyzing the testimonios was influenced by the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and the history of participatory research in Chicana/Latina scholarship. PAR is described as the collection of information to bring about social change (Smith 1996). In

PAR, researchers work collectively with community members to derive questions, collect data, analyze, and implement results (Greenwood, Whyte, and Harkavy 1993; Whyte 1989). PAR shares with critical and feminist pedagogies an emphasis on local knowledge, social action, and a disruption of traditional research roles. This focus on everyday life as the space where oppression is experienced, resistance is enacted, and knowledge is generated makes PAR a powerful methodological companion to Chicana/Latina feminism (Dyrness 2008). Chicana/Latina scholars of education have added a feminist analytical lens and a decolonial stance to participatory research methodologies by emphasizing the everyday survival strategies of Latinas as legitimate sources of learning and resistance (Delgado-Gaitán 1994; Villenas, Godinez, Delgado Bernal and Elenes 2006).

Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis' emphasis on feminist *mestizaje*—"a knowledge plan that interrogates the oppressive power and the erasure of the Chicanas across different feminist studies" (Hernández 2006, 81)—guided the reflections of the *mujeres* about how to specifically respond to the effects of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day. The group also drew on Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis, CRT and LatCrit emphasis on the array of Latina "cultural wealth"—"knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" to use their cultural knowledge for the purposes of analyzing Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day (Yosso 2005, 77). For example, the three women and the authors discussed their understandings of what it means to be Latina and talked about the ways in which they could use this knowledge to improve race relations at the university.

Ellie Hernández argues that Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis emerged in close connection to Chicana feminism and critical studies (2006). Although similar to LatCrit in its emphasis on the relevance of racism and experiential knowledge to

understand and challenge racial marginality, Chicana epistemologies are a central focus of Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis. Hernández defines Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis

As the knowledge production by women of Mexican American descent whose work has altered the structural and particular oppressive conditions determined by the colonial history of Mexico and the U.S. Southwest....The goal of such critical analysis has been to interpret and dismantle historical and structural conditions that oppress women, to demystify the truisms within culture that hold Chicanas to a subordinate role in society, and finally, to recast dimensions of power in all facets of life. (2006, 61)

Although the women who wrote the testimonios do not identify as Chicana, the estudiante and the profesora as well as the authors felt justified in relating the testimonios to a Chicana epistemology because their experiences as brown women resonate with the experiences theorized by Chicanas and because the events discussed in the testimonios took place in the borderlands. Specifically, the estudiante and the profesora found two ideas from Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis and epistemology particularly useful in interpreting their experiences of the effects of racism. Gloria Anzaldúa's (1990, xxvi) call for new "marginal" theories and Chela Sandoval's (1991, 53) "topography of consciousness in opposition" were helpful in illuminating the effects of racism against Latinas/os, yet also insisting that race and gender are noticed in order to promote social justice in universities. The ideas were used to envision strategies to align the women's educational practices to the values of equity and diversity encouraged by the university. We will discuss these strategies in the concluding section.

Ultimately the analysis of *Catch an Illegal Immigrant* led to discussions about how we could translate what we learned into actions to benefit our universities. We agreed that publishing the testimonios would be one way to share this knowledge. However, we also collectively agreed that making the testimonios public could make the women more vulnerable. One of the women told us that she was fearful of possible repercussions, including losing her job. Two women, a student and a professor, agreed to have their testimonios published only if they remained anonymous. Their narratives were edited by the authors of this article and discussed with the women to ensure their anonymity. We present their narratives along with the analysis. The authors selected the text from the testimonios that speaks to the various effects of *Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day* as experienced by the women. In addition to publishing the testimonios, we also agreed to share what we learned from this collective experience through our research and teaching.

### **Testimoniando to the Effects of *Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day***

In this section we present excerpts from two testimonios and include their analysis. We used LatCrit and Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis with the women to analyze both the content and implications of these testimonial narratives. Even though some of the literature that informs our analysis of racism is largely about black and queer students, our emphasis on LatCrit and Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis contributes to the new and developing field of Latinas in higher education. One testimonio is from a Latina graduate student who worked closely with diversity issues and student organizations on campus. This Latina estudiante was born and raised in a small town in Texas. She obtained her undergraduate degree in a Texas public university and worked with numerous nonprofit educational organizations prior to starting graduate school. She was born and raised in the U.S. by an Anglo mother and a third-generation Mexican-American father. Her mixed identity led her to experience the confusion of ethnic and racial labels and the frustration of ethnic identity

imposed by others. The second testimonio is from a Latina profesora who migrated to the U.S. as a teenager from Latin America. She completed her high school, college, and graduate education in U.S. institutions.

Both the estudiante and profesora learned about Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day from other people. The estudiante was attending a conference about Latinas/os in higher education. She explained how she learned about the incident and her reaction to the news:

I received a call from campus about the events and couldn't shake the feeling that this was nothing out of the ordinary. Then, I shared the news with others at the conference who shared my frustration of such events on our campuses. These people, like me, shared my frustration, but were not moved. After a while you become accustomed to such attacks, but at least when they are as blatant as this one, they cannot be ignored by the majority—or can they?

The profesora learned about the event from a student who told her during office hours, “Have you walked by the Student Union? You're going to like this! The Young Conservatives are running around with t-shirts that say catch an illegal immigrant.” Unlike the estudiante, the profesora was surprised and had an emotional reaction. She wrote, “I was stunned, my heart sank. I sat in silence thinking about my own safety as a Latina and the safety of many of my students.”

The estudiante was not on campus at the time so she was unable to attend the event. However, the profesora was in her office but chose not to witness it. Although their immediate reactions were different—the estudiante was not surprised or “moved,” while the profesora was surprised and paralyzed by

the news—both women questioned the long-term effects of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day. The estudiante thought about how the event would be handled, and the profesora worried about its impact on her and her students. Their uncertainty suggests that the estudiante and profesora endured a chilly and hostile racial climate against Latinas/os on their campus.

### **Chilly climate and denial of racism**

In defining racism the testimonios follow the position of CRT theorists who view racism as a prevalent rather than abnormal or irrational component of present-day, seemingly race-neutral, equal, and free educational norms and practices (Roithmayr 1999). Grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT), LatCrit emerged as a “spin-off movement” to focus on Latina/o issues as central to “American” questions of race and racism (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). In education, CRT focuses on the following themes: 1) the central and intersectional role of racism in organizing educational institutions and its practices, 2) challenging dominant ideology, 3) working towards social justice, 4) making experience central, and 5) relying on an interdisciplinary perspective (Solorzano and Yosso 2001).

The testimonios challenge the denial of racism made by the YCT, the administration, and even some Latina/o students, faculty, and community organizations. In her testimonio, the estudiante questioned the university’s interpretation of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day as an expression of diverse ideas. She uncovers a “sophisticated guise” in the YCT’s and administration’s use of a liberal rhetoric. Furthermore, she interprets its effects as a strategy to dismiss other interpretations of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day and silence the views of Latinas/os on and off-campus. As the estudiante explained,

Community members grappled with the fact that such events could be allowed to happen on our campus. The administrators repeatedly

responded by addressing issues of free speech. But this was HATE speech, not free speech. Wasn't it? I believe the biggest blow to Latinas/os came in the lack of response from the administration. For example, it wasn't until the Chancellor was publicly assaulted by the state legislature that Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day was addressed. Only afterward was a statement from the Chancellor officially released. Unfortunately, that was three weeks after the initial incident. The statement focused on the importance of diversity rather than on the students impacted. Of course, here I mean diversity of opinions, not the importance of ethnic and racial diversity in an institution of higher learning.

Chicana theorists such as Cherríe Moraga (1981) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) consider that analyzing race and racism is also integral to feminist theorizing. For Latinas/os the microaggressions of racial practices are specifically evident in discourses related to immigration because our experiences are simply interpreted as illegal, alien, and criminal (Villenas and Deyhle 1999). The continued view of Latinas/os as a "problem minority," particularly in educational contexts, suggests the prevalence and effect of the intersectionality of racism, sexism, and classism, in the interpretation of unequal educational outcomes (Cornelius 2002). In her testimonio, the profesora explained that the denial of her identity as a woman, Latina, and immigrant in her role as a professor allowed the racism of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day to remain unchallenged:

I have experienced similar expressions of racism that are justified as not directed at me or not intentionally hurtful. Most of them remain unnoticed by the public, but they are vivid in my memory adding layers that interweave my scholarship and practice in the academy.

Acknowledging a nonimmigrant mixed identity, the estudiante questioned claims of authenticity as the trope of Latinidad and racial empathy. She asked, “Does that disqualify me from feeling attacked?” The estudiante used her identity as a departure point to challenge assumptions that only immigrants can understand or identify racism and furthermore be affected by it. Her view is further reinforced by the Latina group that also felt attacked even though they are not of Mexican heritage. In addition, the estudiante challenged public justifications of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day as resulting from ignorance, while at the same time she recognized the effects of racism even on those who are not its direct targets:

It is because of this duality of my being, my identity, that I am ever surprised by the fact that others are blind to the injustices that happen to those around them and they appear unaffected by them.

This Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day also challenges the reticence of some Latinas/os against affirming their identity in terms of race and interpreting their experiences in relation to racism (Torres-Saillant 2002). Linda Heidenreich (2006) shows how a “sophisticated guise” is enacted when it comes to racism even among college student organizations that serve Latina/o students. She argues that Latina/o fraternities and sororities are modeled on white supremacy because they exclude others, lack social awareness, and do not include activism into their objectives and strategies. The denial of the effects of race and racism is also indicative of the denial of racial conflict among Latinas/os. The testimonios speak to this conflict and question its effects. For example, the estudiante noticed the power struggles among Latinas/os for public control of discussions with the university administration:

The weeks rolled by with action after action on both sides, that is, both sides of the Latinas/os. It wasn't long before Latinas/

os themselves were infighting and struggling to claim the issue as their own. Student organizations wrestled with faculty and community organizations for control of the issue. Students within the organizations wrestled for control of meetings and agendas. Is this the way things happen in our community? Or are we acting out of internalized oppression?

Similarly, the profesora pointed out this internal conflict when she discussed what she described as a “battle of turfs” over who would get to represent the Latina/o perspective of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day in “closed door meetings” with the administration:

Yes, what became known as Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day was noticed in our campus and across the nation. I was present at some, although not all, of the events that called attention to that day. Nevertheless, the pain, uncertainty, humiliation, anger—the often considered problematic bag of emotions—were discarded as irrelevant even by Latinas/os who I considered allies.

This denial of racial conflict even within the Latina/o population reflects dominant views of diversity that exist in many U.S. educational institutions (Berlak and Moyenda 2001; Giroux 1997; McLaren 1995). The hegemonic view of diversity continues to emphasize racial neutrality instead of racial awareness as a goal of equitable educational policies and practices on college campuses. For this reason, it seemed logical for the administration to seek a Latina/o spokesperson and for Latinas/os to support this approach rather than challenge it. For many students, like the estudiante, the myth of racial neutrality is paralyzing. The estudiante herself was stuck without answers, unable to

deconstruct this discourse and take action to challenge it:

I was not privileged to the private meetings held with administrators, students and community members. The word I received was that community members were writing the dialogue for students and making the issue their own. Unfortunately, the same story was true for faculty members. All of a sudden this turned into a call for a Mexican-American studies program. But wasn't this about a racist event that was held on our campus? Wasn't this about the unwelcoming environment that had been exposed? Yet again the issue was altered, and the voice of the students was muted.

While the profesora acknowledged and deconstructed the racially neutral rhetoric involving interpretations of the effects of *Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day*, like the estudiante, she experienced paralysis as its immediate effect. For example, the profesora realized that "For me, the wound was real, but I was told or led to believe, that the infictive damage of racism was all in my head." She also felt "silent yet shocked and mostly disappointed by [her] own inability to clearly articulate the damage inflicted to students, faculty, and staff in our campus." She felt marginalized by the administration and colleagues, felt disappointed by her inability to provide leadership to students who needed it, because she did not want to jeopardize or undermine existing efforts.

### **Fear and Harm**

The testimonios also illustrate the fear and harm experienced by the women as a result of *Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day*. The estudiante expressed her sense of isolation and fear as she tried to find her voice and work with other students, which she described as "behind the scenes." Upon her return to campus after the incident, the estudiante learned that the administration

justified the actions of the YCT as free speech. Because of this, the university did not reprimand the organizers or condemn the event. Instead, weeks after the event took place and as a result of public scrutiny, the Chancellor issued a statement stating the university's support of diversity. As a result the estudiante asked, "How did that become the focus? Where was my right as a student to feel safe? Where was my right to be heard? Where was my right to be recognized by this university?" The estudiante felt that her point of view was disregarded by the administration and her voice was "muted" by the faculty and community leaders that claimed to represent the Latina/o point of view of Catch and Illegal Immigrant Day. Thus, the estudiante was ultimately harmed by the dismissal she experienced from faculty and administrators because they disregarded her questions. The estudiante felt that even after months of the event the "issue was never too far from our minds, it seemed ever present."

A year later the YCT organized a similar event called "Invasion." This time Latina/o student organizations were informed ahead of time and allowed to set up a table directly across from the YCT. The university newspaper reported the event and during the following weeks articles were published about diversity issues on campus. One article in particular discussed the progress made after Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day and the resulting dissolution of a campus Diversity Task Force. Although not insisting on the so-called authentic voice, once again the estudiante noticed that the articles did not include interviews with Latina/o students. Instead one featured a comment from a YCT member along with others from faculty. Ultimately, the estudiante wondered, "Why are we [the students] letting other people do our bidding? Why is this issue being robbed from us in the same way our dignity and safety was assaulted on the day of Catch an Illegal Immigrant?"

In the case of the profesora, her experiences of harm and fear were related to the dismissal of emotion and the conflict she felt in relation to the expectations of students and colleagues. She was harmed by the emotional damage caused in the denial of the racist implications of the event. She was also harmed by lack of acknowledgement of her Latina identity and immigrant background as part of her role as a university professor. In addition, she was afraid of her own safety and the safety of her students on campus:

I wondered if any of the students who took my classes were involved, either in organizing the event or if they gathered to witness it, and I thought about what I would say in class the next day. Could I keep my composure? Would I be able to stay calm? How could I protect my students? How could I protect myself?

She felt isolated by colleagues who were quick to dismiss the effects of the event and failed to organize as a collective unit. Furthermore, she was afraid of sharing the emotions she experienced as a result of the event and felt vulnerable among colleagues and students. As with the estudiante, this fear continued months after the event:

Every time I walk into a classroom now I wonder about my own safety and the safety of my students. No one has forgotten the events of that day. Indeed, in my classes, students continue to ask about it often wondering what the university is doing to discuss and prevent racism in our campus. We have not been able to move on as a community and certainly have not moved forward.

Unlike Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day the profesora witnessed its counterpart, the "Invasion." She found herself forced to see it because she had to walk by it

on her way to teaching a class. The profesora took her class to this event and prepared with her students a set of questions to ask in order to stage a “counter-invasion.” Yet she was afraid of the responses she would have to endure from those who organized it:

As I greeted students and announced that we were going to the Invasion, I apologized for gasping my words. I blamed my out of shape body, but I lied. My inability to speak was the result of my fear. I was afraid because I was portrayed as a so-called invader in an institution that I care about and respect. I felt that there was very little I could do about this portrayal.

The presence of her class was noticed by a reporter covering the event for the campus paper. It was explained in the following way: “A professor felt secure in taking her . . . class to witness the event . . . A class trying to learn on campus—now that’s a miracle” (Editor 2006). Indeed, the event was hailed in the campus newspaper as a success because ideas were exchanged, “discussion was possible,” and the actions of those who participated in the event seemingly went “beyond the prima donna crap so often associated with border politics” (Editor 2006).

As with the estudiante, the professor’s reasons for attending the Invasion were dismissed, her fear was not acknowledged, her presence was misinterpreted as a sign of success, and her critical voice was insulted. The profesora questioned this interpretation, suggesting that the distortion of her feelings and dismissal of her reasons for attending the Invasion result out of the lingering harm of *Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day*:

Like the newspaper’s editorial, the distorted view that exists about Latinas/os in my university has prevented our community from

acknowledging and responding to the violence and deep-rooted climate of fear that exists inside and outside our campus. In turn, Latinas/os like me—those of us in positions of leadership—are experiencing a paralysis that prevents us from speaking freely and passionately about the fears that cause our hearts to ache.

### **Healing and Action**

The process of collectively bearing witness to the aftermath of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day helped the women affirm a collective differential consciousness. They learned to acknowledge that as Latinas our experiences are at times contradictory and conflictive. For example, the testimonios by the estudiante and profesora are very different. The estudiante questioned her voice because of her status as student and her mixed identity as Anglo and Mexican, which is not supported by the Chicano nationalist rhetoric about racial purity (Russell y Rodríguez 2000). She also felt that her lack of personal experience with immigration suggested to others that she did not have a stake in the issue. In the case of the profesora, her immigrant background made her feel vulnerable and at risk. The inability of the reporter and those involved in Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day to acknowledge her Latina identity also led her to feel invisible. Yet, despite the differences, the profesora and estudiante shared the common experience of fear and harm as a result of the event.

Their collective consciousness is reflected in their choice to use the term “Latina,” but this should not necessarily be taken to represent their agreement about the use of this label. “Latina” was the label they kept using in their conversations to refer to common responses of confusion, isolation, and fear over Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day. Thus, the informal discussions that led to the testimonios helped the women explore and theorize their latinidades feministas or Latina feminisms

(Latina Feminist Group 2001). By engaging across Latinidades and academic rankings, they learned to challenge the legitimacy that the academy and traditional pedagogies afford to faculty as the sole producers of knowledge. Ultimately, they disrupted the hierarchy of student, staff, and faculty by identifying a common experience of marginality. This common experience helped strengthen their bond as Latinas. They gained a sense of collectivity from their unique individual experiences of the aftermath of the event, while grappling with the confusion, fear, and isolation it generated.

Ruth Behar discusses the significance of the act of sharing a life story (1990). A life story is important, according to Behar, because the act of telling this personal narrative is about teaching and learning. Tiffany Ana López further expands the significance of the act of storytelling through the idea of “critical witnessing.” Here the importance of a story relates to its impact to bring to light the conditions that gave rise to the story in the first place (López and Davalos 2009). In this sense, the story is significant because it teaches or instructs about something that needs to be changed (López and Davalos 2009). Other scholars also discuss the personal narratives of Latinas in relation to their pedagogical significance. In describing Concha Delgado-Gaitán’s research about the multiple literacies of Latino homes, Villenas (2005) acknowledges that the power of Delgado-Gaitán’s work has to do with what she did with the stories she heard. Delgado-Gaitán was not only a researcher who listened, but she also became a storyteller as she shared the stories she heard with the community. In the process of listening and telling, she transformed the aims of scholarly research to include action and activism. She engages PAR with a Chicana feminist inflection. Through storytelling, Latinas, according to Villenas, manage to emphasize our ability to survive: “not only to endure but also to create meaningful lives that are constructed and reconstructed through stories and writings” (2005, 275).

Literary theorist John Beverly (2004) specifically elaborates on the pedagogically transformative significance of testimonios. The “act of testifying or bearing witness is significant because of the narrator’s intention to tell an urgently personal story” (Beverly 2004, 32). For Beverly, the urgency of telling in testimonios has to do with the personal representativeness of the story. In this way, “testimonio constitutes an affirmation of the individual self in a collective mode” (Beverly 2004, 34). According to Beverly, the pedagogy of testimonio comes through its collective, dialectical, and interpellating form. Testimonios represent the individual in the collective conveying, as Beverly suggests, “the truth of the other” (2004, 7). Dialectically, testimonios interrupt narratives that exclude and question the legitimacy of subaltern voices, and at the same time speaking to or against the hegemony of other forms of expression. Throughout the informal meetings and in the collection of these testimonios, we realized that the process of collectively sharing feelings and thoughts about Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day helped the authors learn from the mujeres and develop with them a “coalitional consciousness” (Sandoval 2000). Chela Sandoval identifies a coalitional consciousness as rooted in the differential set of tactics that women perform every day in order to survive. These tactics of *sobrevivencia*, survival, are unique technologies, processes, and procedures—a methodology practiced by the oppressed. Practitioners of a methodology of the oppressed use “unprecedented forms of language,” as transformational tools (Sandoval 2000, 76). These tools, according to Sandoval, are the guiding apparatus that can challenge the racism prevalent in university settings. The mujeres’ testimonios affirmed our experiences of a chilly climate and our fears as Latinas in the academy. Most importantly, the testimonios helped us realize the need for healing and action as well as the possibilities to transform the effects of racism in our campus by relating our experiences as Latinas to the roles we play in the university. In addition, we also realized the need to engage a consciousness of

coalition to challenge the distance resulting from the compartmentalizing of our academic activities as students, faculty, and staff.

As the administration and others quickly dismissed the consequences that Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day had on the safety, well-being, and sense of worth of Latinas/os within the university and argued that Latinas/os were dwelling on the negative, the profesora noted in her testimonio that even Latino colleagues asked students during a public forum to “move on” when they shared how they felt about the incident to administrators. The women learned that “taking it personally” reaffirmed their commitment to uphold the values of equity, diversity, and higher learning in their own university roles (Berlak and Moyenda 2001). They realized that institutions of higher learning, despite their problems, can be vehicles of social equity and transformation and contribute to social justice (Anzaldúa 1990). This was evident to the estudiante as students, faculty, and community members rallied together to organize a candlelight vigil. Social justice is about giving voice—challenging, and overturning ideas and practices that are considered normal, while opening spaces for alternative ways of thinking and doing. In this case, the experiences described in the testimonios as well as the collective discussions that informed them prompted the women, including the authors of this paper, to encourage students and colleagues to talk about the effects of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day and, more importantly, drove all of us to take action by incorporating what we learned into our own daily activities as university students, staff, and faculty.

### **Consejos and Praxis in Latina Feminist Pedagogy**

Ironically, just one year after Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day, immigration reform caught the attention of the U.S. public, government officials, and the world.<sup>ii</sup> In the concluding section to this paper, we share some consejos in the

form of pedagogical examples to illustrate how in our teaching, mentoring of students, and research we: 1) put into practice what we learned from the testimonios, 2) challenge the effects of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day, and 3) align our daily practices with the values of diversity, equity, and student-centeredness that are part of the mission of our university.

The Spanish word *consejos* means advice in English. But as it is used in Spanish, *consejos* also means “nurturing advice,” often expressed through cultural narratives shared by adult relatives to children or younger siblings (Delgado-Gaitán 1994). In addition, *consejos* “implies a cultural dimension of communication sparked with emotional empathy and compassion, as well as familial expectation and inspiration” (Delgado-Gaitán 1994, 300). *Consejos* are imbued with *sabiduría* or intellectual knowledge generated from every-day learning. As noted by Delgado-Gaitán, Latinas use *consejos* as educational narratives that counter “the school hegemony” (1994, 298). The practices that we describe in this section were inspired by the testimonios and developed out of a deep sense of caring and concern for our university and for the educational future of Latinas/os in higher education. We developed a sense of responsibility and kinship from discussing the women’s experiences of the effects of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day. Caring and responsibility are the ties that bind us to the university and that imbue our work with social justice. Sharing our *consejos* instead of advice allows us to ground our activities in a Latina feminist praxis and show that the cultural resources of Latinas have a place in the university and can be used to its benefit (Bernal 1998). As *consejos*, the advice that we provide here is meant to have practical applications and consequences. However, our *consejos* are not meant to be prescriptive or comprehensive, rather our attempt here is to show how the value placed on everyday experiences and collective sharing emphasized in Latina/Chicana critical feminism can be used proactively to transform the racist climate that exists in many campuses.

To deal with the confusion, isolation, and fear resulting from Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day, we relied on the importance of voicing experiences, creating a coalitional consciousness, and promoting the cultural wealth of Latinas/os to inform our mentoring of students, design of classes, and our selection of research topics. Sylvia Hurtado et al. suggest that curriculum, faculty contact, and support of diverse student organizations promote a campus climate of diversity (1998). In mentoring we explicitly encourage students to voice their experiences about their lives, the university, their classes, and their views of us as mentors. We do this by creating spaces that invite students to speak from their multiple subjectivities. Specifically, when we mentor Latina students, our *consejos* develop out of dialogue about their identities as Latinas, their lives outside of school, the challenges, responsibilities, and also joys of being a Latina in the academy. Rather than assuming that our ethnicity and gender automatically create a bond with Latina students, we work on building *confianza* by allowing students to bear witness to their lives as Latinas/os in college. We use dialogue as a practice of genuine caring (Valenzuela 1999) or Chicana caring (Furumoto 2009) to acknowledge multiple oppressions, and we emphasize this dialogic practice by inviting students to speak on their own behalf, in our classrooms, departments, and on campus.

Furthermore, we contribute to a coalitional consciousness by being visible to students as both Latinas and university professionals. We attend events and activities on- and off-campus for incoming and existing students and present ourselves as Latinas in the academy. We connect students to existing networks on- and off-campus that are concerned with Latina/o issues. We also encourage students to build coalitions with allies and contact non-Latino/a faculty, staff, and organizations on- and off-campus to facilitate a coalitional consciousness across gender, race, class, and sexual orientation (Hurtado 1998). In the case of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day, we communicated with students about

meetings and discussions that followed with members of the administration and community. We were present at a meeting scheduled a few days after Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day with administrators, staff, students, faculty, and community representatives from the local chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). In addition, we encouraged all of our students to attend a Unity Rally organized by a coalition of student organizations and campus programs. We served on campus committees that developed a report about Latina/o issues at the university as well as one that supported diversity requirements in the university core curriculum.

We work with students to help them uncover the cultural wealth available to them inside and outside the university. Soon after Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day, Chicana(o)/Latina(o) students registered a new student organization devoted to mobilizing, responding, and educating the university community about the effects of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day. The first activity organized by the group was a campus vigil to commemorate the lives lost by thousands of Mexican and Central American migrants as they attempt to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. Soon after, they collaborated with campus organizations, faculty, staff, and community leaders in a follow-up event that brought awareness and dignity to the immigrant community. This coalition set-up 500 crosses to identify and commemorate those who died crossing the border. Both authors are active supporters and promoters of the group's activities and have mentored individually or as a group the students involved. Recently, the group, along with one of the authors, began peer-mentoring activities for high-school students and fundraising events for a local immigrant rights organization.

In a direct effort to counter the effects of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day, both authors collaborated with others on- and off-campus to provide high

school counselors, parents, and students information about the enrollment of undocumented students on our campus. The event included financial aid experts from the state and the university to explain the process of enrolling under special provisions that offer in-state tuition rates to qualifying students. Additionally, the event included testimonios from students who benefit from these provisions.

In our teaching we emphasize the importance of voicing experiences, creating a coalitional consciousness, and promoting the cultural wealth of Latinas/os through course design and educational programs. For example, these pedagogical principles guided the design of an undergraduate course, *Latinos in the U.S.*, around an oral history project that documents the educational experiences of Latinas/os. Students interview Latina/o faculty or Latina/o students, transcribe, analyze the interviews, and present their findings to the class and the public. The oral history assignment is a favorite of students not only because it gives them a chance to do a “real project,” but also because it allows them to learn about themselves, about each other, and about other Latinas/os. Undergraduates who have taken this class have participated in local and national conferences and published their papers in a journal for undergraduate students. More importantly, the Latina/o and non-Latina/o students who enroll in this class get exposed to the multiple challenges Latinas/os experience as they navigate the educational pipeline. Latina/o students in particular learn that Latina/o voices do not necessarily need to say exactly the same things. As the contributors to the anthology *Telling to Live* propose, the engagement in feminist praxis requires sustained dialogue among and across multiple latinidades (Latina Feminist Group 2001). This process requires a “relational framework” through which Latina/o students are encouraged to recognize how “our group histories and lived experiences are intertwined with global legacies of resistance to colonialism, imperialism, racism, anti-Semitism, religious fundamentalism, sexism, and heterosexism” (Latina Feminist Group

2001, 19). The oral history project creates a pedagogical space to learn about multiple experiences as the foundations of a Latina/o epistemology and forms coalitional ties across multiple identities (Pizarro 1998).

Our research interests have also been shaped by the effects of Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day and the women's testimonios. After experiencing the divisive effects of a community under attack and in an effort to create supportive spaces on campus for Latina/o students, one of the authors devoted her Master's degree to developing a stronger Latina/o community on campus. A three-phase program developed as a part of her practicum incorporating Latina/o students in a networking event with other Latina/o faculty and staff and then expanding to include students still in high school. The program also brings together the parents of high school and college students. The authors continue to pursue research interests related to the higher education of Latina/o students, especially those who are undocumented. Both authors currently collaborate with teachers and students using PAR methodologies and Latina/Chicana feminism that involve media technology to give witness to the educational experiences of youth often considered at risk of educational failure because of their race, gender, socioeconomic, and immigration standing.

These examples illustrate how LatCrit and Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis can be used as praxis to challenge the proliferation of racism against Latinas/os in U.S. universities. LatCrit and Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis illuminate the intersections of race and gender and the value of Chicana epistemologies to understanding the effects of racist events such as Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day. LatCrit and Chicana Feminist Critical Analysis guided the mujeres through the process of reflecting and transforming its effects. Our recommendations to deal with the effects of racist events in college campuses—voicing experiences,

creating a coalitional consciousness, and promoting the cultural wealth of Latinas/os—and rely on the value of consejos as an example of the pedagogical relevance of testimonios. These consejos can be incorporated into the design of courses, student mentoring, and selection of research to promote a climate that supports Latinas/os and promotes equity and diversity in higher education.

### Notes

<sup>i</sup> A similar event took place about a year earlier at Southern Methodist University (SMU), this time involving a bake sale in which white students were charged one dollar and fifty cents for a cupcake, while “minorities” were only asked to pay fifty cents. Unlike Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day, the bake sale in protest of affirmative action was shut down by SMU administrators. Other Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day events were planned by various student organizations in 2006 at Penn State, Michigan State, and the University of Michigan, but unlike the event in Texas, these did not come to fruition. The following year students and officials from two Texas universities were made aware of racist photographs posted on popular college student internet sites such as Facebook.com. The pictures showed students from Tarleton State University enjoying a celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. day while eating fried chicken, drinking malt liquor from bottles wrapped in paper bags, and posing for the camera in their rendition of gang clothing. Another set of pictures showed first year law students from the University of Texas at Austin wearing afro wigs and name tags with traditionally Black and Latino names during a “Ghetto Fabulous” party.

<sup>ii</sup> The day and the aftermath were a prelude to the legislative xenophobia reflected in the 2006 immigration reform proposals issued by the U.S. House and Senate. The message to “catch an illegal immigrant” crystallized in legislative proposals that criminalize undocumented immigrants, further militarize the U.S.-Mexico border, and make English the national language. What was different in 2006 is that Latinas/os in massive numbers loudly and clearly broke their silence and had their voices heard in vast demonstrations around the country.

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