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Demanding Social Change at Indiana University: Latino Student Activism in the Mid-1970s

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This historical study examines Latino student activism at Indiana University Bloomington from 1974-1977, and reviews the influence of activism in higher education. Using the Chicano movement as a lens to examine this case study, the political tactics used by Latinos and university administrators was investigated.

What is the true function of American institutions of higher education? Some would say that it is to create leaders and a skilled labor force for our country. Others would claim that a college education make girls and boys into ladies and gentlemen of culture and refinement who can appreciate fine art and intellectual conversation. Yet others believe that colleges and universities function as social institutions that make the American Dream possible by rewarding hard work with a degree and social mobility.

Student activism demanded an answer to these questions by challenging administration to honor the promise of social mobility and access for working class and ethnic/racial minorities. This historical analysis begins with a brief overview of higher education in American society. Focusing on the social contract between institutions of higher education and society to provide a means for social mobility, provides context for the story of Latino student activism at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) during the 1970s. As this story is told, interpretations of Chicano activism by various scholars are provided as a method to compare local events to *el movimiento* (the movement) at the national level. The analysis concludes with an examination of the effects of student activism in higher education and IUB today.

The Debate over the Purpose of Higher Education

Since the first institution of higher education was established in the United States in 1636, the American people have had differences of opinion.

On one side there are those who view American education as an agent to conserve and socialize, an *instrument of social control* [italics added] to perpetuate the culture and produce the next generation of citizens and workers. The outcome of this approach, however is usually to maintain an existing social and economic order (Hume, 1995, p. 325).

Colleges during the colonial era were considered institutions that would instill the appropriate values, culture, and religious education necessary to become leaders in their communities. The Yale Report of 1828 defended the value of a classical education against the tide of vocationalism

in higher education curriculum by stating that college may not be for everybody: "Men of mere practical detail are wanted, in considerable numbers, to fill the subordinate places in mechanical establishments; but the higher station require enlightened and comprehensive views" (Rudolph, 1977, p. 70).

Eventually, colleges opened their doors to women and people of color. This new class of student saw education as a means to change the social role they were given. "On the other side are people who view American education as a liberating agent, as an *instrument of social change* [italics added] whereby the historically disadvantaged and the newcomer can obtain some measure of quality" (Hume, 1995, p. 325). Governmental innovations, such as the Morrill Land Grant Act in 1862 and the GI Bill, solidified federal support for the masses to be able to afford a college education and become part of the middle class. The social contract between higher education and American people was made—the promise of access to college was given to students who were ready to work hard regardless of their class, ethnicity, or gender.

Focusing on the era of the student protests (the 1960s and 1970s), the debate of the purpose of higher education (an instrument of social order versus an instrument of social change) became an outright battle during this time period. Different groups took a side of this debate: the older generation of administrators imposed social order and held fast to the principles of American meritocracy; the young activists believed that the social contract of promising opportunities for higher education was not being honored and the university was not the liberating agent of change for the disenfranchised. By looking at this era of student unrest, we can evaluate how these beliefs clashed with each other, and how these beliefs were manifested in the actions of the students and the administration.

Further centering the scope of inquiry, the history of Latino student activism at Indiana University Bloomington during the mid-1970s will be unfolded. To inform this case study, analyses of Chicano historians will be interwoven to provide a national context of the Chicano movement: its philosophy, political agenda, and the various interpretations of the significance of student activism to *la causa* (the cause) and higher education.

One should note that the Latino student organizations at Indiana University did not claim Chicano identity, yet they held the same ideologies of Chicanismo, the political strategies used by predominantly Mexican American political activists. The choice for the Latinos at IUB not to identify as Chicano may have been because Chicano signifies a Mexican heritage, whereas Latino encompasses all Latin American cultural backgrounds that more accurately represented the mixture of Mexican and Puerto Rican cultures represented at IUB (*Report on the Situation of U.S./Latino Affairs*

at Indiana University and Proposal for the Establishment of the Office of the Dean for Latino Affairs, 1977, p. 11). Linking the activities at IUB to the broader social movements of the Chicano students creates a context to understand the perspectives, motivations, and tactics used by the Latino students.

Document analysis was used as the methodology for this study. Written communication of university administration, newsletters, and letters culled from the university archives were analyzed. Articles and letters published in the university student paper, the *Indiana Daily Student*, were included as well.

September 17: The Beginning of a New Campaign of Activism

As in September 17, 1787, when the men of the Constitutional Convention affirmed their right to "secure the blessings of liberty," Latinos were demanding their right to their share of higher education's blessings on this historical day in 1974.

We, the concerned Latinos of Indiana University at Bloomington, and the Latino community of the state of Indiana have several grievances against Indiana University. The University is well aware of the needs and problems of the Latino. This can be attested to by the myriad of reports and recommendation dealing with Latinos which have flowed out of the University at the administrative and academic levels.... We, the concerned Latinos of Indiana (sic) University at Bloomington, along with the Latino community of the state of Indiana demand to have this situation corrected. (Concerned Latino Students at Indiana University, 1974)

And so began a new campaign by the Latino student activists at IUB. This was not the first time that Latinos challenged the university administration, nor was this the last. However, the level of planning and engagement as demonstrated by university records was distinctive. Previous campaigns influenced the development of the assistant Dean of Latino Affairs position and the establishment of La Casa (The House), a cultural center focusing on uplifting Latino culture.

Latino students were not the only ones dissatisfied with institutions of higher education, nor were they the first to protest. Inspired by the militaristic organization and confrontational strategies of the Black Panthers, several disenfranchised groups (Chicano, Asian American, and women, for example) created their own political agendas and ideologies (Solomon, 1985). At the core was the students' belief that the role of institutions of higher education could be change agents for their communities, thus embracing the ideal of universities as instruments of social change. The student protesters embraced the three key areas for social change in higher education that were

clearly articulated in *El Plan de Santa Barbara* written in 1969 at a student conference at University of California, Santa Barbara.

First, it emphasized the obligation of college and university Chicanos to maintain ties with the barrio community. Second, it stressed the importance of changes to institutions of higher education that could open their accessibility to Chicanos. The hiring of Chicano faculty, administrators, and staff was viewed as a key step in achieving the objectives. Lastly, the Santa Barbara plan called for the alternation of traditional European white interpretations of history, literature, and culture to incorporate Third World viewpoints and particularly Chicano perspectives. (pp. 225-226)

These Latinos were not coming to college to be socialized into the successful middle class. Rather, they were seeking to change it to meet their own and their community needs.

The Chicano political design of bridging community and the university together for the upliftment of the barrio was critical in the September 17 campaign. Students mobilized the community to support their concerns. The Office of the President was flooded with letters from Latino community organizations and businesses demanding that the university take more active measures to increase the Latino student population at Indiana University. All letters cited the disproportionality of Latinos at IU compared to the percentage of Latinos in the country—only 150 out 30,714 students were Latino, much less than the representative 5% of the Latino population in the U.S. at that time (Concerned Latino Students at Indiana University, 1974)

And what were the students' concerns written in the letter to the university president? The main demands were measures to recruit and retain more Latinos at Indiana University, such as the hiring of Latino student affairs staff and guaranteed financial aid for all newly admitted Latinos. Another demand was to increase the allocation to the Chicano-Riqueño Studies program. These demands were in alignment with the goal of ensuring Latino youth access to higher education as stated in *El Plan de Santa Barbara* (Concerned Latino Students at Indiana University, 1974). "The students' emphasis on higher education and the development of Chicano Studies exhibited an optimistic belief in the role of the school as a societal institution" (Quiñones, 1990, p. 141).

The students also stated they wished to meet with President Ryan to talk about their concerns. Instead, they, like the community organizations, received correspondence that detailed the support staff and programs already in place for Latino students. In his letters to the community organizations, Ryan wrote, "I am puzzled by your letter concerning our recruiting Latino students. Are you aware that considerable effort, personnel, and financial assistance has been given this program?" (Ryan, 1974).

The students received another letter in response to their September 17 campaign from university administration. Horacio Lewis, the Assistant Dean and Director of Latino Affairs, wrote *An Open Letter to I.U. Latinos* (1974). "This open letter is provided so as to put things within proper perspective and to appeal to your good judgement as mature responsible students. We must not destroy what we have accomplished thus far! Let's move ahead instead." He was not part of the September 17 campaign, and future actions lend to the interpretation that he aligned his political activism in the tradition of the older generation that oftentimes clashed with the younger generation's approach to political activism. He still believed that the system would work if one went through the right procedures, whereas the new Chicano movement believed that the system of higher education had failed and needed aggressive political activism for change.

Horacio Lewis was a representative of the middle class. García (1997) illustrated the middle class Mexican Americans as integrationists: "secure in their neighborhoods and in their professional or skilled circles," and "too overly conscious of status" to be moved to mobilize in the Chicano movement (p. 73). In other words, the middle class was accused of being *vendidos* (sellouts) to *la causa* (the cause). Lewis's plea to the activists indicated his endorsement of working with the system that he was a part of, thereby placing him on the opposite side of the educational debate as an enforcer of social order within higher education.

Rudolfo Gonzales, a major leader of the Chicano movement, illustrated the Mexican Americans' struggle to be both a Mexican and American. Those who have achieved middle class status struggled with choosing status as a acculturated American against maintaining their cultural pride. The poem excerpted below captured this internal struggle.

I look at myself and see part of me who reject my father and my mother
/and dissolves into the melting pot to disappear in shame./ I sometimes
sell my brother out and reclaim him/ for my own when society, gives me
token leadership/ in society's own name. (excerpt from *I Am Joaquin* by
Rudolfo Gonzales)

Was Lewis labeled a *vendido* by the students? Not at the outset (Alianza Latina Medioeste de America, 1973). Only a year into his appointment, Lewis was asked via a formal letter to have a meeting with the students of the La Casa council to address the widening gap between him as an administrator and students (La Casa Council, 1974). Students were upset that they were required to set up appointments to meet with him. His advice to work with the system instead of challenging it most likely further angered some of the student activists. They wanted a more active and accessible partner for their political activism.

A Liberating Agent within the Social Order

Continuing the campaign for increasing the number of Latinos admitted at IU, Alianza Latina Medioeste de America (ALMA, or the Latino Alliance of the Midwest) sent a letter in October 1975 to President Ryan requesting again to meet with him to talk about hiring a recruiter that would be culturally competent and effective in recruiting Latino students (Alianza Latina Medioeste de America, 1975). African American students already had a university program called Groups, and Lewis considered administrators of this program "downright hostile" towards the idea of expanding their recruitment efforts to include Latinos (Lewis, 1975).

This request did not result in action by the president, however, the new vice president, Robert O'Neil, was quick to act and soon proved to be responsive to the concerns voiced by the Latino students. Having moved from a teaching post at University of California, Berkeley and specializing in the legal aspects of the First Amendment, he was not unfamiliar with being in an environment of very vocal and politically charged students. His misstep taken a few months after taking office of proposing that the Office of Latino Affairs be merged into the Office of Afro-American and Minority Affairs was vehemently shot down by the students, faculty and staff who felt that the needs of Latinos could not be addressed properly in such an office (Moore, 1975). O'Neil quickly learned that the students at the Bloomington campus were very vocal in their opinions and had the expectation that their input would be considered in major university decisions.

In fact, Latinos were also mobilizing to promote a full deanship for Latino Affairs. Students considered it unfair that a dean was warranted for Afro-American Affairs and Women's Affairs, but Latinos only had an assistant dean. Over 650 signatures were collected from a petition drive and presented to the new vice president. Additionally, letters of support came in from faculty and alumni. No records about Lewis's support or opposition to this student movement were found, demonstrating yet another major political campaign in which he was not a critical part of (Committee for Latino Academic Autonomy and Las Mujeres de Hoy, 1975).

O'Neil took the activism seriously, and in less than a year after his appointment he began the process of hiring a Latino recruiter in January 1976. A few months after that, the vice president spelled out his three-item agenda of increasing minority enrollment in the *Indiana Daily Student*. One, the hiring of a Latina that could work in the barrios to recruit students to IU. Two, his intent on creating a "more detailed [Affirmative Action] plan so departments can be committed in their goals to hire minority faculty" (Brodt, 1976). Third, he further included Latinos in the university administration by presenting to the faculty a proposal for the Dean of Latino Affairs.

Embracing the key goals of *El Plan de Santa Barbara* of increasing college access, bringing the university to the barrio, and putting in place measures to increase the number of Latinos in the faculty, O'Neil became a liberating agent for social change and the administrative ally that the Latino students needed.

Loss of Confidence

Frustrated with what students perceived to be Anglo-centered ways of interacting with students, Horacio Lewis was presented with a letter demanding his resignation:

Dean Lewis,

We know that your position was created as a result of student demands. Your prime responsibility is to us, Latino students. Yet your office has been permeated by a formal, closed atmosphere. We must make appointments to see you. We generally end up talking to your secretary. Your office has become a replica of the Anglo bureaucratic, impersonal model. We are not Anglos . . . we are Latinos! . . . We must make you aware of the fact that many Latino students ya no tienen confianza en ti. You have had many chances in the past to correct these deficiencies. We will not continue to accept your unresponsiveness, mis-management, and closed nature. For the good of Latinos at Indiana University we ask that you tender your resignation to the administration. (Concerned Latinos, 1976)

Lewis lost acceptance as a member of the movimiento (movement), and lost confidence of the Latino students for whom he was hired to serve. His absence in the political campaigns was painfully apparent. Additionally, the actions that he did do were interpreted as sabotaging and self-serving. ALMA, the most vociferous of the Latino organizations, was angered that Lewis shortened the annual Latino recruitment program for high school students without their consent. ALMA organized this event since 1967, and they duly felt ownership of it.

It is not clear how other factors affected Lewis's credibility with the Latino students. One student speculated that Lewis was never considered a real Chicano because of his Panamanian background (Desits, 1976). One could also speculate that he was considered a middle-class vendido because his administrative style embraced the Anglo tradition of protocol and bureaucracy instead of taking on the familial and approachable manner that Latinos desired.

Yet another possibility could have been that Lewis had a token position in which he had very little administrative authority and a woefully inadequate budget to fund the needs of the Latino students, resulting in him being effectively restrained from campus politics. He did hold two appointments

(assistant dean and director of Latino Affairs)—he may have found it impossible to offer the individualized and immediate attention that the Latino students expected. Lewis may also have had to face racism and marginalization as a person of color in a predominantly White administration.

The extent of the effect that the loss of confidence letter had on Lewis remains unknown. He shared with the *Indiana Daily Student* that his resignation was not necessarily due to the letter, but rather involved a larger picture that was “very complex” (Latino Affairs dean resigns, 1976, p. 2). Lewis may have been referring to the reconfiguration of the Office of Latino Affairs as proposed by O’Neil to create a full deanship had been approved by the faculty senate.

The history of the Office of Latino Affairs from the Office of Strategic Hiring and Support painted a different picture of Lewis’s time at Indiana University. According to this source, Lewis reflected upon his time IU by stating: “[T]hat position will forever stay close to my heart.’ He remembered that students of the time, which he affectionately called ‘los revolucionarios,’ ‘were ready to do what needed to be done in order to get the services and attention they needed’” (Horacio Lewis, personal communication, April 6, 1999 as cited in Office of Strategic Hiring and Support, 2004). This historical account further goes on to say that when students again protested the Office for Latino Affairs administration years after Lewis’s departure, they wished for a dean who was an activist along the same lines as Horacio Lewis (Office of Strategic Hiring and Support, 2004).

In the Office of Strategic Hiring and Support’s historical account, there is no mention of the loss of confidence letter or reasons for Lewis’s resignation from Indiana University, nor his level of activity in any of the protest activities organized by the Latino students. The picture painted did not discuss the disagreements between the students and Lewis, thus leaving one to question the validity of this historical account. It is unknown if the Latino student body years later did wish for a new dean similar to Lewis, or if this was an assumption made by administration.

The Impact of Student Activism

How influential was the Chicano movement in converting higher education to become more of an instrument of social change? Several scholars have differing opinions regarding the degree of influence that student activism had on the restructuring the university culture. Chicano history scholars debate over the influence that the young students had on the Chicano movement—after all, how much does change in higher education carry over to the barrios?

Rudolph’s (1977) assessment of the student movement of the 1960s indicated a belief that students were not looking for change in higher educa-

tion, but rather political power. Student activism did not bring about change in the ways that courses were being taught, nor did it cause faculty to yield its authority to students. Lazerson (1998) characterized student activists as unruly troublemakers who did not face consequences of their sometimes violent and in-your-face antics. Both Rudolph and Lazerson portrayed the student political activism as acts of self-indulgence and with no true interest in transforming higher education into institutions of social change.

Indiana University’s administration also questioned the legitimacy and true intent of the Latino student activists. In an annual report from the Office of Latino Affairs for the tumultuous year of 1976 when Horacio Lewis resigned, the intent behind the student activism was questioned. Were the students from ALMA really voicing the concerns of the Latino community? And, was it appropriate for the university to respond to a “small, but vociferous” group of protesters? This report also reduced ALMA’s “senseless” political activity to a method of maintaining membership (Annual Report 1976-1977, 1977).

García (1997) believed that the youth political activity was not as significant to the Chicano movement as other historians claim. He believed that the Chicano student activists and faculty were too far removed from the barrios and protected from the daily injustices to have truly been in touch with the movimiento and to have created truly fundamental advancements. Agreeing with Rudolph (1977) who claimed that real social change required a commitment longer than four years and by the people who would be affected by it in their daily lives (in this case, Rudolph was talking about faculty and university administration), García stated:

a closer look at the Movement reveals that it remained dominated not by students or youth but by adults who had experienced Anglo-American prejudice for an extended period...Adults lived in a permanent environment that required more than an office of Chicano student affairs, or representation on faculty and student committees, to make fundamental changes....The most influential activists were those who agitated within their barrios rather than at the university. (pp. 134-135)

García questioned the influence that college students could have because he believed that college student activism ended once a student left the university.

Yet, the institutions of higher education are vastly different today when compared to how they were before the student political activism. University campuses during the 1960s and 1970s were instruments of social change as students watched their peers conduct sit-ins, protests, and circulate petitions demanding social justice for the poor, the discriminated, and the dismissed.

While the racial and social class make-up of university faculty and administration remains relatively unchanged, they are now held accountable for upholding the social contract, another result of the student protests. Today, enrollments of students of color and first-generation college students are monitored. And while teaching methods may not have changed, students now have the option of taking ethnic studies courses and going to cultural centers—resources that may not have existed before the 1960s.

While there is evidence for both sides of the debate as to the effect of the student protests on the culture and purpose of institutions of higher education, the effect of including ethnic studies into the academy is the most compelling evidence for the impact of student activism. What is considered to be worthy of further study and what is in university curriculum are two sacred purposes of higher education. The students who demanded rewriting of history to include disenfranchised groups and who felt that the scholarship of people of color (such as bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, and W.E.B. Du Bois) was worthy of further study forced academics to consider new epistemologies and new lines of inquiry. Rudolph (1977) stated that the inclusion of ethnic and women's studies not only served the psychological needs of disenfranchised students, but

were also an admission of the degree to which the curriculum had ignored or denied the cultural and historical meaning for blacks and Western culture of the legacy of racism, slavery, and colonialism, as well as the existence of vital traditions outside the Western framework. Women's Studies challenged one discipline after another—history, English, psychology—to welcome women into curricular equality with men: Women became a subject. (p. 265)

Curriculum, or what was being taught and researched, which is the most sacred and protected part of a university, was changed because of student demand for inclusion and relevance.

Chicanos fought for recognition in academia to legitimize their history, experiences, and to be considered worthy of further study. With new theories being used in academia such as LatCrit and critical race theory, Chicano Studies courses being taught in college classrooms, and even Ph.D. programs in Chicano Studies, the legacy of Latino student activism continues to grow.

The fight for recognition flowed out of the classrooms and affected the Latino communities as well. "Student activism had a wide impact on many activities including community politics, where the older leadership and political practices were often challenged effectively" (Quiñones, 1990, p. 119). As demonstrated in the Latino student activism at IU, a political strategy was to coordinate efforts between the barrio and the university. Petitioning

and letter campaigns that included faculty and community organizations publicized the Chicano movement in a scale unknown in the movimiento before. The cause of increasing access by the hiring of a Latino recruiter was another example of bridging the community and the university.

El Movimiento Today

Are universities *institutions of social order* that maintain social standards and perpetuate cultural values, or are they *institutions of social change* that change in time to meet the needs of students and its community? Looking at the impact of the Latino student activism at Indiana University Bloomington, as a lens to view the impact of student activism, one may conclude that students created many changes in their communities and at Indiana University. Now, in 2007, more than 30 years later from the activities discussed in this paper, the Latino student population is much more than the 0.5% it was in 1974. The population is now a little over 2% with 849 Latinos enrolled for Fall 2005 (University Reporting and Research, 2006). While this number is not nearly representative of the percentage of Latinos in Indiana (3.5%) or in the United States population (12.6%) (Bergman, 2004), it is a significant increase from the 150 in 1974.

The battle for equity is still being fought. In 1998, the Office of Academic Support and Diversity created a task force to evaluate its recruitment and retainment of graduate students. The recommendations included the adoption of a collaborative working model that encourages communication between administration, faculty, and students to work with the community and each other to recruit and retain underrepresented students—yet another indicator of the need to join community and university for social change to truly occur (20/20: A Vision for Achieving Equity and Excellence at IU-Bloomington, 2003).

Perhaps looking at this debate with a completely dichotomous view may not help one to identify how power and influence affected change. Often, and to the detriment of the movimiento, activists adopted an either/or mode of evaluating who was an ally. The working class was for la causa, and the middle class were vendidos against it. The students were for the movement, and the administration was the enemy. One either fully embraced the Chicano ideals, or one was an assimilated sellout who embraced Anglo culture. Adopting the either/or approach does not give one a chance to appreciate the work of people who were not Latinos, such as Robert O'Neil who used his influence to create a Dean of Latino Affairs and a recruiter for Latinos.

The golden age of the Chicano movement ended in the 1970s, and since then college campuses have not witnessed levels of student activism comparable to what was experienced during that time. However, the activ-

ists who were students at that time settled into various sectors of industry and professional careers, including academia. Most likely, they have continued on with their struggle for equality more quietly but with continued commitment to la causa. Their voices may not be as loud as in their youth, but they continue to slowly reconstruct institutions to be agents of *social change* to help advance the Latino community. And, most importantly, their positions as faculty and administrators have placed them in positions to become part of the *social order* within academia.

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