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Hispanics Playing in the AAR's Field of Dreams

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The Past, Present, and Future of Scholars of Color in the Religious Academy

Several years ago, that great modern-day public theologian – Stephen Colbert of the popular Comedy Central show “The Colbert Report” – began accepting applications for the position of his very own “black friend.” Realizing the importance of political correctness, Colbert thought it would be crucial to have a black friend he could point to just in case he was ever accused of being a racist. He was so committed to the effort of not appearing to be racist that he had to ask someone else, before choosing from the pool of applicants, which ones were black, because he was, after all, “color-blind.” Don’t academic institutions do likewise?

Unfortunately, Colbert's approach to racially and ethnically diversifying his cadre of friends is similar to the approach many within the academy take in trying to diversify. Over the past twenty-five years of the American Academy of Religion's (AAR) existence, not much has changed as to how scholarship conducted by Latina/os is incorporated into the dominant discourse. Tokenism remains the acceptable safe norm.

For some institutions, the hope of diversification is more for the sake of political correctness than intellectual prowess. After all, if hiring Latino/as is done for the sake of the institution's academic excellence, it would then mean that most schools which lack this presence also lack scholastic rigor. Voices from such communities are needed to show diversity, à la Colbert, but must be kept at bay lest they actually influence the discourse. In an effort to appear politically correct, the attempt to create diversity takes on some strange manifestations. In one extreme, there exists the presumption that academic standards must be lowered in order to include Hispanics and other scholars of color. Who among us haven't been at a faculty meeting discussing diversity in connection to a new hire when someone voices that as important as diversity is, academic rigor cannot be compromised? During an academic organizational meeting in which I recently participated, the conversation revolved around the anonymity of paper submissions. Some argued that the main reason against anonymous reviews was to ensure diversified panels at AAR. By seeing the names of those submitting papers, the academic unit coordinator can proactively diversify those presenting. Although the sentiment may appear to be well-meaning, it reinforces the prevailing assumption that Hispanic scholarship falls short of Eurocentric excellence.

Let's ignore for the moment that a Latina/o last name proves nothing concerning the ethnicity of the person. Christina Gomez (a fictitious name with no resemblance to an actual person) could be the result of fifth generation German-American Christina Smith marrying John Gomez whose descendants lived in what eventually would become New Mexico since the fifteen hundreds, neither one having any connection to or understanding of the present-day Hispanic community. Or, Christina Gomez may indeed be a first generation Latina, but may succumb to the pressure to assimilate so as to succeed within the academy.

Any decision to find salvation through assimilation is difficult to unpack. Obviously, individual motives are always complex. Exploring human relationships, educator Paulo Freire noted that everyone in some part of his or her being seeks to be a "subject" who is able to act and transform her or his environment. Thus, members of marginalized communities, who are objects acted upon rather than subjects who do the acting, have an escape route. While habitually alienated and acted upon, they desire acceptance and want to become subjects in their own right. The safe route is to imitate the dominant society whose acceptance they crave. In a very real sense, their consciousness becomes submerged. They become unable, or unwilling, to see how the operating interests and values of the dominant culture are internalized (1994:25-30).

My dear friend and colleague, Tink Tinker, illustrates another strange manifestation of preserving the privileged space of Eurocentric scholarship. Dr. Tinker is well known within the Academy as one of the foremost Native American theologian. In 1992 he was originally hired as the Associate Professor of Multicultural Ministries. When he requested to change his title to Associate Professor of Native American Theologies so that his title would be more congruent

with the scholarship in which he engages, the theologians at his school blocked the title change. In their view, Dr. Tinker could not call himself a theologian because, in their minds, he was not properly trained as a theologian. In other words, he was not trained in nineteenth-century Eurocentric theology – leading one to ask why a person who specializes in Native American theologies must first learn European theologies in order to be considered adequately trained to teach Native American theologies. As a result, today Dr. Tinker’s title is Professor of American Indian Cultures and Religious Traditions. Euroamericans do the universal high-scholarship called theology; Native Americans (along with other scholars insisting on theologizing from the context of their marginalized communities), in the minds of many Euroamerican scholars, just do the subjective-scholarship of particularity called traditions.

Now for the second example. An administrator, while evaluating the performance of a well-known Latino scholar, informed him that his scholarship lacked substance.¹ Because he approaches his scholarship using an interdisciplinary methodology, and because he is prolific, he could not possibly have covered the different topics with the thoroughness required by most academicians. When this particular scholar asked which of his books, four having received national awards, lacked the depth sought, he was informed that the administrator hadn’t read *any* of his books. What the administrator was really saying is that because he, as a scholar from the dominant culture, was unable to write several interdisciplinary works and receive national recognition for them, then how could the scholar of color do so as a Latino.

¹ It is interesting to note that another administrator from this scholar’s institution questioned his level of “maturity” when discussing a promotion in rank, a term I doubt the administrator would ever use when assessing the academic contributions made by a fellow white scholar.

These two examples illustrate the difficulties faced by scholars of color whose work is dismissed because the academy uses different standards when evaluating their scholastic accomplishments. The refusal to allow Dr. Tinker to be called a theologian and the critique by those who need not read the interdisciplinary works of a Latino to know it lacks academic excellence are based on the presupposition that religion as a discipline is rooted in the nineteenth-century European definition of what religious education is. Even though our postmodern conversations may have convinced us to reject such meta-narratives, not much has changed over the past one hundred years of the Academy's existence. Scholarship within the field of religion remains a constructed discourse, legitimized and normalized by those who have the ways and means to make their subjectivity objective, hence, determining who is "in" (academically rigorous) and who is "out" (interesting perspective but lacking academic excellence). "Academic excellence" becomes code-language for fluency in Eurocentric meta-narratives. Latino/a perspectives might be interesting, but they will always fall short. Refusal to anchor the Hispanic scholar's work in the Eurocentric canon is viewed with suspicion. In the final analysis, excellence continues to mean Eurocentrism – even when studying non-European perspectives.

In the 1989 movie "Field of Dreams," Kevin Costner plays an Iowa corn farmer who hears voices commanding him to construct a baseball field. He is repeatedly told: "If you build it, they will come." After building the field, the Chicago "Black" Sox mysteriously show up for a game. Will Hollywood magic work for the Academy? If we build a field for scholars of color to play in, will they too just show up?

If you build it, they will come. There is no question that the work done by visionaries who fought hard to carve out a space at the AAR table has benefitted those of us who have come after them. It is fitting that those who have previously served as chair of the Committee for Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession be sincerely thanked for all their hard work. But before we pat ourselves on the back for building a field of dreams upon which many today are playing ball, we still need to raise the concern that the good work done thus far is still not enough in the eyes of those who equate academic excellence with a Eurocentric cannon.

I am becoming painfully aware that our presence is requested to demonstrate a politically correct diversity; nevertheless, our scholarship remains ghettoized. Having scholars of color as officers and directors of the AAR is a tremendous step forward within the Academy and should never be underestimated. Still, to simply limit ourselves to having a few faces of color sitting around the table while ignoring our contribution to the overall discourse fails to seriously consider how power operates. In a way, we are already set up to fail. And when our strategies do fall short, the present scholars of color who work tirelessly to increase participation from our respective communities will be held responsible, while our white colleagues who employ the rhetoric of the need for our presence can continue to feel good about themselves for supposedly doing everything they could to remedy the situation. We say we want to see more people of color participate in the Academy, but I suspect we don't really mean it.

For Hispanics to insist on doing scholastic reflection from their social location always runs the risk of becoming invisible in the eyes of the Academy. Allow me to demonstrate. The last decade of publications by the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (2000-2009)

reveals how Hispanic scholars intellectually do not exist and how invisibility has become so normative within the academy, that few – if any – even notice their absence. In the 40 volumes of the journal published during the first decade of the millennium,² 325 articles and essays appeared, of which 7 (or 2.51%) were written by a Hispanic. Of these seven, only four (or 1.23%)³ were written from and/or about the Latina/o context.⁴ These 40 volumes also contained 828 book reviews, of which 13 of the books reviewed (or 1.57%) were published by a Latino/a. Not all 13 books dealt specifically with the Hispanic social context, only 10 (or 1.21%) did. The 325 articles and essays which appeared during the first ten years of the millennium contained 11,732 cited scholarly works in the reference section at the end of each article. Of these citations, 174 (1.48%) referenced the works of Latina/os⁵ and Latin Americans.⁶ If we were to focus only on scholarly works written by U.S. Latina/os, those who are part of historically marginalized U.S. communities, the number would drop to 120 references (or 1.02%). If we eliminate the 4 articles that were written by Hispanics, the number of references citing Latina/os drops to 76. That's 76 out of 11,732 citations, or about .64% of all references made to a Latino/a author by non-Hispanics! Even the .64% is misleading when we consider that over half of the

² Four issues per year for ten years equal forty volumes.

³ It should be noted that I authored one of those four articles (Vol. 69, No. 4).

⁴ Although celebrating that Hispanics should not be pigeon-holed solely to doing scholarship about the Latino/a community, still, three of the seven articles dealt with Eastern religions, meaning that only four articles specifically dealt with contributions made to the discourse from the Hispanic context.

⁵ When I was unable to verify the ethnic characteristic of a scholar, I gave the cited author the benefit of the doubt and counted the scholar as a Hispanic.

⁶ In a vain attempt to inflate Hispanic participation, I defined Latin Americans to include authors from Spain, Portugal, and Brazil.

works cited did not even deal with the Latina/o social location, but quoted a Hispanic scholar writing about a different discipline, usually Eastern Religious traditions.

Hispanics may be physically visible; but they are certainly intellectually invisible. The message rings loud and clear: scholarly contributions by Latina/os are neither recognized, accepted, or known. So here is the real question: Why should Latino/as belong to institutions that do not recognize their scholarship, organizations where their perspectives are not taken seriously? I suspect these numbers raise questions in the minds of my white colleagues as well. Specifically: What will the future of the Academy look like, especially as it continues to ignore the voices of Hispanics?

During a recent institutional search for a biblical scholar, I asked the prospective candidate (a Euroamerican man from an Ivy League school) if diversity of resources used in the classroom was important to him. After he provided the politically correct response that diversity in race and ethnicity was important, I followed up with an additional question, asking which authors and books he would use in his courses to achieve his pedagogical goal. After a long pause, he finally responded that he was not aware of any major works of biblical scholarship that were written by a person of color. At least most of the other candidates (not just in the field of biblical scholarship) were able to pull from the recesses of their minds the name of a couple of well-known men (seldom women) of color who wrote major works in the 1960s, 70s, or 80s, ignoring that since then, newer voices have entered and changed the discourse.

Nevertheless, if I were to show these scholars that regardless of their claim of desiring diversity in the classroom, they are still trapped in an academic milieu that silences Hispanic

voices, more likely than not, the critique I offer would quickly be dismissed because it is coming from an “angry” Latino. When the scholarship of Hispanics is not dismissed for being non-essential, they are dismissed as some sort of anger response. As tempting as it may be to level such a critique against Hispanic scholars who challenge the Eurocentric canon and/or the normative academic structures, it is important to refrain. Even though the Hispanic may be portrayed as lacking intelligence or simply being hostile, they do provide what W.E.B. DuBois called a “double-consciousness” that is capable of revealing what those blinded by their privileged status have missed. Why? Because Latina/os are forced to learn how to function and survive within an academic setting where they lack power and privilege as well as live within the confines of their own world. This double-consciousness, and at times triple- or quadruple-consciousness, provides an insight into the prevailing religious discourse usually missed by those whom the Academy customarily privileges.

Although one would be hard-pressed to categorize the theologians in the Tinker example or the administrator in the Latino example as bigots or racists, still, they reveal a prevalent institutionalized racism which exists within the academy that appears absent of racists. No doubt, some are consciously bigoted; still, it is important to stress the complexity of institutional racism. In some cases, the institution deliberately excludes scholars of color. At other times, this exclusion has been so normalized that it may not even be recognized. These theologians and administrators are no doubt well-meaning Euroamericans who believe in equality and are vocal in their desire to encourage and have diversity in their institutions, yet they unconsciously (or maybe even consciously) allow the social structures undergirding our academy to

discriminate for them. By reducing racism solely to the bigot, we ignore how Euroamerican scholars who are well versed in race analysis still remain complicit with racist structures that exclude Hispanics, a point I will explore in greater detail toward the end of this article. Suffice it for now to say that when Euroamericans wish to diversify their departments and conduct a job search, they are more likely to hire a white scholar than a Hispanic candidate with identical credentials, convincing themselves that they are pursuing “academic excellence,” and thus hiring the candidate that best “fits” regardless of race or ethnicity.

While finishing my dissertation, several well-meaning white colleagues continued to reassure me that as a Latino I would have no difficulty obtaining a tenure track position. After all, the truly oppressed group today is white males who need not bother applying for academic posts because, as the logic goes, they are only hiring people of color. As one colleague who did not receive the position which I did told me, affirmative action means that mediocrity trumps academic excellence. The only reason he did not get the job, and I did, was because, in his mind, he was white, not because my *curriculum vitae* indicated a wider accomplishment in publication. White resentment toward the consequences of hiring a Hispanic rather than a so-called more deserving white candidate is not a consequence that the Hispanic might have been a better candidate, but due to an unfair advantages given to nonwhites (i.e., affirmative action) that can only be mediated when everyone is treated the same, ignoring how social structures within the academy continue to privilege whites. Although we may laugh at Stephen Colbert’s quest for a black friend, such laughter unmasks a color-blind discourse wishing to preserve white

advantages through the denial of racial differences, best accomplished by advocating the myth of color-blindness.

It was thanks to affirmative action that I received my first academic post, according to the colleague who was not hired. And yet, if indeed people of color were consistently being hired over white candidates, you would expect our institutions to demonstrate more diversity. The reality is that the vast majority of professors being hired throughout all academic institutions continue to be white. This is evident when we note that in the academic year 2007-2008, even though Latina/os represented 14.7% of the U.S. population, they disproportionately represented 3% of theological faculty. Of the 3,622 full-time faculty in 253 ATS schools, only 124 were Latina/os. Two-thirds of ATS member schools have no Hispanic faculty member. Latina/os, who represent the largest ethnic group in the United States, remain the least represented group among ATS faculty, representing only 2 per cent of all full professors in the academy.⁷ The Hispanic Theological Initiative (HTI), which tracks Latino/a scholars beyond just ATS schools, records 162 Hispanic faculty working within the United States. Hispanics are disproportionately relegated to the “instructor” or “lecturer” rank where they possess little if no voice on how the academic institution structures itself or in influencing doctoral students (Rodríguez-Olmedo: 545-48).

For those Latino/as whose qualifications far exceed white candidates, the choice of hiring the scholar of color may be clear. But in the vast majority of cases, where competing interests are at play in picking equally qualified scholars, the social structures that historically protected,

⁷ Source: Association of Theological Schools: 2007-2008 Annual Data Tables.

maintained, and sustained the normativity of Euroamerican thought will prevail to the detriment of scholars of color. Hence, Hispanic scholars must publish three times as much as Euroamerican scholars just to get half the recognition. It is this embedded aversive racism, the existence of which many Euroamericans are oblivious to, that refuses to make room for Latina/os in the Academy, even after a hundred years.

And yet, even though most academic positions still go to Euroamericans, there is still a pining for the “good-old-days.” No doubt, among many tea-partier’s there exists lament for bygone days prior to affirmative action that assured whites, regardless of qualifications, would fill every empty slot in the workplace, the marketplace, and, of course, the Academy. In a perverse zero-sum-rule, every position earned by a person of color was interpreted as a slot “given” to a less deserving applicant — a birth-right taken away from a member of the dominant culture. Of course, most would not make the error of voicing racist comments or appearing to violate the rules of political correctness, at least not in the presence of people of color. Still, wishing to preserve white advantages through the denial of racial differences has led to the advocacy of color-blindness. White resentment toward the present economic crisis has led many to blame the so-called “unfair advantages” given to nonwhites, which can only be mediated when everyone is treated the same, ignoring how social structures continue to privilege whites. Even Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream that his children be judged by the “content of their character” and not “the color of their skin” has been co-opted to insist that affirmative action violates the spirit of King’s “dream,” and that true followers of King would advocate color-blindness.

Statistical trends reveal that, as a nation, we are becoming more segregated. When we claim color-blindness, we mask the link that exists between the ideal which Euroamericans claim to believe in and the segregated life they have carved out for themselves. By claiming color-blindness, Euroamericans need not be bigots. In fact, they can learn to be very politically correct, stigmatizing, with righteous indignation, those who utter racist comments. Those claiming color-blindness need not believe in or advocate white supremacy, because the social structures, as we have already mentioned, are racist for them, protecting their white privilege, even while they lament the lack of diversity in their lives. And whenever Hispanics who suffer disenfranchisement raise their voice in protest against the oppression caused by the segregated society they live in, they are dismissed by being labeled “reverse-racist” or simply “racist” by those claiming “color-blindness.”

It is indeed a curious thing that those who have spent most of their lives advocating legislation and policies detrimental to communities of color are usually among the first to accuse people of color of being racists. Take the 2009 example provided by former Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, who echoed the comments of radio personality Rush Limbaugh. Gingrich was calling for then-Supreme Court nominee, Judge Sonia Sotomayor, to withdraw her nomination to the Supreme Court because she was, in his words, “A Latina woman racist.”⁸ She has been attacked for lacking sufficient intelligence (graduating summa cum laude isn’t enough for Latinas) or for being too abrasive (translate as a non-docile Latina who speaks her mind). Some of the comments bordered on the absurd, as was the case with former Republican

⁸ Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “Two Sides Start Plotting Confirmation Strategies,” *The New York Times*, May 28, 2009.

presidential candidate Tom Tancredo, who called the National Council of La Raza (the Latino equivalent to the NAACP), an organization to which Sotomayor belongs, a “Latino KKK without the hoods or the nooses.”⁹

When I taught undergraduates at a predominantly Euroamerican college, I would have my students write a socio-political autobiography. Among the many questions I wanted them to answer, one was to describe the racial and ethnic composition of their neighborhood, their school, and their church. Another question asked later was to describe the lessons learned from their parents concerning people of different races and ethnicities. The overwhelming vast majority of my white students usually wrote that they lived, worshiped, and learned in an environment void of people of color. Of course they said the politically correct thing about how they felt cheated by not experiencing diversity and how they truly wished to interact with those who are their Others. A few paragraphs later, when they were supposed to share the lessons learned from their parents about people of color, they usually made comments like: “My parents taught me to treat everyone the same;” “I was taught to be color-blind, just like God;” or “I was taught that we are all God’s children and we should therefore love each other.”

What my students failed to notice is the link that exists between the color-blindness their parents taught them and the segregated life their parents carved out for them by specifically choosing where to live and what church to attend. Obviously, their parents saw color. Thanks to claiming color-blindness, they didn't need to be bigots; in fact they could be very politically

⁹ Oscar Avila, “Controversy Precedes Latino Conference - Economics in Focus Amid Criticism for Immigration Stance,” *The Chicago Tribune*, July 26, 2009.

correct. Again, they didn't have to believe in white supremacy because the social structures were racist for them, protecting their white privilege even while they lamented the lack of diversity in their lives.

Color-blindness is a social construction that has moved the discourse from addressing institutionalized racism to creating a political correctness that attempts to expunge individual bigotry. Racial injury is reduced to the individual, not the group. Racial injustice is rationalized as an expected outcome of individuals competing on a level playing field. And of course, a face of color is usually placed on a pedestal to prove that minorities who work hard enough can be as successful as white people. The Civil Rights movement is hailed as a success for eliminating most of our racist past as we speak more about living in a so-called post-racial world.

But Euroamericans are not the only ones contributing to the marginalization of Hispanic theological scholars. Complicating the academic environment is that theological education is still stuck in a black-white dichotomy that refuses to problematize the role and contributions of Hispanic thought. When both white and black colleagues redefine the U.S. Hispanic voice as Latin American writers and scholars, ignoring U.S. Latina/o academic production, they reinforce our marginalization and justify our physical and academic absence. In fact, Latin American scholars, who at times are from the same economic class as Euroamerican scholars, are preferred hires who are then counted as Latino/as rather than internationals.

Let us now see how the disenfranchisement of Latina/os plays out when we specifically look at the Ivy League. As we know, there are eight schools that are considered to be Ivy

League.¹⁰ Of the eight, we can dismiss Cornell because it lacks a religious studies program. Imagine if you will, what our reaction would be if I was to state that in the seven remaining Ivy League schools, in the 2008-2009 academic year, there were only one and a half women in the core faculty teaching religion. No doubt this would be an outrage. Protests would be organized throughout the Academy – and rightly so! We would seriously question their academic prowess, regardless of the fact that they are the Ivy Leagues. And yet, it has become normative to say today that while there are many women (although not enough) working at these institutions, there are only one and a half Hispanics teaching as core faculty in religion. No one blinks (although they may wink) because it is the acceptable racialized norm. The one and a half faculty members are comprised of one who is a medievalist, and the half, who while basing his scholarship on the Latino/a religious community, is half because he has a joint appointment with another department. Only having one and a half Hispanics teaching as core faculty members means that Latina/o voices are absent in providing any direction or leadership in shaping the future of these schools, and by extension, because these are the Ivies after all, the overall discipline.

Nevertheless, if present demographic trends continue, Euroamericans will cease to be the majority ethnic group in the U.S. within the next 30 years – with Hispanics representing about 25 per cent of the population. In fact, in many major cities and in several states, Euroamericans are already the minority. This means that in most urban and industrial centers, where Hispanics are

¹⁰ Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Penn, Princeton, and Yale.

predominant, the essential American religious perspective *is* Hispanic. Any academic institution of higher education that continues to ignore the changing demographics does so at its own peril.

Even through economic downturns, these Ivy League schools continue to have impressive endowments. If they really wanted to, they could simply endow several chairs on Hispanic Religious Studies and partially solve the dilemma. Hence, the absence of Latino/as in the Ivy League must mean that these schools are not serious about this issue at this time. Here, then, is the challenge facing Ivy League institutions. How can they, like Stephen Colbert, obtain tokenism without placing Hispanics in core faculty positions where they can impact the presumed universality of Eurocentrism? For if such voices were truly at the table, they would instill fear that maybe, just maybe, the universality that has for the past one hundred years privileged Eurocentric methods of religious study is really its own form of the particular.

They consciously or unconsciously employ three strategies to maintain Eurocentric supremacy. The first is to hire Hispanics to teach courses that do not deal with the U.S. Hispanic context. The search is on for Latino/a faces that speak with white voices. Quotas are met without having to deal with the scholarship being generated by these communities, or worse, fuse and confuse Latin American theological scholarship with U.S. Hispanic scholarship. Hiring someone from Latin America and calling them a Latina/o meets diversity quotas without needing to include the voices of those whose roots and perspectives are firmly planted in the *barrios* of this nation. The second strategy is to hire junior scholars, without tenure, to teach courses about the U.S. Latino/a context while continuing the historical trend of seldom granting tenure. In this way, after seven years, the school can find a new Hispanic to use and misuse, ensuring they will

never amass the power to challenge, influence, or change the discourse at the institution. The third strategy is to invite well-known Hispanic scholars to serve as visiting scholars. Again, while the U.S. Latino/a context is explored, the institution protects itself from structural change, because, after all, once the year-long appointment comes to an end, the scholar returns to her or his institution. As radical as they may have been, their absence quickly helps the institution forget whatever challenges may have been raised.

Ivy League institutions are not the only schools that fall into this trap. If we are to look at the so-called “second-tier schools” we discover a similar situation.¹¹ Of the fifteen university websites I explored in 2008, I discovered thirteen Hispanics teaching, of which eight are core faculty. While providing a greater space for the Latino/a voice than their Ivy League counterparts, as a whole, these second-tier schools are still sorely lacking. At least six of these schools have made a commitment to the Latina/o voice with either specific programs of concentration or hiring several Latina/o faculty. The rest either follow the Colbert model of diversification or are following the lead of the Ivy League in maintaining an absence of Hispanic voices.

If the academy is serious about addressing its complicity with white supremacy, it would do well to move away from Colbert’s model of color-blindness and political correctness toward actual praxes that would dismantle the normative structures that continue to privilege a Eurocentric scholarship rooted in a nineteenth-century model of categorization. If the Academy is indeed concerned about the next century of existence, we would do well to take the focus off

¹¹ Boston College, Drew, Duke, Emory, Georgetown, New York University, Notre Dame, Northwestern, Rice, Stanford, Temple, UCLA, UC Santa Barbara, University of Chicago, and Vanderbilt.

of the “problem” of lacking diversity, and the paternalistic question “how do we make room for them?” We should focus our conversation instead on how the field of religious studies is racialized and how the present structures conspire to continue the exclusion of Hispanic voices within the Academy.

Although a space has been carved out for scholars of color within the AAR, the scholarship taking place within that space continues to be ignored. When our scholarship is indeed engaged, it is usually at an elementary level. Additionally, because there are so many sessions and groups, many of our sessions are forced to conflict with each other, seldom providing the opportunity for scholars of color to cross-pollinate. Yes, we should rejoice that scholars of color, specifically African-American, Asian-American, Latina/o, and Native American, have their own groups and sessions. The importance of this should never be underestimated. Kudos to those who had the vision to form these groups and sessions. Yet, we must ask if we have inadvertently constructed exclusive cul-de-sacs from which to master our particular disciplines. Like a four-leaf clover, our separate cul-de-sacs operate side-by-side with few of us ever venturing into adjoining communities. Solidarity may occur from time to time, but it usually happens with little intellectual engagement. If we rail against most Euroamericans for not engaging our scholarship, then in all honesty, we must also hold ourselves accountable, for few of us, in our numerous books and articles, actually quote or dialogue with other communities of color. How is that different from what the Euroamerican community does to us? (De La Torre: 9).

Many of us are content to remain within our own academic niche. Others, because of the numerous sessions at a conference like the AAR, are unable to ever visit the neighboring cul-de-sac. How then can we, with any integrity, hold to task the dominant culture for not engaging the scholarly work within our own community when we too seldom engage the works of the adjacent cul-de-sac? More disturbing is when scholars of color are oblivious to how they and their communities are locked into structures that cause oppression to other communities of color. Where do we explore how our separate marginalized communities remain complicit in disenfranchising other groups, whether those groups are marginalized due to darker skin pigmentation, language, gender, sexual orientation, economic class, or different religious traditions.

Of course, we can recognize that the discipline has been constructed to force communities of color to compete against each other for the scraps falling from the table even when we sit at the table. When a department decides it wants to diversify its faculty, it usually asks potential candidates from differing communities of color to interview against each other for the one coveted “ethnic” slot, which usually is not tenure-track. When a professor decides for the sake of political correctness to “color” a syllabus, s/he usually picks just one book about just one community. When an academic administration decides to use resources to emphasize a racial or ethnic concentration, they pour their money into teaching the perspectives and experiences of one community in the hopes of attracting students from that community, not necessarily for the sake of their white students or in service of a broader contextual awareness. When publishing houses decide to issue or book stores decide to offer publications written from

and about communities of color, these books must compete for room on the shelf to which they are all relegated. Is it any wonder that some within communities of color might hold each other at arm's length? (*idem*: 10).

Maybe it is time for us to dream beyond the walls of the AAR. What if we build our field of dreams on the other side of the tracks? What if we, who are from different racial and ethnic communities, were to pick a weekend, once a year, just to gather and engage each other works? What if we present papers that cut across the different cul-de-sacs that presently exist? The field of dreams I'm envisioning is not a substitution for the AAR, but a space where our own scholarship can develop and grow in conversation with other marginalized ethnic and racial groups with whom solidarity can be built. Just as our own journal, *The Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion*, was created to deal with our invisibility within the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, maybe it is time to start dreaming of our own space for academic discourse, maybe even our own society?

Back in the 1970s, Latino/as were making inroads in the Miami business community. One of the most important organizations in the city was the Miami Builders Association. As Miami prepared for the next building boom, membership in the Miami Builders Association was crucial for any real estate developer hoping to succeed. There was just one problem: Hispanics were not welcome. Frustrated from being ignored and at the same time facing the hostility of having their work being constantly considered substandard, twelve Hispanic sub-contractors created their own organization: the Latin Builders Association. Today, the Latin Builders Association is the largest Hispanic builders' organization in the U.S., and one of the most

powerful political associations in Miami. Few Miami politicians can get elected without their support. As for the original Miami Builder Association? They are dinosaur, a relic.

The voices of scholars of color will eventually be heard. The question is where. The choice of forging our institutional future rests with those with academic power and privilege to do something about it. We can either walk toward a new mañana, or continue the failed policies of yesterday? How will we work together to build the field of dreams? The choice is ours, together, to act, or to keep doing business as usual.

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