

# *African American and Latinx Histories (April 14 update)*

*ILRGL 3805-001*

Professor Paul Ortiz

ILR School, Cornell University

Spring Semester 2025; M/W 2:55-4:10

Ives Hall, 105

*“Well, if one really wishes to know how justice is administered in a country, one does not question the policemen, the lawyers, the judges, or the protected members of the middle class. One goes to the unprotected — those, precisely, who need the law’s protection most! — and listens to their testimony. Ask any Mexican, any Puerto Rican, any black man, any poor person — ask the wretched how they fare in the halls of justice, and then you will know, not whether or not the country is just, but whether or not it has any love for justice, or any concept of it. It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have.”*

*-- James Baldwin, No Name in the Street (1972)*

## **Course Description:**

A study of African American and Latina/o histories, cultures, and politics from the American Revolution to present. Themes include slavery, colonialism, revolutions, social movements, labor struggles and emancipation. Oral traditions, poetry, theater, memoirs, and forms of expressive cultures will be an integral part of the course.

## **Course Objectives/Student Learning Outcomes:**

We will explore histories, cultures, and politics of the African, Caribbean and Latin American diasporas especially since the Haitian Revolution and the Mexican War of Independence. Students will gain a greater understanding of relationships between major hemispheric events such as the abolition of slavery in the Americas, the “Mexican American War,” the US Civil War and other epic events. We will delve into linkages between Reconstruction and the Ten Years War in Cuba including efforts by African Americans to support the struggle for Cuban independence. We will study ties between the expansion of empire and the *Jim Crow/Juan Crow* systems. Journeying deeper into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we will seek to understand Black and Brown workers’ freedom struggles against systemic racism in the Sunbelt, and the pivotal roles these workers played in the making of the New Deal. We will study the rise of the first and second Rainbow Coalitions between the 1960s and 1980s as well as the ways that Black and Latina/o workers contributed to the election of the first African American president in US history.

Students will learn how to craft persuasive written and oral arguments using grounded, historical analysis. Students will gain the ability to discuss contemporary social issues (including labor, immigration, foreign policy, and the US transition to a “minority-majority society,”) in historical context. Students will achieve greater understanding of the economic, political, and cultural integration of the United States, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa—regions scholars refer to as “The Global South.”

## ***COURSE FORMAT***

**Essays:** You will write three synthesis essays this semester. Your papers will weave readings together to grapple with the major historical questions. Each essay will be 5-7 pages in length. Your first essay will key on Piri Thomas’s *Down These Mean Streets*. In each essay you will reference the syllabus assignments, lectures, and class discussions. I am looking for serious engagement with the major themes, and historical comparisons of African American and Latino experiences. Synthesis Essay 1 due date: Friday, February 21.

**Essay #2:** Will be due on Friday, March 28. This essay will cover material in the syllabus from February 17 to March 17. The final essay prompt will be distributed the last week of class and will be due finals week. This essay will cover course content for roughly the final third of the seminar.

**Oral Presentations:** Each student will be part of one group that will give a 10-15-minute presentation on the entire week's readings during Wednesday's class sessions. The group will field questions afterwards. Each group will circulate a 2-page written outline of their presentation the morning of the day before class via Canvas that will present major themes of the group presentation. (The entire class will help me evaluate each group.)

Presentation grades will be based on the following criteria

- **Clarity**—how well does the group present a clear analysis of the reading to a general audience?
- **Research questions and historical context**—does the group frame analytical \*questions\* situating the reading/history in a broader historical context?
- **Revisioning History**—does the group explain how this body of work challenges and/or contributes to our understanding of US history?
- **Creativity in approaching the presentation will be rewarded!**

*We will use Canvas to sign up for the weekly groups after our first class. Each student should only sign up for one week. The intrepid "first weekers" will receive due consideration on their evaluations.*

**Cornell Writing Centers:** Offer free walk-in or scheduled appointments to assist students in writing essays at every stage of the process. Students who submit to me written proof of meeting with a Writing Center tutor (in the form of a summary of what was discussed) will earn an extra 3 points on their 1<sup>st</sup> essay.

**Grading:** Class participation/group oral presentation (10%); 1<sup>st</sup> synthesis essay (30%); 2<sup>nd</sup> essay (30%); final essay (30%).

**Office Hours:** I will be holding office hours this semester in my office at #288 Ives Hall. Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:00 to 2:00. My email address is: [portiz@cornell.edu](mailto:portiz@cornell.edu)

**Canvas Messaging:** A majority of our assignments and readings will be posted on our class Canvas page. Typically, I will send out 3-4 messages per week with updates, supplemental readings, questions, and general announcements. *Check our Canvas page on a regular basis for course updates.*

**Graduate Teaching Assistants' Office Hours:** Adolfo Romero, [ar2539@cornell.edu](mailto:ar2539@cornell.edu) (Tuesday, 12:00-2:00pm, Ives, 137); Michael Chai, [yc2722@cornell.edu](mailto:yc2722@cornell.edu), (Thursdays 10:00-12:00 AM, Ives 137)

**Required Texts:** (Available at ILR Library Reserves and Cornell Bookstore.) Piri Thomas, Down These Mean Streets; Juan Gonzalez, Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America; Paul Ortiz, An African American and Latinx History of the United States; Blair Kelley, Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class; August Wilson, The Piano Lesson; Martín Espada, Zapata's Disciple; Johanna Fernández, The Young Lords: A Radical History. (Cornell Library catalogs features links to free, online versions of most of these texts)

## Syllabus & Reading List

### ***PART I: RETHINKING THE AMERICAS***

*“Both the Spanish and the American colonial enterprises were grounded in racism—in a system of status inequality built on presumed racial difference.”*

*--Laura Gomez*

*“Opposite One-Drop Rules,” (89)*

*“It is urgent that our America learn the truth about the United States”*

*--José Martí, Cuba*

### **WEEK OF JANUARY 22: RE-VISIONING US HISTORY, SEEING THE AMERICAS WHOLE**

**Wednesday:** *Syllabus overview; introductions, ice-breaker*

[\*Frederick Douglass in Belfast, Ireland, 1846 \(CANVAS=CV\)\*](#)

[\*“Another Threat Against Mexico,” \*The Afro-American\*, June 20, 1925 \(CV\)\*](#)

[\*Yes, We Have No Bananas, \*The Cleveland Call and Post\*, July 3, 1954 \(CV\)\*](#)

Martín Espada, [\*Alabanza: In Praise of Local 100\*](#), September 11, 2001 (CV)

Martín Espada, [\*Litany at the Tomb of Frederick Douglass\*](#), November 7, 2008 (CV)

### **WEEK OF JANUARY 27: WALKING DOWN THESE MEAN STREETS**

*The goal is to have the full week’s reading completed by the Wednesday class session to be able to follow along with class lectures, films, etc. This means you should try to have most of the reading done by Monday*

***Monday Reading:*** Piri Thomas, [\*Down These Mean Streets\*](#), Introduction to pp. 148 and afterward.

Rojo Robles, [\*piri’s harlem: afro-puerto rican documentary and urban space\*](#)

In-Class Screening: [\*Half-Past Autumn: The Life and Works of Gordon Parks\*](#) (Finish film on your own)

In-class Screening: Film by Gordon Parks, “*The World of Piri Thomas*” (1968) (CV) (Finish film on your own)

[\*Interview with Piri Thomas\*](#)

Cesar Chavez, [\*Lessons of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.\*](#)

William Darity, Jr., et. al., “Umbrellas Don’t Make it Rain: Why Studying and Working Hard Isn’t Enough for Black Americans,” *Duke University Center for Social Equity*, (2015) (Canvas: CV)

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“[Wells Fargo Agrees to \\$175 Million Settlement Over Lending Discrimination](#),” 2012  
 Gordon Parks Foundation: [Poverty in Latin America Photographs](#)

Martín Espada: *Jorge the Church Janitor Finally Quits & Federico’s Ghost* (CV)

***Wednesday: First Group Presentations!***

Ian F. Haney López, "Chance, Context, and Choice in the Social Construction of Race," in: [The Latino Condition: A Critical Reader](#), 9-15 (Canvas: CV)

*Lecture: Racism, Labor and Functional Stereotypes*

**WEEK OF FEBRUARY 3: SPANISH HARLEM IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION**

**Monday Reading:** Piri Thomas, [Down These Mean Streets](#), 149-230.

**Film:** *The Bronx is Burning: “Decade of Fire,”* [Decade of Fire - Cornell University Library Catalog](#)

[RogerEbert.com review of Decade of Fire](#)

**Willie Perdomo** “[How Beautiful We Really Are](#)”

Héctor Tobar, “Home Country: What does it mean to be Latino?” *Harper’s Magazine* (2021) (CV)

Luis Alvarez and Daniel Widener, “A History of Black and Brown: Chicana/o-African American Cultural and Political Relations,” *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 143-154. CV

**Wednesday: Group Presentations,** Paul Ortiz, “Making History Matter: Teaching Comparative African American and Latina/o Histories in an Age of Neoliberal Crisis,” *for: Kalfou: A Journal of Comparative and Relational Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 3, Issue 1 (Spring 2016), 125-146. (Canvas: CV)

“Deaths of People of Color by Law Enforcement Are Severely Under-Counted,” California State University, San Bernadino, *Latino Education & Advocacy Days* (Canvas: CV)

Julissa Arce, “It’s Long Past Time We Recognized All the Latinos Killed at the Hands of Police,” *Time* (July, 21, 2020), <https://time.com/5869568/latinos-police-violence/>

James Baldwin, [Fifth Avenue, Uptown](#)

**WEEK OF FEBRUARY 10: HARVEST OF EMPIRE: MIGRATION IN THE AMERICAS**

**Monday:** Piri Thomas, [Down These Mean Streets](#), finish book

*In-class film screening:* Jonathan Robinson, “Every Child Is Born A Poet,” film on the life of Piri Thomas

*Piri Thomas:* “Voices of Fighters Against Oppression,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 1985 (CV)

**Wednesday: Group Presentations,** Juan Gonzalez, Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America, Introduction to 78

Martin Espada, "Now the Dead Will Dance the Mambo, Achill Island, Ireland, June 2000"

Tito Puente, "The King of Latin Music" and "The Mambo King" (1923-2000) (CV)

Listen: Susana Baca, *Sounds of Afro-Peru and Legacies of Slavery in South America*

Lecture/Slide Show, The Spanish "Casta" system, Mestizaje, and the development of race in the Americas.

## ***PART II: REVOLUTION & THE EMANCIPATION OF THE AMERICAS***

"First Haiti invented human rights, and then Latin America invented democracy."  
--Laurent Dubois

## **WEEK OF FEBRUARY 17: EMANCIPATORY INTERNATIONALISM**

**MONDAY: NO CLASS, FEBRUARY BREAK**

**WEDNESDAY: Group Presentations,** Paul Ortiz, *An African American and Latinx History of the US*, Author's Note to 94.

Paul Ortiz, "Memories of Revolution," Cultural Dynamics (2019), 410-417. (CV)

Carlos Santana, *The Light of the Supreme: The Mississippi Delta Meets Mexico City* (CV)

Watch: John Leguizamo's *American Historia: The Untold Story of Latinos, Part II*

"Why This Mexican Village Celebrates Juneteenth," *Texas Monthly*, June 19, 2021,

George Reid Andrews, "The Wars for Freedom 1810-1890," in Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000, 53-115. (CV)

Haitian and Dominican Relations: *A Conversation with Edwidge Danticat and Junot Díaz*, INTERVIEW: A conversation with Edwidge Danticat and Junot Díaz | Neo-Griot (kalamu.com)

"Casta Paintings: Inventing Race Through Art Reveals 18th-Century Attitudes on Racial Mixing," *National Public Radio*, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=3043790>

Suggested Listening:

[La Historia Uncovered: Episode #1 – Julissa Arce and Dr. Paul Ortiz](#)

**1<sup>st</sup> Synthesis essay due: Friday, February 21, 11:59 pm, Canvas**

## **WEEK OF FEBRUARY 24 : HEMISPHERIC TRADITIONS OF LIBERATION**

**Monday:** Paul Ortiz, *An African American and Latinx History of the US*, 95-142.

Paul Ortiz, [\*One of History's Foremost Anti-Slavery Organizers Is Often Left Out of the Black History Month Story\*](#), *Time* (2018)

Farm Labor Organizing Committee/Black Workers For Justice, Juneteenth, 2001 Event (CV)

Paul Ortiz, "[Cinco de Mayo About Much More Than Having Fun](#)," *The Progressive*, 2013.

Guadalupe T. Luna, "The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and *Dred Scott v. Sandford*: 'Aren't They All Illegal Anyway?'" in Stokes, Meléndez, et. al., *Race in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America*, 297-312. CV

José Martí, "A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire," "The Abolition of Slavery in Puerto Rico," "The Truth About the United States," in, *José Martí: Selected Writings*, 314-333. CV

[José Martí on Antonio Maceo](#), *Patria* (October 6, 1893)

*In-class Screening: Danny Glover, "Buffalo Soldiers"* (Start Film in class, finish on your own)

**Wednesday: Group Presentations,**

*Short Lecture: Frederick Douglass on the Causes of the Civil War*

## **WEEK OF MARCH 3: WORKING CLASS FREEDOM STRUGGLES**

**Monday: Group Presentations** (Due to Wed. Lecture) Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 81-163.

[Almost a Century Before Trump, the US Deported its Mexicans](#), *Mexico News Daily*, 1/17/2025

Dana Frank, [No Money, No Milk](#), *Hammer & Hope* (Summer 2024)

Dana Frank, [Trump says he'll expel a million immigrants](#). *Believe him — it happened before* *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 2024

Martin Espada, "Two Mexicanos Lynched in Santa Cruz, California, May 3, 1877" (CV)

**Wednesday:**

[More Black and Latina women are leading unions — and transforming how they work](#) *AP News*, 10/6/2024

**(Dana Frank Lecture in class)**

Gay Theresa Johnson, "Constellations of Struggle: Luisa Moreno, Charlotta Bass, and the Legacy for Ethnic Studies," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, vol. 33, (Spring 2008), 155-172 (CV)

Christina Heatherton, “University of Radicalism: Ricardo Flores Magón and Leavenworth Penitentiary,” *American Quarterly* (2014) (CV)

UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Initiative, [More Than Solidarity: How Labor Unions Preserved Latino Jobs](#) (During the COVID pandemic), 2021.

### **PART III: Literature and Liberation**

#### **WEEK OF MARCH 10: CLASS, MIGRATION & MEMORY: AUGUST WILSON**

**MONDAY:** Blair Kelley, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (Through chapter 2)

August Wilson, [The Piano Lesson](#)

[Elizabeth Catlett, American and Mexican](#) (1915-2012) (Explore “The Black Woman” print links)

**In-Class Film Screening,** [Piano Lesson](#)

**Wednesday: Group Presentations,** [James Baldwin Open Letter to Angela Davis](#) (1971) CV

“August Wilson, *Writing to the Blues*,” <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1700922>

#### **WEEK OF MARCH 17: INTERCULTURAL STRUGGLES: THE LITERARY WORLD OF MARTIN ESPADA**

*Essay Prompt Distributed at End of Class: Due March 28*

**Monday:** Martín Espada, [Zapata’s Disciple](#)

Martín Espada, [“Litany at the Tomb of Frederick Douglass”](#)

Martin Espada, [“Sleeping on the Bus,”](#) and [“Litany at the Tomb of Frederick Douglass”](#)

Paul Ortiz, *An African American and Latinx History of the United States*, 143-162.

**Wednesday: Group Presentations,** Paul Ortiz, [Arizona’s New Laws: An Attempt to Secure Cheap Labor?](#) *Truthout*, (2010)

*Listen:* “Now the Dead will Dance the Mambo,” by Martin Espada;

D. Bacon, [“How Mississippi’s Black/Brown Strategy Beat the South’s Anti-Immigrant Wave,”](#) *The Nation*

[Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance](#)

## PART IV: FREEDOM MOVEMENTS

### WEEK OF MARCH 24: UNTOLD STORIES

**Monday:** Blair Kelley, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (Chapters 2-5)

Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, 167-224

Watch: John Leguizamo's *American Historia: The Untold Story of Latinos*, Part III

[Latino Justice Website](#)

**Wednesday: Group Presentations,** Paul Ortiz, "[Fearless educator takes her place as a role model for all](#)," [The Hill](#) (2022)

**Friday, March 28: 2<sup>nd</sup> Essay Due**

**\*\*MARCH 29—APRIL 6 SPRING BREAK\*\***

### WEEK OF APRIL 7: RAINBOW COALITIONS, THE YOUNG LORDS AND ALLIANCE BUILDING

**Monday:** Johanna Fernández, *The Young Lords*, 1-134.

[Fifty Years of Fred Hampton's Rainbow Coalition](#), *South Side Weekly* (2019)

[The First Rainbow Coalition](#), *PBS Documentary* (Watch on your own before class!)

**Guest Lecture: Ray Santisteban, director of "The First Rainbow Coalition"**

Arturo Sandoval and Celia Cruz (CV)

**Wednesday: Group Presentations,** [How the Rainbow Coalition Inspired Solidarity Between Appalachians and Black Panthers](#), *Urban Appalachian Community Coalition*, (2021)

["Power to the People,"](#) An Interview with Paul Ortiz and Johanna Fernandez, [Black Perspectives](#)

### WEEK OF APRIL 14: THE FARM WORKER MOVEMENT AND A NEW HOPE

**Monday:** Johanna Fernández, *The Young Lords*, 135-269.

*Judas and the Black Messiah* (2021), [clip](#).

Maria Varela, "Time to Get Ready" (The 1960s Freedom Struggle in Mississippi), CV

*In-Class:* Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, documentary film

**Wednesday: Group Presentations,** Paul Ortiz, "From Slavery to Cesar and Beyond: Farm Worker Organizing in America," *The Human Cost of Food: Farmworkers' Lives, Labor, and Advocacy* (CV)

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[Black and Latino workers see biggest wage gains from union membership](#), *Marketplace* (2022)

Mike Davis, “Armageddon at the Emerald City,” *The Nation* (1994), CV

### **WEEK OF APRIL 21: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK**

**Monday:** Blair Kelley, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (**Finish book**)

**Prof. Johanna Fernandez class visit via Zoom.**

Johanna Fernández, *The Young Lords* (finish book)

Mike Davis, “Burning all Illusions, LA Rebellion” (CV)

Nikki Giovannie & Tupac Amaru, [The Rose That Grew From Concrete](#)

Film: [“I Am Not Your Negro”](#) (Cornell Library Online Screening)

Elizabeth Martinez, “An Open Letter to Black Americans from Latinos,” (2003) CV

**Wednesday: ~~Group Presentations~~**, Mike Davis, “Burning All Illusions: Urban America Sees its Future,” *The Nation* (1992) CV

**Prof. Blair Kelley class visit via Zoom.**

Roberto Lovato, [“Juan Crow in Georgia,”](#) *The Nation*, May 26, 2008,

### **WEEK OF APRIL 28: THE ELECTION OF BARACK OBAMA**

**Monday:** Angela Davis & Elizabeth Martinez, [Coalition Building Among People of Color](#)

Paul Ortiz, [“To Continue the Work of Our Foreparents,”](#) in, *Who Built America? Working People and the Nation’s History*.

Bill Fletcher, Jr. [“The Immigrant Rights Movement: Forging Black-Brown Unity,”](#) *National Lawyers Guild*

Paul Ortiz, *An African American and Latinx History of the US*, 163-Epilogue.

Martín Espada, [Litany at the Tomb of Frederick Douglass](#), November 7, 2008

**Wednesday: Group Presentations**, ~~Paul Ortiz, [On The Shoulders of Giants](#), *Truthout* (2008)~~

### **WEEK OF MAY 5: ADELANTE: RETHINKING CROSS-CULTURAL SOLIDARITY**

**Monday:** [Cross-Cultural Solidarity](#) website. **Gabriel Espinosa-Ramos class visit**

~~Paul Ortiz, [Charging Through the Archway of History](#), *Truthout* (2013) Paul Ortiz,~~

Paul Ortiz, “Latino Workers, the 2024 Presidential Election and the Future of the Labor Movement,” *Labor Studies Journal* (2025, Forthcoming) (CA)

### **MAY 12: FINALS WEEK**

**FINAL ESSAY DUE: TBD.**

### **About The Instructor**

Paul Ortiz is a PEN-award winning author. He was a consultant and featured narrator for John Leguizamo’s *American Historia: The Untold History of Latinos* docuseries that aired on PBS during “Hispanic Heritage Month” in 2024. Paul was also a consultant and narrator for Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s *The Black Church: This is Our Story. This Is Our Song*, which premiered on PBS in 2021.

Dr. Ortiz was Brooklyn College’s 2023-2024 Robert L. Hess Humanities Scholar-in-Residence. He was the National Archives and Records Administration Distinguished Scholar in Latinx History in 2022-2023. He was a faculty affiliate and advisory board member of the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Florida. He was also a faculty affiliate and advisory board member of the African American Studies Program at UF.

He is a third-generation US military veteran and a first-generation university graduate. Paul received his PhD in history from Duke University in 2000. He earned his BA from the Evergreen State College in 1990 and his Associate of Arts degree from Olympic College in 1988.

He served in the 1980s with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and 7<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group in Latin America where he was a radio operator and instructor for mobile training teams in multiple combat zones. He received the US Armed Forces’ Humanitarian Service Medal for meritorious action in the wake of the eruption of the *Nevado del Ruiz* stratovolcano in Tolima, Colombia in 1985, the 2<sup>nd</sup> worst volcanic disaster of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He attained the rank of sergeant E-5 and received an honorable discharge.

Professor Ortiz’s book *An African American and Latinx History of the United States* was identified by *Bustle* as one of “Ten Books About Race to Read Instead of Asking a Person of Color to Explain Things to You.” *Fortune Magazine* listed it as one of the “10 books on American history that actually reflect the United States.” *Beyondchron.org* called *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* “As both an essential teaching of American history and a critical resource for understanding grassroots organizing today.” Paul co-edited *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell About Life in the Segregated South* which received the Lillian Smith Book Award from the Southern Regional Council.

In 2013, Paul received the *César E. Chávez Action and Commitment Award*, from the Florida Education Association, AFL-CIO for “Outstanding leadership through engaging in activities which dignify workers and by making notable contributions to the labor movement & demonstrating resilience in organizing workers, especially those who have been traditionally disadvantaged.” He is a former president of the United Faculty of Florida, University of Florida Chapter (FEA/NEA/AFT/AFL-CIO)

Ortiz has published essays in *The American Historical Review*, *Latino Studies*, *Cultural Dynamics*, *The Oral History Review*, *Truthout*, *Southern Exposure*, *Kalfou*, the *Florida Historical Quarterly*, *Time*, *The Hill*, and

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many other journals. He has been interviewed by *Agencia De Noticias Del Estado Mexicano*, *ARD German Radio and Television*, *Newsweek*, *Telemundo*, *The Guardian*, *The Undeclared*, *ABC News*, *BBC*, *Hong Kong Daily Apple*, and a variety of media on Black and Latinx history, labor, and immigration among other topics.

Dr. Ortiz is a past president of the Oral History Association (2014-2015). He is a member of the inaugural editorial advisory board for the University of North Carolina Press's *Latinx History* series.