

The theme of this year's LatCrit V Conference in Denver, Colorado, May 4-7, 2000, will be "LatCrit Theory and Praxis in a World of Economic Inequality." Past LatCrit conferences have explored ethnic, gender, religious, and other differences within our community, but class differences, while always present, have never been the explicit focus. Especially in a capitalist, consumerist culture like ours, class is clearly an axis of difference that has a huge impact on people's material lives, and on how the law sees and affects them. It seems particularly appropriate, given our privileged socioeconomic position as academics, for us to focus specifically on how legal concepts and practices contribute to the unequal distribution of resources among our citizens. Focusing on class also fits well with our efforts to engage in interdisciplinary dialogue, to broaden our theoretical understandings, and to strengthen LatCrit's ties to students and communities of color. Important questions exist as to how class affects identity, what can be done about class-based exclusion within communities of color, and how to approach issues of class from a theoretical perspective. While some believe that class can simply be treated as another aspect of identity and analyzed under an intersectionality rubric, others think that the fact that class status is enforced through capitalist economic structures necessitates a distinct approach to class questions. Exploring such issues positions the LatCrit community to participate in current, and pressing, debates about where identity analysis should go from here and what role class analysis should play in progressive thinking.

Past LatCrit conferences have sought to feature and balance four basic perspectives in organizing the substantive program. These four perspectives are listed as themes below. They have, thus far, served as useful lenses, enabling LatCrit scholarship to develop an impressive body of work that is increasingly linking issues of identity to the substantive analysis of law, policy and process. This effort to link identity issues to substantive analyses has been particularly fruitful in revealing the way race and ethnicity are implicated precisely in those areas of law and policy that are ordinarily thought not to be about race and ethnicity: for example, in the operations and assumptions of international law and legal process, foreign affairs, liberal democracy, religion and sexuality, to name just a few areas of recent LatCrit attention.

To build on these accomplishments, everyone is encouraged to develop their proposals with a view to (1) expanding our understanding of the impact of race and ethnicity in substantive areas of law and policy ordinarily thought to be about "something other than race" (e.g. issues of sovereignty, labor rights, globalization, intellectual property, antitrust law); and (2)

deepening our analysis of the various ways in which identity issues intersect, conflate and conflict in our self-understandings and coalitional efforts.

The following four themes are offered, therefore, as possible points of reference for thinking in new ways about familiar issues (like affirmative action and bilingual education), as well as for encouraging critical forays into new substantive areas (like communications or antitrust laws):

1) Papers or panels that focus on Latinas/os as a distinct but diverse and transnational social group, and the group's relationship to law or current legal regimes/practices. The idea is to "center" Latinas/os qua Latinas/os in legal discourse, but to do so in a way that recognizes and accounts for the many axes of difference that help to define Latina/o heterogeneity, both domestically and internationally.

2) Papers or panels that bring a regional focus to the conference, corresponding to the region or locale of that year's conference. In this case, in varying degrees of generality, these papers or panels would help focus the conference on topics historically or currently associated with Latinas/os in the Northwest or the West or the Pacific Rim. The idea is to rotate centers within LatCrit discourse, in part by using the annual geographic rotation of the conference to promote awareness of different conditions at different sites. This effort also helps to ensure a built-in means of substantive variety in conference programming from year to year.

3) Papers or panels that explore or elucidate cross-group histories or experiences with law and power, such as those based on class, gender, race, sexuality and religion. The idea is to ensure that each conference program, in addition to incorporating intra-Latina/o diversities also contextualizes Latina/o issues in inter-group frameworks.

4) The fourth and final guidepost from the past relates to the preceding one: papers and panels that connect or contrast LatCrit theory to other genres of scholarship, and in particular the various strands of outsider jurisprudence (critical race theory, feminist legal theory, queer legal theory) that critique class, gender, race, sexuality and other categories of social-legal identities and relations.

Everyone is encouraged to use these four guideposts, as well as the following considerations, to help draft a proposal, and then to complete the attached Program Proposal form and fax it back ASAP, and in any event no later than November 19, 1999.

