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Dr. Bill Bridges:

I am writing to apply for the tenure-track position of Assistant Professor in Latino/a literature. Currently, I am a Ph.D. candidate in Purdue University's American Studies Program. I have drafted four chapters of my dissertation, which is entitled "The Presence of the Past: the Mythohistorical in the Chicano Movement and the Post-Movement Era." I will defend in spring 2007.

My dissertation explores the function of myth and history in Chicano/a identity formation and social movements, particularly focusing on how Chicanos/as have adopted and adapted usable pasts as a strategy for articulating cultural citizenship within the public sphere. Recently, scholars have turned to ethnic American fiction to uncover the alternative histories of underrepresented communities and explore how these narratives operate as a corrective to the master narrative of U.S. history. My project carries this approach further, investigating the multitude of sites in which alternative pasts can be manifested: fiction, poetry, music, guerrilla theatre, political manifestos, and movement periodicals. This approach takes into consideration how aggrieved communities that lack the means of production and communication are able to articulate and disseminate a political vision and collective identity. For example, prior to its canonical positioning in Chicano/s literature, Corky Gonzales's *I am Joaquín* was published and distributed via mimeograph by Gonzales and movement activists. In chapter two, I read *I am Joaquín* as a response to the historical erasure of Chicanos/as in the work of the eminent 19<sup>th</sup> century historian Hubert Howe Bancroft, illustrating the "cultural work" of working-class artistic productions.

While I examine how myths and histories were deployed to contest the "spontaneous consent" of U.S. hegemony, these narratives also expose an often-overlooked internal diversity within the Chicano/a community. I contend that while the movement was constituted through diverse localized struggles, myth and history were engaged to establish political identities and communities that created the national scope of the movement, allowing Chicanos/as with disparate interests and backgrounds to see themselves as a community and work in unison at key moments. For instance, chapter three examines how Reies López Tijerina's infamous courthouse raid and his subsequent representation in Chicano movement periodicals invoked the revolutionary/bandido trope and drew together the otherwise disparate movement projects of Chicano nationalism and the New Mexico land grant movement. Moreover, while these narratives of myth and history were deployed to create unity in struggle, they simultaneously reinforced patriarchal and homophobic aspects of the movement, hindering articulations of cultural citizenship by feminist and queer Chicanos/as. Thus, I trace the recovery and revision of the past during the post-movement struggles as a response of Chicana feminists and a queer Chicano/a project to the limitations of the narratives that maintained Chicano nationalism. Chapter five, which is under consideration for publication as an article, examines how Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Sor Juana's Second Dream* seek to establish a culturally specific model for queer ancestry.

Throughout my graduate career, I have designed and implemented literature, history, and composition courses. I have utilized my interdisciplinary experience in these required courses to foster critical thinking by emphasizing the connections between the material under investigation and the world in which we live. For a Great American Books course, I organized the class around the theme of “Citizenship and Its Discontents,” exploring how discursive sites construct and limit conceptualizations of community and participatory belonging. The course began with 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century U.S. writings on citizenship and political subjectivity, such as the Declaration of Independence and *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, and moved to the 20<sup>th</sup> century writers Ernest Hemmingway, Toni Morrison, and Gish Jen. This trajectory allowed the class to examine how race, class, and gender impact claims to citizenship and community.

In spring 2005, I worked with Dr. Kristina Bross to design and teach a survey course in American history for the Clemente Course in the Humanities. This course, for which I won a Community Service/Social Justice Award, created the opportunity to bring new ideas and information to underserved members of the community without cost. In order to develop a critical literacy and understanding of the making of history, Dr. Bross and I had the students work with primary documents, including local archives. Similarly, when working through Introductory Composition at Purdue, I have asked students to engage multiple media throughout the semester, pushing them to make connections between diverse rhetorical situations. For instance, one class explored the rhetorical construction of local historical monuments. After presenting their findings to the class, the students collaborated in small groups to design a monument for an aspect of local culture.

Beyond research and teaching, my commitment to working with underrepresented communities is also evidenced through my involvement with Purdue’s Latino/a Cultural Center (LCC). In fall of 2003, I worked with several Latino/a student organizations to develop the first in a series of readings and receptions. Through my relationships with university departments, I aided the students in raising the needed funding and invited Luis Urrea to read from *The Devil’s Highway* and discuss the conditions of the U.S./Mexico border. In 2004, upon the request of the Vice-Provost, I served on the search committee for the LCC Director. Most recently, this fall I facilitated a discussion of educational activism and reform that followed a viewing of the film *Walkout*.

I believe that my intellectual interests, extensive teaching experience, and commitment to community engagement make me a strong match for the position at Sam Houston State University. Moreover, the way in which my research and teaching interests draw together myth scholarship and ethnic studies can contribute to areas of focus already existent within the department.

As requested, I have enclosed my curriculum vitae. My letters of recommendation will be sent separately through the American Studies program. Please do not hesitate to contact me at the address and phone number I have provided on my vitae should you need further information. I will be available to interview at the MLA annual meeting in Philadelphia. Thank you for considering my application.

Sincerely,

Lee Bebout

