

October 24, 2010

Department of English
Arizona State University
P.O. Box 870302
Tempe, AZ 85287-0302

Dear Search Committee:

I am writing to apply for the tenure-track position of Assistant Professor of English with a specialization in Chicana/o Literary and Cultural Studies. I earned my Ph.D. from Purdue University's Program in American Studies. Currently, I am an Assistant Professor in the English Department at Sam Houston State University. I believe that my research interests, focusing on race and gender in social movements as well as U.S./Mexico border politics, make me a strong match for Arizona State University. Moreover, the wealth of local and regional research materials provide me a unique opportunity to more intricately blend my research and teaching at ASU.

My recently completed book complements ASU's departmental strengths, for it is situated within the discourses of postcolonial and gender theory as well as the fields of Chicana/o Studies and American Studies. *Mythohistorical Interventions: The Chicano Movement and Its Legacies* will be published by the University of Minnesota Press in April 2011 as part of the Critical American Studies series. Interdisciplinary in its formation, this project explores the function of myth and history in Chicana/o identity and social movements, particularly focusing on how Chicanas/os have deployed usable pasts to fashion a political vision and collective identity. While I examine how myths and histories were utilized to contest U.S. hegemony, these narratives also expose an often-overlooked internal diversity within the Chicana/o community. Mythohistorical interventions established political identities and communities that created the national scope of the movement, allowing Chicanas/os with diverse interests and backgrounds to see themselves as a community and work in unison. For instance, chapter two, which has been published as an article, 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 barrio youth and rural land grant activists. Moreover, while these narratives were deployed to create unity in struggle, they simultaneously reinforced patriarchal and heterosexist aspects of the movement, hindering articulations of cultural citizenship by feminist and queer Chicanas/os. Thus, I also trace the recovery and revision of the past during the movement and post-movement era by early Chicana feminists and Chicana lesbian feminists. For instance, I examine how Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Sor Juana's Second Dream* establish a culturally specific model for queer ancestry.

My current research project takes on a more comparative approach to Ethnic Studies. Recently, I received a university grant to develop a book-length project, tentatively titled "Whiteness on the Border." Working at the heretofore under-examined intersection of Chicana/o Studies and Critical Whiteness Studies, this project analyses a variety of discursive practices, from film and novels to popular music and political manifestos. By and large Critical Whiteness Studies has grown out of African American Studies and examinations of the black-white binary to explore the formation and machinations of whiteness. This project contributes to the dialogue by exploring how whiteness is manifested and functions in a distinct set of social relations vis-à-vis representations of Mexicans, Chicanos and the border. Moreover, since the nineteenth century, Chicanos have actively negotiated, contested, and reconfigured their relationships to whiteness. For instance, novelist María Amparo Ruiz

de Burton fashioned claims to full citizenship based on the whiteness of Spanish descent as well as popular Anglo-American anxieties of “white wage slavery.” Her efforts, as well as others that contributed to the “Spanish myth,” held forth the potential for immediate gains while simultaneously reinforcing the U.S. racial order. Significantly, even Chicana/o efforts to directly refute white supremacist narratives have exposed the political pliability of whiteness. For instance, since the 1960s Chicana/o deployments of Aztlán and indigenismo have been used to contest concepts such as Manifest Destiny and Melting Pot assimilation. However, cultural workers of the political Right such as Pat Buchanan have adopted and adapted Aztlán as a cornerstone to their anti-immigrant polemics. At this time, I have drafted three chapters of this project, two of which have been submitted as journal articles. Through my grant funding, I will soon conduct archival research at the Daughters of the Republic of Texas holdings for a chapter on the twentieth century Alamo preservation efforts and the historical construction of whiteness as American-ness against a Mexican Other in the dominant imaginary.

While I feel that my research is an essential aspect of who I am as a scholar, I am also deeply committed to my work as an educator. I have mentored graduate and undergraduate students. I have designed and implemented a range of courses, from introductory and American literature survey courses to classes on Mexican-American literature and teaching multicultural texts in secondary schools. Throughout these courses, I have sought to develop critical inquiry in my students. For me, learning is maximized when students can take ownership of the process and make connections across fields of study. Notably, I have utilized my interdisciplinary training to help students situate literature within a sociohistorical context. Ultimately, I believe that to foster critical thinking, the learning experience must be connected to the world in which we live. While this often happens through engaging class discussions, sometimes more is required. A colleague and I have created a travel course on narratives of U.S. historical memory. This course took a group of students to some of the country’s most famous and least-known historical sites to examine the rhetoric of memorialization, absences in the narrative, and the fashioning of American identities. Working at ASU, I could devise a similar class examining the construction of cultural memory in the U.S. Southwest. My work with students within and outside of the traditional classroom demonstrates a commitment to critical thinking and life-long learning.

Beyond research and teaching, my dedication to working with underrepresented communities is also evidenced through a variety of service activities. While at Purdue, I worked with the Latina/o Cultural Center (LCC) and several Latina/o student organizations to develop the first in a series of readings and receptions. Since joining the faculty at SHSU, I have mentored several first-generation students and assisted them in career planning. Moreover, I have developed and proposed a graduate course on multicultural literature. As part of the university’s summer Writing Project, I have given presentations to public school teachers on strategies for incorporating multicultural literature. Additionally, I have also been dedicated to program development by coordinating faculty research workshops and working as the liaison between the English department and the College of Education.

As requested, I have included my curriculum vitae and a previously published writing sample. I will be available to interview at this year’s MLA. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you need further information. Thank you for considering my application.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lee Bebout