

## GUEST EDITORIAL

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Ethnic studies is a rather strange field. In the first place, it is not a "field" in the traditional sense of other academic disciplines, but rather it seeks to include any and all disciplines. Second, it deals with people, and as our colleagues in the so-called "behavioral sciences" have discovered, people are perhaps the most unpredictable of all living things to study, thus the problems are many. Third, many of the subjects which we in ethnic studies have chosen to research, by the very nature of the fact that we deal with ethnic minorities, have tended to strike others not in a rational, objective manner, but in a purely emotional manner. For example, the word history does not usually cause any reaction in most people. However, the addition of black, female, Mexican American, or Native American to history immediately causes almost everyone to have an opinion on the subject, and normally reticent individuals now find themselves compelled to voice this opinion.

Yet, despite the obstacles mentioned above, and there are many more which could be included, we continue to persevere. Why? Most of us, one suspects, feel that we have a mission to spread the faith, that faith being reduced to its simplest common denominator in the phrase "human understanding." We have seen too many communities torn apart and weakened because one group failed to understand or even care about another segment of its population. We have seen our nation perilously close to internal destruction because of the lack of understanding or caring. We look at the world and see lack of trust based on lack of understanding. And we who are involved in ethnic studies feel compelled to do something about it. We are idealists in an unideal world.

But the struggle has not been in vain. Almost every college and university in the United States now offers, as part of the regular curriculum, courses in ethnic history, women's studies, cross-cultural studies, and American (in the full sense of the word) literature. This was not the case not so very long ago. We also find more attention being paid to ethnic cultural programming in terms of ethnic dance, music, art displays, and theatre, all of which were once viewed by most as "exotic." This too is a positive step for which those involved in ethnic studies may take credit.

However, one of the most exciting aspects of ethnic studies is its "across-the-counter" aspect. It is impossible to be merely a

sociologist, historian, educator, anthropologist, etc., in ethnic studies. One must be all of these things to some extent, and the attempt to be all things has led us into closer contact with others outside of our own, to a large degree self-imposed, world. Our attempts to bring others to a better understanding of each other has brought each of us closer to others. Thus, we find ourselves not only proclaiming the gospel but also living by the gospel which we proclaim, which is, after all, the way it should be.

So, while our efforts have been long and slow, there have been results. We have influenced others, and through our writing, teaching, and research we will continue to wield a great influence in helping make this ever-shrinking world a better place for all. After all, we are idealists with a mission.