

**THE MARXIST PROBLEMATIC AS A MODEL INTERDISCIPLINARY
APPROACH TO ETHNIC STUDIES**

by David A. Muga

The subject of interdisciplinary approaches to the study of ethnicity arouses a good deal of interest and concern within the discipline of ethnic studies today. Indeed, the very posing of this topic is as much a reflection on the current state of ethnic studies as it is an articulation of dissatisfaction with the increasingly narrow, parochial, highly specialized and yet, theoretically impoverished treatments that one so often finds in the modern literature on ethnicity and ethnic communities. To the extent that there is some level of dissatisfaction with current developments within the discipline, we may suppose that there is now a search for more viable theoretical and empirical models that can capture the diversity and complexity of pressing issues that we know to be so pervasive in ethnic studies. Indeed, interdisciplinary approaches may offer new insights and intellectual pathways in coming to terms with ethnic complexities.

In my contribution to this discussion, I will suggest the Marxist problematic as a model interdisciplinary approach to ethnic studies and as the single, most effective framework for analyzing developments within and between ethnic communities in capitalist society. The modest goals of the discussion are to ventilate some key aspects of a Marxist approach to ethnicity, outline some of the more important issues that are central to such an approach, and show why the Marxist framework is an interdisciplinary effort that can serve as an effective model for ethnic studies.

As documented in Bertell Ollman's and Edward Vernoff's three volume study on Marxist scholarship on American campuses [Ollman & Vernoff, 1984/85], the Marxist scholarly enterprise has developed rapidly and extensively in recent years and can now be found in virtually all corners of the academy. Within the discipline of ethnic studies, however, this development has been slow and uneven.

DAVID MUGA has published previously in the *Journal of Ethnic Studies*. Of related interest is his article in *JES* 12:1, pp. 1-51, "Academic Sub-Cultural Theory and the Problematic of Ethnicity." The paper in this current issue was intended to be presented at the 17th Annual Conference of the National Association for Ethnic Studies, Seattle, March 2-5, 1989, but was not given. Muga can be reached through the *JES*.

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