Latino Access to Higher Education

Ethnic Realities and New Directions for the Twenty-First Century

Martin Guevara Urbina, Ph.D.
Claudia Rodriguez Wright, Ed.D.

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By

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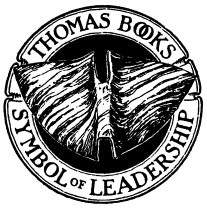

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I dedicate this book to first-generation Latina and Latino students for their perseverance, courage, and will to continue striving for a better life and a better future. And to Dr. Marcos Pizarro for authoring Chapter 7, not only enriching the book with vivid historical analysis, but providing effective tools for deconstructing racial history and racist ideology in academia and everyday life.

M.G.U.

This project is also dedicated to the ten participating Latinas/os who graciously shared their stories. Their insight and depth in sharing their experiences as first-generation Latino students allowed us to better understand higher education and gain further insight into the world of academia. Their perseverance, strength, and wisdom to continue forward in spite the simultaneous interaction of historical and contemporary obstacles and barriers bore witness que si se puede.

C.R.W.

PREFACE

> Who is as free as a writer? Nadie es tan libre como un escritor . . . No one is as free as a writer!
>
> –Sofía Espinoza Álvarez

Detailing the significance and implications of shifting demographic trends across the U.S., Martin Guevara Urbina recently charged in *Twenty-First Century Dynamics of Multiculturalism: Beyond Post-Racial America* (2014:xix),

> Perhaps more than never, in a highly globalized world, we must recognize that multiculturalism is not simply understanding ethnic/racial histories or the mere appreciation of cultural "difference," but accepting that multiculturalism spreads across the very inner core of America's institutions, and ingrained in the very essence of life, for multicultural perspectives, ideas, and ideologies empower us to elevate the multicultural discourse to a higher level of social transformation–ultimately, universal equality, justice, respect, and human dignity for all, in all facets of human existence.

In effect, with rapidly shifting demographics, not only are we confronted with pressing emerging issues, from the educational system to the economic system to the political system, but we are witnessing the transformation of the American society–in a sense "it's a new world" in the twenty-first century. Universally, in the midst of globalization, the *globalization of knowledge* takes a center stage, as the educational system impacts all other institutions, along with opportunities, career success, and ultimately all facets of social life. As in the past, though, the American experience is highly governed by the simultaneous interactions of historical and contemporary factors, particularly education, race, and ethnicity, combined with factors like class, geography, immigration status, and the media. However, while Latinos are now the largest minority group in the country, the focus of academic research, publications, policy, and dialogue continues to follow a dichotomous "black-

white" approach–marginalizing and excluding the ethnic realities of Latinos from discourse.

In seeking to better understand the world of higher education, its past, present, and future, we must recognize and acknowledge that in a highly multiethnic, multiracial, and multicultural American society, the typical approach of reducing all analysis to one monolithic entity can no longer be the focal point of investigation, publication, policy, or discourse. Clearly, with ethnic minorities projected as the upcoming majority, Latinos will be in great demand to sustain the American economy, and subsequently the future of the country. Therefore, in a highly technological and competitive globalized world, from the workforce to the military, education must be a top priority–a twenty-first century challenge. In this context, the primary goal of this project is to explore the ethnic realities of Latinos in the world of academia, focusing primarily (but not exclusively) on the most disadvantaged, first-generation Latino students, utilizing a postsecondary institution on the southwest Texas-México border as an *illustration* of the Latina and Latino experience in higher education across the United States.

Consider, for instance, in the first decade of the new millennium, 2000 to 2010, Latinos increased by 41.8 percent representing 37.6 percent of the population in Texas, which is already a minority-majority state. Yet, only 13 percent of the college-going Latino population over the age of 25 attained a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census, 2010a, 2010b). A study by Lillian Ortiz (2009) found that these gross inequalities in graduation rates between Latino students and nonminority students have impacted all educational institutions, including so-called *Hispanic Serving Institutions*, colleges or universities in the U.S. under a federal program designed to support institutions so they can better assist first generation, majority low income Latino students. As such, seeking to gain further insight into the ethnic realities of Latinos in higher education, while situating the Latino experience within a broader context, central objectives of this book include: (1) examine the ethnic realities of first-generation Latino students, including access to higher education, retention, graduate rates, and career success; (2) analyze historical trends and emerging issues in higher education (including legal cases), focusing on the Mexican American experience, as the largest majority of Latinos are of Mexican heritage; (3) provide an extensive review of prior empirical studies documenting the Latino experience in higher education; (4) analyze American education not from an unitary perspective but delineated in its totality, providing a historical, balanced, and holistic portrayal of education in United States; (5) detail research findings for a qualitative study conducted in an institution of higher education in Texas, placing the stories of participating Latino students in theoretical context; (6) vividly document manifestations of historically entrenched racial ideologies in American education; (7) explore po-

tential solutions to historical and contemporary barriers and challenges confronting Latino students in their efforts to access higher education, while providing new directions for academia in the twenty-first century; (8) develop a model of empowerment for Latino students, particularly first-generation college students; (9) provide information that may be used not only by college students, but also college/university faculty, administrators, community leaders, legislators, and legal decision-makers in their efforts for the establishment of a balanced educational system; (10) propose that higher education institutions must be held accountable, as elucidated in 2008 by Linda Darling-Hammond and Diane Friedlaender, for not providing equal access and support for Latino students along the Texas-México border and throughout the country, a situation that impacts not only Latino students and their communities, but the entire American society; (11) illustrate how "revolutionizing" education in the midst of globalization will be the challenge of our times; and (12) venture into the future of Latinos in higher education, as we seek to explore the Latino experience as well as the overall American experience in its totality.

Broadly, as illustrated in this book, in the twenty-first century, with shifting demographic trends, there may not be a significant dent in our efforts to provide equitable educational practices for students across the country until *reflective learning* mechanisms are designed, instituted, monitored, and assessed over time, along with accountability measures. Reflective learning experiences dismantle the colonized mind, empowering people with analytical thought grounded on critical consciousness, while recognizing and acknowledging structural inequality and levels of oppression inherent in schooling, countering deficit thinking, and how traditional teaching models impact teaching and learning of not only Latino students but all students in general. In this book, by discrediting manipulated or skewed information and subjective teaching practices and models, we seek to provide an alternative discourse to positively influence how culturally and linguistically diverse students in both the public school system and higher education are viewed by educators. We highlight evidence needed to illustrate and advance learning and educational opportunities and achievement and ultimately career success of all students by exposing common myths heard in schools, utilizing elements of Critical Race Theory to deconstruct historical myths in explicit and operational ways.

After centuries of supposed transformation, it is time that we acknowledge the urgent need to work for the oppressed, whose who have been not only silenced but excluded from the pages of history, to emancipate them from the colonizers to extend opportunity, representation, equality, and justice to all in the name of democracy and equality before the law. As noted by Thomas Jefferson, "Democracy demands an educated and informed elec-

torate." As a society, our future depends on our willingness to prioritize and implement mechanisms for reducing the wide gaps in America's main institutions, beginning with education attainment gaps amongst the country's ethnic/racial groups in order to strategically increase productivity, strengthen the economy, and stabilize the American society, setting the foundation for a better life for all Americans. More profoundly, with the advent of globalization, if the United States is to in fact situate itself as the country of the future, we must concentrate our priorities and actions on our greatest resource, *the human element*, while fighting to break the chains of modern slavery. As masterfully illustrated by Paulo Freire (2000:25), we need to educate our students of ". . . the meaning of a profound commitment to fight social injustices in our struggle to recapture the loss of our dignity as human beings." Invariably, an objective and inclusive education is essential for igniting mental/psychological liberation, empowerment, and establishing the ultimate freedom for students, communities, and society; ultimately, educating, training, and grooming the next generation of visionary educators and leaders who will guide us into the next century.

Martin Guevara Urbina, Ph.D.
Claudia Rodriguez Wright, Ed.D.

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M.G.U.
C.R.W.

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

Tables

LATINO ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Chapter 1

SITUATING THE STATE OF LATINO ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

> Men fear thought as they fear nothing else on earth–more than ruin–even more than death. . . . Thought is subversive and revolutionary, destructive and terrible, thought is merciless to privilege, established institutions, and comfortable habit. Thought looks into the pit of hell and is not afraid. Thought is great and swift and free, the light of the world, and the chief glory of [people].
>
> –Bertrand Russell

When the founding fathers of America wrote in the Declaration of Independence (1776) that "all men are created equal," it was quite obvious to them that women, eventually about half of the population, were not equal to men, and it was also quite obvious that by law "all men" meant "white men," not black men, brown men, red men, yellow men, or men of any other color. When Patrick Henry, a slave holder himself, supposedly stated, "Give me liberty, or give me death," he declared that liberty was in actuality reserved for white men, particularly wealthy white men. Paradoxically, seen as one of America's most sacred official documents, the U.S. Declaration of Independence asserts that human beings are endowed with "unalienable rights," and that if a government deprives people of such rights, "it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it." As the most powerful upholder of the Constitution, emblazoned across the front of the United States Supreme Court, the most visible icon of the American legal system, is the principle on which our system is based–"Equal Justice Under the Law." An exploration of the American experience, though, reveals that from the very founding of America, the idea that "all men are created equal," a phrase used by Thomas Jefferson, has coexisted with some of the most heinous, vicious,

and vindictive atrocities, injustices, and inequalities in the history of the United States (Acuña, 2011a; Almaguer, 2008; Bender, 2003; De León, 1983; Feagin, 2000, 2013; McWilliams, 1990; Urbina, Vela, & Sánchez, 2014).

The American experience also reveals that while all social and legal actions over time warrant concern, as the United States strives for positive social transformation in the global era, it is the historically troubled educational system that reveals some of the deepest-rooted social problems in society, as the educational system is the *front-line* for empowerment, opportunity, and success, and thus one of the most significant upholders of democracy, opportunity, and transformation. In effect, the educational system not only impacts and in a sense governs social life of students and their communities, but it impacts all facets of social life for the entire American society–ultimately impacting the future of the country. Yet after centuries of supposed social change, the historical and contemporary *dynamics* of interacting forces, like conquest, colonialism, slavery, identity, and citizenship, continue to gravely influence the everyday American experience, and, in the world of academia, how children in the public school system and later in college or university are treated and educated will influence the future of America's institutions, from the economic system to the political system to the legal system–institutions that until recently have been composed mostly of white men and subsequently one-sided in all domains of life.

With pressing changes in diversity, multiculturalism, and demographics across the country in the twenty-first century, the historical *black-white* binary approach of conducting research and publication, along with public discussion and government policy, must be more inclusive if the United States is to be the country of the future, indicative of a truly democratic country, with equality, justice, and "representation" not only for *whites* but also for *blacks* and *Latinos*, which now constitute the largest minority group in the U.S. In essence, while the racial (black and white) experience has been delineated over the years, the ethnic realities of Latinos have received minimal attention, and, as a segment of the Latino community and a small segment of the educational system, minimal attention has been given to the most disadvantaged, those who have been neglected, marginalized, silenced, and excluded from the pages of history and discourse–first-generation Latino students. Therefore, with Latinos projected as the *upcoming majority*, the central goal of this book is to document the Latino experience in the world of academia, focusing primarily (but not exclusively) on first-generation Latino students in higher education, delineating the *dynamics* of the educational journey (including access, admittance, retention, graduation, and career success), while situating their experiences within the ethnic community, within the overall American society, and within the international community.

THE ETHNIC EXPERIENCE OVER TIME: EMERGING TRENDS AND ISSUES

Contrary to conventional wisdom that ethnic minorities are *new* to America, Latinos were some of the first immigrants in the United States and thus Mexican Americans and other Latinos have been in the U.S. for centuries. Before the English came to America in 1609, there was a Latino presence in the Southwest, including Texas, and they have been in the present-day U.S. since 1565 in Florida and 1598 in New Mexico, centuries before the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the Mexican-American War in 1848, in which Mexico lost over half (55%) of its territory to the United States, and, subsequently, further fueling the notion of conquest, expansion, privilege, power, control, and, ultimately, reformulating white supremacy and dominance over ethnic and racial minorities–redefining and solidifying the parameters of cultural diversity and, by extension, the dynamics of multiculturalism over time.

Invariably, normally excluded from popular discourse, *Latino culture has been part of "America" longer than the United States has existed.* Therefore, understanding the Latino experience and the Mexican American heritage is essential for understanding the roots of America's ethnic and racial minorities and their everyday stories, whether it is the cowboy icon, mustangs, barbecue, dollar sign, law, or Texas chili, which is as old as the U.S. Constitution (1787). Contrary to arguments that Latinos are *infiltrating* the supposed Anglo heritage, Spanish culture and language became part of the national fabric when the United States expanded west of the Mississippi and south of the Carolinas. Mexicans, officially the first Latinos of the United States, joined the American populace through the conquest of Mexico by the United States in 1848. Geographically, Latinos lived in what is now the western and the southwestern United States decades before the first arrivals of non-Latino Europeans at Plymouth Rock in 1620. The area known today as Santa Fe, New Mexico was founded in 1610, and St. Augustine, Florida was founded in 1565 (Weber, 2004). In fact, the oldest records of European explorers and settlers on U.S. territory were actually written in Spanish. The oldest European town, St. Augustine, Florida, was founded by Spain in 1565, 42 years before the founding of Jamestown in the Colony of Virginia. U.S. law has also been influenced by the Spanish legal tradition, as symbolized by the carving of Castillian monarch Alfonso X, King of Castile, in the United States House of Representatives. The U.S. dollar, a powerful symbol of Americanism, also has Spanish roots. In fact, illustrating the historical ethnic influence, from 1500 until the mid-19th century, the Spanish dollar, commonly known as "pieces of eight," was the de facto currency of international commerce, and it was legal tender in the U.S. before Congress approved the