

***Concientización:***  
**A Journal of Chican@ & Latin@ Experience and Thought**  
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*Concientización* is a student journal dedicated to promoting the study of Chican@ & Latin@ experience and thought. We are committed to creating alliances across boundaries of nation, race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality. In that spirit, we incorporate in our mission the study of Latin@s and Chican@s in diaspora; the study of racial, ethnic, class, sexual, and gender identities; and the study of community and nation building.

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Contact the Chican@ & Latin@ Studies Program, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 312 Ingraham Hall, 1055 Observatory Drive, Madison, Wisconsin 53706 for *Concientización* copies and submissions.

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### **Editor's Note to Reader**

This volume provides the reader with a variety of topics from undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students whose scholarship focus on issues of education, immigration, health, legal issues, activism, and identity, informed by an analysis of Chican@ and Latin@ experience in the U.S. The scholarship can be read as fitting into two broad topic areas: (1) Law, Politics and Education; and (2) Identity, Family and Culture. A broad theme that emerges from reading this volume as a whole is an understanding of how historical, national, and local policies and practices interact, shape, and react to shape the Chican@ and Latin@ condition in the U.S.

## **Section One: Law, Politics and Education**

In this section, five authors offer research informed analyses and reflections about current legal systems, education policies, and political organizations impacting Chican@ and Latin@ populations. First, Gray's review of the United States legal system offers a unique analysis of the legal system's shortcomings in guaranteeing equal rights to marginalized groups, particularly in education. In doing so, she discusses the intended purpose of equal protection as ideological and impracticable.

Nieves examines education reform policies of Puerto Rico in the twentieth century. She analyzes how the female body, language, and morality both informed and constructed the education policies aimed at education reform for economic development.

Based on her own experiences and a review of scholarly literature, Chenevert discusses the need for United States' schools to grow more ethnically diverse. She examines how schools can work with community organizations and Latino/a families to increase Latino/student performance.

In an attempt to portray an "insider's look" into the garment work industry, Herrera examines her own mother's life as well as reviews scholarly literature and discusses issues such as labor movements and the role of women in such movements.

Attempting to determine ways that Latinos have gained political representation, Cuevas researches the Independent Political Organization of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward as a vehicle that has been the effective voice of political representation for Latinos in Southwest Chicago.

# ***Law as Symbolic Gesture: Maintenance of the Dominant Group’s “Possessive Investment in Whiteness” Under the Guise of Equal Protection in Education***

Amanda Gray

## **Abstract:**

Law as Symbolic Gesture details the shortcoming of the United States legal system, in guaranteeing equal rights to marginalized groups, particularly in the area of education. The effect of court findings on the racial formation of Mexican Americans in the state of Texas serves as a foundation for understanding the dominant group’s possessive investment in whiteness and the intended purpose of equal protection as ideological and impracticable. This is apparent in the current status of educational segregation within the United States, which makes clear *Brown v. Board of Education* served as little more than law as symbolic gesture. *Brown*’s failure to compel educational integration resulted in judicial rulings that denied marginalized groups’ access to educational equality, as was the case in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, which negatively impacted the progress of educational integration throughout the United States.

*In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education.*

— *Justice Earl Warren*

## **Introduction**

A long, troubled relationship exists between the U.S. and marginalized groups struggling for equality. Whether working within the confines of established legal institutions or challenging authority through civil disobedience, these groups’ efforts to assert their civil rights mark this relationship. Civil rights litigation provides an arena to challenge discriminatory policies and practices in an attempt to assert one’s rights; in some instances, these rights are vindicated. Many would regard this as progress. Yet, litigation fails to address minority group rights adequately. In practice, litigation merely acts to lend voice to members of disaffected minority communities within a legal system that was developed to benefit directly from the subordination of marginalized groups. This is insufficient. While we have progressed significantly since the first half of the previous century in terms of civil rights for most U.S. citizens, we remain a litigious society founded on principles that perpetuate the oppression of non-white groups. Unfortunately, neither judicial order nor legislative action is able to alter the attitudes and minds of individuals responsible for administering justice in courtrooms, classrooms, and communities.

Many believe the ideal that *justice is blind* will ultimately prevail, regardless of one’s age, class, gender, nationality, race, religion, sex, or sexuality. That sentiment perpetuates the notion that law is an entity independent of the individuals who write, decide, and interpret it. To believe so ignores the human element, requisite to the implementation of the law. While law serves an important function in our society, failure to acknowledge how and why the legal system falls short of affecting desired social changes leads to dependence on a potentially impotent and structurally deficient system intended to perpetuate the status quo.

The insufficiency of the U.S. legal system to affect social change is the focus of my future research for the purpose of this project. Specifically, the ambiguous nature of the law created by judicial rulings, particularly as it pertains to the racial formation of Mexican Americans and equality of education in the state of Texas, results in the inevitability of *law as symbolic gesture*. In adopting this terminology, I posit that law performs the specific function of maintaining the status quo and serves as little more than an intermediary in supporting equal protection of marginalized groups. The legal system, therefore, provides a *symbolic* avenue of redress that marks a midway point for individuals experiencing social injustices and hoping to realize fully their civil rights. Symbolism associated with law as an intermediary is important for the purposes of bringing attention to issues of social justice. However, understanding the powerful influence of the law historically in shaping and upholding societal perceptions of marginalized groups is important when considering how the law fails to remedy discriminatory actions, even when it's very intent is to do so.

## Research Questions

In determining the course of my future research, I formulated clear research questions that would help me to better understand how a court decision, such as that in *Brown v. Board*, could result in the present-day situation of segregation in education. The following represent the main research questions I will resolve during the course of this project:

1. How does the ambiguity of law function as *symbolic gesture* in a litigious society such as the U.S.?
2. If law is merely *symbolic gesture*, what are the implications for the future of goals of educational equality?
3. How does the legal system, particularly the judiciary, benefit white people in their denial of educational equality and the continued subordination of marginalized groups?
4. Given the unique racial formation of Mexican Americans in Texas, how have they benefited from integration in education?
5. What court case(s) might serve as evidence for answering these questions?
6. What would the immediate and long-term impact of the decision in this case be in affecting educational integration for Mexican Americans in Texas?

The sections that follow will serve as the foundation for my continued research. First, I provide an historical foundation for the doctrine of "separate but equal." I discuss the unique construction of a Mexican American racial identity from a legal and historical perspective. Second, I address shortcomings of *Brown* in affecting the desired outcome of universal desegregation in education, particularly as it pertained to Mexican Americans in the state of Texas. I discuss subversive measures Texans utilized in avoiding implementation of desegregation mandates. Finally, I discuss expected methodologies and propose a theoretical framework that will provide an analytical structure for addressing the aforementioned research questions. I provide a literature review of various authors and their discussions of the legal formation of race in the United States, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Legal Studies (CLS). I also introduce literature from the field of Education that tracks the (in)effectiveness of desegregation efforts across the country, providing evidence of *law as symbolic gesture*. I utilize this body of literature to illustrate how the combination of white resistance and *law as symbolic gesture* could result in a civil rights catastrophe such as the decision in *San Antonio Independent*

*School District v. Rodriguez* (1973).

## **An Historical Legal Perspective of Racial Formation and Mexican Americans in the U.S.**

*We remain imprisoned by the past as long as we deny its influence on the present.*

— Justice Harry Blackmun

The social construction of race is traceable through a specific lineage of legal precedent established by judicial order. Institutionalized racism creates a lived inequality for which individuals' only course of legal action must occur through the racist institution responsible for the inequality requiring legal action in the first place. When seeking legal relief in the pursuit of equality, one must consider that the social construct of race is deeply embedded our legal system, requiring a critical analysis of the system's effectiveness in affecting desired change.

Civil rights activists routinely utilize the court system to affect change with varying results depending on the cultural, political, and social climate of the time. In describing these unpredictable and unforgiving circumstances in which civil rights activists may find themselves, Kimberlé Crenshaw warns that:

the civil rights community. . . must come to terms with the fact that antidiscrimination discourse is fundamentally ambiguous and can accommodate conservative as well as liberal views of race and inequality. This dilemma suggests that the civil rights constituency cannot afford to view antidiscrimination doctrine as a permanent procurement of society's commitment to ending racial subordination. Rather, antidiscrimination law represents an ongoing ideological struggle in which occasional winners harness the moral, coercive, consensual power of law. Nonetheless, the victories it offers can be ephemeral and the risks of engagement substantial.<sup>1</sup>

Crenshaw identifies the inherent danger that exists in utilizing legal avenues to affect change. As further analysis of influential court decisions and (de)segregation legislation will show, pursuit of this path removes from members of the oppressed group the potential for agency influencing change and places power within the control of an institution implicitly responsible for their continued oppression.

The ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) established the doctrine of "separate but equal," validating deeply entrenched legal and social segregation. The Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy* delegated the problem of defining racial classifications to state legislative bodies, essentially reducing the question of segregation to an issue of state sanctioned discrimination over equal protection of individual civil rights. As a result, several court decisions as well as over 117 localities practicing social segregation, most of which had *de jure* segregation laws on the books, deprived Mexican Americans of equal rights in the state of Texas during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century.<sup>2</sup> Both legal and social segregation practices resulted in Anglo Americans prohibiting use of certain communal facilities, including drinking fountains, bathrooms, and restaurant sections (if an establishment served Mexican patrons at all).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw as quoted in Ladson-Billings, Gloria, and William F. Tate, "Toward a Critical Race Theory in Education," *Teachers College Record* 97, no. 1, (1995): 56.

<sup>2</sup> Martha Menchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 286-287.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

During this time period of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation, many precedent setting cases passed through the Texas court system in the 1930s and 1940s, challenging Mexican Americans' minority racial status. The existing laws inherently favored whiteness; therefore, claiming inclusion within the Caucasian race was a legal tactic that would prove successful in some cases and ineffective in others. In *Independent School District v. Salvierra* (1930), members of the Mexican community in Del Rio, TX brought suit against an all-white school for segregating Mexican children.<sup>4</sup> The Texas appellate court found that the school could not segregate Mexican Americans because they were, in fact, white. However, the court concluded that segregation could occur on the basis of language.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the court determined that Mexican Americans were white as long as they retained the ability to speak English; if they were Spanish-speaking only, they could not be considered white. While this may seem as though the court took strides in a positive direction, it did not; the inclusion of Mexican Americans depended upon a language component that many did not yet possess at the time. Exclusion continued under the guise of legal equality.

Fifteen years later the case of *Terrell Wells Swimming Pool v. Rodriguez* (1944) landed a heartbreaking setback in Mexican Americans' aspirations of equal treatment under the law. The court held that Mexican Americans could be excluded from using white public spaces. Here, the court based its decision on the fact that Mexican Americans tend to have a dark complexion in comparison with those considered to have a white complexion.<sup>6</sup> In this matter, the court did not categorize Mexican Americans as white due to the public nature of the segregation. In defining public spaces, the court did not necessarily rely upon a language component. According to *Terrell Wells Swimming Pool*, public spaces may be inclusive or exclusive based primarily upon a visual component. The color of one's skin literally determined one's inclusion or exclusion as white.

In *Hernandez v. Texas* (1954), defining "whiteness" crossed from one end of the racial-definition-spectrum to the other. The plaintiff, a Mexican American male, challenged his conviction of murder by an all-white jury, asserting that the conviction violated his right to due process and the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. To support his claim, Hernandez relied on case law overturning convictions in which an all-white jury had convicted a black defendant.<sup>7</sup> The appellate court in *Hernandez* ruled that only two races were recognized by the Fourteenth Amendment: black and white, and in such instances, Mexican Americans were considered members of the white race. While this ruling may not at first glance seem representative of the social geography of the time, on closer examination, the court's reasoning, "to say the members of the various groups comprising the white race must be represented on grand and petit juries would destroy the jury system,"<sup>8</sup> represented the court's ability to assign racial identity independent of one's self-identification, as well as the ability to continue discriminatory legal practices, such as exclusion from jury selection.

Upon review of *Hernandez*, the Supreme Court similarly assigned a racial identification to Mexican Americans, as "a cognizable group for equal protection purposes in parts of the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 289-290.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. *Independent School District v. Salvierra*, Texas Court of Civil Appeals (1930).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 287. *Terrell Wells Swimming Pool v. Rodriguez*, 182 S.W.2d 824 (1944).

<sup>7</sup> *Hernandez v. Texas*, 347 U.S. 475 (1954). George A. Martinez, "Mexican Americans and Whiteness," in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 379-385.

<sup>8</sup> George A. Martinez, 379-385.



country where they are subject to local discrimination—but not otherwise.”<sup>9</sup> While the ruling acknowledged that Mexican Americans experienced discriminatory treatment as a “class apart,” the ruling categorized Mexican Americans as members of a racial minority, based on their physical location and social geographical situation in relation to white Americans, without regard for the self-identification and lived experiences of Mexican Americans in various localities.

### **Mexican Americans and (De)segregation in Education after *Brown v. Board***

*We conclude that in the field of education, the doctrine of separate but equal has no place.*

— Justice Earl Warren

*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), perhaps the most significant civil rights case of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, overturned the long-standing legal precedent of segregation that *Plessy* established nearly fifty years earlier. The Supreme Court’s reexamination of “separate but equal” resulted from hearing a number of education desegregation cases in the decade prior to the groundbreaking decision in *Brown*, in which Chief Justice Warren asserted:

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments...Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms...We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other ‘tangible’ factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, for all its social implications and potential for change, *Brown* fell significantly short of fulfilling its promise. While the court emphatically asserted that separate *is not* equal, it failed to promote immediate action in eradicating segregation with its inclusion of the clause “with all deliberate speed.” As a result, desegregation was slow to take effect in the decade that followed the decision. Enforcement of the court’s decision again became an issue of state implementation. Segregation persisted almost unchecked in the south for over a decade as segregationists developed strategies of resistance against a ruling they believed to be “an assault on their way of life.”<sup>11</sup>

So, what happened in Texas after *Brown*? The backlash was considerable on behalf of Anglo Texans. Federal interference with continued enforcement of Jim Crow laws was met with abject defiance from religious, political, and social groups. In 1956, Governor Allen Shivers received a petition denouncing desegregation signed by 165,000 individuals. As a result, referendums “preserving school segregation, strengthening laws against intermarriage, and supporting local rule over federal ‘intrusion’” were placed on the July 1956 Democratic primary ballot.<sup>12</sup> The referendums passed overwhelmingly with 80% of the overall state vote. With such strong support of segregationist sentiments, legislators in East Texas proposed several bills

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 380.

<sup>10</sup> *Brown v. Board*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>11</sup> Smithsonian *National Museum of American History*. “Separate Is Not Equal: *Brown v. Board of Education*.” Smithsonian *National Museum of American History, Behring Center*. <http://americanhistory.si.edu/Brown/history/6-legacy/deliberate-speed.html> (accessed May 7, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 275-286.

between 1956 and 1957, “that, among other things, would withhold state funds from integrated schools, would require integrationists to register with the secretary of state (known as the “thought permit” bill), and would prohibit interracial sporting events.”<sup>13</sup>

The above events make clear that after *Brown*, Mexican Americans endured years of discrimination and oppression as a result of racist legal and social institutions. To claim a “Caucasian” ancestry was a failed legal tactic that many Mexican Americans believed could afford them greater protection within a legal system that could not *a priori* provide Mexican Americans with equal protection. Even after the Supreme Court handed down its decisions in *Hernandez* and *Brown*, the continued existence of racism within our legal and social institutions could not be denied. After *Brown*, the deliberate categorization of Mexican Americans as “Caucasian” allowed Texas to undermine federal desegregation mandates, leading to the discriminatory treatment of Mexican Americans within educational settings. In classifying Mexican Americans as white, administrators were able to produce statistical evidence of desegregation that did not exist.<sup>14</sup> This assignment of a racial identity to Mexican Americans, regardless of their lived experiences, evidences *law as symbolic gesture* in the subversion of legally mandated educational equality under the guise of desegregation.

Perhaps one of the most significant setbacks to the pursuit of educational equality in the 20<sup>th</sup> century came in the decision of *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973). While the U.S. Supreme Court acknowledged the inferior quality of education afforded Mexican American students in San Antonio, TX compared with the quality of education their white counterparts received, the Court determined that education was not a “fundamental right” under the Constitution. Therefore, states would not be required to provide egalitarian funding across district lines.<sup>15</sup> This influential court decision highlighted the inability of the courts to effectively desegregate, while virtually eliminating all progress toward educational equality realized in the U.S. post-*Brown*. For Mexican Americans residing in Texas, what was meant to be a step toward progress in the fight for civil rights resulted in little more than a vision of what might have been.

## Theoretical Framework and Methods

*In order to move beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way.*

— Justice Harry Blackmun

In my analysis of education desegregation litigation brought forth over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the theoretical approach I utilize is founded in CRT and CLS. The following is a review of the body of literature that will inform my analysis of the function of law as established by judicial ruling. I will also present the body of literature I intend to use in my assessment of the status of post-*Brown* segregation in the state of Texas. Paired with statistical data showing prevalence of segregation within Texas schools, I expect that my review of this literature will inform my analysis of *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*. My analysis suggests civil rights victories in the judiciary are little more than examples of *law as symbolic gesture* as it pertains to the inability of judicial ruling to promote educational equality. For the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 275-286.

<sup>15</sup> *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1 (1973).

purposes of this project, I plan to draw connections between this case and present-day segregation of Mexican Americans in the state of Texas.

Understanding how the law helped shape the concept of race in this country is imperative to discerning the function of law in perpetuating institutional racism and its shortcomings in ensuring social change toward racial equality. Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1996) address the role of legislation, politics, and public policy in reflecting and shaping the racial ideology of a society<sup>16</sup>. Their historical analysis of both the law and the formation of race in the U.S. encourages scholars to move away from an interpretation of race based on biological characteristics and towards an understanding of race that focuses on the role of law in solidifying the racial ideology of the dominant group. Further, the implementation and practice of this racial ideology ensures the continued social supremacy of the dominant group.

Martha Menchaca (2001) addresses the unique racial formation of Mexican Americans from a historical perspective. Beginning with the arrival of the Spanish in Mexico during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, she traces the effects of law in the racialization of marginalized groups. Building upon Omi and Winant's conceptualization of racial formation in the U.S., Menchaca explains how the Spanish were able to utilize the *casta* system (a system of laws that calculated one's indigenous or black lineage) to ensure the supremacy of white-Mexicans through the subjugation of those deemed non-white.<sup>17</sup> After the Mexicans gained independence from Spain, the *casta* system was eliminated and all Mexicans obtained full citizenship regardless of race.<sup>18</sup>

Menchaca also describes how Mexican Americans were racialized in the U.S. after the signing of the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* (1848). Mexican Americans of African and indigenous descent were subject to laws that limited the rights of black and Indian Americans in the U.S, even though the treaty mandated that they retain all the benefits and rights they had enjoyed as Mexican citizens. Menchaca discusses the plethora of cases Mexican Americans brought forth in the century that followed, asserting their right to claim whiteness, and later asserting that their treatment as second-class citizens was unconstitutional. These cases influenced the racial formation of Mexican Americans in the U.S., reinforcing the social supremacy of white Americans as the dominant group.<sup>19</sup>

Ian F. Haney-López (1996) assesses the social supremacy of the dominant group and the historical influence of the legal system in asserting white privilege. He explains that courts defined race ambiguously "by deciding on a case-by-case basis who was *not* white. No court offered a complete typology listing the characteristics of Whiteness against which to compare the petitioner. Instead, the courts defined 'white' through a process of negation, systematically identifying who was non-White."<sup>20</sup> Haney-López determines that race is a complex relational negotiation, consisting of both ideological and material properties. Ideas of race live in the minds of individuals within a *social geography*; those ideas materialize within the legal system

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, 2nd ed. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994). In future research I intend to explore Omi and Winant's characterization of U.S. history as "racial despotism" and Democracy as seriously lacking when considering race (79). Their explanation of the positive effects of racial movements for minorities will be important in future research when I consider potential alternatives to the courts in advancing equality of education for minorities.

<sup>17</sup> Menchaca, 62-63.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 215-218.

<sup>20</sup> Ian F. Haney-López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 27.

influenced by individuals. *Social geography* is shaped in part by the legal system, in which “legal decision-makers transform racial ideas into a lived reality of material inequality.”<sup>21</sup> The force of materialized inequality overpowers any opportunity for *law as symbolic gesture* to prevail in achieving progress toward racial equality in education.

George Lipsitz (2006) continues the conversation of a negated definition of whiteness. He explains the many ways that whiteness is accepted as the status quo, so much so that it does not require definition; whiteness permeates every aspect of our cultural and social realities. Looking at the very different experiences of whites and minorities in this country from an historical perspective, Lipsitz dissects white privilege, showing how various programs—that exist under the guise of equality—actually serve to protect that privilege. He discusses how legislation and judicial rulings, ostensibly promoting equality under the law, fail to be accompanied by mechanisms of enforcement.<sup>22</sup> This scholarship serves as a foundation for understanding how the law is lacking in its implementation of equal rights and how white privilege can result in white resistance to actionable enforcement of equal rights when that privilege is threatened.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, et al. (1995), including renowned CRT scholars such as Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado, help to illustrate the institutional limitations of the law in eliminating systemic racism and inequality in the U.S. Emerging from this scholarship is Bell’s concept of *interest convergence*, an approach to legal analysis very important to my research. *Interest convergence* assumes that “racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites.”<sup>23</sup> However, the law does not provide authorization for “judicial remedy” when the outcome of racial equality threatens the superior status of white, middle- and upper-class Americans.<sup>24</sup> The implications of *interest conversion* for my research are significant when considering how and why civil rights victories in the courts fall short of producing social reform, leading to the understanding of *law as symbolic gesture*.

Peter Irons (2002) traces legal cases dealing with segregation in education back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. He discusses the implications of various groundbreaking education desegregation cases prior to, and after, *Brown*. He paints an intimate portrait of the individuals faced with being the first to integrate formerly segregated schools. The white backlash these students experienced would lead to additional civil rights cases brought before the U.S. Supreme Court in an effort to meet the goal of universal educational desegregation set forth in *Brown*. In his examination of education desegregation cases that followed in the late 70s and into the 90s, Irons points to the inevitability of *ebbs and flows* in the judicial rulings of civil rights litigation. This refers to the eventual push back (white resistance or white backlash) that occurs when the dominant group feels that marginalized groups begin to infringe upon their rights. Irons describes the regression of judicial decisions during the *ebbs* in civil right litigation as resulting in the “re-segregation” of our nation’s schools.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>22</sup> George Lipsitz, Rev. and expanded ed. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Derrick Bell, “*Brown v. Board* and the Interest Convergence Dilemma,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, et al. (New York: The New Press, 1995), 22.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Peter H. Irons, *Jim Crow's Children: The Broken Promise of the Brown Decision* (New York, N.Y: Viking, 2002).

Examining the state of resegregation in education, Jonathan Kozol (2005) focuses on the return to segregation in America's inner-city schools. Kozol's study points to the poor quality of education resulting from lack of resources, overcrowding, and strict testing standards inflicted upon low performing public schools. He ties a number of the shortcomings of education in recent years to the Bush administration's education policy (or lack thereof) and the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001. Interviews with school administrators, students, and teachers powerfully present his argument. His subjects speak candidly about the realities of segregation in education in urban settings, struggles they are fully aware their suburban counterparts will never face. Kozol's scholarship is based on visits to over 60 schools in 30 districts where he observed firsthand present-day segregation in urban schools.<sup>26</sup> I intend to utilize similar methods of observation and subject interviews in future research in order to accurately illustrate the lived experiences of individuals (parents, students, and teachers) subjected to segregation in education.

Presenting statistical data that paints a grim picture for the current state of desegregation in the U.S., Gary Orfield (2004) examines segregated schooling in the U.S. 50 years after *Brown*. He conducts comparative analyses of variable factors that include class, urban/rural setting, race/ethnicity, region, and state.<sup>27</sup> Orfield's findings make clear that the past decade has seen a major increase in school segregation in districts where court-ordered desegregation has ended. Courts' decisions against continued desegregation in the 90s resulted from their belief that factors producing segregation and inequality in education had been eliminated. Orfield's report indicates that formerly desegregated schools now face greater rates of segregation than were seen in the 60s. An overwhelming majority of schools with a predominantly minority student body face conditions of poverty, which lead to a state of unequal educational opportunity that segregated white schools rarely face. Latinos specifically face dangerously high levels of segregation by race and class. The significant demographic shifts in the West have meant a major increase in segregation for Latinos.<sup>28</sup> The most segregated states for Latinos are California, New York, and Texas with less than one in six Latino students attending a majority white school.<sup>29</sup> In utilizing data from this report, and reports similar in scope published since the *Rodriguez* decision, I hope to find a correlation between the current state of segregation in Texas and this judicial ruling.

Richard R. Valencia (2008) examines over 80 court cases initiated by Mexican Americans in their efforts to realize equality of education within their communities. He stresses the importance of moving beyond the "Black/White paradigm of race" in order to understand the need for Mexican Americans to benefit from civil rights advancements, as well as their significant contributions to civil rights discourse.<sup>30</sup> Drawing from prominent CRT scholars D.G. Solóranzo and T.J. Yosso, Valencia presents the following five precepts, or "themes...that underlie the perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of CRT in education" utilized in his scholarship: 1) The centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; 2) The challenge to dominant ideology; 3) The commitment to social justice; 4) The centrality of experiential

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<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Kozol, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Gary Orfield, *Brown at 50: King's Dream or Plessy's Nightmare?* (Cambridge: The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>30</sup> Richard R. Valencia, *Chicano Students and the Courts: The Mexican American Legal Struggle for Educational Equality* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 1.

knowledge; 5) The interdisciplinary perspective.<sup>31</sup> These five precepts will influence my analysis of law and education and my understanding of race as “socially constructed and how the systematic nature of racism serves to oppress people of color while it protects White privilege.”<sup>32</sup>

In addition to his outline of this CRT model, Valencia explains the concept of *legal indeterminacy* within CLS that comprises the framework for his legal analyses. He explains that *legal indeterminacy* must be understood as a function of two important elements: 1) the level of uncertainty about any specific legal claim and 2) the standard of proof that one needs to demonstrate a claim.<sup>33</sup> The first element takes into account preexisting authorities such as judicial precedent, legislation, or public referendum. The ambiguity that exists in the interpretation of these authorities speaks to the “level of uncertainty.” The uncertainty leading to indeterminacy is directly proportional to the “standard of proof” that must be met; when the standard of proof increases, the level of indeterminacy and uncertainty increases, and *visa versa*.<sup>34</sup> Understanding *legal indeterminacy* as a function of judicial discretion is important in “exposing [to what] extent...that discretion [will help] bring to light the [ways in which] courts have assisted or failed to establish the civil rights of Mexican Americans.”<sup>35</sup>

As referenced above, perhaps one of the most significant setbacks of educational equality in the 20<sup>th</sup> century came with the decision of *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973) where the court held that education was not a “fundamental right” under the Constitution.<sup>36</sup> I chose this case as the focus of my analysis for a number of reasons. First, the decision in *Rodriguez* failed to live up to the standard set forth in *Brown*, establishing the principle that “separate is inherently unequal.” This failure provides evidence for my argument that victories in civil rights litigation are merely examples of *law as symbolic gesture*. Second, the Supreme Court heard this case almost 20 years after the *Brown* decision and its holding represents a shift in dominant group appropriation of civil rights equality for marginalized groups. *Rodriguez* is a concrete example of white resistance of the perceived threat to white privilege and dominant group positionality resulting from a lack in *interest convergence*. Lastly, this case exemplifies the unique history of racial discrimination against Mexican Americans set forth by the legal system. The refusal of the court to require that states provide all schools with equal funding had greater impact on minority communities. For the purpose of this project, I will look for a correlation between the decision in *Rodriguez* and the impact of segregation and poverty on Mexican Americans in Texas.

## Conclusion

The methodological and theoretical framework discussed in this paper, along with the historical legal foundation that informs the racial formation of Mexican Americans in the U.S., and the analysis of *Brown* as ineffective in truly eliminating segregation in education, all provide a foundation for my future research, in which I intend to show how *law as symbolic gesture* perpetuated by *the possessive investment in whiteness* has landed a blow to education integration

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 2-3.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>36</sup> *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1 (1973).

efforts, adversely affecting Mexican Americans in Texas. Decisions representing *law as symbolic gesture* may threaten the status of the dominant group, but such decisions do not jeopardize dominant group members' position within the racially structured social hierarchy. Once the threat of civil rights litigation poses a true risk of altering the positionality of the dominant group, *law as symbolic gesture* is subverted in favor of maintaining conditions that benefit this group's continued ascendancy.<sup>37</sup> I hope that the implications of this research will provide insight into the shortcomings of law in the progression toward educational equality for Mexican Americans in the state of Texas. This project will serve as a foundation for future research projects in which I hope to determine complimentary and alternative avenues to the legal system in order to advance equality of education in this country, regardless of race.

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### **About the Author:**

Amanda E. Gray received her BA in Legal Studies and Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is currently a Masters to PhD student in the Department of American Studies and affiliated with the Center for Mexican American Studies at The University of Texas at Austin. Her areas of interest include Critical Race Theory, education, community organization and activism, issues of youth justice, and ethnographic methodologies. Prior to entering graduate school, Ms. Gray was a Case Manager for an Arbitration and Mediation firm in Washington, D.C.

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<sup>37</sup> The decision in *Milliken v. Bradley* to eliminate busing programs intended to achieve educational integration serves as an additional example of such subversion.

# **Narrative Palimpsest: Puerto Rico at the Turn of the Twentieth Century**

Bethsaida Nieves

## **Abstract:**

In this essay, I examine education reform policies of Puerto Rico at the turn of twentieth century. I analyze how narratives of the female body, language, and morality both informed and constructed the education policies aimed at education reform for economic development. I also problematize how systems of reason(ing) embedded in education reforms of Puerto Rico at the turn of the twentieth century created types of people, such as the child and the citizen. I conclude by arguing that the education reforms were less about the economy, and more about managing the security, territory, and population of Puerto Rico.

## **Introduction:**

Throughout this essay, I examine the narratives embedded within education policies directing education reforms in Puerto Rico at the turn of the twentieth century. I explicate how narratives of the female body, language, and morality were informing the idea of Puerto Rican citizenship at the turn of the twentieth century. Each narrative, I believe, informed the education reforms aimed at economic development in Puerto Rico at the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1898, the United States acquired Puerto Rico from Spain after the Spanish-American War. According to the policies and reports, the Puerto Rican child would embody American patriotism. Although noted by Michel Foucault with respects to the eighteenth century education, his concept is relevant at the turn of the nineteenth century in the aforementioned polices and reports. “The child became the immediate master of the adult insofar as true education was identified with the very genesis of truth” (Foucault, 1973, p. 65). Within the context of the development of various forms of knowledge, each represents a type or tendency in human behavior, which ultimately reveals the relationship between knowledge and power. As a social construction, knowledge is not truth; it is a fabrication of a truth. However, the fabrication of truth, and what is accepted as knowledge ultimately reflected whom in society possessed power at the turn of the century in Puerto Rico.

Historically, that which has been conceived of as truth has been based on the ordering of knowledge. Foucault explains truth as a production, and not a natural phenomenon. “Truth” is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements. “Truth” is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984, p. 74). In effect, identity and differences were created in the establishment of order through the auspices of education reforms. In the development of education reforms, the activity of judging and judgments create a science of truth based on observation, surveillance, and control. Power, then, was exerted over knowledge in the creation of truth. In the case of Puerto Rican education reform polices, I examine the ‘truths’ that were constructed at the turn of the twentieth century.

## **Narratives of the Female Body**



During the period of 1895 to 1898, Maria DeGuzmán noted that the visual image of the Puerto Rican was depicted as a citizen of the tropical frontier in contrast to the Spaniard who was morally and biologically inferior to the Anglo (DeGuzmán, 1999). Literature, art, poetry, archival photos, and political cartoons played a significant role in constructing and dehumanizing the “other”, which invariably influenced the popular vernacular and perceptions of the Spanish colonizer and imperial power. In wartime, the Spaniards were negatively racialized as “African”, “Moor”, “Indian”, “Semitic African”, “Turk”, “Simian”, “Gypsy” in songs, poems and political cartoons. For example, in a political cartoon featuring Spanish and European characters, the Spaniard is drawn sitting at a table drinking alcohol, wearing tattered clothes, a turban on his head, while his face is drawn with a hooked nose, and thick lips. This image of the Spaniard is in stark contrast to the European who is drawn wearing ancient armor and in full regalia. They were also negatively described as “bloody”, “atrocious”, “decayed”, and “cruel” (DeGuzmán, 1999). Contrasting this image of the Spaniard was the Puerto Rican, who was to be “saved” by the United States from the Spaniard. The ideological and physical battle between two imperial powers was played out in the classical binaries of civilized versus barbarous.

The female body as trope narrative also surfaced during wartime. Depictions of the female body were used to describe Spain as weak, frail, and infantile. While the female body of both the Spanish and Puerto Rican woman was depicted as short and with dark skin, the Puerto Rican female body was depicted as a young “dangerously seductive dark-skinned belle” with her arms around the neck of the white American woman, while the Spaniard woman was depicted as a hunched-backed, “rickety old woman” (DeGuzmán, 1999, p. 108). DeGuzmán notes, “Clearly, the figuration of women in U.S. wartime posters and cartoons was designed to channel Anglo-American women into patriarchally and patriotically controlled mother-and-sisterhood” (DeGuzmán, 1999, p. 109). However, the mother image also implicitly evokes the image of the child. From this perspective, not only was the Puerto Rican woman in need of rescue, but implicitly, so was the Puerto Rican child. The female body as trope narrative begins to unravel the regimes of truth being constructed at this time regarding the Puerto Rican ‘citizen’ and the Puerto Rican ‘child’.

The narrative influencing propaganda during and after the war was one in which the Puerto Rican needed to be saved. This image of the Puerto Rican with outstretched arms was also noted in a speech given by Jacob Bromwell, a representative of Ohio to the 56<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1900. In this address, Bromwell declared, “Puerto Rico came to us voluntarily and without bloodshed. She welcomed us with open arms. Her adherence to the United States during the Spanish war saved the loss, possibly, of many lives and the expenditure of millions of money. Her people welcomed the armies under [Major General Nelson A.] Miles as deliverers and benefactors” (Santiago-Valles, 1999, p. 127).<sup>38</sup> This narrative of rescue was also evident in General Miles’ 1898 address when he declared, “we [the US military] have come to bring protection, not only to you, but also your property, promoting your prosperity and bestowing upon you the guarantees and the blessings of the liberal institutions of our government” (Solis, 1994, p. 29). Thus, feminine images were used during wartime to create the American imperial identity, aligning Orientalist representations of Spain and Spaniards that helped to create the image of an “evil” imperial power that needed to be stopped from colonizing and harming the Puerto Rican people. The paradox of this depiction lies within the typecasting of both Spaniards

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<sup>38</sup> Major General Miles was head of the military government established in Puerto Rico from 1898-1901.

and Puerto Ricans as simultaneously weak and dangerous, with the added caveat of the Puerto Rican woman as childlike, in need of direction and saving.

Between 1900 and 1905, travel writers also contributed to the popular and political imagining of the Puerto Rican woman. They used the female body as trope narrative to sexualize and politicize Puerto Rico and its citizens. Paralleling and layering images of the female body with the images of the landscape of Puerto Rico allowed travel writers to create an idea of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans as wild and barbarous. Santiago-Valles argues that travel writers described Puerto Rico as a land so beautiful it must be “imaginary”, and a land so “dangerous” that it must be controlled and tamed (Santiago-Valles, 1999, p. 135 & 137). Santiago-Valles writes, “By hyperfeminizing both “native” landscapes and bodyscapes North American military and corporate writers could deploy the tropes of romantic love as a way to embracing the “Porto Rican” inhabitants and terrain “into the political and social imaginary as subalterns” (1999, p. 130). In such a way, the pastoral narratives of the landscape were layered with images of the female body to describe and create the image of the Puerto Rican citizen as a sexualized and feminized being. This fabricated image of “the native” was contrasted with the colonialist enterprise, which was depicted as male, white, heterosexual, and virile (Santiago-Valles, 1999). The pastoral narrative also played into the imaginary of a feminized landscape.

The blossoming morality of the student paralleled with imagery of a blossoming flower yielded by a fertile landscape helped to shape this discourse embedded in the policies of education reform for economic development. Most notable were the repeated narratives of the Puerto Rican as an obstacle to economic prosperity, and as a citizen in perpetual moral, linguistic and economic crisis. While these sexualized and feminized discourses were occurring in the popular prose of travel writers, the island of Puerto Rico was undergoing significant economic and historical changes. During the turn of the twentieth century, translations of Puerto Rican laws were being made from Spanish into English (USBIA). In this sense, the colonial Puerto Rican subject was reinscribed into a political, economic, and educational relationship with the United States under the discourse of education reform for economic development. At the turn of the twentieth century, the idea of education reform for economic development was drawing on a larger context of U.S. globalization.

In examining the text of some of the education reforms in Puerto Rico at the turn of the twentieth century, Puerto Rico emerged as an impediment to the United States’ economic growth.<sup>39</sup> A reform of its education policies was one way to combat this matter. In the 1899 report on Civil Affairs by Military Governor George W. Davis, he described the Puerto Rican citizen as exhibiting non-rational behavior and resistance to Americanization.

How could we expect to accomplish the successful implementation of the new dispositions, the Puerto Ricans tenaciously cling to local customs and laws with

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<sup>39</sup> When the U.S. acquired Puerto Rico from Spain after the Spanish-American War of 1898, Puerto Rico’s primary agricultural export was coffee. However, both tariffs and natural disaster led to the demise of the Puerto Rican economy. Before the Spanish-American War, Spain was one of the primary importers of Puerto Rican coffee. After the Spanish-American war, both Spain and Cuba considered Puerto Rico a foreign country, and imposed high tariffs/import taxes on Puerto Rican coffee coming into Spain (Dietz 99). In addition, since the U.S. did not consider Puerto Rico a state, it did not establish tariffs to protect Puerto Rican coffee. Coffee became too expensive to import, and the Puerto Rican market for coffee died out. In 1899, a hurricane destroyed approximately 80 per cent of the crop (Dietz 99). As a result, the coffee farmers who lost their livelihood found themselves unemployed and began to migrate to other nations in the Caribbean, such as Cuba and Santo Domingo, and Hawaii and New York (Dietz 132). This economic crisis, due to natural disaster and tariffs imposed by colonial rule, was recast in narratives that portrayed Puerto Rico as an impediment to U.S. economic growth and as a colonial crisis.

which they are familiar. The accomplishment of a reform or the instituting of innovations will present many difficulties, not precisely because the public is tied to antiquated customs, rather because many of them cannot understand the measures being proposed as substitutions and laws, through these may be defective, in the eyes of a new administration, with its unfamiliar procedures and codes. (Solis, 1994, p. 12)

This commentary is striking because it was written in the same year that the United States legally acquired Puerto Rico. Education was to be instrumental in developing the economy of the island in the direction of U.S. interests. According to Solis, this notion of education reform for economic development has been promoted as a rationale to maintain dependency. The United States has historically used education reforms to both promote economic development in Puerto Rico, and to maintain control over it (1994, p. 20). Other policies aimed at reforming education for economic development. In 1899, Henry K. Carroll's *Report on the Island of Puerto Rico written for the United States Treasury Department*, reported that during a public meeting, Puerto Rican citizens decided to restructure the school system of Puerto Rico. Carroll wrote,

As regards public education, the best means of advancing our people would be kindergartens and normal schools as established in the United States. Our elementary and superior schools should be transformed and graded according to modern pedagogic methods. Universal education should be introduced based on the best models of the United States. (Solis, 1994, p. 49; Osuna, 1949, p. 128)

One factor to consider in the construction of the Puerto Rican citizen and child here is that in order for Puerto Rican citizens to participate in this general assembly, they were required to accept their colonial status under the United States via their education. They would not receive U.S. citizenship until the Jones Act of 1917. Thus, the concept of 'the citizen' was blurred, as Puerto Ricans were both part of Puerto Rico and the United States. In quoting Ohio Senator Joseph B. Foraker's address to the U.S. Congress in 1900, Ringer noted that the notion of citizenship for Puerto Ricans was vague. "The word citizen implies nothing more, when used in its political sense, than that the person who is the citizen owes allegiance to the government under which he belongs as a citizen, and that government owes him protection in return. Now, I understand the people of Puerto Rico do owe us allegiance and that we owe them protection; therefore, they should by right, be declared citizens" (Ringer, 1983, p. 977). In other words, Puerto Rican citizenship meant U.S. military protection in exchange for Puerto Rico's allegiance without Puerto Rico's representation in the U.S. government.

The island's constitution was ratified in 1952, and it allowed Puerto Ricans to retain their U.S. citizenship, exemption from federal taxes, and the right to elect local officials. (Morris 48) However, Puerto Ricans have no right to vote for a U.S. president. The Puerto Rican government may have a member in the House of Representatives, but that member may not vote in Congress. The economies of Puerto Rico and the U.S. are tied by the same monetary system and a common market, as well as the same tariffs and federal legislation (except the federal tax laws). (Morris 48) Puerto Ricans, as U.S. citizens, are not completely excluded from American society and U.S. laws. However, they are not completely included either because as members of a commonwealth, Puerto Ricans are not always part of the decision making process of the laws that govern the island.

## Narrative of Language

Further adding to the confusion was the issue of language. In 1899, Major General Guy V. Henry, then military governor of Puerto Rico, declared that the language of instruction for teachers and students was to be English (Solis, 1994, p. 51; Garcia Martinez, 1976, p. 59). At the time that the 1900 Report of the Commissioner of Education for Porto Rico was written, Professor Samuel McCune Lindsay was the Commissioner of Education. On the issue of language, Lindsay wrote,

Every effort has been made to encourage the study and use of the English Language. This has been done in the interests of the people of Porto Rico [sic], whose future commercial prosperity depends upon their adoption of the English language as the prevailing speech throughout the island. The Porto Ricans [sic.] are anxious to learn English, are eager to have their children learn it, and the department is careful to see that the demand for English instruction is always in excess of the supply. We do not desire to force English upon the people, but we want them to recognize their own interests in the matter, and are willing to do all possible to aid their aspirations in the direction of acquiring a knowledge of English. (Report of the commissioner, 1900, p. 29)

The narrative written by Commissioner Lindsay is one in which the economic advancement and development of Puerto Rico, and implicitly the U.S., depended on education reforms that included changing the language of classroom instruction. Also implied in the narrative is the reconstruction of the Puerto Rican citizen and child through language.

The School Laws of the Island of Puerto Rico, 1899, as organized by U.S. functionary, Victor S. Clark, were aimed at rewriting the laws governing public education (Osuna, 1949). Dr. Clark recommended changes to both the laws of the school districts and the laws concerning public instruction. It is important to note that in 1899, the transition from Spanish colonial rule to U.S. colonial rule was still occurring. Concerned with social unrest, Dr. Clark believed female teachers would help to control the population from civil unrest. “The result of rapidly expanding partial education to the people of this island may be to provide a fertile ground for pernicious social theories. The influence of women in schools may do something to prevent results of this sort that may require foresight and prudence entirely to avoid” (Navarro, 2002, p. 51). Soon thereafter, the Organic Act of 1900 was passed as a measure to ensure the emphasis on English language learning and efforts to promote patriotism (Osuna, 1949, p. 134).

The Organic Act, otherwise known as the Foraker Act of 1900, was passed to grant the United States Congress all rights to govern trade and tariffs of Puerto Rico (Urciuoli, 1996; Navarro-Rivera, 2009). Moreover, the Foraker Act detailed how, “the educational system would become a similarly centralized structure led by a commissioner of education appointed by the president of the United States until 1948” (Navarro-Rivera, 2009, p. 164). In essence, this further centralized education reforms in Washington, and displaced Puerto Rican school boards and politic-economic interests (Osuna, 1949, p. 132). Part of the rationale was based on the limited ability of adults to learn examples of good governance. In 1905, Commissioner Falkner further made the case for the importance of centralizing schools, and for educating ‘the child’ so as to educate ‘the citizen’.

But the education which is coming through the people through political examples and industrial activities, affects mainly the adults whom we can hardly expect to be apt learners. It is not too much to say that the hope of Puerto Rico lies in its

schools, a statement oft repeated to me by representative Porto Ricans [sic.], and which I reiterate not in any sense of vain glory, but with the profound sentiment of responsibility. (Barrow, et al., 1907, p. 162)

Commissioner Falkner's statement promoted economic development and loyalty to the U.S. through the education of children. While teaching Puerto Rican adults to be good citizen and to speak English, there would be more resistance from adults than there would be from children. By promoting both citizenship education and English language beginning at the elementary school level, the U.S. could manage and control the future of the Puerto Rican citizen, and of Puerto Rico itself.

In addition, as a measure to test the teaching and learning of English, Commissioner Lindsay addressed a letter to all teachers in Puerto Rico indicating that they could volunteer to be tested on their English language skills on a yearly basis. The testing process was framed as an issue of economic and civility.

The binding together in closer ties of friendship, sympathy, commercial intercourse, and business relationships of the people of Porto Rico [sic.] and the people of the United States means that we must have one common and universal language which the people are able to read, write, and speak in all parts of our common territory. (Report of the commissioner, 1900, p. 29)

Furthermore, he mentioned that American teachers would visit Puerto Rican classrooms in order to provide assistance in language teaching and learning. The added surveillance likely made the testing schedule appear less voluntary, and perhaps more mandatory. Although the testing was voluntary, Commissioner Lindsay stressed the ties between language and economic development.

### **Narrative of Morality**

While stating that learning English did not mean the neglect of the Spanish language, Commissioner Lindsay continued his letter to the teachers of Puerto Rico by stressing the need to learn English, not only as a matters of morality and safety.

[T]he one common language of social, political, and business intercourse will be the English tongue, common not only to all parts of our national territory but to large sections of the civilized world. We can not do our duty by the children of Porto Rico [sic.], in preparing them to earn a living and to take their place, in public life, in the business world, and in private occupations in the future unless we teach them thoroughly to know the English language. Let us work together to have English used as much as possible in our schools, so that the children may get, not only a book knowledge of the subject, but a practical skill, which will enable them to use it in any and all emergencies. (Report of the commissioner, 1900, p. 29)

This narrative played a significant role for teachers, supervisors and children on the island. Shortly after this letter was sent, teachers responded with reports on how well their students were learning the English language. This issue of language contextualized as a moral need is echoed in a statement by the first US Commissioner of Education for Puerto Rico, Martin Brumbaugh, declaring that, "The spirit of American institutions and the ideals of the American people, strange as they do seem to some in Porto Rico [sic.], must be the only spirit and the only

ideals incorporated in the school system of Porto Rico [sic.]” (Urciuoli, 1996, p. 47). Whether or not the students and teachers were learning the language as well as the Commissioner had indicated, the English language became incorporated into the idea of what is meant to be ‘educated’.

The language of instruction in relation to education reforms for Puerto Rico would continue to be a point of national identity and economic policy. In 1902, the Official Languages Act was passed making both English and Spanish official languages of government and education in Puerto Rico until 1991, when it was overturned and Spanish became the official language of Puerto Rico (Barreto, 1998, p. 119). This same act, which did not mandate English to be taught in the classrooms, still implied the necessity for English language learning. In 1904, Roland P. Falkner succeeded Commissioner Lindsay, and a similar narrative of economic development and language was repeated. As noted in Falkner’s speech at the Lake Mohawk Conference on the Indian in Lake Mohawk, New York,

In the matter of schools there was no compulsion, no forcing the English language upon them. We simply put up two types of school, the Americanized Spanish school, and the American school. We were practically but not consciously offering them a choice. The Porto Rican [sic.] people have voluntarily chosen, whenever possible, the American school taught in the English language, in the tongue of the United States, and I feel you will agree with me that they have had the good sense to make a wise choice. (Barrow, Barrows & Adams, 1907, p. 175)

Over a span of seven years, the education reforms sought to create a docile body, which was to be surveilled and controlled through language and through an internal mechanism of self-regulation. The supervising teachers were to instill a sense of honesty and integrity into her Puerto Rican counterpart. Meanwhile, the surveillance would become a self-regulation working towards an American ideal of morality.

The greater part of them are diligently endeavoring to improve themselves, and I have the testimony of eminent Porto Ricans [sic.] by no means friendly to the administration, that in our schools, a new spirit reins wholly unknown to the people before. The spirit is believed to be the true seed of Americanism planted upon the most fertile soil which will some day blossom out and bear fruit worthy of its origin. (Barrow, et al., 1907, p. 164)

Education was intended to provide the basis for securing a viable politico-economic infrastructure for both Puerto Rico’s economic security and prosperity, but also for the United States. The female body as trope narrative resurfaces under the aegis of women who were to educate the children and, according to the rhetoric, to also maintain civil obedience of the populace. The construction of the child and the citizen was placed upon the female teacher, which was to be surveilled and monitored by her American female teacher co-teacher in the classroom.

The cited policies demonstrate that to be educated meant economic viability, but more profoundly, it represented morality. The discourse, created by the patterning of objects, things, and people metaphorically onto a grid, and controlling them through the fear of punishment creates the ‘docile’ body. But it was not only a matter to be educated, but also a matter of being educated in the proper language, which was English. Furthermore, to educate the adult was good, but not in the best economic or moral interest of Puerto Rico or the United States because it was

more difficult to teach adults both the English language and a sense of U.S. patriotism. It was the child who was to be educated in English under the moral auspices of the American teacher.

In the narratives informing education reform, new forms of control through education were created at the turn of the twentieth century in Puerto Rico. To a large degree, those systems of reasoning are still apparent in the educational policies aimed at educating the Puerto Rican child and citizen for the benefit of economic development. By defining who is included or excluded in the education reform for economic development, the policy becomes as technique of intervention by the government. This power/knowledge nexus of education centering on teaching serves as an indirect form of control of the individual by the government. In the United States Goals 2000 report, the primary objective is to, “promote coordinated improvements in the nations’ education system at the state and local levels. All states and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Territories are currently participating in the program” (p. 3). The policy goes on to state that changes are not mandatory, but implied in the narrative is the idea that changes aimed at meeting the economic needs of the state and the United States are recommended.

Goals 2000 does not have specific performance requirements and objectives, and the Department of Education has issued not regulations specifically related to performance by states and districts concerning their activities under Goals 2000. Rather, the Department of Education provides states the latitude to merge Goals and local reform activities. However, the Department has identified objectives in its annual performance plan that it expects to achieve as a result of this program, along with other education programs. (Goals 2000 Report, p. 5)

In this Goals 2000 report, the symbolic similarity between economics and the school is that it operates, in part, on a supply and demand model. However, as Foucault notes, the fallacy of the supply and demand model is that it does not reflect a perfect market. “The fruit I am hungry for, which I pick and eat, is a *commodity*, presented to me by nature; there can be no *wealth* unless the fruits of my tree are sufficiently numerous to exceed my appetite. Even then, someone else must be hungry and require those fruit of me” (Foucault 1971, p. 192). The availability of education does not imply that those that need or want it will obtain it. The relative power of social forces on the schools shifts, and the relative power that the schools have to shape society also changes. Therefore, those in positions of power must be aware of society’s educational needs, and must provide *access* to all of its citizens in order to fulfill those needs.

In this new/old narrative, why is the discourse of education reform for economic development still so powerful in the language of education, pre-service teacher training, professional development, standards and assessments, technology training and for educating the child and the citizen to become a ‘lifelong learner’? As the narratives embedded in policies are noted, and the truths created are analyzed, the “regimes of truth” become more evident. One hundred years after U.S. education policies took over Puerto Rico, crucial element of creating social identities and reinforcing power relationships are still part of the narratives within education reforms. In the planning of ‘the child’, and of ‘the citizen’, the ideas of self-governing and emancipation begin to explain how the citizen was imagined, and how the citizen was constructed/fabricated to fit into an imagined community at the turn of the twentieth century, and again, at the turn of the twenty-first century. We are still asking the questions, *Who was/is the child? Who was/is considered normal? What were/are the social, educational and economic classifications? What were/are the new systems of reasoning?* Such questions remain important because the new policies aimed at education reform for economic development are opening up

new forms of control. In looking at these questions from varied angles and perspectives, Bloch reminds us that, “[W]e must question the breadth and the depth of the new governing discourses, [...] and how that governing discourse then will govern the modern child, family, teacher, teacher educator and educational research establishment.” (Bloch 2006, p. 106) Whose knowledge will be contested; whose will be accepted; whose will be left out of consideration (again) (Bloch 2006, p. 105), matters greatly if we are to continue the effort toward education for social justice.

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### **About the Author:**

Bethsaida Nieves is a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. My focus area is International Studies in Curriculum, Pedagogy & Teacher Education.

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# **Latino/a and Latino/a Immigrant Students: Educational and Social Science Research Perspectives on United States Public Schools, Family, and Community Involvement**

Lauren Chenevert

## **Abstract:**

As the United States' schools grow more ethnically diverse, teachers need to effectively reach Latino/a students academically. This literature review has been prepared to introduce the reader to both the social science and educational bodies of research concerning Latino/a academic achievement. After a review of the research, the literature was synthesized into cohesive sections: (1) the failures of schools in serving Latino/a students; (2) the role of supplemental community organizations and Latino/a family structure in academic performance; (3) and a need for cooperation amongst school, community, and family to support the academic success of Latino/a students.

## **Introduction**

The United States' public school population of Latino/a students, including those from immigrant families, continues to increase. Outdated tensions between school, family, and community are increasingly impractical and continue to hinder Latino/a student success. Of the 46 million Latinos in the United States today, two-thirds are either immigrants or children of immigrants (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009). In Madison, Wisconsin alone, the Latino/a population increased over 40% from 2000 to 2005. Questions have arisen about the future development of the United States' public school system in serving these diverse Latino/a families, their children, and their ethnic community. Reviews of existing introductory literature in both the social science and educational fields support the need for a changed relationship among schools and Latino/a students, families, and community through a new spirit of cooperation. By a study of large-scale forces like immigration, assimilation, and race, as well as the tensions between the more localized forces of families, communities, and schools, the literature demonstrates opportunity for improved Latino/a student success. The literature begs for continued study in order to arrive at specific solutions to foster a new spirit of cooperation. In this paper, I will introduce the reader to three emerging topics in the field: (1) demonstrated successes and failures of the current public school system in serving Chicano/a and Latino/a students; (2) the role of family and community involvement; and (3) the need to move toward cooperation in achieving Chicano/a and Latino/a student success. Specific practices of the Madison Metropolitan School District in Madison, Wisconsin are cited to give the reader a tangible perspective of some of these ideas.

## **Public Schools and Latino/a Student Identity**

Traditionally, public schools have been fairly rigid in student classification practices. In offering a conceptual framework for the definition of race, Taylor (2006) notes the historical definition of race as a 'biological' category, but suggests that the most successful definition of race is that of a self-defined identity. Wisconsin's Information Network for Successful Schools (WINSS), a division of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, offers enrollment data

by race in the Madison Metropolitan School District. The data illustrates the substantial increase in enrollment of students identified as ‘Hispanic,’ rose from 5.88% of district enrollment in 2000 to nearly 11% in 2005 (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction).

Students are neatly divided into inflexible categories like ‘white,’ ‘black,’ and ‘Hispanic,’ mirroring a phenomenon seen in other studies of school demographic records by Rong & Preissle (1998). Such rigid classifications allow for no fluidity. Moreover, a generic classification like ‘Hispanic’ instantly homogenizes ethnic or national identities and cultural differences (Rong & Preissle, 1998). Likewise, this system categorizes Latino/a students from immigrant families identically to other Latino/a students whose families may have lived in the United States for generations. These rigid classification methods deny Latino/a students the ability to develop a self-defined, multi-faceted racial identity.

### **Interactions Between Public Schools and Immigrant Latino/a Families**

Physical interactions between immigrant Latino/a families and the public school system reveal barriers to parental navigation. On the whole, immigrant children enter the United States’ school system which fails to serve their individual needs (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009). Latino/a parents who did not grow up as part of the system are understandably unfamiliar with its practices, which are largely different from that in their home country. Unfortunately, schools seem to mistake this unfamiliarity as apathy. Orozco (2008) notes the practice of public schools acting as superior ‘parents’ to Latino/a students. For example, schools commonly dismiss Latino/a parent input regarding children’s educational achievement rather than appreciate such involvement (Orozco 2008). Orozco’s findings effectively discredit the popular notion that Latino/a parents are apathetic to their children’s education. Indeed, Orozco finds that Latino/a parents value education very highly and heavily emphasize its importance to their children.

### **Latino/a Students and English as a Second Language Programs**

English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in United States public schools have special importance to Latino/a students who are classified by their schools as Limited English Proficient. Not all Latino/a students are second language learners, but two-thirds do come from Spanish-speaking homes (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009). In United States public schools, Limited English Proficient students, or LEPs, are defined as students with “reported difficulty in understanding oral English or in speaking, reading, or writing the English language that may impair the student’s success in classrooms where the language of instruction is English” (Ruíz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). Despite the increasing number of nonnative English speaking students, public schools often do not have a regulated, consistent framework for English language acquisition (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009). Many ESL programs operate from a ‘deficit’ model. In effect, ESL programs often exist merely to provide remedial English instruction, rather than viewing Latino/a English learners as potentially bilingual and valuing Spanish as a cultural resource (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Such findings indicate room for a changed atmosphere and stronger framework for ESL programs in public schools.

In the Madison Metropolitan School district, schools consider a student officially exited from ESL after testing out of ESL classes and undergoing two years of academic monitoring (Madison Metropolitan, 2008). Unfortunately, schools have traditionally confused a student’s

English attainment with that of the parents (Orellana, Dorner, & Pulido, 2003). In their study, the authors note the frequent instances of child-to-parent translation in the educational arena. School communications—report cards, conference notices, and the like—sent home in English may be incomprehensible to parents. Such practices potentially hinder open and frequent communication between parents and educators.

### **Family Involvement and Improving Latino/a Student Success**

Increasing parent involvement in children's education seems to be an oft-celebrated ideal, yet the actual expectations of parent involvement are elusive. In educational discourse, the traditional characterization of parental involvement praises parent participation in parent/teacher organizations, attendance at school functions, and volunteer work at the school itself (López, 2001). Yet arguably, parental involvement connotes much more than these highly visible practices through parenting practices in the home (Nelson & Guerra, 2009). In a study done by Plunkett, Behnke, Sands, & Choi (2009), the researchers isolated specific parenting practices performed by both mothers and fathers in immigrant families and measured them against student performance. Factors with significant influence include parental monitoring of school obligations and performance, educational advice, and schoolwork help. On the whole, mothers had stronger influence than fathers over a child's academic achievement (Plunkett et. al. 2009). In another study of Latino/a families, Kuperminc, Darnell, & Alvarez-Jimenez (2008) found that these strategies of parental involvement had a greater effect on high school students than middle school students. Both studies laud the importance of considerable involvement in children's education, especially in secondary years. Although, Latinos/as currently have the highest high school dropout rate of any ethnic group in the United States (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009), the research indicates that parent involvement can positively impact Latino/a students' educational achievement.

*Familismo*, the traditional Latino/a family values system, has been well-researched in the social science domain. Henry, Merten, Plunkett, & Sands (2008) applied the *familismo* framework to academic achievement in Latino/a families. By defining *familismo* as a high degree of loyalty, respect for, and obligation to one's family members, the study measured the strength of these factors in Latino/a families against youth's GPA levels (Henry et. al. 2008). The study concludes that high maternal academic expectations and academic monitoring from both father and mother had the most significant impact on GPA. Villenas & Deyhle (1999) discuss another traditional form of parental influence in Latino/a families called *consejos*, or narrative advice. These *consejos* are one means by which parents can transmit numerous cultural values on to their children, notably a high value for educational perseverance (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Such findings ought to resonate with community organizers and education activists wishing to promote academic achievement in Latino/a youth.

### **Community Organizations and Improving Latino/a Student Success**

Unfortunately, even the highest degree of family involvement can't always overcome school system barriers, so community organizing has stepped up to fill this gap in the educational arena. In a call for expanded after-school programs for Latino/a youth, Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2009) note the traditional resources these organizations can provide, such as homework help, language tutoring, and a positive message about academic achievement.

Community organizers and volunteers can also provide test preparation strategy classes, college tours, and other workshops to liberally augment resources.

Beyond providing tangible resources—school-year academic tutoring, summer enrichment workshops, standardized test strategies—to students, such community organizations can offer social networking opportunities for parents in the community. One such program, facilitated by the University of Wisconsin in Madison, is the Pre-College Enrichment Opportunity Program for Learning Excellence (PEOPLE). PEOPLE targets multiple ethnic groups in the Madison community, including Chicano/a and Latino/a (PEOPLE Program, 2007). The PEOPLE Prep program for elementary school students is held in the community centers of the Northport and Packer Town Houses where program participants live (PEOPLE Program, 2007). Such community organizations can serve as invaluable liaisons between stressed families and resource-limited schools (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009).

### **Student Success as the Common Goal: A Need for Cooperation and Communication**

At the heart of the desire to improve Latino/a student success lies the concept of human capital, or skills that improve access to better jobs through education, skills, and previous work experience (Stepick, 2002). If schools, parents, and community organizations all wish to promote Latino/a student performance, and thus to build their human capital, these three entities must strive for a cooperative relationship.

To improve relationships between Latino/a families and public schools, Leiding (2006) proposes that educators ought to build on the cultural values in the *familismo* framework to reach students from Spanish-speaking backgrounds. Accordingly, inclusive, cooperative, and peer-tutor based learning align well with cultural values such as interdependence, cooperation, and interpersonal relationships (Leiding, 2006). If applicable, treating students' English/Spanish bilingualism as a privilege—rather than a burden—can help literacy and communication skills flourish. In Latino/a families, education often has a broader meaning than just academics; it also emphasizes learning about one's community and family roles (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). As such, the inclusive education of tomorrow must emphasize teaching strategies to reach learners of multiple cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Additional changes, like school and teacher preparation reform, must occur on the administrative level to better accommodate and serve Latino/a students. Hood (2003) suggests strategies for successful school reform in urban areas. Urban high schools tend to be larger, and thus more impersonal, though they have more diverse student bodies in terms of both ethnicity and immigrant status. The schools that have provided the greatest success in reaching diverse student bodies are those with small student bodies, a community-like atmosphere, and plenty of one-on-one instruction time (Hood, 2003). Policymakers must take note of how successful schools are organized, and strive to reach these goals.

Regrettably, many high schools that serve Latino/a youth struggle to engage students or prepare them for success in today's global economy. Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2009) suggest school reform should focus on investing in this twenty-first century infrastructure, training students to synthesize and apply knowledge in ever-expanding ways. In addition, the authors call for an improvement in teacher education programs themselves, as too many educators leave teacher education programs with misconceptions about Latino/a cultural practices. Schools of education and public school districts must improve training programs by

using and relying on high-quality research and successfully proven strategies (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

Policymakers, educators, and Latino/a families have come to a very real ‘fork in the road.’ The United States school system currently employs a model not well-equipped to meet the demands of a changing ethnic student body. Parent involvement and the assistance of community organizations can and do improve academic achievement among Latino/a students, but the research has shown a lack of cooperation on behalf of the school system. Such divisions almost certainly detract from the common goal for academic success.

This review of social science and education literature has introduced the reader to current affairs in public schools, and Latino/a families and communities. Yet this literature raises many questions that the research of tomorrow should strive to answer. How can we encourage cooperation between public school, family, and community organizations? What policies and practices will better allow the public school to serve Latino/a students? How can Latino/a parents best support their student’s academic success? The answers to these questions will define the future relationship between United States public schools and Latino/a students, families, and communities.

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## **About the Author:**

Lauren Chenevert is a pre- English Secondary Education student at UW- Madison, and hopes to eventually teach English as a Second Language in public schools. The ideas behind this paper were sparked by my observations working with ELLs at Cherokee Middle School in Madison as well as with PEOPLE Prep at Packer Community Center in Madison.

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# **From Generation to Generation the Struggle Continues: A Study of Mexican Women in Garment Worker Organizing in Los Angeles**

Stephanie Herrera

## **Abstract:**

In this paper I will discuss how the garment work industry has affected the lives of Latino women for many generations. It is imperative that the history of garment labor be discussed to understand the present condition of Latino women doing this type of work. Through the stories of several Latina women in different periods of time, one can gain an understanding of what the different factors were that drew Latina women to the garment work industry. As a result of the growth of the industry, new labor movements made it possible for many women to fight back and to break away from traditional roles.

## **Introduction**

In this paper, I highlight the stories of two Latina women who worked in the garment industry and then discuss research on the experiences and organizing efforts of Latina women in this industry. One of the women's stories is about my mother and the other is of Maria Piñeda who wrote the documentary, *Made in L.A.*

I had the privilege of interviewing and listening to a story of what garment work in Los Angeles, California during the mid 1970s and 1980s was like. The story came from my mother, Maria Esther Cervantes, a valiant woman. I believe there is no greater opportunity than to personally interview and to hear a story by the person who lived it. Thus, by listening to her story and observing various facial expressions and gestures, I have come to a deeper understanding of the experiences of a woman who came before me. She has shared her story in hopes of educating others about the struggles that a lot of Mexican women endured to earn a living and now I can educate others on that part of history. Additionally, from the documentary *Made in L.A.*, I learned about a wonderful woman, Maria Piñeda, who had the dual responsibility of being a wife and labor activist.

The events that these women describe have allowed me to learn about how money, family and politics played a major role in their efforts to organize. These stories are important for several reasons in that they allow our generation to celebrate the commendable work of these women, give insight to the power of organizing, and enlighten us about the contributions Latino women have made to the garment industry labor movement. The stories also describe the conditions under which Mexican immigrant garment workers came together to organize. So I leave you with two questions to think about as you read this paper: (1) can we change anything within a society that is committed to enjoying the benefits of cheap labor; and (2) would their efforts lead to the eradication of taking advantage of people who will do anything to put bread on their children's table?

## **My Mother's Story**

It was 1979 in Los Angeles, California when my mother decided that she needed to work in order to make a living and support her husband and her children.<sup>40</sup> My mother heard, by word of mouth, that the underground factories or “*fabricas clandestinas*” had opened up and were looking for people to work.<sup>41</sup> She described these factories as rooms the size of a living room with one bathroom: “*Las fabricas eran como una sala con baño.*”<sup>42</sup> These factories, she explained, offered no lunch hours, no health insurance, and especially no unions. “*Nada mas era trabajo y paga*” employers expected workers to work for wages and expect nothing else.<sup>43</sup> Organizing was unheard of; and talking about it was prohibited. However, between 1980 and 1983 things began to change: “*Se empezó a oír mas [de uniones], mandaban tarjetitas, boletines, pero nadie se animaba porque le decían a uno si íbamos nos quitaban el trabajo.*”<sup>44</sup> All of a sudden, flyers and cards started to be passed out, followed by threats from employers warning that workers who participated would be fired. Because my mother’s primary role was to take care of her children, she was allowed to come to and from work only. To my mother, keeping her job and caring for her family, as was expected of her, was more important than organizing: “*Era más importante [no participar] por la renta, mis embarazos...por la necesidad.*”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, when asked about her participation in organizing within these garment factories she emphasized that her responsibility was to work and come home and not to put her job at risk: “*...no queria perder mi trabajo. Los ignorabamos [los organizadores] por miedo a que nos asociaran con ellos, si habia una huelga por donde caminabas cruzabas la calle para que no te miraran con ellos.*”<sup>46</sup>

Organizing was such a taboo that my mother even avoided walking on the same side of the sidewalk where a strike was taking place, so as not be associated with any of the strikers and organizers. Despite the fact that, my mother had not taken the step to be a striker herself; she was nevertheless experiencing the same injustices everyone else was.

The injustices were many. In looking at where she is now, my mother was amazed to hear herself say how much she earned for each piece she sewed: “*Nos pagaban entre dos y tres centavos por pieza; lo más que yo llegue a ganar fueron como \$120 por semana, o sea, cuarenta horas.*”<sup>47</sup> She recounted that each employee earned about two to three cents per piece and she recounted that the most she ever earned was \$120 for forty hours of work. At the start of 1980, my mother saw people starting to get involved in strikes, but she was too afraid of losing her job. She wanted to remain a good wife and mother, and expressing her loyalty to her co-workers and devoting time to a labor cause took time away from her household responsibilities. There was no support from the Latino community at that time because striking was something that could not be talked about. When asked about the role of men in organizing, my mother stated that they were the backbone of these women during those times. “*Los hombres apoyaban [a las mujeres] eran el respaldo de la mujer.*”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Cervantes, M. E. (2008, May). Interview. (S. Herrera, Interviewer)

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

She stated that at first, very few women organized to strike against unfair wages, bad working conditions, and bad treatment. “[*Recibiamos*] mala paga, y maltrato, no teníamos *aseguranza medica, las embarazadas no recibían ningun apoyo de nada, las trataban igual que a otro empleado.*”<sup>49</sup> Pregnant women, my mother being one of them, were treated like everyone else; if the employer liked them, after giving birth she could come back to work, but if not, their spot was given to someone else. If an employee made a mistake on a piece, that person was responsible for paying for the material that was wasted, and often, my mother stated, this meant a huge part of the paycheck would be deducted. Lunch hour was a commodity; an employee could choose to eat at their station but risk losing money: “*No habían descansos, podías tener lonche pero perdías dinero.*”<sup>50</sup> Despite employees' efforts to make a difference, my mother noted that with the factories she worked in, the strikes changed nothing. Often the factories would close down because of the strikes. “*...nunca solucionaban nada, habían huelgas, el lugar iba abajo y el lugar cerraba.*”<sup>51</sup> She also noted that the lack of education about laws and rights caused a lot of these organizing efforts to fail. “[*Eramos*] gente sin educación no estábamos entendidas de las leyes, cuales eran nuestros derechos, no había información para las gentes que querían organizar algo.”<sup>52</sup> Regardless of the availability of education about organizing, in the 1970s, nearly 30 percent of workers belonged to a union; some of these people were Latino women who were partaking in labor union organizing to create change in their communities.<sup>53</sup>

### **Maria Piñeda's Story**

Despite the rich history of garment worker organizing in the United States, since the 1970s, women's participation in garment worker organizing has declined.<sup>54</sup> As a labor scholar and director of the Garment Worker Center, Kimi Lee suggests that female immigrant workers tend not to participate in labor organizing because of their legal status, limited English skills, and fear of deportation.<sup>55</sup> However, in 2007 filmmakers made a documentary titled *Made in L.A.* to show the lives of women in the garment industry of Los Angeles, California. The film follows the story of three courageous women who chose to take part in an organizing effort against Forever 21. Forever 21 is a clothing company that paid each woman thirteen cents per shirt they made, yet each shirt was sold in the Forever 21 store for thirteen dollars.<sup>56</sup> Even though earlier documentation of the contributions of women of color in organizing in the garment industry was limited, it is clear that Latinas continue to organize for change.<sup>57</sup>

As a laborer in the Garment Worker Center of Los Angeles, Maria Piñeda's story very much describes what it was like for a Latina to participate in this type of movement. Piñeda, a Mexican mother of three and devoted wife, serves as a representation of hundreds of mothers

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Lee, K. (2008). Organizing Immigrant Women in America's Sweatshops: Lessons from the Los Angeles Garment Worker Center. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 527-532.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Carracedo, A. (Director). (2007). *Made in L.A.* [Motion Picture].

<sup>57</sup> Duron, C. (1984). Mexican Women and Labor Conflict in Los Angeles: The ILGWU Dressmakers' Strike of 1933. *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 145-161.

who are laborers today. Arriving in the United States at the age of 18 she was married to a man who adhered to traditional gender roles and who was also abusive. Due to economic circumstances, she had only one option, and that was to work.<sup>58</sup> While her primary goal was to care for her family, she was strong enough to juggle family and labor activism. In the film and in her life, Piñeda was confronted with a number of decisions that forced her to leave the center. One is her struggle to be the wife and mother her husband expected her to be. While Piñeda valued her role as a wife and mother, she realized that she was a born leader and found the courage to leave her abusive husband and rejoin the movement.<sup>59</sup> Piñeda's contribution not only included her physical work, but her contribution as a great role model for the many women who are in the same situation as she. By becoming aware of her story, many women now have tangible evidence that *Mexicanas* can be leaders and that they can fight for what they believe in. Even though Piñeda's experience takes place in a different time in history, her story is not very different from my mother's experience thirty years before. It is sad to see that over this long period, Mexican garment workers in Los Angeles have had to fight for the same issues.

### **The Enduring Harsh Realities of Garment Workers According to Research**

In fact, almost thirty years prior to my mother's experience and sixty years before the Forever 21 labor action, *Mexicanas* faced the same harsh treatment, unfair wages, and terrible working conditions. These injustices ignited the Dressmakers' Strike of 1933. My mother's experience echoed that of many *Mexicanas* who had arrived to Los Angeles in the late 1920s and early 1930s hoping to live a better life. By 1928, the estimated Mexican population in Los Angeles was 134,300; which was ten percent of the city's total population.<sup>60</sup> Almost seventy percent of the Mexican population worked in unskilled occupations.<sup>61</sup> Just as in 1970 and 1980, industries looked for dependable cheap labor and took advantage of the presence of unskilled desperate workers. In the garment industry, about seventy five percent *Mexicanas* comprised the labor force.<sup>62</sup> From the experiences of *Mexicanas* of 1933, to those of my mother and Piñeda, perhaps the only thing that has changed is the value of a dollar. Wages were still very low and discriminatory for *Mexicanas* as industries continuously and consciously broke the 1933 California minimum wage law of sixteen dollars for a forty-eight hour week for women.<sup>63</sup> My mother and Piñeda were affected by the same factors that shaped *Mexicanas'* experiences in 1933. The Dressmakers' Strike of 1933 involved the participation and work of *Mexicanas* who were brave enough to defy the power structure, their employers, and the men in their families, and step up for change.

In 1933, the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) avoided working with *Mexicanas* for several reasons, one of them was language. *Mexicanas* who had to endure the same unfair treatment were not given the chance to organize.<sup>64</sup> The arrival of Rose Pesotta,

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<sup>58</sup>Carracedo, A. (Director). (2007). *Made in L.A.* [Motion Picture].

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup>Duron, C. (1984). Mexican Women and Labor Conflict in Los Angeles: The ILGWU Dressmakers' Strike of 1933. *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 145-161.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 151.

an important ILGWU organizer who saw the significance of allowing *Mexicanas* to participate, helped to produce bilingual leaflets, meetings, flyers, cards and more. Pesotta recognized that many young *Mexicanas* had arrived in Los Angeles in hopes of becoming independent women and wanted opportunities that were unavailable in their home country. They hoped to be able to accomplish these goals in their adoptive country.<sup>65</sup> Since *Mexicanas* accounted for the largest number of garment workers at that time and their numbers were growing, membership in the ILGWU increased and there was a greater force to fight employers. One of the contributions Latinas have made is running an organization called the Justice Center (“Center”).<sup>66</sup> The Center offers community members the opportunity to participate in discussion and planning of what can be done to create better working conditions.<sup>67</sup> Another important service of the Center is education. Not only are there presentations on what the current issues are, but also, there are services offered like English as a second language classes.<sup>68</sup> This is a perfect example of what women can potentially achieve when given the opportunity to do so. It is also important to remember that behind these women, there were likely family systems that influenced their lives, as with Maria Piñeda and my mother.

Several Latinas who participated in the ILGWU were interviewed about their family life and what factors influenced them to become involved in labor activism. Many stated that they were raised in homes where they were encouraged to stand up for what they believed in and be of service to others. One woman explained to an interviewer: “*Mi abuelita siempre me enseño [sobre] la justicia...*”<sup>69</sup> *Mexicanas* whose fathers had arrived in the United States because of the Bracero Program say they were advised to get an education, and many of them did. However, because they were aware of their families’ financial situation, and felt a sense of responsibility to help their families, at a young age, *Mexicanas* worked to earn wages at a young age.<sup>70</sup> The women who were interviewed all lived in a time when not much was expected of them by the society in which they lived, nevertheless, many of them were able to prove society wrong by becoming part of an organization that helped them to fight back against the garment industry. In a span of sixty years, Latinas repeatedly demonstrated their courage and strength in their willingness to organize together to protest poor working conditions and attacks on their dignity. There were many pioneers who paved the way for Latinas to rise up, and although many are not well-known, their stories made history.

Like Piñeda, Luisa Moreno was a woman who, despite opposition from various people and institutions, was able to triumph over adversity and have an impact on society as a labor activist. As an active supporter of all women, Moreno was involved in *La Liga de Costureras* in 1930 which opened the door to her association with ILGWU.<sup>71</sup> However, as with my mother’s experience, Moreno encountered a lack of support for Latina organizers at that time and she did not receive much funding or ILGWU staff support. The difference is that my mother saw how this lack of support and education tore apart the group of organizers, but Moreno worked to

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>66</sup> Soldatenko, M. A. (2002). ILGWU Labor Organizers: Chicana and Latina Leadership in the Los Angeles Garment Industry. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* , 46-66.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>71</sup> Ruiz, V. L. (2005). Luisa Moreno and Latina Labor Activism. In *Latina Legacies* (pp. 175-191). New York: Oxford University Press.

make Latinas unite and she helped to develop a strong sense of community, enabling women to feel empowered and to fight back.<sup>72</sup> Moreno was able to draw from the prestige of a larger organization to create a strong community of capable men and women to fight against injustice. These women established a sense of organization that helped to strengthen Latinas and created an environment where men and women were equal, which allowed them to work together. This was accomplished despite attempts by some of the men in their lives to uphold traditional gender roles and not allow them to organize. For example, Maria Piñeda found herself held back by her husband's attitudes about her role as a woman and it became one of the obstacles in her participation in labor organizing.

While these conflicts with their husbands may have made it more difficult harder for *Mexicanas* to be activists and likely caused them to shy away from participating in garment worker organizing, the stories illustrate that their devotion to their family and their children did not deter them from fighting for workers' rights. In fact, this devotion gave them courage to resist the *macho* behavior of men in their lives. The fact that these women did not want to be bound by the tradition gender roles is in part what empowered them to seek employment and also become breadwinners. Several studies have been conducted that provide evidence to demonstrate that *Mexicanas'* families come first and that is why they take on jobs in places where they know they will be discriminated against and be subjected to terrible working conditions. As such, Ruth Paris's study concluded that immigrant mothers who participated in a home visit program were eager to provide for their children despite their challenges. Some mothers suffered from depression as they did not even have their children living with them but still worked hard to financially provide for their children.<sup>73</sup> Another study that looked at the types of work women did to support their families and the issue of transportation, showed that in order to maintain a steady paycheck, Latina mothers were willing to take on jobs that meant longer commutes from home.<sup>74</sup> Motherhood and the ability to provide for their children, is perhaps the most important force that drives *Mexicanas* to push beyond physical, emotional, and even mental limits when in the labor market. In the late 1980s Denise A. Segura found that: "Mexicanas worked physically demanding jobs until they were laid off, became disabled, or were forced out of the labor market by gainfully employed husbands."<sup>75</sup> The fact that these women were courageous enough to work in demanding jobs in the first place speaks highly of their devotion to family, and, these types of experience can also empower women. Over a period of sixty years, *Mexicanas* have proved to be independent and capable of being leaders within their homes and the labor movement.

For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, larger unions ignored women and people of color. Unions maintained the discriminatory narratives of society such as believing that African Americans were biologically inferior to the rest of humanity and that *Mexicanas* were women who were unable to organize. Nevertheless, from both of these groups of people came great people who helped to shape this country, through their leadership, activism, and labor. The International Ladies Garment Workers' Union is guilty of having overlooked many women because of their

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Paris, R. (2008). "For the Dream of Being Here, One Sacrifices...": Voices of Immigrant Mothers in a Home Visting Program. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* , 141-151.

<sup>74</sup> Elliott, J. R. (2004). The Effects of Race and Family Structure on Women's Spatial Relationship to the Labor Market. *Sociological Inquiry* , 411-435.

<sup>75</sup> Ruiz, V. L. (2000). *Las Obreras: Chicana politics of work and family*. Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center Publications.

race.<sup>76</sup> However, since 1995, when ILGWU and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers' Union organizations joined together to form UNITE, they have been working to organize all people in the garment industry, regardless of race.<sup>77</sup> Finally, they have realized that the future of labor lies with those once thought to be incapable of organizing.

## Conclusion

It was absolutely surprising for me to see that my mother's experience, the Dressmakers' Strike of 1933, and Piñeda's experience all happened in a period of sixty years. In sixty years *Mexicanas* have demonstrated their love of family as the force that drives them to persevere. My mother, a mother of five, is now a successful Bilingual Resource Specialist in a public elementary school.<sup>78</sup> Piñeda is still struggling to support her family. Her husband quit drinking and became employed, but was killed.<sup>79</sup> Perhaps these women are not where they would like to be, but their experiences will always be there to remind them of how courageous they are. It is important to note that in a period of sixty years there have been many women like my mother and Piñeda who have fought against injustice and attacks on their dignity.

It was truly my desire, when I began this study to be able to conclude by saying that many things have changed for *Mexicanas*; however this is simply not the case. For young *Mexicanas* that are dropping out of high school this could lead them to be stuck in garment factories barely making ends meet. Currently, strikes are still being carried out because some employers have not been able to recognize their employees as human beings deserving of respect, a living wage and decent working conditions, and not just money-making machines. I once heard one of my co-workers say that he feared being replaced by a machine one day since we have become such a technological society. Now, upon reflection, my fear is that people who are treated like machines, who are expected to work as long as needed, will never be appreciated as valuable workers whose hands have helped this country to grow. The stories of both my mother and Piñeda reveal that the struggle continues. After sixty years of organizing and fighting against injustice Latinas have been able to participate despite some obstacles. It is my hope that our generation and the ones to come will look back and celebrate our history. One that is filled with stories of courageous Latinas, who even though they might have been afraid, their values and beliefs drove them to act for change.

## About the Author:

Stephanie Herrera was born in Madison, WI. She will be graduating in May 2010 with my BA in Social Work and will return in the fall for the Master's of Social Work program. She loves to spend time with her husband and family. Also, as a youth pastor she enjoys going on

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<sup>76</sup> Soldatenko, M. A. (2002). ILGWU Labor Organizers: Chicana and Latina Leadership in the Los Angeles Garment Industry. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, 46-66.

<sup>77</sup> National Park Service. (n.d.). *International Ladies Garment Workers' Union 1900-1995*. Retrieved April 23, 2008, from Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site: <http://www.nps.gov/archive/elro/glossary/ilgwu.htm>

<sup>78</sup> Cervantes, M. E. (2008, May). Interview. (S. Herrera, Interviewer)

<sup>44</sup> Made in LA. (n.d.). *Update*. Retrieved April 20, 2008, from Made in LA: <http://www.madeinla.com/about/update>

field trips with the youth from her church. She loves to sing Mariachi and is currently working on writing her own songs. She loves to live everyday to the fullest because she doesn't know if tomorrow may come.

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# **Latino Political Organizations in Chicago: The Independent Political Organization of the 22nd Ward and the Rise of Latino Political Representation**

Ismael Cuevas

## **Abstract:**

In this research I have set out to find out the ways Latinos have gained political representation. The Independent Political Organization of the 22nd Ward is the vehicle that has been the effective voice of political representation for many Latinos in the Southwest side of Chicago because they have organized based on the common need and issues that affect their communities. This research will use an ethnographic approach to gather the data necessary in representing the views of community members, politicians, and local activist.

## **Introduction**

With the steady rise of Mexican immigration to the United States since the early 1900's, we have seen this group settle in major cities that have a constant demand for labor. Mexican migrant workers have been employed by railroad companies in Chicago as early as 1907 (Clark, 1986). We continue to see the rise in settlement and continuous cyclical migration into Chicago. In this study, I have set out to find out about the ways Latinos, especially Mexican Americans, have gained political representation in a system that have often systematically and institutionally excluded them from participation.

Mexican and Puerto Rican American organizational efforts toward community consolidation first began to enjoy unprecedented success during the 1970s. There were new motivations for coalition-building and an increasing pressure to move toward a new "Latino" politics (Gonzalez, 1990). In the mid-1970's, when the Chicago Democratic Party machine still relied extensively on local-level patronage, Latinos' profoundly marginal relation to that apparatus was starkly manifested by the fact that they accounted for only 1.7% of the people employed in any capacity on the city's full-time payroll (Belenchia, 1982). However, in Chicago there was a rise in Blacks and Latinos attaining political power that shifted the power away from the "Daley machine" (Cordova, 1999). The Chicago Democratic Party was known and is still known as a "political machine" since the early 1950's when Richard J. Daley was Mayor for Chicago. This rise of Black and Latino political representatives came from many political and community organizations, but the Independent Political Organization (IPO) is the organization that had the most profound impact during the 1980's in the election of the first African American mayor to Chicago.

As the Latino population continues to grow across cities in America, we need to acknowledge the importance of political representation. Political representation gives citizens and non-citizens the potential to have their voices, opinions and perspectives represented on issues that affect their communities. There have been great strides in political representation since the Chicano and Civil Rights Movements in the 1960's that have allowed the establishment of Latino political representation as it stands today. In understanding the history of political representation in Latino communities, it is important to analyze the types of coalitions that were

built within various communities, like the coalitions in Chicago that support the growing Mexican American population.

### **The Independent Political Organization (IPO)**

I focus on the IPO because of its political strength and affect on the Mexican American population in Chicago. This study of the IPO is primarily based on interviews with key members of the organization. I interviewed Ronnell Mustin, one of the founders of the IPO; Ricardo Muñoz, the current Alderman for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward and the current President of the IPO; and Rudy Lozano Jr, who ran for Illinois State Representative in 2010. New leaders represent a variety of viewpoints within the organization that help assess the situation of the development in the IPO.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> ward is a famous community in the southwest side of Chicago known as Little Village where there is a large population of Mexican Americans. However the large population of Mexicans in this neighborhood did not always mean equal and just political representation on behalf of the Chicago Democratic Party. The IPO was also responsible for organizing coalitions of Blacks and Latinos in neighborhoods such as Little Village, Back of the Yards, and Pilsen. The majority of the founders of the IPO are considered to be "progressive" activists and community organizers with Marxist-Leninist political views. There has been much of controversy with the 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward IPO due to the political landscape of Chicago over the past decades, making it difficult to study. Not only is it difficult to analyze the IPO because of the political landscape, but also because of the political ideologies it follows as a progressive organization. There is also much debate within political organizations such as the IPO because of the methods and stances on organizing. They are a coalition of Blacks, Latinos, and Whites, but they do not necessarily come together under race/ethnicity lines.

The IPO was funded in 1981 with the guiding principle to advocate for services to the community, self-determination in choosing its political representatives, and political unity between the African-American and Latino communities (De Los Angeles Torres, 2004). Many of the interviewees stated that the IPO is crucial for communities to gain political representation that will meet their needs in every aspect of the working class. Issues of immigration, voter participation, black/brown unity, gerrymandering, and organizational tactics are a determining factor of what makes the IPO an important organization in the southwest side of Chicago. Latinos' place in politics, with rare exception, has been restricted and their complex realities of having identities and politics informed by both their host and home country have not fit neatly into the prescribed political practices of the city (De Los Angeles Torres). However, there has been a trend that Latinos have been forced to choose local machine politics that have not always accommodated the needs or the complexities of the various communities (Cordova, 1999). Despite many of the barriers in the city of Chicago, Latinos have tried with success to find the voice that will allow them to gain such political representation that has long denied independent political action. The IPO of the 22th Ward is the vehicle that for the past 28 years has been the effective voice of political representation for many Latinos and Blacks in the Southwest side of Chicago because they have organized based on the common need and issues that affect their communities and have been long ignored by the Democratic political machine.

### **Mexican Migration and Community Settlement in Little Village and Pilsen**

The Mexican population first achieved a notable size in 1916 after the expansion of the railroad industry to the Midwest (Taylor, 1932). Especially during World War I and during the strike wave of 1919, Mexicans were continually recruited on deliberate racial grounds alongside with African Americans from the southern U.S. to migrate north into Chicago and other areas to be strikebreakers. Later, they were recruited as a reserve labor supply for industries such as steel, meat packing, and the railroads (Taylor). From only 1,000 Mexicans in Chicago prior to 1916, the community had grown to over 25,000 in 1930, by which time there were established *barrios* in the South Chicago neighborhoods in Back of the Yards areas and in the vicinity of the Jane Adam's Hull house in the Near West Side (Taylor, 1932).

By the mid-1920s many Mexicans were living alongside with whites and they were often perceived to be competitors for "white jobs." At this time the arrest rates and levels of police brutality against Mexicans in Chicago were higher than other groups in the Southwest U.S. This was becoming a serious issue because the arrest rates and the proportion of Mexicans killed by police surpassed those of virtually every other migrant group in Chicago (Rosales, 1978). Not only were Mexicans experiencing discrimination in the neighborhoods where they were settling, but they were also among the poorest immigrant groups in Chicago. Mexicans were delegated to the lower classes of society by the policies that were being created by the American government in order to properly meet its labor needs. In a 1944 survey of Chicago, employers established that Mexican workers continued to be predominately concentrated in "unskilled" jobs in the meat packing, railroad, and steel mill industries (Año Nuevo Kerr, 1976).

As the Great Depression affected the U.S., Mexicans in Chicago and surrounding areas began to first experience repatriation and forced deportation. In 1930 alone, nearly 22,000 Mexicans and their US-born children were repatriated or deported from Illinois. Although Mexicans in Illinois only accounted for 2% of the total U.S. Mexican population 1930, the number expelled from Illinois accounted for 5.3% of all Mexicans deported from the country at that time. The Mexican community in Chicago was significantly reduced by 36% to 16,000 by the end of the decade (Año Nuevo Kerr, 1976). This showcases the exclusionary policies that have long affected Mexicans in U.S. especially in areas where they have historically settled in. Not only has this policy left remnant feelings of deportation in these particular Mexican enclaves, but the majority of the deportations that have happened in Chicago took place in neighborhoods such as Little Village and Pilsen that have historically had a large undocumented Mexican population.

### **Foundation of the IPO and Historical Background**

In the 1950's Mexicans began to move into the Pilsen community in large numbers increasing from 0.5% in 1950 to 14% in the 1960's (Belenchia, 1977). This was critical to the development of the community since it was the only neighborhood where Latinos were the majority. Not only was the Pilsen community growing, but the South Lawndale community, later to be known as Little Village, grew rapidly to 32% Mexican during the 1960s as well (Belenchia, 1977). During this time there was an increase in the need for social services in those areas.

Community-based organizations began to emerge as Mexicans began to feel an alienation from the services that the City of Chicago was providing (Rosales, 1978). Local organizations began to hold workshops on legal rights of immigrants and citizens. By the early 1970's, Pilsen had become the center of community-based political activity devoted to the promotion of Mexicans as a distinct group with specific issues that were affecting their areas (Mora, 1991).

During this time, a great variety of grassroots community organizations were created that were essentially representing a broad variety of ideologies across the political spectrums. The majority of these organizations primarily devoted themselves to gaining representation for better services, education, and housing (De Genova and Ramos-Zayas, 2003). However it is important to note that demographic and political conditions began to facilitate the entrance of Latinos into political offices, yet the representation of this group still lagged behind its full potential.

This change in demographics gave way to the formation of the IPO of the 22<sup>nd</sup> ward. In an interview with Rudy Lozano Jr., the son of political activist and founder of the IPO, he stated that Latinos, particularly Mexicans, were receiving very little access to higher education. In 1982, the dropout rate for Pilsen's public high school had reached an astounding 49.4% (Caruso and Camacho, 1985). Education was one of the issues that gathered the people in these communities together to organize.

### **Rise of Mexican American Leadership: Rudy Lozano**

Rudy Lozano was instrumental in making the connection between the Latino community and high school students. Lozano Jr. (personal communication; May, 4, 2009) states that it was during his father's first year of college that "Lozano realized that Harrison [high school] graduates were not being adequately prepared for college. Towards the end of his first year at University of Illinois-Chicago, Lozano began to get more involved in campus as well as community activism." Lozano began working part-time for the Pilsen Neighbors Community Council as a community organizer. During this time he organized Pilsen students and residents to oppose the Chicago Board of Education from closing Froebel High School, a branch of Harrison High School. With the combined efforts of Lozano, students and residents, were able to confront the Board of Education and got a new high school built. Lozano's student and community organizing experiences led him to his involvement in CASA-HGT, the most significant political developmental periods of his life (Lozano Jr, personal communication; May 4, 2009). In tracing the history of CASA and the IPO, it is important to trace the accomplishments that Rudy Lozano made in the community.

Rudy Lozano is considered to be one of the most prominent early Mexican American political figures to come out of the movements in the Pilsen community during the 1970's until his assassination in 1983. His political credibility was built through his efforts in organizing the large population of undocumented Mexican and migrant workers that made up a significant proportion of ineligible voters. Lozano was able to achieve this through reforms and advances in the interest of his Mexican American constituency in the Pilsen community as an "independent Democrat." In 1979, Lozano began to organize the Mexican/Latino migrant/undocumented workers in one of Chicago's tortilla factories know as Tortilleria Del Rey. Del Rey threatened to notify INS of the undocumented status of union sympathizers, and two weeks before the first union certification elections someone evidently invited the INS to conduct its first raid in the Del Rey factory ending with eighteen workers being arrested. Later in 1982, Lozano and other community organizers were threatened at gun point in front of the Del Rey factory by one of the pro-company workers (Pina, 1991). Even as all this was going on in the community, Lozano was committed to voicing the sentiments of the Latino community in Pilsen. His efforts of mobilizing the community led to the election of the first African American Mayor of Chicago, Harold Washington.

## **Black and Brown Coalitions: Election of Harold Washington**

During 1983, Lozano launched his career in the public sphere as he mobilized the Mexican American communities in the Southwest Side of Chicago to elect Harold Washington. He was also in the bid to be the first Latino alderman of the 22<sup>nd</sup> ward as an independent. Ultimately he lost to the Democratic machine politician who ran in that area by a handful of votes of an electoral runoff. Most importantly was the victory of the first African American Mayor, Harold Washington, elected into office because of such efforts. This was very critical to organize the Mexican and Black communities in Pilsen and in Little Village. The IPO played a very important role in registering new voters. When the IPO was created, Lozano sat as the President and Ronnell Mustin, an African American, sat as the Vice President. This created a vital coalition in giving both ethnic communities the political representation they needed.

The core movement was to organize for the rights in the ward because of the poor social services. The main engine that drove the IPO was the issues that they fought for and the elections of progressive Latinos and Blacks such as Washington and Lozano. Another person that was critical to Washington's success was his campaign manager, Jesus Garcia, who later became the first Mexican American Illinois State Representative. In a conversation with Ronnell Mustin (personal communication, May 1, 2009), he discussed the efforts on behalf of Blacks and Latinos to put Lozano and Washington in power. One of the ways to bring both groups to together was by having fund raisers where both candidates would speak about the issues in their communities. Usually a couple hundred of Lozano and Washington supporters would attend the fund raisers and rallies that would be held throughout Chicago during the 1980's. As the IPO was organizing with both candidates, the IPOD organized marches to end the apartheid in South Africa and to attain immigrants rights in the U.S (Mustin, personal communication, May 1, 2009). This way of organizing brought Black and Latino members of the Pilsen and Little Village communities to work together on issues that affected their livelihood.

## **Issues of immigration and voter registration: Power to the community**

Political representation in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward is an important goal that the IPO has been constantly striving to achieve since its foundation. As Lozano Jr. ran for Illinois State Representative in early 2010, there were many issues in the community that needed to be considered in order to have a successful campaign that was going to unite Blacks, Latinos, and Whites. In terms of political power, undocumented Latinos cannot vote, and that becomes an obstacle in voter mobilization. All the issues in the community that negatively affect its residents bring everyone together in order to gain their rights. Latinos have long been a racialized group that has been given the message that once they arrive here, being Hispanic simply means *not being white* (Garcia Bedolla, 1999). The particular issues that affect newly naturalized citizens in neighborhoods such as Pilsen and Little Village also have to do with concerns of racism, discrimination, drugs, gangs, and employment opportunities (Michelson and Pallares, 2001).

The demographics of Pilsen and Little Village have been important because the voting attitudes and concerns for Mexicans in that community are not all the same. In a study that measured the concerns of Mexican American citizens and native-born Mexican naturalized citizens, there were significant differences in the concerns of each group. The results show that the concern about racism and discrimination are due to the hostile policy environments, and that

those naturalized and mobilized to vote in this environment were more likely to be sensitive to such issues (Michelson and Pallares, 2001).

According to community members, the IPO has been crucial in voter registration and mobilization. In an interview with the current President of the IPO and current Alderman of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward, Ricardo Muñoz states the importance of having a strong Latino vote in the ward. Before election time, the IPO was mobilizing in the local school council, neighborhood coalitions, and other community organizations. It is important that the IPO follows through with the political calendar to maximize the number of people that register to vote. One of the most important steps is getting residents to become citizens. IPO then performs voter outreach and registration activities. This tactic from the IPO originated in the late 1980's when Ronald Reagan passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, better known as the "Amnesty Act" that resulted in thousands of Latinos legalizing their status if they were in the country before 1982. After this policy was enacted, later between 1992 through 1994, hundreds of Mexicans were able to become U.S. Citizens in Chicago. During this time, the IPO held massive efforts to help people gain their citizenship in the Little Village and Pilsen communities.

### **Fair Representation in the Southwest Side Districts**

There were many issues leading up to the 1986 election of Mayor Harold Washington. There was a gerrymandering maneuver on behalf of the Democratic "machine" to disenfranchise many Black and Latino communities particularly in the Southwest Side of Chicago. The demographics of Chicago significantly changed between 1960 and 1980 the population of Latinos grew from 110,000 to 423,000.<sup>5</sup> In November 1981 a new map of aldermanic districts obtained city council approval. This would ultimately break apart districts that had a majority of Latino and Black voters. The plan was challenged in 1982, when lawyers representing Blacks and Latinos filed complaints of voting rights violations (Cordova, 1999). An appeal was made in the Illinois Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals. The court upheld claims of minority voter dilution through packing, fracturing, and boundary manipulation. As a result of this there were nineteen majority Black wards and the creation of four Latino wards (Cordova).

Thereafter was a reshaping of seven wards which altered the constituency of long-standing "machine" alderman. The 22<sup>nd</sup> ward in Little Village became a Mexican American majority with a jump from 57 percent to 71.7 percent Mexican American population in the district. In the 25<sup>th</sup> Ward, the Pilsen community also became majority Mexican American, giving space for Latino political representatives to be elected (Cordova, 1999). Jesus Garcia, a community organizer and former IPO President was elected in 1992 as Illinois State Representative because of this redistricting. The strong leadership of Jesus Garcia and Ricardo Muñoz has been able to keep further redistricting from continuing. Alderman Ricardo Muñoz has been able to maintain the integrity of the neighborhood from the 1990's into his current administration (Latino Institute, 1987).

The IPO has been a key player in the mobilization of the community in order to maintain its political power in this ward. Political representation has manifested itself in the continuation of the IPO controlling the 22<sup>th</sup> Ward since the 1980's. The local support that the IPO has gained is able to continue to reelect Alderman Ricardo Muñoz into office every two years. There have been five new elementary schools and one new high school built in the area. This was due to a

great effort on behalf of the community and the IPO to pressure the Chicago Board of Education to build new and better schools that are not overpopulated. Not only has this benefited the IPO, but it has empowered its residents to be engaged with the policies that affect their areas.

### **Evolving Community: Present and Future changes of the IPO**

Unfortunately, today the IPO is not as powerful as it was ten years ago because of the pressure of the Daley machine to create another organization, the Hispanic Democratic Organization (HDO). Regardless of the power struggles within the city, the IPO continues to be based on coalitions, especially solidarity between all working class communities. The IPO of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward is the vehicle that for the past 28 years has been the effective voice of political representation for many Latinos and Blacks in the Southwest side of Chicago because they have organized based on the common need and issues that affect their communities and have been long ignored by the Daley political machine.

Issues of voter mobilization and immigrant rights have been a long battle that the IPO has fought, and it has been able to sustain power in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward where there is a mix between residents and citizens that are eligible to vote. The efforts of the IPO have let the Little Village community exercise active political representation with the help of Alderman Ricardo Muñoz. Not only have the voter registration drives allowed hundreds of Mexican Americans and Latinos to vote, but it has created a strong voice that pressures the IPO into fighting over issues it has promised. The IPO has been able to function on an agenda of inclusion because it allows residents, citizens, and undocumented immigrants to participate in the voice of the community.

Black and Latino coalitions that the IPO has helped push over the past 20 years have resulted in important advances politically and in the community. The IPO has opened the door for minorities in Chicago to have political representation. The expansions of districts that have majority Latino and Black constituencies have also empowered the community, and in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward, stripped the Democratic Machine from having a stronghold in that area. Being able to continue to have the 22<sup>th</sup> Ward as majority Latino has enabled the IPO to defend community interests. Rudy Lozano states that:

It is all about unity because it is good to be aligned with folks in coalitions that will fight for their community. But is it so much better to that solidarity in order to overcome the questions of racism that we face on a day to day basis. We should all work together on issues that are directly affecting us and our communities. Solidarity is sometimes more powerful than political ideals and it is a way we are going to base the upcoming campaign with the IPO (Lozano Jr, personal communication, May4, 2010).

The work that the IPO has done will have important impacts in the future as young leaders become involved with the organization. Restructuring the organization and allowing younger people to become involved in the IPO will help continue to push its agenda in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward, and in other wards that need a strong political representation on behalf of a Black, White, and Latino coalition.

### **Research on Latinos in Chicago**

The research implications of this study can lead to a greater understanding of the Latino, Black, and White communities in Chicago. Political organizations such as the IPO need

extensive studies in order to show the dynamics of a city with evolving demographics. Not only has the IPO taken important steps in local politics, it has shown throughout this study that it is a progressive organization that is multi racial, engaged in multi issues, and seeks for coalition and solidarity building. Latino political empowerment movements such as the IPO are attending to diverse populations that are very fragile in a system that has denied them for so long. The IPO has expanded the definitions of exclusions in the American electoral system by seeking to help represent that people who are denied rights because of their legality status. Latino claims of equality and justice along ethnic lines are logical consequences to a distributive system that uses ethnicity (Young, 2000)

Latino communities in Chicago have greatly advanced since the Civil Rights and Chicano Movements of the 1960's. They have constructed a political field in which anyone can participate and gain their respective rights as citizens of a community. The theoretical implications of this study are that these communities have also opened the doors to the way we see community organizations and coalition building. Ideas of culture and ethnicity have to be developed in order to fully express the way different racial groups work in urban environments. As we have seen with the IPO, they were able to mobilize Latinos, Blacks, and Whites in an environment that normally didn't have coalitions. This shows how much progressive and grassroots politics can achieve if they are doing the right things at the right time. The future generation of members of the IPO will continue to expand the way the 22<sup>th</sup> Ward is run in a very democratic way that defies the current Daley administration and his political machine that seeks to exclude communities of color. Schools, roads, healthcare, and housing are just a few issues that have been improving and will continue to improve with the presence of a grassroots organization such as these. The IPO of the 22<sup>th</sup> Ward will continue to push this kind of policy as long as it continues to engage its residents regardless of ethnicity or legality into their politics.

### **About the Author:**

Ismael Cuevas was born in Fresnillo, Zacatecas and was raised in the Southwest side of Chicago. He became involved in the Immigrant Rights Movement in 2006 and has since then been active in many community issues. His passions in politics have been an influencing factor in the research he will be conducting on Latino political development in Chicago.

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## **Section Two: Identity, Family and Culture**

Section two contains three articles dealing with topics in Latin@ Identity, Family and Culture. First, Ritger describes the Dominican racial hearth – a collection of cultural ideals, attitudes and values surrounding Dominicans’ racial identity. She looks at racial identity construction among African-descendants in the United States and in the Dominican Republic to discuss conflicting racial views.

Through a comparative theory of family development among Latino American and Anglo American families, Perez offers a model of coping methods both family types use to reach resiliency. She stresses the need to understand family multidimensionality.

Attending to concerns of how the Mexican culture deals with life’s struggles, Pereira examines cultural characteristics that convey the activities and specified behaviors in the lives of Mexican families and social lifestyles in Mexican communities.

# Understanding the Dominican Racial Hearth and an Analysis of its Preservation in a Transnational Context Using Loida Maritza Pérez's Geographies of Home

Pamela Ritger

## **Abstract:**

This paper provides a brief introduction to what David Howard has termed 'the Dominican racial hearth' – the collection of cultural ideals, attitudes and values surrounding Dominicans' racial identity. Given the different racial identity construction among African-descended people living in the United States and African-descended people in the Dominican Republic, this paper also addresses whether the hearth is preserved or dismantled when Dominicans immigrate to the United States and are confronted with conflicting racial values than those present in the Dominican Republic.

As a Dominican-American, my research into Dominican identity is very personal and my motivations for studying Dominican identity may seem fairly transparent – researching Dominican identity is equivalent to exploring my own identity. However, I feel that I am a somewhat atypical Dominican–American. I am not fully Dominican, my mother was born in the Dominican Republic, but my father was born in the United States, as was I. My mother's racial background is a mix of African, European, and indigenous Taíno ancestry, and my father's is European. Although I now speak Spanish nearly fluently, I didn't even begin to learn my mother's native language until my freshman year of college, when I was 18 years old. Although we have many Dominican friends in Milwaukee, my family, by no means, lives in or is part of a strong Dominican community, like those found in upper Manhattan, Queens, or the Bronx, New York. Therefore, there were many aspects of Dominican and Dominican–American culture that I was not aware of until I learned to speak Spanish and spent a significant amount of time integrated into Dominican society while living in the Dominican Republic during the summer of 2000.

The aspect of Dominican culture and society that I discovered during that time period and found most interesting was an apparent negation of blackness among many Dominicans. My interest in this aspect of Dominican culture is most likely due to my upbringing in the United States, where people largely identify themselves by the color of their skin and where African ancestry is celebrated in black communities – so I was intrigued as to why this did not seem to be the case in the Dominican Republic. More striking, however, than the negation of blackness was an apparent affinity towards whiteness. This was clear in comments made about one's skin tone, hair texture or facial features, because many of these comments were pejorative in nature when referring to darker skin and/or more phenotypically African features, and complimentary when referring to lighter skin tone and more European features. Given that the ethnic background of the Dominican population is approximately 75 percent mulatto and 15 percent black, I wondered how these types of pejorative comments could be tolerated, even if they were said in a joking or endearing manner (Metz, 2001: 71).

My intrigue about these social phenomena became the focus of my two-year fellowship research: to understand the development of what David Howard has termed 'the Dominican racial hearth' – the collection of cultural ideals, attitudes and values surrounding Dominicans'

racial identity. Furthermore, given the generally different racial identity construction among African-descended people living in the U.S., I sought to analyze whether the hearth is preserved or dismantled when Dominicans migrate to the U.S. and are confronted with conflicting racial values than those present in Dominican society. Whereas, in the Dominican Republic, any white ancestry will make an individual 'not black', generally, in the U.S., any African ancestry will make one black, or at least lead that individual to recognize her or his African ancestry. Given this stark difference between race construction in the U.S. and in the Dominican Republic, I hypothesized that this difference would surely impact the racial identity construction of Dominicans who migrate to the U.S. from the Dominican Republic, and even among Dominican-Americans who are born in the U.S., but whose Dominican culture still comprises a large part of their identity. Accordingly, this paper serves as a conclusion to my fellowship research, in that I present a brief introduction to the Dominican racial hearth, along with an analysis of its preservation in the United States, using the literary work *Geographies of Home*, by Loida Maritza Pérez.

As an American, the Dominican racial hearth is difficult to explain without using judgmental language, just as it is difficult for an American audience to understand the complexity of the Dominican racial hearth without judging Dominican society as discriminatory and prejudiced. I emphasize my American identity in making these statements because I recognize that the society in which I have been raised has strongly influenced how I think about race and ethnicity, and how these variables help shape identity in the United States. It is easy to forget that the American manner of constructing racial identity is not universal, which is why I, and other American scholars studying the Dominican case, so easily fall into the trap of denouncing and disparaging Dominicans' racial identity. Silvio Torres-Saillant, a Dominican-born scholar of Dominican racial identity, reminds his readers of this fact in his chapter on Afro-Dominicans in *No Longer Invisible: Afro-Latin Americans Today*:

Generally devoid of the language of racial polarity current in the United States, Dominicans have little familiarity with a discourse of black affirmation. Nothing in their history indicates to the masses of the Dominican people that their precarious material conditions or the overall indignities they suffer constitute a strictly racial form of oppression. As a result, they have not developed a discourse of racial self-defence [*sic*] among their strategies of social resistance. This, no doubt, bewilders observers coming from societies like the United States where race tends to outweigh many other elements of human identity. But the specific history Dominicans have lived simply did not beget the rigid racial codes found in North America. Thus, they have no difficulty recognizing a valid identity in their racial fusion... (Torres-Saillant, 1995 p.132).

Despite this difference, however, there are aspects of the Dominican racial hearth that are recognized by Dominicans as discriminatory, and acts of discrimination do still occur in Dominican society. Personal anecdotes and my field research support this point. On one occasion, while hanging out with some friends in Santo Domingo, the country's capital, we began discussing the topic of my research, which at that time was the existence of racial discrimination in Dominican society. My two darker-skinned friends agreed that discrimination does sometimes exist and provided the example of occasionally being refused entrance to nightclubs. When this happened, they were offered the excuse that they were in violation of the dress code or that there was a special 'high society' event that evening, although all lighter-skinned Dominicans were allowed in without any problems. On the other hand, I often noticed

how there seemed to exist a low level of self-segregation between lighter-skinned and darker-skinned university students on campuses, lower than at many American university campuses I have visited. This suggests that while race and ethnicity may not act as a dividing factor in Dominican society, discrimination still exists in a more embedded, insidious, and unspoken nature that cries out for dialogue among Dominicans.

It is the complexity of this case that makes the Dominican racial hearth so difficult to explain. Classifying individuals into racial categories based on their skin tone, hair texture, and facial features is very difficult to do in the Dominican Republic due to what Torres-Saillant calls “[Dominicans’] history of pervasive racial mixture” – meaning that two Dominican children with strikingly different phenotypical characteristics may belong to the same nuclear family unit (1995: 133-134). This history of racial mixture has created a racial continuum in Dominican society, rather than the American racial dichotomy of white or non-white, and often white or black. Despite this racial continuum in Dominican society, lighter, more European features are valued more highly than darker, more African features. It is this value system that has led to the development of the two most important concepts in the Dominican racial hearth. They are the concepts of *blanqueamiento* (whitening) and its synonymy with ‘*mejorando la raza*’ (improving the race), and beauty ideals based on race. I have chosen to highlight these concepts of the Dominican racial hearth because they are two of the salient issues in Pérez’s *Geographies of Home*. David Howard’s theory about the preservation of the Dominican racial hearth in a transnational Dominican society is both proven and problematized in Pérez’s novel, respectively by the protagonist’s sister, Marina, and the protagonist, Iliana.

In order to better understand this concept of the Dominican racial hearth, a brief history of its development is in order. As Torres-Saillant explains, the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo served as the “port of entry to the first African slaves who arrived in Spain’s newly conquered territories following the transatlantic voyage of Christopher Columbus in 1492 (110).” The African slaves were brought to Santo Domingo initially to replace the aboriginal Taíno people who had been enslaved by the Spanish to work in gold mines but were quickly decimated. African slaves were forced to work in mining and later in the sugar industry. Scholar Pedro Mir argues that with the rise of the sugar industry in Santo Domingo, the ‘racialization of slavery’ originated in the Americas, connecting slavery to the black race. Due to the association between slavery and blackness, value-based perceptions of race were developed early in the exchange between peoples in Santo Domingo, giving the least value to the black African slave (Torres-Saillant, 1995: 111). These negative perceptions of African-descended peoples were exacerbated later in Dominican history for a number of reasons. The most important of these was the Dominicans’ historically hostile relationship with their neighbors in French Saint-Domingue, the colony that later became Haiti when it proclaimed its independence in 1804—a black nation created by former slaves. Haiti ruled the Dominican Republic from 1822 to 1844. Dominican Independence day is February 27<sup>th</sup>, the date of the 1844 coup that triggered the end of Haitian rule in the former Spanish colony and the creation of the Dominican Republic. Therefore, Dominican identity was partly constructed to differentiate itself from Haitian identity: as Haiti is a self-proclaimed black nation, the people of the Dominican Republic asserted their identity as not black. This was particularly true among the influential upper class white and mulatto populations. Dominicans’ inclination to negate blackness was only reinforced during the Spanish annexation of the Dominican Republic (1859-1865), as the Spanish rulers offended the majority mulatto population by reminding them that in Puerto Rico or Cuba, they would be slaves (Moya Pons, 1995: 206-207). Therefore, the Spanish further ingrained the idea of white

superiority into the Dominican racial hearth, and thus created further incentive to negate blackness and African ancestry.

This aspect of Dominican identity construction was greatly reinforced during the dictatorship of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo (1930-61), whose ideology proclaimed Dominican identity as ‘Catholic, Spanish and white’ and created policies to resist the ‘Africanization’ of the Dominican nation. Trujillo’s most dramatic and horrifying act to this end was a general roundup and execution of Haitians residing without permission on the Dominican side of the Dominican-Haitian border. The massacre took place October 4, 1937, and resulted in the deaths of an estimated 18,000 Haitians. Dominicans were shocked by Trujillo’s brutality, but he and his government propagandized the massacre as a means to “save the country” from ‘Africanization’ by Haitians (Moya Pons, 1995: 368-369). Furthermore, the Trujillo regime legitimized the usage of the term *indio* to describe the racially mixed Dominican population. The usage of the term *indio* instead of *mulatto* recalls the island’s native Taíno population in order to avoid any allusion to the population’s African heritage. This complex past has helped to create both the concept of *blanqueamiento* and race-based beauty ideals that primarily comprise the Dominican racial hearth.

*Blanqueamiento*, translated as ‘whitening’, is the concept of finding a mate with a lighter skin tone or a skin color similar to one’s own, in the attempt to continually lighten the skin tone of one’s offspring. This concept remains one of the more salient concepts within the Dominican racial hearth, although pursued more subtly today than in the past. In his study entitled Coloring the Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic, David Howard mentions this concept several times throughout his book. Howard introduces this concept in reference to results from a study conducted on university students in 1987 by Menéndez Alarcon. When these students were asked if they would marry a darker-skinned partner, fifty-five percent replied that they would not, frequently expressing their concern for the ‘corruption’ of physical appearance through ‘race mixing’ (Howard, 2001: 8). Later in Howard’s work, while reporting his own research conducted between 1992 and 1995, he reveals that “[i]nterviewees tended to agree with the general strategy of ‘marrying lighter,’ or at least seeking a partner of similar color. When questioned about marriage, over a third of the respondents across all [social] classes in my survey sample, expressed the desire to marry lighter (*mejorar la raza* or *blanquearse*) (Howard, 2001: 81).” In my own field research conducted in 2001, most respondents asserted that this concept did not exist, or were not sure about its meaning. In comparing these three studies on a time line, the trend would show that fewer and fewer Dominicans agree about the existence of this concept, thus its influence may be becoming weaker in Dominican society. In my study, however, there were interviewees whose responses corresponded with those reported by David Howard and agreed that the concept of ‘whitening the race’ was still important in Dominican society. A 20-year-old female from PUCMM<sup>80</sup> (racially identified as between *india clara* and *india obscura*) stated that “Yes, parents (especially mothers) really insist on [marrying lighter]” while her classmate, a 19-year-old male from PUCMM (identified as *moreno*) responded that “Yes, [this concept does exist] because lamentably we live in a racist society.” Therefore, although this concept may be weakening in Dominican society, it still remains one of the most important components of the Dominican racial hearth.

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<sup>80</sup> Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, primary field study site located in Santiago, Dominican Republic.

The esthetics of race remain one of the most discriminatory aspects of the Dominican racial hearth because of the deep-seated idea that European features are ‘good’ and ‘beautiful’ while African features are ‘bad’ and ‘ugly.’ These features include skin color, facial features, and hair. As Casandra Badillo articulates in her article “Only My Hairdresser Knows For Sure: public perception of women’s hair in the Dominican Republic,” the way that women style their hair carries a great social significance. Straight hair, as it goes along with European features, is considered most proper in Dominican society, although the majority of Dominican women must pull the natural curl out of their hair either through blow-drying it or among Afro-Dominican women, by using chemical relaxers to achieve this idyllic straight hair. She says that, “In the Dominican Republic, curly hair carries a symbolic weight, a social stigma (Badillo, 1996: 2).” Women who leave their hair naturally curly are seen as *abandonada*, roughly translated to mean that they abandon the duty of taking care of their appearance since curly hair is seen as informal, improper, or low-class. Among Afro-Dominican women, the social stigma of leaving hair natural is even worse, as Badillo’s research shows:

...a white woman is always white no matter what she does to her hair. But in the Dominican Republic, black women who stop straightening their hair are seen as rebellious: “When I quit straightening,” Chaki [one of her research subjects] said, “a man told me: ‘You look like you don’t have a husband. You will see the beating your husband is going to give you!’ Another person asked me: ‘Where are you going to work, as a cook or a washerwoman?’ My mother didn’t want to see me. One of my sons told me: ‘Mom, I didn’t know you were like that. We thought you were white and not black’ (Badillo, 1996: 2).

Merely from this passage, the stereotypes that are related to having naturally kinky hair are made clear: it means you are poor, thus the reference to working as a house servant; you make others related to you feel embarrassed or ashamed; and leaving your hair kinky means that you are accepting your blackness, or as Badillo says: “recognizing oneself (yourself) as oppressed and exploited (Badillo, 1996: 3).”

The cultural values contained in the Dominican racial hearth provide a sharp contrast to the current racial discourse in the United States, which explains why so many researchers are curious about how Dominican racial ideals clash with American racial values. How do transnational or first-generation Dominican-Americans negotiate these two sets of values to adapt or reconstruct their identities in an American societal setting? David Howard argues that among Dominican-Americans, these racial ideals remain intact in a transnational or American setting: “The perception and awareness of race, the racial hearth of Dominican society, remains one of the few aspects yet to be transformed by the development of a transnational community (Howard, 2001: 119).”

Many Dominican-American authors, such as Julia Alvarez and Angie Cruz, address the issue of race in their literature, but the author that I have found to have most directly confronted this issue is Loida Maritza Pérez in her novel *Geographies of Home*. Through her various characters in the novel, Pérez accurately describes racial ideals within the Dominican racial hearth as deeply embedded within Dominican culture. Pérez criticizes these racial ideals, but also illustrates the conflict that many Dominican-Americans face regarding their racial and cultural identity. She gives credit to the extremely difficult task of negotiating identity within an American societal context while still very conscious and influenced by the racial ideals of the Dominican racial hearth. Pérez embodies this conflict with her characters Marina and Iliana. Howard’s theory about the preservation of the Dominican racial hearth is proven by the character



Marina's denial of her African heritage, while his theory is problematized by the character Iliana, who rejects the ideals of the Dominican racial hearth and tries to combat these ideals, which are still well-preserved within her family.

In Pérez's fictional family, the esthetics of race remain preserved. Beauty values based on race are reinforced in the family unit, as both Iliana and another sister, Beatriz, are valued for their fine, narrow noses, while Marina is valued for her lighter skin tone. Their most European features are singled out and admired – as if to compensate for Iliana and Beatriz's darker skin tone and Marina's wide nose, their more African features. The comparison made between the sisters creates a competitive and ultimately destructive familial atmosphere, apparent from the following passage:

Competitive but indifferent to Iliana, whom she had cursorily dismissed as posing no threat, she [Beatriz] had focused her venom on Marina. No one, she had claimed, would ever consider her attractive. Not with her baboon nose and nigger lips. So Marina had better resign herself to becoming an old maid (Pérez, 42).

Beatriz feeds the idea that Marina's wide nose and full lips make her unattractive and undesired. She utilizes the Dominican racial hearth to make her lighter-skinned sister feel insecure. The fact that Marina is insulted based on her more African features reinforces her denial of her African ancestry and worsens her identity crisis.

Throughout the novel, Marina rejects her African ancestry and consequently pursues *blanqueamiento* more intently. Both of her obsessions are made clear in the following passage from *Geographies of Home*:

Marina: "Talking about men, have you hooked yourself a gorgeous, blue-eyed hunk yet?"

Iliana: "Blue-eyed wouldn't be my first choice," she muttered.

M: "Why? What do you have against white people?"

I: "I didn't say I had anything against them. And all whites aren't blue-eyed."

Marina snickered. "A big, black stud. That's what you want."

"Yeah," Iliana retorted. "A big-black-man-with-a-great-big-dick. What would be wrong with that if I did?"

"Only that you could do better."

"Better? What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"You know how black men are."

"No, Marina. Tell me."

"They're lazy as shit and undependable."

"You've been watching too much TV," Iliana snapped.

"TV my ass. Look at all your brothers."

"Look at yourself. You're suffering from the same thing they are, thinking anything lighter must be better."

"Give me a break, Iliana. How many black people are at your school?"

Iliana whirled around to face her sister. "What are you saying? That blacks are inferior? Is that what you think about yourself?"

"I'm Hispanic, not black."

"What color is your skin?"

"I'm Hispanic!" (Pérez, 1999: 38-39)

Marina's obsession actually pushes her to the point of insanity, illustrating Pérez's opinion about the difficulty of constructing Dominican-American identity. Before developing her mental condition, Marina works as a paralegal, hoping to meet a wealthy white or Hispanic man to

marry. However, the lawyers she works with are not interested in marriage and instead sexually harass and disrespect her. Eventually, her inability to marry her idyllic lighter-skinned, wealthy lawyer, combined with her inability to recognize that her view of white men is idealized, Marina drives herself insane. Since the selected passage occurs post Marina's mental breakdown, Pérez demonstrates that, even with a mental condition, Marina's ideas about race remain unchanged. The Dominican racial hearth remains intact and the reader begins to see how her retention of these cultural ideals in an American setting could have greatly influenced Marina's mental condition.

Iliana, on the other hand, is very conscious of her racial identity. She experiences discrimination at her college in Upstate New York, having the word 'nigger' written on her message board again and again. It is probable that this experience of racism helped to weaken the Dominican racial hearth for Iliana, but even prior to this she is more aware of the ambiguity of her identity because she has been questioned about it from a young age:

Iliana remembered as well how, during her years in that apartment on Pennsylvania Avenue and in that neighborhood where few other Dominicans had resided, she had yearned to look like the Puerto Rican or black American girls so that she could be easily identified as belonging to either group. She would have traded her soul to have the long, straight hair and olive skin of her Spanish-speaking friends, or to wear her hair in cornrows and have no trace of a Spanish accent like the Johnson girls down the street. She used to hate the question "Where you from?" because few of her classmates knew of the Dominican Republic and several of her black friends assumed that she claimed to be Hispanic in order to put on airs.

"What you talking about, girl?" they'd ask. "We don't care where you from! You be black just like us!"

"Nah, you speak Spanish. You one of us," her Puerto Rican friends would say.

She used to feel like a rope in a game of tug-of-war. Throughout elementary, junior-high and high school she had frequently been harassed by black friends for hanging out with greasy spics who in turn questioned why she wanted to be in the company of loud-mouthed spooks. With her skin color identifying her as a member of one group and her accent and immigrant status placing her in another, she had fit comfortably in neither and even less in the circles she had found herself in when she finally went away to school (Pérez, 1999: 190-191).

Iliana also experiences first-hand the confusion of constructing a Dominican-American identity within the rigid confines of American racial categorization; however, she is better able to adapt to the American system and thus the Dominican racial hearth is weakened to the point of virtual nonexistence, problematizing Howard's theory. Iliana's experiences in American society have been very different from Marina's experiences. She has attended college, experienced anti-black racism, has spent more of her formative years in the United States than Marina, and is more often identified by others as black because of her skin tone, which is shades darker than Marina's. These experiences have probably contributed to her deconstruction and rejection of the Dominican racial hearth, while Marina's experiences have not forced her to renegotiate her racial identity to the same extent. Iliana's rejection of the Dominican racial hearth demonstrates that further specification of Howard's theory is necessary, as the Dominican racial hearth is not preserved in all Dominican-Americans.

With *Geographies of Home*, Loida Maritza Pérez demonstrates the ways in which Dominican immigrants negotiate their identities in an American setting and the problems that

arise in this process. Her narrative criticizes the Dominican racial hearth, illustrated by Marina's mental breakdown, but also places her identity crisis in a transcultural context, making Marina a victim of competing Dominican and American racial value systems. At the same time, Pérez offers hope with the character Iliana who is able to deconstruct the discriminatory aspects of her cultural heritage and yet retain a Dominican-American identity. This literary work acts as an effective tool to explain the Dominican racial hearth in a manner that is not overly critical or apologetic in its approach to this complex issue.

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### **About the Author:**

Pamela M. Ritger was born in the U.S. to an American father and a Dominican mother, and considers herself Dominican-American. She received a B.A. in Political Science/International Relations from Carleton College in June 2003, with a Concentration in Latin American Studies. This article was the culmination of two years of research into Dominican ethnic and racial identity. An earlier version of this paper appeared in the 2003 Mellon Minority Undergraduate Fellowship Journal. Pamela plans to work on issues of inequality between Latin American and Western nations, especially concerning environmental, trade and commercial law, and is also interested in sociological and cultural issues in Latin America.

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## Stress, Coping and Resiliency Within Latino Families

Laura G. Perez

### Abstract:

This article offers a discussion of family development in Latino American families. Discussion examines stressful events within the Latino family and offers a model of coping methods that the family uses to reach resiliency during varying life events. The qualities involved in these developmental processes include external, internal, individual and communal factors. There is an emphasis on understanding that in order to ascertain cultural awareness and resources for all families in the United States there needs to be an acknowledgment of the multidimensionality of families in the United States, in relation to cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

### Introduction

Today the United States is home to about 309 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), 45 million of whom are Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008). The average family size in the United States is about 3.23 persons, which allows for an approximation of about 15 million Latino families in the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008). While there is some margin of error involved in the statistics, there are nonetheless a significant number of Latino families in the United States, and Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic group in the US (Parra-Cardona, Cordova, Holtrop, Villarruel, & Wieling, 2008). Due to this increase in the Latino population and the cultural differences they bring, the government and researchers have become aware that it is crucial to study this particular ethnic and cultural group (Chiang, Hunter, & Yeh, 2004).

Research on the lives of Latinos in the United States (Parra-Cardona et al., 2008), has found that there has been much discussion and debate on what it means to be an "American." Dictionary.com defines "American" as any inhabitant of the United States of America. By this definition, our society, institutions and organizations need to take into consideration that each ethnic group in the United States, including Latinos, brings new backgrounds, traditions, languages, values, morals, religions and norms and can encompass a multitude of characteristics. There is no room for a static mind-set about a homogenous United States culture as this will only produce ignorance and mediocrity. Acknowledging and understanding the multidimensionality of American families is vital to improving the lives of all families in the United States.

In this paper, I will discuss family development in the matters of stressful events, the use of coping methods, and the creation of resilience among Latino American families. I will also point out some differences between Latino families in relation to Anglo American families. I provide information to help better understand the Latino American family culture and how it is related to stress, coping and resiliency. I conclude with an example of how an agency takes into account cultural values and strengths to help Latino American families cope and what I view as my personal role in helping Latino American families succeed.

The definition of "Latino" is a term of great complexity, so for the purpose of this paper, it should be understood that "Latino" will be defined as a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, Central American, South American or Spaniard descent (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2006-2008). However, it is important to keep in mind that every sub-group of the Latino ethnicity has its own identity and culture. For example, the traditions and language of Mexicans is different when compared to Brazilian traditions and language. However, there are many cultural factors that different Latino subgroups have in common such as the cultural value of *familismo*, which I define later (Organista, 2007). Therefore, I will discuss the stress issues, coping methods and forms of resiliency that Latino American groups have in common.

## **Understanding Stress, Coping and Resiliency**

Before delving into the certain events that occur in the lives of Latino and Anglo American families, there are some models and concepts that need to be defined as the basis for the ideas in this paper. Lazarus and Folkman (1991) define stress as “a particular relationship between an environmental demand and a person (or family) that is appraised as taxing or exceeding one’s family’s resources and endangering one’s family’s well-being.” This can mean that a person or family under stress can be experiencing feelings of pressure, strain, tension, pain or trouble. Usually the factor or demand causing the stress is outside the person’s control and is a major change or transition (Lazarus & Folkman, 1991).

The hopeful reaction to stress is a coping method. A combined definition of coping by Lazarus, Folkman and Boss (1991) is “the cognitive, affective and behavioral process through which an individual and family manages (or attempts to) demands that are appraised as stressful. In an article about coping behaviors, Bird (2005) conveys that coping methods come in all different forms, such as problem-focused, emotion-focused, individual, dyadic and communal. A problem focused coping strategy is an active effort. This strategy involves the individual analyzing the problem, seeking out information, dividing the problem to find a solution for each section and taking action. This coping strategy demands focus and aims for effectiveness. An emotion focused coping strategy directs the solution to psychological regulation and a composed state of mind. This may involve relaxation techniques, self-control, positive self-talks or exercising. The goal is to have a healthy mind, so the individual can work towards a healthy life.

While coping measures are usually described in relation to the individual, coping is also done among family members as a communal coping strategy and can be a very powerful process. When applying coping strategies within a family it is essential to be very communicative and to make an effort to bond and sustain an attitude of interdependence among family members (Bird, 2005). Basically, to maintain strong family ties, the stressful situation must be accepted and understood by everyone involved in the coping process. If there is any concern or questions surrounding the stressful matter, it is useful for family members to gain knowledge in this particular area of uncertainty. Communication in this situation is not only verbal, but psychological as well (Bird, 2005). All feelings must be expressed and all family members should be sensitive to each other’s needs. Coping calls for a time of adaptability, flexibility, honesty and strength. These coping strategies are essential because the family needs to understand that life will never return to the state that it was before the stressful event. It is as if each coping strategy is a building block towards the new way of life.

The coping methods should result in a form of resilience for the family. According to the National Network for Family Resiliency, “Resilience is the family’s ability to cultivate strengths to positively meet the challenges of one’s life” (Retrieved from <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~fraz/nfr.html>). This means that the family has the ability to balance family demands with the capabilities that they have as a family; resilience defines the

family for everything they are and are not (Patterson, 2002). The different strengths or capabilities are their coping methods. The challenges or demands are the stressful events or stressors in their lives.

Resiliency is more than just overcoming the different obstacles that the family is faced with; it is a way of life for the family. The family finds a balance and a stable pattern to successfully handle the good and bad that life presents to every family member. While a stable pattern is necessary for the family, it does not mean that this pattern stays the same for the family eternally (Patterson, 2002). The pattern is going to have to change and be an ongoing process to best fit the family at that time and place of their existence, but once the balance is reached it must be solid and secure.

There is much research surrounding models of family stress and how families can best function. The successful functioning of a family involves many different factors (Patterson, 2002). It has become evident through research that there are differences in these factors when comparing ethnicities in the United States (Shapiro, 1995). Due to these differences, it is important to understand that the type and quality of supportive services are going to vary in necessity between ethnic groups. For Latinos, as with other ethnic groups, it is imperative to provide social services that are relevant to their specific needs.

### **Stressors among Latino Americans: Discrimination and Clash of Cultural Values**

First, I will discuss the most common stressors occurring in the lives of Latino families in the United States. Racial exclusion is a major stressor for Latinos at the moment. Racial exclusion occurs in events ranging from discrimination in employment opportunities to language barriers and housing demands (Parra-Cardona et al., 2008). When compared with stressors in Anglo American families, Latino American families are more likely to be exposed to community violence, deficient urban schools, discriminatory practices in the workplace (Parra-Cardona et al., 2008), and are more likely to have limited access to health and mental health care (Shapiro, 1995). Such barriers in these areas of basic needs can hold a family back tremendously and become stressful. When barriers to basic needs are the result of discriminatory practices against Latinos, they can be embarrassing and can place fear at the forefront of the challenge, which makes it that much more difficult to overcome.

Besides the external stressor of racial exclusion, there is also the internal stressor of acculturation. This is defined as “the complex process whereby the behaviors and attitudes of the immigrant change toward the dominant group as a result of exposure to a cultural system that is significantly different from one’s own culture” (Rogler, Malgady, Constantino & Blumenthal, 1987). Whether or not the entire family or some family members are immigrants, there is still a process of understanding and molding two different cultures into one. Although Latino families are in the United States and are a part of the American culture, they have the difficult task of working at not losing the Latino culture at the same time. Essentially, the Latino family needs to work at finding the best fit for their culture within the American culture without feeling limited by either one.

One of the main differences that have been shown between Latino families and Anglo families is the Latino value of *familismo*. This is a value “that emphasizes the centrality of family and kin networks, and prioritizes the importance of family interests over those of the individual (Kulis, Marsiglia, Nieri, Parsai, & Voisine, 2008).” While the family may be a form of strength, the difficulty may come from wanting to conform to the dominant US society.

Within this dominant society, which is based on Anglo American culture, independence is one of the highest and more important values. This value of independence creates a society that does not respect or promote decisions of an individual to put their main responsibilities aside and tend to their family members lives first.

Imagine a family of a Latina college student. The family wants her home because a family member is celebrating a traditional Mexican church ceremony, but the student has an exam the next day. The Latina college student can attempt to explain this to her professor, but if the professor is not Latino himself or herself, he or she may not know how important the event is and not understand the student's view of putting their family before everything. Instead the professor sees the student as someone who is using excuses to get out of the exam. Even if the Latina student decides not to go home, the teacher's impression of her has already been tainted and the student's relationship with the professor may be in danger for the remainder of the semester. This is an example of an outsider not taking into account the view of the Latino family that may feel disrespected and saddened if the family member does not come. It is also an example of a Latina individual who feels torn between her family responsibilities and academic responsibilities.

Another value that has been found within Latino culture related to *familismo* is that of *colectivismo*. The value of *colectivismo* "emphasizes the importance of remaining attentive to the common good (Parra-Cardona et al., 2008)." *Colectivismo* stems from a strong and respectful relationship among family members. Everyone in the family works hard and treats others with kindness because they all represent the family as a whole. It is the idea that everyone is living for one another and can act in passion and consideration that will help to produce a flourishing society. There is also the value of *respeto* among Latino families that is highly regarded. The value of *respeto* "highlights the need to inform all relationships based on dutiful respect" (Parra-Cardona, et al., 2008). For example, learning to be respectful to others no matter who they are and learning to behave and be grateful in all areas of life is the type of respect that is the backbone to many Latino cultures. Latinos want a close connection with family members and with a high level of respect a powerful relationship and connection can be maintained through life. Due to these differing values, Latino American parents and children deal with the ongoing conflict of attempting to stay loyal to their family, community and culture while living in a culture in which children receive education in schools that "celebrate the limitations of a monolingual English society and diminish the value of bilingual and bicultural competence" (Shapiro, 1995, p.162).

Racial exclusion and a lack of cultural awareness among the US social structures add many contrasting stressors to Latino American families in comparison to Anglo American families. On account of the varying stressors, the coping methods used by Latino American families differ as well. Shapiro (1995) explains that the "challenge of collaboratively integrating a complex, culturally diverse life experience can lead to creative adaptive strategies which feature a more perspectivistic or complex view of self and others' (p.163). Thus, the members in the Latino culture have developed coping methods that are culturally bound to their specific worldview of cultural perceptions (Chiang, Hunter, & Yeh, 2004).

### **Coping Strategies and Resiliency among Latinos: Cultural Values as Strengths**

The types of coping methods frequently chosen among Latino families have dealt with more informal social support systems than formal; coping methods may involve the church,



home care, folk healers or medicines. Latino families are more likely to consult within their family than consulting with professionals. In a study done by Chiang, Hunter and Yeh (2004), it was found that Latino college students do prefer activities such as exercising and participating in hobbies as a coping method, but only if the activities are with family members.

After stressors are experienced and coping methods are created, the overall outcome is resiliency within the Latino family. Many Latino parents use the negative aspects from their daily challenges (stressors) and reinterpret them as strengths for the future. The Latino parent uses this reinterpretation as a way to encourage and support the growth of their children and family as a whole. This becomes a way to teach their children that there are many opportunities that await them in the future and with the opportunities comes a time for improvement and success for Latinos in the United States. In a qualitative study about life experiences described by U.S. Latino parents done by Parra-Cardona and colleagues (2008), the researchers gave an example of a mother explaining that college was never an option for her, so she made sure her children attended college no matter what. Latino families are driven by this ideal to generate a finer legacy than the families that came before them; it is a symbol of the *colectivismo* to make the family proud.

## **Community Resiliency**

While families have the ability to combat stressors through personal coping methods and avoid future stressors through the formation of resiliency, there are times when families need outside resources to successfully reach the point of resiliency. Due to this need, there has been a formation of many different types of support systems in the United States often initiated by Latinos themselves. This is evident by the establishment of self-help groups, therapy facilities, psychologists, church groups and many others. As a result of the increase in Latino families, support centers have begun to cater to the exact needs of members in the Latino culture. While there is room for much improvement, it is important to recognize facilities that have already been established in hopes to decrease racial exclusion, increase cultural awareness and provide resources to families of all backgrounds.

There is one such establishment in Milwaukee, Wisconsin called *La Causa*. This agency and support system began in 1972 with only 19 members. It began because a group of Latina women in Milwaukee, WI wanted a place that they could trust and feel secure with looking after their children. *La Causa* now serves more than 13,000 families and is known as one of the largest bilingual, multicultural agencies in Milwaukee, WI. Their mission is “to provide children, youth and families with quality, comprehensive services to nurture healthy family life and enhance community stability (Retrieved from <http://www.lacausa.org/home>).” They aim to achieve this mission by providing the community and the families with “resources and opportunities to maximize personal development and self-sufficiency” (Retrieved from <http://www.lacausa.org/home>).

*La Causa* has programs for early education and care, a family resource center, social services, crisis nursery, and has established their own charter school. Within the bounds of the program there are values of providing a nurturing, bilingual, multicultural learning environment, a respect for parents in caring for their children, good ties with other community service providers and an overall aim of building a healthy and stable environment (Retrieved from <http://www.lacausa.org/home>).

This agency is providing a support system for Latino American and other families to

develop their coping methods to overcome the stressors in their lives. In the charter school program, there is an option for children 3-5 years old to be enrolled in a High/Scope Curriculum Approach to work in a bilingual setting to intellectually and psychologically prepare the child for school (Retrieved from <http://www.lacausa.org/home>). The child is able to retain their Spanish language and use English as well; they are given the opportunity to learn school subject ahead of time, so they do not fall behind in the future. As for the parents, there are multiple workshops offered, both in Spanish and in English, which teach academic curriculum, give job training and offer home visits (Retrieved from <http://www.lacausa.org/home>). The different workshops offered provide more knowledge and understanding of society that may contribute to more opportunities for parents to do well at their place of employment.

The agency also provides education that bridges generational gaps within the families. When parents grow up in a different country it becomes difficult to understand their child's development, which can lead to misunderstandings and stressors among family members. The agency is an outside source that acknowledges and explains these situations, providing a coping method for the family. The agency addresses that the entire family as a whole is important, not just the children or the parents, which incorporates the value of *familismo*.

This is only one example of a social support system by and for Latino American families. However, the possibility of increasing cultural awareness and decreasing racial inclusion in the future is attainable on a larger scale in the US. Although the solution is going to have to occur at a national level, I believe that finding and understanding the solution within oneself is where the process begins. As a student, as a young adult, and as a Mexican-Irish American citizen, I know there are ways I can move towards this change. First of all, I can spread my knowledge of the family stress and coping concepts to others. As a hopeful, future child psychologist that will most likely come across multicultural children I can help them by implementing solutions based on family stress and coping theories. I can also be a role model to my two younger sisters by living through the coping methods that best fit my cultural background, so they can follow by example. Second, I can continue research in this area. My pursuit of higher education in this field will allow me to find more information to give leverage to the varying family stress and coping theories similar to those of Lazarus and Folkman (1991). Third, I can live by this theory constantly. For example, I can demonstrate that many different cultural backgrounds and lifestyles can succeed together by being aware of my own cultural strengths, having a strong cultural identity, and communicating that to other on my way to becoming a successful professional.

### **About the Author:**

Laura Perez was born and raised in Milwaukee, WI with her mother, father and two younger sisters. Her multicultural background stems from her Irish-American mother and Mexican-American father. Her dream job is to work in an elementary school as a child psychologist to focus on preventative measures, working to improve communication within the child, the parent and the teacher. She is dedicated to being a positive influence and source of motivation to all those around her.

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# **El Dia de Los Muertos and the Struggle to Retain National Cultural Identity**

Steve R. Pereira

## **Abstract:**

Death, other than being viewed as a natural cycle of life in Mexican culture, has a unique expression that includes specific activities and behaviors in the lives of families and social lifestyles in a community. In traditional Mexican families, it has become apparent that their ways to deal with death has allowed them to continue with the struggle of life. However, in light of keeping cultural tradition alive, this paper will examine the struggle to maintain such ceremonies. The focus will be on how the United States celebration of Halloween has weakened Mexican national cultural identity in the borderlands.

## **Introduction**

The perception of death in different cultures is always thought to be the same, the usual belief of the transition from life to death. However, there is a widely held image of how some cultures deal with death in different manners. In the United States, death is seen as the end of one's existence on earth. Many Americans pay their last respects and say goodbye to their loved ones forever. Contrastingly, Mexico has a totally different view on death. Death is believed to be related to the morbid Mexican, unafraid and obsessed with dying because it is the bridge to reincarnation (Sayer, 1990). However, the view on death in Mexico and how it is changing has become a concern to Mexicans because their Mexican national identity is Americanizing and struggling to move away from United States ideologies. This paper will examine the Mexican view of death, and the struggle to maintain traditional ceremonies and practices of the Mexican Day of the Dead (El Dia de Los Muertos) through the lens of cultural and religious view points. The focus will be on how the United States celebration of Halloween has weakened Mexican national cultural identity through commercialization.

## **The Mexican cultural view of death and its historical roots**

Scorning and mocking death is part of the collective national identity that Mexicans share when they come to face death. As a result, this creates a distinct national perspective that enables Mexicans to separate themselves from other cultures. Throughout Mexico, death has become a symbol that allows its natives to self-govern their ritual practices and beliefs rooted from spiritualism and indigenous ideologies. This unique practice allows Mexicans to develop pride and vision to live in a culturally fused community that is intermeshed with the dead. An early study by Stanley Brandes (2003) indicated that Mexican national identity also promotes the national unification through cultural ethnicity, class, age, religious affiliation, and place of residence. A sense of *carnalismo* (brotherhood and sisterhood mentality) fuses Mexicans' indigenous roots because it reminds them of the relevance of the life story that is framed within contextual identities, which provide a deeper meaning toward understanding one's cultural reality and significance (Arredondo, 2002; Ramirez, 1998).

The culture in Mexico is principally derived from two cultural roots – religious and ethnic. For instance, the historical and religious background of Dia de los Muertos has merged with Catholic theology and the basic principles of Aztec rituals, such as the use of skulls. This cultural merging introduced a new way to keep the dead spiritually alive through building altars

that honor their loved ones. From these two roots, the view on death has converted into a spiritual element in Mexican culture, life after death. It has long been recognized that people construct collective identities through differentiating their own group from others. According to Brandes (2003) not all aspects of culture enter into this differentiation. For historical reasons, particular elements become especially salient identity markers. For example, many customs in Europe, influenced through Arabs, were transmitted to the Spanish conquistadors. These customs had a wide acceptance throughout the diverse practices that were considered to be *pre-Hispanic* Spain because the Spaniards believed that death was the end of life. In their attempts to get rid of indigenous ideology in Mexico, the Spaniards tried to use Catholicism to convince the natives to turn against their spiritual beliefs. Although this method was not successful, I believe that the Mexican natives, instead, learned to embrace Catholicism and incorporate it into their indigenous spiritual beliefs, which eventually enabled them to feel connected with a spiritual presence portrayed with affection and humor.

### **The Significance of Dia de Los Muertos as Cultural Practice**

Death in Mexico is embodied through the Day of the Dead. According to Brandes, (2003) the Day of the Dead, more than any other ceremony, provides a concrete indication of whatever Mexican posture toward death might exist. A celebration for the dead in Mexico has a profound connection with its rituals. Mexicans accept death as an unavoidable cycle of life for which they have a friendly attitude. During the first and second of November, it is believed that the deceased family members and icons that the deceased were buried with have special permission from God to come back to visit friends and family on earth. This observation, further clarified by Goizueta (2002), provides culturally symbolic celebrations such as the communal procession on Good Friday, and the use of altars as highlighting the fact that one's family, one's barrio, one's ancestors, and God all exist in one relationship. This celebration in Mexico is carried through cosmological, spiritual, and religious beliefs. During this time of year, artistic representations of death are widely seen throughout Mexico. Brandes (1998) argues that the Day of the Dead challenges stereotypes of the death-obsessed Mexican by tracing mortuary image through undifferentiated iconographic tradition, cranial skeletal images of death that have become virtually synonymous with Mexico itself.

Religious affairs in Mexico play a profound role in how death is viewed in Mexican culture. Since the influence and the rituals practiced during the Day of the Dead come from a cosmology vision created through Catholicism, most Mexicans embrace death as a spiritual cycle of life, because they hold a strong belief in reincarnation. The integration of an indigenous perspective provides structure to affirm one's spiritual awakening and a more appropriate order of transpersonal experiences (Lee & Armstrong, 1995). A similar understanding is noted by Assagioli (1991), who comments that the psychospiritual realm permits the human experience to be viewed as a larger whole, interconnected through a life force that is binding of all living entities. Death is not the natural end of life but instead it is a phase of an infinite cycle where a stage of cosmic process repeats itself continuously in indigenous roots. According to Paz (1961), life only justifies and transcends itself when it is realized in death, and "death is transition, a somersault between two lives, the temporal and the otherworldly" (p. 53), and eventually transcends into a new life.

### **Dia de los Muerto: Symbol of Mexican National Identity**

As previously discussed, Mexican national identity is no easy subject for discussion. It has long been the object of lengthy deliberation and passionate rituals that represent the different ways a Mexican can show his or her views toward death. During this holiday, representations of skulls and skeletons become an element of inheritance of the Mexican soul. *Calaveras* (skulls) are humorous epitaphs written for friends and celebrities, while they are still alive, which often circulate on printed sheets during the Festival of the Dead to provide an opportunity for political satire and comment, as noted by (Sayer, 1990). This is the uniqueness of death in Mexican culture because it recognizes a popular cultural belief. Furthermore, death related depictions are considered to be humorous, promoting laughter, enjoyment and happiness, rather than sadness. Cisneros (1989, 1994) states that this evolved understanding also engages one to promote *flor y canto* (i.e., laughter and song) and a willingness not to take oneself seriously. This shows that Mexicans rarely fear death and that they accept it because they know their spirit will remain alive.

### **The Influence of Halloween on the Practice of Dia de Los Muertos**

The national identity in Mexico does not solely remain in the Day of the Dead. Since the introduction of Halloween, Mexican cultural beliefs have been diminished because of this United State's commercialized holiday. According to Mayo's (2002) recollection of a conversation with Don Fernando Cota: "in downtown Cabo San Lucas, I find a swarm of black paper bats taped to the street walls of Planet Hollywood and cardboard tombstones and pumpkin head scarecrows are propped below on the sidewalk. Soon it will be Halloween and there will be a Halloween costume contest" (Mayo, 2002. p. 41). It is apparent that the United State's Halloween celebration has dispersed into a culturally fused area in Mexico and has started to change national identity through modernized franchise and customs.

Dia de los Muertos has its origins in Aztec tradition, whereas Halloween is rooted through Roman pre-Christian Paganism. Since both holidays occur at the same time of the year, Catholics merged cultures with Aztec indigenous practices to create Dia de los Muertos. A few decades ago, and more so with every decade after, Mexico has incorporated Halloween into their society through a similar commercialized event to Halloween, although much more comical. Some of Mexico's border cities, where there is more powerful influence from the United States, showed widespread Americanized versions of Dia de los Muertos. Halloween in the United States is an annual event in which United States Americans dress up as monstrous characters. Many wear costumes to depict witches, vampires, goblins, zombies, and devils. Although both holidays may seem similar, they are different in meaning because indigenous spirituality overtakes Mexican cultural beliefs. However, as Halloween slowly begins to infect the northern regions of Mexico, retention of Mexican culture weakens. The fact that Mexicans are often exposed to United States ideologies, many Mexicans find it hard to retain their traditions and practices. Loya's (2002) commentary on the need to own one's indigenous history, is understood as providing the relevant backdrop to an increasing self-awareness of social justice issues that may be impacting one's communal responsibilities. Additionally, ownership of one's indigenous history provides an opportunity to "wake up," which alerts an individual toward increased self-empowerment and a determination to change one's life circumstances—that is, learning to effectively manage the various social and economic life forced that are immediately changing. Therefore, it is important to recognize and own one's Mexican culture before it gets lost in Americanized customs.

Halloween is seen as an event that contrasts the traditional celebration of the dead. In the United States it is customary to see depictions of monsters and witches, something that Mexico tries to resist because these practices scare the living. Mexicans try to resist Halloween because it is not consistent with the ritual practices included in Dia de los Muertos. For example, altars built for loved ones represent the time for the dead to return home and visit loved ones. During this ritual practice, family members honor their deceased with offerings which consists of an object or food that symbolizes their life. Since Halloween excludes the elements of mysticism and remembrance of the dead, the meaning that Dia de los Muertos conveys of tying to life and death together is being lost. In Mexico, as elsewhere, folklore has been important in the search for national identity (Brandes, 1997). This is an important identity marker because it mirrors the ancestral roots and the essence of cultural spiritual beliefs. Without this notion, Mexico will fail to keep their symbolic holiday pure because the neighboring country has made them move toward a modern attitude.

Today, Halloween has slowly been influencing different beliefs in Mexico of what the actual meaning of Dia de los Muertos is because its commercialized concept is distorting the cultural views. As Brandes (1997) states, the historical origins of the two holidays are nonetheless closely intermeshed...but the actual origins and meaning of ritual beliefs and practices during Halloween and the Day of the Dead are becoming irrelevant to the growing significance of these holidays for national identity. As a native from San Antonio, Texas and a frequent traveler to Monterrey and Nuevo Leon, Mexico, I have noticed how Americanized ideologies are infecting the northern states of Mexico. For example, since the approval of NAFTA, I have seen an influx of American department stores being built in this region of Mexico. This agreement has allowed many Mexican natives to work at stores that produce large-scale marketing of Halloween costumes and candies. As a result, the Day of the Dead in Mexico has slowly started to become a commercial holiday. For instance, many Mexican bakery owners have started to use Dia de los Muertos as a way to make money by attracting locals to purchase sugar skulls and skeletons. Yet this aspect of festivities, which has grown through time and persists today, remains relatively unacknowledged in the collective mind of Mexican cultural nationalists. This presents a contradiction because these nationalists believe that Halloween in the United States has become a way for many Mexican natives to support their families. However they may not understand that commercialization may threaten the meaning of traditional cultural practices.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the traditional Mexican view of death has consisted of diverse influences that include cosmology, spirituality, religion, ritual practices and national identity. Whatever mysteries or questions still exist, one belief that remains regarding Mexican cultural life and death, is the belief about the ways in which the living can communicate with their deceased loved ones. In Mexico, there exists diverse ways to honor the life of the deceased, one of which is the celebration of the Day of the dead that is celebrated throughout the country. Also, much has been said about the Mexican attitude toward death, the importance of living side by side with it, and showing respect toward the dead. However, there is a concern about Mexico losing its traditions to those of Halloween because it is overlapped with the Day of the Dead in the modernized United States' attitude towards this Mexican celebration. The only way the Mexican view on death can survive is by continuing the celebration of the Day of the Dead. This celebration of the deceased, to Mexican people is part of a tradition that has survived for



centuries. In the memory of Mexicans, the dead are still alive and therefore, an active memory will nurture and enrich Mexican national identity. "In San Jose's main plaza there would be a contest for the best altar, announced El Diario Peninsular: To rescue the Mexican tradition of the Dia de Muertos, as well as counteract foreign influences. Hopefully this will leave in the trunk of forgotten things the ritual of Americans: Halloween" (Mayo, 2002. p. 45).

### **About the Author:**

Steve Pereira is from San Antonio, Texas. He is a senior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison majoring in Political Science. He is working towards obtaining a certificate in Chicano Latino Studies and Women Studies. He has always wanted to accomplish great things in life because he knows it would benefit him and his family. Being a first generation student has nourished his abilities to go far in life and to be able to become a great leader now and in his future endeavors.

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