

AN EXAMINATION OF THE SOCIOPOLITICAL HISTORY OF CHICANOS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

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How does a history of discrimination and marginalization affect Chicanos' perceptions of schooling? This article offers a brief analysis of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo as an instantiation of a historical metanarrative of colonialism. Using a critical theoretical framework, the article explores the destructive impact of this narrative on Chicano youth. Although it is clear that times change, certain essential elements of a colonial relationship remain; they are inescapable for Chicano youth and affect their view of schooling along with their school performance. Furthermore, students' critical examinations of these metanarratives can empower young people to disrupt predictable educational trajectories. The article concludes with suggestions for creating a caring school culture through a culturally relevant critical pedagogy that empowers students to develop a sense of hope, purpose, and positive identity.

Keywords: *Chicano education; urban education; critical pedagogy; culturally relevant pedagogy*

The underachievement of Chicanos in American schools is well documented, and yet solutions to this problem remain elusive and unimplemented. Valencia (1991), in his examination of the failure of the public school system to educate Chicanos, describes this institutional absenteeism as a prime example “of pupils affected by the pernicious ideologies, institutional mechanisms, and outcomes of educational inequality” (p. 3). What Valencia’s statement begins

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to shed light on is the larger sociopolitical context of the circumstances and histories of Chicanos in the United States, of which school failure is often an outcome. This sociopolitical context has its origins in government policies predating the infamous Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, and its legacy continues to linger in Chicano communities in the form of social and economic marginalization.

After a short description of the term *Chicano* and its usage in this article, a brief critical re-examination of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo is provided as the backdrop for a discussion of modern public portrayals and responses to Chicanos. The author contends that the dubious intentions behind such U.S. policies and actions toward Mexicans can act as a framework for understanding the current dominant social portrayal and treatment of Mexican immigrants and their descendants in the United States, particularly inside institutions such as schools. Furthermore, the argument is made that the history of this troubling sociopolitical relationship offers important insight into our understandings of decades of Chicano school failure. The article concludes by putting forth an analysis of the impact of this relationship on Chicano school performance, ultimately offering solutions for increasing the effectiveness of schools in reaching Chicano students.

Defining Chicano

Although a complete examination of the term Chicano is beyond the scope of this article, a brief synopsis of this author's definition—stemming from self-definition, personal usage, and inclusion and critique of others' definitions—will serve to clarify the term's use herein. Although many scholars have laid claim to a definition of the term Chicano, those definitions often find themselves in disagreement with one another, leaving its use quite varied. This variability often arises out of the fact that the term Chicano has purpose in two different contexts. In this sense, the term can be used to describe one's political identity, or it can be used as definition of one's socioethnic identity.

The flexibility of the term allows it to take on different meanings for different people, giving it the strength of diversity, much like the varied group of people finding themselves united under it. Similar to the term “nigga” in its present usage among some African Americans and other urban youth, the term Chicano became a turn of phrase among politically and economically disenfranchised Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Acuña (1988) explains that the 1960s California Mexican American student movement adopted the term which “had historically been a pejorative term applied to lower-class Mexicans” (Acuña, 1988, p. 338). He goes on to assert that working class Chicanos had long been using the term to playfully refer to each other. This turn of phrase has persisted in the face of “police and politicians,” many of whom were Mexican themselves referring to poorer Mexicans as Chicanos and describing them as “se hacen pendejo” [those who act stupid] (Acuña, 1996, p. 9).

With this historical background on the origins and meanings of the term, it might still be unclear as to who would be considered a Chicano in the present day. Some scholars limit the use of the term Chicano to specific references to the Chicano Generation and the Chicano movement of the 1960s (Munoz, 1989), arguing for its preservation as a term born of political activism. Others define the term as referring “to people of Mexican origin who were born in the United States” (Mahiri, 1998, p. 16), considered categorically different from Mexicanos (those who were born in Mexico). Like Mahiri, Guerra (1998) draws distinctions between the Mexicano and the Chicano in his study of a large Chicago-based Mexican population. Guerra argues that “Chicanos in Chicago tend to have limited command of the Spanish language . . . [and] they have acculturated to varying degrees” (p. 15).

The term Chicano has become so widely used that it is listed in *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* (Hirsch & Kett, 1993) and has even made its way into the *American Heritage College Dictionary* (1997) with the following definition:

Chicano: A Mexican-American, esp. a man or a boy; usage note: Care should be taken when referring to Mexican-Americans. In some regions of the Southwest the term suggests ethnic pride; in others it may be felt to be derogatory. (p. 108)

Although all of these definitions have their relevance and can stake claims to legitimacy if they are held up as absolutes, they tend to oversimplify the complexity of the term and the people who identify themselves with it. The term Chicano and its relationship to classism, racism, and political activism should not be forgotten or overlooked and is deserving of continued study. However, for the purposes of this article, the term Chicano is meant to represent people of Mexican ancestry living in the United States.

**The promise of an unpromising future:
Counternarrating the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo**

There is a long and well-documented history of U.S. imperialism in Mexico. Historians, sociologists, and anthropologists alike have documented and examined high levels of political disenfranchisement for Chicanos as a result of U.S. imperialism (Acuña, 1988; Menchaca, 1995; Zinn, 1995). Scholars also point out the alienating and mistrustful relationships that develop when there is no critical evaluation of such histories in dominant institutions such as schools (Acuña, 1988; Darder, 1998; Freire, 1970). To address the resulting, justifiable disinvestment in dominant institutions by Chicanos and other historically marginalized groups, it is important that history is presented in a way that allows for open analysis and critique. The development of this type of counternarrative stands against the traditional voice used in schools—one in which the United States might always makes right.

Acuña's *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* provides an excellent example of a historical counternarrative—one that re-examines the historical relationship between the United States and Mexico. His analysis of the events that led up to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the subsequent impact of the document's social and political policies provide critical sociohistorical insight into the present condition of Chicanos in the United States. Acuña confirms that the history of oppression between the United States and Mexico does not necessarily begin with the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, but this treaty is representative of their relationship, one that has changed very little during the past century.

He also notes that a good portion of the Mexican attitude about the defeat of Mexico City at the hands of American troops, which ultimately led to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, is symbolized by the nostalgic remembrances of Los Niños Heroes [The Boy Heroes]. These six teenage cadets “leapt to their death rather than surrender . . . and they became ‘a symbol and image of this unrighteous war’” (Acuña, 1988, p. 18). This image goes directly counter to stereotypical imagery of Mexicans as lazy and passive and questions common perceptions that the purchasing of the northern half of Mexico was righteous and economically beneficial for both countries.

Counter to traditional stories of overwhelming American support for the war, Acuña’s (1988) work exposes a very different historical narrative. He notes that some North Americans opposed the war because of the probability of the extension of slavery. Some American military leaders actually admitted that the United States had been the aggressors and saw this as morally problematic. However, he concludes, “patriotism and support for the war overwhelmed reason in the march ‘to the Halls of the Montezumas’” and led to the sale of nearly half of the country of Mexico for the price of 15 million dollars.

According to Acuña (1988), a key turning point in the postwar negotiations centered around the exclusion of Article X from the treaty. He argues that in spite of conflicting U.S. sentiments, Polk and his supporters did manage to amend the treaty to their liking, writing out Article X, which concerned the rights of Mexicans currently living in the occupied territories being purchased. What the deletion of Article X meant was essentially the elimination of property rights for Mexicans living on the soil that America had purchased. When word of the dropping of Article X reached the Mexican government, they protested and received a Statement of Protocol from the United States emissaries assuring them that land rights for Mexicans would be upheld:

The American government by suppressing the Xth article of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo did not in any way intend to annul the grants of lands made by Mexico in the ceded territories . . . Comformable to the law of the United States, legitimate titles to

every description of property, personal and real, existing in the ceded territories, are those which were legitimate titles under the Mexican law of California and New Mexico . . . (Compilation of Treaties in Force, 1899, as cited in Acuña, 1988, pp. 19-20).

As the Mexican Congress could barely raise the votes to ratify the treaty—even with this statement from the emissaries—it is clear that resistance to U.S. occupation was already present. In fact, opposition to the treaty was not hidden from public view as Mexican diplomat Manuel Crescion Rejón remarked at the time of the signing of the treaty that “they [Americans] consider us unworthy to form with them one nation and one society, they clearly manifest that their future expansion begins with the territory that they take from us and pushing [sic] aside our citizens who inhabit the land” (Acuña, 1988, p. 20). Rejón’s words became prophetic when much of the treaty was ignored and Mexicans began a journey of marginalization and second-class citizenry in U.S. society that persists today.

The Telling of History Makes It So: Life on the Political Margins

Acuña’s (1988) analysis of original historical perspectives from both Mexico and the United States is critical to the process of creating a counter historical narrative. Rather than a one-sided summation of the historical happenings, he is providing access to multiple voices and allowing readers to decide for themselves whether they agree with his analysis. This presents a more complete story and allows for a more accurate understanding of the events as they occurred. It also provides readers the opportunity to critically interpret events rather than being spoon fed metanarratives of U.S. Manifest Destiny.

This use of a critical historical perspective creates room for exploring the lasting effects of traditional historical portrayals of Mexico as subordinate to the United States. Freire (1970) provides one of the seminal works on the impact of this type of marginalization on the psyche of oppressed peoples, arguing that oppressed groups ultimately internalize their own oppression.

They come to believe the negative images that circulate around their identity until they become self-fulfilling prophecies. He writes,

Self-deprecation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything—they are sick and lazy, and unproductive—that in the end they become convinced of their own inadequacy. (p. 45)

Traditional American history is the story of Mexicans as a conquered people, virtually devoid of historical, economic, or cultural significance. These notions of powerlessness and cultural deficiency, most powerfully transmitted through the schooling system, have been passed down to Chicanos. However, this telling of Mexican history, and *vis-á-vis* Chicano history, is not the only version or even the most accurate one. The availability of more complete historical accounts (of events such as the Mexican American war) are imperative for a more equitable schooling curriculum. The work of critical historians and ethnographers (Acuña, 1998; Martinez, 1991; Padilla, 1993; Rendón, 1971; Villaseñor, 1991; Zinn, 1995) highlight the current shortcomings of history as it is currently told in schools. Their respective works explain that the positioning of the dominant historical view as the only acceptable knowledge in schools has meant the alienation and disempowerment of school-aged Chicanos.

As this process of institutional disenfranchisement continues to happen, Chicano students' faith in the school system wanes. Horace Mann's promise that schools would be "the great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance wheel of the social machinery" (as cited in Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 28) becomes another catch phrase in a long line of half truths. I say this in the wake of data, which show that Latinos supported the Los Angeles Unified School District by "voting for bond issues, and [that] local school board elections generated as much interest among registered voters in Latino communities as did statewide contests" (Acuña, 1996, p. 289). However, as has been the case historically, little change came

to the predominantly Latino schools from this push at the polls. Arguably, as Acuña (1996) notes, this lack of change can be directly linked to the fact that Latinos did not have the controlling number of votes and therefore did not set the agenda for Los Angeles public education. This history of taxation (social, economic, and political) without representation continues to negatively affect Chicano perceptions of the promise of equal and democratic institutional access, particularly among young urban Chicano youth (see Valenzuela, 1999).

Similarly, in his chapter in *Chicano School Failure and Success*, a comprehensive evaluation of the state of affairs for Chicanos in schools, Pearl points out the import of political direction, citing it as a key factor in school performance:

Political direction has an important bearing on school performance. When the emphasis is in providing political support for Chicanos—categorical aid, affirmative action, financial aid, etc.—school performance changes. . . . The crucial consideration today is the prevailing negative attitude among political leaders for such programs. Tied to the issue of political direction of a country is Chicano influence on that direction. Chicano political power has not been nearly proportionate to its potential voter base. (Pearl, 1991)

What Pearl's statements and the history of political interactions between the United States and Mexico help us to recognize is that Chicanos have spoken out against their sociopolitical oppression. However, the power and representation that presumably comes with political mobilization of a group has not been forthcoming.

The chasm between what is promised and what actually comes to pass is often contrary to the rhetoric of meritocracy. These political double standards are poignantly represented in rhetoric around Chicano parent participation in schools. Examinations of educational attainment frequently attempt to link parental involvement and academic guidance with school success (Cavazos, 1990). Often, this research allows for conservative interpretations about democratic participation. These notions can lead to claims that parents that are less involved with schools and/or the political process of this country get what they deserve (Henry, 1994; Nocera, 1990; Ogbu, 1987). The shortsightedness of such interpretations is

grounded in class values that often fail to understand economic limitations requiring a parent(s) to work multiple jobs, or shifts, differing from the middle class cultural norms of 9 to 5. These interpretations are also couched in the very upper class perspective of ownership and entitlement that often overlooks the power dynamics at play between dominant institutions and community members that have been made to feel unwelcome or unworthy of legitimate participation (Menchaca, 1995; Valdes, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). For scholars such as Ogbu (1987), the willingness to adapt to dominant cultural norms—which would presumably include democratic participation in a democratic society—ultimately leads subordinated cultural groups down the road of academic success. The flaw in this logic, aside from its assimilationist principles, is that it is ahistorical and presumes the existence of a true democracy in which participation is equally valued and encouraged. For Chicanos, quite the opposite has proven to be true.

Historically, Chicanos have found themselves in a political stranglehold spanning their experiences from urban communities to migrant farm towns. Menchaca's (1995) ethnographic work in Santa Paula, California, uncovers a history of sociopolitical oppression for Chicanos in their relationships to the dominant, Anglo American community. She argues that for a period of some 70 years, predominantly White families controlled not only the wealth of the town but subsequently also the political and social life. Through this control of the political process, they perpetrated a system of oppression that "subtly forbade Mexican Americans from participating in elections" (Menchaca, 1995, p. 110).

What Menchaca helps us to understand is that a perceived lack of participation in the political process by Chicanos has often been skewed in the eyes of the American public to be perceived as just that—a lack of participation. However, there is another, equally likely interpretation of the action of nonparticipatory behavior, which is not based on apathy but on a grounded perception of reality. Knowing that their participation in the political system was discouraged and would likely lead to economic punishment by their employers, Chicanos perceived political involvement to be counterproductive. Rather than this being apathy, which implies a conscious decision not to act although knowing that action would

produce results, Chicanos did not vote because they were forbidden to do so. Menchaca (1995) uses the writings of Ornelas to note the following:

Chicanos did not vote, not because voting was an Anglo thing but because Anglos forbade Chicano involvement at the polls. American society imposed clear restrictions based on law and custom. . . . The political socialization of a minority group is retarded when the host society is perceived to be, or is indeed, hostile. (p. 111)

The Politics of Public Portrayal: The Otherizing of Chicano Youth

The impact of the extensive history of political and social disenfranchisement that Acuña and Menchaca describe continues to manifest itself through public perceptions and portrayals of both Mexicanos and Chicanos in contemporary American society. The popular media's images of Mexicanos, Mexican Americans, Latinos, Hispanics, and Chicanos offered up for the American public tend to stream together to form one image. From California television commercials promoting fear over illegal Mexican immigration, to television news images of Highway Patrol officers chasing and beating illegals fleeing the law, and to mass media portrayals of criminal activity, the American public has been flooded with negative imagery of Chicanos. These menaces from the borderlands are often depicted as lawless bandits, roaming the badlands of urban America, producing crime rates inconceivable to the civilized public. As Acuña (1996) puts it,

The fear of crime was in great part a product of hysterical TV coverage, which equated crime with gangs and portrayed Mexicans, like Blacks, as universally gang members or drug dealers. (p. 255)

Politicians in urban centers nationwide have used images of criminal activity gone wild to place law enforcement and incarceration at the top of their budget agendas,¹ leading to all-time highs in the national per capita prison population (see Figure 1).

Former Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan and Police Commissioner Bert Beockman argued that the only way that the people

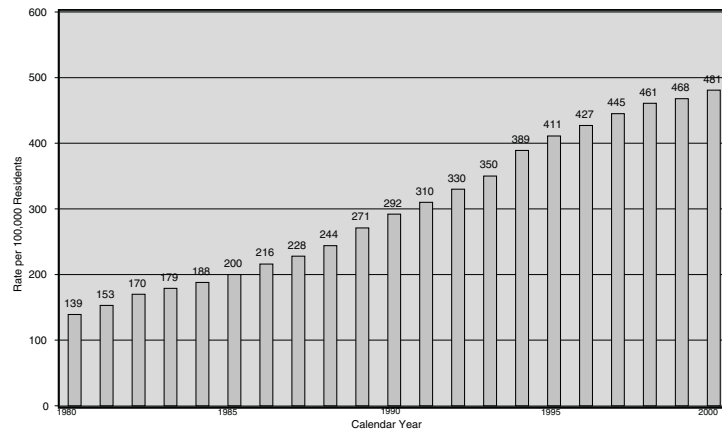


FIGURE 1 Federal and State Prison Rates in the United States, 1980 to 2000.
 SOURCE: Data collected from Bureau of Justice Statistics.

of their city would feel safe was if there was a police officer placed on every street corner. “Crime,” they said, “and the fear it creates is one of the primary reasons the city is losing its business” (Garvey & Winton, 2002). Little has changed in the discourse of the public officials currently holding the positions of mayor and police chief. A recent *Los Angeles Times* article, “City Declares War on Gangs” (Garvey & Winton, 2002), has an abstract that reads,

Mayor James K. Hahn and Los Angeles Police Chief William J. Bratton declared an all-out assault on the city’s street gangs Tuesday, saying they will use the same tactics that crippled the Mafia to pursue gang leaders and members. Bratton on Tuesday called gang activity “homeland terrorism”, warning that the city’s street gangs are “the head that needs to be cut off”. (p. A1)

Lying in wait, underneath these calls for more policing, are the rampant images of the violent Chicano gangbanger, the Cholo, who serves as the perfect scapegoat for a failing police force and ensures that statewide discontent over economic insecurity and crime is deflected away from elected officials and onto Chicanos and other non-White groups. (Acuña, 1996; see also Davis, 1990).

Images of violent youth gang members have become associated with the most heartless and cruel elements of urban society, and consequently with social and academic inadequacy. Its members are often characterized as young males of color with no regard for humanity or the rules of society, presenting an almost inhuman representation of "the Other," something a few can identify with but which most people can despise and fear. These "otherized" youth are said to gather themselves in city centers, wreaking havoc on an otherwise civilized society while the rest of the country tunes in to the nightly news to see the decay of urban schools and the landscape of urban America at the hands of these youth.

In the public sphere, the label "gang" is a thickly lacquered representational screen onto which powerful and contradictory images are projected. The term "gang" powerfully cathects and conjures middle class fears and anxieties about social disorder, disintegration, and chaos, which are made palpable in these demonized figures of inscrutable, unproductive, predatory, pathological, alien Others lurking in urban shadows and margins, outside the moral community of decent people (Conquergood, 1992).

Through the use of powerful imagery, including popular films such as "187," "American Me," "Colors," "Dangerous Minds," "Mi Vida Loca," "Mi Familia," and "South Central," and a plethora of popular rap music releases, the entertainment industry has made a valuable, consumable commodity of the marginalized, violent image of urban youth as gang members. In the process, the media has essentially proclaimed itself the informant of authority for the masses on gangs and their impact on urban communities. The impact of this media barrage on groups such as Chicanos has led researchers such as Conquergood (1992) to point out the ensuing trap that is laid for urban youth by the definitions of gangs and urban life that are embraced by the political, legal, and social power structures.

Urban youth [particularly Blacks and Chicanos] are always already inscribed by stigmatizing images of gangs and the so-called inner city that produces this social pathology. Before they tattoo their bodies with gang insignia, they are branded by the official discourse of the media, legal system, social welfare, and public policy institutions as dangerous Others, the menace from the mar-

gins. Gangs are constructed in public discourse as the cause, effect, and aberrant response to urban decay and disintegration (Conquer-good, 1992).

Given this social positioning of many Chicano youth into the margins of society and consequently the outskirts of academia, the roots of a heightened skepticism toward the institution of schooling and its connectedness to upward mobility become more lucid. In contrast to the notions of some scholars (Henry, 1994; Ogbu, 1987), their lack of success seems to hold more of a causal relationship to low societal expectations and limited socioeconomic and sociopolitical opportunity than to a lack of personal motivation or willingness to assimilate. What we find on the surface of dominant political rhetoric, such as "No Child Left Behind," is the promise that schooling offers Chicanos a pathway to rewrite society's negative imagery. Sadly, beneath the shiny exterior of this bootstrap theory, lies the reality that "[s]chools have historically kept Mexican Americans 'in their place' as cheap labor by pushing youth out of public schooling at an early age through the tracking system" (Munoz, 1989, p. 21). Given such inconsistencies in political rhetoric, the sociohistorical positioning of Chicanos must become a lens through which students and schools develop critical understandings of past struggles, so as to better reach the promises of equal opportunity.

Chicano students may or may not understand the complete historical relationship between Mexico and the United States, a story with a tail dragging more than a century into the past. They may or may not understand their social positioning on the margins of dominant society and its institutions. But what becomes clear when they attend schools is that they must change or fail. Freire calls this attitude among the institutions of schooling "the banking concept," whereby students must receive and regurgitate the knowledge legitimated by the schools to pass through those institutions.

In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable on those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry [sic] . . . by

considering their ignorance absolute, [the oppressor] justifies his own existence. (Freire, 1970)

Through this hegemonic approach to instructing non-White students and the subsequent failure of those students under that oppressive instructional scheme emerged cultural deficit arguments. Prominent educators worldwide argued that ethnic minorities had a culture that was deficient in comparison to Anglo cultures, and if they retained that subordinate culture, then they would certainly never reach the intellectual plateaus necessary for upward mobility (Olson, 1977; Ong, 1982; see also Valencia & Solórzano, 1997 for an extensive analysis of deficit theory).

Reform or Reproduction?

During the past 25 years, there has been a declared national commitment to improving the quality of education for Chicano and other urban student populations. In the face of these 25 years of attempts at reform, the numbers of Chicano students finding success in American schools has changed very little (Pearl, 1991). Although dropout rates for Whites and Blacks have declined substantially (from 12% to 7% and 21% to 13%, respectively) since 1972, we have seen no such statistically significant trend among Hispanics (see Figure 2; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001).²

There are many ways to perceive these two and a half decades of failed educational reform. One is to presume that the problem is so complex that American educational theorists have been unable to crack it despite ever increasing government attention. Another possible conclusion is that the reform policies necessary to significantly affect these trends of failure for Chicanos is so drastic that their implementation lacks the political support necessary for them to take effect.

Possibly a combination of these two conclusions is the most likely. As educators seek to find solutions to these problems, they are encouraged to uncover leaks in the ship that can be patched, allowing the ship to merely stay afloat. However, what is becoming more and more clear is that the ship is sinking as Chicano students

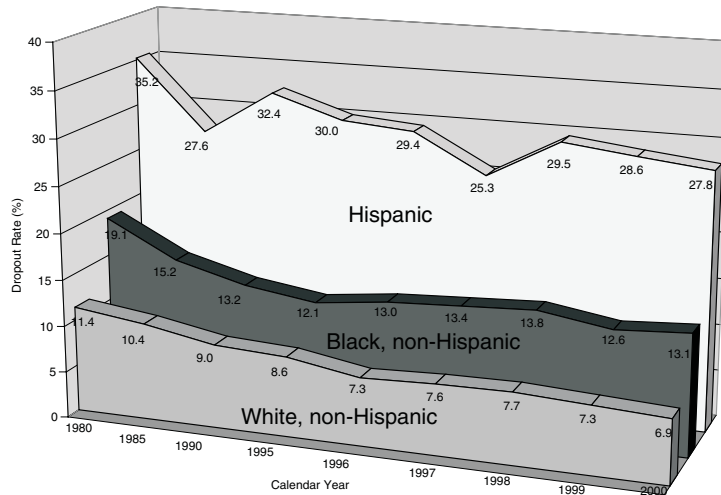


FIGURE 2 Dropout Rates of 16 to 24 Year Olds, 1980 to 2000.
SOURCE: Data collected from U.S. Census Bureau.

place less and less faith in the promise of schooling as the ultimate social equalizer. Pearl (1991) argues that this cycle of failure is reaching disastrous proportions as it continues to replicate itself (see also Solórzano, 1998).

The dearth of Hispanic college graduates has a direct effect on Hispanic school experiences. As the Hispanic population grows, the number of Hispanics available to teach them declines. A large Hispanic student population with few or no Hispanic teachers is generally recognized as a negative condition (Valencia & Aburto, in press). [sic] Whatever the cause, it should be apparent that significant improvement in Chicano school experiences will be more difficult without a significant increase of Chicanos as teachers and administrators. (Pearl, 1991)

This is the dilemma facing educational reformers. How do we produce Chicano teachers if Chicanos are not even making it out of high school? The detrimental effects of these trends of academic failure are heightened by the fact that the Hispanic population has more than doubled since 1980 (U.S. Census Bureau Decennial

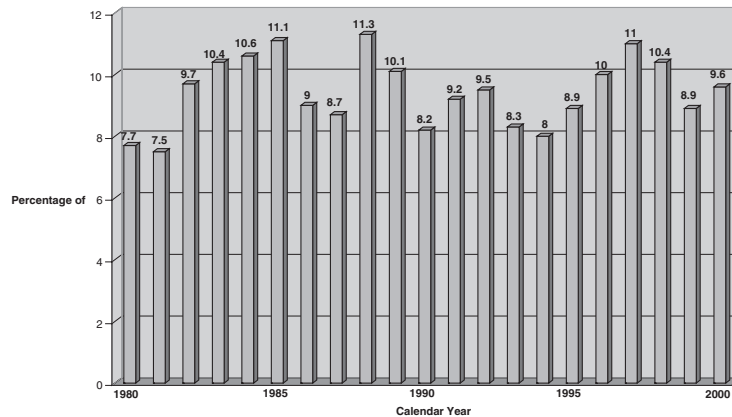


FIGURE 3 Percentage of 25-to-29 Year-Old Latinos with Bachelor's Degree or Higher, 1980 to 2000.

SOURCE: Data collected from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Surveys, 1971 to 2001.

Census of Population, 1980 to 2000). As Figure 3 shows, the growth in the numbers of Chicanos attaining college degrees has not kept pace with the group's population growth, resulting in severe underrepresentation in the pool of qualified potential teachers.

Research focused on increasing college-going rates for Chicanos sees the teaching force as a powerful place to create meaningful reform (Gibson, Gandara, & Koyama, 2004; Oakes & Lipton, 2001; Valencia, 1991). With a predicted national need for 2.2 million new teachers through the next 10 years, the conditions for a major overhaul of schools serving our most disenfranchised students seem to be in place.³ In all four of the largest districts in California, for example, more than 40% of the students are Latino, less than 25% of the teachers are Latino, but nearly 30% of the classified (nonprofessional) staff are Latino (California Department of Education Educational Demographics, 2003).

Pearl (1991) sees these high numbers of certified employees as a missed opportunity to increase the number of Latino teachers. He proposes reconceptualizing teacher credentialing programs to provide certified employees upward mobility into the professional

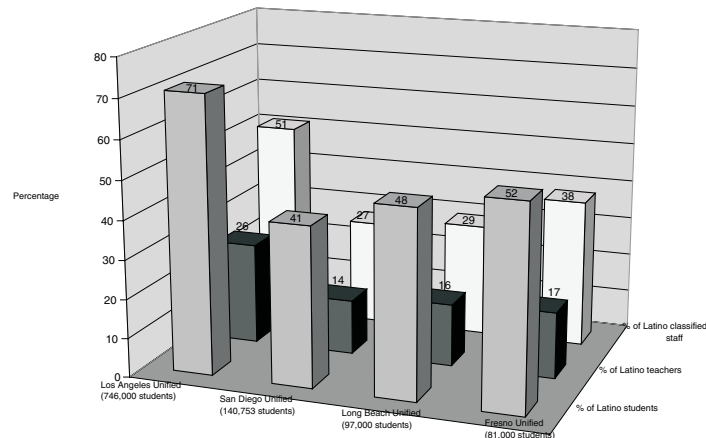


FIGURE 4 Latinos in California's Four Largest School Districts, 2002.
SOURCE: Data Collected From California Basic Educational Data System.

teaching ranks. Valencia and Aburto (1991) argue that there are three positive outcomes of such an increase in Latino teachers: (a) an increase in shared identity between teachers and students, (b) an increase in professional role models in the school and the community,⁴ and (c) an increase in the capacity to develop and deliver a meaningful multicultural education.

The creation of these professional opportunities would also mean the injection of economic capital into the community, as these new teachers are likely already living in the communities where they will teach (see also Anyon, 1997 for visions of urban education reform). A professional standing for community members will also shift the political dynamics of the school. This may have the most significant, long-term impact on schools, as rebirth in political influence could bring about more immediate and meaningful change in districts. As Valencia (1991) argues, "one application of political power is influence over school policy and practice. School policy and practices in turn are crucial determinants of school performance" (p. 275). Political power is crucial in determining the direction schools take, and without that power, it is

likely that Chicano communities will continue to see only patchwork solutions.

A Disempowering Curriculum

In addition to the absence of teachers and professional role models, Chicano students are also faced with a curriculum that too often reduces their role in the historical development of the modern world to that of a conquered people whose contributions are hardly worth mentioning. To exacerbate this problem, the legacy of oppressive relationships between Chicanos and American institutions is frequently minimized or bypassed altogether. In reference to this way of teaching American history in schools, W. E. B. DuBois wrote,

One is astonished in the study of history at the recurrence of the idea that evil must be forgotten, distorted, skimmed over. We must not remember that Daniel Webster got drunk but only remember that he was a splendid constitutional lawyer. We must forget that George Washington was a slave owner . . . and simply remember the things we regard as creditable and inspiring. The difficulty, of course, with this philosophy is that history loses its value as an incentive and example; it paints perfect men and noble nations, but it does not tell the truth. (DuBois, 1964)

This grand narrative of American history to which DuBois refers can become a site of tension for Chicano students in schools. Chicano students find themselves subjected to a set of competing realities throughout their educational careers. On one hand, there is the institutional narrative articulated in a teacher's promise: "you can become anything you want, even president, if you just work hard enough." On the other hand, students are given a curriculum narrative that portrays Mexicans and Mexican Americans as a group whose historical contributions to the United States do not extend much beyond the sale of half of Mexico to the United States. There is little, if anything, in the current state of schooling that provides students a space to critically evaluate the disharmony in these two statements or to develop counterhistorical narratives. Indeed,

school curriculum rarely provides references to Chicanos having made significant contributions to the development of anything in science, mathematics, or classic literature. Equally as absent from the school metanarrative, a likely result of the narrative itself, is the Chicano teacher whose presence alone would offer the beginnings of a counternarrative.

Instead, Chicano students are left to their own devices to make sense of readily available images of Chicanos serving food in the school cafeteria every day, and Chicanos cleaning the garbage cans and sweeping the floors at the end of each school day. The impact of this reality on a student's self-perception is compounded by the absence of a critical curriculum in which this can be interrogated. The result is what Maeroff (1988) called the "withered hopes and stillborn dreams" of students in urban schools. Although there certainly are students that are able to overcome the dearth of positive images of Chicanos, they tend to be the exception rather than the rule. To further complicate matters, these exceptional students are often asked to carry the added burden of being a spokesperson for the race inside of dominant institutions such as universities and professional workplaces. This weight often brings with it feelings of alienation that all but insures bouts with isolation (see Fanon, 1967; hooks, 1989; Rodriguez, 1982). Sadly, the school promise of meritocracy and equal opportunity finds itself losing out to a much harsher reality of inequality and misrepresentation. For disenfranchised students, the power to disrupt these trends of social reproduction lies in a culturally relevant critical pedagogy in which old narratives can be challenged and empowering new narratives can emerge.

One element of an empowering curriculum is that it allows students to process history through a critical lens. Loewen (1995) characterizes current trends in the teaching of history in American schools as a series of lies passed on from teacher to student. He points out the skewing of historic realities to characterize American presidents as heroic icons that are above critique. Loewen, along with other historians and sociologists (Acuña, 1998; Martinez, 1991; Padilla, 1993; Rendón, 1971; Takaki, 1993; Villaseñor, 1991; Zinn, 1995), explore critical historical narratives that hold tremendous potential to empower poor and non-White students.

One example of this potential is rendered in Loewen's analysis of Woodrow Wilson's invasion of Mexico in 1914. Traditionally, this story is described as a heroic and bold endeavor, supported by popular sentiment to bring order to the chaotic state of affairs in Mexico. This description of the American invasion of Mexico at Wilson's behest is commonplace for high school history texts such as *Triumph of the American Nation*, but according to Loewen (1995), it is also untrue. He writes,

Walter Karp has shown that this version contradicts the facts—the invasion was Wilson's idea from the start, and it outraged Congress as well as the American people. According to Karp, Wilson's intervention was so outrageous that leaders of both sides of Mexico's ongoing civil war demanded that the U.S. forces leave; [sic] Textbook authors commonly use another device when describing our Mexican adventures: they identify Wilson as ordering our forces to withdraw, but nobody is specified as having ordered them in! Imparting information in a passive voice helps to insulate historical figures from their own unheroic or unethical deeds. (p. 25)

For a Chicano student, such a change in curriculum whereby an act by the most powerful of Americans could be questioned and critiqued opens up a space for that student to feel empowered to challenge other aspects of his reality that he finds unjust. Freire (1970) argues that this allowance for critique is crucial in developing the most essential of the traits of human empowerment, the ability to be analytical. The ability to analyze allows those without power to become critical of their surroundings, to problematize their material conditions, and then to act on solutions for ameliorating the oppressiveness of those conditions. Freire (1970) sees this type of education to be liberatory, the essence of becoming more fully human:

For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (p. 53)

The deprivation of this opportunity to invent and reinvent, to see oneself as the creator of knowledge, stymies students' intellectual and social growth. This results in a system of education that measures its efficacy on its ability to reproduce the norms of the dominant culture rather than on its ability to create self-thinkers. The more completely disenfranchised groups adapt to these purposes of reproduction prescribed to them in schools, the less likely they will ever prescribe their own purposes in society and the more smoothly they will come to accept a limited future reality.

Reconceiving School Success and Possibilities for Change

The history of Chicano failure in schools has not been devoid of efforts by the Chicano community to be involved in change. In the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Chicanos fought successfully alongside of African Americans to bring national attention to issues of unequal access to dominant institutions such as schools. However, in the 40 years following those times of political unrest, despite continuous efforts to remain politically active and to promote the values of democracy and education from the home, upward mobility for Chicanos has not been forthcoming.

This "pluralistic democracy" that we constitutionally uphold cannot be pluralistic with only one hand on the pen of reform. Giroux (1997), in his examination of the politics of identity formation argues that heavy-handed control of identity and power by institutions such as media and schools must be addressed for pluralism to be realized:

The liberation of racial identity is as much a part of the struggle against racism as the elimination of racial discrimination and inequality. That liberation will involve a revisioning of racial politics and a transformation of racial difference. It will render democracy itself much more pluralistic, and will make identity much more a matter of choice than of ascription. (p. 285)

Other theorists have argued that pluralism will be achieved when minorities that take on oppositional attitudes begin to realize the

counterproductiveness of those attitudes and alter their strategies for dealing with a system they perceive to be oppressive. John Ogbu (1987) calls these groups "involuntary minorities" and argues that because they associate the United States and its institutions with oppression, based on a collective historical experience, they develop a counterculture of resistance to these institutions and the principles under which they operate. This theory, depending on your interpretation of it, lends itself to an important jump off point for creating the pluralism referred to by Giroux. If we understand Chicano school failure as a response to unfair educational practices rather than as a sign of deficiency or inability, then we can recognize that the failure of these students rests to some degree on the failure of the institutions to provide them with the intellectual space to critique and positively combat the lack of pluralism in American institutions.

This article has critiqued Ogbu's analysis of involuntary minorities as a call for these groups to change their lives in an effort to assimilate to the dominant structure. However, I would also argue that his work can be useful in the search for solutions to the dilemmas facing these groups in schools. Ogbu's theory can be used to provide those schools, which currently act as absentee landlords in the education of the most distressed U.S. youth, with an opportunity for self-reflection. If, indeed, this country's most unwanted youth are actually acting out of patterned, intellectual responses to oppressive stimuli, such as curriculum, then there is room for institutional reform to significantly affect student lives and academic performance. It is here that Ogbu's work is helpful because he makes it clear that Chicano students see schools as institutions that do not have their best interests at heart. This makes their resistance to school a natural reaction, one of self-defense, and one that does not pathologize them. From this perspective, the responsibility falls onto schools to self-examine and remedy the institutional circumstances that give rise to these feelings in their students.

Thus, the frequent critiques of Ogbu's work for its assimilationist tone may be an incomplete analysis of the possible usefulness of his theory. What may in fact be the case is that Ogbu has presented a case for the harsh reality that Chicanos and other non-White groups

are facing in U.S. schools, namely, assimilate or fail. If we look at Ogbu's work not as suggestive but as an anthropological summation of a set of social circumstances, it becomes useful for understanding the prevailing ideology of success confronting non-White students in public schools. In this light, the creation of school cultures that will lead to Chicano success depends largely on changing the institutional circumstances that most profoundly influence student perceptions of school. These influences include the culture of schooling and, more precisely, the pedagogy and curriculum put forth by the adults governing those institutions.

Along these lines, Darder (1991) argues that classroom teachers' pedagogical decisions can act in one of two powerful ways. They can reify ideological processes of marginalization:

the underlying principles related to both curriculum content and teaching methodology are derived from . . . the perpetuation of values and social relations that produce and legitimate the dominant worldview at the expense of a vast number of citizens. (p. 19)

She also argues that teachers can make pedagogical decisions that contest and change ideological processes of marginalization:

any classroom situation can potentially be converted into a critical environment as educators discover the multitude of pedagogical possibilities at their disposal. But this can only take place when educators courageously abandon old and disempowering notions of what is necessary and certain. . . . From this vantage point, teachers function as empowered social agents of history, who are firmly committed to collaborative struggles for transformation as they seek to change and redefine the conditions that threaten the opportunities for voice, participation, and solidarity in their schools. (p. 128)

In short, for reform efforts to positively affect Chicano school performance, they must abandon pedagogical perspectives that perpetuate dominant cultural ideologies and situate failure inside of perceived cultural deficiencies in Chicano communities (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). The consistent failure of this deficit model approach to educational reform demands a shift to a more critical

way of approaching the problem. Meaningful school reform efforts must reach out to the Chicano community with an eye to the fact that the institution has historically not served them well. For this to happen, the institution must recognize itself as oppressive and allow for the painful past to be openly critiqued by the community.

**Stories of Possibility:
Reforming Perspectives and Remaking Schools**

Apple (1990) argues that education is the key institutional link between economic circumstances, knowledge, and power. To this end, educational attainment becomes the strongest indicator of an individual's potential to attain socioeconomic self-determination. With this much at stake in schools, education ceases to be a neutral endeavor and becomes an act on students and communities. For education to become an act by and for young people, close attention must be paid to students' perceptions of whom they look to as holders of expert knowledge. In disenfranchised communities, a partial answer is instituting a more radical perspective about knowledge creation and purpose in schools.

This shift in purpose has already had some success in schools and community programs serving historically misserved youth. At Claremont Middle School and at Central Park East Secondary School (CPESS), students attend school in a "caring environment" (Valenzuela, 1999) that is fostering increased academic achievement in its various traditional and untraditional measurements. After a push to the Effective School Movement in the 1980s, Claremont improved its test scores on the California Basic Skills Test from a highest score in the 46th percentile to 3 years later having a lowest score in the 62nd percentile. Claremont, "once a dumping ground for troublesome low achievers" was given a new principal, a new attitude toward its students, and in 6 years, "the school has been transformed" (Pearl, 1991, p. 291-293).

Since it opened in 1984, CPESS has been lauded for its success with its predominantly Latino and African American students. In 2001, the school was 50.1% Latino and 44.8% African American. CPESS has consistently outperformed other New York City schools,

with 66.7% of its 2001 seniors graduating compared to 51% city-wide. Of those graduates, 91.5% are attending college, whereas only 66.1% of 2001 citywide graduates matriculated to college. In addition to these impressive numbers, CPESS has a dropout rate (11.1%) that is nearly half that of other schools in the city (20.4%).⁵

As a third site of effective work with Latino youth, Flores-Gonzales and Rodriguez (in press) reports on Café Teatro Batey Urbano in Chicago's Humboldt Park, a predominantly Puerto Rican community. At this educational-cultural center,

It is really more about a process of humanization . . . the space is decolonized, and that takes time, and that takes a series of discussions and dialogues . . . and it takes not being judgmental with youth, but being a space where they can come together and they can learn, and they can critique, and they can challenge. (p. 1)

Batey has focused on the implementation of a youth cultural development model that permits urban youth to interpret and act on the conditions of material inequality in their community and in the larger society. Students that find themselves unwanted in any number of Chicago's struggling urban schools find at Batey a "space where young people learn to use words to communicate their feelings and thoughts in writing, and where they can speak up about them publicly" (p. 14).

What Claremont, CPESS, and Batey Urbano show us is that changing how we educate Latinos and other poor youth of color is possible and impactful. The Effective Schools Model employed at Claremont offers a set of five circumstances (listed below) necessary for creating schoolwide change (Edmonds, 1984, as cited in Pearl, 1991). To address my important concerns that the model fails to address the reproductive nature of school (Pearl, 1991), I have included a sixth component that emphasizes the need for a curriculum that promotes rigorous and critical intellectual development among teachers and students.

1. Strong administrative leadership.
2. High expectations from students.
3. Safe and orderly environment.
4. Emphasis on academic literacy skill development.

5. Frequent monitoring of teacher and pupil progress.
6. Support for and implementation of a culturally relevant critical pedagogy.

These six elements are deceptively simple because they are, on one hand, obvious expectations for any effective school but, on the other hand, difficult to achieve in the context of severely underresourced schools that have been failing for decades. Still, we have stories such as Claremont, Central Park East, and Batey Urbano as examples that things can change. What these counter-narratives tell us is that the conditions for success may not be as hard to come up with as the will to commit to doing the difficult work of creating those conditions. Anyon (1997) argues that a key component of school reform rests in the willingness of school officials to change their attitudes to address the needs of the community they are serving. Anyon's words ring true in the cases of both Claremont and Central Park East, as their successes emerged out of schoolwide commitments to the specific needs of their students. Both schools sought out and hired personnel they knew would have a personal stake in seeing their students learn. Both schools had leaders that personally invested themselves in the success of their schools. Not surprisingly, this approach has produced success.

The sixth component of school reform emerges out of works that emphasize the importance of a culturally relevant critical pedagogy for schools servicing traditionally disempowered groups (Duncan-Andrade, 2004, 2005; Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Oakes & Lipton, 2001; Shor, 1992). What these works help to point out is that in our rush to racially sensitize textbooks on the way to a more appropriate multicultural curriculum, we have done little to provide poor and working class students the language to powerfully critique their society. Without this language of critique, the multicultural curriculum becomes nothing more than a subtext to the dominant narrative of "official knowledge." The discourse of critical analyses of past and current conditions of socioeconomic inequality remains at the margins of the school experience. As W. E. B. Du Bois pointed out in his essay "The Freedom to Learn," the demarginalization of this space for critique is central to the

sociopolitical development and empowerment of all groups that find themselves on the margins of society:

. . . we should fight to the last ditch to keep open the right to learn, the right to have examined in our schools not only what we believe, but what we do not believe; not only what our leaders say, but what the leaders of other groups and nations, and the leaders of other centuries have said. We must insist upon this to give our children the fairness of a start which will equip them with such an array of facts and such an attitude toward truth that they can have a real chance to judge what the world is and what its greater minds have thought it might be. (DuBois, 1964)

The provision of this critical intellectual space in schools moves us beyond the rhetoric of a success paradigm measured solely by higher test scores and grade point averages. It transitions notions of student learning into a space in which social, economic, and political circumstances can be interrogated and challenged by students. This opportunity for young people to critically investigate the conditions of their lives is an essential step in the development of their sense of hopefulness, purpose, and positive self-identity. For these types of fundamental changes to occur in the schooling lives of Chicano youth and other marginalized groups in the United States, schools must take on this more culturally relevant critical perspective.

NOTES

1. The 2003 California State Budget made cuts in every category, including education, except prisons. Prisons were given a small increase in funding.

2. Because the U.S. Census does not distinguish between Latino (Hispanic) groups of differing national origins, the educational statistics should be taken to suggest trends among Chicanos as well as other Latino groups.

3. This need will be greatest in areas with high percentages of non-White, low-income students.

4. Although non-Latino teachers can act as role models for Chicano students, Valencia points out that an important feature of role modeling is the "model-client similarity" (p. 33).

5. Data collected from 2000 to 2001 School Report Card.

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