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A. Reynaldo Contreras

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## *EPILOGUE*

### *Latinos at the Portal of the 21st Century*

A. REYNALDO CONTRERAS  
*San Francisco State University*

As we move into the 21st century, Latinos have become the largest minority group in American society. Consequently, we are shifting from a majority White/minority Black paradigm to a paradigm that will consider a broader spectrum of ethnic and racial diversity wherein Latinos will provide guidance in promoting inclusiveness as we address social change in the 21st century. The focus of this article is on the education of Latinos and on the efforts to address segregation while pursuing educational opportunities. It is concluded that maintaining any paradigm that promotes continued segregation of Latinos is inconsistent with the spirit if not the letter of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

*Keywords:* *Latinos; segregation; educational opportunities*

**In 1998, the balance tipped:** For the first time, Latinos and Latinas composed a greater percentage of the national school-age population than did African Americans. Within 40 years, Whites will become a statistical minority in the United States's school-age children. In Hawaii, New Mexico, and California, this population shift has already occurred (see Davis, 2000, for discussion of California's demographic shift, and see Haney López, 1998, for discussion of Hawaii's and of New Mexico's demographic shift). Texas will have a non-White majority around 2015, and Arizona, New York, Nevada, New Jersey, and Maryland will quickly follow (Haney López, 1997). The rapidly changing racial and ethnic demographics of our country might seem surprising not only because a non-White majority is anticipated within the next 60 years, but also because so much of the growth will occur in the Latino population. The 2000 United States Census shows that the percentage of respondents identifying themselves as Latino increased 60% since 1990 and that Latinos have become the United States's largest minority group even sooner than expected (Cohn & Fears, 2001).<sup>1</sup>

American society operates in a paradigm in which an individual is a member of the majority or of the minority, either White or non-White. As a group, Latinos are nearly invisible within this paradigm because non-White often is

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presumed to be roughly equivalent to African American. This invisibility is readily apparent in contemporary school-desegregation law. The perception of *Brown* and of its progeny as occurring in a society where there are two races, Black and White, is widely shared. This Black/White binary has influenced courts' and legislatures' remedies, such as school-desegregation orders and employment-discrimination claims. When those remedies originated in the 1960s, they reflected a population that was nearly 90% White, including an estimated 4% Latino and 10% African American (see Ramirez, 1995, citing the 1960 Census).

Although plaintiffs brought successful challenges to Latino segregation in public schools before *Brown* (1954) cemented the idea that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," the Supreme Court made no mention of those cases, nor any reference to Latinos, in its 1954 decision. *Brown* ushered in an era of viewing desegregation in a Black/White binary. It was not until almost 2 decades later, in 1973, that the framework changed.

In *Keyes v. Denver*, the Court endorsed the White/non-White paradigm by deciding that it would classify Latinos with African Americans for purposes of school desegregation. Since 1973, the changing racial composition of the United States and of public schools has resulted in many courts' balancing schools<sup>2</sup> according to a White/non-White paradigm that ignores the full spectrum of racial and of ethnic difference and that presumes that non-White groups are similar for purposes of racial and of ethnic balance.<sup>3</sup> The White/non-White paradigm was injurious to *Brown*'s intent because, instead of promoting equality, it promotes the dominance of Whiteness. White becomes the singular point of reference for all other races; if one is not White, the so-called other race to which one belongs is immaterial. White dominance and White privilege remain unquestioned when White is the standard against which all else is defined. This White norm has been particularly harmful to Latinos, whose history has been marginalized as much if not more than that of African Americans. This approach to balancing schools is not only intellectually imprecise, but it also denies Latinos the full benefits of school desegregation.

In the context most relevant to this commentary, school-desegregation litigation, Latinos and African Americans both must be integrated with White students. This epilogue discusses the importance of Latinos in school-desegregation efforts past and present caused by the already substantial and rapidly growing Latino population in the United States. Latinos are an important constituency nationwide and specifically in many school districts with outstanding desegregation decrees. However, many of the ideas discussed here are not exclusive to Latinos. The concepts have parallels to other racial

and ethnic groups. For example, in parts of California and New York, where large concentrations of Asian Americans reside, Asian Americans' experiences are similar to, but certainly should not be assumed to be identical to, Latinos' experiences (Chang, 1999).

### EMERGENCE OF LATINOS

During the closing decades of the 20th century, the process of gradual demographic transformation that had begun on the eve of World War II gained extraordinary momentum. At the end of the war, the population of the United States was largely of White, European origin. By the year 2000, more than a quarter of the U.S. population was composed of members of ethnically marked minorities, including African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans, and the future promises even more startling changes. In a widely cited report, scientists at the U.S. Census Bureau concluded that by the year 2050, some 50% of the U.S. population would be members of ethnic minorities, making the term minority somewhat anachronistic. These data, nevertheless, suggest an unequivocal social fact: The United States is now in the midst of unprecedented change (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999).

This increasingly obvious demographic reality makes it evident that the United States is becoming a country that is no longer largely White and of European origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). Indeed, the future of the United States will be in no small measure linked to the fortunes of a heterogeneous blend of relatively recent arrivals from Asia, from the Caribbean, from other parts of the world, and, above all, from Latin America.

At the dawn of the new century, the more than 35 million Latinos in the United States make up roughly 12.5% of the total population. It is estimated that, in just two generations, the United States will have the second largest number of Latinos in the world (after Mexico). More Latinos than African Americans are currently attending U.S. schools. Indeed, Latinos already have surpassed African Americans as the nation's largest minority group. The U.S. Census Bureau claims that by the year 2050, a full quarter of the U.S. population will be of Latino origin; that is, nearly 100 million people will be able to trace their ancestors to the Spanish-speaking, Latino, American, and Caribbean worlds (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

In this analysis, I have opted for the broadest, most inclusive, and most generous definition of Latinos: that segment of the U.S. population that traces its descent to the Spanish-speaking, Caribbean, and Latin American

worlds. The term *Latino* is a new and ambiguous invention. It is a cultural category that has no precise racial significance. Indeed, Latinos are White, yellow, Black, indigenous, and every possible combination thereof.

Latinos come from more than a dozen countries as varied as Mexico, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic. They also include Puerto Ricans, who move freely between the island and the mainland as U.S. citizens. Nor does the term *Latino* evoke any particular period in U.S. history. Latinos are among the oldest Americans. The ancestors of some settled in the Southwest and spoke Spanish, making it their home well before there was a United States. They did not come to the United States; the United States came to them. Latinos are also among the newest Americans, for two thirds of all Latinos in the United States are either immigrants or the children of immigrants. The vast majority of Latinos in the United States come from Latin America—the number of Latinos from Central and from South America grew by more than 100% between 1990 and 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

Latinos today are players in social spaces where racial and ethnic categories have high-stakes political and economic implications. The largest wave of immigration in U.S. history—the wave responsible for the current Latinoization of the country—took place after the great struggles of the civil rights movement.

One reason that racial and ethnic categories are relevant is that they have become critical tools in the workings of the system of administration. States use these categories for various purposes, such as census enumeration, taxation, and apportionment for political representation. Racial and ethnic categories as generated by state policy are relevant to a variety of civic and political matters, including civil rights, affirmative action, and equal opportunity. Furthermore, such categories are appropriated and used by various groups for their own emotional and strategic needs. Because all major federal agencies have chosen to employ the broader pan-ethnic term and because of a powerful bureaucratic and market-driven impulse to standardize and to homogenize, it is abundantly clear that, in the context of the workings of the state administration, the subgroup labels are generally quite secondary to the pan-ethnic construct.

Latinos are the offspring of these three broad sociohistorical processes: large-scale immigration, U.S.–Latin American relations, and racialization. These momentous social and historical vectors have shaped the experiences of Latinos in the United States. Although each Latino subgroup is unique, the lives, struggles, dreams, and deeds of Latinos in the United States can be fully understood only in reference to these formations and to their enduring legacies.

The presumption of a seamless, unproblematic Latino identity militates against the unity that U.S. Hispanic communities could and should forge to increase their levels of empowerment in American society. The potential for building coalitions, fashioning collaborative agendas, and joining forces in causes of common interest can become a reality only through serious reflection, inclusive dialogue, and tactful planning. Simply to assume Latino unity is to forgo the hard work, long time, and deep thought that bringing it about will take. A good number of scholars and of intellectuals have already warned against the danger of uncritically embracing homogenizing discourses in defining the Hispanic subsection of the American population (Davis, 2000; Flores & Yudice, 1993; Klor de Alva, West, & Shorris, 1998; Oboler, 1995). Flores and Yudice (1993) have described Hispanics in the United States as a "very heterogeneous medley of races and nationalities," composing not "even a relatively homogeneous 'ethnicity'" (p. 199). These authors and many others have abundantly shown that promoting general representations of the Latino community overlooks the differentiated cultural contributions and the particular social legacy that each individual subgroup has brought to the large canvas of American society. The disadvantages have thus far been articulated in terms of the levels of material or of symbolic power that a homogenizing representation can cause Latinos to lose or to fail to acquire vis-à-vis American society's non-Latino political and economic mainstream. However, no one has alerted us to what is perhaps an even graver danger: the debilitating impact that such representations can have on the ability of individual subgroups to fend off intra-Latino injustices.

Given the varied circumstances under which the various subgroups entered the United States, as well as the differing "ages" of their relationships with this country, at least these subgroups' economic and political leaderships differ in visibility, access to resources, and level of empowerment. Differing levels of empowerment imply, of course, unequal degrees of vulnerability. Divides may exist even within Latinos of the same national origin if obstacles such as race and class intervene.

With this background in mind, I would like to suggest that current assertions of a harmonious pan-ethnic Latino identity have the potential to perpetuate intra-Latino exclusions and injustices, thus preventing the emergence of a genuine sense of community among the various Hispanic groups that form part of the U.S. population. A corollary to this critique is the argument against locating Latino identity in the obtuse vastness of pan-hemispheric or intercontinental cultural spheres. I suggest that borders exist, the global economy notwithstanding and despite the transnational dynamics considered indicative of the demise of the nation-state. There is a need to separate Latin Ameri-

can from Latino identity, especially given the legacy of racial inequality in countries south of the Rio Grande River.

We can rest assured that, whatever its problems, the idea of a pan-Latino community with a claim to some kind of wholeness is here to stay (Oboler, 2000; Torres, 2000). We therefore face the challenge of articulating an all-encompassing narrative that might historicize the U.S.-Latino experience, all national groups and ethnic constituencies included. But we must remain acutely aware of the problematic paradigms that inform our effort. As Klor de Alva (1988) urged us more than a decade ago, we must reflect on the importance of class differences within the Latino community. Equating class with culture, he questioned the very existence of such thing as the Hispanic family because, in his view family, kinship, and gender roles all vary along socioeconomic and generational lines (pp. 116, 122). It follows, that “the poor inhabit a different cultural and socioeconomic world” from other strata of society among Latinos, as among any other portion of the U.S. population (p. 116).

Clearly, we must come to terms with our traumatic past. We must also acknowledge as cultural ancestry the indigenous population that suffered the consequences of that early Hispanic presence in what is now the United States. We inherit a racist ideal from both Latin and Anglo America, and we must try to keep it from dictating the logic of our remembering as we construct a Latino history. We must protect ourselves by instituting analytic safeguards in our models. Specifically, we need to admit the utility of boundaries—those confines that at least initially enable people to recognize one another in their difference. I would urge us to erect intra-Latino frontiers so that the differentiated experiences of specific national groups can come to light. It is as wrong to demonize boundaries as it is to simplify the common linguistic heritage that by some unexplained mutation turns all our disparate national and ethnic groups into one big, happy family. We need to begin unearthing the distinct histories of all the Latino subgroups that make up the U.S. Latino population, going beyond the exclusive focus on Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans.

## EDUCATION OF LATINOS

An important feature of the Latino experience is the increasingly segregated concentration of large numbers of Latinos in a handful of states in large, urban areas polarized by racial tensions.

By the year 2000, half of all Latinos lived in two states: California (11 million) and Texas (6.6 million). More than 70% of all Mexican Americans reside in three states (California, Texas, and Illinois). It has been argued that, as a result of an increasing segmentation of the economy and of society, many low-skilled Latino immigrants have become more, not less, likely to live and to work in environments that have grown increasingly segregated from Whites. (Waldinger & Bozorgmehr, 1996, p. 20)

Quite alarming are the recent findings of the Harvard Civil Rights Project, which established that Latino children are now facing the most intense segregation of any ethnic and racial group in the United States, as demonstrated by the following:

American schools continue the pattern of increasing racial segregation for black and Latino students. . . . Latino segregation by both measures has grown steadily throughout the past 28 years, surpassing the black level in predominantly non-white schools by 1980 and slightly exceeding the proportion in intensely segregated schools (90-100% minority) in the 1990s. . . . School segregation statistics show that the next generation of Latinos are experiencing significantly less contact with non-Latino whites; 45% of Latinos were in majority white schools in 1968 but only 25 % in 1996. (Orfield & Yun, 1999, p. 14)

Indeed, by 1999, more than 35% of all Latino students were enrolled in schools where 90% to 100% of their peers were other minority students.

School segregation is strongly linked to inequalities in schooling opportunities, processes, and outcomes. Forced to attend inferior schools, living in deep poverty and in heavily segregated neighborhoods, many Latino children struggle, educationally, against the odds. Most disconcerting is the unacceptable rate of school dropout. In 1998, 29.9% of Latino youths dropped out of high school, compared to 7.7% of White, non-Latino youths and 13.8% of African American youths (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). The future appears even more troubling, as schools throughout the country are instituting achievement tests as a prerequisite for graduation. Recent data suggest that large numbers of Latino youngsters are failing these tests. For example, in 1999, more than one third of all Latino students failed the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. Of course, whether achievement tests are administered, Latino youngsters who are leaving school without the skills demanded by an increasingly unforgiving global economy face dim prospects on the job front.

In his research, Haro (2004) has found that data have value in providing a sense of the expanding Latina and Latino student population and in providing something about their socioeconomic background, especially as the younger groups mature to comprise the future college-age cohort (18-to-24-year-olds). Thus, the population projections by the U.S. Census Bureau are critical.

Moreover, a much greater demand for access to American higher education is evident by the expanding ranks of Latino students interested in attending college. However, the programs and the machinery to accomplish a successful transition and matriculation through the baccalaureate process and onto graduate work remains static and largely unsuited for this population. There are several key factors affecting Latino students' access to college, successful matriculation, and preparation for graduate study that must be mentioned. First, the type of institution where Latino students begin their undergraduate experience is significant. Second, the type and the quality of academic preparation and guidance in the K-12 grades most often determines success or failure in admission to and matriculation at the campus of choice. Third, once at a college or university campus, advising staff, services, and faculty assistance will determine, for the most part, whether a Latino student prepares adequately for graduate or for professional study. And finally, access to enrichment programs, undergraduate research opportunities, and other forms of pre-graduate school preparation activities are determinative in the level of postbaccalaureate attainment.

Information available from different sources indicates that, in major states like California and Texas, which have large and well-established community college systems, the percentage of Latinos attending 2-year colleges may exceed the national norm. The transfer rate from most 2-year colleges to 4-year campuses remains relatively flat. Too often, effective advising and constructive encouragement for Latino students to pursue an academic major and to transfer to a 4-year college are lacking.

The value of such outreach programs like PUENTE<sup>4</sup> is twofold. First, it recruits students at the high schools and prepares them to attend college. Second, the preparation and the mentoring enable most PUENTE students to complete a 2-year academic program at a community college and to transfer to a 4-year college or university. One important aspect of the PUENTE process that demonstrates a priority for achieving academic success for Latino students is an emphasis on writing. The instruction focuses on teaching writing and critical-thinking skills. This academic activity develops strong writing skills and moves the student from narrative or personal writing to rigorous academic prose, including analytical, argumentative, and research-based texts.

Because such a high percentage of Latino students do attend 2-year colleges, where many of them opt out of an academic-transfer program, some version of the PUENTE program should be a model for replication in geographical areas where Latino youth are concentrated.

One of the greatest challenges for Latino students and for their parents is to qualify for a private, 4-year, liberal arts college, especially the most selective ones. The way these institutions select their entering classes, and the support provided for targeted students, is significant. The factors that work against Hispanic students at these institutions are numerous. Some of the major challenges, however, include learning to navigate the system, continuous performance evaluation, developing peer support, faculty and staff support, and retention programs.

Three strategies to help Latinos persist and graduate from university are improving campus climate, finding role models, and developing academic-support services. Therefore, some of the top research universities, where Latinos and where other underrepresented minorities are increasing in numbers, have put in place structured programs and activities and have hired Latino staff to help these students persist and earn their degree. At some campuses, there are programs to prepare minority students for the rigors of graduate study. Included in some of these efforts are activities and services that help students select an appropriate graduate or professional program and craft a strong application.

Access to a Ph.D. program usually involves a much different set of tactics than those used for admission to a professional school. The role of a graduate faculty member is critical in this process. Too often, Latino students, because of limited familiarity with graduate education, apply for graduate school and do not make contact with a suitable faculty member.

Outreach programs like PUENTE are rigorous experiences for students and provide a successful way to achieve a student's educational goals. Putting aside matters of financial assistance and of family or community involvement and relationships, some critical matters still remain. Latino students must participate in well-designed and academically rigorous outreach programs in high schools under the aegis of a selective college or university.

Latino families must play a larger role in major decisions that a student will make regarding the type of higher-education campus selected and the kind of academic experience required for a particular career field. There is much for Latino parents to learn about the kind of preparation in the schools that their children will require if going to college is a priority. Informed decisions about which classes and which course sequences are important, honor classes, the Advanced Placement Program, or the International Baccalaureate Degree Program need to be explored and understood before a student

reaches a 2- or a 4-year campus. Soliciting the assistance of an outreach program like PUENTE makes this process much easier for Hispanic parents.

For students at a 4-year campus, the advice of trained academic advisors and counselors will be critical to Latinos with ambitions to do graduate or professional study. More often than not, the recommendations of a faculty member, along with strong grades, good test scores, and a research portfolio, will make the difference between going to the doctoral program of choice or to a fall-back decision. There is a need for Latino parents and students to learn as much as possible about selecting the right undergraduate college or university for the career desired. Access to pertinent information about how to prepare for admission to the campus of choice, and then how to negotiate the system on the campus to graduate on time and with high grades, is critical. Thus, whether a student succeeds in going to graduate school is not so much a result of their desire but of having the right information and completing a rigorous academic program.

## CONCLUSION

The unique identity of Latinos is important because of their common experiences in the United States, experiences distinct from African Americans' and with which it should not be combined. School desegregation, however, has collapsed Latino history, first rendering it homeless in the Black/White binary that was the legacy of *Brown* and then rendering it invisible in the White/non-White paradigm that was the legacy of *Keyes*. Recognizing Latinos as a distinct group is inconsistent with both the Black/White and the White/non-White paradigm and has threatened the privilege connected to those binaries. Even so, Latinos are a significant percentage of our nation's population, and they are becoming a greater percentage every day. Maintaining paradigms that allow for the greater educational segregation of Latinos is inconsistent with the spirit, if not the letter, of *Brown*.

## NOTES

1. Because race and ethnicity are separate questions on the Census, some individuals who self-identify as racially African American could also self-identify as Latino. However, only 1.7% of African American respondents also indicated that they are a member of another racial group, thus making it less likely that a significant number of individuals designated themselves both racially African American and ethnically Latino.

2. In the remedy phase of school-desegregation litigation, courts commonly require that schools throughout the district contain numbers of White and of non-White students roughly proportional to the respective percentage of White and of non-White students in the district. This practice is generally known as balancing schools along the lines of the race and of the ethnicity of students.

3. For a recent example, see *Brown v. Unified School District* (1999), 207-211.

4. PUENTE is an outreach program established by the University of California to recruit Latino students.

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*A. Reynaldo Contreras, Ph.D., is a professor of administrative and interdisciplinary studies in the College of Education at San Francisco State University. Formerly, he was department chair at San Francisco State University and a professor of educational leadership and policy studies at Indiana University, Bloomington. Professor Contreras received his doctorate in philosophy from Stanford University, where he studied administration and policy analysis. His research interests include policy research in education, minority educational leadership, and education in emerging metropolitan contexts. He has contributed to journals and to books on urban education and on educational leadership and continues to serve on editorial boards of professional publications in education.*