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# REVIEWS

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Enrique T. Trueba. *Latinos Unidos: From Cultural Diversity to the Politics of Solidarity*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999. 173p.

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Much has been written over the past five years on pan-latinity and Latina/o identity in the United States. Trueba's contribution to this body of work is refreshingly original, however, because he frames the question as an intimate and personal one. In the opening paragraph, he makes this focus explicit: "I cannot detach issues of my personal identity from issues of Latino solidarity, cultural hegemony in America, and the terrifying experience that our enduring self is gone or is a stranger from our past" (xxvii). The personal substrate from which Trueba launches his analysis begins to take shape in the Introduction. The author recalls his life as a Jesuit priest and his subsequent decision to leave the priesthood and dedicate his life to academic endeavors. This brief recollection of the author's journey through the halls of faith and reason serves a dual purpose. First, it endears the author's life and struggle to the reader. Second and more importantly, however, I feel that Trueba's introduction is actually a metaphor that illustrates the very condition that he ascribes to the U.S. Latina/o community. Trueba explains that after leaving the Jesuit Order, he was unable to extirpate himself completely from the priestly self that had been constructed during his years as a seminarian. Trueba's transition from priest to scholar was really not a transition at all, but instead it was an addition — from priest to priestly scholar. Trueba argues that Latinas/os entering the United States also configure their new, situated selves with an enduring self that maintains the cultural and linguistic heritage of the homeland. In this way, diversity itself becomes a polysemous term in that it refers not only to the differences between the distinct Latina/o groups but also to the differences encountered within oneself. Solidifying diversity on both levels seems to be the recurring theme of *Latinos Unidos*.

Chapter 1 discusses the recent anti-immigrant sentiments that have been gaining in popularity over the past decade and that have resulted in legislative action such as Propositions 187 and 209 in California. Trueba notes that while such xenophobia is certainly not alien to the history of the United States, the recent ex-

pressions of it are fundamentally different from those seen in the past. While past outbreaks of immigrant bashing occurred during periods of economic hardships, today's episodes are, for the first time in history, being played out against the backdrop of economic recovery. Such a social, economic, and historic backdrop makes the present scene all the more distorted and disproportionate. Trueba forcefully argues for the immense benefits that Latina/o immigration has brought to this country. He demonstrates that these benefits come in the form of "intangible, long-term developments" (8) that normally escape the attention of both politicians and public opinion. The greatest benefit that Latina/o immigrants have brought to this country are cultural. Latinas/os have brought with them a cultural capital of inestimable worth; they have brought with them a capital that fortifies democracy and revitalizes the liberal ideals upon which this country was founded in ways that far outweigh the social problems that anti-immigrant politicians emphasize. Trueba argues that Latina/o immigrants bring with them a resiliency that finds expression in community units and networks and that this resiliency "is profoundly related to the construction of a new ethnicity and a new identity, without necessarily rejecting other identities" (9).

Chapter 2 sets out to analyze the unique demographic characteristics of the various Latina/o groups in the United States. Trueba adduces data in support of the fact that Spanish dominant homes do not correlate significantly with poverty levels and educational attainment. This fact is extremely important in light of the oft-cited criticism that Latinas/os' insistence in maintaining their native tongue reflects their unwillingness to participate and contribute to society at large. While Trueba does deny that linguistic and cultural maintenance causes socio-economic marginalization, he does not dismiss the widening power asymmetries that plague the Latina/o community. In fact, he points out that Latinas/os have benefited the least from the economic recovery of the 1980s and the 1990s. These asymmetries are propagated and perpetuated in the socio-economic structures of the country in numerous ways; however, Trueba chooses to focus on their perpetuation in educational institutions. This is a wise choice given the general youth of the Latina/o community. Traditionally it has been argued that power asymmetries are propagated by way of the teaching methods adopted in schools. The logical solution to the problem is, of course, to revamp or reconceptualize the methodology. Trueba argues against such simplistic and myopic solutions. In order to stop the propagation of power asymmetries in the schools, one must focus not on the curriculum but on the people who transmit and breathe life into that curriculum. Teachers must be taught to be culturally sensitive, and more importantly, to have "political clarity." Political clarity is the art of translating and critically analyzing exemplary

pedagogical approaches into culturally and linguistically viable codes. It is the art of making learning interesting and relevant to students, but more importantly, it is the art of having faith and confidence in the potential and in the prior knowledge of students.

Chapter 3 shows that the perpetuation of power asymmetries is not limited to elementary and secondary education, but that it has also infiltrated the very arteries of higher education. Trueba notes that the laudable efforts of affirmative action programs have not been as effective as many critics would contend. The greatest asymmetries to be found in higher education may be seen in the hiring of minority faculty. Based on personal experience, Trueba shares his frustrations over the predominantly white male faculty's fears of hiring and promoting minority candidates. This chapter is not simply a lament, however. Trueba feels that power asymmetries are perpetuated in higher education because there is a lack of mentoring and academic socialization of minority faculty members. In order to remedy the situation, then, Trueba makes a very bold and specific proposal to set up centers that would assist young minority faculty in becoming more adequately socialized in the arena of academia.

Chapter 4 focuses on the inherent strength of Latinas/os to overcome the asymmetries described in Chapters 2 and 3. Through specific case studies, Trueba argues that Latina/o resilience finds its purest expression in the insistence upon and the profound commitment to the education of youth. He carefully analyzes the expression of this resilience, and he finds that it is primarily perpetuated by Latina women. "In the end, it is mothers who engineer the quality of education and their children's choice of careers" (109).

Chapters 5 and 6 tie the previous arguments together with both critical ethnography and the pedagogy of hope. In these chapters Trueba sets forth a charge to educators to fundamentally revise their view of Latina/o children and to see the profound importance of these children for the future of this country. "Daily praxis through action and unbiased, open interaction with immigrant children starts from the assumption that these children can learn and they deserve to be empowered with knowledge" (161).

*Latinos Unidos* is a landmark essay in the continual struggle to understand the growing Latina/o community at the dawn of the 21st century. Trueba's insight into contemporary political problems and his true passion for education, in its broadest sense, are truly an inspiration to young scholars and teachers. Trueba argues for culturally sensitive and politically sensible education in ways that are both intellectually stimulating and emotionally moving. I think that *Latinos*

*Unidos* is a must read for anyone interested in education, at any level, in the United States. ✨