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Latino Civil Rights in Education: La Lucha Sigue

Anaida Colón-Muñiz and Magaly Lavadenz (Eds.)

New York, NY. Routledge, 2016

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Reviewed by Kortney Hernandez, Loyola Marymount University

Latino Civil Rights in Education: La Lucha Sigue, edited by Anaida Colón-Muñiz and Magaly Lavadenz, is a carefully curated anthology that honors and centers the voices of brave students and activists in the struggle for civil rights in the education of Latinas/os. Sixteen critical narratives compose this anthology that provides an historical legacy of struggle and counter narratives to the dominant discourse that saturates and depicts Latinas/os in education. The implications of these narratives draw upon the political, economic and historical realities of the untold stories and “silenced discourse” of Latina/o civil rights activists. The stories they tell are important for any educator working with Latina/o students. The historical and present miseducation of Latina/o students is clear throughout the anthological map that Colón-Muñiz and Lavadenz set before us, as they put forth narratives that interrogate racism, language issues, policies, court cases, ethnic studies, the quest for social justice, and the call to counter a “pedagogy of lies”.

Donaldo Macedo’s powerful foreword, speaks of a “deferred revolution”, and his influence on both Colón-Muñiz and Lavadenz, as he encouraged them to uncover what happened to the Latina/o activists who so courageously challenged segregation and declared “no mas” (no more) inferior education for their children. Macedo frames the collection by providing an important context for the work of those that are presented. As such, the reality that Latina/o history has been interpreted through the lens of non-Latinos serves only as a perpetuation of the dominant colonizing culture that seeks to provide false realities. Moreover, Macedo astutely interrogates the “people of color” category that renders Whiteness invisible and in turn, points to the hyphenation (i.e., Mexican-American, African-American, Asian-American) process as recognition that this is an illustration of those that have not been given full citizenship. Those placed in positions of leadership and educators

of Latina/o students must honor the history and spirit of those who have fought for civil rights and must push back against the tendency to become “colonized and indifferent” to the struggle.

“Si se puede” (Yes we can), the call by Dolores Huerta and so many others embodies power, courage, and hope, which continues to reverberate throughout Latina/o history. Macedo, Colón-Muñiz and Lavadenz, forthrightly addressed the usage of “Yes we can” by President Obama which usurped and sloganized Huerta’s powerful words, disembodying them from their historical roots in the Farmworkers Union Movement and from the passionate advocacy of Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and many others. One of the sixteen narratives includes an interview by the authors with Dolores Huerta as she provides her perspective on the education system with a deep recognition that *la lucha sigue*: the struggle continues. This struggle taken up by Colón-Muñiz and Lavadenz seeks to center and place Latinas/os in their rightful place—subjects and tellers of their own his and her/stories. Thus, we are offered a formidable collection of stories by those whose lived experiences depict the struggle for civil rights in education by Latinas/os.

Issues of inequality have plagued Latinas/os for centuries, but the civil rights activists who have struggled and refused to remain silent put their lives on the line to challenge all forms of oppression. Civil rights activists are not only black as history might have us believe. Pushing against the black/white binary, narrators such as Mike Madrid and Sandra Robbie point this out in their analyses of the Lemon Grove incident and Mendez v. Westminster, respectively. Madrid and Robbie highlight two important cases that, while neglected from history and the school curriculum, showed the courage and tenacity of parents and communities as they collectively challenged segregation. Untold stories of struggle surface in the book as Luis Fuentes recounts his experiences as one of the first Puerto Rican principals in a New York City School; Sonia Nieto relives her experience as part of the BC44 who protested and were arrested for their activism in the ethnic studies movement; Pedro Pedraza provides an account of the struggle to establish El Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños at Hunter college in New York; Herman Sillas, the lawyer for Sal Castro, provides his perspective of the 1968 Walkouts and his journey as an activist; and Theresa Montaña, Marta Sanchez, Evangelina Brignoni, Anaida Colón-Muñiz, Maria Quezada, Magaly Lavadenz, Pablo Ramirez, Angela Valenzuela and Patricia Lopez all provide important recollections of their lived histories and struggles as activists who

engaged issues related to the union, higher education programs, language rights as civil rights, colonization of our histories, Prop 227 and the English for the children movement, action research and parent advocacy, and the history of the National Latino/a Education Research and Policy (NLERAP) project with a “grow-your-own” initiative to improve the lives of Latinos through education.

Drawing upon the work of MacDonald, the authors close by offering up an appendix that provides a detailed historical and chronological account of the experiences of Latinas/os in Latin America and the United States from the 1500s-2012. This is a valuable account for all educators and in particular Catholic educators, as it provides a documented history of key moments that are vital to the education of Latina/o students. In 1858, it is noted that Anglo parents won the battle for English-only instruction and thus, Mexican parents began enrolling their children in Catholic schools that permitted Spanish. In line, with the courageous and collective spirit found within this anthology, it is not surprising that the action of parents to mobilize in reaction to racist practices enacted upon their children would be shown through parents moving their children to Catholic schools to preserve their language and heritage. Thus, this points to a crucial recognition for Catholic educators, as they seek to provide accurate historical accounts in the education of Latina/o children. How can one educate or understand the debilitating and brutal conditions placed upon Chicanas/os-Latinas/os without an understanding of the historical realities and their linkage to the present day?

McLaren and SooHoo, in their afterword note that “spaces of hope and possibility” have been created and cultivated by non-white educators and cultural workers and thus these have been the sites of liberation that exist within schools and the community. Thus, the courageousness of the Latina/o authors and narrators of each of the sixteen narratives, many of whom were influenced by Freire’s work, to challenge, disrupt and counter the dominant thinking, provide a critically conscious mass of civil rights activists that continue to inspire and labor for justice. They have embodied, the words “Si Se Puede” in their fight, heart, and commitment to the ongoing struggle. Yet, much work is still ahead, as Dolores Huerta and the authors of this book note so eloquently: *la lucha sigue*, the struggle continues.

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