

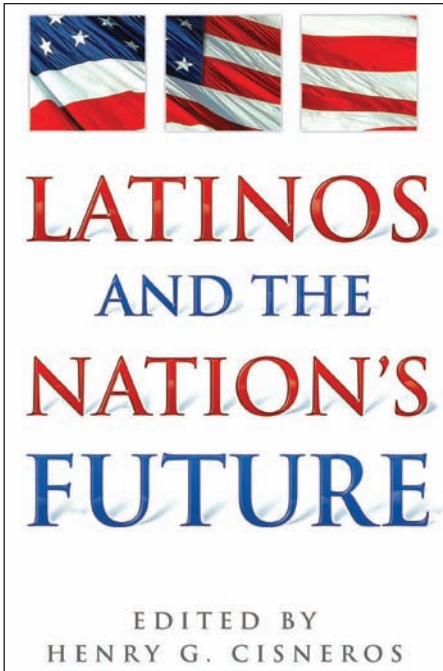
The Interweaving of the United States and the Hispanic Community:

A Review of Latinos and the Nation's Future

by Henry G. Cisneros (ed.)

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Reviewed by Kenneth C. Burt



Kenneth C. Burt, M.P.A. '84, is the political director of the California Federation of Teachers and a visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley. The author of *The Search for a Civic Voice: California Latino Politics*, Burt has authored chapters in five anthologies, an encyclopedia entry, and academic articles relating to Latino politics, labor, and the Cold War. He has started a blog focusing on national Latino political history since the 1930s. For more information, visit www.KennethBurt.com.

“The same things are said today of Puerto Ricans and Mexicans that were once said of Irish, Italians, Germans and Jews: ‘They’ll just never adjust; they can’t learn the language; they won’t be absorbed.’” So wrote former U.S. President John F. Kennedy some five decades ago in *A Nation of Immigrants*. The sixteen contributors to *Latinos and the Nation's Future* share President Kennedy’s assumption that immigrants make good Americans. On one level the authors seek to refute the present generation of nativists; on another they seek to proscribe a path forward in the subjects of politics and policy, business and labor, and primary and secondary education, as well as capital formation, housing, and health care. But this anthology has a far more significant and overarching message: the dramatic growth of the Latino community—which, as cited in the book, is projected to increase to 25 percent of the national population in 2050—means that the economic, social, and civic health of the United States as a whole is increasingly intertwined with that of the Hispanic community.

Henry Cisneros, former San Antonio mayor, cabinet secretary in the Clinton administration, and businessman, edited this timely book, which succeeds as both

a scholarly tome and a practical guide for policy makers. He demonstrates how rapidly the process of integration is occurring in his introduction and opening chapter. According to Cisneros, “the flaw in the arguments of [Harvard] Professor [Samuel] Huntington and others who fear Latino separatism is that they are insufficiently respectful of the strength of American culture to create an irresistible magnet for full integration.” In this, Cisneros is both idealistic and practical. He articulates the need for society to facilitate “the process of integration” while recognizing that “integration into American life requires the intense personal commitments of motivated people.”

The chapters that follow span an array of topics by many well-known individuals. An overview of each is provided below.

Janet Murguía, president and CEO of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), notes in the foreword that a hundred years ago there was a network of institutions with a mission of helping immigrants adapt and adjust. By contrast, today’s new arrivals are largely left on their own to navigate life. This raises the question: What should be done to assist Latinos and immigrants in the United States?

Nicolás Kanellos’s essay, “The Latino Presence: Some Historical Background,” is one of my favorites because he showcases Hispanic influence in the New World that was more extensive than many people understand. He also discusses early labor leaders, important because of the proletarian nature of most Latino communities.

Raúl Yzaguirre, former NCLR executive who now serves as U.S. ambassador to the Dominican Republic, begins with the Spanish influence on Latino-

mainstream relations and goes on to examine the marginalization of Latinos by English-speaking Americans and more recent civil rights struggles.

In “Becoming American—The Latino Way,” former journalist (now immigration advocate) Tamar Jacoby posits a new lens to understand Latino naturalization patterns by borrowing a metaphor from Albert Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs.”

University of Southern California Professor Harry P. Pachon contributes a fine essay, “Increasing Hispanic Mobility into the Middle Class.” He stresses that “the acquisition of educational capital is undoubtedly the most common means of such movement,” while also emphasizing the importance of home ownership.

Businesswoman Aída M. Álvarez, former director of the Small Business Administration under President Bill Clinton, examines the dynamic nature of entrepreneurship in the Latino community as well as the high rate of self-employment.

Building on Pachon’s emphasis on education, former Clinton education adviser Sarita E. Brown prescribes how institutions can increase the rate of higher education success. She also examines a number of successful efforts by colleges and universities with large Latino populations.

Florida activist and former Democratic congressional candidate Joe Garcia examines the emergence of Latinos as a political force in the aftermath of the massive immigration-related protests of 2006 to 2007. He stresses that in states like Florida Hispanic voters cannot be seen as reliable supporters of either party.

Advertising executive Lionel Sosa served as adviser to former Presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush, and a number of other

Republican political figures. He asserts that Latino values are Republican values.

Journalist Sergio Muñoz Bata argues that Mexican Americans should make closer U.S. relations with Mexico a political imperative in the same way that Cubans, Jews, and Greeks have done successfully in the context of U.S. foreign policy. The international journalist notes that Puerto Ricans have had mixed success in this effort.

UCLA School of Public Affairs Professor Leobardo F. Estrada and University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication Professor Roberto Suro provide complementary looks into attitudes, demographics, and trends among various Latino subgroups. Suro previously served as the founding director of the Pew Hispanic Center.

Health and housing—two pressing needs within the Hispanic community—are discussed by nationally recognized experts Dr. Elena V. Rios, past president of the National Hispanic Medical Association, and Saul N. Ramírez Jr., head of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials.

Ernesto Cortés pens the concluding essay. A national leader in the Industrial Areas Foundation, the longtime community organizer reflects on education and community action. Cortés stresses the need for more conversations and community-school interactions as the foundation for Latino student and adult learning.

While the multiple Hispanic experiences are each unique in a number of aspects, they share characteristics with each other as well as with other immigrants in search of the middle-class life that defines the American Dream. Taken together, the essays featured in *Latinos and the Nation's Future* provide a starting point for new and more purposeful policy conversations both within the diverse Latino community and, equally important, between Latinos and non-Latinos.