LATINOS AND THE NATION'S FUTURE

EDITED BY
HENRY G. CISNEROS

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WITH JOHN ROSALES

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DEDICATION

To Mary Alice Cisneros, Celina Treviño Rosales, and our families, without their support this book project would not have happened.

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FOREWORD

Janet Murguía

One of the most cherished institutions in any place large or small is the public library. Beyond lending books, libraries are often where children acquire a love of reading and help with their schoolwork, and where many people have their only Internet access; they serve as the meeting spaces for numerous community activities and organizations.

Libraries are so central to the life of a community that it is easy to forget that the idea of a public library is barely a century old. With the goal of ensuring that anyone who wanted to learn could have the means to educate themselves, the steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie built nearly two thousand libraries at the turn of the last century. Thousands of communities followed suit.

But this massive public-private venture also had another purpose, explicitly stated by Carnegie: to establish the means for immigrant self-education, enlightenment, and the study of democracy and English. Public libraries, along with the public school system and the Progressive Movement's Settlement Houses, were among a series of initiatives undertaken in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to integrate millions of recently arrived immigrants into American society. By every measure, they were an astonishing success.

Yet our country hasn't undertaken anything even remotely comparable since then. Henry Cisneros' *Latinos and the Nation's Future* makes a com-

pelling case that such initiatives are needed today and that they are in the best interest of all Americans, not just Hispanic immigrants themselves.

Despite the lack of deliberate integration initiatives, today's immigrants are assimilating remarkably well. Immigrants and their children are learning English faster than ever, and the number of people applying for citizenship is breaking records throughout the country. Challenges remain, however, that affect not just immigrants but all Hispanics. Latinos continue to be the most undereducated group at all levels. They are overrepresented in low-wage, dead-end jobs without benefits and underrepresented in high-wage occupations.

Given the exponential growth of the Hispanic community, these challenges put our entire country's future at risk. It doesn't need to be. A century ago, naysayers wrongly predicted that immigrants would never become loyal Americans or succeed economically. But immigrants went on to defend our country through two world wars and to fuel massive economic prosperity as they vaulted into the middle class. Latinos have all the raw materials of our immigrant ancestors—a strong work ethic; a set of values deeply rooted in faith, family, and country; and an unbreakable optimism.

Cisneros and his coauthors make the point that the fate of the country and that of Hispanics are inextricably linked. In other words, one essential way to maintain our status as the greatest nation on the face of the earth lies in opening the door to the American Dream to the current generation of immigrants. It follows that an investment in immigrants today is an investment in America's future.

I could not agree more. Just like the public library, the fruits of whatever we do today will be enjoyed by all Americans in the years to come.

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Henry G. Cisneros and John Rosales

In February 2007, a group of Latino scholars, writers, and leaders in a variety of fields came together at our invitation to engage in a series of discussions about the Latino present and future in the United States. The motivating factor in our invitation was the need to explore the meaning of an extraordinary development in our nation's history, that is the dynamic and, in recent years, explosive growth of the Latino presence in all aspects of American life.

Today, American Latinos are the fastest growing and youngest population segment, generating fast-growing levels of economic attainment, moving into positions of leadership in all sectors of society, and making rich contributions to the cultural life of the nation. This phenomenon has been called the "Hispanization" of the United States. It is a mistaken concept assumed to mean that the United States will become a Hispanic nation. Instead, we believe that the Latino presence in the nation's future will be so pervasive that it will be one of the defining differences between the nation as we know it today and as it will change over the next twenty-five years.

Latinos and the Nation's Future is organized to help Americans of all ethnic groups in all parts of the nation understand the Hispanization of the United States. It makes the point that the scale of population change is large and reaches every part of the country, to states and regions far beyond traditional Latino settlement patterns. It asserts that the youthful character of the Latino popula-

tion, with its propensity for work and its ambitions to succeed, is a powerful engine of potential strength for the United States and an advantage when compared to the demographic trajectories of population decline in Japan, France, Italy, Germany, and other northern industrial nations.

The central message of this book is that this phenomenon of Latino potential is of such scale that it is no longer a side-bar interest; it is now a basic shaping force of the American future. Therefore, we advise that it is in the nation's interest to undertake the full integration of this population, to harness its market growth, to develop its educational potential, to engage its community-building energies, and to transform it into the backbone of the next American middle class. These are things Latinos are working hard to accomplish on their own, but as in the case of every other rising group in the American saga, the United States must be open to that prospect in its policies and attitudes and must do so in modern ways that reflect the particular realities of our time.

The contributors establish the scale of Latino growth, anticipate what it will mean over a timeframe of twenty-five years, and offer concrete suggestions for how Latinos themselves and American institutions must work together for progress.

Whether it be as the "swing" vote in an election in a particular state, or as the dormant ethnic contingent in baseball—America's National Pastime—or as progenitors of the country's most popular food condiment (salsa), it is abundantly clear that Latino influence is pervasive and growing more so with each passing year. All this despite the harsh impact of the recent so-called "immigration debate" (more on this subject in Chapter Four). Although the writers herein were given a common mission, concluding wherever possible with a look to the future, it is important to note that each one speaks with his or her own voice with no editorial attempt to homogenize the text. There are a variety of tones and styles here, but a singular passion throughout to convey a Latino point of view on issues of both Latino and universal consequence.

We arranged the chapters rather loosely in categories. Part One consists of material with a broad historical perspective. Part Two places a variety of Latino experiences in the context of the larger society. Part Three deals with hard facts, "raw numbers" and their impact on areas including housing and health care, which are largely driven by numbers. A final Part Four offers provocative meditations of the most crucial of all our considerations—the nature of education in a society in transition and the potential of an entirely new structure of the American polity in the twenty-first century and beyond.

A few more introductory points are warranted. Throughout this book the words "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably, just as they are often

used in that manner in daily discourse in the nation. To be sure, each name has its history, its own nuances, and each is preferred in specific parts of the nation by persons of particular age groups or of various political leanings. But for the purposes of this book they are used interchangeably according to the preference of each chapter author.

It is also important to clarify that even though the rapid pace of Latino growth seems to define the Latino emergence as a recent event, in fact Latinos have been a force in North American life since Spaniards first explored the New World. The Spanish city of St. Augustine in Florida for example, is the oldest European settlement in North America. Spanish commercial, military, and mission outposts defined the early maps of the nation and grew into the modern cities of Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Las Vegas, Albuquerque, El Paso, San Antonio, and many others. And Hispanic heroes, such as David Farragut, were major contributors to the cause of independence in the American Revolution.

Over the centuries, Mexican Americans have helped build the American Southwest, Puerto Ricans have contributed to the vitality of New York, Cuban Americans have helped propel Florida into an engine of world trade, and Central and South Americans have added to the nation's workforce and professional reservoir. The point is that this is not a book about newcomers to the American scene. These are people whose ancestors helped build America and who today have the capacity to do much more. All Americans should know that.

It is also important to note that Latino educational, political, and economic gains in recent decades are the result of prodigious efforts by foresighted and courageous leaders and organizations that often fought through crucial discrimination and backbreaking poverty. The gains did not come automatically as the population grew or with the passage of time. They were not easily tendered or assured. The prospects Latinos enjoy today were hard-earned by pioneering individuals and the civil rights organizations they created.

Individual leaders have inspired the national Latino community by their personal courage. Others have risen to positions of national leadership; and still others have created organizations to unify the community for action. César Chávez, organizer of the United Farm Workers Union, and Dr. Antonia Pantoja, a Puerto Rican icon and founder of ASPIRA, stand out as voices of conscience and inspiration. Breakthrough elected leaders such as Sen. Dennis Chavez of New Mexico in the 1940s, Congressmen Henry B. Gonzalez of Texas, and Edward Roybal of California in the 1960s proved the electoral power of Latino communities to send leaders to positions of national importance. Organizations were breathed into life by Willie Velásquez, the Southwest Voter Registration

and Education Project; Juan Andrade, the National Hispanic Leadership Institute; Raúl Yzaguirre, the National Council of La Raza; Dolores Huerta, Community Services Organization and United Farm Workers Union; Jorge Mas, the Cuban National Forum; and Dr. Hector P. García, the American G.I. Forum.

Within their spheres of action, the organizations such leaders created and others have changed the conditions in which Latinos live today and have created prospects of immense promise. For example, the legal arguments and litigation successes of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) and of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund have altered prejudicial laws and generated court judgments against unfair election practices. Over the years they have helped create single-member electoral districts to increase Latino representation, forced states to construct equitable school finance systems, and successfully attacked discrimination in employment and housing. As a result Latinos across the nation can live, work, and seek education on a more level field, with many of the vestiges of overtly unfair and purposely devised barriers having been dismantled.

The League of United Latino American Citizens (LULAC) is the oldest of the Latino civil rights organizations and continues to be one of the largest and most active. It first organized opposition to discrimination against Latinos in the school systems of Texas after World War II and today mobilizes its national base of community leaders in support of small business expansion, fairness in employment, and educational programs. Voter registration and participation by Latinos in elections have undergone massive and consistent increases over the last three decades, in great measure attributable to the intensive, street-level outreach campaigns of the Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project in the Southwest and the National Hispanic Leadership Institute in the Northeast and Midwest.

Latinos today represent the fastest growing segment of the workforce, the most rapidly increasing segment of the middle class, and a growing entrepreneurial group of small business owners. Pushing this momentum along are the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Hispanic Association of Corporate Responsibility (HACR), and the New America Alliance. They recognize that the economic advances of emerging populations have been essential to political and social progress in the nation's history and they have undertaken effective initiatives to enhance business ownership and to expand participation in corporate governance and in the financial system.

The on-going efforts of individual leaders and organizations such as these have established a new base for Latino progress going forward. Advocacy, unity, legal intervention, electoral strategies, education, mobilization of civic energies,

entrepreneurial development—these are the tried and true instruments of integration into American society. They are an implicit recognition that progress for an emerging population does not arrive on its own, as if inevitable; it requires people to express their hopes and work to make them real. Such progress also requires a larger society that understands the nation's interests and is willing to act on them. We believe, the American national interest is best served by tapping the human energies and unleashing the diverse capabilities of America's Latinos. Thus the message of this book is that the stakes for America are immense, the opportunities are historic, and the time to act is now.

Latinos and the Nation's Future would not have been possible without the help and support of many hands. First, we would like to thank the Freddie Mac Corporation for having enough faith in this project to fund the symposium that initiated the birth of this book. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation also understood our mission and what we were trying to accomplish. The staff at Freddie Mac and Kellogg gave selflessly of their time and shared the same passion so that this work would be as accurate and stimulating as possible. Next, we thank the fifteen contributors who gave so much time, thought, and talent to the mission. For practical support, we must thank Marc Jaffe for his fresh insight and deft editing during the early, critical stages of the project. He helped us to focus on the human aspects as well as narrative and grammatical proprieties in each chapter. Sergio Bendixen, Cathleen Farrell, Stephenie Overman, Simon Rosenberg, and Steve Taylor were also part of the editing team who brought considerable experience and talent to this endeavor. Their meticulous research lifted the manuscript to new heights. Great thanks to Nora Clark, Sylvia Arce-Garcia, Choco Meza, Jessica Muñoz, Gloria Paniagua-Rodriguez, and Yvette Solitaire, for their administrative support and organizational skills. They stuck with this two-year project through thick and thin.