THE IDEAL OF A COMMON FUTURE

"To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul."

– Simone Weil

The massive immigration marches during the Spring of 2006, led and organized primarily by Latino/as, but also including nationals from other countries, began as a protest against HR 4437. Originally proposed by Congressman Sensenbrenner and passed by the House of Representatives on December 16, 2005, this anti-immigration legislation specifically called for the criminalization of all undocumented immigrants and of any institution or person who came to their aid.

On the one hand, the marches successfully served to refocus national attention on the presence of Latino/as, regardless of political status, as human beings with the right to have rights. Indeed, mainstream media reports on the marches included sporadic attempts to "humanize" immigrants, by presenting some of their individual and collective contributions to this nation, hence, at least temporarily, quieting the dominant society's fears of Latino/as as the dangerous "illegals".

On the other hand, the successes of the marches have been marred by senseless deaths, lynchings, and various acts of random discrimination around the country. A case in point is the untimely death on April 1, 2006 of 14-year-old Anthony Soltero – an 8th grader, who helped to organize his school's student walkout in defense of their rights as citizens and to protest against HR 4437. He committed suicide after the Assistant Principal of De Anza Middle School threatened to have him jailed for 3 years, for his role in organizing the March 28th school protest. According to the press release reporting Anthony's death, "The vice principal also forbade Anthony from attending graduation activities and threatened to fine his mother for Anthony's truancy and participation in the student protests."

To say the least, it is shocking to confirm yet again the callousness of such school officials, who, after all, are supposed to be looking after the welfare of students. Indeed, this young California Latino's senseless death highlights the hysteria surrounding the immigration issue. Like many before him, Anthony's untimely death is yet another confirmation of the extent to which the definition of citizenship cannot be reduced to some abstract legal status.

Perhaps one of the most significant outcome of these historical 2006 marches is that they served to confirm once again that practical issues such as employment or wages, are not necessarily the only, nor actual, reasons

why people organize, resist, protest, and, in short, “stand up to be counted.” Instead, the main mobilizing force of the 2006 demonstrations was clearly the fact that across the country, most Latino/as perceived the attempt at criminalizing immigrants as a direct attack on their very dignity and humanity. In organizing to defend their human and civil rights, in following this country’s tradition of civic protest, Latino/as play, once again, a critical role in the restoration of this country’s historical memory. Such a vivid reminder of the tradition and right to civic protest in the US, serves to underscore the crux of the problem, that is, how should people live together in a truly human society. These protests against ongoing exclusion and the struggles for social justice and the affirmation of human dignity, are part of the constitution and reformulation of citizenship in the modern world – citizenship, understood as the political expression of national belonging, in the broadest sense.

Indeed, while the state has various legal procedures for determining belonging, the experience of Latino/as – like that of African Americans, Native Americans, and other people of color in the US – would suggest that there is more to the sense of belonging than the formal state rules and regulations concerning birthplace, naturalization, and citizenship. Who then has the right to define the experience of belonging for those whom mainstream conceptions continue to define as the outsiders, “the Other” within a nation, irrespective of their contributions to society?

The articles in this issue, like the short essays in the *Reflexiones Pedagógicas* section, all address this question in various ways. Focusing primarily on the socialization of Latino/as in both traditional and non-traditional settings, the articles point to some of the issues that continue to keep Latino/as’ presence and experience in the US high on the national agenda. Leisy Abrego for example, pointedly shows the dilemma of belonging of undocumented students who, throughout their childhood, attend US schools and are socialized with all the rights and legal protections of other children, only to be barred from enrolling in institutions of higher learning, once they graduate. Without the rights and legal protections they once had in school, Latino/a youth suddenly find that they are denied full participation in the society in which they grew up. Armando Solorzano provides a detailed historical case study of the education of Latino/as in Utah. This account of experiences in Utah, with the cultural and religious specificity of Mormonism prominent in that state, reveals specific and very particular racial underpinnings, theological premises, and social class undertones which shape the experience of Latinos as they seek education in Utah’s schools. While Solorzano’s article points to alternatives proposed by Latino/as in that state, his case study also serves as a reminder that belonging entails much more than the mere fact of being born a citizen of the United States.

The articles by Ulla Berg and Margarita Cervantes focus on immigrants’ political and economic contribution to society, detailing their experiences from the perspective, respectively, of the ways that immigrants are challenging and

reshaping traditional state policies and of the economic relations structured by the sending and receiving states. While Berg discusses the new political institutions being forged by Peruvian immigrants abroad and their implications for power, ethnic and social relations both in the home and new societies, Cervantes focuses on the incorporation of Nicaraguan migrants into labor markets in Florida and Nicaragua, and the role and place of entrepreneurship and transnationalism in the incorporation process. In documenting the impact and consequences of new transnational institutions and political and economic practices, Berg and Cervantes point to the multiple ways that the very experience of belonging is today shaped and redefined by the sovereign states as well as and more importantly by the immigrants themselves.

The ability to incorporate new members and adjust to new circumstances are the measure of the vitality of a nation. As L Febvre reminds us in his passionate although unfinished work, *Honor and Fatherland*, “a nation is a will to live together in communion... [it] is the will to create together a common future. Hence, it is an ideal to be achieved.” A failure, in this context, may bring about the “vanishing of the very word home from the human lexicon,” as William Faulkner once warned. The immigrant experience is then at the very heart of the historical formation of a common will capable of forging a conscious national life and history. The 2006 marches, and the national debates they are forcing, are a vivid reminder of this truth.

Saludos!

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