



Association of Mexican American Educators Journal

A peer-reviewed, open access journal

Volume 12 Issue 3

2018

AMAE Special Issue

Latinx Education Policy and Resistance in the Trump Era

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Latinx Education Policy and Resistance in the Trump Era

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The 2016 U.S. presidential election and evolving political climate defined by racial bullying and divisiveness. Since assuming office, the Trump administration has asserted its grip on power, enabling a hostile climate that places money and greed above the sovereignty and human rights of indigenous and historically marginalized people and land. Trump's list of ideological and nationalist agenda is the ongoing assault on immigrant, Latinx communities. Beginning with Trump's early executive order on "Enforcing Statutory Prohibitions on Federal Control of Education" (Executive Order No. 13791, 2017) to the current and ongoing threat to end the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program the Administration continues to place the lives of 800,000 young adults and future beneficiaries in limbo as they await the May 2020 trial date for the Texas-led challenge to DACA (MALDEF, 2018). These ongoing battles are also a cogent reminder of the need for comprehensive, federal immigration policy.

In the case of public K12 and higher education, campuses continue to be sites of horrific waves of racism, bigotry, and violent extremism (SPLC, 2016; Dreid and Najmabadi, 2016; ADL, 2018; Bauman, 2018). These are in part exemplified by Charlottesville, where hundreds of white supremacists took to the University of Virginia campus motivated by racial hatred, to Parkland, where young victims of gun violence sparked youth resistance and walkouts across the country. Adding to youth resistance is a surge in voter turnout during the 2018 midterm election, marking a major shift in Congress that has already begun to destabilize the Trump administration. The 2018 midterms also galvanized an unprecedented representation of females in the House of Representatives, and a series of firsts: the first Black female to represent Massachusetts, Muslim and Native American female representation, and a Latina self-identified

democratic socialist who became the youngest female elected to Congress. These changes may arguably provide newfound possibilities for U.S. democracy and the viability of racial, economic, and social justice for all historically marginalized communities.

Also immanent during the publication of this special issue is the constant criminalization of asylum seekers and the violent separation and detainment of children from their families. Trump's current border fight and threat of a government shutdown as a way to strongarm Congress to approve his \$5 billion funding priority to build a wall on the southern border with Mexico. These actions are yet another artifact of the administration's deplorable zero tolerance agenda epitomized by scorn for immigrant and many Latinx communities. These contextual factors, and many more, inform the special issue and contributing authors' examination of Latinx education in the Trump Era. Each piece weaves multidisciplinary scholarship, drawing from critical theories and methodologies, and providing critical insights Latinx education policy and resistance in the Trump Era, while challenging racist nativist framings of Latinx youth and broader communities (Pérez Huber, 2009).

Opening the issue, Fernandez and Magaña Gamero discuss how the Ethnic Studies curricula and the use of Critical Reflective Journals are a site of healing and resistance among Latinx/Chicanx college students in the current political climate. Drawing upon students' reflexive writing prior to and following the 2016 presidential election, the authors humanize Latinx/Chicanx students' experiences, capturing feelings of being caught in *el compromiso*—crossing from one border to another—as a result of the perpetual hyper-militarization of the Mexico-U.S. border, while resisting identity formations hinged on the immigrant/foreign born v. U.S.-born dichotomy. The writing process allowed others to name and confront their lived experiences, intergenerational traumas, and the wounds of colonialism by embracing political identities, such as Chicanx, while self-defining its multidimensional meaning.

Also focused on Latinx student resistance, Beltrán, Montoya-Ávila, García, and Canales' ethnographic study examines how teachers build upon students' lived experiences and community cultural wealth to cultivate resistant capital and scrutinize oppressive rhetoric in the current political climate. The authors discuss how high school youth expand their critical

literacies about their social contexts while at the same time underscoring the importance of critical pedagogy that calls for teachers to “pause the curriculum” in order to work through the social, emotional, and political issues that are impacting youth. Rodriguez Vega sheds light on immigrant youth’s artistic expressions and how they signify resistance and resilience to Trump politics. Using photovoice, drawings, and performance through a weekly after-school theater class focused on societal issues, youth describe and make meaning of the impacts of Trump’s zero tolerance campaign agenda and subsequent policies during the first year in office, which included family separation and the detainment of children. Rodriguez Vega highlights how youth use theater to reject Trump’s criminalizing messaging towards Mexican and South American communities, while stepping outside of political tradition to reimagine a more accepting and inclusive present and future.

Muñoz, Vigil, Jach, and Rodriguez-Gutierrez discuss how undocumented college students navigate institutions of higher education in a climate mired by anti-immigrant discourses and an ensuing elimination of DACA. Drawing upon interview and focus group data, the authors describe how escalated racist nativism—from racial microaggressions and stereotypes, to collective taunting among Trump supporters—impact their daily experiences and safety on and off campus. Moreover, undocumented student narratives reveal sentiments of exploitation based on the dual labor they’re confronted with. Undocumented students are forced to carry to burden of nativist attacks and policies, while at the same time shouldering the work to make positive changes on their campuses. Finally, Muñoz and colleagues discuss how undocumented students’ resiliency must acknowledge the trauma they experience from institutional racism and heightened white nationalist aggression targeting immigrant and communities of Color.

Placing a spotlight on Chicana/Latina voices in higher education, Mercado-López, Alamillo, and Herrera analyze graduation caps worn during the 2017 and 2018 Chicanx/Latinx ceremony. The authors frame the proudly donned political statements worn by Chicana/Latina graduates as forms of resistance and critical commentary in the wake of Trump’s xenophobic and anti-Latinx fervor. This post-election climate sparked increases in politicized and creative voicing on graduation caps, whereby three overarching themes emerge: messages of resistance against anti-immigrant sentiments and policies; feminist “refashionings” of Latina identity; and

familial pride and community belonging. Pushing back against racial and xenophobic characterizations of Latinx communities, Chicana/Latina graduates' declarations honor sacrifices and collective success, upholding their families as central sources of knowledge, rich histories, and pride.

Also, situated in the context of higher education, Allard, Sellman, Torres, Schwartz, Bernardino, and Castillo unpack an elite private university's sanctuary status to understand the extent to which institutional policies mitigate undocumented students' experiences of belonging and inclusion. In addition to establishing protocol for how the university would cooperate with immigration enforcement and programs, support for legal counsel for undocumented students and an emergency fund were also created. While noteworthy and unprecedented, student narratives reveal that institution's sanctuary campus status did not alleviate broader stress of uncertainty associated with documentation status in the current political climate. Adding to the discussion on sanctuary campuses is Serrano, Vazquez, Samperio, and Mattheis' article examining public documents and messaging by leadership at two four-year universities in California. The authors find that while both universities express support for undocumented students, their messages are vague and devoid of acknowledgements of broader social tensions surrounding immigration issues. Moreover, such policies are entrenched in a paternalistic discourse of *protection*, conflate Dreamer (i.e., AB 540) and DACA statuses, and limit higher education supports to immediate campus contexts. These pieces highlight the enduring problems related to a lack of comprehensive immigration reform.

Rounding out the special issue manuscripts is López and Matos' conceptual paper that historicizes the intersection of immigration and education policies and their escalated presence in the Trump Era. As part of their analysis, the authors underscore how immigration policies targeting adult immigrants will have direct implications for K12 educational institutions and the children of immigrants. Moreover, the paper puts forth arguments for how education is both weaponized and used as a bargaining chip, particularly among immigrant Latinx youth and families. Acknowledging the relentless targeting of immigrant youth and children of immigrants, López and Matos put forth various acts of resistance that political and educational actors can assert in response to the subordination of these communities.

Summing up the issue are contributions by Irene Sánchez and Matt Sedillo, who use poetry to speak truth to power and inspire us to continue documenting Latinx communities racialized experiences. Fallas-Escobar' book review of *Teacher Leadership for Social Change in Bilingual and Bicultural Education* by Deborah K. Palmer, detailing bilingual teachers' processes of transformation and agents of positive social change.

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