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Cuba's Potential Contribution to the Success of Chicano Students in the U.S.: Directions to Decolonize the Raza Community

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> *In April 1975, a delegation of Raza Unida party activists from throughout the country made a visit to Cuba at the invitation of the Cuban government. The head of the delegation, José Ángel Gutiérrez, held a news conference . . . Gutiérrez declared that the problems of poverty and racism suffered by Chicanos in Texas were similar to those that the Cuban people have begun to overcome by taking socialist measures. One of the reporters then said to Gutiérrez, "You are going to be asked sometime that if you like socialism so much why don't you and all the other Mexicans go to Cuba." Gutiérrez replied, "Because we are going to make a Cuba over here."*
>
> (Pendas, 1976).

Introduction

This exploratory paper examines educational developments in Cuba since the triumph of their revolution in 1959 and their potential application to increase educational achievement among Chicanos in the U.S. A fundamental premise of this paper is that the greatest challenge facing Chicano communities in the U.S., particularly in southwestern states such as California, is to deconstruct the colonial conditions and subsequent mentality among Chicanos that are created and maintained by class and racial hierarchies that structure U.S. society and subsequently hinder Chicano students' achievement. Thus, Cuba's 63-year effort to resist U.S. colonialism and imperialism warrants the attention of those frustrated by the continued educational underachievement of Chicanos.

For the purposes of this paper, I define Chicanos as U.S. residents of Mexican heritage regardless of immigration status or "political" orientation. Admittedly, such a definition is highly contested. According to 2020 U.S. Census data, approximately forty percent of California residents are Latino, and approximately eighty percent of California Latinos are of Mexican heritage (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021).

Chicano underachievement in education has become a national crisis that threatens the economic and sociocultural fabric of our increasingly diverse nation. In their 2009 seminal text, Gándara and Contreras detail the achievement gap between Chicano and white students at virtually all levels of K-12 education. For example, their data revealed that nationally, forty-one percent of white 4th graders score at the highest level in reading compared to only sixteen percent of Latino (including Chicano) 4th graders. By the time Chicanos reach 8th grade, the gap barely changed as thirty-nine percent of white students scored at the highest level in reading compared to fifteen percent of Latinos (Gándara and Contreras, 2009).

In higher education, Bowen et al. reported a considerable gap between the college graduation rate of Chicanos and that of whites. Nationally, thirty-six percent of white women earned a bachelors' degree by age twenty-six compared to thirteen percent of Latinas. Likewise, thirty percent of white men earned a bachelors' degree by age twenty-six compared to twelve percent of Latinos (Bowen et al., 2009).

More recently, data from the Excelencia in Education organization documents that in 2021, twenty-one percent of Latino adults had earned a bachelor's degree or higher compared to thirty-eight percent of all U.S. adults. Latinos' degree completion increased only three percent from 2019 to 2020 (Excelencia in Education, 2022). In California, a report from the UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Institute documented that the state's Latinos have lower levels of educational attainment than the state average and Latinos nationally (UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Institute, 2022). Likewise, over half of the California high school graduates are not eligible for admission to the state's public four-year university systems because of inadequate academic preparation. The student body of the University of California system, the state's most selective level of public higher education, has a Latino enrollment of only twenty-five percent (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021).

Conversely, there exists considerable documentation of the success of Cuba's education system (Lutjens, 2017, 2007, 1996). Carnoy's comparative study found a significantly higher level of both language and math scores for Cuban students compared to students in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, and México (2007). Ludjens (2007, 1996) also found large gains in educational achievement throughout Cuba since the triumph of their revolution in 1959. Almost a decade later, Carnoy repeated his study of the Cuban education system's success, including analysis of recent standardized test scores (2011). He concluded, "Not much had changed. Cuban students were again in a league of their own." More recently, Cuba's educational strategies have received similar praise from scholarly analyses (Ludjens, 2017).

The application of Cuban educational strategies to the situation of Chicano students in U.S. schools, colleges, and universities may indeed constitute a considerable leap of faith given the great difference between the two groups' context. Obviously, Cuba is a sovereign nation-state while Chicanos are a subordinate ethnic group within the U.S. Cuba's socialist economic system differs greatly from U.S. capitalism although such a description is somewhat simplistic. A thorough discussion of the two different contexts is beyond the scope of this paper. However, despite the major difference in the economic, historical, and political context of U.S. Chicanos and Cubans on the island, Cuba's accomplishments in education merit an examination to identify strategies that could have utility for the education of U.S. Chicanos. The persistence of Chicano underachievement at all levels of education merits such a degree of open-mindedness.

The genesis of this exploratory paper occurred in the early 1970's when I was a first-generation, Chicano college student in the U.S. Midwest. Far from the U.S – Mexico border, my peers and I were student activists trying to improve educational, political, and socioeconomic conditions in our relatively small Chicano community. Later we sensed that our effort to recruit more Chicano students to the university necessitated a concurrent strategy to transform the university into an institution that reflected and validated our culture, e.g., a representative level of Chicano faculty, administrators, curriculum, and public art, ensuring supportive conditions for those Chicanos that matriculated to the university. After all, why recruit more Chicano students to an institution that neglected, excluded, and marginalized them?

Although we were geographically distant from visible Chicano movement activism in the Southwest, those movements informed our philosophy and strategies. We drew inspiration from the charismatic leadership of Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, José Angel Gutierrez, and Reis Lopez Tijerina. In particular, Corky's strand of "cultural nationalism" appealed to our sense of isolation and marginalization as Chicanos in the Midwest. Largely cut off from the consistent cultural reinforcement of Mexico, we felt the need to educate ourselves about Mexican and U.S Chicano history and culture. Although inexperienced and largely lacking positive role models of Chicanos who were both professionals and activists, we somehow realized the need for praxis: community and institutional activism informed by theory, research, and history. In our early developmental stage of ideology and activism, we necessarily focused on Chicano communities and their seemingly inexhaustible range of needs.

However, contrary to popular and academic critiques of "Chicano nationalism," (Mariscal, 2005) we also extended our analysis and activism to the social movements of other people of color in the U.S., e.g., African Americans and Native Peoples, as well as movements for change in Latin America and throughout the so-called Third World. Among these other emancipatory movements, we were most intrigued and inspired by the Cuban Revolution that seized power from a U.S.-backed dictatorship in 1959. The names and faces of Fidel Castro, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos, Celia Sanchez, Juan Almeida, and other participants in the Cuban Revolution adorned the walls of our Chicano community center and our small office of United Minority Students at the university.

In our collective analysis, the local Chicano community needed to confront the dominant white society with an honest, unflinching assessment of racism in both its historic and present contexts. We viewed the revolutionary leadership of Cuba as allies who dared to stand up to the racist imperialism of the U.S., which we viewed as the same basic structural forces that subjugated our own community. Our intuitive analysis reflected the feelings captured by Jorge Mariscal (2005) in his book about the Chicano Movement in the U.S. from 1965-1975:

> The Cuban struggle to build an open socialist society made ideological sense to many Chicano/a Movement activists who themselves were engaged in a political project for self-determination and the reimagining of relations of gender, "race," class, and their own relationship to U.S. liberalism and capitalism (p. 113).

Chicanos who visited Cuba as part of the "Venceremos" brigades during the 1960's and 70's expressed much the same sentiment. Two such Chicano Movement activists, Luis Valdez and Roberto Rubalcava, wrote:

> As sons of Mexican manual laborers in California, we have travelled to Revolutionary Cuba, in defiance of the travel ban, in order to emphasize the historical and cultural unanimity of all Latin American peoples . . . After a two month visit to Cuba, we can now see why the U.S. government has put a travel ban on the island. It is because the social problems characteristic of Latin America are being solved there. . . This is the first Latin American country whose leadership is solely dedicated to solving the social crimes committed by imperialism upon an underdeveloped country and at the same time, not interested in personal wealth (Valdez and Rubalcava, undated mimeograph, cited in Valdez and Steiner, 1972, p. 217).

Such early Chicano preoccupations with the construction of a new, decolonized identity and the collective struggle for Chicano empowerment led to my ongoing interest with the "experiment" in Cuba, particularly its education system. As I will discuss in subsequent sections, I have conducted research in Havana, Cuba on nine separate occasions. This study seeks responses to the following research questions:

- What are the factors that contribute to Cuba's high degree of educational success?
- To what degree can those factors be applied to improve the educational achievement of Chicanos in the U.S.?
- To what degree are Cuban strategies for educational success

> in a nation-state compatible with the culture and community resources of Chicanos, a subordinate ethnic group in the U.S.?

For this study, I utilize a mixed research methods approach of ethnography, interviews, and literature analysis. For those unfamiliar with scholarship that explains Chicano underachievement in the U.S., I begin my analysis with brief exemplars of such scholarship. To avoid reductionism, I focus on theoretical frameworks that emphasize the role of racism in limiting Chicano student achievement. I then provide a historical context for such racism that establishes a link with Cuba's colonial experience. This context explains the oppression of Chicano communities through a lens of "internal colonialism," including the complementary contribution of Marxist theory. Finally, by focusing on education, I identify directions from Cuba's historic struggle and achievements that might be applied toward a substantive increase in Chicano educational achievement. I provide these directions from my own visits to Cuba, during which I spoke with Cuban scholars, activists, students, workers, etc. These included formal, recorded interviews as well as more informal conversations and seminars. Some of these conversations reflect the "anecdotal methodology," in which "accidental conversations and casual encounters become evidence" described by Lutjens (2017, p. 250). I integrate their input with findings from scholarly literature on Cuban education. I reiterate that this is an exploratory paper and that the directions I identify are tentative.

Chicano/Latino Educational Under Achievement

> As a group, Latino students today perform academically at levels that will consign them to live as members of a permanent underclass in American society. Moreover, their situation is projected to worsen over time. But as alarming as this is for Latinos, it is equally so for the U.S. population as a whole; neither the economy nor the social fabric can afford to relegate so many young people to the margins of society (Gándara and Contreras, 2009, p. 304).

Many years after my early experience as a student activist, I became a university educator struggling with others to create equitable institutional transformation at a historically white, selective institution in Southern California. This institution consistently failed to maintain a critical mass of Chicanos at all levels, systematically excluded Chicanos from decision making processes, and engineered lower educational outcomes for Chicano students. I wondered again how Cuba's example might inform our efforts to increase Chicano students' achievement as well as their development of "liberatory outcomes" that would maximize their ability to become change agents (Garcia, 2023). The issue is what Massey et al. (2003) terms "minority underachievement," the historic and present gap in educational achievement between historically underrepresented students of color (i.e., African Americans, Chicanos, and Native Peoples) and white students. This persistent gap in achievement occurs at virtually every level in the educational pipeline (American Council on Education, 2007; Charles et al., 2009; Contreras, 2011; Solorzano et al., 2005). Even in the rarified air of selective universities, Massey et al. (2003) and Charles et al. (2009) find that Chicanos/Latinos and Blacks achieve at lower levels than whites even when controlling for socioeconomic background. Gándara and Contreras (2009) emphasize that for Chicanos, "Every measure, beginning with kindergarten readiness and extending through high school completion and postsecondary education shows a consistent pattern of under-achievement, especially for males" (p. 27-28). As I will discuss later, the underachievement of Chicano students in the U.S. is an important manifestation of the colonial experience of Chicanos that established and maintains their subordinate position in the U.S. racial hierarchy.

While scholars have analyzed a wide variety of variables that impact the educational achievement of Chicanos, several scholars focus on the impact of racism at both societal and institutional levels. These include scholars of Latino Critical Theory (Delgado Bernal, 2010; Fernandez, 2002; Solorzano et al., 2005; Yosso, 2006) as well as those that focus on broader Critical Race Theory. In her development of Latino Critical Theory, Yosso (2006) offers this definition of racism:

> The social meanings applied to race find their justification in an ideology of racial superiority and White privilege—an ideology of racism. I draw on the work of

> Audre Lorde, Chester Pierce, and Manning Marable to define racism as (1) a false belief in white supremacy that handicaps society, (2) a system that upholds whites as superior to all other groups, and (3) the structural subordination of multiple racial and ethnic groups. With its macro, micro, interpersonal, institutional, overt, and subtle forms, racism entails institutional power. Communities of color in the United States have never possessed this form of power . . . Racism—the systemic oppression of people of color—privileges whites (p. 5).

Patton et al., (2015) utilizes Critical Race Theory, or CRT, to analyze issues in higher education for Chicanos/Latinos and other students of color. This scholarship builds on the work of Chicano scholars such as Solórzano, Villalpando, and Yosso, respectively, that utilized CRT to explain how institutional racism in higher education undermines the achievement of Chicano/Latino students. Patton et al. state that research in higher education has largely ignored racism and white supremacy and that CRT provides a useful lens through which to examine equity. According to Patton et al.:

> Consistent throughout critical race scholarship is an effort to unveil the insidious nature of racism and its disproportional impact on communities of color . . . CRT acknowledges the endemic nature of racism in America and how it permeates every social system in this country . . . CRT scholars argue that racism naturally extends to all systems, including higher education (Patton et al., 2015 p. 194-195).

The institutional racism that disadvantages Chicanos results from a societal level racial hierarchy that situates Chicanos in a subordinate position (Beltran, 2020; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Darder, 2011; Persell, 1977). A critical point in my analysis is a comparison between such societal level racism and the colonialism suffered by Cuba for more than a century. To illuminate that comparison, I will now address the scholarly treatment of the racism suffered by Chicanos that is often described as "internal colonialism."

Chicanos' Subordinates Status in U.S. Racial and Class Hierarchies: Internal Colonialism

In his comprehensive history of the political experience of Chicanos in the U.S., Navarro (2005) frames his analysis through the theory of internal colonialism. In so doing, he expresses his alignment with the Chicano historian Rodolfo Acuña. Navarro unabashedly emphasizes the current explanatory power of the internal colony model, particularly as contextualized within a critique of U.S. capitalism:

> A fundamental argument of this work is that the barrios and colonias of Aztlán, since the genesis of the "Mexican political experience" in 1848, have and continue to be internal colonies . . . today little has changed, even though the barrios and colonias are becoming bigger and more plentiful. The barrios and colonias of Aztlán today exist under the specter of "neocolonialism," which in turn continues to be fed by the exploitive nature of liberal capitalism . . . I challenge readers to explain why is it that the country's barrios and colonias are underdeveloped, impoverished, and relegated to what appropriately can be described as a third world status within the geographical context of the richest country in the world (p. 4-5).

After the development of the internal colony model among Chicano scholars during the 1970's, other Chicano scholars offered a critique of the model's efficacy in explaining the Chicano experience. Such scholars as Almaguer, Flores, and Cervantes, respectively, largely utilized a Marxist, class analysis to argue that the internal colony model placed too much emphasis on racism and too little on socioeconomic class hierarchies in the U.S. (Navarro, 2005). For them, the internal colony model reflected excessive nationalism. Some scholars of the time integrated the internal model with a class and/or explicit Marxist analysis. According to Munoz, "the colonial model can be a transition from a cultural-racial interpretation of the problems of the Chicano to a class analysis of the Chicano experience" (1983, p. 448).

In his extensive history of the U.S. Southwest, Barrera asserted the efficacy of the internal colony model while integrating it with a class

analysis (1979; cited in Darder et al., 1997). Barrera's definitions of these concepts are useful for clarifying the scholarly thinking during that era:

> Colonialism is a structured relationship of domination and subordination, where the dominant and subordinate groups are defined along ethnic and/or racial lines, and where the relationship is established and maintained to serve the interests of all or part of the dominant group . . . Internal colonialism is a form of colonialism in which the dominant and subordinate populations are intermingled, so that there is no geographically distinct "metropolis" separate from the "colony" (p. 20).

Having considered the critiques of the internal colony model, Barrera subscribed to its explanatory power when integrated with a class analysis. With the benefit of historical hindsight, one might see that the two theories, internal colonialism and Marxism, are both helpful lenses to understand the intersection of racism and classism in maintaining the oppression of Chicanos.

I suggest a relevant comparison between the internal colonialism experienced historically by Chicanos and the "classic" colonialism imposed upon Cuba. Perez' comprehensive historical analyses of Cuba document a very long, protracted experience with colonialism (2013; 1999). For decades, Cuba was occupied by Spain culminating with a debilitating thirty-year war for independence:

> The Cuban struggle for independence from Spain spanned the entire second half of the nineteenth century . . . No Latin American country in the nineteenth century experienced wars of independence of longer duration or greater destruction than Cuba. Three successive generations of Cubans endured recurring cycles of privation and impoverishment; incalculable material losses were surpassed only by incomprehensible personal ones (Perez, 2013; p. 3).

At virtually the same time that Cuba finally expelled Spanish rule in 1899, the U.S. moved in to establish its own colonial dominance of Cuba (de la Fuente, 2001). That colonial situation did not end until the

triumph of the Cuban revolution in 1959. For Chicanos, their subjugation under U.S. colonialism began after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 ended the U.S.-Mexico war and established the conditions for Chicanos' participation in U.S. society as a subordinate group (Barrera, 1979). Unlike Cubans under de facto U.S. rule, Chicanos did not engage in a revolution for liberation. However, their explicit resistance, often violent, to colonial conditions over decades is well-documented (Beltran, 2022; Lytle Hernandez, 2023). In addition to such open resistance, Chicanos resisted their subordinate status in education institutions from at least the 1930's through research, theory, and proposed policy and practice (Murillo, 1977).

Education Under Colonial Conditions

Scholars (Fanon, 1963; Freire, 1970; Memmi, 1965) have documented the cognitive, psychological, and emotional effects of colonialism on subordinate populations. In analyzing the early Chicano experience in the U.S. southwest, Barrera summarized the broad impact of colonial relations, including their effect on education: "The system of structural discrimination that forms the essence of the colonial relationship exists first of all in the economic realm, but extends into political institutions, the educational system, and all forms of social structures" (1979, cited in Darder et al., 1997). Freire described the dysfunctional way colonial effects impede the educational process for colonized peoples (1970). Such effects include a fear of freedom (i.e., dependency), a desire to invert the oppressor/oppressed relationship, a lack of consciousness of one's subordinate status, including its historic causes, and perhaps most seriously, the inability to conceptualize strategies and solutions not based on the structures and models of the colonizer (Darder, 2005; Freire, 1970).

Despite scholarly refutations of the internal colony model, contemporary Chicano scholars continue to reference the effects of colonialism on Chicanos, particularly in terms of its effects on the educational status of Chicano students. Delgado Bernal cites Villenas and Deyhle (1999; cited in Delgado Bernal, 2010) to describe the manifestation of such colonialism in school practices that undermine the success of Chicano students:

> In the schools, the colonization of the mind is continued through the instilling of a historical amnesia that renders Latino/indigenous peoples as "immigrants," foreigners who have no claim to the Americas, while European Americans are constructed as the natural owners and inheritors of these lands. The rich knowledge, beliefs, and worldviews of Latino and Mexicano/Chicano communities are not validated, let alone taught (p. 916).

Scholars continue to refer to "colonialism" in their analysis of the conditions that oppress Chicanos and other historically underrepresented communities of color in the U.S. Villanueva cites Grosfoguel et al. when discussing the continuing need for emancipation of Chicano communities: "decolonization of the U.S. empire is at the center of the agenda for the twenty-first century" (Grosfoguel et al., cited in Villanueva, 2013, p. 25). Rodriguez cites Gonzalez in characterizing the indigenous dimension of the Tucson Unified School District's Mexican American Studies program as "a form of decolonization of Chicano Studies" (Rodriguez, 2012). Tintiangco-Cubales et al. describe "decolonization" as central to the purpose of ethnic studies in the U.S. (2014). They describe ethnic studies pedagogy and curriculum as part of a broad struggle for social justice "that sees dismantling our *internal neocolonial* condition and abolishing its multiple forms of violence as preconditions to the existence of justice between all peoples that inhabit the contemporary United States" (Tejeda et al., 2002; cited in Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014, p. 112, emphasis added).

The internal colony model and its Marxist critiques offer critical directions toward the analysis of the root causes of socioeconomic depression and educational underachievement in Chicano communities. The intersection of racial and class hierarchies in the U.S. have important implications for the degree to which public education institutions at all levels are responsive to the needs of Chicano communities. As the subsequent discussion will indicate, hierarchical structures and the ideologies that legitimate them at the level of society are strongly reflected in educational institutions, with significant effects on student outcomes (Persell, 1977).

Thus, it appears that the most fundamental challenge to the emancipation and educational achievement of Chicanos is the process of decolonizing. In the search for a model of Chicanos or similarly situated groups that have effectively undertaken such a process, the direction might well include Cuba. Unlike virtually any other Latino group inside or outside the U.S., Cuba has consciously engaged such a decolonizing process for over sixty-three years. In fact, Cuba has in many ways sought to develop a social structure and identity in direct opposition to the U.S. My speculation is that within Cuba's example, there are directions helpful to the conceptualization and/or refinement of alternative solutions to the crisis in Chicano educational achievement, including higher education.

At the same time, I again acknowledge the considerable differences in circumstances between Cuba and the U.S. Chicano community. In some respects, Cubans are more homogenous in terms of the socioeconomic and educational conditions they face throughout the island. Cuba does not suffer from the same type or degree of racial hierarchy that structures U.S. society (Morales, 2013). While some Cubans refer to themselves as "Black" and others as "White," my observation is that most Cubans construct a mixed racial identity. I often heard an expression in Cuba: "Si no tiene de Congo, tiene de Carabali" (roughly, "if you don't have a relative from the Congo region of Africa, you have a relative from the Calabar region of Africa"), attesting to the ubiquitous presence of African heritage throughout Cuba. While occupying a generally subordinate status throughout the U.S., Chicanos encounter different circumstances based on variables such as their length of time as a settled community, immigration status, social class, numerical representation in the larger population, etc. Chicanos attend schools at all levels that differ widely in the degree to which they constitute a large portion of the school enrollment (Garcia, 2023), with strong implications for the applicability of educational strategies that focus on Chicano student achievement.

Directions Towards Decolonizing Chicano Communities: Lessons from the Cuban Experience

I had the opportunity to conduct research in Havana, Cuba on nine

separate occasions from 2007 to 2020. These visits included symposia in 2007 and 2008 at the Centro de Estudios Sobre Los Estados Unidos (Center for the Study of the United States) with Cuban scholars at which we exchanged information and analysis regarding Chicanos and Cuba, respectively. In 2009 I attended an international social justice and education conference ("Paradigmas Emancipatorias") with Cuban scholars, teachers, social workers, students, and representatives from numerous Latin American countries. During these symposia and conference, I was able to speak extensively with Cuban scholars, students, and community workers regarding various aspects of the Cuban experience. I shared research, theory, and policy, both formally and informally, about Chicanos in the U.S. The Cuban scholars, particularly those at the Center for the Study of the United States, were very interested in the position of Chicanos in U.S. society. In addition, these scholars provided me considerable information about Cuba's education system.

In 2011, I presented at a symposium of Cuban historians and pedagogists regarding the crisis in Chicano educational achievement and directions toward solutions from the Cuban experience. During each of my first four visits, I also conducted and recorded formal, semi-structured interviews (Maramba and Velásquez, 2010) with scholars, teachers, community workers in social services and health care, and musicians. Beyond my formal research activities, my knowledge and understanding of all aspects of Cuban life was supplemented tremendously by daily conversations, or "anecdotal methodology" (Lutjens, 2017) with taxi drivers, waitresses and waiters, store clerks, hotel staff, vendors, and students.

My research assistants transcribed each of the interviews (all conducted in Spanish) and translated most into English as well. My interviews reflect the field-based, ethnographic tradition (Merriam, 1998). Such interviews and observations often yield "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973; cited in Maldonado et al., 2005), in this case of education and culture in Cuba.

In 2015 I participated in an exchange between U.S. and Cuban educators called "Búsquedas Investigativas" (Research Explorations) in Havana organized by Dr. Sheryl Lutjens of the California State University in San Marcos and the Asociación de Pedagogos Cubanos (Association of Cuban Educators). This collaboration between educators

in Cuba and the U.S., respectively, was first organized in 1994. The exchange in which I participated was the twentieth; more than 400 educators from the U.S. participated over those years (Lutjens, 2017). Our group of over thirty professional educators and graduate students spent a week visiting Cuban schools, universities, education centers, and cultural centers. This was by far the most structured and informative of my visits to Cuba. We were able to visit classrooms, participate in symposia with university faculty and students, and attend information sessions with educators at all levels. My own visits included the Tomás David Rayo Pre-University in Havana (the equivalent of a U.S. high school), the University of Havana in a historic section of the Vedado neighborhood, the Eduardo Solís Renté Polytechnic School in the province of Mayabeque, the Havana Agrarian University, San Gerónimo University in Havana Vieja, and the Enrique José Varona University of Pedagogical Sciences in Havana. In addition, I visited the national headquarters of the Association of Cuban Educators in Havana and two cultural centers, Muraleando and Casa de Africa. The information I obtained from dialogues with Cuban educators in these institutions was invaluable in furthering my knowledge of and understanding of Cuban education.

In both 2016 and 2017, I worked with student affairs staff in the UC San Diego Office of Academic Support and Instructional Services (OASIS) to bring two different groups of fifteen UC San Diego undergraduates to study in Havana, Cuba for one week. These visits were authorized in 1995 as "travel related to educational activities" (Lutjens, 2017). The students, staff, and I spent each morning in an academic class taught by a Cuban scholar that was secured by our trips' host, Academic Programs International. Each afternoon, we visited a historic site in Havana that was hosted by a Cuban professional. Our trips provided us a wealth of information on the history, culture, and contemporary sociopolitical situation of Cuba. This included considerable information about the Cuban education system. Before each trip, all the participating students completed a ten-week, credit-bearing course that I developed and taught. This seminar grounded the students in critical information on the history, culture, and education system of Cuba.

Later in 2017, I visited Cuba once again to participate in an international conference on "Latinos in the United States" sponsored by Casa de Las Americas, an academic and policy entity in Havana that

examines a broad array of international issues, most of which focus on Latin America. At the conference, I presented my comparative research on Cuba and Chicanos in the U.S., respectively. In 2020, I returned to Havana through a program called Plaza CUBA, in which I studied percussion at a music school with Cuban musicians and instructors.

Collectively, my nine visits to Cuba have greatly informed my perspective on the Cuban experience since the triumph of their revolution in 1959. The fact that I was able to visit Cuba over a thirteen-year period that featured important developments in both Cuban and U.S. policies was especially valuable. I reiterate that my intention of this analysis is to identify directions toward the decolonizing of Chicanos in the U.S. and a subsequent increase in their educational attainment and achievement. My purpose is not to debate the merits of socialism versus capitalism (except as they impact education, admittedly a potentially significant impact) or to compare the degree of individual freedoms granted to residents of Cuba and the U.S., respectively. Those are compelling topics that I discussed frequently with Cubans on the island but are beyond the scope of this paper. For the purposes of this discussion, suffice it to say that many Cubans argue that perhaps the most fundamental freedom enjoyed in Cuba is one largely denied to Chicanos in the U.S.: a high quality, rigorous education.

I now present a description of directions identified through my research in Cuba integrated with analysis of scholarly texts on the Cuban experience that offer possibilities for effective interventions in the education of U.S. Chicanos. I will focus on education at macro and micro levels. Indeed, among Cuba's educational strategies, there are both structural elements of school supervision and curriculum as well as pedagogy centered on the close relationship between teachers and students.

Insights from Cuba's Educational Success

A major focus of my dialogues with Cubans on the island was the educational success of Cuba. Through my structured visits to the island, I was able to secure a broad overview of Cuba's educational system, which is essential to contextualize its structures, policies, and practices. Scholarly sources such as Carnoy (2011; 2007) and Lutjens (2007, 1996) document the considerable success of Cuba's educational system even in the context of severe material deprivation. In his research published in

2007, Carney observed and analyzed primary school classes in Cuba. He concluded, "The Cuban classes were well taught, Cuban teachers well trained, and Cuban schools responsibly administered" (2011). These elements reflect the country's attention to both psychological and sociological dimensions of schooling.

Lutjens (2007) describes several educational accomplishments of Cuban education, including a 100 percent primary school enrollment rate and a higher ratio of teachers to population than that of Canada, the U.S., Spain, and Sweden. She notes that nearly 750,000 Cubans have earned university degrees, double the number of Cubans who had only a sixth-grade education at the time of the Cuban revolution in 1959. Women have made impressive gains, representing more than 60% of university students and graduates and over 66 percent of Cuba's technical and professional work force (Álvarez Suárez, 2004; cited in Lutjens, 2007).

Whereas the educational achievement of Chicano students is among the lowest of ethnic groups in the U.S. (Excelencia in Education, 2022; Gándara and Contreras, 2009; Solorzano et al., 2005), Cuba's educational achievement surpasses that of virtually every other Latin American country including México (Carnoy, 2007). Cruz' description of education in Cuba highlights its differences from the standard of education historically provided to Chicano students:

- The education budget in Cuba is approximately 13 percent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This is high when compared to other developing countries.
- High expectations matter. A country with limited resources was able to erase illiteracy through a focused campaign in one year.
- In Cuba, no one leaves school out of fear that the next level isn't affordable (unlike here in one of the country's richest nations). Cuba offers a free education from cradle to the grave, including pre-school, adult education, doctorate, and post doctorate studies.
- Cuba has the ultimate wrap around institution for children. It also offers community based after school and weekend programs (Cruz, 2017).

A close examination identifies elements of Cuba's educational success that might be applied to Chicanos in the U.S. Some of these elements may already be applied in educational settings in the U.S. with various populations. While some of these elements might be applied in the early stages of Chicano education, they have implications for policies and practices that promote Chicano success in higher education as well.

Cuban scholars spoke often to me about the strong emphasis on educational achievement throughout Cuba. This collective consensus links academic achievement with service to community and society, with the very essence of being a proud Cuban citizen. During my 2015 visit, several Cuban scholars spoke about the influence of Jose Martí, one of Cuba's greatest advocates for independence from Spain, on the philosophical foundation of Cuban education. This national priority on education is reflected in access to higher levels of education. In 2015, Cuban educators told me that approximately 90 percent of Cuban children attend preschool. Approximately 40 percent of students completing primary and secondary school matriculate to the "pre-university." An additional 60 percent move on to a polytechnical school (I was able to visit each type of institution in Havana and Mayabeque, respectively). The emphasis on national pride through academic achievement occurs at all levels of education, both pre-university and university.

Since the triumph of the 1959 Cuban revolution, Cuban pedagogy has been transformed from a passive process to a student-centered, active process. At a 2015 symposium at the University of Havana, Cuban educators described the considerable influence of progressive Brazilian educator Paulo Freire on Cuban pedagogy. They also described an ongoing focus on continued reform of Cuban education for the period of 2014-2030.

In addition to the success of their primary and secondary school systems, Cuba is equally proud of its higher education system in terms of both access and success. Our 2015 presentations on Cuban education included vital facts about the higher education system in Cuba:

- The University of Havana includes five campuses and twenty research centers.

- Cuban universities explicitly prepare students for life as engaged Cuban citizens so they can maximize their contribution to society. They address the development of both cognition and ethical values.
- Cuba's awareness and recognition of both national and international standards drives a constant effort to improve university education and to keep higher education institutions integrated with surrounding communities.
- An important role of the university in Cuba is to teach students history to preserve and strengthen Cuban culture and identity.
- Through the directives and support of the Ministry of Education and the Communist Party, there is a high level of integration of resources among higher education institutions and collaborations between universities across Cuban provinces.
- The "Agrarian University" in Mayabeque Province, which we visited for a symposium with administrators, teachers, and students, serves over 3,000 students with majors in technical fields as well as social sciences and humanities, respectively. It also grants Masters and Doctoral degrees.
- At Cuban universities, there is a strong emphasis on building positive working relationships between professors and students. At a university campus in Havana that I visited in 2015, all classes were suspended for a week of athletic competition between faculty and students as a means of team-building and mutual respect.

These descriptions by Cuban scholars and educators reflect the concept identified by Carnoy as "state-driven social capital" to maximize educational access and achievement. Carnoy's notion of social capital (Coleman, 1966; cited in Carnoy, 2007; Stanton-Salazar, 2001) connects students in supportive networks that both emphasize the importance of academic achievement and transmit information on how to achieve educational success. According to Carnoy, social capital is usu-

ally described as a resource generated at the level of families and schools. However, Carnoy argues that social capital can be generated at broader levels such as communities, regions, and even the nation state. Clearly, this "state-generated social capital" is a critical element in the educational success of Cuban schools. Cuba has created and maintained a social context supportive of academic achievement through its "hierarchical centralized government bureaucracy" (Carnoy, 2007, p.2). Cuba's state-generated social capital has a major influence on the state's regulation and organization of schools.

Stanton-Salazar (2001) describes the great challenge faced by working-class Chicano students whose parents lack the education and professional status to transmit social capital and whose subordinate racial status makes school personnel reluctant to facilitate their accumulation of social capital networks. Carnoy's conceptualization of social capital as a resource that can be cultivated and transmitted by the "state," as opposed to families or schools, raises the question of how large government levels might create the consciousness of educational success that would facilitate social capital development among working class Chicanos. Chicano students in working class communities often struggle to connect their efforts in school to subsequent socioeconomic mobility (Massey et al., 2003).

In their explanation for Cuba's educational success, Cuban scholars and social workers emphasized to me the critical role of teachers. They noted both the technical, instructional competence of Cuban teachers as well as their genuine concern for the welfare of their students. In Cuba, it appears that this concern for students and their achievement moves from high levels of government to mid-levels, e.g., ministries of education, that focus on educational policy. It also carries on to school principals and especially to classroom teachers. Lutjens (2007) quotes from her Cuban interview subjects who work directly in education regarding the deep concern for students among Cuban teachers. Likewise, I interviewed a Cuban health care practitioner and graduate of Cuba's higher education system in 2011, who attested that the caring attitude of Cuban teachers is the most important variable of Cuban national success in education. In our interview, she told me:

> There are objective factors in the success of Cuban education but there are also subjective factors. One subjective

> factor is the dedication of Cuban teachers. It is the love they have for their students and their profession. To carry out an educational occupation in Cuba, one must have love for that occupation. One must be dedicated to education. This country has many difficulties, but its teachers are incredible (Elba Capote, Havana, Cuba, 2011).

During my 2015 dialogues with Cuban educators, they often discussed the importance of recruiting and training such caring, effective Cuban teachers at all levels. We were told of reforms since 2009 to include more teacher training at both the pre-service and in-service levels. Such preparation includes three dimensions—academic, research, and community relations. Teacher trainees are placed in schools during their first year of training to observe instruction. Their second year focuses on research, including interviews with teachers in their placement school. During the third year, trainees design a theoretical framework for their research and teaching. In the fourth year, teachers work full-time in their own classroom while returning to the university for classes in which they discuss their instructional challenges. Another result of recent reforms allows for more autonomy in school organization and the distribution of teacher workload.

The in-service development of teachers remains a strong national priority. Instructors from pedagogical universities such as the one we visited in 2015 at the offices of the Association of Cuban Pedagogues in the Havana barrio of Marianao provide such training for teachers on a regular basis. There, I was able to teach a "short course" to Cuban teachers on the academic experiences of Chicano students in the U.S. It was clear that the teachers were very focused on effective pedagogy. This emphasis on teaching carries over to the level of higher education as well. One scholar at the University of Havana told us that new university professors start at the bottom of the rank and salary levels and that they cannot progress until they complete a course in pedagogy. One of the highlights of our 2015 visit was a dialogue with Lydia Turner Martí, the renowned Cuban author of "Pedagogía de la Ternura" (Pedagogy of Tenderness), whose work exemplifies Cuba's "caring teachers." During our conversation, Dr. Turner Martí emphasized the role of empathy among Cuba's teachers as well as the increased attention to Cubans' African heritage.

Her life spanned the years prior to the Cuban Revolution off 1959 to her continued involvement with Cuban educational reform. The theme of "caring teachers" was one that I heard several times in Cuba.

My observations and conversations with Cuban educators reinforce Carnoy's conclusions regarding the Cuban education system, including its teachers:

> Cuban schools use a European curriculum in math that, according to experts, is better than the variety of math curricula used in U.S. schools. Cuban teacher education is tightly controlled by the Ministry of Education, which insists that teachers know how to teach the curriculum. When young teachers begin teaching, experienced colleagues and the principal mentor them for several years. Students do not change schools, and at the elementary level, usually have the same teacher for at least four grades (2011).

Gándara and Contreras document the importance of teacher quality in Chicano students' education: "Numerous studies have shown a clear relationship between the quality of teachers and the achievement of their students, and the quality of instruction has also been shown to have the greatest impact on the academic achievement of students of color" (p. 103). I suggest that an infusion of more "caring," effective teachers and professors in schools and colleges attended by Chicano students is directly related to the need for more Chicano teachers in education institutions at all levels (Darder, 2011; Gándara and Contreras, 2009). A 2004 study found that almost 19 percent of all U.S. students were Latino, yet only 6 percent of teachers were Latino; on the other hand, whites made up only 58 percent of students nationally and 83 percent of teachers (Gándara and Contreras, 2009). In their synthesis of research, Bristol and Martin-Fernandez found that the ethnic background of Chicano teachers adds value to their Chicano students' learning as well as their social and emotional development (2019).

Chicano teachers, if educated in credential programs that help develop their ethnic identity and commitment to social justice, might hold more positive expectations for Chicano students (Persell, 1977; Sleeter, 2011), to understand their culture and its impact on learning

styles (Buriel, 1994; Ramirez, 1984), to appreciate the complexities of Chicano students' and parents' subordinate position in the U.S. racial hierarchy (hooks, 1994), and to serve as an ethnic role model for Chicano students (Darder, 2011). In their review of literature on effective ethnic studies pedagogy, Tintiangco-Cubales et al. emphasize the efficacy of teachers of color in such instructional strategy: " . . . while there were strong white and non-white ethnic studies teachers, being a person of color was a distinct asset" (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). Smith examined the literature on Hispanic Serving Institutions in higher education and concluded: "recent findings suggest that success varies among HSI institutions, with some of the difference being accounted for by the presence of Latino faculty" (2015, p. 217). Likewise, the recent scholarship by Garcia strongly recommends that colleges and universities hire and retain more Chicano/Latino faculty (2023).

The imperative for transformational Chicano mentors exists in higher education where Chicano faculty are drastically underrepresented in post-secondary institutions (Ibarra, 2001). The Chicano presence among graduate students, the pipeline to the professoriate, is also weak (Castellanos et al., 2006; Castellanos and Jones, 2003; Ibarra, 2001). Considerable policy initiatives that place more Chicanos in the pipeline to develop them as teachers or college professors is essential to raising Chicano student success at all levels. In addition, Ibarra (2001) documents the need for higher education to transform its institutional culture to reflect the "high context culture" of Chicanos and other underrepresented students that contributes to equitable, supportive conditions. A faculty that understands the needs of such students and provides a "culturally sustaining" pedagogy (Paris, 2012) exemplifies the concept of "caring teachers" in higher education. Higher education institutions can provide clear incentives and professional development to cultivate such faculty (Kuh et al., 2010).

The directions toward such institutional transformation have been articulated recently by Garcia, who emphasizes the development of Hispanic Serving Institutions as a factor that creates urgency for explicit attention to the needs of Chicano and other Latino students (Garcia, 2023). My own observations from advocacy in San Diego, California support Garcia's note of the pride expressed by such "HSI's" in reaching enrollment levels for Latino students without deep consideration of the

institutional conditions that will maximize their success. Transforming those institutional structures, policies, and practices entails application of documented, effective strategies from both within and outside the context of U.S. higher education.

My Cuban contacts identified additional features of the Cuban educational system that, if replicated in U.S. schools at all levels, might contribute to the success of Chicano students. Some of these features facilitate the development of more democratic schools and classrooms. One feature of such classroom environments is the explicit role of school principals as instructional leaders rather than bureaucrats or administrators of student discipline (Carnoy, 2007). This critical role sends a message about the importance of staff development for better teaching and concretely helps to improve the instructional effectiveness of Cuban teachers. A shift in policy and practice regarding the role of school administrators underscores the need for Chicano administrators as well. In addition to serving as instructional leaders, well-trained Chicano school principals can also serve a leadership role in maximizing teachers' knowledge of Chicano culture and sociopolitical position that impact students' engagement with school. They can provide the leadership for a culturally compatible, collective approach to education.

Likewise, having Chicano administrators that provide leadership in effective teaching and culturally inclusive student services would be a transformative policy shift for higher education. They would be well positioned to provide the forms of validation found effective in facilitating academic success and satisfaction among Chicano students in higher education (Rendon and Muñoz, 2011) and equally adept at structuring mechanisms for involvement that contribute to Chicano students' sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Unfortunately, scholars such as Hurtado and Ruíz document the relative absence of such administrators and faculty in higher education:

> In terms of instructor and staff identities, Latina/o faculty, administrative/managerial, and other professional staff are all alarmingly underrepresented at the national level (p. 21) . . . Diversification of the faculty at all ranks is the single most important long term, structural change in institutional transformation because faculty may be

> employed for up to 30 years at a single institution (with adequate support and promotion) and it becomes the most effective way to diversify the curriculum, broaden research foci, and increase connections with minority communities (2012, p. 23-24).

Lutjens (2007) describes the practice in Cuban schools of primary teachers who remain with the same cohort of students throughout primary school rather than changing cohorts each school year. Such a practice would seem very compatible with Chicano students whose culture emphasizes social connections and personalization (Buriel, 1994; Canul, 2003; Garcia, 2001; Ortiz and Santos, 2009; Ramirez, 1984; Ramirez and Castañeda, 1974). It offers the obvious advantage of teachers who increasingly know the needs of their students and know the students' parents as well. A more familial relationship is constructed between families and schools, and as Ortiz and Santos observed in their study of Latino students: "Family as a collectivistic entity was a defining and fundamental aspect of (Latino) students' ethnic self-concept" (p. 313). It is worth noting that one reason Cuba can operationalize this practice effectively, which requires broad and deep content knowledge, is that teaching is a respected profession in their country and as a result, teacher training programs can recruit among the best students with considerable content knowledge (Carnoy, 2007).

My Cuban informants described an additional Cuban practice that could be replicated with Chicano students: Cuba's national curriculum (Carnoy, 2007). Rather than using suspect testing mechanisms to sort and track students into different levels of academic challenge and support (Darder, 2011; Oakes, 1985; Persell, 1977), Cuba applies a standard, rigorous national curriculum for all students. Clearly, this policy contributes to Cuba's academic success (Carnoy, 2007), a finding that was supported by the testimony of Cuban teachers and scholars with whom I interacted. Some California schools have sought to increase equity in educational outcomes by such standardization of curriculum with high expectations (Sacks, 2007), such as requiring courses that lead directly to public higher education eligibility. Given the historic pattern of tracking Chicano students into lower-level classes and their underrepresentation in gifted programs (Oakes, 1985; Solorzano et al., 2005),

standardizing a high-challenge curriculum for Chicano students could make a considerable contribution to raising their achievement levels.

As Solórzano and his colleagues have identified (2005), similar barriers, e.g., placement of Chicanos in remedial courses, exist in higher education. Rather than tracking Chicanos in such remedial courses, often in math and writing, more innovative practices to place relatively underprepared Chicano college students in mainstream courses with access to academic support should facilitate their higher academic achievement. Such uniformity in course enrollments helps to maximize the positive effects of peer-to-peer learning in higher education (Astin, 1993; Hurtado, 2012).

Smith emphasizes the unique, positive features of "special purpose" institutions in the U.S. such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's; 2015). These institutional values and strategies are very similar to those embedded in the Cuban educational system at all levels, including the university. High expectations and strong support epitomize Cuban schools and universities. Cuban students pursue educational achievement and credentials for a "larger purpose," that of contributing to a stronger, more positive Cuban society. Compared to education in the U.S., students' educational opportunities in Cuba are not significantly altered because of their race or gender (Morales, 2013). From the experience of Cuban schools at various levels, it appears clear that educational strategies that emphasize high expectations for students with corresponding levels of support represent a strong "cross-context" element with potential for success with Chicano students in the U.S.

It is no accident that both Cuban schools and special-purpose institutions in U.S. higher education generate high rates of success for their students. It is incumbent on schools and higher education institutions that enroll Chicano students to operationalize these principles and deploy these strategies (Garcia, 2019). While Garcia's argument for a focus on HSI's is compelling, it makes sense for colleges and universities to construct supportive conditions before reaching an HSI enrollment level, a strategy that facilitates higher Chicano enrollment and success.

Indeed, Hurtado and Ruíz (2012) and Garcia (2023; 2019) document that the potential of so-called "Hispanic-Serving Institutions" (HSI's) to replicate such strategies is still largely unfulfilled. Such institutions have generally been defined almost exclusively by the percent-

age of their undergraduate enrollment that is "Hispanic." Hurtado and Ruíz note that unlike Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other special-purpose institutions, HSI's did not begin with the explicit purpose of serving Latino students. Instead, they often evolve into an HSI because of significant demographic changes in their service area. Despite this difference, some HSI contributions are impressive: "HSI's top the list of institutions for the production of Hispanic associate and baccalaureate degrees in a number of fields each year and about a quarter of Hispanic doctoral degree recipients have earned their degree at HSI's in spite of the small proportion of these institutions that offer doctoral programs" (Hurtado and Ruíz, 2012, p. 5).

The commitment of these HSI's to transformation that results in more supportive institutional conditions for Chicanos is uneven. In their study of HSI's, Contreras et al. (2008) conclude that some such institutions have not made the necessary commitment to enact such changes in their culture, and that for them the HSI designation is no more than a "manufactured identity." Hurtado and Ruíz also conclude that more focused institutional energy is necessary to construct greater equity in conditions and outcomes: "A talent development approach toward institutional excellence will require greater attention to regular assessment of Latina/o students along many dimensions beyond raw numbers of degrees and graduation rates" (p. 15). Garcia describes an HSI transformed to fully reflect the needs of Chicanos/Latinos as a "dream" that does not yet exist (2023).

Cuban Society: The Social Context of Education

Broader, societal level aspects of the Cuban experience that occur outside of classrooms and schools might also be applied to a resolution of the Chicano educational crisis. The interviews and seminars I experienced in Cuba along with the scholarly contributions that analyze Cuba's educational success (Carnoy, 2007; Lutjens, 2007) point to a strong connection between the nation's collective motivation for educational success and the perception of a national project to construct a society that minimizes inequality. At a seminar I led with Cuban scholars in Havana in 2011, participants repeatedly emphasized that most students in Cuba (at all levels including higher education) are not socialized to pursue educational success based on a motivation for individual socioeconomic

mobility, clearly the case in the U.S. (Johnson, 2006). Instead, they work for academic achievement and matriculate to higher education through their drive to contribute to a stronger Cuba that facilitates prosperity for all.

According to Juan Nicolas Padrón, a professor I interviewed (2011) at Casa Las Americas in Havana, even the structure and curriculum of higher education reflects this collective sense of motivation. Whereas many research institutions of higher education in the U.S. implement a curriculum heavy on theory and weak on applications (Ibarra, 2001), Cuba's higher education system emphasizes a praxis that combines theory with applications designed to improve Cuban society. Even students' ability to choose a major in Cuban universities is driven by national labor needs rather than individual choice or the need of private enterprise to maximize profit. Thus, although access to an affordable higher education is a "freedom" enjoyed by Cubans more so than many Chicanos, their conception of freedom in educational choices reflects a more collective lens than that often acquired through individualistic socialization in the U.S.

Such an approach is compatible with a strategy that seeks collective achievement and emancipation for Chicano students and their communities. As a result of decades of systemic racism and colonial conditions, a major problem in Chicano communities is convincing young Chicano students to enroll in a rigorous curriculum that prepares them for college (Gándara and Contreras, 2009; Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Appeals to individualistic and instrumental motives are unlikely to succeed because they are largely incompatible with the culture and socialization of Chicanos (Canul, 2003; Darder, 2011; Garcia, 2001; Ibarra, 2001; Ramirez, 1984; Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, 2010). Maldonado et al. underscore this principle, using Fanon's concept of "collective catharsis" (Fanon, 1970; cited in Maldonado et al., 2005) to describe "the benefits of oppressed groups collectively acting to end their marginality" (p. 626). As Cuba's example demonstrates, cultivating and capitalizing on a more collective motivation that encourages Chicano students to connect their own success with increased opportunities for their community might be more effective than individualistic appeals.

When I visited the Tomas David Rayo school in Havana in 2015, we learned from administrators and students that these pre-university

students belonged to a school club dedicated to community service. This strong practice in Cuba dedicated to linking education and community service is part of a larger national landscape that increasingly encourages active civic involvement. The strategy of collectively minded student organizations dedicated to service should resonate among Chicanos in the U.S. Despite the historically low numbers of Chicano students in higher education, the student organization MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano/a de Aztlán, or Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán) has existed for decades. Its structure includes national, regional, state, local, and institutional levels. Numerous scholars have documented the effectiveness of MEChA and other Chicano student organizations in contributing to a sense of belonging among Chicano students at often elitist or exclusionary college campuses (Maramba and Velásquez, 2010; Santos and Ortiz, 2009; Smith, 2015; Treviño, 1994). Another research direction to pursue would be comparing Cuba's strategies for community service with community service requirements for U.S. college students that might be linked to institutional and/or state policy.

In Cuba, what might be a cultural and political inclination to experience motivation through a more collective lens is cultivated by an educational system that encourages and enacts community service by students at all levels. At a seminar with Cuban scholars in 2007, participants described to me the "homework circles" held for elementary students in the homes of parents as well as middle school students organizing to tutor elementary students. This community service model is enacted in higher education as well. In my interview with social worker Maria Isabel Romero in the municipality of Marianao in Havana in 2009, she told me that university students in Cuba are members of a student organization dedicated largely to national service. This organization, the University Student Federation, supports educational and community activities throughout Cuba. Although membership in this federation is compulsory, my informants at the University of Havana in 2015 reinforced its importance to the development of Cuban students as citizens.

Yet another societal level condition in Cuba that enhances educational achievement is the relative lack of violent crime and social disorder in Cuba. Although I have not seen scholarly sources that document the level of such crime and disorder on the island, Cubans at many levels

from university professors to taxi drivers and restaurant waitresses related this observation during each of my visits to Cuba. Perhaps the most frequent description I have heard by Cubans about their country is, "Es muy tranquilo" ("It's very tranquil"). Several told me very empathetically that they were aware of the high crime and violence levels in both México and the U.S., and they contrasted it with a low rate of such crime in Cuba.

In contrast, the conditions in U.S. Chicano communities are reflected in a study by Charles et al. (2009) that documents the high propensity for Chicanos and other historically underrepresented students of color who attend selective higher education institutions to have experienced high levels of violence and social disorder in their communities. Charles et al. also find that those students' exposure to such dysfunctional community conditions has a negative impact on their cognitive development and their ability to focus on their academic achievement.

Likewise, Gándara and Contreras cite research documenting that Latinos report significantly more perceptions of being unsafe at school or even traveling to school, and that "poverty and neighborhood disorganization are also correlated both with race and ethnicity and with higher incidences of violence on school campuses" (p. 110). While racial segregation does not proliferate in the same manner in Cuba, the segregation and marginalization of Chicanos and other historically underrepresented students in the U.S. continues to increase as disparities in wealth, including the distribution of wealth by ethnicity, continue to grow (Charles et al., 2009; Gandara and Orfield, 2010; Johnson, 2006; Massey et al, 2003; Keefe and Padilla, 1987; Stiglitz, 2012). Such segregated communities are often marked by the degree of violence and social disorder described by Charles et al. (2009).Comprehensive strategies to increase Chicano educational achievement must include components that address such community conditions.

The challenge of replicating Cuba's ongoing, national project to achieve equity is formidable. It reflects the significant difference in societal values between Cuba and the U.S. The national consensus in the U.S. toward equity took a step backward with the June 2023 U.S. Supreme Court's rejection of affirmative action policies in higher education admission. Attacks on the teaching of Critical Race Theory are also widespread. Reflecting the dialectic process of creating change (Persell, 1977;

Yosso, 2006), some school and higher education systems, respectively, have increased their focus on "equity-mindedness" (Covarrubias and Quinteros, 2023; UCB HSI Task Force, 2020; UCLA HSI Task Force, 2022). It seems likely that efforts to shift values toward greater ethnic-racial equity, with subsequent transformation of educational institutions, may be more feasible at the state level in states such a California, where Chicanos and other Latinos are the largest ethnic group and even greater pockets of Chicano populations exist at county and/or state levels.

Despite the directions for Chicano educational success that are found in Cuba's model, if Chicanos face a strong degree of systemic racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Feagin, 2001) and occupy a subordinate position in the U.S. racial hierarchy (Darder, 2011), implementing strategies to raise Chicano students' educational success will remain challenging. Despite that, there are examples of effective strategies to increase the achievement of Chicano students. One such example that has been examined by scholars is the Mexican American Studies (MAS) program in Tucson, Arizona (Cabrera et al., 2012; Paris, 2012; Villanueva, 2013). Their curriculum that focuses on the Chicano experience may reflect the positive effects of a curriculum in which Chicanos and other underrepresented students see themselves in all their diversity and complexity (Sueyoshi and Sukitparapitaya, 2021; Sleeter, 2011). Additional research attention is merited by Tucson's MAS Program to determine the degree to which its apparent educational benefits are sustained and what degree the program has been replicated in other locales.

Conclusion

In her analysis of education policy and its failure to address the achievement of Chicanos, Contreras (2011) describes a contradiction in the rapidly increasing size of this underachieving population and the distinct lack of public investment in the education of Chicanos. Contreras describes this policy inertia as "demographic denial." The lack of public policy focus on Chicanos is especially perplexing when considering that virtually all indicators of socioeconomic progress for Chicanos remain low. Mariscal chastises contemporary scholars of Chicano Studies who claim that current conditions in the Chicano community lack the urgency that existed during the Chicano Movement in the late 1960's to early 1970's (Mariscal, 2005). Mariscal points out:

> Faced with a reinvigorated U.S. imperialism, the plight of indigenous people in Mexico, the situation of the Chicano/a working poor, the victims of police brutality and corruption, the thousands of incarcerated Chicano/a youth, the assault by military recruiters on Latino/a communities, the violence and death along the U.S./Mexico border, and the exclusion of Chicana/o students from prestigious universities and professional schools in Texas and California, the implication that at the beginning of the twenty-first century Chicano/a Studies scholars need not feel a sense of urgency can only be understood as denial or evasion (p. 272).

In response to my research questions, my exploratory study of Cuba's educational system and process of national identity development have confirmed previously established directions toward solutions to the educational crisis among Chicanos. These include the important contribution of constructing a critical/analytical ethnic identity, a challenging and supportive curriculum at all educational levels, the effectiveness of institutional validation of Chicanos and their culture, the efficacy of Chicano Studies, and caring Chicano educators that serve as transformational role models. As a Chicano educator, I find significant value in the confirmation of these strategies within the context of Cuba's struggle for sovereignty and empowerment, particularly since such strategies have not been applied broadly with Chicano students in the U.S.

In addition, the Cuban experience reveals other directions, sometimes counter intuitive, that have not received the same degree of attention in U.S. scholarship on Chicano education. These include the impact of state-driven social capital (and presumably cultural capital) that transcends the capacity of working-class Chicano families and inner-city schools to transmit such capital. It also includes the finding that an uncompromising "top down" policy on high academic standards, curriculum, and institutional administration need not result in a lack of democratic participation in the educational process among all stakeholders, e.g., parents, students, teachers/professors, and administrators. In the context of the United States' racial hierarchy, such uniformity in institutional conditions may be necessary to avoid the hindering

conditions, i.e., institutional racism, for Chicanos generally found in schools, colleges, and universities.

The strong national identity developed by Cubans largely through their education system has an important dimension of critical analysis that constantly examines Cuba's place in the world within the context of global capitalism. To achieve the educational benefits of a strong ethnic identity, such an identity constructed by Chicanos must have a similar critical dimension that remains focused on the subject position of Chicanos within the class and racial hierarchies of U.S. society, and the subsequent need to create societal and institutional transformation. As I emphasize, the difference in economic and sociopolitical context between the Cuban nation and the U.S. Chicano population is but one challenge in replication Cuba's educational success. However, given the intransigence of Chicano educational underachievement, it would be a mistake to unequivocally discount the features of that success as hopelessly inapplicable.

After the triumph of the Cuban revolution in 1959, the new Cuban government recognized the necessity for an ongoing revolution that was economic, political, and cultural. As Fidel Castro described in his biography, education must be a major part of that multi-dimensional process (Castro and Ramonet, 2006). Education scholars have described the dialectical process in which oppressive spaces such as schools and universities are also sites of resistance (Persell, 1977; Solorzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2006). Thus, educational institutions specifically hold potential to interrupt the circular process of inequality. Schools, colleges, and universities can make structural changes in values, curriculum, pedagogy, staffing, student enrollment, the construction of policy to increase Chicano students' educational achievement and the deep, meaningful learning that helps decolonize such students and their communities. Such structural change represents the institutional transformation in higher education defined by Eckel and Kezar: "the type of change that affects the institutional culture is deep and pervasive, is intentional, and occurs over time" (Eckel and Kezar, 2003; cited in Harper and Hurtado, 2010). Cuba's model of education reminds us that we hold at least some of the answers to such success in our grasp, even against formidable barriers.

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