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Book Review: Mexican Americans and Education: El saber es poder by Estela Godinez Ballón

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Godinez Ballón, Estela. *Mexican Americans and Education: El saber es poder*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2015. x + 179 pages. Paperback, \$22.95.

Of the 50 million students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in the United States, 8 million are Mexican American. This is not surprising to those abreast of population trends given that Mexican Americans have become one of the fastest growing demographic groups in the United States. However, despite substantial presence in U.S. schools, educational and workforce outcomes for Mexican Americans continue to be substantially lower than U.S. averages, particularly in such categories as annual household income (\$10,000 below average), the percentage living in poverty, and the percentage attaining white-collar employment.

Sociologist Godinez Ballón, a professor of Liberal Studies, has cohesively woven together an analysis of significant factors contributing to such outcomes. She draws from several academic disciplines including, but not limited to, anthropology, education policy, history, Chicano/a studies, American studies, and sociology of education. To highlight educational inequalities, the author also utilizes data from the National Center for Education Statistics, the College Board, the Pew Hispanic Center, and the Kaiser Family Foundation among others. Stemming from this broad field of references, Godinez Ballón argues that structural inequalities within the U.S. school system account for educational disparities of many Mexican American students. In making this argument, she discredits the historically subjective and prejudicial theories that claim that educational disparities are due to genetic and cultural inadequacies.

Chapter 1 of the text identifies historical factors that have created significant barriers for Mexican Americans. These include overt school segregation, assimilation agendas (referred to as Americanization), Mexican American community responses, and the cultural and genetic deficit theories. Here, Godinez Ballón ties in reproduction theories, critical race theory, critical ethnography, and other approaches as a means of sufficiently decentering hegemonic narratives. Chapter 2 provides a contemporary snapshot of ongoing systematic challenges that include continued school segregation, standardized testing, and curriculum tracking. Chapter 3 focuses on language and education with regards to English learners. Godinez Ballón notes several institutional inadequacies within this discussion, including lack of teacher preparedness and instructional materials. She also provides an accurate overview of language politics and the powerful agenda for pedagogical monolingualism. Chapter 4 provides a general landscape of Mexican American students in higher education, highlighting the hurdles to admission, persistence, and completion that include preparedness, financing, and unfavorable campus climates. Chapters 5 and 6 offer frameworks and recommendations for moving the U.S. educational system forward in ways that would curtail the barriers faced by Mexican American students. In doing so, Godinez Ballón returns to the theories introduced in Chapter 1 in order to provide constructive analysis of existing conditions.

Overall, this is an accessible book that includes a comprehensive range of topics relevant to the Mexican American educational experience. The data utilized is easily read and draws a clear picture of current educational outcome indicators among Mexican Americans. Furthermore, Godinez Ballón's sources are robust and include key contributors from each field. Godinez Ballón, however, does discuss the difficulty of parsing out Mexican American data

within the larger Latino category. As a result, some of the quantitative information may be skewed by those Latino/a populations which may have varying educational experiences and outcomes. Also, the depth of analysis is inconsistent; it is more than sufficient in some areas but lacking in others. For example, in regard to Chapter 4 – *The Quest for Higher Education*, Godinez Ballón simply introduces microaggression theory but does not include any in-depth analysis of how degradation – in the form of insults and dismissals – influences the educational outcomes of Mexican Americans. In addition, examples and references from the growing literature on diversity in higher education would be relevant and informative for considering persistence in both undergraduate and graduate pathways for Mexican American students.

This book is timely and provides a focused analysis of topics addressed within other recent popular releases such as *Latinos and Education: A Critical Reader* edited by Antonia Darder and Rodolfo Torres (2013), as well as *U.S. Latinos and Education Policy: Research-Based Directions for Change* edited by Pedro R. Portes, Spencer Salas, Patricia Baquedano-López, and Paula J. Mellom (2014). *Mexican Americans and Education: El saber es poder* would make an excellent supplement for undergraduate courses focusing on education and/or inequality. Godinez Ballón’s text is significant as it provides a clear and organized narrative for carefully reviewing the Mexican American educational experience.

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