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Richard R. Valencia. *Chicano Students and the Courts: The Mexican American Legal Struggle for Educational Equality.* New York: New York University Press, 2008. xix + 484 pp. $49.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-8819-6; $25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8147-8830-1.

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Professor Valencia offers, in this book, an analysis of legal cases brought by students belonging to minority social groups, including Mexican Americans and African Americans. He explores the legal complexity and the social implications of the cases, part of the struggle for better schools and funding, the elimination of discrimination, and the avoidance of school closures. The litigation surrounding the aforementioned issues is intended to achieve equality in the education that Mexican American students receive in the United States of America.

The book contains a well-documented historical overview of notable legal cases that resulted in unprecedented change, both good and bad, in the education opportunities for members of the Mexican American community. As the author explains in the introduction, the conceptual framework used to understand and analyze school litigation initiated by Mexican American community members is critical race theory, a form of oppositional scholarly work "that challenges the experience of whites as the normative standard and grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color."[1] The book consists of eight chapters devoted to specific legal cases and their implications for law and society, grouped according to their characteristics. Chapter 1 is entitled "School Segregation" and discusses the origin of school segregation of Mexican American students in the decades after the signing of the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty in 1848. The chapter considers thirty-five legal cases, mostly in Texas, followed by California, and, to a lesser extent, Arizona and Colorado. Almost all of the trials were initiated by Mexican American students, and Valencia looks at fourteen representative cases from the years 1925 to 1985. Valencia believes that the consequences of these cases shed light on contemporary struggles for educational equality. He goes on to provide data on the prevalence of segregation of Mexican American students, with hard numbers that show also how schools with the highest concentration of Mexican American and Latino students have the lowest graduation rates.

Chapter 2, "School Financing," reflects on the enormous costs of the education system. K-12 schools and school boards, along with state departments of education and the federal Department of Education, employ more people than any other area of the public sector in the United States. Valencia finds that since the inception of schools, funding for the education of the Mexican American population has been cut steadily. Therefore, in this chapter, he discusses the consequences of this situation.

Chapter 3, "Special Education," focuses on three major cases involving plaintiffs who were people of color, among them Mexican Americans and African Americans. Both groups asserted that the use of standardized tests by educational authorities was discriminatory, with the result being an overrepresentation of Mexican American and African American students in classes for students labelled "mentally retarded." The chapter addresses the following issues: the roots of placement of Mexican American learners in special education classes, the entrenchment of the practice of group-administered intelligence tests, allegations of discrimination in testing, litigation involving special education and Mexican American students, and the influence of Mexican American federal special education litigation on legislation governing educational systems and teachers' professional practices.

"Bilingual Education" is the title of chapter 4. Here, Valencia focuses on eight legal cases brought to the courts by Mexican American students. The chapter discusses the importance of Spanish-language and bilingual education for Mexican Americans, identifying how

the requirement of Spanish in schools serves as a catalyst for the resurgence of bilingual education and Mexican American-initiated bilingual education. In sum, the chapter offers rich historical context for the subject.

Subsequently, chapter 5, "School Closures," undertakes an analysis of the closure of underutilized schools. Valencia investigates the closure of schools as a measure taken by school districts to save costs in the 1970s and 1980s. He seeks to answer the question, are school closures in socioeconomically diverse communities fair? The author ventures to decide in this chapter who won and who lost with the closure of schools. Readers encounter three legal cases driven by Mexican American plaintiffs (the *Angeles*, *Castro*, and *Diaz* cases). The author served as an expert on these cases and so readers gain an insider's perspective on the matters.

Chapter 6 addresses the thorny issue of undocumented students. The chapter is about the major change from universal access to education to access for students who are U.S. citizens. It is about legal cases and the consequences of amendments to Texas laws. The chapter is set against the backdrop of the controversial issue of illegal immigration, acquiring special relevance in the *Plyler* case, and its implications in the struggle for the achievement of full rights to education in U.S. schools for Mexican American students.

Chapter 7, "Higher Education Financing," addresses the problems of the limited population of Mexican American students who reach higher education. Valencia identifies the difficulties Mexican American students face in their attempts to access it. He also notes the lack of institutions in geographic regions densely populated by Mexican American people.

The final chapter, "High-Stakes Testing," is about accountability and the consequences of reforms following this discourse. Here, Valencia discusses three cases (*U.S. v. Texas*, *AMAE v. California*, and *GI Forum v. TEA*), which are analyzed with the help of critical race theory. The theory helps readers to understand why the tests perpetuate racist patterns.

Finally, Valencia seeks to explain "what we have learned from this legal history" (p. 306). He shares some thoughts and ideas on the current and future status of litigation arising from the Mexican American community. He discusses the involvement of Mexican American parents in the education of their children. He focuses especially on the possibilities and advantages of using critical race theory as a source of navigation in this collective struggle.

The importance of the book lies in the achievement of the author in providing an orderly and well-documented exposition of legal disputes initiated by students from the Mexican American community. The students seek to defend their right to access education without segregation. These same students seek equal opportunities in the different levels of the education system. The book provides certainty to Mexican American community members who have been segregated, and gives them hope to fight and win the opportunity to access education. It is not a question of whether Mexican Americans students, as members of a community with specific cultural practices different from students who are "white," are more or less likely to work hard in school. According to Valencia, it is instead about the struggle to combat, through legal battles, the practice of segregation of Mexican Americans in schools. Written in plain, clear language, without abuse of legal or pedagogical terms that can be understood only by specialists, this book is recommended for those interested in educational policy and the history of social struggles, as well as those interested in the history of the Mexican American community and the history of education in the United States of America.

Note

[1]. Edward Taylor, "A Primer on Critical Race Theory," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 19 (Spring 1998): 122-124.

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