

## The Social Construction of Latino Childhood in the New South

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**Abstract:** Childhood in the United States, and in the American South more particularly, has several well-known and popularized constructions, typically divided by social class and ethnic identity. More specifically, Southern childhood is constructed as an either white or black experience, with one's social world being extremely ethnically segregated in either case. Over the last several decades, as a post-NAFTA immigration boom has brought several generations of Latinos into the American South (in part because of these shifting demographics, the area is now often called the "New South"), this bifurcated popular conceptualization of childhood has been disrupted by the growing presence of Latino children in Southern schools and communities. Building upon Vygotsky's premise that identity (including ethnic identity) is constructed through a cultural-historical lens, we here use the nascent literature on Latino education in the New South to outline an initial construction of Southern Latino childhood.

**Keywords:** Latinos/as, Childhood, American South, Schooling, Inequality

Childhood in the United States, and in the American South more particularly, has several well-known and popularized constructions, typically divided by social class and ethnic identity. More specifically, identities for Southern children have been generally constructed in terms of either white or black experience, with one's social world often being structured by a contested and segregated inter-cultural history. This construction is both external, in that the ways in which the experience of childhood is understood is a product of larger social dynamics (Miller & Moore, 1989), including divisions and power dynamics based in ethnicity (Smedley & Smedley, 2005), and internal, in that young children interpret and understand their own experiences in a way that shapes their later understandings of childhood (Engel, 1995). We see this ethnic divide portrayed powerfully in literature, poetry and film—one need only briefly consider the differences in experience portrayed in, for example, the characters of the white child Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) or the white aristocratic family of the Compsons in *The Sound and the*

*Fury* (1929) with Celie in *The Color Purple* (1982) or the black sharecropper family of *Sounder* (1969).

Social class also plays a role in these dynamics (Lareau, 2011; Twine, 1996), with the white experience dividing between the typically rural, agricultural experience of the white working poor and the “landed gentry.” That said, the Southern African American experience, as popularly conceptualized, typically always skews towards poverty and marginalization (Lopez, 1994).

Over the last several decades, the ethnic landscape of the American South has experienced a radical overhaul due to a significant upswing in Latino immigration to the area, particularly in the decade following the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA (Beck & Allexaht-Snider, 2002). Unlike states like California (Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2008) and Texas (Straubhaar, 2013), which have always had a sizeable Latino presence, only after an aggressive post-NAFTA push in labor recruitment from the agricultural industry did Latino communities of significant size arise in non-traditional areas of Latino settlement, a trend referred to by some as the New Latino Diaspora (Murillo & Villenas, 1997; Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002). However, as Wortham and Rhodes (2015) have noted, there is a great deal of heterogeneity between regions in terms of what this influx of the New Latino Diaspora looks like—due in large part to the prominence of agricultural industry in the region (Cuadros, 2006; Marrow, 2011), one of the parts of the New Latino Diaspora that has experienced the most drastic demographic change has been the American South (Gill, 2010; Murphy, Blanchard & Hill, 2001; Villenas, 2002).

This sustained period of immigration has resulted not only in short-term demographic change, but the creation of Southern Latino communities (Furuseth & Smith, 2006) that have

now brought several generations of Latino children into Southern schools (Portes & Salas, 2010). The Pew Hispanic Center (2011) has recently noted that during the first decade of the new millennium, for the first time since the 1970s, Latino population growth in the U.S. was driven more by U.S. births than the arrival of new immigrants into the country. Portes and Salas (2015), building off of this trend, refer to school-aged Latino children in the contemporary American South as a “post-first generation” who are helping to create a “New Latino South.”

This addition of Southern Latinos as another sizable non-dominant group alongside Southern African Americans has disrupted prior conceptualizations of childhood bifurcated along a white-black divide with new geographies and socio-linguistic variants. However, while this change represents a demographic reality, recognition of that reality in popular discourse lags behind significantly. As James Loewen (1988) once stated when describing the disruption of black/white U.S. Southern racial divides by the arrival of other ethnic minorities, “A biracial system of etiquette has no provision for a third race” (p. 73). As such, in popular conceptions of Southern childhood Latino children typically remain invisible. Recent legislation placing punitive restrictions on undocumented children and youth in many Southern states, seen by many as a nativist response to in-migration of Latinos and other ethnic minorities (see Russell, 2011), has only served to make the growing Southern Latino population feel more and more marginalized.

Given this particularly regional cultural interpretation of Latino identity and childhood in the American South, and the lack of previous theorization of Latino childhood in this region, we find that a cultural-historical lens is a fruitful one for understanding the ways in which the rather historically unique ethnic politics of the American South inform the contemporary construction of Southern Latino childhood. More specifically, we build here upon Vygotsky’s (1980) premise

that identity (including ethnic identity) is constructed cultural-historically, a premise that has previously informed a great deal of sociocultural analysis of Latino identity and Latino schooling (see, for example, the various chapter-length contributions to Portes and Salas' [2011] edited volume *Vygotsky in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Society: Advances in Cultural Historical Theory and Praxis with Non-Dominant Communities*). In this article, we provide an initial exploratory regional focus to this previous Vygotskian analysis of Latino childhood and schooling, integrating the nascent literature on Latino education in the New South to examine the inter-cultural development and adaptation processes involved in the construction of Southern Latino childhood.

### **Theoretical framework**

The work of Vygotsky (1980) and other core cultural-historical theorists in education (Cole, 1996; González, 2010; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Moll, 1992; Portes, 1996; Portes & Salas, 2011) that have followed him is firmly grounded in this tenet: that both broad sociological trends among demographic groups and individual behavior can only fully be understood through dynamic accounts of change in the sociocultural and historical context in which the person or group in question is situated. In the present work, we operationalize this heretofore predominantly theoretical concept in our sociocultural and historical exploratory articulation of Southern Latino childhood.

In the present case of Southern Latino childhood, the role of *ethnicity* in shaping this sociocultural and historical context is key. Here we understand and define ethnicity as a demographic category in which different ethnic groups are defined by some combination of shared language, history, beliefs and physical characteristics (often which are shared due to a period of extended shared history in a particular physical location). More particularly, Latinos as

an ethnic group are here defined as those in the United States with a shared historical connection to Spanish-speaking parts of North and South America and the Caribbean—though the history (including time lived in the United States), beliefs, physical characteristics and variations of Spanish spoken by those within this group vary widely. This variation is crucial to take into account when attempting to explore the role of ethnicity in shaping a person or group’s lived experience, as all too often “ethnicity is [erroneously] presumed to be experienced in the same way by different individuals and to have the same effects on different individuals” (Portes, 1996: 337).

What differentiates Latinos’ ethnic experiences as Latinos in different geographic areas and circumstances, in this framework, is the variable availability of “material and psychological tools” (Portes, 1996: 344) that can facilitate learning and development and mitigate inequalities in learning opportunities. More specifically,

Individuals may be advantaged or constrained by the nature of activities found in their community, which in turn influences the degree and the scope of the tools and signs employed. Yet individuals are relatively free to alter their development by acting on the environment with newly acquired means and schemata. (Portes, 1996: 346)

In other words, Latinos in a particular community (in the present case, Latinos in various parts of the post-NAFTA American South) will only have access to particular tools and resources, depending on the way in which they are received and treated by the towns and counties to which work opportunities have brought them over the last several decades. The availability (or lack) of such resources is what determines the extent to which they experience what we here call “group-based inequality” (Portes, 1996, 2005) in education. As will unfortunately be seen in most of the case studies presented hereafter, such group-based inequality is typical within the experiences of Latino children in the American South.

It is for this reason that a cultural-historical perspective (Portes & Salas, 2011), drawn extensively (but not exclusively) from Vygotsky's (1980) original theoretical framing, is useful in exploring ethnicity, as it provides a framework that can be used to measure "group-based inequalities" (Portes, 1996, 2005) as cultural artifacts of disproportionate rates of poverty that sustain consequent school learning gaps, which can in turn lead to staggering differences in educational outcomes between ethnic groups. While such inequalities are extensively documented in the sociology of education literature (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1977), what a Vygotskian cultural-historical perspective contributes is a particular focus on highlighting, examining and unpacking the historical particularities of cultural communities' lives in discrete contexts, and how those particularities shape contemporary inequalities. In the American South, despite variation within the Latino immigrant communities which have grown throughout the region over the last several decades, a number of such particularities are notable as region-wide trends. In the following section, we identify these trends in the existent literature, and build upon those trends to articulate a common theorization of Latino childhood in the American South.

### **Latino childhood in the New South**

#### *The educational context of Southern Latino childhood*

Until the relatively recent turn of the new millennium, it was common practice to take steps to ensure that Latinos and other English Language Learners (ELLs) were taught by teachers with certification and training in either English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual/dual language education (Lucas, Villegas, & Martin, 2014). However, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), which made states liable for the test scores of ELLs, led to many more

ELLs being mainstreamed into general education classrooms taught by teachers who did not possess the training or certification to know how to meet their educational needs (Lucas, 2011).

In the New South, where this change in policy occurred soon after Latinos began to move to the region *en masse*, the passage of NCLB (2002) became in part a justification to avoid accommodating the educational needs of Latino ELLs. In many classrooms receiving Latino students, educators are not prepared sufficiently to connect cultural background factors with teaching and learning in ways that might help them to effectively teach Latino children. This is reflected in the current literature: Kayi-Aydar (2015), in a study of preservice teachers working with Latinos and other ELLs in Arkansas, found that while teachers saw themselves as one of the few advocates available for Latino ELLs, those same teachers felt a large cultural distance and lack of understanding separating them from those same students. In a similar study of preservice teachers in a multicultural education course in Virginia (DeMulder, Stribling, & Day, 2014), most participating teachers were found to hold negative assumptions about immigrant ELLs, even when they had the desire to challenge and counter them. In another study of undergraduate preservice teachers in multicultural education courses, this time in North Carolina (Kolano & King, 2015), nearly all participants reported having very limited knowledge of ELLs when first entering program, despite good intentions to want to serve such students and counter educational inequities. In a separate study of teachers already in the classroom in Georgia, Mellom, Straubhaar, Balderas, Ariail and Portes (under review) found that most teachers, particularly those who self-identify as white, come into the classroom holding negative stereotypical views of Latino students and the communities from which they come.

The consistent trend across these findings is troubling—that is, that students in preservice programs throughout the American South continue to be predominantly white and have very

limited experience or knowledge regarding the history or culture of Latinos and other growing ethnic minorities. Not only do such educators lack knowledge of Latinos and other non-dominant communities, but due to their own cultural-historical background shaped by the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow and mass incarceration of Black (and now Latino) Southerners, what they do know is typified by negative stereotypical assumptions shaped by nativist ideologies that are not grounded in reality. When this punitive cultural-historical legacy is combined with a lack of multicultural training or sensitivity, and then deteriorated by a post-NCLB policy context in which such training is becoming less and less common within teacher education programs, the subsequent reality is one in which the experience of Southern Latino childhood includes regular exposure to hostile learning environments led by untrained and unprepared educators who are not willing or able to relate to their Latino students.

Adair (2015) explores how in one school in Nashville, Tennessee, this lack of teacher cultural sensitivity plays out in interactions with Latino parents. Through interviews with both teachers and parents, she found that while both mainstream teachers and Latino parents were concerned with Latino children's welfare in schools, parents internalized responsibility for that welfare more strongly, while teachers were more likely to ascribe responsibility for any negative aspects of Latino children's school experiences to larger structural issues like high-stakes accountability tests, mandated curricula and the like. What made this difference in perspective poignant was that each group could have benefited from hearing the other's perspective, but at least in the context of Adair's (2015) study, this kind of two-way communication between mainstream parents and Latino children was rare to nonexistent. Instead of community-building across demographic lines, the most common experience in this study was one of alienation (a

finding we have also assessed and validated with similar cultural samples, though among university-age Latinos [Portes, Simmons, Boada & Mira, 2014]).

In addition to a lack of culturally qualified teachers, the educational climate of the New South is unprepared for and unwelcome to Latino students in several other ways. Harklau and Colomer (2015) document how many Southern schools use stop-gap measures with Latino children rather than build in structures that can meet their needs, like putting Latino students into traditional Spanish foreign language classes and relying on Spanish language teachers as cultural brokers, even when they are unprepared and untrained to do so.

In his ethnography of one North Georgia community, Hamann (2008) notes how the educational programs and policies that were developed locally to accommodate the arrival of significant numbers of Latino immigrants were largely shaped by what Suárez-Orozco (1998) calls immigration scripts, or narratives (whether positive or negative) ascribed to immigrant communities to justify either rejection or acceptance of those communities. In the case of North Georgia, several scholars (Murillo, 2002; Portes & Salas, 2010) have shown that unfortunately dominant communities typically use nativist anti-immigration scripts to justify rhetorical and legal rejection of Latinos, as reflected in the aforementioned laws throughout the South (for example, in Georgia, South Carolina and Alabama) forbidding undocumented immigrants from attending public universities (Russell, 2011). Once again, the existent literature reveals that an inherent part of Southern Latino childhood is alienation from both their own neighborhood schools and school personnel, as well as the very notion of schooling and learning, as typified in restricted access of many Latinos to higher education.

Generally speaking, the cultural-historical context of American Southern Latino childhood is one in which Southern Latino children see themselves and their community framed

in public discourse as a problem (Murillo, 2002). In *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois (1986) frames the unspoken approach of white America to black communities with the poignant rhetorical question, “How does it feel to be a problem?” Murillo (2002) transposes this same question to describe the approach of white policymakers to Latino newcomers in the South, noting that as right-leaning Southern politicians began to adopt and proliferate nativist discourses towards immigrants during the post-NAFTA Southern Latino immigration boom of the 1990s and early 2000s, institutional policies and practices in schools and elsewhere were framed within an unspoken, accepted ideological “common sense” in which whiteness is accepted as the norm to which other ethnic identities must either defer or conform. This is an essential, defining element of the cultural-historical context of Southern Latino childhood. Huddleston (2015) confirms this notion in his study of fifth graders (including Latinos) in a North Georgia elementary school, as he documents the ways in which state tests do not account for or take advantage of any of the cultural, social or economic capital which Latinos brought from their life experiences and home contexts—on the contrary, the questions, prompts and stories in these state tests conformed most directly to middle-class white experiences, and thus in order to succeed Latinos and other nonwhite students had to go the extra mile in becoming acquainted with a cultural system other than their own.

In general, school and social systems in the South are constructed in such a way as to make it more difficult for Latino children and their families to request equal treatment. While the many scholars cited here have taken different theoretical orientations (such as, for example, Bourdieuan notions of symbolic violence [Huddleston, 2015], Suárez-Orozco’s notion of immigration scripts [Hamann, 2008], Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of *conocimiento* [Kasun, 2015] and Critical Race Theory [Urrieta, Kolano and O Jo, 2015]) to explain their work, the empirical

data shared in their many studies indicate a consistent level of inequality of educational opportunity and quality of instruction that has been culturally and historically constructed through a legacy and ideological lens of white supremacy. As a broader corpus of literature outlining the experience of Southern Latino childhood, the reasons behind this inequality of opportunity and quality are best understood through a theoretical lens that accounts for the historical and cultural context in which Southern Latino children now live—that is, a context in which public and political nativist responses to Latino in-migration, alongside an already established caste-like system of ethnic educational segregation, have shaped the current reality in which Southern Latino childhood is typified by ethnic alienation and erasure. In a Vygotskian (1980) cultural-historical framework, this aggressive social climate is perhaps the most significant individual factor in shaping the identities and schooled experiences of Southern Latino children.

This is reflected in policy structures as well as cultural norms. As Tarasawa (2013) points out in her study of the political economy of Atlanta public schools, despite laws mandating that ELL services be offered within a school when a certain number of ELL students is identified within that school, only schools in which community members organized and advocated for provision of such services (in the face of significant opposition) did they tend to be present. While some initiatives are being put forth to help Latino children counter these inequities, including STEM initiatives intended to increase Latino understanding of science (Llosa et al., 2016) and broader initiatives meant to help Latino students learn to communicate and learn more effectively across the curriculum (Straubhaar, Mellom, & Portes, 2017), in terms of broader policy and public discourse throughout the region such positively framed projects are unfortunately still the exception to the rule.

*The pain, isolation and alienation of Southern Latino childhood*

It is within this broader cultural-historical context of alienation and separation that Southern Latino children go about their lives. For some, they live in areas with sufficient numbers of Latino students and their families to constitute supportive communities—for others, the experience of being a Latino child in school is that of being perceived as “the only Mexican in the room” (Kasun, 2015)<sup>1</sup>.

This is also often the case for Latino children who live in Southern areas with established Latino communities, but who are somehow able to escape tracking systems that typically keep Latinos and other ELLs from being able to enroll in honors, AP and other “college track” coursework (Kanno & Kangas, 2014). Carrillo and Rodriguez (2016) share a case study of one such “escapee,” a working-class Latina high school student in North Carolina who has experienced a great deal of success in school and is enrolled in nearly all honors and AP courses. However, despite seeming to embody traditional notions of success, she reports often feeling discriminated for being a Latina student in such privileged spaces. Carrillo and Rodriguez (2016: 2) develop a term for this, called “smartness trespassing,” to describe situations when Latinos “[trespass] into the areas deemed for ‘intelligent’ people *who are not supposed to look like [them]*” (italics in original).

Urrieta, Kolano and O Jo (2015) share a similar case of an undocumented student in North Carolina who, despite on the surface appearing to be a strong success story and testament of the power of hard work in the face of adversity, experienced a significant and powerful sense of alienation and loss as a Latino child in the South. The student in this study was raised in a migrant worker household, and became an honor student in high school before attending one of

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<sup>1</sup> Even though Latino children in the South come from many different parts of North and South America and the Caribbean, rhetorically they are often globalized under the inaccurate catch-all term “Mexicans” (see Guerra, 2011).

the most prominent public state universities in North Carolina. This upwardly mobile child eventually earned his college degree, and was seen by many as an embodiment of the American Dream, the notion that anyone who works hard enough can get ahead and make their dreams come true. However, the typically unspoken part of his story that is explored at length by Urrieta, Kolano and O Jo (2015) is that this student's Southern Latino childhood was also very painful, isolated and alienating. He describes how, in order to "get ahead," he had to spend a great deal of time away from his Latino community and peers, to the point where he began to question his Latino identity, instead wondering if he was, as John Ogbu (2004) explores in his work, "acting white." At the same time, he felt little to no validation for the work he was doing, as in his teachers' eyes "he constantly had to prove he was smart, because it was not an expectation teachers had of people like him" (Urrieta, Kolano, & O Jo, 2015: 61). Though he was eventually able to attend and graduate from college, this process took much longer than the traditional four years, as his undocumented immigrant status made him ineligible for in-state tuition, and thus he had to reduce his course load and work at the same time in order to afford his schooling.

Understandably, students like those in these studies (Carrillo & Rodriguez, 2016; Urrieta, Kolano, & O Jo, 2015) felt a certain degree of resentment at having to experience alienation at the hands of both the Latino community and their educational mentors in order to "get ahead." It is easy to ask the question, why are stories of those who "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" so heavily romanticized and valued in the United States, when the experience of pulling those bootstraps is so difficult and alienating as to become dehumanizing? The student in one study (Urrieta, Kolano, & O Jo, 2015) went so far as to say he felt that he had lost his childhood, due to the additional time he had to put into extra school work and part-time employment throughout his youth and adolescence—unlike the carefree associations commonly made to youth, Southern

Latino youth is instead a period typically marked by labor and alienation, whether alienation at the hands of an educational system not built to serve your needs or alienation from one's own community if one puts in the required labor to meet the cultural and social demands required to be a "successful" student<sup>2</sup>. In this way, this important chapter adds to the our general theorization of Southern Latino childhood as painful and alienating by refuting the idea of childhood altogether—that is, Southern Latino childhood is typified by a lack of the common markers of childhood (innocence, playfulness, etc.). In a sense, to live a within the cultural-historical context (Vygotsky, 1980) of Southern Latino childhood is to not have a childhood at all.

One way in which Southern Latino children have responded to their often-hostile school environments has been to rely heavily upon each other. Fitts and McClure (2015) describe this as a process of building networks on the basis of *confianza*, or mutual trust and respect (Dyrness, 2007, 2011; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992), as a means of countering the often-nativist reception of Latinos in Southern schools. Fitts and McClure (2015; see also Straubhaar, 2013) explore at length how such networks help Latino students to succeed even in the face of adversity. However, such networks are also not a panacea, as the reciprocal "one hand washes the other" nature of such relationships necessitates a fair amount of labor as Latino students and their families give and reciprocate favors and other forms of support. Giving and reciprocating favors in these networks seems to be essential to the emotional and scholastic survival of all involved, but it does not come without its own costs in terms of time, effort, and emotional energy. As Menjívar (2000) notes, we must be wary of overemphasizing the positive aspects of tight-knit Southern Latino communities, when such ethnic networks are also dependent on the

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the immigrant adaptation process for all ethnicities is often difficult, requiring children to "grow up" quickly and feel they have lost their chance to experience a traditional childhood (Horton, 2008).

continued emotional and temporal investment of all community members, and often can (unfortunately) fail, fall short or wane in terms of size and influence.

## **Discussion**

Here, due to a lack of such theorization in the current literature, we have begun the process of mapping and theorizing the experience of Southern Latino childhood, and the forces that influence how the experiences of such a childhood are socially constructed.

First and foremost, especially since the significant increase in Latino immigration to the South in the wake of NAFTA, Southern Latino childhood is framed by negative nativist stereotypes of Latino children and their communities, or what Suárez-Orozco (1998) calls anti-immigrant scripts. Such scripts not only shape the lived experiences of Latino communities in the South in the workplace, but they also inform the attitudes of teachers who work with Latino children in Southern schools. As noted above, many studies have explored the many ways in which most Southern teachers (who are predominantly white) lack the cultural competence or life experience to effectively connect with and work well with Latino students, as to such teachers Latino children are unfortunately pre-defined by negative stereotypes before they even step foot in the classroom. Even for well-meaning teachers, Adair (2015) and others have noted the ways in which the cultural distance between teachers and parents often keeps them from really communicating with one another, which limits the degree to which mainstream teachers can advocate for Latino children's needs in the classroom. However, while these previous studies all have compelling internal theoretical narratives, no work as yet has looked at this broader corpus to note the empirical similarities between these studies' findings and draw out broader theoretical conclusions. It is precisely for this purpose that we here begin to theorize the notion of Southern Latino childhood, which across these studies has been typified by a lack of access to

multiculturally sensitive or trained educators, a lack of policy structures designed to accommodate the needs of linguistically and ethnically diverse learners, and a lack of political will to address these gaps. In sum, the experience of Southern Latino childhood documented in these studies is one typified by alienation and erasure, in which Southern Latino communities are stigmatized, made to feel unwanted, and encouraged to remain invisible from the public eye through punitive laws and policy structures.

Even for those Latino children who pursue traditional routes of “success” in Southern schools, the experience is often one of dehumanizing labor and alienation from one’s community, as explored at length by Carrillo and Rodriguez (2016) and Urrieta, Kolano and O Jo (2015). This alienation can be mitigated when Latino students work together in reciprocal social networks to “get ahead” in school (Fitts & McClure, 2015), but the physical and psychosocial demands of such reciprocity carry their own toll, especially in the midst of the “perfect storm” of recent economic recession noted by Durán (2017). Indeed, as previously noted, the path to educational achievement and success for Southern Latino children is one that requires a level of time, effort and endurance in the face of rejection that is ultimately dehumanizing. In a context in which being Latino is framed as a problem, the path to success requires the shedding of one’s own self, the rejection of one’s heritage. Childhood itself, a period supposedly marked by innocence and playfulness, is ironically not typically a part of the Southern Latino child’s experience.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we have drawn on the cultural-historical theory of Vygotsky (1980) and others to provide a potential framework for understanding the ways in which the regional, cultural and historical particularities of the American South have shaped the experiences of

Latino children in this region. Drawing from the growing literature in this area, we have articulated an experience of Southern Latino childhood unfortunately typified by alienation, pain, and dehumanization as a result of participation in school structures that do not make room for or accommodate the cultural heritage of Latino students, staffed by educators who lack multicultural sensitivity, training and experience working with Latino children.

This general framing of how Southern Latino childhood is socioculturally and historically constructed can now serve as a starting point for much needed further inquiry into the lived experiences of Southern Latino children across the lifespan, from birth through elementary school to high school graduation and beyond. More specifically, much of what currently typified Southern Latino childhood is pain, alienation and dehumanization—experiences which no educator, community member or parent wants for a child. In order to avoid reproducing such a punitive childhood experience for Southern Latino children, much more attention is needed relative to policies and practices that effectively change structures in P-20 education so as to counter and dismantle group-based inequalities (see Portes 2005 for one life cycle model of how this might be carried out).

Clearly more longitudinal and sustained inquiry into practices and policies that work to prevent these dire consequences on Southern Latino youth and other ELL communities is needed. Changes both in the culturally situated educational spaces serving these children and in the culturing of dominant group communities are potential contributions that could help create a more intercultural American South, in which Southern Latino children are more fully able to be themselves as Latinos and experience the playfulness and innocence of childhood. Another potential avenue for potential fieldwork in this area lies in other geographic areas, for example in other areas of the United States wherein the immigrant experience, and in particular the Latino

immigrant experience, varies significantly due to local variations in cultural-historical context. Perhaps even more importantly, there is the possibility of research into the ways in which the cultural-historical legacies of other countries, in particular European countries with large populations of immigrants from the Global South, frame the childhoods of such immigrants within cultural-historical contexts that are entrenched within white European discourses of national identity.

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