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Book Review: Strategies of Segregation: Race, Residence, and the Struggle for Educational Equality

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Author

Sanchez Castillo, Marisol

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Strategies of Segregation: Race, Residence, and the Struggle for Educational Equality. By David G. García. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018. 269pp. ISBN: 9780520296879

University of California, Los Angeles, Associate Professor David G. García uncovers how educational inequalities were designed and implemented in Oxnard, California from 1903 to 1974 to intentionally limit the educational advancement of Mexican American children. García describes the men and women who directly designed these educational inequalities as “the White Architects of Mexican American education” (p. 3). Furthermore, García provides examples of how the White architects designed and implemented unequal schooling to the detriment of Mexican families. Through a sophisticated historical narrative, García centers the untold stories of individuals who attended segregated elementary schools in Oxnard and offers the reader vivid examples of their lived experiences. García identifies four strategies that were used by the White architects to implement inequality: (1) establishing a racial hierarchy, (2) building an interconnection between residential and school segregation, (3) constructing a school-within-a-school model of racial separation, and (4) omitting a rationale for segregation. García defines and employs the concept of mundane racism as “the systematic subordination of Mexicans enacted as a commonplace, ordinary way of conducting business within and beyond schools” (p. 5). As such, how mundane racism manifested itself in Oxnard is specifically highlighted throughout the book.

García provides detailed archival content to contextualize and highlight the central issues that Mexican American children faced in light of school segregation in Oxnard. García employed traditional history methods and also relied heavily on oral history inquiries. More specifically, the author analyzed numerous archival collections, local bilingual (English-Spanish) newspapers, school board meetings, academic literature, and visual aids, and examined and conducted more than 60 oral histories.

Chapter one analyzes how the White architects built an unequal city of Oxnard that privileged Whites and disadvantaged the Mexican community primarily in matters of school and residential segregation. García concludes the chapter by shedding light to the lived experiences of Antonia Arguelles, a Mexican American former student at a local elementary school in the mid-1930s. In comparing the socioeconomic status of her family with White families, Antonia shares the heartbreaking story of believing her father was lazy and her family was poor as a result of it, when in reality her father was incredibly hard-working. Through this oral history, García gives readers a glimpse into the ways Mexican

American children made sense of their racialized environment and how they internalized racism.

In chapter two, García further explores how school and, especially, residential segregation made up the cultural landscape of Oxnard. Whites were concentrated on the west side of Oxnard with nicer homes, while Mexicans were concentrated on the east side in La Colonia and did not receive the same resources despite being taxpayers. In an interview with Miguel Espinosa, a longtime resident of Oxnard and veteran, Espinosa recalls being denied buying a home on the west side of Oxnard for being Mexican. García clearly unveils how the White architects refused Mexicans the opportunities for better living conditions.

Chapter three demonstrates how White parents' demands pressured the school board into separating Mexican American and White children in schools. As a result, the Oxnard school board "appeared obsessed with school segregation" (p. 77). The separation within the schools created unequal learning conditions for Mexican American children and provided superior learning conditions for White children. This inequality was evident by the difference in educational outcomes that largely favored White and Asian American children. García provides evidence to prove how historically, school systems have viewed the existence of Mexicans through a deficit lens. García offers an important contribution by demonstrating that the model minority myth, at least in Oxnard, dates back to the 1930s.

In chapter four, the historical narrative elaborates how the White architects continued their bold segregation efforts by building schools for Mexican American children in La Colonia. The Oxnard school board shamelessly claimed their concern for Mexican American children's safety as the reason for having separate schools. The school board disingenuously claimed that Mexican American children needed their own school for their own safety. However, García offers overwhelming evidence that proves the real motive was for *de facto* school segregation and unequal education.

Chapter five centers on the coalition between the local chapters of the NAACP and the Community Service Organization (CSO). García explains how the Mexican American and African American communities came together to demand and fight for equality in the case of school segregation. The author highlights the importance of this alliance despite African Americans representing a small number of residents in Oxnard and includes their stories in their struggle for equality. In this chapter, García offers a solid example of how relational histories can lead to victory through solidarity.

In chapter six, García details how Mexican American and Black efforts to stop school segregation through the 1970 legal case of *Soria v Oxnard School Board of Trustees*. Among much evidence, the plaintiffs' legal team specifically

relied on historical evidence, such as school board minutes, to prove deliberate *de facto* school segregation orchestrated by the Oxnard school board. Judge Harry Pregerson ruled in favor of the plaintiffs - a legal victory for Mexican American and Black families.

García ends the book by reminding readers about the implications that history has on ongoing racial inequalities in education and how they directly impact Communities of Color beyond Oxnard. In fact, García uses Oxnard as a vehicle for us to think about the educational histories of our own communities. In my case, my community in Austin, Texas. I highly recommend this book to anyone who desires to learn and understand how unequal education conditions are deliberately designed and implemented to the detriment of Mexican American children, their families, and their communities. García's unapologetic approach allows readers to find depth in the historical narrative. García offers a refreshing aspect and goes beyond the Black-White binary and graciously brings to light the powerful stories of the Mexican American men and women that have also been directly affected by the plague of white supremacy. It is no surprise this book won the 2019 Critics' Choice Award from the American Educational Studies Association, a well-deserved recognition.

References

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Reviewer

Marisol Sánchez Castillo is a doctoral student at UCLA in the School of Education & Information Studies. Her research centers on issues of equity, inclusion, and social justice in higher education policy and practice, focusing on campus racial climate, academic outcomes and equitable access to opportunities for Latina/o students and undocumented students. Marisol received two Bachelor of Arts in Mexican American Studies and Spanish and a Master's in Educational Leadership and Policy from The University of Texas at Austin. She has extensive professional work experience in the K-16 education pipeline serving historically underserved communities in the U.S. and abroad.