

**Henry G. Cisneros (Ed.), with John Rosales. *Latinos and the Nation's Future*.
Houston: Arte Público Press, 2009. 248 pp.**

This heartening collection of 16 essays comprehensively construct a fine case for nourishing and promoting the needs of the largest minority population living in United States today. Ably edited by our former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, the volume addresses a wide array of timely issues. Several authors point out that Latinos and the future of the U.S. are inextricably linked in ways that have not been sufficiently recognized. Our rather recent reality change in the U.S. is dramatically brought out by Leobardo F. Estrada, a UCLA Urban Planning professor: “When the Southwest Territories became part of the United States [1848], there were about 160,000 Spanish-origin persons in the U.S. and its territories. Andrew Jackson was president when foreign born Latinos reached the 1 million mark in population. [But it took 128 years or until] John F. Kennedy was president when Latinos reached the 5 million mark. Richard Nixon was president when Latinos reached the 10 million mark. Ronald Regan was president when Latinos reached the 20 million mark. Bill Clinton was president when Latinos reached 30 million [and] it was under president George W. Bush that Latinos reached 40 million. The president elected in 2008 [Obama] will witness Latinos reaching the 50 million level of population.” In short, U.S. citizens have not thought about Latinos for 3/4 of American history because numbers-wise Spanish-speakers have been small when compared to the larger population. But another way to see and to understand the incredible demographic change the U.S. has undergone during the last half century is to say that the Latino population has grown by roughly a million people every year since 1960 when Kennedy was elected president. When Estrada then compares the fertility of U.S. groups, he states that “Latinos are the only racial/ethnic group having enough babies to grow by births alone.”

The growth in numbers is significant and should be more important, most contributors argue, because democracies are about numbers. The numbers, indeed, create the realities that we daily live with, a fact that people now used to icons and visual representations of themselves are now increasingly realizing. Indeed, an area not considered at any great length is: how are other Americans reacting to the new demographic realities Latinos present? Nicolás Kanellos does discuss the “struggle against oppression” that Latinos have historically encountered on many American fronts, and Raúl Yzaguirre’s focuses attention on liberty, justice and Civil Rights. But the essays tend to celebrate the new facts, comparing them to the realities of the past,

the essayists marching forward, positively asserting the new realities, while highlighting inequities and disparities that afflict Latinos in the small business community (Aída M. Álvarez), politics (Lionel Sosa), Latino progress (Sergio Muñoz Bata) and U.S. foreign policy, improving Latino health (Elena V. Rios), Latino housing (Saúl N. Ramírez, Jr.), and education (Ernesto Cortés) and community action. The new American Dream (Nicolás Kanellos), the next generation as our greatest resource (Sarita E. Brown), Hispanic opportunity (Joe García), and the social implications for the future (Roberto Suro) are also addressed trenchantly. Harry P. Pachon works on increasing Hispanic mobility, on moving more Latinos into the middle class; Tamar Jacoby addresses the complexities of naturalization; and, Robert Suro posits that the March 10th to May 1, 2006 immigration marches by approximately 3.5 million people in more than 120 U.S. cities “surpassed any other effort at coordinated civic engagement by Latinos.”

The volume is accompanied by 15 pages of tables, charts, and maps, and 18 pages of endnotes and a bibliography. It is as strong and as extensive a multisided effort by some of the best known and most incisive Latino minds I have seen. The purpose is clearly to place before readers new demographic realities that less than 50 million Latinos are now, in effect, presenting as a challenge to the United States, either our natural home or adopted country. The book begins with a short, insightful foreword by Janet Murguía, the president of the National Council of La Raza. She thoughtfully places the public library, books, love of reading, and school work at the center of what Latinos should be engaged in by way of helping ourselves because everyone knows that education is the most transformative way to improve our standing in the U.S., both as individuals and as our large, diverse communities require.

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