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Voices, Experiences, Trials, and Triumphs*

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## The Latino Experience in America

Robert D. Sanborn

CHILDREN AT RISK, [sanborn@childrenatrisk.org](mailto:sanborn@childrenatrisk.org)

Angelo P. Giardino

Texas Children's Health Plan, [apgiardi@texaschildrens.org](mailto:apgiardi@texaschildrens.org)

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This issue of the Journal of Family Strengths focuses on Latinos and their influence on and engagement with civil and cultural institutions. There is much to be examined, and it is doubtful that this will be the last time that we so dedicate an entire issue of JFS, because Latinos now occupy a prominent and rapidly-growing space in the United States. As our nation's demographics continue to change and become more diverse, other changes will ripple out consequently and new outcomes will emerge, both civically and culturally. There are few social issues more timely, or more interesting, than Latino social engagement.

Dr. Sanborn was recently reminded of this when he was honored to speak at a high school commencement in Austin, Texas. It was at a small, college preparatory high school before an entirely Latino graduating class and few, if any, of the proud parents in the audience had attended college. All graduations are momentous occasions, but this one seemed to be especially so, because, as he gazed out into the audience, he saw a group of parents and students that in many ways represented the future of our country. These students have an array of possibilities before them that their parents could scarcely dream of, and Dr. Sanborn wondered how their choices, and the choices of the thousands of similar, excited young graduates, will impact the nation. Having grown up in Puerto Rico himself, Dr. Sanborn decided to start his commencement address in Spanish (leading to applause from the parents) before he switched back to English.

The parents had likely wanted him to continue to speak in Spanish, because it would be easier for them to understand. The students, however, were fine with either language and in many cases probably preferred English. Prior to the speech, Dr. Sanborn had looked over a list of where these students intended to go to college, and he commented upon some of their choices as he spoke. The plurality of the students were going to community college. Another large group was headed to branch campuses of the University of Texas and Texas A&M. Some were going to local private schools and a small group were admitted to selective schools like Franklin & Marshall, Lycoming and Duke. This is not unlike what we might expect from any high school in America. The graduates, however, did not look like what many might picture to be an average American high school class to be. Maybe our idea of the average American class needs to change.

There are many unanswered questions about these students, and the thousands of similar graduating classes around the nation. How will these young adults vote? Will they participate more in the electoral process, as second generation immigrants, than their parents' generation? Will they continue to speak Spanish? Or will they, like many immigrant

communities before them, become solely English speakers? Will they watch Univision and Telemundo in the same numbers that their family members have done or will they switch entirely to English-speaking television? Or will they, like their college peers, consume a mix of media on a myriad of devices? Looking further forward, when these graduates become parents, how will their expectations change in comparison to the family expectations with which they had grown up? Will more affluent, college-educated Latinos act in a manner that creates a lasting divide of inequality within the Latino community itself? These are important questions, both when speaking about Latino families and when prognosticating about the future of our country.

With this issue of JFS, we begin the process of sifting through the data and processes behind these questions. We include a look at immigration; Latino parents and children; and a piece on immigration rights and students. We also examine at the barriers to increased civic and social engagement in the Latino community, as well as the importance of increasing the participation of minority youth participation in civic activities. Our examination of Latino education issues includes: teachers' individual views through a cultural lens continuum; Latino voices in the storytelling process; and a journey to bilingual teaching from a young Latina.

In this issue, we begin a new segment in the Journal of Family Strengths with our Journal Interview. This issue we interview Latino public officials and the journey to public service for prominent Latinos.

We live in exciting times. The United States is changing in a multitude of ways and the resultant outcomes will be hard to predict if we fail to ensure that we are providing sufficient resources to all of our families, as well measure the impact of transformation across cultural and civil institutions. With *Latino Civic and Social Engagement: Voices, Experience, Trials and Triumphs* we begin the important yet often neglected work of documenting and analyzing the Latino experience in the United States.