CHAPTER 4

RACIALIZATION AND THE IDEOLOGY OF CONTAINMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF LATINA/O YOUTH

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Sitting there in the school office, I couldn’t even hear what they were saying. While the principal yelled at me, I played the fight over and over again in my head: The White kid started it. He threw yogurt at me. I went to get a teacher. But the teacher didn’t even listen to my side of the story. She just blew me off. I felt like I had to do something. So I approached the kid, he stepped to me, and I punched him in the face. I mean; it was self-defense. Finally, the principal stopped yelling and said, “Get your things; it is time to go.” I saw him pointing to the police officer who came to pick me up and take me in.

This testimonio from Ramiro, one of our student participants at Rana High School (see Urrieta, Kolano, & O. Jo [this volume] for more about the logic and process of testimonios), illustrates the profound disconnect between schooling and the frustration and marginalization experienced by numerous young people as a result of their positioning by adults as deviant, dangerous criminals (Meiners, 2007; Tilton, 2010). Predictably, the other student in Ramiro’s anecdote was not sent to the principal’s office; only
educational researchers, to examine our personal participation in the school-to-prison pipeline. Alarmingly, an overwhelming majority of the Latina/o students we have worked with have found themselves, at various times, detained or incarcerated within the penal system. Other students have reported to us the surprising number of their friends and family members who have served time behind bars. These individuals are not necessarily “bad kids,” and getting to know them as multifaceted persons caused us to wonder about the menacing clouds of the prison-industrial complex (Davis, 1999) gathering over the urban poor communities with which we have interacted over the years. The insights we have gained into our students’ lived realities further led us to question our own complicity as teachers, as well as the role of schooling itself, in perpetuating what strikes us as eerily predictable patterns of discipline and punishment aimed at controlling the behavior—and containing the aspirations—of urban youth. Far from fulfilling the youthful dreams for better futures, we have sought to understand the ways in which schools often work at cross purposes for students from marginalized backgrounds.

By way of clarification, we use the term minoritized to suggest that while Black and Brown students may share status as members of historical numeric minority groups, in many cases they constitute the majority of the student body within the schools they attend. Research has documented that numerous urban school districts are more segregated now than during the heyday of the Civil Rights movement, leaving many youngsters in our nation’s cities to attend predominately Brown and Black schools (Orfield & Lee, 2005; Saporito, 2007). Moreover, in more and more communities, students of color can hardly be said to constitute “minorities” when their community populations are overwhelmingly Black and Brown. Minoritized captures (better than “minority”) the ongoing political and social status that racializes Black and Brown individuals in predictable, frequently stereotyped ways.

Following a similar definitional logic, we use “Brown” to denote collectively individuals of Latina/o descent. Recognizing that race as a social construct renders almost meaningless any facile categorizations of diverse people of mixed Indigenous/Native, African, and European ancestry as a discernible “race” (e.g., as “Hispanic or “White”), we have struggled with how to accurately and adequately refer to students and communities known variously as “Hispanic” and “Latina/Latino.” For us, “Brown” captures the politically charged, racialized, and hybrid identities, characterized by sociohistorical phenomena that include race mixing (mestizaje), colonization, transnational migration, assimilation, and deculturalization. “Brown” further signifies a common origin from some combination of three distinct races or roots, (namely Indigenous/Native American, African, and European). Yet “Brown” as a marker for community and identity also
involves more contemporary patterns pertaining to socioeconomic class, transnational status, performances of linguistic identities, and is tempered by gender and other identities. Every term that attempts to label and describe a diverse group of people has its limitations. "Hispanic," for us, overemphasizes linkages to colonial Spain while negating equal value to (or obscuring) African, indigenous, or other cultural linkages that are an integral part of identity for many Latinas/os. In our usage, "Brown" reflects the broader character of a Latina/Latino racialized identity in a highly race-conscious society that continues to reward and punish largely along the lines of skin color, even as we recognize that the intersectionality of systems of oppression based on other identity characteristics (such as gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class) is operationalized simultaneously.

Recent escalating tensions around immigration issues (and the concurrent surge of anti-immigrant legislation across the United States in both traditional and New Latino Diaspora states, most notably in Arizona, Nebraska, and Alabama), we have become particularly alarmed at the ways discipline and heightened surveillance play out in schools purportedly serving youth in the New Latino/a Diaspora. As members of the largest minoritized group in the demographically changing United States, Latina/Latino or Brown youngsters currently face challenges in childhood and adolescence that threaten a pessimistic fate. Since today's youth represent our nation's future, and if that future is, in fact, becoming Brown more graphically with each passing year, we believe strongly that schools must secure far better opportunities for students from all backgrounds, especially those in emerging Brown communities who, after all, will comprise the numeric majority in numerous cities and states in the not-too-distant future.

Focus of Inquiry

Drawing from data collected as part of a 2-year ethnographic study of a group of high school students embedded in a fairly recently emerged Latino/a Diaspora community in New England, this chapter discusses the discourses of containment, specifically as they target our Brown youth participants. The seven students who took part in the project were high school seniors by the time the study concluded:

- Alberto (Mexican American, age 18)
- Carmen (Puerto Rican, age 18)
- Jasmine (Puerto Rican, age 18)
- Natasha (Mexican American, age 18)
- Ramiro (Puerto Rican, age 19)
- Taína (Puerto Rican, age 18)
- Tamara (Puerto Rican & White, age 18)

Our chapter draws from students' experiences and testimonios to document the youths' interactions with various containment discourses and their relationship to the school-to-prison pipeline. In the spirit of Murillo (2002), we aim to call attention to the links between the pervasive nature of policies and practices aimed at containing Latinas/Latinos as a group with current events such as fear-driven national discussions of immigration and the growing presence of the prison system in the lives of Brown families. Of particular interest to us as teachers and teacher educators are those certain school practices involving the hypersurveillance of urban minoritized students. We explore how, when left unacknowledged by educators, inattention to containment discourses that directly affect Brown youth may contribute to students feeling distant from and uncared for by their teachers, which has been shown to be a critical influence on the school trajectories of many Latina/Latino students (Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999). We raise questions about the effects on Brown youth when teachers and administrators uncritically accept popular culture representations of issues pertinent to Latinas/Latinos, take up systematic surveillance, and participate in containment measures as part of their professional identities and responsibilities. Finally, we underscore the need for educators to critically analyze and interrupt the discourses of containment by rejecting the school-to-prison pipeline as the template for the education of minoritized youth. We call on fellow educators to stand steadfastly in solidarity with minoritized students and the communities in which they reside, and to strive for schooling that will help them achieve, rather than curtail, their youthful aspirations.

METHODS

Using critical race theory (CRT) in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and Latino CRT, otherwise known as LatCrit (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004) as analytic tools, our study highlights the racialized aspects of discourses of containment as well as the ways in which race and ethnicity interact with other identity markers to target Latinas/Latinos for discrimination. To that end, we employ the methodology of counterstories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005) or compelling narratives emerging from communities of color that challenge majoritarian discourses to foreground the voices of participants. In doing so, we critically examine the internalization (by teachers and students alike) of popular discourses of containment, and speak back to and challenge these oversimplified and problematic
narratives that have become entrenched in the national imagination. We also draw upon testimonios (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Urrieta et al. [this volume]) as an innovative methodology that documents subaltern voices and perspectives embodied by the Brown youth student participants in our study.

The seven student participants were part of a multiyear YPAR (Youth Participatory Action Research) project led by one of the authors (Jason Irizarry) in an urban high school in New England with a burgeoning population that is representative of the settlement patterns that characterize the New Latino/a Diaspora. While these high school students were recruited randomly, it so happened that 100% of the participants have had an immediate family member arrested and/or incarcerated. Based on the youths’ perspectives—shared in focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and in students’ journals—we developed testimonios that reflected the students’ collective experiences. The collection of testimonios is a qualitative methodology emerging from the field of Latin American studies and gaining traction within LatCrit scholarship. Testimonios honor and affirm sources of knowledge that are often overlooked or delegitimized within academic research (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Urrieta et al. [this volume]) and “seek to disrupt the apartheid of knowledge in academia, moving toward educational research guided by racial and social justice for Communities of Color” (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 640). We include testimonios as a form of counterstorytelling to document the voices of our Brown students as they confront the influence of the school-to-prison pipeline in their everyday lives. Crafted and narrated by the authors for a primarily academic audience, the testimonios nonetheless accurately reflect the voices and perspectives of the student participants. Testimonios were triangulated through review by the students, who assured us that, while perhaps not expressed in the exact language of youth, the testimonios nevertheless represent their lived experiences.

**Theoretical Framework: LatCrit and Critical Race Theory**

The discussions from which the testimonios emerged took place in a high school class led by Dr. Irizarry geared specifically for Brown high school juniors and seniors. As we witnessed a pattern of students confronting and naming racism as an influential factor that affects all aspects of their lives (including schooling), it became clear that we needed an analytical framework that spoke directly to race and racism while allowing for consideration of other interlocking systems of oppression, including sexism, heterosexism, linguicism, ageism, and classism. As a result, because of the ways we have observed and interacted with various groups of Brown high school students as they were being racialized both in and out of school, our research draws theoretically on both CRT and LatCrit. Our decision to adopt LatCrit as an analytic tool was influenced, in part, by the analysis of Christine Sleeter and Dolores Delgado Bernal (2004), who argued that multicultural education could be sharpened in three significant ways. First, they maintained that a focus on race and racism furthered the important anti-racist goals of critical multiculturalism, while forwarding an analysis of the intersections of racism with other forms of domination. They argued further that CRT could challenge hegemonic epistemologies and ideologies (e.g., notions of meritocracy, objectivity, and neutrality), pointing out the benefits of counterstorytelling as both a pedagogical practice and tool that could be useful in educational research (p. 245).

Our understanding of LatCrit traces its growth from CRT to address issues that were often previously excluded in CRT. LatCrit extends the scope of CRT to address how variables other than race, (including gender, class, immigration status, language, accent, ethnicity, and culture) intersect to shape the experiences of racialized peoples (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Yosso, 2006). LatCrit challenges the standard Black/White binary that tends to limit considerations of race and racism to the power relations between African Americans and European Americans, thereby creating more discursive space for Latinas/Latinos, who as a group typically span racial categories, as well as for individuals who may identify as multiracial or multiethnic. Such an expansion is crucial to understanding the complexity of the context enveloping Brown youth in schools today, while taking into account other intersections with culture and ethnicity.

We have been influenced by the work of scholars Daniel Solórzano and Dolores Delgado Bernal (2001) who forwarded five themes that underpin a LatCrit framework in education. Their work has pushed CRT toward a more specific focus on Brown contexts. These themes include: (a) the centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination; (b) the challenge to dominant ideologies; (c) the commitment to social justice; (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (e) the interdisciplinary perspective (pp. 312–313). These five tenets shaped all aspects of our study from data collection through analysis.

**FINDINGS**

**Welcome to America: Legacies of Colonization and Imperialism**

All that stuff on TV bothers me, about how immigrants are messing this country up. Everything you hear is about how we are bad people. But we work hard and
just want a chance at the American Dream. My family came here from Mexico, true. But don’t get it twisted: this country took over half of Mexico, now they act like we are fools because WE come here. I want what any kid wants, to go to college, make something of myself, get a good job to support my family. But we don’t have the DREAM Act, so I have to pay out-of-state tuition, which is like three times the in-state rate. Even though I have lived here since I was 7 years old, I still don’t have the same chances as everyone else. This makes it hard for all Latinos, regardless of their immigration status. So it is hard enough to graduate high school and go to college. Now because of my status—I don’t have official papers—I don’t have the chance to go to college. I just want a chance to contribute to this society. But it is clear to me that they really don’t want me here. (Alberto)

Our perspective on containment as an ideology is informed by the history of intercultural contact during the expansion of the United States as a nation. Historians have pointed out the significant use of nationalism to build unity during the first century and a half of the White nation-building project:

American nationalism—our modern sense of ourselves as a national community—as well as American imperialism, marked a newly narrowed and deepened opposition between Americans and non-Americans, manifest especially in the Spanish-American War. The defeat of the last independent Indian nations as well as the official closing of the frontier with the 1890 census gave this rising nationalism a contiguous and continental geography. (Hale, 1999, p. 6)

Hale (1999) connects nationalism with nation building and imperialism, which we argue has significant implications for the containment of Brown youth, both today and historically. The annexation of much of Mexico after the Mexican-American War, the colonization of Puerto Rico after the Spanish-American War, and the containment of conquered Native tribes and nations under the newly implemented system of Indian reservations all speak to the historic strategic movement of peoples and the restructuring of boundaries in the service of American nation-building.

The legacy of colonization and imperialism has enduring effects on schooling, as well as on race relations. In 21st century U.S. popular culture, public representations of containment—the literal removal from society of young individuals who are first branded as criminals and then labeled and restrained as dangerous deviants—have become a source of both profit, as suggested by the economic success and viability of the prison industrial complex (Bowie, 2012), and even as entertainment, as evidenced by the rash of “reality” television programs and other dramas focused on walled-off social spaces. These media images of containment for the young include prisons, drug rehabilitation programs, juvenile detention centers, and Homeland Security deportation centers. The media’s current infatu-

ation with televising the suffering of detained pariahs reflects society’s acceptance of an increasingly punitive and incarceration-oriented culture, which, as predicted by Michel Foucault (Foucault & Droit, 1975), is indicative of the extent to which the panopticon model of surveillance and social regulation has invaded the national consciousness.

Running parallel to a steady diet of containment narratives that televide the punishment of “immoral outsiders” as a political discourse that has been fixated on the hot button issue of illegal immigration (Catalano, 2011), especially from the United States’s immediate neighbor to the south, as a national problem of great urgency that is said to overwhelm local communities and schools. With the most tangible, visible solution offered being the construction of a hundreds of miles-long wall or fence along the U.S.-Mexico border along with the round-up and deportation of so-called illegals and their children (often without regard for the children’s legal citizenship status), the national conversation has turned to how, not whether, to hold back the burgeoning Brown, Spanish-speaking masses that are “invading” the United States (Santa Ana, 2002).

"They Always Be Hawkin’ Us:” Teachers Agents of Surveillance

The parallels between schools and prisons as institutions of control and behavior management are not lost on students. Whether they wind up suspended in school or out, Brown students describe feeling watched and excluded from school spaces that they perceive are reserved for Whites:

Teachers here always be hawking [watching] us. They like want you to mess up, so they can catch you out there and throw you into In-School Suspension. As soon as I walk into class, the teachers be looking for a reason to throw me out. They always think the White kids are doing good, but they be scheming. No matter how much I try, they always be on me. It’s like... they just don’t want Latinos here. (Alberto)

In our previous work (Raible & Irizarry, 2010), we addressed ways in which teachers are encouraged, often in the name of accountability, to become agents of surveillance and behavior management. We also explored the potential for schools to become sites of youth resistance to heightened surveillance and the possibilities of a counter-narrative to the “expectation of incarceration” (Meiners, 2007) for youth that have been effectively written off as problem children. For example, Pedro Noguera (2008) describes how, in more and more urban schools, police officers, security guards, and administrators have taken on the role of managing and enforcing school discipline, while in most cases teachers actually initiate the discipline process by making referrals. Noguera points out how
teachers, therefore, exert tremendous influence in determining which students receive discipline and for what reasons, thereby actually initiating many youth on the school-to-prison trajectory.

When students like Alberto feel watched and unwelcome, their negative perceptions are rooted in reality. For example, in her study of Chicago school reform policy and its effects on the regulation of urban youth, Pauline Lipman (2003) argued that reforms in that city “concretely and symbolically ‘crack down’ on African American and Latino youth who are seen as largely superfluous... and dangerous in the racialized social landscape of the city” (p. 82). Lipman drew parallels between school accountability measures aimed at corralling minoritized youth, relating these to other efforts implemented throughout the city that were intended to make Chicago more attractive to tourists and high-paid managers, technical workers, and business services at the core of the city’s economy (p. 89). Lipman’s research helps connect the dots between social engineering schemes, racialization, and the experience of schooling in the minds of minoritized youths.

Thus far, we have advanced an admittedly somber argument to suggest that officially sanctioned surveillance of the young, including that carried out in the name of education, increasingly leads to containment, figuratively and literally. In our view, the physical and symbolic containment of Brown youth is related to the historic attempts to regulate or manage diversity (and to keep communities of color oppressed).

Educational research has indicated the ways in which ostensible efforts towards addressing the educational problems among various immigrant minority groups has, in fact, resulted in the maintenance of the political and economic subordination of the very communities educators claim to help (Spring, 2004). Building on this literature that documents the uses of schooling to manage youth populations viewed by ruling elites as threatening, troublesome, and undesirable, the experience of our student participants demonstrated how the discourse of containment marks contemporary Latina/Latino youths as hyper-racialized beings. Given such dynamics extant in today’s society, students become acutely aware of the containment measures implemented to curtail their freedom of movement.

Research has documented the seemingly paradoxical finding that for many immigrant youths, their length of residence in the United States correlates with declining health, attitudinal, and educational outcomes (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). For example, in their multimethod study of immigrant youths, Steinberg et al. (1996) concluded that “becoming Americanized is detrimental to youngsters’ achievement, and terrible for their overall mental health” (pp. 97–98). A more recent study suggests that first-generation immigrants, those most recently arrived in the United States, tend to outperform their second- and third-generation schoolmates on measures of academic success and achievement (Hu-DeHart et al., 2008). While one might reasonably expect that living in the United States for a longer duration would result in future generations having increased access to social institutions, greater proficiency in standard English, and increased assimilation that could result in academic success, the converse is actually true, at least for non-White populations. This “immigrant paradox” suggests that the longer (generationally speaking) that immigrants remain in the United States, the worse their children and grandchildren perform in schools. The findings of these important studies find resonance in the lived experience of our Brown student participants.

My grandmother was born here. We have been here a long-time, but we still don’t do good in school. English is my main language. I don’t even speak Spanish... the main language for a lot of my friends is English, but you don’t see us on the honor roll and stuff. That’s all White kids. (Carmen)

Many Latina/Latino students are keenly aware of the ongoing controversy over immigration, exemplified perhaps most graphically by the recently erected fence between the United States and Mexico. Many young people took part in protests against the controversial Arizona law that ostensibly targets so-called illegal aliens and in advocacy efforts aimed at supporting the Dream Act. Brown students and families in the Southwestern United States in particular must anticipate being targeted by self-appointed vigilante groups as well as federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents that patrol the border between the two nations, whether the families are documented, undocumented, or U.S. citizens. These efforts to forcibly target suspected “illegals” are not confined to la frontera (the border regions), but are visible in communities across the spectrum of the New Latino/a Diaspora, even those that are geographically distant from the long-standing Brown communities throughout the Southwest.

For example, in 2007, New Haven, Connecticut was the first city in the country to approve the establishment of resident identification cards, which would require individuals, regardless of citizenship or immigration status, to possess identification necessary to access services such as creating a bank account or securing a library card. Within 48 hours of the passage of the new law, federal ICE agents conducted raids across the community, arresting almost three dozen suspected “illegals.” During the deportation hearings for several of those arrested, iniquities were brought to light that demonstrate the far-reaching grasp of efforts to intimidate and control Brown communities:

[The immigrants] said in affidavits that agents barged into both homes after residents had opened their doors only a little... Witnesses alleged in court
documents that parents were arrested in front of their frightened children, agents refused to identify themselves and told people in the homes to shut up. (Chris, 2009)

Reflecting on the ICE raids in New Haven, which incidentally is not far from the community in which our youth participants reside, one undocumented student offered the following observation:

Those raids made me feel like more petrified. I always live with that fear that they might come take me, my mother or father or somebody in my family. Then what? What can I do? That’s why I gotta stay on the low sometimes. I was thinking about applying for college, but I gotta put a social security number in the boxes. What if they start asking me questions and stuff? You know if they did it in New Haven they can do it here. (Alberto)

The progeny of undocumented immigrants are particularly vulnerable to the threats posed by containment, finding themselves enmeshed in debates over social benefits such as in-state tuition at institutions of higher education, access to health care, and even citizenship for the U.S.-born children of so-called “illegals.” Such debates discursively rope in the hopes and dreams of hundreds and thousands of young people and can be said to represent the symbolic containment of Latina/Latino youth—and arguably the very future of the Diaspora.

For growing numbers of students, particularly those attending schools in urban areas that are personally involved with the penal system (whether they have family members who are incarcerated or because they themselves are caught up in the bureaucracy of juvenile justice), containment plays out in practical experience through incarceration and other out-of-home custody placements. Ramiro shared a poignant story that relates the outcome of his arrest for the school fight described at thechapter opening. His testimonio speaks to the separation of children and parents, and the emotional toll that can take on Latina/o families:

I had to do three weeks in the work camp. When I saw my mother’s face, that was hard. I wanted to cry. I worked all the time to help her. But now I couldn’t work … and plus she had to see me like that. (Ramiro)

The separation of children from their parents is one of the more poignant manifestations of the containment discourse that we have witnessed.

**BUSCANDO AMERICA: “IS THIS WHY WE CAME HERE?”**

Immigrant youth naturally become attuned to the prejudices and fears of the dominant host society. This may be particularly true for students of Mexican and Puerto Rican descent, the two largest ethnic groups within the Latino/a Diaspora. As members of colonized and racialized groups, students of Mexican and Puerto Rican origin inherit a legacy of collective treatment that is rooted in each sending entity’s historical relationship to the United States, including the legacies of the slave trade and genocide against Native populations. In practical terms, this legacy plays out in the relationship between families and schools, and can be felt in the tensions between today’s students and teachers.

Schools are often perceived as hostile to the aspirations of Latina/Latino families and communities. For example, educational research has demonstrated that many Latina/o students are acutely aware of their teachers’ low expectations and furthermore, feel unchallenged by their school experiences (Garza, 1996; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Valdés, 1996). Other studies have shown that immigrant youth of color adapt quickly to the caste-like racialization model that persists in the United States (Bailey, 2001; Stepick, 1992; Waters, 1999). The findings from their Harvard Longitudinal Immigrant Adaptation Study (2001) revealed to researchers Carola Suarez-Orozco and Marcelo Suarez-Orozco that racism and anti-immigrant hostilities were recurring themes among immigrant youth. According to these researchers, such youth are highly aware that “many in the dominant culture do not like them or welcome them” (p. 98). This attitude was borne out among our students at Rana High School:

My family came here for a better life for us. But it is like they don’t want us here. Because I don’t have [citizenship] papers, it is like I am a criminal. I want to go to college but we don’t have the Dream Act here [in my state]. I have to worry about La Migra. I have a hard time finding jobs, and I can’t really go to college. I ask myself: Is this why we came here? (Natasha)

Immigrant youth and other students of color typically attend schools that are more racially segregated today than they were 30 years ago (E. García, 2005). In addition, less money is spent on urban Latina/Latino students than on students in wealthier suburban schools (Nieto, 2004). In their lived experience, increasing numbers of Brown youth daily cross clearly delineated borders as they move between home, school, and work. Not only must they navigate symbolic boundaries erected through cultural and linguistic differences, but they inevitably find themselves being treated as “a foreigner, an alien, or an intruder” (E. García, 2005, p. 499).

Immigrant youth who entered U.S. schools with positive aspirations often find their hopes diminished the longer they stay. Many urban students confront a “climate of insurmountable obstacles, cultural hostility, identity threats, and psychological disparagement” (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Doucet, 2004, p. 430). As students navigate the borders between home, neighborhood, and school, they are undoubtedly cognizant of the ways that their daily border crossings take place in a political climate in which
As education researchers, our abiding interest is in understanding the sociopolitical context in which schooling occurs. We concur with one of the leading architects of multicultural education, Sonia Nieto, who has argued consistently that educators must develop a clear understanding of the sociopolitical context in which education takes place (Nieto & Bode, 2012). More specifically, our current research investigates the socialization processes affecting Brown students, particularly the children of recent immigrants who find themselves adjusting to life in the United States while being racialized in particular ways. We further concur with Banks and Banks (2007, p. 318), who asserted that the manner in which minoritized students are received by schools is directly related to the manner in which immigrants are treated by society. Banks and Banks stressed the importance, therefore, for educators to consider the ways in which immigrant populations are viewed and, as Nieto insists, to understand the sociopolitical realities in which their education takes place.

In our view, the emerging anti-Latina/Latino immigrant backlash circulating throughout the first decade of the 21st century represents the boiling over of deep-seated, historical antagonism between the colonizers and the colonized (Memmi, 1965), for example, unfinished contests over definitions of citizenship and national identity, that is, over who gets to be counted as an American. Moreover, the current political climate reflects growing majoritarian anxieties around recent shifts in the dynamics of U.S. race relations that culminated most visibly with the election of Barack Obama as the nation’s first President who is a person of color. The backlash—summed up in the vitriolic political slogan “We want our country back!”—specifically targets visible immigrants, particularly those who are raced as Brown, and creates a climate that students and their families may perceive as hostile to their educational aspirations, if not their actual freedom of movement. We argue that such aspirations are effectively curtailed under an ideology of containment, which we link to the educational arm of a broader punitive “push-back” against Black and Brown advances in recent years.

Rather than emerging as a new-fangled, 21st century dynamic, containment historically has been a driving force in the nation’s treatment of minoritized students as the nation’s leaders and social reformers have responded to demographic diversity (see Joel Spring’s [2004] illuminating history of the uses of schooling to suppress various racial groups in the United States). While containment may have worked effectively as a White supremacist strategy for managing diversity in the past, we call for today’s educators to resist such outmoded and problematic approaches to meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse society by embracing an explicitly anti-racist approach that advances a more egalitarian and critical multicultural education that is more relevant to (and respectful towards) students and teachers in the 21st century (Pollock, 2008).
Teachers today should bear in mind that the sociopolitical context in which the education of Brown youth occurs is rooted in a protracted history of cultural clashes that have flared up periodically, beginning with the historic contest between European colonizers of the Americas. The conflicts between England, France, Spain, and other European powers—not to mention the original indigenous inhabitants, who were overwhelmed by imported diseases, fire power, and heinous genocidal acts—underwrite the history of the present-day culture wars. In a real sense, current debates over the place of Brown people in U.S. society, reflected in controversies surrounding immigration reform, bilingual education, and English-only initiatives, represent the continuation of unresolved political conflicts about social and economic control of colonized territory. It is too simplistic to accept the majoritarian romanticized story of the “nation of immigrants,” as if the nation’s history is merely a pleasant conglomeration of diverse cultures, all of which arrived with open hearts and minds and a generosity of spirit, ostensibly to pursue religious freedom and economic security for their families. As a subaltern perspective of history reminds us, large parts of what is now the United States belonged to various nations for decades, if not centuries. The story of Brown people in America is not simply a tale of recent newcomers. It is a deeper and more complex story of intercultural conflict and conquest, of virtual winners and losers. In some communities, the conflicts rage on, if only on an emotional or ideological level. Families continue to struggle with issues of ethnic pride and identity, in which language issues and racial discrimination continue to weigh significantly. In this way, today’s schools become the battleground for unfinished contests from the past.

To reiterate, the point of this chapter is simple and blunt: Containment has historically been a tool for the suppression and management of “undesirable” populations that have stood in the way of U.S. progress in the project of White nation-building. Containment is now manifest in New Latino Diaspora locales like it long has been elsewhere, even though it can be understood that containment often works at cross-purposes of today’s educators, especially those who view education as a tool to positive integration into the U.S. social order and greater access to the American Dream. Rather than the ideology of containment dissipating through some benevolent march of progress, our research shows how it continues to influence the larger social order with schooling a key venue for its operation. Indeed, containment takes on new twists and eerie manifestations that impact the educational achievement and life chances of the fastest growing minority group in the country.

Unfortunately, we do not think it is mere hyperbole to view the amalgamation of various measures of containment as an orchestrated response to what has come to be known as the “browning” of America, a phenom-
As educators, we cannot stand by passively while schooling becomes an arm of the prison-industrial complex that is being used literally to contain and control increasingly diverse and potentially rebellious urban youth populations. The strength and prosperity of the nation's Browner future requires teachers to stand in solidarity with urban minoritized students and to steadfastly interrupt school-to-prison pipeline dynamics that criminalize far too many youth and squander their educational careers.

In conclusion, we have argued for a connection between the counter-stories and testimonios presented here and an emerging racist ideology of containment, particularly targeting Brown and other minoritized youth, combined with more generalized adult surveillance of youthfull bodies and behavior in schools. We have pointed out the ways in which containment symbolizes the apparently preferred strategy promulgated by dominant social forces in response to the demographic "browning" of the United States. For newcomers in the New Latino/a Diaspora, the racialization they experience upon entering the hyper-racialized U.S. sociopolitical context runs the risk of potentially teaching youth their "proper place" at the bottom of the social hierarchy, effectively rewriting the American Dream narrative with a far from happy ending. The future we work to materialize through education must offer a brighter destination than simply life behind bars or in the threatening shadows of pending deportation.

REFERENCES


