

González, K. P., and Padilla, R. V. (Eds.). (2007). *Doing the Public Good: Latina/o Scholars Engage Civic Participation*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Review by Ronald López II

*I*n *Doing the Public Good: Latina/o Scholars Engage Civic Participation*, editors Kenneth P. González and Raymond V. Padilla have collected essays that address what “serving the public good” and “engaging civic participation” mean to an intergenerational selection of Latina/o scholars and educators. This series of autoethnographical essays explores a variety of questions: How and in what ways does your work as Latina/o faculty respond to the civic mission of higher education? What personal and institutional obstacles have you faced, or are you facing? In what ways did graduate school prepare you for this civic mission of higher education? What is your vision for serving the public through your role as an academic or educational professional? What does civic engagement for the public good mean to you, and how do you embody it in your own life? Finally, the editors ask the authors to consider how they engage their students in a process of civic engagement for the public good.

In this series of deeply personal and introspective articles, the authors define their own roles in working for the public good and fulfilling this increasingly deemphasized civic mission of higher education. However, while most of the articles explore the authors’ own ideas and contributions to the public good, only a few authors detail how they have mentored their students to work for the public good. Several authors could further explicate how they systematically employ a pedagogy that fulfills the civic mission of the university, that is, producing socially and politically engaged citizens who will meaningfully contribute to the communities from which they came, and to society at large. The essays in this volume are generally good, but the collection is somewhat uneven; a few essays could have been excluded without compromising the collection as a whole.

Many of the authors’ reflections are deeply infused with ideas, ideals, and theories of civic engagement and transformative education that were articulated by the Chicano and Latino civil rights movement. In fact, today, most Chicano/Latino studies departments and many other university programs around the country demand that students engage in supervised community service of

some kind. Also, it is no surprise to see these ideas so comfortably articulated by Latino scholars. After all, much of Chicano and Latino studies scholarship includes the role of civic participation, community service, and ideals of the public good as articulated by members of the Mexican American or Latino community at different places and times. Nonetheless, most of the authors do not attribute their sense of the public good to any connection with a specific political generation. Rather, in discussing their dedication to nurturing students toward civic engagement and the public good, the authors generally consider this deep sense of duty a legacy of family and cultural values.

Exemplifying this is the number of authors who attribute their own values to members of their family. It is inherent in the autoethnography that the authors mention their childhood experiences, their fathers, mothers, grandparents, mentors, and the community ethos that nurtured them to grow and succeed within a professional (university) context. At the same time, the extension of Latino family values, to a broader view that “giving back to the community” for the social good is a duty of all members of a community, is central to the ethos of civic engagement that evolved out of the Chicano movement.

Highlighting the idea that notions of the public good are deeply rooted in family tradition, two of the essays are written by related authors. Both essays illustrate how the value of civic engagement in service for the public good is deeply rooted in family values and practice. In the first article, “Tres Hermanas (Three sisters): A Model of Relational Achievement,” by Aída Hurtado, María A. Hurtado, and Arcelia L. Hurtado, the Hurtado sisters, each writing her own section of the chapter, articulate their own work toward the public good in terms of their vibrant childhoods and their relationships to older relatives and mentors.

The second article to follow this pattern is “Two Brothers in Higher Education: Weaving a Social Fabric for Service in Academia,” by Miguel Guajardo and Francisco Guajardo. The Guajardo brothers write jointly, and also describe the role of family and childhood as formative to their civic engagement for the public good as public intellectuals and developers of a successful program for youth in their home community in south Texas. However, the Guajardo brothers more effectively describe in detail how working together, and with the active support of their family and an extended community, facilitates their cooperative work in both university and community settings, and their engagement for the public good—in this case, the development of an educational advancement program

for low-income youth in the same rural community from which they came. At the same time, as relative newcomers to academic life, they recognized that the academy might, ultimately, not view their public activism as acceptable, given a context of increasingly valued publishing and institutional success hand-in-hand with the increasingly minimized civic mission of universities. In creating the Llano Grande Center at Edcouch-Elsa High School in Texas, the Guajardo brothers provide an exemplary model of promoting civic engagement for the public good among young people who are generally excluded or discouraged from civic participation.

One article especially worthy of a closer read is “Agency and the Game of Change: Contradictions, Consciencia, and Self-Reflection,” by Luis Urrieta, Jr. This essay is, in some ways, the most theoretical. Employing critical race theory, game theory, radical and indigenous pedagogies, and notions of “Whiteness” and agency, Urrieta explores how the notion of a public good as a general social value is most often employed by those with power to subordinate the Chicanos/Latinos who are outside mainstream (he uses the term *Whitestream*) society. To counter the exclusionist nature of these constructs in the public sphere, Chicano/Latino educators must retain a consciousness, in the Freirian sense, that they have agency and are not victims, but can act, strategically, within the “game” to bring about social change. This essay is particularly engaging, for it provides an excellent model for a highly strategic civic engagement vis-à-vis what Urrieta calls the potential to be co-opted by the *Whitestream*. The question that remains is how to translate this approach into a model for involving students in meaningful civic engagement for a liberatory public good.

Also of value was “La Trensa de Identidades: Weaving Together my Personal, Professional, and Communal Identities,” by Dolores Delgado-Bernal, who self-consciously uses a *testimonio* (traditional personal narrative) approach, as well as employing the metaphor of the *trensa*, or braid, to explore how she integrates her distinct personal, professional, and communal identities through a Chicana feminist approach. Like several other authors in this volume, Delgado-Bernal attributes much of her early education not to schools but to the family *cuentos*, or stories, told to her by elders. She portrays experiences similar to those of the Guajardo brothers, describing her work with a group of close colleagues and a community-based organization to combine research with promoting higher education among community youth. Delgado-Bernal brilliantly demonstrates how her “braiding” of the elements in her life allows her to work in the personal, professional, and communal

spheres without compromising her identity or principles, while simultaneously working toward the public good.

In this volume the authors use a variety of themes, concepts, and metaphors to describe their enactment of the public good. The notion of weaving appears in both the Guajardo brothers' and Delgado-Bernal's pieces, for example: while the Guajardos suggest that their collective activism "weaves a social fabric," Delgado-Bernal weaves her various selves into a *trensa* or braid, a metaphor illustrating that smaller disparate elements can be bound together in a single, mutually interdependent whole. Many of the authors refer to the *cuentos* and key role that Latino family life plays in fostering a strong drive to support community advancement. And while several suggest it indirectly, Urrieta explicitly challenges mainstream ideas about what the public good is, and how politically engaged Latino scholars must actively reflect on who defines what is of value, both in academic life and in civic engagement.

This volume will appeal to educators deeply invested in civic engagement for the public good. Readers will no doubt explore what the public good means to them and how they pursue civic engagement for the public good.

About the Reviewer

Ronald López, is an assistant professor in the Department of Chicano and Latino Studies at Sonoma State University. López conducts research on the historical and contemporary development of the Latino community in the greater North Bay region, with an emphasis on Sonoma County. A proponent of advocacy and 'problem-solving' research, López is also an active member of several community-based organizations in the Sonoma County area. He earned his bachelor's degree from the University of California, Los Angeles and his master's degree and his Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley.