

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I WOULD NOT HAVE GUESSED in 2008, when the first edition of this book was published, that the story line I called the Latino Threat Narrative would become so quickly and commonly referenced in political discourse. The Latino Threat Narrative consists of a number of taken-for-granted and often-repeated assumptions about Latinos, such as that Latinos do not want to speak English; that Latinos do not want to integrate socially and culturally into the larger U.S. society; that the Mexican-origin population, in particular, is part of a grand conspiracy to take over the U.S. Southwest (the *reconquista*); and that Latin women are unable to control their reproductive capacities, that is, their fertility is out of control, which fuels both demographic changes and the alleged *reconquista*.

Advocates for reduced immigration, media pundits, and politicians pushing tough immigration laws routinely characterize Latinos, both immigrants and citizens, along the lines of the Latino Threat Narrative. For example, Pat Buchanan has warned of Mexican-origin Americans having “no desire to learn English” and creating a “nation within a nation.” Even respected scholars such as Samuel P. Huntington have espoused the Latino Threat Narrative: “Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture”; “Demographically, socially, and culturally, the *reconquista* of the Southwest United States by Mexican immigrants is well underway.”

Such views have exploded into politics in Arizona, Alabama, and many other states where harsh anti-immigration laws have been passed. As I will show, images and rhetoric used in the politics surrounding get-tough state laws which seek to increase surveillance of immigrants, even to the point of having

teachers and medical personnel alert authorities to “suspected” undocumented immigrants, express taken-for-granted assumptions of the Latino Threat Narrative. In Arizona, these assumptions led lawmakers to ban Mexican American studies classes because they allegedly fomented an overthrow of the United States, the *reconquista*.

Presidential politics, especially the Republican presidential candidates’ debates in 2012, focused on the threat Latinos pose to the nation. For example, candidate Rick Perry, the governor of Texas, was attacked for his support for a state DREAM Act to help young people who were brought to his state as undocumented immigrants as young children. The U.S.-born children of undocumented immigrants also had the legitimacy of their citizenship questioned; most of the Republican candidates called them “anchor babies,” meaning they were part of a plot to help their parents take advantage of the United States. Even sports events have not been immune to the Latino Threat Narrative, as Latino high school and college players, all American citizens, have been subjected to opposing fans chanting “USA” and “Where’s your papers?” The pervasiveness of these public displays toward Latinos pushed me to move forward with the second edition of *The Latino Threat*.

Readers will find that this second edition is fully revised, updated, and extended to include events since 2008. A new chapter focuses on the children of undocumented immigrants. As the above discussion indicates, heated political debate has emerged over both undocumented youth who have spent most of their lives in the United States and U.S.-born children, citizen children, of undocumented immigrants. This new chapter explores two important questions: Should undocumented immigrants who have spent their formative years in the United States be provided a path to citizenship or be deported? Should we throw out the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution so that undocumented immigrants cannot give birth to U.S.-citizen children? The public debate over both questions invokes the Latino Threat Narrative in ways that are unsettling and that undermine public attitudes toward Latinos. Throughout the book, I’ve updated the statistics to show how the trends elucidated in the first edition have continued apace. Evidence of use of English, marriage patterns, religious behavior, and other patterns exhibited by both Latino immigrants and citizens that challenge the veracity of the Latino Threat Narrative has been expanded to include research on the greater Los Angeles area where appropriate.

As in the first edition, this new edition keeps issues of citizenship and media spectacles front and center. After all, debates over citizenship are really about

whom we, as a nation, judge eligible to become one of “us.” And the stories that become media fodder provide essential information—or sometimes misinformation—on the nature of immigrant and citizen Latino lives. Unfortunately, media stories that espouse the tenets of the Latino Threat Narrative cloud the judgments we, as a nation, must make about immigration reform and how to encourage mutual respect as we all pursue the dreams that have been the promise of America.

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