

## Introduction

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already given and transmitted from the past.

—Karl Marx, 1852<sup>1</sup>

The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never allow us to bring about genuine change.

—Audre Lorde, 1984<sup>2</sup>

If you ask adults living in the United States, “Who is your favorite elementary school teacher?” they can instantly think of at least one teacher who inspired them, pushed them, and molded their way of thinking. When I reminisce about my elementary school days in Santa Ana, California, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, Mrs. Howell, Dr. Kaiser, and Mrs. Valentine are the names that instantly pop into my head, all of them women and all of them white. In writing this book, I often thought about these college-educated women and how they taught my working-class colleagues and me how to read, write, and do arithmetic successfully. With the help of bilingual Latina paraprofessionals, the third-grade teachers helped us transition to the English language, as the bilingual program in place at the school at the time required. At such an age, of course, I never thought about how the political climate within the region could influence their teaching patterns, and how they perceived us as students, or our Mexican and Central American immigrant parents.

I began to consider these questions when, enrolled in college in southern California, I started working in an after-school program as an instructional assistant provider. Many Latina teachers begin their careers this way, and I, too, dreamed of becoming a bilingual-education

teacher, preferably in my hometown, in my own elementary school. I even passed several of the teacher certification tests, got a tuberculosis exam and a Live Scan fingerprint background check, and worked as a substitute teacher for a period of time.

Working as a public-education teacher in a Mexican immigrant city in California, I noticed that my colleagues did not perceive Latino cultural resources—my own or my students’—as assets but rather as obstacles to overcome. Drawing on graduate-level sociology courses, I also noticed that my Latina colleagues functioned as what I call “cultural guardians” to Latino students and their immigrant parents.

Before I take up the question of what it means for Latina teachers (I say “Latina” because women continue to dominate the profession at the primary and secondary levels) (Flores and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2014) to be cultural guardians, I want to call the reader’s attention to the question of how Latinas find themselves in the profession and their experiences within this formerly white woman’s field. These questions bring to the fore the debates between structure and agency, which are a foundational sociological puzzle. I took a different path, but many Latinas do become teachers, especially in schools with many Latino children—which are growing in number throughout the United States (Flores and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2014). As Karl Marx describes, every individual faces choices constrained by societal circumstances. Audre Lorde, on the other hand, would have us believe that any agency exerted within institutional parameters might not suffice to bring about genuine change. Playing by institutional rules, in a sense, will not change the structures of power in place. In this book, I ask how much agency people possess and how much of it they can exert, given social constraints, to bring about change. Indeed, agency can be constrained by the social structure. Latina teachers face larger policies, institutionalized racism, and hegemonic racial ideologies that permeate educational institutions and their work lives, all of which constrain their choices. In this book I strike a balance between the actions of individuals and the constraints and boundaries defined by the educational structures in which they operate because all teachers, not just Latinas, are operating under severe structural constraints in their efforts to reach minority students of color.

Perhaps one of the biggest constraints teachers encounter is that society is set up so that students of middle-class and Anglo backgrounds

succeed and experience upward mobility. Yet schools implement a color-blind ideology, the reigning racial ideology of our time (Bonilla-Silva 2003). The idea that actually seeing and talking about race is a problem makes it impossible to address the unequal experiences that students of color face in the classroom and beyond. High-stakes tests complicate this picture, forcing teachers to track students into different academic levels to ensure that they are meeting certain benchmarks. Tracking has long had a profound impact on life-long trajectories (see López 2002; Gándara 1995; Valenzuela 1999). Another form of structural constraints is controlling images, which are larger hegemonic racial ideologies that permeate social institutions and play a tremendous role in race relations between teachers, students, and parents.

Agency, on the other hand, is free will and choice. When Latina teachers manage under a set of conditions they cannot change, they exert agency. However, that agency is always to some extent constrained, and at times the participants in this study face essentially one choice—it may look like a choice, but it is virtually impossible to do otherwise. More often, however, the teachers described in this book, while bound and limited and situated where they find themselves, do make a conscious decision to resist racial hierarchies. Latina teachers remember the racialized penalization they experienced as students and recognize the political, economic, and legal context in which their current Latino students live and learn; they recognize the gaps those students experience because of immigration restrictions—because they have lived them directly or witnessed them in their extended families—and realize that they can be a valuable asset to the Latino community.

The teachers who appear in this book, as cultural guardians, metaphorically resemble lifeguards more than they resemble security guards. A private security guard is in charge of milling around edifices to monitor individuals, enforce rules, and enact punishment if necessary. They surveil the scene and discipline those who step out of line. In Spanish, my mother tongue, the word *guard* has several connotations: *proteger* [to protect], *salvaguardar* [to safeguard or save], and *respaldar* [to support]. In becoming cultural guardians, Latina teachers act to protect, save, and support their students from the waves and rip currents of a dominant culture that threatens to extinguish their language and behavioral codes. They swim in the ocean and bring Latino students to rest on shore. More

than driftwood that a desperate swimmer might cling to, they are swimmers who take action, who swim upstream and against the current, or sometimes sideways. Maybe they are also surfers who get on a surfboard and ride the wave to the rescue, risking being knocked into the ocean to return their students safely to shore.

Like the lifeguard at the ocean—but, perhaps, not like a lifeguard at a tranquil swimming pool, whose superior skill ensures her success, assuming she notes the swimmer in distress—Latina teachers face risk in taking on the role of cultural guardians; the ocean is rough and risky for a swimmer who chooses to carry someone else to safety. The massive structural constraints that Latina teachers experience in their work make it risky to become cultural guardians. They know that they themselves almost drowned in the system, yet they choose to enter the waters again to bring to shore as many children as they can.

While I observed that the experiences Latina teachers brought with them to the educational institutions where they work prompted them to become cultural guardians, I do believe that teachers who lack these experiences can do enormous good for Latino students, if they put aside the racism their society instills in them. Moreover, neither are all Latina teachers in racial/ethnic and minority schools uniformly dedicated. Nonetheless, based on my observations, I rejoice that, just as the Latino population in schools throughout the country grows, Latinas are the largest subgroup entering the teaching profession. This book, however, focuses on my observations of Latina teachers at two separate primary schools in California, the vast majority of whom faced the ocean's highest waves and jumped in, swimming with determination to the children and their families and carrying as many as they could.

## From “Americanization” to “Latinization”

“*Tú vas a hablar el español!*” [You are going to speak Spanish], Jacqueline Arenas’s grandmother informed her when she began responding to her inquiries in English one day after school. Mrs. Arenas told me about that moment and the fear in her grandmother’s eyes to explain why she promulgated native-language retention as an ethnic cultural marker to her students in her classroom daily. She understood how her grandmother feared losing her to a schooling system that promoted English.

Her younger Latina co-workers at Goodwill Elementary<sup>1</sup> in Rosemead, California, consider Jacqueline Arenas<sup>2</sup> as the teacher they aspire to become. At sixty-one years old, Mrs. Arenas is among the oldest of the school’s Latina teachers, but she bursts with energy, as I observed one day in October 2009 when she hobbled hurriedly to relieve a fellow educator for yard duty during recess. While I interviewed her, she offered me Twin Dragon almond cookies that one of her Asian students had brought her. We sat by her desk in the room where she teaches a class of mostly rambunctious fourth-grade students, most of them Asian or Latino, after they had left for the day. She was wearing a purple collar shirt, blue jeans, thick black eyeglasses, long blue turquoise earrings, and white *peinetas* (Flamenco hair combs) on each side of her hair—a style she wore daily. I had created a sheet querying teachers about their background, and as she filled it out she talked to me about it, giving me tidbits about her background as the college-educated daughter of two U.S.-born parents who were agricultural workers. Neither of her parents graduated from high school, and they found themselves trapped in low-wage work sectors. The family’s hardships worsened when her parents divorced when she was nine and her mother had to pull Jacqueline and her siblings out of school in a *barrio* of La Puente, a city twenty miles east of downtown Los Angeles where Mexican immigrants predominate, to travel to different farms to pick produce to make ends meet. Mrs. Arenas recalled missing the school bus on several occasions from

the fourth grade to the seventh grade in the early 1960s. She described hiding behind large trees from other school-aged children because her mother made her wear a “big old hat and long sleeves” to protect herself from the scorching sun in the fields. A Latina professional of Mexican descent,<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Arenas had taken her grandmother’s admonishment seriously, and she still spoke Spanish confidently, with no discernible accent. While her schooling was primarily in the English language, her grandmother challenged this traditional mainstream practice by encouraging her to maintain Spanish, something that Mrs. Arenas transmitted to her students’ daily despite structural policies that forced her to do otherwise.

While in the twenty-first century it has become more common for Latino children to have a Latina teacher (Flores 2011a), scant scholarship has given voice to the challenges Latina teachers face in teaching Latino families in multiracial schools composed of different racial/ethnic minority groups. Teachers’ occupational experiences can be drastically different, influenced by the racial/ethnic dynamics of the schools, institutions, and regions in which they operate. Some, like Mrs. Arenas, have thrived. Many of her colleagues at Goodwill Elementary have as well, but the other school site where I did the research for this book, Compton Elementary, was a more difficult working environment for Latina teachers. School governance structures and colleagues and administration unfriendly to their project as cultural guardians made it a constant struggle to fight off burnout, as this book will describe. To explicate this difference, I examine the pathways into the jobs they have, how structural conditions influenced their agency and directed them to certain districts, and what creates the disparate workplace experiences I observed. The analysis will uncover some of the ways schooling and work and organizations intersect, creating differential race and cultural experiences for both Latina teachers and their families.

Mrs. Arenas’s pathway to her job had involved seventeen years at another school, and in the 1980s she was one of a few token Latina teachers. She had been at Goodwill Elementary for only four years<sup>4</sup> and fondly remembered her previous school, which was also in the Garvey District.<sup>5</sup> It had a strong bilingual-education<sup>6</sup> program that catered to Spanish-speaking Latino students, but it was ultimately closed down because of low enrollment, a problem she attributed to misinformation among parents.<sup>7</sup> An avid proponent of bilingual education, she was

saddened when California’s voters eliminated it. “I don’t think people understood the merits of the program,” she said.

This book is situated at an important historical moment in California as college-educated Latinas succeed white middle-class women in the teaching profession and the presence of majority–minority schools grows throughout the state. Newly minted college-educated Latinas have been entering this feminized occupational niche in droves, especially in schools in immigrant and racial/ethnic minority communities (Ochoa 2007). While the issue of a lack of minority teachers has typically driven studies on Latina teachers, they are the fastest-growing non-white group entering the teaching profession (Feistritzer 2005; Flores and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2014). Women of Latino origin are more than 18 percent of teachers in California, and Latino children, who constitute 20 percent of K–12 schools nationwide, are more than 50 percent of California’s student population; thus there is a Latinization of schools and the teaching profession (California Department of Education 2015).<sup>8</sup> These demographic shifts are especially pronounced in Los Angeles, where Latino students now make up nearly two-thirds of the K–12 population and Latinas/os constitute almost 30 percent of teachers (Ed-Data 2015).

Historically, children of Mexican origin experienced “Americanization” programs to hasten assimilation in the United States (González 1997; Ochoa 2007; Urrieta 2010). Remnants of these policies still permeate the organizational culture that Latina teachers encounter daily, but I found that schools where immigrants predominate allow for alternate scenarios. In the schools where they work, Latina teachers are creating apertures and quietly revolutionizing an educational system to bring Latina/o ethnic capital into the classroom, often through practices that challenge norms about culture’s place in the teaching profession. I define Latina/o ethnic capital as elements of Latino immigrants’ social origins and human capital such as language and behavioral codes. In doing so, they subvert normative rules regarding Latino ethnic culture in their jobs. I show that their efforts meet with varying results in two elementary schools, one predominantly Latino/Black and another predominantly Latino/Asian. Thus, I address the question as to whether Latina teachers’ experiences vary according to the racial/ethnic composition of teachers and students at the worksite.

Like the teachers in this study, who found work in the Garvey District in the San Gabriel Valley, most Latina teachers find employment in schools that serve predominantly poor immigrant and minority children and their families.<sup>9</sup> These daughters of immigrants mostly grew up working-class and or poor; most are the first in their family to go to college. My observations suggest these experiences give them a sense of empathy with their lower-income Latino students as they try to find innovative ways to assist these students and their families at home to survive in an often confusing, even antagonistic, educational system. I find ethnic cultural transmission to be one of the most powerful modes of assistance, which Americanization makes vital to the well-being of these children. Whereas such programs were formal up until the middle of the twentieth century and openly degraded Mexican culture to encourage Mexican immigrants and others to shed their ethnic culture and assimilate into a white mainstream (González 1997; Urrieta 2010), children still experience pressure to assimilate and devalue their culture. The idea that Latino culture and foreign-language capabilities were pathological deficiencies and obstacles to schooling success, which schools openly embraced a century ago (Ochoa 2007), persists. And while overt policies encourage multicultural education practices in public schools (Washburn 1996; Delpit 2006; Nieto 2005), a paucity of research investigates how Latina teachers implement Latina/o cultural resources. My own, earlier research shows that when Latina teachers display their culture in schools where the majority of students are Latino, they meet resistance and hostility from white co-workers (Flores 2011a).<sup>10</sup> Similarly, sociologist and educational scholar Angela Valenzuela (1999) suggests that for U.S.–Mexican youth, schools are a “subtractive process” where students of Mexican origin feel that teachers do not care about them or respect Mexican culture and migration experiences. This book outlines the ways in which Latina teachers navigate this subtractive schooling process that has manifested for Mexican children over several decades. These educators have generated a culture of teaching with the ultimate goal of supporting students’ long-term educational success. Latina educators now form a part of the middle class, and in their workplaces they see mirror images of their younger selves in their students. They use their own life histories to draw on Latina/o cultural resources and serve as agents

of ethnic mobility, actively teaching their students how to navigate American race and class structures while retaining their cultural roots. I contend that Latina teachers serve as cultural guardians because they protect their students’ cultural identities and foster their students’ learning via their ethnic cultural capital, challenging the traditional Americanization approach that institutions and schools still favor. They are cultural guardians because they guard their students’ cultural identities within and beyond the school, but the institutions, standardized testing, and the schools in which they find themselves simultaneously regulate them because they do not follow the Americanization script.

Because all work organizations have “inequality regimes” (Acker 2006)—which serve to maintain class, gender, and racial hierarchies within a particular organization—it is important to take note of where these schools are located in relation to regional racial hierarchies because inequality regimes are fluid and tend to change depending on the organization, its racial/ethnic composition, and racial representation. Teachers who work in urban schools with the children of Latino immigrants may very well have workplace experiences distinct from those who work in suburban or rural locales. Even so, representations of Latina/o teachers in urban schools have captured the hearts and minds of moviegoers, documentarians, and television watchers both in the United States and in Latin America. For example, the movie *Stand and Deliver* (1988) is a classic, portraying the success of Bolivian male mathematics teacher Jaime Escalante at Garfield High School in teaching calculus in East Los Angeles. The documentary *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary* (1997), filmed by Laura Simón, a Latina teacher who worked in the Pico-Union neighborhood in Los Angeles, demonstrates the drastic effects of the so-called Save Our State initiative, Proposition 187,<sup>11</sup> on her undocumented students by following the life of Mayra, a Salvadoran student going to school without papers. Simón captures the measure’s incitement of racial strife at the school between Arcelia Hernández, an activist Mexican American teacher who fights the measure, and Diane Lee, an Anglo teacher who supports it. Finally, the television series *Carussel* has introduced global audiences to *La Maestra* [the teacher] Jimena, a Mexican teacher who helps her students navigate race and class relations in *La Escuela Mundial* in Mexico, demonstrating that her duties did not stop once the bell

rang but extended away from the school and accentuated the reverence shown to all teachers in Latin America. The character is particularly, but not exclusively, famous in Latin America.

The United States does not accord teachers, regardless of racial/ethnic background, the prestige that they receive in Latin America (Hargreaves 1969; Abbott 1988; Gordon 2002)—or, for that matter, in Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Finland, and Canada.<sup>12</sup> Opinion pieces in prestigious publications openly blame teachers for low student achievement and question the professionalization of American education as well as teachers’ claim to being skilled workers. One titled “Teachers: Will We Ever Learn?”<sup>13</sup> suggests that teachers are the reason for the “rising tide of mediocrity” of American students because, unlike medicine, law, and architecture, teaching lacks a formal body of knowledge. This environment influences the pathways Latina college graduates take into the teaching profession, as well as their experiences.

### Occupational Trends among Latinas

Drawing from demographic statistical data compiled by the Current Population Survey (2007), table 1.1 shows a distribution of the top ten professions/occupations for Latinas who possess a four-year college degree. The “teachers” category includes educators ranging from preschool to high school, ranking as the top occupation among Latina professionals, with three times as many going into teaching than the next most concentrated occupation, nursing.<sup>14</sup> Table 1.1 also shows that Latinas are underrepresented in the better-paying, more prestigious occupations, such as lawyers and doctors, and remain concentrated in a limited set of female-dominated “semi-professions” including education, health care, and social services (Catanzarite and Trimble 2008). While it was common for Latino men to have higher educational levels than Latinas in the late 1960s, today Latinas obtain the education level teaching requires in far greater numbers (López 2002).

U.S. Department of Labor data shows that Latinas represent the fastest-growing nonwhite group entering the teaching occupation, especially in the preschool, elementary, and middle-school sectors, both in the country (2010),<sup>15</sup> and in California specifically (Feistritzter 2005; CDE 2011). At 48 percent, white women still represent a plurality of

TABLE 1.1. Top Ten Professions/Occupations Latinas Enter\*

| Occupation   | Frequency | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|
| Teachers**   | 225,256   | 15.3    |
| Registered Nurses  | 71,384    | 4.9     |
| Accountants and Auditors                                 | 56,658    | 3.9     |
| Social Work  | 50,141    | 3.4     |
| Managers   | 48,967    | 3.3     |
| Secretaries/Administrative Assistants                    | 42,598    | 2.9     |
| Lawyers, Judges, Magistrates, and other judicial workers | 19,832    | 1.4     |
| Nursing, Psychiatric and home health aides               | 18,396    | 1.3     |
| Chief Executives   | 14,133    | 1.0     |
| Physicians and Surgeons                                  | 11,003    | 0.8     |

\*Findings for first-, second-, and third-generation Latinas were calculated. Regardless of generational level, teaching was the top profession entered by Latinas. The percentage of women in the teaching profession was highest for third-generation Latinas.

\*\*This includes teachers of all grade levels (ranging from preschool to high school).

N=1,471,195

Source: Current Population Survey, November 2007

teachers in California (CDE 2015), but the white teachers as a group are aging. As Mrs. Lomeli, a second-grade teacher and U.S.-born daughter of Mexican immigrants, points out:

When I started working [as an elementary school teacher] a lot of the staff was Caucasian ladies, which is what you used to think of when you [saw] an elementary school teacher. A lot of them have retired now. As the years [have gone] by you can see [the changes] by the little profile of teachers. The names have started changing, the ages have considerably gone down, and the names have very much been inclining toward the Hispanic. In the first grade [team] we have six teachers: Corrales, Dyer, myself, Villalpando, Pedroza, and Williams. Dyer is married into her last name but she is Hispanic.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of these trends, research has not examined prior to the current project the professional and personal lives of college-educated Latina teachers who share the workplace with a majority of other college-educated, upwardly mobile, Black and Asian women.

The exponential growth of Latinas into the teaching occupation dovetails with structural opportunities that opened up new occupations

for educated white women and the graying of the Baby Boom population (Stone 2008; Myers 2007). Affirmative action programs and the passing of California’s Proposition 209<sup>17</sup> in 1996 opened up former male-dominated occupations such as medicine and law to white women (Cassell 1998). Although it was widely speculated that racial/ethnic minorities benefited the most from affirmative action programs, in fact, white women were the subgroup that made the most significant gains (Lipsitz 2006). In keeping with this fact, scholarship on women entering the professions in the 1970s examined the ways in which men excluded women in the workplace (Kanter 1977; Lorber 1984). Studies of white women breaking boundaries and entering male-dominated professions such as law, medicine, and managerial occupations focused on the gender hierarchy (Lorber 1984; Kanter 1977; Epstein 1993; Cassell 1998). These studies tended to emphasize gender inequality and undertheorized the salience of the intersection of race, class, and immigration. They also centered on the experiences of white men and women as universals, applicable to all racial/ethnic minorities.

But major inequalities in U.S. society shape where and under what conditions women work, as well as how they see themselves and their options in the workplace (Higginbotham and Romero 1997: xvii). In spite of the remarkable strides made by women and racial/ethnic minorities since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, what race and work sociologist John Skrentny (2014) calls “racial realism”—the notion that racial difference is a qualification for certain occupations—continues to characterize hiring processes. Thus employers equate employee racial differences, and sometimes immigrant status, with unique abilities or desirable reactions from a population the employer seeks to please. In the case of schools, it is parents. The notion that racial diversity increases workplace potency is also an element of racial realism. The Latina teachers who participated in the study generally believe they have advantages over non-Latinos in the hiring processes for teachers, so my findings support Skrentny’s ideas.

### The Legacy of Latinas’ Occupational Past

Latinas have historically occupied jobs on the bottom rung of the occupational hierarchy because of race and class stratification in the United

States (Barrera 1979; Segura 1989). While some sociologists refer to this phenomenon as double jeopardy, triple oppression, or the simultaneity perspective,<sup>18</sup> others aptly suggest that the intersection of various factors determines women of color and Latinas' experiences in the workplace (Espiritu 2008; Segura 1992a; Collins 2000). Work on Latinas in the workplace has shed light on their economic contributions to their families but has focused mostly on their experiences in informal economy sectors or in low-skill jobs, such as agriculture, domestic employment, canneries, or manufacturing (Ruiz 1998; Zavella 1987; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). For example, Patricia Zavella's (1987) case study of cannery workers in the Santa Clara Valley examined the structure of the industry and the social context in which Chicanas decided to *seek* cannery jobs. Historian Vicki Ruiz, studying a similar population in the American Southwest (1998), points out that the majority were "young, unmarried daughters whose wage labor was essential to the economic survival of their families" (63). Looking at Latinas/os in the United States more broadly, Catanzarite (2000) indicates that the population is concentrated in "brown-collar jobs," poorly paid and relatively unregulated fields such as gardening, factory work, and manual labor, and that recently arrived immigrants are particularly concentrated in these fields. Immigrant women are hypersegregated into service and domestic work, and Latinas with a high school diploma are highly concentrated in pink-collar clerical work (Catanzarite and Trimble 2008; López 2002; Smith 2005).

Sociologist Denise Segura drew attention to the large number of Latinas entering clerical jobs in the 1980s, what she called "pink-collar ghettos." These jobs provided an essential source of income and pride for many Chicanas. Secondary schools, Segura found, prepared Chicanas for clerical jobs by curricular placement in "business" classes, as well as youth employment in clerical trainee positions. Chicanas and Mexican immigrant women saw clerical jobs as desirable because they were "clean" and offered a nicer environment than those of farm work and service-sector jobs. But they often described themselves as having to walk on eggshells. They faced racial discrimination and social ostracism based on social class and cultural differences from white co-workers (Segura 1992b).

A good deal of sociology of work and occupations scholarship examining workplace inequalities in the post-civil rights era has focused on

women of color from working-class backgrounds who achieved professional careers, most of whom worked in white-majority environments (Higginbotham and Weber 1992; Higginbotham 2001; Chávez 2011; Flores 2011a; García-López 2008). This work describes women of color who acknowledge the sacrifices others made for them and maintain a collective identity and orientation with poorer co-ethnics. For example, research conducted in the 1990s studying African Americans of both sexes shows that they have a linked fate with African Americans across class lines and that they consider giving back financially and socially to the poorer members of their racial group to be essential (Patillo-McCoy 1999; Hochschild 1995; Higginbotham and Weber 1992). Hochschild (1995), in particular, argued that middle-class African Americans maintain a collective identity because of a shared history of racism and exclusion that compelled Blacks to serve their communities. More recently, Vallejo and Lee (2009) built on this work to examine the attitudes of professional Latinas/os. They argue that the immigrant narrative becomes a vehicle to express gratitude toward parents and communities, and that professional Latinas/os give back, even to the point of suffering financial hardship themselves.<sup>19</sup> However, Vallejo (2012) finds that there is a class dimension to giving back, as Latinas/os who grew up in working-class homes are more likely to give back socially and economically than Latinos who grew up solidly middle class.

Beyond pathways into the job and racial dynamics, ethnic culture remains a central determinant of schooling and workplace experiences. Professional racial/ethnic minorities struggle over whether they should hide or express their cultural and ethnic heritage in white spaces (see Chávez 2011; Livers 2006; Dhingra 2007; Feagin and Sikes 1995). Much of this literature began with African American women professionals. Some studies have documented workplace practices like instructing African American women to tie their hair back or not wear attire that looks “ethnic” so as not to cause discomfort for white co-workers, especially when women of color reach management positions (Livers 2006; Feagin and Sikes 1995). Latina business professionals describe feeling that they must navigate two cultural contexts: their own Latina heritage and mainstream white culture (Hite 2007). In some environments Latinas are praised for their bilingual skills (Flores 2011a), but in others they are sanctioned for using their native language (Chávez 2011; Vallejo

2012). These studies emphasize that private corporations and professions require women of color to hide or compromise their ethnic identities. This book will examine such sanctions in educational institutions and how Latina educators incorporate ethnic culture into their jobs when the mission of the school that employs them is to promote students' assimilation to white culture.

Education is a highly specific workplace that differs in many respects from both canneries and offices where women may enter the pink-collar ghetto. Yet all indicators suggest that the ranks of college-educated Latinas who enter teaching will continue to grow in the coming decades. The following sections will illuminate the history of structural and cultural impediments Latinas have faced in U.S. educational institutions, impediments that continue to influence the environment in schools today.<sup>20</sup> In order to understand how Latino ethnic culture is a powerful asset for today's Latina teachers in multiracial environments, it is important to understand the larger macro-structural conditions that subjugated Latino students (and other students of color) in schools over time.

### The Era of *De jure* School Segregation

Historically, U.S. schools have been segregated spaces fraught with racialized, political, social, and legal issues (see Fairclough 2007; Valenzuela 1999; Ochoa 2007; González 1990). The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo<sup>21</sup> stipulated that Mexican families who opted to stay in the newly acquired territories would be granted U.S. citizenship. The treaty promised them the right to maintain the Spanish language and their ethnic culture (Ochoa 2007). However, U.S. policymakers soon used these cultural markers to justify segregationist policies against Mexican children in schools. *De jure* segregation separated children of Mexican descent from children of European descent until *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). In spite of the common timing of the end of *de jure* segregation, however, the rationale for mandated segregation in schools of Mexican families differed from that of African Americans.<sup>22</sup> Common ways of thinking deemed Black children biologically inferior to white children. Students of Mexican and Latino origin had a racially ambiguous status. Thus court cases would determine if segregation was justifiable based on racial markers usually or ethnic ones.

Some of the earliest court cases concerning school desegregation in U.S. schools involved Latinas/os in the Southwest. In 1925, Adolpho Romo, a Mexican American rancher who lived in an eastern suburb of Phoenix, Arizona, sued the Tempe School District for not allowing his four children to attend school with white students (Muñoz 2001). Mexicans posed a complex educational dilemma as most Mexican Arizonans were U.S. citizens and the state considered them to be white. The judge ruled in Romo’s favor because the Spanish-language school did not employ fully credentialed teachers, meaning that students of Mexican origin would not receive an equal education under the law (Muñoz 2006). Another court case, *Roberto Álvarez v. the Board of Trustees of the Lemon Grove School District* (1931), occurred in southern California (Álvarez 1986).<sup>23</sup> Because the decision did not involve a finding of inequality between the segregated schools, it has the distinction of being the first successful desegregation court decision in the history of the United States. In this case, an all-white local school board and teachers in San Diego, California, relegated children of Mexican origin to a separate school known as *la caballeriza* [the stable] in order to undergo “Americanization” before they could integrate with white children (Christopher 1985). Such practices supported perceptions of Mexican children as lazy, backward, and suffering from an infirmity of will; their Spanish-language abilities were perceived as limitations to schooling success (González 1990). The decision in “The Lemon Grove Incident,” as it came to be called, established the rights of children of Mexican origin to equal education. The ruling stated that segregation “denie[d] the Mexican children the presence of American children, which is so necessary to learn the English language” (Álvarez 1986: 47). Nonetheless, local, regional, and national sentiment favored segregation and actual deportation of Mexicans, even those who were natural-born U.S. citizens. In the words of Vicki Ruiz, “With the onset of the Great Depression, rhetoric exploded into action. Between 1931 to 1934, an estimated one-third of the Mexican population in the United States (over 500,000 people) were either deported or repatriated to Mexico even though the majority were native U.S. citizens” (Ruiz 2998: 29).

While no state that adjudicated the issue in the American Southwest upheld the segregation of Mexican American children on the basis of

race specifically, the practice was rampant and the use of other justifications had legal impact. Efforts at school desegregation cut across class and generational lines within Mexican American communities (Gutiérrez 1995). In Texas, more than in the rest of the Southwest, Jim Crow extended into the educational system (Sánchez 1997). As late as the 1940s, some school systems segregated "Mexican" children throughout public schools. As it had been in Lemon Grove, the "language handicap" of bilingual children was used to justify "racial" discrimination against children of Mexican origin (Sánchez 1997). For example, a Texas state court in *Independent School District v. Salvierra* (1930) upheld the right of the Del Rio school district to separate Tejano (Texans with roots in Mexico) children from Euro-American Texans. Through the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), a largely middle-class Mexican American organization founded in Texas in 1929, Tejano parents had argued against the segregation of children of Mexican descent from children of other white races. The superintendent tried to justify segregation by noting the "decided peculiarities" of Tejano children (Ruiz 2004: 59). The court agreed, saying that segregation of Mexican children—regardless of where they had been born or their language skills—was not racial. LULAC shifted its focus to inequities in school funding (Ruiz 2004). The argument that permitting Mexican children to share their classroom endangered the academic achievement of Euro-American children gained currency (Moore 1970).

The Mexican-origin population of Orange County, California, challenged the logic of separate but equal schools<sup>24</sup> in *Mendez et al. v. Westminster School District of Orange County* (1947). Gonzalo Méndez, a naturalized citizen, and his Puerto Rico-born wife, Felicitas, had attempted to send their three children to the Westminster School, the elementary school Gonzalo had himself attended as a child in the 1920s. The Westminster school district had redrawn boundaries around Mexican neighborhoods in the intervening time. Only the lighter-skinned and less obviously Spanish-surnamed Méndez cousins could stay. Their darker-skinned and Spanish-surnamed Méndez relatives would have to matriculate at the Hoover school. The public schools to which the Méndezes' children and those of three other families that joined the suit had access offered manual and vocational training rather than college

preparation, a practice the school district attempted to justify pedagogically (Brilliant 2010; González 1990).<sup>25</sup> The school superintendent in Garden Grove, where one of the families lived, regurgitated tired stereotypes to the *Los Angeles Times*: “Mexicans are inferior in personal hygiene, ability and in their economic outlook . . . [Youngsters] were handicapped in interpreting English words because their cultural background prevented them from learning Mother Goose rhymes.”<sup>26</sup> Historian Mark Brilliant (2010) notes, “More than anything else, language—or, more specifically, the school districts’ claim that lack of English proficiency was the reason for the segregation they admitted practicing—presented the most salient distinction between segregation of students of Mexican descent in southern California (and elsewhere in the southwest) and African Americans in the South.” A year later, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit decided that the segregation defined in *Méndez et al.* was not racially based but had been implemented by the school district without being authorized by state law (Ruiz 2004; Strum 2010). The court held that the segregation of Mexican immigrant and U.S.-born Mexican students into separate “Mexican schools” was unconstitutional. This was the first ruling in the United States in favor of desegregation.

### Demand for Structural and Cultural Changes

In the 1950s and 1960s, Mexican Americans took part in a national quest for civil rights, staging a series of protests in response to *de facto* segregation—segregation by practice. The Chicano Blowouts, also known as the East L.A. Walkouts, against unequal schooling conditions in Los Angeles Unified School District high schools were among the best-known (González 1990; García and Castro 2011). Sal Castro was one of the few Chicano teachers among the leaders of these protests, although they were largely student-led. Of the protests Castro said,

These schools were characterized by high dropout rates, a heavily vocational curriculum and a marginalized academic one, low reading scores, few academic counselors, overcrowded conditions, and worst of all, low expectations of the Chicano students by a mostly Anglo or white faculty. Moreover, these schools in no way reflected the ethnic and

cultural background of the kids. These were the conditions we faced in 1968 when the students decided to take things into their own hands and attempt to force changes by resorting to a student strike. (García and Castro 2011)

Castro was arrested in 1968 for participating but was able to resume teaching after his release (García and Castro 2011).<sup>27</sup> The movement demanded more teachers of Latina/o origin, bilingual education, equitable schooling facilities, and culturally relevant curriculum (Chávez 2002). Providing a gendered analysis, Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) highlights the pivotal role high school—and college-educated Chicanas played as grassroots organizers. Chicanas collected surveys, helped set up campaigns, held office, raised consciousness and awareness, were spokespeople for the movement, and testified before the Los Angeles School Board.

Multicultural pedagogical approaches emerged in the 1970s, responding to some of the demands of the East L.A. Walkouts. However, these efforts concentrated on preparing white teachers to work with and teach students of color (Delpit 2006; Sleeter 2001). In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its only ruling to date dealing with the language rights of racial/ethnic minority children in *Lau v. Nichols* (Wollenberg 1978).<sup>28</sup> In the case, Chinese American students in San Francisco argued that a lack of linguistically appropriate accommodations effectively denied Chinese students equal educational opportunities on the basis of their ethnicity. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of families of Chinese origin and expanded the rights of students nationwide with limited English proficiency.<sup>29</sup> However, the 1980s and 1990s saw the re-segregation of Latino children in schools mainly because of residential and linguistic issues, especially in California schools. The English Only movement and the passing of Proposition 227, the English for the Children Initiative, in 1998 drove segregation. Much as Ruiz notes that in the era of the Great Depression “even on the playground, students were punished for conversing in Spanish” (Ruiz 2004: 57), Proposition 227 led to sanctions against teachers who spoke Spanish to children in the classroom, even when failing to do so posed considerable classroom management issues. The model in which Latina/o students must sink or swim in an English-only environment continues in the classrooms I studied.

Throughout this period, class-based divisions characterized Latina/o activism. The words of a school official in San Antonio, Texas, reveal the logic that fueled this dynamic:

American children and those of the Mexican children who are clean and high-minded do not like to go to school with the dirty “greaser” type of Mexican child. It is not right that . . . [these American and middle-class Mexican children] should have to do so. There is but one choice in the matter of educating these unfortunate Mexican children and that is [to] put the dirty ones into separate schools [and] tell them that they have to learn how to “clean-up.” (García 1991: 187)

On the side of middle-class Latinas/os, LULAC gained power representing middle-class Mexican Americans in the Southwest. The group argued that hard work, allegiance to the United States, limited Spanish use, and active assimilation could achieve white acceptance of Latinas/os. As David Gutierrez (1995) notes, LULAC stressed the leadership of an “educated elite” who would lift their less fortunate neighbors by their bootstraps. Racial prejudice, LULAC members assumed, would fade over time. They feared that recent Latino immigrant arrivals would be lumped together with more established, later-generation families, giving the impression that all Latinos were a monolithic group, “un-American” and poor (Gutierrez 1995; García 1991; Ochoa 2004). Moreover, many middle-class Latino elites favored Catholic school education for their own children, believe it would make them “*gente decente*,” more “civilized” than the Mexican laboring class, whose children were relegated to public-educational facilities that prepared them for vocational jobs (García 1991).

The efforts of groups like LULAC have influenced educational policymakers to direct their attention toward developing effective multicultural education practices and preparing teachers for a racially and linguistically diverse classroom and nation (Sleeter 2001; Ochoa 2007; Ladson-Billings 2005). However, the academic achievement of students of color and English Language Learners continues to decline in U.S. schools and continues to widen (Romo and Falbo 1996; Velez 2008). Current research on multicultural education practices indicates that most schools still stress Anglo conformity. While multicultural

education practices have grown, they appear to be poorly integrated in schools, with lessons limited to certain days of the year. Recognitions such as César Chávez Day and Black History Month often fall under the food, fun, faces, and festivities rubric instead of that of serious education (Washburn 1996; Flores 2015a). Education scholar Norma González and colleagues (2005) propose a cultural funds of knowledge frame for integrating multicultural practices in schools. The model suggests that teachers learn and understand the political, historical, and personal situations of their students because the household contains rich cultural and cognitive resources. Montecinos (1996) points out that teachers may not be able to transfer cultural experiences into meaningful pedagogical practices in schools, even if they share their students' cultural backgrounds. The obligation to learn, therefore, may not be confined to non-Latina/o educators. Bernal (2001) anticipates the work of González and colleagues by bringing the *mestiza consciousness*<sup>30</sup> of Chicana students to the forefront to demonstrate the pedagogies of the home they relied upon to supplement their cultural knowledge on their higher-educational journey. While scholarship on Latina teachers is emerging (Arce 2004; Ochoa 2007; Urrieta 2010; Flores 2011a), these studies focus on Latina teachers working with mostly white teachers in schools attended by Latino students and not with another racial/ethnic minority group. Increasing diversity in many regions, communities, and work-spaces makes the analysis I offer in this book important.

### Interracial Relations and Region

Tomas Almaguer (1994: 206) notes that racial hierarchies are "historically contingent and regionally specific, varying in meaning over time as well as within different regions of the country." For example, in early-nineteenth-century California, racial ethnic groups were racialized in unique ways to keep white racial privilege intact. Almaguer examines that "differential racialization" elevated the status positioning of whites while making distinctions between Mexicans, Asian Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans. While Native Americans were racialized as unassimilable, the Chinese as heathens, and the Japanese as a "Yellow Peril," Mexicans, especially those who were U.S. citizens and of a lighter phenotype, were regarded as almost white. Asian exclusion laws

rested on displacing negative controlling images (Collins 2000)—that is, hegemonic racial ideologies—associated with Blacks onto the Chinese. In an attempt to distance themselves from the Chinese, the Black press published anti-Chinese narratives in their newspapers so they could claim moral superiority to Chinese immigrants who were portrayed as alien, unsanitary, and sexually deviant (Jun 2006). The intermediate position of Latinas/os in California one hundred years ago continues to influence their status today.

Differential racialization of Latinas/os operates across the United States. Race relations in the South have largely consisted of Black/white political conflicts for more than a century, but Latino migration has shifted this picture. Laura López-Sanders (2009) and Angela Stuesse (2016) argue that Latina/o migrants are not entering society at the bottom social rungs but rather are inserted into an ambiguous space between Black and white; their positioning in society and in low-wage employment sectors is often shifting and situational. Other scholars, like Helen Marrow (2011), indicate that Blacks are actively excluding newly arrived Mexican immigrants through political ostracism, resulting in a Black/non-Black divide. Paula McClain and colleagues (2006) suggest that Latina/o immigrants hold negative stereotypical views of Blacks and feel more affinity with whites. Daniel Rochmes and Elmer Griffin (2006) argue that tensions between Latinos and Blacks are signs of an emergent white racial formation among Latinos. However, McClain and colleagues (2006) find that whites hold negative views of Latinas/os and that the presence of Latina/os in the South modulates Latinos’ negative attitudes toward Blacks. Differential racialization is therefore historically contingent and regional and can produce fluid racial hierarchies (Almaguer 1994). Others have also gone beyond the Black/white dichotomy to look at racialization processes of Latina/o, Black, and Asian populations as well as their conflicts and commonalities in educational spaces (Calderon 1995; Cheng 2014; Ochoa 2014; Saito 1997; Vaca 2004). Alberto Camarillo (2004) and Emily Straus (2009, 2014) examine issues arising in schools in Compton, California, where I did my research. They note that the influx of Latino immigrants has led to increased hostility between Blacks and Latinos as a result of curriculum changes and Blacks’ purported unwillingness to share power. Nicholas Vaca (2004) describes this kind of thinking as a “zero-sum” game that deems gains

made by one group a direct loss suffered by the other. Addressing the racial triangulation of Asian Americans, Kim (1999) argues that racialization does not occur in a vacuum but is mutually constitutive. Kim describes a hierarchy in which whites have ranked nonwhites along several dimensions. For example, she describes situations in which whites “valorize” Asian Americans to subordinate African Americans on cultural and/or racial grounds or construct Asian Americans as unassimilable through civic ostracism—“forever foreigners”—compared with whites and African Americans. In both cases the objective is to dominate both groups. These processes operate differently in relation to Latinas/os in schools. For example, Ochoa (2014) finds that the achievement gap in Asian and Latino schools leads to a series of negative outcomes for Latino high school students. More recently, Cheng (2014) suggests that in nonwhite multiracial communities, a regional racial formation process occurs, in which a concomitant racialization process of “Asian valorization and Mexican inferiority” emerges. These processes can also be gender-driven (Mindiola et al. 2002).

Undocumented immigration status complicates race relations between people of color (Clark-Ibanez 2015; González 2015; Abrego 2006). Most studies involving the implications of legal status address the ways in which it blocks the progress of the children of immigrants in U.S. schools, including those who have attended schools in America from an early age. While *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) allows undocumented students legal access to K–12 schools, California and Georgia, for example, have drastically different contexts of reception (Portes and Rumbaut 2006) for newer immigrant arrivals. The fact that high-performing Latina/o students cannot attend state college at in-state rates in places like Alabama if they lack documents has enormous ramifications (Abrego 2006).<sup>31</sup> However, research has focused on how legal status plays out in schools where the majority of the student body is white, rather than Black or Asian.

In *Latina Teachers*, I look at how the mechanisms between Latina professionals and their colleagues of various races operate in majority-minority spaces. To do this, I draw on and expand on the rich insights of existing literature to investigate culture and work across two underperforming multiracial schools. I demonstrate how the rise of Chicana/Latina<sup>32</sup> teachers and their use of culture in public schools is challenging

the schooling experience of Latino families. A lens that focuses closely on educational and work policies and culture, therefore, reveals a more complete picture of the lives of Latina teachers and their interactions with Latino families. Thus, this book examines schools as workplaces to illuminate how Latina teachers have implemented Latina/o cultural resources and how they have quietly reshaped the way in which schools are run and classrooms are taught. Latina teachers are transforming the ways in which Latino students and their immigrant parents receive, engage with, and become incorporated into American ways of life. Their efforts, however, meet different receptions in different contexts.

### The Teachers and Their Narratives

I draw on in-depth interviews with Latina teachers who work in two scholastically underperforming multiracial school districts in the Los Angeles metropolis, Compton Unified School District in Compton and the Garvey Unified District in Rosemead. I call the schools that employ them Compton Elementary (Compton) and Goodwill Elementary (Garvey) to protect the identity of participants. I rely on copious ethnographic fieldnotes as well as tell the nuanced stories of how the intersection of race, gender, class, and immigration shapes their workplace experiences in a feminized white-collar job. Most of these women are first-generation college students. Many are the sole possessor of a four-year college degree from a U.S. institution in their families. The voices of the daughters and granddaughters of immigrants fill the pages of this book. In all, I conducted fifty semi-structured interviews with teachers<sup>33</sup> of various racial/ethnic backgrounds in the two schools, twenty of whom were Latinas. While Latinas' point of view is the focal point of the book, I also include interviews with twenty-five non-Latina/o teachers. The ethnographic data includes observation of teachers of all ethnicities as well as interactions with teachers, students, and parents. This set of data both adds nuance to the portrayal of the organizational culture of these schools and accentuates Latinas' understandings of the racial and cultural dynamics at these schools.

Prior to beginning the interview, each teacher was asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire that queried them about their marital status, their parents' places of birth and occupations, their own place

of birth, city of residence, the highest level of schooling obtained, their credentialing institution, and whether they had the training designed to prepare them to teach diverse student populations.<sup>34</sup> Forty-nine of the teachers I interviewed were fully credentialed, meaning they had obtained their bachelors degrees and had completed all of their training at a credentialing institution in California. The single remaining teacher, who works at Compton Elementary, had been teaching for five years and needed to pass one last exam. As the teacher demographics table in appendix A shows, the Latinas I spoke with are a heterogeneous group differentiated by generation and ethnic origins.<sup>35</sup> Three were born in Latin America but migrated before the age of twelve (1.5-generation), eleven are the U.S.-born children of immigrants, four are the grandchildren of immigrants, and two are the great-grandchildren of immigrants. In addition to the thirteen with at least one parent born in Mexico, two had parents born in Central America, one the Caribbean, and two were multiracial (Mexican and white). There were significant differences between the two schools in that teachers who worked at Goodwill Elementary tended to come from families whose immigration occurred further in the past than those who worked at Compton, reflecting patterns of immigration in the two districts. Eighteen had parents who toiled in low-skilled, manual, and manufacturing jobs, typically "brown-collar jobs" (Catanzarite and Trimble 2008) such as welders, seamstresses, domestics, and agricultural workers. The exceptions, a Cuban/Salvadoran teacher and a fourth-generation teacher of Mexican origin, grew up in middle-class homes. The average annual income of the nineteen who supplied their teacher salary was \$62,947, much more than what most of their parents earned when they were growing up.

During interviews, some teachers cried. Most expressed zeal for their role as cultural guardians. Others evinced the effects of fighting off disillusionment. Structural changes in the profession and district policies that they believed undermined their classroom autonomy were taking a toll on most participants. Some spoke openly and candidly about their experiences, but others seemed initially afraid of speaking with me, fearing that I was a journalist looking for the latest scoop on teacher improprieties. Teachers in Compton seemed particularly nervous. They often asked me if I had principal approval to speak with them, and my assurances didn't prevent them from lowering their voices when the

principal was around. News articles blaming teachers for poor student outcomes and reports of teachers who lost their jobs for implementing particular teaching methods in Los Angeles affected the recruitment process as well as the interviews themselves. However, all ten of the teachers I approached at Goodwill Elementary and eight out of ten of the teachers I approached at Compton seemed eager to participate in a project conducted by a young Latina researcher who focused on their lives as college-educated and “professional” Latinas giving back to the community and Latino families. The two who initially hesitated ultimately agreed to speak with me; I think they were nervous only that I might be there to evaluate their preparedness for high-stakes testing, rather than that they were immune to the inducements that had made their colleagues enthusiastic. The patterns of reticence signaled the structural conditions that teachers face in their jobs and how that affected them at the micro level. The Methodological Appendix provides a complete account of the process I undertook to gain access and entry to the schools.

The schools that I selected are characterized as majority–minority, meaning that teachers, parents, and students are mostly people of color. Both the school districts they belong to are unincorporated,<sup>36</sup> meaning they fall outside of the larger Los Angeles Unified School District. I chose these schools for their specific demographic characteristics—one Latino/Black and one Latino/Asian. The analysis will reveal how local regional racial/ethnic hierarchies have shaped the experiences of study participants and the contrasting ways in which they influenced their workplace dynamics. These patterns reveal their collective understanding and construction of social phenomena, including how they perceive race relations in their own schools. At both schools, I used snowball sampling<sup>37</sup> to recruit participants. The interview instrument included open-ended questions on three broad central domains: pathways into the occupation, the implementation of Latina/o cultural resources in minority schools, and interracial relationships and interactions. Each interview lasted between one to three hours in total, and I met with most participants after school, before school, or during lunchtime. To protect instructed learning time, I sometimes interviewed teachers in intervals of thirty-minute blocks over several days during their lunch breaks. Some preferred to talk about their jobs away from the school.

They invited me into their own private homes or to locations such as coffee shops in their home neighborhoods.

## The Districts and Schools

While the interview data provides the bulk of my findings, I supplement the interviews with more than 450 hours of participant observation and focus group data that I gathered between August 2009 and September 2011. I split my time between the two schools over the course of two full academic school years. Site selection for this study was key, intentional, and meaningful to the fields of race/ethnic relations, gender and work, and education. In this book I follow the comparative methods of sociologists such as Christine Williams's (2006) study of race and gender workplace inequalities in two toy stores, one high-end and one big box outlet, and Rachel Sherman's (2007) comparative study of "class acts" at two urban luxury hotels. I purposely and strategically selected two communities in southern California that reflected the demographic breakdown necessary to complete this study: one Latino/Black and one Latino/Asian. I intentionally selected Latina teachers who work in two distinct predominantly immigrant school districts and communities because "more can perhaps be learned about the inter-group relations by studying the minority than by studying the dominant group" (Hughes 1994: 94). I used the California Department of Education's website's data feature to select potential research sites, narrowing down the schools I would visit by the sheer number of Latina, Black, and Asian teachers in each school.<sup>38</sup> This process led me to Compton Elementary and Goodwill Elementary because they offered the most even balance between Latina teachers on the one hand and Black/Asian teachers on the other. As historian Albert Camarillo (2004) writes, "Compton has become a cultural, ethnic, and racial borderland where Latinos and African Americans meet on a daily basis. For the first time in the twentieth century in Los Angeles, Black and brown people are living among one another in large numbers. Their interactions both in public and private spheres are shaping a new frontier in ethnic and race relations in California" (2004: 367). The conditions Camarillo described held true six years later when I began my research. Both Compton and Garvey had experienced considerable growth in their Latina teacher workforce. For example, in

TABLE 1.2. Racial/Ethnic Demographics of Teachers and Students

|                            | Latinas/os | Blacks | Asians | Whites |
|----------------------------|------------|--------|--------|--------|
| <b>Compton District</b>    |            |        |        |        |
| <i>Teachers</i>            | 24%        | 41%    | 1%     | 21.2%  |
| <i>Students</i>            | 77%        | 19.3%  | >1%    | >1%    |
| <b>Compton Elementary</b>  |            |        |        |        |
| <i>Teachers*</i>           | 30%        | 35%    | 4%     | 26%    |
| <i>Students</i>            | 78%        | 17%    | >1%    | 0%     |
| <b>Garvey District</b>     |            |        |        |        |
| <i>Teachers</i>            | 28%        | 3%     | 44%    | 23%    |
| <i>Students</i>            | 41%        | >1%    | 56%    | 1%     |
| <b>Goodwill Elementary</b> |            |        |        |        |
| <i>Teachers**</i>          | 45%        | 0%     | 41%    | 14%    |
| <i>Students</i>            | 45%        | >1%    | 52.5%  | >1%    |

\* Total: forty-eight teachers

\*\* Total: twenty-nine Teachers

1992, only 3.2 percent of Compton educators were Latina and in 2013 this number rose to 25 percent. Also, in 1992, 17 percent of Garvey teachers were Latina and in 2013 they made up 30.1 percent (Ed-Data, 2015).

Compton Elementary school, a K–5 school, serves close to 900 students. As table 1.2 reflects, in the 2010–11 academic school year, 78 percent of students at Compton Elementary were of Latino origin and 19.3 percent African American (Ed-Data 2015). Teachers at the school often referred to the student ratio as 80:20; a number of them mentioned the only Samoan family with children enrolled in the school. While some Latina teachers referred to the student population as “biracial,” others negated the idea that it was diverse because most students were Latino. More than 80 percent of the student body received free and reduced lunch and 85 percent were considered socioeconomically disadvantaged. Nearly three-fourths were considered English Language Learners.<sup>39</sup> The teacher racial/ethnic breakdown in the Compton District was 25 percent Latino, 41 percent Black, and 21.2 percent white (Ed-Data 2015).

Goodwill Elementary, located in Rosemead, serves roughly 600 students ranging from preschool to the sixth grade. Asians and Latinos, who both occupy the perceived racial middle (O’Brien 2008), live side by side in Rosemead, with many Latino families living in apartment

complexes. The split between the Asian and Latino origin population hovers around 50:50. When I began my fieldwork, 52.5 percent of the student population was of Asian background and 45 percent were Latino (Ed-Data 2015).<sup>40</sup> The district classified 55 percent of the students as English Language Learners, who speak Spanish, Cantonese, Vietnamese, and Mandarin.<sup>41</sup> The two African American students included a Latina teacher’s niece, who was Black and Mexican. The majority of the student body, 85 percent of children in the school, are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged. The distribution of teachers is Asian Americans, 39.5 percent; Latinos, 26.1 percent; African American, 2.9 percent; and whites, 27.2 percent (CDE 2009).<sup>42</sup> Most students who came in with English-language ability had second-generation Mexican parents from working-class backgrounds.

### The Data-Gathering Process

I immersed myself in the professional and home lives of the study participants, capturing daily interactions among teachers, students, and parents during school hours, at school events, and at off-campus activities. The data includes observations in a number of contexts, including faculty meetings, the teachers’ lounge, the front office, Parent-Teacher Association meetings, the parking lot, and all campus events. From August 2009, when the academic school year officially began, until September 2011, I spent four days a week when school was in session documenting the interactions at both of the research sites. I also at times came to the school grounds on Saturdays, when teachers would hold special fundraisers for their students. I actively volunteered for social events on and off school grounds and served as a translator for teachers during parent-teacher conferences. I completely immersed myself in the social worlds of the teachers at both schools.

I also shadowed four Latina teachers, two at Compton and two at Goodwill Elementary, to document their daily activities and routines. This means that I arrived to their schools at 7:00 in the morning, performed the duties of a teacher aide<sup>43</sup> in their classrooms, and followed them on all of their daily activities on campus until they left the school, which might be 3:00 p.m. or 8:00 p.m., meaning that they served an eleven-hour day. Some teachers allowed me to conduct interviews and

observations of their personal lives, away from the workplace and in their homes. A couple of teachers immediately treated me like a friend, inviting me home and trying to set me up on dates with their friends and family members, a point I address in the Methodological Appendix. One respondent invited me to a summer party at her home in an affluent neighborhood of Orange County, and yet another invited me to her *despedida de soltera* [bachelorette party].

Understanding the social worlds of Latinas would not be complete without inclusion of the families they served, day after day. In order to triangulate the data, I conducted a series of focus groups with multiple cohorts of parents in both schools. Recognizing that immigrant Latino parents had distinct experiences in schools from those of U.S.-born Latino families, I determined I would need three focus groups at each site—one in Spanish for immigrant parents, one in English for Latino parents born in the United States, and one in English for non-Latino parents. Across the six groups, twenty-eight parents participated.<sup>44</sup> Although there is a tendency by the U.S. Census Bureau and large-scale quantitative data sets to homogenize the Latino experience and subsume Latinos under one pan-ethnic label (Oboler 1995), the teachers in this study made reference to the distinctions between the daily lived realities of immigrant parents, many of whom were undocumented, and Latino parents who had grown up in the United States and therefore were fluent in English, insights that the focus group data bore out. This aspect of the research helped increase the validity of results by corroborating the Latina teachers’ perceptions of racial/ethnic tensions and illuminating the nuances in their points of view.

The schools included in this book are located in southern California, a region that mirrors demographic transformations in many U.S. locales. Both traditional immigrant gateways such as Texas and Arizona and new destinations like Mississippi, Tennessee, and Georgia are increasingly Latino. Thus the lived experiences of Latina teachers who participated in this study may provide valuable insight into emerging regional racial dynamics and their impact in locations where Latino students and their families come into daily contact with one another and with teachers in multiracial communities. In this book, I trace how Latinas “fell into” the profession, explore what happens when they learn that a large number of their students and parents are co-ethnics, and end with an

analysis of what will ultimately be the future of the teaching profession in the United States.

### Organization of the Book

*Latina Teachers* is divided into six chapters and a Conclusion. This first chapter has situated the study in the literature from various disciplines, drawing from theories about workplace inequities and educational disenfranchisement. It relies on classical and contemporary educational theories to detail the history of Latino youth in the U.S. educational system and in southern California schools. It connects cultural deficit and "subtractive schooling" theories to argue that these perspectives linger, influencing the measures Latina teachers take once in their workplaces. As I have explained, Latino ethnic culture is a powerful asset that Latina teachers bring to their workplaces, but structural forces work to limit them.

In chapter 2, I explain the forces that channel Latinas into the teaching profession. The changing opportunity structure of the economy, familial social networks, and social structural forces of racial, class, and gender inequalities create a situation in which gender and race refract working-class status, such that primary and secondary teaching has emerged as the top occupation drawing Latina college graduates. Many of these graduates are the first person in their families to graduate from college, and my research suggests a strong obligation on their part to help their families financially. These forces, at work in their families and universities, both constrain and enable their pathways into the teaching and influence the emergence of cultural guardianship once they are in the job. For this reason, I suggest that "class ceilings" help us understand how Latina college graduates navigate their educational and career choices with collectively informed agency and filial obligations to family members.

Chapter 3 elucidates my concept of Latina cultural guardians. I use this term to elucidate the range of sanctioned and unsanctioned strategies Latina teachers consciously deploy in order to protect and help co-ethnic children. Most Latina teachers describe "bumping" into the profession—meaning that they did not intend to pursue this career, and therefore they do not set out to become cultural guardians, but their interactions with poorer co-ethnic students and their families as well as

with their colleagues prompt them to adopt the role. Given their own marginalization over the life course, including negative childhood experiences in K–12 schools and beyond, they soon realize how valuable they can be to their working-class Latino students and those students’ families. Their educational experiences as Latinas also give them background knowledge that is of value in their role as cultural guardians. At the same time, Latinas who are multiracial (Mexican and white), or who grew up in English-speaking and/or in middle-class families, or are of later generations, can play the role as well as Latinas from working-class backgrounds, especially in multiracial environments, as they all experience exclusion in spaces that privilege whiteness. Cultural guardians therefore include Latinas who do not speak Spanish fluently, or at all.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 examine Latina teachers’ relationships and interactions with students, parents, and teachers of various racial/ethnic backgrounds at the two school sites. Chapter 4 provides a glimpse of how Latina teachers navigate their professional lives with mostly African American and Asian colleagues, students, and parents. The issue of macro-structural racial representations is of central importance to an analysis of race and work in different regions. I find that controlling images, which are hegemonic racial ideologies that permeate social institutions, have been applied to racial/ethnic minority groups and individuals, but much less so to school district space. I argue that controlling images of school district space—in this case the schools these Latina teachers work for—influence racial positioning between Latina teachers and non-Latinos because the context of reception (Portes and Rumbaut 2006) disadvantages Latino students, thus hastening their predisposition toward co-ethnics. Latina teachers working in Compton—a city consisting primarily of Latino immigrants—describe having been encouraged to leave for school districts and workplaces that are not associated with the “Black underclass” when they first took their jobs. Latina teachers in Rosemead, an ethnoburb consisting primarily of Latinos and Asians, on the other hand, enroll their children there and are able to access resources the more socioeconomically heterogeneous Asian population provides. Ultimately, Latina teachers perceive undocumented Latina/o immigrants to be below African Americans and Asian Americans in local racial hierarchies because of the political ostracism of the first group and the valorization of the second group. This process provides

the impetus for co-ethnic cultural guardianship to develop. The findings of this chapter also provide an explanation for the absence of guardianship directed toward Black or Asian students, and the racism that Latinos express toward non-Latinos.

Relying on the months of participant observation in the classrooms and parent–teacher meetings as well as through the focus groups, chapter 5 illustrates how Latina teachers are creatively exercising an alternative form of cultural capital I term *Chicana/Latina cultural pedagogies*. This is a central component of cultural guardianship. The focus of this chapter is twofold. First, I define and illustrate how Chicana/Latina cultural pedagogies are different from what we usually associate with Latino cultures, the symbolic forms that appear in schools occasionally. Although Latino culture is not monolithic, Chicana/Latina cultural pedagogies are a set of practices Latina teachers use to subvert normative workplace rules regarding culture in teaching. Chicana/Latina cultural pedagogies comprise immigrant narratives, communication codes, and alternative mathematical problem solving—cultural resources that many lower-status Latino children and their parents possess. Second, I elucidate how Latina cultural guardians faced resistance, especially at Compton Elementary, to their use of Latina/o cultural resources to facilitate Latina/o student progress. While they are informal in practice, I observed that Chicana/Latina cultural pedagogies were at times denigrated or challenged in specific ways by colleagues and administration.

Chapter 6 offers an analysis of how California’s structural policies regarding high-stakes testing and the academic labels applied to language-minority children fuel interracial conflicts between Latina teachers and their African American and Asian American co-workers. Chapter 6 demonstrates how cultural guardianships extend outside of the classroom as well. As cultural guardians within the classroom and beyond the school gates who rely on ethnic cultural resources to facilitate their students’ educational success, Latina teachers resist structural inequality. This includes biased standardized testing that racializes their students and drastically affects their students’ well-being in the long term. Thus, chapter 6 explains the workplace tensions that high-stakes state testing creates for Latina teachers and the ways in which they shield co-ethnic children from inequitable racialization processes. This process, however, comes at a cost to African American teachers and students.

The Conclusion ends the main part of the book by summarizing its main contributions. It describes whether Chicana/Latina cultural pedagogies can be learned and implemented by non-Latina teachers and ends with a discussion of the possible negative repercussions of Chicana/Latina cultural pedagogies in multiethnic metropolitan regions across the nation as Latino families settle in new immigrant gateways. It also provides policy implications for educational reform for students who attend schools in multiracial spaces.

This book is for anyone interested in how the U.S. school system might serve its burgeoning Latino population and for anyone interested in promoting teaching strategies that support the educational achievement of immigrant populations. It has particular insight for readers interested in the obstacles that Latina/os encounter in professional occupations in general and in occupations that serve Latinos, as the teachers in this study serve students and their families, in particular. It is also for those who already feel that they are a cultural guardian in their jobs—as I believe it will help such readers make sense of their experiences—including the obstacles they face and the triumphs they celebrate.