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2011

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Hamann, Edmund T., "The Anglo Politics of Latino Education: The Role of Immigration Scripts" (2011). *Faculty Publications: Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education*. 105.  
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## The Anglo Politics of Latino Education: The Role of Immigration Scripts

Edmund T. Hamann

In the 41 states without a substantial historic Latino population, large-scale schooling of Latinos is a comparatively new issue and the nature of that schooling is fundamentally shaped by how the more established (usually Anglo) populations understand this task. This chapter describes the understandings that led to, but also limited, one particularly comprehensive attempt in Georgia to respond to Latino newcomers. In that sense, this is a study of the cosmologies that can undergird the politics of schooling of Latinos. This chapter utilizes the concept of the *script*, or broadly shared storylines about how things are or should be, to illustrate how two such competing scripts were employed in Dalton, Georgia.

*Script* is a term used by Marcelo Suárez-Orozco (1998) in a chapter referenced extensively here. Depending on the research tradition, script, as used here, is synonymous with trope, meta-narrative, and cultural model. The core premise of script is that there are foundational storylines—like “rooting for the underdog” or “hero as a rebel victim”—that can be and are retold in myriad ways, but that resonate because of a simple and familiar core message. Moreover, those scripts, because of their familiarity and ubiquity, steer us away from more nuanced or less expected interpretations. In this chapter, the emphasis is on two intertwined scripts—the pro-immigration script and the anti-immigration script—that, though superficially quite different, preclude other ways of understanding local demographic change. These scripts, in turn, manifest themselves in political arguments about schooling and other institutional arenas where the presence of Latino newcomers is being negotiated.

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## THE GEORGIA PROJECT AS RESPONSE TO CHANGE

In March 1997, two Georgia school districts, a committee of leading citizens, and a private Mexican university formally began a novel binational partnership called the Georgia Project. At that time, Dalton, Georgia, was negotiating an unprecedented demographic change—that city's school district would become Georgia's first majority Latino district in 2001, even though the Latino enrollment was just 4% as recently as 1989. The larger surrounding Whitfield County district was also enrolling larger numbers of Latinos, but the proportional change was slower. Not surprisingly, such a dramatic and sudden demographic transformation was often disorienting to newcomers and long-established residents alike (Súarez-Orozco, 2003).

The Georgia Project was the most tangible local educational response to this demographic transformation; It became a reflection of, as well as a template through which, this disorientation was negotiated and definitions of community and responsibility to newcomers were contested. As such, considering the economic, social, political, and ideological dynamics that surrounded the Georgia Project's creation—including how it informed other issues from workplace organization to housing—sheds insight more generally into the politics of Latino education, particularly as negotiated in the “new Latino diaspora” in areas outside traditional Latino enclaves in the Southwest, California, and metro Chicago and New York (Hamann & Harklau, 2009; Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002).

In 2008, 11 years after it began, the Georgia Project has largely withered away, although the Latino presence in northwest Georgia had become both permanent and substantial. Latino students were graduating from high schools in record numbers, but unprecedented numbers were also dropping out and scoring much lower on state mandated tests than their non-Latino peers. At 70.9%, the official Hispanic graduation rate was also lower than any other group (Georgia Public Education Report Card, 2007–2008), although it exceeded Georgia's statewide average Hispanic graduation rate of 65.5%. To use the phrasing of Gitlin, Buendía, Crosland, & Doumbia (2003), Latinos continue to be both “welcome” and “unwelcome.”

To explore the ways that the Anglo population made sense of the newcomers as the demographic transition was at its swiftest 11 years earlier, when the binational partnership was launched, helps to explain why Dalton and surrounding Whitfield County have unevenly supported the school success and acculturation of Latino newcomers. Perhaps it will also help explain why the unorthodox Georgia Project was largely gone by 2008, although its legacy of teacher training, Latino scholarship recipients, and even marriages between visiting Mexican instructors and Anglo locals continues.

This chapter examines the *imagining* (Anderson, 1991; Chavez, 1994) of Latino immigrant newcomers by local Anglos in Dalton in the mid-1990s, as manifest in the editorials and letters to the editor in the local newspaper, in the advocacy efforts of the Georgia Project's initiators, and in patterns of employment and social organization that marked Dalton at that time. Imagining in this instance literally references the mental constructs or models that community members deployed to think about Latino newcomers. It was this imagining that shaped how the Georgia Project was constructed, launched, adapted, and ultimately limited. It was also this imagining that linked understandings from one sphere, the economic—to another—the educational. Finally, this imagining set up Latinos to be, as Foucault (1977) would have put it, “objects of information, but [almost] never subjects of communication” (p. 200).

In Dalton, as elsewhere, Anglos' conceptualizations of Latinos were the product of existing and sometimes discrepant and unreconciled assumptions about self, place, community, and fairness. Those abstractions formed the lenses through which Anglos tried to make sense of encounters with Latinos in the workplace, at school, and in a few other public settings. Anglo conceptualizations also were the product of their vicarious experiences with Latinos through representations in the media and in the daily talk of their fellow Anglo community members. See Santa Ana (2002) for a particularly compelling explanation regarding media representations of Latinos that shape how they are conceptualized in the public sphere and how, in turn, those conceptualizations become salient to what Latinos must navigate/encounter. See Pollock (2004) for a powerful analysis of the dilemmas Americans encounter when they do (and do not) talk about race, particularly as pertaining to schooling and educational advancement.

Reflecting the tension that is embedded in schooling in a capitalist society—where the private good of having schooling make one more qualified than a peer coexists with the public good of all doing well (Labaree, 1997)—the Georgia Project was supposed to remedy and *not remedy* an unequal social order that imperiled social cohesion. On the one hand, the ongoing viability or at least prosperity of many local employers depended on a low-wage, largely Latino newcomer labor force. Yet permanent or egregious exploitation risked tearing the already fragile social fabric. The Georgia Project needed to exemplify a fair and compassionate response to newcomers, but practicality dictated that Dalton and Whitfield County still “needed” the social stratification that assured an abundant supply of low-wage workers and the continuation of the traditional community order. The play of immigration scripts enabled this prospect because the paternalism and more subtle racism of Suárez-Orozco's (1998) pro-immigration script was obscured by the overt racism of the anti-immigration script.

## THE PRO-IMMIGRATION / ANTI-IMMIGRATION SCRIPT DUALISM

The pro-immigration script casts immigrants as familial, hard working, religious, loyal, and willing to take jobs that others will not. It derives much of its appeal from its nostalgic reiteration of the important assimilationist storyline that America is a land of opportunity—a land where hard work, even in trying circumstances, can lead to success—and thus, that America is essentially fair. In a time of anxiety and dislocation, such a familiar script is comforting. Immigration validates and rejuvenates America, but per the script's understanding, it only imagines America within preexisting terms of what it means to be a good American.

Given the appeal of this script, those who espouse it do not easily tolerate deviations from it. Any newcomer resisting language loss or characterizing employment conditions as less than fair violates the script. The pro-immigration script may seem pro-immigrant, but it is colonialist in dismissing the value of anything newcomers might want to retain that is not “American.” It actually offers only a confining range of possible immigrant actions and little support for immigrants who contest what Spener (1988) calls the “ambiguous social contract” actually available in this stratified society:

The United States offers immigrants an ambiguous social contract. It reads, more or less, as follows: “In order to participate in a non-marginal way in the U.S. economy, you must become an American by giving up your loyalty to your home country and language, and you must learn the language of the American elite. In order to become an American, you must meet certain standards. This country is in the process of raising its standards because, unfortunately, there are already too many Americans. If you aren't allowed to become an American, there's still plenty of room for you in this country—at the bottom.” (pp. 145–146)

Although the pro-immigration script's nostalgic appeal is broad, as is its gloss of inclusiveness, those who gain directly from the presence of newcomer laborers are those who most willingly embrace it. If the employment hierarchy can be equated to a pyramid, a proposition supported by segmented labor market theory (Griffith, 1995), anyone in a position above those that are occupied by newcomer laborers benefits from the expansion of the employment base below them. This means that most people in management, as well as others in the same class, gain from and articulate this script. For example, a carpet company CEO who crucially linked Dalton leaders with business and university partners in Mexico on repeated occasions (thereby helping originate the Georgia Project), emphasized that Dalton's growing Latino presence was “an opportunity, not a problem.”

In contrast, Suárez-Orozco's (1998) "anti-immigration script" views the same demographic change as threat. In this script, immigrants are illegal aliens, welfare cheats, criminals, and job stealers. Notably, the contradiction between alleged government dependency and stealing jobs is unexplored. The anti-immigration script closely matched the virulently anti-immigrant content of the 1995 letters to the editor that led Dalton's daily newspaper to declare a temporary moratorium on publishing letters about immigration and Latinos. It also describes arguments made by the protesters outside a 1997 city council meeting who complained about a \$750,000 municipal allocation for the Georgia Project.

Because the two scripts vehemently contradict each other, even as both ignore the actual voices of newcomers, those who espouse the different scripts tend to talk past each other, often heatedly. This miscommunication leaves the anxiety untouched, but enables each side to dismiss opposing viewpoints and rationales. Because the more powerful community members typically champion the pro-immigration script, while the less powerful community members generally promote the anti-immigration script, the rejection of the anti-immigrant script and its espousers becomes conflated with the play of hegemonic reproduction. This was the case in Dalton.

According to Suárez-Orozco's (1998) model, when their script is dismissed, those articulating anti-immigrant views feel more disempowered, more anxious, and, as a result, even more anti-immigrant. Thus, the likelihood of articulating the anti-immigrant script in a still more unacceptable fashion only increases. Plaut (1983) notes a longstanding dynamic in Appalachia where communitarian voices of marginal locals are first ignored and then, as the expressions of disenchantment take on less appropriate forms, their hostility increasingly becomes a rationale for their exclusion.

Natives use both scripts for formal and informal debates about how new immigrants should be treated and what social station they should be offered by the host society. Necessarily tied to such debates is the social construction of the class-related meanings of being native and being Anglo, or white (Gibson, 1996). These class-related meanings are the product of the economic and cultural-historical dynamics in play in the community. To understand those meanings and how they related to the use of the immigration scripts merits a brief description of Dalton's intertwined transformations.

## **DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSFORMATION**

Dalton and Whitfield's school enrollment changes in the 1990s and early 2000s were partially based on white flight to private schools and less demographically changing nearby districts, but it reflected more the enrollment of 3,000 Latino newcomers in the schools and the arrival of 20,000 or more

Latinos into the larger community. In 1995, when the pro-immigration and anti-immigration scripts first became broadly visible in local newspaper accounts, Dalton's school enrollment of Latinos had grown by a multiple of seven from 1989 and constituted more than a quarter of enrollment. In turn, Latinos, mainly of Mexican descent, made up nearly all of the newcomer population, so reaction to newcomers and reaction to Latinos were nearly synonymous.

The business and civic elite shaped much of the imagining of the Latino *other* in this community; this elite class was responsible for the hiring practices at local carpet and poultry facilities that brought thousands of Latino workers and their families to Dalton and surrounding Whitfield County. They also instigated the novel Georgia Project, which formally partnered the local schools with researchers at a private university in Mexico for the purposes of:

1. bringing bilingual teachers from Mexico to Dalton
2. sending Dalton teachers for summer training in Mexico
3. revising the district's version of Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum to accommodate bilingual instruction, and
4. initiating a series of community studies and Latino leadership development seminars  
(Hamann, 1999a, 1999b, 2002, 2003, 2004).

Mexican university partners created about three fourths of this design, however. Therefore, while the Georgia Project became a key template for Anglo thinking about the school and community *accommodations* required by Dalton's and Whitfield County's new demography, its most powerful champions were not necessarily willing or capable of defending all of its design elements. In the public sphere, the Mexican project partners' "third way" of more respectful inclusion was not as compelling as the pro-immigration script to Dalton's leaders.

The use of the pro- and anti-immigration scripts dominated the public sphere and private sense-making of long-time community stakeholders, but concerns about how to negotiate demographic change in schools did not mainly drive the use of these scripts. Rather, the scripts were used for talking about community and economic change more generally. Thus, understanding the scripts requires the understanding of other co-existing dynamics that generated the need for the scripts' deployment.

Local manifestations of three dynamics—reducing labor costs by expanding the labor supply, corporate externalizing indirect costs, and creating/maintaining labor market segmentation—triggered the arrival of newcomers into Dalton, assignment of their social location, and the related need for public scripts to make sense of them. In the 1990s Dalton's major employers

were carpet factories and a poultry processing plant; in both instances, these were mature industries (i.e., industries that were not growing quickly), so increased profitability depended on cutting costs. One way to do this was to expand the potential labor supply and thereby put downward pressure on wages. Latinos, whose local presence had been slowly growing since a Texas dam construction company had first brought Latino laborers to the area in the 1970s, were a key target population for such expansion, in part because their extensive familial ties could be tapped to recruit more workers. Also, a successful dropout prevention consent decree in the late 1980s, through which local employers agreed not to hire those under 18 who lacked a high school diploma during school hours, meant that other (largely non-Latino) sources of prospective low-wage labor were declining.

Still, recruiting a new laborer population needs to be cheaper than not doing so. Recruiting businesses have to avoid indirect costs related to the recruitment and retention of this new labor supply. Businesses that externalize costs do not pay for new or changed costs of housing, health care, language instruction, skills training, and other human services (Hackenberg, 1995). From a profit standpoint, companies that externalize costs gain if others carry their indirect costs (Griffith, 1993). Of course, others (e.g., taxpayers) can resent extra costs that they have to bear; in order to reduce community resentment, the creator of these costs may explain that the costs are worthwhile, are preferable to other options (like relocating the business away from the area), and/or are mitigated by other actions that the cost creator has undertaken. The Georgia Project, championed by local employers, could be (and was) framed as proof of mitigating the social consequences of their employment strategies.

It is important to note that the externalization of indirect costs is only one source of resentment. The community can also resent the downward pressure on wages caused by expanding the labor supply, as well as the disorienting sense that one's home and community are changing. As Suárez-Orozco (1998) summarizes: "Anti-immigrant sentiment—including the jealous rage that 'illegals are getting benefits instead of citizens like my friend'—is intertwined with an unsettling sense of panic in witnessing the metamorphosis of 'home' into a world dominated by sinister aliens" (pp. 296–297). One way this tension is relieved is through the emergence of workplace segmentation and segmentation in other social domains.

In segmented labor markets, laborers, managers, and others internalize ideas regarding job-status hierarchies and corresponding wage differentials, and workers seek to protect the relative advantage of their position and avoid questioning the larger organization altogether. For these to be stable, there need to be palatable ideological rationalizations for differing compensation and deflections of challenges to the unequal social structure. Differences in race, ethnicity, language, gender, and school experience often



become grounds for such differentiation (Griffith, 1995). But this differentiation needs to feel natural, inevitable, or impermanent, or it violates the American concern with fairness. The task of the scripts is to rationalize the status quo while relieving pressure related to the unfairness of that status quo by 1. promising how existing problems will be remedied or 2. explaining why a complaining party's complaint deserves to be ignored or dismissed.

In 1997, Dalton's local newspaper, *The Daily Citizen-News*, (1997a) acknowledged the public complaints about externalization of costs:

[The] former superintendent of Dalton Public Schools said more than once to our reporters that business and industry here must get more involved with solving community problems related to the rapid growth of the Hispanic community . . . After all, our Hispanic neighbors are here because local businesses gave them jobs . . . Business leaders here must accept some responsibility beyond handing out a regular paycheck. (p. 4A)

But the newspaper raised this issue to praise local businesses for organizing the new Georgia Project and, indirectly, to counter the former superintendent's claim. According to the newspaper's editorial board, the Georgia Project's existence refuted the criticism that businesses were not meeting their community responsibilities.

## CONNECTING THE SCRIPTS TO LOCAL POLITICS

According to a school district contact, the influx of Latinos in the 1990s was displacing low-income whites and blacks from Dalton's East Side, where the bulk of the city's lower-cost housing was located. According to the same source, Latinos were gaining a reputation among local landlords for being more prompt with rent payments and better at keeping up properties than other types of tenants. A local landlord subsequently confirmed this sentiment.

The dynamic described by the school district informant and the landlord depicts physical ramifications of the pro-immigration script—newcomers were better than or preferable to others in their class (a stance that surely stoked the anti-immigration script.) This script helped structure the local social order along ethnic/racial lines, and it helped shape the related ideational lenses through which members of different ethnic/racial groups viewed one another.

Echoing the landlords, other leading Anglo voices in Dalton also cast local Latinos in preferable terms in comparison to low-income portions of the more established population. Repeating Suárez-Orozco's (1998) impossibly

virtuous pro-immigration script, a December 1996 editorial that endorsed the Georgia Project in *The Daily Citizen-News* (1996), claimed, “For too long Dalton and Whitfield County have walked by the growing Latino community, rarely offering substantial help” (p. 4A). They seemed unaware that they had differentiated Latinos from the named city and county population. The editorial writers identified Latinos as “hardworking,” “filling some of the toughest manual labor jobs around,” and “an example of intensive familial ties” (p. 4A). Having praised local Latinos, the editorial writers thus exempted themselves from the following charge that was aimed at articulators of the anti-immigration script and was also in the editorial: “Meanwhile [Latinos] have been virtually ignored—even hated by some—simply because of their presence” (p. 4A).

If Latinos were the primary group referred to in the editorial, a shadow referent, an unnamed group or people were therefore *not* hardworking, *not* willing to take on the tough manual labor jobs available, and *not* exemplars of intensive familial loyalty. If local Latinos were meritorious because of their family and work habits, as per the pro-immigration script, those without those virtues were not deserving of support or sympathy. The closest the editorial came to mentioning the shadow referent was with the vague pronoun “some” in the phrase “even hated by some.”

A brief retelling of local history, particularly as it involves the local newspaper, clarifies to whom “some” referred. In 1995, before anyone had conceived of the Georgia Project, several citizens began a stream of letters to the editor questioning Dalton’s changing demographic face. The author of one early letter (Letters to the Editor, 1995) sarcastically wrote:

Am I to understand that people in our community are upset Dalton has become a haven for uninvited guests? . . . Just because the crime rate in Dalton has risen considerably in the past couple of years. Just because the local law enforcement is overburdened by a whole new (to them) criminal subculture. Just because native Daltonians prefer to retain their own language—poor English or not—is no reason to be uncivil to guests. (p. 4A)

Several components of this letter merit highlighting: Latinos were labeled as a criminal subculture, Latinos were characterized as guests, and Latinos were labeled as uninvited, hinting at a distinction among long-time Dalton residents between those who “invited” Latinos (by employing them) and those who did not. With a leap of logic, the author implied that the presence of Latinos had imperiled the retention of English by English speakers. Finally, the author made claims about her own socioeconomic status and group membership with the self-denigrating reference to “poor English.” Though, as the letter itself shows, the author’s English was fine, she distinguished herself from the presumably more educated speakers of English

who perhaps were not threatened by the Latino influx. Her loyalty was with native-born, Daltonians, who might not be so scholastically accomplished, but who maintained a right to express their concerns about changes in their community.

In contrast, in 1998, a carpet industry executive mentioned the same rise in Whitfield County's crime rate mentioned in the above quoted anti-immigrant letter, but he rationalized its increase as related to a disproportionate Latino citation and arrest rate for DUIs (Driving Under the Influence). He went on to explain that this was the simple product of newcomer Latinos lacking awareness of local rules regarding alcohol use. The same executive also claimed that, because of Latinos' relative poverty, they lacked sufficient private space in which to be festive without running afoul of the law. Neither the defender of "poor English" nor the carpet executive suggested that the changing arrest rate could be a product of an entirely non-Latino police force targeting the newcomers for closer scrutiny or an inchoate complaint by some Latinos about their "welcome."

By the autumn of 1995, a year before the Georgia Project was first proposed, the trickle of anti-immigrant letters-to-the-editor had become a torrent. Claims like "We're losing control of our borders" from a letter in May became increasingly common. In October, shortly after an Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) raid at a local carpet mill had led to the arrest of several hundred undocumented workers (Rehyansky, 1995a, 1995b), the letters became especially virulent. *The Daily Citizen-News* responded by declaring a temporary moratorium on anti-immigrant and anti-Latino letters to the editor. Though the local paper has long been identified with advocating local business leaders' points of view (Kelley, 1996) and for rebuffing the more nativist or reactionary perspectives, the letter-to-the-editor moratorium blocked access to one of the few public forums through which populist doubt about immigration could be expressed.

The point here is not to defend a racist discourse, which is what the letters to the editor often were. Rather, what needs highlighting are the divergent responses that actions like the newspaper's moratorium and the INS raids precipitated. As noted above, the less educated, predominantly white, working class had serious doubts about how immigration was changing their community, but these residents' resistant voices were formally silenced. In the meantime, many of the civic-minded elite were concerned about the increasingly obvious fracture in their community and the social ferment that might become directed at their businesses. The implicit priorities of the civic-minded elite included repairing the social fabric and thus, indirectly, reiterating the rationale for a social order that benefited them. Repressing the anti-immigration script was an incomplete gesture. They needed to proactively demonstrate their responsiveness to immigration-related community concerns. The Georgia Project did this dramatically.

## LOCATING THE GEORGIA PROJECT IN PUBLIC DIALOGUES

In the public discourse, neither the anti-immigration nor the pro-immigration scripts provided a rationale for community transformation, for the ready acceptance of immigrants as they were, or for the rearticulation of school goals to prepare transnational students to negotiate the multiple social and economic environments that they might encounter as children and later as adults. The Georgia Project's original compact—authored mainly by Mexican partners—promised such changes, but the pro-immigration script, the anti-immigration script, and their shared *de facto* silencing of Latino newcomer voices together created a simplified ideological landscape in which the transformative prospect of the project was emasculated.

In late 1996 and early 1997, concurrent with visits by Dalton leaders to Mexico and by Mexican project partners to Georgia, the pro-business local newspaper, *The Daily Citizen-News*, published several articles favorably describing the promise of the Georgia Project (e.g., Hamilton 1996a, 1996b, 1997a, 1997b). These articles were organized to lay a favorable foundation for popular acceptance of the project. As they were published, the most important Dalton instigator of the Georgia Project was busily sending descriptions of the project and bids for its support to several of the state's most powerful political and educational leaders.

Both the articles and the instigator's letters contrasted markedly with the anti-immigration sentiment noted in the last section, but they, too, conveyed a simplified, overly homogenized rendering of the growing local Latino population and, in particular, of the Latino newcomer students who were to be main targets of the Georgia Project's programs. While this portrayal was expedient for the purpose of gathering support from the Anglo community, it did not actually convey a sense of what the project needed to accomplish if it was to accomplish more than what was promised by the pro-immigration script (i.e., the welcome of the uncomplaining to menial jobs).

The first newspaper article (Hamilton, 1996a) was published the day local project leaders left for their first visit to Mexico for the first face-to-face contact with prospective Mexican partners. The article began with the question, "How do you teach someone you cannot communicate with?" and the answer: "You can't." Titled "Educators seek ways to reach Hispanics," the article identified the problem of Latinos in Dalton schools as a communication problem and presented the project as a solution to the problem. The article described the project one-dimensionally (referring only to the prospect of bilingual Mexican teachers coming to Dalton), for the first time publishing the Georgia Project's "creation story," a rationale for why the project was initiated.

The creation story (Hamilton, 1996a) went as follows: One day, the project's founding attorney listened to his exasperated daughter describe

the great difficulty she and her colleagues faced as *parapros* (paraprofessionals) at a pre- through grade two elementary school on the poorer and more Latino side of town. She and her colleagues were all monolingual English speakers, while many of their students and their students' parents were monolingual Spanish speakers. According to the daughter, the two sides could not communicate. Feeling compelled to try to remedy this mismatch, but not immediately sure how to proceed, the attorney visited the school where his daughter worked. Disconcerted by what he observed, he mentioned his daughter's complaint to the CEO of one of Dalton's largest carpet manufacturers. That CEO then contacted the head of one of his company's Mexican trading partners. That contact, who was also a lead supporter of a private Mexican university, telephoned that university's rector. Within a short time, a *parapro*'s complaint was transformed into a binational discussion about how a Mexican university might help the public schools in Georgia.

This creation story was repeated frequently and was central to selling the Georgia Project to both skeptical and enthusiastic local Anglos. While the creation story was readily intelligible to its target audience and effective in gaining their support, it simplified the challenge facing the school and community and, in the security of its problem diagnosis, it precluded any need to consult with any of Dalton's Latino newcomers. During the planning for the first year of the project's enactment, only one local Latino was even intermittently involved with its coordination. Apart from this limited exception, the project was fully the product of local Anglo business leaders, Anglo school district leaders, and Mexican university officials.

The second December 1996 newspaper article (Hamilton, 1996b) promoting the proposed Georgia Project was also a front-page piece. It was printed shortly after the Dalton contingent returned from their visit to the Mexican university, and was crucially different from the first. The second article outlined four proposed components of the project (expanding on the original conception of recruiting Mexican teachers for Dalton schools). At the request of the Mexico-based partners, summer training in Mexico for Dalton educators, a bilingual education-oriented curriculum overhaul, and a community research component were added to the project's action plan. Despite the increase in the number of proposed components, the second article did not change its straightforward depiction of Dalton's challenge as the remedy for the communication gap between newcomers and teachers at the public schools.

Within a week, a third article, an editorial, celebrated the Georgia Project's initiator as "Citizen of the Week" ("Mitchell Leads Effort to Help Educate Hispanic Students," 1996, p. 4A). Perhaps seeking a metaphor that would be broadly appealing at Christmastime, the article compared him to the Good Samaritan described by Jesus in the New Testament. The initiator

was lending a helping hand while other locals remained silent. The moral of the Bible story is that those who lend a helping hand are blessed and holy, while the silent—those who do not offer a helping hand—are not so virtuous. It is worth remembering that the man helped by the Samaritan in the Bible had been robbed and beaten and was a stranger to the Samaritan. Per the analogy, Latinos in Dalton were abused, suffering, and needy strangers.

The day after Christmas 1996, the project's instigator penned a letter describing the proposed Georgia Project to the newly appointed Chairman of the State Board of Education. This letter emphasized how he and the new chairman were personally connected (i.e., college fraternity ties, shared friends, and acquaintances). It conveyed his enthusiasm for the nascent project and it suggested the need to account for Dalton's changing demography. It did not mention the project's proposed four-component structure, however. Rather, it reduced the project again to a program to remedy the communication gap, and suggested that recruiting Mexican instructors for Dalton classrooms would help solve the problem.

The daily newspaper printed another flurry of favorable articles at the end of January 1997 during the 4-day visit of the Mexican university representatives. Headlines for those articles include: "Communication revolution arrives in Dalton today," (Hamilton, 1997a), "Visiting professors shocked by size of communication problem," (Hamilton, 1997b), and "Business involvement aids binational partnership," (*The Daily Citizen-News*, 1997, p. 4A). Reiterating that Latino students and Anglo teachers in Dalton faced a communication gap and that the Georgia Project would bridge that gap, thus solving Latino students' problems, the "Visiting Professors Shocked" story began with a description of a lengthy conversation (presumably in Spanish) between one of the Mexican visitors and a young Latino student. The student's local teacher was reportedly shocked by the exchange because she had never seen the girl particularly expressive. According to the article, the teacher had previously worried that the girl had a speech or learning problem. The article's intended conclusions were easy to draw. If only somebody could communicate with these Spanish-speaking students, their talents could be cultivated.

These articles did not note obstacles to Latino students' achievement such as their parents' economic vulnerability, the unfamiliarity of the curriculum, or their families' uncertain ties to Dalton. Nor did the articles critically consider how the macrodynamics of businesses' externalization of indirect costs, the segmentation of labor markets, the ethnic typing of jobs, or the national and local constructions of Latino newcomers in the media might also have been impediments to Dalton Latino students' achievement. Absent a public discourse describing the intertwined factors that can inhibit Latino newcomers' school success, the intentional complexity of the project's four-component design lacked public rationale. Still, the project was

officially inaugurated in March 1997 as a four-component effort. Major municipal funding ostensibly to support all four components was obtained a month later,<sup>1</sup> although the Dalton school district's willingness to spend funds and to develop programs in each of the areas for which funding had been obtained later proved problematic.

By 1999, the Georgia Project was a significant and sometimes celebrated local presence that had gained national attention from the *Washington Post*, *Time*, the *San Jose Mercury-News*, Scripps-Howard News Service, National Public Radio, and more. The Director of the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA) spoke favorably at length about Dalton in her congressional address supporting the reauthorization of Title VII funding.

Yet within Dalton, the Georgia Project was on the brink of disappearing, with most of its accomplishments more ephemeral than transformative. With the exception of a self-sustaining Latino community leadership initiative, most portions of the three components initiated at the request of the Mexican partners (the bilingual curriculum adjustment, the summer institute in Mexico, and the community research initiative), were frozen or withering (and soon to end). Only the component originally proposed by Dalton leaders (the effort to bring Mexican instructors into Dalton classrooms) was thriving, and even it was vulnerable to the pending end of various funding allocations. In fact, the next superintendent terminated local funding for the program, although one component continued operating using federal funds for a few more years.

### **MAKING SENSE OF THE GEORGIA PROJECT'S RAPID RISE AND FALL**

Figuring out why so much of the Georgia Project's promise was not realized requires looking back at two crucial 1997 partnership-related events and; more generally, considering the role of culture in framing the politics of Latino education, in this case, shaping the persistent Anglo conceptualizations of local Latino roles, needs, and entitlements.

In March 1997, the Georgia Project was formally inaugurated at a ceremony at Dalton High School (Hamilton, 1997c). The ceremony was attended by several Dalton carpet executives, the project's initiating attorney, Dalton and Whitfield County school district officials, the rector of the Mexican university, the Mexican industrialist who had facilitated the binational link, the Mexican Consul General from Atlanta, and several scholars from the Mexican university. Despite the large official contingent, however, the high school auditorium was largely empty. No students, no parents, no high school administrators, and no teachers were present. The start of the

Georgia Project was not cause to interrupt anyone's school day. The three-page accord signed that day outlined all four proposed components; it alluded to ideals like "globally competitive education for all learners" and "adult biliteracy," and it promised involvement not just of educators, but also workplaces, parents, and the University of Georgia System. Few heard this comprehensive vision, however, and fewer proved willing to adhere to it.

One month later, two challenges to the Georgia Project were presented at a City Council meeting that ultimately approved \$750,000 for the project. The first challenge was the previously noted angry chorus of protesters assembled outside city hall. One of the protesters held a sign that read, "Would the last person out of [Whitfield] County please bring the flag." Given Whitfield County's fast growing population, the sign's argument, a perfect articulation of the anti-immigration script, was as absurd as it was angry. Not surprisingly, those inside the meeting ignored the protesters. Later the newspaper dismissed the protesters as offensive racists ("Georgia Project's Aim is to Teach English," 1997).

The second challenge superficially seemed even less serious than the first one, but it compelled a public redefinition of the Georgia Project in such narrow terms that, in retrospect, its influence demands recognition. The second challenge was the circulation of a *Readers Digest* article by Linda Chavez (1995), a conservative critic of bilingual education, to a city councilman (and subsequently to the whole city council). The article included a strong attack against bilingual education and all who advocate for it. The article further asserted that Latinos needed to be taught English, positing the flawed argument that those promoting bilingual education did not want Latinos to learn English and reducing the broad academic goals of bilingual education to a simplified concern with language acquisition rather than academic achievement in all subject areas. While this article does not review bilingual education research, readers should note that many researchers have contradicted Chavez's claims (e.g., Thomas & Collier, 1997; Cummins, 1996; and Ramirez, cited in Cazden, 1992). Because the Georgia Project proposed a bilingual education-tied curricular overhaul, the article encompassed a criticism of at least a portion of the project.

The project's instigator dismissed Chavez' argument in a reply to the councilman. He compared its validity to the pseudo-science claims that blacks were less intelligent than whites. Nonetheless, he and other local leaders of the Georgia Project responded to the Chavez challenge by clarifying that the project's primary intent was to teach Latino children English, a story line that was dutifully echoed in an editorial in the local newspaper ("Georgia Project's Aim is to Teach English," 1997). As soon as this argument was put forth, the rationales for enacting the portions of the Georgia Project that could not be directly related to this language education task were diminished.



To understand how such a redefinition of task could occur (and how the redefinition was not recognized as a redefinition) requires returning attention to Dalton Anglos' understanding of Latinos and their needs. With the exception of the project's instigating attorney who, at times, articulated a nuanced understanding of the complexity of Latino community circumstances in Dalton, local proponents of the project saw the challenges before them through the lens of Suárez-Orozco's (1998) pro-immigration script. The simplistic vision of assimilation embedded in this script supported the original rationale for the project—Latino newcomers were deserving people and as such deserved to be able to be communicated with. In the short term, bringing in bilingual educators from Mexico would remedy this communication problem; in the long-term, assimilation would prevail; per Grey (1991), assimilation here is presumed to be unilateral—i.e., Latino newcomers changing to become more “mainstream.”

This simplistic vision prevented its adherents from identifying any problem with a language-education-only program and inhibited the project from taking any kind of political stance in relation to ethnic segmentation in the workplace and other issues. Nor did project advocates see that Latino newcomers confronted obstacles that were more complex than simply those associated with language skills. Thus, the pro-immigration script did not require tending to complicated circumstances and realistic needs, nor did it compel its adherents to defend the Georgia Project's full action plan.

Sarason (1990) noted that transformative school reform efforts require both inclusion of the larger community and attention to power issues. At first glance, the Georgia Project attended to both of those dynamics, as it involved the business community and used its power to push for school change. The exercise of the business community's power did not provide a sufficiently coherent and sophisticated problem diagnosis, however; it did not clarify what accommodations local Latinos most needed, nor did it clarify how non-Latinos could redefine community or school tasks. In the absence of a local, Anglo-recognized script that supported the Georgia Project's comprehensive vision, the prevailing, more simplistic, pro-immigration and anti-immigration scripts had free play in the community; this interplay excluded Latino representation and obscured the embedded the simplifications in each script.

McQuillan (1998) noted that, while culture is routinely contested, it is also resilient, equivalent to a kind of default setting for expectations. Culture puts parameters on what seems possible and supports the hierarchies that group members agree are normal and appropriate. In the absence of a clear framework to act otherwise, most of the Georgia Project's Dalton-based supporters were limited in imagining its transformative potential, even though on paper they had accepted a transformative four-component plan.

## NOTE

1. Full disclosure: my entree to Dalton was as a grant writer hired to draft a \$500,000 Title VII Systemwide Bilingual Education federal proposal that focused on the Georgia Project. That grant was funded in July 1997. Nonetheless, both when I was writing that grant and afterward, my role as a researcher studying the Georgia Project was always overt (and formally approved by Dalton Public School's Superintendent).

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