

Challenging Racist Nativist Framing: Acknowledging the Community Cultural Wealth of Undocumented Chicana College Students to Reframe the Immigration Debate

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Using the critical race testimonios of ten Chicana undergraduate students at a top-tier research university, Lindsay Pérez Huber interrogates and challenges the racist nativist framing of undocumented Latina/o immigrants as problematic, burdensome, and “illegal.” Specifically, a community cultural wealth framework (Yosso, 2005) is utilized and expanded to highlight the rich forms of capital existing within the families and communities of these young women that have allowed them to survive, resist, and navigate higher education while simultaneously challenging racist nativist discourses. Reflecting on her data and analysis, Pérez Huber ends with a call for a human rights framework that demands the right of all students—and particularly Latinas/os—to live full and free lives.

I am a human pileup of illegality. I am an illegal driver and an illegal parker and even an illegal walker, having at various times stretched or broken various laws and regulations that govern those parts of life. The offenses were trivial, and I feel sure I could endure the punishments—penalties and fines—and get on with my life. Nobody would deny me the chance to rehabilitate myself. Look at Martha Stewart, illegal stock trader, and George Steinbrenner, illegal campaign donor, to name two illegals whose crimes exceeded mine. Good thing I am not an illegal immigrant. There is no way out of that trap. It’s the crime you can’t make amends for. Nothing short of deportation will free you from it, such is the mood of the country today. And that is a problem.

—Lawrence Downes, “What Part of ‘Illegal’ Don’t You Understand?”

Within dominant immigration discourse, frames of illegality are used in ways that are illogical when applied to other “illegal” acts.¹ In the epigraph above, Lawrence Downes, editorial writer for the *New York Times*, demonstrates this illogic. George Lakoff and Sam Ferguson (2006) argue that language has been strategically used to frame the immigration debate, constructing “illegal” immigrants as criminal and deviant, thus justifying efforts to exclude them from U.S. society. Importantly, as Eric Haas (2008) describes, framing immigrants as “illegal” hides our shared humanity and allows anti-immigrant sentiment, policies, and practices to become normalized ways of responding to undocumented immigration—an argument that informs the implications of this paper. Researchers have also acknowledged that the current framing of immigration targets Latina/o undocumented immigrants, powerfully linking race and immigration status (Galindo & Vigil, 2006; Pérez Huber, Benavides Lopez, Malagon, Velez, & Solórzano, 2008; Sánchez, 1997).² Specifically, my coauthors and I (2008) further develop the concept of racist nativism in order to locate the discussion of undocumented immigration within a historical legacy of racism that has been intricately tied to notions of the native and non-native—one in which whites have been perceived as native to the United States and all other groups non-native. In this historical moment, racist nativism targets Latina/o undocumented immigrants, regardless of their many contributions to U.S. society as productive community members, as well as other Latinas/os, regardless of citizenship status. Thus, I argue that the current undocumented immigration discourse is a racist nativist framing.

The concept of racist nativism has evolved over several past research studies focused on undocumented Latina/o youth. One study examined how Latina/o youth activists were negatively portrayed by print media in the mass mobilizations against House Resolution (HR) 4437 that took place in the spring of 2006 (Velez, Pérez Huber, Benavides Lopez, de la Luz, & Solórzano, 2008).³ A second study explored the experiences of undocumented community college and four-year university Latina/o students (Pérez Huber & Malagon, 2007) and found that these students were marginalized within and beyond their educational institutions due to negative perceptions resulting from dominant assumptions that linked being Latina/o (race) with being undocumented (immigration status).

In 2008, my coauthors and I further theorized racist nativism to understand how a legacy of racism rooted in notions of white supremacy has created negative constructions of undocumented immigrants historically and Latina/o undocumented immigrants in the contemporary moment (Pérez Huber et al., 2008). The present study is an extension of this past work, using empirical data to illustrate the theory in the lived experiences of undocumented Chicana undergraduates. I begin by describing how dominant frames guide contemporary immigration discourse. I then show how Latina/o critical theory (LatCrit) can help expose the subordination imbedded within these frames. Next I describe how a community cultural wealth framework (Villalpando &

Solórzano, 2005; Yosso, 2006; Yosso & García, 2007) can challenge racist nativist framing by revealing how undocumented Chicana college students draw on multiple forms of accumulated assets and resources in their families and communities to survive, resist, and navigate higher education.

This work contributes to the community cultural wealth literature by extending it to include *spiritual capital* and by showing how the framework can be used to challenge racist nativist framing. A community cultural wealth lens allows us to reclaim the humanity of Latina/o undocumented immigrants that racist nativist frames erase. Ultimately, I argue for a more accurate framing of undocumented Latina/o immigrant communities—a human rights frame—which recognizes that *all* students have the right to educational opportunity.

Understanding, Exposing, and Challenging Dominant Framing of Undocumented Immigration in the United States

George Lakoff (2006) explains how human beings create “mental structures” that allow us to understand reality and our perceptions of reality. He calls these mental structures “frames,” which can be used to construct particular meanings:

Frames facilitate our most basic interactions with the world—they structure our ideas and concepts, they shape the way we reason, and they even impact how we perceive and how we act. For the most part, our use of frames is unconscious and automatic—we use them without realizing it. (p. 25)

Building on the work of sociologist Erving Goffman (1974), Lakoff describes how a range of frames can help shape our interactions and the larger social institutions that structure our society.⁴ He argues that the use of frames happens unconsciously. We use frames even when we are unaware of it, and they become normalized through repetition. When frames are normalized, they define our common sense.

Throughout this article, I use the term “frame” and “framing” in the sense Lakoff describes—as mental structures that help us make sense of the world. I use the term “framework” within the context of the theoretical framework used to guide this study. The term “discourse” describes an institutionalized way of thinking about a particular topic, such as immigration. Lakoff describes the powerful function of frames that guide dominant immigration discourse.

Lakoff applies the concept of framing to understanding the ways conservative views have come to dominate politics in the United States. Specifically, Lakoff and Ferguson (2006) outline how framing has been used in dominant discourse to define the current debate regarding “immigration reform.” Lakoff (2006) explains that this is an “issue-defining frame” where the word “reform” suggests the need to solve a problem—which in this case is immigration. Framing the problem in this way places blame on the backs of immigrants who have crossed the border “illegally” and on the governmental agencies that have

failed to secure the U.S. border (Jonas, 2005; Lakoff & Ferguson, 2006). This framing of immigration provides a narrow range of solutions that only attempt to alleviate the problems this frame defines: solutions regarding immigrants themselves and governmental agencies. Thus, recent “immigration reform” targets immigrants, citizenship laws, and border security (Lakoff & Ferguson, 2006).

The immigration problem frame does not allow for discussion of the larger problems that cause the need for masses of people to flee their homelands. For example, this frame precludes discussions of U.S. foreign policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that have imposed Mexican economic dependence on the United States. González and Fernández (2002) describe NAFTA as “the most recent and devastating example of how U.S. domination over México continues to misdevelop and tear apart the socioeconomic integrity of that society” (p. 51). The impact of U.S. imperial expansionism through international trade agreements becomes nearly irrelevant within the immigration problem frame, although such policies are directly tied to the reasons why people must migrate.

Lakoff and Ferguson (2006) further demonstrate how the conceptual framing of the immigration debate has focused on immigration as a problem caused by immigrants and the failure of governmental control. They explain how specific linguistic expressions are used as “surface” frames to reinforce and perpetuate this conceptual understanding of contemporary immigration. Perhaps the most common and widely used surface frame within the immigration debate is the “illegal” frame. “Illegals,” “illegal immigrants,” and “illegal aliens” all convey a similar message: undocumented immigrants are criminals. The term “illegal alien” goes even further to frame immigrants as nonhuman. Leo Chávez (2001, 2008) and Otto Santa Ana (2002) describe how constructions of Latina/o immigrants as criminal, dangerous, and threatening to an “American” way of life are reiterated in the media, bombarding public discourse with negative images of Latina/o immigrants, which in turn reinforce the “illegal” frame.

It is clear that the “illegal” frame targets a specific group of immigrants. As Chávez (2001, 2008) and Santa Ana (2002) show in their work on media images, negative portrayals of undocumented immigration overwhelmingly target Latinas/os. Demographic data that show the majority of undocumented immigration coming from Latin American countries (Passel, 2006) make it easier to justify connections between illegality and undocumented Latina/o immigrants. In fact, illegality is now how most scholars, policy makers, and media frame this population, regardless of their positions on the issue of undocumented immigration (Chávez, 2001; Huntington, 2004; Ngai, 2004; Ochoa & Ochoa, 2007; Santa Ana, 2002).

However, we must look beyond the frame of illegality to understand how and why this concept is so successful in framing undocumented Latina/o immigrants. LatCrit in education helps us understand that race has much to do

with the ways Latina/o undocumented immigrants have been framed. Moreover, LatCrit illuminates the ways in which this framing relegates Latina/o undocumented immigrants generally, and students in particular, to a subordinate position in U.S. schools and society.

Exposing a Racist Nativist Frame: CRT and LatCrit

Critical race theory (CRT) and, in particular, LatCrit (a branch of the broader CRT framework) are powerful theoretical frameworks that help expose racism, nativism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression. CRT was first developed as a theoretical tool by critical legal scholars to recognize the marginalized experiences of People of Color in the law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). For more than a decade, educational researchers have been utilizing CRT as a theoretical framework to analyze the role of race, racism, and the intersections of racism with other forms of oppression in the lives of People of Color. According to education scholars Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso (2001), a CRT framework in education can be used in the following five ways:

1. To center the research focus on race, racism, and the intersections of multiple forms of oppression
2. To challenge dominant ideologies imbedded in educational theory and practice
3. To recognize the significance of experiential knowledge and utilize this knowledge in our research
4. To utilize interdisciplinary perspectives
5. To guide our work with a commitment to racial and social justice

Collectively, these strategies allow educational researchers to center the experiences of People of Color and reveal the ways racism and other forms of subordination mediate our educational trajectories. LatCrit is guided by the same five tenets but also acknowledges issues of immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture that may be overlooked by the Black-white paradigm that often becomes the focus of race discourse. LatCrit enables researchers to better articulate the specific experiences of Latinas/os through a more focused examination of the unique forms of oppression this group encounters (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). In this study, LatCrit illuminates the intersectionality of race and immigration status that is at play in the dominant framing of Latina/o undocumented immigrant communities.

A further framework developed from LatCrit examines the “inextricable” link between race and immigration in our current historical moment (Sánchez, 1997). A *LatCrit racist nativism framework* is a conceptual tool that helps researchers understand how the historical racialization of Immigrants of Color shapes the contemporary experiences of Latina/o undocumented immigrants (Pérez Huber et al., 2008). A LatCrit racist nativism framework explains how perceived racial differences construct false perceptions of People of Color as “non-native” to the United States (Acuña, 2000; De Genova, 2005; Pérez Huber

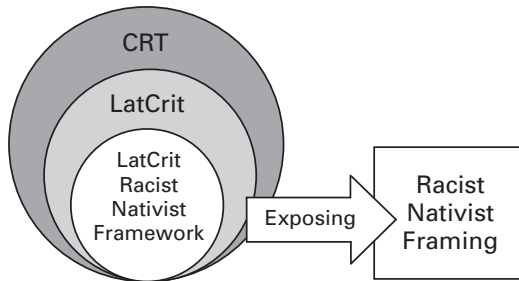
et al., 2008; Sánchez, 1997). These perceptions justify racism, discrimination, and violence committed against various groups of people throughout history. In the current historical moment, Mexican undocumented immigrants are targeted as non-native. Because racist nativism is based solely on perceptions, other Latinas/os, regardless of citizenship status, are also racialized as non-natives. Following this theorizing, I argue that a racist nativism framework can be used to describe the frames used in dominant immigration discourse and thus can be called racist nativist frames.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the theoretical links between the frameworks of CRT, LatCrit, and LatCrit racist nativism, illustrating how these theories work collectively to expose the dominant framing of Latina/o undocumented immigrants. While undocumented immigrant communities are the focus of this study, the model can also be used to expose other negative framing that guides mainstream beliefs about and understandings of the experiences of Communities of Color, such as cultural and biological deficiency theories (Moreno & Valencia, 2004; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). In the progression of this article, I will continue to build on this model, showing how a community cultural wealth framework challenges racist nativist framing and creates the opportunity to position immigration debates within a human rights frame, advocating for the humanity of all communities to be recognized.

LatCrit racist nativism as a theoretical lens interrogates dominant racialized perceptions of Latinas/os as non-native to the United States and contends that racist nativism is a “symptom” of a deeper “disease”—that is, white supremacy (Pérez Huber et al., 2008). In positioning racist nativism this way, it becomes critical to understand how a historical legacy of racism has shaped the experiences of various immigrant groups and People of Color in the United States. Racial definitions are fluid, and constructions of whiteness have changed throughout U.S. history to include and exclude specific groups of people according to racial categories, defining who is and is not “native.” I argue here that the dominant “illegal” frame used in contemporary immigration discourse is a racist nativist framing, and a symptom of white supremacy, used to construct racialized notions of who is and is not native to the United States.

Constructing Latina/o undocumented immigrants as non-native assigns them to a subordinated position in U.S. society and justifies the anti-immigrant and inhumane policies and tactics used to curb undocumented immigration. Examples of such policies can be seen in recent proposed legislative initiatives such as HR 4437 in 2005 and the 2007 STRIVE (Security Through Regularized Immigration and a Vibrant Economy) Act—bills designed to further criminalize undocumented immigrants and their advocates and supporters. The emergence of anti-immigrant groups such as the Minutemen is an example of the violent tactics used to target Latina/o undocumented immigrant communities (see Argetsinger, 2005). A LatCrit racist nativism framework functions to expose the racism imbedded within immigration discourse generally and the “illegal” immigrant frame in particular.

FIGURE 1 A visual model: Exposing racist nativist framing through CRT, LatCrit, and a LatCrit Racist Nativist Framework.



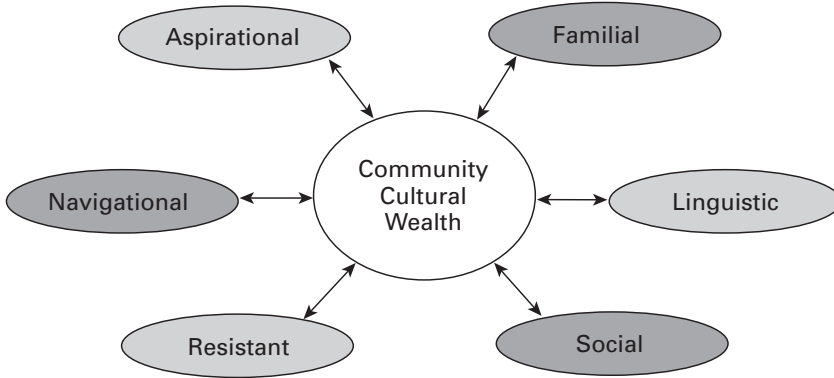
Challenging Dominant Frames: Community Cultural Wealth

Daniel Solórzano and Octavio Villalpando (1998) first used a CRT framework to focus the research lens on the forms of “resistant cultural capital” Students of Color use to succeed in higher education despite the many obstacles they encounter. In later work, they used CRT to develop the concept of “cultural wealth”—the unique forms of cultural capital, accumulated resources, and assets that Students of Color develop and utilize in spaces of marginality within educational institutions (Villalpando & Solórzano, 2005).

Yosso (2005) further developed the concept of cultural wealth by outlining six forms of capital that exist within Communities of Color, collectively termed “community cultural wealth”:

1. Aspirational capital: The ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future despite real and perceived barriers.
2. Linguistic capital: Skills learned through language such as, “memorization, dramatic pauses, rhythm, and rhyme” (p. 78) and the ability to communicate through visual art, music, and poetry.
3. Familial capital: The forms of knowledge “nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition” (p. 79).
4. Social capital: The “networks of people and community resources” (p. 79) that can help students navigate through social institutions.
5. Navigational capital: A form of capital inclusive of social networks and the resiliency students develop to persist through institutional barriers.
6. Resistant capital: “Those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (p. 80), grounded in a history of resistance to subordination by Communities of Color, guided by a motivation to transform oppressive institutions and structures.

FIGURE 2 A model of community cultural wealth. Adapted from Yosso, 2006.

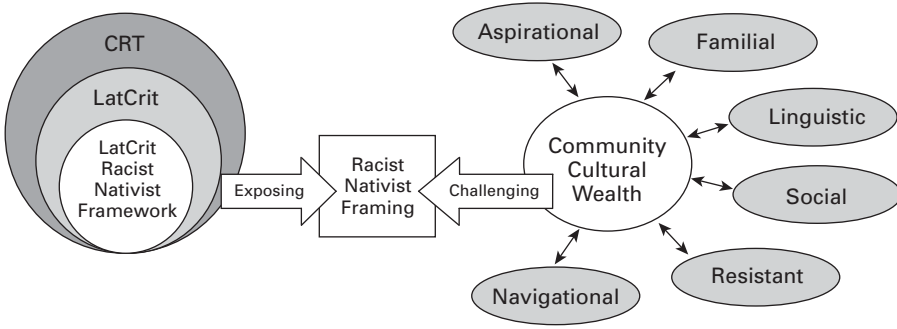


These six forms of community cultural wealth, illustrated in figure 2, challenge dominant perspectives of Communities of Color and recognize the ways People of Color have historically built on generations of resources to survive, adapt, thrive, and resist within racist institutions and social structures (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Villalpando & Solórzano, 2005; Yosso, 2006; Yosso & García, 2007). Community cultural wealth not only acknowledges strengths, but can be used to reframe deficit perspectives of Communities of Color in educational research. Yosso and García (2007) explain:

As we decenter whiteness and recenter the research lens on People of Color, we can validate often-overlooked forms of cultural knowledge forged in a legacy of resilience and resistance to racism and other forms of subordination. Centering our analytical lens on the experiences of Communities of Color in a critical historical context allows us to “see” the accumulated assets and resources in the histories and the lives of marginalized communities. This act of reframing builds on an extensive body of critical social science research that has consistently identified culture as a resource for Communities of Color, rather than a detriment. (p. 154)

Figure 3 illustrates how community cultural wealth can be used to challenge racist nativist framing exposed collectively by CRT, LatCrit, and LatCrit racist nativism frameworks. Using community cultural wealth to challenge racist nativist framing sets a precedent for reframing immigration discourse in a more humane way—a way that recognizes universal human rights. Approaching racist nativist framing in this way, researchers can use data to redefine “criminal” undocumented communities as instead struggling through, resisting, and transforming the institutions and structures that oppress them, their families, and larger communities.

FIGURE 3 A model for using community cultural wealth to challenge racist nativist framing.



Yosso and García (2007) note that a community cultural wealth framework is not static; rather, similar to the view through a kaleidoscope lens, these forms of capital are interrelated and shift and overlap depending on the focus of analysis. Staying on this theoretical trajectory, this study uses and extends the cultural wealth model to acknowledge the many strengths of undocumented students, families, and communities that simultaneously facilitate their academic success and challenge racist nativist framing. Later I will describe how several forms of capital emerged in the study as intricately tied to the lived experiences of the participants.

Methods

In this study, I employed a critical race grounded theory approach—an analysis strategy that allows themes to emerge from data while using a CRT lens to reveal often-unseen structures of oppression (Malagon, Pérez Huber, & Velez, in press). I used a network sampling method (Delgado Bernal, 1997; Gándara, 1995) to identify participants who (1) were undocumented, (2) were female, (3) identified Mexico as their country of origin, and (4) were from a low-income family (as defined by federal poverty guidelines). A Chicana student population attending a top-tier research university was selected for several reasons. First, this study focuses on students who come from Mexico because they are the largest undocumented immigrant group in the United States (Passel, 2006). Second, an all-female sample was selected in order to more closely examine the gendered experiences of undocumented women, as research suggests that contemporary immigration policy in California has shifted to target women and children (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1995). Third, Chicana/o students attending a research university, where they are a small proportion of the total student population, are more likely to experience racism and discrimination

(González, 2002; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002) and as a result must develop “critical navigational skills” to survive the competitive university environment (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). Considering this setting, the experiences of undocumented Chicana college students reveal much about how racism (and its intersections with other forms of oppression) emerges in the undergraduate careers of this student population and how they respond. Ten students attending one University of California (UC) campus were interviewed twice, for a total of twenty in-depth *critical race testimonio* interviews.

Critical race testimonio can be understood as “a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racist, nativist, classist, and sexist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future” (Pérez Huber, in press).⁵ Originally developed in the field of Latin American studies, testimonio centers the participant who narrates her experiences to reveal exploitative and oppressive conditions while validating her own experiential knowledge (Beverly, 2004; Yúdice, 1991). Combining the basic elements of testimonio and LatCrit, critical race testimonio interviews function to (1) validate and honor the knowledge and lived experiences of oppressed groups by becoming a part of the research process; (2) challenge dominant ideologies that shape traditional forms of epistemology and methodology; (3) operate within a collective memory that transcends a single experience to that of multiple communities; and (4) move toward racial justice by offering a space within the academy for the stories of People of Color to be heard. This method was designed to capture the complexities of the lived experiences of People of Color whose realities are mediated by multiple forms of oppression (Pérez Huber, in press).

I position testimonio within a Chicana feminist epistemology that enables Chicana researchers to draw on multiple forms of knowledge gained from our personal, professional, and academic experiences through the process of *cultural intuition* (Burciaga, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Cultural intuition allows the women participants and me to utilize these forms of knowledge in data collection and analysis. I employed a three-phase data analysis process: (1) preliminary analysis, where initial themes were identified; (2) collaborative analysis, in which analysis was co-constructed with the participants; and (3) final data analysis, which synthesized the previous analyses. In the first phase, I used a grounded, line-by-line approach to develop initial codes and identify tentative thematic categories (Charmaz, 2006). Phase two, the co-construction of data analysis, took place in focus groups where participants provided feedback on the thematic categories and contributed their own interpretations of the data. In phase three, I synthesized data from the previous analysis phases to revise and edit the coding scheme and finalize the thematic categories. During this phase, I integrated theoretical memos into the analysis and employed grounded theory strategies (i.e., concept mapping, diagramming) to make larger theoretical connections between micro- and mac-

rostructures. The data analysis process revealed that the women utilized various forms of personal, familial, and community resources to move through educational institutions and that these resources were particularly significant in navigating higher education. It was in describing these resources throughout their testimonios and in the focus groups that a community cultural wealth framework emerged as a powerful way to understand how the women were able to survive, resist, and often thrive within racist nativist institutions.

Findings: Community Cultural Wealth of Undocumented Chicana College Students

This section explains the various forms of community wealth the women utilized in their undergraduate careers to counter racist nativism. The analysis confirmed the fluidity of the community cultural wealth model as particular forms of capital emerged as overlapping in the experiences of the undocumented Chicana students. But first it is important to understand the educational conditions these students resisted and navigated in their undergraduate experiences.

The educational opportunities and resources available to these women were severely limited due to their undocumented status. For example, not having access to state or federal financial aid programs was the most problematic barrier they identified in attaining their college degree. Although California Assembly Bill (AB) 540 allows the students to pay resident (in-state) tuition fees, the bill does not allow them access to financial aid programs. As a result, many students struggled each academic quarter to pay their school tuition and were often unsure if they would be able to continue the following term. Undocumented students are also excluded from federally funded programs such as the McNair program, which provides undergraduate research training and graduate school preparation to first-generation and low-income college students. Undocumented students may be able to participate in campus-based programs, such as tutoring or summer enrichment programs, but they cannot receive funding to participate. Thus, in addition to their school tuition, these students had to find the means to pay for such programs. Finally, the women expressed a profound concern about the career and professional opportunities that would be available to them once they did graduate if they remained without recognized citizenship status. While these are only some of the constraints for these women at the university, it provides a context, albeit brief, for how community cultural wealth emerged as a powerful resource in their undergraduate careers.

In the following sections, I describe how the women utilized each form of capital by presenting an emblematic example from the data. Each of these examples is representative of the forms of capital the women in the study used throughout their educational trajectories. The examples presented here were selected because they most clearly represent how community cultural wealth

emerged in the lives of the women participants. They will show how community cultural wealth can help explain the multiple strengths undocumented Chicana students bring to their educational contexts.

Aspirational and Familial Capital

Aspirational capital is the resilient ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future in the face of adversity. Yosso (2005) describes aspirational capital as developed and transmitted through cultural lessons—*cuentos* (stories), *consejos* (advice), and *dichos* (proverbs) shared within social spaces, particularly in families, about continuing to “dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances” and nurturing a “culture of possibility” (p. 78). Yosso also explains that aspirational capital is tied to other forms of community cultural wealth. Indeed, this study found that familial, linguistic, social, resistant, navigational, and spiritual forms of capital were rooted in a profound belief that these forms of capital could be utilized to transcend the students’ current circumstances. In fact, what emerged was that aspirational and familial capital were intricately tied to one another in the experiences of the undocumented women in this study.

Although the women were often unsure if they would be able to continue their college education, or if they would be able to utilize their degrees after graduation, they demonstrated an amazing resiliency in holding on to their dreams of being college graduates and career professionals. The women aspired to one day become medical doctors, lawyers, professors, and college counselors. All of the women aspired to attend graduate school and attain an advanced degree.

The women showed that this aspirational capital was often tied to their families and, particularly, their family migration stories. Brenda, a fourth-year sociology major and the oldest of nine siblings, shared how she watched the physical changes in her father, who works as a landscaper and food vendor.

I always see my dad working. When I was little, he would work seven days a week and it bothered me so much, because he [could] never spend time with us. Now I’m older . . . I see my dad’s hands, and they’re not soft. I remember when I was little, touching his hands, I don’t know why, but back then they were softer. He works in landscaping, so touching all the grass and stuff like that, his hands are really rough. And my dad, for many, many, years, he sold shrimp cocktails [outside]. He’s really much darker, and you could see the *manchas* from the sun, like one big one he has right here [pointing to cheek]. And so when I saw his face and his hands, I was like, “Ugh! This is the reason why I’m going to school!” I just see how much he works, and how brave they [her parents] were to come here, it motivates me.

Brenda described the pain she felt in seeing the physical manifestations of the hard labor her father endured over the years. The changes in his hands and the *manchas* (sun spots) on his face are symbolic of his subjugated position as a low-wage Mexican immigrant worker. In recognizing these changes,

Brenda was reminded of her family's migration story of coming to the United States, which she vividly remembered and recounted in her testimonio. She remembered "how brave" her parents were to leave the only place they knew as home, enduring an unknown and treacherous journey across the U.S.-Mexico border and starting a new life in California. In remembering this family history, Brenda also drew from her familial capital. Her family's migration experiences are forms of cultural knowledge that carry a sense of family and community memory. In her testimonio, Brenda connected this history and memory to her aspirations. Brenda utilized the aspirational capital rooted in her family migration story to maintain her dreams of graduating from college and one day becoming a high school counselor to guide other Latina/o students toward higher education. Brenda shared that she often found her family to be a source of motivation when she felt discouraged at the university. She, like the other women in this study, maintains her hope and dream that one day her and her family's circumstances will change.

Linguistic Capital

Yosso (2005) defines linguistic capital as "the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (p. 78). While bilingual education policies, particularly those in California, frame learning and speaking the Spanish language as a detriment in the context of schools, a community cultural wealth lens allows us to see the strengths bilingual students bring to their educational experiences.⁶ Yosso (2005) argues that bilingual Students of Color learn a "repertoire of storytelling skills" (p. 79) including memorization, attention to detail, and comedic timing. Natalia, a fourth-year Chicana/o studies major, showed us how her linguistic capital enabled her to become a more outspoken person—a skill that she was able to later use to adapt to classroom culture at her university.

Natalia is originally from a small, rural *pueblo* in Oaxaca, Mexico. Her native language is *Zapoteco*, a language spoken by many indigenous communities in the state of Oaxaca. She attended a small school in her community where she was taught Spanish. Similar to the English-only instruction we have in U.S. schools, Natalia's teachers enforced Spanish instruction and reprimanded students for speaking their native language in the classroom. Once she arrived in the United States, Natalia's family settled in the Los Angeles area in a predominately Spanish-speaking community. When Natalia entered elementary school, she encountered yet another linguistic environment—English. Though Natalia struggled to learn the English language as a young child, she is now a trilingual student fluent in Zapoteco, Spanish, and English.

Natalia explained that one of her major responsibilities in her household was to translate for her family members, and in fact she continues to have this responsibility as a college student. For her Zapoteco-speaking relatives, she often translates to Spanish, and for her Spanish-speaking relatives, she often translates to English. Natalia has no doubt acquired a wide array of skills

and abilities as a trilingual “language broker” in her household (Buriel, Pérez, Dement, Chávez, & Moran, 1998; Faulstich Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Meza, 2003). In her interview, she described the impact this language brokering has had on her.

I was scared of talking to people, but then with all those responsibilities [translating], I had no choice, so I had to approach people. Sometimes I felt that my uncle or my aunt was being taken advantage of because they didn't speak Spanish. So I would call and demand, and say like, “You know what? They're not alone.” Not insulting them, just being strong. Sometimes I felt like I wasn't that strong, like I was passive, but with all those responsibilities I felt stronger because I felt my family [was] relying [on] me. I had to do something about it. I guess that's the number one thing that made me stronger.

Here Natalia shows how her language brokering skills have made her a “stronger” person. With these responsibilities, she had to overcome her shyness and engage in conversations with others to help family members navigate through social structures. Natalia later explains that she has been able to utilize these skills as a college student: “So . . . with my professors, I shouldn't be afraid or . . . intimidated, or with people that have higher positions than [me]. I think that helped me in that way . . . just approaching people . . . and not being shy anymore.” Natalia has used her linguistic capital as a trilingual student to advocate for her family members, whom she explained are mistreated because they do not speak dominant languages. Her linguistic capital has strengthened her ability to communicate within academic spaces as well as to identify and confront subordination.

Social Capital

Yosso (2005) defines social capital as the networks of social contacts and community resources that help Communities of Color navigate social institutions. For the women in this study, social capital was absolutely critical in their ability to navigate the university and the many barriers their undocumented status created. Drawing from social networks in their communities and cultivating networks at the university, students were able to garner significant financial and academic resources. Elena, a third-year sociology major whose family is from Jamay in the Mexican state of Jalisco, explained one of her strategies to fund-raise for her school tuition.

My uncle, he was involved with Club Jalisciense, and he just knows a lot of people . . . I participated in [their] pageant my first year and they gave me a scholarship. Another person that has helped me out is the vice president of AT&T and I met her through him [my uncle] too. I met a lot of people through him that have been able to help. I mean, even if they give me a hundred dollar scholarship, that's a lot of help for me, so I've used him [my uncle] a lot. I met a councilman from New York and he said he was going to help me put on an event; he was going to fund it and whatever [money] came out from it, it would be for me . . . like a dinner, I guess you could say.

Elena explained that her uncle was a prominent member of Club Jalisciense, a social network group whose members are from various areas of Jalisco. Members of these *clubes* garner resources to help and provide support to their native communities in Mexico, such as building hospitals and schools, making electricity and clean water available, and donating basic necessities like clothes, food, and blankets. The organizations host events such as annual conferences and pageants that honor prominent members and their families. The clubs are often regionally specific and governed by a larger *federación* (federation) of collective organizations. As Elena described, members of Club Jalisciense come from various social classes, from top executives of corporations to day laborers. As a result, this organization (and others like it) serves as a critical source of social capital for its members and their families. Elena has drawn from this group to make social contacts with those supportive of her educational pursuits and to fund-raise for her college tuition.

The majority of women utilized social networks and community resources to navigate higher education. Social capital was especially critical in fund-raising efforts. For example, many students sold tickets to dinners hosted by households in the community. Other fund-raising efforts included raffles, where businesses and community members donated items for students to raffle off. Garage sales, car washes, and donation drives were other strategies used to draw from community resources to help fund-raising efforts.

Aside from the material resources present in the students' communities, emotional support was just as critical. Beatrice, a fourth-year political science and Chicana/o studies double-major, described how she found comfort in knowing that her family and community would support her during her undergraduate career.

I know my dad will not let me [discontinue school], I know he'll find any means for me to come here [the university], for my tuition, so, I know people will find any means for me to continue school. They'll help me if I'm sick or anything like that.

Social capital was critical in both the material and emotional sources of support that it provided to undocumented college students. This finding supports a wealth of research that has found social networks to be critical for Latina/o immigrants in navigating social institutions in the United States (Amado, 2006; Flores, Hernández-León, & Massey, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Ruiz, 1998; Sarmiento, 2002; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). The women in this study show that it is because of the social resources present in their families and communities that they are able to continue their undergraduate careers.

Navigational Capital as Resistant Capital

Navigational capital can be understood as the "skills of maneuvering through social institutions" that have historically functioned without the needs of Communities of Color in mind (Yosso, 2005). Similar to social capital, social net-

works are an important element of navigational capital. However, different from social capital, navigational capital is drawn from the resiliency of People of Color to continue to overcome barriers that are consistently encountered. Yosso (2005) borrows a definition from Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000), who explain that resiliency can be understood as “a set of inner resources, social competencies and cultural strategies that permit individuals to not only survive, recover or even thrive after stressful events, but also draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning” (p. 229). This study found that strategies of resiliency were indeed “critical navigational skills” for the undocumented women in their undergraduate careers (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998).

In her interview, Noeli, a fourth-year sociology major and community college transfer student, described how she had to learn to use her “inner resources” to navigate higher education as an undocumented student. Living as undocumented immigrants, the students developed particular skills that help in the context of higher education institutions. Revealing their status as undocumented immigrants was an issue of concern for many of the women. Sharing this information with others created a very real sense of vulnerability, particularly during a historical moment when anti-immigrant sentiment has again peaked, resulting in the increased efforts of deportation and border enforcement. Despite the potential risks in revealing their status, students were able to skillfully develop an intuition about to whom, when, and where it would be appropriate to share this information. As Noeli explained,

When you are AB 540, you come to realize that you have to say something out of means, you have to do it, if you don't say something nobody is gonna help you. I learned that in the community college [and] the UC system, because you never know who [is] sympathetic . . . you never know what could happen unless you say something and you have to learn how to do that.

Noeli suggests that undocumented college students must reach out to others to build social networks to access important information and resources that can help them in their higher education experience. Perhaps this is a navigational strategy learned from what Delgado Bernal (2001) terms “pedagogies of the home”—a “cultural knowledge base” amassed from a lifetime of personal and familial experiences living as an undocumented Latina/o immigrant in the United States.

The data in this study revealed that many of the navigational strategies utilized by these women were in fact informed by a consciousness of resistance. This is a point of overlap for navigational and resistant capital within a community cultural wealth framework. Resistant capital is the knowledge and skills developed in opposition to oppression, grounded in a legacy of resistance to subordination. A powerful example of this intersection between navigational and resistant capital for the students in this study was their participation in DREAMS, a student-initiated, university-sponsored organization created to

provide undocumented AB 540 students a “camaraderie of people working together, networking, sharing our day to day experiences, struggles, and success, to fulfill our personal and educational goals as undocumented individuals.”⁷ Each of the students in this study had some connection to and/or involvement with the DREAMS student group. Andrea, a fourth-year political science and history double-major, called the skills she learned as a DREAMS member “survival mechanisms” for navigating the university.

Knowing people in [DREAMS] . . . I kinda know how everything works now . . . you just have to be like, I’m doing this [school] and I’m gonna do it well! I’m gonna need other people to get through, or else it’s not gonna work out. So even though you’re not living on campus, you’re not going to parties . . . you just have to learn . . . like survival mechanisms to get through school . . . It’s not just about the social experience, even though that helps . . . You’re here to do what you have to do.

Indeed, Andrea’s ability to “survive” was an act of resistance to the barriers that made her undergraduate education nearly impossible to complete, and enabled her to do what she came to the university to do—attain her college degree.

DREAMS was a place where undocumented students exchanged vital sources of information, strategies, and support to navigate higher education, despite and in spite of the institutional barriers they encountered. The DREAMS group utilized three specific strategies to achieve its goals: (1) disseminating information about state and federal legislation concerning the education of undocumented students; (2) recruiting and retaining incoming and current undocumented students; and (3) advocating for the rights of undocumented students at the university, state, and federal levels.

The women described participating in a range of activities and events that reflected these organizational strategies, including holding fund-raising events for their scholarship fund, lobbying in Sacramento, holding protests against the unfair treatment of undocumented students and communities, and traveling to local high schools to disseminate information about AB 540 and undocumented students’ rights. Graciela, a third-year psychobiology and neuroscience double-major, described the reasons she participated in the DREAMS high school outreach project, traveling to local urban Los Angeles high schools to provide undocumented students with information about college access.

I’m giving back to those who aren’t here, because there’s a lot of undocumented [people] in our community who aren’t able to come to college because of financial situations . . . so it gives me a lot of responsibility in a way of representing them . . . so that’s why I’m involved in DREAMS. I feel like I have the responsibility to help those students that weren’t able to make it here and inform them that there is something that they could do beyond just high school. It’s giving back . . . giving back to your community . . . I personally want to see the numbers of undocumented students grow in these universities because I feel like we’ve . . .

been crippled. We haven't been allowed [in]to college and I believe everyone should be allowed to go to college, especially the UC [system]. UCs are supposed to represent the community and they don't . . . They are public institutions for a reason and no one is doing nothing about it so . . . students have a lot of power . . . and I think that we should use it.

For Graciela, being a member of DREAMS was about more than finding support for herself; it was about “giving back” to her community and reaching out to other undocumented students. Ultimately, she believed that these efforts would lead to greater college access for undocumented students, particularly in the UC system. Her involvement in DREAMS was a means of resisting the subordination that has constrained educational opportunity for undocumented students.

The DREAMS organization was critical in the women's ability to find their way within the university. However, this organization provided much more than navigational skills; it provided the opportunity to come together with a collective agency to resist oppressive conditions in and beyond the university for themselves, their communities, and future undocumented students. This organization was where the community cultural wealth of undocumented students converged to provide a set of navigational skills that could be utilized not only to get through the institution but to transform their current situations, exercising what Yosso (2005) describes as transformative resistant capital.

Spiritual Capital

Aside from the multiple forms of capital the women in this study utilized in their undergraduate careers, an additional form of capital emerged from the data: *spiritual capital*.⁸ Spiritual capital can be understood as a set of resources and skills rooted in a spiritual connection to a reality greater than oneself. Spiritual capital can encompass religious, indigenous, and ancestral beliefs and practices learned from one's family, community, and inner self. Thus, spirituality in its many forms can provide a sense of hope and faith. Ruth Trinidad Galván (2006) explains, “If we truly come to understand spirituality as that essence that moves us, that makes us whole, that gives us strength, then essentially, spirituality gives us hope” (p. 173). Galván found spirituality to be at the source of *campesina* (rural or peasant women) strength and a “catalyst” for resistance and resiliency. Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) emphasizes the indigenous influences of Chicana spirituality. She explains that for Chicana women, “our faith is rooted in indigenous attributes, images, symbols, magic and myth” (p. 52), such as the belief in *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. Godinez (2006) found a spirituality to be “woven” throughout the identities and worldviews of Chicana students that was used to negotiate and navigate their daily experiences. Finally, Delgado Bernal (2001) found spirituality to be a “source of inspiration” among Chicana college students who practiced varying forms of spirituality, such as lighting a candle, displaying a picture of La Virgen, and talking to relatives who have passed on.

Elena shared how her faith has enabled her to maintain her aspirations despite the many barriers she has encountered in her undergraduate career.

I know I have to have faith that things are going to turn out good, and maybe I have a hard time right now, but it's going to get better eventually. And I'm sure all my hard work is going to pay off someday and then I'm going to say, "Ok, all of that was worth it." So I think having faith is really important.

Brenda expressed similar feelings about her faith, which has become a source of motivation in the face of obstacles that still lie ahead.

I think I'm a woman with great faith. So I really trust God, he has great plans for me. But sometimes I feel like, "Where am I going to work after [graduation]?" Although there's days I really, really want to give up . . . I can't give up.

Brenda and Elena both described how their faith plays a central role in their resilient abilities to persist through institutional barriers. Their spirituality was also a critical source of hope for the future. Daria, a second-year psychology major, reflected on her spirituality and the impact it has had on her undergraduate experience:

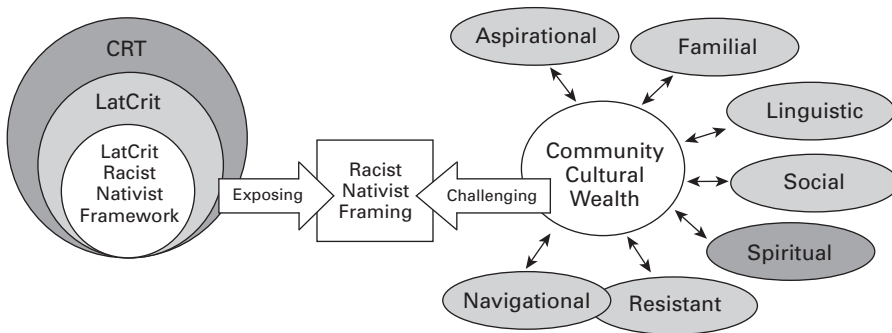
Religion has always been a very big part of my life since I was young . . . For me it's always been a source of strength, a source of hope, a source of faith, a source of positivity in my life. You know, everybody goes through their struggles . . . and there [are] times when you're down, and I've learned to think positively ahead . . . to think that I'm here for a reason, that all this that I've gone through is for a reason. God has always been there for me, to help me get through. There's no problem in my life so big that I've never been able to overcome thus far. Thank God. Whether it was fear of going to college, fear of how I'm going to pay for college, fear of "how am I going to pass that class?" Fear of anything. I've learned to not stress out so much because of that confidence, that I know that God has always put me through it. So for me it's a big part of who I am. It's given me a lot of confidence, a lot of . . . what's it called? Peace.

Although we can see how these experiences can be connected to forms of aspirational, navigational, and resistant capital, what these women describe is something different. Their faith and hope are nurtured by a spiritual connection and prove to be powerful resources they draw on to overcome barriers and maintain their aspirations for the future. They have translated the spiritual capital learned from their families and communities to make sense of, negotiate, and navigate their undergraduate experiences.

Summary of Findings

The critical race testimonios reveal how the students utilize community cultural wealth in their undergraduate educations, which challenges dominant perceptions constructed by the racist nativist framing of undocumented communities. Consistent with past research that explains how community cultural

FIGURE 4 A critical race model for exposing and challenging racist nativist framing of Latina/o undocumented immigrant communities.



wealth capital can shift and overlap (Yosso, 2005, 2006; Yosso & García, 2007), we see how particular forms of community cultural wealth intersected in the lived experiences of these women as they drew from various forms of capital simultaneously. Furthermore, an additional form of capital emerged from the data, spiritual capital, which can now be added to the community cultural wealth framework. Figure 4 builds on the models presented earlier, showing the addition of spiritual capital and the points of overlap that emerged from the analysis.

Figure 4 shows how CRT, LatCrit, and the LatCrit racist nativism framework collectively provide researchers the ability to focus on the intersectionality of race and immigration status in the lives of Latinas/os. The model shows how theory emerges from the data (testimonios) to understand, expose, and challenge subordination (racist nativist framing). A LatCrit racist nativism framework exposes the oppression of a dominant discourse that frames undocumented immigrant communities as “criminal,” “dangerous,” and a “drain” on limited U.S. social resources.

The women describe the strengths in undocumented immigrant families and communities that allow them to navigate a top-tier research university. The array of knowledge, skills, and resources they draw from their families and communities is a challenge to racist nativist framing, allowing the opportunity to consider how we can reframe undocumented Latina/o immigrant communities in a way that reflects the strengths these women describe.

Conclusion: A Human Rights Frame

Racist nativist framing of undocumented Latina/o immigrants as “criminals” strips undocumented communities of their humanity, making illogical arguments for exclusion plausible and widely accepted. These negative portrayals of undocumented Latina/o immigrants have become so prevalent within

immigration discourse that they have become “common sense” in how we understand immigration issues (Haas, 2008; Lakoff & Ferguson, 2006). This framing limits the understanding of undocumented immigration to a “crime” and can potentially constrain the agency of undocumented immigrants, their allies, and advocates to counter these negative portrayals. Positioned within this frame, institutions can easily deny undocumented immigrants the same rights and treatment that U.S.-born and “legalized” communities have. For example, this framing allows undocumented college students, such as those in this study, to be denied access to state and federal financial aid programs, barred from having driver’s licenses, and denied the right to gain employment that reflects the training they earned at the university. These oppressive policies are the result of racist nativist framing that constructs particular rights as benefits that undocumented communities should not be allowed to access. The testimonios of the women in this study are a challenge to these racist nativist frames.

In attempting to name this reframing, the work of the late African American activist Malcolm X becomes especially useful. Nearly fifty years ago, Malcolm X recognized the significance of framing in the civil rights movement for African Americans in the United States.⁹ He argued that framing African American rights as civil rights limited the African American community in gaining racial equality because it continued to uphold the belief that whites possessed the power to give and take away rights. Malcolm X (1964) argued for a human rights frame to guide this movement: “You can never get civil rights until you have human rights. Human rights represent the right to be a human being. Whenever you are respected and recognized as a human being your civil rights are automatic.” He argued that racial equality could never be achieved without recognizing that African Americans were entitled to the same basic human rights as whites. Within a human rights frame, the historically racist laws, policies, and violence committed against the African American community in the United States could not be justified. As an activist, Malcolm X argued that any move toward greater racial equality in the United States must be guided by the fundamental belief in and simple acknowledgment of human rights for all people.

More than four decades later, the Catholic Church published an official statement advocating for the human rights of undocumented immigrants (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003). Mexican and U.S. Catholic bishops felt compelled to denounce the injustices committed against Latina/o immigrants and, guided by the principal of respecting the dignity of the migrant, offered policy recommendations to both countries. The bishops said:

Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected. Often they are subject to punitive laws and harsh treatment from enforcement officers from both receiving and transit countries. Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary. (p.16)

What the bishops suggested in their policy recommendations was a reframing of the ways we understand immigration. At a transnational level, the Church urged governmental agencies, officials, enforcers, and media to acknowledge the dignity of Latina/o immigrants and respect their human rights to work, live, and provide for their families wherever they find the opportunity and “safe haven” to lead their lives.

Positioning the immigration debate within a human rights frame reclaims the humanity of undocumented Latina/o immigrants. A human rights frame would provide the opportunity for researchers, policy makers, and immigrants themselves to work toward creating strategies and implementing policies that would benefit all who have a stake in the immigration debate. We must recognize that the immigration debate is not about borders or national security but about human beings and their opportunity to live full and free lives. A community cultural wealth framework moves us toward a human rights frame by acknowledging the strengths that exist within immigrant Communities of Color. This framework affords us a lens to “see” Latina/o undocumented immigrant communities as places rich in resources, assets, skills, and abilities, where faith and hope guide pedagogies of the spirit (Galván, 2006)—even in the face of oppression and dehumanization.

The women in this study have shown the multiple forms of capital present in undocumented families and communities that enable them to be successful college students even in the face of tremendous barriers. A human rights frame reveals what the women in this study demonstrated: that we all have the right to create a reality better than the one in which we live, for ourselves, our communities, and the generations to come. A human rights frame should be used in educational discourse beyond the immigration debate to focus the efforts of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers toward equal educational opportunity as a human right *all* students deserve.

Notes

1. I use quotation marks for the terms “illegal” and “legal” to denote that I do not subscribe to the constructed meanings of these terms within the context of immigration discourse.
2. Linguistically, we are limited in the language used to describe people who have migrated to the United States without casting a dark image of criminality. As Lakoff and Ferguson (2006) argue, we must move toward reframing language about the immigration issue to counter the negative portrayals of Latina/o immigrants. For example, Lakoff and Ferguson introduce the term “economic refugees” to describe those who flee their home country to escape economic insecurity. Altering the description to refugees portrays people who deserve compassion, who are entitled to the same life opportunities as all human beings. Jonas (2005) also argues that we must work to reframe the immigration debate from a national security issue to one that reflects the interests of migrants themselves.
3. HR 4437 (2006) was a bill that sought to charge all undocumented persons living in the United States with a felony for their presence in the country and bar them from ever gaining legal status. The bill also sought felony charges for anyone, regardless of

- legal status, who assists or conceals the status of undocumented persons from the U.S. government.
4. According to Lakoff (2006), conservative politicians have mainly used four types of frames (surface frames, deep frames, issue-defining frames, and messaging frames) to shape how we think about and define political issues, the values we associate with those issues, and the solutions we negotiate for matters identified as problematic.
 5. See Pérez Huber (in press) for a more detailed description of this methodology designed for critical race research in education.
 6. California Proposition 227, passed in 1998, prohibits bilingual instruction and education in all California classrooms. While this law affects all English-language learner (ELL) students, it targets Spanish-speaking students who, at the time Prop 227 passed, comprised 81 percent of all ELL students in California public schools (California Department of Education, 2006). Macedo (2000) argues that English-only initiatives like Prop 227 were born of the assumption that English is the “superior” language. Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Asato (2000) also name the move toward English-only instruction as “English-only hegemony” (p. 17).
 7. The name of this student organization has been changed to protect the identities of its members. The source of this statement is from the organization’s official statement of purpose. However, the direct source of this statement will not be provided so as to protect the identity of the organization’s members.
 8. The concept of spiritual capital is a form of community cultural wealth that has not yet been documented but is the subject of an ongoing discussion among critical race scholars in education. I acknowledge these discussions in the development of spiritual capital in this work, particularly among Daniel Solórzano, Tara Yosso, and Rebeca Burciaga, who have discussed how we can expand the community cultural wealth model to include the role of spirituality as a resource used by communities of color.
 9. I acknowledge Daniel Solórzano for sharing Malcolm X’s speech and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (2003) publication, *Strangers No More*, to examine the ways we can begin to move toward a human rights frame of undocumented immigration in the United States.

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