

## Critical Race Theory Counterstory as Allegory: A Rhetorical Trope to Raise Awareness About Arizona's Ban on Ethnic Studies

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**Abstract:** The critical race counterstory in this essay takes on the form of allegory to raise awareness about Arizona's anti-immigrant/Mexican climate, and pays particular attention to legislation targeted at Tucson Unified School District's Mexican American studies (also RAZA studies) program.

### Derrick Bell, Allegory, and Rhet/Comp

Composing allegorically for publication has proven an effective writing style in fields, such as law and education. For over forty years, prominent critical race theory scholar, Derrick Bell has employed allegory as CRT counterstory. His allegories have been published countless times in law reviews and as two bestsellers. Bell (1987) contends allegory is the most effective style through which to convey his argument because his work seeks "to uncover enduring truths...[and] allegory employs stories that are not true to explore situations that are real enough but, in their many and contradictory dimensions, defy understanding" (p. 6-7). Bell asserts his use of allegory gets at the "truth" about racism and his purpose for writing allegorically coincides with my working definition of allegory. Copeland and Struck cite Jane K. Brown's definition of allegory as "a mode of representation which renders the supernatural visible" (2010, p. 5). Combining the rhetorical understanding of allegory as a trope, Bell's justification for use of allegory in his writing, and Brown's definition, I define allegory as a trope by which to render invisible forms of racism (structural or colorblind), visible. This definition applies to Bell's body of work, but particularly "The Space Traders" (1992), on which the allegory in this article is modeled.

In "The Space Traders," Bell weaves his allegory around citations of historical and contemporary American legislation, historical cultural references, and characters that represent existing political and racist ideologies. In my own work, I set my allegory in the present anti-immigrant context that plagues Arizona and the nation at-large, and reference political and media coverage. Modeled after Bell's Gleeson Golightly in "The Space Traders," I have constructed a composite character<sup>(1)</sup> as a protagonist who is an assimilated conservative person of color and is used (like Golightly) by powerful politicians as a "minority mouthpiece" for their white, right-wing interests. While Bell (1992) allegorically dramatizes the African slave trade, my allegory dramatizes the great event of the U.S. conquest of the southwest. I explore assimilation, especially with regard to the protagonist, and the colonizing effects of an education that conquers the mind, crushes, and essentially obliterates a people's worldview (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999, p. 417). This setting illustrates the imminent threat of cultural erasure posed when a people are denied the right to their history; a real threat in Arizona's anti-ethnic studies climate.

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## An Allegory about Immortality

"Immortality!" Dr. Rosette Benitez exclaimed. The crowded lecture hall shifted and students murmured excitedly to one another. "Immortality has been a pursuit of humankind since the beginning of our time here on earth; so much so that our many cultures have created myths and legends of humans and creatures who have achieved such a feat. Right, Deb?" Dr. Benitez looked pointedly at a furiously blushing student seated in the front row. Deb quickly crossed her arms across her chest as the podcast camera adjusted to point in her direction, now displaying on the giant screen behind Dr. Benitez, Deb's blushing image of her t-shirt's "Team Edward" barely discernible through her crossed arms. "I am excited to share with you all that we are on the cusp of an astounding achievement for our species, and I am happy to report that the fantasy of 'immortality' is a castle in the sky no more." A male student seated near the rear exit of the auditorium raised his hand and Dr. Benitez squinted into the darkened house as she called on the student to speak.

"Uh, yeah, so are you like saying that it'll be like impossible for me to be killed? Like I can jump off a building and stuff and I won't die?"

A scattering of students snickered while several in the front of the auditorium craned their necks to get a look at the joker in the back. "Hmph," Benitez thought, "seated close to the door for a quick escape when lectures aren't so exciting...idiot."

Although Dr. Benitez could barely discern the student through the darkness, she congenially shook her head and smiled toward the general area she heard the voice from, "No, no...um, your name?"

"Brad" the student answered. "Of course," Benitez thought.

"No Brad, intense trauma and abuse to the body will not likely increase your chances to live indefinitely; however, if you all would so indulge me I'd like to explain to you how this immortality works." Vigorous nodding and a chorus of "yesses" and "uh huhs" spread among the 150+ student audience. "Okay," Dr. Benitez said, "let's begin." The lecture hall filled with the sound of quick shuffling to grab paper and Apple notebooks. Benitez rolled her eyes and thought, "Now they wanna take notes."

## A Description of Dr. Benitez: Who is Rosette?

Dr. Rosette Benitez, a pioneer in the field of Biomedical Engineering, earned her MD/PhD at the incredible age of twenty-four and was hired immediately by the prestigious White-Angley Cancer Institute at Pennsylvania Institute of Technology. Rosette, a first-generation Mexican American, and first-generation college student, was always fascinated by the natural world surrounding her and was the kid at Little League games who got thrown in the outfield because her general interests had more to do with observing insects crawling in the grass rather than any pop-flies descending from the sky. Her parents, both immigrants from Durango, Mexico, settled in the borderlands of Arizona and they had Rosette and her siblings soon thereafter. They instilled in Rosette a strong work ethic and an optimism for achievement (Rivas-Drake & Mooney, 2008, p. 4), and while it was her mother always asking about school and pushing Rosette to complete homework and other school assignments (Yosso, 2006, p. 130), it was her father who would drive the family out to wooded areas for walks to observe exciting aspects of the natural world (Moreno & Valencia, 2002, p. 236; also see Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

As a young student Rosette studied vigorously and was accepted on scholarship to a private college-prep high school in a neighboring city forty miles to the north of the border town in which she grew up. Determined as she was to get the best education possible, and supportive as her parents were of this pursuit, Rosette opted to live during school semesters with a host family in the northern city. Growing up in a border town where the population was nearly all Mexican American or Mexican national (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; Border Counties Coalition, 2006, p. 2), Rosette experienced quite the culture shock when she realized this new city had more white people than she had ever seen in her life, and her host family, white people as

well, did not operate (as a cohesive unit and household) like the one she had grown up in (Aylesworth & Ossorio, 1983, p. 49-50). For instance, her host parents had customs that seemed strange to Rosette, such as drinking alcohol three times a day, one drink when arriving home from work, another with dinner, and one more before bed. Rosette had seen adults in her family drink, but usually only on special occasions, not on an everyday basis, and usually beer in cans not scotch in crystal tumblers. Also, her host brother and sister, both close to her in age, had credit cards and cars, and rarely if ever interacted with their parents. In fact, the whole family just sort of orbited around one another never actually touching. The one person who the kids did go to with any problems or sometimes just to chat was their long-time nanny and housekeeper, Consuelo, a *nana*.<sup>[2]</sup> Living with Consuelo as the family *nana* was to Rosette the most familiar yet initially the most uncomfortable aspect of her new life with this host family. Consuelo, Rosette noted, looked like family and reminded her of home. Her soft voice and accented English sprinkled with a dash here and there of Spanish, a sort of "English con Salsa" (Valdés, 1994, p. 4) made Rosette long for home. And although Rosette was initially uncomfortable with Consuelo doing things for her such as making her bed and doing her laundry (chores Rosette was expected to do at home) she soon became accustomed to her new life that included disposable income, a ride in a cool car to school every day, and someone to clean up after her.

Rosette excelled in her studies but made sure to take breaks from her rigorous scholarly life to visit home. Nearly every weekend there was a birthday party for one cousin or another so she would make the trip down home to catch up with *la familia*. Yet as the years passed and as Rosette became more comfortable in her northern city world, a canyon of sorts grew between her and her cousins from down south (Rodriguez, 2004, p. 51). She found she had less and less in common with many of them, and eventually went from visiting home nearly every weekend, to only making the trip on important holidays like Christmas and Easter. Over time, Rosette became increasingly uncomfortable and sometimes even disdainful around her family (Córdova, 1998, p. 35). She began feeling anxious to return to her more familiar northern life. Rosette stopped socializing with her cousins as she felt their lives diverge onto different paths. She would receive updates every now and then from her mother about this cousin who was graduating high school and got a job with the police (*that's nice*, Rosette thought), or another cousin who was getting married (*good for him*), one who dropped out (*geez*), and another who was pregnant (*big surprise*). Rosette didn't understand her cousins and their life choices, *they had every opportunity I had*, she'd think. And because her cousins seemed to be fulfilling every stereotype and standard she perceived were societal norms for Mexican Americans, Rosette was determined to single-handedly battle these assumptions and "prove them all wrong" (Yosso, 2006, p. 132). She worked harder at speaking perfect accent-free English (Rodriguez, 2004, p. 46; Casas, 2005, p. 39), she strove to write better essays than her white peers (DuBois, 1969, p. 44), and she excelled in the sciences, a field very few Mexican Americans occupied (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2011). Rosette promised herself she would give Americans no reason or ammunition to believe she was helped in any way by affirmative action policies (Connerly, 2000, p. 3). After all, she pulled herself up by her bootstraps and made it, an American success story (Villanueva, 1993, p. xiv; Rodriguez, 2004, p. 1); as for the *primos* back home? *Well*, she reasoned, *they simply didn't want it as bad as she did* (Martinez, 2009, p. 585).

During her undergraduate years at the prestigious Pennsylvania Institute of Technology, Rosette became a staunch supporter of anti-affirmative action movements, as she joined the Civil Rights for All Students (CRAS) organization that, among other things, invited anti-affirmative action leaders to campus to inform the public about the detriments of affirmative action for minority students and its reverse discrimination against white students. Rosette took note of the fact that she was indeed a minority both on campus at large and within CRAS (Stavans, 2006, para. 2; Rivas-Drake & Mooney, 2008, p. 2); however, her peers, although they seemed suspicious and skeptical of her at first, soon became rabidly loyal and devoted friends and supporters when Rosette shared stories about her humble border-town beginnings. She would use her success versus the perceived failures of her family back home as undeniable proof that anyone can achieve the American Dream so long as they make the right choices and take advantage of the equal opportunity

that CRAS promoted as reality for all in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 28). And although she felt a twinge of discomfort when her peers made derogatory statements about Mexicans, Rosette felt slightly heartened when they'd follow up such remarks with an obligatory smile and "Of course you're nothing like *them* Rosette" (Casas, 2005, p. 39). Rosette felt better being embraced by her peers as an exception to the rule rather than not being accepted at all.

On a scholarly level Rosette progressed beautifully as she maintained top grades in her courses, won academic awards for her achievements, and, through coursework, caught the attention of faculty in the emerging field of Biomedical Engineering, a field devoted to bridging the gap between engineering and medicine with the goal of improving healthcare. Rosette secured an undergraduate research assistantship in PIT's bioengineering lab under the direction of Dr. Richard Linger, a world-renowned bioengineer who ran the largest bioengineering lab in the nation. With Dr. Linger's encouragement, Rosette applied to an MD/PhD program in her field and became the first Hispanic female in the United States to degree in this discipline, not to mention the youngest female to do so at the time. Together, Dr. Linger and the newly minted Dr. Rosette Benitez worked on numerous publications based on their research, as they issued nearly 900 patents worldwide that were licensed for over 200 pharmaceutical, chemical, biotechnology and medical device companies. As a duo they became the most cited bioengineers in history. Dr. Linger often referred to Dr. Benitez as his "prodigy." But their most exciting work was yet to come.

## In the Lab

"Immortality?" Dr. Rosette Benitez said skeptically.

"Yes Rosie," Dr. Richard Linger replied, "that's what I said, 'What if I told you achieving immortality was possible?'"

"Wow," Rosette mouthed, "I can see it now, but you've only described half of what we'll need for this to become even a remote possibility, Rich."

"Oh?" Richard said, "Go on."

"Well," Rosette responded, "you mentioned the use of nano machines within our bodies, right? So I'm guessing they would be dispersed throughout our bloodstream and they'd act as automated machines providing the body with something akin to a much more advanced immune system, yes?"

"Exactly," Richard said, "they'd perform actions such as maintaining peak performance of all our bodily functions and organs, including expediting bodily repairs from injury, identifying and destroying illness and disease before there are any discernible symptoms—it's all possible Rosie."

Rosette continued, "I know it is Rich, but there's a missing piece to this equation, and the missing link involves gene therapy. We would have to combine the use of nano machines with gene therapy, there's no other way."

Richard replied, "Rosette, *this* is why I call you my 'prodigy.' You're absolutely right, I didn't see this hole and it was staring me right in the face. Well whadaya say? Shall we get to work? We'll need extra funding for this one and I think you're ready to solicit the politicians."

"Okay Rich, they're gonna think we're nuts, but we've got something here. It's really a possibility isn't it?"

"Immortality?" Richard replied. "Yes dear one, we're about to achieve the impossible."

## Nine Months Later in a Capitol Hill Boardroom

"So you see ladies and gentlemen," Rosette announced as she advanced her PowerPoint slide, "all cells have a finite amount of DNA information used to reproduce themselves and the DNA contained within them, and there's a stop to this reproduction called DNA telomerase..."

A voice with a drawl interrupted Rosette's flurry of words with, "Now just hold on there Miss Benitez..."

Rosette was startled by being addressed as "Miss" instead of "Dr.," a title which she was proud of and had grown accustomed to in professional spaces. Dr. Benitez looked up from her notes into the smirking face of Senator Russell Borne. She had heard of Senator Borne, mostly through the news. He held his senatorial seat in the same state Rosette had roots in, and his numerous anti-affirmative action initiatives as a politician in a state heavily populated with Mexican Americans had earned him quite a reputation among Rosette's family. This was especially so with her *prima*, Alejandra Prieto, the only cousin Rosette perceived as having "made it" like she did.

Alejandra was much younger than Rosette, so she had already left to college by the time Alejandra was old enough to have an intelligent conversation; however, Rosette suspected they would have had little to agree on from what she heard of Alejandra. Her cousin was a doctoral student in some Humanities discipline, and caused a great stir in the family when she publicly spoke out about Borne's policies calling him a "racist" and claiming his initiatives were "anti-Chicano." While most members of *la familia* were proud of Alejandra's resistance efforts, Rosette rolled her eyes at this young idealist's vigor. Her cousin simply didn't understand the value and necessity of assimilation (Rodriguez, 2004, p. 26) and its importance for getting ahead in life. She would probably end up never leaving their home state, and would likely remain spinning her wheels in some low paying social work-type career.

Didn't Alejandra know better than to pit herself against the likes of heavy hitters like Borne? From what Rosette knew he was a graduate of Yalvard University, magna cum laude as an undergraduate and with honors in his JD, and was poised early for greatness. He had risen through the ranks of politics beginning his career as a member of the state legislature, making an early name for himself through his anti-affirmative action stance on school admissions and scholarships, though particularly he went after cultural clubs/organizations (Benson, 2008, para. 2). After his term in the state legislature, during which he was able to accomplish the dismantling of cultural centers on school campuses (claiming they were segregationist in nature and discriminatory toward white students), he served as State Superintendent of Public Instruction and spearheaded a campaign to put a conservative stamp on history textbooks in his state (McKinley, 2010, para. 1), "stressing the superiority of American capitalism, questioning the Founding Fathers' commitment to a purely secular government and presenting Republican political philosophies in a more positive light." When interviewed by a state newspaper about his stance on the textbook issue, he remarked, "We are adding balance. History has already been skewed. Academia is skewed too far to the left" (McKinley, 2010, para. 6). He was influenced by the writings of another Yalvard graduate, William L. Kensington, whose significant, albeit controversial, essay "The Hispanic Dispute" claimed Mexicans in particular were becoming a threat to the founding principles of Anglo-Protestant culture set forth by the Founding Fathers. Superintendent Borne successfully defeated efforts by Hispanic school board members to include more Latino figures in textbooks and history/social studies curriculum as role models for the state's large Hispanic K-12 population (Huntington, 2004). Some prominent Chicano citizens, including *prima* Alejandra, protested Borne's initiative claiming he and his conservative board members want to promote the myth that this is a white America and Hispanics don't exist. However, Borne duly prompted by the scare tactics rampant in Kensington's essay, created a now (in)famous mission statement which outlined curriculum standards instituted in state public schools based primarily on the issues Kensington identifies in his essay. The primary actions taken with the passing of these curriculum standards involved the following:

- A complete dismantling of the Spanish-English bilingual education programs, replaced with strict English-only requirements for grades K-12 (Sánchez, 2007a, para. 27; Crawford, 2000/2001).
- Inherently "Hispanic" cultural teachings and celebrations were to be strictly relegated to home spaces and were not welcome nor tolerated in public school spaces, both during and after school hours (Huntington, 2004, p. 230).
- And no territorial claims to the US Southwest by any "immigrant groups" were to be tolerated in the teachings of K-12 faculty, nor would such claims be allowed inclusion in history/social studies textbooks, nor would faculty be allowed to order other texts in which these claims are made (Huntington, 2004, p. 219).

Rosette agreed for the most part with Borne's stances as she grew uncomfortable with the way her mother began to talk about these issues when she would make her weekly call home.

"This man is going overboard!" her mother exclaimed. "He is not an expert. He is not a historian, yet he is attempting to rewrite the history of not only our state, but of the United States and the world! And he wants to rewrite it leaving *Mexicanos* out! As if we don't exist, as if we've never contributed to this country, as if our history doesn't matter! But I exist, we exist" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p.108; McKinley, 2010, para. 8-9)

"*Mami*, I need to interrupt you right there, it sounds like you've been listening to that little Alejandra. I've never heard you speak like this before, what's gotten into you? Borne just wants us to be united as a people and as a country. How can we accomplish this unity if we're all speaking different languages and placing in prominence cultures and holidays that have nothing to do with who we are as *Americans* (Huntington, 2004)? If people want to learn about their heritage they can do so at home; public *American* schools should not have to bear this responsibility (Benson. 2008, para. 7-8). People like Borne and plenty of other Americans, including myself, just want to preserve the America our Founding Fathers dreamed of (Huntington, 2004, p. 211)."

"Aye Rosette, *mija* sometimes I wonder what this elite education you've received has done to you (Rivas-Drake & Mooney, 2008, p. 13). Don't you see *mija*, a people without a history also have no future, and with this textbook *mierda* going on Borne and his cronies are trying to erase our history. You have no idea what it's like here *mija*, you've been gone for so long. *Mija* we have a history..."

"Yes mom, we do, and it's called American history. Look I've gotta go, I have a big meeting to prepare for. I'll call you in a week."

"Okay *mija*, take care of yourself." Her mother's voice sounded sad as they hung up.

That conversation took place nearly two years ago, and beyond that call, Rosette's mother rarely brought up politics again.

"Miss Benitez? Hello? Are you there?"

Rosette was jerked from her memories and musings by Borne's lazy drawl. *Ugh* she cringed, *he called me 'Miss' again*. She forced a smile and continued, "So sorry ladies and gentlemen, I was momentarily lost in thought."

"That's obvious," Borne said in a completely audible whisper.

"But you had a question Senator Borne?" Rosette asked with the most genuine smile she could muster at a man she was quickly growing to loathe.

"Yes Miss Benitez—"

"It's Dr. Benitez" Dr. Richard Linger interjected, clearly annoyed.

"Right, *doctor* Benitez," Borne enunciated with a pained look on his face resembling the look someone would have while smelling dog waste. "I don't think I'm alone in this request, but it'd be really great if you could just pump the breaks a bit and use some layman's terms for us regular folk here." A few of the other people sitting along the rectangular boardroom table nodded in agreement.

"Right," Rosette replied, a slight flush coming to her cheeks out of both frustration and slight anger, however completely misinterpreted by Borne.

He remarked (with a infuriating wink), "Now, now, *doctor* Benitez no need to blush, I meant no offense, it's just that most of us took our last math and science courses too many years ago to count so please, no jargon, just plain English for this crowd."

Rosette swallowed the retort bubbling in her throat and instead of suggesting where he could shove his request she responded with another forced smile and said, "Certainly Senator Borne, let me back up a bit. As many of you know, both nano machines and gene therapy have independently been projects in the works for many years now—"

"So give us some explanations for both nano machines and gene therapy, really spell it out for us *doctor* Benitez."

"Certainly Senator Borne. Now, nano machines, also known as nanobots or more formally referred to in engineering as the study of nanorobotics used to exist only in the imaginations of science fiction authors and video game designers; however, due to the rampant attention the 'cancer bot' has received in the past few years, I'm guessing nano machines should be fairly familiar to you ladies and gentlemen as their success rate has now made them part of our public consciousness."

Most heads around the table nodded and a middle-aged man in a blue suit spoke up. "Right, the 'cancer bot' detects and destroys cancer cells in the human body. From what I've heard the 'cancer bot' works at a reported 99.9% success rate too."

"That's partly true Mr.—"

"Rico," the blue suit replied. Ah, big money Rosette thought, a financial backer; good, he seems on board.

"Yes, as Mr. Rico suggests the most recent incarnation of the cancer detecting nano machine has been successfully tested and implanted into real cancer patients with an extremely high success rate of detection and cancerous cell destruction. Now, granted these patients were in somewhat early stages of cancer progression, so this particular machine will not help those who are terminal, however those who are between what are referred to as stages 0-2 have been cured. For those of you less familiar with this technology, this next slide I am displaying shows the actual 'cancer bot'; however, this image has been magnified as the naked eye would not readily discern these machines because, as their name suggests, they are microscopic, small enough to implant into the human body. Now, ladies and gentlemen, I'm sure you're all wondering how these nano machines that work specifically with cancer transfer to the research I'm here today to ask you all to support."

"Yes Dr. Benitez," a fairly young female senator who Rosette knew as Breckinridge, responded, "You haven't gotten to the point about what research you're asking us to fund, I'm not quite there yet—"

"Right, Senator Breckinridge, I'll get to the point. Dr. Linger has developed a nano machine that goes many steps further than the more widely publicized 'cancer bot.' In fact pending patent approval, this machine will soon be available for a considerable sum to the general public; but as a select few of you know, it is already in use and has been for the past year within our military branches. This nano machine is a super machine in that it has successfully detected and destroyed all known diseases to humankind." Gasps and utterances of disbelief erupted around the table and many of the people gathered all began to speak at once. "I know, I know, these claims sound outlandish," Rosette had to raise her voice to be heard over the shouted

questions from the astonished crowd, "however, I can assure you that Dr. Linger's bot has been in development for many years, and the current prototype to which I now refer has two published studies in *Nature* concerning the trials and success rate, and there are countless unpublished and classified studies under military lock and key that I can assure you substantiate my claim which again seems outlandish to you now."

The room grew silent as Rosette looked into the large round eyes of each person staring back. "The research I'm here today to ask you all to support involves the combining of Dr. Linger's super bot with my own experimental procedures in gene therapy. Aided by a team of researchers, I've developed treatment that has turned weak, feeble and old human cells into healthy cells. Our initial finding in this research indicated human cells aged slower aided by this therapy. However, as we continued our work, we were astonished to discover that cells were regenerating and in essence the aging process was, well, reversing...stopping only at the point of prime adult health. Prior to our research the aging process was poorly understood, however my group of researchers focused on a process called "telomere shortening." Our DNA is carried in our 23 pairs of chromosomes, those of which exist in each of our cells. At the ends of each chromosome is a protective cap called a telomere. Each time a cell divides, the telomeres are snipped shorter, until eventually they stop working altogether and the cell dies. This telomere shortening process is behind much of the wear and tear associated with aging. My research developed an injectable treatment that raises the levels of an enzyme called telomerase. This enzyme essentially stops telomeres from getting shorter and the tissue this treatment was tested on was repaired of all damage and all signs of aging were reversed. Now, the downside to this gene treatment is that telomerase, as an evolutionary compromise, eventually stops producing in humans in order to prevent cells growing out of control and turning into cancer. Though raising levels of telomerase slows the aging process, the risk is that it makes cancer soar" (Sample, 2010, para. 6-8).

Breckinridge's hand shot into the air, Rosette nodded in her direction. "So you'd like us to fund research that investigates the effects of combining your gene therapy discoveries with Dr. Linger's nano machines?"

"That's right Senator Breckinridge, Dr. Linger and I suspect that through a dual treatment of telomerase injections and the presence of a nano machine the body will reverse its aging process. All cells, tissue, organs, you name it, will be rejuvenated, and any development of cancerous cells or other disease will be not only detected but terminated. We expect to achieve what has often been touted as impossible or mere fantasy; we are on the brink of achieving human immortality." Again the room was silent.

## Eight Years Later in a Small Living Room

"And from this day forth it is no longer a question of whether the human race will survive for we have achieved what was once thought only the stuff of fantasy, we have achieved immortality!"

(Wild cheers from the crowd)

"What are you watching *Abuela*?" "It's the news, a special alert, they interrupted my *novela*..."

Ernesto took a seat on the floor next to his grandma's recliner and grabbed the remote so he could turn up the volume:

*Reporter:* This is Leticia Saldivar, reporting live from Washington D.C., where Secretary of Health and Human Services Jennifer Breckinridge, from the sounds of it, has just announced a scientific breakthrough tantamount to the announcement made back when we landed our first men on the moon.

*Newsroom Anchor:* Leticia did I hear all this correctly or are my ears deceiving me? Immortality?

*Reporter:* Well James, "immortality" is the word you just heard used by Secretary of Education Russell Borne when he took to the podium after Secretary Breckinridge's speech, so more on that in a moment, but according to Secretary Breckinridge a research project to prolong human life and reverse aging,



spearheaded by PIT scientists, has apparently been in the works for almost ten years. From what I've gathered they've developed a treatment that reverses the aging process stopping only at the point of adult prime health while also supplying patients with a technology that detects and destroys all diseases known to mankind.

*Newsroom Anchor:* But if I'm not mistaken Secretary Breckinridge seemed careful not to describe the results of such treatment as "immortality" for humans, even avoiding the term when prodded by journalists in the crowd—

*Reporter:* That's right James; it was Secretary of Education Russell Borne's strange outburst at the conclusion of Secretary Breckinridge's speech that introduced the term.

*Newsroom Anchor:* Right let's play back the footage. You can hear Secretary Borne's outburst. I believe he's saying, "We've achieved immortality!"

*Reporter:* To be honest James, I'm not even sure why Secretary Borne was present during this media briefing, but when he took the podium after his outburst and at the request of curious journalists he proceeded to give, as we all together heard and saw, what can only be described as an impassioned speech, using the term "immortality" unreservedly while soliciting an unexpected uproarious response from the gathered reporters...

"Change the channel or turn it off, I've had enough of this nonsense."

"But *Abuela* this is really interesting—they're talking about living for—"

"*Callete* no one's ever landed on the moon, and certainly no one in this family will live forever, *gracias a Dios.*"

Ernesto rolled his eyes and changed the channel.

## Six Months Later at the White House

"What we need is a contingency plan. How in the world will this treatment be administered? The sheer cost of production alone is enormous." Joseph Slatterly, Secretary of the Treasury had a pained look on his face as he rubbed his fingertips to his temples.

"Well, what ideas have we got, let's hear some proposals," President Jackson Dennison said looking expectantly at his gathered cabinet. The public response to Secretary Breckinridge's announcement was unprecedented and news of this scientific break-through had gone viral, worldwide, within minutes of live coverage. Particularly driving the public and worldwide interest was Secretary Borne's "interruption." President Dennison smiled to himself as he recalled the liberal media accusations claiming Borne's intrusion on Breckinridge's announcement was staged so as to excite the public. Their plan, this staged disruption, had worked. Who better to introduce the public to the term "immortality" than Borne?

The nation knew well that Borne was not a man of science. He was not cold and beyond approach as many science types were perceived, and most of his political career was built on his ability to identify with voters through an "aw shucks" persona that seemed down to earth; less politician and more the kind of guy you can grab a beer with after work, just an "Average Joe" (Benedetto, 2004, para. 7-12). Little attention was paid to the fact that Borne was just as pedigreed as the most aloof politician on Capitol Hill (Benedetto, 2004, para. 9), and as testament to his appeal, no one, neither media or otherwise ever brought up the fact that Borne was not an American citizen by birth, that he was in fact born in Quebec and naturalized when he was twelve. He was the type of American whose patriotism was not called into question. Also never questioned was where he got that southern drawl, seeing as he was raised in Connecticut. No, Borne had a certain appeal to him that was invaluable to President Dennison, because Borne served as the honest-to-goodness guy capable of gathering support from working-class America, they simply loved him. So yes, his

presence at Breckinridge's press conference and his use of the term "immortality" was no mistake, and the public responded beautifully and exactly as expected, however President Dennison was well aware that the world was watching; waiting to see what the U.S. would do, policy-wise, to accommodate the high demand for what was now being called the "immortality treatment." There were so many questions to be answered. He gathered his whole cabinet together on this day because he needed all members present to come up with a plan.

One well-known fact was that the treatment was not cheap, and many Americans were not in a financial position to acquire it. After all, the first Americans who were successfully treated were beginning to make public appearances, and the media duly noted these individuals' personal or celebrity-attained wealth. The "Average Joe" American was beginning to ask the inevitable question: "What about me?" And like clockwork, politicians vying for constituents were prodding these concerns along and making hell for President Dennison and his cabinet as they scrambled to provide answers they didn't have. A social policy would need to be determined so as to satisfy the public who would undoubtedly lash out if the treatment did not become available to the masses, and soon.

An unmistakable drawl chimed in, "Mr. President if I may," Dennison nodded in Secretary Borne's direction. "I, like so many of us seated around this table today, have made this 'immortality treatment' crisis a top priority. My staff and I have been working tirelessly to provide a suggestion, perhaps even a solution for the question of distribution and I think the answer resides in a quota system."

"A quota system?" Dennison replied. "Like the ones in practice during affirmative action? I don't understand Borne, you helped draft and pass the legislation responsible for more or less outlawing affirmative action quota systems in this country—my administration has come to be identified by our political rivals as the anti-affirmative action presidency. How in the hell are we going to justify instituting a quota system when we worked so hard to end another? Please explain yourself."

"Of course Jack, of course. I understand well the political backlash we could receive by even proposing, not to mention if we institute such a system, however our justification is foolproof."

President Jackson Dennison nodded, "Okay Borne, let's hear it."

"Well Jack, it all boils down to contribution. Our society has been built by the blood, sweat, and tears of our citizens, but let's be frank, some members of our society contribute more than others, am I mistaken?" Borne looked around the table and most cabinet members shook their heads.

"So what I propose is simple, we devise a quota system that distributes the treatment to descendants of Americans who have consistently contributed to making this the great country that it is."

"Pause there, Borne," Secretary Breckinridge interrupted, "how in the world are we going to determine who has and has not consistently contributed?"

"History. We look to our history. What's been documented and who the participants are, the key players, if you will, in our nation's story. We can trace genealogical lines from our founding fathers for starters, naturally their descendants would be granted a large percentage of the treatment per fiscal year—"

"But what about people like you Borne? Recent immigrants? You don't have these sorts of genealogical ties to our nation's founding, but I wouldn't say you haven't contributed—"

"Well thank you Secretary Breckinridge, I appreciate your kind words, and you bring me to the next part of my proposition. We'll also distribute treatment based on statistics of those graduating from college. We'll look into what groups of people constitute this population, and once again, we'll also look to history. We'll look for who in our history has made this country what it is today. Who has served in political office, who has helped create and carry out our nation's laws, who has founded and built up our greatest cities, who has made ingenious scientific breakthroughs, who has led us into battle and defeated our enemy, or has died

trying, who are the people who uphold our values, traditions, and culture as a Protestant nation (Huntington, 2004, p. 211)? These are the folks I want to go into the future with and those who constitute this group are the very people who should have access to this treatment."

"Borne, you do realize that the racial make-up of these 'groups' you refer to is predominantly white?"

"That's beside the point, Jack. What we need to get our public on board with is the idea that such an exciting scientific breakthrough of this sort provides us as a country the opportunity to start over in a way while still forging on into a bigger and brighter future filled with the best and the brightest our country has to offer; merit based, if you will." Borne looked around the room and no one seemed to blink for a full minute.

Then President Dennison offered, "How are we going to propose, or rather announce such a move to our citizens? How are we going to make people feel okay about this?"

"I've already thought of this," Borne replied, "we get that scientist, the Latina one, to become the face of this campaign."

"Rosette Benitez?"

"Exactly."

## A Week Later in a Philadelphia Condo

Rosette hung up the phone in a stunned silence. She couldn't believe what Breckinridge had just proposed and in all her life she had never felt so betrayed. Yet she felt guilty as well. How could such a miraculous breakthrough become so monstrous, so hateful, disgusting, and prejudiced? She'd done it all right, played the game by their rules, achieved by their standards and still she would lose. She would lose her family, her people, their history, and any hope they'd have for the bright future she'd achieved. And yet she'd done it all right; she performed her role perfectly at the expense of alienating herself from her *familia* and her roots (Carter Andrews, 2009, p. 297-298; Fordham, 2008, p. 231). How would this treatment, something she had worked so hard to see through ever become something people like those from her hometown could ever come by? By the time this treatment became available to her people, many of them will have died off and those left would undoubtedly form a new sort of underclass of mortals versus the immortality afforded by those in power and their descendents.

The immortals would likely form a powerful upper echelon of the caste, powerful because this group will have prolonged access to learning, political positions (no one will be allowed to run for certain political offices without being immortal, and there will be many justified reasons for this Breckinridge assured), and will have longevity allowing for accumulation of wealth and resources. Suddenly horrified, Rosette realized her family and people of her family's status who have not provided documented evidence of historical contribution may never meet the criteria necessary to qualify for the treatment, and although they likely will not completely die out, they will not have access to the American Dream, a dream so important to Rosette, a dream she believed in with all her heart. Yet Breckinridge cited recorded history as a main source for attributing contribution to groups and Rosette could not remember learning one thing in her history courses about her people and their contribution to this nation (Casas, 2005, p. 42). In fact, her memory of any mention of Mexicans involved the Mexican-American War and César Chávez. Infuriated she thought of Russell Borne, Secretary of Education and undoubtedly a key player in this sickening cabinet decision. Heck, for all Rosette knew of Borne this policy was likely his brainchild (Reyes, 2011, para. 3). *He set us up*, Rosette thought. *He lays claim to ridding our nation's textbooks of any evidence that we exist and then he thinks up this policy to exterminate us.*

Well, not all of us, Rosette thought. Rosette, Breckinridge assured, was a "credit to her race," and being so her immediate family would be entitled to the treatment at first pass, but what, Rosette wondered would happen to her *tias* and *tios*? Her *primos*? Cousin Alejandra had been waging the very war these politicians

were now putting into play through their selection criteria for the treatment. Had little Ale been right all along? Rosette distinctly thought back to news headlines from several years back describing the attempted law suit brought against her home state by eleven educators who were fighting for the right to teach the histories and literatures of Chican@s (Martinez & Gutierrez, 2010), an effort quickly shot down by political cronies of Borne. Rosette realized that without these teachings, Chican@ children, not so different from whom she was once upon a time, would buy into the idea that their people had no history, made no contributions, and were thus undeserving of a future. Dr. Rosette Benitez, the leading researcher on the immortality project had made it possible for so many to live, indefinitely, and had also made it possible for others, including her own people, to slowly die out. As tears welled in her eyes, Rosette lowered her head into her hands and could only think, "What have I done?"

## Contextualizing the Allegory: House Bill 2281, Arizona's Ban on Ethnic Studies, an Overview

On May 11, 2010, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer signed into law House Bill 2281. This bill, the brainchild of then State Superintendent of Public Instruction (now State Attorney General), Tom Horne, bans the following from Arizona K-12 public education:

- Promotion to overthrow the United States Government.
- Promotion of resentment toward a race or class of people.
- Courses designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group (with the exception of courses for Native American students, or the instruction of the Holocaust or any other instance of genocide, or the historical oppression of a particular group of people based on ethnicity, race or class).
- Advocating ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals. (State of Arizona, 2010, p. 1-2)

Effective December 31, 2010, HB 2281 stipulates that if public school programs are found in violation of the law, the entire district will face losing ten percent of its annual state funding.

## La Lucha de Ahora

Since HB 2281 was signed into law, John Huppenthal, a Republican who voted in favor of the bill, was elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction, while Tom Horne ascended to Arizona Attorney General. In October of 2010, eleven TUSD educators (all prominent ethnic studies teachers) publically announced their lawsuit against the state of Arizona board of education and State Superintendent of Public Instruction (Martinez & Gutierrez, 2010, para. 1). The educators have spent the last year and a half raising funds and national awareness for their cause and have garnered sympathy, praise, and support for TUSD's ethnic studies through speaking engagements and screenings of *Precious Knowledge*, a documentary film chronicling the ethnic studies struggle in Arizona.<sup>[3]</sup>

When Huppenthal took over in January 2011 as superintendent, he ordered an audit of TUSD's ethnic studies program. By June 2011 a 120-page report was released with auditors praising RAZA studies stating "students are taught to be accepting of multiple ethnicities of people...teachers are teaching César Chávez alongside Martin Luther King Jr. and Ghandi, all as peaceful protestors who sacrificed for people and ideas they believed in" (The Associated Press, 2011, para. 3). Huppenthal was later quoted as saying, "We reject totally what [the auditors] observed." He told The Associated Press (2011), "We disagree that it was in fact an audit. We disagree with those findings being representative of ethnic studies classes" (para. 6). Although TUSD ethnic studies educators worked to adjust their curricula so as to accommodate HB 2281 stipulations, on January 10, 2012, the TUSD board voted to immediately suspend the MAS program (Huicochea, 2012a,

para. 1). In March 2012, the constitutionality of HB 2281 was taken under federal consideration to U.S. Circuit Judge A. Wallace Tashima, who has not yet ruled on the matter and has given no timeline for a decision (Huicochea, 2012b, para. 1-2 & 5). Meanwhile, on April 10, 2012, the TUSD board voted not to renew the contract of MAS director Sean Arce, the first ever recipient of the Zinn Education Project's Myles Horton Award for Teaching People's History<sup>4</sup> (Huicochea, 2012c, para. 1 & 9), and during this same month State Superintendent Huppenthal declared, during an interview with Fox News Latino, his intent to "suspend Mexican American studies in the Arizona universities because these courses teach students to resent Anglo-Saxons" (Askar, 2012, para. 2).

## The Heat We Live In: Arizona's Anti-Mexican Climate as Dramatic Setting for Allegory

HB 2281 comes on the heels of Arizona's most severe and controversial anti-illegal immigration legislation, SB 1070. Following a lawsuit by the U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. District Court Judge Susan Bolton blocked 1070's requirement (among other stringent stipulations in the bill) that police use "reasonable suspicion," based solely on physical appearance, as grounds to question a person's immigration status. After Judge Bolton's enjoinder, Governor Brewer characterized the ruling as a "small bump in the road" and the State of Arizona has sued the federal government over the ruling. Critics say 1070 unfairly targets Arizona's large Mexican American population while supporters insist the legislation is necessary to prevent persons from crossing illegally into the country along the Arizona border (Hing, 2010). SB 1070 and HB 2281 are two of many unjust occurrences that have occurred in Arizona in an overwhelmingly anti-Mexican climate. As Anita Fernández (2010) notes, "many families have left Arizona, fleeing the impending radical expansion of racial profiling that legal experts, community organizations, and even law enforcement officials predict will occur under 1070 [when] it goes into effect" (p. 2). SB 1070 and HB 2281 are only a couple instances of a decade-long tirade of anti-immigrant/Mexican laws in Arizona and as Fernández (2010) observes:

- Bilingual education was outlawed in 2000 by Proposition 203, leaving stranded a third of all Arizona English language learners, who were then enrolled in bilingual programs.
- Students brought to Arizona at a young age who do not have documentation have had their chances to attend college drastically reduced by Proposition 300, which makes undocumented students ineligible for in-state tuition at public colleges or universities.
- On the other end of the academic timeline, Head Start students are required to provide proof of citizenship to enroll in the early childhood education program that puts underprivileged children at an advantage when they begin kindergarten.
- Also last year, the Arizona Department of Education ordered the removal of teachers who speak with an accent from English classes.
- Now state Sen. Russell Pearce is pushing legislation that denies birth certificates to the children of undocumented immigrants. (p. 3)

These efforts can be traced to reactionary fears fueled by anti-Latino sentiments such as those expressed in Samuel P. Huntington's essay "The Hispanic Challenge." In his essay, Huntington (2004) asserts his belief that United States identity is a purely British and Protestant enterprise and that "the single most immediate and most serious challenge to America's traditional identity comes from the immense and continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico, and the fertility rates of these immigrants" (p. 212). As the demographics of Arizona, and the nation for that matter (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), change, individuals like Huntington, Tom Horne, Russell Pearce and countless others who have profited from unearned privilege and a legacy power, are now fighting tooth and nail to resist "the prospect of a diverse United States" (Fernández, 2010, p. 3) in which white is the new minority (CBSNews, 2010, para. 4 & 10).

Social contexts like the one in Arizona provide an inlet for dramatized dialogue or narrative that evokes imagery and metaphors to address the very real problems presented by contemporary racism. Plato's works are noted for their dramatic setting in which he creates philosophical discussions among characters who in many instances can be identified as or associated with real historical figures. According to Richard Kraut (2011), Plato did not try to create "a fictional world for the purposes of telling a story, as many literary dramas do; nor do his works invoke an earlier mythical realm." His dialogues often begin with a depiction of the setting that forms vivid portraits of a living, breathing social world, and the dialogues are not "purely intellectual exchanges between characterless and socially unmarked speakers. In *many* of his dialogues...Plato is not only attempting to draw his readers into a discussion, but is also commenting on the social milieu that he is depicting, and criticizing the character and ways of life of his interlocutors" (Kraut, 2011).

Following Plato's method of devising a setting reflective of contemporary social issues and depicting characters that can be easily associated with real public figures, Arizona's anti-immigrant/Mexican/ethnic studies climate provides dramatic context in which to stage an allegory about immortality. In the allegory, immortality represents the privilege to extended life and in essence existence versus lack of access (for the non-privileged) to immortality and thus imminent erasure/extinction of an entire culture, people, and way of being. In its literal sense (i.e. living forever) immortality is reserved for members of society from privileged backgrounds and the underprivileged are denied immortality based on a set of measures that correlate to Arizona's anti-ethnic studies legislation. The one Mexican American character who does reap the benefits of immortality personifies the struggles underrepresented students encounter when striving to achieve the American Dream by way of a college education. In the process of becoming educated, this character buys into white middle-class values, and eventually suffers the effects of cultural displacement defined by Aylesworth and Ossorio (1983) as:

[A]n individual who has an experientially based, internalized culture of origin, a culture which contrasts in more or less important ways with a second, host, culture into which the person has been displaced and is currently living...to participate in the host culture requires that they deviate from what feels right, do what is unnatural, and participate in what seems unreal. (p. 49)

This Mexican American character (the allegory's protagonist) is warranted access to the inner workings of United States politics through her achievements in academia. The politicians the protagonist interacts with are composites of real public figures key to our nation's anti-immigrant and anti-ethnic studies politics. In particular Arizona's forty-ninth legislature is personified through the allegory's antagonist. While the conclusion of the allegory is bleak, it concludes on a low note so as to emphasize the severity of consequences involved in denying a people the right to an education about their past. As a whole, the allegory about very real anti-immigrant/ethnic studies issues in Arizona may evoke many interpretations, and like Derrick Bell, I have written this counterstory to elicit discussion. I welcome readings and resulting discussions that explore additional meaning in either the themes or characters written herein.

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## Notes

[1] Composite characters are fictionalized persons composed based on available information offered in statistical data, existing literatures, social commentary, and authors' professional/personal experiences concerning the topics addressed and encountered by the character. CRT scholars Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado (1995) have formed and maintained recurring composite characters that are foundation for other CRT scholars and their own recurring composite characters.

[2] Nana: A grandmother or also an elderly nursemaid or housemaid. My grandmother and great aunts expressed their preference for "abuela" or "grandma" because of the hired help connotation of the word.

[3] For more information about *Precious Knowledge* see <http://www.dosvatos.com/InProduction/> and <http://www.facebook.com/preciousknowledge>

[4] For more information about the Zinn Education Project and the Myles Horton Award see <http://zinnedproject.org/> and <http://zinnedproject.org/posts/17704>

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