


version” of Brandeis that Ben-Porath ably gives us. Social and civic trust, alas, seems fleeting and elusive.

doi:10.1017/heq.2024.15

Laura K. Muñoz. *Desert Dreams: Mexican Arizona and the Politics of Educational Equality*

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024. 278 pp.

Philis Barragán Goetz 

Texas A&M University-San Antonio, USA

Email: philis.barragan@tamusa.edu

Mexican American educational history has been a growing field since the 1980s, when scholars like Guadalupe San Miguel and Gilbert González published their first monographs. Beginning with this early scholarship, the history of Mexican American-initiated desegregation court cases has always factored heavily into the historiography, as they provide insight into how public education acted as an oppressive institution, while also elucidating a way that ethnic Mexicans asserted agency in resisting said oppression. Until recently—when Rubén Donato, Jarrod Hanson, and Gonzalo Guzmán brought to light the 1914 *Francisco Maestas et al. v. George H. Shone et al.* case in Colorado—the first Mexican American-initiated desegregation case was thought to be the 1925 case of *Romo v. Laird* in Arizona. Despite the acknowledged significance of *Romo*, there has been little scholarship on Arizona’s educational past, as most of the historiography has focused on Texas and California. Laura K. Muñoz’s excellent new book, *Desert Dreams: Mexican Arizona and the Politics of Educational Equality*, fills in this large gap, and offers a new interpretation that places ethnic Mexican educational history at the center of “the making of Arizona” and the emergence of a “Mexican American political consciousness” (p. 3).

Drawing from public school records, university and government archives, court cases, Spanish-language newspapers, and genealogical histories, *Desert Dreams* makes two significant interventions in Mexican American educational historiography. First, Muñoz traces Arizona educational history between 1871 and 1941, uncovering how, for decades, Arizonenses (ethnic Mexicans of Arizona), particularly teachers, parents, leaders, and activists, “intellectualized a politics of education” that created a foundation for “Mexican American civil rights across the borderlands” (pp. 3-4). Muñoz’s temporal framing of the text provides the rich history behind *Romo v. Laird* and the educational activism that continued thereafter until the United States’ entrance into World War II. *Romo* was not the singular event of Arizonense educational history, but it

was a crucial case that was decades in the making. As early as 1871, Mexican American leaders worked with Anglo-American politicians to pass the Safford-Ochoa Act, which founded the Arizona public school system. Mexican American leaders also directly funded the expansion of public education. Tucson businessman Estevan Ochoa, for example, donated land for a public school in his city and covered the costs of having the construction materials delivered to the site. The second significant intervention *Desert Dreams* makes is highlighting several Arizonense women educators who taught between 1885 and 1940. Muñoz argues, “The educational experiences of these Mexican American daughters demonstrates that the Arizonense educational vision not only included women but also depended critically on their labor” (p. 18).

By the early twentieth century, as the ethnic Mexican population doubled, the public school system that ethnic Mexicans helped create embraced segregation. By 1913, Arizona passed a school code that permitted de facto segregation, a move that enabled school officials to carry out pedagogical segregation. Though these racist policies have long “overshadowed” the “political, economic, education, and social networks within a constellation of communities across Arizona and the Southwest borderlands” that Mexican Americans built, *Desert Dreams* carries out three objectives to bring these Arizonense communities and their educational activism to the center (p. 4). First, Muñoz argues that Arizonenses intentionally created a politics of education, as well as their own philosophies, from which they drew to improve their children’s lives and futures. Second, *Desert Dreams* examines how Arizonenses challenged the public school system’s racism and the Americanization and segregation policies that it gave way to. Finally, Muñoz introduces “a nascent civil rights project by parents, teachers, and lawyers to preserve educational equality for Mexican Americans in the decades before World War II and to further the national civil rights movements of the twentieth century” (p. 5).

Desert Dreams is grounded in two themes, civic integration and civil rights. Civic integration, a phrase Muñoz introduces into the historiography, “names the collective practices of political, economic, and social action that Arizonenses took to sustain their belonging in the region after U.S. conquest” (p. 5). Civic integration, “a form of cultural citizenship, as much as it is a form of cultural coalescence,” proved an effective strategy because it required Arizonenses to uphold American laws and claim and exercise civil rights as American citizens (p. 13). The educational activism that stemmed from their civic integration was the vehicle through which Arizonenses staked their claim to “the land, and to their citizenship” (p. 12). Muñoz asserts, “Schools became the principal venue for civic integration” (p. 13).

Chapter 1 argues that, during the territory years, the act of building schools was a priority for Arizonenses throughout the region, from the Mexican border to the Grand Canyon, and not just in Tucson and the San Pedro River Valley. In building these schools and establishing an education system, Arizonenses “centered their place-making and their sense of belonging on the educational ambitions they had set for their children and the schoolwork they pursued for them” (p. 25). Chapter 2 examines the Mexican American experience in high schools, normal schools, and college from 1890 to 1930, arguing that their small enrollment in these institutions of higher learning gave rise to complicated race relations. Some of these students “retooled civic integration into an incipient race consciousness. This shift toward a racialized identity emerged

from the students' self-awareness" (p. 59). Chapter 3 focuses on the Americanization movement and the policies and curriculum, such as segregation and vocational training and domestic science courses, that racialized Mexican American children and asserted explicit expectations that they take on jobs as manual laborers when they left school. These policies helped Arizona teachers connect their work "to larger plans to whiten Arizona's national reputation" (p. 95). Chapter 4 examines *Romo v. Laird*, arguing that the case's "standing in this pantheon of landmark school-desegregation cases significantly alters Mexican American civil rights chronology, not only as an early twentieth-century challenge to segregation and educational inequity but also in its cultural geography as both Arizona and Arizonenses have been categorized historically as a place and a people with no civil rights history" (p. 118). Chapter 5 focuses on the plight of several Mexican American teachers who labored under Juan Crow, examining how "teachers of color" experienced "the paradox of race" (p. 150). Though these teachers "cultivated a political discourse and community action for improving children's lives through public school work," the reality of Juan Crow restricted many of their goals for school reform and opportunities for career advancement.

Desert Dreams will be of interest to scholars of education history, Arizona history, Mexican American history, women's and gender history, and ethnic studies, and is accessible to undergraduate and graduate students alike. Throughout the text, Muñoz illuminates how Arizonenses, over generations, maintained their cultural heritage as they created and embraced a new national identity. The nuanced, well-researched, and erudite approach Muñoz brings to her examination of these processes makes Arizona history a microcosm for United States history.