BOOK REVIEW: *Figures of the Future: Latino Civil Rights and the Politics of Demographic Change*

By Michael Rodríguez-Muñiz

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Few recent books so plainly illustrate the seemingly permanent relevance of the sociological imagination as Michael Rodríguez-Muñiz's (2021) *Figures of the Future: Latino Civil Rights and the Politics of Demographic Change*. Through self-reflection, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and the analysis of primary materials, Rodríguez-Muñiz crafts a conscientious, sociologically informed narrative that is approachable yet critical, and that engages while challenging the reader. "The central argument of this book," Rodríguez-Muñiz (2021: 26) summarizes, is "that the so-called browning of America owes more to politico-cultural dynamics than to the complexion of emergent populations." The author provides readers with an intricate, multi-faceted view into population politics as they apply – and are applied to – Latino civil rights activists and the broader populations they advocate for. And the author jumps right in. In the preface, Rodríguez-Muñiz begins the book reflecting on the author's earliest experiences wielding demographic information with the tactical intention of social change. A core gift of this book is in sensitizing readers to a truly novel interpretation of the intersection between temporality and demography, demonstrating how demographic realities shape and are shaped by their cultural, social, and political milieu. The author traces civil rights and the use of demographic data through several US presidencies, ending the book with the Trump administration's 2016 victory at the polls. By the concluding remarks, the reader is dutifully equipped to see, in all their multiform nuance, the politics of framing demographic data, the temporal dimensions of population politics, and the unintentional tendency among activists and academics to naturalize our talk and thought about demography.

Beyond these analytical and empirical triumphs, the book is a page-turner, which, we admit, was somewhat unexpected for a book foremost about demography. Also, please note that we reviewed this book as a team of undergraduate students working with faculty, and we have concluded that upper-level college students interested in demography, race, politics, and social movements are all well-served by this text as would be graduate-level readers and faculty members. In what follows, we position this book in Rodríguez-Muñiz's broader writing, discuss the author's uncanny ability to blend narrative with number, reflect on the significant authorial decision to anchor the text in the ethoracial label "Latino," and then end with a few concluding

remarks.

Readers familiar with Rodríguez-Muñiz's past sociological research on Latino civil rights advocacy, positioned at the intersection of demography (e.g., 2020), race (e.g., 2019), the state (e.g., 2017), and science and technology studies (e.g., 2016), will get similar themes consolidated and pushed in new, productive directions in *Figures of the Future*. The most notable – and laudable – advance by the author is the integration of the sociology of the future and futures studies literature into this previous line of research. While demographic talk about the future is ubiquitous, Rodríguez-Muñiz's perspective is noteworthy and unique. The feeling of following the actors without getting bogged-down in jargon appears to be the author's signature style. Each chapter unfolds like the next room in a Latino civil rights museum with Rodríguez-Muñiz as their dedicated, resident docent. The author gives readers a behind-the-scenes view into significant summits, conferences, and conventions of Latino rights activists over roughly the past half-century with special emphasis on the 2010 and 2020 censuses that have formulated, shaped, and refined political discourse on members of the Latino population. Rodríguez-Muñiz (2021: 83) seamlessly blends narrative together with number in this demographic text sharing memorable statements about the growing Latino population such as, "I am 1 out of 4 babies born each year" and "I will account for 95% of the TEEN population growth THROUGH 2020," which are claims cleverly framed and woven into the fabric of conventional political marketing tools. Perhaps foreign to some readers, these carefully packaged claims serve as an interesting and welcomed gift in the broader conversation on demographic politics. The author goes on, further solidifying and embedding this message into the fabric of sociology's history, reminding readers, reminiscent of W.E.B. DuBois' unforgettable insight on "twoness," that "the Latino population is bilingual and bicultural, at once and wholly Latino and wholly American" (p. 84).

With a balanced, reflexive tone, Rodríguez-Muñiz (2021) walks the reader through the choice, as an academic and an activist, to anchor the text in the ethnoracial label "Latino," per the subtitle of the book, *Latino Civil Rights and the Politics of Demographic Change*. The reader gets a glimpse into the kind of teacher Rodríguez-Muñiz must be. The author does not tell the reader *what* to think about the ultimate decision to go with "Latino," but *how* to understand it, precisely *what* is at stake when choosing between ethnoracial labels, and that any author of a book relevant to contemporary discourse on race must make challenging choices, many of which have no easy, simple, or obvious answer. The author treats such labels as "live" concepts that change over time and that are socially constructed and contested and not natural or given. "The fact remains that appeals to and articulations of Latinidad (or Latino-ness)—as with other ethnoracial categories—do not arise out of nowhere," Rodríguez-Muñiz (2021: xvii) writes, for they "stem from, and are marked by, complex, shifting, and stratified colonial relations that have systematically centered particular raced, gendered, classed, and sexual experiences and systematically marginalized others." In a form of self-exemplary reflexivity, "I wondered," Rodríguez-Muñiz (2021: xvi) asks the reader as well as himself, how "heterogeneous Latin American-origin groups come to be imagined—and to some extent imagine themselves—as part of a "panethnic" whole?"

The author owns the decision, fully and unambiguously, to anchor the book with the ethnoracial label that was used by the civil rights organizations that Rodríguez-Muñiz participated within and observed firsthand. "No decision can fully appreciate and acknowledge the complexity of these labels and their contingent relations to peoples and projects," Rodríguez-Muñiz (2021: 26-27) acknowledges; the author has "chosen to primarily use the now somewhat archaic "Latino,"" and admits, leaving room open for criticism, that this "choice might influence how the book is received and what assumptions are made about it." "Perhaps this is unavoidable," and, with all things considered, it was "important for me," Rodríguez-Muñiz (2021: 27) shares, to remain "close to the labels and categories used by national Latino civil rights organizations." To embrace, and to not avoid, this significant authorial decision, and to share the personal and professional complexity of the choice with the reader, was a special moment in the book.

As a brief aside, our only real complaint about the book was that there was not enough of it— that individual chapters could have gone into greater depth at greater length and that we, as readers, would have been dutifully satisfied by that. We did have a minor complaint, too, which is relevant to the book's title: for readers that had not yet happened upon the sociology of the future or futures studies more broadly, the meaning of the title *Figures of the Future* was not at all obvious when first seeing the text on the bookshelf. Once you get into the book, of course, the title seems progressively more and more obvious. That said, we raise this point not merely because it is an interesting quality of the book's title, but because the same feeling extends throughout the text as a whole. Even though the author lays out exactly what to expect in the book from the outset, the chapters are still vibrant and emergent and full of life. The author's insights, especially the author's application of foresight, foreshadowing, and forewarning to describe the use of demographic information by Latino activists, build upon one another like scaffolding, deepening the reader's understanding and appreciation of the activists' tactics, and making the eventual implications of such tactics progressively more obvious to the reader – just like the title.

A closing remark, which we, as undergraduate co-authors, would be remiss not to acknowledge, is for instructors. If you are considering this text as required or recommended reading, then you should be reassured that Rodríguez-Muñiz provides plentiful background for readers. This is significant because as current undergraduates, some of us were not yet born or were not yet invested in politics enough to understand what was happening in Latino activism or American government during the book's relevant time period. In our opinion, what makes Rodríguez-Muñiz's book special, and, thus, the big payoff for advanced undergraduates exploring this text, is the author's ability to blend core sociology that students will be familiar with (e.g., sociology of race, political sociology, and research on social movements and social change) with other aspects of the discipline that otherwise get short shrift in introductory and even some advanced texts (e.g., demography, science and technology studies, and, surely, the sociology of the future). This is good reading for students, without doubt, but creates a significant challenge for instructors who, themselves, may not particularly familiar with demography or may not yet have happened upon the microcosms of science and technology studies or the sociology of the future. Still, for close readers, this is a moot point because

Rodríguez-Muñiz has extensive and exemplary endnotes. Any question or curiosity voiced by a student is easy enough to follow-up on by referencing the near-encyclopedic references amassed by the author – as a research team working on this review, we did. So, in closing, if our rich and abundant discussion while reading this text is any indication of the rewarding exchanges faculty should expect to have with students, then you will find this book very satisfying, first, empirically and substantively, and then, stylistically and pedagogically.

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