A Tribute to Thomas P. Carter (1927–2001): Activist Scholar and Pioneer in Mexican American Education

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This article presents a testimony to the late Dr. Thomas P. Carter. Well known for his classic (1970) book, *Mexican Americans in School: A History of Educational Neglect*, Carter was an activist scholar and pioneer in Mexican American education. His considerable interactions with South Americans, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans served as a foundation that forged a lifelong commitment working toward equal educational opportunities for Mexican American students. It is clear from his biographical information that Dr. George I. Sánchez, whom Carter studied under while pursuing his doctorate in education at The University of Texas at Austin, helped to shape Carter’s antideficit thinking perspective and structural analysis approach in doing research on Mexican American students. In this tribute to Carter, author Richard Valencia focuses on four of Carter’s major accomplishments: (a) his 1970 classic book, *Mexican Americans in School*; (b) his influence on the education chapter in the Grebler, Moore, and Guzmán (1970) book, *The Mexican-American People: The Nation’s Second Largest Minority*; (c) his influence on the landmark U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Mexican American Education Study of 1971–1974; and (d) his role as an expert witness in Mexican American-initiated litigation, particularly the highly significant *Cisneros v. Corpus Christi Independent School District* (1970) school desegregation case. Based on these accomplishments, in particular, Dr. Thomas P. Carter emerged as one of the foremost contributors of his time in advancing the field...
of Mexican American education. As well, he needs to be acknowledged for assisting the Mexican American people in their quest for educational equality.

Key words: Thomas P. Carter, tribute, social activist, Mexican American, education, antideficit thinking

This article provides a tribute to the late Dr. Thomas P. Carter—activist scholar and pioneer in the field of Mexican American education. I have delayed writing this essay so my testimonial can coincide, as closely as possible, with the 35th anniversary of his landmark book published in 1970, *Mexican Americans in School: A History of Educational Neglect*.

Stemming from intense political activity engaged in by Chicano(a) students and professors in the late 1960s at the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB), a Department of Chicano Studies was established at UCSB in 1970.\(^1\) While a first-year graduate student pursuing my master’s degree in educational psychology at UCSB, I was fortunate to be appointed as a teaching assistant (TA; along with first-year graduate student Yolanda García) for the Introduction to Chicano Studies sequence, which was comprised of large lecture meetings and smaller discussion sections that students were required to attend. The introductory course was designed to be comprehensive and interdisciplinary in scope (e.g., history, political science, sociology, education), and TAs were expected to facilitate learning in the required discussion sections. In my preparation for the education unit, I came across the newly published book, *Mexican Americans in School* by Tom Carter. Given that the only existing book (and the first ever published) on Mexican American education—Herschel T. Manuel’s *The Education of Mexican and Spanish-Speaking Children in Texas* (1930)—was published 40 years before Carter’s tome, *Mexican Americans in School* was most welcome and appreciated.\(^2\) Carter’s book, coupled with the landmark U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Mexican American Education Study (1971 to 1974; to be discussed later), ushered in the modern era of Mexican American education and helped to inspire a new generation of scholars (such as myself) who went on to teach courses in Mexican American education and to produce scholarly publications in this developing field.

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\(^1\)The establishment of Chicano Studies at UCSB and other California universities and colleges was provided impetus via a statewide meeting in 1969 at Santa Barbara, California, where Chicano(a) college students, staff, professors, and community activists drafted *El Plán de Santa Bárbara*, a Chicano(a) master plan for higher education (Chicano Coordinating Committee on Higher Education, 1969; for further discussion regarding *El Plán*, see Muñoz, 1989).

\(^2\) *Educating the Mexican American*, an edited volume by Henry Sioux Johnson and William J. Hernández-Martínez, was also published in 1970. The book contains 34 entries of various origins (e.g., speeches, reprints of previously published reports, papers presented at conferences). Although the volume speaks incisively to the plight of Mexican American students, it lacks, for the most part, the scholarly grounding of Carter’s *Mexican Americans in School*, and thus made little impact in the field.
The remainder of this article consists of two parts: (a) a biographical sketch of Tom Carter and (b) a discussion of Carter’s accomplishments to Mexican American education.

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Tom Carter was born in Pasadena, California, on June 19, 1927, the son of Edna Eichelman Carter and Arthur Pelham Carter, and raised in Southern California (Pasadena, Glendora, Los Felix). In 1945, he graduated from Covina Union High School and subsequently served in the U.S. Navy for a short period during World War II. Following his brief military service, Carter enrolled at the University of California at Santa Barbara and earned his bachelor’s degree in social science in 1950. Also, in 1951 he earned his bachelor’s degree in foreign trade from the American Institute for Foreign Trade in Phoenix, Arizona. Prior to his marriage to Teresa Irene Pancallo in 1954, Carter worked in international banking in New York, Puerto Rico, and California. In 1956, Tom Carter Jr. was born. Carter Sr. became interested in education, and in 1957 he was first employed as a secondary school teacher and later as a vice principal at a junior high school in the Palm Springs area.

In 1961, Carter accepted a 2-year contract to supervise an educational program in Arequipa, Peru. While there, he met and became acquainted with Dr. George I. Sánchez, Professor at The University of Texas at Austin, who was in the country undertaking his own research on education in southern Peru (see Sánchez & Sánchez, 1962; cited in Carter, 1965). Carter (1965) noted: “It was at the suggestion of Dr. Sánchez that the author decided to pursue the doctorate at The University of Texas” (p. xiii). Subsequently, Carter enrolled in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin and studied under the tutelage of Professor Sánchez, earning his Ph.D. in the History and Philosophy of Education Department in 1965. Carter’s dis-

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3 This biographical information on Tom Carter was graciously provided by his son, Tom Carter Jr. (electronic and telephonic communication, December 12, 2005).

4 It is clear that over the years, both Carter and Sánchez (an activist scholar and pioneer in Mexican American education in his own right; see Romo, 1986) had mutual admiration and held one another in high esteem. Sánchez, who wrote the foreword for Carter’s 1970 book, noted:

There can be no doubt that Tom Carter’s book offers a valuable part of this appraisal [the status of the Mexican American people]. He is widely experienced in the developments about which he writes. He has an excellent knowledge of the people, of Spanish, and he has a deep understanding of and genuine sympathy for their problems, trials, and tribulations. He is highly appreciative of their past and current achievements, and of their potential for continuing contributions. His book is a most comprehensive work on the role of education in the lives of Mexican Americans. If it contributes, even slightly, to an appreciation of the severity of the educational neglect of this group, and if that appreciation is translated into action, then Dr. Carter will have made a major humanitarian contribution. (Sánchez, 1970, p. xi)
sertation is titled *An Analysis of Some Aspects of Culture and the School in Peru* (Carter, 1965).

After receiving his Ph.D., Carter accepted the position of assistant director of the College of Education’s Center for International Education (University of Texas at Austin). Next, he held teaching and research positions at the University of California at Riverside, University of California at Los Angeles, and the University of Texas at El Paso. Following his work at the University of Texas at El Paso, Carter became the first scholar in residence at the United States Civil Rights Commission in Washington, D.C. From 1971 to 1976 he served as Dean of the College of Education at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). He had subsequent appointments there in the departments of Behavioral Sciences in Education, Counseling Administration and Policy Studies, and Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Carter retired from CSUS in 1991.

In preparing this tribute to Tom Carter, I wondered what the basis was for his strong interests in Mexican American education. As such, I asked the following query of Tom Carter Jr.: “It’s clear that Tom had a passion regarding the educational plight of Mexican American students. Do you know the basis of his long-standing interests in Mexican American education?”5 Tom Jr. informed me that he believed his father’s affection for the Mexican people was the foundation of his deep interest in the Mexican American community, as noted in the following:

My dad loved Mexico, the Mexican culture, history, food, language, and most especially the Mexican people. He spent a lot of time in Baja in his young adult life—on camping and fishing trips, especially. He felt at home there, appreciating the gentleness and openness of the people he met, as well as their love of life and dedication to hard work. I think this, combined with his fluency in Spanish, enabled him to develop a quick and often lasting camaraderie with just about everyone he met in Mexico. When we went to Mexico as a family, I was struck by how much joy my dad took in talking and laughing with so many people at every opportunity—from the gas station attendants to the fishermen to the professors. A trip to Mexico was always a special occasion because of his delight in being there.6

Carter, in the introduction to his 1979 book, *Mexican Americans in School: A Decade of Change* (co-authored with Roberto D. Segura; Carter & Segura, 1979a), commented how Sánchez influenced him:

> Dr. Sanchez led me to look beyond simplistic arguments and explanations to elements within the dominant socioeconomic system as well as within the schools themselves. His penetrating analysis of a dynamic and diverse Mexican American subculture prompted more questions. Because few substantial studies described the existing cultural variations and the rapid changes taking place, my questions persisted. (Carter & Segura, 1979b, p. 6)

5 Electronically communicated on December 13, 2005.

6 This and the following two quotes were electronically communicated to me by Tom Carter Jr. on December 13, 2005.
Tom Jr. also informed me that Tom’s father was an inspiration, as noted:

Significantly, Tom’s dad also was a lover of Mexico and the Mexican people. Indeed, he (my grandfather) wrote a book called *Trails and Tales of Baja* (Carter, 1967) and one of the reviews of the book says, “A love of the Mexican people and their land is reflected in this book by a man who has dwelt much among them.” Without a doubt this love was passed from father to son.

Finally, Tom Jr. noted that his father’s considerable interactions with South Americans, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans served as the foundation to forge a lifelong commitment working toward equal educational opportunities for Mexican American students. Tom Jr. stated:

This foundation of respect and admiration for the Mexican people undoubtedly had an impact on his awareness and concern for their plight in America. As a teacher and administrator in the agricultural Coachella Valley, he would have either had the children of Mexican agricultural workers in his classroom or—if not—he would have been keenly aware of their absence from that classroom as he saw them in the fields or around town. His two years in Peru and South America undoubtedly gave him an even richer understanding and appreciation of the Latin American experience in general. As he got further into his academic career, I believe his connection with the people of Mexico heightened his awareness of the educational experience of both Mexican migrants and Mexican Americans … and shaped his passion for drastic improvement in Mexican American education. And thus was forged the foundation of his career, his lifelong passion to create equal educational opportunity for the people of whom he was so fond.

**CONTRIBUTIONS OF TOM CARTER TO MEXICAN AMERICAN EDUCATION**

In this testimonial to Tom Carter, I focus on four of his major contributions to the field of Mexican American education: (a) Carter’s classic book; (b) Carter’s influence on the Grebler, Moore, and Guzmán (1970) book; (c) Carter’s influence on the Mexican American Education Study; (d) Carter’s role as an expert witness in educational litigation.

**Carter’s Classic Book**

In my view, one of the most significant scholarly contributions to the study of Mexican American education ever published is Tom Carter’s 1970 book, *Mexican Americans in School: A History of Educational Neglect*. Carter’s landmark book—
which I believe deserves a “classic” status—presented a sustained and comprehen-
sive paradigm shift to help explain Mexican American school failure. Carter did so
by debunking the entrenched orthodoxy (i.e., deficit thinking) and advancing a
more plausible theoretical framework (i.e., an institutional analysis). In sum,
Carter needs to be recognized for his role as a pioneer in providing a systemic anal-
ysis of Chicano school failure in *Mexican Americans in School*.

Of the six chapters in *Mexican Americans in School*, two are centerpieces—
“Failure of the Culture” (chapter 2) and “The Default of the School” (chapter 3). In
chapter 2, Carter discussed the pervasive view that Mexican Americans are the
makers of their own problems and that their culture fails to equip children to suc-
cceed in school. Carter explained matters as such:

- The vast majority of educators interviewed for this study and most of the relevant
  literature argue that Mexican American children are culturally deprived or disad-
vantaged, that their home environment does not provide the skills, personality
  characteristics, or experiences necessary for a child’s success in school. (p. 35)
- Explicit in the concept that some children are culturally deprived is the idea that
certain nurturing cultures do not provide the necessary influences to make children
successful in school or acceptable in the majority society. (p. 36)
- American educators, pressed to explain the failure in school of low-status, and mi-
nority-group children, rely heavily on the theory of ‘cultural deprivation.’ The fault
is seen to lie in the socialization afforded by the home and neighborhood, and it is
assumed that the child must be changed, not society or its educational institutions.
(p. 60)

The theoretical framework that Carter described has become known as “deficit
thinking.” Although the term of deficit thinking was barely gaining currency at the
time *Mexican Americans in School* was published, it is quite clear that Carter was
referring to this notion. Deficit thinking, which was comprehensively explicated
in my 1997 edited volume, *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking: Educational
Thought and Practice* (Valencia, 1997b), is an endogenous theory of school failure
that “blames the victim” rather than examining how schools and the political econ-
omy are organized to disallow many students of color, particularly of low-socio-
economic background, from optimally learning. Regarding the evolution of deficit
thinking in American social thought, the deficit thinking model is rooted in the ra-
cial climate of the American Colonial period (Menchaca, 1997), and is protean in
nature. Depending on the Zeitgeist, the variations of deficit thinking have included

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7Regarding the origin of the deficit thinking notion, Valencia (1997a, p. x) noted:

… it is difficult to pin down precisely when it was first coined. It appears that this brilliant
two-word phrase was invented by a small cadre of scholars in the early 1960s who launched an
assault on the orthodoxy that asserted the poor and people of color caused their own social, eco-
nomic and educational problems. (A. Pearl, personal communication, August 8, 1991)
genetic (Valencia, 1997c), cultural (Foley, 1997), familial (Pearl, 1997), and geneti
cultural/familial explanations for school failure (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). In *Mexican Americans in School*, Carter focused on the cultural base of def
cit thinking in which the alleged values, customs, and lifestyles of Mexican Amer-
icans—such as the devaluing of education, fatalism, apathy, present-time orienta-
tion, poor nutrition, and bilingualism—fail to prepare children for school success.8

Following his “Failure of the Culture” chapter, Carter presented a lengthy dis-
cussion on “The Default of the School.” Here, Carter shifted culpability for school
failure away from Mexican American culture to the schools—where it rightly be-
longs. In a clear antideficit thinking posture, Carter asserted:

> Some educators take the position that much of the school curriculum and many
 school policies and practices inhibit learning and promote cultural conflict, emo-
tional problems, and the eventual flight of children from school. They believe that the
school is at fault because of its inability to adjust realistically to serve culturally dif-
ferent groups, that there is nothing per se bad or deficient about Mexican Americans,
but that the school has failed to capitalize on the “good and sufficient” child. These
educators denounce the argument that Mexican American children are culturally de-
prived and see their background as full of meaning, order, and significant experi-
ences. (p. 65)

Based on extensive interviews with school personnel, a review of germane lit-
erature, and quantitative data from educational agencies, Carter zeroed in on
three major institutional factors that contributed to the school failure of Mexican
American students. First, there is school segregation and the inferior education
Mexican American students typically receive in such schools. Since the publica-
tion of *Mexican Americans in School*, school segregation has been a significant
area of study in the field of Mexican American education (e.g., Álvarez, 1988;
González, 1990; Menchaca & Valencia, 1990; Valencia, Menchaca, & Donato,
2002). Second, Carter discussed the issue of “dependence on English,” as seen in
the imposition of the “No Spanish Rule.” In a later chapter, Carter spoke to the
value of bilingual education. Decades after the publication of Carter’s book,
Mexican American English language learners are again being victimized as seen
in the dismantling of bilingual education in California (Proposition 227, passed
in 1998) and in Arizona (Proposition 203, passed in 2000; see García & Wiese,
2002; San Miguel & Valencia, 1998). Third, Carter discussed the inadequacy of
teachers. He noted: “The shortage of qualified teachers throughout the South-
west particularly influences the quality of Mexican American schooling.

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8See Valencia and Black (2002) for a critique of the myth that Mexican American families do not
value education. For earlier critiques of the deficit thinking assertions that the “value orientations” of
Mexican Americans are the root cause of their educational failure and social problems, see Hernández
(1970) and Romano-V (1968).
Noncertified teachers are often placed in schools serving low socioeconomic areas …” (p. 126).\(^9\) This problem still remains. Recent data regarding Texas, for example, show that a disproportionate number of teachers who were not certified were more likely to teach in urban compared to rural locales (State Board for Educator Certification, 1998), strongly suggesting that students of color were the most likely to be taught by noncertified teachers (see, e.g., Valencia, 2000, Note 12; also, see Valencia & Villarreal, 2003).

Carter also discussed “less obvious [schooling] factors” (p. 66) that are inappropriate and disadvantageous for Mexican American students. These factors include tracking and ability grouping, overrepresentation in classes for the educable mentally retarded, cultural exclusion in the curriculum, authoritarianism of educators, negative perceptions of students by teachers and other school personnel, and inequities in school financing.\(^10\)

In conclusion, Tom Carter’s classic book, *Mexican Americans in School*, published slightly more than 35 years ago stands as a profound treatise on the education of Mexican Americans.\(^11\) The book is particularly powerful in its antideficit thinking posture and institutional analysis of Mexican American school failure. At the end of his chapter, “The Default of the School,” Carter reminds the reader that substantive analyses of Mexican American school failure are in the seminal stage:

> The processes through which school practices, teachers’ attitudes, and irrelevancies and rigidities in the curriculum have contributed to the low educational attainment of Mexican Americans have been touched upon here. These factors act in combination and probably in mutually reinforcing fashion. There is neither a theoretical framework nor empirical evidence that would make it possible to isolate and assess the impact of the numerous forces through which the school system contributes to the deficient education for Mexican Americans. Hence, the influence of the school’s inadequacies might best be seen by observing the results of its work. (p. 128)

\(^9\)Carter also discussed the shortage of Mexican American teachers, a problem that still abounds today (see Valencia, 2002a).

\(^10\)Once again, many of these problems discussed by Carter more than 3 decades ago currently exist. See Valencia (2002a) for a discussion of 15 schooling conditions and outcomes that characterize the contemporary plight of Chicano students.

\(^11\)Illustrative of the importance of Carter’s (1970) *Mexican Americans in School* is the long-standing frequency of citations. Examples of authors who have cited Carter’s book—listed by decades and in chronological order of publication, within decades—are: 1970s (Brischetto & Arciniega, 1973; Gámez, 1973; Servín, 1975); 1980s (Vega, 1983; Martínez, 1985; Álvarez, 1986); 1990s (Donato, Menchaca, & Valencia, 1991; Donato, 1997; San Miguel & Valencia, 1998); 2000s (Valencia & Black, 2002; Donato, 2003; Trujillo, 2005). In sum, citations of *Mexican Americans in School* continue into a 4th decade, and even beyond the 35th anniversary of Carter’s (1970) book (e.g., Yosso, 2006). Clearly, the significance of this seminal work in advancing the field of Mexican American education, coupled with the longevity of citations by scholars, earn Carter’s *Mexican Americans in School* a classic book status.
I believe that the previous statement by Carter was a tacit call for research and writing on Mexican American education. Reflecting on Carter’s subtle plea today, I now realize that his 1970 book and his later work helped shape my own scholarly agenda regarding how I have approached the study of Mexican American education over my career (e.g., San Miguel & Valencia, 1998; Valencia, 1991, 2000, 2002b, 2006; Valencia & Black, 2002), as well as my study of social thought and practice in education vis-à-vis Mexican American and other students of color (Valencia, 1997a), and my teaching.12

Carter’s Influence on the Grebler, Moore, and Guzmán Book

In 1970, Leo Grebler, Joan Moore, and Ralph Guzmán published *The Mexican-American People: The Nation’s Second Largest Minority*. This massive compilation (775 pp.) was extremely important in bringing attention to the Mexican American people as a national racial/ethnic minority, and no longer just a regional group. Included among the 24 chapters (e.g., “The Ebb and Flow of Immigration,” “Occupations and Jobs,” “Residential Segregation,” “Social Class and Social Mobility,” “Interrmarriage as an Index of Assimilation,” “Political Effectiveness”) was a prominent chapter on “The Education Gap,” which dealt “with one of the most widely recognized facts about Mexican Americans: their generally lower attainment in formal schooling” (p. 142).

The beginning of the education chapter by Grebler et al. (1970) provides comprehensive data on differences between average educational outcomes (e.g., median years of school completed) for White and Mexican American students. Following this presentation of data is a section (“General School Practices Affecting Mexican Americans,” pp. 155–159), written by Tom Carter. In this brief section, which was based on his *Mexican Americans in School* (in press at the time), Carter discussed the massive school segregation of Mexican American students in the Southwest, their language suppression and cultural exclusion, the over-representation of Mexican American students in classes for the mentally retarded, and the compensatory nature of school reform. Carter concluded:

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12For over 3 decades, I have taught an introductory course on Mexican American education, “Mexican Americans in the Schooling Process.” Since 1993, I have taught a second course, “Chicano Educational Struggles.”

13Scholars who also contributed to various chapters in the volume include the following: Jeffrey L. Berlant, Tom Carter, Walter Fogel, C. Wayne Gordon, Patrick H. MacNamara, Frank G. Mittelbach, and Samuel J. Surace. Carter was invited to work in the Mexican American Study Project (financed by the Ford Foundation) at UC Los Angeles (see Carter & Segura, 1979b, p. 6). In January of 1965, Carter started a substudy of Mexican American education. His work was sponsored by a grant from the College Entrance Examination Board to the Mexican American Study Project. Carter’s study culminated in the publication of his 1970 book, *Mexican Americans in School.*
Generally speaking, teachers interviewed in Southwest schools tend to attribute the problems to the failure of Mexican culture to prepare or motivate the child for school … The prevailing general acceptance in educational circles of the present goals and organization of the school and the prevailing general diagnosis of Mexican Americans’ cultural deficiencies as a prime source of their educational problems have apparently prevented radical experimentation with the school itself. (pp. 158–159)

In the Summary section of their chapter, Grebler et al. (1970) attempted to explain the basis of the persistent and pervasive educational gap between White and Mexican American students. The authors attributed the achievement gap, in part, to intragroup (i.e., Mexican American and White) variations in “… rural-urban background, to immigrant status, and to poverty and other aspects of the home environment” (p. 170). Grebler et al. also presented a structural inequality hypothesis to explain the gap:

_The extreme disparities in different locales suggests [sic] also an [sic] hypothesis concerning a strategic determinant in a larger society: the extent to which local social systems and, through these, the school systems have held the Mexican-American population in a subordinate position._ (p. 170)

I would daresay that Carter’s earlier discussion in the chapter (pp. 155–159) had a strong influence in shaping this structural inequality hypothesis offered by Grebler et al.

**Carter’s Influence on the Mexican American Education Study**

A third important way that Carter influenced the course of Mexican American education was through his role as a consultant to the landmark Mexican American Education Study (MAES) undertaken by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights from the early to mid-1970s. The MAES consists of six reports (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1971a, 1971b, 1972a, 1972b, 1973, 1974), and covers various educational concerns regarding Mexican American students (e.g., school segregation, low academic achievement [e.g., reading], high dropout rates, language suppression and cultural exclusion, inequities in school financing). Hailed then as providing a watershed of data on the plight of Mexican American students in the five Southwestern states, the MAES is considered today to be the most comprehensive investigation ever undertaken with respect to the educational _practices, conditions, and outcomes_ germane to Mexican American students. Although the data re-

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14 The Southwestern region covered in the MAES includes the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas.
ported in the MAES are outdated, the MAES provides rich and comprehensive baseline data for contemporary researchers and scholars.¹⁵

Carter was one of two chief consultants (the other being Dr. Uvaldo Palomares) to the MAES. Their charge was to assist in the “design, development, and conduct” of the study (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1971a, p. 9). In light of Carter’s unequivocal antideficit thinking perspective and institutional analysis of Mexican American school failure, I believe that via his role as a chief consultant he likely helped influence, to some degree, the tone of the MAES’ interpretations and conclusions.¹⁶ For example, in the second report of the MAES (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1971b)—which focused on academic achievement (e.g., reading performance, schooling attainment)—the Commission chose to use the term “school holding power” rather than the widely used notion of “dropout.” The former term was defined as “A basic measure of a school’s effectiveness … to hold its students until they have completed the full course of study” [i.e., kindergarten through grade 12] (p. 8). By locating the onus for retention on the school, rather than the student, the Commission advocated an antideficit thinking perspective.

Another example of how Carter may have affected the Commission’s interpretations along the lines of a systemic analysis of Mexican American school failure is seen in MAES report number 5, which dealt with teacher–student interactions in the classroom (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1973). After analyzing all the data collected by its research staff, the Commission concluded:

The disparities in teacher behavior toward Anglo and Chicano pupils documented in this report indicate that Chicanos are not receiving the benefits of these [positive] types of teacher instruction in the classroom. Instead, the pattern of teacher-student interaction only mirrors the educational neglect of Mexican American students found throughout the educational system. It is the schools and teachers of the Southwest, not the children, who are failing. (p. 44)

A third and final example of how Carter’s antideficit thinking position and his systemic analysis of Mexican American school failure probably influenced the

¹⁵See, for example, Valencia’s (2002a) use of most of the MAES findings as baseline data.
¹⁶It appears that the MAES finding also had impact on Carter himself, as seen in his 1979 book with Segura (Carter & Segura, 1979a). A good deal of statistical information on Mexican American schooling conditions and outcomes is drawn from the MAES. The book, a follow up to Carter’s 1970 volume, concludes with a sobering note: “The Mexican American remains poorly educated, economically disadvantaged, and politically underrepresented. Some improvement has taken place; much remains to be accomplished” (p. 392). Notwithstanding the realistic appraisal of the slow-changing nature of educational improvement for Mexican American students in the Southwest, Carter and Segura’s book was an important contribution to the literature. One reviewer commented: “Mexican Americans in School should be must reading for all educators in the five Southwestern states. As of now, it is the top study of its kind” (Rios, 1980, p. 539).
Commission’s perspective is seen in the sixth (and final) report. The Commission proffered a powerfully castigating conclusion:

In all … aspects of their education, Mexican American students are still largely ignored. In the face of so massive a failure on the part of the educational establishment, drastic reforms would, without question, be instituted, and instituted swiftly. These are precisely the dimensions of the educational establishment’s failure with respect to Mexican Americans. Yet little has been done to change the status quo—a status quo that has demonstrated its bankruptcy. Not only has the educational establishment in the Southwest failed to make needed changes, it has failed to understand its inadequacies. The six reports of the Commission’s Mexican American Education Study cites scores of instances in which the actions of school officials have reflected an attitude that blames educational failure on Chicano children rather than on the inadequacies of the school program. Southwestern educators must begin not only to recognize the failure of the system in educating Chicano children, but to acknowledge that change must occur at all levels—from the policies set in the state legislatures to the educational environment created in individual classrooms. (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1974, p. 69)

Carter’s Role as an Expert Witness in Educational Litigation

Still yet another way in which Carter influenced the course of Mexican American education was his role as an expert witness in Mexican American-initiated educational litigation. This is an area in which I can particularly empathize with Carter, having served over my career as an expert witness for minority plaintiffs in educational litigation in a number of instances (e.g., Valencia, 1980, 1984a; Valencia & Bernal, 2000). In fact, it was in this context that I first met Tom Carter. Both of us were asked by counsel of minority plaintiffs to serve as expert witnesses in the 

Diaz et al. v. San Jose Unified School District et al. (1985) school desegregation case. Although our introduction was brief, it was indeed a pleasure to have met Carter and an honor to serve with him on the same team in this very notable legal case. While listening to his testimony in the Diaz Federal Court case (U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California [San Jose Division]), I was extremely impressed with his expertise on Mexican American education.18


18Carter’s primary task as an expert witness in the Diaz case was to sensitize the court as to the general plight of Mexican American students. By contrast, my task as an expert witness was quite specific. The school district’s desegregation plan had a component that called for the closure of several high-enrollment Mexican American schools. In light of my expertise on school closures at the time (see, e.g., Valencia, 1980, 1984a, 1984b), I testified that such closure plans were not educationally sound in that they would be injurious to the Mexican American students. For more on my involvement in the Diaz case, see the “School Closures” chapter in Valencia (2006).
In my view, Carter’s most important contribution as an expert witness was the testimony he provided in *Cisneros et al. v. Corpus Christi Independent School District et al.* (1970), a desegregation lawsuit. *Cisneros,* which set off a flurry of Mexican American desegregation cases in the early 1970s, is considered one of the most important Mexican American-initiated lawsuits because of its widespread impact. Prior to *Cisneros,* lawyers in desegregation cases brought forth by Mexican American students had been arguing, for decades, that Mexican Americans were legally considered “other White,” and thus could not be segregated from White students. Yet, in the late 1960s school districts turned this argument to their own advantage. If Mexican Americans were indeed considered “other White,” then school districts contended that Mexican American students could be paired with Black students under court-ordered desegregation plans. As such, counsel for Mexican American plaintiffs in desegregation cases were forced to abandon the “other White” position and develop an equal protection position (14th Amendment) so as to be protected under the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling. There lay the challenge in *Cisneros.* Plaintiffs’ lawyers in *Cisneros* sought, and achieved, the legal argument that Mexican Americans were a readily identifiable minority group. In his role as an expert witness in *Cisneros,* Carter was erudite and persuasive in arguing this assertion. First he testified that Mexican Americans were victims of widespread discrimination as a class (in society generally and in schools) in the Southwest. Carter then testified that:

> Looking at it culturally, they [Mexican Americans] are an identifiably different group with adherence to the Spanish language, certain physical characteristics that are more or less Indian or mistisaje or the blending of the Spanish and the Mexican. So, no matter how you cut it, you are going to come out as a minority, both from social science and from the legal point of view, and from the cultural point of view, and the racial point of view.

In sum, the legal strategy of melding testimony on discrimination and ethnic identifiability proved to be powerful for *Cisneros* plaintiffs. Judge Woodrow Seals wrote in his *Cisneros* decision: “Not only do I find that Mexican-Americans have been discriminated against as a class, I further find that because they are an identifiable, ethnic minority they are more susceptible to discrimination.”

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20 For further coverage of *Cisneros,* see the “Segregation” chapter in Valencia (2006). The following discussion of *Cisneros* is excerpted, with minor revisions, from the aforementioned chapter.
23 *Id.* at 614.
At 73 years of age, Thomas P. Carter passed away on March 8, 2001. His life-long work has served as an inspiration for a new generation of scholars of Mexican American education beginning around the early 1970s. Through his scholarship, consultant work, and role as an expert witness in educational litigation, he emerged as one of the foremost contributors of his time in advancing the field of Mexican American education. As well, he needs to be acknowledged for his indefatigable commitment in working to improve schooling for Mexican American students. Dr. Tom Carter is most deserving of this attestation of his groundbreaking social justice scholarship and activism on behalf of Mexican American students and their communities. On a personal level, I am honored to have been inspired and illuminated by him and his work, and for that I am extremely grateful.

REFERENCES


