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“Accentuate the Positive; Eliminate the Negative”: Hegemonic Interest Convergence, Racialization of Latino Poverty, and the 1968 Bilingual Education Act

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Derrick Bell’s interest convergence thesis is a seminal framework to analyze social change within critical race theory. While interest convergence’s influence has grown, two foundational questions have been raised: do interest groups act rationally; does interest convergence also offer a change prescription or only an explanation of prior events. By revisiting Bell’s early influences, via the concept of hegemony, the article intervenes in these two formative debates by offering a reimagined analytic framing that I term “hegemonic interest convergence.” The article then applies this concept to analyze how broader political economic shifts shaped the struggles within which the 1968 Bilingual Education Act arose. I demonstrate that support for bilingual education stemmed from a seeming interest convergence among policymakers and Latino activists based on economic, rather than cultural, concerns regarding poor urbanizing Latino communities. In doing so, policymakers promoted the bill as a concession to redirect focus from other Latino demands for economic uplift and a tool to promote ideas of cultural deficit that reimagined job automation and outsourcing into linguistic and racial “handicaps.” These findings are significant in illuminating how hegemonic interest convergence functions, thereby providing a novel historiographical analysis of the Bilingual Education Act as well as suggesting a possible strategy for future change.

The 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* verdict of the United States Supreme Court to desegregate public schools has produced more scholarly publications than any other event in modern American educational history. Among the seminal studies, Derrick Bell’s (1980) analysis of the decision via the thesis of interest convergence has become one of the leading frameworks within *Brown* historiography and, in doing so, bore the new interdisciplinary subfield of critical race theory. At its core, the interest convergence thesis offers an answer to the puzzle that civil rights leaders and scholars began questioning in the 1970s: why did the *Brown* case succeed during a conservative period best known for anti-communist McCarthyism, while 1970s civil rights gains stalled after an unprecedented decade of legal successes and broader social change? According to Bell, the 1954 *Brown* decision occurred primarily due to a convergence of interests between black communities struggling for racial justice and white political elites concerned about Soviet propaganda regarding Jim Crow that dissipated by the 1970s with declining Cold War anxieties.

I similarly both apply and further develop on the interest convergence thesis to answer the puzzle regarding why the 1968 Bilingual Education Act arose at a historic moment when it seemed least applicable by today’s standards.

Most current public debates over bilingual education focus on meeting the pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural needs of foreign-born immigrants who do not speak English at home. However, the Bilingual Education Act arose during the 1960s when the United States had the lowest percentage of foreign-born and non-English-speaking people of any twentieth-century decade. The relative disparity stemmed from the long-standing policy of American isolationism beginning at the end of World War I and ending with the 1968 enactment of the Hart-Celler Immigration Act (Ngai, 2014). Furthermore, the law was passed by Congress without any major objection and was supported by both outgoing Democratic President Lyndon Johnson and incoming Republican President Richard Nixon.

So why did the push for bilingual education arise at a moment when it seemed least necessary? And how did the 1968 Bilingual Education Act draw such broad and bipartisan support from policymakers and Latino¹ activists alike during an era most often remembered for highly politicized divides over both federal education and civil rights policies? Drawing from an analytic framework that intersects theories of interest convergence and hegemony, I illustrate how broader political and economic shifts shaped the seeming hegemonic contestations and convergences concerning urban Latino poverty that led to the bilingual education bill’s passage. In doing so, I reimagine the concept of interest convergence and provide a new historical interpretation of the 1968 Bilingual Education Act’s origins.

The article starts by revisiting Bell’s early influences, via the Gramscian concept of hegemony, to develop a new analytic framework of “hegemonic interest convergence.” The article then applies this concept to analyze how broader economic shifts shaped the political struggles within which the 1968 Bilingual Education Act arose. Through the case study I demonstrate that support for bilingual education stemmed from a seeming interest convergence among policymakers and Latino activists based on economic, rather than cultural, concerns regarding poor urbanizing Latino communities. The second section establishes how policymakers promoted the bill as a concession to redirect focus from other Latino demands for economic uplift and as a tool to promote ideas of cultural deficit already present in existing federal War on Poverty efforts. The third section illuminates how Latino leaders supported bilingual education within a distinct agenda while contesting policymakers’ cultural explanations for urban Latino poverty. Activists highlighted how changing rural and urban labor markets undercut many Latinos’ attempts to secure employment, and thus viewed bilingual education as one minor element within the broader struggle for economic uplift and political empowerment.

The paper concludes that the robust, though ephemeral, political support for bilingual education partially resulted from a changing world system that forced Latino communities to challenge,

¹ Spanish-speaking, Latino, Spanish-surnamed, Latin American, Hispanic, and Mexican American (and to a lesser extent, Chicano) were all used interchangeably as self-identifiers in the 1967 Congressional hearings and other contemporaneous public conferences on bilingual education. I support the recent move to use the term “Latinx” (and previously “Latin@”) to challenge the seeming banality of gendered wording, and I adopted the term in my other writing about current policies and policymaking. However, I intentionally utilize the terms Latino and Mexican American for this historically based article because of their colloquial usage both in the 1960s and today, and because my discussion focuses on “Latinos” who were of Mexican origin and lived in the Southwestern United States (for more on the twentieth-century rise of pan-ethnic labels including “Latino” and “Hispanic,” see Mora, 2014).

and federal policymakers to legitimate, the current political economic and racial power structure through education policy. Bilingual education arose as a popular reform in which activist aspirations for uplift and policymaker concerns over social control could find contingent ideological space. However, the bilingual education bill ultimately failed to fulfill either vision, a contradiction heralding the broader eclipse of the modern welfare state to address economic inequities in an era of increasingly globalized capital and corporations. These findings are significant in illuminating how hegemonic interest convergence functions, thereby providing a novel historiographical analysis of the Bilingual Education Act as well as suggesting a possible strategy for future change.

CRITICALLY THEORIZING RACE, INTEREST CONVERGENCE, AND HEGEMONY

Legacies of Interest Convergence and Critical Race Theory

Derrick Bell is widely recognized as a founding figure in critical race theory. His framework responded to the 1970s' critical legal studies, which were critiqued for being too class-based and thus lacking a strong, nonreductive racial analysis. Among the central concepts is the principle of "interest convergence" (Bell, 1980). In his seminal interest convergence study, Bell (1980) illustrated how the 1954 *Brown* decision stemmed from a transitory convergence of interests among black communities struggling for racial justice and white elites concerned with communist Cold War propaganda. Through this example, Bell (1980) shows how interest convergence occurs when "the interests of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 523). According to Bell, interest convergence and its corollary "racial sacrifice," a term to indicate the phenomenon of how U.S. courts are generally willing to sacrifice black interests over white interests if they are not aligned, posed a dilemma for civil rights advocates who found it increasingly difficult to win legal remedies.

Since Bell's (1980) *Brown* article, interest convergence has been applied across a variety of fields and cases including the racialized histories of employment discrimination (Green, 2005), slavery reparations (Hopkins, 2001), jury by peers (Delgado, 2006), the War on Terror (Weinstein, 2006), Chinese Exclusion Acts repeals (Torok, 1995), immigration reform (Delgado, 2005), cultural defenses (Lee, 2007), and housing discrimination (Dickerson, 2005). However, beyond legal studies the field of education is now the primary residence of critical race scholarship with research on teacher education (Milner, 2008), college athletes (Donnor, 2005), desegregation (Leigh, 2003), inclusion (Zion & Blanchett, 2011), intercultural education (Caraballo, 2009), affirmative action (Park & Liu, 2014), undocumented students (Allen, 2015), and media on education (Gillborn, 2012).

The field of education is a natural fit for this area of study, as education continues to be the principle interest convergence topic in legal studies, including racial desegregation (Bell, 1980; Singleton, 2007), school finance reform (Adamson, 2006), educating undocumented youth (Lopez, 2005), diversity rhetoric (Weeden, 2016), affirmative action (Bell, 2003), or school choice (Dickerson, 2005). The rise of critical race theory in the field of education in the 1990s can be traced to a similar critique of critical pedagogy (Leonardo, 2013) that was leveled in the 1980s

toward critical legal studies (Delgado & Stephancic, 2012; Feldman, 2012). Critical race theorists posited that both were primarily class-based analytic frameworks, lacking a substantive, nonreductive racial analysis.

As interest convergence’s academic influence has grown quickly, two foundational critiques have been raised against it. First, Bell’s (1980) thesis regarding “the subordination of law to interest-group politics with a racial configuration” (p. 523) draws from political science and economic theories of rational interest groups. These theories posit that rational interest groups will act according to what is in their best interest. Lani Guinier and others have questioned how monolithic or rational racial groups’ interests are (Cole & Maisuria, 2007; Driver 2011; Guinier, 2004) as well as how “perceived” versus “actual” group interests are accounted for (Gillborn, 2012; Jackson, 2011; Taylor, 2000; Sung, 2015). For example, Guinier (2004) asserts that class-based rather than race-based interests played a larger part in the legacy of *Brown*, whereby a “biracial elite” disproportionately benefited from the *Brown* verdict at the expense of poor white and black communities. Guinier explains that racial “interest divergences,” which partially resulted from poor whites’ and blacks’ false perceptions of racial interest convergences, allowed white supremacy to restructure in Jim Crow’s wake by pitting poor whites and blacks against one another.

The second topic is interest convergence’s ability to, in Bell’s (1980) words, both “offer an explanation of why school desegregation has in large part failed and what can be done to bring about change” (p. 519). The idea that interest convergence is also prescriptive, rather than simply descriptive, has led to sustained debate over whether interest convergence offers a broader social justice strategy or even a viable legal strategy (Driver, 2011; Feldman, 2012; Lee, 2007; West, 1993; Zion & Blanchett, 2011). For instance, Enrique and Sonia Aleman (2010) argue that interest convergence is a limiting racial justice prescriptive because it encourages people of color to strategically foreground causes that converge with white interests, thereby potentially minimizing focus on race and racism where interests with whites often diverge. However, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) offers a counterpoint example where Arizona activists pushing to institutionalize MLK Day strategically forced a convergence of interests with white elites through a successful economic boycott of state businesses until the holiday was recognized.

Hegemonic Interest Convergence

Revisiting Bell’s formative influences in critical legal studies, via the concept of hegemony, can help reimagine a more robust interest convergence theory that sheds light on the two main critiques of interest convergence (Delgado, 2005). Hegemony is significant since, as Ladson-Billings explains, “much of the Critical Legal Studies ideology emanates from the work of Gramsci (1971) and depends on the Gramscian notion of ‘hegemony’ to describe the continued legitimacy of oppressive structures in American society” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, pp. 20–21). Likewise, seminal critical theorists of race from Stuart Hall (1986) to Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) have drawn heavily upon Gramsci to examine the intersections of race and class. Two elements of hegemony, which Peter McLaren (2014) succinctly states “refers to the maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force but primarily through consensual social practices” (p. 140), are key to reimagining interest convergence for this article on the 1968 Bilingual Education Act’s origins.

First, hegemony is based on the idea that elites maintain hegemonic power largely by getting non-elites to consent to rules because they have been made to believe that these rules serve their interests, through a process of genuine and dynamic compromises within structural constraints that do not allow for a totalizing, nondialectical power (Apple, 2004). Positivist political science and economics conceive of “interest groups” as largely legitimate and rational. Unlike these disciplines, hegemonic interest convergence posits that continual contestation to maintain or challenge hegemonic power happens within broader shifts in societal and political economic structures, such as during the 1960s period of political and economic destabilization. These shifts in material and ideological structures shape both social consciousness and formations within which interests are imagined, rather than as simply a struggle among different fully formed and agentic groups whose interests may or may not converge. Consequently, interests are best understood as fluid, intersecting, strategic, and often contradictory because they are constantly being contextually formed and reformed in response to structural constraints.

For example, the idea of a pan-ethnic “Latino” or “Hispanic” identity that arose in the 1960s to encompass both Southwest Mexican Americans/Chicanos and East Coast Puerto Ricans was neither a natural or predetermined interpellation, but rather a distinctly Americanized collective identity, or imagined community (Anderson, 1983), based on seemingly common struggles and interests (Mora, 2014). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) make note of this historically specific process of racial formation and explicitly reference Omi and Winant (1994). Omi and Winant (1994) contend that race is best understood as a process that is continually contested and reified through racial projects that are historically linked to “the evolution of hegemony, the way in which society is organized and ruled” (p. 56). Applying the theory of racial formation to American post-World War II history, Omi and Winant demonstrate how a destabilized hegemonic bloc resulted in shifting paradigms within which various social movements and political party contestations were waged.

Second, as a potential explanatory and strategy, Edward Taylor (2009) clarifies that “interest convergence has its roots in Marxist theory that the bourgeoisie will tolerate advances for the proletariat only if these advances benefit the bourgeoisie even more” (p. 5). Reforms based on compromise are generally not helpful, and meaningful “progress is only possible through resistance” (p. 5). According to Antonio Gramsci (1971), resistance takes a variety of forms or positions, from economic to political to cultural. The goal of such hegemonic contestation is not to completely overthrow structures. Instead, it is to bring together and maintain a critical mass of people with seemingly allied interests to form a new “hegemonic bloc.” This resistance thus results in “hegemonic interest convergences,” which are neither limited to legal remedies nor strategies based on static or overdetermined interests. Ladson-Billings’ (1998) MLK Day example mentioned above demonstrates this dynamic. Arizona activist interests in institutionalizing an MLK Day holiday initially did not converge with white policymakers who did not support recognizing the holiday at the state level. However, rather than assuming defeat, activists intentionally produced a convergence of interests within the broader context of Arizona’s already struggling economy by tying MLK Day recognition to elite economic interests through a successful boycott of state businesses.

Gramsci’s theory of hegemony offers the existing thesis of interest convergence a more robust analytic frame. In particular, the concept of hegemonic interest convergence helps to account for broader structural constraints and how they shape the terrain within which different positions are staked and interests are imagined. In doing so, I build on the existing work of other critical

theorists including Stuart Hall, who illustrates how Gramsci’s theories can offer new insight to how race and class intersect. Hall does so by illuminating how racialized and class-based collective identities, as well as their contestation over hegemonic power, are historically specific and formed within a process marked by both agency and structural constraints, rather than simply based on a priori “commonsense” essentialisms (Hall, 1986). Support for the *Brown* verdict can thus be reinterpreted from what Guinier (2004) calls an interest divergence into a hegemonic interest convergence, in which reimagined racialized and class-based coalitions developed in response to a shifting political economy. The 1960s civil rights discourses and reforms following *Brown*, including the 1968 Bilingual Education Act, likewise exemplified another hegemonic interest convergence in which broader social and political economic shifts reshaped the imagined interests from which elite concessions were offered for limited non-elite consent.

Reanalyzing the 1968 Bilingual Education Act Historiography

Scholars studying the history of bilingual education in the United States draw from two primary frameworks to explain why bilingual education gained such currency during the 1960s and 1970s, which I label as activist and institutionalist narratives. The activist narrative is currently the dominant account and focuses on the importance of community organizers on the ground. This account emphasizes how regional social movements, led by educators and Latino community organizers, and sympathetic policymakers such as Texas Senator Ralph Yarborough, created change by forcing real compromises from the state (Donato, 1997; San Miguel, 2004). Bilingual instruction legislation provides one example of federal response to social movements. Specifically, the activities that brought about the legislation show how the federal government continued to be responsive to the social movements of marginalized communities whose demands now extended beyond a War on Poverty or Jim Crow.

However, the activist narrative leaves largely unquestioned the context surrounding why such actions were successful in changing policy at this particular historic moment as well as how such policies narrowed in both reach and purpose. These issues are partially answered by the second explanatory narrative. Refocusing on policymakers, the institutionalist narrative emphasizes how the political and institutional climates, such as President Nixon’s electoral strategy of promoting bilingual education to court Latinos for his “New Majority,” were key drivers in bringing about the convergence of initial support for the Bilingual Education Act (Davies, 2007; Petrzela, 2010). Although the institutionalist account offers an alternative framework to the activist account, it also provides an incomplete narrative. These narratives often read as accounts of political strategy largely insulated from broader social forces that shaped the ideological terrain upon which such political elites framed issues and made decisions.

Some recent studies illuminate the relation between domestic policy and global politics. Mary Dudziak (2002) and John Skrentny (2002) illustrate how U.S. civil rights movement struggles, including those regarding education, were also shaped within the larger theater of the Cold War. Similarly, Jeff Bale (2011) and Nelson Flores (2016) establish how the broader legacy of American imperialism and militarism had a direct impact on twentieth-century U.S. language education policies and employed the rhetoric of English instruction as a tool of economic uplift for colonized communities overseas. These macro-narratives illuminate how broader political struggles offer important context to understand 1960s’ policymaking and activism. However, these

longue durée political trends still do not fully explain the relatively quick shifts in 1960s' policy or politics that culminated in the emergence and widespread support of bilingual education.

This analysis seeks to fill in the gaps where other narratives have fallen short. I examine the concerns and actions of local actors as symptomatic of underlying postwar economic changes by considering two central questions: How did the relation of global political economic shifts give rise to the economic concerns that shaped bilingual education? How did policymakers and Latino activists conceptualize support for bilingual education within this changing 1960s' economic climate? In doing so, I demonstrate that bilingual education generated widespread backing in the late 1960s because of a hegemonic interest convergence based on economic concerns rather than concerns over culture and race that are more widely identified with bilingual education today. Although culture and race did matter, neither was a sufficient argument for bilingual education. Rather, policymakers and Latino activists both focused on the economic struggles of Latinos who were moving into cities and, unable to find jobs, falling into poverty.

POLICYMAKERS

War on Poverty

Congressional debate over bilingual education in the 1960s epitomized the concerns that propelled the emergence of the Bilingual Education Act, and the 1967 Congressional hearings offered a key stage for policymakers and Latino activists to express their broader positions with particular clarity. Although concerns about race and culture were present, policymakers characterized bilingual education as a pedagogical tool to produce an economic end: Latinos graduating from school, securing employment, and escaping poverty. "If we seek to raise the economic level of any group, we must first educate them," Senator Yarborough asserted during the spring 1967 Committee Hearings on Mexican American Affairs, "that is what I am trying to do with my bilingual education bill" (Texas Conference for the Mexican American, 1967, p. 9). Likewise, California Democratic Representative Edward Roybal, cocreator of the merged 1967 House bill, commented later that summer during the Senate hearings of the Special Subcommittee on Bilingual Education that bilingual education would offer a "new field of economic" opportunity for poor Latinos (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 412).

It is not surprising that politicians and activists focused on education when discussing poverty and unemployment. Many of the comments on bilingual education drew from two main findings in the National Education Association's 1966 report, *The Invisible Minority*, produced by a group of Tucson, Arizona, public school educators (National Education Association, 1966, p. v; see also De La Trinidad, 2015). First, over one third of all Latino households were below the national poverty line in what was popularly termed the Southwest "thousand miles of poverty," a mainstream reference to the area between Brownsville, Texas, and San Diego, California, where a vast majority of Southwest Latinos worked and lived. This poverty rate was nearly double that of Anglo/white families and significantly higher than that of black households (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, pp. 358, 410). Second, Latino school attainment rates were equally dismal and correlated highly with poverty levels. Mexican American adults had an average of 7.1 years of schooling as compared to 12.1 for Anglo/white adults and 9 for black adults (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 358). Even though school attainment and poverty rates were reported

as a correlation, policymakers treated the rates as a causal relationship. The report thus provided ammunition to the argument that a better education for Latinos would be the antidote to their poverty.

This idea that improved educational attainment would constitute a path out of poverty also drew on broader 1960s’ discourses focusing on the primary role of education in “War on Poverty” policy (Katz, 1989; Urban, 2009). Unlike the 1930s New Deal job creation and industrial policy programs, as historians Harvey Kantor and Robert Lowe (2006) explain, Great Society reformers “focused on education and training programs instead of intervening in the workings of the marketplace or expanding the welfare state” (p. 477; see also Fraser & Gerstle, 1989; Kantor & Lowe, 1995). “Education pays; stay in school” (Berg, 1971, p. xi) was the mantra repeated in promotional speeches by liberal poverty warriors throughout the 1960s, that the acquisition of employable skills and values were the “payoff” for schooling. Historians Harold and Pamela Silver (1991) note that President Lyndon Johnson claimed that his central strategy in launching the War on Poverty was to eliminate poverty with education, explaining that through his programs people would “learn their way out of poverty” (p. 70; see also O’Connor, 2001).

Both liberal and conservative policymakers invoked these education-based theories to rationalize Latino poverty as a lack of proper skills and values. To explain the failure of Mexican Americans to succeed in school and find gainful employment, California Republican Senator George Murphy was among those at the 1967 Senate hearings who blamed the standard symptoms of poverty alongside an additional “severe handicap” of being linguistically and culturally different from Anglo-Americans (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 421). During the 1967 California Department of Education Proceedings both Senator Yarborough and Representative Roybal reiterated the sentiment that “children with knowledge of another language” are “handicapped ... and in need of immediate and aggressive remedial action to help overcome this handicap” (Calvo, 1968, p. 34). The logic behind this argument was that high unemployment and school dropout rates were fundamentally due to Latino students being unable to learn properly due to this problematic nexus of linguistic, cultural, and economic “handicaps,” a challenge becoming more visible as poor Latinos continued to migrate to cities across the Southwest (Sanchez, 1973, p. 57).

Culture of Poverty

The fundamental assumption undergirding policymaker rhetoric was that difficulties among the Latino urban poor stemmed from a lack of proper cultural values, such as discipline or motivation, that were necessary for employment. Like Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s (1965) infamous U.S. Department of Labor report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, which focused on how disintegration of traditional Southern black values and civic institutions resulted in inner-city ghetto entrenchment based on a “culture of poverty,” policymakers argued that unmoored Latino families similarly struggled in urban neighborhoods increasingly defined by disorganization and vice. As Congressman Brown explained during the 1967 Senate Special Subcommittee hearings, one goal of bilingual education was applying “Spanish instruction as a means of improving English” (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 427). However, Brown contended, “I do not ... seek to affix the cause of this low educational attainment to the language problem alone.” Rather, there were “many other” issues urban Latinos faced including a “poor

[home] environment which too often fosters a distorted sense or priority of values" (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 429).

Brown was not alone in his assessment that language skills were only a small part of a larger cultural nexus that helped produce Latino poverty and unemployment. Rather, his logic drew from what policymakers' perceived as a near unquestioned commonsense, or hegemonic, culture of poverty argument regarding the converging interests of struggling Latinos and the Johnson administration's poverty warriors. Indeed, California Assistant Superintendent of Public Instruction Eugene Gonzales noted during the hearings that Latinos who needed "language services per se" made up only a small subset of the Latinos who required particular educational interventions, a pertinent point considering that 80% of the state's Latino population was American-born (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 475). The Los Angeles Mayor's office similarly supported bilingual education based on the understanding that "many second and third generation Americans of Spanish ancestry, although they speak English, have had difficulty in adapting to our fast-moving [urban] society" (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 467).

Policymakers supporting bilingual education regularly echoed contemporary sociological theories when referring to Latino academic or economic struggles due to cultural "barriers" associated with migrating to cities alongside linguistic "handicaps." These urban social disorganization theories posited that urban delinquency and criminal behavior among new groups migrating to cities was the result of the fragmentation of traditional civic institutions and normative "self-policing" structures (Linder, 1996). For example, sociologist Dr. Frank Cordasco paralleled the struggles of "the Mexican-American poor," who were now "largely an urban minority," with those of "the Negro in-migrant rural poor huddled in the urban ghettos in the 1960s" (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 546). Although Latinos migrating from seasonal work camps did not often have equivalent robust civic institutions to southern black Baptist churches, Dr. Cordasco echoed the same concerns of urban Latino youth becoming "culturally deprived, disadvantaged, disaffected, alienated, socially unready" (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 546) that were voiced regarding black ghettoization (Fox, 2012). The struggles facing urbanizing Latinos thus did not "present American educators with new problems," explained Dr. Cordasco, since "there is a common denominator" in the cultural effects of urban "poverty" (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 546).

In drawing from urban social disorganization theories, policymakers' promotion of bilingual education also echoed prior progressive urban reformers such as Jane Addams' Hull House Association. Addams was part of an urban reform movement that promoted ethnic renewal as a means of helping renew civic institutions and cohesive ethnic structures with some sort of disciplinary power in America's urban slums (Deegan, 2005; Polikoff, 1999). For example, among other policymakers, Congressman William Ryan presented bilingual education as a tool to help create Latino civic institutions that could help them solve their own problems. Specifically, the Latino community could self-police its "pistol-packing" urban youth, eliminating the need for additional "Spanish-speaking truant officers" (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 510).

Bilingual Education as Social Control

Congressmen such as Senator Yarborough and Representative Ryan similarly joined the notion of the culture of poverty and human capital arguments with that redirected concerns about the

economy. First, their human capital argument hid the fact that a lack of jobs, rather than employable skills to enter the market, was the primary source of the Latino poverty. The combination of automation and outsourcing meant that many of the jobs Latinos had traditionally held were disappearing, leading to “conspicuously absent” job opportunities (Massey & Sampson, 2009). Furthermore, the logic behind their human capital argument was inherently flawed. If Latinos needed better job skills, they would likely need better vocational training more than bilingual education. So why did the policymakers advocate for bilingual education as the solution to urban Latino poverty?

According to policymakers, bilingual education was not simply about developing employable skills such as speaking English. Rather, policymakers also promoted bilingual education as a remedy to urban Latino’s “culture of poverty” based on assumptions about “handicaps” in the values and disposition of urban Latino culture. This “culture of poverty” discourse framed Latino poverty in cities as an underclass problem rather than a working-class one. Struggling Latinos lacked a proper disposition and values, not necessarily just specific skills and training.

Advocating for bilingual education allowed policymakers to produce a new commonsense, or hegemonic, logic to acknowledge Latino poverty and discuss deindustrialization’s effects that diverted attention away from outsourcing or structural weaknesses in the economy. In addition, this cultural characterization of Latino poverty was particularly useful for policymakers as globalizing corporations became less beholden to national economic concerns. Because globalization weakened policymakers’ ability to retain traditional urban manufacturing jobs, policymakers offered genuine concessions to build new political coalitions and legitimate their political power during this period of social and economic unrest.

Bilingual education programs, presumably staffed by local Latino educators and teacher aides, offered community leaders a platform to provide strong role models and assert authority to both support and discipline potentially wayward urban Latino families and communities. In doing so, the programs were imbued with elements of both coercion and consent. “These programs are designed to impart to Spanish-speaking students a knowledge of and pride in their ancestral culture and language,” Senator Yarborough explained at the 1967 Senate hearings, alongside “efforts to establish closer cooperation between [adults in] the school and the home” (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 410). Another politician elaborated that Latino youth in his city do not have their own ethnic middle-class role models and thus are “surrounded only by low-income people” (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 521). Accordingly, he argued, “the best way” to rectify this issue is to have bilingual education to provide Latino youth more Latino adult role models as well as teach them about the “judges and architects and poets” present in their “culture and history.”

LATINO ACTIVISTS

Cultural Citizenship

If the problem was primarily economic, why did Latino activists choose to rally behind a bill that discursively tied a subtractive vision of cultural “handicaps” and corporate liberal reform within a subtractive vision of second language education? In short, Latino leaders supported bilingual education for different reasons and within a different agenda that did not simply echo policymakers’

positions. Despite the various civil rights successes of the 1960s, the changing political economy and weakening job markets created genuine economic concern among Latinos. This compounded as Latinos who were unable to find work in the fields continued to migrate to the cities throughout the 1960s. As historian Daniel Perlstein (2004) notes, their focus on economic concerns echoed calls by civil rights movement leaders such as Bayard Rustin, who contended that black activism should turn from desegregation to unemployment and ghettoization.

Specifically, Latino activists supported bilingual education as one minor part of a broader strategy for collective economic and cultural uplift, based on a combination of genuine economic concerns and recognition of bilingual education's cultural symbolism as political power. Culturally sensitive collective action, or what anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (2003) has termed "cultural citizenship," reinforced activists' efforts by challenging Latinos to reimagine the notion of citizenship. This new definition of citizenship went beyond individual's discrete civic actions such as voting to also include the collective action of marginalized groups in organizing and making political demands. The Latino activists engaged in bilingual education advocacy because they understood how it promoted cultural citizenship. Their advocacy reflected and enhanced their capacity as activists to collectively mobilize a still-forming political bloc through particular ethno-cultural activities and resources (Bedolla, 2009; Gutierrez, 1995; Olneck, 2009).

However, hope for collective cultural uplift did not mean Latinos simply rubber-stamped policymakers' efforts to promote bilingual education. Despite the best efforts of Senator Yarborough and his staff to create a "parade" of support during the 1967 Senate Special Subcommittee hearings, many Latino speakers pushed and challenged policy-elite perspectives on bilingual education. For instance, although high school senior Hortencia Morales acknowledged that Latino students both "have a difficult time with the language barrier and a great difficulty in getting jobs ... the main problem, I feel, is the lack of jobs" (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 428). Morales attributed the lack of job opportunities to a combination of contracting job markets and racial discrimination by employers.

Superintendent Rodolfo de la Garza assessed the situation of Latinos even more bluntly, exclaiming during the hearings that "the problems of our children all derive from poverty" (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, pp. 314–315). "Our problem is mainly unemployment," de la Garza continued, "there is nothing but stoop labor for most of them and little of that." In doing so, he reframed the issue to blame declining urban and rural job opportunities despite Latinos' "hard-working" attitude. De la Garza's position echoed many advocating for bilingual education within a broader strategy to meet a changing economy, thereby offering a limited consent within the process of hegemonic contestation shaped by broader structural concerns. For example, the League of United Latin American Citizens did not have bilingual education as part of its written agenda. Although the organization willingly supported the bilingual education bill when requested, their "overwhelming focus" was on Latino political appointments and a White House Conference on broader Latino economic and political problems (Kaplowitz, 2005).

Political Economy

The 1960s marked a crucial period for the United States, which struggled to maintain its dominant global position after two decades of nearly unabated economic growth (Kantor & Lowe, 1995; Katz, 1989). Among the factors that contributed to the nation's economic slowdown starting in the

late 1960s, increased global business competition forced American corporations to reassess and create novel business strategies. In particular, corporate outsourcing of American factories eliminated traditional manufacturing jobs at precisely the moment when automation of agribusiness pushed ever more people into cities in search of work.

First, the flight of American industrial production to factories outside of the 50 U.S. states eliminated urban manufacturing jobs commonly held by Latinos. Historian Aviva Chomsky (2008) notes that the American textile industry helped pioneer the creation of “runaway shops,” starting in the U.S. colonial territory of Puerto Rico during the 1940s and then expanding transnationally to other countries including Mexico and Colombia. The 1965 U.S. Border Industrialization Program greatly accelerated this development in Mexico through codification of “maquiladoras,” the term used to describe American-owned factories whose Mexican workers were not subject to American labor laws (Seligson & Williams, 1981). The most visible and immediate effect of outsourcing was the deindustrialization and economic restructuring of American urban economies, which led to a rapid decrease in the number of “family-wage” manufacturing jobs in the 1960s (O’Connor, 2001).

Second, the global shifts in agribusiness, most notably within the cotton economy during the 1950s–1960s, truly accelerated Latino urban relocation at this same time traditional manufacturing jobs were leaving. In particular, two influential postwar economic trends in the modern world system pushed American growers toward innovations such as mechanization to increase efficiency. First, global cotton consumption, which had maintained a 2% average annual growth rate through the early twentieth century, doubled to 4.6% during the 1950s and maintained high growth levels through the 1960s as the global economy expanded (Craig, 1971). Second, a concurrently rapid rise in cotton production and exports from China and India during the 1950s challenged the existing cotton markets (Beckert, 2014; Markovitz, 2002; United Nations Environment Programme, 2002).

Although American cotton growers responded with new technological innovations that doubled cotton yield rates during the 1950s, these innovations dramatically dropped labor needs in the process (Beckert, 2014). The effect of having nearly three quarters of all U.S. cotton mechanically harvested by 1962 (Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 1969) on southern black migration to northern cities is well documented (Baldwin, 2007; Gregory, 2007; Payne, 1995). However, the twentieth-century westward shift in cotton production in search of better soil and weather conditions turned the U.S. Southwest into the nation’s top-producing cotton region by the 1930s (Walsh, 2008). Thus, the mechanization of postwar cotton production also disproportionately affected Latinos living in the Southwest (“Machines Take Over ‘Bracero’ Job,” 1966; see also Brown, 2011). Illuminating the extent of cotton’s labor force contraction, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations cited statistics that in California alone “mechanization cut the workforce in cotton from 120,000 seasonal workers in 1949 to 25,000 in 1961” (Selvin, 1967, pp. 4–5).

This combination of outsourcing and mechanization of “blue-collar” urban work alongside agricultural automation placed many Latinos in an increasingly difficult position despite legal victories against racial discrimination. Urbanizing Latinos were moving “into jobs that were, on balance,” noted social scientist Tim Kane in 1973, “declining in importance in the economy” (p. 395). In the wake of the closures of unionized factories and processing plants across the Southwest, a disproportionate number of Latinos became unemployed and went into poverty (Carnoy, Daley, & Ojeda, 1993). Even in Los Angeles, the metropolitan capital of the Southwest, the earning power

of residents in Latino communities, according to civil rights activist and Mexican American Opportunity Foundation founder Dionicio Morales, “had actually decreased since 1960 ... by nearly \$400 annually, while it rose substantially for other segments of the white population” (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 447). Consequently, the rising levels of urban unemployment and poverty caused increased concern among policymakers and community leaders alike.

Hegemonic Contestation

In sum, it was not that Latinos were forced to support bilingual education against their own interests. Rather Latino leaders voiced how and why they supported bilingual education within an agenda distinct from policymakers. Whereas policymakers saw bilingual education as a means to avoid attention to economic causes of unemployment such as outsourcing, Latino activists explicitly saw bilingual education as a way to continue to strive toward broader structural changes for economic uplift and political empowerment.

Indeed, bilingual education gained traction so quickly precisely because it represented one overlapping area of consensus among policymakers and Latino leaders. Thus, unlike Bell’s (1980) traditional interest convergence thesis that is based on realization of objectively rational group interests, the framework of hegemonic interest convergence suggests that the robust support for bilingual education lay in its ability to generate a limited consensus within what both policymakers and Latino activists seemed to perceive as a set of choices formatively constrained by a shifting 1960s political economy. The process of hegemonic contestation from which the Bilingual Education Act arose thus highlights how policymakers and Latino leaders both struggled over the discursive terrain within which Latino poverty was framed as the problem and bilingual education the solution.

Latino communities sought a foothold in their resistance through multiple avenues, including speaking with policymakers as well as direct public actions. In doing so, Latino leaders reiterated demands that included bilingual education within broader platforms for social uplift. The most recognizable of these leaders were the Brown Berets who helped spearhead the 1968 East Los Angeles school “blowouts” within a broader organizing platform (Chavez, 2002; Pulido, 2006). Co-founder Carlos Montes (2003) described how “the Brown Beret’s thirteen-point political program talked about self-determination as having political and economic control over our lives.” Montes explained that Brown Beret’s operationalized this vision by calling for a legitimization of Chicano language and culture as one element alongside “a return of our land, release of prisoners, jobs, housing ... and solidarity with all revolutionary peoples engaged in the struggle for self-determination.”

Organizers of the blowout, which the *Los Angeles Times* predicted “could spell the beginning of a revolution,” framed schooling within a broader “social, political, economic, and educational” struggle for cultural citizenship and collective uplift (McCurdy, 1968, p. c1). The blowouts’ goal, explained teacher and organizer Sal Castro, was “to address the very nature of the Mexican schools, inner city schools that, instead of creating opportunities for educational and economic mobility, reinforced a status quo which valued people of Chicano/Latino descent primarily for being cheap labor” (Castro & García, 2011; see also García & Castro, 2011; Gonzalez, 1990; Valencia, 2008). Activist Carlos Muñoz Jr. recalled, although they were “strongly supportive of [Cesar] Chavez and [Reies Lopez] Tijerna,” who focused on rural issues including farm labor

organizing in California and land-rights in New Mexico, Chicano “student leaders on urban campuses were well aware that the vast majority of their people lived in cities [and] therefore felt the need to build an urban movement to address the issues faced by the majority of Mexican Americans” that included, but was not limited to, the lack of bilingual education (Munoz, 1989, p. 60).

Although Latino activists did advocate for bilingual education, on average, the responses to the proposed bilingual education bill by those who did illuminated the dynamics of the hegemonic contestation. For example, policymakers tried to keep the Senate Special Subcommittee hearings on Bilingual Education filled with speakers supportive of bilingual education. However, not all who spoke in the hearings held bilingual education as their principal concern. After the League of United Latin American Citizens president Alfred Hernandez finished his testimony on the high correlation of Latino illiteracy and poverty Senator Yarborough asked Hernandez: “if these children learned English, you don’t think they would have any difficulty getting a job or fully integrating into our society in an economic way?” (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 401). Rather than agree with Yarborough that learning English would lead to full employment and integration, Hernandez only acknowledged in his testimony, “this has been a definite barrier for the Mexican American,” implying that learning English was neither the only or primary barrier Latinos faced.

The difference of positions was further clarified when Latino leaders explicitly raised structural concerns. For example, Latina activist Irene Tovar explained during the hearings that it would be “very erroneous” if policymakers continued to claim that “if you Mexicans only learn English and become Americans, the problems will be solved” (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 481). To emphasize her point, Tovar referenced the current labor organizing of Latinos in Rio Grande City, Texas, as well as the legacy of the Mexican-American war and subsequent U.S. occupation and colonization of the Southwest in shaping current Latino struggles. In reply, Senator Murphy asked Tovar about her education and then ominously stated, “I think you have learned quite a lot ... [but] if you get too much learning, this can also be dangerous” (Bilingual Education: Hearings, 1967, p. 485). Murphy concluded their testy exchange by positing that Latinos such as her would better help their community by heeding Johnny Mercer’s famous 1944 song to “accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative.”

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, bilingual policymaker practices of “accentuating” and “eliminating” during the hearings simultaneously captured and marginalized the complex situation that postwar Latinos faced. The 1968 Bilingual Education Act’s origin thus illuminates two key points of hegemonic interest convergence. First, the passage of the 1968 Bilingual Education Act cannot be divorced from the shifts in the postwar economic world system that simultaneously propelled massive demographic movements, reordered agricultural and industrial production, and weakened the capacity of policymakers to formulate an effective economic policy. Despite civil rights victories, an evolving agrarian world economy reshaped rural labor markets in the Southwest and pushed Latinos to search for work in cities at the exact moment that globalizing industrial corporations were stripping American cities of traditional manufacturing jobs. The idea that bilingual education would solve urban Latino poverty grew out of these global economic shifts.

Second, the turn to bilingual education was part of a hegemonic contestation shaped by larger structural conditions rather than simply an imposition from above. Unable to create an effective industrial policy, policymakers reframed the problem of unemployment and poverty from one of structural weaknesses in the economy to one of both inadequate skills and cultural deficits among poor, urban Latinos. Latino activists joined policymakers in endorsing the 1968 Bilingual Education Act, based on the hope of promoting cultural citizenship and achieving Latino economic prosperity through increased educational and school employment opportunities. The hopes of Latino activists would go largely unmet, however. As Irene Tovar hinted, supporting bilingual education proved an important, though ultimately inadequate, tactic for activists pushing for social change and economic uplift. In building a coalition, policymakers successfully channeled many Latinos' broader concerns away from structural critiques of economic inequality and toward reforms ideologically amenable to maintaining the social order.

In contrast to prior narratives that highlight the role of activists and politicians in codifying bilingual education, this analysis seeks to demonstrate how underlying postwar economic changes shaped the voiced concerns and underlying ideologies among local actors. The intervention that hegemonic interest convergence thus offers to Bell's (1980) analysis is the focus on how 1960s' ideologies, which policymaker and activist interests drew from, were shaped by the underlying structural context whereby certain challenges were deemed not simply acceptable but comprehensible. That both activist and policymaker support was based on their perceived "rational interests" misses the point that neither interests were fully realized within the constrained terrain upon which bilingual education was debated. Left unanswered were the broader structural challenges that continued to result in negative outcomes as Latinos' communities increasingly struggled with outsourcing and automation at the same time that policymakers struggled with a resulting loss of state power to address these issues as capital and corporations globalized.

The case of bilingual education emblemizes the broader political economic history of 1960s' education-based reforms as a process of hegemonic interest convergence through which democratic and egalitarian aspirations were redirected into reforms that were as much about promoting social control as about attempting to alleviate poverty or inequity. Although bilingual education has become increasingly framed as a cultural project instead of an economic one in the decades since 1968 (Blanton, 2014; Dabach & Faltis, 2012; Hong, 2011; Michener, Sengupta-Irving, Proctor, & Silverman, 2015; Moran, 1988; Santa Ana, 2002; Suh, 2016), its longer legacy as a project of social control continues to shape debates even within its current iteration (Flores, 2016; Hsu, 2015; Sung, 2008; Zion, York, & Stickney, 2017).

Despite the discursive shift from fighting poverty to addressing immigrant linguistic and cultural differences, policymakers' positions on bilingual education often continue to frame Latino marginalization as resulting from cultural deficits rather than structural, political, and economic relations. Although it is true that bilingual education was and continues to be framed through such "commonsense" assumptions, as Gramsci (1971) noted, the process of hegemony is never done. Beyond offering a novel historical analysis of the 1968 Bilingual Education Act's origins, the theory of hegemonic interest convergence also suggests a new prescriptive in that any strategy to reappropriate bilingual education must both confront the underlying assumptions about the culture of poverty embedded in its history and place bilingualism within the broader context of economic justice and cultural citizenship that 1960s' Latino activists embraced.

AUTHOR BIO

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