

CONFLUENCE & COLLISION, OUR INSTITUTE AT THIRTY

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The National Hispanic Institute, like all of the other six million U.S. Latinos born in the 1970s, entered an American landscape that had only quite recently begun promoting equal access to our nation's educational resources and positions of power. Throughout its infancy during the early 1980s it struggled to survive economically, often competing with other organizations derived from an earlier civil rights era that were redefining their social messages for a new generation of potential young leaders.

Armed only with its nascent leadership concepts and programming for high ability Latino youth, NHI stood apart from all other longstanding and new Latino organizations due to its economic autonomy and focus on college-bound students. As the Institute approached ten years of age, it could propel unlikely Latino students from numerous urban enclaves and marginal rural communities into our nation's top institutions of higher learning. By the early 1990s, NHI alumni were not only found at every major selective institution in the United States, they were engaging their campuses as leaders and active intellectuals.

By its teenage years, the Institute was rebelling against its own ideological conventions and questioning the outcomes of channeling so many high ability Latino youths into "multicultural" systems that would leave them unprepared to conceptualize and engage the rapidly expanding U.S. Latino community at the dawn of the twenty first century. These were extraordinary times and they radically influenced the program experience for thousands of new participants and volunteers from this period forward.

In its mid-twenties NHI matured into a school of thought and then it began to forecast the future dynamics of the U.S. Latinos during a confluence of social forces (i.e., the 'perfect storm' scenario). One of the primary discussions during this time was related to the disconnect of high ability Latino youth, and the implications associated with the mass retirement of Latino leaders who were born in the 1940s and 1950s.

As these multiple crises collide on the horizon, NHI is one of the few entities that has continued to challenge its participants to question how these forces will influence their lives after graduation as well as to determine how they can individually and collectively address the opportunities that the global Latino population will provide in the years ahead.

Now at thirty years of age, the National Hispanic Institute endeavors to become a Latino institution of higher learning—the first in our country. Although a handful of de facto Hispanic Serving Institutions operate throughout the U.S./Mexico border region, the U.S. Latino community has yet to create its own universities. With over forty acres in Maxwell, a unique body of knowledge that has grown for three decades, and an alumni base numbering greater than 80,000, it is quite likely that this dream will become a reality in the near future.

Reality formation, as both a concept and body of actions, when applied for thirty years can produce any type of institution or institutional formation even within a growing social maelstrom. That NHI seeks to become an alternative to what it once sought to access is a revolutionary cycle to complete indeed. Moreover, that it will achieve this goal through the support of a critical mass of alumni provides a model for other Latinos born after the creation of the Institute to evolve further as their own legacy.