

## **History of Latino Fraternal Movement and Why it Matters on Campus Today**

Oliver Fajardo, Lambda Theta Phi Fraternity, Inc.

Latin@s have been attending colleges and universities in the United States since the late 1700s. The first known international Latin American student to enroll in a U.S. university was Francisco de Miranda when he attended Yale in 1784 (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). Throughout the 1800s, more students from Latin America enrolled in U.S. colleges as compared to Latin@s born in the United States. An example of increased native Latin American enrollment was the University of California – Berkeley that had twelve students from Latin America enrolled in their Fifth Class Program compared to four Latin@s born in California in the 1871-1872 academic school year (Register, 1871). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a demand in skilled workers for Latin America's new railroads, waterworks, highways, dams, and canals led to increased enrollment of international students in American colleges (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). These international Latin American students began to congregate and create clubs, societies, and fraternities that brought them together (Fajardo, 2015).

The first wave of Latin American fraternities began when international students at Cornell founded Alpha Zeta Fraternity during the 1889-1890 academic year (Alpha Chapter, 1890). Alpha Zeta Fraternity started a movement of organizations that catered to international Latin American students that lasted until the spring of 1975 (Fajardo, 2015). Over a dozen fraternities were founded from California to New York and Kansas to Louisiana. These organizations had several reasons for their existence. Some served as political organizations that wanted to liberate Puerto Rico from the United States, others wanted to unite Latin American countries so that they could stand up to perceived U.S. imperialism, yet others wanted to create a network of students from Latin America studying in this country (Fajardo, 2015). Jorge Mañach, a Cuban member of Phi Lambda Alpha stated, "But deep down, coincidences united all of us: the blood, the language, the melancholy that I spoke about earlier, and above all a fervid ideal: in that one day our America can unite against the colossal of the North" (As cited in Alva Castro, 1988, p.248). Alberto Matto, a Peruvian member of Phi Iota Alpha exclaimed "[Phi Iota Alpha's] objective was to liberate Puerto Rico" (Descro, 1996, p. 9). The last known fraternity founded by the international Latin American students was founded at Kansas State College (now Kansas State University) in 1949 (Fajardo, 2015). All of the fraternities established between 1890 and 1949 became defunct at a period of increased U.S. Latin@ enrollment in the early 1970s. One of these organizations was resurrected in April of 1984 by U.S. Latin@s after reading an article about one of the international students that was a member of a fraternity (Latin Americans Reform, 1984). A founder of this group stated, "If you compare Phi Iota Alpha's goals of yesterday to the present, they are very much different. The fraternity was once a political organization which restricted membership to native born Hispanics" (Fraternity Supports Culture of Hispanics, 1984, p. 5).

The current wave of Latin@ Greek-lettered organizations began in New Jersey in 1975. The "Latino Greek Movement" as it is known today, was founded on December 1, 1975 with the birth of Lambda Theta Phi Latin Fraternity, Inc. (Fajardo, 2015; Heidenreich, 2006). This came at the heels of the civil rights movement which included student movements by Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in the United States. After decades of being treated as second class citizens, Latin@s in the United States began to create social justice organizations such as the

Puerto Rican Student Movement and the Movimiento Estudiantil Chican@ de Aztlan (M.E.Ch.A) (MacDonald & Garcia, 2006). Organizations like these advocated for and empowered the Latin@ student body and surrounding communities. These organizations began to actively voice their concerns regarding the treatment of the Latin@ community in the United States, something that the international Latin American fraternities had avoided (Fajardo, 2015). One of their main goals was to help their communities through higher education. The student organizations began to host youth conferences and implement college visits so that younger Latin@s could learn about the benefits of attending institutions of higher education (60 Kids Go, August 16, 1970). The activism of Latin@ students on campus was a microcosm of what was occurring in the country (Heidereich, 2006). Latin@ Greek Movement organizations, this time including sororities, began to do the same. One of the first actions taken by these organizations was to demand bilingual voting instructions to help support the English as a Second Language (ESL) students at Kean University so that their voices could be heard (Peña, 1994). May 7, 1977 also marked the first time in history where a fraternity hosted an event to raise funds for a scholarship to benefit Latin@ students (Peña, 1994). The actions were taken by Lambda Theta Phi Latin Fraternity, Inc. Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority, Inc. was also founded at Kean University to be followed by Lambda Sigma Upsilon Latino Fraternity, Inc. (Rutgers University) and Chi Upsilon Sigma National Latin Sorority, Inc. (Rutgers University). The movement would spread to New York when La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity, Inc. was founded at Cornell University in 1982. Hernando Lodoño, a Founding Father of La Unidad Latina, exclaimed “Latinos have formidable challenges. One of the biggest is in the area of education...I felt obligated to give back to the community and hopefully inspire or be a role model to a young brother or sister” (The Story of LUL, nd.).

When the Latin@ Greek Movement made it to the West Coast with the birth of Lambda Theta Nu Sorority, Inc. (1986) and Gamma Zeta Alpha Fraternity, Inc. (1987) at California State University – Chico, Latin@s across the U.S. had organizations that represented their heritage and culture in the United States. Latin@s had an additional pipeline to use in order to increase their graduation rates. This additional pipeline was created by the bonds within the brotherhoods and sisterhoods (Sanchez, 2011). Those fraternal bonds created a support system that pushed their members to be successful academically, held them accountable for their actions, facilitated internship opportunities, and created a network of mentors that guided Latin@s through their collegiate experience (Sanchez, 2011). The current Latin@ graduation rate from a U.S. college with at least an Associate’s degree is 20% (Latino College Completion: United States, 2014) and even lower for those who continue on to graduate with a Bachelor’s degree. Being members of a Latin@ Greek organization helps increase student self-efficacy, which in turn, motivates students to graduate from college (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013)

Latin@ Greek Movement organizations provide a sense of belonging, cultural awareness, and a sense of service to the community. As one organization’s founding fathers stated, “What sets the fraternities/sororities apart, is the level of interaction and commitment of its members” (The Story of LUL, nd.). Latin@ Greek members not only serve as role models to the younger generations, but they create a sense of belonging and family, which is important in the Latin@ community (Sanchez, 2011). In addition to providing support, organizations help Latin@s navigate and eventually graduate from college, and that is why *we matter!*

## References

- 60 Kids Go To College for a Day* (1970, Aug. 16). Staten Island Advance.
- Alpha Chapter of Alpha Zeta (1890, January). *The Cornell Daily Sun* (Vol. 10). Cornell University.
- Alva Castro, L. (1988). *Haya de la Torre: Peregrino de la Unidad Continental* (Vol. 2). Lima, Peru: Fondo Editorial.
- Bevis, T. and Lucas, C. *International Students in American Colleges and Universities*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Delgado-Guerreo, M. & Gloria, A. M. (2013). La Importancia de la Hermandad Latina: Examining the Psychosociocultural Influences of Latina-Based Sororities on Academic Persistence Decisions. *Journal of College Student Development*. 54 (4) pp. 361-378
- Descro. (1996). *Que Hacer: Revista Bimestral del Centro de Estudios y Promoción del Desarrollo*. (Issues 99-104). Lima, Peru: El Fondo Editorial.
- Fajardo, O. (2015). A Brief History of International Latin American Student Fraternities: A Movement That Lasted 86 Years (1889-1975). *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 14 (1), 69-81.
- Heidenreich, L. (2006). Against the grain: Confronting Hispanic service organizations in times of increasing inequalities, 1930 and 2005. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 5, 123-137.
- Latin Americans reform fraternity. (1984, April 25). The poly, p. 3. Institute Archives and Special Collections, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.
- “Latino College Completion: United States.” *Latino College Completion: United States*. Excelencia in Education, 01 Apr. 2014. Retrieved from <<http://www.edexcelencia.org/research/college-completion/united-states>>.
- MacDonald, V. and Garcia, T. (2006). Historical Perspectives on Latino Access to Higher Education, 1848-1990.
- Register (1871). University of California.
- Sanchez, Sheila M. (2011). First-Generation Latino Males in Latino Fraternities at a Predominately White Institution: Psychological, Social, and Cultural College Experiences. Educational Resources Information Center.
- The Story of LUL (n.d.). Retrieved on February, 26, 2015 from <http://www.launidadlatina.org/about-lul/history/story/#.VO9jl3zF81I>