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Latino Young Men and Boys in Search of Justice: Testimonies (Hispanic Civil Rights)

Frank De Jesus Acosta

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In "Message to My Seventeen-Year-Old Self," Roberto Martinez, a California Correctional inmate, writes that he wishes he would have taken school more seriously. "Prison ain't anything like the thug life lies romanticize it to be; it doesn't make you a man." In this compelling collection of first-person testimonials essays, poetry and letters Latino men and boys who have been or are incarcerated write movingly about their past and future.

The book also incorporates essays by community advocates seeking criminal and juvenile justice system reform. Leaders of organizations including Barrios Unidos, Homeboy Industries, Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice and National Compadres Network contribute pieces that address issues such as culture-based healing and violence prevention. Many use artistic expression as a form of healing, and this volume includes a wide variety of art, from poetry to drawings, tattoos and murals.

Acclaimed author and former gang member Luis J. Rodriguez writes in his foreword that the disproportionate number of young men of color in the justice system is rooted in economic, political and historical factors. He asserts that the United States' punitive laws and practices including three-strike laws, gang and gun enhancements, zero tolerance and school removals have fueled a massive prison industrial complex, and ultimately, more gangs and violence.

With the publication of this collection of first-person testimony and articles by system reform advocates, editors Frank de Jesus Acosta and Henry A.J. Ramos seek to humanize disadvantaged Latino young men and call attention to the need for a restorative rather than punitive justice system. This volume confirms that for both the Latino community and the country as a whole the "school-to-prison pipeline" must be closed now.

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