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The Latino/Hispanic Communities in the U.S.:

History, Demography, Issues, Politics—A Socialist Approach

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The following paper is meant as an overview of the Latino/Hispanic communities in the United States to provide basic information and some political discussion of the Latino/Hispanic communities in preparation for the Solidarity Summer School of 2012 and for the general education of our members. This document constitutes a step toward the drafting of a position on Socialism and the Latino Movements for the Solidarity Convention to be held next year. It might also serve as a kind of handbook or reference for those doing Latino work, at least as long as the information remains relevant.

***The Introduction** puts forward the thesis of a multinational and internationalist struggle for Latino rights in the United States. **Part I** presents basic historical and demographic information on Latino communities in the United States. **Part II** takes up some of the most important issues facing Latino communities, largely through charts. **Part III** looks at the organizational and political responses and the role of the labor unions, social movements, and left in dealing with these issues. We look there at the Justice for Janitors Campaign, the immigration reform campaign of 2006, and the Dreamer movement. **Part IV** raises the question of the role of Solidarity in the Latino movement in the United States, suggesting practical activities and programmatic ideas. The study and discussion of Latinos in the U.S. has implications as well for the rapidly growing groups of Asian, African, and Arab immigrants as well. The bibliography provides a guide to further reading.*

Aware of the pitfalls, I have used “Latino” throughout this paper as a useful shorthand for the complex constellation of groups under discussion. I use the word Mexicans to refer to both Mexican immigrants and to Mexican Americans, as many, many Mexicans in the U.S. refer to themselves as Mexicans or mexicanos or chicanos. Puerto Ricans sometimes call themselves Boricuanos or borinqueños, but I have used Puerto Ricans throughout.

Introduction

The thesis of this document is that the large, diverse, complex, and dynamic Latino community of the United States, the various elements of which often organize on a national, regional, or ethnic basis, generally fight for democratic and economic improvements in the same ways as other Americans: petitions, protests, marches, strikes, lobbying and political action. While they may face particular forms of oppression and exploitation based on their nationality, race, ethnicity, language and culture, as well as their immigration status, Latinos and Latino immigrants, like other ethnic groups and immigrants in the United States, tend to fight through

their various ethnic and national organizations as well as through unions and political organizations to achieve democratic rights and improved economic conditions just as the rest of us do. As Latinos, however, they must *also* fight for the right to speak their languages, to engage in their cultural practices, and to be treated fairly and equally as people of color. We must fight beside Latinos for their political rights, their economic needs, and for their language and cultural rights.

Regarding the question of nationalism, at present, though many Latinos see themselves as having a common history and experience, there are relatively few who see themselves as a nation within the United States and no significant Latino population within the United States calls for self-determination, with the exception of the colony of the island of Puerto Rico. If because of historical circumstances such a demand arose, we would, of course, support that right, though we might or might not be for Latinos workers exercising that right; whatever the case, the decision would be theirs to make.

The slogans “black and white unite and fight” or “brown and white unite and fight,” while expressing the ideal of international labor solidarity, fails to speak to the experience of national, racial or ethnic oppression experienced by African Americans or Latinos in the United States. At the same time, calls for the liberation of the oppressed nations within the United States (not including U.S. colonies abroad), while they have the virtue of dignifying the struggle of African Americans, Latinos and others for full political, civil, and labor rights, have little material basis today and find little resonance in our contemporary multi-national and multi-cultural Latino and American society. Few Latinos today see themselves as a distinct nation within the United States or demand the right to self-determination with the right to secession from it. Almost all Latinos, however, demand respect for their language and cultural rights, as well as political and civil rights and a higher standard of living.

Increasingly, the struggles of Latinos take on a multi-national and pan-Hispanic character here complicated by international ties of Latinos to their national homelands and native ethnic groups. Whether or not there may be an emerging “Latino people,” as opposed to distinct Mexican or Puerto Rican nationalities, in the United States, we do not know, but Latino ethnic groups and nationalities understand that many of them share a common Spanish language (as well as speaking other languages) and many of them share variants of the Iberian culture (often mixed with and altered by other cultures), but, in any case, because they face the same oppression because of their nationality, race or ethnicity, language or cultural practices, they have much in common.

Latino issues in the United States developed in the past and exist today principally because of U.S. imperialism in Latin America and the Caribbean. The U.S. has been more than 150 years an imperial power in Latin America, using its wealth, its diplomacy, and its military to attempt to control and to shape the economic, social and political life of Latin America. We reject those policies absolutely. Socialists must continue to defend the rights of colonies like Puerto Rico to

independence and the rights of small and developing nations such as Honduras to self-determination. The more than 50-year old embargo of Cuba should be terminated, regular diplomatic relations should be reestablished, and American attempts to overthrow the Cuban government must be ended. Similarly, the U.S. should give up its attempt to destabilize or overthrow the government of Venezuela. Our principal responsibility as Americans is to oppose U.S imperialism—economic, diplomatic, military, and cultural—in Latin America.

The struggle for socialism in the United States will be based on a workers' revolution in conjunction with the struggles for their rights of African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Africans, Arabs, Native Americans, as well as movements of women and LGBT folk other groups, for their rights, for their needs, and for power. The struggles of any people or group for their rights should not be subordinated to other struggles of the labor movement or to some plan or model of the left, but should be seen as forming part of a broader struggle for both socialism and the liberation of oppressed peoples. Nor should the struggles of women or LGBT people within those national groups be subordinated either to the struggles of a particular ethnic or national group or to the broader struggles of working people for socialism. The struggle of any oppressed group has its legitimacy and autonomy as well as its articulation within the broader struggle for workers' revolution and socialism.

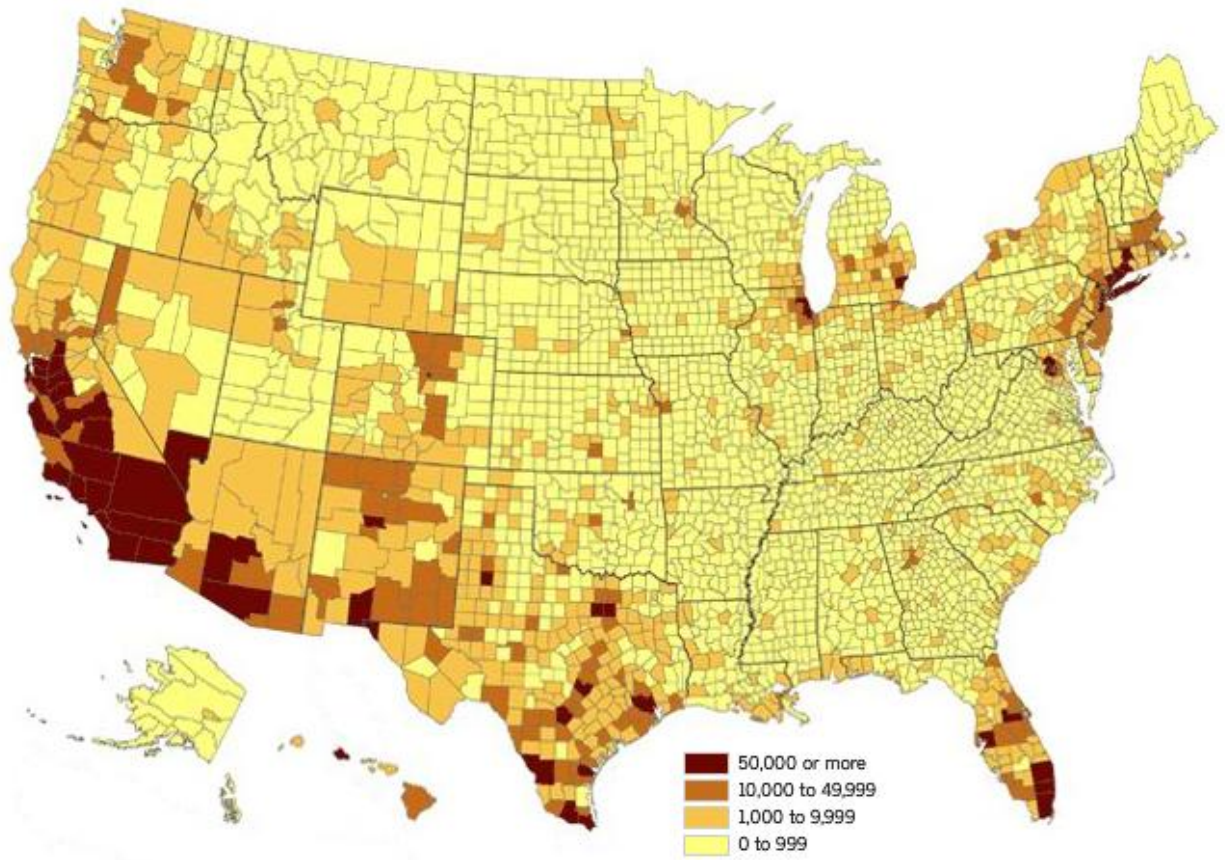
We in Solidarity should be part of the struggle of Latinos for their rights and for a better life, fighting with them as Latinos ourselves or as allies, while at the same time carrying out socialist propaganda, winning them to the socialist movement and recruiting them to Solidarity. At the same time, we support the attempt to build international solidarity between immigrants in the United States and their families and fellow countrymen and women in the homeland, as well as attempts to build organizations of solidarity in which U.S. labor organizations, social movements, and left groups build international ties to strengthen the international struggle against capitalism and imperialism.



Part I – A Sketch of Latino History and Demography

The Latino communities are as Juan González calls them *Harvest of Empire*.¹ Imperialism has been the great motor of Latin American migration. The Mexican American War of 1847-48 forced 100,000 Mexicans to become citizens by force. The Spanish American War of 1898 made Puerto Ricans U.S. nationals and later U.S. citizens.

The Cuban Revolution of 1959, a revolt against the Batista regime and the U.S. government's domination of the island, was followed by the migration of tens of thousands of Cubans to exile in America. The Central American Wars of the 1980s led hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and Nicaraguans to migrate to the United States. Latin Americans migrated, fleeing military governments and their terror, civil wars, revolutions, and the social and economic chaos they had created.



Source: Pew Hispanic Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau county population estimates

Map above of Latino Population in U.S. from 2009

The great wealth of the United States, the result in part of its exploitation of Latin American fields, forests and mines and more recently industry, led to the great economic inequalities which have caused Latinos to migrate to the United States in search of economic opportunity, usually in search of jobs at higher wages than they could earn at home. While the American economy in its boom times offered jobs, the government didn't always offer enough visas for those wanting to fill those jobs, so many migrated without papers. In slack times, Latinos suffered higher rates of unemployment than whites. Those who migrated from Latin America to the United States have often faced racial discrimination or discrimination because of their language or culture, police profiling and mistreatment and higher levels of incarceration than whites. Undocumented immigrants, without civil or labor rights, have been forced to live in the shadows or have been subjected to arrest and deportation. We have seen most recently a campaign by conservative legislators aimed at reducing the rights of Latino immigrants which as a by-product also affect legal immigrants and other Americans. The Arizona laws, for example, imitated by other states throughout the country and recently upheld in part by the U.S. Supreme Court, threaten to turn Latino immigrants into a criminals and to make Latino citizens into second-class citizens.² We turn now to look at the Latino/Hispanic communities in the U.S.

Latinos in the United States Today

The people that the U.S. Census Bureau calls Hispanic and that the media and social scientists sometimes call Latino has grown from 9.6 million or 4.7% of the U.S. population in 1970 to 50.7 million who make up 16 percent of the population today.³ Once clustered in three areas—the Southwest, Florida and the New York-New Jersey-Philadelphia region—Latinos now live throughout the United States with large populations in regions such as the Northwest, the Midwest, and the Deep South.⁴ While forty years ago most Latinos were either Mexican (in the Southwest), Puerto Rican (in the New York-New Jersey-Philadelphia area), or Cuban (in Florida and New Jersey), today's Hispanic population is made up of people from all of the Hispanic nationalities (including not only Spain and the Spanish speaking nations, also from Brazil, the Caribbean and the Azores).

Most Latinos are Not Immigrants

Sometimes one hears the term “Latino” used interchangeably with “immigrant,” as if all Latinos were immigrants (or all immigrants were Latinos), yet the fact is that 63 percent of Latinos, almost two-thirds, are native born while only 37 percent are immigrants. The Mexicans descended from those conquered during the Mexican American war were never immigrants. As they say, “We didn’t cross the line—the line crossed us.” Other Latinos have been in the United States for generations, the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of immigrants.

While most white Americans tend to think of the Latino as the bronze-skinned Mexican mestizos, many Latinos are of European, Amer-Indian (indigenous), or African descent or of complex mixtures of those racial groups, but there are also significant numbers of Japanese and smaller numbers of Chinese, Arab and Jewish Latinos, also often also racially mixed. Because of this diversity, nearly all Latinos or Hispanics reject those labels, preferring to call themselves something else, whether using their nationality like Mexican, using their ethnicity Quiché (a Guatemalan indigenous group), or using their culture such as the Garifunas (people of African or African-mixed race from Central American coastal areas).

The point of this brief description is to call attention to the complex character of what we call the Latino or Hispanic population and to suggest that much of the discussion tends to involve broad generalizations, stereotypes and misunderstandings. Nevertheless, we will use the term Latino (cautiously) in this essay as a broad term for all of those and many more mentioned here. The key point to remember is: diversity.

Class and the Latino Community

Class identities are also complex. While most Latinos in the U.S. are working class, many are middle class professionals and small business owners, other Latinos form part of a Latino bourgeoisie. While there are very few Latinos in the capitalist class in the United States, there are a number of them, some worth hundreds of millions, with revenues of billions, and employing

thousands. The Latino capitalist class, those who are independently wealthy, own large- or medium-sized businesses or who serve as the executives of large banks and corporations constitute not only part of the Latino community but also part of the capitalist class and their class interests are different than and fundamentally opposed to those of most Latinos.⁵

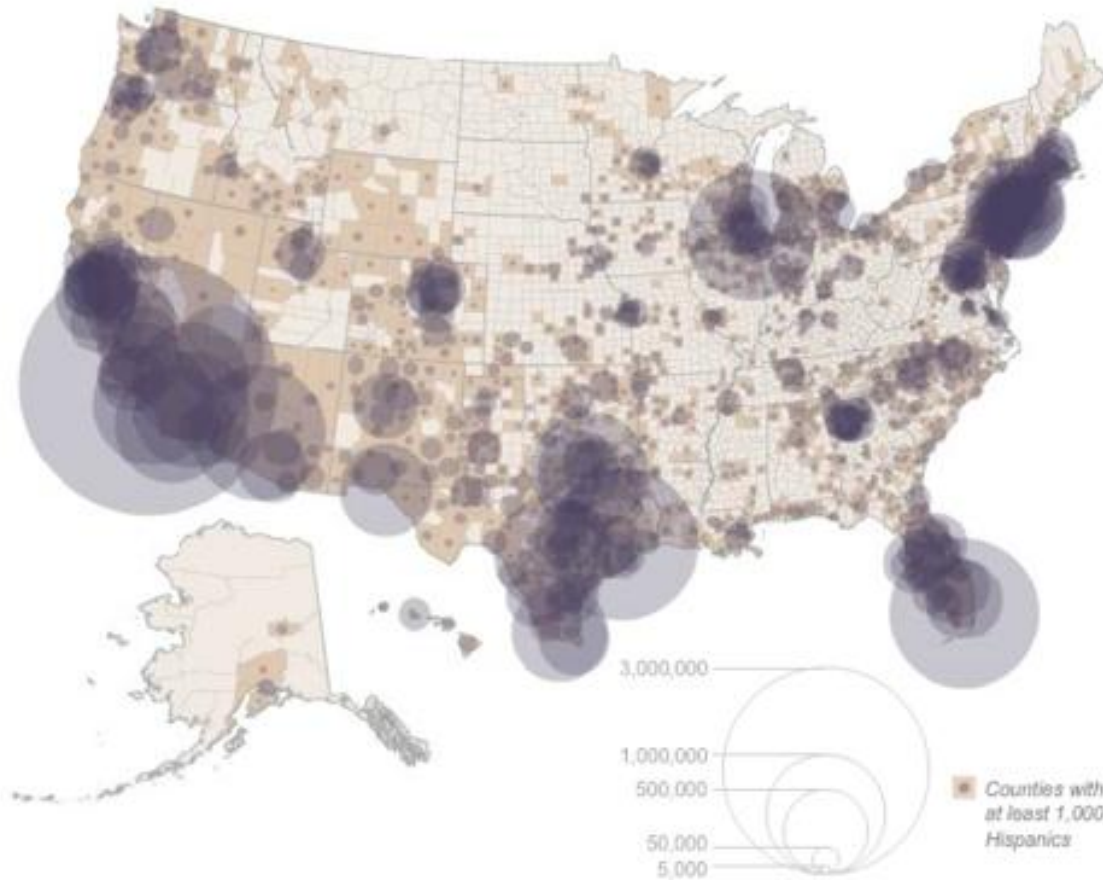
There is also a quite large Latino petty-bourgeoisie, that is, small capitalists, owners of small business, stores, and restaurants who find themselves buffeted about by all of the larger forces of society: government at all levels, banks, corporations, and labor unions. The Latino petty-bourgeoisie, just like small employers of all groups, because they do not have the economies of scale of corporations and larger companies, are often just as exploitative or even more exploitative of Latino labor than other bosses. While the Latino petty-bourgeoisie is quite numerous, most Latinos form part of the working class as industrial or service workers, public employees or laborers. There were 23 million Latino workers in 2011 representing 15 percent of the U.S. workforce.⁶

All Latinos, however, regardless of class, may face racial discrimination in American society because of their complexion, their accent, or their legal status if they are not citizens.

Complex and Dynamic Communities

One could argue that the presence of many Latinos of different nationalities in many large urban areas of the United States (Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, D.C., New York, and Miami), especially where these groups often live in the same or adjacent neighborhoods, work in the same jobs, go to the same churches, inter-marry in significant numbers and share common economic, social and political problems in this society is leading to the emergence of a Latino people in the United States. The idea of an emerging Latino ethnicity in the U.S. is a hypothesis, but an interesting one that has implications for various nationalist theoretical approaches to Latino populations.

If in discussion of Latinos the first word to remember is diversity, the second is dynamic. Latino communities are in motion geographically, socially and culturally. We turn now to make some broad generalizations about geographic mobility among the three historic Latino communities we mentioned (Mexicans in the Southwest, Puerto Ricans in New York/New Jersey/Philly, and Cubans in Florida).



The Pew Research Center's map of Latinos by location offers a glimpse of the regions of the U.S. with the highest concentration of Latinos in 2010.

Mexican Americans

Let's begin by looking briefly at the evolution of the Mexican American community the largest Latino community in the U.S. and the largest immigrant group. When conquered by the United States in the Mexican-American War, the Southwest was inhabited by 100,000 Mexicans who became U.S. citizens by force. Subsequently in the early twentieth century about one million Mexicans immigrated into the United States fleeing the violence of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), while another million immigrated during the Cristero Rebellion (1929-1934). Those migrants laid down the tracks for hundreds of thousands of Mexican other immigrants who came later, stimulated to migrate by the *bracero* program (1942-64).⁷

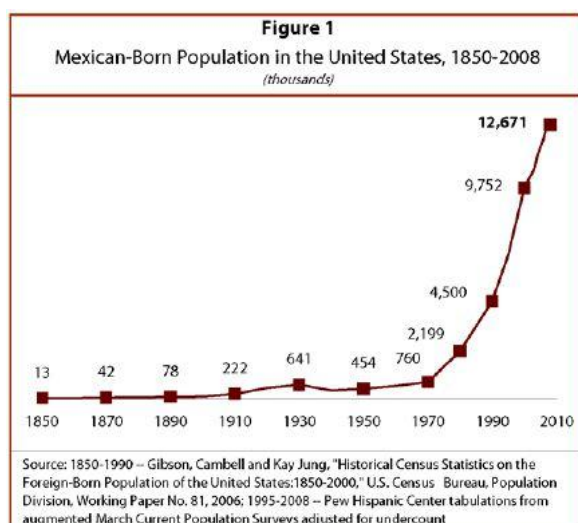


Table of Mexican-born Population in the U.S. in Thousands - Pew

A More Detailed History of Mexican Americans

The secession of Texas in 1836, its incorporation into the United States in 1846, the U.S-Mexico War of 1847, and the Gadsden Purchase of 1854, all taken together took about half of Mexico's territory and brought tens of thousands of californios, New Mexican hispanos, and tejanos into the United States, as well as unnumbered Indians.

The first Mexican Americans were a conquered people, often soon deprived of their land, stripped of their rights, and exploited as a labor force. Nationality, race and immigration became complicated in the Southwest where Western white supremacy, with its anti-Chinese and anti-Mexican attitudes, met Southern white supremacy with its anti-African American ideology and practices such as lynching. In Texas white immigrants from the South at first rejected the tejanos, but then later turned to them as a reliable workforce. The tejanos, U.S.-born Mexicans sometimes won toleration of the dominant white group, but those earliest Mexican Americans then in turn sometimes discriminated against the new immigrants from Mexico, who threatened their new found social status.⁸ During the years between 1854 and 1880, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans migrant laborers moved in and out of the United States in the Southwest.⁹

First Mexican Immigrants

Mexican immigration into the United States in even larger numbers began in the 1880s as the result of several related phenomena. First, in Mexico the dictator Porfirio Díaz and his cabinet of científicos supported the new, modern exported-oriented haciendas in dispossessing the Mexican peasants, turning them into a class of agricultural laborers or jornaleros. At the same time, Díaz built a national railroad system with lines that reached from Mexico City to the U.S. border, making it possible for those landless peasants to seek work in the United States. While we have no exact statistics, tens of thousands probably came.

Then came the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, a decade of violent upheaval that disrupted the economy. Fleeing the violence in the nation with a population then of 15 million, about a million Mexicans sought refuge in the United States. With a million Americans conscripted for military service, those Mexican immigrants readily found jobs in agriculture, mining, and even manufacturing.¹⁰ In the next decade of the 1920s, as a result of violence and economic disruption in Mexico, particularly the Cristero Rebellion, about 600,000 Mexicans immigrated legally into the United States and perhaps another one million illegally.¹¹ Thus between 1880 and 1929 about 2.8 million Mexicans found work in the fields of California, the mines of Arizona, in the steel mills of Chicago, and the railroads of Pennsylvania.¹²

Mexicans as Workers and Activists in the U.S.

Mexicans were attracted to the United States by economic opportunity, meaning jobs at higher wages. At the turn of the last century, Mexican agricultural laborers on the haciendas made about 12 cents a day, while in Texas they could make 50 a day clearing land, a dollar or two a day as a railroad worker, and a sure two dollars a day as a miner.¹³ Mexicans got this work because the Chinese Exclusion Act had made the Chinese unavailable for that work, and with the so-called “Gentlemen’s Agreement” between the United States and Japan of 1907-98, Japan no longer permitted emigrants to go the United States. At the same time the outbreak of World War I in 1914 made Europeans unavailable until 1918, and then in 1924 the restrictive immigration law cut them off. Mexicans, despite the U.S. immigration authorities’ new literacy examinations and fees, continued to immigrate legally and illegally in massive numbers. With all other groups excluded, the job fell to the Mexican.

Mexicans in the Southwest worked principally in agriculture, mining, railroad construction and maintenance, building construction, and in low-paid and unskilled work. Mexican immigrants often moved back and forth, between Mexico and the United States, especially along the border. The Mexicans brought with them their labor union and political experience garnered in the years just before and during the revolution. Some of these immigrants had been members of the anarchist Mexican Liberal Party (PLM) which had attempted to launch the Mexican Revolution in 1906. Some had been involved in the House of the World Worker (Casa del Obrero Mundial – COM), the anarchist labor federation a section of which eventually allied with the conservative Constitutionalist forces of the Revolution. Others had joined the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) either in Mexico or the United States, for that radical syndicalist labor federation operated on both sides of the border. Some immigrants had fought in the revolutionary armies of Francisco Madero, Pancho Villa, Venustiano Carranza, or Alvaro Obregon, or one of the other lesser figures of the great rebellion.

All of this is to say that partly because of the proximity of their homeland, and partly because of the radical events unfolding there, Mexican immigrants brought a unique social consciousness to their experience as exiles, refugees, or simply economic immigrants. Mexicans participated in and sometimes took the lead in many of the bitter battles between miners and the corporations in

the 1910s, and participated in union organizing drives and strikes in agriculture, construction and on the railroads.¹⁴ Mexican union activism continued throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s.

Mexican Expulsion

During the Great Depression decade of the 1930s, the U.S. government began a program of voluntary or forced “repatriation” or deportation of Mexicans. The goal of the program was to return indigent workers and their families to their own countries, to save welfare agencies money, and to provide jobs for unemployed Americans. The Federal government’s efforts were supported by state government and by vigilante action, leading to the removal of 500,000 Mexicans from cities throughout the United States. Employers told workers they were fired and should go home. Social service agencies told them they would not be eligible for relief (welfare) and should leave the country. In some case, vigilante mobs threatened to beat them if they stayed on their jobs. Some Mexicans were sent home from New York on steam ships, from Detroit by railroad and from other cities by bus. Some of those who “returned to Mexico” were U.S. citizens who had been born in the United States and never lived there.¹⁵

Bracero Program

During World War II, the Mexican and United States government agreed to establish “a program unprecedented in the history of both nations; the large-scale, sustained recruitment and contracting of temporary migrant workers under the aegis of an international agreement.”¹⁶ The “*bracero*” program, as it came to be known, was eventually extended, with various modifications, from 1943 through 1964. Altogether some 4.2 million Mexican migrant workers, virtually all men, entered the United States under the program, the majority working in agriculture, though some also worked for the railroad industry. Between 1943 and 1946, about 49,000 workers came each year; between 1947 and 1954, about 116,000, and between 1955 and 1964, about 333,000 annually. The year of highest immigration was 1956 when 445,197 workers were issued contracts according to U.S. authorities.

While the U.S. and Mexican governments worked to enforce the contract provisions protecting workers during the war years, in the post-War period this was simply a labor service for agricultural employers. Mexico had had some leverage to protect conditions during the war, but lost its bargaining position afterwards, and could no longer effectively bargain for and protect Mexican workers. Also the Mexican political elite began to see Mexican emigration for work to the United States as a safety valve protecting the Mexican state from social upheaval. At the same time, in the United State agribusiness became the dominant force in shaping the program, while other forces, such as labor unions, lost influence.

The *bracero* program tended to institutionalize the earlier Mexican migrations of the era of the Porfiriato (1870-1910), the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), and the Cristero Rebellion (1926-1934) when millions of Mexicans fleeing political instability, revolutionary violence, and

economic disorder and poverty had come to the United States. The *bracero* program tended to stimulate both legal and illegal migration to the United States, and to develop the migration routes and patterns that persisted after the program ended in 1964. The *bracero* program and illegal migration tended to substitute for each other at different times.

Post-Bracero Period

At the same time, at its height in the 1950s, the *bracero* program coincided with “Operation Wetback” organized by the border patrol under the leadership of retired Army General Joseph Swing, a friend of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, whom he had made the INS Commissioner. Under Swing, the Border Patrol conducted a “military-style” operation that caught in its dragnet 865,318 “deportable Mexicans” in 1953, and 1,075,168 in 1954. Through the period from the 1930s through the 1950s, the United States alternated between periods of mass expulsion, followed by mass legalization, sometimes accompanied by further mass expulsion.

When the *bracero* program ended in 1964, the Mexican and U.S. government developed the *maquiladora* or in-bond plant program, establishing an industrial export zone on the U.S.-Mexican border. The *maquiladora* program was intended to provide jobs for the Mexican workers who would not longer be employed in the United States. However, while the *bracero* workers had all been men, the early *maquiladora* workers were 80 percent women. At the same time, the U.S. government created the H-2 Guest Worker program to continue to provide Mexican workers for U.S. agribusiness. This was “essentially a unilateral bracero program.” But most important, illegal immigration by undocumented workers—often a tolerated illegal immigration—would become the substitute for the *bracero* program.¹⁷

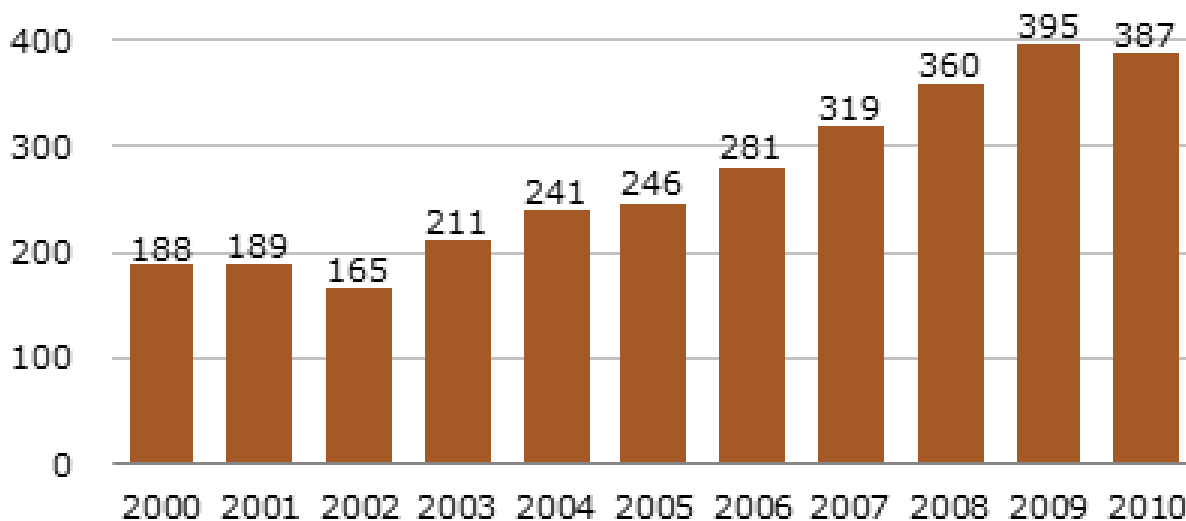
Mexicans and Economic Diversity

While Mexicans in the United States have a history that involves oppression and exploitation, many have also through their labor, through their unions, and through political organization achieved relative economic security and stability. I conducted interviews over the last several years with Mexicans from the Rio Grande Valley, many of them living on either or both side of the border during their lives, who were agricultural workers in the first half of the twentieth century. They were among the founders, activists in, and supporters of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC). They “settled out” in Toledo, Ohio, where they became industrial or service workers and sometimes active in those unions. Some of their children remained working class, but others became middle class teachers or social workers, and some became professionals or small business people. I found a similar experience among Zapotec immigrants from Oaxaca who migrated to the Midwest. I am sure we would find similar experiences among other Latino immigrants. I write this not to suggest that the U.S. is a land of boundless opportunity, which it certainly is not, but rather to point out the complex character of the contemporary Latino community.

From the 1970s to Today

Consequently by the 1970s there were as many as three million people of Mexican descent living in the Southwest. The relative prosperity of the United States and Mexico's prevalent poverty led hundreds of thousands more Mexicans to migrate to the U.S. in the 1970s and 1980s. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 which legalized approximately 2.7 undocumented failed to stop the flow of Mexican immigrants who continued to migrate in large numbers into the 2000s, until the economic crisis of 2008 slowed the flow.¹⁸ At the same time President Barack Obama vastly increased the deportation of undocumented immigrants, leading to widespread criticism of the president's policy by Latinos.¹⁹

Figure 2
Removals, Fiscal Years 2000-2010
(thousands)



Notes: Removals are the compulsory and confirmed movement of an inadmissible or deportable alien out of the United States based on an order of removal. An alien who is removed has administrative or criminal consequences placed on subsequent reentry.

Source: Department of Homeland Security, *2010 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2010*.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

As of 2009 there were 31.7 million people of Mexican descent in the United States making up 10.3 percent of the U.S. population. The Mexican migrant population itself has changed over time. From 1900 to the 1970s, most Mexican immigrants to the U.S. were from the northern and western states and typically mestizo, but by the 1980s many of those immigrating were from the

southern states and were indigenous. Older Mexican immigrants were usually Spanish speakers, while newer immigrants may speak an indigenous language and some Spanish.²⁰

More Detailed Immigration Policy History

In the early 1980s Congress and American society debated immigration reform and in 1986 Congress adopted the Immigration Reform and Control Act or IRCA. IRCA did not change the fundamental immigration law of the country (that of 1965) but instead focused on regularizing the status of undocumented immigrants and penalizing employers who hired undocumented workers. IRCA had four principal provisions: 1) amnesty for many undocumented immigrants; 2) requirements that employers verify the status of all new hires; 3) penalties for employers who hired illegal aliens; and, 4) special provisions for the importation of agricultural workers. The law provided that undocumented immigrants who had been in the United States continuously since December 31, 1981 could apply for amnesty. Others could apply under easier terms for those working in perishable agriculture. By the time of statutory eligibility had ended 3.1 million immigrants had applied. Between 1989 and 1992 some 2.6 “former illegal aliens” gained permanent resident status under IRCA.

NAFTA and Hold the Line

In an attempt to compete more effectively with Japan and the European Common Market, in 1994 the United States entered into a treaty with Canada and Mexico called North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). While the NAFTA treaty facilitated the movement of capital and commerce across the international borders, and permitted some increase migration for managers and professionals, it did not provide for the free movement of workers. In particular it did not make it any easier for Mexicans to migrate to the United States in search of work.

At the same time, President Clinton’s Attorney General Janet Reno and the INS developed a new strategy to restrain illegal immigration across the Mexican border. Beginning in 1994, at the same time as the implementation of NAFTA, the Border Patrol began to establish a series of programs—Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego, Operation Hold the Line in El Paso, Operation Rio Grande in McAllen, and Operation Safeguard in Tucson—to tighten control at the U.S.-Mexico border. Many critics have characterized these policies as the militarization of the border, and human rights organizations such as

Amnesty International have been highly critical of the INS and Border Patrol, alleging many human rights violations.

The operations reduced apprehensions in the urban areas where they were enforced, but drove more migrants to attempt to cross the Rio Grande (Rio Bravo) River, or to trek through the mountains and deserts. The BP policies have resulted in the deaths of thousands migrants from Mexico, Central America and other countries crossing the U.S.-Mexico border.

The new Mexican migrants did not confine themselves to the Southwest as most earlier Mexican migrants had, but migrated to cities and towns throughout the United States. The Obama administration's aggressive deportation program and the economic crisis of 2008 have led to a Mexican immigration rate of zero, since about as many people are leaving as are arriving.²¹

Social and Political Organizations in the Mexican American Community

The Mexican communities in large cities today tend to be highly organized in a variety of ways. Many immigrants belong to hometown clubs or to soccer teams based on hometowns, state or regions in Mexico. Most Mexicans are Catholics and many belong to Catholic churches, though there are also significant numbers of Protestants most of them members of the Evangelical churches. Mexican political parties, particularly the center-right Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) have organizations in U.S. cities with large Mexican populations such as Los Angeles and Chicago. Since the "Viva Kennedy" campaign of 1960 the Democratic Party has successfully won most people of Mexican descent to vote for the Democratic Party and the Democrats in big cities tend to have Latino political organizations.

Mexican Americans have a long history of participation in labor unions going back to the late nineteenth century and many unions in areas such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, Chicago and Gary have large numbers of Mexican union members, union officers and staff members. Latinos today play leadership roles in unions such as SEIU, LIUNA, USW and the Teamsters. Some unions, such as the SEIU, have become involved in forming coalitions with Latino organizations in the larger cities. Many Mexican Americans and other Latinos also play leadership roles in workers centers as well as in working class community organizations. The Mexican American today is found everywhere in the United States.

Central Americans

Beginning in the 1970s, millions of Central Americans began to migrate to the United States to escape the civil wars and U.S. military intervention on the side of reactionary regimes in Central America. Many of these Central Americans migrated to the Southwest, often settling down among Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants changing the character of the Latino population of the Southwest. At the same time, other Central Americans went directly from their homelands to areas far from the Southwest: particularly to the states Texas and Florida and to the cities of Chicago, New York and Washington, D.C. Today there are an estimated 2.9 million Central Americans in the United States.²²

The Salvadoran immigrants of the 1980s to the 2000s in particular, but some of the Guatemalan immigrants as well, brought a great deal of political experience and recreated their political party organizations in the United States. In Los Angeles today for example the Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (FMLN) has hundreds if not thousands of members and a political organization

active in both the U.S. and El Salvador. Some of these immigrants were Marxist socialists and some had trade union organizing experience. Salvadoran and other Central American immigrants have taken on leadership in some U.S. labor unions and in various Latino communities.

Puerto Ricans on the Island and in the U.S.

The United States acquired Puerto Rico as a result of the Spanish-American War of 1898 and was administered by the U.S. military for two years until the Foraker Act of 1900 established a colonial administration under an appointed governor and council. Puerto Rican Socialist Santiago Iglesias acted as the agent of Samuel Gompers during this period to bring the American Federation of Labor to the island. The island had both a Socialist Labor Party, which favored U.S. statehood, and a Federal or Unionist Party which fought the U.S. colonial government in Puerto Rico.

The Jones Act of 1917 gave Puerto Ricans restricted citizenship, restricted because they couldn't vote for the President or for representatives or senators for Congress, but did make them eligible for military conscription. Some 20,000 Puerto Ricans were drafted and served in the U.S. military during World War I. Throughout the 1930s decade of the Great Depression and large strikes, Puerto Rican nationalists conducted armed assassination attempts on U.S. officials and the U.S. authorities repressed the nationalist movement violently. During World War II (1941-1945) about 65,000 Puerto Ricans joined or were conscripted into the U.S. military.

Post-War Puerto Rican Experience

In 1950, President Truman signed Public Act 600 granting commonwealth status to Puerto Rico, which allowed Puerto Ricans to write their own constitution. Puerto Rican politics between the 1950s and the 1990s had three different major political tendencies: 1) Pedro Albizu Campos led the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party which attempted several armed revolts; 2) Juan Marí Bras and Carlos Gallisá Bisbal led a split from the Nationalist Party, first called the Pro-Independence Movement and later the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), after 1959 strongly influenced by the Castro and the Cuban Communist Party; 3) Luis Muñoz, who was elected governor (1949-65), led the Popular Democratic Party, linked to the U.S. Democratic Party.

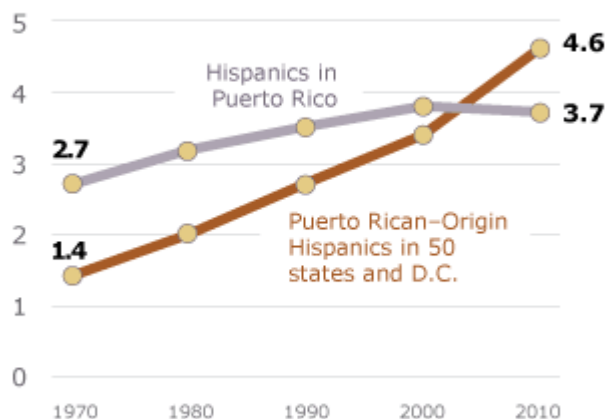


During the post-World War II period Puerto Ricans, facing economic hardship at home, migrated in large numbers to the New York and Philadelphia areas where they worked as farm laborers in New Jersey or in industrial plants and service industries. Many Puerto Ricans became members of labor unions such as the ILGWU, SEIU, Teamsters, and others. While small number of Puerto Ricans had lived in New York since the turn of the last century, the Great Migration, as it has been called, saw 300,000 Puerto Ricans migrate to New York between 1946 and 1950. To give another set of statistics, 45,000 Puerto Ricans left the island each year in the 1950s and 20,000 each year in the 1960s. A smaller group of Puerto Rican immigrants settled in Lorain, Ohio, lured by jobs in a steel mill there.

Puerto Ricans immigrating to the U.S. enjoyed full U.S. citizenship rights on the mainland, though they often faced racial and cultural discrimination. There was always a good deal of back-and-forth as some migrants might return home to Puerto Rico and later immigrate again to the United States. The economic recession of the 1970s in the U.S. slowed Puerto Rican immigration. The migrants brought with them the three major Puerto Rican political parties which established organizations in the United States linked back to the island.

Puerto Rican Population Trends

IN MILLIONS



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The 1980s and 1990s saw a mass return migration to Puerto Rico from New York, Philadelphia, New Jersey and other locations by Puerto Ricans who were retiring and returning to their homeland. At the same time, new waves of immigrants from Puerto Rico continued to come to the United States. Puerto Ricans taken as a whole might be described as a Latino group which lives both on the Island of Puerto Rico and in the mainland of the United States. In 2009, there were 4.6 million Puerto Ricans living in the 50 states and the District of Columbia and there were 3.7 million Puerto Ricans living on the Island. Forty percent of Puerto Ricans on the island live in poverty, compared to 25 percent on the mainland.²³

The main political trends among Puerto Ricans tend to be the Democratic Party and smaller independence and socialist groups, though the latter two are not as strong as they were in the 1950-1990 period. Support for independence has been declining. Another referendum on the status of Puerto Rico is scheduled to be held at the time of the November 2012 elections.

More Detailed History of Plebiscites

In 1950, the U.S. government held a plebiscite on Puerto Rico's new Commonwealth status among a total of 777,675 registered voters. The Nationalists boycotted the election, but still, 65.08 percent voted in the election. A total of 76.5 percent of those voted for the law, so Commonwealth status was approved by 49.76%, a minority of the population. Neither the plebiscite nor the Puerto Rican Constituent Assembly were permitted to vote for independence. In 1967 a second plebiscite was held in which it was possible to vote for one of three possible positions: Commonwealth (ELA), statehood, or independence. The Nationalists boycotted the election keeping an estimated 33.7% of voters from the polls. Among the remaining two-thirds who voted, U.S. statehood received 40% of the vote, and the Commonwealth received 60 percent. In the referendum of 1998, 71% of 2.2 million registered voters voted, with 50.2 percent voting to maintain the Commonwealth status, while 46.5 percent voted for statehood, and only 2.5 percent voted for independence.

The Cuban Community

In the late nineteenth century small numbers of Cubans migrated to New York or in greater numbers to Ybor City, Florida, many working in the cigar manufacturing industry. There were about 45,000 Cubans in the U.S. in 1910. The great modern Cuban migration, however, began with the Cuban Revolution of 1959. The majority of the Cuban upper class, almost all of which was of Spanish or other European descent, made of landowners, businessmen, and the professional classes migrated as exiles principally to Miami, Florida but also in smaller numbers to the State of New Jersey. In 1959 some 124,000 Cubans fled to Miami, followed by 215,000 more in the period from 1960 to 1963. Another wave, made up of lower middle class and working class immigrants, came between 1965 and 1973.

The first waves of Cuban immigrants saw themselves as exiles, working to overthrow the Castro government and expecting to return soon to their country, their property, and their positions.

After the fiasco of President John F. Kennedy's invasion of the Bay of Pigs, these arch-conservative Cubans turned to the Republican Party. In 1981, having by then accepted the fact that they had been forced to become permanent residents of the United States, they created the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), led by Jorge Mas Canosa, dedicated to pressure to the U.S. government to act against the Cuban government. Since the death of Jorge Mas Canosa in 1997 the group has become less reactionary though still generally anti-Castro and conservative.

Cuban Immigration

Years	Numbers
1959-1960	250,000
1965-1973	300,000
1980	125,000

Cubans were not permitted to travel freely or to emigrate from Cuba, though the government did permit several thousand more Cubans to leave throughout the 1970s. In 1980 after a group of Cubans occupied the Peruvian embassy creating an international incident, Fidel Castro permitted 125,000 Cubans to leave the island. Many of those permitted to leave were Afro-Cubans who had been in prison, mental institutions, had disabilities or were homosexuals. While the white Cuban community was initially loath to take responsibility for the largely black working class and impoverished group, they did eventually provide charitable assistance.

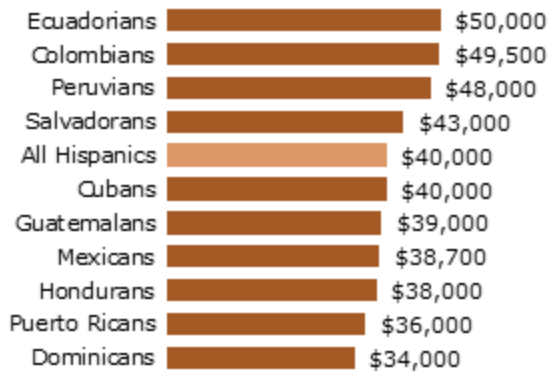
The Cuban population today is 1.8 million, still mostly in the Miami, Florida area with some in New Jersey. The Miami area and Florida as a whole have become much more diverse and Cubans no longer play the dominant role they once did. In Florida at present, Cubans make up 32 percent of eligible Latino voters, Puerto Ricans 28 percent, and Mexicans 9 percent. While Florida has a larger percentage of Latino Republicans than other states, still the numbers of Democrats and independents are significant. Thirty-one percent of the state's registered Latino voters are Republicans, 38 percent Democrats, 29 percent independent, and 2 percent other parties.²⁴

Part II – Latino Social Issues

While there is great social and economic diversity in the Latino community, taken as a whole Latinos faces severe problems of income inequality, poverty, lack of health care, educational disadvantage and lack of health care. Wages are the first concern of all workers as they are of Latino/a workers. The U.S. median wage for all households in 2010 was \$49,800, while for Latinos it was only \$40,000. Wages among Latino of different nationalities differed widely as shown in the following graph.

Figure 9

**Median Household Income among
U.S. Hispanic Population, by Origin,
2010**

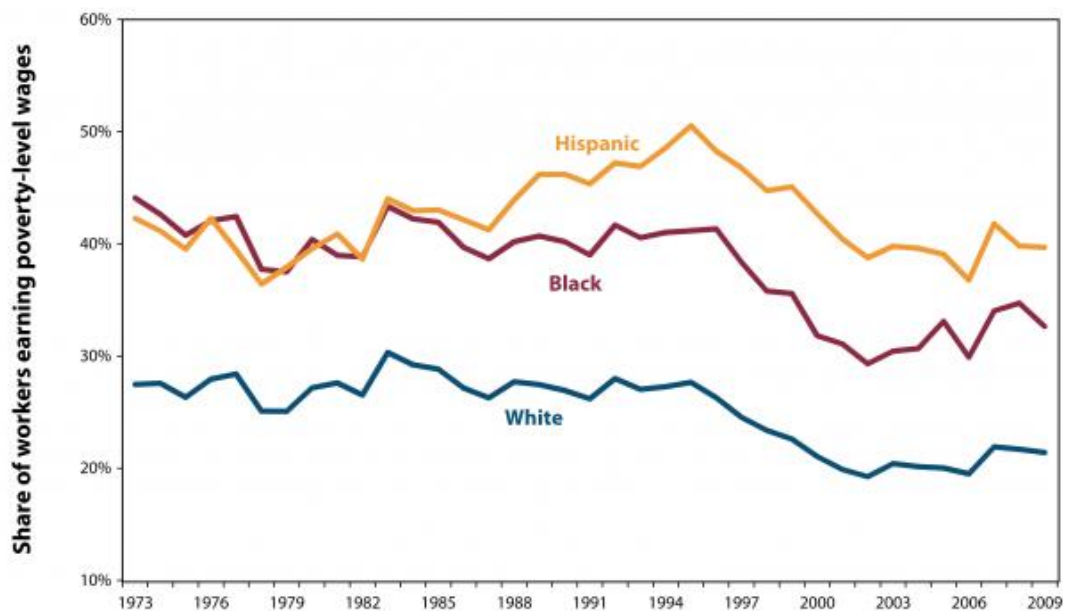


Notes: The household population excludes persons living in institutions, college dormitories and other group quarters. Median U.S. household income is \$49,800.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the 2010 ACS (1% IPUMS)

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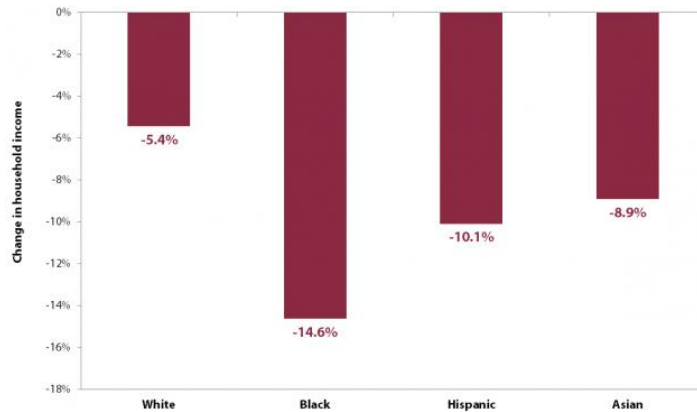
For decades, Latinos have been the group most likely to be earning poverty wages, a situation attributable to the large number of immigrants with low levels of education, large numbers undocumented immigrants, and low levels of unionization.



Note: The poverty level wage is the wage that a full-time, full-year worker would have to earn to live above the federally defined poverty threshold for a family of four. In 2009, this wage is \$10.55 an hour.

Source: Authors' analysis of Current Population Survey, Outgoing Rotations Group.

Like all workers' wage in the last decade, Latino wages have fallen, but at twice the rate of white workers' wages.



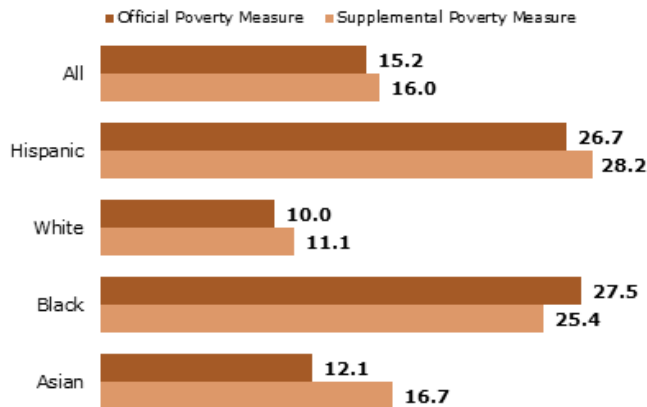
Source: EPI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010* – Historical Income Tables, H 5: Race and Hispanic Origin of Householder–Household by Median and Mean Income.” Excel spreadsheet accessed November 23, 2011.

Graph above shows how incomes fell in the 2000s. Economic Policy Insitute: State of Working America

<http://stateofworkingamerica.org/great-recession/falling-income-rising-poverty/>

Latinas (that is, Hispanic women) have the lowest earnings among white, African American and Hispanic workers male and female. While women workers as a whole have a wage gap of \$.77 to \$1.00 (that is, women earn 77 cents for every dollar a man earns), the disparity is greater among Hispanic women. “The gender wage gap differs by race and ethnic background. Hispanic/Latina women have the lowest median earnings, at \$518 per week, 55 percent of the median weekly earnings of white men; black women have median weekly earnings of \$595, 64 percent of median weekly earnings of white men.”²⁵

Figure 1
Comparing the Official and Supplemental Poverty Measures, 2010
% of population in poverty



Notes: Whites include only non-Hispanic whites. Blacks and Asians include both Hispanic and non-Hispanic components of those populations.

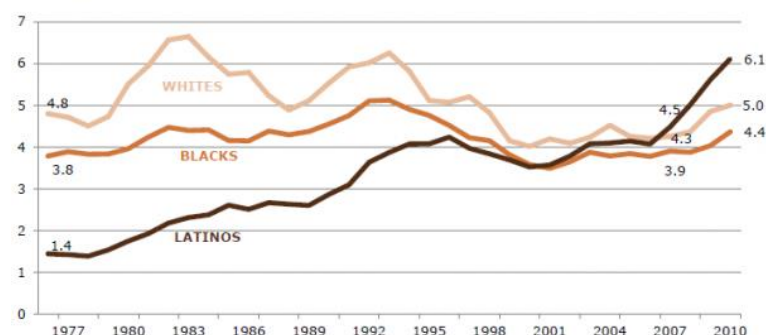
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, [Short \(2011\)](http://www.census.gov/hhes/povmeas/methodology/supplemental/research.html). For more information on the Census Bureau's supplemental poverty measure see <http://www.census.gov/hhes/povmeas/methodology/supplemental/research.html>.

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Graph above at: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/11/08/hispanic-poverty-rate-highest-in-new-supplemental-census-measure/>

Latino communities tend to be among the poorest in the United States and some studies suggest that they are the very poorest. A recent study found that 28 percent of Latinos live in poverty, while another study found that 37 percent of all poor children were Latino.

Figure 1
Number of Children in Poverty, by Race and Ethnicity, 1976-2010
(in millions)



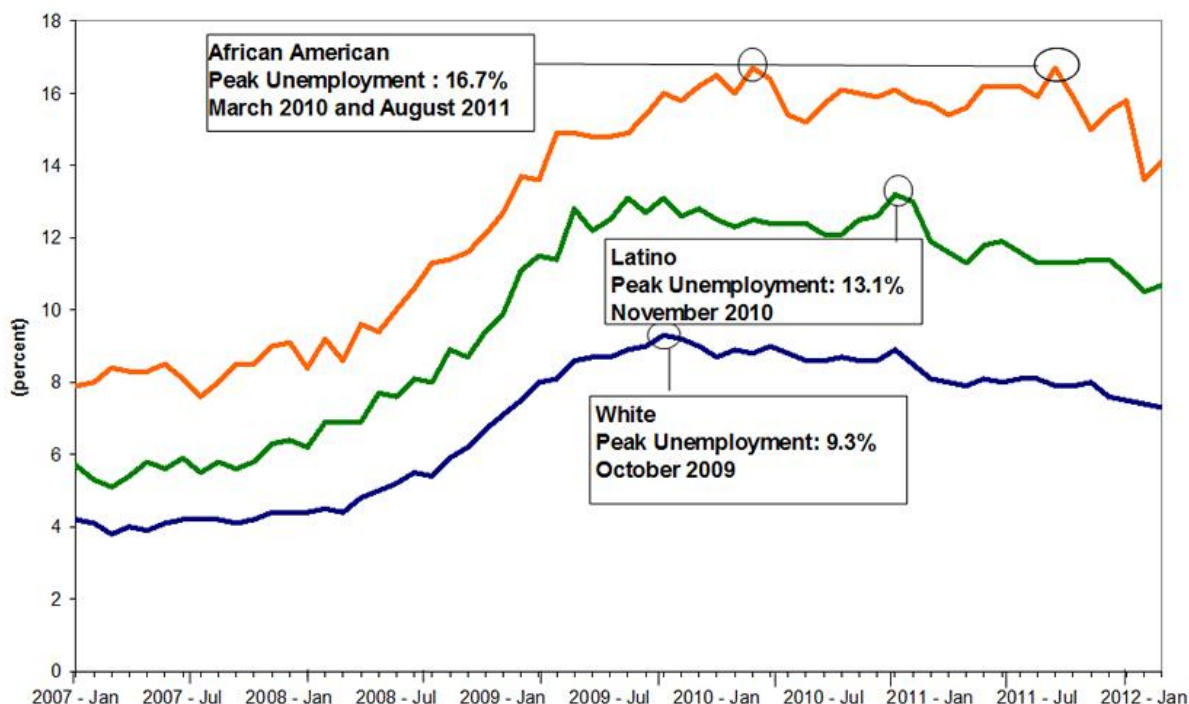
Notes: Children include all individuals younger than 18. Whites include only non-Hispanic whites. Blacks include both Hispanic and non-Hispanic components of the black population.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/ncspovhlt/2010/index.html>

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<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/09/28/childhood-poverty-among-hispanics-sets-record-leads-nation/>

While Latinos have historically had high poverty rates, the 2008 economic crisis which lead to official unemployment rates as high as 13 percent, rates which might be double that if discouraged workers and the underemployed (those with temporary or part-time jobs who want permanent, full-time jobs) were included.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey
<http://www.dol.gov/sec/media/reports/hispaniclaborforce/>

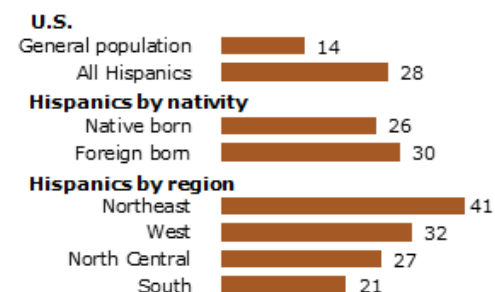
Latinos and the Housing Crisis

The economic recession of 2008 brought many homeowners to the brink, leading to widespread foreclosures and to many who are “underwater,” that is, owing more on their home than they could sell it for. The Latino community has been especially hard hit by the crisis. While 14 percent of the general population was underwater in 2011, some 28 percent of Latinos owed more than their homes were worth. Even before the crisis of 2008, Latinos were facing great numbers of home foreclosures than whites or African Americans.

Figure 10

Underwater Mortgages

(% of homeowners saying they owe more on their home than they could sell it for today)



Note: N=494 homeowners, 2011 National Survey of Latinos. N=1,222, Pew Social & Demographic Trends, March 2011.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center, 2011 National Survey of Latinos; Pew Social & Demographic Trends, March 2011.

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Demographics of foreclosure

How minorities have been disproportionately hit with home foreclosures:

In 2007-09, for mortgages originating in 2005-08

By racial, ethnic group Per 10,000 home mortgages



By income group

		Percent of mortgages	Percent of foreclosures	Increased likelihood of foreclosure than for non-Hisp. whites
Low	African-American	15%	21%	56%
	Hispanic	11%	12%	20%
	Non-Hispanic white	74%	67%	
Middle	African-American	10%	15%	71%
	Hispanic	13%	19%	67%
	Non-Hispanic white	77%	67%	
High	African-American	6%	10%	81%
	Hispanic	14%	23%	94%
	Non-Hispanic white	80%	67%	

Source: Center for Responsible Lending
Graphic: Judy Treible

© 2010 MCT

Left: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/01/26/iii-latino-and-homeownership/>

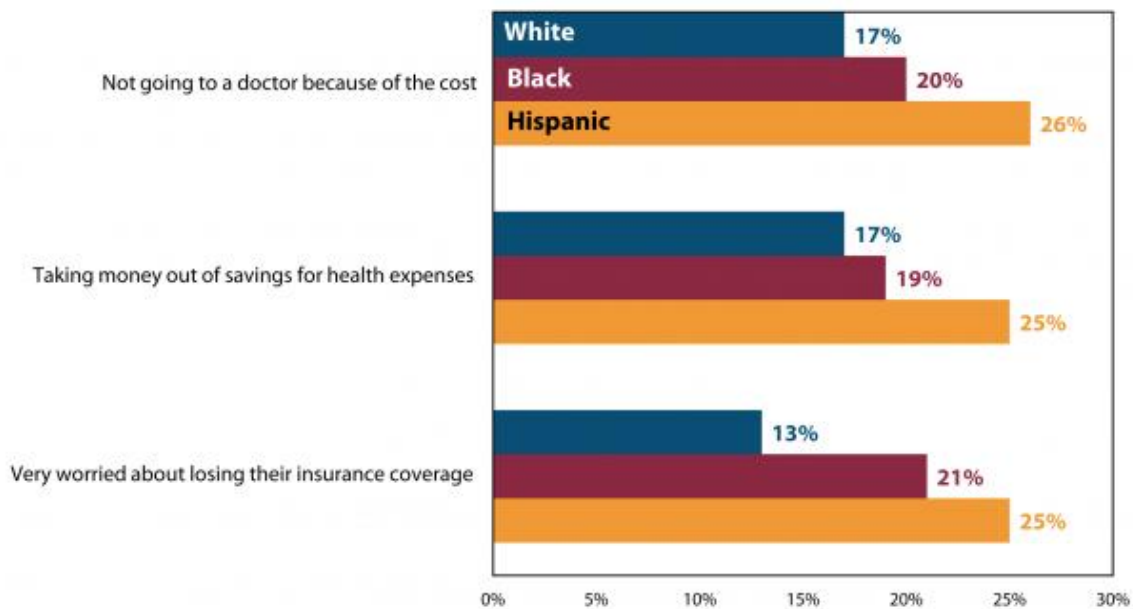
Latinos and Education

Official Latino high school graduation rates show improvement over the years, but Latinos still drop out at twice the national average and three times the rate for whites. Native born Latinos are more likely to finish high school than the foreign born. A Pew study found that: “Some 52% of foreign-born Latino adults are high school dropouts, compared with 25% of the native born. And among Hispanic dropouts, some 21% of the native born have a GED, compared with just 5% of the foreign born.”²⁶

Latinos also have less higher education. One study found that, “In 2011, 21 percent of Hispanics had an associate degree or higher, compared to 57 percent of Asians, 44 percent of Whites, and 30 percent of Blacks.”²⁷

Latinos and Access to Health Care

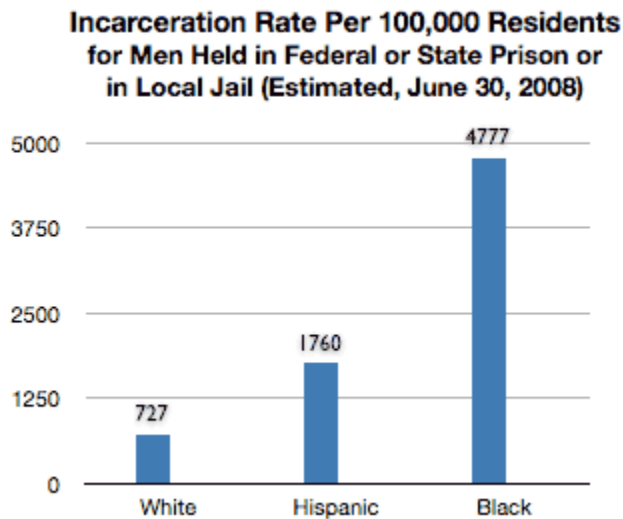
Latinos tend to have the least access to health care of the three major ethnic groups of the American working class, a result of fewer assets, low incomes, high levels of poverty, and cultural and linguistic barriers.



Source: The Rockefeller Foundation's American Worker Survey, 2007.

Latinos in the Criminal Justice System

Latinos also face severe problems in their dealings with the criminal justice system. A recent report commissioned by the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) and carried out by Michigan State University and published under the title *Lost Opportunities: The Reality of Latinos in the U.S. Criminal Justice System* found that “Hispanics are overrepresented in the nation's criminal justice system, with Hispanic defendants imprisoned three times as often and detained before trial for first-time offenses almost twice as often as whites, despite being the least likely of all ethnic groups to have a criminal history, a report has found. [And] also found that Hispanics represented 13 percent of the U.S. population in 2000, but accounted for 31 percent of those incarcerated in the federal criminal justice system. Hispanics have one chance in six of being confined in prison during their lifetimes, the authors found.”²⁸



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Prison Inmates at Midyear 2008 – Statistical Tables*, March 2009 (Revised 4/8/09), Table 18

Part III – The Politics of Latino Communities

We look in this section at the theories, principles and strategies of social and political organizing in the Latino communities. The Marxist socialist movement has generally approached the question of oppressed groups of a predominantly working class character make up using several different analytical tools. First, it has looked at their class position, seeing these groups as part of the working class, a multi-national and multi-ethnic working class. Second, it has looked at these in national terms, that is in terms of their origin in their country of origin as it has been subordinated to and exploited by an imperial power, in this case the Latin American nations subordinated to and exploited by the United States. Third, it has sometimes looked at such groups as distinct people within a nation who either literally or by analogy might be considered as “nations.” Fourth, under the influence socialist feminism, Marxists have looked at the particular ways in which women have been oppressed and exploited both within capitalism at large, as well as within their own ethnic or national communities. Finally, under the influence of feminism, the LGBT movement, and queer theory, it has looked at the special oppression of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender groups, again both within society at large and within their own ethnic or national group. We want to say a word about each of these, with emphasis on the question of nationalism.

Latinos and Labor

Marxists, as well as academics and labor activists, have analyzed the situation of Latino workers within a segmented job market. Historically, Latino men and women were restricted to certain job categories that require longer hours, lower pay, dirtier and more dangerous work, and especially precarious labor, that is temporary part-time, or sub-contracted work. First generation

Latino immigrants, especially those from rural areas, often speaking only and indigenous language and/or Spanish, with low levels of education, few skills, and in many cases undocumented often work in agriculture, construction, meat packing, and services such as restaurants and hotels for low wages, sometimes the minimum wage or below. Marxists argue that the unions and working people should fight both to improve the condition of Latinos and to bring them to the same economic and social levels of other workers while fighting to end the capitalist system.

Marxist View of National Oppression

The Marxist view of workers who suffer national oppression, both in the sense that their homeland is oppressed by imperialism and that they are oppressed when they migrate to the imperial metropolis, was first developed by Marx in dealing with Ireland and Irish workers in Britain. Marx described the problem in a letter of 1870:

Every industrial and commercial center in England now possesses a working-class *divided* into two *hostile* camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he feels himself a member of the *ruling* nation and so turns himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists of his country *against Ireland*, their strengthening their domination over *himself*. He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same of that of the “poor whites” to the “niggers” in the former slave states of the U.S.A. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker at once the accomplice and the stupid tool of the *English domination of Ireland*.

This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. This *antagonism* is the *secret of the impotence of the English working-class*, despite their organization. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And that class is fully aware of it. [All italics in original.]²⁹

Marx had written to Engels about how to respond to this issue in an earlier letter in 1867.

The question now is, what shall *we* advise the *English* workers? In my opinion they must make the *repeal of the Union*...an article of their *pronunciamiento*. This is the only *legal* and therefore only possible form of Irish emancipation which can be admitted in the program of an *English* party.³⁰

Marx is arguing that English workers will have to support the Irish people's right to independence from England, that is to say, to political self-determination. If they were to do so, that would make possible a reconciliation in England between English and Irish workers. Marx himself brought this point of view into the International Workingmen's Association (the First

International).³¹ The point is that American workers must be won to opposing the economic, political and military role of the United States in Latin America, while also expressing solidarity with Latinos as workers in the United States.

Lenin and the Right to Self-determination

Lenin's whose writings on self-determination form the foundation for any contemporary socialist argument on the question, remained remarkably consistent in his views before World War I, during the war, and after the war. While the fundamentals of his position are quite simple, the arguments become rather complex and we cannot pursue them all here in this paper.

Lenin took Marx's position on the relationship between England and Ireland and between English and Irish workers and applied it to Czarist Russia, a nation that had been called "the prison house of nations." Lenin frequently quoted Marx's dictum that "no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations," that is, that no nation could achieve its socialist liberation as long as it and its working class oppressed other nations. He pointed out that Marx advised the English workers to support Irish independence precisely because a bourgeois democratic and general movement for national independence had arisen in Ireland and among the Irish in England. It was the existing of an Irish nation demanding independence that put the question on the agenda.

Lenin repeatedly wrote that the working class in Russia must as a matter of principle support the right of oppressed nations to self-determination, thinking as a Great Russian (that is, the ethnic group of people from Russia) he had in mind the rights of Poles, Ukrainians, Byelorussians in the West, the Uzbeks, Kazaks, Turkmen, and others in the East, and the Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and others in the Caucasus. He also mentioned the recognition of rights short of self-determination for other peoples who might not constitute nations. Yet he repeatedly argued that socialists did not therefore necessarily support the demands of the bourgeoisie of oppressed nations who might lead national struggles.

He put his position on national self-determination very clearly in his repeated writing on the question before, during and after World War I. The position hardly changed and might be summarized by this passage:

The proletariat must struggle against the enforced retention of oppressed nations within the boundaries of the given state, which means that they must fight for the right to self-determination. The proletariat must demand freedom of political separation for the colonies and nations oppressed by "their own" nation.³²

Similarly, he wrote one should not lose sight of the fact that "...the *principal* practical task both of the Great Russian proletariat and of the proletariat of other nationalities: that of day-to-day agitation and propaganda against all state and national privileges, and for the right, the equal right of all nations, to their national state."

Lenin argued that opposition to Great Russian nationalism was the guiding principle of his party in this regard. The party's position was: National equality. No national privileges. The socialists' fundamental interest, however, he repeatedly wrote was in the right to self-determination *for the workers* of an oppressed nationality.

Yet, at the same time, Lenin argued, socialists must strive for the closest cooperation and unity between workers of different nations. Workers of an oppressing nation must be won to support workers of an oppressed nation. Yet no nation, Lenin argued was integral or whole; each nation was divided into an oppressing nation and an oppressed nation, or a capitalist nation and a working class nation. There was a nationalism of the oppressors and a nationalism of the oppressed in every so-called "nation." Marxists supported the nationalism of the oppressed, of the working class.

Yet Marxists were also internationalists who wanted the greatest working class unity. "All advocacy of the segregation of the workers of one nation from those of another, all attacks upon Marxist 'assimilation,' or attempts, where the proletariat is concerned, to contrapose one national culture as a whole to another allegedly integral national culture, and so forth, is *bourgeois nationalism*, against which it is essential to wage a ruthless struggle."³³ At the same time in his writing on the national question, Lenin makes it clear that the working class should never subordinate itself either to its own bourgeoisie or to the bourgeoisie of an oppressed nation.

Finally, Lenin saw the national question as subordinated to the labor question, that is, to the question of working class struggle for socialism. In another passage he writes:

Successful struggle against exploitation requires *that the proletariat be free of nationalism, and be absolutely neutral, so to speak*, in the fight for supremacy that is going on among the bourgeoisie of the various nations. If the proletariat of any one nation gives the slightest support to the privileges of its "own" national bourgeoisie, that will inevitably rouse distrust among the proletariat of another nation; it will weaken the international class solidarity of the workers and divide them, to the delight of the bourgeoisie. Repudiation of the right to self-determination or to secession inevitably means in practice, support for the privileges of the dominant nation.³⁴ (My italics.)

This passage and Lenin's writings on the national question taken as a whole suggest that in essence socialist are neutral on national struggles among the bourgeoisies of different nations, supporting the right to national self-determination for oppressed nationalities in principle and strategically as a way to set greater forces in motion against the bourgeoisie of the dominant nation, and as a way to bring about greater working class unity.

Marxism and Feminism and LGBT Perspectives

Marxist socialist feminism insists that in examining the condition of women, we locate and understand their situation on the basis of their sex, their race or ethnicity and their class.

Women's class position and ethnicity will complicate their situation, either increasing or reducing their experience of oppression or exploitation in society. The wealthy, white Chilean or Cuban woman may almost entirely escape the experience of Latinas who are working class and dark in color. *Machismo*, however, the specific Latino version of patriarchy and male superiority, can affect all women, just as *marianismo*, the particular Latino version of women's assigned role as faithful wife (or marginalized prostitute) also defines and subordinates women. Finally, the LGBT Latino/a will also find his or her experience complicated by class, race and gender normative values and practices. The fundamental Marxist positions are the notions of self-emancipation, the right to self-organization at all levels, and the rejection of the subordination of gender issues to national or class issues.

The Left's Latino Politics in the 1930s

In the 1930s, the Communist Party adopted a political approach based on the struggle for civil rights an internationalist outlook irrespective of citizenship. The Communist Party's approach was not nationalist, but rather internationalist, or one might say an *americano* approach in the Latino sense of that word: it aimed at organizing all of those who considered themselves *americanos*, that is, Latin people of the Americas. The approach had its origins in the campaigns of José Vasconcelos (Mexico) and José Ingenieros (Argentina) in the 1920s to construct Latin American unity in opposition to U.S. imperialism which flowed into the Anti-Imperialist League and its Congress of the late 1920s.

In the 1930s, the National Congress of Spanish-Speaking Peoples, led by the Communist Party, organized Latinos in the United States who were citizens, including both Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans and those who were not citizens but immigrants from Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Spain. "Unlike some of the moderated Mexican-American organizations such as LULAC, which at the time differentiated between Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants, El Congreso opposed such differentiations and instead stressed the unity of all Spanish-speaking people, U.S. citizens or not. An attack on one Spanish-speaking group was an attack on all," wrote Bert Corona, a member of the Congreso.³⁵

Mexican American Politics in the Post-World War II Period

One might say in very general terms that Latinos, then almost all Mexican Americans, had some significant labor and social movements in the Southwest in the period from 1910 to 1940, but they hardly participated in significant political movements or in electoral politics before World War II. Many Latinos in the Southwest were totally subordinate to the employers and local and state government and were either denied the vote or their votes were often coerced. While Latinos had to struggle for the civil rights and for human rights, they had had few successes in the pre-War period.

World War II opened an era of large scale Latino struggle. Why? First, because the U.S. government argued the World War II was a war against Nazi racism and for democracy, leading Latinos to demand that racism be ended and democracy be implemented in the United States. Second, Latino participation in the U.S. armed forces led them to believe that they now had a greater claim on citizenship people who had fought to defend the country against its enemies. Third, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 established an international platform for demands the recognition of rights. Finally, the Cold War and competition with the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc more generally tended to reveal America's poor human rights record among African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and other racial groups. No doubt the long period of war-time and post-war prosperity from 1939 to 1969 also created the economic optimism that buoyed up hopes for expanding democracy and for economic justice.³⁶

Latino struggles from 1945 to 1965 were fundamentally fights for democratic rights as U.S. citizens and for economic improvements as workers through union organization and strikes. The changed political climate led to the creation or the growth of an anti-colonial independence movement in Puerto Rico and to Mexican American civil rights organizations and of civil rights movements in the United States. The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) which had been founded in 1929 became an activist group in the 1940s waging legal fights and carrying out lobbying over civil rights issues. (LULAC could be compared to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People – NAACP). In 1948, G.I. Forum, a Latino veterans and civil rights organization, was created in Texas and expanded throughout the Southwest as. At the same time Ernesto Galazara led the National Farm Labor Union in unsuccessful strikes in an attempt to organize Latino farm workers in California. Other such non-governmental organizations founded in the 1960s merged in 1973 to become the National Council of La Raza, an advocacy group funded by major corporate foundations. (The National Council of La Raza could be compared to the Urban League.))

The Movements of the 1960s and 1970s

During the period from 1965 to 1975, the character of Latino struggles continued to be primarily democratic, but simultaneously there was the growth of both nationalist and sometimes even irredentist currents in the movement, as well as of more radical and leftist currents.³⁷ In California, César Chávez, who had for years done work to register Latinos to vote, organized the United Farm Workers (UFW) which fought with some success to organize farm workers. Chávez's politics blended a current of Mexican nationalism, with the Catholic religion, pacifism, and with support for the Kennedy's and the Democratic Party.³⁸

In New Mexico, Reies López Tijerina led a struggle by *hispanos* (that is descendents of the Spanish settlers) over land that had been taken from them over the previous hundred years. Tijerina's *Alianza* engaged in the occupation of state and private lands and became involved in armed confrontations with the authorities. He later took his movement into Martin Luther King's

Poor People's campaign.³⁹ In Denver, Colorado, Corky Gonzalez, a former Democratic Party leader, organized working class communities and led them out of the Democratic Party, creating a militant, working class, and politically independent social movement. In Texas, José Angel Gutiérrez in Crystal City founded the La Raza Unida Party and succeeded in winning a variety of local elections in Crystal and other Rio Grande Valley towns. After initial successes in Texas, they projected the party at a national level and attempted to spread their party to other regions of the country, but without success.⁴⁰ The greatest achievements of this period, the organization of the United Farm Workers in California and La Raza Unida Party in Texas both proved to be short lived successes. La Raza Unida disappeared within a few years, and the UFW victories of the 1970s were mostly gone by the 1980s. They remained, nevertheless, splendid examples of the potential for building a Latino workers movement and of building an independent working class Latino party.

Why Nationalism?

During the late 1960s and early 1970s a strong Mexican American nationalist current developed and subsequently declined. Nationalism existed in both a strong and a weak form. In the strong form, it tended to call for the right to self-determination including the right to a separate nation for Mexicans in the United States. Some very small number of Latinos did argue for an independent Latino nation in the Southwest and in some cases for the return of that area to Mexico. Defense of the principle of the *right* to self-determination among leftists did *not* suggest that the oppressed nation *should* necessarily separate and form a nation. In its weak form, nationalism called for recognition that the Mexicans in the United States constituted a people with their own language and culture which should be respected and recognized in the form, for example, of bilingualism. One version of the weak form called for culturally autonomous regions of Latinos within a multi-national state, though most simply defended the right to speak Spanish and maintain elements of Mexican culture.

Why was nationalism strong at that time? First, the post-war decolonization struggles in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and above all the Cuban Revolution of 1959 had inspired Latino youth. The Mexican nationalist tradition of Cardenismo, as well as Castroism or Guevarism, Maoism, and Trotskyism, all of which tended to emphasize national struggles in the 1970s, had a strong attraction. Second, at that time, the vast majority of Latinos were Mexican American and most of them lived in Southwest which was a territory that had been conquered by the United States in 1847 and 1848, so there was a sentiment of national identity with that greater Mexico. The rising current of Mexican nationalism in the United States corresponded with the rise of the Mexican left in 1970s raising the prospect of unity with Mexico attractive to some. Third, some Chicanos (a popular working class shortening of the Spanish word *mexicanos* in some areas) as they called themselves adopted an ancient Aztec myth of racial origins in a northern region called *Aztlán* which they identified with the American Southwest. A very small current of these nationalists were irredentists who demanded that the Southwest be separated off either as an independent country or returned to Mexico. Finally, there also developed within the various

Mexican American movements in particular, some Maoist organizations that propagandized and agitated around the issues of nationhood and national self-determination.

The situation became quite complicated in terms of class and ethnic social analysis. Within the larger Mexican American community, most Mexicans—with the exception of new immigrants—considered themselves U.S. citizens and fought as Americans for their democratic rights and organized as Americans, clearly Mexican Americans, in community groups and labor unions. Some of course, did not feel such a high degree of ethnic identification as others; they participated in social movements, labor unions, and political parties not as Latinos but simply as American citizens. Especially in parts of the Southwest, the successes of civil rights and labor struggles had made it possible for many Mexican Americans to gain college educations and to enter into professions such as teaching, social work, higher education, and many other areas. For some others, military service served as stepping stone to education and careers. For some Mexican Americans of different social classes assimilation was a cultural strategy, but for others acculturation and adaptation were sufficient to succeed in an Anglo-dominated society while still preserving their own language and culture. One section of more affluent, better educated, and politically ambitious Mexican Americans, but some working class Latinos as well, became active in the middle and upper class reform organizations, NGOs such as LULAC, and in Democratic Party or sometimes Republican Party politics. Those individuals and groups might or might not use their own ethnic identity or nationalist ideology to advance their political careers within the context of American and Mexican American politics at the time.

The Decline of Nationalism

Today a nationalist perspective in the strong sense seems less attractive. Why? First, Mexicans are no longer particularly confined to the Southwest of the United States (though since the 1910s there had been Mexicans in small numbers in many towns and cities in the United States). Today Mexicans live everywhere in the United States, making the idea of a Mexican autonomous region in the Southwest materially untenable. Second, while Mexicans remain the largest Latino group, many other groups from Central and South America have migrated to the Southwest, so that its Latino communities are no longer so distinctly Mexican. The Southwest's Latino communities are a mosaic of nationalities and ethnicities. At the same time, millions of whites and new Asian immigrants have immigrated into the state of California, creating further complications for any idea of regional autonomy. Third, many of the indigenous immigrants from Mexico do not identify with Mexican nationalism, but rather see themselves as members of as an indigenous ethnic group, such as Mixtecos or Zapotecs or one of the other 45 indigenous groups. These indigenous people, who often suffer discrimination at the hands of Mexican mestizos, often react against Mexican nationalism. Finally, Mexican nationalism of the 1970s which had a progressive character in immigrant movements as a fight against oppression may still sometimes have that character, but sometimes it takes the form of lording it over other national groups, for example and in particular the Guatemalans.

In the case of Puerto Rico, the waning of nationalism, apparent in the decline of the independence movement, reflects the reality that a majority of Puerto Ricans live in the United States and that there is a constant circulation of Puerto Ricans between the island and the mainland. Most Puerto Ricans live in big cities in the United States and their actual struggles revolve around jobs, housing, education, health care in the context of complex urban environment involving many nationalities and ethnic groups. Puerto Rico remains a colony which should be granted the right to self-determination, but that would not seem to many to provide solutions to the majority of Puerto Ricans' problems. While nationalism has some appeal, it does not speak to the material needs of most Puerto Ricans.

Even the weaker version of nationalism becomes less viable as the proliferation of nationalities—more than two dozen Latino nationalities and dozens more ethnicities present in the United States—make the attempt to struggle around separate national identities difficult. The general principle that people have a right to their own ethnic identity, to their language, and culture remains valid, of course, as does the touchstone principle of self-organization for self-emancipation, but nationalism would not seem to further these attempts in complex communities, especially since nationalism so often implies putting one nation above another—even among what we refer to as oppressed groups.

Ethnic and National Organization Continues

Nevertheless, while nationalism in its strong or weak forms is less attractive as a solution to problems, many Latinos and especially immigrants continue to organize on a national, regional, or ethnic basis. Most large cities and many states have national immigrant organizations: Mexican, Colombian, etc. Some Mexican immigrants such as those from Zacatecas and Michoacan have strong state organizations. Indigenous people from Mexico and Guatemala have strong ethnic organizations such as burial societies. For Latino immigrants, especially the indigenous, this is a practical matter. For example, Mam speaking immigrants in Southwest Ohio can best communicate with other Mam speakers, since Spanish is their second language. While organizing generally takes place especially among immigrants through such national, regional and ethnic organizations, the methods and goals of the struggle are generally a demand for democratic rights and for economic improvements.

Many such national, regional or ethnic groups come together under the roof of one or another organization or coalition, such as a workers center or a city-wide Latino rights coalition. Some of those centers and coalitions in turn form broader alliance with other community groups, with labor unions, and sometimes with a political party or its agents, usually the Democratic Party. They may also at times enter into relationships and formal alliances with governmental agencies in an attempt to advance Latino interests.

Not all groups emphasized nationalism, on the contrary, some advocated an internationalist approach. The internationalist civil rights perspective first raised in the United States by the

Communist Party in the 1930s appeared again in 1968 with the founding of CASA-HGT (Centro de Acción Social Autónomo-Hermandad General de Trabajadores), led by Bert Corona and Soledad “Chole” Alatorre, which focused on the needs of “undocumented Mexican workers and their families” and brought to the struggle the “conjugation of a class base with social justice and liberation aspirations.” The CASA newspaper *Sin Fronteras* “*Without Borders*” carried on its masthead the slogan, “We are One because America [meaning the continent] is One.”⁴¹

Revolutionary Socialists and the Latino Movements in the 1970s

The revolutionary socialist left of the 1970s to varying degrees and in different ways attempted to adapt their politics to the nationalist current in the Latino movements. One sees that in the use of the term “Chicano,” then popular with radical youth, and the term *la raza* or the people to refer to Latinos. The Communist Party, which had the longest history of work in the Latino communities and the most Latino members, was the least nationalist of the groups on the far left. The Communists derived their position from the traditional Marxist tradition, arguing that Mexicans in the United States were a “specially oppressed people.” The Communist Party resolution stated:

The path to unity of the working class and the Chicano people is to build the independent strength of the Chicano workers and people, while at the same time winning the entire working class as champion of the special needs of the Chicano people. This is a decisive task for all class-conscious workers.

The Communists urged political struggle for the Chicanos’s democratic rights, labor struggle for their economic needs, and a social struggle for respect for their cultures. The Communist Party noted the importance of La Raza Unida Party in Texas, but indicated that most Latinos continued to work within the Democratic Party, with the implication that their struggles there for greater representation were the appropriate ones.⁴² In practice, the Communist Party led the movement in which it was involved into the Communist Party on the theory that one could build a people’s movement within it.

The Maoist October League (later the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist) put much more emphasis on the question of national liberation:

For us, the Chicano people and their historic struggle for liberation are a component part of the U.S. people’s movement for revolution and socialism. Our strategy calls for a mighty alliance between the general multi-national working-class movement and the national movements of the Afro-American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Asian-American, Native-American Indian and other nationally oppressed peoples. This alliance makes up the core of the anti-imperialist united front in this country, which under the leadership of the working class and its Marxist-Leninist vanguard will smash for all time the evil system of imperialism.

The October League wrote of the “national character of the Chicago people” and called for “regional autonomy” in the Southwest as part of building a “multi-national state” in a future Socialist America.⁴³ The idea of the autonomous Latino region in the Southwest is clearly modeled after the Sixth World Congress of the Communist Party resolutions on the Negro Question which had proposed the possibility of a Black nation in the American South with the right to self-determination.

The Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, like the Maoists talked of the Mexican Americans as an “oppressed nationality” and also used the language of “national self-determination.” The SWP’s resolution adopted at its Cleveland Convention in 1971 stated:

The ruling class will never grant freedom to oppressed nationalities, including La Raza. The national liberation of the Chicano people can only be won in the process of the socialist revolution, which will have a combined character: a social revolution by the working class to establish its own state power *combined* with a revolution by the oppressed nationalities for their self-determination.⁴⁴

At the time they were written, the Maoist and Trotskyist pamphlets with their greater emphasis on the national character of the Mexican people in the United States appeared to be reasonable and were attractive to many in the Mexican social movements and in the left.

Whatever the reality or possibility of nations and national self-determination, the leftist position of referring to the Mexicans in the Southwest as a “nation,” had the effect of dignifying an often despised and outcast group, just as the Black Nation in the South position had dignified the African American people by referring to them as a nation. No group on the socialist left called for the secession or separation of either the Black nation in the South or the Chicano nation in the Southwest, though some very small and marginal African American and Latino nationalist groups did.

Puerto Rican Politics in the Post-World War II Period

All of the same issues already mentioned—the war against Nazism, the United Nations Declaration, the Cold War, and the strength of the U.S. economy also had an impact on Puerto Ricans. Inspired by the anti-colonial movement, the Puerto Rican independence movement remained strong and under the influence of the Cuban Revolution the Puerto Rican Socialist Party also grew in strength. However, by far the most important development in Puerto Rico was the massive migration of hundreds of thousands and eventually millions out of the island and to the United States. As already mentioned, they carried their political parties with them, joined labor unions, and the participated in community struggles. An important development on the far left was the founding in Chicago of the Young Lords Organization, originally a street gang that became a political organization after 1968 under the leadership José Cha Cha Jiménez. While the Young Lords received a great deal of notoriety, the Puerto Rican Independence Movement and

the Puerto Rican Socialist Party were larger, more stable and more significant movements from the 1940s to the 1980s.

Latino Issues Today

Immigration reform has been one of the highest priorities of the Latino and Latino immigrant communities. Today on a national scale, the Latino communities find their allies in the Catholic Church, Evangelical churches, the AFL-CIO, and other large unions such as SEIU and the UFCW. The Latino and Latino immigrant organizations form alliances with these organizations and with large corporations concerned to reform immigration policies usually through the Democratic Party. The various organizations for “comprehensive immigration reform” were usually made up of such Latino-immigrant-religious-labor-corporate alliances. So-called comprehensive immigration reform programs generally which excluded large numbers of immigrants, included guest worker programs, and often had onerous penalties and obstacles for immigrants were quite controversial in immigrant communities throughout the country.

It is worth noting that some Latino immigrant organizations maintain an internationalist, rather than a nationalist approach. One example is that of the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC) which is led by Oscar Chacón. NALACC organizes among immigrants on both a multi-national and a transnational basis, unifying diverse national immigrant communities in the United States and building transnational ties to their countries of origin in an attempt to leverage greater political power.⁴⁵

Contemporary Latino Movements

Since the 1980s most Latino struggles have been for democratic rights and social justice issues and have been fought for under those rubrics and not principally as nationalist issues. Throughout the country there are hundreds of Latino organizations of all sorts involved in an enormous variety of local struggles over jobs, housing, education, etc. We look here at three of the most important movements of the recent period.

Justice for Janitors

In the 1980s and 1990s, American labor unions declined in size, economic power, and political influence, leading the labor union leadership to make a great turn in the 1980s and 1990s. First, unions decided to put more of their resources into organizing, committing millions of dollars and hundreds of organizations to organize low-wage workers of color. Second, by 2000, the AFL-CIO changed its position from opposing immigration to supporting immigration reform and the struggles of immigrant workers. The Justice for Janitors campaign arose within the context of this great shift in U.S. labor union policy.

The Justice for Janitors campaign was launched by the Service Employees International Union in 1985 in an attempt to organize the hundreds of thousands of janitors in the United States who

worked in large buildings in big cities, many of whom were immigrants from Latin America or other countries. Launched in Los Angeles, it later expanded to Houston and Miami, and then later to cities in the Northeast and the Midwest, including New York, Philadelphia and Chicago. The goals of the campaign were to win union recognition, to increase wages, and to win health care benefits for workers. The campaign succeeded in organizing about 250,000 workers over thirty years, one of the most successful union campaigns in the recent period. While a majority of these workers were Latinos of different nationalities, they also included white, African American, and sometimes African immigrants.

Justice for Janitors became the model for other organizing campaigns by the SEIU and by other unions such as the UFCW which attempted to bring together the elements of ethnic solidarity, community support, public pressure, and labor union organization, including the tools of boycotts and strikes.

Other unions also succeeded in organizing Latino workers in significant numbers, yet these campaigns have failed to either maintain the percentage of Latinos in the unionized workforce or to expand the size of the unions altogether. The share of Latino workers covered by unions fell from 24% in 1983 to less than 11% in 2007, just as the percentages of African American and whites in unions also fell.⁴⁶ While ethnic solidarity is a factor that increases the changes of workers' joining labor unions, it is not as important a factor as workers' location in the economy. "In terms of union membership, where you work and what kind of work you do matters much more than our ethnicity and immigration status. The substantive effects of immigration status and ethnicity pale in comparison to positional factors such as sector, occupation and firm size."⁴⁷ The continued shrinking both of the industrial sector and of plant size, the expansion of precarious labor, and the weakness of labor unions pose fundamental problems for Latino worker organizing. With Latino workers, like white and African American workers, having fewer permanent full-time jobs in large workplaces, but rather holding temporary and part-time jobs, often as self-employed contractors or through sub-contractors, labor unions and the left are challenged to find new strategies and tactics for organizing these workers. While there have been important campaigns to organize immigrant workers with some success, new and different strategies will be necessary to reverse the trend of declining union membership.⁴⁸

Immigration Reform 2006

The immigration reform movement of 2006 began as a defensive campaign against the Sensenbrenner Bill HR 4437, the Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. The Sensenbrenner bill would have expanded the border wall, allowed local authorities to detain undocumented immigrants, made it illegal to aid undocumented immigrants, imposed fines on undocumented immigrants, as well as other onerous clauses. The movement to oppose the bill by immigrants and their allies was organized by Latino Catholic and Evangelical churches, hometown clubs, soccer teams, radio stations, labor unions, and many other

organizations. While much of the organization took place through national, regional and ethnic Latino organizations, the movement had a multi-national character. At many of the demonstrations while immigrants, many of them undocumented both led and formed the majority of the demonstrators, they were joined frequently by Puerto Ricans—who are U.S. citizens—and by white and African American allies in small numbers. Latinos at first carried their national flags, but after scathing criticism from the corporate media, politicians, and other sectors of society, they began to carry the U.S. flag, or more often the U.S. flag and their national flags. The protests were fundamentally a demand for dignity and democratic rights by groups which suffered both racial oppression and economic exploitation. The movement organized through Latino networks had an overwhelmingly democratic character, in general demanding residence visas, the right to work in the United States, and a road to citizenship if so desired.

The immigration reform demonstrations of 2006 reached sizes of half a million or perhaps even a million in Los Angeles and Chicago, tending in some places to take on in some areas the character of a general strike.⁴⁹ There were protest demonstrations in scores of cities throughout the United States some of thousands and many of hundreds. These were the largest social protest demonstrations in U.S. history, but their failure to find a political expression and to win a national political victory led to defeat and profound demoralization. While the Sensenbrenner was defeated, the movement failed to achieve the passage of an immigration reform bill of any sort.

The immigration reform movement remained throughout deeply divided into two camps. The camp made up of the Catholic Church, the Latino civil rights NGOs in Washington, the large labor unions, and corporations who favored a bill which would have created a path (long and arduous in some drafts of the bill) to legalization and to citizenship for a substantial majority of undocumented workers, but not all. Others demanded legalization of all immigrants, with greater civil and labor rights, and without onerous penalties and procedures. There were also strategic differences between a more militant wing of the movement prepared to expand from protests to economic action, some even raising the issue of a Latino general strike, and the more moderate institutional wing—churches, unions, and NGOs—who wanted to pursue lobbying, corporate alliances and the support of the Democratic Party. The recent experience of Alabama poultry workers who responded to anti-immigrant legislation proposed in their state with wildcat strikes suggests that such a call for strike action was not unrealistic.⁵⁰ The demoralization following the failure to win a political victory has hampered subsequent organizing efforts in the Latino community.

The Dreamers Movement

The Dream Act, or Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act, was introduced as a bipartisan bill in the U.S. Congress by U.S. Senators Dick Durban (D) and Orin Hatch (R) in 2001. It would allow undocumented immigrant high school graduates without a criminal record who had been in the U.S. for five years to obtain permanent temporary residency by either

serving in the U.S. military or attending college four two-years. They would subsequently be able to seek permanent residency.

Student activists, dominated by the Latinos but also involving other nationalities and ethnicities, began to build a movement starting in 2001 focusing on lobbying and accompanied by meetings and some demonstrations. They received support from the National Immigration Law Center (NILC) and, later, the Center for Community Change (CCC). The Dream Act movement flowed in 2009 into the broader liberal dominated movements for immigration reform of that moment. In 2009, UWD joined with Reform Immigration For America (RIFA), the national legislative vehicle supporting Comprehensive Immigration Reform. RIFA, a Washington, D.C. NGO connected to the Democratic Party created a top-down coalition that included all the established immigrant rights organizations, organized labor, and business organizations—advocating for a comprehensive immigration reform bill that would include the Dream Act.⁵¹ That top-down, NGO dominated, liberal, lobbying approach failed.

In 2011 in Memphis, representatives of fifty-five youth organizations from twenty-five states gathered for a national congress for undocumented immigrant youth, organized by the United We Dream (UWD) network. At about that time the movement changed, taking a page from the LGBT movement, students began to “come out,” revealing their undocumented status and engaging in public protests and even in civil disobedience.⁵² Still Congress failed to pass the laws.

Based in large cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago, but with groups in many smaller cities and towns, the “Dreamers” as they were sometimes called, began to also redefine the movement, rejecting the focus on the “American Dream,” which the name of the bill suggested, and also rejecting the focus on only winning immigration rights for the privileged high school graduates who were college bound. Some also rejected the idea that students should serve in the U.S. military given its record in Latin America and around the world as an imperialist force.

The Dream Act movement took militant action in 2012 by occupying the campaign offices of the Obama campaign to pressure the President to take executive action. Under the pressure of the militant mostly Latino student activists, Obama issued an order to stop the deportation of a category of immigrants corresponding to those who would have been covered by the Dream Act. Obama’s order was estimated to affect 1.4 million unauthorized immigrants.⁵³ The students’ direct action brought a victory for immigrants and especially for the Latino community which has so many of them, though everyone also recognized that this was an election year ploy of the President to win Latino votes.

What lessons might we generalize from these three most important cases of the recent period? First, of course, that Latino workers are capable of being organized and of organizing themselves when provided resources and leadership. We might also speculate that while SEIU provided the leadership and resources, immigrant workers might have done better in a bottom-up democratic

movement. Second, that when the immigration movement, even as a mass movement, remains within liberal lobbying and legal channels, as was the case with the immigration reform movement of 2006 and with the first stage of the Dream movement, it will have great difficulty in achieving its goals. Third, the combination of a movement with a more radical outlook, as the Dream movement became in its second stage, combined with direct action, represents the road to victory for social movements.

A Word on the Left and the Latino Movements

The left of all stripes, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the Communist Party (CPUSA), the Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO), and many others, including Solidarity are involved in the Latino movements and bring different analyses to those movements. The CPUSA works in the Latino movements on reform issues, but as in other movements its fundamental orientation is to the labor bureaucracy and the Democratic Party, a position which inhibits the ability of the Latino community to win its objectives. The DSA which has less work in Latino movements has a similar relationship to union officials and the Democrats.

We in Solidarity have for many years now found ourselves often working with the Freedom Road Socialist Organization which has a long history of involvement in Latino causes, so we should take time to look at their position. Freedom Road's position is more complicated than those of the CP or DSA. According to documents on its website, Freedom Road bases its work on its "Unity Statement on National Oppression, National Liberation, and Socialist Revolution."⁵⁴ That pamphlet makes several political points: 1) African Americans, Chicanos, and Hawai'ians constitute oppressed national groups in the United States. 2) The strategic ally of these groups is the working class, particularly lower strata of the working class. 3) The working class has to be won to support self-determination for these groups, including the right to secession. 4) Within the oppressed groups there is a struggle for leadership between the bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie, and the working class. All of these classes can be brought together in a "united front" (we would say "popular front") to fight for the liberation of the oppressed groups under the leadership of the working class. 5) Only socialism can liberate the oppressed groups. 6) A communist party will have to be constructed to lead this fight for socialism. The Freedom Road pamphlet "The Immigrant Rights Movement and the Struggle for Full Equality" takes up and reiterates these points applying them to Latinos and developing a program of partial and immediate demands. (Solidarity members are encouraged to read and discuss the Freedom Road pamphlet and positions.)

We would differ with the Freedom Road positions on various points. First, we would not put forward the notion that the oppressed groups constitute nations within the United States, nor would we support the call for self-determination. Though we agree with the principles on which the argument is based, and appreciate the way in which the argument dignifies Latin groups, we

do not in general find the material basis for the existence of nations in the U.S. at this time. (Native peoples might be an exception.) Nor do we see a social movement fighting for such nations in the United States. We do, of course, call for an end to U.S. imperialism in the countries of origin and we do fight for full-democratic rights and for economic improvements for Latino immigrants. We also insist upon respect for Latino languages and cultures.

Second, we reject Freedom Road's argument that there should be a bloc of all Latino classes to fight for Latino political objectives. For example, we would differ strenuously with this argument from their "Immigrant Rights Movement" pamphlet:

Our attitude towards the Chicano bourgeoisie is that we want to maintain the independence and initiative of the working class, and in no way subordinate the mass movement to legal maneuvers in Congress. At the same time, we have to recognize that only the Chicano bourgeoisie and their national representatives (mainly Democrats in Congress) are the ones that are going to have to carry any legalization bill through Congress and the Senate, so we want to pressure them, but do not want to make them the target of the immigrant rights movement. The most important factor is the actual strength of the mass movement—the stronger the movement, the greater in influence of the masses on the Chicano bourgeoisie, the weaker the movement, the stronger will be the influence of the monopoly capitalists.

We believe that this position contradicts Freedom Road's own call for working class independence, since one cannot rely upon the Latino representatives in a capitalist party to represent the interests of the working class. We would argue for the independence of the Latino movement and of the labor movement, so that they can build the power to pressure all representatives in Congress. We would place no faith in Latino businessmen or politicians. We also believe that the Democratic Party, while more amenable to pressure than the Republicans, will tend to inhibit and to limit the activity of even its most progressive African American and Latino representatives.

Solidarity should continue to work where possible in the Latino movement and other movements with Freedom Road with and to engage in discussions on the question of the Latino movement, the Democratic Party, and the struggle for socialism.

Part IV – The Role of Solidarity in the Latino Movement

What should be Solidarity's role in the Latino movement?

Solidarity should approach the issue of Latinos in the United States on the basis of several principles: working class solidarity, anti-imperialism, internationalism, and the touchstone self-organization.

First, Solidarity members need to become better informed about Latino movements and issues nationally and in their own states and cities. We see this document as a step in such a process.

Second, Solidarity needs to be more involved in Latino movements throughout the United States. We would urge our Latino members and Spanish-speaking members to become involved in Latino struggles of all sorts but particularly working class struggles.

Third, as we are more involved in Latino movements, we need to focus on recruiting Latinos and Latinas to Solidarity. We should have branch and commission discussions of where Solidarity has Latino contacts, we should be inviting them to our meetings and public events. Only with more Latino/a members will we be able to develop a strong and healthy relationship to Latino/a movements.

Fourth, Solidarity needs to develop literature, particularly pamphlets, which lay out our views on issues of importance to the Latino community in both English and Spanish (and other languages, such as Portuguese for example, when appropriate).

Fifth, to produce such literature, Solidarity needs to clarify its own views. We might begin with a discussion of these points:

1) As Americans, our first responsibility is to oppose imperialism in Latin America and other nations. Solidarity opposes U.S. economic and political domination of Latin America and opposes the U.S. police agencies' involvement in and U.S. military interventions in Latin America. Solidarity stands for the full economic and political independence of the nations of Latin America, while supporting the struggles for democracy and social justice by workers and oppressed peoples in those countries against their own capitalist classes and governments.

2) Solidarity supports all struggles of Latino peoples in the United States for full democratic rights and for fair and equal treatment under the law. We oppose all forms of racism and racial and other forms of discrimination that affect Latino people. We are for legal language equality for Spanish and English and for protection of language rights of all groups including the indigenous.

3) Solidarity believes in open borders and in full citizenship rights for all Latino immigrants even while recognizing that open borders and universal citizenship is a difficult goal to achieve at this moment. We oppose all laws, such as the Arizona laws, that aim at reducing the rights of immigrants and that adversely affect other Latinos and other Americans. We opposed the U.S. Supreme Court decision that upheld some parts of that law, all of which should be struck down. We fight for the regularization or legalization of all immigrants. We oppose the border wall and militarization of the border, the raids and deportations, and the tendency to criminalize undocumented immigrants.

4) Solidarity supports all union organizing campaigns among Latinos, Latino immigrants as well other workers. We believe that it is important to increase the organization of Latino workers, to rebuild the power of the unions, and to build rank-and-file groups within the union fighting for union democracy, militancy, and internationalism. We support Latino workers centers in organizing workers either independently or as stage in the process of union organization. The existing trade union leadership represents a bureaucratic caste with its own interests, a group that is incapable and opposed to fighting for workers, including Latinos. We therefore support Latino workers and other workers in building rank-and-file groups to fight the union bureaucracy. We support Latino workers' demands for meeting with translation or in their own language(s) and for unions' constitutions, by-laws, and contracts in the Spanish language or other languages as appropriate. We are for affirmative action in the unions to move Latinos/as into leadership positions.

5) Solidarity supports the struggles of Latinas as they fight for their fights for equal rights and respect within capitalist society and within their own communities and within labor unions, social movements, and within left organizations. We take a similar position with regard to the LGBT communities' struggles, joining them in the fight for their rights in society at large and within the Latino community and with the unions, social movement, and the left. Every group's rights must be respected within the movements of struggle and within our left political organizations. We are for the self-organization of the oppressed at every level to win their rights.

6) Solidarity believes that Latinos will need to find an independent political vehicle to fight for their rights, while this may be an independent Latino party or Latinos might become part of a movement to create a working class political party in the States. In any case, we encourage Latinos to take the path of independent political action to the left of the Democratic Party, ideally in alliance with a broader working class movement, though independently as Latinos if they see fit.

A Brief Bibliography for Further Reading

Juan González. *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*.

This is the best general introduction to the subject for the general reader.

Rodolfo Acuña. *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*.

This is the best general introduction to the history of Mexican Americans.

Bert Corona, *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona, as told to Mario T. García*.

Corona's fascinating memoir is a virtual history of Mexican American activism from the 1930s to the 1980s.

David Bacon. *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants*.

This is a thoughtful book criticizing U.S. trade and immigration policy.

Justin Akers Chacón and Mike Davis. *No One Is Illegal: Fighting Racism and State Violence on the U.S.-Mexico Border*.

Focuses on the struggles of immigrants against repression and has some discussion of Latinos and labor unions.

Notes:

¹ Juan González, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (New York: Penguin, 2000).

² Adam Liptak, "Block Parts of Arizona Law, Justices Allow its Centerpiece," *New York Times*, at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/26/us/supreme-court-rejects-part-of-arizona-immigration-law.html?pagewanted=all>

³ U.S. Census Bureau:

http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/hispanic_pop_presentation.html

⁴ Pew Hispanic Center, see interactive map at: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/>

⁵ There are 50 Latinos who are worth over \$30 million, some of whom are worth hundreds of millions. "Magazine Publishes List of Richest U.S. Latinos," <http://www.hispanicbusiness.com/news/newsbyidfront.asp?id=6775>. There are 39 Latino banks in the United States, nine of which have a capitalization of under \$100 million. Susana G. Baumann, "Hispanic-owned Banks..." <http://www.voxxi.com/hispanic-owned-banks-financial-goals-deep-roots-community/> The largest Latino-owned businesses have revenues in the billions and some employ thousands of workers. "Hispanic Business 500" at: <http://www.hispanicbusiness.com/research/500/list.asp?ListYear=2012&States=All&City=&RawText=&Conjunction=AND&Submit1=Find+companies>

⁶ Latino Labor Force in Recovery, U.S. Department of Labor, at: <http://www.dol.gov/sec/media/reports/hispaniclaborforce/>

⁷ The *bracero* program brought into the U.S. some 4.2 million temporary workers, but it stimulated some of them and others to immigrate to the U.S. for higher wages and other opportunities. Richard B. Craig, *The Bracero Program* (Austin: University of Texas, 1971);

⁸ Neil Foley, *The White Source: Mexicans, Blacks and Poor whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 58-63.

⁹ Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 47.

¹⁰ Lawrence Anthony Cardoso, "Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1900 to 1930: an Analysis of Socio-Economic Causes," (Ph.D. Diss., University of Connecticut, 1974), 90. Only 330,000 legally registered immigrants were admitted, but the author estimates as many as 1.65 million may have entered. While foreign immigrants were not eligible for the draft in World War I, misunderstandings and rumors led thousands of Mexicans to voluntarily return to Mexico. The government and employers, working with the Roman Catholic Church corrected the misunderstanding and stopped the exodus. (86-87)

¹¹ Cardoso, "Mexican Emigration," 108. The chief cause of emigration was the Cristero Rebellion in Western Mexico, especially in the state of Jalisco.

¹² The great contemporary account of this social movement can be found in Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States: A Study of Human Migration and Adjustment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), 2 vols., based on his 1926-27 interviews with migrants.

¹³ Lawrence A. Cardoso, *Mexican Emigration to the United States, 189-1931: Socio-Economic Patterns* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), 22.

¹⁴ Juan Gómez Quiñones, *Mexican American Labor, 1790-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994) is the best account.

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- ¹⁵ Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), Chapter “Repatriation: *El Regreso*.”
- Neil Foley and John R. Chavez, *Teaching Mexican History* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 2002), Chapter 6, “The Great Depression.”
- ¹⁶ Manuel García y Griego, “The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers into the United States, 1942-1965,” in: David G. Gutiérrez, ed., *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1996), 47.
- ¹⁷ García y Griego, “The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers,” 45-85.
- ¹⁸ PEW, “Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero and Perhaps Less,” at: <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/2250/mexican-immigration-immigrants-illegal-border-enforcement-deportations-migration-flows>
- ¹⁹ Mark Hugo Lopez, Ana Gonzalez-Barrera and Seth Motel, “As Deportations Rise to Record Levels, Most Latinos Oppose Obama’s Policy,” at: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/12/28/as-deportations-rise-to-record-levels-most-latinos-oppose-obamas-policy/>
- ²⁰ Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, *Indigenous Mexican Migrants in the United States* (La Jolla, California: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies; Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, 2004).
- ²¹ Jeffrey Passel, D’Vera Cohn and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, “Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero, Perhaps Less,” at: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/04/23/net-migration-from-mexico-falls-to-zero-and-perhaps-less/>
- ²² Migration Information Source, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USFocus/display.cfm?ID=821>
- ²³ “A Demographic Portrait of Puerto Ricans, 2009,” Pew Research Publications, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/2021/puerto-rico-statistical-profile-populations-trends>
- ²⁴ Anna García and Philip E. Wolgin, “The Top Ten Things You Should Know about Florida’s Latinos and Immigrants,” Jan. 27, 2012, at: http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2012/01/florida_latinos_immigrants.html
- ²⁵ Ariane Hegewisch, Director, Institute for Women’s Policy Research, “The Gender Wage Gap by Occupation,” at: <http://www.iwpr.org/about/staff-and-board/ariane-hegewisch>
- ²⁶ PEW, “Hispanics, High School Dropout, and the GED,” <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/122.pdf>
- ²⁷ Excelencia in Education, “Latino College Completion in 50 States,” at: http://edexcelencia.org/sites/default/files/exceaf_lcc_execsummfnl.pdf
- ²⁸ MSU Press Release, “Justice System Unfair, Unjust for Hispanics,” at: <http://crime.about.com/od/issues/a/blmu041026.htm>. Full report at: http://www.ncrl.org/images/uploads/publications/27567_file_Lost_Opportunities_PDF.pdf
- ²⁹ Letter of Karl Marx to S. Meyer and A. Vogt, London, April 9, 1870, in: *On Britain* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), pp. 552-3.
- ³⁰ Letter of Karl Marx to Frederick Engels, London, April 9, 1870, in: *On Britain* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), p. 543.
- ³¹ Karl Marx, “On the Irish Amnesty Question,” in: Karl Marx, “Confidential Communication,” in: Karl Marx, *On the First International*, edited by Saul K. Padover (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), pp. 115-20. Marx put forward to the Council of the International a motion of support for the Irish amnesty movement which passed.
- ³² Lenin, *Critical Remarks on the National Question and The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), p. 102.
- ³³ Lenin, *Critical Remarks on the National Question and The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), p. 21.
- ³⁴ Lenin, *Critical Remarks on the National Question and The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), p. 68.
- ³⁵ Bert Corona, *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona, as told to Mario T. García* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 108-134, quotation from page 112.
- ³⁶ Bert Corona, *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona, as told to and edited by Mario T. García* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) provides a wonderful account of the Mexican American labor and left experiences throughout the entire post-war period in the Southwest.
- ³⁷ A good overview of Mexican American politics in this period can be found in: Juan Gómez Quiñones, *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990).

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- ³⁸ Frank Bardacke, *Trampling out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (New York: Verso, 2011) is the definitive history of the union with a left critique of Chavez. Dan La Botz, *Cesar Chavez and la Causa* (New York: Longman, 2005) has a similar though less detailed critique.
- ³⁹ Reies López Tijerina, *Mi lucha por la tierra* (Mexico: Fondo de la Cultura Económica, 1978) and Richard Gardner, *¡Grito! Reies Tijerina and the New Mexico Land Grant War of 1967* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971).
- ⁴⁰ José Angel Gutiérrez, *The Making of a Chicano Militant* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).
- ⁴¹ Arnaldo García, "Toward a Left without Borders: The Story of the Center for Autonomous Social Action-General Brotherhood of Workers," *Monthly Review*, July-August 2002, 69-78, quotation from page 72.
- ⁴² Communist Party, *Toward Chicano Liberation* [pamphlet] based on the resolutions of the National Convention of the Communist Party U.S.A. of 1972, (New York: New Outlook Publishers, 1972)
- ⁴³ "Chicano Liberation: Resolution of OL's Third Congress," *Class Struggle: Journal of Communist Thought*, Summer, 1975, #2.
- ⁴⁴ Socialist Workers Party, *The Struggle for Chicano Liberation* [pamphlet] (New York: Pathfinder Press, Inc., 1972).
- ⁴⁵ NALAAC at: <http://www.nalacc.org/>
- ⁴⁶ CEPR, at : www.cepr.net/index.php/publications/reports/the-decline-in-african-american-representation-in-unions-and-manufacturing-1979-2007
- ⁴⁷ Jake Rosenfeld and Meredith Kleykamp, "Hispanics and Organized Labor in the United States, 1973 to 2007," *American Sociological Review*, 2009, Vol. 74 (December: 916-937).
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- ⁴⁹ Dan La Botz, "Millions March for Immigrant Rights, Virtual Strike in Some Cities," at: <http://labornotes.org/node/221>
- ⁵⁰ Eduardo Soriano Castillo, "Alabama Workers Meet Harsh Immigration Laws with Wildcats," *Labor Notes*, at: <http://labornotes.org/2011/10/alabama-workers-meet-harsh-immigration-law-wildcats>
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