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RESPONSES TO IMMIGRATION POLICY

By
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Push Comes to Shove:
Latino Responses to Immigration Policy

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INTRODUCTION

On the final day of its session, the 101st Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1990. This sweeping legislation greatly expanded the numbers of potential immigrants to the United States. In what appeared to be a moment of confidence, National Council of La Raza president Raul Yzaguirre said, "This legislation represents a new era in the immigration policy debate. The votes [during original action on the bills] in both the House and Senate have shattered the myth that Congress is unwilling to adopt [a] fair, human immigration policy."¹ By many accounts in Washington, the outlook for immigrants and refugees, and their families, was very positive. On a parallel note, Congressional redistricting opened the door to greater political representation for minorities, which translated to record numbers of Hispanics in Congress and in the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC). However, within a few years of the 1990 legislation, the immigration outlook changed dramatically in Washington, as more restrictionist, or "anti-immigrant," legislation was successfully introduced in Congress. This combined with a growing backlash against immigrants in localities to produce a general anti-immigrant sentiment nationally, ranging from ambivalence to fear and hysteria. Immigrant and non-immigrant Latinos have received a substantial share of the legislative, administrative, and popular backlash. Just as importantly, they have registered their own oppositional and diverse responses throughout the United States.

It was in 1994 that Latinos on Capitol Hill and throughout the United States were served the wake-up call. The Republican Party gained partisan control of Congress and California voters approved Proposition 187, a punitive "people's" initiative meant to deny undocumented immigrants public services, and proposing a system to detect illegal immigrants. Events in Mexico also drastically changed. A propped-up Mexican peso buckled after the passage of NAFTA and political chaos ensued. Political opportunists in border states rushed immigration policy to the national agenda as a "hot-button" issue, the media captured the fearful imaginations of the country. Former hesitancy to engage in "immigrant bashing" and "scapegoating" inside the House of Representatives disappeared as the immigration "crisis" elicited intense reactions. As Latino lawmakers became overwhelmed and constrained by the rapid changes in the federal policy, Latino community activists and organizations mobilized for counteraction.

Proposition 187 catalyzed political action in the Latino community at all levels. It opened the door to sophisticated coalition politics in Washington and Latino communities, and led to widespread protest throughout the United States. The response to Proposition 187 revealed an infrastructure of activism on behalf of immigrants that would shape the oppositional debate and guide the community under several organizational and strategic flags to challenge the anti-immigrant hysteria in the U.S.

This paper describes the diverse response of the Latino community to various legislative and non-legislative policies since the Immigration Act of 1990. It names both issues and voices critical to the debate, and seeks to explore the grey area of difference between the Latino community-based response to immigration policy and that of Latino members of Congress. The heterogeneity witnessed in the Latino voice reflects the complexity of Latinos in the U.S. and the complexity of immigration policy and its impacts. As David Gutiérrez writes in *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*, "Although Mexican Americans and, more recently, other U.S. Latinos have been among the most directly affected by sustained immigration from Mexico and Latin America, relatively little is known about how they have reacted to the steady influx of immigrants into their communities over the course of the century."² As such, the project aims to fill the contemporary void and center Latino voices, that because of their intimacy with the immigration phenomenon, are critical in the immigration debate. Finally, the paper provides an analysis of the variance in Latino reactions, especially the separation of the rights of documented and undocumented immigrants, and concludes with a discussion of how current U.S. immigration policy functions as a racialized project.

SECTION I: HISPANICS IN CONGRESS

"The success of a Hispanic Member of Congress is not to be pigeon-holed into doing just Hispanic issues. You have to play the inside game. You have to show broad interests in other areas and other issues."³ - Rep. Bill Richardson (D-NM)

Hispanic elites in the House of Representatives are the Latinos in closest proximity to the formulation of legislative immigration policy. As elected lawmakers, they engage in the nuts and bolts of drafting, revising and voting on legislation. Their position of leadership also requires that they balance the wishes of their districts with the appeal for political representation from the national Latino

population. Also, while Latinos represent roughly 10 percent of the U.S. population, Latinos in Congress number 19 members, or between four and five percent of Congress. This number includes Representatives from Puerto Rico and Guam who have limited voting privileges. To confront their low representation in Congress, Latino lawmakers formed the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) in 1976 in order to band together on common issues and to centralize their influence. Since then, the CHC's agenda has evolved from representing the wishes of a handful of Mexican American Democrats from the border states to that of an ethnically, geographically, and ideologically diverse group. According to journalist Ray Suarez, "What had been a basically Democratic, Mexican-American club from the West and the border states, now includes three Cuban members and three Puerto Rican members. . . and three members drawn from the Republican ranks."⁴ As such, the CHC and its members have developed into a pivotal force in Washington, cooperating on issues that include education, housing, and immigration.

U.S. immigration policy was debated by Latino Congressional elites since the formation of the CHC. Latino Representatives, with critical support from the "Latino Lobby"—the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and the United Farm Workers (UFW)—blocked the passage of what became the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA, 1986) for over ten years.⁵ Today, immigration policy in Congress poses an enormous political challenge for Congressional Latino elites. The *National Journal* reports that "the immigration debate is likely to throw the Hispanic Caucus into a more brutal political melee than it has ever faced before. It has become a bona fide 'hot-button' issue in California, and is beginning to sour federal-state relations in other parts of the country."⁶ As Bill Richardson (D-NM) states, "We're literally under attack every week with some kind of anti-immigration amendment."⁷ As such, Latino elites in Congress are positioned at one of the battle grounds in the struggle over the future of U.S. immigration policy. Their successes and failures in this decade have affected, and will affect, the Latino community in the U.S. directly and indirectly.

Response to Immigration Policy

"The caucus is united in its opposition against anything giving the perception of immigrant bashing. For us it is singling out a special group."⁸ - Rep. José E. Serrano (D-NY)

In the 1990s, the immigration debate has ebbed and flowed before Congress. As a central issue, it lulled after the passage of the Immigration Act of 1990, appearing occasionally as part of broader pieces of legislation. In fact, a *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report (CQ Weekly Report)* story stated that the 103rd Congress "moved no major legislation on immigration, in part because Clinton and some Democratic congressional leaders were reluctant to take on the issue in such a politically charged climate."⁹ Latinos in the House, nonetheless, responded throughout the 1990s to anti-immigrant amendments and provisions included in more expansive legislation, often engaging in aggressive debates and strategies.

Today, immigration is a "blood-pressure issue of rare force" that can "touch off firestorms of anger in Hispanic communities."¹⁰ More specifically, for the CHC, "immigration is a double-edged sword for many members, especially those who don't live in border districts or urban centers with a high immigrant population."¹¹ Thus, Latino lawmakers are fighting the propagation of myths about immigrants and the growing hysteria inside Congress, while also confronting their constituencies' opinions, and their own as Latinos. For example, in a recent hearing, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) stated, "Certainly there are very strong antirefugee, antiimmigration feelings I would say in the U.S. Congress today. . . . As a Cuban refugee, it saddens me to hear such discussion in the U.S. Congress. . . . I hope we use caution and not let the heat of the moment or the passion of hysteria. . . sway us in this very sensitive issue."¹² By entering her own immigrant identity into the debate, Ros-Lehtinen also departs from other Latino experiences and non-Latinos in her district. For instance, the *National Journal* reports that "the 'immigrants' rights' stance by some caucus members doesn't reflect the feelings of many people in the Hispanic community who are U.S. citizens and pay taxes, and resent large federal expenditures on behalf of illegal immigrants."¹³ Richardson and other Democrats also fear that many in the Latino community may, as a result, switch parties.

The Caucus and individual Latino lawmakers are at the forefront of the discussion over legislative immigration policy. For example, the CHC published a report entitled "Fact and Fiction: Immigrants in the U.S.," (1994) in order to contribute to the debate, distilling opinions from

government figures and independent research studies.¹⁴ The report, relying on data from the INS, the Census Bureau, and the Urban Institute, asserts that immigrants are an economic gain for the U.S., and makes the point that only 39 percent of undocumented immigrants come from Mexico, and that "immigrant bashing" and hate crimes are directly related. Individual Latino members of Congress also defended the reputation for hard work and civic values possessed by immigrants. Xavier Becerra (D-CA) attests that immigrants "do the things that we talk about at a higher clip than the citizen population."¹⁵ Similarly, Cuban native Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL) believes that legal immigrants are "taxpaying people, and people who followed all the requirements for getting into the country."¹⁶

Prior to the unanimous CHC vote in favor of the Immigration Act of 1990, the General Accounting Office Report on IRCA's employer sanctions confirmed the hypothesis that Latinos in Congress argued in the 1970s and 1980s: employer sanctions lead to discrimination. As ethnic organizations and the ACLU immediately called for a repeal of employer sanctions, both Ed Roybal (D-CA) and Richardson (D-NM) filed joint resolutions calling for a repeal, despite a probable presidential veto. As the *CQ Weekly Report* states, "Some lawmakers said they regretted ever voting for the law when they saw the results of the GAO survey. Rep. Bill Richardson, D-N.M., who was chairman of the Hispanic Caucus in 1984-85, said, 'The pact on which many of us supported this bill has been breached.'"¹⁷ In other post-IRCA housekeeping, Roybal remained influential, fighting for extensions of State Legalization Impact Assistance Grants (SLIAG) for high-immigrant states.¹⁸

When the 1990 legislation was in its final stages, Latino Representatives "engineered a late night defeat" of a rule that called for a pilot program to test a tamper proof driver's license, risking a delay of the pro-immigrant legislation on the last day of the session. Arguing that the project was a gesture toward instituting a national identification card, Esteban Torres (D-CA) and Roybal (D-CA) worked throughout the final day persuading colleagues to oppose the rule from a civil rights standpoint. On the House floor, Roybal said, "It is ironic that South Africa has just abandoned its notorious pass-card identification program that has been an essential element of its hated apartheid system."¹⁹ Despite the Act's eventual passage, bill sponsors remained angry at Hispanic Congressional members, who remained in solidarity on the issue. Joe Moakley (D-MA) angrily said, "They put up a dollar to win a penny."²⁰

After 1990, Latinos in Congress fought similar rules, provisions, and amendments which attempted to deny rights to immigrants, especially the children of immigrants, with both success and failure.²¹ José Serrano (D-NY) states that such victories "established that the House recognized that setting immigration policy cannot and should not interfere with the education of our children."²² In 1992, the Caucus introduced a bill that provided for foreign language voting instructions and also a provision supporting bilingual education. Both passed.²³ In the area of school lunches, however, Becerra (D-CA) unsuccessfully attempted to amend a proposed program which excluded legal and illegal immigrants from benefits.

In other areas, Latino members of Congress unsuccessfully battled the sentiment of Congress as well as the White House. According to the *CQ Weekly Report*, "The White House has turned a deaf ear to the caucus's pleas to include illegal immigrants in the Clinton Administration's health care reform plan."²⁴ Also, Becerra's (D-CA) efforts failed in 1995 at ensuring migrant workers more protection against employers by allowing migrant laborers to sue for damages above a very low ceiling.²⁵ Latino members of Congress also made little headway in amending the most recent Welfare Reform law which denies legal immigrants access to benefits. In response, Diaz-Balart (R-FL) stated, "It's simply targeting people because of their political vulnerability."²⁶ In fact, the *CQ Weekly Report* states that Diaz-Balart cited the Contract for America's prospect of denying legal immigrants access to federal programs and benefits as the only reason he did not sign the Contract.

When Congress moved to extend unemployment benefits during a recession, supporters proposed to finance the plan by cutting SSI monies spent on behalf of aged and disabled legal immigrants. The *National Journal* reported that opposition from the CHC prompted House leaders to introduce a provision that would prevent Congress from cutting welfare benefits for disabled immigrants. The provision was voted down.²⁷ "I don't see why we're denying benefits to people who are aged, blind or disabled to give them to the unemployed," said Becerra, D-Calif., a member of the Hispanic caucus who took the lead on the issue. "It's robbing Peter to pay Paul."²⁸ After it passed Serrano (D-NY) angrily stated, "I found the tone of the floor debate on this bill offensive, misleading and antithetical to everything this country stands for."²⁹

Signs of Ambivalence

In an interesting predicament in 1994, Congress was poised to exclude illegal immigrants from emergency earthquake relief in Southern California. Esteban Torres (D-CA) challenged the emergency legislation by submitting a controversial amendment in a political compromise which guaranteed emergency aid to undocumented immigrants but made them ineligible for housing grants or long-term aid. The *National Journal* reported that Torres, who never saw his father again after he was deported during the Depression, paid an emotional and strategic price for this Congressional maneuver. Fearing that emergency relief to undocumented immigrants would be curtailed, the Torres compromise, nonetheless, opened the door to future restrictions of long-term services based on citizenship status.³⁰ Less restrictive than the amendment it replaced, the "Torres amendment could still delay the flow of aid to victims by requiring officials to investigate each applicant's immigration status."³¹ More importantly, it clearly delineated between the rights of legal and illegal immigrants, indicating a growing tendency to sacrifice illegal immigrants when doing "damage control" against sweeping immigrant restrictions.

Even more interesting, Latinos in Congress voted almost unanimously in favor of increased Border Patrol budgets and stricter enforcement in 1994. This occurred despite the widespread complaints in the Latino community about INS abuses.³² Increased enforcement at the border is framed as an effort to halt crime, a maneuver rich in political currency for the CHC. According to the *CQ Weekly Report*, "Tightening the border has become an automatic cause for most politicians—either as prelude to cutbacks in legal immigration or as an attempt to forestall them."³³ For instance, in a recent House crime proposal, there was almost no debate on the provision to add 6,000 Border Patrol officers over the next five years.³⁴ However, when the House Appropriations Committee was arguing over an increase in Border Patrol spending in 1993, the *CQ Almanac* reports that Luis Gutierrez (D-IL) was "troubled" by the tone of the debate, and said that members of Congress had painted a picture of immigrants sponging off welfare, and as the source of the country's problems.³⁵ By denouncing the tone of the argument, Gutierrez indicated an ambivalence among Latinos in Congress.

In terms of Haitian immigrants, the CHC has also given unequal support. While attempting to grant Haitians Temporary Protected Status, four of 11 Latinos in the House did not even vote on the

measure, and Congress eventually provided a lesser six-month-suspension on deportations.³⁶ Also, when voting to prevent the immigration of people living with AIDS, the CHC was divided, with the majority supporting exclusion, and several members changing their positions between House and joint conference votes.³⁷ This was a departure from outspoken Black Caucus member and political ally Charles Rangel (D-NY), who opposed the exclusion, and according to the *CQ Weekly Report*, "saw something else at play in the vote: racism toward black Haitians."³⁸

In 1995, Latino lawmakers were faced with major immigration legislation moving through Congress. The proposals aimed to crack down on illegal immigration and also reverse the direction of the Immigration Act of 1990 by limiting legal immigration. Xavier Becerra (D-CA), who sits on the Judiciary Committee, was the Latino Representative most involved with the potential legislation, having mixed success opposing it in committee. For example, Becerra challenged the ethics of curbs on family reunification stating, "This seems to be a complete contradiction of what we're trying to do to promote family values."³⁹ He also unsuccessfully opposed an amendment which barred undocumented parents from receiving aid on behalf of their U.S. born children. Becerra countered, "You're penalizing the children who are U.S. citizens [in order] to try to go after the parents."⁴⁰ Despite the consistency of Becerra's unsuccessful attempts, there are signs that his efforts were not futile. After he unsuccessfully sought to remove a provision that prevented immigrants who illegally stay in the U.S. a year or longer from seeking legal immigration channels for ten years, committee members later softened the provision, giving the attorney general some avenues to waive the ten year ban.⁴¹ Similarly, Becerra won a small victory for those would-be citizens who have been approved for naturalization but are on waiting lists, yet were slated to have their approval overturned by the proposed legislation. He offered an amendment that would return their immigration fees if the bill passes, since they would then be ineligible.⁴²

A major element of immigration legislation has been contested by Latino lawmakers is the provision for a national verification system to curtail hiring undocumented workers. One of the potential abuses of the system is that it creates an incentive for employers to distrust people of color, and discriminate against anyone who appears "foreign." With the Immigration Act of 1990, Latino lawmakers set a precedent by excluding this decades-old proposition. The *CQ Weekly Report* stated,

"Torres and other Hispanics say it is now clear that any move toward a national identification card will not be easy."⁴³ However, receptiveness to a national verification system has grown. In 1994, a hearing was held concerning the feasibility of this system, and more recently, lawmakers authorized a pilot system to be tested in five states.⁴⁴ In committee, Becerra attempted to guarantee protection for workers unfairly denied jobs because of verification errors; he tried to create a special fund and appeal process. Although unsuccessful, Becerra skillfully articulated the unsolved problems of the verification system, ranging from high costs, privacy issues, and the problematic necessity of an I.D. card.⁴⁵

Overall, Latinos serving in Congress were involved in the legislative immigration debate in several areas during the 1990s, earning some victories, sustaining losses, and also expressing ambivalence. The issue of immigration is complex. Latinos in the CHC reflect that complexity, and also an awareness to anti-immigrant hysteria, as noted by several members in the House. While some are intimate with immigrant issues personally, Latino members of Congress mostly engage in the formulation of immigration policy. Immigrants and the organizations that serve them, on the other hand, experience the impact of these policies. As scholar David Gutiérrez writes, "Long the most publicized of all so-called illegal aliens in the Southwest, Spanish-speaking immigrants are again receiving most of the negative attention generated by recent campaigns against immigrants. As a result of this attention Mexican Americans and other Americans of Latin American descent once again find themselves caught in the middle of the immigration controversy."⁴⁶

SECTION II: LATINO COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS

"The immigrants, as they are organized, will begin to fight for their own identified self-interest and in so fighting will then be fighting for the interest of the overall gamut of American groups."⁴⁷

-Bert Corona

The Latino community in the U.S. is intimately connected to the immigration debate. The mostly steady stream of immigrants since the late 19th century has continued to revitalize the community, increasing the population, reinforcing language, maintaining cultural traditions and keeping the issues, needs and obstacles of immigrants at the center of the Latino community. Also, Latinos have always drawn from community resources to receive, integrate, and empower arriving immigrants, from 19th century mutualistas to the current proliferation of naturalization campaigns. The

mode of reception, level of integration, and strategies for immigrant empowerment are as diverse as the community itself, and like the CHC, not without reservation. While many U.S. Latinos, and even recent immigrants, are themselves in favor of the restriction of immigration and reducing access to rights for immigrants in the U.S., the focus here is on the "pro-immigrant" Latino response to immigration policy.⁴⁸ In the 1990s, Latino community based organizations have responded to legislative policy—from Proposition 187 to the current proposed legislation—as well as non-legislative immigration policy, which broadly defined, includes the administration of legislative policy, and such impacts as private labor practices, border enforcement, and anti-immigrant sentiment. As such, the Latino community response, occurs in several sectors, and its battles in the 1990s are salient examples of the heterogeneity and the potential for political change within the Latino community.

Responses to Legislative Policy

"At first they asked us if we would support the immigration laws. We said we are not responsible for enforcing the immigration laws. We are strong enough that [we made them] take that out of the contract."⁴⁹

-Carlos Marentes, Union de Trabajadores Aricolos Fronterizos

Few organizations and Latino community based leaders are invited to Washington to testify before Congress and engage the machinery which creates immigration legislation. As such, the Latino community's most direct influence in legislation is at the ballot box. Latino organizations have widened the two avenues toward this form of a political voice—voter registration and naturalization assistance. According to Marta Lopez-Garza, "voter registration is a task Chicano political organizations list as a priority. The increase in registered Latino voters throughout the state [of California] since the early 1980s indicates that this strategy has been a moderate success."⁵⁰ As such, many Latino organizations are now conducting voter registration drives in their communities. For example, the Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project (SVREP) asserts that "young Latinos and non-citizens are more motivated to become citizens and/or get registered because of Proposition 187, and similar anti-Latino measures."⁵¹ More so, the *San Francisco Examiner* reported that SVREP intends to register a million more Latino voters before the 1996 elections.⁵²

However, because many members of the Latino community are non-citizen immigrants and cannot vote, Latino organizations like National Association for Latino Elected Officials (NALEO),

Hermanidad Mexicana Nacional, SVREP, the Community Association of Progressive Dominicans in New York City, El Concilio in Ventura, the Latino Forum in Pomona, and a majority of Southern California elected officials have aggressively stressed naturalization to politically empower immigrants.⁵³ For example, at the May 1994 pro-immigrant demonstration in Los Angeles, Dolores Huerta of the United Farm Workers urged immigrants to sign up for citizenship. "We must become citizens and vote so that our voices can be heard," Huerta said.⁵⁴ According to Harry Pachón of the Tomás Rivera Center, an average Latino immigrant waits 13 to 15 years before seeking naturalization, and in California, Pachón notes, "1 out of 2 Latino adults. . .is not a U.S. citizen."⁵⁵

There is thus room for improvement in at least two areas: increasing Latino applicants and improving the INS's naturalization system. NALEO recently noted that it processed as many applications by March 1995, as it did all year in 1994.⁵⁶ Especially since immigrants who qualified for amnesty under IRCA are now becoming eligible for citizenship, Latinos are calling for changes in the system. Latino organizations have recommended that the INS increase the number of examiners, simplify citizenship forms, and provide alternative options (such as diplomas and certificates) for satisfying the civics and language exams. Juan Andrade of the Midwest Voter Registration and Education Project has also advocated for a presidential executive order to grant citizenship to long-time legal residents.⁵⁷ Many immigration restrictionists are decrying the increase in citizenship requests and the political ramifications for Latinos, as some persons ponder amending naturalization and birthright citizenship in the U.S. For as Pachón states, "Perhaps the least recognized reason so many Latino immigrants are now seeking U.S. citizenship is a growing recognition that naturalization is the missing ingredient to Latino empowerment strategies."⁵⁸

Other Legislative Responses

Dolores Huerta and the UFW are longtime players in immigration policy debates, both in the agricultural fields and on Capitol Hill. Not only have they engaged in opposition to anti-immigrant legislation, such as IRCA in the 1970s and 1980s,⁵⁹ Huerta and the UFW have also opposed broader legislation which denies services and benefits to legal residents. Recently, Huerta and the UFW have circulated a "Call to Action," requesting persons to call or write President Clinton and encourage him

to veto the Welfare Reform Act, which "denies assistance to legal residents" and "us[es] immigrants as scapegoats to give tax cuts to the rich."⁶⁰ Huerta further writes, "Do not side with this cruel legislation. We should not deprive the farm workers who feed our nation the right to feed themselves." In a similar "United Farm Workers Action Alert!," UFW organizers Alicia Sandoval and Marta Rivera urged allies to "send a clear message to President Clinton that we will not stand for this cruel legislation." Sandoval and Rivera state that the current Welfare Reform Act "would deny student loans and federal aid to immigrant students, take school lunches from immigrant children and, in the cruelest irony, it would deny food stamps to farm workers."⁶¹ The suggested response letters cite statistics that assert the benefits of immigration to the U.S. Huerta's expertise and influence in the struggles of migrant laborers have also resulted in UFW testimony at Congressional hearings. In a 1993 hearing entitled the "Impact of Immigration on Welfare Programs," Huerta powerfully questioned the morality of government attempts to deny immigrants access to public assistance, while still subsidizing growers. Huerta stated, "If public assistance programs are seen as subsidies, they are not subsidies to the workers, they are subsidies to the employers who do not pay their workers an adequate wage and who do not provide them with medical benefits."⁶²

NCLR and MALDEF have also been major contributors to the immigration debate in Washington since the passage of the Immigration Act of 1990. NCLR has testified in several hearings, and spoken out on the recent proposed legislation. Regarding the uncertainty of the proposed national verification system, NCLR Chair Audrey Alvarado stated, "It's time to stop looking for quick fixes and focus on real strategies, instead of expensive and dangerous experiments using Hispanics as guinea pigs."⁶³ Senior immigration policy analyst Cecilia Muñoz has also been effective on Capitol Hill, testifying in hearings regarding the national verification system, and the overall impact of the INS on the Latino community. For example, Muñoz stated, "The INS affects all of us. It affects Latino U.S. citizens who petition for their family members, and the way that the INS handles itself has a profound effect on the rate at which Latinos choose to become citizens."⁶⁴

MALDEF has also engaged in legislative immigration policy at local, state and federal levels. For example, MALDEF is monitoring the pilot programs testing the employment verification system, and their potential for employment discrimination.⁶⁵ Throughout the 1990s, MALDEF has been busy

combating state-generated anti-immigrant legislation . In 1993, the organization battled 21 bills in California that sought to reduce the rights of immigrants.⁶⁶ Most notably, MALDEF has successfully challenged the implementation of Proposition 187 through federal and state litigation. According to staff attorney Thomas Saenz, "Our day-by-day work leads to incremental victories that will add up to ensuring that the initiative is never implemented."⁶⁷

The Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF) has also pressured Congress and the White House on legislation affecting immigrants. PRLDEF president Juan A. Figueroa recently stated, "Discrimination against immigrants is a danger to all Latinos. Ultimately, we cannot effectively counter discrimination against Puerto Ricans, unless we challenge the pervasive discrimination against immigrants."⁶⁸ As such, PRLDEF has involved itself in legislative battles for undocumented immigrants to receive government services such as public housing, healthcare and welfare benefits.

Proposition 187 "Proposition 187 is not an isolated movement, but merely the opening salvo in what will become a continuing effort to whittle away social services for immigrants, as well as others in our community."⁶⁹ -Richard Fajardo, Tomás Rivera Center

Throughout the United States, grassroots mobilization has taken place as a result of the passage of Proposition 187 in California. As much as Republicans and conservative Democrats have followed the political lead of California and introduced restrictionist legislation in the House and Senate, Latino community-based organizations and leaders have also utilized Proposition 187's emergence to organize and politicize various sectors of the Latino community. Journalist Michael Novick writes, "Many of these efforts demonstrate a new level of unity among U.S. born Mexican Americans, naturalized citizens, refugees, legal resident aliens and the undocumented, regardless of their national origin."⁷⁰ While Proposition 187 catalyzed the community to produce an array of new activists, coalitions and programs, the recent mobilization has also revealed both the strengths and weaknesses in the infrastructure of Latino pro-immigrant resistance.

For example, according to María Jiménez, a Latina activist with the American Friends Service Committee, "Currently we don't have a strong Latino voice and coordinated strategy at the national level, especially one that is articulating a coherent policy on immigration. And this includes the

Hispanic Caucus, which is sometimes divided."⁷¹ Juan José Gutiérrez of One Stop Immigration, however, counters the notion of a Latino leadership void, stating, "We do have leaders of tremendous stature—they're just not recognized by the media."⁷² Community-based organizations are thus "filling the vacuum that presently exists within the Latino leadership institutions."⁷³ More so, according to Rubén Solís of the Southwest Network for Economic and Environmental Justice, former leaders in the Latino community such as MALDEF and NCLR have lost their community base of support, both for supporting NAFTA and for failing to work equally with other Chicano groups during the anti-Proposition 187 campaign.⁷⁴ This demonstrates the urgency for Latino individuals and organizations to propel their pro-immigrant agendas into the debate, and the justification for a new era of coalition politics around the pro-immigrant rights movement.

Thus, Proposition 187 is a key piece of legislation for Latinos for several reasons. The initiative, which crystallized the trend toward legislative attempts at denying immigrants' basic rights, served as a wake up call to the Latino community and as a catalyst for change on both sides of the immigration debate. Not only did Pete Wilson bank his re-election campaign on Proposition 187, the initiative tested the waters for the restrictive federal legislation recently passed by Congress. In fact, its successful legal challenge prompted Sonny Bono (R-CA) to sponsor a bill that would require a three-judge panel to challenge ballot initiatives passed by popular vote.⁷⁵ According to Frank Del Olmo, "That is what Proposition 187's more astute backers. . . wanted all along. They hoped to create political momentum for immigration reform."⁷⁶ For the Latino community, Proposition 187's inception provoked a diverse and organized response that created a critical mass of Latino pro-immigrant advocates, and planted the seeds for future activists within students.

In October 1993, a Southern California coalition named Proponents for Responsible Immigration Debate and Education (PRIDE) developed out of the Latino community's concerns with rising anti-immigrant sentiment. That year, 21 anti-immigration bills appeared before the state legislature. In an interview, PRIDE Coalition member Miguel Santana of MALDEF stated that the group's purpose is to dispel myths about immigration by informing the public.⁷⁷ As Proposition 187 gained momentum, another major statewide coalition, the California Latino Civil Rights Network was established in February 1994, and included MALDEF, One Stop Immigration, NCLR, as well as

organizations with prominent Latino leadership such as the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), the California Immigrant Worker's Association, and others. After a disappointing meeting with Pete Wilson, the Network planned a simultaneous series of organizing meetings and a subsequent statewide day of protest. On May 28, 1994, thousands of Latinos marched through downtown Los Angeles in a "tightly organized counterattack" on the anti-immigrant sentiment in California and the nation. According to the *L.A. Times* front-page article, marchers focused on the positive contributions of immigrants despite the difficult circumstances of their lives, and "pledged to reverse what they acknowledged is a legislative tide against immigration and to avert further defeats in the political and legislative arena." "We're here to put an end to the big lie propagated by all those who use immigrants for political expediency," said Roberto Lovato, executive director of CARECEN.⁷⁸ Simultaneous protests were held in Sacramento, San Diego, Fresno, San Jose and Santa Maria.⁷⁹

An even larger demonstration occurred in October 1994 in Los Angeles, prior to the California elections. The *L.A. Times* reported that the October 16th march consisted of 70,000 persons, although march organizers estimated 100,000. Nonetheless, "it was the largest protest gathering here [in Los Angeles] in decades, surpassing Vietnam War era demonstrations" including the National Chicano War Moratorium in 1970.⁸⁰ Juan José Gutiérrez commented, "This is not a parade, this is a social movement." Like the May demonstrations, marchers burned Governor Pete Wilson's image in effigy at L.A. City Hall and also placed the stuffed dummy into a coffin. Likewise, shirts, placards, etc. mocked the California governor.⁸¹ The *L.A. Times* reported that the event was a multi-ethnic, multi-generational occasion for the Latino community, and that "Proposition 187 is one of the rare issues on which many of the teenage opponents seem to be in sync with their parents. Parents have actually joined in some of the marches, while others have encouraged their children to participate."⁸²

Overall, the initiative set into motion a massive mobilization for immigrant rights, reaching into many areas of non-legislative policy. For example, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists has boycotted California as a site for its annual meetings, and the Mexico-based World Boxing Council banned world title fights in California as a protest.⁸³ Also, when 200 Pasadena High School students marched off campus in October, they were joined by Vera Vignes, district superintendent.⁸⁴ The *San*

Jose Mercury News reported the Latino community's cheers from the Latino-owned Delia's Furniture in San Jose after Judge Mariana Pfaelzer's ruling against the California initiative: "'We've been so worried about this for so long now that it's a great relief to hear this,' said owner Presentación Domínguez, 51. 'We knew all along this was unconstitutional, but we weren't sure whether the judge would be fair and rule in our favor.'"⁸⁵

Despite Proposition 187's electoral success, and the pleasing message sent to restrictionist Congressional members, the initiative politicized a new generation of Latino activists. Student marches and demonstrations, which mirrored the "blow-outs" by Chicano students in 1968, occurred frequently in the weeks prior to the California elections. Scholar Rudy Acuña interpreted the student response, stating, "Young students are very moralistic, they deal in what is fair. This proposition is clear-cut racism to them, and it's clear-cut that it's about them too."⁸⁶ As one immigrant protester astutely stated, "I've got a lot of friends who will have to quit school if Proposition 187 passes because they're illegal. Plus classes will be smaller and some teachers will get fired. I want people to know that students disagree with this."⁸⁷ Some students garnered pride and awareness in theirs and other cultures because of the demonstrations. One student, Stephanie Bernal, stated, "It feels great right now just to be doing something about it. When we get together to talk about it, we speak Spanish and just feel good about being Mexican."⁸⁸ Appropriately, writer Eduardo Stanley of *El Sol del Valle* listed the rise of high school leadership as one of the few positive outcomes of Proposition 187.⁸⁹

Latino student protests, while a major component of the anti-Proposition 187 efforts, also included their own agendas to improve the conditions in their schools and to develop leadership and organizing skills. As one Oakland youth organizer states, "The [student] marches were a wake-up call, both to the adults in the Latino community and to the rest of the state. . . . They are not just saying 'stop [Prop.] 187' but are organizing with a real vision of what they want."⁹⁰ Students marched to challenge the racism directed at them in the schools, and to address issues of poor Latino representation in teaching staffs and in the school curriculum.⁹¹

Responses to Non-Legislative Policy

"A strategy of resistance does not mean passivity or inaction. On the contrary, if our capacity to modify the macroeconomic variables has been temporarily but substantially reduced, then we ought to seek to modify variables that are not macro."⁹² -Rubén Zamora

Throughout the 1990s, many Latino organizations and individuals have resisted the anti-immigrant backlash in several areas outside of combating national legislation. The politically charged atmosphere and media coverage draw attention to non-legislative immigration policies. For example, in Los Angeles, the county Board of Supervisors has sought to curb day labor, the police have harassed street vendors, and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority has sought to raise fares and eliminate bus passes on routes used predominantly by immigrants and poor people of color.⁹³ Labor practices and INS border enforcement are further non-legislative examples. As such, service organizations are faced with the task of improving and formalizing their new advocacy and community empowerment duties, while still maintaining a continuous level of services. As Rubén Solis states, "The fight against 187, and the issues of migration, are presenting themselves as facilitating tools for other issues that have always existed but have historically received little attention."⁹⁴ Similarly, Raul Yzaguirre states, "Historically, when Congress enacts sweeping immigration reform, and promises effectiveness, it is invariably the Latino community which suffers the backlash when such measures fail."⁹⁵

Border Militarization

"Militarization of the border treats Mexico as an enemy state and Mexicans as enemies, and similarly influences the popular perception of *mexicanos* in the U.S."⁹⁶
-María Jiménez, American Friends Service Committee

One of the most drastic impacts of the administration of immigration policy occurs at the U.S.-Mexico border. Unexplained deaths, unlawful deportations, the denial of civil rights, illegal searches and arrests, physical and mental abuse, and the institutionalized suspicion of drugs and criminal activity targeted at undocumented and documented immigrants and U.S. Latinos have occurred abundantly at the hands of the U.S. Border Patrol. In response, several organizations and coalitions monitor the border area and provide various services to immigrants. María Jiménez, a prominent Latina activist with the American Friends Service Committee, has worked along the border for almost ten years. She states that much of the abuse is the result of both racism and the lack of INS accountability. Jiménez writes, "Immigration law is enforced selectively and discriminates overwhelmingly against

Latinos."⁹⁷

At a conference in 1994 entitled "Immigration: A Call to Action," several Latino border activists stressed the importance and significance of this pattern of incidents. Jiménez, a panelist there, stated, "In terms of anti-immigrant hysteria, the basic problem as we have seen it materialize on the U.S.-Mexico border is the growing militarization of the border. As well, xenophobia exists in Congress, in California, and throughout the country."⁹⁸ Likewise, Guadalupe Castillo of the La Mesilla Organizing Project in Tucson stated, "Real human rights violations occur at the border day in and day out. . . . They are all connected to militarization at the border. I would like to say that militarization on the border has always existed. It is not a new phenomena [sic]. When you invade a country, and you conquer people, you militarize, and maintain a certain level of militarization."⁹⁹ Therefore, the increased law enforcement presence creates what Jiménez calls a "deconstitutionalized" zone, where the Border Patrol and local police have fewer limits on the exercise of authority than in non-Mexican-border areas. This is a drastic difference from the Canadian border, and a clear inconsistency with the NAFTA agreement. Jiménez maintains, "Basically, the whole issue of walls, blockades, and proposed increased militarization such as the use of the National Guard, mine fields, etc. is in direct conflict with our policy of equal economic partnership with Mexico, and unjust when compared to Canada."¹⁰⁰

Immigrant Labor "The politicians are happy to have my people here working, but they don't want us to have any rights."¹⁰¹ -Jasmine Aguilar, U.S. born daughter of immigrants

For most Latino immigrants, whether they immigrate to the U.S. for family reunification, to escape political and economic persecution, or as part of a rite of migratory culture, finding and maintaining a job is an inevitable experience and necessity. Issues of immigrant labor, therefore, are important to both the pro-immigrant rights community, as well as the restrictionists. According to Victor Valle and Rodolfo D. Torres, "Many labor leaders and sympathizers inflamed by anti-immigrant rhetoric portray Latinos as both victims and villains. Their status as undocumented workers not only exposes them to exploitation, they are also blamed for lowering wages and undermining the overall bargaining power and social benefits of unionized employees."¹⁰² Nonetheless, Latino immigrants continue to form the backbone of industrial labor and the labor movement. According to the *People's*

Weekly World, "Unions have initiated successful organizing drives of Mexican and Latino immigrant workers, bringing thousands of new union members into the fold.¹⁰³ These efforts are just whispers of the potential for organizing immigrant laborers. For example, Los Angeles, despite a long-term decline in its economy, is still the largest manufacturing center in the U.S., employing 717,000 workers, over half of them immigrants. Writer David Bacon states, "These workers are trapped in an apartheid-like subclass of minimum wages, bone-crushing injuries and intense speedups. They are also the backbone of militant labor protest in Los Angeles."¹⁰⁴ According to long-time labor and immigrant activist Bert Corona, "I think that immigrants, number one, are a very key permanent segment of the American workforce. . . . Immigrants are going to play and are playing a major role in reshaping the relationship of the United States to all of Latin America, and of course to Asia and Africa."¹⁰⁵

Immigrant labor organizing therefore serves a critical role in combatting exploitation, INS abuses and the economic stratification of the immigrant community. Bacon writes, "Immigrants are most indispensable to the economies of areas in which the cry for exclusion is the strongest."¹⁰⁶ This creates an increased tension between organized labor and immigrants. Underscoring this tension, Corona suggests, "To organize they [unions] have to take a just and fair and equitable approach to immigrants. They have to receive them and take them in and integrate them as worthy members of the trade union movement."¹⁰⁷ As unions benefit from increased immigrant recruitment, workers benefit from the organizational resources. Journalist Mariana Mora writes, "Labor contacts proved highly effective during the anti-Prop. 187 campaign, where union workers provided a major base of support."¹⁰⁸ Michael Novick adds, "Because immigrant workers are virtually the only growth area for labor organizing today outside the public sector, the organized labor movement has enlisted in the struggle to defend immigrant rights and defeat Prop. 187."¹⁰⁹

And where immigrants are not accepted into the mainstream labor movement, they have organized successfully amongst themselves, promoting strikes such as the recent Southern California drywallers' wildcat strike which forced almost two dozen construction contractors to sign labor contracts. Humberto Camacho, a representative of the United Electrical Workers Union, states that hardball tactics are common in immigrant dependent industries. He writes, "Just because we speak a

different language, come from another country, have darker skin, doesn't mean we don't have rights or that we'll accept exploitation in silence."¹¹⁰ Despite economic hardship and popular hostility toward immigrants, poor working conditions have prompted thousands of immigrant workers to walk off their jobs and agitate for better conditions.¹¹¹ In San Francisco, Latino day laborers, many of them immigrants, formed the Asociación de Trabajadores Latinos, a mutual assistance membership organization which provides "know your rights" presentations and seeks to contract a minimum wage of \$6.25 per hour. Similarly, La Mujer Obrera organizes immigrant women in the garment factories of El Paso.¹¹²

Other Community Responses

While several Latino organizations work in opposition to the INS, monitoring their law enforcement on the border, and protesting INS budget increases in Congress, some Latino organizations have worked in partnership with the INS in order to service their community. For example, after the unlawful deportation of two Latino youths, the Immigration Project at the Latino Forum of Nebraska initiated a series of informative workshops in cooperation with the INS to counsel immigrants on their immigration status and to educate the community about the INS's non-enforcement services. According to Al Rodriguez, the Project's chair, "Just because we sat down and talked, we were able to turn an ugly experience into a positive one."¹¹³ Similarly, the Chicago based Organización de Vecindarios Unidos, or UNO, recently announced a new effort to work in conjunction with the INS and other non-Latino immigrant associations to accelerate the process of citizenship for its members.¹¹⁴ And the Albuquerque Border City Project, an organization with substantial Latino participation, has also coordinated efforts with the INS to create the first INS Community Relations Board.

Mujeres Unidas y Activas, a San Francisco Bay Area Latina immigrant women's group, engages non-legislative immigration policy by educating and preparing immigrant women and refugees for adaptation to U.S. society, while focusing on community involvement and social, civic, and political impact.¹¹⁵ Founded in 1990, Mujeres' over 200 members sponsor leadership trainings, community organizing projects, citizenship *teatros*, "Know Your Rights" classes, parents' groups, and

health and ESL classes. Mujeres Unidas has also worked closely with Asian women's immigrants associations. According to the Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Services, "Their mobilizations, public testimonies, coalition work and media presence have brought immigrant Latinas' perspectives to the public. . . . Mujeres has become a program others in the country look to as a model for immigrant Latino empowerment."¹¹⁶ Mujeres Unidas y Activas has responded to the increased hysteria surrounding the immigration debate by increasing its membership and programs, providing accurate and accessible information about legal rights directly to immigrants.¹¹⁷ Similar to Mujeres' bilingual format, local Spanish language newspapers also combat the exploitation of immigrants. For example, the Chicago newspaper *¡Exito!* recently published a detailed article clearly stating the legal limits on immigration fees and services, as well as providing numbers in the event of abuse of these limits.¹¹⁸

Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP), an international Latino membership organization of board and staff members of grantmaking foundations, has also responded to non-legislative immigration policy. After the uprising in Los Angeles in 1992, where local media portrayed the Latino immigrant community as criminal, HIP conducted a dialogue and site visit with Central American community representatives in the Pico-Union area, a flashpoint of the insurgency. HIP also coordinated a tour of Marin County's Canal Area for the Council on Foundation's national conference. The intent was to examine the local impacts of anti-immigrant conflict and articulate the challenges for funders, nonprofits, and policy makers.¹¹⁹ HIP also published a report, *Reweaving Our Social Fabric: Challenges to the Grantmaking Community after Proposition 187*, based on a series of workshops and panels held in Chicago, San Francisco, New York City, Washington, D.C., and a site visit to several immigrant communities in Miami.¹²⁰ The report urges funders to recognize and support immigrant communities in all their funding categories.

In 1994, deputy editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, Frank Del Olmo, opposed the *Times'* endorsement of Pete Wilson with his own editorial. Del Olmo writes, "I must protest against this awful, and unnecessary, campaign in the strongest way I know how." Del Olmo feared the outcome of the Wilson 1994 and Proposition 187 campaigns, which he viewed as tightly intertwined. "That is why the *Times'* endorsement of Wilson is not just another endorsement, and why I must register my

dissent so publicly," wrote Del Olmo.¹²¹ Similarly, newsman, author and poet Rubén Martínez responded to the "evil of Proposition 187" as a journalist, self-consciously targeting his readers. Martínez writes, "I have struggled to rise above the hatred that fuels the immigration debate. I will not waste my breath on the hatemongers, a tiny minority. I want to speak to you, the political middle." He describes the California imagination as that of a lynch mob—"the real power of the mob is the majority of the people who won't do anything to prevent the unspeakable from occurring."¹²²

Latino artists have also responded critically to U.S. immigration policy, from mariachis playing the "Star-Spangled Banner" at pro-immigrant protests, to the "Hispanics for Wilson" hoax by Lalo López and Esteban Zul. Although Latino and Chicano artists have consistently resisted oppressive U.S. policies—such as Chicana visual artist Yolanda López' indigenous man crumpling "Immigration plans" with the caption aggressively stating "Who's the illegal alien PILGRIM?" (1981),—the 1990s version of immigration hysteria has led to a contemporary surge in artistic oppositional forms. At the May 28, 1994 march and rally in Los Angeles, the *L.A. Times* reported that "a band from Tijuana, its members outfitted in green fatigues, provided a steady drumbeat of marching music."¹²³ Also, Latina artist Carmen Meléndez recently collaborated with immigrant-serving institutions to create the bilingual educational comic book *El Inmigrante: Derechos y Oportunidades / The Immigrant: Rights and Opportunities*.¹²⁴ As well, Rubén Martínez recently joined forces with performance artist and "Border Brujo" Guillermo Gómez-Peña on a poetry-performance-lecture series to "personally settle the score with Pete Wilson."¹²⁵ A press release announcing the spoken word and performance format stated that "it was Proposition 187 in California and the spate of anti-immigrant legislation in Washington that brought them back to the frontline of the Culture Wars."¹²⁶ These alternative forms of Latino response to immigration are deliberately coded to enlighten and empower Latinos, and reflect back to the artistic traditions of the Chicano Movement. Says artist and immigration satirist Lalo López, "We want people to think critically. . . . You make your enemy appear cartoonish, and it gives you a sense of empowerment."¹²⁷

The "Hispanics for Wilson" (HFW) hoax was conceived and enacted by *POCHO Magazine* publishers Lalo López and Esteban Zul. López, co-founder of the Chicano comedy troupe, the Chicano Secret Service, has in the past used his nationally published comic strip "L.A. Cucaracha" to

satirically defend immigrants and *pendejo*-ize Pete Wilson and immigrant-fearing Anglos. However, López' and Zul's September 16, 1994 HFW press release, which was a response to the "preachy piety of Chicano political activism" and conservative anti-immigrant Latinos, earned them national notoriety.¹²⁸ López stated, "I was sick of hearing about how so many Latinos are for 187. We thought, let's spoof it by creating this rabid self-deportationist movement of people so fervently for Wilson that they were willing to repatriate to Mexico."¹²⁹ The press release snow-balled into a spot on a nationally televised Telemundo talk show which included pro-immigrant activist Juan José Gutiérrez of One Stop Immigration. The humor treaded thin ice as Gutiérrez and other panelists took López and his HFW colleagues seriously. Morales writes that this act of *pochismo* "moves political activism into a new frontier, with a full dose of mediated irony."¹³⁰

Chicano nationalist organizations have also been part of the struggle for immigrants' rights and have been irritants to those in support of anti-immigrant legislation. For example, Union del Barrio, a Chicano nationalist organization based in San Diego, opposes not only anti-immigrant legislation, but also questions the commitment and agendas of other pro-immigrant rights Latino organizations and politicians, stating that they "divert the real aspirations of the people." Their oppositional gaze at anti-immigrant legislation—terming Proposition 187 "Save our Slavery"—allows them to see the connections between current anti-immigrant hysteria and the historical legacy of opportunistic and selective U.S. immigration policy, as well as other conservative movements and legislation such as English Only. Union del Barrio writes, "Proposition 187 is a modernized, synthesized and generalized version of what the U.S. has been doing to Raza for the last 150 years."¹³¹ Union del Barrio also questions sectors of the pro-immigrant rights community, arguing that much of the leadership is being supported and rewarded by the government. The organization writes, "Therefore, if Prop. 187 fails to pass, they still have control over the masses [through] what was sold to them as 'their leaders.'"¹³² While this radical line of thought is meant to more broadly view pro-immigrant strategies—or "dead end sell-out strategy"¹³³—it draws a thick dividing line through potential collaborative efforts in pro-immigrant struggles, exacerbating the obstacles of ideological difference and diversity as opposed to attempting to transgress them.

Non-immigrant Latin Americans have also been an important and often excluded voice in the

debate. In Mexico City, 2,000 Mexicans marched and protested outside of the U.S. Embassy in October 1994 in opposition to both Proposition 187 and Pete Wilson's election campaign. Also the Mexican government publicly expressed alarm over the California initiative. Elsewhere on the border, *mexicano* opposition has taken other forms. In California, local papers reported that "Tijuana schoolteachers have begun handing out pamphlets denouncing Prop. 187 as racist, while irate Mexican shoppers are vowing to boycott U.S. stores in some Texas border cities."¹³⁴ The boycotts have ranged from temporary general boycotts to those more selective. UPI reported that a Tijuana group known as "Operation Dignity" distributed pamphlets and flyers at the border crossing urging Mexicans who regularly cross into the United States for the weekend not to patronize stores as a protest against Proposition 187, which they called "racist," "xenophobic," and "an insult to all Mexicans."¹³⁵

Echoing the 1980s restrictionists' response to the "Latino Lobby," which successfully battled the passage of IRCA until 1986, anti-immigrant policy advocates in the 1990s are again accusing immigrants rights advocates of "interest group" and "behind the scenes" politicking. Columnist Richard Estrada, a self-proclaimed "political independent" and Republican appointee to the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, ironically accuses opponents of the current anti-immigrant legislation of a "'divide and conquer' strategy to keep important reforms from ever coming to a vote." Likewise, he defines opponents to the current proposed legislation as "mass immigration advocates" that "are staging kamikaze attacks against the bill."¹³⁶ Other conservative Latinos remain more ambivalent than the "independent" Estrada. Linda Chavez, a former Reagan appointee and Manhattan Institute fellow, recognizes immigrants as a "tremendous national asset" and opposes the national identification system, yet still questions immigrants' access to welfare benefits, or in her words, "entitlement programs that drain resources and entrap immigrant[s]."¹³⁷ Writer and journalist Richard Rodriguez also displays the ambivalence to immigration policy found within the Latino community. Rodriguez cryptically writes, "My fellow Californians complain loudly about the uncouth southern invasion. I say this to California: Immigration is always illegal. It is a rude act, the leaving of home. . . . Illegal immigrants trouble U.S. environmentalists and Mexican nationalists. Illegal immigrants must trouble anyone, on either side of the line, who imagines the poor are under control."¹³⁸

SECTION III:

DIVERSITY, COALITION POLITICS, & THE INTERSECTION OF STRATEGIES

"While stressing links to other communities, organizers leave no doubt that this is foremost a Latino movement—one designed to embrace both new immigrants and multi-generational U.S. residents, the undocumented and those with legal status. The many attacks on illegal immigrants, they say, are to be viewed as assaults on all people of Latin American ancestry."¹³⁹

-*Los Angeles Times*, June 4, 1994

As this study documents, the Latino response to U.S. immigration policy is complex and multi-layered. A confluence of Latino voices covers a broad organizational spectrum, from the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, to national Latino civil rights organizations, to local immigrant self-help groups. A multivalent Latino response to the immigration debate consists of various and sometimes contradictory strategies toward equal access, fairness, and political empowerment. In this diversity, projections of "unity" or any singular strategy are nearly impossible to reach, especially given the different agendas, constituencies, ideologies, organizational structures, and political constraints of the Latino actors in immigration policy. As a result, coalition politics and collaborative strategies appear, as they did in the 1970s and 1980s, to be the model of organization that can sustain, at least temporarily, the multiple and parallel fronts of resistance to anti-immigration legislation and non-legislative backlash. According to Juan Gómez-Quíñones in *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990*, "To achieve equity, a necessary condition is the continuing development of both single-membership advocacy and confrontational groups as well as strong 'operational unity' coalitions, which can be vehicles for the national community on specific issues."¹⁴⁰ The 1990s have witnessed numerous examples of simultaneous collaborative and individual efforts within the Latino community and in Congress. Yet Latinos have also experienced the limits of collaboration that Gómez-Quíñones alludes to in the expression "operational unity" coalitions. Thus, coalitions break down, especially as the diversity of differences buoys its way to the forefront of decision making structures. Besides existing political contradictions, political ambition, the economy, international stability, and shifts in political vision can affect the trajectory of Latino political actors.

Diversity as a Strength and Obstacle

"That calls for two related kinds of action: building a new civil rights movement that includes immigrant and refugee rights, and combating forces that pit people of color or workers against each other by scapegoating immigrants."¹⁴¹ -Elizabeth Martínez, journalist and community activist

If there is one lens or viewpoint from which to analyze the Latino community's effectiveness in engaging immigration policy, it is heterogeneity. Ethnically, racially, socioeconomically, by gender, by ideology, by political access, and by individual standards such as personality, fear, and concern, the Latino community is diverse—so diverse, that the term "community" itself bears an inclusive definition, evading assumptions that Latinos are a monolithic bloc. At the same moment that diversity translates to increased opportunity to make connections and enable collaboration, Latino diversity also suggests increased difference and potential for division. According to Marta Lopez-Garza, "Geographical dispersion and varying degrees of assimilation have also prompted the diverse political consciousness within the Latino community, which has created difficulties for political organizers."¹⁴² Yet in the face of the anti-immigrant backlash this decade, both the Latino Congressional members and community-based organizations have utilized the rich potential of community diversity and transgressed the tensions that surround difference.

For instance, the watershed marches and protests in California in 1994 exemplify the multiplicity of cultures and leadership within the pro-immigrant rights community. The *L.A. Times* reported that "behind the [May 1994] demonstration was a newly formed statewide coalition and a corps of young Latino leaders—typically immigrants or the working-class offspring of immigrant parents—who are far removed from Los Angeles' traditional Eastside Latino leadership."¹⁴³ The presence of Mexican, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan flags as well as representation from South America and the Caribbean testified to both the impact of immigration policy and the diverse response from the Latino community.¹⁴⁴

Similarly, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, despite the commonalities of being elected officials, reflects a diverse composition. The CHC members' Latino and non-Latino districts range from Dade County Florida, to Chicago, New York and Los Angeles, to south Texas and northern New Mexico, including varying populations of immigrants. The CHC's differences include each Representative's proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border and partisan differences. For example, the

majority Democratic CHC contains three Republicans and Robert Menendez (D-NJ), a "rare bird in politics, a Cuban and a lifelong Democrat."¹⁴⁵ Likewise, some Latino members of Congress have never joined the Caucus. As *Hispanic* journalist Michelle Meyers writes, "Diversity has served as an agenda-setting tool for the caucus. Differences between members and their constituents have given credence to the issues on which caucus members see eye to eye."¹⁴⁶ For example, Luis Gutierrez (D-IL) states, "We use our Republican members to speak to their leadership; it's a strength for us."¹⁴⁷ Hence, the ability to come together impresses a sense of political "unity" onto the public debate over immigration. As José Serrano (D-NY) writes, "So many times we have heard that our Hispanic diversity works against us. The Congressional Hispanic Caucus is now well-positioned to change this perception and provide the new administration and this nation a model for building coalitions and reaching consensus."¹⁴⁸

Therefore, it is imperative that Latinos, in responding to the anti-immigrant backlash, acknowledge their differences in order to transcend them when possible, and to respect them when required. Latino elites in Congress are extremely different from community organizers and working class immigrants. While the CHC's members create legislation, immigrants and community based organizations bear the brunt of it. Likewise, the differences in constituencies are significant. The CHC represents voters, and those that serve immigrants represent non-voters. Also, proximity to the border directly affects the priority of issues that involve Border Patrol enforcement for members of Congress and the Latino community. Nonetheless, Serrano writes, "I believe that it is the responsibility of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus to reflect the interests and concerns of all our Latino communities on every issue."¹⁴⁹ "Far more people think we represent them than the 582,000 or so we each have in our districts," says Serrano. Likewise, Becerra (D-CA) accepts the responsibility of a national constituency. He states, "Some members of Congress are not doing their job representing that [Latino] population. So a small number of us is being asked to support, defend, and protect these people."¹⁵⁰

As a result of constituency divergence between Latino Congress members and Latino community based organizations, and the resulting immigration priorities of each group, some Latino organizations support the CHC, while others disdain it. As one journalist notes, "If the caucus has failed to attract some of its own, however, it is winning kudos beyond Capitol Hill from Hispanic

interest groups, who applaud its aggressiveness on such issues as redistricting and immigration."¹⁵¹ Furthermore, Mark Brimhall-Vargas of the NALEO states, "The Hispanic Caucus has been doing a remarkable job at trying to focus people on the real issues, which are that immigrants aren't the linchpin to all our problems."¹⁵² On the other hand, some Latino community-based organizations have criticized the Latino Congressional leadership. For example, Alvaro Maldonado of the Pro-Immigrant Mobilization Coalition states, "We can't rely on the politicians, even Latino politicians. We need to educate and agitate from a more radical perspective of defending all immigrants, because many of the worst attacks aren't coming from Wilson and the Republicans, but from the Democrats."¹⁵³

Coalition Politics "In order to be effective, we have to maximize our voting numbers. So we stick with the issues where we can find common ground and work as a group."¹⁵⁴
 -Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA)

Coalition politics is one of the major Latino strategies to combat the anti-immigrant backlash. Members of Congress and Latino organizations both have engaged in collaboration within and beyond the Latino community. Because Latinos in Congress and community organizations operate in different arenas and sectors in the immigration policy debate, they remain separate for the most part, with the exception of national Latino organizations with a presence in Washington, D.C. Nonetheless, both groups, given their internal diversity, function as coalitions. Like the collaborative national Latino organizations which fought the eventual passage of IRCA in the 1970s and 1980s, the "divergent strategies and organizational imperatives hinder the development of a unified campaign."¹⁵⁵ As such, today's pro-immigrant rights coalitions contend with internal tensions which may shorten the longevity of collaboration, and promote several simultaneous and varied efforts at resistance to anti-immigrant policies, as opposed to one singular movement. For example, José de Paz of the California Immigrant Workers Association "sees the attempt to coordinate everything as pointless, if not impossible."¹⁵⁶ As such, in the 1990s, Latino coalitions have focused on both coming together quickly when common ground can be found, and on maintaining individual agendas when unity does not exist.

Conferences that convene Latinos from different sectors of the immigration debate exemplify the collaborative efforts of the pro-immigrant rights struggle. For example, in April 1994, the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies held a symposium entitled "Immigration: a Call to

Action." The event brought together community activists, Chicano academics, and border city officials. Chicana scholar Teresa Córdova stated, "Part of what we want to do here today is talk about the way in which those of us based in institutions of higher education can become players and contribute to the community efforts around immigrants' rights."¹⁵⁷ A similar conference entitled "The Immigration Crisis: A Latino Public Policy Response," sponsored by the Ernesto Galarza Think Tank, took place in Riverside, California in January 1994.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, immigration conferences and workshops targeting specific aspects of immigration policy have taken place including "Welfare Reform—Impact on Immigrant Communities" in Seattle, "Challenging the Anti-Immigrant Backlash: A Community Call for Education and Action" held in San Francisco, and others.¹⁵⁹ The focus of these dialogues has been to convene grassroots activists, immigration lawyers, academics, and public officials to inform each other and develop strategies to politicize the community and oppose restrictive immigration policy.

Coalition politics also provides an avenue to reach beyond the Latino community and draw non-Latino groups into the struggle, and thus widen the debate. Both community-based organizations and the CHC have stressed the importance broadening the base of support for the pro-immigrant agenda. José Serrano (D-NY) writes, "I want to see a committee of our members meet on a regular basis with members of the Congressional Black Caucus and other progressive members who are willing to work together on a mutually beneficial agenda."¹⁶⁰ Accordingly, *Hispanic* reports that "Serrano is proud of the relationship he has built with Rep. Kweisi Mfume (D-Maryland), chairman of the Black Caucus."¹⁶¹ In fact, when the Republican majority removed the structure which allowed for caucus funding, both Mfume and Serrano accused Republicans of trying to "disempower" minorities.¹⁶² Coalition building in the CHC, however, has not been without hesitancy. For instance, the *National Journal* reports that Bill Richardson (D-NM) has suggested to his Latino colleagues that they "seek unity among themselves before they forge alliances with other groups such as the Congressional Black Caucus."¹⁶³ More so, Congressional unity has been difficult to maintain over issues such as state reimbursement for immigration expenses, and well as issues over Cuban, Haitian, and other Latino immigrant groups.

Latino community-based coalitions have also made efforts to include other minorities who are

directly affected by immigration policy. For example, PRIDE coalition member Miguel Santana stated that "from our inception, the group's intent was to do outreach to the Asian community and other immigrant groups who are not Latino."¹⁶⁴ Likewise at the May and October 1994 California pro-immigrant marches, speakers spoke on behalf of Haitian refugees and Asian immigrants.¹⁶⁵ Latino speakers were joined by Fernando Fernando from the Filipino American community as well as Joe Hicks from Southern Christian Leadership Conference.¹⁶⁶ While there was tension as to who to include, L.A. city council member Mike Hernandez stated, "There was concern and disagreement based on what was the best way of defeating 187, but I don't think you can deny people the right to participate."¹⁶⁷

The broad coalition strategy is being promoted by several persons. Roberto Rodriguez and Patrisia Gonzales recently explored the topic of Black-Latino coalitions, and the need for greater "unity of purpose." In their article, Jesse Jackson warns, "We underestimated the bigotry. . . we did not build sufficient coalitions to fight back early enough. You had Blacks for Prop. 187. You had some Hispanics for Prop. 187 because they had joined the predominant culture. Their minds had been tampered with."¹⁶⁸ Similarly, in a recent organizers' column which fields queries from the public, a California signatory, "Trying to Reach Out," wrote to veteran organizer Alfredo De Davila: "We need some help to figure out how to explain the 187 issue in a way that appeals to people who aren't Latino/Chicano." De Davila's suggestion included drawing a historical connection between 187 and other repressive policies against women, Jews, and other people of color, and also noted that the first victim of the fear of Prop. 187 was a Chinese woman who neglected to seek health care for fear of being deported.¹⁶⁹

Another collaborative example is the bipartisan "Right-Left Coalition," which includes many Latino organizations and individuals, that formed in order to lobby Congress in opposition to the proposed national verification system. The coalition, comprised of fourteen national organizations, thirty-five local/regional organizations and immigrant service coalitions, and fifty-three individuals consists of Latinos in every category. Besides MALDEF, NCLR, the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and SVREP, other members are Latino academics and conservative critics such as Linda Chavez, and several local organizations such as AYUDA, El Centro Hispanoamericano, Proyecto

Adelante, Proyecto Libertad, and others from across the nation.¹⁷⁰ The bipartisan coalition, which denounced the verification system as "misguided and dangerous," serves as another example of the parallel efforts against immigration policy that are taking place. More critically, with new leadership developing out of these broad based efforts, there is hope that these coalitions will create enduring bridges. According to Mario Salgado, who heads the California Latino Civil Rights Network, "We want new leadership to come along, so we'll hopefully have a long-lasting network."¹⁷¹

Similar Issues & Separate Solutions

"We must begin this work now by making it clear to lawmakers on the political fringe that we will no longer tolerate their flooding the Legislature with impractical, expensive, unconstitutional bills designed to curry favor with a vocal minority whose agenda is to foster racial division and intolerance."¹⁷² -Frank Acosta, CHIRLA

As has been documented, within the matrix of Latino responses to immigration policy, there have been several areas Latino elites in Congress and community-based organizations intersect in their efforts and strategies. While they are in solidarity on some forms of legislative policy and issues of political empowerment, they are in disagreement on many administrative and non-legislative policies.

Clearly, opposition to Proposition 187 and support for reconfiguring the naturalization process has wide appeal among Latinos. The CHC and the pro-immigrant rights community denounced Proposition 187 and have strongly encouraged voter registration and naturalization efforts. The *San Francisco Examiner* reports that SVREP spokesman Alfredo Cruz "said those new voters could mean good things for the Democrats at a time when Republicans are hoisting the anti-immigrant standard."¹⁷³ Similarly, NALEO and Xavier Becerra (D-CA) in the House have pressed the INS to improve the naturalization process, especially since many legal residents will be eligible for citizenship next year as a result of IRCA. In a recent Congressional hearing, Becerra interrogated the INS and the Government Accounting Office, who reports on INS spending and efficiency, on the INS's notoriously clogged bureaucracy in processing citizenship. Becerra commented on the fees currently charged to applicants and what percentage of that money is devoted to citizenship processing, unashfully reminding INS officials of their responsibility as service providers.¹⁷⁴

Political opportunism is another issue recognized and opposed both by Latino Congressional leaders and community activists. Pete Wilson and California politicians were widely accused of

political posturing even prior to Proposition 187. As Frank Acosta of CHIRLA writes, "Perhaps the concerted legislative attack on the very people who must ultimately help solve California's economic problems is merely cynical political posturing. After all, several of the 21 anti-immigrant bills these lawmakers have introduced this year [1993] in Sacramento would almost certainly be judged unconstitutional if enacted. Yet considerable public resources have been expended on promoting them anyway."¹⁷⁵ Proposition 187 is another case in point, where Pete Wilson used the political currency of the immigration debate to support his reelection. The sponsorship of anti-immigrant legislation and litigation against the federal government on behalf of the state amount to state-funded campaign advertisements. Twenty two civic organizations including several Latino nonprofits (MALDEF, El Concilio, Proyecto Libertad, CARITAS, etc.) protested Texas Attorney General Dan Morales' suit against the federal government, calling it "politically motivated" and "for public consumption."¹⁷⁶ Also, in early 1994, La Alianza, a workers' rights coalition organized a rally in response to U.S. Representative Jay Kim's (R-CA) district report which alleged that immigrants cost taxpayers \$10 billion. La Alianza coordinator Fabian Nunez astutely states, "He's pushing a trendy political prejudice to appeal to voters. We've seen elected officials use racism like this before."¹⁷⁷ Likewise, in response to the political currency of the anti-immigrant stance of many politicians in Washington, D.C., Esteban Torres (D-CA) states, "They're in trouble politically, and they're playing the crowd so that their hides are protected."¹⁷⁸

An element of division between the pro-immigrant rights community and Latino lawmakers exists over border enforcement. Many in the Latino community and Congress have displayed ambivalence and contradiction over this issue. For example, both Latino members of Congress and NCLR have stressed the need to review the INS for a history and presence of abuses of authority, noting that the grievance mechanism is also inadequate.¹⁷⁹ Nonetheless, both Latino lawmakers and NCLR have supported increases in Border Patrol programs and numbers of officers. The CHC has unanimously supported such increases and NCLR has stated that "the Latino community has a very strong interest. . . in immigration control. That is controlling the border at the border."¹⁸⁰ NCLR president Raul Yzaguirre has also uncritically stated, "We are encouraged by recent evidence which shows that efforts to control the border are beginning to take effect, and we encourage the INS to

implement its 'Operation Gatekeeper' effort in San Diego and 'Operation Hold the Line' in El Paso in a way which provides an effective deterrent without violating human rights."¹⁸¹ These statements, despite their disclaimers, signal a dangerous division of the fates of documented and undocumented immigrants, and a shallow understanding of the Latino family and community, which is a mixed status community. As national Latino leaders clearly delineate between documented and undocumented communities, their qualified support of border enforcement is vulnerable to manipulations by restrictionists. Also, the concerns of millions of undocumented workers and border residents, in daily contact with the INS, are devalued and given less credence.

These controversial viewpoints exemplify the divergence of opinions in Congress and the community, but more importantly are indicative of the short-sighted interpretations and remedies within the immigration debate. Frank Acosta of CHIRLA sees anti-immigrant sentiment as contributing to widespread discrimination and the gap between the rich and the poor. Acosta writes, "The practical effect of these politicians' actions has been to encourage intolerance against anyone who looks or sounds 'foreign'. . . [and] will lead to a further widening of the chasm that separates California's 'haves' and 'have-nots.'"¹⁸² Likewise, in the effort to protect documented immigrants, politicians and community organizers are, perhaps unknowingly, codifying the system of legitimacy that stretches only to our national borders, preventing us as a nation from understanding the globalization of our economy and society. According to a Chicano/Latino Policy Project (CLPP) report, besides the scapegoating of immigrants of color, there is a lack of compassion beyond the national borders. The CLPP report states, "That is, when times are bad and there is less to go around, people resist adding those who are not full-fledged members of the political community to the list of claimants for jobs and governmental assistance."¹⁸³ This attitude is in opposition to cross-border organizers and border residents who view themselves as part of a process of globalization. As Rufino Domínguez of the indigenous organization Frente Indígena Oaxacaño Binacional states, "What we are experiencing in California is part of a global political crisis."¹⁸⁴ Even former Border Patrol chief Silvestre Reyes, who instituted "Operation Blockade" in El Paso, says "it is foolish not to view ourselves as part of the global economy."¹⁸⁵

As public policy, such views are myopic and dangerous to the lives and safety of the

undocumented community, and also sets the precedent for delineating between who is "entitled" to services and human respect and who is not. Unfortunately, not only does this attitude arise from Latinos in Congress and various persons in the Latino community, President Clinton echoes this rationale. The *CQ Weekly Report* states, "Clinton, however, predicted a public backlash against all immigrants if the government does not do more to block abuses of existing laws. 'We must say no to illegal immigration so we can say yes to legal immigration,' he said."¹⁸⁶ Frank Del Olmo of the *L.A. Times* also matter-of-factly expresses this trade-off between documented and undocumented immigrants, predicting that Republicans in an "eminently sensible stance," will remove the provisions against legal immigrants in order to pass their legislation against illegal immigration.¹⁸⁷

CONCLUSION

"My perception is that the Latino voice on the current immigration debates, as articulated by nonprofits, is towards an increase in pluralism and multiculturalism. I hear more of the 'we are also Americans, why are you doing this to us?' kind of thing. Especially at a time when funding is more scarce than ever, there is no room to play the radical card. With community groups in the neighborhood, I see more of the same. There is no radical voice so far. That is why I have not worked on Prop. 187 as much as I want, because it is controlled by a mainstream discourse that does not challenge, nor present alternatives."¹⁸⁸

René Poitevin, Latino immigrant activist and community organizer

This study has documented the concurrent and diverse Latino response to immigration policies thus far in the 1990s. The coalitions and community mobilization set into motion by the emergence of Proposition 187, as well as the long-standing Latino infrastructure of pro-immigrant rights groups, recently confronted extremely restrictive legislation as it progressed through Congress and was signed by President Clinton. Its implementation, the administrative policies outside the scope of legislation, and the negative sentiment that beset the Latino community necessitate the maintenance of the pro-immigrant struggle in simultaneous arenas. Several Latino members of Congress like Xavier Becerra (D-CA) and José Serrano (D-NY) voiced strong opposition to the 1996 immigration legislation. Similarly, we can expect continued legal contestation of Proposition 187, and other immigrants' civil rights cases. The Republican Congressional takeover in 1994, however, has made it especially difficult for the Latino community and Latinos in Congress to maintain this struggle. For example, the Republican majority voted to eradicate the funding structure which allowed the Congressional caucuses to exist. CHC member Robert Menendez (D-NJ) said, "It was meant to clip the ability of the Caucus to

move ahead and have influence. . . . It is no coincidence that the Republican Congress went after the caucuses at the same time it began to target immigration and welfare."¹⁸⁹ It must be acknowledged that the anti-immigrant backlash is thus partially fueled by national gestures toward increased conservatism. As *Hispanic Link* reporter Margarita Contín writes, "Surging white voter backlash against both immigrants and Hispanics is likely to present elected Latino leaders with immense problems in their home states as well as in the nation's capital. . . . Latino legislators will have their hands so full it's unlikely they'll be able to push for new reform in matters of special concern to Latino communities."¹⁹⁰ Serrano further warns, "[Republican] anger is backed up by their majority. That means, when their anger takes the form of legislation, they have the votes to get it through."¹⁹¹ Some Latino organizations have thus specifically targeted the Republican majority to counter restrictionism. For instance, the National Chicano Moratorium Committee (NCMC) recently held a march and protest in opposition to the 1996 Republican National Convention in San Diego.

Additionally, many Latino community activists are also concerned with their role in the fight against anti-immigration backlash. Now politicized, many persons in the Latino community are drawing connections between the pro-immigrant rights struggle and their efforts against other forms of discrimination. Community activists are concerned about maintaining their influence in the debate, especially as it is manifested in courts.¹⁹² As such, community activists are imprinting their agendas upon the immigration debate. Juan José Gutiérrez and One Stop Immigration have asserted their own immigrants' rights campaign entitled "Proposition One." "Their non-electoral petition calls for a new legalization of immigrants who have arrived in the dozen years since the cut-off period of U.S. residence in the earlier amnesty, and agitates for citizenship for those who are already legal residents."¹⁹³ As well, One Stop Immigration has advocated for increased coverage of immigrant issues by the Latino media. Gutiérrez was the national coordinator of "Coordinadora '96," the Latino march on Washington, D.C. in October 1996, which has a strong focus on immigration issues. According to Gutiérrez, who disputes the notion of Latino second class citizenship, "The purpose of the march is to affirm that we are part of the American family, not bastard children."¹⁹⁴ Prior to the demonstration, columnists Patrisia Gonzales and Roberto Rodriguez added, "It will be particularly momentous because it is being organized from the bottom up— by human rights activists rather than

politicians."¹⁹⁵

Lastly, I believe the Latino community must continue to acknowledge the presence of racism often at the core of anti-immigrant hysteria. Restrictionist and punitive legislation such as Proposition 187 signify a fear that Latinos and Asians are changing the racial and cultural composition of the U.S., and reinforce a culture of xenophobia. The appropriate response to that fear is yes, Latinos and Asians are transforming U.S. society. These "new immigrants" are part of worldwide system of economic and societal globalization. An immigration policy that is a reaction founded in fear and racism will prevent the possibility of a sound and equitable national adjustment to global change. I also believe that there is a direct line between such restrictive legislation and racist hate crimes, such as the "Students Against the Brown Peril" flyer recently distributed in Albuquerque. As Roberto Maestas, executive director of El Centro de la Raza in Seattle states, "America is a ticking time bomb. It must confront its racism, or pay a price."¹⁹⁶

The lack of parity on our national borders—between Mexico and Canada—is another indication of the racist trajectory of U.S. immigration policy. The policy of militaristic enforcement reinforces the harassment of Latinos, vigilantism along the border, and anti-Latino sentiment throughout the United States. According to border activist María Jiménez, "More serious is the threat posed by individuals driven by an ideology of racial superiority."¹⁹⁷ Latino Congress members such as Becerra have noted the sinister anti-immigrant tone inside the House of Representatives, stating that the "issue of immigration is extremely hot, and. . .has gotten to the point of being hysterical."¹⁹⁸

While apprehension toward the immigration "crisis" is often couched in economic reasoning, the findings from a recent Chicano/Latino Policy Project (CLPP) report suggest otherwise. The CLPP report states, "While improving national economic conditions may reduce anti-immigration sentiment, cultural and ideological factors, as well as beliefs concerning the impact of immigration are likely to drive opinion regarding immigration policy for the foreseeable future."¹⁹⁹ This suggests that non-economic factors are salient determinants in the stratification of U.S. society. Immigration and race thus enter the hierarchical equation that determines legitimacy and the right to social mobility as critical variables. The stark differences between European and Latin American immigrant experiences and accesses to social mobility are functioning examples of the race-based immigrant hierarchy we call

U.S. immigration policy. More so, though Latino community-based organizations and lawmakers have provided an excellent and spirited defense of immigrants in many areas, Latinos have yet to promote a sweeping pro-active immigration policy, nor set national precedents with incremental legislative strategy. In fact, many Latinos in Congress and in community organizations have used the notoriety of illegal immigration as a point of compromise to ensure the protection of legal immigrants' rights, providing "damage control" to restrictionist immigration policy, but unfortunately contributing to the de-legitimization of portions of the Latino community. Sadly, this is the essence of a "divide and conquer" strategy.

End Notes

SOURCE NOTE: This study utilizes the immigration terminology found in the source material—that is, "legal" and "illegal" and "documented" and "undocumented" immigration. Keep in mind that these terms are dubious, and imply a system of legitimacy that divides society and reinforces U.S. social hierarchies.

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