

*Anna Bartnik*

# AWAKENING THE SLEEPING GIANT: A SHORT HISTORY OF *HISPANICS* ORGANIZATIONS IN CALIFORNIA AND TEXAS

---

The *Hispanic*<sup>1</sup> population is currently the major minority group in the USA. Its growing number has been attentively tracked by U.S. Census data since 1980.<sup>2</sup> In 1980 there were 14.6 million people of Hispanic origin living in the United States. During the decade they increased by 53% and in 1990 the number of Latinos was 22.4 million. From 1990 to 2000 the growth rate was even higher – 58%.<sup>3</sup> Thus, by 2000 Hispanics represented 12.5% of the U.S. population.

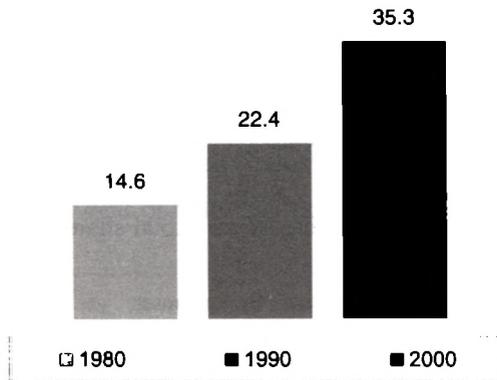


Fig. 1. Hispanic Population (millions)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census of Population, 1980 to 2000

---

<sup>1</sup> *Hispanic*, *Latino*, and *Spanish* are the terms commonly and interchangeably used in the USA to describe people from Central and South America as well as people from Mexico and those of Spanish origin.

<sup>2</sup> The 1980 census was the first to include a separate question on Hispanic origin asked of every individual in the USA. The previous 1970 census included the same question but asked only a 5-percent sample.

<sup>3</sup> F. Hobbs, N. Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Census 2000 Special Reports, November 2002, p. 78.

The regional distribution of the Hispanic population is quite stable. Three-quarters of Latinos live in the Southwest, and smaller proportions live in the Northeast<sup>4</sup> and the Midwest.

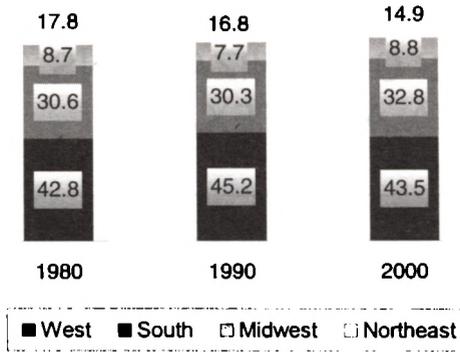


Fig. 2. Hispanic Population Distribution by Region: 1980–2000 (percent)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census of Population, 1980 to 2000

In the 1980's, the number of states with at least a 10% Hispanic population was limited to only five (Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas). However, two decades later it doubled. In 2000, five more states were added to the list: Florida, New York, Nevada, New Jersey and Illinois.<sup>5</sup>

Latino diversity is visible both in the racial and ethnic composition of the population. Mexicans constitute the major part of it, Puerto Ricans are the next identifiable subgroup and the third are Cubans. The category of "other Hispanic" grew significantly in the past decade (from 3.9% to 17.3%) and this is the reason why the Mexican population has seemed to decrease as a total share of all Hispanics.<sup>6</sup>

Table 1. Distribution of U.S. Hispanic Population, by Subgroup

Latino subgroup	1990	2000
Mexican	61.2%	58.5%
Puerto Rican	12.1%	9.6%
Cuban	4.8%	3.5%
Central American	6.0%	4.8%
South American	4.7%	3.8%

<sup>4</sup> Actually, the Northeast is the only region with a declining Hispanic population, from 18% in 1980 to 15% in 2000.

<sup>5</sup> F. Hobbs, N. Stoops, op.cit., p. 96.

<sup>6</sup> *Beyond the Census: Hispanic and an American Agenda*, National Council of La Raza, Washington 2001.

Latino subgroup	1990	2000
Dominican	2.4%	2.2%
Spaniard	4.4%	0.3%
All Other Hispanic	3.9%	17.3%

Source: *Beyond the Census: Hispanic and an American Agenda*, National Council of La Raza, Washington 2001

The history of Hispanic civil activity in the USA is, in a great part, shaped by the history of Mexican Americans. At the beginning of the twentieth century, from 380,000 to 560,000 U.S. and foreign-born Mexicans lived in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Between 1910 and 1930, nearly 700,000 Mexican immigrants entered the southwestern United States. Depression-era unemployment, however, reduced immigration to less than 33,000 during the 1930s. Demand for Mexican-American labor resumed during World War II. In 1942, the United States and Mexico instituted the *bracero* (Spanish for “arm-man” – manual laborer) program,<sup>8</sup> which allowed Mexican contract laborers to work in the United States in seasonal agriculture and other sectors of the economy.

The first forms of Hispanic American immigrants' social organizing in the U.S. date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Organizations that appeared in that period were so-called “*mutualistas*,”<sup>9</sup> associations of mutual help. Their members' task was to help Latinos to get services that they usually could not afford. Thanks to this help, the organizations' members had access to cheap funeral services, loans, insurance and even entertainment and cultural events.<sup>10</sup> *Mutualistas* made up a kind of buffer that let the newcomers adapt to their new situation without experiencing, so typical in such a situation, the cultural shock of assimilation. The beginnings of immigrants' adaptation to new conditions were difficult for both Americans and Latinos, and were marked with a great deal of mutual reluctance. Recognizing this fact, Mexicans,

---

<sup>7</sup> *America in Ferment: the Tumultuous 1960's. Viva La Raza!*, University of Houston, [www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/)

<sup>8</sup> On August 4, 1942, the United States government signed the Mexican Farm Labor Program Agreement with Mexico, the first among several agreements aimed at legalizing and controlling Mexican migrant farmworkers along the southern border of the United States. The agreement guaranteed a minimum wage and humane treatment of Mexican farmworkers. In 1951 the Mexican migration program was revised under the “temporary” Public Law 78. The United States government included in the amended version several clauses pertaining to expenses of transportation from Mexico to reception centers in the United States, guaranteed burial expenses, assistance in negotiation of labor contracts, and a guarantee that employers would return workers to reception centers at the expiration of the contract. Public Law 78 was extended in 1954, 1956, 1958, 1961, and 1964. Texas State Historical Association and The General Libraries at the University of Texas at Austin, *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/>

<sup>9</sup> H. Ramos, *Building a Tradition of Latino Philanthropy*, Research Report, January 2000, The Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> D. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors. Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*, p. 34.

who naturally were the first group that faced the problem of assimilation, turned to Latin American nations, which were more culturally related to them, rather than American society. They started to consider themselves not only as Mexicans but also as members of a much larger pan-Hispanic community, called at that time *La Raza*.<sup>11</sup> Nowadays, the term *La Raza* has a different meaning, but at the beginning of Mexican-American relations it referred to Mexicans living on both sides of the border. At present *La Raza* is the name of one of the biggest Latino organizations existing in the USA.

Contemporary Hispanic American organizations in the USA mostly emerged during the years before World War II, but their largest development was particularly visible after the war. In the 1920's, in Texas, began the movement of creating different organizations whose aims were clear: protecting, developing and fighting for Mexican Americans' interests. The largest of them, *El Orden Hijos de América*, *El Orden Caballeros de América*<sup>12</sup> and *League of Latin American Citizens* were created by representatives of the lower middle class of the Latin community in Texas. The most important feature distinguishing these organizations was the exclusion from membership of all Latinos who did not have American citizenship.

The members were convinced that Mexican Americans were too involved in their ethnic culture and were thus neglecting the process of assimilation with American society. In their opinion, the most desirable direction of future development should be building loyalty to the new country, expressed by developing their communication skills in English, celebrating American national holidays, and retaining American national symbols.

A similarity of represented positions made these organizations join. After several meetings, on February 17, 1929, in Corpus Christi, Texas, the organizations officially announced a new one called *The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)*.<sup>13</sup> During the meeting, the new charter of the organization, "The LULAC Code," was accepted. Its leading rule was to popularize "the best and the purest" form of Americanism, fight with discrimination against Americans of Mexican origin and teach children the rights and duties of the citizens of the USA. LULAC also encouraged its members to participate in politics, particularly local.

During the years previous to World War II, on the wave of growing tensions in the international arena, immigration organizations skillfully used rhetorics of democ-

---

<sup>11</sup> The term was coined by Mexican scholar José Vasconcelos to reflect the fact that the people of Latin America are a mixture of many of the world's races, cultures, and religions. Some people have mis-translated "*La Raza*" to mean "The Race," implying that it is a term meant to exclude others. In fact, the full term coined by Vasconcelos, "*La Raza Cós mica*," meaning the "cosmic people," was developed to reflect not purity but the mixture inherent in the Hispanic people. This is clearly an inclusive concept, meaning that Hispanics share with all other peoples of the world a common heritage and destiny, and that Latinos provide an example of a world in which traditional concepts of race can be transcended. J. Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cosmica*, The National Council of La Raza Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1997, [www.nclr.org/about/nclrfaq.html](http://www.nclr.org/about/nclrfaq.html)

<sup>12</sup> Texas State Historical Association and The General Libraries at the University of Texas at Austin, *The Handbook of Texas Online*, [www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/HH/pqh1.html](http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/HH/pqh1.html)

<sup>13</sup> *History of LULAC*, [www.lulac.org/Historical%20Files/Resources/History.html](http://www.lulac.org/Historical%20Files/Resources/History.html)

racy and equality. Activists related to such groups as the First National Congress of Spanish Speaking Peoples thought that Latin Americans, through their hard work and devotion became true Americans and thus should also experience the benefits of American democracy. Subsequently, organizations started to claim civil rights not only for Americans of Latin American origin but also for all representatives of these ethnic groups settled in the USA.

The Great Depression and the outbreak of World War II were the main reasons behind the sharpening and stratification of the internal political and cultural processes of the Latino community. The war also made an impact on the Hispanic Americans' position in American society. The wartime lack of workers made for Latinos a unique chance of getting better paid work. It opened for many of them the new opportunity of social promotion. At the same time the fact that most Mexicans living in the southern states were already citizens born in the USA, was also significant. It was clear that this social group would be more prone to identify with the American rather than the Mexican mentality.

The post-war reality did not change a lot in LULAC's ideology. It was still dominated by the idea of integration with American society. The rhetoric of organization intensified for a moment during the 1950's. They condemned the McCarran-Walter Act<sup>14</sup> and Operation Wetback,<sup>15</sup> saying that there were thousands of Mexicans who were married to American citizens, who were even parents of American Military Forces soldiers and they should have the opportunity of legalizing their status without the necessity of returning to Mexico. The rhetoric quickly became gentler. LULAC returned to its anti-immigration campaign. The permanent inflow of immigrants, according to the organization, was destroying the process of acculturation, because the newcomers, in spite of the largest efforts, were staying outside of the political American society.

---

<sup>14</sup> A law, also known as the Immigration and Nationality Act, tightening controls over aliens and immigrants. The act replaced the National Origins Act of 1924 and modified the 1929 quota formula by allowing a limited number of Asians to enter the United States. The law removed racial barriers and made citizenship available to people of all origins for the first time, but required screening of aliens to eliminate security risks.

<sup>15</sup> The word "wetback" is a relatively new disparaging term for an illegal Mexican immigrant or worker who crosses the Rio Grande into the United States, sometimes swimming to get across. After Operation Wetback, the term became very popular in American culture as a way of defining Mexicans. Eventually, the term began to be used to refer to all Hispanics in general. To a Hispanic, the word "wetback" is just as derogatory as the word "nigger" to an African American.

"Operation Wetback" was a repatriation project of the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service to remove illegal Mexican immigrants ("wetbacks") from the Southwest. Between 1944 and 1954, "the decade of the wetback," the number of illegal aliens coming from Mexico increased by 6,000 percent. It is estimated that in 1954, before Operation Wetback got under way, more than a million workers had crossed the Rio Grande illegally.

On July 15, 1954, the first day of the operation, 4,800 aliens were apprehended. Thereafter the daily totals dwindled to an average of about 1,100 a day. Texas State Historical Association and The General Libraries at the University of Texas at Austin, *The Handbook of Texas Online*, [www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/OO/pqo1.html](http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/OO/pqo1.html)

There was a paradox in the organization's ideology. Because of the ideology, of representing the interests of only those Latinos who were American citizens, children born in the USA were entitled to that protection but their parents not. This created a lot of controversies in the Latin American immigrant community, and day after day problems developed not only of a moral or cultural nature but first of all political.

Similar trends shaped California at this time. At the end of the 1920's, Confederación de Uniones Obreras Mexicanas (CUOM) came into being.<sup>16</sup> One of the first of the organization's declarations was the proposal, to both American and Mexican governments, to work together to hold back the constant inflow of immigrants from Mexico. CUOM believed, as long as the newcomers continued to arrive, there would be no hope to improve the situation of those currently living in the USA. They started a campaign of sending letters to families and relatives living in the homeland, asking them not to come to the United States, as the further inflow of newcomers would be harmful for workers on both sides of the border. Moreover, COUM tried to encourage Latinos already settled in the USA, to voluntarily repatriate.

Organizations, acting both in California and Texas, agreed on the issue of limitation of immigration. Divergences appeared according to the position that Latin Americans should fill in American society. Unlike LULAC, COUM's ideology was far from the proposal of Americanization. The organization's leaders wanted to realize the idea of an almost autonomic community. The challenging life conditions of Latin Americans were the main argument for LULAC supporters to popularize the idea of assimilation, whereas COUM used the same reason to advocate for creating independent ethnic groups. The Californian organization, in its constitution, clearly specified its aims: building its own schools, libraries, collecting funds for orphanages, hospitals, and also the necessity of having competent lawyers.

In the 1950's in California, similarly to Texas, new immigration organizations appeared. One of the most active was the Community Service Organization (CSO). From the beginning of its existence the organization focused on services such as legal advice, lobbying on the state and local level, education, activities tending to neighborhood improvement etc. The CSO was working hard in an effort to organize a campaign of electors' registration in municipal elections in East Los Angeles in 1949. Over 15,000 voices were gained thanks to this campaign allowing Edward Roybal to win.<sup>17</sup> He was the first member of the municipal board of Latin American origin since 1888.<sup>18</sup> The CSO, similarly to LULAC, supported the idea of integrationism. They underlined the importance of citizenship and naturalization. The CSO organized special courses for those trying to get citizenship. But what distinguished this organization from others was the level of engagement in building bridges between the deeply separated communities of Mexican immigrants and Mexican

---

<sup>16</sup> N. Kanellos, *Hispanic America: the Last 100 Years. Hispanic Achievements in the Twentieth Century*, [www.hispaniconline.com/hh/timeline/index.html](http://www.hispaniconline.com/hh/timeline/index.html)

<sup>17</sup> K. Burt, *Edward Roybal's Election to the LA City Council Marked the Birth of Latino Politics in California*, "Public Affairs Report," vol. 43, no. 1, Spring 2002; Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, [www.igs.berkeley.edu/publications/par/spring2002/roybal.htm](http://www.igs.berkeley.edu/publications/par/spring2002/roybal.htm)

<sup>18</sup> D. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors...*, p. 169.

Americans. Unlike the American G.I.Forum<sup>19</sup> or LULAC, the CSO never required American citizenship from its members. On the contrary, it encouraged non-Mexicans to join. The assumption was simple – if immigrants had made the decision of settling down in the USA, they should have become citizens for their own good as well as the whole Spanish-speaking community living in the United States.

The organization's efforts to improve the situation of illegal residents were also visible on the legislative field. The pressure made by the CSO, alongside other organizations defending immigrants' rights in California's state legislature, resulted in granting old-age pensions to aliens living over 25 years in the USA, irrespective of their status.

As early as the 1950's, the period of tightening co-operation among immigrants' organizations began. It was obvious that federal policy contributed to this process. The McCarran-Walter Act, as well as growing mass deportations of Mexican Americans under Operation Wetback, not only intensified the feeling of terror and confusion but also provoked stronger reactions from the Latin American community. The leader of this transformation was the Los Angeles Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born (LACPFB), an organization that came into being as a reaction to the McCarran-Walter Act. The LACPFB co-operated with other organizations in the sphere of protection of immigrants and adapting them to life in the USA. One of the organization's branches was mainly specialized in protection of the rights of Mexican immigrants menaced by McCarran-Walter Act sanctions.

The fight against the government's immigration policy became the main principle of immigration organizations' activities in the latter half of the 1950's. Reasoning in the issue of the abolition of unfavorable solutions for aliens led to the reproach that these acts were unconstitutional and contradictory to American ideas of fair treatment and equality. Of course, it did not lack emotional rhetoric and the recalling of comparisons from the time of World War II. INS deportation actions were compared to war displacements and even the Holocaust.

Consciousness of political limitations as well as growing discrimination sprouted up among Hispanic Americans. Although many activists still believed that the presence of illegal immigrants was the largest source of the appearance and strengthening of anti-Latino stereotypes, the convictions of the government's, not the newcomers, responsibility for the situation constantly grew.

Immigration organizations emphasized the contribution of non-citizens to the development of American society. The most characteristic proof of changes in the consciousness of Latin American community was the pronouncement of the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born in front of the United Nations in 1959. In an announced petition, Mexican Americans were described as an "oppressed national minority."

The birth of the new course of ethnic thinking bore fruit with the rise of new organizations such as: the Mexican American Political Association in California or the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations in Texas. These organiza-

---

<sup>19</sup> In 1948, Dr. Hector P. Garcia was quarreling with the Naval Air Station in Corpus Christi, Texas which refused to accept sick World War II veterans who were Latino. After this effort, Garcia founded the American G.I. Forum. While many veteran advocacy groups were already in operation, very few allowed Latinos membership, and none actively fought for Latino veterans' rights.

tions entered the national and local scene with new programs of political activity underlining their ethnic origin.

It is impossible to overlook El Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Española (The Congress of Spanish-Speaking Peoples) among newly formed organizations, the activity of which became more visible particularly after World War II. Using local Latin American organizations, mainly in New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, Arizona and California, its activists appealed to unity and action. As a result of this policy, about 1,000 delegates representing over 128 Latin American organizations met in Los Angeles on the First National Congress of Spanish-Speaking Peoples, in April 1939. The main issues discussed during the Congress were education, health, housing conditions, discrimination as well as problems connected with naturalization and citizenship. The activists of the Congress did not support LULAC's idea of assimilation. In its members' opinion, the situation of Latinos already settled in the USA did not differ significantly from the situation of those currently arriving. All of them had to face the same problems of discrimination, employment and accommodation.

When the inflow of illegal immigrants started to grow at the beginning of the 1950's organizations opposed to it were afraid it might worsen the already limited economic, social and political power of Latino Americans. Consequently, they doubled their efforts aiming to encourage the U.S. Congress to enact serious limitations of immigration on the south border of the USA.

At the same time many new organizations appeared. They were against the Bracero Program as well as the new wave of immigrants. The most active was the American G.I. Forum of Texas. Hector P. Garcia established it in the small town of Three Rivers, as a sign of protest against the discrimination of the population of Mexican origin.<sup>20</sup> The organization quickly widened its activity not only across the territory of Texas but also in other southeastern states. From the beginning of its existence, the organization was considered as the most effective in defending the rights of Americans of Mexican origin.

Soon after the establishment of the group, a campaign aiming to convince the U.S. Congress of the necessity of finishing the Bracero Program<sup>21</sup> began. The largest pub-

---

<sup>20</sup> In 1948, an incident known as "The Felix Longoria Affair" boosted the American G.I. Forum into the national spotlight. Three years after the conclusion of the war, the remains of Private Longoria, a native of Three Rivers, Texas, killed in duty during a volunteer mission in the Pacific, were being returned home for final burial. The owner of the town's sole funeral parlor would not allow a Mexican American to have chapel services there because "the Anglo people would not stand for it." Longoria's widow approached García for assistance.

The deceased Private Longoria quickly became a symbol of racism in Texas. Latinos were outraged that an American soldier, after giving the supreme sacrifice of his life to his country, was not even allowed to be buried in his hometown. [www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/history/timeline/19.html](http://www.pbs.org/kpbs/theborder/history/timeline/19.html)

<sup>21</sup> During the first five years of the program, Texas farmers chose not to participate in the restrictive accord. In 1943 the Texas growers, through the American Farm Bureau Federation, lobbied in Washington to weaken the terms of the agreement, since they suspected that the accord would eventually apply to seasonal workers in other areas, domestic service, and other related fields of temporary employment. Texas farmers, in the meantime, opted to bypass the Bracero Program and hire farmworkers directly from Mexico. Texas State Historical Association and The General Libraries at the University of Texas at Austin, *The Handbook of Texas Online*, [www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/BB/omb1.html](http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/BB/omb1.html)

licity campaign, the American G.I. Forum of Texas, supported projects of reforms, brought to the Congress, related to such issues as confiscation of vehicles used to transport aliens and fines for employing illegal immigrants. The organization widened its basic principles in 1957 to the community of Mexicans living in the south border zone, and also appealed for limitations in the inflow of oriental workers.

Ernesto Galarza and his National Agricultural Workers' Union (NAWU) in California were as active as the American G.I. Forum in Texas. Galarza claimed that the lack of workers in agriculture was the state's internal problem and should be dissolved using internal possibilities. Bringing foreign agricultural workers was an ineffective idea, and therefore why the Bracero Program, according to Galarza, should be stopped. Instead of the program, the U.S. Congress should guarantee similar conditions for native agricultural workers: fixed minimum wages, cheap transportation, accommodation and health care. That was, in his opinion, the only solution to the problem.

The "water into a mill" of anti-immigration rhetoric was, effectively incited by the press, the threat of communist infiltration. The lack of strict rules controlling the inflow of immigrants was for some organizations, like LULAC, American G.I. Forum and NAWU, a pretext for exerting increased pressure on Congress. In their opinion, tightening the borders and more careful checking of inflowing foreigners would make an effective resource preventing the penetration of agents through the borders, pretending to be both contract workers and *wetbacks*.

Growing controversies concerning immigration during the 1960's became, in the next decade, one of the most important questions in the area of civil rights.

The First National Chicano/Latino Conference on Immigration and Public Policy, a convention organized in October of 1977, was the answer to projected changes in the sphere of immigration announced by President Jimmy Carter. Delegates gathered in San Antonio, Texas, and criticized Carter's plan as discriminating against both citizens and aliens of Latin American origin.

During the 1960's and 70's, the opposition of the Hispanic American community to proposed reforms grew on the ground of changing ethnic policy. It was also connected with considerable changes in the political tactics of immigration organizations. Many activists assured that self-organization on the basis of ethnic heritage was not enough. They postulated the creation of new organizations, closer in their character to interest groups than existing traditional organizations, and based on more strongly stressed ethnic identification. The best examples of the new strategy were the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) that emerged in California in 1959<sup>22</sup> and the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations<sup>23</sup> that came into being a year later in Texas. These groups manifested larger political activity. Their hopes for strengthening the position of Latin Americans were connected with choosing candidates representing the Hispanic community's interests, while at the same time opposing solutions unfavorable for them as gerrymandering.

---

<sup>22</sup> *Historical Chronology of MAPA*, [www.mapa.org/historical\\_highlights.htm](http://www.mapa.org/historical_highlights.htm)

<sup>23</sup> *Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations*, Texas State Historical Association and The General Libraries at the University of Texas at Austin, *The Handbook of Texas Online*, [www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/PP/vep1.html](http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/PP/vep1.html)

Organizations' activities during the 1960's were not limited only to politics. According to the idea of improvement of the Mexican status, groups strove for better education of the Hispanic community, underlining at the same time the importance of naturalization and citizenship. They encouraged participation in different courses preparing for the legalization of their stay in the USA, acting also as a resource leading to an extension of community consciousness and enlargement of the number of electors of Latin American origin. In California, first CSO and later MAPA encouraged participation in English language courses but also in all aspects of political activity. In Texas, LULAC introduced the innovative program "The Little School of the 400." The program was directed to children of pre-school age and its aim was to provide these children-future pupils with knowledge of at least 400 English words. In the program creator's opinion it would reduce stress and lower the barrier of difficulties awaiting Latino pupils in American public schools. This program was the first step towards the later bilingual education policy.

Hitherto, the opposition of Hispanic Americans to the Bracero Program had not succeeded. The 1960's brought about a change. The coalition of labor unions, religious organizations, ethnic groups with support from the liberal wing of the Democratic Party expressed more and more firmly its doubts about the need of continuing the program. During Kennedy's presidency, the lobby supporting the continuation of the Bracero Program managed to prolong it twice.

The decade of the 1960's was also marked by the birth of a new character of *Chicano* identity.<sup>24</sup> For a long time the term *Chicano* was a slang expression describing a person of Mexican origin from the lower class, but later it was received, mostly by young Mexican Americans, as a symbol of challenge, defense of their rights and at the same time as an attempt at self-determination. The term *Chicano* quickly became the symbol of solidarity and pride in Mexican origin. By the end of the 1960's it had become so popularized that its meaning had changed. At the beginning of the 1970's the term *Chicano* referred to the whole population of Americans of Mexican origin. This new dimension of ethnic solidarity was visible in the so-called concept of *Aztlán*.<sup>25</sup> The idea was introduced for the first time at the First National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver in 1969. The aim for representatives of students, political organizations and Latin American activists was to work out rules and strategies of action for the *Chicano* movement. The conception of *Aztlán*<sup>26</sup> was introduced in the manifesto "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán." It was based on a feeling of special pride derived from the Aztec heritage. The activists' intention was for it to help to create a separate *Chicano* culture. For the authors of the *Aztlán* idea, the land adopted by the USA in 1848 became the mythical land of their ancestors. The conception of *Aztlán* became the symbol of negation or even rejection of hitherto assimilative opinions. Reflection of the idea in reality should be actions aiming at broader activity in local communities, mainly in the sphere of education, elective public offices as well as business and financial institutions.

After some time, the *Chicano* movement became more institutionalized. Activists from Denver and Texas, Corky Gonzales and José Angel Gutiérrez, created in the

<sup>24</sup> *America in Ferment...*

<sup>25</sup> D. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors...*, p. 185.

<sup>26</sup> *Aztlán*, was the Aztecs' mythological settlement where they came from.

southwest a political party based on ethnic background – El Partido de La Raza Unida (La Raza Unida Party – LRUP). It created a debate between supporters of the traditional assimilative approach and *Chicano* activists. The main opponents in the discussion were José Angel Gutiérrez and a congressman from San Antonio named Henry B. González. Accusations made against activists of the new movement first of all referred to, in the opinion of congressman González, a too strong emphasis on ethnicity. According to him, their campaign, concerning a strongly expressed ethnic solidarity was based on “racist assumptions placing race above all.”<sup>27</sup> In his answer Gutiérrez accused traditionalists of denying the value of their own cultural heritage. *Chicano* activists received additional support in 1971, when the court (Cisneros v. Corpus Christi Independent School District<sup>28</sup>) considered Mexican Americans to be an identifiable minority group entitled to federal support. It, undoubtedly, strengthened the *Chicanos'* conviction about the need for an organized ethnic lobby, which would aim to realize reforms.

In the political rhetoric of the 1960's there was no real recognition of the immigration problem as a significant political issue. After a temporary weakening of controversies on immigration, a few reasons introduced it once again into the political arena. One of them was the impossibility of maintaining the parallel development of the Mexican economy and population growth. The developmental boom was also important in the decade of the 1960's in the USA.

INS registered regular growth of incidents of illegal border crossings, and although these figures were far from those noted during the years of the Bracero Program, the number exceeded 100,000 in 1967, and later grew to 500,000 in 1970 and almost a million seven years later.<sup>29</sup>

Americans noticed the threat that followed the renewed inflow of newcomers not before they started to feel the results of the coming recession of 1970 and 1971. The media, including the “New York Times,” “Washington Post” and “Los Angeles Times,” often published articles describing the inflow of illegal immigrants as a “human flood” or “silent invasion.”<sup>30</sup> One of the INS's members, Leonard Chapman, warned of a “national disaster,” accused that community of “milking” American taxpayers of over 13 million dollars by taking jobs and, of course, enlarging unemployment as well as illegal using of social services. In response to the constantly growing controversies, the INS decided to face the problem, which in reality led to various raids mostly organized in southwestern states. The growing importance of the issue forced legislators to think. The U.S. Congress and some state legislatures noticed the necessity of regulating the immigration problem. On the level of state legislation, the so-called “Arnett's Amendment” is well known. In 1970, Dixon Arnett, a representative of Redwood City in Californian legislature, announced a project of regulations providing sanctions for employers hiring illegal workers.

In the U.S. Congress, after a year of hearings, a few proposals supported by the Judiciary Committee were introduced. The proposals were quickly attached to the

<sup>27</sup> R. Salazar, *Chicano vs. Traditionalists*, “Los Angeles Times,” 06.03.1970.

<sup>28</sup> D. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors...*, p. 187.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 188.

<sup>30</sup> F.L. Chapman, *Illegal Aliens: Time to Call a Halt!*, “Reader's Digest,” October 1976; *Illegal Aliens – A Growing Population*, “New York Times,” 22.10.1974.

name of the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Peter Rodino. Among the introduced proposals there were those referring to Arnett's ideas, a project of using improved Social Security Cards and a new system of protection against document faking. As a sign of favor towards the Latino community, the proposition of a possible expansion of amnesty conditions for aliens able to supply documentary evidence of their stay on the territory of the USA from an arbitrarily settled date was introduced.

Initially, only a few Chicano groups referred in their policy to an immigration problem. The most active among them was El Centro de Acción Social Autónoma, Hermandad General de Trabajadores (the Center for Autonomous Social Action, General Brotherhood of Workers – CASA). Bert Corona – a Mexican American veteran – and Soledad “Chole” Alatorre established the group in 1968 in Los Angeles. The organization aimed at helping Mexicans predominantly living illegally in the United States. CASA patterned itself after the first mutualistas organizations, and at the beginning of the 1970's widened its area of activity to Texas, Washington, Colorado and Illinois. The organization's local branches provided such services as advice on immigration problems and notary help. In 1973, CASA contributed to the National Coalition for Fair Immigration Laws and Practices coming into existence. The most important thing distinguishing this organization was the perceived meaning of dependency joining immigration with Chicano ethnicity and the position of Mexican Americans in American society. The groups claimed that immigrant workers made up an integral component of the American working class and thus should have the same rights as American workers. Such opinions were expressed in their leading slogans e.g. *Somos Uno Porque America Es Una*.<sup>31</sup> The organization's activists aimed at helping immigrant workers to stop being victims of inhuman and unlawful actions.<sup>32</sup> They also claimed rights belonging to every human creature. CASA stated that naturalization and Americanization were not good ideas in a society that refused civil rights to its racial and ethnic minorities.

Bert Corona, proceeding in accordance with the leading slogan *Somos Uno Porque America Es Una*, in one of his speeches assured that unity did not concern only *Chicanos* born in the USA, but CASA represented both legal and illegal newcomers from Mexico, Central America and South America.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, Corona assured that growing unemployment was not immigrants' fault and that they brought into society more advantages than they received. Similarly to the Congress of Spanish-Speaking Peoples 30 years earlier, CASA demanded access to public offices and the possibility of obtaining American citizenship after a year's stay in the USA, as well as the right to work under the same conditions as citizens were entitled to.

The whole Latin American community took part in the immigration debate that occurred in the 1970's. LRUP, similarly to CASA, first of all appealed for the right apply for citizenship after a three-year stay in the USA without the requirement of speaking English. In Denver, a coalition of groups called Crusade for Justice declared that Peter Rodino's proposal was nothing more than the continuation of racist

---

<sup>31</sup> (Spanish) *We are one because America is one.*

<sup>32</sup> D. Gutiérrez, *CASA in the Chicano Movement: Ideology and Organizational Politics in the Chicano Community, 1968–1978*, p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> D. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors...*, p. 192.

activities aimed at Hispanic Americans.<sup>34</sup> The debate forced traditional Latin American organizations to face new challenges. LULAC and the American G.I. Forum initially supported changes proposed in Congress (also Rodino's proposal), but after some time they distanced themselves, underlining that the planned changes could turn out to work against American citizens of Mexican origin. The change in their attitude was explained by the fact that they were torn between two aspirations, the first being the desire to help newcomers coming to the USA to improve their poor living conditions, and the second being the creation of the possibility of social promotion and better adaptation to the American lifestyle for those who were already citizens.

Similar changes occurred in MAPA and came out during the debate over Arnett's project. The organization proposed sanctions for employers hiring illegal workers and agreed with Arnett's proposals, but MAPA's activists did not support it. They explained the change in their opinion by the threat that Arnett's proposal would open the door to discrimination against every "Latino-like" person.

The United Farm Workers Union established by César Chávez and Dolores Huerta in 1962 also had to adapt to the new situation. Chávez believed that to reach its goal, the organization's activities should include the interests of citizen workers as well as resident aliens. Consequently, the organization opted for a strict control of the Mexican-American border. UFW's activists claimed, similarly to Galarza, that the presence of illegal workers made it more difficult for legal workers to unionize. Moreover, they accused employers of using illegal workers to break strikes. Hence, the first decade of the organization's activity was focused on agitating for restoration of the Bracero Program and cracking down on illegal immigration. The UFW's attitude sharpened the conflict in the *Chicano* community. In July of 1974, the National Coalition for Fair Immigration Laws and Practices addressed a letter to UFW in which they underlined that all workers had the same right to look for a job that let them and their families live. Moreover, the authors argued that demanding deportation of workers without visas would also turn out to work against those working honestly and who were not strike-breakers despite not having work permission.

The activity of the *Chicano* community became especially visible in autumn 1974, when Attorney General William B. Saxbe announced the Department of Justice's intention of realizing an action of deportations of about a million illegal aliens. Moreover, the attorney general assured the UFW of support for the action. This intensified during the last eighteen months, and discharges organized by the INS made the Latin American community more sensitive to such accidents. This was why Attorney Saxbe's announcement caused their immediate reaction. CASA, MAPA, American G.I. Forum, LULAC as well as many other organizations condemned governmental plans, pressing at the same time for the attorney general's resignation.<sup>35</sup> Chávez faced a difficult situation. In a letter addressed to the editor of the "San Francisco Examiner" published on November 22, 1974, he introduced UFW's position denying its support for Saxbe and accusing the federal government of manipulations aiming not to restart the Bracero

<sup>34</sup> *Rodino Immigration Proposal Protested*, "Denver Post," 04.10.1974.

<sup>35</sup> *Saxbe Calls Illegal Aliens a U.S. Crisis*, "Los Angeles Times," 31.10.1974; *Chicano Criticize Saxbe on Alien Deportation Proposal*, "Los Angeles Times," 08.11.1974; *Chicano Activists Ask Ford to Seek Saxbe's Resignation*, "Los Angeles Times," 18.11.1974.

Program. He underlined once again, as an act of rehabilitation, that aliens living in the USA illegally were doubly used. First as workers, and second because they were not able to have any rights because of their status.

On the other hand, if there had not been strike-breakers coming from the Hispanic community, organized protests would have achieved their aims and let Latinos gain a position that would enable them to improve their working and living conditions. In the name of UFW, Chávez assured immigrants of the organization's support for efforts of obtaining amnesty for illegal workers, and help in achieving legal documents.

After 1975, the Latin American community became more consolidated. In particular, the presidential election in 1976 aroused much hope. Jimmy Carter became the head of state. Because of the considerable support of Hispanic electors for Carter, a new direction in immigration policy was expected. A packet of immigration reforms announced in the summer of 1977 caused shock among Latin American organizations, because of its resemblance to earlier proposals made by Rodino. LULAC, the American G.I. Forum, the National Council of La Raza, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF)<sup>36</sup> and many other groups immediately criticized Carter's plan. The most expressive form of protest became the First National Chicano/Latino Conference on Immigration and Public Policy organized in October of 1977 in San Antonio. Over 2,000 participants representing different organizations took part in the meeting as well as many national officials of Latin American origin. During the three-day, debate they clearly underlined that changes proposed by the federal government would meet with opposition from the Latin American community. This striking unity of organizations, so far often characterized by divergent opinions, was caused by the feeling of threat felt by the whole community. The situation was best described in the words of Peter Camejo, a representative of Socialist Workers Party written in the article *Human Rights for Immigrants* ("The Militant," December 9, 1977).

I speak. But also LULAC, an organization I do not agree with. We may not agree. But we can also sit down and talk. Because when they come to deport us, we all will be in the same boat.

During the conference the representatives worked out a few resolutions claiming unconditional amnesty for workers without legal documents already settled in the USA, as well as expansion to full constitutional rights for resident aliens. The conference was an important event in Latin American immigration history, though it did not become the turning point. It showed how important the problem was of relationships between Americans of Latin origin settled legally in the USA and illegal immigrants. At the same time it showed how far some organizations' attitudes had changed. A few years later it was impossible for organizations for and against immigration to work together defending immigrants. This unprecedented demonstration of unity did not manage to eclipse paradoxes and disagreement still dividing Mexican Americans and *Chicano* communities in the areas of ethnic identification, ideology and the further direction of organizations' policies.

---

<sup>36</sup> *President Seeks Legalized Status*, "New York Times," 05.08.1977; *Latins Ready Lobby Effort*, "Los Angeles Times," 16.10.1977.

Immigrants were an easy target for people who could not accept cultural and economic changes in their transforming society. Blaming newcomers for all unfavorable occurrences became a frequent argument of politicians. Opponents of the uncontrolled inflow of immigrants represented the whole political spectrum of the country. A progressively larger number of both conservatives and liberals underlined the perceived fatal results that the new inflow of newcomers would bring, especially in southern states. Many cities' governments developed new solutions to control the arrival of immigrants but they also started to deal with the problem on their own local level. The cities of El Paso and San Diego suggested conducting experiments based on the idea of border blockades. The proposals contained a wide range of ideas starting from the "quite gentle" project of making lists of foreign pupils in schools to the considerably more severe measures of forbidding access to public education and health care for illegal immigrants. Some projects like building a wire fence along the whole south border or digging deep ditches watched by armed guards did not seem to be serious. But the most dramatic sign of fear that some part of American society maintained concerning the growing number of newcomers was a proposed constitutional amendment stating that citizenship due to birth in the USA could not be obtained by children whose parents' stay in the States was illegal. The proposal was supported by such people as the Republican governor of California, Pete Wilson, a Democrat congressman from Los Angeles named Anthony Bielsen, and influential organizations such as the Federation for Immigration Reform, and it gained quite wide support during the 1980's.

After many decades of Hispanics' silent existence in American society, a consciousness of their unused power is currently growing. In tandem with the community's increasing number, more politicians are making great endeavors to gain hispanic votes, although Latinos, in a great part, still resist voting. Social and political activists also work hard on improving Latinos' assimilation into the American mainstream, but they still have plenty to do. Undoubtedly, the Hispanic population has made progress, though this is hard to notice if we look at the community as a whole, which is in a significant part formed by new immigrants who have just begun working towards their American Dream. Looking carefully at data gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau and other governmental agencies, we can see that Hispanics born in the United States do not differ much from other Americans.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> L. Chavez, *Hispanics and the American Dream*, "The Freeman," November 1996, vol. 25, no. 11, The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc.

