

Alianza Conference: Toward a National Latino Agenda April 6, 2002

PANEL 1

JUAN PEREA:¹ Our panel is going to discuss the issues which transcend the political and ethnic divisions within the Latino community. I would like to ask Professor de la Garza to proceed.

RODOLFO DE LA GARZA:² In addressing issues that transcend the Latino community, I would like to discuss the results of polling that we conducted in key Latino states in 2000. One should note that, except for peaks around particular issues, policy preferences do not change frequently. They change gradually over time unless something major happens, such as Proposition 187. The point is that data collected in 1990 would, for the most part, still be viable today.

The first question that I would like to discuss is what issues Latinos believe are facing the nation. By this I do not mean issues facing Latinos specifically, but rather those facing the nation as a whole. Overall, Latinos deem education to be the most fundamental issue. The data also reveals that the more educated one is, the more likely one is to say that education is an important issue. The less educated one is, the less important education will be as an issue. Ideally, one wants these two variables to closely correspond to one another. When uneducated people say that education is not important, this does not bode well for the group.

When we categorized the priorities of Latinos by state, we found some interesting patterns. Again, education ranked the highest for all of the groups. Immigration, curiously—and I say curiously because historically it has not normally shown up—has become an issue for Latinos. However, we are not sure whether immigration has become an issue for all Latinos or whether, as the number of immigrants increases, immigrants say they are concerned about this issue. We currently lack the longitudinal data that would indicate the latter. So, as the composition of the Latino population changes, interest in immigration also rises.

One of the other interesting findings concerns gun control. Overall, Latinos are very supportive of gun control. This is correlated to concerns

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about partisanship because Republicans are very opposed to gun control. Nonetheless, no matter where you survey Latinos they want gun control. This pattern appears across the board.

Abortion is another very important issue for Latinos. Most Latinos are pro-choice. Again, from a political perspective, this is contrary to the Republican mantra which says that Latinos are Republican but simply do not know it. This is not an unrealistic mantra. Nonetheless, it is incorrect.

It is important to notice that Cuban Americans, very much like Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans are in favor of gun control. This stems from the environment in which they live, which is much more prone to violence. With regard to the pro-choice sentiment, this is probably a plurality vote. The majority of Latinos are not pro-choice, but a plurality is pro-choice. So to correct slightly what I said earlier on abortion matters, Latinos are to the left of the Republican Party, but not radically to the left.

In analyzing support for presidential candidates, polls revealed that Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans voted similarly, but are almost the mirror image of Cuban Americans. If you sort by ethnic sub-group, a higher percentage of Cuban Americans supported George W. Bush than Latinos supported Al Gore. Remember, there are a lot of Central Americans and others that we have not included, most of whom voted for Al Gore.

With these last two slides I would like to raise some general questions. One of the most interesting assumptions is that Latinos are driven by identity politics. People assume that Latinos see the world in the same way that African Americans might. When we ask people what group they most identify with, they reply that they identify with working class families, not with their own ethnic groups. This finding is quite striking. Latinos do not use their national origin or their ethnicity as the primary indicator of who they are. The leadership addresses being Latino, but Latinos respond, "I am a working class person."

Finally on the issue of Latino party identification, once again we discovered that Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans are quite similar and that Cuban Americans are their mirror image. For twenty years now, we have told ourselves that there is not a Latino political community. But there are groups of Latinos that have come together around certain issues. The material I have presented documents this phenomenon.

One of the problems with the data I presented is that it ignores several very important realities. First, we did not break down the results by foreign versus native-born status. Immigrants are often different from the native-born population on many of the issues identified here, especially in terms of predictors of attitudes. For a long time the native-born were opposed to immigrants. Today, this is no longer necessarily the case.

Whenever I do work on Latinos it strikes me that unless you disaggregate them you are being dishonest with yourself. For example, it is commonplace to say that Latinos were the only group in the 1990s that went down in family income. Everyone else went up. This information is

misleading because the results aggregate immigrants and the native-born. The Latino native-born income went up while immigrant income went down. When these statistics are placed side-by-side, they bring down the entire group and distort the socioeconomic picture of Latinos as a whole.

The second point to bear in mind, which we often forget, is that there are very few Cuban Americans in this country. Moreover, they are likely to become a smaller and smaller proportion of the Latino population. While we always talk about what Cuban Americans think, the only reason we do so is because they are an anomaly. Despite their small numbers, they have a very effective political voice. They have money and they know how to use it. Yet the Cuban Americans' situation makes more sense when one considers the fact that Florida is a swing state and that Floridian Anglos are divided in such a way that a small number of votes can make a difference. Thus, in the last election it seemed perfectly reasonable that the Latino vote, a.k.a. the Cuban vote, swung that election for George W. Bush. Overall, Cuban Americans should be getting less and less politically important. Very few Cubans are coming in anymore. Money matters in politics, but numbers also matter.

SARITA BROWN:³ Education is an issue that I believe transcends the cultural nuances within the Latino community and is a necessity in forming a common agenda. In serving as a leader or community activist, it is important to be informed about the educational condition of Latinos and to have an opinion about the factors which influence that progress. It is also important to be knowledgeable of public policy issues, pressure points, and the differences that exist within the Latino community, as these are very pliant things that we can change.

Latinos at each point on the education continuum are a fragile community in terms of participation. This can be seen in the lower participation levels of Latinos in Headstart, poverty that begins at birth, and the fact that there are congregations of Latinos in urban school districts that are poorly resourced. There are also issues concerning teacher quality, English language proficiency, emergency certified teachers in school districts with large Latino numbers, and the absence of college-bound curricula in school districts with large Latino populations.

As a nation we are concerned about high school completion rates, attendance rates at colleges, and master and doctoral level education. This last issue is one of great concern for me because to produce professors one must have a graduate level degree. Minimal Latino participation in doctoral programs is a concern not only because campuses lack a Latino perspective, but also because this means fewer Latino faculty members will be produced. In constructing a national Latino agenda we should accept

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responsibility for increasing the overall educational achievement level of the Latino community.

The work that I have been doing for the last twenty years has been a privilege because, like you, as a student at the University of Texas at Austin I did not see many Latino students. I did not see many students of color. Since I believe that talent and ability are present in all communities, I do not believe it is a natural occurrence when I do not see a lot of people like me in a room. I wish that when I attended college I had seen a room like this filled with Latinos.

One must be strategic in determining how to intervene in the struggle for educational achievement. This may include running for the school board, being an activist on campus, and exploring ways to increase participation by Latino students, or having a position in public education.

What are the practices that will change educational achievement levels for Latinos? One is creating a new standard for Latinos that does not say, "Latinos can go to college," but "Latinos will go to college and the only question is which institution they will attend." These practices are at our disposal every day. In Washington, D.C., the Hispanic Scholarship Fund has launched a public sector organization called the Hispanic Scholarship Fund Institute. There are also advocacy organizations such as the National Council of La Raza, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and the Cuban American National Council. Every Latino organization headquartered in Washington, as well as those with satellite offices across the country, has an educational component. The challenge will be for the organizations to speak to each other, in spite of their differing missions, in order to find points of consensus. We should be disciplined enough to pursue an agenda that does not pit one organization against another. Advances for the Latino community will require that all the organizations act together.

For now, I believe we should focus our efforts on the university level. It is not that I think that K-12 education is not important, but instead that reform at the collegiate level can have the most impact. If we intervene now, we can radically change the college participation rates of Latinos.

DAVID HAYES BAUTISTA:⁴ This is an extremely broad topic that we are discussing today. I would like to approach this issue by discussing the research that we have been doing in the area of health and medicine. When looking at Latino health, the data indicates that there is much variation in comparison to other ethnic groups. Latino health is so unique that it is of little use to compare Latinos' health to that of non-Hispanic whites, African Americans, or Asian Americans. In terms of heart disease, cancer, strokes, and HIV, there are distinctive Latino norms nationwide.

⁴ Professor of Medicine, UCLA School of Medicine; Director, UCLA Center for the Study of Latino Health.

From an education perspective, one Latino norm is that Latinos are far less likely to have graduated from high school compared to non-Hispanic whites in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, and Texas. Likewise, we see another very common sociological pattern. Latinos are far less likely to have health insurance compared to non-Hispanic whites. These are classic patterns that I would not argue are culturally derived. They are more externally derived.

Latinos tend to be called a high-risk population. We have lower incomes and relatively little education. What is interesting is how these facts impact health care. When looking at overall, age-adjusted mortality rates for all Latinos in the United States, Latinos have a thirty percent lower age-adjusted mortality rate than non-Hispanic whites. Rates for African Americans are about forty percent higher. One would expect that Latinos, having worse risk factors than African Americans, would have a mortality rate of around 850 deaths per 100,000. Instead, the rate is thirty percent lower than that of non-Hispanic whites. This is called the Latino epidemiological paradox.

There are some geographic variations, however. When comparing Latinos to non-Hispanic whites, the general trend in California, Texas, Arizona, Florida, Illinois, New York, and New Jersey is for the Latino rate to be lower than the non-Hispanic white rate. Variations also occur in Colorado and New Mexico, the only two states where the Latino death rate is a little bit higher than the non-Hispanic white rate. Again, from the risk factors one would think that the rate should be a lot higher. As I said before, there is a Latino norm, but we need to understand the variations from the norm as well.

If we look at the top three causes of death across the country for all ethnic groups, the leading cause is heart disease, the second is cancer, and the third is stroke. Latinos have thirty-five percent fewer heart attacks, a forty-two percent lower incidence of cancer, and twenty-five percent fewer strokes, with the exception of New Mexico and Colorado. We will always have variations from the norm.

These epidemiological patterns translate into behavior in an interesting way. According to the Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance Study, when patients are asked by physicians if they have high blood pressure, Latinos are far less likely than non-Hispanic whites to respond affirmatively. This is because Latinos have fewer heart attacks. This is an example of how behavior is being driven by epidemiology. Another question in the study asked whether patients had high cholesterol. It turns out that Latinos have lower cholesterol and therefore fewer heart attacks.

There are some causes of death for which Latinos' rates are higher. I would caution though that these death rates are an order of magnitude lower. That is, they are a tenth of heart disease, cancer, and stroke rates. With diabetes, for example, the Latino rate is almost twice as high as the

non-Hispanic rate. Interestingly, we see this played out in behavior. When one controls for access to medical care, Latinos are more likely to have been told by health care professionals that they have diabetes. So there is a relationship between the culture and the behavior in terms of what people say they do and what we actually pick up in their health profile.

There are also national variations by gender. Generally, women have lower mortality rates than men. Latinas have about a forty percent lower mortality rate than Latinos. However, this does not play out in every single cause of death. For example, men are much more likely to die by a firearm. Interestingly, the female rate of diabetes is as high as the male rate, rather than the Latina rate being forty percent lower. This would indicate that there is a serious problem with Latinas and diabetes. In terms of access to care during pregnancy, the general trend is that Latinas are less likely to receive care during the first trimester than non-Hispanic white women. Nonetheless, this does not translate into an adverse birth outcome. We continue to see this Latina epidemiological paradox as we look at low birth weight rates. Latinas have a slightly lower percentage of low birth weight babies compared to non-Hispanic white women. In terms of infant mortality, they have virtually identical infant mortality rates as compared to non-Hispanic white women. Again, considering the risk factors, one would think the rates would be far higher even than those of African American women.

There is also variation between Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans, and South Americans. Variation also exists according to whether one is native-born or an immigrant. Oddly enough, immigrants have far lower infant mortality rates. It is native-born citizens who have higher infant mortality rates even though they have higher incomes, better education, and better access to health care. One explanation is that they are also drinking more, smoking more, and doing drugs. Another general trend is that Latinos tend to be a bit more obese. Interestingly, Latino obesity does not translate into higher rates of heart disease. Although it does translate into diabetes, this poses far lower health risks.

This is where culture facilitates the understanding of Latino health. It does little good to compare Latino health to white or black health. Rather, we have to understand our own norms and compare ourselves to one another. Even if one does not take into account the risk factors, Latino health is surprisingly good. That is why this is called the Latino epidemiological paradox. On a side note, statistically half of all children born in California and Texas are born to Latina mothers. I tell my colleagues that this is not a paradox—this is the norm. The true paradox is that those in medical science who have spent so much time conducting research do not realize that half of the mothers are Latina in these two big states.

A classic question asked in studies concerns the self-assessment of one's health status. Research subjects are asked, "How good would you say your health is today? Is it excellent, good, fair, or poor?" A randomly

selected sample of non-Hispanic whites will respond that their health is somewhere between good and excellent. In contrast, randomly selected samples of Latinos say that their health is between fair and poor. What does this mean? Last year the American College of Physicians, looking at this response pattern alone, asserted that this means that Latinos have more heart attacks, higher incidences of cancer, shorter life expectancies, and higher infant mortality. They added that responses by non-Hispanic whites and African Americans correlate to their actual health conditions. However, as I mentioned earlier, this is not the case with Latinos. This is why I tell my colleagues that this is a culturally incompetent question. One cannot use this question as a proxy for health status because it completely contradicts what the data reveals.

Here are a couple of quick examples that demonstrate how important cultural norms are. We performed a population-based survey a couple of years ago on the causes of diabetes in elderly Latino and non-Hispanic whites. The thought was that Latinos must know less about diabetes because its prevalence is twice as high. However, research revealed that Latinos were as likely as non-Hispanic whites to know whether diabetes ran in their family. They also knew that diet and weight contributed to diabetes.

Latino respondents also cited another set of issues that are just as important as heredity, diet, and weight in the onset of diabetes, namely *susto*, *nervios*, and *estrés*. You see, Latinos are deceiving, and you are all laughing. When I presented this presentation a week ago to some colleagues, the first question I received was, "Sir, what is *susto*?" If a doctor is working with Latino patients, he or she should be prepared to deal with fright, nerves, and stress.

Finally, Latinos across the country are facing a Latino physician shortage. To give you an idea of the gravity of this problem, in California there are 335 non-Latino Californians per non-Latino physician. Yet for every Latino physician, there are 2893 Latinos. It is approximately that same order of magnitude in every state.

The bottom line is that in order to understand Latinos we have to research what the Latino norm is on any issue. We must understand both the national and local variances within the Latino community. As you leave this conference, remember that Latinos have thirty-five percent fewer heart attacks, forty-two percent less cancer, and twenty-five percent fewer strokes. Being Latino is good for your health.

ADAM CHAVARRIA:⁵ As you have heard before, polls and surveys taken of Latinos in communities across the nation consistently show that education ranks high on the list of priorities and concerns. In fact, education is at the top in the minds of most Latino families and parents, regardless of socio-economic background, ethnicity, or political affiliation. There is

⁵ Associate Director, White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans.

not a single parent who does not wish for a better life for their children. They know that education is the vehicle that will fulfill their dreams.

However, many Latino families and parents are often not equipped with the knowledge or the information they need in order to ensure that their children can obtain a quality education. We believe that this is about to change. The last five months have witnessed a significant boost in the educational aspirations of Latino families and parents. On October 12, 2001, President George W. Bush signed Executive Order 13,230 establishing the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans.⁶ The Commission will advise the Secretary of Education and submit a report to the President on effective ways to close the academic achievement gap and improve the educational achievement of Hispanics.

This past January, the President signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, upon which Executive Order 13,230 was modeled.⁷ The Act will bring with it the most dramatic change in American education in the last thirty years. Latino parents, regardless of their ethnicity, will play a pivotal role in ensuring that these changes produce a quality education for their children.

The President shares the same vision. His commitment was evidenced during his signing of the Executive Order, which created the President's Advisory Commission, where he stated that this nation of immigrants believes in all children, not just those whose parents may speak English. The President has, with reason, made public education the top priority of his administration. When we get it right and every child learns, America will be a much more hopeful place. We must close the academic achievement gap that persists today. We must ensure that every child in every school has an opportunity to live up to his or her academic potential and enjoy the product of his or her talents. We must equip Latino parents with the tools and knowledge they need to help their children start school ready to read and ready to learn.

We realize that we have a daunting challenge ahead. The state of education has not changed to meet the learning needs of our children during the last thirty years. The Hispanic dropout rate has hovered around thirty percent for three decades. This stagnation has led to the institutionalized failure of minority and disadvantaged children. We must make quality education the expectation, not the exception.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is dedicated to bringing educational reform to our nation's schools. It reflects a commitment to healing our neighborhoods and lifting our children up. It will encourage caregivers and families to prepare very young children for a lifetime of learning

⁶ Exec. Order No. 13,230, 66 Fed. Reg. 52,841 (Oct. 12, 2001).

⁷ No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 502, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002).

through reading. It is built upon the belief that every child can learn and achieve high academic standards. Students will be tested and schools will be held accountable for the results. We must put an end to the old excuses that attempt to explain the persistent failure of our schools, especially when it comes to the education of Latino children.

We want to expand parental options and increase their participation. Since we know that many families do not always know how to navigate the educational system, we want to give them the information and resources they need in order to become strong advocates for their children. Information is power when it is placed in the hands of families and parents. Armed with enough information, Latino parents can defend their children's pursuit of a quality education. We owe it to the children, as our parents owed it to us, to give them more prosperity, security, health, wisdom, and knowledge than we had ourselves. This is more than a transcending thought. This is the duty of every Latino in America.

PEREA: I cannot resist one editorial comment. In light of statistics, which indicate that Latinas tend to outlive Latinos at quite a significant rate, it seems to me that this strengthens the argument for appointing a progressive Latina to the Supreme Court. I never had medical data to make that argument, but now I hope we will all keep that in mind.

DE LA GARZA: It seems that there has to be some kind of genealogical or biological explanation for what you are presenting. That is, there must be some explanation for how the Latino population overrides so many bad things to outperform other ethnic populations.

BAUTISTA: This issue is why I started the Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture. We are trying to find the link between health, behavior, and culture. We do not have all of the answers yet, but the one thing I am inclined to say is that the cause is probably not genetic. Latinos are so genetically heterogeneous that genetics is probably the least probable cause. It is more likely that it has to do with culture and daily behavior. By this, I do not mean that we have some secret Aztec herb that we take every night. Rather, it has to do with our daily social behavior, which somehow leads to these surprising outcomes.

On a side note, if the entire United States had the same epidemiological profile as Latinos for heart attack, cancer, and stroke rates, over 350,000 lives would be saved every single year. This fact alone merits significant investment and research. Yet instead of researching behavior, we are putting all our money into the genomics project. Clearly, we need different models. These old models simply do not work.

PEREA: When we talk about "the Latino community" obviously this term encompasses many national origins. We have seen some data with respect to political differences amongst the three most frequently mentioned groups of Latinos, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban Americans. Sometimes I get concerned about whether a political fault line on the basis of national origin exists, and I wonder if our panelists

would discuss this. Is this something that we should be concerned about or is it merely a consequence of the heterogeneity within the Latino community? Finally, why should we not have many political differences like every other group?

BROWN: Clearly there are disparities among different groups, some of which have been discussed. Various causes include differing socio-economic levels and differences in countries of origin. Accordingly, we must focus on whether there is truly a unified community. Is there camaraderie? Do we feel that there is a common agenda? As my previous comments indicate, I think it is a question of choice. The Spanish language is something that does bring us together. Beyond language, however, it becomes more complicated to identify shared characteristics.

DE LA GARZA: I have spent essentially all of my life in the Southwest, after which time I moved to New York. The tremendous, palpable difference between the sense of Latinoness in New York versus the Southwest was something I was completely unprepared for. The Southwest, like Los Angeles, is predominantly Mexican American. There is a form of Mexican hegemony which is not replicated anywhere on the East Coast.

As a result there are a series of exogenous factors that shape a Latino agenda. With this in mind, what creates an ethnic agenda? Ethnicity is often defensive. The more discrimination there is, the more interested people are in ethnicity. As groups move more into mainstream society and as more minorities attend Harvard, their investment in ethnicity declines. This is less likely to occur in the Southwest where more Mexicans are at the bottom, rather than the top, due to continual immigration. This cycle is continuously reproduced in the Southwest. It is not clear to me that any other region experiences this phenomenon.

Most of the Latinos in New York assume that I am a Latino. They will often ask me in English if I am Spanish. They are not asking if I am from Spain. Rather, the word is used as a synonym for Latino. For them, Spanish is the predominant identifier. In the Southwest, however, being called Spanish is pejorative. In some way, this acknowledges the construction of a new identity in the region. The more groups succeed in moving into the mainstream, the more likely they are to use neutral terms.

Your generation is much more likely to be exogamous and marry people who are not Latino. Once this is done at a sufficiently high rate, ethnic lines become blurred. Fifty percent of mainland-born Puerto Ricans marry Anglos. What does it mean to be Puerto Rican in this context?

BAUTISTA: In looking at birth records for 1998, one sees inter-paternity, or when the mother and the father of a child are of different racial or ethnic groups. In Los Angeles County, there are four and a half million Latinos. Compare this to the population of Massachusetts, which has about four and a half million people total. As you can see, in just one county alone we have the Latino equivalent of the entire population of Massa-

chusetts. In Los Angeles County, sixty percent of college age adults are Latino. It turns out that for fifty-seven percent of white mothers under the age of twenty-five in Los Angeles County, the father of their baby is not white but Latino. For forty-eight percent of African American mothers, the father of their child is not African American but usually Latino. For about forty percent of Asian American mothers, the father of their child is usually Latino, not Asian American.

PEREA: What conclusion do you derive from this?

BAUTISTA: This is a phenomenon limited to young mothers. For older mothers in their thirties and forties, white women are married to white males, African American women are married to African American males, and Asian American women are married to Asian American males. I am not sure the old framework we are accustomed to, exogamous marriage, has much meaning in the Southwest because there are many inter-racial Latino couples. I believe that marrying a Latino is one of the best things that could happen to people, since their children will add four and one half years to their life expectancy. An even more interesting issue involves the ramifications of a Cuban American marrying a Mexican American. What sort of identity is created?

DE LA GARZA: On a personal note, my wife is Cuban, and we have a daughter, who is perfectly fluent in Spanish. The construction of her ethnicity is neither Cuban nor Mexican. It is a completely different and dynamic thing. It is both an American and a Latin identity.

BAUTISTA: I was born in the United States, and I married an immigrant from Mexico. About five or six years ago, my daughter was in high school, and we were talking over dinner one day about the terms “bilingual” and “bicultural.” In spite of the fact that she spoke both Spanish and English, she insisted that she was not bilingual. She explained that when one uses the term “bilingual” it makes it sound as if there were a difference between the two. She did not see it like that. To her, speaking Spanish and English means that she has more choices when she listens to music on the radio. She does not use the “bi” in bilingual.

I can remember an interview that I had with the *New York Times* about four years ago. Apparently the interviewer had just discovered Latinos and was going to do a big cover story. While we were having breakfast he kept asking me, “Are you primarily Latino or are you primarily American?” I kept refusing to answer that question. He finally asked me that question in the most pointed way I have ever heard. He said, “Suppose you are going to bed tonight. You are in the bathroom. You are in pajamas. You brush your teeth. You put down the toothbrush. You walk into the bedroom. You pass a mirror. You look in the mirror. What do you see? Do you see a Latino or do you see an American?” Suddenly a thought flashed into my head. I replied, “Questions like that assume that Latinos are not American. Being Latino is kind of like being a Texan. It is a distinctive way of being an American.” He finally caught on. I was shocked

because you would never ask a Texan if he or she was Texan or American. They are one and the same.

I think we are creating a distinctively American identity which people today call Latino. The next generation may call it something else. They say they are American, but they speak Spanish, listen to *rock en español*, and also listen to the Beatles. They do it all. They are just themselves.

PEREA: I would like to get back to something mentioned earlier. It seems to me that one implication of the statistics that we have heard is that the Latino identity might be changing and/or disappearing in some way. It was also mentioned, though, that ethnicity and race are often a function of race discrimination and of outsiders' perceptions of the ethnic group. We have discussed the process through which the group itself is changing, as we perceive it, as internal group members. But I am not sure that the majority of society perceives Latinos as changing in the same way. I think we tend to be seen as Latino or Hispanic and labeled as such. In the presence of race discrimination on the basis of language, culture, and perceptible features of Latinos, there are many societal reasons for racial and ethnic groups to exist, even if they change, in order to assert collective claims for civil rights.

DE LA GARZA: That is the defensive argument. In contemporary American society you better all be claiming that you are Latino, even if you do not appear to be Latino. There are incentives now, such as scholarships and job placements. This was not always the case.

The issue is that there are many Latinos and then a mix of immigrants. Mexican immigrants experience the very real discrimination that light-skinned Mexican Americans do not experience. Color is the damnation of this country. We do not know what to do with it, yet it is clear that color makes a difference.

BAUTISTA: I would like to take a different approach to this topic. When we look at epidemiology, discrimination does not make Latinos Latino. The health and the behavior of Latinos are independent of discrimination. Let me give you one example. Obstetricians often see pregnant Latinas, particularly from Mexico, who wear red underwear with a safety pin on it. Even if they do not speak Spanish, they will often dress in this manner. This practice has its roots in the Aztec notion of fetal development. The idea is that you store red cord—red is one of the sacred Aztec colors—with a little obsidian blade. After the arrival of the Spaniards, the obsidian blade transformed itself into other metal objects. Now the tradition is to wear bikini underwear from Victoria's Secret. This is knowledge passed from mother to daughter about health. Now we are seeing it being passed along in English.

In health care we respect cultural competency. For example, a chief of one of the largest health delivery systems in Los Angeles will fire an obstetrician on the spot if they ask a patient why they are wearing red underwear with a safety pin. She will do this because that offends her

patients who are predominantly English speaking. They have choices and can go anywhere, but they give birth at that hospital because they feel comfortable. They should not have to explain why they are wearing red underwear with a safety pin on it.

PEREA: It seems this is a testament to cultural survival and adaptation.

BAUTISTA: Yes, it survives across languages.

CHAVARRIA: When I attended the University of Minnesota many years ago, we had a Chicano student movement on campus. I remember that there was enormous pressure to speak Spanish. If you did not, then you were not Chicano enough at the time. I recently asked a couple of Berkeley students whether that same type of pressure exists today. The students agreed that the pressure persists. I suspect that this remains true on campuses all over the country.

I tried to explain to them that no one can really define the term "Latino," particularly contemporary Americans, because we are living it. In fact, we are establishing what Latino is every day of our lives. We are uniting our cultural values and building something better that is uniquely Latino in the United States.

PEREA: We have identified several issues, which might be part of a Latino agenda, such as increasing one's life expectancy, improving education, and improving voter participation. I think we should all be aware that the four million residents of Puerto Rico are not entitled to vote for the President of the United States and do not have voting representation in Congress, yet they are subject to federal law. As a matter of political access, full representation for all Latino people could be part of a national Latino agenda. Receiving better health care is something that probably everyone would agree on. Perhaps some form of commitment to our cultural identity could also be important. I wonder if these are components that transcend individual national origins and help us understand ourselves as a community.

Another thing I would point out is that many of the potential parts of a transcendent Latino agenda are probably in fact good parts of an agenda for all poor or disempowered individuals. Part of our work might be to build a coalition with people who are similarly situated. For example, we could have an agenda that emphasizes educational quality, which would be highly relevant for the African American, Asian American, and, in many instances, poor white communities. This broader appeal will make a Latino agenda more persuasive and potent.

With that said, we should open this discussion to questions and comments from the audience.

Q: On the topic of building coalitions, some scholars have pointed out that there is mistrust of Latinos by other minority communities. The argument is that Latinos move up the economic ladder, move to the suburbs, become Republican, and forget Latinos and other minorities that

are poor. Do you see this as a valid argument? Is there something dividing the Latino community across classes?

DE LA GARZA: Latino partisanship is marvelously insensitive to changes in human wealth. High income Latinos are disproportionately Democratic or vote Democratic. Low income Latinos are disproportionately Democratic or vote Democratic. Of course, there are variations on both sides, but the fundamental point is that partisanship and voting preference is very insensitive to income. The model I use is a Jewish model. Most Jews are Democrats and will likely stay Democrat. So I would bet that two-thirds of Latinos are going to be Democrats for a long time.

BROWN: I have a few comments with regard to your question on coalition building. First, there is a notion that any community, which succeeds, owes a responsibility to those left behind. Personally, the fact that I achieve makes me want others to do so as well. With regard to joining forces with other groups, this is an issue we are currently struggling with. When I started at the White House Initiative in 1997, it was right in the middle of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.⁸ I learned an important lesson, that not everyone shares a common goal in securing education. There is a sense of competition within poor communities. Accordingly, we should push for the formation of alliances across ethnic and racial lines. In the process of building a coalition, there has to be trust. There has to be confidence that we are not riding anyone's coattails, that the Latino community is not Johnny-come-lately on this issue, and that there is more to be gained in partnership.

PEREA: If I could address the issue of mistrust. I think this is a very serious issue and often an impediment with respect to relations between Latinos and African Americans. This could be in part because of the alleged newness of the Latino community. Latinos confound traditional racial categories. I do not think that Anglo whites consider most Latinos to be white. And I think that many African Americans perceive fair-skinned Latinos to be white. Fair-skinned Latinos have access to white-skinned privilege to some extent. I think a lot of the mistrust is based on a concern that Latinos have greater opportunities to assimilate because of this fair-skinned privilege. As that happens, I think African Americans rightly become concerned about whether Latinos will identify with whites and adopt an agenda that is hostile to African American interests. That is a large part of the issue. In the end it comes down to what our political commitments and political actions are with respect to issues that are of concern to both communities.

DE LA GARZA: It is wrong to conflate the basis for resolving the needs of immigrants with the claims of historic injustice that drive black males. It is very hard to say that an immigrant from Mexico deserves

⁸ Higher Education Act of 1965, Pub. L. No. 89-329, 79 Stat. 1219 (1965) (codified as amended in scattered sections of 20 U.S.C.).

affirmative action like blacks. It does not make sense. In order to have a unified agenda, Latinos should be sensitive to the concerns of the African American community.

BROWN: Actually, I do not believe this perspective is necessarily accurate. I think that the Latino community is better served by standing on its own ground and asserting the history of the Latino community. When the fastest growing minority community in the country has low educational attainment rates, the implications for the country are severe.

PEREA: I would like to second the point that it is very important to be sensitive to the particular history of different groups in the country. When we think about the meaning of justice, it becomes defined by the nature of historical injustices. Those different histories are highly relevant in defining the appropriate remedies for different groups at different times.

Q: I would like to comment on black, white, and Latino identities. Latinos can be extremely racist, even toward members of their own group which are of white, mulatto, mestizo, or black tones.

PEREA: I think this is a helpful comment. Again, one of the challenges of being such a racially mixed and diverse community is to include everyone within the community and to deal with our own racism as a community.

Q: Would Professor de la Garza clarify comments he made earlier regarding the advantages and disadvantages of having a Latino identity?

DE LA GARZA: Whether one asserts one's ethnic identity can be influenced by external factors. If one will be punished for identifying as Latino, then one will tend to keep quiet. If one will be rewarded, then one will be more willing to embrace one's identity.

When I was teaching at Austin, my classes were always racially and ethnically mixed. I asked the class how many people considered themselves Latino. I was trying to distinguish among Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and pan-Latinos. One woman who had very fair, light hair raised her hand. I would have never thought of her as Latina, yet she explained later that her mother was Colombian and her father was German. She confessed that she checked the Latina box when applying for scholarships and graduate schools. In this sense, she has an incentive to be a Latina. That is what I was trying to explain earlier.

Q: True, but I also think there is a strong disincentive. For me, the elephant in the room is racism. Are we not forgetting that scholarships are only one reason to claim one's Latino status? The discrimination people face could deter some from claiming their Latino status.

DE LA GARZA: This is certainly a complex issue. How can Latinos say they are discriminated against when three-quarters of them have never been discriminated against? Although the typical Latino has probably not been discriminated against, his or her father probably has. Alter-

nately, everyone in this room may have been discriminated against, but I would also say that half of you do not know when it happened.

My point is that Latinos do not see the world in the same way as African Americans. Seventeen percent of African American males between eighteen and seventy-five are in prison or have served time. Latinos have not had the same kind of experience, at least to the same extent. Racism takes different forms and affects groups in varying ways.

BAUTISTA: The National Institute of Health revealed that Latinos were far less likely to have health insurance. When whites, African Americans, and Latinos who had the same type of heart attack were treated in the same type of hospital, Latinos and African Americans both received far fewer surgical techniques and procedures. The interesting thing is that Latinos may not need them. Hospital discharge records show that Latinos who suffer heart attacks have far better outcomes. Although we survive them better, it is clear that Latinos receive fewer services as compared to whites.

DE LA GARZA: This is institutional murder.

BAUTISTA: I can provide further statistics on the birth outcomes of Latinas. Although they have better birth outcomes, they are far less likely to receive any form of pain medication compared to whites. We hear all the time in hospitals, "Oh, they can handle the pain."

Q: Reaching out to minority communities is important because if we do not join together to advocate for better conditions, we are going to fight over the same small piece of pie. What we really need to do is increase the size of the slice. How can we increase the size of the slice for education? How do we increase funding for overstuffed and under-funded school districts? When I was in Los Angeles just a few weeks ago, I saw an elementary school that had relocated from a toxic site and was in its third year of being in trailers.

CHAVARRIA: The new law, which I mentioned in my speech, will transform education in many ways. First, it holds school districts and states accountable for meeting certain basic academic standards. Students will be tested and assessed on how they are doing. In the months ahead, you will hear about high-stakes testing. This should not be confused with what this law is going to do. Students will be tested periodically in order to determine whether they are at the level they should be and what resources are needed to help them progress. In addition, for the first time, parents will be involved in a substantive way. Schools will have two years to see that children are making progress toward meeting the standards established by the states. After two years have passed, parents will have the option of getting tutoring for their children or placing that student in another public school or a charter school.

Q: Most people agree on the importance of education. Is there a consensus on peripheral issues such as bilingual education, English immersion, charter schools, or school vouchers?

BAUTISTA: I can address the language issue. Countless surveys show that Latino parents want their kids to learn English. Figures range anywhere from ninety-five to ninety-nine percent. Almost unanimously, Latino parents, non-Hispanic white parents, and African American parents agree that they would like their children to learn Spanish. Those who are opposed to having children learn Spanish are those without children, particularly non-Hispanic white non-parents.

BROWN: The issue of charter schools and vouchers, in my opinion, is quite revealing. We have schools that are not bringing all students to the level of academic proficiency where college is an option for them. People are responding to this with a charter school and voucher approach. Every child should be able to go to a good school, but a voucher does not get a child into the neighborhood Catholic school. One must usually supplement a voucher with money.

However, Latinos usually have at least one valuable asset. While I do not have the clinical data, studies have shown that the Latino family is a unique phenomenon. The family is communal in that many people care for the children. That warmth, that socialization is integral to the development of a human being as a social person. Socialization acts as a source of strength, which can be used as one moves into the larger world. When contrasted with middle class families, there are fewer caregivers and the socialization of young children is diminished. The phenomenon of the family allows Latinos to persevere.

PEREA: I would like to make one last comment. There is nothing new about a school system in which Latinos are not encouraged to achieve at the same level as whites. It is a systemic problem. I think a large part of the problem has to do with a society that accepts a low set of expectations for students of color and is not so troubled that it fixes the system. I believe a lot of work must be accomplished through teacher training. I would label this a form of systemic racism. It gets repeated all the time in urban and rural school systems. There are resource issues as well, but the main part of the problem is that society is content with underperformance on the part of people of color. This has very old, historical roots.

PANEL 2

MARSHALL GANZ:⁹ Today's panel will address how the interests of the Latino community can be asserted most effectively. This question is based on the recognition that we live in a world of competition and collaboration, where a community's interests are acted on to the extent that the community has developed the capacity to articulate, assert, and mobilize its power on behalf of those political, economic, or moral interests. Although elected officials can play an important role in making this hap-

⁹Lecturer in Public Policy, Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

pen, labor leaders, legal advocates, community activists, and others—to the extent they are organized, ordinary citizens—can also contribute. The goal of this panel is to explore these avenues of representation. We will begin with Pedro Noguera.

PEDRO NOGUERA:¹⁰ The question of who represents us is very important. It is one with which I have grappled myself, as I have a background in elected politics. To begin with, I was the first person of color elected as student body president of Berkeley. Afterward, I served as an elected member of the Berkeley school board. From about 1985 to 1994, I was involved in politics at the local level, which also took me into politics in California to some degree. At one point I seriously considered running for higher office, and I was encouraged to do so by the congressman of the Bay Area, Ron Dellums. However, I decided to enter academia rather than elective politics.

Let me explain why. I do not mean to disparage people who make that choice. But to be in politics today means one has to spend a lot of time raising money. If successful, one must find the margin at which one can speak about interests that will not alienate powerful constituencies. Politicians are constantly worried about alienating people and finding campaign contributions to keep them in office. Even in a really safe district, they may not have the funds to remain in office. I can give you many examples of good people who have gone that route whom I no longer consider politicians with integrity because of the kinds of compromises that they have been forced to make.

However, I recognize that compromise is the business of politics. The problem is that politics in this country is bankrupt when it comes to addressing the needs of our people. I moderated a panel yesterday, which consisted of several elected officials, all of whom I think are fine people. I am not trying to attack anyone, but I posed a question about Los Angeles County because there are more people in that county than in forty-two states. I often tell people, if you want to know the future of America go to Los Angeles. It is a scary future because Los Angeles epitomizes the growing divide between the “haves” and “have-nots.” If you go to Pico Union, you find people who live as if they were in San Salvador today. How do we remedy this level of desperation in a country which has the greatest wealth in the world?

Right now I have little faith that politicians, whether at the local, state, or federal level, have any answers or even a vision to address these issues. When I hear politicians attack the public schools, I think to myself, “How short-sighted.” The public schools are all that remain of the social safety net in this country for poor children. This is the only place where they will be guaranteed a meal and adult supervision. For many of

¹⁰ Professor, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

our children our public schools are the most stable institution in their lives. Public schools are indispensable institutions. Until we have a replacement, Latino politicians should not call for vouchers, knowing full well that there are few private schools clamoring to educate poor Latino children.

However, I am a critic of the public schools. Many of our kids do not receive a good education. But to blame schools for that and absolve society is ridiculous. We live in the wealthiest country in the world, yet we have third world schools. Canada, our neighbor to the north, has excellent public schools, not because it is wealthier but because it values them. Canada also has bilingual education in many of its schools.

We must think about policy issues and focus on the needs of those without a voice in our society. Latinos have the highest employment rates but the highest poverty rates of all ethnic groups in the country. We run the risk of becoming a permanent underclass. Without access to education we will always be the busboys, the gardeners, the mechanics, and the nannies. We serve as a pool of cheap labor.

How do we change this situation? To begin with, business people can play a role by generating economic development. However, without first securing an education, Latinos will not be able to take advantage of opportunities that exist. Accordingly, I would argue that we must embrace and support our schools. Children who are hungry and children who need eyeglasses cannot learn. By providing financial and political support to schools, education can have tremendous potential for improving the development of our communities. Strong schools give children, particularly adolescents, a sense that they are going somewhere. Those who believe that their education will take them somewhere will behave much differently than children who believe that they are going nowhere.

Patricia Gándara, a colleague of mine at the University of California, Davis, wrote a book called *Over the Ivy Walls: The Educational Mobility of Low Income Chicanos* in which she looked at upwardly mobile Latino professionals.¹¹ In interviews, these individuals repeatedly stated that in order to be successful they had to learn how to downplay their ethnic identities. They had to avoid taking their grandmothers, their *abuelas*, to any events because they would expose them as Latino. They had to change their accents. They had to change their names. These Latinos admitted they were successful but asked, "At what cost?"

Even though some Latinos are upwardly mobile, the question we must ask ourselves is whether this mobility results in benefits for those who are marginalized? I would argue that so far there is very little evidence that those who are upwardly mobile identify with those who are not. This is one reason why in California, where there are growing num-

¹¹ PATRICIA C. GÁNDARA, *OVER THE IVY WALLS: THE EDUCATIONAL MOBILITY OF LOW INCOME CHICANOS* (1995).

bers of Latinos in higher offices and positions of power, there is little proof that this influence is changing conditions for impoverished Latinos.

RICARDO ANZALDUA:¹² When you ask who represents Latinos' interests, it implies that the Latino community has a single, defined identity. If my own experience is any guide, there are at least as many different perspectives on what is meant by "our interests" as there are national groups encompassed within the term "Latino."

With that said, I think these debates are ultimately unproductive. Those of us who have gained access to institutions of higher learning, like the ones represented on this panel, are in positions to make a difference in terms of representing the interests of our various communities. If we sit around discussing what our identity is, who our constituencies are, and what interests need to be represented, the socioeconomic and political agendas of those communities evolve without us. We on this panel are debating the abstract, but Latino communities need leadership and results. It is necessary for educated Latinos to act on the results of that privilege. Further, Latinos must embrace the heterogeneity of their heritage and consider it in establishing what their interests are.

Each of us comes from a community that has interests, and our challenge is to play a constructive role in defining and representing those interests. Those who emerge to speak on behalf of these communities have defined and will define their own agendas. In our lifetime those agendas have been defined broadly as political empowerment and the pursuit of social, educational, and economic opportunities. Some interests are expressed in an affirmative manner, such as securing access to education, physical infrastructure, housing, and sanitation services. Some agendas are defined in negative ways, like resisting efforts to pare back affirmative action and staving off English Only initiatives. Depending on the characteristics of the particular community that he or she comes from, each Latino is likely to perceive these agendas differently. As a practical matter though, Latinos are still working on the issue of political empowerment. In this context, who represents the interests of Latino communities? The question cannot be answered solely by considering what we, as individuals, are going to do.

Another challenge is to ensure that those who define the agendas are not co-opted by people who have self-interest as their driving force. Take political leadership, for example. If Latinos took control of the government of a particular jurisdiction, this control would not matter if economic and social benefits continued to be divided up as they were previously.

We also need to take advantage of those Latinos in positions of power in corporate America and have those benefits filter through to the communities. Having more Latino CEOs can translate into more Latino scholarships and fellowships.

¹² Partner, Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton.

Finally, we need to make sure that politically conscious people work in non-governmental organizations and public interest groups. These agencies are crucial in delivering services to Latinos which ensure their day-to-day survival.

DEBRA JOY PEREZ:¹³ The Institute of Medicine submitted a report reviewing a hundred studies which revealed that there are racial disparities in the provision of health care services. Thirty percent of Latinos are uninsured. Latino children are not well fed. They do not get glasses when they need them. When Latinos get heart attacks, strokes, and cancer they end up dying faster because they do not get the prescribed treatment. We receive fewer angioplasties and other treatments than we should be receiving.

So who represents Latinos' interests in the health care industry? It is not the Bush administration. The policies it promotes these days concern the elderly. In contrast, the primary health problem in Hispanic communities centers on the younger population. Health indicators show that Hispanics have an advantage in terms of longevity, but there is another side. Disparities in health care contribute to a higher death rate among minorities from cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and HIV infection. Latinos are less likely to get the sophisticated treatments needed to combat HIV and AIDS, which means that they die sooner. Not surprisingly, white male age-related deaths have declined while age-related deaths for Latina and black women have risen in the past ten years. Minorities are also less likely to receive appropriate medications. Finally, Latinos and African Americans are thirty-seven percent less likely to receive standard care for cardiac problems.

Compounding lack of service, there is a problem with physicians overusing less desirable procedures. Minority Medicare beneficiaries are up to four times more likely to have their lower limbs amputated as a result of diabetes. Hispanics above the age of fifty have between a twenty-five and thirty percent rate of diabetes. Puerto Ricans are three times more likely than whites to have diabetes.

Bias on the part of health insurers is also pervasive. Thirty percent of Hispanics have no health insurance at all. Minorities who are covered are concentrated in the lower end of the insurance plan, where they receive fewer services. These plans impose numerous restrictions and require physicians to see greater numbers of patients. Minority physicians, including African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos, represent only nine percent of all doctors in this country. Eight percent of whites live below the poverty level compared to twenty-four percent of Hispanics and twenty-eight percent of Puerto Ricans.

What are health policy experts and legislators doing to solve this problem? Current legislation focuses on drug prescriptions for the elderly.

¹³ Doctoral student, Harvard University Ph.D. Program in Health Policy.

They are also promoting a patient's Bill of Rights so that a consumer can sue his or her HMO. Well, most of us do not have HMOs to sue.

Legislation is moving away from the core problems affecting the Latino community. Twenty-three percent of Latino males have alcohol-related problems, compared to thirteen percent of white males. Twenty-three percent of Latino youths have considered suicide, compared to fifteen percent of white youths. We should focus on eliminating this gap. There should not be one standard for Latinos and another for the rest of the population. We want to be as well as everyone else. These statistics reveal that Latinos have not been successful in holding accountable those few leaders who represent our interests. Hispanics' poor health and lack of access to health insurance are subsidizing those with privilege and funds, thereby helping them secure access to the best health care systems. It is shameful that we are the only industrialized nation in the world that does not provide universal health access.

Underrepresentation of Latinos in universities and graduate institutions compounds this problem. Just consider for a moment the issue of genomics. Tests are being developed to help identify genes which indicate whether a person is going to develop Alzheimer's or Huntington's disease. Medication is being developed now to prevent these conditions. Realistically, the pharmaceutical industry will not invest money to find the gene which causes diabetes, asthma, or any other chronic illness from which they now make billions of dollars. Genomics is going to be the boutique health plan available only to those that can afford it.

We cannot rely on politicians to represent our interests. For now, the people in this room best represent our interests. We should continue to hold professors accountable for incorporating writings from people of color into their curricula. Even when discussing issues such as economics, I want to hear what black and Latino economists have to say.

We should also continue to discuss Latinos' lack of access to health care. I am reminded of the words of Paulo Freire, an educator, philosopher, and great thinker, who remarked, "In the final analysis, what is expected of those who teach by speaking or writing, by being a testimony, is that they be rigorously coherent so as not to lose themselves in the enormous distance between what they do and say."¹⁴

RALPH PANIAGUA:¹⁵ I have heard much today about numbers and statistics. Although I work with numbers every day in the business world, I do not believe in them anymore. Numbers to me have become a blur. They are a blur because there are so many distinct subgroups within the Latino population that statistics vary by who you ask, how you ask, and where you ask.

¹⁴ PAULO FREIRE, *LETTERS TO CRISTINA: REFLECTIONS ON MY LIFE AND WORK* 3 (Donaldo Macedo trans., 1996).

¹⁵ CEO, R. Paniagua, Inc.

I am fortunate enough to come from New York and from Puerto Rican blood. Interestingly, from the age of twenty-eight, I really wanted to be Jewish. The last thing I wanted to be was Latino. But I was blessed. I was blessed with an incredible family. I was blessed because I grew up in a New York where one could have friends that were African American, Jewish, Irish, and Italian. I do not believe that this New York exists today. I was blessed because although people tell me that I experienced racism, I really did not. If it was there, I did not even notice it.

I remember going back into the Bronx one day and waiting while my son got a haircut. I noticed some kids playing handball in the street. I thought to myself, "Why do they have to play on the street? Why not play at the schoolyard where I used to play as a child?" As I looked in the direction of the old schoolyard, I realized that temporary buildings stood in its place. There was nowhere for them to play. Then I wondered why they did not play at the Young Hebrew Men's Association where I used to go. That building had burned down. This is actually part of a larger problem: these kids have nowhere to go. This is why I feel that complaining about percentages and numbers serves little purpose without taking action.

Even when politicians are interested in protecting Latinos' interests, their power to influence others is often limited. For example, I held an event in New York City, but the city gave me the permit on the unofficial condition that I not allow a Latino politician on stage. I believe that there is no one currently looking after our interests in this country. The politicians cannot act, not necessarily because they do not want to, but because they do not know how. They simply lack the political power. Likewise, academics can show you the numbers, but they cannot force people to take note of those statistics. Accordingly, such research is often put to the side and not acted upon.

Given the difficulties facing Latinos today, I have no idea how I was able to get where I am today. Perhaps it is because I go to church on Saturday and I light five candles, one of which is always for focus. Why do I go to church on Saturday? Because everyone goes to church on Sunday, but on Saturday I get Him all to myself. In any event, I have been blessed not by being able to crunch numbers, but by being able to construct things and coalitions. I have a network of associates spanning from Los Angeles to Miami. We have created brotherhoods and relationships that I never dreamt were possible. Finally, Latinos are beginning to enter positions of power. Those of us who want equal opportunities for Latinos are looking beyond the numbers and starting to take action. As I look out into the audience, I see many young Latinos ready to step forward. Due to the work of those before you, there may be an organizational chart for you to jump into. We need your talent to secure the interests of the Latino community.

ANDRES TORRES:¹⁶ I would approach this conference's topic by discussing a project that I am involved with at the Mauricio Gaston Institute. Two years ago our organization sponsored a conference which discussed similar issues, but on a local level in Massachusetts, called Latino Policy Agenda 2000. The Mauricio Gaston Institute, a research and policy unit within the University of Massachusetts at Boston, has been working with community organizations for nearly a decade. Our research over the years has shown that Latinos in Massachusetts feel very informed about the problems affecting their community. We also learned that, as of five years ago, these people were ready to focus on strategy development and to identify steps to solve the problems facing the Latino community.

On a personal note, I lived through and observed a rise in Latino activism in New York City during the 1960s and 1970s, as did many Mexican Americans in the Southwest. From the post-war Puerto Rican migration through the second generation which I am a part of, Latinos have come to assume a greater role in city politics. I see this happening now in Massachusetts. This state has a very large Dominican presence within the Latino community, as well as a Puerto Rican and growing Central American presence. During the 1990s, Latinos became the largest ethnic minority in Massachusetts. However, this population is very diverse. Accordingly, the issue of intra-Latino relations has taken on greater significance.

So the issue of who represents Latinos' interests should be connected to a series of issues that the Mauricio Gaston Institute has come across in organizing various policy conferences. Some of the issues are: What is the modus operandi of our leadership? How much does our community depend on individual charismatic leadership as opposed to collective leadership? How much do organizations conceptualize the role of coalition building among the assorted Latino populations, where there is often a tense balance between a primary allegiance to one's origin of nationality—whether one is Mexican, Dominican, or Puerto Rican—and an allegiance to a pan-Latino concept? Depending on the context, one identity or the other will prevail.

Due to an inability to adopt a pragmatic pan-Latinism, we find ourselves cutting our own throats, dividing ourselves, and then blaming the so-called "system" for applying policies of dividing and conquering. In reality, the Latino community suffers from an inability to see beyond immediate identities, beyond the family, and beyond one's own culture.

In future conferences, we will ask ourselves: if one assumes the existence of a statewide network of Latino organizations ready to act upon your ideas, what three steps would you propose such a network take? This is a way to shift from the past practices of merely assessing our problems and move toward a broader vision which analyzes solutions to those

¹⁶ Professor, College of Public and Community Service at the University of Massachusetts, Boston; Director, Mauricio Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development.

problems. I am very hopeful that the community here in Massachusetts is reaching a new level of political maturation.

GANZ: We have heard a number of interesting arguments today. Do the audience members have any questions?

Q: I have heard some argue that in the past few years Spain has literally bought out all of Latin America. For example, the Spanish are trying to tap the Latino market with their acquisition of Lycos. Do you see the Spanish as allies in furthering a U.S. Latino agenda or have they co-opted our agenda?

ANZALDUA: Well, I think it is overstating the case to say that the Spanish have bought out Latin America. The Spanish see both Latin America and the Latino market in the United States as parts of an overall opportunity, and they are taking advantage of it. Certainly, they have placed themselves well in certain sectors. They have also done very well in the area of financial services. The Spanish are the largest banking presence in Latin America. Apart from this, however, they lack the power to co-opt the agenda. They are simply capitalists who have taken advantage of a profit opportunity.

It seems to me that, from the point of view of Latinos both in the United States and Latin America, the Spanish have taught us a valuable lesson. Latino communities can wield great influence over companies which depend on them as a source of profit. We should put pressure on these companies. We should make sure that they are being responsive to the interests of our communities.

PANIAGUA: On a side note, those who invested in Latin America thought that the Latino market in the United States would be similar. They thought that they could simply transfer the Latin American model to the United States. For example, HBO planned to translate every movie in Latin America and then bring that piece up to the United States, in the hopes that every Latino was going to sign up for HBO en Español. They learned very quickly that most Latinos currently subscribed to HBO prefer watching it in English. Clearly, companies have yet to understand the Latino community. This lack of understanding often results in unprofitable ventures, which then discourage future investment. Our major challenge will be to prove that Latinos, like every other group, can make a return on investment. Companies should not be afraid to cater to Latinos' interests.

NOGUERA: Ralph Paniagua makes an interesting point. The net worth of Latinos in this country is greater than the GDP of any country in Latin America. Consider also that remittances to Mexico by Mexicans living in the United States are the second largest source of foreign exchange in Mexico today after oil. In El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, remittances are the number one source of foreign exchange.

What is interesting is how these remittances are being used. They are no longer simply going into people's homes. Remittances are building schools. They are building roads. They are building an infrastructure in

the community. This is quite advanced compared to the lack of circulation of money in the Latino community in this country. The market is here, but businesses do not know how to serve that market. This is an important issue that merits discussion. If we are interested in the well-being of Latino communities, then education and health are key. If Latinos do not have a place to work and the means to support themselves, they will remain on the margins of society.

On a related note, I would add that I disagree with Ralph Paniagua about the importance of numbers. We need to know more about the numbers, as statistical research is extremely important. I would agree, however, that the real concern is how the Latino community will act on the numbers. How do we translate what we know into a strategy?

Q: How can Latino organizations and communities combine forces and form a unified agenda which will work to the benefit of all? Should such a movement start at the grass roots level?

TORRES: During the younger stages of our lives, we have a lot of enthusiasm, passion, commitment, and ideas. After graduation, however, we come out of that phase and confront the real world. This world can be quite tedious and boring compared to the experience of being exposed to new ideas, debating with fellow students, and writing papers on challenging topics. I find that after graduating, many Latinos do not want to work in community organizations and get involved with the nitty-gritty of community organizing. We often come out of an earlier phase of life, myself included, believing that just because we have a degree we should be made a program director in an organization that already has resources. We assume that we can make an immediate impact and policy changes. We want to be the people conducting press conferences and appearing on C-SPAN.

In reality, there is no easy solution to the problems confronting Latinos. For instance, in Massachusetts there are compelling arguments for re-districting East Boston and Chelsea in a manner that favors Latinos. Yet not even liberal politicians support proposals which increase the likelihood that a Latino will be elected from these areas.

PANIAGUA: In forming coalitions, we must make sure that Latina women play an integral role. Movements have a tendency to get bogged down in *machismo*. Alliances are going to be the next key step in pushing forward a Latino agenda.

ANZALDUA: From my perspective, work must start on the grass roots level. These organizations are adept at unifying small communities and helping them understand that their collective voices make a difference. There is no substitute for elbow grease when organizing a community.

PEREZ: I would add that we should not overlook the power of political participation and the vote. It is not enough just to hang around other Latinos and be supportive. This is necessary, but not enough.

GANZ: We are prone to forget that movements for change are often led by young people. Martin Luther King, Jr. was twenty-seven when he led the Montgomery bus boycott. In fact, many of the people driving the civil rights movement were in their late teens and early twenties. A fresh perspective and the willingness to act on your notion of how the world ought to be can produce the kind of courage it takes to initiate change.

Also, one of the consequences of demographic change and a growing minority population is that it can be easier to form organizations. It is much better when the wind is in your sails, as opposed to when you are sailing into the wind. In California, political, labor, and community organizations have begun to come together in an extraordinary manner unlike anything that I have seen in the last twenty or thirty years.

Q: One lesson I believe we can learn from the past with relation to the Mexican American community is that we have to be leery of allowing the middle class and more acculturated members of the community to identify themselves as the sole leaders. In any community as diverse as the Latino community there are numerous centers of power and sources of leadership. Oftentimes, the middle class leadership is not cognizant of or responsive to class and racial issues. What are your opinions regarding middle class leadership?

GANZ: I would note that one must distinguish between self-appointed leaders and leaders who have earned their positions by building constituencies to which they are accountable and responsive.

Q: To follow up on that issue, I feel that one of the dangers of a place like Harvard, or any institution of higher learning, is that graduates are often designated as leaders by virtue of their education and pedigrees. We should be wary of falling into this trap. It is an ego trap. One needs more than a B.A. or J.D. to be a leader. Leadership must be earned.

GANZ: As time is running out, I suggest that we allow each of the panelists to make some closing remarks.

ANZALDUA: I believe there are many ways to get communities to participate politically. I lived through the mobilization of many communities in south Texas. We managed to organize a political party and get people involved in the political process who had never before participated in politics. The challenge will be in making political institutions accountable to Latinos.

PEREZ: In order to get other people engaged in community activism, you must be involved yourself. I am a proponent of "social capital." By this term I mean developing networks and relationships with people and then infusing an element of political participation. Also, hold people accountable, question authority, become politically engaged, and develop networks. I like the idea of questioning the politically self-appointed.

ANZALDUA: I think the mistake we made when we organized the political movements of the 1960s was that we allowed politicians to be co-opted by the ideas of political process and electoral politics as an end in

themselves. Organizations have to exist to serve the communities and this notion must drive the political process.

PANIAGUA: What concerns me most is that there is too much emphasis placed on how politicians can help Latinos. There are really very few politicians willing to help. Those who are willing to help often lack the power necessary to make change. Another issue that concerns me is communication within the Latino community. If one wants information regarding the struggle, where does one go? It is as if we have no control over our own destinies. Hopefully we can make some progress in this area by taking advantage of the medium of television.

TORRES: The differing comments made by the members of this panel reflect the profound differences of opinion held by members of the Latino community. At some point, each of us must decide where we want to put our chips. Some will take the economic route. Others will take the political route. Some will focus on education or health. Each individual must decide where he or she can make the most effective contribution. In so doing, one must make sure not to block the efforts of others. It is not right to bash another because he or she has a different focus. This is not to deny that there will always be sharp dividing points where no negotiation is feasible.

Looking at the larger picture, the full realization of our goals may take a century or two. However Latinos, because of our diverse cultural roots, can transform this country's notions about race. My goal, my dream would be to no longer need to identify myself as Latino. I can simply be a human being. We are certainly far from this color-blind society now. In the meantime, we have to fight for every inch, struggle around every issue, and not lose our humanity in the process.