MINORITY REPORTS: THE EMERGENCE OF PAN-HISPANIC POLITICS, 1945-1980

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the efforts of activists, elected officials, and bureaucrats to make Hispanic identity into a meaningful tool in postwar U.S. politics. Opposing radical nationalism as well as assimilation, Mexican American and Puerto Rican leaders sought to convince all “Spanish-speaking Americans”—irrespective of nationality, immigration status, or language ability—to see themselves as a single, nationwide ethnic group. They gained support from liberals reinventing their creed amid the New Deal coalition’s collapse. They also found allies in conservative Republicans, who perceived a chance to exploit anti-black sentiment among Latino Democrats. Bipartisan interest in these voters produced a consensus that “Hispanics” deserved government recognition as a distinct national minority group, with their own presidential advisors, a unique place in federal statistics, and parity in the civil service.

There were limits, however, to pan-Hispanic politics. Mexican American and Puerto Rican congressmen who attempted to unify grassroots political activists found they would not subordinate their distinct national identities to pan-ethnic solidarity. Furthermore, even as Hispanics came to be recognized as “America’s second largest minority,” presidents remained more concerned with the Electoral College than with ethnic fairness. Their favoritism toward certain segments of this population exposed and exacerbated national origin rivalries, challenging leaders who sought to mobilize the country’s “Latino Vote.” This electorate’s
failure to realize its vast potential—its status as a “sleeping giant” of politics—became itself a key component of Hispanic identity, which activists would deploy in an effort to achieve the political power that long eluded them.
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Introduction

As I peer into the future and I see this crass materialism that is beginning to infect and poison American life, and in fact imperil and endanger its very essence of liberty and freedom, I see this great Hispanic people of the Southwest then rendering their great contribution, because of the nature of their being, spiritual, idealistic, they will contribute to offsetting the destructive and noxious effects of this crass materialism. They, like a giant stream that for generations and years and centuries flows underground unseen by human eye, will through some event, fortuitous event, suddenly arise to the full surface, in full flood and majestic grandeur.

—Walt Whitman to the Citizens of Santa Fe, New Mexico, ca. 1865¹

Identifying an ethnic group is a complicated act. It requires attention to nuance, and it should not be casually undertaken. The prominent Mexican American intellectual and civil rights activist George I. Sánchez delivered this message during the early 1950s in a friendly critique of a young sociologist’s research. Sánchez, who taught at the University of Texas at Austin, found the study of a Colorado health care program for “Spanish Americans” impressive, but questioned its interpretations. Particularly concerning was what present-day academics might call the paper’s “essentialism.” “For gosh sakes,” he wrote, “don’t characterize the Spanish-American with what is obviously true for the human race, and then imply, by commission or omission, that his characteristics are peculiarly his and, OF COURSE, radically different from those of the ‘Anglos’!” Specific complaints followed:

1. We insist that “Latin American” (“Spanish-American,” “Mexican-American,” etc.) has no precise meaning nor does the term connote generalized cultural attributes. 2. We say that, for convenience, all non-Latins are to be called “Anglos” (Germans, Italians, Jews, Catholics, Baptists, hill-billies, Bostonians, poor whites, Texans, Minnesotans, AD INFINITUM) have a precisely defined common culture whose features can be correlated

with the non-existent (or, at best, undefined) features of the Latin “culture.” . . . The
time orientation of a “poor white” is no different from that of a poor Negro or of a poor
Spanish. Neither can provide for the future; each has to live for the present; after laboring
for 14 hours or day, none of them has the energy or interest or curiosity to go to PTA’s or
to Association meetings. You wouldn’t either, nor would I – nor would Abraham Lincoln! 

Sánchez had previously warned the young scholar, Julian Samora, against the tendency to
view social distinctions as the product of “ethnic” differences. Even before Samora had begun
his research, Sánchez had advised him that, “the characteristics that distinguish the Spanish-
speaking group in any part of the United States are much less ethnic than they are socio-
economic.” He regarded the ethnic framework as especially problematic for Samora’s likely
subjects, because “there is no real ethnic sameness among the various subdivisions of the same
Spanish-speaking group, and the socio-economic factors vary considerably.” He therefore
recommended that Samora “define ‘ethnic’ in very broad terms so as not to give the impression
that they are a distinct ethnic group.”

It was a greater scholarly mistake in his eyes, however, to suggest that the Southwest’s
diverse “Spanish-Mexican” populations should be understood as part of a pan-ethnic group. To
illustrate this point, he sent Samora a scathing review he had written of the sociologist John H.
Burma’s 1954 book, *Spanish Speaking Groups in the United States*. In addition to disparaging
Burma’s research, Sánchez cast doubt on the entire concept of such a book. It “takes a veritable

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2 George I. Sánchez to Julian Samora, undated, Box 42, Folder 5, Julian Samora Papers, Benson Latin American
Collection, University Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.
3 George I. Sánchez to Julian Samora, February 20, 1952, Box 42, Folder 5, Julian Samora Papers, Benson Latin
American Collection, University Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.
shotgun wedding to make Puerto Ricans, Spanish-Mexicans, and Filipinos appear to be culturally homogeneous,” he wrote.⁴

Sánchez’s advice seems ironic in retrospect, since Julian Samora was to become a leader in the establishment of both Mexican American and Latino studies, and one of the most influential Mexican American scholars and public intellectuals of the second half of the century. Nevertheless, the conversation is an important artifact. It marks a time when Mexican American leaders and thinkers often downplayed their cultural distinctiveness in public debates. Instead, they argued that material improvements in jobs, housing, and schools would not only allow them to live better but would reveal their fundamental similarity with other Americans.

The exchange also suggests that the desire for intellectual accuracy, no doubt informed by a certain assimilationist sentiment, produced in many Mexican American leaders strong reservations about the existence of a national pan-Hispanic identity. Sánchez expressed this view clearly in 1963, after the great flow of Cuban exiles to the United States had begun:

They are just too many different peoples to be adequately covered under one umbrella. While they could be called, loosely, “Americans who speak Spanish” they would have to be treated in separate categories – for, by way of illustration, though a Cuban in Florida and a Mexican in Laredo both speak Spanish, they really have little else in common (even though both may be aliens or citizens, or a combination).⁵

Federal policies in the middle third of the twentieth century sustained this analysis.

Before the civil rights revolution of the 1960s, the national government did not recognize U.S. populations of Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and others of Spanish or Latin

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⁴ “Book Review,” George I. Sánchez to Julian Samora, February 20, 1952, Box 42, Folder 5, Julian Samora Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.
⁵ George I. Sánchez to Kyle Haselden, May 22, 1963, Box 42, Folder 6, Julian Samora Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.
American descent as a single national community. Federal statistics reflected perceptions of each group’s basic geographic separation, employing a range of methods and terms to count the different populations. In 1960, for example, the census identified Americans of “Spanish surname” in five Southwestern states (but nowhere else), and asked New Yorkers whether they were of Puerto Rican origin. Few institutions linked the groups, their leaders remained largely unfamiliar with one another, and thus policies had not been developed to treat them as a collective. In short, the common understanding and the federal recognition of “Hispanics” or “Latinos” as a national minority group did not exist in 1960.

Much changed in the following two decades. By the late 1970s, Hispanic pan-ethnicity had gained wide acceptance in government and in the broader culture. Presidents declared a “National Hispanic Heritage Week” each September. Mexican American and Puerto Rican legislators formed a Congressional Hispanic Caucus. The decennial census began asking all Americans if they were of “Hispanic/Spanish Origin.” These changes illuminated a national “Hispanic Market” for advertisers and corporations. They led pundits to opine about the tendencies and values of a “Hispanic Vote.” Indeed, so thorough was the transformation that media and commercial interests joined civil rights activists in proclaiming that the 1980s would be the “Decade of the Hispanics.” These distinct populations had become one national minority.

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This dissertation critically examines the phenomenon of the development and institutionalization of Hispanic pan-ethnicity in the United States. While pan-Hispanic sentiment has undoubtedly arisen as a result of many factors, including residential patterns, religious worship, marriage habits, and media strategies—to name an important few—I argue that the construction and institutionalization of Hispanic pan-ethnicity in the United States was, in crucial respects, a political process. My study explains how ethnic leaders and elected officials sought to forge several peoples into one. It narrates their attempts to make pan-Hispanic solidarity an instrument of political power, one that could produce the society that they desired. Finally, it explains how these events helped to redefine American assimilation, and the United States as a multicultural republic.

This analysis of ethnic identity in transition has benefited greatly from the diligence of scholars in a variety of fields. It draws upon the insights of historians who have established the need to view identity among ethnic Mexicans as a process of creative adaptation in dialogue with the currents of mainstream U.S. culture, politics, and the economy. Scholars in both history and the social sciences have shown how the sons and daughters of early twentieth-century migrants synthesized a new “Mexican-American” culture from pieces of the old and the new, at work and at leisure, all under the constraint of discrimination. They have discerned a “Mexican-American Generation” of leaders, a largely middle-class cohort rising to prominence in the middle third of the twentieth century. Its members, including George I. Sánchez, embraced Americanism,

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seizing upon their rights as U.S. citizens to demand full social and political inclusion.8 By the late 1960s, disenchantment with the liberal nationalist project pointed Mexican Americans in another direction. Scholars have written of a generation embracing a “Chicano” identity, and pursuing a cultural renaissance and power in opposition to the supposedly assimilationist tenets of the generation that preceded them.9

Historians have explored “Hispanic” identity less comprehensively. It has been argued that Mexican Americans adopted this identity in a mid-century embrace of “whiteness,” a “Faustian pact” to get on the color line’s good side in the era of Jim Crow.10 A separate claim—about the resurfacing of Hispanic identity in the 1970s—is that it “represent[ed] a renewal of the Mexican-American middle-class political tradition that was shaped by the generation of the 1930s.”11 In either formulation, “Hispanic” identity has very little to do with ethnic Mexicans’ views about or relationship with other national origin groups falling under that pan-ethnic umbrella.

Such approaches, focusing largely on the Southwest and especially Texas, cannot be expected to explain Hispanidad or Latinidad (“Hispanicness” or “Latinness”) in all times and all places. Hispanic pan-ethnicity was, in fact, taken on earlier, not always as a racial positioning

11 Muñoz, Youth, Identity, Power, 175.
device, and not always by Mexican Americans. Historian Virginia Sánchez Korrol has observed that Puerto Ricans participated in a range of pan-Hispanic organizations in New York City during the early part of the twentieth century. A recent history of the city’s Puerto Ricans that devotes significant attention to the postwar years explains that pan-Hispanic organization went into a decline after Puerto Ricans became numerically dominant among the city’s Spanish-speaking people. All of these studies reveal that pan-Hispanic sentiment was fragile and heavily influenced by context and was always in close dialogue with U.S. and Latin American national identities.

Although historians have made little systematic or nationwide study of pan-Hispanic identity and organization, sociologists have done more to investigate the phenomenon. Felix Padilla’s study of Chicago’s Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in the 1970s and 1980s concluded that “Latino ethnic consciousness” was a “situational ethnic identity,” a feeling “fabricated out of shared cultural and structural similarities” in response to social inequality. The two groups were brought together by virtue of their shared position in society’s lower layer, making pan-Hispanic identity a manifestation of integration in U.S. society.

While this approach treats pan-Hispanic identity as largely created from below, scholars looking at the national level have understood it as an ascriptive identity, something done to communities and individuals, often against their will. According to one such study, “Hispanic”

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is a “stigmatizing ethnic label” that was “imposed by state administrative agencies” after Mexican American and Puerto Rican nationalist movements had demanded justice for their respective people in the 1960s and 1970s. The advent of the new “label” meant that these groups would be “homogenized” and “thrown back into invisibility” following their challenge to the status quo.\(^\text{15}\) A related interpretation, though not connected to politics, sees Latinidad as a consequence of corporate marketing imperatives, the system of ethnic media production, and the cultural and economic hierarchies of Latin Americans in the advertising business. In this view, media and advertising workers defining a market segment “make” a people.\(^\text{16}\)

Each approach has its merits and disadvantages for understanding Hispanic pan-ethnicity’s emergence as a national phenomenon. Padilla’s local study, for example, rightly credits government, especially affirmative action programs, with fostering Latinidad. At the same time, it shows that activists were essential to advancing this form of ethnic consciousness, that it was not just imposed from without. It also suggests that pan-Hispanic identity may, in fact, be understood as a form of assimilation. However, Padilla fails to connect pan-Hispanic activists to national players in Mexican American and Puerto Rican politics who were constructing and molding this form of “ethnic assertiveness” for those back home in their communities, and institutionalizing the policies that would serve as tools in local organizing.\(^\text{17}\)

Some ascriptive works see this bigger picture, and identify government’s role in setting the terms of self-definition common in political discourse. Most fail, though, to appreciate that activists building national pan-Hispanic alliances, in and out of government, have been crucial in

\(^{15}\) Oboler, xv, xvi, xvii, 15
\(^{17}\) Padilla, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness*, 12.
cementing the identity. Recent sociological scholarship adds balance to the discussion, arguing that the institutionalization of Latinidad was a “gradual process…resulting from a series of negotiations between bureaucrats, ethnic leaders and other state agencies and constituent groups.”\(^{18}\) Power critically shaped this process, and the study of media-constructed Latinidad is sensitive to its inequalities. Latinos who construct pan-ethnic images for popular consumption do so for employers with their own views about what constitutes Latinidad, and in response to the demands and biases of powerful corporate clients.

The process by which advertisers assign a common culture of consumer tastes and values to Latinos is not divorced from politics and governance, however. It is government, after all, that generates the census figures that marketers use. Government licenses the airwaves that disseminate a composite Latino image. The state, similar to the advertising industry, must mold populations to fit its needs, classifying and measuring groups in order to rule them. In political scientist James C. Scott’s term, they must make them “legible.” However, federal classifications created to facilitate governance can, writes Scott, ultimately “becom[e] categories that organize people’s daily experience precisely because they are embedded in state-created institutions that structure that experience.” They can become “an authoritative tune to which most of the population must dance.”\(^{19}\)

Again, though, time and place matter, especially in the study of ethnicity. To grasp the development, institutionalization, and deployment of this pan-ethnic identity, one must consider


the broader historical context during the period when Hispanic pan-ethnicity became a national phenomenon, the 1960s and 1970s. Historian Gary Gerstle has argued that the United States in the late 1960s was reaching the end, both of a political era associated with the New Deal and of an epoch in American national identity. In the “Rooseveltian” America that was passing, liberals’ robust language of “civic nationalism” had made equal opportunity and economic prosperity for all the objective of domestic policy and the essence of Americanism. This civic identity was thought capable of healing the country’s historic racial divisions. With new immigration restricted, nation-builders used it to incorporate European immigrants and their children in the national consensus. Influential liberals advocated cultural pluralism, but resisted making ethnic or racial difference an explicit factor in public policy.20

Events of the 1960s initiated a new era of ethnic history. As expectations rose for rapid social and economic transformation, activists, intellectuals, and politicians vowed to make race and ethnicity central factors in the establishment and evaluation of public policy. This revolution in civil rights created powerful incentives for ethnic Americans to obtain official recognition as protected minority groups. As the decade wore on, the Vietnam War shook faith in the country’s virtue, and vigorous identity movements arose to denounce mainstream liberalism, hastening the old Americanism’s demise. During those years, the Keynesian consensus underlying federal management of the macroeconomy faltered, leaving elites with fewer tools to manage societal conflict. In response to these and other challenges, many politicians and intellectuals advocated making the protection and honoring of ethnic and racial differences central objectives of public

20 On civic nationalism, see Gary Gerstle, American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 8-10;
policy. This movement was sometimes referred to as “multiculturalism” and other times by its
goal of “diversity.”

21 I do not suggest that these terms are identical in meaning, especially as they differ in terms of their requirements for public policy. But for the purposes of this dissertation, they are considered to be part of the same basic movement that considered recognition of ethnoracial difference to be a national imperative; On the loss of faith in Keynesian solutions, see Daniel T. Rodgers, Age of Fracture (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), chap. 2.


Scholars differ on how to understand the politics of race-conscious talk and programs. One view has been that the liberal fight against employment discrimination, including the rise of affirmative action, allowed Mexican Americans to reject their past embrace of “whiteness,” and instead “position themselves as the ‘brown’ counterpart to blacks in a vigorous assertion of their right to good jobs.” When the state changed the rules, it was “more likely” that Mexican Americans would seek “cooperation with other minorities.”

This dissertation underscores the great obstacles to that cooperation. It suggests that Mexican Americans’ ethnic assertion and the emergence of pan-Hispanic identity came out of a strong sense of rivalry with African Americans. Distrust and hostility between the groups had accumulated over decades during which Mexican American elites usually distanced themselves from the black struggle. These tensions did not disappear quickly. In fact, legislative progress and political patronage became new points of rivalry for the two groups. Mexican Americans’ relative lack of success in obtaining government recognition alienated them from African Americans and reinforced their sense of ethnic pride. At the same time, the national logic of
affirmative action grouped Mexican Americans with Puerto Ricans and Cubans, forcing their leaders to reconsider the boundaries of their ethnic community.

This study thus argues for seeing American multiculturalism as a process of both creative adaptation and intense competition. At certain levels, America’s “minorities” have fought with one another over resources, privileges, and recognition as eagerly and parochially as any European immigrants did. The rise of a national Hispanic identity and its role in the making of multicultural America helps to inform this difficult history.

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Pan-Hispanic identity emerged on the national stage amid the debate over the place of ethnic and racial difference in Americans’ relationships with one another and with their government. Before 1960, Mexican American and Puerto Rican leaders had established few alliances of any kind, and those they did manage to form were short-lived. However, during the next decade, their involvement in national campaigns on behalf of both Democratic and Republican candidates, and in securing civil rights protections from the federal government increased their awareness of one another. But misgivings, mostly Mexican Americans’ about organizing in coalition with Puerto Ricans, persisted. Some leaders, such as Edward Roybal of California, Joseph Montoya of New Mexico, and New York’s Herman Badillo, believed their influence could grow if they overcame mutual mistrust and transcended geographic divisions between their people. They sought to build pan-Hispanic coalitions and to convince all “Spanish-speaking Americans” to see themselves as members of a single, nationwide community.
These pan-Hispanic activists and elected officials gained support from other liberal Democrats, who were reinventing their creed amid the New Deal coalition’s collapse and eager to extend rights to the nation’s minorities. They also found allies among Republicans such as Richard Nixon and Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, who wanted to exploit an anti-black sentiment they perceived as common among Latino Democrats. Republicans who had opposed national civil rights laws cleverly argued that their efforts on behalf of this group were in the spirit of equal opportunity. Bipartisan interest in these voters and the political parties’ desire to mold them into a single electorate produced a consensus that “Hispanics” deserved government recognition as a distinct national minority, with their own presidential advisors, their own place in federal statistics, and parity in the civil service.

Wide support for initiatives that treated “Hispanics” as a single national minority came about for several reasons. First, mastering the politics of Hispanic identity appeared vital to future partisan advantage. Predictions of these populations’ coming demographic significance meant that neither major party could afford to alienate their leaders. Second, the story told by Mexican American and Puerto Rican leaders to explain what set their people apart was sufficiently broad to make either party a vessel for the pan-ethnic group’s supposedly essential traits, only one of which was said to be language. Along with “Anglo” supporters, they produced a common narrative based on their people’s inherent loyalty and patriotism, and their opposition to both radical cultural nationalism and traditional assimilation. They helped make the national project of cultural pluralism a success by showing that diversity need not be threatening. Finally, consolidating the various populations of Latin American descent into a single entity appealed to state officials because it appeared to simplify governance. Thus even
Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans who believed it critical to work separately, lest their particular issues get lost, often found that government required them to coordinate their requests for government assistance.

As ethnic activists, elected officials, and bureaucrats created a common route to national significance for several distinct groups, their actions also revealed the limits to pan-Hispanic politics. Even as Hispanics came to be recognized as “America’s second largest minority” (and now its largest), their leaders had difficulty finding the issue or appeal that would mobilize these diverse populations to rise up and act as one. Adding to the challenge for these leaders, presidential favoritism that sometimes benefited Mexican Americans (the most numerous group) and other times Cuban Americans (perceived as the most successful), exposed and exacerbated national origin rivalries that threatened the unity of the “Hispanic Vote.” The leaders succeeded in institutionalizing the idea of a single, national “Spanish-speaking” community, one deserving of a fair share of federal attention. However, their group’s newfound prominence inadvertently helped fuel fears of a monolithic “Hispanic Invasion.” As nativist forces mobilized against this perceived national threat, pan-Hispanic activists had only an electoral “sleeping giant” to defend their people from attacks.

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To demonstrate the interplay between political assertion and the institutionalization of Hispanic identity, I have divided this dissertation into four sections. Part I, “Becoming a National Minority,” examines the foundation that was laid for this national minority’s emergence as Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans who fought separate struggles drew together in
national political campaigns and as part of the expansion of federal civil rights and anti-poverty efforts. Chapter 1 examines the intersection of campaign activism and group transformation. It shows a Southwestern ethnic Mexican population struggling to build a regional political alliance because of tactical disputes and a weak sense of ethnic solidarity. John F. Kennedy’s 1960 presidential campaign brought many of these rivals together for a shared goal and encouraged them to feel that their people had collectively made the difference in electing a president. While many of their divisions remained, their special place in national politics encouraged Mexican Americans to use cultural difference to lay a claim on patronage positions in the new administration.

They were not alone, however. Puerto Rican leaders argued that they too had played a major part in Kennedy’s triumph and expected that their efforts would bring additional federal attention to their communities. The two populations’ leaders remained, by and large, unfamiliar to one another. In a sign of their new prominence in the Democratic Party, however, Mexican Americans doubled their small congressional delegation, and Puerto Ricans achieved greater representation in New York politics.

Chapter 2 argues that Mexican American elites’ embrace of minority status was accelerated by the perception that the civil rights revolution was passing them by. In the eyes of many Mexican Americans, the Democrats’ professed interest in fighting discrimination could not be squared with the disproportionate attention which black Americans received from civil rights agencies. Estranged from liberal Democrats, Mexican American leaders redoubled their efforts to find a solution to their organizational and cultural fragmentation. Their effort to organize themselves as “Mexican-Americans” and to challenge the Johnson administration represented a
breakthrough. Their sense of themselves as a unique people distanced them from Puerto Ricans, then hoping to collaborate in search of greater power vis-à-vis the federal government.

Chapter 3 analyzes President Lyndon Johnson’s response to Mexican Americans’ growing discontent. After significant Democratic losses in 1966 and rumors of Mexican American defections, Johnson nominated a Mexican American to serve on the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC), and created an Inter-agency Committee on Mexican American Affairs (ICMAA) to work on this group’s behalf. Ostensibly an advocate for all “Spanish-Americans,” including Puerto Ricans, the ICMAA was largely run by and for Mexican Americans. Sensing an effort to control them, Chicano activists rejected Johnson’s incorporation strategy. They began to create independent organizations to protect their ethnic group first and foremost, and remained divided from Puerto Ricans at the national level.

Despite the gulls that separated traditional and emerging Mexican American and Puerto Rican leaders—divisions often exacerbated by presidential prerogatives—politicians pushed for consolidation and institutionalization their ostensibly shared interests and identity. Part II, “Institutionalizing Pan-Ethnicity,” examines this process. Chapter 4 uses the congressional debate over extending the ICMAA as a case study in the elite-driven institutionalization of pan-Hispanic identity at the start of the Nixon administration. Selectively interpreting the distant past and ignoring emerging radicalism in Mexican American and Puerto Rican communities, congressmen crafted a narrative of pan-Hispanic unity in which these populations formed a model minority for having suffered for so long, and allegedly without protest. Against Mexican American leaders’ previous wishes, they chose to represent all of these worthy constituents through a single, national body. The Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish Speaking
People (CCOSS) was their attempt to provide the institutional unity that had long eluded Mexican American and Puerto Rican leaders, to show federal concern, and to manage these groups’ relationships with each other and with the wider society during a time of ethnic tumult.

Chapter 5 discusses how Richard Nixon, also seeking advantage with and through these voters, intervened to organize them into a single statistical entity. As Congress was developing its national advocate for the Spanish-speaking American, the Nixon administration forced the Bureau of the Census to provide, for the first time, nationwide data on the country’s “Spanish Origin” population. Many leaders were overjoyed with the change, while others, unsure if they wished to belong to this large and heterogeneous group, successfully demanded that their national origins also be reflected in the country’s statistical profile. Neither side exercised much control over how the numbers were used, however. A new national “Spanish heritage” statistic elevated their groups in national policy debates, yet threatened to make their historical uniqueness irrelevant to those discussions.

Seeking to reap what they believed was its considerable political potential, elected officials had institutionalized pan-Hispanic identity before most Mexican American and Puerto Rican leaders had embraced the feeling. Part III, “Politicizing the ‘Spanish-speaking Concept,’” examines initiatives undertaken to mobilize this fragile identity for electoral gain. Chapter 6 shows that 1969 to 1971 were years of learning for the Nixon administration. The White House sought to master a method of appealing to these populations as a national constituency, relying heavily at first on racial polarization. The administration’s outreach strategy largely avoided national rivalries, at least on the surface. Instead, it created pan-Hispanic small business development and affirmative action programs to convince the middle-class, Spanish-speaking
Americans that their “ethnic” values and Republicanism were a natural fit. But it had difficulty reconciling Nixon’s pursuit of Mexican American voters with the ideals of fair treatment for all “Spanish-speaking Americans” to which Congress had seemingly committed the president.

As Nixon and his aides tried to set the course for this national minority, Mexican American and Puerto Rican congressmen attempted to assert themselves as its true leaders, an effort that is the subject of Chapter 7. In October of 1971, they brought together activists from around the country—Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and others—in hope of organizing a “Spanish-speaking coalition” that could command the balance of power in national elections. The participants agreed on many issues but largely failed to build a grassroots pan-Hispanic organization capable of deciding elections. Although nationalism hampered electoral organizing, the event inspired other activists and government workers to believe in the potential for a pan-Hispanic unity built on basic cultural familiarity and a shared need for affirmative action.

Chapter 8 shows that while the activists and congressmen struggled with coalition politics, the Nixon administration enjoyed an easier time of things. The White House’s “Spanish-speaking Task Force,” the so-called “Brown Mafia,” used patronage to make the “Spanish-speaking” voter a part of the “New Majority” in 1972. Mixing federal jobs and grants with racially-charged appeals, the White House was able to attract favorable publicity, as well as a substantial segment of the coveted Mexican American middle-class. Behind the scenes, however, the campaigners’ contempt for Puerto Rican voters exposed the fissures within what they called the “Spanish speaking vote.” Meanwhile, George McGovern’s presidential campaign employed an outreach strategy that seemed to suggest that being a minority and being poor were
one and the same, an affront to the ethnic middle class that appeared to gravitate toward the
president. Nixon’s landslide victory and his improvement among Mexican Americans gave
Republicans great hope that they had finally begun to dislodge this group from its traditional
loyalty to the Democratic Party.

Although Nixon and his Cabinet Committee would be undone by the Watergate scandal,
Part IV, “Institutional Legacies,” shows that presidential and congressional Spanish-speaking
initiatives lived on. Chapter 9 traces the struggles of Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and
Cuban public employees in establishing a meaningful place for their pan-ethnic group within the
federal workforce. For them, the Nixon administration’s affirmative action program was a great
disappointment. They believed that government bureaucrats, especially black administrators,
still did not take seriously their claims for inclusion. These civil servants saw themselves as
leaders whose personal advancement was a prerequisite for their group’s progress, and for
government to function properly. With the help of sympathetic federal managers, they built
IMAGE, a 7,000-member nationwide pan-Hispanic government workers’ organization.
Although they did not achieve significant increase in the number of Hispanic federal workers,
IMAGE demonstrated the critical role that federal policy played in fostering common ground
among Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans.

Chapter 10 analyzes the institutionalization of Hispanic identity in federal statistics over
the course of the 1970s. It shows how an informal coalition of advocates, elected officials,
bureaucrats, and advertisers promoted accuracy, efficiency, and standardization, as well as self-
determination, to justify a unique place for “Hispanics” in the nation’s statistical system. By
1980, many political activists considered census participation as important as electoral
participation to the future of America’s Hispanics. The chapter also demonstrates how census organizing helped generate a backlash against the counting of aliens, regardless of legal status, complicating and in some cases reinforcing pan-Hispanic solidarity across the nation. With the Hispanic category thus inscribed, there developed a kind of permanence around this identity, one that ensured that its meaning would be contested in years ahead.

Finally, my epilogue revisits the shift toward pan-Hispanic identification, and brings the story of the “Latino Vote” to the present. It suggests that the long history of supposed electoral underachievement by “America’s largest minority,” articulated in national news stories, community debates, and by political organizers, served in and of itself as a catalyst for pan-Hispanic solidarity, one that could eventually help this group live up to its perceived electoral potential.
PART I. BECOMING A NATIONAL MINORITY
Chapter 1

Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and the Politics of Recognition, 1945-1964

In 1960, more than 110 years after annexation and war turned Mexico’s northern hinterland into the U.S. Southwest, Mexican Americans held just a limited claim on the nation’s consciousness. A sizable number of ethnic Mexicans had established communities in the industrial Midwest, but the majority lived in the Southwest, a region still gaining prominence in the nation’s political economy. They existed beyond the sight of many academics, advertisers, and policymakers, enigmatic and easily misunderstood, if mentioned at all. George I. Sánchez’s 1940 study of New Mexicans called this group a “Forgotten People.”¹ More than a quarter century later, the *Atlantic Monthly* would run an oft-cited piece identifying them as “A Minority Nobody Knows.”²

Mexican Americans were in this respect quite unlike the African Americans to whom they would often be compared in the years ahead. The history of black enslavement, and the overwhelming nativity of black Americans, had long compelled black and white to reckon with their status and identity in the United States. The “Great Migration” of African Americans to Northern cities had established this group’s incontrovertibly national character, and transformed the Democratic Party. Moreover, dramatic mobilizations for black freedom and fair treatment

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challenged the American order, including the country’s claim to lead the free world during the Cold War.³

Their peculiar status was not purely the function of Eastern bias. It also had roots in the image their leaders projected to the larger society. Mexican Americans’ most important civil rights organizations long had fought for their people to join the American mainstream. They taught their members to embrace the English language and to show respect for U.S. citizenship by naturalizing and voting. Service in the U.S. military was celebrated. By and large, they expressed discomfort asserting their rights as members of an oppressed minority. At times, this sentiment led Mexican American leaders to distance their people from African Americans, and to claim rights and social privileges as members of the “Caucasian Race.”⁴

Despite their desire for incorporation in American life, Mexican Americans faced unique divisions that complicated their efforts. Mexico’s proximity to the United States and relatively open U.S. immigration policies⁵ meant that many communities were divided by immigration and citizenship status.⁶ The distinct political socialization and needs of ethnic Mexicans in various states, informed in part by their own diverse relationships to Mexico and Mexican immigrants,

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⁵ While many European nations faced strict immigration quotas during the middle third of the twentieth century, nations of the Western Hemisphere did not.
frustrated their efforts at political unification. As a consequence, they were “taken for granted as a known and modest part of the Democratic Party constituency.”

Even as Mexican Americans remained on the margins of the emerging national debate on civil rights, events were unfolding in the East that would alter their prospects for political empowerment. Racist laws passed in the 1920s had restricted mass immigration from Europe, but migration returned with a flourish after World War II. Hundreds of thousands of overseas migrants—Puerto Ricans—arrived on the mainland, the vast majority congregating in New York City. In 1940, they were less than 1 percent of New York City’s population. In 1960, their number stood at almost 8 percent. They replaced Jews and Italians in garment shops and tenements. They joined and often overwhelmed longstanding Puerto Rican and Hispanic communities. Usually poor and frequently of African descent, they were grist for an angry and sensationalist local press. Because the migrants were U.S. citizens, many hoped they would follow the path of many previous urban newcomers and improve their lot through politics. Yet some established figures saw their growing numbers as a threat, and worked to suppress Puerto Rican political participation. Longstanding questions over Puerto Rico’s political status, and whether U.S. citizenship could have any real meaning for a colonized people, further clouded the picture.

There is little indication that a nationwide “Latin Vote” (as it likely would have been called) existed in the early 1960s. Although Mexican American and Puerto Rican leaders were asking themselves similar questions about the desirability, scope, logic, and strategy of ethnic participation.

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politics, they had few personal connections. Instead, the middle third of the twentieth century witnessed the two populations asserting themselves as distinct and dominant Hispanic minorities in their regions of primary residence. As a result of their separation, ambivalence, and at times competition, characterized their relationship.

Nonetheless, both groups learned new strategies for employing ethnic identity in politics. Their frustration at receiving few rewards for their campaign efforts taught them the value, and the limitations, of asserting ethnic difference as a qualification for government service. Although they lagged behind other Democratic constituencies in patronage and party visibility, each group was able to use their association with national Democrats such as John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson to improve their position in local and state politics. They elected officials who, sometimes in spite of their own desires, served as symbols of their groups’ incorporation in the Democratic Party and progress in American life. Institutional integration drew these distinct populations closer together, setting the stage for even greater ties in the years ahead.

The Challenges of Mexican American Politics

In 1960, Mexican Americans found no shortage of reasons for wanting to improve their position in the United States. At a time of great national prosperity, they faced systematic economic discrimination. Prejudice restricted their occupational choices and paid them a fraction of what “Anglo” workers earned, often for the same labor. In Texas, where the inequalities were most extreme, Mexican American workers in certain job classes averaged as little as 61 cents for every dollar an Anglo counterpart made. The median annual income for a
Mexican American family in the state was equal to the national poverty line. Even in California, where the economy and society were more open, significant disparities still existed between the earnings of “Spanish surname” Americans and whites. Despite some breakthroughs resulting from litigation, Mexican American children frequently struggled to learn in separate and inferior educational facilities. Throughout the Southwest, 28 percent of Mexican Americans above the age of fourteen were “functional illiterates,” meaning they possessed at most only four years of formal education. Overcrowding was common and public services could be scarce on the “Mexican” side of town, with roads unpaved and sewers incapable of standing up to seasonal flooding. In 1960, almost 30 percent of the dwellings where Mexican Americans made their rest were “dilapidated or deteriorating,” four times the rate for Anglo domiciles in the Southwest.9

Social discrimination persisted. Swimming pools and restaurants that may have taken down their signs warning “No Dogs or Mexicans” could still make plain—and do so legally—those who would and would not be enjoying service. Compounding matters, since the early 1940s, the U.S. government had been inviting Mexican laborers to come north to work in agriculture as part of the Bracero program. Many Mexican Americans, particularly those interested in unionizing farm workers, understood that this contract labor scheme imperiled their economic and social standing. As damaging were the dual realities that the contract system spawned: the undocumented migrants filling the demand for labor outside of its restrictions, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) response to this, the so-called “Wetback

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problem.” Whether to fight the Bracero program itself, or to seek an end to INS raids of their neighborhoods, politicized Mexican Americans had ample targets on which to focus.\(^\text{10}\)

Despite this range of pressing concerns, they had long encountered severe obstacles to using politics to improve their lot. They faced party bosses who were “set on not incorporating Mexican leadership, much less providing resources for their activities.” They tended to lack the financial resources to play a more independent role, since most Mexican American communities were working-class in character. Moreover, their communities usually contained large numbers of non-citizens, ineligible to vote and thus unable to use the political system to advance their interests. In some places, rural Texas in particular, their opponents discouraged independent politics with the threat of violence, and with subtler means such as language and residency requirements. Poll taxes discouraged many more. When Mexican Americans were able to cast ballots, gerrymandering or at-large election strategies often diluted their ability to elect candidates who would represent their interests.\(^\text{11}\)

New Mexico was the chief exception to this pattern of political weakness. Due to relatively low levels of “Anglo” in-migration, the state’s “Spanish-American” population maintained economic and political influence into the twentieth century. Hispanos were strongly represented at the 1910 convention that produced its first state constitution. The document reflected their power and protected their interests by guaranteeing citizens of the state the right to vote, hold office, and serve on juries, regardless of “religion, race, language or color, or inability to speak, read, or write the English or Spanish languages.”\(^\text{12}\) Both major political parties courted

\(^{10}\) Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, chap. 5.
\(^{11}\) Gómez-Quíñones, *Chicano Politics*, 83-84.
the Hispano vote, and fielded Hispano candidates. In 1930, Dionisio “Dennis” Chavez, a liberal Democrat, became the state’s lone U.S. Representative. In 1934, he became the U.S. Senate’s lone American of Spanish surname—a decade and a half before the first Italian-American was to serve in that legislative chamber.

Overall, however, Mexican Americans faced a narrowing of acceptable routes to power. During the Depression years, left-wing trade unions had organized workers in the Southwest’s fields, packinghouses, canneries, mines and smelters, and did so regardless of race. They offered Mexican American workers the chance to achieve social equality and political power by fighting for economic justice. Some labor activists sought to channel this ferment through a Popular Front organization, El Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Española (the Congress of Spanish-Speaking Peoples). El Congreso, as it was known, advocated voter registration and support for candidates who joined “the fight of the Spanish-American people against economic discrimination and for educational and cultural equality.” However, while a labor-centric political mobilization held some promise before World War II, the Cold War era was profoundly hostile to its prospects. Radical unions fought to endure raiding by more conservative ones, as well as the hounding of anticommunist crusaders in government. El Congreso faced state harassment and intimidation, and saw its leaders deported for reasons ranging from minor immigration violations to their past or present Communist sympathies.

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As the postwar anticommunist consensus foreclosed more sweeping solutions to Mexican Americans’ plight, it opened new doors for mainstream activists. World War II fueled an economic revolution in much of the Southwest, encouraging Mexican Americans to join a mass exodus from rural areas. Veterans took advantage of the GI bill to go to college, and used Veterans’ Administration loans to secure property. Often finding stable and relatively well-paid work in the Southwest’s burgeoning defense industry, they became the core of a growing Mexican American middle class. This newfound stability enabled Mexican Americans to obtain “partial integration and patronage” in Texas cities. One result was that a young politician named Henry B. González could win election to San Antonio’s City Council in 1953 and the Texas State Senate in 1956, with both Mexican American and Anglo support. He espoused a sort of “civic nationalism,” according to which the country’s minority constituents would achieve civil equality and economic progress by emphasizing their common bond with other Americans, and their total commitment to the national project, not by highlighting ethnic or racial difference. His vigorous defense of labor, integration and civil rights for all Americans—of freedom and equality as the essence of Americanism—made him a towering figure among Texas’ perennially embattled liberal Democrats.

Lacking the institutional advantages of their counterparts in New Mexico, but laboring in a more open society than Texas, Mexican Americans in California also found new leaders in electoral politics. In East Los Angeles, a WWII veteran and social worker named Edward

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17 On “civic nationalism,” see Gary Gerstle, American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 5-11; To illustrate his loyalty, in those years González referred himself as an “American of Spanish Surname” and not as a “Mexican American.”
Roybal teamed with an Industrial Areas Foundation organizer, Fred Ross, to build the Community Service Organization (CSO). With liberal, anti-communist trade unions and Catholic clergy, the CSO registered thousands of new voters and elected Roybal to the Los Angeles City Council in 1949, the first Mexican American elected to the body since 1881. Roybal fought against employment discrimination, criticized police brutality, and proudly identified himself as a “Mexican American.” However, like Henry B. González, he won with a New Deal coalition that included Jews, labor, and other minority support. No single-interest politician, he said at the time, he intended to “represent all the people in my district—one of the most cosmopolitan in our city.”18

The generation of politicians and activists coming to the fore after World War II succeeded to the extent that it did in part because its members posed far less of a challenge to dominant social and economic relations than did the labor radicals of the 1930s. The two most prominent Mexican American civil rights organizations, the League of United Latin American Citizens, founded in 1929, and the American G.I. Forum, a veterans’ group established after WWII, called for “Latin Americans” to be included in U.S. society on the basis of their rights as citizens, their military sacrifices, and their essential similarity with other Americans. LULAC also stressed that Mexican Americans needed to make themselves acceptable in the eyes of American society by conducting themselves with dignity, obtaining an education, and acquiring the English language. They had achieved notable victories by litigating for integration, often asserting that Mexican Americans were “Caucasians” and not the racial minority that society

often cast them as being. Their ideology dovetailed with a mid-century nationalism that brooked little critique of the basic structures of American economic life.

Regional Politics

These groups’ ability to coordinate and advance Mexican American power in politics was severely limited. As one scholar has noted, they were “more a conglomeration of chapters than…national entities.” “With no national magazine, no national leadership, and no national consensus they lacked a voice to speak to the problems of the community,” or to mobilize its voters, for that matter. LULAC employed almost no professional staff during its first three decades. It made its national headquarters in the hometown of its president, an office that might change hands yearly. Thus it had little organized presence in Washington, increasingly the place where crucial decisions would be made. The American G.I. Forum was, on balance, more politically assertive than LULAC. However, much of the Forum’s strength came from the alliance between its leader, Dr. Hector P. Garcia, and the senator and future president, Lyndon Baines Johnson.

To expand beyond local influence was thus an aspiration. And in a theme often repeated over the next decade, activists looking to take their success to the next level of government encountered obstacles that required them to confront the nuances of ethnic identity in politics. CSO activists, for example, discovered this when they began to plan the “state-wide Latin-

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19 Foley, *Quest for Equality*, chap. 3.
20 See Gerstle, *American Crucible*, chap. 6, esp. 245-246.
American Coordination Committee” that in 1960 became the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA). Of all the issues presented at the founding convention, which elected Roybal as president, the organization’s name produced the “most heated discussion.” For one, insisting on “Mexican-American” in the name bucked the wishes of members with roots in Puerto Rico or elsewhere in Latin America, and these were a nontrivial contingent, especially in Northern California. But as MAPA activist Henry López recalled, “there had been too much evasion…too many people evading the use of the word Mexican, as though there was something shameful about it.” He acknowledged the concerns of those from San Francisco, who felt the name excluded them, but he recalls telling them, “‘Listen, we love you, we want you, but for our special psychological reason we have got to confirm this as Mexican American.’”

The trouble in building an inclusive statewide organization was magnified at the regional level. El Congreso had recognized the link between a name and an ethnic identity, and had attempted to build a truly national pan-Hispanic organization under the umbrella of the “Spanish-speaking” people. But El Congreso did not survive, and local identities persisted. Ethnic Mexicans who gathered in 1958 to build a Southwestern political coalition failed, the MAPA activist Bert Corona recalled, “largely—and foolishly—because we couldn’t agree on a name for the group.” According to Corona, “the Texans wanted ‘Latin American,’ the New Mexicans wanted ‘Spanish-speaking,’ the Arizonans wanted ‘Hispanic’ or ‘Latin American,’ the Coloradoans wanted ‘Hispanic,’ and we in California wanted ‘Mexican.’”

While Corona chalked their collective failure up to “provincialism,” it was a provincialism with deep and tangled roots. As one scholar has noted, a “variety of historically constituted social boundaries” had arisen in the Southwest over centuries, with numerous local terms favored to describe and divide people of Mexican and Spanish ancestry. These identities were a testament to the multiple group loyalties brought by Spanish colonists, and the uneven incorporation of New Spain’s (and later Mexico’s) northern provinces in their respective political cores. They also resulted from distinct experiences with and responses to the migration of both “Anglos” and Mexican nationals. These identifiers not only correlated to location, but they also served as a comment on status, skin color, language ability, citizenship, or wealth, among other characteristics.24

They were also proxies for political orientation. Corona, who was from California, claimed that the use of the term “Latin American” was “an attempt to obscure our true identity as Mexicans,” and a surrender to past discrimination and political subordination.25 Such a view helped frame disagreements that could have been seen differently—as arguments over goals or strategy, for example—as “ethnic” in nature. Thus, the adoption of “Latin American” or “Spanish-speaking” by the more conservative Texans was, for Corona and many others, evidence of their lack of ethnic honesty, rather than, say, their political socialization in a conservative state or their lack of ties to the country Mexico. Such sustained the impression that if Latin Americans

stopped being ashamed about who they were, they would advocate the political approach that

*Mexican Americans* in California demanded.26

Some Popular Self-designations among the Ethnic Mexican Populations in Three Southwestern States, 196027

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Popular self-designation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>Mexican American, Mexican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico/Colorado</td>
<td>Spanish American, Hispano, Spanish-surname</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Latin-American, Tejano, Mexican</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While Corona hoped to unify a Mexican American political community in the Southwest, his vision obscured the state-by-state variations in each population’s connection to the country of Mexico and her citizens. California and Texas, booming in the postwar years, attracted great numbers of Mexican immigrants. As a result, nearly half of the recorded “Persons of Spanish Surname” within their borders were either born in Mexico or had at least one parent who was. That is, their populations were, in an objective sense, more likely to come from Mexico. In contrast, New Mexico and Colorado’s populations remained stubbornly “American” in terms of

26 It has been observed that the self-designation “Mexicano” carried fewer pejorative connotations than “Mexican,” even for the “Spanish-Americans” of New Mexico, suggesting that part of the challenge was finding a word in English to encompass both group diversity and pride. Nevertheless, by the late 1950s, much of the debate was taking place in English, and among people who were born in the United States. Gutiérrez, “Unraveling America’s Hispanic Past,” 90.

nativity and parentage. Fewer than 4 percent of the Spanish surname population in each state had been born abroad, and more than 85 percent of their population was born in the United States of two U.S.-born parents. 28 Mexican Americans thus faced a doubly daunting task of developing ethnic solidarity in spite of immigration, varied political affiliations, and local identities. 29 With native-born Spanish surname populations concentrated in two states, and immigrants heading elsewhere, the challenges were significant.

Distribution of Spanish-surname Persons by Nativity Status, Southwest and Five States, 1950 and 1960 (Percent of total in each area) 30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area and State</th>
<th>Native of Native Parentage (2 U.S.-born parents)</th>
<th>Native of Foreign Parentage (at least one foreign-born parent)</th>
<th>Born in Mexico</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>87.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Migrants in the Empire State**

29 David Montejano’s recent work suggests that, prior to the Chicano movement, “a unity of class or even of ethnicity could not be assumed,” even within largely Mexican American neighborhoods in San Antonio. These, he finds, were “a complex aggregation of …local worlds” in which, at least for the young, “kinship and intimate peer relationships” were more relevant than national identity. See David Montejano, *Quixote’s Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 54.
In the early 1960s, then, Mexican American leaders had not yet established common understandings, symbols, and rhetoric to plan a successful independent large-scale political mobilization as ethnics. As divided as they were, the political universe they inhabited was even more separate from that of the Puerto Ricans, whose political development paralleled theirs in certain important ways. In New York City and in several other northern industrial cities, including Chicago, these “Americans of Spanish Surname” were also seeking a more autonomous voice in their own affairs, and greater influence within the Democratic Party.

Puerto Rican political activity on the mainland was centered in New York City, but its dimensions extended far beyond. Similar to many Anglos’ perceptions of Mexican Americans, many New Yorkers perceived the Puerto Ricans as a transient population, and thus made few efforts to integrate them. And in another parallel, this treatment rested on, among other factors, questions about the migrants’ loyalty to an external homeland. What was distinct, however, was that their external homeland was a part of the United States. It was subject to the country’s laws and was involved, however unequally, in its political system. It had a chance, however slim, to be independent. Puerto Ricans faced a thorny set of questions. Did participating in U.S. politics mean that they surrendered their claim to influence life in Puerto Rico, in effect validating its colonial status? For many associated with the island’s independence movement, engagement with mainland politics was a fraud, a mistake, and a betrayal. If they did not want independence, what did this say about their commitment to Puerto Rico, to their people, to their true selves? But how could they better themselves on the mainland without exercising their rights?31

Puerto Ricans had something to offer to local politicians. Unlike many other new arrivals to the city, and unlike Mexican immigrants in the Southwest, they were U.S. citizens from birth, thanks to the 1917 Jones Act. They had begun organizing Democratic clubs, especially in the outer borough of Brooklyn. Like other migrants, they organized “on a paternalism-patronage model,” trading their votes for social services, job referrals, housing help, legal and medical assistance, and entertainment.32 Some of these organizations were pan-Hispanic in nature, and included the city’s Cubans, Spaniards, and others Latin Americans. Most had a more specific identity. Some announced their ethnic composition by name, as in the “Puerto Rican Democratic Club,” while others were named after Puerto Rican political heroes.33

Puerto Rican leaders invested in local politics gave migrants hope that mainland civic engagement would not just better their day-to-day lives, but also help them gain a voice in the debate over the island’s political and economic status. In the early 1970s, Carlos Tapia, the Puerto Rican political boss in Brooklyn, recalled the diasporic political connection in this way:

So that when some unfortunate Puerto Rican is arrested by the police I can ask some politicians to talk to the judge on his behalf. So that I can ask the same politician to help some poor Puerto Rican who needs medical attention in some municipal hospital….I am looking ahead for my people in Puerto Rico and that is what every one of us should have in mind. The only way for our island to get political recognition is through the Puerto Ricans here in New York and in other states of the Union. Someday the Puerto Ricans in New York and in many other states of the United States, will by their political power get what our brothers on the island will never get, congressmen who in exchange for our help to elect them will have to help our beloved Puerto Rico.34

City politicians did not easily give Puerto Ricans their favor, though. Like other urban newcomers before them, Puerto Ricans had to struggle for patronage, and for protection from

32 Sánchez Korrol, From Colonia to Community, 173-175.
33 Ibid., 174.
34 Quoted in Sánchez Korrol, From Colonia to Community, 186.
abuses by employers, landlords, and other petty tyrants whose indiscretions have many a Democrat made. The newcomers had particularly tense relationships with other Democratic constituencies in upper Manhattan and the Bronx. One writer considered the state of affairs during the Depression and concluded that there was a stark choice: “Who are we going to serve? The Jews? American Negroes?” His answer: “NO. Puerto Ricans.” Such sentiments at times led Puerto Ricans to abandon their usual connection with the Democratic Party to support crossover candidates, as in 1937 when East Harlem sent Oscar García Rivera, a Republican, to the New York State Assembly, making him the first Puerto Rican to hold a state office in the United States.

Ethnic antagonism and a yearning for self-determination ran high, but the trauma of the Depression offered Puerto Ricans, as it had Mexican Americans, the political and intellectual resources to pursue their ethnic goals within a larger critique of economic injustice. Vito Marcantonio, who represented East Harlem in the House of Representatives every year but two from 1934 to 1950, was the embodiment of this approach. Fiorello LaGuardia’s former campaign manager, Marcantonio was a radical with ties to the Communist Party. He won seven elections because of his strong support for New Deal labor and social legislation, and because of his fervent constituent service, which often extended beyond his district, to Puerto Rico itself.

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35 Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*, 94.
36 Quoted in Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*, 104.
37 Ibid., 125.
38 Marcantonio often ran on the line of the American Labor Party, a social democratic party that was active in New York at the time, but he became so popular in his district that he sometimes swept the Democratic and Republican primaries.
Marcantonio was “de facto Congressman for Puerto Rico” on serious policy questions as well. He demanded that the U.S. government return Spanish to its status as the language of instruction in Puerto Rico’s schools, and did so as fervently as he defended progressive taxation, rent control, and old-age pensions in New York. He introduced legislation calling for Puerto Rican independence, and later won the extension of a variety of New Deal benefits to the island’s population. His class and culture-conscious politics rested on an ability to connect his constituents’ everyday experiences of economic exploitation and racism to Puerto Rico’s status as, in his words, a “slave colony” that bore the “scars of imperialist control.”

As with El Congreso and the labor-left in the Southwest, Cold War anticommunism worked to narrow the range of political critiques available to Puerto Ricans. There was considerably less room in American politics for Vito Marcantonio in those red-baiting times. Finally, in 1950, the Democratic, Republican, and Liberal parties fielded a coalition candidate who defeated him. Puerto Ricans’ longtime association with such a radical figure did little to dispel broader doubts about their fitness to participate in U.S. democracy. Nor did it endear them to Democratic Party regulars in New York, justifying their marginal position in the ascendant New Deal coalition.

As in the Southwest, however, postwar economic developments altered the calculus of Puerto Rican life and politics, both on the island and on the mainland. After WWII, the Partido Popular Democratico (PPD), a populist political party that shared many values and interests with the modernizing New Dealers, ascended to power in Puerto Rico. Party leader Luis Muñoz

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Marín had once stood for independence. Despite that past, he and the PPD forged a distinct status for the island as a “free associated state” or commonwealth, neither a U.S. state nor an independent nation. Muñoz Marín viewed foreign investment, not extirpating colonial rule, as the key to resolving the Puerto Rican people’s poverty. In his development plan, known as “Operation Bootstrap,” both the growth of light industry and the migration of the island’s “surplus population” were essential.  

Under the new regime in San Juan, wages increased, literacy expanded, and health improved. Between 1940 and 1960, average life expectancy in Puerto Rico jumped from 46 to 69 years. But even as population grew and the economy and society were modernized during the 1950s, the number of jobs in Puerto Rico actually declined. And although wages improved over the decade, the lure of better opportunities on the mainland, where the minimum wage would rise to $1 an hour in 1956, was strong (in Puerto Rico in 1953, wages for male manufacturing workers averaged $18 a week, while women earned about $12). Aided by lower airfares, the resulting migration was staggering. In New York City, the Puerto Rican population grew ten-fold between 1940 and 1960. 

Puerto Ricans in New York City

43 Ibid., 180, 194.
44 Ibid., 181.
However, like other migrants to the urban North in the postwar era, those Puerto Ricans able to secure employment often found it in sectors, such as the garment industry, tipping into decline. Puerto Rican male unemployment in New York hovered around ten percent in the 1950s, roughly twice the rate for whites. In 1960, Puerto Rican men with labor market experience in New York had median annual earnings of $5,430, as compared to $8,140 for whites and $6,241 for blacks. Experienced female workers from Puerto Rico found median earnings of $3,861, while white women earned $5,131 and black women $4,572.46

Postwar Puerto Rican migrants became targets of intense public attacks. Politicians and journalists often cast them as a threat to society for their supposed propensity to require welfare assistance, for their alleged tendencies toward poor health, stupidity, and criminality.47 Just a few weeks prior to his reelection in 1949, Mayor William O’Dwyer established a Mayor’s Advisory Committee on Puerto Rican Affairs (MACPRA), with the aim of incorporating community elites and rehabilitating the Puerto Rican migrants’ collective image. It also appears to have been an effective line to patronage, at least in the city Welfare Department, where the

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47 Thomas, Puerto Rican Citizen, 134-135.
number of Puerto Rican staff grew from 20 to 250 in just two years. Such gains could be fleeting. A new mayor, Robert Wagner, ended the MACPRA in 1955, revealing how little effective control Puerto Ricans had over their relationship to local authorities, or their public image.

In defending themselves, Puerto Ricans were also caught between the nationalizing demands of their homeland and those of the places to which they had migrated. The Puerto Rican government watched over the migrants through a Migration Office (established in 1947), and after 1951 through the Migration Division of its Department of Labor. Although it worked to shield migrants from extreme cases of abuse, the Migration Division also was “de facto facilitator of the system of contract labor” that placed Puerto Rican migrants in low-paid agricultural, domestic, and industrial employment. Such a dual role limited its effectiveness as an advocate for migrant interests, and drove some migrants to develop autonomous institutions to work on their own behalf. However, the PPD’s quasi-nationalist project shaped the postwar migrants’ civic presence on the mainland in other ways. As part of its desire to “to construct a distinct conception of Puerto Rican identity,” the government adopted a national flag and anthem, and began Puerto Rican participation in international sports competitions in the late 1940s. Its Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, established in 1955, sanctioned an official national identity based on the island’s Taíno, Spanish, and African cultural inheritances.

Just as Mexican Americans in California believed it vital to assert their ethnic identity in MAPA, Puerto Ricans blended official and local nationalism in New York, laying claim to a

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48 Ibid., 153-154.
49 Ayala and Bernabe, Puerto Rico, 195-196.
50 Ibid., 208-210.
more prominent place in the city’s Spanish-speaking institutions throughout the 1950s. The city’s Hispanic Parade, inaugurated in the mid-1950s to emulate similar Irish and Italian community spectacles, only lasted two years before demands arose to change it to the “Puerto Rican Parade.” The new name, its sponsors believed, better acknowledged the Puerto Ricans’ numerical predominance and cultural import in the city’s Hispanic life. Mirroring these developments, a split in the Hispanic Young Adult Association (HYAA), a youth uplift organization, led to the establishment of the Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs (PRACA) in 1956. And in another change that reflected the new ethnic balance, the Puerto Rican-Hispanic Leadership Forum, established in 1957, had by 1964 become simply the Puerto Rican Forum.

Although more organizations considered “Puerto Rican” to be their essential identity, this did not mean that they blindly followed the island government’s wishes. A new generation of leaders, some of whom had been born on the mainland, was coming to the fore. Often coming from the professional ranks, they were less radical than earlier community leaders based in organized labor and the Puerto Rican Socialist party. Their organizations preached the virtues of education and self-help, and of improving the public’s image of Puerto Ricans. The community organization ASPIRA, founded in 1961 by the activist Antonia Pantoja, was philosophically in tune with LULAC or the Urban League. It opposed discrimination, to be sure, but largely on

52 Thomas, Puerto Rican Citizen, 211.  
53 Ayala and Bernabe, Puerto Rico, 238.
behalf of a “liberal professional Puerto Rican middle class committed to the further advancement of Puerto Ricans within the existing political and economic structures.”

Thus even as the Puerto Rican electorate was expanding greatly, it faced a number of limits. Its left was diminished, its middle and upper classes still small, and its competition with other organized Democratic constituencies was intense. Racial antagonisms, including some within the Puerto Rican population itself, remained salient and divisive. And then there was New York State’s literacy test, which since 1921 had limited voter registration to those who could demonstrate an eighth-grade education, or pass a “stringent” test of their English-language reading and writing ability, given by the state Board of Regents. In short, Puerto Ricans may have been more important to the city than ever, yet they still faced abundant obstacles to exercising effective control over their own lives and communities.

Presidential Politics

Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans both found, for varying reasons, that having the numbers to swing an election did little, in and of itself, to dent the overwhelming challenges they faced as communities. But partisan political activity was forcing each population to debate, sometimes quite publicly, the boundaries of their groups, and to reconsider the way that community, identity, and citizenship related to one another. The urgency of overcoming their communal weakness compelled them to explore where they came from, who they were, and to

54 Ibid., 238, 239.
arrive at judgments about what their communities would stand for going forward in the United States.

At this moment in each population’s political history, John F. Kennedy selected Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas to be his running mate in the 1960 presidential election. Kennedy brought the Democratic machine of the North—urban, Catholic, Jewish, and increasingly African American—together again with its uneasy ally, the South. Because the civil rights revolution had made the South decidedly less solid for Democratic presidential candidates, the Southwest, especially California and Texas, appeared increasingly important to Democratic victory. Consequently, what many still understood as a struggle for black civil rights was elevating other minority voters and regions in political significance as well. The Massachusetts senator needed support in both the Southwest and New York, and in return offered politically active Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans a slight opening to change their local circumstances. If the activists could provide a victorious presidential candidate’s margin of victory, they would gain critical federal allies. These friends could help them obtain positions of influence, strengthen their hand in local politics, and bring resources to bear on their group’s needs.

In the summer of 1960, the Kennedy campaign presented them with the opportunity to establish a parallel campaign that would register and turn out voters in their communities, independent of Democratic Party regulars. A central figure in this effort was James Carlos McCormick, the son of an Irish American truck driver and Mexican American housewife who was raised in Santa Barbara, California. McCormick had married into the family of Ralph Estrada, head of the Arizona-based fraternal society Alianza Hispano-Americana. His father-in-law’s connections landed McCormick in Washington, where he used his spare time to volunteer
for Senator John F. Kennedy and to organize a D.C. chapter of the American G.I. Forum. After
Kennedy won the Democratic nomination, the campaign placed McCormick in charge of
“Spanish-speaking” outreach. He set up shop in an office at 1512 K Street and, with the help of
an aide to New Mexico congressman Joseph Montoya, began to organize the “Viva Kennedy”
effort.  They planned to emphasize Kennedy’s party affiliation, his interest in Latin America,
and his liberal concern for the poor. Less directly, they would suggest that his Irish heritage
gave him insight into the minority experience in America. Even less directly still, they would
“not discourage” voters from embracing Kennedy as the Catholic candidate.

With Dennis Chávez and Montoya serving as honorary national co-chairmen, the
campaign reached into the states to enlist other promising politicians and civil rights activists to
serve as state chairmen and coordinators. Edward Roybal, the Los Angeles Councilman, served
as state chairman in California. Henry B. González, a state senator from San Antonio, and the
American G.I. Forum’s leader, Hector P. Garcia, signed on in Texas. Vicente Ximenes, a Forum
leader and Johnson ally then living in New Mexico, directed the effort there. While “Viva
Kennedy” clubs were strongest in the Southwest, they also organized in Kansas, Iowa, Ohio,
Minnesota, Michigan, Florida, and New York. With money from the California State AFL-
CIO, Roybal’s CSO hired twenty organizers and registered 140,000 Mexican American voters,
almost fifty percent more than had previously been on the state’s voting rolls. Chávez stumped

56 Burt, Search for a Civic Voice, 185-187.
57 García, Viva Kennedy, 55.
58 Ibid., 54.
for Kennedy in California, reminding his audiences that though they “may complain about police brutality and discrimination” unless they voted they would “deserve what [they] get.”

In New York, analysts expected the “grand prize of the electoral college”—the state had 45 electoral votes—to be very close in 1960. The Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor was conducting an ostensibly non-partisan registration drive, as were the city’s two major Spanish-language newspapers, El Diario and La Prensa. The campaign looked to boost turnout in the city, and Robert Kennedy went to stump for his brother in Spanish Harlem. He strolled Lexington Avenue trailed by hundreds of young followers, his future constituents when he was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1964. He wooed voters at the Caribe Democratic Club by a friendly butchering of his limited portfolio of Spanish phrases, and by stressing origins in—and production of—a large family. “I was one of nine children myself; so I think we can keep up with the Puerto Ricans,” he joked to the Democratic activists. Kennedy was not alone in his interest, however. Just a few days later, Rodman Rockefeller, the bilingual son of New York’s governor, opened an office in Harlem to reach out to Puerto Rican and Negro voters on behalf of the Nixon-Lodge ticket.

As had been the case for Mexican American activists, Puerto Rican political aspirants saw in the Kennedy campaign a golden opportunity to break out of old patron-client relationships, to build community power, and to advance their own careers and causes. In East Harlem, although Puerto Ricans and African Americans represented the majority of residents,

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59 Burt, Search for a Civic Voice, 188-191.
63 Jack Murphy, “Rockefeller’s Son Opens Drive To Woo Harlem to the G.O.P.,” New York Times, August 27, 1960.
Italian Americans maintained control of the area’s elected offices. Herman Badillo, a young island-born attorney, recalls the Kennedy campaign understanding that Democratic regulars were at best lukewarm about adding new voters to the rolls for fear that it might upset their traditional dominance. Sensing his opportunity, he established “East Harlem Citizens for Kennedy” and opened a campaign headquarters, using Kennedy money to educate voters. He recalls his efforts:

I proceeded to get a sound truck to go around the district, telling people in Spanish and in English that they could register to vote….It was a very bitter campaign, because…they [local Democratic leaders] didn’t want to have any Puerto Ricans or blacks registered. So it was a question of them trying to push them out and me trying to push them in.64

Indeed, reports came in that the citizens of East Harlem who went to the elementary school polling places to register or take the literacy test waited on “discouragingly long lines” that snaked around and outside of the buildings. Registration cards ran out, and there were not enough literacy tests to go around.65

Despite these hurdles, the registration effort produced impressive results. On the eve of the 1960 election, the New York Times reported that over 230,000 Puerto Ricans had registered in the city’s five boroughs alone. Just eight years before, only 35,000 of 250,000 eligible Puerto Ricans had registered to vote in the contest between Dwight Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson.66 Kennedy took the state and its 45 electoral votes by less than 400,000 votes out of more than 7 million cast. Puerto Ricans had given him 77 percent of their votes,67 and elites in the migrant community spoke of their pride in fulfilling the responsibilities of citizenship. “We are a young

64 Herman Badillo, interview by author, March 3, 2011.
66 José Ramón Sánchez, Boricua Power: A Political History of Puerto Ricans in the United States (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 120.
community,” said Joseph Monserrat of the Migration Division. “We will solidify and accelerate the relatively rapid progress we have made.”68 Although they did not yet consistently secure city patronage or see their own elected to local government, the Puerto Ricans seemed on the cusp of achieving political influence to match their growing numbers.

Patronage and Pan-Americanism

No one can say how many votes the “Viva Kennedy” campaign netted that would not have otherwise gone Democratic, but the overall effort has been credited with transforming at least Mexican American politics. For example, one observer has written that, “the campaign in the barrios…crystallized a new Mexican American politics that sought national attention, that sought to connect itself to national leaders, and that saw its problems and dilemmas as being national rather than local or regional.”69 According to another historian, voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts “signaled a change in the political temper of the Mexican middle class.”70 What had long been passive and provincial was becoming increasingly activist and engaged in the wider world. And while previous efforts to unite for a common goal almost had led Mexican American organizations to blows, “they all fell in under the banner of Viva Kennedy,” recalled one of Senator Chávez’s aides.71

If Viva Kennedy encouraged Mexican American political elites to make common cause as never before, the alliance nonetheless had its limits. Rare is any evidence that the Southwestern activists came together with leaders from New York’s Puerto Rican community,

69 García, Viva Kennedy, 103.
70 Gómez-Quiñones, Chicano Politics, 89-91.
71 Burt, Search for a Civic Voice, 199, 187.
for example.\textsuperscript{72} In the end, it can be said that the most politically influential Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans were part of the same effort, but that they operated in largely separate spheres.

This fact encouraged a regional analysis of the election results. In the Southwest, Viva Kennedy campaigners could with some justice claim that Kennedy would not have won without them. Mexican Americans gave the ticket 91 percent of their votes in Texas, a 200,000-vote cushion in a state Kennedy carried by only 50,000. The 85 percent that this group gave nationally was higher than those given by practically every other ethnoracial segment of the electorate.\textsuperscript{73} Mexican American leaders interpreted the results as evidence that they had finally arrived in national politics. Kennedy himself wired his congratulations to a Texas Viva Kennedy leader, saying that “the margin of victory” they gave him in South Texas was of “prominent significance” in winning the state.\textsuperscript{74} McCormick had implied that there would be rewards for their efforts.\textsuperscript{75} Kennedy’s Mexican American supporters could not be faulted for believing that their campaign labors entitled them to judgeships, ambassadorships, as well as other less prestigious but still well paid federal jobs. Since, as the G.I. Forum’s newspaper put it, “Mr. Kennedy rode the Mexican burro into the presidency” it was time for those efforts to be recognized.\textsuperscript{76} The election was so close, however, that any number of constituencies might have seen their votes as decisive in the Democratic victory. With so many others in line for the spoils

\textsuperscript{72} In October, the campaign held a “National Conference on Constitutional Rights” in New York City, with a handful of Viva Kennedy leaders from the Southwest in the same place with two New York State assemblymen of Puerto Rican heritage. Ibid., 190.

\textsuperscript{73} It was even higher than Kennedy’s percentage among Irish Americans. Burt, Search for a Civic Voice, 193-194.

\textsuperscript{74} Quoted in Julie Leininger Pycior, LBJ & Mexican Americans: The Paradox of Power (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 120.

\textsuperscript{75} García, Viva Kennedy, 55.

\textsuperscript{76} Quoted in Pycior, LBJ & Mexican Americans, 121.
of victory, and with Viva Kennedy’s coordinators failing to secure many clear promises in advance, little patronage would be forthcoming.

Bert Corona remembered Kennedy as a “Boston political animal” whose administration “didn’t understand Mexicans.” But realpolitik may explain the administration’s patronage decisions as much as cultural ignorance does. The Democrats were still largely the party of Northern cities and the South. In 1960, Pennsylvania provided Kennedy the same number of electoral votes as California had given Nixon, and each offered eight more than Texas’s 24 votes. New York, with its 45 electoral votes, added more to a candidate’s tally than Texas, New Mexico, Nevada, Colorado, and Arizona combined. Massachusetts gave a candidate almost the same amount of electoral votes as the last four of these Southwestern states. Since fifteen of eighteen Viva Kennedy coordinators came from the Southwest, their campaign efforts, however important, may have done little to dispel the notion that Mexican Americans were basically a distant and regional concern, one that could wait for more central Democratic constituencies to be rewarded.

While in past years these same leaders might have redoubled their efforts to demonstrate that Mexican Americans were similar to all other U.S. citizens, and thus deserving of a fair share, they were finding it easier to exploit their ethnic difference in controlled ways. They demonstrated growing comfort in asserting that they possessed unique cultural attributes and sensibilities, and that these should be considered in personnel matters. This trend was particularly evident in foreign affairs, where Mexican American leaders argued that their distinct culture made them vital to the fight against communism in Latin America. Their pan-Hispanic

77 García, Memories of Chicano History, 209.
78 Kaplowitz, LULAC, 74.
rhetoric of a deterritorialized “Latin American” character justified their demands for high offices in government, while avoiding the unseemly appearance of asking for patronage. Hector P. García told Democratic National Committee members that the U.S. had done a poor job selling democracy in the hemisphere “because we are not making use of our greatest salesman of Democracy” the “Americans of Latin American origin.” LULAC’s national president of LULAC, Frank Valdez, reminded Kennedy of the advantages to employing them in South America, “where the ethnic background and the language are one and the same.” The head of LULAC’s San Antonio Council suggested that Mexican Americans’ knowledge of Latin Americans’ “habits, traits, characteristics and most of all their emotionalism” would make them ideal ambassadors to the region. The U.S.-born Latin Americans, LULAC maintained, “have an insight to their problems and generally know how they think.”

Kennedy acknowledged that Mexican Americans represented a “great reservoir of talent,” especially for the Foreign Service. But international relations recommended a patronage strategy at odds with Mexican Americans’ sense of their own importance in Kennedy’s election. Tensions with Cuba rising in the wake of that nation’s revolution, Puerto Rico gained greater importance as a model of anticommunist development in Latin America. Two men with ties to Puerto Rico were therefore among the first diplomatic appointments Kennedy made. Arturo Morales Carrión, Puerto Rico’s (Cuban born) secretary of state, was named Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America. Teodoro Moscoso (born in Spain but living most of his life in Puerto Rico) who had spent the previous decade in charge of Operation

80 Quoted in Kaplowitz, LULAC, 72-73.
81 Pycior, LBJ & Mexican Americans, 122.
Bootstrap, was picked to be Ambassador to Venezuela and to head up the Alliance for Progress.  

By June of 1961, Spanish-surnamed Americans filled four key diplomatic posts. Only one was a Viva Kennedy leader, however, El Paso mayor Raymond Telles. With their sense of Kennedy’s indebtedness to them, and representing the numerically dominant Latino group, Mexican American leaders were bitter. When Moscoso’s visit to Venezuela in the summer of 1961 touched off riots, Dr. García’s remarks revealed the state of pan-Hispanic unity: “I think that by now Kennedy would be realizing…that the only people that they respect in Latin America are the Mexicans.” However much their claim for patronage rested on transnational cultural attributes, the leaders’ sense of themselves was far more specific.

**Building on the Viva Kennedy Experience**

The Kennedy campaign heightened Mexican American leaders’ sense of ethnic distinctiveness. Perceiving the disrespect on the national stage that had become all too familiar in their local and state activism, they redoubled their efforts to build autonomous institutions to influence state and local politics. Many of them already belonged to civil rights organizations such as LULAC and the American G.I. Forum, and yearned for a more active and “explicitly political” approach to their community’s problems. As the Democratic Party’s Southern wing continued to fracture, more opportunities appeared. The growing strength of Republicans in Texas and their attraction of conservative Democrats seemed to strengthen Mexican Americans’

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83 Telles was named ambassador to Costa Rica. Kaplowitz, *LULAC*, 72.
84 Quoted in Garcia, *Viva Kennedy*, 111.
85 Gómez-Quinones, *Chicano Politics*, 69.
position with state Democrats. “For once in their lives” thought the Texas activist Ed Idar, Jr., the Democrats “are going to have to really cater to our people.”

In the spring of 1961, Viva Kennedy leaders in Texas established a statewide organization called Mexican Americans for Political Action (MAPA). With Dr. Hector P. García as its national organizer and Bexar County Commissioner Albert Peña, Jr. as its state chairman, the group looked to leverage its local activism into statewide electoral power and patronage. It endorsed Henry B. González in the Democratic primary to fill Lyndon Johnson’s seat in the Senate, and supported a Viva Kennedy campaigner for the federal bench in South Texas.

Though unsuccessful in these initial statewide efforts, they continued on, working to transform the Viva Kennedy network into a permanent Southwestern political powerhouse. In March of 1961, the Texas activists met in Phoenix to join forces with another MAPA, California’s Mexican American Political Association. Chaired by Viva Kennedy’s James Carlos McCormick, the Phoenix conference established an organizational structure for a joint effort, balancing the Texas and California factions by naming García its president and Edward Roybal its vice president. Nevertheless, as one account explains, attempts to unify “required them to find a name that was inclusive of their diversity.” Lacking an ethnic identifier acceptable to all, the activists spent the bulk of the conference debating what to call their new political group. They established a temporary organization, the “Political Association of Spanish-speaking Organizations” (PASSO), but remained largely split along state lines. In the end, Texans and Californians maintained separate organizations, with Texans calling their group PASSO and Californians retaining the MAPA name. Roybal, nominally the vice president of some larger

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86 Quoted in Pycior, *LBJ & Mexican Americans*, 133.
association of these two, did not attend the next meeting of the two factions, which also fractured over what to call the group. A vocal contingent wanted ethnicity out of the naming altogether, preferring to emphasize the group’s “Americanism.” \(^8\) If the Viva Kennedy experience had brought about a new consciousness, the challenges to institutionalizing that attitude and converting it into political power remained sizeable.

**Joining the National Government**

Efforts to unify Mexican American political forces faltered, and a pan-Hispanic coalition with Puerto Ricans was more complicated still. Mexican American and Puerto Rican activism nonetheless produced notable political victories. From 1961 to 1964, the Mexican American presence in Congress expanded meaningfully, while Puerto Rican leaders in New York gained important footholds in power.

Henry B. González, the state senator from San Antonio and a Viva Kennedy backer, was a strong candidate to become the first Mexican American to represent the state in the U.S. House of Representatives. National Democrats repaid part of their debt when Kennedy used a federal appointment to open up a congressional seat in a district that included González’s home turf. With the president’s endorsement, González won the Democratic Party’s nomination.

The general election was a high priority for both parties. Earlier in the year, a conservative Houston political scientist named John Tower had beaten William “Dollar Bill” Blakley, an oil man and conservative Democrat, in a special election for Lyndon Johnson’s senate seat. With many liberals refusing to support Blakley, Tower became the first Republican

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\(^8\) Ibid., 126-128.
to represent the state in the upper chamber since Reconstruction. Sensing an opportunity, the
GOP sent former president Dwight Eisenhower to Texas in support of González’s opponent.
Vice President Johnson stumped for Henry B., as he was known. Newspapers portrayed the race
as a referendum on the New Frontier and the future of Republicanism in Texas.

González liked to portray himself as the candidate for all Texans, but Johnson was not
bashful in playing up his ethnic credentials. González would be a national asset in Washington,
Johnson told crowds, and proof that Americans “can elect a man to the United States congress
regardless of his race.” The vice president promised that if González won, Kennedy would send
him “throughout the hemisphere to show people what can happen in the land of the free and the
home of the brave.” For those inclined to discriminate, he called on voters to think again, and
show their support for “a good American…regardless of the region from which he comes.”
González was born in San Antonio, but no matter.89 Leaving nothing to chance, Johnson called
upon Mexican president Adolfo López Mateos to ensure that Cantínflas, Mexico’s favorite film
star, would wow the faithful at an election-eve rally for González.90 In the end, Henry B. took
nearly 53,000 of 95,000 votes, roughly 56 percent, with a coalition including Mexican American,
but also strong African American, Anglo and labor support.91 While Texas Republicans later
claimed they never had a chance against “a Mexican in a Mexican town,” they had clearly hoped
for a much better result.92

90 Pycior, LBJ & Mexican Americans, 126.
91 “Democrat Wins Texas House Seat,” Los Angeles Times, November 5, 1961; Gómez- Quiñones, Chicano Politics,
58.
92 For his part, the loser suggested economics played a larger role, that “in a low-income metropolitan area, you just
Whereas a presidential intervention had enabled González’s breakthrough, congressional reapportionment provided Edward Roybal his opportunity. After the 1960 census, California gained eight seats in the House, pushing its total to 38. The disposition of those new seats was of intense interest to national Democrats, eager to hold on to majorities as traditional strongholds in the Northeast lost power and as the South began to tip. The Democratic-controlled state legislature divided Los Angeles County into 15 congressional districts, and redrew the state’s thirtieth district to include the MAPA activist’s city council territory.\(^93\) The new district was roughly 60 percent Democratic, but only 9 percent Mexican American.\(^94\) In the 1962 primary, Roybal battled William Fitzgerald, a Loyola University professor supported by state assembly kingpin Jesse Unruh. He won the primary with support from African American and Jewish voters, the district’s Mexican Americans, and with institutional aid from the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor and other liberals in the state Democratic Party, a New Deal coalition similar to González’s.

In the general election, Roybal highlighted his connection to Kennedy and received at least three supportive campaign visits from members of the Cabinet, an important sign of the administration’s gratitude.\(^95\) In the end, he defeated the nine-term Republican incumbent, Gordon McDonough with 56.7 percent of the vote.\(^96\) As he had been the first Mexican American


\(^{94}\) Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics*, 73.

\(^{95}\) Burt, *Search for a Civic Voice*, 204-206.

to serve on the Los Angeles City Council in the twentieth century, so did he become the first Mexican American sent to the House of Representatives from California since the 1870s.97

Two years later, Eligio “Kika” de la Garza was elected to represent Texas’s 15th Congressional District, drawn from a strip of agricultural counties in the Rio Grande Valley.98 He took nearly 70 percent of the vote.99 That same year, Joseph Montoya, New Mexico’s at-large representative in the House, reclaimed the U.S. Senate seat occupied by that chamber’s lone Spanish American, Dennis Chávez.100 With his victory, Montoya became, in the eyes of many, the highest-ranking Mexican American in government.

Relatively small in number and low in seniority in a Congress dominated by Southern Democrats, the cohort of Mexican American legislators was not especially powerful in advancing legislation. Politically speaking, however, they were quite important. To Democratic elites intent upon portraying their party in its traditional role as champion of the underdog, the Catholic, the immigrant and, increasingly, the “minority,” they were supremely useful. Though the representatives would not form a “Hispanic Caucus” until 1976, the relationship had benefits for them as well. Being one of the few congressional representatives of an important minority group afforded more power and recognition than being simply one of hundreds of congressmen. Their influence derived in part from their position in symbolically important ethnic nodes. Montoya’s New Mexico, Roybal’s East Los Angeles, De la Garza’s Rio Grande Valley, and González’s San Antonio all endowed their representatives with a certain ethnic credibility.

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97 One of the first announcements he made after being sworn in was to announce his opposition to extending the Bracero program. “Bracero Plan to be Opposed by Rep. Roybal,” Los Angeles Times, January 10, 1963.
100 The New Deal supporter Chávez was in his seventies when he died of cancer in 1962, and had been replaced by the state’s former governor, Edwin L. Mechem.
Colleagues could turn to them for an expert opinion on the sensibilities, longings, and political behavior of their co-ethnics. Some chose to become, or came to be seen as, spokesmen for the country’s entire Mexican American population. From their place in the national legislature, they helped elevate Mexican Americans to a position of national prominence. From states whose population growth and economic dynamism portended growing influence in national affairs, they were a rising political power with undeniable importance for the future.


Mainland Puerto Ricans did not elect one of their own to Congress during this period.102 However, Herman Badillo experienced an ascent in New York politics comparable to that which was occurring among Mexican Americans in the Southwest. After the 1960 election, the 31-year old Badillo converted East Harlem Citizens for Kennedy into the East Harlem John F. Kennedy Club, using the same storefront and vowing to “draw people from all racial groups to work for the betterment of the community, not for any particular racial group.” His immediate target was the incumbent of the 16th state assembly district, Alfred E. Santangelo, a long-time Tammany

102 Island voters ostensibly had recourse to a non-voting Resident Commissioner in the House of Representatives.
Democrat, whom he charged with running the district purely in the interests of its Italian-American residents.\textsuperscript{103} Although Badillo lost to Santangelo in a bitterly contested election to represent the district in the Democratic state committee—by 75 votes out of more than 2,800 cast—he was on the rise.\textsuperscript{104} Badillo was only 32 when Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr. extended his patronage, making him the first Puerto Rican to serve as a city commissioner. The job of Deputy Commissioner of Real Estate paid a tidy $15,000 salary, and Badillo later became the city’s first Commissioner of Relocation, in charge of managing the human displacement that attended building and infrastructure projects.\textsuperscript{105}

Badillo’s growing political network and recognition portended even bigger things. In 1965, at age 36, he won a close race for Bronx Borough president against a candidate backed by the Bronx Democratic machine. To put matters in perspective, the Bronx had almost 1.5 million residents in 1960, making it twice as large as San Francisco and one and a half times as populous as Houston. It had almost three times as many residents as San Antonio, and six times the population of El Paso. Were the Bronx it its own city, it would have been the sixth largest in the country in 1960.\textsuperscript{106} That its leader was now a Puerto Rican seemed an important sign, that incorporation of newcomers was still possible, even after the gates had been shut to Europeans. It gave confidence to those who suggested that Puerto Ricans were just like other immigrant groups, who had risen to political prominence before them. The system, its beneficiaries could reasonably claim, seemed to be working.

Conclusion

Mexican American and Puerto Rican activists of the early 1960s struggled for more autonomy and power in state and local politics. They believed, however, that connections to national Democrats, their support for Kennedy and Johnson specifically, would allow them to break through established political barriers. The Viva Kennedy campaign brought some leaders of the two populations together, but it was a brief experience that hardly unified Mexican Americans themselves, let alone generated a sense of solidarity with Puerto Ricans. The populations would have little connection in the short term after the campaign ended. Distance had nurtured unfamiliarity and patronage nurtured rivalry. Ethnic difference framed the ensuing conflict. Nevertheless, changes were at work within the distant regions, especially in the Southwest. Mexican Americans may have argued among each other over the nature and extent of their ethnic bond, but they were gaining some measure of influence within the Democratic Party. The patronage their leaders received was unsatisfactory to them, given how hard they had worked to bring about what many believed was a historic election. Frustration with Democrats was thus becoming a unifying point for these ethnic Americans, one that would increase in salience in the coming years as the party advanced its agenda for civil rights.
Mercedes M. Martinez might have been the last person likely to complain about discrimination at work. The daughter of immigrants, she described herself as a “loyal American citizen,” and took pride in working for her country at the U.S. Army’s Transportation Material Command in St. Louis. Her supervisors recognized her diligence, and for more than a decade rated her work “outstanding.” The federal government had been a good employer. However, something happened in July of 1962 that “greatly disturbed” her, something she said “altered my thinking completely.”

The catalyst for Ms. Martinez’s displeasure was a simple survey. One day, an Army personnel representative informed her of an upcoming census of her workplace’s “minority employees.” Apparently, there was a need to determine “the number of Negros [sic] and Spanish-Speaking employees” in each salary bracket (emphasis in original). At the time, however, civil service supervisors were prohibited from questioning employees about their ethnic background—a rule deemed necessary to prevent even the appearance of discrimination. Managers would therefore conduct the survey by visual observation, forwarding the results to what Martinez called “the Presidents’ Committee on Equal Employment to prevent discrimination because of race.”

Deeply offended, Martinez protested to one of her U.S. Senators, the Democrat Stuart Symington. “I have never, until this day, considered myself a ‘minority group,’” she explained,

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1 Letter, Mercedes M. Martinez to Stuart Symington, July 19, 1962, Box 140, Vice Presidential Papers, LBJ Library.
2 Ibid.
“merely because of the fact that my parents were Spanish and I speak Spanish.” If language made one “in the minority,” she wrote, “why not include Italian-speaking, German-Speaking, Greek-speaking employees, etc.”? The employee census implied that Americans who “spoke a different language, or came from a different country,” now belonged to “a different race.” Adding to the insult, the government’s category did not even make sense. “Spanish-Speaking’ covers a lot of territory,” she informed her senator. Washington had been “very careless” indeed.3

Her letter ended up with the staff of the President’s Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity (PCEEO), which the Kennedy administration had created to fight discrimination in the civil service and at the workplaces of federal contractors. It had instituted the offending survey to measure its progress. PCEEO staff sympathized with Martinez’s concern, but they wrote, apparently without irony, that it was “unfortunate that she was given the impression that this group”—“Spanish-speaking” Americans—“referred to race or language knowledge.” After all, the U.S. government’s official definition of this group was clear: “persons who are of Mexican, Spanish, Puerto Rican or Latin American origin (without regard to the Spanish language knowledge of the individual).”4

Mercedes M. Martinez’s parents had emigrated from Spain, making her a minority within a minority. But her encounter with federal civil rights enforcement raised larger questions. As the previous chapter has shown, at the beginning of the 1960s, many “Spanish-speaking” Americans were debating their association with one another, and seeking to define how they

3 Ibid.
4 Unknown to Stuart Symington, undated, Box 140, Folder “Labor P.C. on E. E. O. – M,” Vice Presidential Papers, LBJ Library.
wished to be understood by and represented in, the larger society. Were they one people? If so, what defined their bond? How important was language? How analogous were their experiences to those of European immigrants? Did being a “minority” mean belonging to a different “race”? Martinez’s frustration also stemmed from the appearance that civil rights administrators had little interest in these important questions. As James C. Scott has argued, censuses like the PCEEO survey are designed to render populations “legible” to government administrators. To preserve order and promote the image of the United States as a harmonious and successfully pluralist nation, policymakers therefore sought to harness the citizenry to “abstractions,” such as the “Spanish-speaking” American. The category Ms. Martinez rejected did not represent her reality, but that was never the intent. Administrators chose it for the exact reason she found it inadequate—it “cover[ed] a lot of territory.”5

But as Scott contends, such state action “discovers new social truths” in addition to “merely summarizing known facts.”6 These “truths” influenced the direction of Mexican American politics. For Mexican American leaders still smarting from being passed over for patronage and recognition, federal equal employment statistics provided official confirmation that the authorities ranked African Americans’ claims for justice above theirs. With Democrats in charge of the White House and the state houses in California and Texas, this sentiment played a partisan role. This difficulty grew as the distribution of benefits from civil rights became more apparent. Since many African Americans had, with some justice, come to see the civil rights apparatus as existing only because of their sacrifices and suffering, conflict was inevitable. Liberals, on the political defensive after being charged with promoting racial quotas for blacks,

5 Scott, Seeing Like a State, 2, 77; Martinez to Symington, July 19, 1962, LBJ Library.
6 Scott, Seeing Like a State, 77.
exacerbated this tension by retreating to the rhetoric of color-blind liberalism just as Mexican Americans came calling with claims to their own distinct minority status.

Their view that African Americans commanded an unfair amount of attention from new, high profile federal anti-discrimination agencies infuriated Mexican American activists, but it also spurred them to adopt new approaches to ethnic political action. Their fragmentation had prevented them from building an independent organization that could influence elections across the Southwest. Yet these leaders were able to come together in local and then regional coalitions to protest what they believed was unjust administration of civil rights at the national level. In place of the many local terms they had employed in years past, they began to identify themselves to the state as “Mexican Americans.” Although adopting protest tactics reminiscent of those employed by the black freedom movement, their willingness to assert that Mexican Americans were a distinct minority, with unique problems rooted in the development of the Southwest, often came from perceptions of conflict with African Americans, not from any desire to join them. This heightened Mexican American ethnic consciousness made it difficult for these activists to see reasons to ally with other “Latins,” especially Puerto Ricans.

Meanwhile, Republicans who had opposed civil rights legislation opportunistically pursued Mexican American voters by appealing to their growing hostility toward African Americans and their supporters in the Democratic Party. The cumulative effects of this political and administrative period, running roughly from 1961 to 1966, were to heighten Mexican Americans’ sense of themselves as the nation’s “second largest minority” and a vital bloc in politics, and to give Republicans a blueprint to split them from the New Deal coalition.
A Compromise Executive Order

The Democratic Party Platform of 1960 pledged great progress on civil rights. It proposed to hasten the desegregation of Southern schools, provide fair access to voting booths and the housing market, and “to break down artificial and arbitrary barriers to employment based on age, race, sex, religion, or national origin.”7 To assist in this last objective, it called upon Congress to establish a permanent “Fair Employment Practices Commission” that could investigate and punish instances of employment discrimination in sectors of the economy tied to the federal government. The original FEPC had been established during World War II, but only after threats of a Negro “March on Washington” convinced Franklin D. Roosevelt to put the presidency behind the opening of defense jobs to African Americans. After the war, while more than a dozen states and many cities created their own versions of it, conservative congressmen eviscerated the FEPC.

The FEPC’s fate suggested the substantial barriers—many of which appeared in the physical form of Democratic legislators—that were preventing a legislative civil rights revolution. Also, John F. Kennedy had won a bare plurality of the vote in 1960. Rather than bringing in a wave of congressional allies, his party actually lost seats that year. Most importantly, however, the Democrats’ Southern wing, atop the legislature’s seniority structure due to the region’s one-party monopoly, acted as a tireless bulwark against civil rights reform. For all their obstruction on race, the Southern barons were essential to much of the rest of the party’s agenda. The president had little inclination to pick a fight with them so early in his term.

Kennedy needed to make good on his civil rights promises, however. Throughout the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, federal committees had monitored discrimination in government employment and at federal contractors. These, accomplished by executive order, lacked both the staff and enforcement powers of the FEPC, clout that congressional sponsorship might have provided. Nonetheless, and given his constraints, Kennedy returned to this formula of executive action. His Executive Order 10925, signed on March 6, 1961, consolidated two of the Eisenhower committees into the President’s Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity (PCEEO). Kennedy predicted that the PCEEO’s “vastly strengthened machinery” would do much good for “Americans who are members of minority groups [who] have often been unjustly denied the opportunity” to hold jobs with the government and its contractors. The regulation’s precise influence was unclear, but integrationists could take heart, for it demanded that “affirmative action” be taken against discrimination in the civil service, and for contractors to “affirmatively cooperate” in integrating their facilities.8

Chaired by Vice President Johnson, the new committee included the heads of the major federal agencies, the three secretaries of the armed services, and more than a dozen public members chosen to reflect perceived stakeholders. Business and labor had seats at the table. For religious balance, the administration included Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish representatives.

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They added one woman, and one African American. Approximately forty staff members, in Washington, DC, Chicago and Los Angeles offices, would carry out the day-to-day work.\textsuperscript{9} Although such committees had a not undeserved reputation for weakness, the administration’s salesmanship and some initial successes raised expectations that the PCEEO would be different. It garnered early praise for negotiating voluntary anti-discrimination agreements with several major employers. Defense contractor Lockheed Martin, for example, reported a 25 percent increase in black employment after signing such an agreement. The committee claimed to have processed more discrimination complaints in a single year than Eisenhower’s had in seven. More importantly, it was sustaining complaints at a higher rate, and forcing employers to comply, lest they lose their federal contracts.\textsuperscript{10}

The PCEEO focused much of its effort on the Southeast, and thus had its most visible impact on behalf of African Americans.\textsuperscript{11} This in turn led Mexican American activists to argue that the committee did not seem interested in them or their problems. Dr. George W. Borrell protested to Vice President Johnson that Mexican Americans were “misunderstood and too little represented” in the committee’s activities. Borrell was a California physician who had once run for state Senate as a Republican, and he had founded a group, the “Equal Opportunity Foundation,” to advocate for Mexican Americans in discrimination cases. Disappointment was bipartisan, however. The American G.I. Forum, a reliable ally of Democrats, evaluated the committee and concluded that, “the emphasis appears to be all on discrimination against

\textsuperscript{9} Republican businessman Fred Lazarus, American Federation of Labor president George Meany, and Congress of Industrial Organizations leader Walter Reuther served on the PCEEO. Graham, \textit{Civil Rights Era}, 45-46.

\textsuperscript{10} Graham, \textit{Civil Rights Era}, 54, 60.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., chap. 2
Negroes.” Some implied that black progress was being achieved without a sense of proportion or fairness. Rudy Ramos, a former Viva Kennedy coordinator who directed the Forum’s Washington, D.C. office, lambasted the PCEEO for devoting “98% plus direct work for one minority group.” Obviously frustrated, Ramos implied that African Americans were abusing the civil rights system. “We do not publicize every event to which we have legitimate complaints as opposed to the group mentioned in paragraph one,” he wrote. Mexican Americans, he claimed archly, “do as much as we can to solve our own problems.”

Ramos’s frustration spoke to a fundamentally unresolved tension among Mexican American leaders in mid-century America. They knew that their people were victims of discrimination, but had long sought to ameliorate it by denying its premise: that they were different from “Americans” and could be therefore treated differently. By emphasizing their personal dignity, sacrifice, and patriotism, they might win acceptance from the wider society. This ostensibly color-blind Americanism existed uncomfortably alongside race-based legal strategies to win protections as members of the “Caucasian” race. They were reluctant to embrace protest tactics. Some leaders argued that protest was undignified, a sentiment reinforced for some because of its association with African Americans. As Ramos’ remarks indicated, they were caught between wanting more federal attention to their community’s problems and not wanting to be seen as the kind of people who called attention to their own suffering.

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12 Quoted in Pycior, *LBJ & Mexican Americans*, 129, 128.
13 Quoted in MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough*, 168.
14 Behnken, *Fighting Their Own Battles*, 72-73.
The PCEEO’s data could be read to endorse the view of Mexican Americans as supremely self-reliant. Surveys revealed that of the 4,334 complaints it received from March of 1961 to July of 1963, against both contractors and the federal government itself, only 90 (2.1%) came from Spanish-speaking Americans.\(^{15}\)

**PCEEO Complaint Experience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complaints</th>
<th>Total Received</th>
<th>Spanish-Speaking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contractor</td>
<td>1,951</td>
<td>35 (1.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Employment</td>
<td>2,383</td>
<td>55 (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,334</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PCEEO, “Information for Workshop Chairmen.”\(^{16}\)

Whatever the benefits to those who had appeared self-reliant, federal civil rights initiatives now favored a change in the culture of protest in Mexican America, and a different reading of the data. Civil rights enforcement statistics could be used to shift the burden onto the state. If discrimination was a universal wrong, the official statistics suggested to Mexican American activists that the government was not universally committed to fighting it. The PCEEO had inadvertently presented a new social reality: government and its contractors discriminating in the workplace, and government discriminating in its investigations of the wrongdoing.

\(^{15}\) “Information for Workshop Chairmen,” Box 20, Folder “Los Angeles Regional Conference,” Office Files of George Reedy, LBJ Library.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.
In contrast to their difficulty establishing organizational unity, the activists’ arguments over civil rights enforcement constructed the highly heterogeneous ethnic Mexican population—and implicitly all the nation’s Spanish-speaking people—as a single homogeneous entity. This was partly because the data invoked on both sides of the debate obscured the ostensibly non-discriminatory factors that influenced personnel decisions—age, language ability, citizenship, or education, for example—as surely as it did more objectionable ones, such as personal connections, nepotism, and prejudice. Federal statistical categories also appeared mutually exclusive, furthering the notion that a person might be Spanish speaking, or Negro, but not both. They thus framed a potential conflict between blacks, an accepted national minority, and a multifarious Spanish-speaking population still defining its ethnic allegiances. This comparison allowed politically active Mexican Americans to begin to stake a claim on the national consciousness despite their historic reputation as a regional people.

California Conflict

Federal equal opportunity initiatives structured group solidarity on the national level, but their capacity to reshape ethnic feeling depended on local context. Mexican Americans’ critique of civil rights enforcement was informed by their larger struggle for influence in the Democratic Party, conflicts that varied in intensity and opposition depending upon state and local factors. Southern California was at the forefront in this process of minority polarization, creating unrest for Democratic officials. World War II and the Cold War had fueled the region’s rapid growth, with defense industry jobs abounding as the fruit of the citrus trees once had there before giving way to suburban subdivisions. The Southland’s economic dynamism drew migrants from far and
wide, transforming its demographics and leaving some observers with a sense of impending conflict. The state’s black population grew by 91 percent in the 1950s, a veritable “10-year Negro avalanche,” in one reporter’s words. Blacks had made up 2.7 percent of Los Angeles County’s population in 1940, a percentage that almost tripled by 1960. Mexican Americans gained numbers in the county as well, going from 358,000 to 576,000 during the fifties.\textsuperscript{17}

Tensions might be expected in such a rapidly changing environment, as minority populations competed for space and influence in a city dominated by others. Civil rights enforcement exacerbated these. As the PCEEO intervened to promote equal opportunity in the region’s economy, reports emerged of employer actions that intensified a growing sense of competition between blacks and Mexican Americans. African American employees were not being fired from government contractors, it was alleged, because the firms feared being charged with race discrimination. Instead, the story went, whether to meet payroll, adjust for production changes, or for any other reason, contractors were choosing to fire Mexican Americans. Some reports suggested the same logic was at work in hiring. For example, a member of the California Democratic Central Committee claimed that, “When Negroes apply for jobs, employers are afraid not to hire them for fear of retaliation and so, in some cases, fire Mexican-Americans to make space for the Negro.” Sixty Mexican American leaders in Los Angeles held a closed-door meeting to respond to the situation. They wanted to form a united front of Mexican American and African American civil rights organizations, but according to an account of the meeting,

\textsuperscript{17} Paul Weeks, “Great Negro Tide Surges Into Melting Pot of West,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, September 17, 1962.
“several of the more conservative Mexican-American leaders strongly oppose[d] any ‘mixing’ of Mexican-American and Negro grievances.”18

The controversy set the stage for Mexican American organization, and for Democratic response. Calling themselves the Mexican-American Education Conference, a coalition of fifty Mexican American leaders from LULAC, the Community Service Organization, MAPA, the American G.I. Forum, Mexican American lawyers’ associations, chambers of commerce, and social work agencies protested the administration’s lopsided civil rights efforts. Vice President Johnson agreed to confer with them in Los Angeles a few weeks later, assigning aide George Reedy to plan the meeting. A Midwesterner, Reedy knew little about California politics. He investigated the situation, met with Rep. Edward Roybal, and concluded that the number one issue was not equal employment per se. It was “appointments—that means political patronage.” In his estimation, “THIS IS THE THING THEY ARE REALLY INTERESTED IN AND EVERYTHING ELSE IS SECONDARY.”19 They had worked hard for Kennedy in 1960, and felt they had been “double crossed” by his administration.20 They believed that all of the jobs—or at least the prized ones—had gone to Puerto Ricans, or to Mexican Americans from other states. Kennedy would be relying on them to have any chance to win California in 1964, and it

20 California activists were particularly incensed by a pamphlet touting the president’s record of appointments to commissions, postmasters, embassies, and the like. Making no allowances for the status of those appointments, it indicated that Kennedy had named 14 “Spanish-speaking Americans” from New Mexico, 8 from Texas, 7 from California, 5 from Puerto Rico, 4 from Arizona and Colorado, and 3 from New York. See George Reedy to Lyndon Baines Johnson, n.d., Box 21, Folder “Los Angeles Regional Conference (3),” Office Files of George Reedy, LBJ Library; and “Spanish-speaking Americans: A People Progressing,” Box 20, “Los Angeles Regional Conference,” Office Files of George Reedy, LBJ Library.
was not sufficient to name a plethora of “Spanish-speaking Americans” to boards and committees. Their state deserved more.21

The latest federal employment numbers on Mexican Americans, which Civil Service Commissioner John Macy rushed to obtain for Johnson “on a special crash basis,” could be interpreted in a number of ways. Macy determined that “the Spanish speaking minority in the southwest area” was in fact “doing very well,” when skills and education were taken into account. Indeed, they fared “better than the Negro in terms of actual discrimination.” But Macy had produced statistics on Albuquerque, Corpus Christi, El Paso, San Antonio, and Santa Fe, all areas of exceptionally high Mexican American concentration.22 Where Mexican Americans were a strong presence and had significant clout with Democrats, as in these parts of Texas and New Mexico, they gained a decent share of public employment. In San Antonio, for example, Spanish-surname Americans (SSA’s), another one of the many official terms for this group, held more than 35 percent of federal jobs. Blacks held 6.8 percent. And while blacks had roughly 40 percent of the post office jobs in Houston, with SSA’s having about 5 percent, the numbers were reversed, more than 33 percent to 9 percent, in the Alamo city.23

Federal statistics showed how difficult it was to make a claim about Mexican Americans’ participation in federal employment that would stand throughout the Southwest. Indeed, this population’s uneven incorporation was replicated at all levels of government in the region.

Spanish-surname and Negro Males in Government Jobs as a Percent of All Male Employees in Such Jobs, by Categories, California, Texas, and New Mexico, 1960²⁴

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>California Spanish-Surname</th>
<th>California Negro</th>
<th>Texas Spanish-Surname</th>
<th>Texas Negro</th>
<th>New Mexico Spanish-Surname</th>
<th>New Mexico Negro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Employment</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal Service</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal public administration</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State and local public</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>administration</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public education</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Californians observed the greatest inequality. PCEEO surveys revealed that Negroes held 12.5 percent of federal jobs in the state, while the Spanish-speaking had only 3.2 percent.²⁵

In Southern California, where larger numbers of Mexican Americans and blacks resided, the disparity was even greater. According to a 1963 PCEEO survey, the latter held 20.2 percent of federal jobs in Los Angeles, while Spanish-speaking Americans had 3.7 percent of those jobs.²⁶

In the United States Post Office Department, with its highly visible workforce, the inequality was

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greater still. African Americans held nearly a quarter of L.A.’s postal jobs, while only 4 percent of postal workers in the area were classified as Spanish-speaking Americans.  

Although the federal civil rights effort in California provided various community leaders a common rallying point, beneath their shared concern with equal opportunity were a variety of objectives. According to Roybal, there were three major factions: one that wished to have a “gripe session”; a second that wanted “an hour of ‘sensible conversation’”; and a third that desired “to boycott the thing altogether and start plugging for the Republican party.”  

One, likely belonging to this last group, said that they wished to express their frustration at Kennedy and Johnson “because we were literally forgotten once we helped the administration get into office.”  

Dr. George W. Borrell, on the other hand, thought that the meeting was necessary to remedy Mexican Americans’ obscurity in the national consciousness. “Who is not aware of the plight of the Negro?” said Borrell. “Conversely, who is aware of the plight of the Mexican American?”  

Although Johnson was sympathetic, he was reluctant to address aspects of Mexican Americans’ social disadvantage that may have called for a specialized approach. The administration was attempting to pass a comprehensive civil rights bill, and was busy fighting charges, in the Senate and in public opinion, that its antidiscrimination policies constituted a racial quota system for blacks.  

This context helps to explain why Johnson barely deviated from a color-blind and assimilationist script in his meeting with the twenty Mexican American

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27 Ibid.
31 Graham, Civil Rights Era, 106-110.
leaders. Their people were not so different from other Americans, he explained. He had learned much about them from his time teaching at a “Mexican school” in Cotulla, Texas. Yes, the children may have spoken little English. But that did not define them as a minority for, as Johnson told the proud and frustrated activists, minorities were economic in nature. Minorities were the “underprivileged.” He himself had been one. In fact, he told the audience, “all of us have been a minority at one point.” “If it is no longer so, it is because the people knew how to join together,” he said, “to merge with other social sectors, to work, and to rise to a higher station in life.” Color-conscious policy—treating “each minority as something distinct and apart from the rest of the community”—would never solve the problem, he claimed. He also issued a warning about the conflict brewing between blacks and Mexican Americans: “the surest way to keep minorities in a minority status—to freeze an unyielding pattern of discrimination—is for minorities to pit themselves against other minorities.” He challenged them to file more discrimination complaints if the circumstances merited it. But fighting African Americans, or anyone else, was bound to be counterproductive. According to Johnson, the society’s progress depended “precisely on the harmony of all elements of which it is composed.”

While such an inclusive vision of the nation undoubtedly appealed to some in the room, Democratic patronage practices and civil rights enforcement had been sending a different message for some time. Group power, and not mere individual merit, was what government rewarded. Consequently, Johnson’s audience felt compelled to correct his broad definition of a minority, to make a case for their group to be recognized as unique, and deserving of the dreaded

“special treatment.” One goal was, of course, patronage. Citing “many sociologists and political scientists,” the G.I. Forum asserted that their “ethnic background” put them in a “position to make a great contribution” to the civil service. They called for the country to “profit from bi-lingual and bi-cultural traits of our ethnic group” in hemispheric relations. The group deployed cultural difference on a number of fronts besides federal employment, however. The bracero program, they held, constituted an “attack on family life,” which made it “a threat to the civilization in which our culture has its roots.” The activists also presented arguments for measures to fight Mexican Americans’ youth dropout rate. It was, in part, a function of “adjusting to a different culture.” These culturally based claims for state attention appeared alongside requests for Johnson to intercede with California Democratic leaders on behalf of the Mexican Americans. They were a political minority, too. They held no statewide offices, and lacked even a seat on the L.A. City Council since Roybal’s election to Congress. They wanted increased representation for Los Angeles in the state Democratic Party. They wanted positions of influence in the Democratic National Committee.33

Mexican American organizations had a reputation for rivalry, but civil rights was bringing them together and raising their profile. Said one organizer, the vice president’s visit, “with all its incidents and accidents, [it] has helped us to unite…. From now on we shall work shoulder to shoulder.”34 Johnson agreed to hold PCEEO hearings in Los Angeles in November, another opportunity to shine the spotlight on their minority. The activists’ coordination and the White House’s attention to their complaints furthered national media interest in the condition of

33 “Recommendations Presented to Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson,” Box 20, “Los Angeles Regional Conference,” Office Files of George Reedy, LBJ Library.
Mexican Americans. Far from the Spanish settlers popularized in state pageants, or the male migrant laborer, “today’s Mexican-American family” was “trapped in degrees of second-class citizenship and deprivation,” reported the New York Times after Johnson’s visit. Their lowly status assumed a bitter new dimension as national reports framed their struggles in light of black gains. Though they were “almost as underprivileged as Negroes,” their leaders felt that “nobody seems to be worrying about them.” Even worse, civil rights enforcement was having a perverse effect on them. “Word is circulating that the employers’ new refrain is: ‘You’re fired—and a Negro’s hired.’”

Conservative Multiculturalism

It was a moment of political opportunity, and Republicans sought to seize it. On September 16, 1963—Mexican Independence Day—Arizona’s Barry Goldwater was perched atop an open white convertible, a political star on the emerald playing field of Dodger Stadium. The senator had not formally announced his presidential run, but was acting the part of candidate. And Southern California was vital to his hopes of securing the Republican nomination. As he and his wife slowly circled the field, they waved to the “wildly cheering Dodger stadium throng” that had paid a dollar a piece to see their hero in person. Forty thousand screams went up. Were they shouting for Goldwater, or because the out of town result (Dodgers over Cardinals) had just been posted on the stadium’s giant scoreboard? Regardless, the mood in Los Angeles was bright.

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Though Goldwater was an outspoken opponent of federal civil rights enforcement, the Los Angeles gathering was no bonfire of racial backlash. Indeed, organizers billed the engagement as a “Republican Fiesta,” with “mariachi bands and Mexican dancers” supplying the warm-up entertainment. The rector of an East Los Angeles mission delivered the invocation, and did so in Spanish. Goldwater followed with his own tribute to Mexican independence, again in Spanish, before proceeding with English-language attacks on the Kennedy administration and Republican moderates. The Democratic Party, he charged, used a “gingerbread monstrosity of programs and promises,” to placate its “warring factions,” but had built an unsustainable coalition, a “house of trick cards.” He implied that Democrats had “bred racial discontent in this land.” Republicans, in contrast, would welcome voters of all backgrounds, but in a party “controlled by principle.”

It was the glorious culmination of a busy day. For breakfast, Goldwater had enjoyed eggs and grits with Billy Graham. Then he attended a “coffee klatsch” with members of the NAACP and Urban League. Afterward, he held a press conference, at which he conceded that black votes would go mostly to Democrats, but still expressed optimism that he could erode Kennedy’s support among Spanish-speaking Americans. Some of this confidence may have come from a meeting with John Flores, identified in newspaper reports as a former national co-chairman of Viva Kennedy. Flores was now the executive director of “Latinos con Goldwater.” The group’s strategy was simple enough: appeal to Mexican Americans on the grounds that their

37 “Goldwater Rally will Be ‘Fiesta,’” Los Angeles Times, August 20, 1963.
38 Baltimore Sun, September 18, 1963.
past support for Democrats had been taken for granted, that their people had been used.\textsuperscript{40}

Rolling out the new organization just days after the Dodger Stadium rally, Flores proclaimed the Arizonan’s chances of prying the “Spanish-speaking vote” away from Kennedy to be “very good,” because “our people…have not received proper representation or any recognition for their efforts.”\textsuperscript{41} Democrats called Latinos con Goldwater “a phony publicity front,” and challenged its ethnic authenticity. A group of Mexican Americans that made its headquarters in Beverly Hills could never meet the “real needs and aspirations of the Mexican-American community,” they taunted.\textsuperscript{42}

In this context, over two thousand people, approximately half of them Mexican Americans, gathered in Los Angeles on November 15, 1963 for the PCEEO conference on equal employment in the Southwest. In a replay of the defensive liberalism he had shown in August, Johnson told the crowd that the administration’s main goal was to remove “artificial barriers” to opportunity. Simply “promoting minorities” was a dangerous strategy, he warned. It was “merely another way of freezing the minority group status system in perpetuity.” What the White House wanted, he said, was to create an America in which “all of us are in the majority after all.” Anthony J. Celebrezze, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), also made this argument. Celebrezze was an Italian immigrant who had served five terms as mayor of Cleveland. His political savvy deserted him, though, when he advised that the Mexican Americans could take a lesson from the European immigrants, whose determination and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[40] Baltimore Sun, September 18, 1963.
\end{footnotes}
willingness to integrate themselves into the larger society, he said, explained their success. “You are making a mistake when you say others should feel sorry for you,” he scolded the audience.  

George Reedy’s fear that the “highly political temperament of the Mexican-American community” would present “unusual difficulties” for the administration was realized. Many in the audience at the Ambassador Hotel were in no mood for a color-blind version of equal opportunity, one that implied that Mexican Americans and other minorities could—or should—cease belonging to a minority. The speakers tested their patience. Mexican American spokesmen angrily retorted that their people had been in the Southwest, had attempted assimilation, and still had suffered discrimination for generations. One attendee defended his people’s right to “retain their cultural background because they are indiginous [sic] to the country.”

While the long existence of Spanish and Mexican communities in the Southwest justified their refusal to partake of America’s immigrant narrative, immigration continued to influence—in some senses, define—their communities. In 1960, at least 45 percent of Mexican Americans in the Southwest, and almost 55 percent in California, were either immigrants or were born to least one foreign-born parent. Ignoring or downplaying the role of immigration did not mean that the activists did not identify with the immigrants. But neither were they blaming them for the community’s relative lack of prosperity. According to one California political insider, the assimilation gaffe, “coupled with the general dominence [sic] of the conference by the Negro at

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44 Memo, George Reedy to Lyndon B. Johnson, August 20, 1963, Box 21, “Los Angeles Regional Conference (2),” Office Files of George Reedy, LBJ Library.
least in terms of numbers,” had left Mexican Americans with “a sour taste in their mouths.” It was too late now to make up for the campaign promises of 1960. At this point, “for any one appointment several enemies will be made and only one friend.” Policies and programs would matter more going forward. The activists had begun to identify a new set of culprits—including government administrators—responsible for their community’s overall condition.

In one of the recurring themes of Mexican American organization in the Southwest, disappointment in a Democratic initiative convinced activists to try again to unite their region. After the conference, sixty community leaders organized a follow-up meeting of their own in Arizona to plan “a permanent Southwestern Mexican-American organization.” Even for those who did not want to break with the Democrats, resentment over civil rights enforcement, some of which was directed at African Americans, reframed their sense of themselves as an aggrieved national ethnic minority, diminishing the local and state rivalries that before had been so important.

**Houston and Dallas, 1963**

The administration had hoped to calm tensions in a state Kennedy had narrowly lost in 1960 to native son Richard Nixon. Yet their clumsiness seemed to make matters worse. The White House’s inability to comprehend Mexican Americans’ evolving group consciousness, and the poor press their events received were only part of the problem, though. For all of the disappointment that national Democrats’ supposedly meager efforts on civil rights engendered

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among minorities, they were still sufficiently threatening to land them in trouble with party conservatives. Kennedy believed that his support for civil rights would likely cost him much of the South, but he was determined to keep Florida and Texas in the Democratic column. In the latter state, the liberal and conservative wings of the party were bitterly divided. Johnson had worked to hold them in balance, but he was no longer as dominant in Texas as he had been. Moreover, the administration’s support for civil rights posed dilemmas for his relationship with Connally, while his disputes over patronage and policy matters alienated important liberals such as U.S. Senator Ralph Yarborough. Kennedy hoped that a presidential visit would help reconcile the warring parties and solidify his support in Texas. Further, he needed to raise money for the 1964 campaign, and so traveled to the Lone Star State a week after the PCEEO hearings Los Angeles. Johnson joined him, struggling mightily to smooth over the hatred between Connally and Yarborough.

On November 21, 1963, after a busy day of tarmac greetings, building dedications, and ceremonial dinners, the presidential retinue entered the Grand Ballroom at the Rice Hotel in Houston, where they were honored guests of the League of United Latin American Citizens. Grainy 8mm film survives of the event. The president fidgets as he shakes hands with guests. He and the First Lady make brief remarks to the audience, she in Spanish and without notes. Lyndon Johnson smiles in the background. A band serenades the dignitaries with a corrido in honor of the president:

Dios le ha dado gran dominio

God has given him a great dominion

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Para poder gobernar,
El ha guiado los destinos
De esta América sin paz.

Kennedy, Kennedy, Kennedy,
Hombre de fuerza y valor,
Todo tu pueblo te aclama
Porque eres su salvador.

The president left amid a crush of photographers and well-wishers. Most of the audience filed out, but some men lingered to discuss the evening’s activities. For a night in Texas, it might have seemed possible that the administration’s problems, the Republican advance on Mexican American voters one of many, might be forgotten.

John F. Kennedy’s life was extinguished the next day in Dallas. In the wake of the assassination, a wave of Kennedy-themed corridos could be heard in Texas and elsewhere. Many were performed live, while others poured forth lamentations through Southwestern radios and jukeboxes. The ballads made Kennedy, Irish and Catholic and thus an outsider, into a representative of the Mexican Americans and their struggle for full recognition in U.S. society. His achievement of the presidency had been a victory for them. His vision for a cooperative hemisphere validated them by making their ancestral homeland a U.S priority. Performers railed against the “cowardly assassin” who had left humanity aghast and the world “weeping.”

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53 Dickey, The Kennedy Corridos, 3, 76.
LBJ and The Politics of Equal Employment in the Southwest

As Kennedy passed from disappointment to martyr, it fell to Lyndon Johnson to satisfy the Mexican American activists who had lost their faith in the late president. As a Texan, one who claimed a lifelong association with Mexican American people, he would be under particular scrutiny to better Kennedy’s record. His early success was astounding. Within nine months the national government had outlawed several forms of discrimination, not simply in government, but in the private sector as well. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned employment discrimination on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The law created a new governmental body, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to enforce nondiscrimination at work. Led by five new commissioners, the EEOC promised to be better funded, better staffed, and in possession of a greater mandate than the PCEEO. Johnson cast the new law as a unifying measure, not as punishment to the South. Its “purpose is not to divide, but to end divisions—divisions which have all lasted too long. Its purpose is national, not regional,” he had said upon signing the bill.54

This nationalist vision and the EEOC’s new powers raised Mexican Americans’ hopes for federal intervention in the exclusionary employment systems of the Southwest. However, civil rights enforcement again raised questions about whether the federal government truly considered Mexican Americans a priority, a national minority. Johnson’s choices to lead the EEOC, for example, raised flags in Mexican American communities. New York’s Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr. was the first EEOC Chairman, and Rev. Luther Holcomb of Texas was its Vice Chairman.

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Both men were Democrats. Richard Graham, a Wisconsin businessman and Republican, offered political balance. Rounding out the original five Commissioners were two African Americans, Samuel C. Jackson and Aileen C. Hernandez. Holcomb was a Johnson ally, but had a bad reputation among the Tejanos who were aligned with liberal Senator Ralph Yarborough. Hernandez served as the lone “Spanish surnamed” Commissioner. But she was unlikely to satisfy Mexican Americans either. Though she was an expert on employment law, and embodied the Commission’s apparent interest in fighting sex discrimination, she was a black New Yorker, the daughter of Jamaican immigrants. Her surname came courtesy of a four-year marriage to a Los Angeles garment cutter. Johnson claimed that his five Commissioners represented “a broad cross-section of America” in its quest for “the simple justice of equal opportunity.” Mexican Americans were not so sure.

Lower-level staffing further suggested that Mexican Americans would not be a high priority for the new agency. The EEOC began with a staff of just 19, but by December of 1966 had 128 employees in its Washington, D.C. headquarters. In addition to a large applicant pool (over 7,500 applications poured in from people wanting a job with the new agency), its exemption from the competitive civil service process in its first year meant that managers had

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56 Ibid., 178.
58 Around 1 in 6 staff members were spread around the country at six new Regional Offices: Atlanta, Dallas, Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, and New York. In the subsequent year and a half, EEOC opened six Area offices: New Orleans, Albuquerque, Kansas City, Washington, DC, and Birmingham. It moved the LA Regional Office to San Francisco, but kept a new Area office in Los Angeles. Staffing at the Area offices was highest in New Orleans (22), and lowest in Albuquerque and Kansas City (9). The LA office had only 10 employees. “The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission During the Administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson, November 1963 – January 1969,” 31, Box 1, “Volume I Administrative History [1 of 2],” Administrative History, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Volume I, Volume II, Part I, LBJ Library.
great power to select staff. Yet just a few were Latinos, out of a staff that would become 227 employees by the middle of 1967.\textsuperscript{59}

A familiar pattern from the PCEEO days reappeared. In its first year, the EEOC recommended that 3,773 cases of discrimination be investigated. 2,026 of those recommended for investigation were for racial discrimination against Negroes. 1,624 were for sex discrimination. Only fifty were for national origin discrimination, with 25 of these filed under the category of Mexican-American, 1 under Cuban, and 8 under “Latin American.” Whether the “national origin” complaint was the aggrieved party’s preference or that of the EEOC staff, very few Mexican Americans or other “Latins” were designated as having made a complaint on “race discrimination.”\textsuperscript{60} And race discrimination seemed to be the EEOC’s focus. It was not until 1970 that the body provided general guidelines about what, in fact, constituted national origin discrimination.\textsuperscript{61} In the meantime, EEOC chairman Roosevelt planned to name an “Ad Hoc Advisory Committee” of Mexican American leaders to help the Commission formulate better strategies for implementing Title VII for national origin complaints.\textsuperscript{62}

Lacking a critical mass of supportive staff at the EEOC, the activists sought to influence its deliberations by explaining the role that cultural difference played in the discrepancy, recasting civil rights enforcement as a public service that all groups were entitled to partake of.

\textsuperscript{62} “Speech Given by Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. At a Civil Rights Rally in Corpus Christi, Texas Sponsored by the American G.I. Forum on December 14, 1965,” Box 2, Folder 26, Albert A. Peña, Jr. Papers, MS 37, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.
equally. The Equal Opportunity Foundation, the Republican-led group from California, demanded that government reach out to the Mexican-American poor, “whose culture and language make it difficult to communicate experiences of prejudice.” As Texas’ Ed Idar wrote to Roosevelt, “over the centuries,” Mexican Americans had been “acclimated or…subtly ‘brainwashed’ into a sense of futility, docility, and resignation,” with respect to power. But Idar’s private words were unacceptable if spoken in public by someone else. The EEOC’s Executive Director, Herman Edelsberg, angered a San Francisco audience by citing “the disorganization of Mexican-American groups” and a lack of assertiveness on the part of the average Mexican American for the small number of investigations. As George I. Sánchez protested to Roosevelt, “the number of complaints, and the ratio of Negro to Mexican-American is a very lame and illogical excuse for inaction. By this line of reasoning we would render public health service only to those who called in a doctor!”

El Grito de Albuquerque

Mexican American leaders’ growing acceptance that their people constituted an aggrieved minority produced changes in the way their organizations did business. LULAC, for example, elected the Mexican immigrant and attorney Alfred J. Hernández as its national president in 1965. Hernández was a moderate by most standards, but he stood out as a LULAC leader for his recognition that the old tactics were insufficient. He marched alongside striking farm workers in Texas, he attempted to amend LULAC’s constitution so it could take sides in

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64 Ed Idar to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., January 7, 1966, Box 2, Folder 26, Albert A. Peña, Jr. Papers, MS 37, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.
65 Quoted in Pycior, LBJ & Mexican Americans, 164.
elections, and he was willing to build coalitions with other Mexican American groups. He was, according to one author, the group’s “most activist national president” to date. That he was re-elected to lead what had been probably the most conservative Mexican American civil rights group suggests the changing temper of these organizations in general.\footnote{Kaplowitz, \textit{LULAC}, 97-98.}

Discontentment with the EEOC allowed Mexican American elites to set aside many of their considerable differences and concentrate on an issue that maximized their strength as an ethnic bloc. They were a small percentage of the electorate, concentrated in a handful of states, but they could present themselves as an important group in the national civil rights discussion. Appealing to a simple liberal logic, they could argue that one group must not be helped less than another.

They were coordinating their actions more effectively than many could remember, and in response to their complaints, Roosevelt scheduled an EEOC conference to be held in Albuquerque in April of 1966. Its ostensible goal was to field suggestions for improving the commission’s record in the Southwest. Roosevelt and the White House no doubt hoped that it would placate Mexican American activists. However, the activists from across the Southwest gathered ahead of the conference to diagram an oppositional strategy. Leaders from PASSO, the Texas group established after Viva Kennedy, from California’s MAPA, the national presidents of LULAC and the G.I. Forum, as well as the Los Angeles-based Community Service Organization (CSO), all met to coordinate their action. While enjoying drinks at a cocktail reception, they discovered that only one EEOC commissioner would be present at the next day’s conference. That commissioner, the Republican Richard Graham, apparently suggested to them that only
“direct and drastic action” would compel the Johnson administration to acknowledge their grievances. The civil rights leaders spent the next few hours debating their options. By 5:00 in the morning, they had developed a coalition structure, a schedule for a rump conference, a media plan with press releases, and a list of resolutions to present to Lyndon Johnson and other administration officers.67

The next day, less than an hour into the EEOC program, they leveled their charges at the commission. “Our employment problems our severe and complex,” charged LULAC’s Hernández, “yet we have no one on the commission with any insight into them.” “I find it difficult to see how the commission can go out and enforce laws on fair employment when it practices discrimination itself against the Mexican-American,” said Dr. Miguel Montes of San Fernando’s Latin-American Civic Association. Augustine Flores, the G.I. Forum’s national president, demanded an EEOC Commissioner who had “special insight into the unique employment problems of our bilingual, bicultural group.” They called for the EEOC to hire more Mexican Americans, to open offices where large numbers of their people lived, and to investigate “800 major national companies in the Pacific Southwest” that allegedly refused to hire Mexican Americans. No longer should they simply wait for the complaints of individuals. The protestors also demanded inclusion at the White House Conference on Civil Rights, an event planned for black leaders in June. Then they walked out, calling themselves the “Mexican American Ad Hoc Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity.”68

67 “Description of Events Preceding the EEOC Meeting at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, March 27-28, 1966,” Box 2, Folder 26, Albert A. Peña, Jr. Papers, MS 37, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.
The leaders believed they had done something groundbreaking. A veteran labor activist, MAPA’s Bert Corona considered the confrontation a turning point for his more conservative colleagues. It was the first time these “professional people and educators,” had “displayed their anger and disgust with the government,” he remembered. And given how many coalitions had fallen apart because the members could not agree on a name, the agreement of professionals and political workers from around the Southwest to join together, and to identify themselves as a “Mexican American” committee was significant. According to one proud organizer of the walkout, “It has always been said that Mexican-Americans can’t get together—that if you put three of us in a room to form an organization, we end up with three organizations.” But, he proclaimed, their actions had put an end to that “myth.” Augustine Flores agreed that failures to organize a broad Mexican American political movement were a thing of the past, “because we have one common goal now—dissatisfaction with the power structure all over the Southwest.” The time for parochialism was over.

In tandem with such symbols of ethnic power as the growing farm worker movement, the administration of civil rights had helped change the way Mexican American elites related to each other and to the state, molding them into a new network. They sought to claim their place in a larger narrative of activism. They referred to their walkout as “El Grito de Albuquerque,” (“The executive board, the “Joint National Committee,” consisted of the heads of the major Mexican American organizations: Corona (MAPA), Flores (AGIF), Hernandez (LULAC), and Albert Peña (PASSO). Most were Democrats, and California and Texas were the states best represented on the committee. A California educator, Armando Rodriguez, was chairman chaired the larger coalition, which included Henry B. González’s brother, Dr. Joaquin González; also included were Ralph Guzman, a California political science professor, and a young antipoverty worker from Denver named Rudolph Gonzales. Pycior, LBJ & Mexican Americans, 165-167; “Minutes of Delegates Assembled At University of New Mexico Albuquerque, New Mexico Monday, March 27, 1966, Box 2, Folder 26, Albert A. Peña, Jr. Papers, MS 37, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.

69 Garcia, Memories of Chicano History, 224.

70 “Banquet Memo,” Box 2, Folder 26, Albert A. Peña, Jr. Papers, MS 37, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.

Cry of Albuquerque”) suggesting it was a modern version of Father Miguel Hidalgo’s 1810 uprising, “El Grito de Dolores.” Beyond aligning their rebellion with Mexican independence, they likened it to the farmworker struggle. Said one organizer: “The first and hardest steps toward unity have been taken, in Albuquerque and in Delano, where Mexican-Americans have taken a leadership role” in organizing broad and inclusive organizations. At a banquet to honor their walkout, held at a Los Angeles hotel, the speakers reached for authenticity by wearing huaraches, the sandal of choice among the Mexican rural classes.

Proportionality and Becoming “America’s Second Largest Minority”

The emerging civil rights bureaucracy had frustrated and offended their sense of fairness by making the distribution of rights appear subject to political imperatives. But while civil rights administrators gave them reasons for anger, they also offered relatively safe places to show it. The Mexican American activists were not dealing with Bull Connor or the Texas Rangers. They were not in the fields, facing physical reprisals from Teamsters or company thugs. They were dealing with a federal agency, staffed by educated people who were quite unlikely to harm them.

While the leaders did not take the physical risks of Cesar Chavez and his supporters, challenging their traditional Democratic patrons was not without danger. They felt emboldened by their actions, and pressed to remain at the head of a Mexican American community, and a society, that was showing signs of unrest. They requested a meeting with President Johnson to

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72 “Banquet Memo,” Box 2, Folder 26, Albert A. Peña, Jr. Papers, MS 37, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.
discuss the demands they made in Albuquerque, and demanded an invitation to the upcoming White House Conference on Civil Rights. The “Mexican-American Community emotion is such,” they warned him, that they had to be included.74 Within days of the walkout, Johnson pledged assistance, and announced that he was not opposed Mexican American participation in the summit.75 About a week after that, the Department of Labor announced a nearly $200,000 grant for job training programs to get Mexican Americans jobs in the aerospace industry of greater Los Angeles.76

As the administration sought an appropriate response, the Ad Hoc Committee took the fight for equal opportunity to the federal government itself. Earlier complaints had centered on the lack of ambassadorships and other high-level appointments. The fight for a broader set of federal jobs was a community-building exercise. It demanded that people who may have once been uncomfortable with asserting cultural difference in the public sphere now use it to justify their demands. Repudiating the federal experts whose impartial planning and exercise of judgment on behalf of the nation had been a hallmark of modern, color-blind liberalism, George I. Sánchez explained why getting Mexican Americans into government mattered so much:

The mexicano is in the sad plight of a patient whose illness is diagnosed by doctors with whom he cannot communicate because they lack insight into his malady, but who nevertheless prescribe efficient-sounding remedies from the clinical sterility of theoretical eminence and an abysm of practical ignorance.77

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74 Robert A. Reveles to Lyndon B. Johnson, March 31, 1966, Box 2, Folder 26, Albert A. Peña, Jr. Papers, MS 37, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.
75 Robert E. Thompson, “President Pledges Aid to Mexican-Americans,” Los Angeles Times, April 1, 1966.
The EEOC had convinced activists of the relationship between the public workforce’s ethnoracial composition and its efficiency. The small number of Latinos employed at the EEOC explained the small number of investigations into discrimination against them. The logic was probably so convincing to Mexican American leaders because it fused their continuing quest for patronage and federal recognition with their demands that civil rights enforcement proactively address their group. Regardless, according to this argument, government agencies could not be fully effective until they were ethnically representative.

The logic, of course, extended to other agencies. With only one Mexican American at the D.C. headquarters (and none in its migrant branch), the OEO could never achieve victory in the War on Poverty, they argued. Similarly, petroleum companies leasing federal lands hired few if any Mexican Americans because there were none on the Secretary of the Interior’s staff. The offices charged with monitoring employment within the agencies had to “hire a proportionate number of Mexican-Americans” and empower them to redress the inequities in staffing. If the Civil Service Commission (in charge of EEO for the federal government) could not secure equal employment for Mexican Americans in the federal government, they wanted a new agency created.78

No part of government had disappointed them more than the EEOC, the great symbol of federal efforts to stop discrimination against American workers. On April 22, 1966 the Ad Hoc Committee filed a complaint with the Civil Service Commission charging the EEOC with bias. The two Mexican Americans on its staff of over 150 showed “shameful discrimination against Mexican-Americans because of our national origin.” No mere oversight, it was “premeditated

78 “Federal Departments’ ‘In-Shop’ Equal Employment Opportunity Program,” Box 2, Folder 26, Albert A. Peña, Jr. Papers, MS 37, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.
exclusion of Mexican-Americans” and it had been “carried out meticulously.” Moreover, EEOC Commissioners had obviously been chosen to represent certain important segments of society, but none was a Mexican American, despite the fact that “the Mexican-American ethnic group” was “the nation’s second largest minority group in size.”

The campaign to open public employment to Mexican Americans, especially its perceived electoral implications, was a crucial step in their emergence as a truly national minority group. In the Washington Post, the influential columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak called the Albuquerque walkout “the Mexican Revolt,” one “in the nature of warning” to Democrats. Mexican Americans, they wrote, “feel they have been ignored” by the federal government, particularly so as a result of “the Great Society’s preoccupation with the Negro question.” “Unless the Johnson Administration starts taking the Mexican-Americans seriously the revolt will grow.”

Leo Grebler of UCLA’s Mexican-American Study Project also emphasized the national dimension of Mexican American unrest. Policymakers had been so “preoccupied by their concern over Negroes,” he wrote, that they had overlooked an important shift. They had failed “to recognize that this group, despite its concentration in the Southwest, is emerging as a national minority” with unique needs that “cannot be equated with those of Negroes.” Discrimination, poverty, and poor educational outcomes, he claimed, “can no longer be brushed off as matters of only regional significance. They are problems of the nation-at-large.”

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79 Rudy L. Ramos to John Macy, Jr. April 22, 1966, Box 2, Folder 26, Albert A. Peña, Jr. Papers, MS 37, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections; “EEOC Named in Complaint by Latin Unit,” Los Angeles Times, April 30, 1966.


As the argument that policymakers’ supposedly excessive “preoccupation” with black concerns was perpetuating Mexican Americans’ social marginality gained in popularity, it further fueled a reconceptualization of Mexican Americans as a relatively homogeneous national minority. A few days after the Evans and Novak piece ran, George I. Sánchez demanded of Roosevelt that more be done. “Your commission seems to be concerned only with the Negro,” he complained. Although he conceded that “we still are not doing enough to do justice” for African Americans, he protested that “we have done nothing for some six million Americans of Mexican descent.”82 Their present conditions were galling because they were longstanding Americans. “We were here, as Indians, from time immemorial. As Europeans, we were here long before Jamestown and Plymouth Rock,” the professor explained to FDR’s namesake son.83 In leaving the Mexican immigrant experience unaddressed, and comparing his people to African Americans, Sánchez—who had in the past seen the diversity in the country’s ethnic Mexican populations as defining—now asserted that ethnic Mexicans in the United States were a single people, whose claim on the nation was second to none.

82 George I. Sanchez to Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., April 5, 1966, Box 2, Folder 26, Albert A. Peña, Jr. Papers, MS 37, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.
83 Ibid.
The White House Conference and Presidential Prerogatives

Despite their protests, and in contrast to his earlier statement, Johnson would not invite Mexican Americans to the White House Conference on Civil Rights. The June event, he now claimed, “flowed from” his Howard University commencement address. Instead, he pledged to hold a conference “of the same type for their [Mexican Americans’] problems,” which seemed to some Mexican Americans even more evidence that they were in the back of the line for “equality as a fact and equality as a result.”

The decision split the activists. The G.I. Forum’s Rudy Ramos blamed their exclusion on “THE BIG SIX” (the nation’s black civil rights leadership), and formed a group called “Civil Rights for All Americans – Now.” He argued for militant action, and an injunction to stop the conference from opening on the grounds that it constituted “government activity that discriminates against Mexican-Americans.” Failing that, he called upon Mexican American groups to picket the event, claiming both that the Forum’s board of directors approved, and that “numerous Negro grass root [sic] organizations” would join the picketing. But others were far less sanguine about the enterprise. Fearing that the picketing “could be misconstrued by those forces that want to see the minority groups fighting amongst themselves,” the Ad Hoc Committee backed down. It had pressed as far as its position and disposition would take it.

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85 Rudy Ramos to Augustine Flores, undated, Box 2, Folder 26, Albert A. Peña, Jr. Papers, MS 37, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.
86 “Washington, D.C. Report ‘Information for Progress,’” Box 2, Folder 26, Albert A. Peña, Jr. Papers, MS 37, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.
88 Maclovio Barraza to Rudy L. Ramos, May 13, 1966, Box 2, Folder 26, Albert A. Peña, Jr. Papers, MS 37, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.
fact, and somewhat ironically, it was the chairman of the group’s “National Committee for Militant Action,” LULAC president Alfred Hernandez, who called off the protest.

The coalition saved face in late May, when Johnson invited its leaders to the White House. Johnson plied the activists with drink, regaled them with stories, showed them movies (of himself on official trips), and gave them a grand tour of the premises in which he encouraged them to test the firmness of Lincoln’s bed. When they finally got down to business, Corona recalled, Johnson’s advisors seemed receptive to establishing a federal committee to focus specifically on Mexican American concerns. The president also pledged to make his secretary, a Mexican American, a direct conduit for their communications. After the White House meeting, Johnson received their recommendations for a Mexican American to serve on the EEOC. He also assigned staff to plan a White House Conference on Mexican Americans, promising to put them and their concerns in the national spotlight. “None of us had gone to the White House with any illusions,” recalled Bert Corona. Still, “we were pleased with the concrete results concerning the agency.” Corona, for one, believed that “it signaled a new and national position for Mexican-Americans.”

However, White House attempts to soothe Mexican Americans’ feelings of neglect created dilemmas elsewhere. New York City mayor John Lindsay, a liberal Republican with presidential aspirations, had been planning a conference for Puerto Ricans, and some administration staff wanted to preempt it. Hoping to address the groups’ concerns together,

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presidential staffers held three planning sessions with Mexican American leaders, and one with Puerto Ricans, in fall of 1966.92

The administration soon learned how difficult it would be to develop a common approach to the two populations. First and most basic was that they could not convince the two groups to work together. Mexican American leaders, resentful at being shut out from black civil rights events, “balked rather vehemently” at including Puerto Ricans in their conference.93 David North, the administration’s Mexican American liaison, felt that “the Mexicans are very reluctant to accept the Puerto Ricans, and the latter expect (rightfully) some attention of their own.”94 There appeared to be substantive policy differences between the two constituencies. For example, North believed that “Puerto Ricans are concerned with Urban Renewal, but most Mexican Americans are not; Mexican Americans worry about border problems; Puerto Ricans to [sic] not.” Such differences led North to suggest dividing any conference into Mexican American and Puerto Rican segments.95

In the end, opponents of a shared conference won out. Dropping Puerto Ricans from the agenda altogether, the administration renamed the proposed event the “White House Conference on Problems of the Mexican-American.”96 The decision revealed the limits of pan-Hispanic

92 The planners began this process totally unfamiliar with most of the people they were meeting. They hoped to use the conferences to identify the activists with whom they could best work in the future. As they met, Civil Service Commissioner John Macy had his “talent scouts” on hand to offer patronage positions to the best of them. Memo, David S. North to Joseph A. Califano, October 21, 1966, Box 6, Folder “Latin American Conference,” Office Files of Joseph A. Califano, LBJ Library.
95 Memo, David S. North to Joseph A. Califano, November 9, 1966, Box 6, Folder “Latin American Conference,” Office Files of Joseph A. Califano, LBJ Library.
solidarity at the national level in 1966. Mexican Americans’ public discourse of themselves as an aggrieved minority—the nation’s second largest—had been forged in part by their competition with African Americans. As yet it was too much for them to widen their circle of group loyalty to include a people largely alien to them.\footnote{Larry Ramirez to David North, November 13, 1966.}

It might not have mattered anyway, since indications are that the planning sessions were largely for show. Johnson repeatedly made it known to his top domestic assistant, Joseph Califano, that there would be no conference. “We are thru’ with all Whit House [sic] – call them conf. on Mex Am Problems,” he scrawled on a September memorandum to Califano.\footnote{Memo, Joseph A. Califano to Lyndon Baines Johnson, September 24, 1966, Box 6, Folder “Latin American Conference,” Office Files of Joseph A. Califano, LBJ Library.} Johnson thought that the White House could encourage Mexican Americans to coordinate their efforts, but did not want to be accountable to their demands. Meetings only made matters worse. “The more you have the more trouble you have,” he told Califano. Better for the White House not to “get in it.”\footnote{Transcript of Phone Call to Joseph A. Califano, December 31, 1966, EX HU 2/MC, Box 23, Folder “10/13/66-” WHCF, LBJ Library.}

In addition to planning for a conference that would never occur, the administration made other gestures of concern for Mexican Americans as the 1966 elections approached. In late September, the White House claimed to be on the verge of establishing a federal panel that would improve the War on Poverty’s performance among Mexican Americans. Cesar Chavez was rumored to be in line for an “extremely high federal appointment.” The FBI was even sent to Delano, supposedly to perform a background check as part of the hiring procedure.\footnote{Harvey Bernstein, “Federal Rights Panel for Latins Expected Soon,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, September 27, 1966.}
However, no Mexican American EEOC commissioner was forthcoming, and no schedule was set for a White House Conference. After months of protesting, the activists were nowhere.101

Conclusion

Mexican American leaders struggled to consolidate the political network the Viva Kennedy campaign had set in motion. But their shared frustration with national politicians offered a point of unity. Developed and proposed with universal principles in mind, yet seemingly administered according to particularistic and insensitive politics, liberal policies generated a backlash from the Mexican American leaders who had supported Kennedy and Johnson. This perception of neglect helped them achieve, at least temporarily, the unity that had so long eluded them. Drawing on the evolving discourse of civil rights and proportionality, they overcame questions about each other’s ethnic authenticity, and uncertainties over the role that their ethnicity should play in the public sphere. By 1966, leaders representing various factions and states within the Southwest had developed an alliance premised upon the acknowledgement that, regardless of their citizenship status, they shared a common “national origin.” They demanded to be seen as the equals of influential African Americans. At the same time, a vocal contingent of this nascent alliance decisively rejected joining their cause with Puerto Ricans. The Mexican Americans had their own history and their own problems to solve. They were growing into their role as the leaders of America’s “second largest minority.”

Chapter 3

The Johnson Way of Handling the “Mexican American Problem,” 1966-1968

On a warm October day in 1966, Ronald Reagan walked the streets of East Los Angeles in search of votes. He was running for governor of the country’s most populous state, and had two Mexican American supporters from his “Viva Reagan” committee flanking him as he progressed along the barrio’s crowded sidewalks. One was a doctor and member of the Los Angeles Police Commission and the other was a local television personality. They guided Reagan in and out of stores and through markets, with a hired mariachi band struggling gamely to keep up. The candidate signed autographs and pumped hands. He addressed the students and instructors of a beauty college via loudspeaker. Strangers came up and hugged him. His campaign workers met a show of force from supporters of California’s liberal Democratic governor, Edmund “Pat” Brown. Jostling with their rivals for space, the Reaganites held their placards aloft, and tendered East Los Angeles a simple message: “Ya Basta!”

“Enough already!” The slogan’s combination of stridency and generality furnished much of its appeal. Those drawn to the message may have heard it as a rebuke to the state’s open housing law, then a key issue in California politics. They may have had enough of street crime, welfare dependency, riots, campus protests, drug use, or sexual liberation, all issues Reagan used against Brown that year. Or was it the new civil rights laws the liberal Congress had passed? Regardless, the challenger’s argument was simple. Liberals controlled the government, and they were failing in their response to social change and instability. In fact, their very policies and

2 See Brilliant, The Color of America Has Changed, chap. 7.
attitudes were encouraging the disruptions. Voters could pull the lever for Ronald Reagan—inexperienced, yes, but a challenger with the fortitude to fight back.

Ronald Reagan was not the first politician that year to serve East L.A. a helping of backlash politics, however. Los Angeles Mayor Sam Yorty had run to Brown’s right during the Democratic primary, criticizing the governor for being “soft” on an array of societal menaces, including Communists, criminals, rioters, and Vietnam war protestors. And though Yorty had failed to win the nomination, he had done well in East Los Angeles. His success there led Reagan’s strategists to believe that many Mexican Americans, traditionally a Democratic constituency, would support a candidate who talked tough against Brown’s “irresponsible” liberalism. The campaign tapped the leader of Yorty’s Mexican American campaign, Dr. Francisco Bravo, head up “Mexican-American Democrats for Reagan.” “Ya Basta!” was his idea. He stood with Reagan that day in East L.A. as the candidate contrasted Yorty’s record of support for Mexican Americans with Governor Brown’s sorry history of neglect.

The state’s Democratic rulers, the argument went, practiced favoritism and tolerated chaos—even rewarded mayhem—but Mexican Americans could expect consideration, fairness, and order from a Governor Reagan. This message was not expected to resonate with the state’s large African American population, whom the challenger implicitly impugned as illegitimate beneficiaries of the Democrats’ perfidy. As one of Reagan’s campaign managers was to recall many years later, “We did a lot of work in the Mexican-American community. Almost none in the black.” The reason: they believed “there were no votes there to speak of.”

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This chapter focuses on the politics of race and ethnicity after the landmark civil rights legislation of 1964 and 1965. These triumphs for equality reconfigured the race question and altered political strategy for both parties. Conservative Republicans who had opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 sought to drive a wedge between African-American and Mexican American voters (as well as white liberals) by accusing Democrats of playing favorites with the now-sacrosanct principle of nondiscrimination. As Republicans made highly public overtures to Mexican American voters, they contributed to the Mexican American political elite’s perception that their electoral power had grown dramatically. The end of the poll tax and the coming of court-ordered reapportionment promised further change and, they hoped, strength. Finally, the defection of scores of conservative white Democrats also appeared to strengthen the hand of Mexican Americans who remained loyal.

To pacify his Mexican American critics, Lyndon Johnson took steps that amounted to official recognition that Mexican Americans were a national minority group comparable to African Americans. He named a Mexican American to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the government’s most prominent civil rights body. At the same time, he established an Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican American Affairs (ICMAA). Despite its name, the ICMAA was expected to be the government’s champion for all “Spanish Americans.” The difficulty of convincing these distinct communities to work together and feel a sense of ethnic solidarity with one another was exacerbated by the administration’s decision to give Mexican American concerns top billing. Left-wing nationalist movements of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans further stymied this elite-driven organization of ethnic discontent. By the end of 1968, then, Mexican Americans had emerged as a recognized national minority group, but only halting progress had been made toward a pan-Hispanic alliance.
Splitting the Texas Democracy

As Ronald Reagan made incursions into Democratic strongholds in California, fellow conservative Republican John Tower employed a curious mix of color-blind politics and support for affirmative action to secure ethnic votes in Texas. In 1966, Tower was locked in a tight battle to hold the Senate seat he had won after Johnson became vice president. He wanted Tejano votes. Though he had voted against the Civil Rights Act just two years before, he believed he could get them by requiring the EEOC to have at least one commissioner of “Latin American heritage.” EEOC commissioners, he argued, “should be qualified to understand and assess the nature” of discrimination in all parts of the country. Echoing the arguments of Mexican American civil rights advocates, Tower claimed that “Latin Americans” brought unique and necessary talents to Title VII enforcement. He therefore urged the president to provide the commission with “maximum feasible representation” of “all the various groups throughout our Nation” and, incongruously, that he manage to do so “without regard to race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.”7 In another obvious jab at Johnson, Tower went on the record supporting Mexican Americans’ inclusion in the White House Conference on Civil Rights, scheduled to be held in June of 1966.8

Tower and at least some of the Tejano establishment had found a use for each other. Citing the Senator’s plan for the EEOC, as well as his support for farmworker legislation and immigration restriction, LULAC President William Bonilla formed a group called “Democrats for Tower.”9 Although he hesitated to criticize Johnson directly, Bonilla claimed it was time for Mexican Americans to stop giving Democrats their votes without “being recognized in Austin or

9 Pycior, LBJ & Mexican Americans, 177.
Washington.” Mexican Americans needed to “vote intelligently and not be herded to the polls” by patrones or “special interest groups,” the civil rights leader claimed. A two-party strategy would demonstrate political maturity, wisdom, and independence.10 “Amigo-Crats for Tower” took out space in LULAC publications.11 A large Tower campaign ad in the October 1966 issue of LULAC Extra featured the Republican with Father Antonio González, “spiritual leader” of the Texas Valley Farmworkers, and reprinted a news article describing his support for “fair treatment of…persons of Mexican and Latin American heritage” in matters of equal employment.12

In the elections held that fall, Republicans gained eight governorships, 47 House seats, and three Senators. The Great Society was largely ended. John Tower hung onto his seat, despite the fact that the both the president and Texas’s popular governor, John Connally, supported his opponent. One estimate has Tower pulling 18 percent of Mexican American votes in his win. Another, offered by a Tower campaign leader, puts the number “between thirty and thirty-five percent” statewide.13 Ronald Reagan’s victory over the liberal stalwart Brown came by nearly one million votes and roughly fifteen points, confirming the political headwinds for progressives in the Golden State. Estimates of his success with Mexican American voters vary widely, from a respectable 22 percent14 to a remarkable 40 percent.15 Of course, Mexican Americans’ frustration with the Democratic Party was but one of many factors pointing toward Democratic losses in 1966. Watts, Vietnam, rising crime, youth rebellion, a backlash against

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11 Craig A. Kaplowitz, LULAC, 110.  
14 Kaplowitz, LULAC, 110.  
civil rights, and other problems would all hurt the party. Nevertheless, these races seemed to hold special importance for the Democratic coalition. Was it time for the president to worry about Mexican Americans?

**Searching for “Mr. Mexican”**

Mexican American leaders wanted him to believe so. Hector P. García, a long-time Johnson ally and client, expressed the sour mood prevailing among even the older and more established Mexican American political leaders. “Unless you help me and my friends…the backbone, the main stay, and grass roots of the Viva Johnson clubs,” García wrote to LBJ’s Mexican American liaison David North, “President Johnson will not even carry Texas in 1968.” Vice President Hubert Humphrey learned from the Mexican American Political Association’s Bert Corona and Herman Gallegos that there had been “important defections in the Mexican-American vote” in California. He reported to Johnson that the Mexican American vote for Reagan “may have been a kind of protest against Negro advances,” ominous news for the Democratic coalition. Humphrey advised the president to secure Mexican Americans’ loyalty through patronage. There were, he wrote, “a number of very bright young Mexican-Americans” who deserved “some prominence in government,” but the administration had not incorporated them. But Johnson, unmoved by the threat, ordered his assistant to “tell the Vice President that we have heard all this year in and year out.”

President Johnson did not think that Mexican Americans would desert him en masse, but nor did he wish to antagonize their leaders. Atop Hector García’s list of demands—the Mexican

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16 Quoted in Pycior, *LBJ and Mexican Americans*, 196.
17 Memo, Hubert Horatio Humphrey to Lyndon Baines Johnson, March 1, 1967, EX HU 2/ST 5, Box 25, WHCF, LBJ Library.
American establishment’s collective demand—was for the president to appoint a “political Mexican-American” to the EEOC. Johnson himself wanted, according to top domestic aide Joseph Califano, someone who would “actively take charge of the Mexican American problem and keep it away from the White House.”

Finding one person for both jobs would be difficult. First, there had to be an opening on the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. A Republican vacancy opened up first, but Dr. Garcia’s “political Mexican-American” was almost certainly not a Republican. Fortunately for the administration, commissioner Aileen Hernandez resigned in November of 1966, enabling the president to appoint an additional Democrat. Only some of the challenges came down to party affiliation, however. Divisions within Mexican America precluded a simple fix. Civil Service Commissioner John Macy, who vetted Johnson’s major appointments, described “the magnitude of the problem” they faced: “On the one hand, a candidate acceptable to a given group of Mexican-Americans tends to be unacceptable to certain other political forces. On the other hand, a candidate with political support in one State may be unknown to Mexican-American groups in other parts of the Southwest.” Moreover, an EEOC commissioner needed to possess a common touch. The White House rejected one otherwise highly-regarded candidate because he came from “an old New Mexico family,” which raised doubts that he could build “genuine rapport with the group most affected by employment discrimination.” There were considerations of temperament as well. The candidate had to prove “neither so well assimilated that [he] can be accused of being an Uncle Tom, nor so militant and vitriolic that [he] cannot

18 Quoted in Kaplowitz, LULAC, 108.
bring to the Commission a rational attitude.” Finally, there was Johnson’s overarching criterion for appointments. As his Chief of Staff Bill Moyers put it, LBJ looked for “someone who’s the best but indisputably loyal.”\textsuperscript{22} The administration had received its “first firm candidate” in June of 1966. By March of 1967, when Garcia wrote his letter threatening to abandon Johnson’s reelection effort, Macy’s “talent scouts” were on their sixteenth potential Mexican American EEOC commissioner.\textsuperscript{23}

Johnson finally nominated the 47 year-old Vicente T. Ximenes in April of 1967. A bombardier in World War II, Ximenes had returned home to establish the New Mexico chapter of the American G.I. Forum. The links between the Forum and Johnson went back to the group’s founding in the late 1940s.\textsuperscript{24} Ximenes directed the “Viva Johnson” campaign in 1964, and was rewarded with a position as Deputy Director of the USAID mission in Panama. For several years in the federal employ, he knew Washington’s ways but could speak comfortably, both to and about, the Southwest. He satisfied the important criteria: he was educated, he was a civil rights activist, and he was undeniably mestizo. Most important to the White House, he was “a proven friend and operator.”\textsuperscript{25}

The White House introduced Ximenes as a New Mexican, but he was originally from Texas and as historian Hugh Davis Graham noted, had “deep roots of loyalty and patronage in the southwestern Democracy.”\textsuperscript{26} He learned about politics at an early age from his father, a Floresville political figure, and went to high school with the family of future Governor John

\textsuperscript{22} Quoted in Pycior, \textit{LBJ and Mexican Americans}, 197.
\textsuperscript{23} Memo, John Macy to Lyndon Baines Johnson, March 10, 1967, Box 889, Folder “Latin Americans,” Office Files of John Macy, LBJ Library.
\textsuperscript{24} See Carroll, \textit{Felix Longoria’s Wake}.
\textsuperscript{25} Memorandum for the President (unsent), December 13, 1966, Box 774, Folder “3 of 6,” Office Files of John Macy, LBJ Library.
\textsuperscript{26} Graham, \textit{The Civil Rights Era}, 226.
Connally. He remembered tacking Lyndon B. Johnson campaign posters to mesquite trees when the big man ran for Congress. The president once explained Ximenes’ status in Texas politics by saying “he is for me, he’s from my place, and we raised him,” and calling him a “boy of mine.”

Ximenes recalled that “ethnic politics was the name of the game” in his part of Texas, and however unequal the relationship between teammates was, he had been playing for a long time. The “typical” campaign weekend of his youth hit all the stops, including “Polish and German sausage barbeques, Mexicano matanzas, a Negroes [sic] beef barbeque, and a Baptist Church Americano picnic.”

Now, Lyndon Johnson wanted him to play the game writ large.

Pan-Ethnic Possibilities and the Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican American Affairs

Ximenes’ appointment signaled Johnson’s recognition that Mexican Americans were, beyond being politically important to him, a significant American ethnic group, a national minority. But nationalizing Mexican Americans and their policy concerns exposed new challenges for maintaining their support. While Johnson wanted to use Ximenes to mollify his Mexican American critics, Senator Joseph Montoya of New Mexico wanted to use him to help mold the nation’s disparate Spanish-speaking communities into one powerful force. Montoya wanted to include the “already large Spanish-speaking communities” that were “growing in Florida, New York, and the Midwest” in a larger collectivity with ethnic Mexicans in the Southwest. They, too, suffered from poor schools, language barriers, and inadequate training for

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work. Together, he argued, the “Spanish-speaking community of our Nation” constituted the “second-largest minority in our land.” As far as Montoya was concerned, Ximenes must be a fighter for all of them.

The pan-ethnic perspective was gaining acceptance, not only among such aspiring national politicians as Montoya, but also among activists. The Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), for example, was looking to extend its influence beyond California, and in the summer of 1967 announced that it was forming a coalition with Puerto Ricans in New York. They meant to force all levels of government to “recognize the problems of our people and begin to develop programs specifically directed and designed by Spanish-speaking Americans.”

Once devoted to organizing Mexican Americans first (“If we couldn’t do that, how could we offer strength and support to other groups”), MAPA’s Bert Corona recalled now trying to convince the Johnson administration, “that we were no longer a regional minority, but were now a national minority, from coast to coast and border to border.” Reports of a forthcoming federal civil rights council for Mexican Americans had been leaking out, and Corona now hoped that it would “represent all of the Spanish-speaking.”

Lyndon Johnson’s political priorities only tenuously accommodated this sentiment, however. On the day that Ximenes was sworn in to his EEOC post (June 9, 1967), the president also named him to lead a new cabinet-level committee. Ximenes would convene the Secretaries of Labor, Health Education and Welfare, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, as well as the director of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Their agencies would then detail staff to

30 Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Nominations: Vicente T. Ximenes, New Mexico, To be a Member of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 90th Cong., 1st sess., 1967, 1.
the new committee and to fund its operations under a sweeping mandate: “to assure that Federal programs are reaching all Spanish Americans…and to seek out new programs that may be necessary to handle problems that are unique to the Spanish American community.” Despite the use of the inclusive term “Spanish American,” and the budding desire of some activists to address Mexican Americans’ public policy needs in tandem with Puerto Ricans’ and possibly Cubans’, the new federal advocate was called the Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican American Affairs (ICMAA).

The president’s political needs required Mexican Americans to be given top billing. Accompanying Johnson’s announcement was the release of “Report to the President: The Mexican-American, A New Focus on Opportunity.” It was a compilation of Johnson’s efforts on behalf of Mexican Americans, including his dozens of high-level appointments, and it was meant to answer the administration’s Mexican American critics. Whereas Montoya and Corona imagined a nationwide Spanish-speaking minority group, the White House’s less expansive vision held that Mexican Americans, “more than 5 million strong,” were “the second largest minority group in our country.”

An editorial appearing in the influential Los Angeles Spanish-language newspaper La Opinión captured the moment’s excitement as well as its ambiguity. “The news of the day, the talk of the town,” it remarked, was “not the war between the Arabs and the Jews, or the Vietnamese conflict,” but the ICMAA. The new committee represented a victory for moderation, proof that Mexican Americans could make gains without acting “in a sweeping or

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violent manner.” It also portended a new era in ethnic politics. “At the risk of sounding overly optimistic,” the editorial “dare[d] to predict that this will be the basis for the unification of all the Spanish-speaking, without distinction since, (whether we admit it or not), the goals of the Mexican Americans coincide with those of the other Spanish-speaking communities, at least as it relates to the political-social-economic field.”

If *La Opinión* interpreted the ICMAA as the start of something new, the White House leaned more toward conservation. Its goal was to manage ethnic difference within the broader framework of liberal nationalism. Within this liberal paradigm, programs that might on their surface appear to target Mexican Americans as ethnics would remain fundamentally consistent with other state efforts geared toward incorporating marginal groups. Economic development, however achieved, would bring them into a consensus in which national goals trumped ethnic concerns. State recognition of ethnic difference was framed within in a larger “search for equal opportunity and first-class citizenship.” In fact, some of “The Mexican American, a New Focus on Opportunity” is boilerplate taken from War on Poverty speeches that Johnson gave in Appalachia. Both poor whites and Mexican Americans, the report’s composition implied, “want education and training…want a job and a wage which will let them provide for their family…want their children to escape the poverty which has afflicted them. They want, in short, to be a part of a great nation, and that nation will never be great until all the people are a part of it.”

At the same time, the ICMAA showed the transformation in Johnson’s liberalism since his appearance at the PCEEO conference in 1963. He had warned Mexican Americans then that

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37 Ibid.
ethnically conscious public policy would only make of them permanent minorities. If such was ever true, Johnson, and indeed much of the country, was now reconciled to it.

The Balancing Act of Vicente Ximenes

The president’s desire to legitimize Mexican Americans’ claims to distinctiveness without jeopardizing their allegiance to the liberal nationalist project placed Vicente Ximenes in a difficult position. He was to be the White House’s highest-ranking Mexican American, advancing this group’s interests in government and also defending the White House from any charges of insufficient devotion to those interests. Moreover, while his committee appeared to consider Puerto Ricans less important than Mexican Americans, he was in charge of convincing their leaders that Johnson cared about them, too. Furthermore, he was expected to discharge these obligations in ways that did not conflict with the professional duties and expectations of an EEOC commissioner. He was thus required to be perfectly impartial and dedicated to the (albeit evolving) principles of equal opportunity in one of his jobs while a determined ethnic advocate in another. Finally, Johnson gave him little policy direction, but still expected him to generate visible accomplishments in short order.38

It was difficult to know where one job ended and the other began. Though his appointment was the result of intense lobbying by Mexican American leaders, Ximenes stressed his professional commitment to equal employment opportunity for all. After being sworn in, he pledged to a national reporter that he had “no plan to be the Mexican-American guy on the commission,” and that he would enforce the law as vigorously in Atlanta as he would in

38 Vicente Ximenes, “Emergence of Mexican Americans in National Politics,” Box 3, Papers of Vicente T. Ximenes, LBJ Library.
Albuquerque. In his other job, he took public stances on questions of perceived importance to Mexican Americans. He criticized advertising executives for their negative portrayals of Mexican people. His ICMAA publicized its support for collective bargaining rights and minimum wages for farmworkers, its desire to eliminate “green card commuters,” those whom it described as “citizens of nearby countries who compete with U.S. citizens for jobs.” It claimed to have helped increase Mexican American hiring at post offices, and to have shaped congressional initiatives such as the bilingual education appropriation. It also took credit for advancing the cause of migrant education and manpower programs, to fight “hard-core unemployment” in 13 Southwestern cities. Ever mindful to show progress, the ICMAA centralized demographic data for the civil service, and collected statistics on how federal programs were helping Mexican Americans, and then publicized these as evidence of Johnson’s care and concern.

The line between politics and equal opportunity seemed particularly blurred on those occasions when the White House dispatched Ximenes to serve as an administration surrogate. He delivered twelve speeches during the second half of 1967, giving five in Texas, three in Colorado, and three in Washington, D.C. A list of 19 speeches he gave in 1968 reveals a similar pattern. Eight of the engagements were in the Southwest, mostly to labor, civil rights,

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39 Seth Kantor, “President Johnson to Give Oath to Ximenes on Friday,” Albuquerque Tribune, June 7, 1967, Box 2, Folder “News Coverage Swearing-In Ceremonies of Vicente T. Ximenes to EEOC Board,” Papers of Vicente T. Ximenes, LBJ Library.
42 Memo, Vicente Ximenes to Lyndon Baines Johnson, September 7, 1967, Box 7, Papers of Vicente T. Ximenes, LBJ Library.
43 The location of one final speech was unidentified. “Speeches, 1967,” Box 3, Folder “Speeches Given by Vicente Ximenes, 1969-1971,” Papers of Vicente T. Ximenes, LBJ Library.
and community groups. Six took place in Washington, D.C., the majority of them before
government officials. He spoke twice in the Midwest and once in New York.44

Before Southwestern audiences, Ximenes described the ICMAA as the institutional
embodiment of Mexican Americans’ new assertiveness. As he well knew, ethnic terminology
was especially important to his audiences. His people’s willingness to self-identify as “Mexican
American,” and not to “seek cover under some other term,” was evidence of rising pride and
group progress. He was proud of the committee he led, for having “Mexican American” in its
name constituted “one measure” of victory over a history of “self denial.”45

Nevertheless, Ximenes worked to instill in those audiences a sense that being a national
minority meant organizing themselves to resolve group problems through official channels.
Ethnic Mexicans in the Southwest, he argued, must transcend the region’s long-standing ethnic
divisions and form a single community whose rights would be guaranteed by liberal government.
He told the American G.I. Forum that though Northern New Mexico and South Texas might
have problems, “what is important to understand about all these regions is that they all have a
common factor, and that is that the majority of their inhabitants are Spanish speaking.” They all
had shown “strength and virtue” amid a distinct history of injustices in the United States. And
they all would see their problems ultimately resolved by the United States government. If only
“all Mexican Americans cooperate[d] with the Committee and the Commission,” he said, they
could at last “discover a new place in this society for the forgotten people of the United States –
the Mexican Americans.”46

44 Two of the listed speeches made no mention of location. Box 2, Folder “News Coverage Swearing-In
Ceremonies of Vicente T. Ximenes to EEOC Board,” Papers of Vicente T. Ximenes, LBJ Library.
45 “Keynote Speech by Vicente T. Ximenes…before the 20th Annual Convention of the American G.I. Forum of the
U.S.,” August 8, 1968, Box 2, Papers of Vicente T. Ximenes, LBJ Library.
46 Vicente Ximenes, “Address to the G.I. Forum National Convention, Denver, CO, August 2-August 6, 1967,” Box
Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.
The other side of the institutionalization of Mexican American identity, however, was frustration from those left unrecognized. The White House evidently received abundant complaints that the ICMAA was neglecting other “Spanish Americans,” so many that the committee created a generic letter responding to the criticism. There had been no “intention to detract from any other Spanish-speaking group,” Ximenes states, now downplaying the importance of the committee’s name. Nonetheless, he defended it as having been “extremely important and imperative to focus on the Mexican-American and his need,” since they were unlike “other ethnic groups” with “similar, but perhaps more avenues for solution of their problems.”47 Whether Ximenes feared devoting scarce resources to Cuban exiles, already covered under the Cuban Refugee Program, or to Puerto Ricans, birthright citizens with their own commonwealth government, is unclear.

Ximenes sought to allay Puerto Ricans’ doubts about his office in a visit to New York City in early 1968. While in the Southwest he had invoked the region’s unique history and the urgency of asserting a Mexican American identity, before the audience of Puerto Ricans he remarked that “our problems can be categorized, not by nationality groupings, but only by rural and urban demands.” Quoting Henry B. González, he urged the Puerto Ricans to see themselves instead as fellow “Americans of Spanish surname,” whose “identical sense of personal dignity and the worth of family life” and whose common struggles pointed to a shared sense of peoplehood. “We can travel from Santa Fe, New Mexico to Santa Fe, Puerto Rico, and finally to Santa Fe, Ecuador,” he argued. “These links are indisputable,” he averred, “regardless of the

country from which our parents came or of the section of this country in which they settled to live.”

Affirmative Action and Pan-Ethnicity

National origin differences tended to dominate at the local and regional levels, but pan-Hispanic entreaties had greater appeal in Washington, D.C., home of a small Latino community but a large federal workforce that Ximenes addressed a number of times. Many advocates viewed representation in the civil service as a key benchmark of administration responsiveness. Attuned to their demands, Ximenes advocated a comprehensive program of affirmative action to combat what he believed was the severe underrepresentation of “Americans of Spanish surname” in the bureaucracy. A steadfast belief that people make government run, that policies cannot be neutrally implemented, regardless of their design, led Ximenes to demand intensified recruitment of Spanish-speaking consultants as well as permanent civil servants. Those already working for the government required training and accelerated upward mobility. Under Ximenes, the ICMAA worked to reduce the percentage of federal jobs requiring a written examination. It published directories of “Spanish-speaking” college graduates, and ran its own employment pool so that “talented members of the Mexican-American community” could latch on in the civil service.

The fight for these jobs facilitated the growing sensibility that there was an amalgamated population of “Americans of Spanish surname” because it required would-be members of this group to explain what set them apart, and why their presence would improve federal programs’

49 “Address by Vicente T. Ximenes...Before the Interagency Advisory Group of the Civil Service Commission,” February 14, 1968, Box 2, Papers of Vicente T. Ximenes, LBJ Library.
50 Senate Subcommittee, Establish an Interagency Committee on Mexican-American Affairs, 96-98.
effectiveness. Ximenes and the ICMAA worked to educate the bureaucracy about this underrepresented population. He told Health, Education and Welfare Department employees in 1968 that “the American of Spanish surname” may have had family in the Southwest for centuries, or be a recent immigrant. “His parentage may have its roots in Mexico, South America, Puerto Rico, Spain or a combination of these.” But regardless of how “varied his origins are…the Spanish surnamed American shares a basic culture and a common language,” and a life distinct from “the accepted American middle-class tradition.” This national minority group’s inclusion was a prerequisite for bureaucratic efficiency, he argued. “Until our people gain better representation in both policy-making and technical positions, we cannot expect our government to become permanently responsible on a day to day basis.”

Most of the gains from this ostensibly pan-Hispanic affirmative action effort, however, were realized in the Southwest. The ICMAA took credit for helping increase federal employment of the Spanish-surnamed in the region by 41 percent, including an increase in Mexican-American postal employment at “about 60 times the rate that it averaged in the last 120 years.” The ICMAA fought for higher level jobs as well, helping double the number of federal employees in the Southwest making at least $11,000 a year. For those on the bottom end of the scale, the committee touted its record securing training money to promote upward mobility. It was a plan for incorporation, not for overturning the system. Ximenes summed up the sentiment in a quote from Texas Senator Ralph Yarborough: “this restlessness is afoot today among 5 million Americans whose heritage is grounded in the Spanish language. It is not a violent

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51 Vicente T. Ximenes, “Before HEW Employees,” February 8, 1968, Box 2, Papers of Vicente T. Ximenes, LBJ Library.
52 Senate Subcommittee, Establish an Interagency Committee on Mexican-American Affairs, 96-98.
restlessness but an eager...movement. It says...let me be a meaningful citizen. Let me be a real American.”

The New Nationalism

As the White House adopted a modified liberalism that used government programs and civil service incorporation to validate ethnic difference, but also to contain it, a new challenge was emerging. While LULAC and the American G.I. Forum of which Ximenes was a leader had long endeavored to collapse the distance between Mexican and American, a new generation of activists strove to achieve power by widening the gap. As a conquered people whose lands were colonized by nineteenth-century invaders, they had no obligation to the United States and its institutions. They had a duty to resist. Taking inspiration from a vast array of sources, including Black Power activists, Cesar Chavez, and Mao Zedong among others, they embraced a militant critique of U.S. citizenship and patriotism, affirming as primary their bond with fellow ethnic Mexicans. Their symbols of power were Emiliano Zapata and the Mexican tricolor, not Jack Kennedy and Old Glory. In place of the numerous solidarities that characterized the Spanish and Mexican-descended people of the Southwest, these activists embraced the term “Chicano.” Although its origins have been disputed, the term had strong association with working-class and poor Mexicans. The younger generation embraced this pejorative self-designation in order to show their solidarity with those same souls, to reject assimilation, and to “establish a genealogical tie to a militant, Aztec warrior past.”

One strain of the movement was irredentist, calling to regain lands lost during the nineteenth-century U.S. conquest of northern Mexico. This impulse was strong in New Mexico,

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53 “Address by Vicente T. Ximenes...Before the Interagency Advisory Group of the Civil Service Commission,” February 14, 1968, Box 2, Papers of Vicente T. Ximenes, LBJ Library.
where an itinerant Pentecostal preacher named Reies López Tijerina formed the Alianza Federal de Mercedes in 1962. The Alianza first tried to recover Spanish and Mexican land grants through the courts, claiming that vast parcels had passed into Anglo hands illegally and in violation of treaty obligations. But recovery of the grants was also a process of cultural recovery, affirming the separate history and cultural distinctiveness of those Tijerina called the “Indo-Hispanic” people. As the decade wore on and legal strategy bore little fruit, the Alianza adopted a strategy of armed land occupations and confrontations with the state. In one famous episode, just days before Vicente Ximenes was sworn in to protect the White House from Mexican problems, Tijerina’s armed band entered New Mexico’s Rio Arriba County courthouse to make a citizen’s arrest of the district attorney. The courthouse raid produced a hostage situation and manhunt. Though it ended in Tijerina’s arrest, the raid only increased his celebrity among a rising generation of militant activists seeking to mobilize ethnic solidarity to redress the social and economic condition of ethnic Mexicans in the Southwest.

As Tijerina’s movement gained force, Democrats’ erstwhile allies repudiated mainstream politics and embraced cultural nationalism. Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales was a former prize fighter and bail bondsman who had coordinated the Colorado Viva Kennedy effort in 1960, and had directed Denver’s participation in the War on Poverty. He had walked out of the Albuquerque EEOC conference in 1966, and later resigned his position and a promising future in Democratic politics. In its place, he chose confrontation with an establishment he claimed had done little to solve his people’s problems but much to turn them into “lackeys, political bootlickers and prostitutes.” In addition to founding the “Crusade for Justice,” a hotbed of cultural nationalism,

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56 García, Chicanismo, 33.
57 Muñoz, Youth, Identity, Power, 57.
58 Quoted in García, Chicanismo, 34.
revival and self-help organizing among Denver Chicanos, Gonzales penned one of movement’s most influential anthems, *I Am Joaquin/Yo Soy Joaquin*. The 1967 poem instructs readers to reject assimilation and its attendant “American social neurosis” in favor of fortifying the beloved ethnic community for “cultural survival.”\(^5^9\) The poem is a celebration of mestizaje, and an attempt to make the blood ties ostensibly uniting ethnic Mexicans the basis for authentic and powerful group action.

Tactical and ideological differences of the sort that often divided generations of African Americans in the age of black power were playing themselves out in Mexican America as well. New political players challenged established ones by bringing in new constituencies and mobilizing them around new ideas. In San Antonio, for example, the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) began to organize disaffected young people, many of them gang members, and to unite them with students, neighborhood residents, and politicians around a Chicano “liberation strategy.”\(^6^0\) Embracing principles of *carnalismo* (brotherhood) and their need to be a “raza unida” (united people) in the face of external threats, they commenced political attacks against the city’s establishment, especially Rep. Henry B. González. While one activist’s brother conceded that, “to our parents and their generation, Henry B. was a hero, a pioneer,” MAYO labeled him a sellout for his unwillingness to abandon liberal nationalism for their goal of Mexican self-determination.\(^6^1\)

The Chicano movement presented a profound challenge to leaders who had accepted political gradualism, eschewed protest and instead pursued justice by litigation and an alliance with the Democratic Party. The older generation had built its claims to justice on its loyalty and


\(^6^0\) Montejano, *Quixote’s Soldiers*, 59.

\(^6^1\) Ibid., 88.
patriotism, including its willingness to sacrifice in the armed forces. They had placed their faith in the justice and righteousness of the American order. For many young people, and not a few parents in the age of Vietnam, America and its institutions seemed to have been indifferent to their oppression, if not the direct cause of it. And since many of the protestors felt as if they had never known true citizenship and equality, but instead poverty, bad schools, racist cops, and biased draft boards, they rejected the belief that the United States was a fundamentally benevolent nation. They were unwilling to wait for those who kept saying that progress was just around the corner. Pressed from the left, traditional leaders struggled to find a balance between their patriotic gradualism and their yearning to remain relevant within their communities.

**The “Charade on the Chamizal”**

With another minority upheaval looming, and the Mexican American establishment restless, the White House announced that in October of 1967 it would finally hold a conference on Mexican Americans. Johnson refused to host it at the White House, but allowed Ximenes to schedule the event for El Paso. Johnson planned to be nearby anyway, for an event at which he and Mexican President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz would sign a formal proclamation resolving a small-scale but long-running border dispute between the two countries.

Ximenes planned to have mainstream voices outline the distinct Mexican American perspective on government operations. The heads of two major Mexican American civil rights groups, LULAC and the American G.I. Forum, along with the California-based Community Service Organization and Texas’s Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASSO) would serve as “monitors” for three days of hearings on Mexican Americans and

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63 The disputed land was the Chamizal, 600 acres of land adjacent to El Paso that had been jointly claimed by the two countries.
Agriculture, Labor, Economic Development, Housing, Health, Education, and the War on
Poverty. It was to be, in the ICMAA’s hyperbolic words, “a watershed in Mexican American
affairs, a milestone in democratic government, and the greatest step forward to date in centuries
of Mexican American history.”

The administration acknowledged Mexican Americans’ special history problems and
cultural distinctiveness, and worked to convince them that the solutions to their problems were
faith in government and in incremental social reform. On October 26, 1967, Vice President
Humphrey opened the event, reciting a litany of indignities that Mexican Americans suffered in
the United States, suffering all the more shameful because “most of these same people have been
American citizens for generations—many of them since well before the Humphreys arrived from
Scotland.” He applauded them for no longer accepting the status quo. For Humphrey, the recent
activism he had seen represented nothing less than “a new awakening of ‘la raza,’” set to yield
“some of the greatest social reforms this nation has yet known.” He spoke of the need to provide
a “material basis on which a cultural tradition that is precious to America can grow and flourish.”
In addition to the usual paeans to the family and religious orientation of Mexican Americans, he
linked the Southwest to Iberia, claiming his understanding of the shared heritage of Diego
Rivera, Velazquez, El Greco, and Pablo Casals.

Many of the policies discussed at the hearings would have been of interest to Puerto
Ricans and other Latinos. The educators, social service providers, and other professionals in
attendance demanded federal attention on housing, bilingual education, federal employment, and
manpower training programs, none of which had a specific national origin requirement. The two
most important goals they identified were increasing the numbers of “bilingual and bi-cultural

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64 Chacon, “Accomplishments,” 94.
policy makers, administrators and community workers in the Federal Government,” and expanding bilingualism in “all phases of public activities, especially education.” These policies were the basis of a pan-Hispanic alliance.

Despite the Hispanismo suggested by this rhetoric and policy discussion, the conference’s Mexican American emphasis was clear. A Puerto Rican invitee remembered how “two thousand people attended from the Southwest and six New York Puerto Ricans. We were well received by our Mexican friends but it was not our conference.” The closing presentation, cut short so that attendees could be bused to the edge of the Rio Grande to serve as an audience for Johnson and the Mexican president, could only have reinforced this feeling.

More seriously, even those for whom the conference had been planned had no guarantees that their policy proposals would be implemented, or if they would have any influence after the event. Furthermore, the White House failed to account for the full spectrum of ideas and leadership coming to the fore in Mexican American communities. Some had been angered to learn that Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales and Reies López Tijerina had not been invited. Cesar Chavez had declined his invitation on the grounds that the administration had fought sufficiently hard to give farmworkers collective bargaining rights and protection from state police forces, deployed in service of the growers. Pickets began to form during Humphrey’s speech, with activists carrying signs reading, “Today We Demonstrate—Tomorrow We Revolt.”

Some did, in fact, choose to walk out and join a rival assembly in downtown El Paso featuring Gonzales and Tijerina, and chaired by farmworker advocate and scholar Ernesto

67 Senate Subcommittee, “Establish an Interagency Committee on Mexican-American Affairs,” 204.
68 Kaplowitz, LULAC, 117.
69 Pycior, LBJ and Mexican Americans, 204.
Galarza. The activists were brought together in opposition to a government seeking to manage their people through a committee they could not influence. Galarza, who had testified at the official hearings, wanted “a strong Inter-agency committee,” not one that was “a rubber stamp” for an administration tepid in its commitment to helping them.71 The rump conference concluded that the answer would be found in autonomous political action. According to Corona, it was there that politically active Mexican Americans first adopted “Raza Unida” as a rallying cry.72 Activists later agreed on a set of principles for Mexican American self-organization, “El Plan de la Raza Unida.” Pledging “loyalty to the Constitutional Democracy,”73 it nonetheless stressed the need for full cultural independence. “We affirm our dedication to our heritage, a bilingual culture, and assert our right to be members of La Raza Unida anywhere,” it claimed. It was a potent alternative to the old practice of a divided Southwest, in which “Latin Americans” argued with Hispanics and Mexican Americans over their relationship to one another and what label constituted ethnic authenticity.74

Wanting to continue their work, they asked MAPA’s Herman Gallegos, also a Ford Foundation consultant, to see if he could obtain funds to further their organizational efforts. In June of 1968, the Ford Foundation announced a grant of $630,000 to a new advocacy organization called the Southwest Council of La Raza. “The Spanish-speaking leaders will be linked together for the first time” by the new group, said Ford vice president Mitchell Sviridoff.75 Prospects for cohesive and assertive Mexican American community, and possibly a Southwestern Chicano political party, were brightening.

72 García, Memories of Chicano History, 227.
73 Quoted in Gómez-Quiñones, Chicano Politics, 110.
74 Quoted in Pycior, LBJ and Mexican Americans, 212.
Conclusion

The ICMAA experience illustrates the difficulties liberals faced in fashioning a political appeal that would resonate with a geographically and ideologically diverse set of Hispanic constituents, give primacy to the most important ones, and stay within the ideological and programmatic boundaries of liberal nationalism. Liberals required constituents to trust an understaffed and underfunded government committee to improve the functioning of government programs. They appeared insufficiently committed to acknowledging the growing sentiment that cultural domination had played a role in this group’s subordinate status, and that cultural assertiveness might empower them. Mexican Americans’ tenuous hold on white racial identity, a legacy of conquest and decades of discrimination, called into question comparisons with the “new” European immigrants. At the same time, extensive immigration from a mostly mestizo country throughout the twentieth century limited any comparisons with the Scotch-Irish of Appalachia. Economic deprivation may have been the bedrock problem, but policies designed to promote economic inclusion would struggle to be seen as an adequate solution in the late 1960s.

The Johnson administration’s effort to soothe Mexican Americans’ discontent by honoring their sense of ethnic difference thus produced unforeseen outcomes. In the end, the ICMAA legitimized the notion that Mexican Americans and to a lesser extent other “Spanish Americans” were a unique people with a special set of policy needs—a distinct relationship to the state—but further eroded their confidence that liberal nationalism could meet those needs.

Going forward, amid a vacuum of presidential leadership on the question, congressmen of both parties would continue the state’s project of redefining the nation’s second-largest minority. Official recognition of America’s “Spanish-speaking people”—a pan-ethnic
community defined by humility, loyalty, and hard work as much as by language—was the next step for elected officials. They had to make ethnicity safe for the American state.
PART II. INSTITUTIONALIZING PAN-ETHNICITY
Chapter 4

A Difference that Unifies: Creating a Federal Advocate for Spanish-Speaking Americans

The strength of America lies in its rich diversity, not in conformity. Hispanic culture, with its emphasis upon the sanctity and responsibility of the individual, should make a notable contribution…these people are a proud, firmly rooted, and law-abiding group who have done so much and still have so much left to offer.

—Rep. George H.W. Bush (R-TX), 19681

The committee’s basic aim is to institutionalize the idea that the Spanish-speaking are an integral part of this Nation.

—The Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, 19732

It was 1968, and a speaker arose to rail against the assimilationists and the Americanizers. He was disgusted with their attempts to “eradicate the ancestral minority culture[s]” of so many people. It was an “egregious repercussion” of bigotry, he said, for immigrants’ children to reject their ethnic heritage, instead of seeing it as “an heirloom to prize.” Those haughty arbiters of Americanism had not expunged all precious diversity, however. “A distinctive Spanish-Indian-Mexican culture” had managed to survive. “The strain of the Spanish Conquistador and the Aztec warrior lives in America today,” the speaker avowed defiantly.3

The words might have been a Chicano activist’s, but they were far from subversive. They belonged to United States Senator Joseph Davies Tydings, a Democrat from Maryland, and the occasion for them was Congress’s approval of a Joint Resolution calling upon the president to proclaim each week of September 15 and 16—independence days in Central America and

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Mexico—a “National Hispanic Heritage Week.” Tydings praised the initiative, and the new Public Law 90-498 that instructed the country’s institutions, “especially the educational community,” to honor the week “with appropriate ceremonies and activities.”

The logic of national ethnic celebrations necessitated that this pan-ethnic group derive its praiseworthiness from contributions to the national project. The “Hispanic heritage” was in great scientists, politicians, artists, athletes, and businessmen who left an “indelible Hispanic influence” on the entire country. Even the average group member, according to Tydings, possessed deeply ingrained values that were aligned with the national interest. The many honors these people won in battle, for instance, proved that “patriotism, courage and bravery,” were traits “sacrosanct in the Hispanic culture.” The urge to celebrate converted transnational agricultural labor forces into good ethnic Americans. Those “Mexican-Americans who toil long hours in the hot sun for meager, below minimum standard wages” showed that, as a people, they had fully embraced the “value” of “hard work.”

Hispanic Americans, so often disparaged in racist tales of the West or in damaging stereotypes of poverty-stricken ghetto dwellers—as obstacles to national progress—now found themselves embraced as part of an alternative history of noble cultural attributes deployed in the national service.

This story of heroic humility was of little use, however, if young people failed to acknowledge it. Tydings wanted the “new generation of Hispano-Americans,” rather than taking the road of rebellion, to see themselves as “but the latest in the long line of contributors” to America. “National Hispanic Heritage Week” ceremonies would help them “recognize that the American culture truly is an amalgam of many and variegated cultures,” including their own.

With pride in their ancestors’ dedication to the country, and recognized as an integral component

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of the nation’s culture, they could go on “to make their own meaningful contribution” to its future.⁶

The celebration of the nation’s “Hispanic Heritage” held various uses, depending upon one’s perspective. For Mexican Americans in the Southwest, it was to make Mexicans and their culture more “American.” It was a rejoinder to a Chicano movement claiming that Mexicanos existed “sin fronteras,” irrespective of borders, and that war, land theft, violence, and racism had defined the Southwest. But it was more than a simple paean to a mythical “Spanish fantasy heritage” that denied the region’s Mexican character.⁷ One of the Justifications for “National Hispanic Heritage Week” was the census’s finding that large numbers of Americans bore “Spanish surnames, especially in our Southwestern States and in New York City.”⁸ Thus to be “Hispanic” in the United States increasingly meant more than simply denying that one was “Mexican.” It spoke to a particular moment in national life, in which U.S. nationalists expected distant and often unfamiliar populations were expected to see themselves as sharing an essential ethnic bond. Institutionalization of Hispanic identity was one part of a larger government-facilitated reconstruction of the United States as a multicultural nation.

This chapter examines another crucial moment in the making of pan-Hispanic identity, the congressional initiative to bring all Hispanic Americans under the same umbrella by institutionalizing their common identity in government. The debate over extending the ICMAA to all “Spanish-speaking Americans” shows congressmen attempting to present an alternative to radical nationalism by giving shape and direction to a pan-ethnic solidarity still in the early stages of forming. Because key Mexican American and Puerto Rican organizational leaders had

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⁶ Ibid, 27513.
⁸ Cong. Rec., 90th Cong., 2nd sess., 1968, 114: 22800
established few linkages of their own, elected officials took the lead in defining their shared public identity. Not surprisingly, they did so in ways congenial to their own interests. They sanitized the groups’ historical experiences and decoupled the populations from the territories that both provided them with political, cultural, and intellectual resources—and that divided them from one another. They tried to supplant Mexican and Puerto Rican nationalism with pan-ethnicity. Their desire to curry favor with patriotic ethnics, the structure of Congress, and their own limited imaginations ensured that this official Hispanic identity would be a soft synthesis, vague but positive. It assigned to all these groups trans-historical cultural traits aligning them with forces of order and opposed to the riotous and troubled America of the late 1960s. As far as government was concerned, the public persona of the “Spanish-speaking” people became that of the deserving American minority, peaceful, dignified, quite, humble, and loyal to the United States.

A Surging Militancy

Like the American liberalism they had embraced, Mexican American and Puerto Rican leaders were in transition by the late 1960s. Throughout the middle third of the twentieth century, they had sought power and justice in a manner not unlike that of European immigrants. They did not necessarily deny their culture, but they subordinated it to their U.S. citizenship, and their sacrifices for the country, in making political claims. Henry B. González, for example, employed a strict version of this approach in Texas, exemplified by his desire to be known as an “American of Spanish surname” and not as a “Mexican American.” But by the mid 1960s, many advocates had grown more comfortable than González had with the notion that they were a

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“minority,” with a history of suffering discrimination analogous to African Americans’, and a similar need for targeted public policy. However, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans did not build effective pan-Hispanic coalitions to press for shared gains at the national level, in part because Mexican American political elites understood Puerto Ricans as having distinct problems, and because the Johnson administration ranked Mexican American concerns above Puerto Rican ones. This was a second way of organizing their ethnic politics.

Despite their willingness to embrace cultural difference, and the government’s acceptance of their claims, mainstream activists’ gradualism and commitment to traditional electoral politics—especially the Democratic Party—came under attack as the decade drew to a close. In a third formulation of ethnic politics, Chicano and Puerto Rican nationalists, in tune with the growing radicalism of the black freedom movement, rejected the dominant civic nationalist conception of the United States. It was not an essentially just society whose liberal founding documents provided the basis for a steady expansion of rights and economic prosperity to all Americans. Their history proved differently, they argued. Their ancestors had been conquered, their lands violently colonized by grasping, materialistic Americans. The generation coming of age drew a direct line from nineteenth-century events to their poor neighborhoods, inferior schools, limited job prospects, and their disproportionate presence in Vietnam. Their America was a racist place.

So it was that as the Congress was appropriating Hispanic heritage to serve nationalist ends, between one thousand and fifteen hundred young people, precisely those whom Senator Tydings hoped would stay in the fold, were instead planning to free themselves from the country’s shackles. It was March of 1969 and in Denver the students were attending the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, hosted by the Chicano activist Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales. The
charismatic former boxer, bail bondsman, and Democratic leader had quit the Democratic Party and started an independent civil rights group, the Crusade for Justice.\textsuperscript{10}

Gonzales aimed to convince the students that they were no longer an American ethnic group, but a Chicano nation in desperate need of self-determination. The conference steering committee confirmed this new direction by declaring that, “we owe no allegiance, no respect, to any of the laws of this racist country.” According to one news account, “Chicano youths” demonstrated their new loyalties by lowering the U.S. flag outside the state capitol and replacing it with the Mexican tricolor.\textsuperscript{11}

More than simply a rejection of the United States, however, nationalist politics was about “rediscovering, promoting, and maintaining” cultural tendencies perceived as common at the “grassroots level.”\textsuperscript{12} The conference’s roadmap for Chicano nationalism, “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán,” sought to replace virtually every aspect of the U.S. presence in the Chicano’s life with a just and authentic alternative. First, it disputed U.S. sovereignty over the Southwest. Activists renamed the region “Aztlán,” after the mythical homeland of the Aztec empire, and called upon Chicanos to begin “reclaiming the land” of their “forefathers,” dispossessed by “the brutal ‘gringo’ invasion of our territories” during the nineteenth century. As a practical matter, reclamation often meant a search for ethnic autonomy rather than an independent state, although the latter had its partisans. Part of the search for community control was to reject the two-party system, an “animal with two heads that feed from the same trough.” El Plan called instead for a Chicano political party dedicated to representing the “Familia de la Raza.”\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} Lorena Oropeza, ¡Raza Si! ¡Guerra No! Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Viet Nam War Era, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 75.


\textsuperscript{12} García, Chicanismo, 97.

Chicanos’ adoption of Aztlán as part of their “origin myth,” and their commitment to separate political action on behalf of a “raza nueva” (new people) were part and parcel of a new perspective on racial identity. El Plan would have none of the previous generation’s tendency to identify as Caucasian. It drew sharp racial distinctions between the Chicanos, “a bronze people with a bronze culture,” and the “foreign Europeans” who exploited their community. To amplify racial pride and make it politically useful meant mapping certain cultural values onto skin color. As a “mestizo” nation, Chicanos were said possess “cultural values of life, family, and home” that could defeat the “gringo dollar value system.” They could replace Anglo capitalism with a culturally appropriate system of economic cooperation by “driving the exploiter out of our communities.”

The student movement furthered its separation from the U.S. mainstream a month later in Santa Barbara. Student groups that had once incorporated “Mexican American” in their name began to federate as chapters of the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, the Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán, or MEChA. MEChA’s foundational document, “El Plan de Santa Barbara,” reveals the student movement’s disillusionment with integration on U.S. terms. “For decades,” it states, “Mexican people in the United States struggled to realize the ‘American Dream.’” However, “the ultimate cost of assimilation, required turning away from el barrio and la colonia,” so that students’ social mobility meant impoverishment, exploitation, and marginality for those left behind. The solidarity implied by U.S. citizenship was minimized if not dismissed entirely in the name of “community.” “Chicanismo simply embodies an ancient

14 Oropeza, ¡Raza Si! ¡Guerra No!, 85.
15 A cooperative economics for “the liberation of La Raza” called all classes to action, the workers “who plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops” as well as “the middle class, the professional.” “El Plan Espirtual de Aztlán,” http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/00W/chicano101-1/aztlan.htm [accessed September 29, 2011].
16 Muñoz, Youth, Identity, Power, 79.
truth,” said the students, “that man is never closer to his true self as when he is close to his community.” No longer would they follow a self-destructive path of assimilation.17

The young Chicanos were not alone in their alienation, of course. They drew inspiration from their own lives and histories, but also from the perspectives of activists, both black and white, then challenging the assumptions of postwar American society. Puerto Rican youth were coming to similar conclusions as well. Disenchanted with U.S. domination of Puerto Rico and their own place in American society, young Puerto Ricans, many of them students on City University of New York (CUNY) campuses, began organizing quasi-nationalist organizations in the mid-1960s. Despite its nationalist tilt, a busload of Puerto Rican student activists from New York attended the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference. In Denver they met José “Cha Cha” Jiménez, leader of a Puerto Rican street gang in Chicago known as the Young Lords. Jiménez was transforming the gang into a political organization committed to community empowerment and ethnic nationalism, a process similar to the one Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) leaders were pursuing in Texas. The New Yorkers met Jiménez again, in Chicago, and not long after began to merge their organizations into a New York chapter of the Young Lords Organization.18

With purple berets and militant raised fist salute, New York’s Young Lords’ debut for many was in an August 1969 protest of the city sanitation department’s habitual indifference to garbage removal in East Harlem. Barricading several city blocks, the Lords built great piles of uncollected trash at street intersections, and then set them ablaze. Crowds overturned and burned abandoned cars. Sanitation workers arrived at last, under the protection of “heavy police reinforcements,” to haul away the garbage. Community leaders were caught off-guard. When

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17 Quoted in Muñoz, Youth, Identity, Power, 191-192.
18 Thomas, Puerto Rican Citizen, 228-231.
asked what he made of the new group, the sixty year-old head of a neighborhood betterment association was puzzled. “How do we know what they stand for, what their aims are?” he responded.19

The Young Lords would not remain a mystery for long. In the fall of 1969 the renamed “Young Lords Party” released its “13 Point Program and Platform.”20 The Lords conceived of Puerto Ricans as a “divided nation,” for whom living conditions in Puerto Rico and the well-being of those on the mainland were inseparable. Since forces outside of the community made both the “slaves of the gringo,” their only option was “liberation on the Island and inside the United States.” Calling for community control of land, institutions, and education, they vowed to resist “cultural, as well as economic genocide by the yanqui.”21

Whereas the Plan de Aztlán made room for the Chicano middle classes, the Lords blended their critique of colonial power relations with a pointed jab at “capitalists and alliances with traitors.” Those “exploiters” and “puppets of the oppressor” who controlled wealth and power in their neighborhoods only led Puerto Ricans “down blind alleys.” In place of the “poverty pimps” and “street workers” offering liberal government aid, the Lords proposed a socialist society.22

Their internationalism led the Young Lords to view their struggle as connected to those of others enduring oppression. They supported their “Latín Brothers and Sisters” who suffered under “amerikkan business.” They offered Chicanos in the Southwest, for example, assistance in the struggle “against gringo domination and its (puppet) generals.” They expressed solidarity

20 The document was strongly influenced by the Black Panther Party’s “Ten-Point Program.”
22 Ibid.
with the oppressed people of the “Third World.” The “Latins…Black people, Indians, and Asians” who “slaved to build the wealth of this country” and others around the globe formed “one nation under oppression.” Such politics demanded that Puerto Ricans resist service in the “Amerikkan military,” which would make them fight for imperialism and against their “Brothers and Sisters.” “U.S. Out of Vietnam, Free Puerto Rico!” their manifesto demanded. “Armed self-defense and armed struggle” had become “the only means to liberation,” and the Lords committed to “revolutionary war against the businessman, politician, and police.”

Nationalisms Compete

Chicanos’ and Puerto Ricans’ dynamic movements raised hopes for self-determination, but in many respects complicated the prospects of an alliance between the two populations. After all, the movements and organizations derived strength from their invocation of shared historical events, of heroes and martyrs, of national flags and quasi-national symbols. Most of these symbols in turn corresponded to places. Emiliano Zapata did not struggle to free Puerto Rico. And when Chicano activists imagined a homeland, they dreamed not of the Antilles but of the greater U.S. Southwest, of Aztlán. Likewise, despite their internationalist impulses, the Young Lords wore buttons depicting a raised fist clutching a rifle, against the silhouette of Puerto Rico, and the words “Yo Tengo Puerto Rico En Mi Corazon” (“I have Puerto Rico in my heart”). There might be an alliance of the two, but it was unlikely to produce a common identity.

Despite the challenge of coordinating movements, the nationalists’ separate challenges were potent locally, especially in the Southwest. Mexican American Democrats who had been

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23 Ibid.
24 Hundreds of thousands of Cuban exiles, it scarcely needs mentioning, had a particular place in mind when they thought of home.
sent to Washington during the liberal groundswell of the early 1960s now came under attack for “selling-out,” and protecting the “gringo” establishment. Though they reacted to the nationalist challenge in different ways, most found that they could use it to enhance their power and gain support for their more moderate initiatives.

One scene of challenge and response was San Antonio. In local races held in early 1969, Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) candidates pledged to defend Chicano interests against the city’s Democratic establishment. The largely Mexican American West Side turned out in surprisingly large numbers for them. Though none of the MAYO candidates won, the group had injected a new unpredictability into the city’s political arrangements. The activists held up Henry B. González, the U.S. Representative whose district included the West Side, as an impediment to a much-needed political transformation. His refusal to lend public support to the farmworkers on strike in the Rio Grande Valley (he claimed it was because the strike was beyond his district boundary), or to take a stand in favor of Chicano school walkouts, led them to ask, “Where is Henry B.”? For his part, González feared that MAYO would be used as a tool of his rivals, especially Bexar County Commissioner (and PASSO activist) Albert Peña. Indeed, Peña initially threw his support to MAYO, and endorsed the charge that González had “forgotten the people who elected him.”

Henry B. González tended under ordinary circumstances to interpret any and all disagreements as bitterly personal. Given the stakes of these challenges—many of which actually were quite personal—he fought back with a vengeance. As historian David Montejano has shown, the congressman enlisted informants to report on MAYO’s activities, and worked with the San Antonio Police Department and the FBI to build a case against the group. Further, he collaborated with other congressmen and the IRS to challenge the Ford Foundation’s tax-

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25 Montejano, *Quixote’s Soldiers*, 81, 86, 93-94.
exempt status, since it had indirectly funded MAYO, and to pass legislation aimed at preventing any future foundation grants being given to groups like MAYO.26

MAYO presented a challenge, but also an opportunity for Henry B. to burnish his support among traditional constituents, and even to make gains in more conservative precincts. In addition to his clandestine attacks on the group, González responded publicly with a strident American nationalism. He waged a campaign against MAYO that drew upon the civic nationalist tradition of the New Deal and Great Society to delegitimize the group’s philosophy and tactics. MAYO posed a threat, he claimed, because it “demand[ed] an allegiance to race above all else.” The group’s leaders were little more than “brown Bilbos,”27 who practiced what he called “reverse racism,” or sometimes “the new racism.” MAYO leader José Angel Gutiérrez had spoken of a “vicious cultural genocide being inflicted upon La Raza by gringos and their institutions.” But for González, talk of “cultural genocide” was both abstraction and distraction. “The real issue,” he claimed, was finding a way to “defeat poverty and hopelessness and despair.” Justice had a national economic dimension, but not a specific cultural dimension. It was “decent work at decent wages for all who want work; decent support for those who cannot support themselves;” equal opportunity in schools and impartial administration of the law; it was “decent homes, adequate streets and public services.” To Chicanos who claimed that the United States was a lost cause for them, González replied with optimism. “I have seen too much proof that there is a residue of good will in this country…I have seen, taken part in, and been the beneficiary of too much progress to deny its existence, or to say that we are incapable of it. I

26 See Montejano, *Quixote’s Soldiers*, chap. 4 and 5.
27 A reference to the Mississippi Senator and notorious white supremacist Theodore G. Bilbo, who had died in 1947.
cannot find evidence that there is any country in the world that matches the progress of this one,” he said.\(^{28}\)

While Henry B. González’s civic nationalism was capacious, it demanded conformity, both ideological and cultural. He belittled MAYO as a bunch of imitation radicals, phonies who “affect[ed] the Castro manner—berets, beards, fatigues, and so on,” and who “play[ed] at revolution.” He red-baited the publishers of radical Chicano newspapers, dismissing their ideas as, in essence, the product of outside agitation. Their “hate sheets,” he claimed, did little but “reflect the language of Castro,” and echoed a politics “that is alien to our area of the country.” González went even further, however, to align Americans of Spanish surname with the American nation. As he lambasted foundations for subsidizing Southwestern Mexican American organizations he continued to assert that there was no single organization that could speak for “such a disparate” and “pluralistic group” as the Mexican Americans in the Southwest. González even questioned that there was even a separate cause for “what he [Gutiérrez] calls the Mexican-American.” González, in contrast, claimed the standard of “classless, raceless politics.”\(^{29}\) All that was needed was to be American.

**Negotiating a Framework for Pan-Hispanic Politics**

González’s insistence on an undiluted Americanism, validated by the slow but steady expansion of equal opportunity, represented one liberal nationalist alternative to Chicanismo. It was a role that González was experienced at playing, and his district rewarded it. But by the late 1960s, the meaning of Americanism was changing. The yearning for an ethnically authentic form of politics, often driven by radicals espousing nationalism, led elected officials to look for

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ways to demonstrate that they recognized and celebrated their constituents’ difference from the mainstream culture. A fourth way of organizing Mexican American and Puerto Rican politics emerged, in which a bipartisan group of congressmen—most of them “Anglos” sought to bring the two groups together, and to unite them with other similar populations, for decidedly less radical ends.

Fortunately for congressmen seeking to show their concern for these voters, Lyndon Johnson had created the Interagency Committee on Mexican American Affairs (ICMAA). Despite the committee’s shortcomings, Mexican Americans defended it vigorously. They saw it as the only institution they controlled in the federal bureaucracy. It was all the more important because their leaders had yet not established a significant lobbying presence in Washington. For their part, Puerto Ricans showed that they believed the ICMAA was important by protesting for greater inclusion in its activities. Richard Nixon had not committed to retaining it, handing Congress the initiative to take a popular step with an important constituency.

In January of 1969, New Mexico’s Joseph Montoya, the Senate’s lone Spanish American introduced legislation to make the ICMAA a statutory committee, and thus one whose existence was not subject to presidential whim. Initial support for his bill, S. 740, was substantial. It had seventeen Senate cosponsors, including four Republicans. Some of the cosponsors came from the Southwest, including Ralph Yarborough of Texas, California’s two Senators (one Democrat and one Republican), as well as the two Republicans from Arizona, Barry Goldwater and Paul Fannin. Other sponsors were found in less likely locations, including Wyoming, Arkansas, and Iowa. Liberals with small Mexican American constituencies but grand political ambitions joined in as well, with Edward Kennedy, Walter Mondale, and Eugene McCarthy all backing the
legislation.30 Presidential hopefuls Birch Bayh of Indiana and Maine’s Edmund Muskie later signed on, though South Dakota’s George McGovern did not.31 By September of 1969, Montoya’s bill had 39 cosponsors in the Senate, almost a quarter of them Republicans.

Puerto Ricans had mobilized against the original bill, which one activist labeled an attempt to perpetuate “discrimination in the past of the Mexicans toward others.” Some activists drafted alternate bills calling for a “Spanish American” affairs committee to replace the one devoted to Mexican Americans. To acknowledge their concerns and to win the support of Senators with Puerto Rican constituents, Montoya proposed renaming the organization the “Interagency Committee on Hispanic American Affairs.”32

The need to maintain broad support encouraged the sponsors to consolidate several populations into a single national minority. Whereas Johnson’s ICMAA aimed at the Southwest, Montoya now saw the need for a “community advocate” whose “constituency will be nationwide—wherever there are Spanish-speaking Americans.” The goal was now to “expand upon the functions” of the ICMAA “by involving all Americans of similar ethnic or cultural background.”33 With assurances that the new committee would include Puerto Ricans, New York Republican Jacob Javits signed on as a cosponsor.34

To establish a federal institution that could provide nation-wide attention to several populations whose leaders were often reluctant to join together was an act of ethnic creation. And like all elite-sponsored ethnic creations, it required highlighting the commonalities and

32 Senate Subcommittee, Establish an Interagency Committee on Mexican-American Affairs, 228-232, 1.
34 Javits was on the Senate subcommittee that heard hearings on S. 740, but does not appear in transcripts of the hearings in which Montoya, Castillo, Diaz and others debated the mandate of the proposed organization. Cong. Rec., 91st Cong., 1st sess., 115: 21605-21606.
minimizing or dismissing the differences among the groups involved. Montoya, the highest-ranking elected official of the group in question, and an aspiring leader of a national minority, conceded that the estimated 10 million “Spanish-speaking Americans” exhibited “striking” heterogeneity. “As a group,” they ranged “from native born Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans to emigrants from Latin America.” Nevertheless, he claimed that “their similarities in language and culture” were “also striking.” Regardless of “his ethnic origin,” said the Senator, “the Spanish-speaking American” constituted “the second largest minority in America, representing 5% of our population.” He invoked characteristics that would yield the greatest sympathy from his colleagues without straining the plausibility of a common bond among these groups. They all shared “the same background, language, and surnames,” he said. But he based their collective claim for justice and attention on the historical narrative of the Southwest. He offered an extended historical discourse on Juan de Oñate, Hernán Cortés, and the Mexican-American War, joking that his people had been there so long that “When the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, the Spanish were there to feed them pinto beans!” This group was more American than just about any other, “a part of the American dream…American citizens and have been for generations.” This explication anchored the pan-ethnic minority in a place that gave it historical primacy, while it obscured the ways in which Mexican migration, documented or not, had redefined even its base Spanish-Mexican population.36

Despite Montoya’s best efforts, Senate hearings on his bill reveal a spectrum of elite opinion as to the accuracy and efficacy of placing all of the “Spanish-speaking Americans” under that umbrella. His mooring of multiple populations to the Southwestern historical narrative did little to hide the fact that the regionally-distinct populations remained largely unfamiliar to one

36 Senate Subcommittee, Establish an Interagency Committee on Mexican-American Affairs, 4, 2.
another. For example, he described Puerto Ricans as “newcomers from a predominantly rural society,” a people unused to the “increasingly high level of technological sophistication” they encountered on the mainland. U.S. citizens from birth and large percentages of them urban, at least on the mainland, Puerto Ricans appeared more foreign to American society than Montoya’s normative Southwesterner. But this portrayal of Puerto Ricans found an opposite match later in Manuel Díaz, Jr., a Puerto Rican leader and the Deputy Commissioner of Manpower for New York City. Díaz was asked if Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans could work together to resolve common grievances. He thought they could, but noticed “one essential difference” between the two populations. “The Puerto Rican is by and large an urban animal,” he claimed, one who “engages the economy in industrial areas in the manufacturing field.” By contrast, he believed that Mexican Americans were “largely focused on agricultural endeavors.” The image of the poor rural Mexican, however, was a slur to Los Angeles attorney Martin Castillo. Nixon’s choice to replace Vicente Ximenes at the still-functioning ICMAA, Castillo replied angrily that his people had “long ago been converted into an urban population.” He rebuked the “Easterners” for “misconceptualiz[ing] about the Mexican-American to the extent that they do.” His brief time in Washington, had given him the distinct impression that policymakers knew about Puerto Ricans, but had no clue about Mexican Americans. “The Eastern mind believes my community is some kind of a cross between an Eskimo and a Patagonian” living in a place “out there somewhere,” he fumed.37

A sense of confusion, and a defensiveness that at times bordered on anger limited pan-Hispanic cooperation. Montoya argued that Puerto Ricans had a “parallel” experience to “other Spanish-speaking Americans.” Castillo, in contrast, stressed that he had been “brought here as a

37 Ibid., 14, 209, 213.
Mexican American,” in his view the more important group since, “in terms of number, we have the most people.” Vicente Ximenes may have told the Senate subcommittee that that he “could write a speech to be delivered to the Mexican Americans of East Los Angeles and make the same speech to the Puerto Ricans in New York or Spanish Americans in New Mexico” because they all shared “poverty plus language, custom, history, and culture and background.” But that did not change the fact that those labels reflected something essential about how the groups saw themselves. Regardless of how similar their needs may have been, Ximenes still recoiled at the attempt to rename the ICMAA to reflect the pan-ethnic identity of “Hispanic-Americans.” In his view, having “Mexican-American” in its name “hits at the large numbers of people who have the problem which we talk about.” Castillo argued that to change the name of the Mexican American Affairs Committee—“the only thing we have ever had”—would be “a step back into anonymity.” “The term ‘Hispanic-American,’” he declared, “is ridiculous.”

Yet the system of pluralist politics taking shape, in part through the maneuverings of men like Joseph Montoya, favored synthesis. The “eastern mind” of Subcommittee Chairman Abraham Ribicoff, a liberal from Connecticut, was just the sort of thing a new bureaucrat in Washington was going to have to understand if he wanted to be successful. Ribicoff admonished the assembled Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans for not working out their differences. “You represent segments of a community, and you are looking for the same objective,” he informed them. As part of his lecture, he urged the witnesses to sit down for “a long lunch,” during which they could determine a name for the new committee. It was as if they were siblings arguing over what color their room would be painted, and not virtual strangers being asked to determine how millions of other strangers would be jointly represented in their

38 Ibid., 15, 220, 196, 194, 218-220.
39 Ibid. 219.
country’s federal government. Those differences of region and nationality, those unique
histories, the context for millions of lives and the meanings attached to them, so important to the
panelists, all began to be melted away in the state’s machinery. But what would replace them?

A Humble People

Senate hearings showed the difficulty in drawing a composite portrait of the country’s
Spanish-speaking population. Congress was determined to do so anyway. Not only did black,
Chicano, and Puerto Rican nationalism worry legislators, electoral activism by mainstream
Mexican American and Puerto Rican groups could not be ignored. Elected officials could
usually do little to convert the radicals, but they could win over their parents by appealing to
their sense of ethnic difference. While Mexican American and Puerto Rican leaders debated
their relationship, the legislators moved ahead, balancing a fear of ethnic conflict with flattery for
their responsible ethnic constituents.

They justified their intervention as necessary to prevent society from losing the Spanish-
speaking people to anger and violence, a contagion threatening to spread from African
Americans. Having recently returned from California, Ribicoff stressed the need for government
to take steps to stem “what they call the Chicano problem.” He had observed that the “Mexican-
American is learning, rightfully so, from the pressures brought by the Negro.” Nevertheless, he
hoped that “we have the wisdom…not to see our history with regard to the blacks repeated” or
“compounded now with the Spanish-speaking people.” Barry Goldwater, too, feared that
without government help, “radicals will be able to excite the Mexican-American to the point that
he might attempt what we have seen the blacks attempt.” Although the chances of this

40 Ibid., 158.
happening were small, since this people “come to this country because they love this country,” it was not worth taking the risk when the Congress was in a position to help.41

Eager to see his legislation through and to solidify his support at home, Montoya did little to allay these suspicions. New Mexico was the epicenter of Reies López Tijerina’s land grant recovery movement. But Hispanos had also given a large number of their votes to David Cargo, the state’s Republican governor.42 Pressed from both sides, Montoya warned that a “growing discontent and unrest among very responsible individuals and groups…is both justified and long overdue and must be taken seriously.” To ignore this sentiment now, he cautioned his colleagues, would lead to “serious civil disturbances throughout this Nation.” Yet even as he predicted riots, Montoya endeavored to define this national minority in ways that would resonate with more conservative audiences. The “Spanish-speaking American” did not “want special treatment” or “charity” or “handouts.” Such things “rob him of his man-hood, of his initiative, of his strong pride which is his birth right,” said Montoya. “But neither does he want to forever be relegated to a third class citizenship behind white America and Black America. All he wants is equality.”43 Support for this group would “prove that the free market economy and our whole system of Government can work for everyone, regardless of historical or ethnic origin.”44

In the House of Representatives, confusion and skepticism over the bill led sympathetic legislators to offer their various understandings of the population it intended to assist. Apparently, a number of lawmakers did not understand, or did not believe what Montoya had told the Senate: that the Spanish-speaking were a native population with longstanding claims. Supporters struggled to explain that the bill aimed to assist Americans, or those on their way to

41 Ibid., 158.
43 Senate Subcommittee, Establish an Interagency Committee on Mexican-American Affairs, 17.
becoming Americans, not foreigners in the country without authorization. Los Angeles’ Chet Holifield stated that, rather than “depress[ing] the wage level of other segments of our society,” the committee would “build up the vocational skills and the educational levels of…American citizens and legal residents” belonging to the “Spanish-speaking group.” With this aid, they could “share more abundantly in our normal American standard of living.” Edward Roybal enlightened his colleagues that the bill’s beneficiaries were “not foreigners to this land” but “Americans who can trace their ancestry here in the United States to a time before the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock.” At the same time, Roybal claimed, they were “Americans who have come from every Latin American country to enrich the culture of our Nation.” Regardless of their origins, from fighting in wars to contributing to the country’s economic development, they had proven they belonged.45

While Roybal acknowledged that immigration was part of the story, others seemed to deny it altogether in defining this people as exceptionally worthy of aid. California Republican Charles E. Wiggins, who mentioned his “personal familiarity with the problems of Spanish-speaking Americans,” distinguished them from other ethnics. Immigrant processes did not really apply to this monolingual group. They were “unique,” he said, because “Spanish is their only language and as such they do not have the advantages of other hyphenated Americans.”46 To those who blamed this minority group for its lack of progress, John Erlenborn, an Illinois Republican, defended cultural pluralism. “The Spanish speaking were the first to come to this country,” he said. “They have resisted assimilation into the culture of this country—that is, a complete assimilation—and they maintain their own life style and culture,” a condition that he

46 Ibid., 39393.
considered “healthy.” They rarely explained how the group came to be a part of “this country,” of course, but it was clear that politicians of both parties had for the time-being given up on assimilation as a precondition for government assistance.

The Southwestern narrative was useful, but not sufficient. Representatives from the Northeast also defended Puerto Ricans’ special need for a federal advocate. New Jersey’s Joseph Minish added his praise for “our residents of Puerto Rican descent” who suffered “inattention and neglect” that were shameful given the ways in which their “industry, vitality, and pride, have contributed vastly to the quality of our national life.” Leonard Farbstein, representing the Lower East Side of Manhattan, lauded his Puerto Rican constituents’ “progressive spirit and hardworking character.” They suffered poverty, and he demanded that Congress act to provide them with a “special agency to handle their side of the problem, because their difficulties are different and need to be treated differently.”

If Mexican Americans, it was implied, were there first and Puerto Ricans had special problems, the congressional debate knitted the two groups together around a vague cultural disposition they supposedly shared. For their constituents back home and their colleagues in the House, the congressmen argued that this minority represented the antithesis of the disorder and disenchantment of the late 1960s. Roybal, for instance, called them “law-abiding Americans who have not resorted to riot and civil disobedience and need just a little help to enable them to lift themselves from their present status of poverty and neglect.”

An implicit comparison emerged between this group’s supposedly timeless patience and the alleged impatience, rioting, and dependency of other groups, presumably African Americans.

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47 Ibid., 39396.
48 Ibid., 39398, 39400.
49 Ibid., 39395.
In the juxtaposition, the deserving group came off as docile, virtual spectators in their own lives. Holifield, who claimed to have “lived among these people most of my life,” considered them both “gentle and kindly...a religious-type people” who “err on the side of gentility and timidness if they err at all.” Rather than “burn down buildings and break windows…they suffer in silence.” The Congress “owe[d] these people some encouragement” for their quiet dignity. The Illinois Republican Thomas Railsback agreed. Elected in 1966 to represent a district including Moline, he repeated the praise for the “gentle, kind, timid, and deeply religious people” who do not “demonstrate in the streets, burn down buildings, and break windows.” Though “often frustrated at their lot,” they were “always striving toward self-help....They do not ask that others do what they themselves can do.” Roman Pucinski of Chicago also marveled at how, even as “they suffer their indignities and they are exploited,” they were “the only group that almost never ask for a handout.” William C. Cramer, the first Republican representative from Florida since Reconstruction, repeated the view that “Americans of Spanish heritage have proved a law-abiding minority” and expressed his pride “to welcome freedom-loving Cubans to my State and Nation.” No handout was this. “They have earned all the support we can give them,” said Cramer.50

It was a remarkable display in many respects. The 1966 Division Street Riots in Pucinsky’s Chicago saw “Spanish-speaking Americans” engage in street battle for days against city police. In 1968, thousands of Chicano students had walked out of Los Angeles schools to protest against racism and school conditions that prevented them from getting a decent education. The L.A. students had backing from the Brown Berets, a militant Chicano

50 Ibid., 39398, 39400, 39395, 39399.
organization that drew upon the style and philosophy of the Black Panthers.\textsuperscript{51} Reies Tijerina’s followers were armed and occupying national forests. The farmworker movement was an enormous protest led by a Mexican American. In short, there was ample evidence to contradict the rosy portrayal that the congressmen had put forward. But they were aiming to please a different segment of the population. They were hoping to win or maintain the support of the working and middle-classes that were drawn to organizations such as LULAC and ASPIRA. Their desire for the votes they could win and their willingness to traffic in stereotypes, even if these were intended to be positive, worked together. It allowed them to ignore the youth challenge altogether, while still paying a tribute to their constituents’ ethnic difference.

Conservative voices did rise against the plan, with Iowa Republican Harold Royce Gross criticizing the bill on cultural and fiscal grounds. He wondered aloud if his colleagues would refuse to create a Cabinet Committee for Polish-speakers, or one for Scandinavians, Germans, or even Swahili speakers. “Are they going to teach languages under this program or is it to promote basket weaving,” he sarcastically inquired. Most of his concern, however, stemmed from the program’s costs. Given “the billions we are spewing out on social and welfare programs,” Gross claimed to be “surprised that there is a rock down in the southwest part of the country that has not been turned over so that they could find another place to plant some money.” “When,” asked the Iowan, “do we let somebody lift themselves up by their own bootstraps?”\textsuperscript{52}

Gross was no match, however, for the bipartisan coalition in support of such decent and honorable Americans. Arizona Republican Sam Steiger reminded him that American pluralism implied a commitment to fairness. The bill, he said, would help rectify inequities in federal attention to minority populations. “In terms of simple equity,” said Steiger, “if we are going to

\textsuperscript{51} Chávez, \textit{¡Mi Raza Primero!}, 47-51.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Cong. Rec.}, 91\textsuperscript{st}. Cong., 1\textsuperscript{st} sess., 1969, 115: 39393-39401.
attempt to solve the problems of a minority then we must attempt to solve the problems of all minorities, and we must not have a situation where we have a favorite minority.”

Yet for all the talk of ensuring equal treatment, the debate revealed that many congressmen had just that.

A Federated Minority

While the congressmen implicitly and unfavorably compared African Americans to the culturally monolithic “Spanish-speaking” Americans, the institution they established shows their awareness of their accountability to several distinct populations. Ribicoff’s committee named the “Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People” (CCOSS) to reflect these various constituent interests. The final bill also created an “Advisory Council on Spanish-Speaking Americans.” Appointed by the president, it would consist of nine people deemed “representative of the Mexican American, Puerto Rican American, Cuban American, and other elements of the Spanish-speaking and Spanish-surnamed community in the United States.”

There was, of course, something awkward about having this group’s solidarity defined as linguistic. Neither group membership nor the conditions that led to demands for federal intervention necessarily went away with English language acquisition. The Chicano movement had proposed to understand their people as a racial group. But this was hardly a majority position, especially among the Mexican American political elite who represented their group to the state. Moreover, racial ascription was even more obviously complicated in the national context as Puerto Ricans and Cubans brought greater phenotypic variation to pan-ethnic population. Spanish-speaking was the best the Congress could do at the time to honor the

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53 Ibid., 39394.
sensibilities of distinct national origin groups, while still meaning to unite and organize these populations in their relationship with the state.

Henry B. González was not pleased with the development. When the House passed Montoya’s S. 740 by an almost four to one margin in December of 1969, he angrily made his way to the well and denounced the new committee as a “third-rate Bureau of Indian affairs.” The CCOSS would be “a fine agent for political gamesmanship,” he predicted, a “press agent for a politically astute administration.” But it would do little to resolve the problems of the Southwest, “where most of these people live.” The majority had simply created “a token, a false hope, a vague promise.” The CCOSS would substitute for action rather than catalyze it, “imprison[ing] hope and freeze[ing] into permanence the injustices that afflict the Spanish surnamed.” In the face of those injustices, the CCOSS was akin to “feeding soup with your finger…enough to taste but not enough to satisfy hunger.”

The Nixon administration, which had once been inclined to let the committee die, now appeared set to make the most of it. From the Western White House in San Clemente, the president signed the Cabinet Committee into law—“con gusto,” his signing statement declared—on New Year’s Eve, 1969. Johnson’s liberal nationalism had conceived of Appalachia and the Rio Grande valley as largely interchangeable in their economic marginality, with each in need of government’s helping hand to integrate vast populations into national life. In contrast, Nixon viewed bilingual education, “enlisting [the] support of the private sector,” and “assisting Spanish-speaking people to launch their own businesses” as the way forward. Borrowing from the congressional playbook, he lauded as many as 10 million of “our people [who] draw upon a

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Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban heritage,” for showing “admirable respect for law, strong family and religious ties, and a proud individualism.”

Conclusion

The spread of nationalist movements in Mexican American and Puerto Rican communities led to political consequences that the nationalists did not intend. Activists presented nationalism as a means to both community and personal empowerment, and not just for the young. Their denunciations of the United States ensured the contempt—and the attention—of elected officials. In this time of ethic assertion, the state had a keen interest in ensuring that ethnic enthusiasm remained within safe parameters and operating via government channels. Individual congressmen also had strong incentives to reward the older guard and middle class ethnic leaders in these communities, incentives that only seemed more important amid the radical challenge. Their search for an ethnically authentic yet still “American” alternative to cultural nationalism, filtered through the Congress’s own structural realities, led the politicians to elaborate a wider definition of pan-Hispanic solidarity for the state to safeguard and promote. This state-directed ethnicization generated challenges, not least of which came from Mexican Americans who believed that they should be first in line for assistance. Nevertheless, the emerging logic in the Congress was that Puerto Ricans, and Mexican Americans, and even Cubans shared so much. It was time for them to get together to solve their problems. From the interplay of the activists, the Congress, and the White House, a “Spanish-Speaking Strategy” was emerging.

They defy categorical classification as a group and no term or phrase adequately describes them.

— George I. Sánchez, 1963

The Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish Speaking People represented Congress’s effort to organize several distinct and competitive ethnic groups under a single pan-Hispanic standard. The federal data system, however, operated according to another logic. Ethnic Mexicans and Puerto Ricans each had gained recognition in federal statistics as a result of mass migrations that occurred during different decades of the twentieth century, population movements that were, by and large, to different parts of the country. Reflecting their unique historical trajectories, the government counted the two groups separately, using different methods.

Nevertheless, because statistics regarded them as discrete regional minorities, those who wished to know the extent of their social disadvantage frequently had trouble discerning them, at least statistically, from the majority. A 1968 article in the social science journal *Trans-Action* took note of the curious dilemma. Since official statistics counted “Latins” as “whites,” census data was often of limited use in analyzing the “characteristics of the large populations in Texas, California, New York, and Illinois—the Mexican-Americans and the Puerto Ricans.” “How many are there? How poor are they,” it asked. “We simply do not know.” The key to informed

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public policy, the piece argued, would be for government “to separate Latins from the white population statistically.”²

This change proved rather difficult to obtain, however. For decades, one way Mexican American leaders had sought to escape discrimination was to resist efforts to distinguish their people from the nation’s “white” population. When, in the late 1960s, this group’s leaders sought for them to be counted as a separate, nationwide ethnic group, this legacy had to be overcome. They met strong resistance from census officials who deemed a new approach, however reflective of current politics, to be costly, inaccurate, and likely to jeopardize the historical comparability of data. In addition, this demand for a new form of national representation was another change that required activists to make judgments, often in public, about the boundaries of their ethnic community. Were they a race? Was theirs a community defined by language? What was the significance of nationality to them? After several attempts to convince the Bureau of the Census to change—including a pivotal intervention credited to Richard Nixon himself—the federal government reluctantly agreed to count Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and “Other Spanish” people as one nationwide population. As the activists grappled with questions of solidarity, the state responded to these groups’ potential political value and institutionalized their relationship with one another as members of a national “Spanish Origin” population.

**Objective Invisibility**

The techniques the U.S. Bureau of the Census used to measure the country’s population, and its strategies for counting the nation’s ethnic Mexicans, have undergone significant changes

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² A Staff Report, “The Census—What’s Wrong With It, What Can Be Done.” *Trans-Action* 5 [May 1968].
over time. With millions of Southern and Eastern Europeans coming to the United States, the Bureau began in 1880 to identify persons of “foreign stock.” Individuals so classified were those who were born abroad or whose parents had been. The practice, in effect until 1970, thus provided statisticians with the number of Americans or their parents who were born in Mexico, or Cuba, or some other Latin American country. Although distinguishing the “foreign stock” from the American mainstream, the identifier nonetheless constituted a statistical endorsement of assimilation’s possibility. Provided each second-generation parent was born in the United States, the third generation would no longer register as being of “foreign stock.”

For the 1930 census, however, the Bureau added a wrinkle. During the 1920s, racist pseudoscience had justified severe restrictions on European immigration. Pressure from Southwestern economic interests had left the Western Hemisphere largely unfettered by these quotas, but for the 1930 census the Bureau planned to classify certain Americans as belonging to the Mexican “race.” Mexican American activists spoke out against any official practice that might justify their segregation. The Mexican government, eager to be seen as protecting its citizens abroad and also concerned that such a designation could lead to restrictions on Mexican migration, also vehemently opposed the practice. Opposition appeared in the census-taking process as well. In Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado, for example, “Spanish-Americans” were eager to distance themselves from the Mexican immigrants they believed were beneath them, and rejected the term. Without broad cooperation, the statistic was of limited utility.

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5 Peter Buechley, “A Reproducible Method of Counting Persons of Spanish Surname,” Journal of the American
In response to the protests and inefficiencies, the Bureau dropped the Mexican “race” category from its 1940 census. In its place, officials began to identify “Persons of Spanish Mother Tongue.” According to the Bureau, a person belonged to this group if he or she grew up in a household in which Spanish was spoken. This seemingly objective category suggested a more flexible view of Mexican America, one rooted in linguistic affinity rather than in inherited racial characteristics. Moreover, the identifier endorsed assimilation. Over generations, people could leave the subgroup and enter the statistical mainstream. The Bureau’s instructions to enumerators attempted to make clear that Spanish language, not racial difference, was what made this population unique: “Mexicans are to be returned as white, unless definitely of Indian or other nonwhite race.”

The next decennial census, however, implied that ethnic Mexicans did not join the mainstream simply by passing the English language down to their children. For 1950, the Bureau employed another objective identifier for this population, but one over which personal decisions could have far less influence. Census officials had learned that during the 1930s, as it was managing the deportation of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Mexicans, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) had compiled a list of the repatriados’ surnames. The Bureau would compare the surnames of census respondents in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Texas to the INS list. Those that matched would belong to the new statistical
population, “Persons of Spanish Surname.” They, too, would be classified as “white” unless they were “definitely Indian or other nonwhite race.” The new measurement’s appeal lay in its apparent objectivity—either a person’s surname matched one on the list or it did not—and in its potential for distinguishing southwesterners who no longer spoke Spanish, but who may have maintained a distinct Spanish-Mexican culture. Furthermore, it appeared to circumvent the statisticians’ problem with sub-regional identifications (e.g. Latin American, Spanish American, Mexican American, Hispano, etc.). However, if this technique was intended to facilitate an understanding of ethnic Mexicans’ lives, it was a leaky one. Most women who married a man without a Spanish surname would leave the population. It did not matter if they considered themselves Mexican Americans. The technique suggested that these women were no longer group members by virtue of their exogamy.

Nevertheless, those interested in ascertaining the conditions of ethnic Mexicans in the Southwest considered the change a significant improvement. The renowned scholar-activist George I. Sánchez informed the Bureau that he was “very pleased” with the surname method, and predicted that “no difficulty will be experienced in the use of that plan.” When the 1950 census data became available, Sánchez praised it as “extremely valuable.” Although the census had been taken during the migrant season and it did not account for those he called “wetbacks,”

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9 Philip Hauser to George I. Sánchez, December 6, 1949, Box 36, Folder 6, George I. Sánchez Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.
11 George I. Sanchez to Philip Hauser, December 10, 1949, Box 36, Folder 6, George I. Sánchez Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.
12 George I. Sanchez to Howard G. Brunsman, July 15, 1953, Box 36, Folder 6, George I. Sánchez Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.
he nonetheless concluded that “this means of checking the population of Spanish-Mexican
descent is far superior to the plans used in 1930 and in 1940.”

Ethnicity in Transition

The Bureau consolidated its measurement of the Southwest’s ethnic Mexicans at a unique
time in the history of American ethnic groups. The quota laws passed in the 1920s and the Great
Depression had drastically curtailed European immigration, and would-be Asian immigrants
faced even greater restrictions than their counterparts from Europe. This meant that in 1950,
American leaders presided over a country more “native” than at any time most could remember.
The foreign born, almost 15 percent of the U.S. population in 1910 and 11.6 percent in 1930,
constituted just 6.9 percent of the U.S. population by 1950. Along with this demographic
change, Americans—especially white Americans, whether immigrant, second generation, and
long-time native—found themselves united as never before. The shared experience of World
War II, the incredible jumbling together of peoples and the common sacrifice of lives and toil for
a patriotic goal, had done much to break down barriers between them. In the Cold War that
followed, anticommunist repression greatly discouraged any appearance of disloyalty. Both
events provided strong encouragement to activists to frame their appeals for justice in the
language of American patriotism.

It is thus not surprising that George I. Sánchez, a former LULAC national president,
believed that “White Persons of Spanish Surname” was an appropriate measure of the

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13 George I. Sanchez, “The U. S. Census – 1950,” Box 36, Folder 6, George I. Sánchez Papers, Benson Latin
American Collection, General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.
States, 1850-2000, Working Paper No. 81,”
15 See Gerstle, American Crucible, chaps. 5 and 6.
Southwest’s ethnic Mexican population. The term was broadly consistent with the assimilationist sentiment and legal strategy of the Mexican American leadership. LULAC continued to admit only U.S. citizens to membership. Along with the American G.I. Forum, they argued that their people were patriotic and upright Americans, and therefore entitled to full social privileges. The statistic did not compromise their citizenship-based claims by official suggestion that they had any allegiance to a foreign state. Nor did it classify them as nonwhites, a distinction of crucial importance as they sought to maintain their access to Jim Crow facilities, to participate in Texas politics, and to litigate against school segregation.

The Bureau used the same method in 1960, and was planning to use it again in 1970 until profound transformations in Mexican American ethnic consciousness and civil rights strategy rendered “White Persons of Spanish Surname” hopelessly outdated. By the late 1960s, Mexican American civil rights leaders had begun to consider it essential to present themselves as Mexican Americans in their interactions with government. They recognized that their people’s share of federal resources was contingent upon them appearing to be a nationally-significant minority group, which required data that demonstrated their difference from the majority. Furthermore, the Chicano movement was winning supporters by challenging the notion that ethnic Mexicans belonged with “whites,” statistically or otherwise.

No doubt cognizant of the new environment, the Bureau repackaged its 1960 data in a special report, We, the Mexican Americans/Nosotros, Los México Americanos. Released in 1970, it was intended to demonstrate bureaucratic attentiveness, but may have accomplished just the opposite. The report showed the severe limits of federal knowledge concerning Mexican

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16 The surname technique would be used again in 1960 and 1970.
17 See Foley, Quest For Equality, among others.
Americans. One of its illustrations suggested that they lived in 16 states, but could only provide exact numbers for 5 of them (Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and California). Those populations appeared in bold. For several other states across the West, the industrial Midwest, as well as New York, the map showed only question marks. Strangely, the report implied the same likelihood of observing Mexican Americans living in Georgia or Vermont as it did of encountering them in Oklahoma or Nevada.


The report thus serves as a relic from a time when the Bureau considered Mexican Americans a regional population. While Richard Nixon and many congressmen were proposing
to aid the nation’s second largest minority, the Spanish-speaking Americans, the statistical basis for that conceptualization was not yet established.

Indeed, the Bureau employed a separate methodology in the case of Puerto Ricans on the mainland, which it developed after a “great migration” began heading for work in northern industry and agriculture after WWII. In 1953, the Bureau of the Census published a special report on mainland Puerto Ricans.\textsuperscript{18} In 1960, the Bureau asked New York state residents a separate question on their origin, giving them three choices: the United States, Puerto Rico, or elsewhere. That same year, the Bureau instructed enumerators that “Puerto Ricans, Mexicans or other persons of Latin descent would be classified as ‘White’ unless they were definitely Negro, Indian, or some other race.” Coinciding with this massive upsurge of population from an island with significant numbers of African-descended individuals, “Negro,” and not just Indian or white, had become something that persons of Latin descent could be, according to the census.\textsuperscript{19}

In 1970, then, federal knowledge of these populations largely consisted of 10 year-old data on Whites of Spanish surname in the Southwest, and Persons of Puerto Rican birth or parentage in New York.\textsuperscript{20} In the 1,500 miles from Dallas to Spanish Harlem, the census was essentially black and white. If this was a national minority, statistical confirmation was still forthcoming.


\textsuperscript{20} Since more than 90 percent of second-generation Puerto Ricans on the mainland were under thirty years old, Bureau statisticians later concluded that the “Puerto Rican Birth or Parentage” question covered “practically all of the population of Puerto Rican origin” residing on the mainland in 1970. Siegel and Passel, “Coverage of the Hispanic Population,” 6.
Terms Employed to Measure “Hispanics,” 1880-1970

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<td></td>
<td>Mexico, Cuba, Central or South America (other)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Mexican “race”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940, 1970</td>
<td>Spanish Mother Tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950, 1960, 1970</td>
<td>Spanish surname</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Five southwestern states)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Spanish Origin (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Spanish Heritage (Spanish language + Spanish surname in Five Southwestern States) + Puerto Rican Birth or Parentage in NY, PA, NJ + Spanish Mother Tongue in remaining 42 states and District of Columbia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Objectivity” and its Discontents

As useful as these procedures may have once seemed, they were wholly out of step with ethnic politics in the late 1960s. “White persons of Spanish surname” seemed sterile and

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21 Ibid.
Insensitive to even many established Mexican American leaders, let alone Chicano movement activists. Its geographical limitations added further insult, since large communities of “Spanish surname” in the Midwest went unidentified. Puerto Rican leaders had particular reason to complain. If they lived outside of six states (the Southwestern five and New York), the third generation stood a good chance of being made to appear part of white or black America’s statistical portrait, much like the majority of “foreign stock” individuals. The federal government was slowly but surely erasing their distinctiveness, and thus their need, from the record.

The gaps in governmental knowledge, largely born of Mexican American integrationist sentiment, appeared now as an affront maintained only by bureaucratic inertia. Activists pressured the president, congressional leaders, and bureaucrats to change the system. In 1967, members of the Johnson cabinet, having received the message, urged the Bureau to collect more information on “ethnic origin, particularly the identification of Mexican-Americans.” In 1969, the ICMAA’s Vicente Ximenes lobbied Census Director A. Ross Eckler to expand coverage of Mexican Americans beyond the Southwest.

Activists employed a new language to demand greater personal freedom on census forms, objecting that the old system violated their “right” to identify themselves as they saw fit. Ximenes publicly criticized the Bureau for denying the Mexican American “the prerogative to indicate his ethnic group,” and instead choosing “it without his consent or knowledge.” The demands intensified as the 1970 census approached. Texas Senator Ralph Yarborough protested

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24 Ibid.
that the Bureau appeared more concerned with “determining the number [of] toilets, bathtubs and showers in the United States than they are the number of Puerto Ricans, Latins and Mexican Americans.” He demanded “salient questions” to “clearly identify each of the Spanish-speaking groups,” and asserted the people’s “right of self-identification.”25 Herman Gallegos, the MAPA activist and now executive director of the new Southwest Council of La Raza (SWCLR) protested “flagrant discrimination” in the census. Forms allowed “several other minority groups,” including Filipinos, Hawaiians, and Koreans to identify their ethnic origin, but did not extend that “right” to “Spanish-surnamed, Spanish-speaking minorities.” Without a major change, he argued, the “Hispanic community” would spend the next decade “forced to continue as an invisible minority when seeking assistance and recognition.”26

The Bureau opposed the desired modifications. Its statisticians believed that their traditional techniques were superior to self-identification. However, they reintroduced the “Spanish Mother Tongue” identifier, along with their other ostensibly objective measures, for 1970. In any event, a new question would have to meet their standards, and there was not


26 Gallegos’ followers demanded that “the question titled Color or Race be changed to read Race, Color, or Ethnic Origin” and to provide “a breakout of the groups of Spanish heritage such as Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Central Americans, South Americans, etc.” Including ethnicity as coequal with race in U.S. life elevated, but did not substantially distinguish it. In some sense, Gallegos sought to make a quasi-racial Hispanic group, which was an act of distinguishing black Hispanics from African Americans, white Hispanics from Anglos, Indo-Hispanics from American Indians, while muting the differences in lived experiences and influences among and within each. National origins did not impede this broader ethnic feeling. Instead, they were its component parts, distinct for the purposes of intra-group analysis, yet aggregable for the more important comparison with dominant groups. Memorandum, Herman Gallegos, May 13, 1969, Box 162, Folder 21, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
enough time before the decennial census to perform a satisfactory test.\textsuperscript{27} As late as March of 1969, the Bureau’s statisticians remained committed to their existing techniques.\textsuperscript{28}

Fearing their omission from the national picture for another decade, activists showed their frustration during hearings of the House Subcommittee on Census and Statistics, held in Los Angeles in May of 1969. Witnesses, including academics, civil rights advocates, non-profit workers, and elected officials, fueled by a desire to assert their “right” to self-identify, united to oppose the old system. They rebuked the census for its geographic limits when it came to their people. They criticized the Spanish surname category for being inaccurate, devoid of cultural content, and potentially misleading. One witness called the surname technique “an offense to many Mexican-Americans who claim a culture of their own.” A MAPA witness derided the current system as “the ‘guestimate’ approach” to the Mexican American’s “statistical identity.” Political scientist Ralph Guzman, who helped direct the UCLA Mexican American Study Project, claimed that all parties involved confronted a choice “between bureaucratic convenience and social justice…between a governmental agency as servant or master.”\textsuperscript{29}

As previously, the notion of ethnic rights and recognition existed in tension with pan-ethnicity. Witnesses, hearing that a nationwide identifier might be forthcoming, argued that it would be unacceptable unless they could list whether they had Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, or some other Latin American ancestry. Guzman called this “the right of freedom of choice.”

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} Harvey Choldin, “Statistics and Politics: The ‘Hispanic Issue’ in the 1980 Census,” \textit{Demography} 23, no. 3 [August 1986]: 407.
\item \textsuperscript{29} The Mexican American Study Project was a Ford Foundation-financed initiative begun in 1964 to fill in many of the gaps left by the census. The project would culminate in the 1970 release of \textit{The Mexican-American People: The Nation’s Second Largest Minority}, a more than 600-page tome on the experience of urban Mexican Americans; House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, \textit{1970 Census and Legislation Related Thereto}, 91\textsuperscript{st} Congress, 1\textsuperscript{st} sess., 1969, 481, 520, 482.
\end{itemize}
we must invade people’s privacy,” he explained, “why…racially categorize people without even
giving them a choice of what they would like to be called.” It was also a question of fairness.
One witness described how “many, much smaller ethnic designations have found their way into
the form,” such as the Asian nationalities already listed. Closely related to fairness was
nationalism. Most of the witnesses wanted Mexican Americans to appear clearly in the record.
Including them under a broad pan-ethnic term, however, with the storied Cubans, for example,
rang the risk of painting “a false picture” that their people had made it “into the mainstream of
American life,” said one group.30

The argument that respect for individuals’ preferences promoted fairness and accuracy
did not preclude activists from wanting to have data tabulated in ways conducive to greater
group power. Guzman, for example, argued that the “range of identities that Mexicans choose,
depending on where they live” justified allowing them to identify as “Latin-American” or
“Spanish-American” or “Mexican” or “Mexican-American.” But he portrayed these identities as
a form of false consciousness, lamenting that “not all Mexicans—because of what American
society has done to the Mexican people—consider themselves Mexican.” Accordingly, he
wanted to be able to “compress these categories in a number of ways, and still count the Mexican
in Texas who might be forced to cloak himself with a euphemism like Latin American.”31 An
individual’s right to identify himself was essential, but it was not the end of the story.

Unsurprisingly, the witnesses exhibited diverse attitudes toward the still fragile state of
pan-Hispanic solidarity. Guzman’s nationalist orientation exemplified one approach. He
claimed that the “Mexican-American community” was “the second largest minority in the
Nation.” “We do not object to the Puerto Rican people,” he said, but they were best understood

30 House Committee, 1970 Census, 484, 520, 481.
31 House Committee, 1970 Census, 484-486.
as “ethnic cousins” whose “model does not fit the Mexican model.” They needed to be distinguished in national statistics. Others, however, adopted a pan-ethnic approach. For Rep. Edward Roybal, the “Spanish-speaking community” constituted “the second largest ethnic minority in the United States and an important and significant component of our overall population.” Roybal’s long-time colleague in California political organizing, Herman Gallegos of the SWCLR, too claimed “the Hispanic community” as “the second largest minority in the United States.” Ricardo Callejo of the Spanish-Speaking Political Association opened the community to “anyone who is willing to answer truthfully that they are either Spanish surnamed or Spanish speaking.” The pan-ethnic perspective was by no means precisely defined, nor was it the uncontested way of seeing the ethnic Mexican’s place in the country. But it was gaining credibility.32

Presidential Intervention

Institutionalization would be next. During the hearing, word came through that the Nixon administration had just announced that the 1970 Census would for the first time ask a nationwide question to identify the country’s population of “Spanish Origin.” What explained the change? Conrad Taueber, then associate director of the Bureau, remembered it as a case of interference from above. He recalled years later that the 1970 forms had been finalized “when the order came down that we were to ask a direct question, have the people identify themselves as Hispanics” [sic].33 Most of the forms had been printed, but “the 5-percent schedule had barely started at the printers when we pulled it back and threw in the question which hadn’t been tested

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32 House Committee, 1970 Census, 484, 466, 563, 561.
33 The term employed at the time was “Spanish Origin.”
in the field—under orders.” The statisticians considered the new question problematic, and clearly resented the political interference. But, explained Taueber, they could not “get away from the people in New Mexico, Arizona, and South Texas,” referring to those residents who had been in the Southwest so long they were not distinguished by Spanish language or parental nativity. Ironically, it was these Americans’ deep roots in the United States that justified a question about their “origin.”

While Bureau statisticians lamented the politicization of their craft, many others hailed the new statistic as a major triumph for justice and recognition. Hector P. García, founder of the American G.I. Forum, called it “a great success.” “We have been working since 1961 to let the people in Washington know of our Spanish-surname minority. This will let them know we exist,” he claimed, “for good or for bad, and whether we have problems or not.” Vicente Ximenes deemed it “a great victory,” one that left him “completely satisfied.” Senator Yarborough said that the data “will be of great help” in improving health care, housing, and bilingual education. The enthusiasm was broadly shared. The *Dallas Morning News* editorial page applauded the replacement of “woefully out of date” statistical methods. “Economically, sociologically, and politically,” it argued, “it is important to spell out the ethnic situation in this and other states.” With scarcely concealed boosterism, the editorial expected the new numbers

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to be “especially helpful to Texas,” which was, after all, a “home for millions of Latin
descent.”38

“A loosely concocted mixture rather than a compound of even consistency”

Despite perceptions of the new statistic’s transformational possibilities, “Spanish Origin”
was only part of the Bureau’s “Spanish heritage” population. This pan-Hispanic amalgam was
actually made up of four unique identifiers, reflecting a legacy of demographic change, key
constituencies’ shifting ethnic orientations, and the Bureau’s own imperatives. First, in the five
southwestern states the Bureau counted persons of “Spanish surname.” The surname list had
grown since the 1950s, however. To account for the sizeable migration of Cuban refugees, the
Bureau added any surname appearing more than two dozen times in the Havana phone book.
Mexico City and Puerto Rican telephone directories expanded the list for 1970. Along with rules
on suffixes and prefixes, the Bureau had between ten and twelve thousand surnames against
which to match their subjects.39 Second, the Bureau asked a question about Puerto Rican birth or
parentage in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. Third, it revived the “mother tongue”
identifier, last employed in 1940, asking it in the Southwest and forty-two other states (excluding
NY, PA, NJ) and Washington, DC.40 Finally, the Bureau asked the “Spanish Origin” identifier

Favorable 1969,” Files of David L. Kaplan, Coordinator of the 1970 Decennial Census, RG 29, Records of the
Bureau of the Census, National Archives, Washington, DC.
39 In addition, a 1967 version of The Romance of Spanish Surnames and the 1968 Urban Employment survey
provided more names. “Census Advisory Committee on the Spanish Origin Population for the 1980 Census,
Census, Meeting Records, 1974-82, RG 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives, Washington,
DC.
of 5 percent of the population. With all these identifiers considered, the Bureau could determine the country’s population of “Spanish heritage.”

The composite statistic had at least one major flaw. A person could leave the population simply by changing location within the country. For example, Bureau statisticians discovered that children of Puerto Ricans who possessed a Spanish surname but did not have Spanish as their “mother tongue” would cease belonging to the “Spanish heritage” population simply by moving from New York to a Midwestern state such as Kansas, or Illinois. However, those same children would rejoin it if they moved to California, where the surname technique was employed. “Spanish heritage” was, the Bureau later admitted, “a loosely concocted mixture rather than a compound of even consistency.”

Critics of the New Standard

“Spanish heritage” was highly vulnerable to criticism and, true to form, the Bureau came under attack even before the 1970 Census began. A strong sentiment had emerged that Mexican Americans constituted a separate race, but Bureau instructions were for most Mexican Americans to be listed as white. With the help of the Mexican American Political Association and legal aid workers, “three impoverished East Bay Spanish-Americans” sued the Bureau in federal court to stop the census. They cited the absence of a “Mexican-American” or “Hispano-American” entry on the race question as evidence of “invidious discrimination.” Texas activists viewed the procedures as “an obvious attempt to shut the Chicanos completely out” of

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42 Ibid., 21-22, 8.
federal antipoverty efforts. “We’re just getting lumped in with the Anglos, among the whites,” protested Rene Martinez, a Dallas protestor. Some people were choosing “other,” and some were choosing “white,” but in all cases, the argument went, Mexican Americans were being lost. Back in California, the American G.I. Forum pushed several state senators to introduce a resolution chastising the Bureau for not properly distinguishing the Mexican Americans. They claimed that this group “constitute[d] the largest racial minority in the United States,” and called upon Mexican Americans to mark “other” and then write in “Mexican-American” on the race question.\textsuperscript{45}

As some Mexican Americans and their allies asserted a racialized Mexican identity and distrustfully awaited the results of 1970, the federal government released a new statistical portrait that subsumed them in a national language-based minority. \textit{Persons of Spanish Origin in the United States: November 1969}, which the Bureau released in the spring of 1971, gave the results of its first use of the “Spanish Origin” identifier. Based on the November 1969 Current Population Survey (CPS), the report looked quite different from \textit{We, the Mexican Americans}. Gone was the singular focus on Mexican Americans. But gone, too, were the many question marks. The sample survey found that there were 9.2 million persons in the country (excluding such “outlying areas” as Puerto Rico) who spoke Spanish at home, reported Spanish as their mother tongue, or who identified as being of “Spanish Origin.” They were approximately five percent of country’s population.\textsuperscript{46} More than 5 million were judged to be of Mexican origin, while approximately 1.5 million were Puerto Rican. About 565,000 were Cuban, roughly the

\textsuperscript{44} “Census Race Question Hit,” \textit{Houston Post}, April 17, 1970, in Box 17, Folder “Releases, Statements, Clippings – Anti.” Files of David L. Kaplan, Coordinator of the 1970 Decennial Census, RG 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives, Washington, DC.
\textsuperscript{45} The senators also criticized the Bureau for not hiring sufficient numbers of bilingual enumerators, and for not printing sufficient quantity of bilingual questionnaires. \textit{Cong. Rec.}, 91\textsuperscript{st} Cong., 2nd sess., 1979, 116: 6710-6711.
same amount as in the “Central and South American” category. There were actually more “Other Spanish” counted than Puerto Ricans. Roughly 80 percent of Mexican origin people resided in the five Southwestern states.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Five Southwestern States</th>
<th>Remainder of United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9,230</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>5,507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>5,073</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>4,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>1,454</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuban</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central/South American</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Spanish</td>
<td>1,582</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>835</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of questions on language use raised challenges for the public’s understanding of this pan-ethnic group, which public figures increasingly called the “Spanish-speaking Americans.” For example, the report’s title page contained a jarring illustration: more than half of those of “Spanish Origin” did not, even in their own homes, speak Spanish. Almost a third reported English as their mother tongue. Fewer than half of those citing an “origin” in Mexico

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spoke Spanish at home. More than 80 percent of “Other Spanish” Americans spoke a language other than Spanish at home. Cuban Americans and Puerto Ricans on the mainland, however, had high percentages of Spanish speakers due to their relatively recent migrations. They thus made the “Spanish Origin” population appear more “Spanish-speaking.” The Bureau presented the national language data as evidence of the entire pan-ethnic group’s historical propensity toward ethnic differentiation. “The continued use of Spanish is an indicator of the strength of those bonds which tie Spanish persons to each other and to their past,” it argued.  

Despite such claims, the data suggested fissures that would challenges these groups in building a shared political identity. One obvious route was to develop coalitions around the idea of a shared experience with linguistic isolation. But when asked, more than half of the “Spanish-speaking Americans” had revealed themselves to be English-speaking Americans. The “Spanish Origin” population’s components remained rather distinct in other ways. Rarely did a member of one national origin sub-group choose to marry a member from another. Only 5 percent of marriages of “Spanish Origin” Americans occurred across two of the five categories.

Still, the new statistic exerted its own power in the ongoing debate over minority rights and American pluralism. Though the report showed that about 80 percent of the population was born in the United States, “or in outlying areas of the United States,” the New York Times informed readers that 5 percent of the country’s people had now “identif[ied] themselves as having an origin in a Spanish-speaking country.” This group constituted “America’s second largest minority,” though “probably its least visible” one. The article made no mention of discrepancies in income or unemployment or language within the group. It did not mention any differences in racial identification. Instead, it portrayed the “Spanish Origin” population as a

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48 Ibid., 9, 14, 2.
49 Ibid., 7.
50 Ibid., 2.
“nation within a nation, the size of Belgium or Chile.” Previous methods of measuring these populations, once lauded for their objectivity, now came in for criticism. “Most experts agreed that the methods were imprecise,” the Times noted, before mentioning that even these new statistics had come under fire from “Spanish leaders.” Antonio Rodriguez, executive director of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish Speaking People, was the “Spanish leader” whose expert opinion it first cited. Rodriguez suggested that the Bureau may have missed almost three million of his people, which if true meant a staggering national undercount of almost a third.51 With new statistics showing a national population of “Spanish Origin” Americans, and advocates from the Cabinet Committee serving to interpret them, America’s ethnic boundaries were being redrawn.

Conclusion

The Congress had established a pan-Hispanic advocate in the CCOSS, and a powerful nudge from a Republican president had ensconced pan-Hispanic identity in the statistical system. It was clear, however, that the numbers were accumulating faster than shared ethnic feeling. Public debates over data collection illustrated the discomfort that some activists still felt toward regarding Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and others of Latin American descent as a single community. Yet a number of civil rights leaders and politicians were willing to embrace that notion, even if most of these groups’ leaders had not yet established much trust or understanding. Moreover, the federal government put its imprimatur on a new knowledge that acted to redefine the American people. Amid these changes, elected officials and political activists would try to convert the political potential of this newly-recognized minority into votes that would allow them to control the institutions of government.

PART III. POLITICIZING THE “SPANISH-SPEAKING CONCEPT”
Chapter 6


You've got to get to know the Mexicans. And I - so many people particularly in my state in California - I mean and they sorta look down their noses at the Mexicans. Here in the East, as you know, everybody is obsessed about the Blacks, and the Mexicans are put upon much worse than the Blacks from an economic standpoint. They're in a horrible condition in Los Angeles and other places, but ah . . . they have such quality....They can't do anything very well! [Laughing] But on the other hand, they work, they're loyal, they have a . . . a warmth, a warmth that is very real. I mean, most of the Latins are poets.

— Richard Nixon, 1971

These militant *asquerosos* (filthy ones) associate us with the colored people. We are white people. The United States government said so.

— Los Angeles Housewife, 1969

Two weeks before being sworn in as President of the United States, Richard Nixon received a warning from Barry Goldwater. “These people are watching us,” wrote the Senator, “to see if we will treat them the way the Democrats have.” He urged Nixon to honor his campaign pledge and hold a White House conference on Mexican Americans as soon as possible. In a nod to changing ethnic sensibilities, the he advised the president “that Mexican-Americans be referred to with that title.” “Latin-American,” on the other hand, should “not be applied to Mexico and Mexicans” but instead be reserved for South America. Mexican Americans, whom Goldwater had long courted in Arizona, nonetheless gained greater prominence by being placed in a larger electoral context. The Senator rhapsodized about a “Spanish speaking” population national in dimensions. “Did you know New York is the biggest

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Spanish speaking city,” he queried, “and did you realize that we have over six million Americans with Mexican or Spanish names?” “You will hear a lot on this subject from me, so the faster you move, the less bother I will be.”³

Nixon did not need Goldwater to know that he could do much better. He took only about 10 percent of the national “Spanish-speaking” vote in 1968. His campaign-trail recollections of growing up among Mexican Americans appeared to helped him even less in Texas, where thanks in part to the end of the poll tax, twenty percent more Mexican Americans voted in 1968 than in 1960. They rose up in force to thwart Nixon. In a state he lost by fewer than 40,000 votes to Vice President Hubert Humphrey, Nixon lost Tejanos by a 300,000-vote margin.⁴ A modest improvement from his 7 percent share of their votes would go a long way toward switching Texas’ 25 (and counting) electoral votes to the Republican column. Several other states in the Southwest and Midwest appeared close enough that they, too, could be tipped or secured with a decent showing among Mexican Americans. And there was reason to believe this was possible. Nixon tallied 40 percent of Spanish American votes in New Mexico. While he benefited from appearing on the ticket with David F. Cargo, a popular Republican governor whose wife (the former Ida Jo Anaya) helped him among the state’s Hispanos, the results suggested, at the very least, that these voters were not congenitally anti-Nixon.⁵

Richard Nixon had not been elected president of the Southwest, however. Over the next two years, his administration would struggle to reconcile its outreach to the large votes of

³ Barry Goldwater to Bryce Harlow, January 6, 1969, EX HU 2, Box 1, WHCF, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, College Park, MD (hereafter NPM).
⁵ Ibid.
Mexican Americans with the demands of governing in the interests of all “Spanish-speaking Americans.” On one hand, partisan allies and the administration’s own doubts about the likelihood of converting Puerto Ricans led the White House to focus on dislodging Mexican Americans from the Democratic Party, usually by pitting them against African Americans. Advocates for Puerto Ricans and Cubans complicated this “Mexican American strategy.” Drawing inspiration from the pan-Hispanic promise of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish Speaking People, they demanded parity, not with African Americans, but with Mexican Americans. The White House tried to minimize this conflict by developing special programs for the upwardly mobile of all Spanish-speaking communities. While Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Cuban leaders were often skeptical that assistance to one was assistance to all, the White House moved ahead. Through the CCOSS and other federal offices, it was learning where the various populations resided and in what numbers, what concerns they had, and it was learning how to manage their relationships with each other. It was learning to govern these populations. It was developing a Spanish-speaking strategy.

National Recognition

As Goldwater’s letter to Nixon suggested, influential Republicans regarded Mexican Americans as an important part of their future. This group’s numbers were growing fast—just how fast was often unclear—and they were a major presence in the swing states of the Sunbelt, states whose economic and political power were on the rise. Furthermore, cultural pluralism was fast becoming the nation’s defining characteristic, making this visible and newly assertive minority an even greater asset to a party struggling for black support. Republicans had spent the
Kennedy and Johnson years telling Mexican Americans that Democrats had taken them for granted for far too long. Implicit and sometimes explicit in their critique was that Democrats had played racial favorites, reserving “minority” benefits for African Americans to the detriment of Mexican Americans. Goldwater used a version of this argument during his 1964 presidential run (see Chapter 2). Ronald Reagan tried it when he ran for governor of California in 1966. So did John Tower when he sought Senate re-election that year in Texas (see Chapter 3). Whether the charge was accurate or not, winning the presidency had thus put Republicans in the unfamiliar position of having to demonstrate accomplishments for a group they had long, and at little cost to themselves, accused Democrats of neglecting.

This did not require an entirely new set of strategies. Like his predecessor, Richard Nixon hoped that Mexican Americans would respond favorably to seeing their people in high government positions. In February of 1969, he named El Paso businessman Hilary Sandoval Jr. to lead the Small Business Administration (SBA). Sandoval was a traditional partisan appointee, having been an active supporter of Sen. John Tower and Nixon in the last campaign. In April of 1969, however, the White House announced that a Democrat, a Los Angeles attorney and former fighter pilot named Martin Castillo, would be the next Chairman of the Interagency Committee on Mexican American Affairs (ICMAA). Castillo had campaigned for Nixon in California. And in another attempt to incorporate California Democrats, the administration named Henry Quevedo, son of MAPA founder Eduardo Quevedo, to be ICMAA Executive Director. The two

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6 Since the position offered no salary, Castillo would also be appointed as deputy staff director of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.
were supposed to oversee a staff that grew to more than thirty. They were to produce research, recommend the right people for federal jobs, provide advice to Congressional committees, and otherwise encourage federal agencies to direct resources to Spanish-speaking communities. The White House assigned higher-level personnel to managing these minority ambassadors. The Spanish-speaking were in Vice President Spiro Agnew’s portfolio, demonstrating that the group was an administration priority. Leonard Garment, Nixon’s liberal civil rights advisor and former law partner in New York, would act as an administration strategist and contact as well.

Nixon added to these appointments a more lasting form of recognition. In April of 1969, Secretary of Commerce Maurice Stans announced that the 1970 census would, for the first time, ask Americans nationwide if they were of “Spanish Origin.” (see Chapter 5). Martin Castillo recalled that it was “pretty tricky business” to make the change, since the Bureau of the Census was against it and since Mexican Americans had long insisted that they were “Caucasian.” But a “lot of White House pressure” had gone into persuading the Bureau, pressure Nixon was willing to apply because, in Castillo’s words, the change “was good for everybody.” Years later, Castillo argued that that the new statistic was probably the administration’s greatest accomplishment in Spanish-speaking affairs.8

The new statistic’s short-term political utility was three-fold. First, Nixon could boast that he had accomplished what other presidents had not: provided official recognition that Mexican Americans were no longer merely a regional people. Second, the administration was generating information to justify disbursement of new funds to their communities, something for

which Nixon would be able to claim credit. Third, the data would clarify these voters’ locations and socioeconomic circumstances, enabling Republican political strategists to target them more easily during the reelection campaign.

**Racial Polarization**

Nixon appealed to blocs of voters by drawing unmistakable contrasts between those constituencies he desired and those he disfavored, a strategy with particular implications when the desired constituency was a minority. Surmising its destructive potential for Democrats, Vicente Ximenes had downplayed the competition among minority groups seeking federal attention. Coming from Los Angeles, scene of bitter conflict between blacks and Mexican Americans, and working for an administration with different priorities, Martin Castillo struck a more aggressive posture. Shortly after his nomination, he stoked “black-brown” antagonism at LULAC’s 1969 convention in Long Beach, California. According to news reports, “several” of the civil rights group’s “most important delegates” boycotted the convention’s opening speech, given by Sam Simmons, an African American who was the Assistant Secretary for Equal Opportunity at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Castillo sided with the dissenters, criticizing the decision to open the conference with an African American and not a Mexican American. He urged the audience to put their ethnic identity ahead of partisan loyalty. But if there was any doubt about who was working harder for them, Castillo claimed that “before

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this Administration took over, Washington thought in terms of minority or black problems….Now we talk in terms of black and Mexican-American problems.”

The White House’s “Spanish-speaking” outreach, marketed as rectifying imbalances, was difficult to separate from its larger campaign against perceived enemies in the bureaucracy. The administration’s view was that government, especially its civil rights functions, was beholden to Jewish and black—and in the president’s mind, anti-Nixon—interests, and that it needed to be shaken up. The president had his Counselor John Ehrlichman investigate the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) for “possible discrimination” against Mexican-Americans and Indians. In news that supposedly confirmed Nixon’s suspicions, Ehrlichman reported that five Jews and two African Americans comprised the USCCR executive staff, and that the other populations were “virtually unrepresented,” with “budget allocations, outlays and programs reflect[ing] similar imbalance.” In another case, the Secretary of Labor learned that Agnew wanted “more visibility” for “to the plight of our Spanish-speaking citizens.” The vice president had been “disturbed to learn that the Spanish speaking, as the second largest identifiable minority group in this country, has unemployment rates…considerably higher than almost every other sector of the country.” Given their plight, Agnew wanted a Department of Labor weekly publication, “Black News Digest,” to devote more attention to “the non-Black minority groups which share similar labor problems.” Its title might even be changed to “Minority News Digest.”

11 Memorandum, Ehrlichman to Nixon, September 29, 1969, Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, Staff Member and Office Files (hereafter SMOF), NPM.
12 Memorandum, C.D. Ward to Secretary of Labor, November 5, 1970, Box 17, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
White House Conferences and Pan-Ethnic Politics Revisited

Racial polarization did not amount to a positive program of government assistance; rather, it was a default strategy adopted in part to avoid more difficult decisions. Nixon had promised to convene a White House Conference to formulate policies that would help Mexican Americans. But the White House delayed, for reasons Lyndon Johnson would have recognized. A White House Conference was fraught with problems. Who would be invited? What would need to be promised? How would it be reported? Did the administration need to achieve something substantive beforehand, or could they simply stack the room with supporters? Even the more conservative Mexican American organizations had leaders willing to walk out of federal conferences in protest. Of course they would picket Richard Nixon.

Vocal party leaders tried to push the White House to act. Republican congressmen from the Southwest viewed a White House conference as essential to building the party, for it could show Mexican Americans that Republicans took them seriously. They were furious that Nixon had appointed Castillo, a Democrat, and were outraged by the addition of numerous “unfriendly militant Democrats” to the ICMAA staff. Writing for California’s Republican delegation and in favor of those Mexican American Republicans—a group “too loyal to neglect and too important to offend”—Rep. Burt Talcott demanded a White House conference run without the ICMAA’s involvement, “unless Republicans can have some voice.”13 Several Republicans did not want Puerto Ricans invited either, fearing that they and the liberal northeasterners who represented them would diminish the partisan advantage Republicans expected to gain from the conference.

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13 Burt Talcott to Harry S. Dent, July 1, 1969, HU, Box 6, WHCF, NPM.
In October of 1969, the administration committed to southwestern Republicans that it would exclude Puerto Ricans and Cubans from any White House conference.\(^\text{14}\)

As far as Martin Castillo was concerned, there was no point in holding the conference, regardless of who was invited. His ICMAA was not respected. He could not get the Cabinet to hold a single meeting. He could not get Mexican Americans into government jobs. A conference, Castillo told Leonard Garment, could “only focus on the lack of success in dealing with the Mexican American.” He then threatened to publicize how little progress the administration had made toward promoting this group and their interests in the federal government.\(^\text{15}\)

Nevertheless, a year had passed since Nixon took office, and Mexican American Republicans were uneasy. A group in San Antonio went to the newspapers with their impatience. “If we, the registered and working Mexican-Americans toiling in the Republican vineyards do not remind him and request that he honor his pledge,” they argued, “the Democrats will remind him, and the rest of us, around election time.” The Texans found it “hard enough to convert garden-variety Mexican-American Democrats to the Republican Party” without having to “use our converting time making excuses for the President not keeping his word.” They were happy to hold “a special presidential Southwest Mexican-American Conference” in Texas, if one in Washington could not be arranged.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{14}\) Gordon Brownell, Bill Casselman, Steve Hess to John Ehrlichman, October 1, 1969, Box 21, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.

\(^{15}\) Martin Castillo to Leonard Garment, December 11, 1969, Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.

As the White House delayed action, Congress constrained its ability to improve the Republican Party’s standing with this promising minority. When Nixon, reluctant to alienate Mexican Americans, signed the bill that created Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish Speaking People in December of 1969, he incurred new obligations. Republicans with ties to Puerto Rico or Puerto Rican communities on the mainland now felt even more justified in arguing for a pan-Hispanic agenda. An aide to Puerto Rico’s Resident Commissioner in Congress had spent years “wondering why the national Republican Party has not endeavored to tell Puerto Ricans living in the Continental United States why they should ‘vote Republican.’” The new Cabinet Committee, he believed, could be the vehicle to incorporate them into the Republican Party en masse. “The Democrats have really done very little for the Puerto Ricans, but they have succeeded in making them believe that it was a lot,” he wrote. “Lets [sic] get our just rewards.”17

Indeed, it appeared to be a propitious time for a Republican advance on the Puerto Rican electorate. In 1968, voters in Puerto Rico had elected the industrialist Luis Ferré as governor, and Ferré was the candidate of the Republican-aligned Partido Nuevo Progresista (New Progressive Party). His victory ended the twenty-eight year reign of the island’s Democratic Party analog, the Partido Popular Democrático (Popular Democratic Party).18

But while the White House criticized bureaucratic enemies for their supposedly low levels of “Spanish-speaking” employees, Puerto Ricans criticized the administration for not staffing the Cabinet Committee with the types of employees who they believed would address

17 Orville Watkins to Bryce Harlow, January 22, 1970, Box 15, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
their particular concerns. Ivan González, Special Assistant on Spanish-speaking Affairs to Massachusetts’ Republican Governor, Francis W. Sargent, wrote of his “great joy” upon learning that the Congress had expanded the ICMAA to include his people. However, he protested that “there is not even one single Puerto Rican within the agency who could act as a liaison” with the large “Spanish leadership” of the Northeast. He had “become very disillusioned [sic], for although the name has changed, the game is still the same. The only ones receiving any benefit from this agency are still the Mexican-Americans in the Southwest.”

Ferré, Puerto Rico’s new governor, echoed the view that staff demographics and service went hand in hand. He applauded Nixon for signing the Cabinet Committee into law, and thus acknowledging “the needs of a silent, loyal, deserving and somewhat neglected minority…at the highest level of government for the first time in our nation’s history.” He believed that its mandate extended to three million Puerto Ricans, either on the mainland or in Puerto Rico. Because “the concept of the committee has been broadened to include Puerto Ricans,” however, “and because they are completely unrepresented at the moment,” he asked Nixon to give Puerto Ricans “priority for all vacancies on the staff…until their representation is brought to par with that of Mexican-Americans.” Ferré, whose father had been born in Cuba, forwarded the résumé of a potential Cabinet Committee leader, a man whose “outlook is brought enough so that he is sensitive to the needs of Mexican Americans and Cuban-Americans.”

The problem was that although the Congress made Nixon responsible for managing these constituencies as one, his staff did not see them as equally valuable. When Leonard Garment cited the Cabinet Committee’s “wider mandate” to justify their inclusion in a White House

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19 Ivan González to Richard Nixon, March 25, 1970, HU 2, Box 6, WHCF, NPM.
20 Luis A. Ferré to Richard Nixon, January 29, 1970, Box 18, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
conference, Ehrlichman’s assistant Ken Cole gave the White House’s position: “for several reasons, the most important of which is politics I think we should limit to just Mexican-Americans.” After all, he reminded Garment, “that’s where the votes are.”

Their consistent marginalization compelled Puerto Rican leaders to form new arguments against national origin as a criterion for inclusion. ASPIRA was a New York-based organization that promoted education and upward mobility for Puerto Ricans. Its president, Luis Nuñez, maintained frequent contact with Garment, offering a moderate perspective on Puerto Ricans’ relationship with the administration. The Cabinet Committee, he claimed, showed the existence of “much sentiment both in the Congress and in the general public for a united approach” to Mexican American and Puerto Rican problems. The administration had therefore to choose to satisfy national priorities or parochial ones. “Any list of arguments” in favor of the pan-Hispanic approach “could rapidly be refuted by someone who felt that Mexican-Americans (Chicanos), have unique problems and for that matter, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, etc.,” he conceded. Efficient policy and ethnic harmony were more important, and thus “the better policy would be one of trying to bring people together into larger grouping.” They were a “community representing over 10 million people,” even if they did not always recognize it. He maintained, therefore, that “from a national stand-point and for the future of all these communities it will be better if the federal government in all its activities, tried to encourage this feeling of community.” That the numerically smaller Puerto Ricans would stand to reap greater benefits from being included with Mexican Americans as full members of a national “Spanish-speaking”

21 Memorandum, Leonard Garment to Kenneth R. Cole, Jr., September 8, 1970, Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
22 Memorandum, Garment to Cole, September 14, 1970, Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
minority group is not in itself sufficient reason to doubt Nuñez’s sincerity. Nevertheless, the incentives for reconciling ethnic differences were powerfully conditioned by the politics of federal assistance.23

The Middle-Class Strategy

The White House’s Hispanic outreach had so far managed the worst of both worlds: Mexican Americans believed that the administration had done nothing for them, while Puerto Ricans believed that the Mexican Americans had gotten everything. Rather than risk bringing these groups together against the will of its Southwestern allies, and unwilling to completely reject Puerto Ricans and Cubans, the administration tabled the conference until after the 1970 elections. Instead, it attempted to orchestrate the solidarity Nuñez spoke of, though not by bringing recognized leaders into a pan-Hispanic consensus. Largely bypassing community elites, it created new nationwide pan-Hispanic institutions dedicated to convincing middle-class members of those communities to view Republican values as expressions of their own ethnic advancement.

One initiative rewarded the Spanish-speaking for embracing entrepreneurship. In August of 1970, with midterm elections nearing, Vice President Agnew, CCOSS Chairman Martin Castillo, Small Business Administration director Hilary Sandoval, and Los Angeles businessman Benjamin Fernandez gathered at Los Angeles’ Century Plaza Hotel to launch the National Economic Development Agency (NEDA). NEDA was a private non-profit organization that had been chartered in July with federal assistance. Its aim was to “promote business development

23 Luis Nuñez to Bradley H. Patterson, Jr., September 8, 1970, Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
among the nation’s 10 million Spanish speaking citizens.” Fernandez, a Republican fundraiser (and future presidential candidate), was its first president and chairman of the board. Agnew declared the new organization “a clear sign of President Nixon’s interest in what we call ‘the forgotten minorities.’” It would help ensure that “Americans of Hispanic descent get a fair chance at the starting line” and an opportunity to “share in America’s economic miracle.” At once an affirmation of the administration’s ethnic inclusiveness and America’s middle class promise, the program would “prove that a man born poor, if given a chance, just a little help, can still succeed in the United States.” It was definitely “not a handout,” Agnew said.24

At a time when Puerto Rican and Mexican American Democrats had difficulty combining their efforts, NEDA’s fusion of entrepreneurial ideology and ethnic symbolism, backed by federal funds, showed Republicans had a model for pan-ethnic cooperation. For its modern mission of “foster[ing] the free enterprise system among Spanish-speaking people,” NEDA drew upon icons of the past.25 Its publications were emblazoned with a sword and morion, the crested helmet commonly associated with the defunct Spanish Empire.26 Taxpayer dollars provided the material encouragement to bind these communities to one another. An initial grant from the government of more than $600,000, and over a million dollars of further federal assistance in its first two years, allowed the organization to establish offices across the continental United States,

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24 Office of the Vice President, “News Release,” August 21, 1970, Box 18, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM; For those curious why Agnew was so concerned with minority business, the Vice President reminded the audience that his father was Greek, and therefore “a member of a minority.” Richard West, “Agnew Announces Economic Aid Plan for Latins in U.S.” Los Angeles Times, August 22, 1970.
as well as in Puerto Rico.\textsuperscript{27} NEDA’s board reflected the diversity of the nation’s Spanish-speaking people. It consisted of “leaders from Mexican American, Puerto Rican and Cuban Communities [sic],” a collaboration Agnew celebrated as historic. Indeed, it was one of the only major organizations of its time to successfully connect these various communities to one another.\textsuperscript{28}

NEDA served many administration purposes. It accepted and advanced the ongoing redefinition of the Spanish-speaking American as a national minority. But it did so on politically safe terms, balancing ethnic representation among populations and orienting the members of these populations toward a market-centric view of ethnic empowerment. By aiding small businessmen, the administration would be supporting role models whose moderate values would compete with the militant Chicano and Puerto Rican social movements. NEDA’s beneficiaries would be expected to provide campaign contributions as well, which Fernandez would be in position to process. NEDA thus represented the potential of pan-Hispanic capitalism to link middle-class and establishment values to ethnic empowerment, in turn promoting social stability and Republican politicians along the way.

This pan-Hispanic project was not without certain biases, however. During its first two years, NEDA claimed to have helped thousands of clients to receive guarantees of leases or bonding, lines of credit, or minority set-aside contracts. It took credit for facilitating more than 36 million dollars in debt and equity financing for nearly 700 proposals in one single ten-month period. National numbers concealed familiar distributional inequalities, however. More than

\textsuperscript{27} Cong. Rec., 92\textsuperscript{nd} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} sess.: 15815-15817; National Economic Development Agency, “NEDA Performance Record, March 1972,” Box 18, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.

\textsuperscript{28} Office of the Vice President, “News Release,” August 21, 1970, Box 18, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
one third of NEDA’s financing went to Miami. Of the remainder, three quarters went to the
Southwest. More funding went to Albuquerque and El Paso, for example, than to New York and
Chicago, a virtual guarantee that Puerto Ricans would receive only a small benefit from
NEDA. 

The Cabinet Committee’s construction of a respectable pan-ethnicity neatly
complemented NEDA’s message that business was the essence of *Hispanidad*. Although
culturally different from the mainstream, all Spanish-speaking people shared its values. CCOSS
publications argued that, in certain respects, this group’s members were just like anyone else. Its
1970 annual report contained a photo, captioned “Spanish Speaking Family on a Fishing
Holiday,” showing a loving father playing with two boys, the picture of an American family
enjoying its leisure time. It was a stark middle-class rejoinder to the nationalists’ raised fists and
*indigenismo*, and to the struggle as the essence of ethnic authenticity. The report contained
images of Mexican agricultural laborers and Puerto Rican slum dwellers, but suggested that the
solutions lay not in strikes or other collective action, but in education, and in trusting the
government to promote small business. Several photos celebrated CCOSS and Small Business
Administration employees fighting for federal resources on behalf of their constituents. Another,
captioned “A Puerto Rican Couple Proudly Display Their Small Cafe Built on Resourcefulness
and Enterprise,” illustrated what the Spanish-speaking could become with hard work, helpful
bureaucrats, and the business savvy of groups like NEDA. 

29 “NEDA Performance Record, March 1972,” Box 18, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
Committee on Opportunities for Spanish Speaking People, 1970), 12-16.
If the partisan implications were unclear, the Cabinet Committee reemphasized the “forgotten minority” argument. Although the federal government had attended to the problems of the 1960s with “a host of educational, antipoverty, and economic programs,” Spanish-speakers received mere “token participation” in these efforts. Now, thirty or so Cabinet Committee staff worked tirelessly to persuade federal agencies to devote more resources to these communities. They had helped Richard Nixon convince the Bureau of the Census that “the Spanish-speaking groups” together constituted “a separable and distinct group” for purposes of statistical analysis, a change that meant that their people could no longer be ignored. The seventies were, the 1970 CCOSS Annual Report was titled, *A New Era*, and could be “the dawn of achievement and progress” for Spanish-speaking Americans thanks to the current administration. \(^\text{31}\)

**The Spanish-Speaking Voter, 1970**

What remained for 1970 was to harmonize Spanish-speaking voter outreach with the administration’s larger campaign message. In what became the White House’s handbook for the 1970 elections, Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg’s *The Real Majority* (1970), politics pivoted on the “social issue,” defined as the fear of wholesale broad cultural transformation and instability in social mores. The vast “real” majority of American voters otherwise attracted to Democrats’ economic message—the “unyoung, unpoor, and unblack” voters—would reject the party if they associated it with permissiveness toward crime, pornography, drugs, black militants, 

protestors or other menaces of the day.\textsuperscript{32} Relentless exploitation of the social issue was supposed to help the administration retake the Senate, where Democrats were defending twenty-five seats and Republicans just ten. Agnew campaigned far and wide, ripping into “ultraliberalism” and the “troglodytic leftists who dominate Congress.” Those “radical-liberals” could “work themselves into a lather over an alleged shortage of nutriments in a child’s box of Wheaties” but “cannot get exercised over that same child’s constant exposure to a flood of hard-core pornography that could warp his moral outlook for a lifetime.”\textsuperscript{33} Agnew’s belligerence alienated many Republicans, and the strategy lost effectiveness as Democrats emphasized that they, too, wanted to restore respect for traditional norms, that they did not support rampant drug use and babies watching dirty films and or other hazards to society. Nixon’s campaign appearances were not much of an improvement over Agnew’s. The White House allowed protestors to get close to the president, to shout vulgarities at him, and kept the cameras rolling for all to see their offensiveness, and his willingness to stand up for decency.\textsuperscript{34} It was not a positive approach.

On one hand, the White House’s appeal to the Spanish-speaking American as a culturally distinct and dignified guardian of mainstream values resembled its use of the “social issue” before other audiences. Indeed, a common thread is the administration’s attempt to heighten a group’s racial consciousness—aggressively tried with white voters—by framing its values as diametrically opposed to both black Americans and their liberal patrons. On the other hand, the

\textsuperscript{33} Quoted in Rick Perlstein, \textit{Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America} (New York: Scribner, 2008), 524-525.
Spanish-speaking Americans were clearly a minority, and Nixon seemed to fear that certain policies that helped them could be detrimental to Republican chances in the mid-terms. The White House had designed a civil service affirmative action program for this group, but delayed its announcement until after the election, possibly concerned that it would alienate the conservative whites it was courting in 1970.

While a common culture that supporting mainstream values was said to justify assistance to this pan-ethnic group, the belief that policies aided specific national origin or regional populations further limited the administration’s ability to devise a unified campaign for this group. Republican campaign operatives were warned to “tailor the use” of materials to the audience in question. The Cuban Refugee program, for example, was not popular with African Americans, and “not particularly appreciated by Mexican-Americans.” They were reminded that “Mexican-American advancements are not as enchanting to the Cubans or to Puerto Ricans in the northeastern United States.” “In sum,” the word went out, “a Spanish speaking opportunity program does not touch every American whose mother tongue was Spanish.”

Despite the White House’s efforts—or perhaps because of them—Democrats had retained a 10-vote Senate majority, a 73-vote edge in the House, and had scored notable wins in governors’ races. In states of note for Mexican American strategy, the outcome had not been good for Republicans. In Texas, Rep. George H.W. Bush lost his Senate bid to Lloyd Bentsen, a conservative Democrat and John Connally protégé. Joseph Montoya, the Senate’s lone Spanish American, defeated a Goldwater conservative in New Mexico to earn another six years. Finally,

35 Memorandum Robert Finch to John R. Brown III, October 17, 1970, Box 21, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
36 Reeves, President Nixon, 272.
in California, liberal Democrat John Tunney won his race, defeating Republican incumbent George Murphy. In one bright spot, Manuel Lujan Jr. of New Mexico, the lone Republican of Spanish heritage then serving in the national legislature, was reelected.\(^{37}\) It was small consolation, however.

**A New Ethnic Plan**

An irritated President Nixon demanded to know why Republicans had not gained greater traction with Mexican Americans, since this group was supposedly ripe for the political taking. The next major campaign was for his reelection, and it was clear that the administration’s Spanish-speaking outreach program would have to undergo a significant transformation.

Shortly after the election, Hilary Sandoval was forced to resign his position at the SBA, citing poor health.\(^{38}\) Martin Castillo and Henry Quevedo resigned two weeks later, with Quevedo blaming “old-line bureaucrats” for obstructing their tenure in Washington. “They think of civil rights as a black-white issue and just don’t know that the nation’s second largest minority is also suffering. That’s 10 million people,” he said.\(^{39}\) Leonard Garment, who viewed the failed outreach program as “a really unfortunate story of misfires, inaction and bad luck,”\(^{40}\) was relieved of his responsibilities for dealing with the Spanish-speaking Americans in February of 1971. According to Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman, the change was made “because his overriding concern is for Blacks.” The administration needed someone to focus exclusively on this

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\(^{37}\) He had joined the House in 1968, when the end of the state’s at-large congressional voting meant the creation of a new district for the heavily Hispanic northern part of the state. He was a moderate, a former insurance salesman, and the son of the Mayor of Santa Fe. Martin Tolchin, “Manuel Lujan Jr.: Secretary of the Interior,” *New York Times*, December 23, 1988.

\(^{38}\) “SBA Head Quits, Cites Poor Health,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 20, 1970.


\(^{40}\) Leonard Garment to Richard M. Nixon, February 5, 1971, Box 65, Bradley H. Patterson, Jr. Files, SMOF, NPM.
minority, and Haldeman assigned the former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) Robert Finch “the responsibility for the exploitation of our Mexican American accomplishments.”

Finch was a moderate Republican who had served as California’s lieutenant governor before joining the administration. His tenure at HEW was dismal, however, for he was too liberal for White House conservatives and too far to the right for much of the staff he oversaw. A poor bureaucratic infighter surrounded by much more ruthless types, he was convinced to take the new position of White House Counselor in June of 1970.

Given his familiarity with Mexican Americans in California, however, he was a logical choice to take over for Garment.

**Of Affirmative Action and Patronage**

Finch would help advance a second administration plan to develop middle-class Mexican Americans’ loyalty to Nixon. Given that ethnic leaders viewed federal jobs as evidence of an administration’s inclusiveness, and indeed of their own progress in society, Nixon looked to expand Mexican American participation in the civil service. Nixon had endorsed strong affirmative action before, most memorably when his White House had required racial hiring “goals” to open up a small part of the construction industry to blacks in the “Philadelphia Plan.” However, under the leadership of Robert E. Hampton, the Civil Service Commission practiced affirmative action “minimalism.” Nixon’s Executive Order 11478, which Hampton helped draft in early 1969, called for “positive action,” but did not lay out specific “goals” for minority

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41 H.R. Haldeman to Robert H. Finch, February 2, 1971, Box 65, Bradley H. Patterson, Jr. Files, SMOF, NPM.
hiring. As a result, most federal agencies moved slowly to produce a federal workforce that more closely resembled the country’s people.43

The difficulty was in balancing the ideals of meritocracy with the goals of ethnic inclusiveness. Back in July of 1970, Agnew and Castillo held a White House meeting with eleven federal “Spanish-speaking officials.” It was intended to demonstrate Nixon’s interest in, as Castillo put it, “parity of attention” for this group in Washington. While assuring reporters that he did not support the use of “quotas,” the vice president concluded that it was fair for minority groups to expect federal employment at “a reasonably equivalent ratio to [their percentage of the] population.”44 Given that more than 9 million “Spanish-speaking Americans” lived in the United States, there was much work to do before the federal government reached adequate representation.

Following the 1970 elections, the administration found it safer to embrace proportionality for Spanish-speaking Americans. A “Sixteen Point Program” ostensibly extending affirmative action to this group, the one that Castillo and Hampton had developed over the summer, was announced just a few days after the voting. Eager to confirm this constituency’s best image of itself, and aware of conservatives’ disdain for affirmative action, the administration insisted that the plan constituted no “preferential treatment.” Rather, it was a “special emphasis program” necessary to prevent discriminatory policies like height and weight requirements, or the use of “an ‘accent’...as a screen-out factor,” from denying otherwise “highly qualified” people a chance at “rightful competition.” According to the White House, the “Sixteen Point Program” was less

a matter of justice and more an efficient use of human resources.\textsuperscript{45} It referenced statistics showing that Spanish-speaking Americans “held only 2.8% of Federal jobs,” evidence that their skills in “the labor market were possibly not being effectively tapped.”\textsuperscript{46}

There were sixteen steps to remedying this inequity, some of them redundant. The program pledged to boost federal recruitment of Spanish speakers using “selective placement on bilingual basis,” and by reaching out efforts to Spanish-speaking veterans who were eligible for “noncompetitive appointments.” It called upon agencies to employ high school and college teachers from this group for summer jobs, and to require agency affirmative action (EEO) plans to incorporate this minority group. Continuing a demand of the ICMAA, the program called for improving and expanding minority employment statistics to show “special information relating to employment and upward mobility of Spanish surnamed persons in the Federal Government.” The Sixteen Points also mandated a full-time staffer in the Civil Service Commission to “assure full application of the EEO program in all Federal agencies to this group.”\textsuperscript{47} Just before the new year, the administration placed a New Mexico Republican named Fernando E.C. De Baca to this position in charge of implementing the new Program.\textsuperscript{48}

While the program was superficially pan-Hispanic and national (like NEDA), it advanced a much more specific mission. The administration planned to use affirmative action to build its Mexican American patronage network in the Southwest. In early 1971, the White House’s new

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{“Sixteen Questions on the Sixteen-Point Program,”} Box 4, Folder 4-1, Central File, \textit{Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People}, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{“President Nixon’s Sixteen Point Program,”} Box 4, Folder 4-1, Central File, \textit{Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People}, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{“President Nixon’s Sixteen Point Program,”} Box 4, Folder 4-1, Central File, \textit{Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People}, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{“New Chicano Adviser,”} \textit{Los Angeles Times}, December 10, 1970.
Special Assistant for Personnel, former HEW Undersecretary Fred Malek, established a “Spanish-Speaking Ad Hoc Committee.” Headed by Antonio Rodriguez, who ran the Cabinet Committee after Castillo was forced out, it was part patronage and part political intelligence operation. Above all, it was designed to place pro-administration Mexican Americans in high positions in the federal service. Malek wanted people “who are politically in concert with the Administration and generally sophisticated executives in their own right,” people with “the ability to reach into the pertinent states”—Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas—to recruit others. His staff assembled an initial cadre of fourteen Mexican American professionals, whom they expected to screen out applicants unlikely to assist the Nixon program. All were Republicans under 50 years old. They were doctors, lawyers, and businessmen. They were to act as the administration’s conduits to the sensible, winnable, Mexican Americans.49

Learning to Manage Ethnic Relations

The Cabinet Committee was supposed to buttress such administration efforts to incorporate and govern Spanish-speaking American. In theory, it was a means to distribute patronage and a source of ethnic knowledge as well as publicity. It had been ineffective and unhelpful, though, and had been moribund since the 1970 election. The administration explored ceasing its activities altogether. However, its many supporters ensured that the administration would revive the outfit. Numerous congressmen were pressing the White House to appoint a

49 The administration created a similar committee for blacks, and one for “ethnics,” the latter chaired by the RNC’s Laszlow Pastor. Fred Malek to H.R. Haldeman, January 6, 1971, Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
new chairman and to fill staff vacancies. Asian Americans were reportedly demanding a Cabinet Committee of their own, which only increased the pressure on Nixon to do something about the CCOSS. After joint meetings with HEW, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans began to more closely coordinate efforts, not necessarily for any specific policy, but to pressure the White House to save the Cabinet Committee.

The president’s team understood how important it was to these groups. Finch’s deputy, George Grassmuck, observed that “many ‘grass roots’ individuals” considered the CCOSS “the most important Federal body which exists solely for their benefit.” It served as “as the primary point of contact between the community and Washington,” and a “beacon” for “those who might otherwise become lost in the Federal labyrinth.” It seemed to be “the focal point for the emerging role of the Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Latins” in national affairs. Eliminating it would certainly anger voters.

However, Grassmuck also recognized that “the combination of all government and Administration concern” about Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans “into one effort” was deeply complicated. “While all are Spanish speaking, and have some religious, and other cultural aspects that are alike, they do not share these in common,” he wrote. To organize these communities together reflected “the Anglo’s way of looking at these people from the outside” more than anything else. Cubans felt toward Mexicans and Puerto Ricans a “polite disdain – certainly not a willingness to follow” their leaders in the Cabinet Committee “or in other Spanish

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51 Memo Antonia Pantoja to Robert Finch, May 21, 1971, Box 15, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
52 George Grassmuck to Neal Ball, August 4, 1971, Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
53 George Grassmuck to Ken Smith, July 30, 1971, Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
speaking matters,” which led Grassumuck to conclude that they “probably need to be handled separately” from the others.  

On the other hand, ethnic pragmatism and rivalry validated the pan-ethnic approach.

Grassmuck saw that many leaders had embraced pan-Hispanic politics—he called it the “Spanish-speaking concept”—out of a clear-eyed quest for power. They may not always like it, but they believed it was “a foundation on which they can build.” Moreover, since “none of the three communities want[ed] to see either of the other two” in charge of the Cabinet Committee, and since Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans were sure to “react with a violent negative” if the administration scrapped it, the groups were, to an extent, stuck with each other.

But how to make the CCOSS both seem fair and politically useful? Mexican Americans constituted the bulk of its staff, a “constant source of divisiveness,” especially for Puerto Ricans. The “factionalism within the brown community” made finding Castillo’s replacement more difficult still. The new chairman had to come from “the Mexican-American sector of the Spanish-Speaking population,” and was preferably a Republican, although the “right kind of Democrat” was a possibility. Robert Finch looked into appointing two additional deputy chairmen who could provide ethnic balance, but the Office of Management and Budget shot down the plan, calling it “unwarranted,” likely to lead to dysfunction, and contrary to the CCOSS’s enacting legislation.

Although their many divisions made the country’s Spanish-speaking populations difficult

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55 George Grassmuck to Ken Smith, July 30, 1971, Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
56 “An Overview of Spanish Speaking Affairs for White House Perspective, May, 1971,” Box 21, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
57 Frank P. Rocco to Fred Malek, March 19, 1971, Box 18, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
58 Dwight A. Ink to George Grassmuck, July 14, 1971, Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
to organize, the administration believed that they could see a greater divide between themselves and African Americans. Twelve Democratic congressmen had formed a Black Caucus and met with the president in March of 1971, requesting changes to foreign and domestic policy.\(^{59}\) Grassmuck noted that “Spanish Speaking community spokesmen were watching closely” for the administration’s response. It was clear that “they want the same type of opportunities as Negroes, and do not want ‘to play second fiddle to any minority.’”\(^{60}\) He argued that Republicans could “champion the Spanish speaking groups,” partly because “the Democratic Party appears to be the champion of the Blacks” and this, he believed, did “not go down well with the Spanish-speaking.”\(^{61}\) Months of White House planning had led again to racial hostility as the potential unifying factor in their appeal to this constituency.

**The New Faces of Progress for Spanish-speaking Americans**

The administration rolled out its new program for Spanish-speaking Americans in the summer of 1971, publicly acknowledging few of the nuances of seen in its internal deliberations. The Cabinet Committee’s 1971 Annual Report held that this “disadvantaged minority” of perhaps 12 million was made up of “a diverse amalgam of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban and other Spanish derivation.” Using a variety of federal statistics, including the new census figures that the White House had ordered and data gleaned from “on-site visits by CCOSS personnel,” it then illustrated them as a single element in America’s ethnic map:


\(^{60}\) Edward Roybal and newly-elected Representative Herman Badillo would not officially form the Congressional Hispanic Caucus for another five years, but they were beginning to collaborate on issues of shared concern, pressing the administration to do more for their communities. George Grassmuck to Clark MacGregor, May 10, 1971, Box 15, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.

\(^{61}\) George Grassmuck to Ken Smith, July 30, 1971, Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
The federal authority on this national pan-ethnic group anchored its story in the Southwest and made strong suggestions about its racial identity. It noted the existence of Spanish settlements before Plymouth Rock—then still the central physical referent in American nationalist mythology—and referred to “the white population of the Southwest” in 1790 as “practically all Spanish.” Whereas others had assimilated, the report found that Spanish-speaking Americans “remain the least ‘Americanized’” of the country’s ethnic groups. The “remarkable phenomenon” of language maintenance was supposedly “a singularly unique element of their character,” and not the consequence of, for example, persistent immigration or
social exclusion. “They simply have not been willing to abandon their cultural and linguistic heritage,” the attributes which, as “whites,” most clearly distinguished them.  

The administration also selected 42-year old Henry M. Ramirez to carry its message to the Spanish-speaking masses as the new chairman of the Cabinet Committee. Ramirez was an active Republican and a conservative Catholic who had grown up in a migrant family. He had taught high school in Nixon’s hometown of Whittier until the last months of the Johnson administration, when he accepted a job with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights’ Mexican American Studies Division. According to Finch, Ramirez had caught the administration’s attention in a lengthy memo he wrote on federal outreach to the Spanish-speaking Americans. Ramirez’s perspective dovetailed with Republican hopes, describing this group as “generally characterized by a strong family structure, deep religious ties,” and “a rather conservative political outlook.” The Nixon administration could do much to help these people, Ramirez claimed, from distinguishing them in all federal statistics to honoring their church leaders to supporting the farm workers. Possibly angling for a job, he declared that the Cabinet Committee must have “a competent and imaginative chairman” who came from the Mexican American population. The White House was attracted to his moderate views. “He is not a militant, and he is not a soap-box advocate,” read Grassmuck’s memo on the vetting process. Ramirez was

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62 “Annual Report of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish Speaking People, Fiscal Year 1971,” Box 15, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
64 “An overview of Spanish speaking affairs for White House perspective May, 1971,” Box 21, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
“perhaps...an opportunist,” but not “just for himself. He is also ambitious for his people,” he wrote.65

On August 5, 1971, in an attempt to provide a scene comparable to his March summit with the Black Caucus, the administration held a meeting to introduce Ramirez and the Cabinet Committee’s new advisory committee, the latter having been mandated by its enacting legislation but never established. Careful now to preserve ethnic balance, the administration selected four Mexican Americans, three Puerto Ricans, and three Cubans. They came from California, New Jersey, Arizona, New Mexico, Florida, Texas, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico. Geographical and ethnic representation did not correlate to political representation, however. While the Spanish-speaking Americans were overwhelmingly registered Democrats, only one advisory committee member was a Democrat.66

During the meeting, which also included several members of the Cabinet, the president gave informal cues as to how this group should present itself and justify its claims. The Mexican Americans he had known from his childhood in Whittier had been “family oriented, law abiding people” and “although they did need attention – that wheel was not squeaking much.” He urged his administration’s hand-picked leaders to form a lobby so that their people would access to federal programs and employment. While they were organizing themselves, he would do what he could. “The government has the responsibility,” he said. “Private business does not move as fast in developing opportunities.” Nixon admonished his Cabinet to “get off their duffs,” and to

65 George Grassmuck to Robert Finch, May 18, 1971, Box 18, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
66 “Schedule Proposal,” July 28, 1971, EX FG, Box 7, WHCF, NPM.
provide assistance to this deserving group, not just to “those who tear up the place and pound fists.”

Afterward, Nixon spent a few minutes in the Oval Office, coaching Ramirez on how to stand up for himself and his goals. The subject was not in his day’s talking points, but the president made more explicit his comparison between the Mexican Americans and blacks. “They just raise the devil, and as a result they've got a congressional lobby to send in,” but “you fellas, you've just sat too long.” “The responsible people,” he told Ramirez, “you've got to really get organized, and just raise as much hell as they do.” They faced a “language barrier,” of course, but “the Mexican American has an enormous advantage over the blacks” because “you do not have the racial” barrier to overcome. “You shouldn't be penalized for not being a bunch of bomb throwers. But what will it take?” Ramirez’s answer was the inclusion of people such as himself. “We have to become an integral part of the fabric of our country and our government…. It happens by being in positions of authority….to be inside.”

Making this humble and patriotic son of immigrants into an American minority leader was of a piece with the administration’s broader quest to appear the champion of humble and patriotic people of all backgrounds, the Silent Majority. One of eleven children, forced into migrant labor after an injury to their father, Ramirez claimed to have “picked every crop there is to pick in California.” The Los Angeles Times retold his story of a modest upbringing, and portrayed him as a mixture of several tendencies, challenging yet conformist. He was “a

67 “Draft Minutes of Cabinet Committee Meeting on Spanish Speaking,” August 5, 1971, Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM; and CAB 67-13; August 5, 1971; White House Tapes; NPM.
68 OVAL 555-3; August 5, 1971; White House Tapes; NPM.
69 Ibid.
Chicano activist with some Establishment views.”

His diagnosis had little to say about past injustice, and even less to say about revolution. He told reporters that his people’s problem was that it lacked a bourgeoisie: “that’s the trouble….The stability of our community, as well as the nation, depends on development of a middle-class.”

Ramirez represented the upwardly mobile, nationally focused ethnic entrepreneur. While Chicano activists often embraced the localism of loyalty to the barrio, Ramirez was glad to have left California for it afforded him perspective on his people’s problems and the capacity to do something about them. He called for “a brain drain from the barrios into positions of responsibility.” Chicanos brought into the system would return to their communities with new ideas and useful experience. “They won’t just know about Los Angeles, but also about Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico.” By shifting the focus of community empowerment from the local to the regional and national, and connecting with activists and administrators elsewhere, they would have a better chance to make a difference in the barrios.

In addition to Ramirez, the White House identified several other Mexican Americans to for prominent positions in government. A few days after the CCOSS relaunch, Nixon nominated El Paso’s former mayor and Kennedy’s Ambassador to Costa Rica, the Democrat Raymond Telles, for a five-year term as Vicente Ximenes’s replacement on the EEOC. A few weeks later, the president named Philip V. Sánchez, a 41-year old Fresno Republican, to direct the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). Another Los Angeles Times story emphasized the rags-

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71 Seth Kantor, “New Cabinet Panel Head Will Boost Chances for his People,” Fort Worth Press, August 12, 1971, Box 15, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
to-respectability of a Nixon appointee. Sánchez, “whose appearance is distinctly Mexican,” had been “a scrawny 6-year old” when he “joined his Mexican migrant family in the Salinas Valley, picking fruit and cotton” during the Depression, it reported. Abandoned by his father, he had come a long way.\textsuperscript{74} Indeed, the \textit{Washington Post} concluded that Senate confirmation would make Sánchez the “highest ranking official of Mexican heritage in the federal government,” an assertion bound to irritate Senator Joseph Montoya.\textsuperscript{75}

However, the White House’s true public relations masterstroke was a Los Angeles entrepreneur named Romana Bañuelos. In September, after what the administration claimed was a 24-hour search, Nixon nominated her to be Treasurer of the United States. Reporters saw an amazing story. The \textit{Chicago Tribune} wrote of a business genius, a woman who, without as much as a high school diploma, had turned a home-based tortilla business into a multimillion-dollar Mexican food empire.\textsuperscript{76} Named after Bañuelos daughter, Ramona’s Mexican Food Products was indeed an impressive story.

Nixon was particularly pleased and on multiple occasions reflected on Bañuelos’ vote-getting potential. He was glad she was “born in Mexico, [and] therefore not a Spanish type. She isn’t old [unintelligible], like Cesar Romero. Not an aristocrat.”\textsuperscript{77} He returned to the subject with Haldeman, basking the glow of her ethnic credibility. “I think the Mexican lady thing was a good one,” he said. “She talked with a Mexican accent. She looks like a Mexican.” Indeed,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[77] EOB 279-14; September 22, 1971; White House Tapes; Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, National Archives at College Park, MD. Transcript posted at www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB95/mex14.pdf [accessed January 6, 2011].
\end{footnotes}
Haldeman remarked, “She's got Indian blood in her. She isn't just a high level, you know.”

“She's not a Spanish Mexican,” the president replied, “she's a Mexican Mexican.” It had been “a hell of an appointment.”

Like Henry Ramirez, Romana Bañuelos was an exemplar of the kind of Mexican Americans the administration wished to attract. Haldeman considered her “a good American success story. Built her own little tamale stand up into a growing business.” “Damn right,” said Nixon. “Very good.” As if that were not enough, her sons were Los Angeles county sheriffs. The two men could almost not believe their good fortune. She was a political hat-trick, appealing to small businesspeople, Mexican Americans, and even “law and order” types. “That was the most dramatic example,” Haldeman marveled, where “we sort of pushed a button, and said come up with a Mexican woman, and in fact four days later we ended up with a Mexican woman. Who was chairman of the board of a bank, and runs around with scholarship foundations for Mexican kids. She’s a hell of a story! And they run all of this in the paper, made it out like – yeah, she’s a good Horatio Alger type.”

The two men considered the political exchange rate on patronage for this group to be favorable. Certainly, they believed, the appointment would go farther with Mexican Americans than a comparable appointment would have gone with blacks. “I have a feeling that that helps with the Mexicans [voters]. I don’t think it helps one damn bit with the Negroes,” the president said. “Well, they think it’s their divine right,” replied Haldeman. “The Mexicans haven’t gotten

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78 OVAL 577-17; September 20, 1971; White House Tapes; NPM.

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enough of it to be able to think that.”80 Nixon thrilled at his fortune. “If we can't make something out of that, that the Treasurer of the United States is a Mexican. She signs every goddamned bill: Romana Bañuelos.”81 Recognition of a group’s political utility hardly made the president’s circle into racial liberals, however. When, on another occasion, Nixon mused about the political benefits of seeing, “Romana Bañuelos on every dollar bill,” an advisor cracked that, “They’ll start calling it the peso.”82

Conclusion

By late 1971, the Nixon administration had committed itself to a comprehensive attempt to win over the “Spanish-speaking” minority group. It sought to convince Spanish-speaking Americans that certain aspects of Nixon’s approach to governance—an emphasis on personal independence, family, and small business—reflected their ethnic values honored and incorporated in government. The new knowledge and institutions created about and for this minority population did not necessarily make it an electorate, however, let alone mobilize it to vote for a particular party or candidate.

Nonetheless, ethnic leaders seemed more accepting of the “Spanish-speaking concept” than ever before, provided it was fairly applied. The administration, with its force of upwardly-mobile political surrogates, believed it was poised to capture the Spanish-speaking vote. But the Nixon team was not the only one trying to convert pan-Hispanic identity into political power.

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80 Ibid.
81 OVAL 577-17; September 20, 1971; White House Tapes; NPM.
82 Oval 576-6; September 18, 1971; White House Tapes; NPM.
Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Congress saw themselves as the rightful leaders of the nation’s Spanish-speaking people. They, too, hoped to consolidate the Spanish-speaking vote.
In September of 1969, Carlos Alvarez, the former president of a Puerto Rican veterans’ group, called on Senator Joseph Montoya to lead the nation’s Spanish-speaking people. There was great need, he said, for someone to “convene a high level nationwide conference of Spanish leaders,” and to establish “a large master organization or federation of Hispanic Societies.” Alvarez envisioned an inclusive association, one “representative of all, without regard to creeds, color of skin, or political beliefs.” The federation would be based on the ethnic bond shared by these “close to fifteen (15) million citizens and residents who live, work and pay taxes in the world's most important nation.” While conceding that their “traditions and cultures vary as among the very people of the United States of America because of regions and ancestry,” he affirmed that, “to all intents and purposes we are all one and the same, descendents in the great majority of the mother country Spain.” Who better to coordinate this important undertaking than the eminently respectable Senator from New Mexico, whom he flattered as “a man totally divested of personal ambitions for self-aggrandizement,” and as a “solid, living example of self-made (Hombre) who through courage and dedication has raised an exemplary family.”

In his reply, Montoya declared his support for “unity among the Spanish-speaking organizations.” To that end, he had sponsored legislation to create a “Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People” (CCOSS) which would act as “a permanent body to

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1 Carlos Alvarez to Joseph Montoya, September 25, 1969, Box 162, Folder 22, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
serve all Spanish Americans and represent all organizations of Spanish-speaking people.”

After Montoya’s bill passed later that year, Carlos Alvarez joined the new Cabinet Committee as a consultant, but he and its congressional liaison (also a Puerto Rican) were fired in the fall of 1971. They were surplus to a White House directive turning the unit into a full-fledged arm of Nixon’s 1972 reelection campaign. Given Montoya’s hope that the CCOSS would foster pan-Hispanic unity, it was ironic that Alvarez’s attorney was to accuse it of engaging in “a pattern of discrimination and practices that excluded Puerto Ricans.”

While the White House optimized this congressional project for its own benefit, Mexican American and Puerto Rican politicians tried to establish themselves as the true leaders of the Spanish-speaking people. The first signs of what the Nixon administration called a “Brown Caucus” were emerging in 1971, after Herman Badillo of New York had become the first Puerto Rican to serve as a voting member in the U.S. House of Representatives. In the fall of 1971, Badillo joined congressmen from the Southwest in convening more than a thousand activists, politicians, and government workers from across the country in the hope of establishing a national pan-Hispanic electoral coalition. The politicians struggled to stay ahead of radical activists, however. They particular difficulty reconciling their scorn for past and present government neglect with their arguments that responsible federal officials would satisfy ethnic goals in the future, if only the group mobilized for elections. Moreover, the persistence of nationalist sentiment and the leaders’ own party loyalties hindered the grassroots groups in

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2 Joseph Montoya to Carlos Alvarez, October 3, 1969, Box 162, Folder 23, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
achieving a meaningful alliance. The congressmen did succeed in promoting pan-Hispanic solidarity among white-collar workers fighting for affirmative action, but were chastened in their attempt to hold the balance of power in national elections.

**Confronting the Administration**

Edward Roybal of Los Angeles and Herman Badillo of New York had grander ambitions than their congressional districts could hold. Roybal aimed to become a national spokesman for all Spanish-speaking Americans. Badillo, the former Bronx borough president, plotted to exchange his seat representing East Harlem and the South Bronx for the mayor’s mansion in Manhattan. Though both were identified as spokesmen for their respective communities, neither was an ardent nationalist. Both men spoke perfect English, inflected by regional accents.

Brought together in the Congress in 1971, the two politicians from the great coastal metropolises sought to move beyond the political battles and community boundaries of Mexican Americans in Los Angeles and Puerto Ricans in New York, toward a politics built on shared interest and a new, nationwide pan-Hispanic identity.

They viewed the administration’s revitalized outreach program with frustration and suspicion. As Henry B. González had predicted, the Cabinet Committee had proven weak and subject to executive manipulation. Ethnic leaders had fought hard for this federal advocate, and knowing that it might prove helpful with a different president, Roybal and Badillo others tried to use their own clout as ethnic leaders to influence its activities. They wrote to the president in August 1971, expressing relief that a chairman and advisory committee had at last been named. “Clearly,” they claimed, “a cabinet-level committee” was “essential” if Spanish-speaking
Americans were to receive a fair share of federal resources and “enjoy full equality with other Americans.” Nevertheless, the administration’s previous neglect meant that that 16 million people—a third more than even the Cabinet Committee had estimated—suffered poorer quality of health, housing, welfare, jobs, education, as well as a lack of “equal justice under the law and basic human dignity.” Nixon had met with the Black Caucus in March, and now Roybal and Badillo wanted their own meeting to discuss making the CCOSS an advocate for all Spanish-speaking people, and not simply for the administration.5 Nixon had anointed his own representatives for this group, however, and made the two elected officials wait months for a reply to their request for an audience.

So stymied, Roybal and Badillo set out to organize the sort of ethnically inclusive and ostensibly nonpartisan alliance that Carlos Alvarez had called for two years earlier. In September, they joined Senator Joseph Montoya and U.S. Representative Manuel Lujan Jr., a New Mexico Republican, to announce that they would be convening a “National Spanish-Speaking Coalition Conference” the following month in the nation’s capital. The diverse sectors of Spanish-speaking America were to be “unidos” (united) to overcome their common disillusionment at the prospects for meaningful material improvement within existing political arrangements. “Our expectations over the last decade in terms of social justice have not materialized,” the leaders announced.6 “The continuous deterioration of conditions in which the Spanish-speaking live,” Badillo told the New York Times, “and the apathy shown to their

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5 Edward Roybal and Herman Badillo to Richard Nixon, August 9, 1971, Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
problems by governmental institutions make the calling of this conference imperative.”

Having spent months designing a pan-Hispanic outreach plan they intended to be both tightly-controlled and focused on Mexican Americans, the White House was divided in its response. “Our need is to cut the ground out from under this gathering and this group before these people can seize the initiative for the heavily Democrat Puerto Rican population in the northeast,” wrote White House aide George Grassmuck. His boss, Robert Finch, and CCOSS Chairman Henry Ramirez recommended meeting with the congressmen before their conference, presumably to blunt their criticism of the administration. White House political guru Charles Colson appears to have been less concerned. One of his subordinates informed him that the conference was an effort by “the Spanish-speaking types in the Congress” to “follow the Black Caucus’ lead.” Scribbled on the memo was a pungent reply: “The Hell they will! They’ll never follow the lead of the blacks!” Colson refused to sanction a meeting between the president and the two congressmen alone. Instead, he proposed that Nixon convene the Cabinet Committee and invite the “Spanish surnamed members of Congress” to attend. Others wanted all congressmen with sizeable Spanish-speaking constituencies included, which meant conservative Republicans Barry Goldwater and John Tower, as well as James Buckley, the Conservative Party Senator from New York and brother of National Review editor William F. Buckley. This was obviously not the meeting Roybal and Badillo wanted, but Congress had given the president the tools to ignore them. It was thus all the more important to generate external pressure on the

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8 George Grassmuck to Dave Parker, October 5, 1971, Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
9 Doug Hallett to Charles W. Colson, October 8, 1971, Box 4, EX HU, WHCF, NPM.
10 W. Richard Howard to Dave Parker, October 8, 1971, Box 4, EX HU, WHCF, NPM.
11 Bud McFarlane to William E. Timmons, October 12, 1971, Box 4, EX HU, WHCF, NPM.
White House.

The legislators needed to create sources of political power that utilized the “Spanish-speaking concept” without entrusting it either to the executive or party officials. In Washington, Roybal affirmed that they wanted to be seen as the leaders of a national minority. “When we speak in the House,” he declared, “we no longer will be speaking only for ourselves but for the whole Spanish-speaking community.” The leaders had been involved presidential politics through parallel campaigns to turn out the Democratic vote in Spanish-speaking districts, but now bristled at this role. They generalized the Republican critique of their status with Democrats to the entire political system. “We’ve been taken for granted by both parties for too long,” Roybal fumed. They wanted autonomy and respect, and planned “to set up an organization with political muscle” and to create “a united political front.” No longer content merely to turn out the vote, they planned to influence matters themselves with a “permanent coalition” organized “in every state,” according to Badillo. While one *Los Angeles Times* reporter called the conference an effort to put “brown power” on the map, the ever-cautious Montoya downplayed any racial or radical overtones: “We seek to utilize our location, numbers and access to American political institutions to bring America’s attention to the previously ignored plight of our Hispano-American population.”

As Badillo’s remarks indicated, however, the congressmen blamed the American government for much of their people’s problems. In fact, the day before the conference, Roybal joined LULAC and the American G.I. Forum of California in suing the federal government for

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12 Thomas J. Foley, “‘Brown Power’ Parley Opens This Weekend,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 1971; Minutes, “Planning Meeting,” September 29, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
discrimination. Only 2.9 percent of federal workers had a Spanish surname, compared to 7 percent of the country’s population, evidence, they argued, that the Civil Service Commission and a number of federal agencies were violating civil rights law. Roybal angrily accused federal officials of acting “immorally and illegally” maintaining an American “caste system,” and rendering “the ideal of equal employment” simply “another American myth.”

Possessing different levels of disillusionment, it was not clear that the organizers were equally committed to the idea of political independence either. After all, with the exception of Lujan, the congressmen were all Democrats. Would it really not serve their party’s interests? Lujan registered his concern about the conference’s partisan potential, saying he preferred to see it develop “solutions for problems, not political strategy.” Nevertheless, the politicians wanted to at least create at least the impression that Spanish-speaking Americans were a national swing vote. Together, they could control one hundred electoral votes and hold the balance of power in presidential elections, agonizingly close in 1960 and 1968. Such a potent ethnic bloc would be in a position, Roybal believed, to obtain the sorts of “concessions and promises from national politicians” that had long eluded them and caused their people to suffer.

Opening the Conference

16 Minutes, “Planning Meeting,” September 29, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
It was a humble setting for an historic meeting, but a great mass of activists and political organizers and social service providers descended upon the 160-room Hospitality House Motor Inn, located in the District suburb of Arlington, Virginia. Press reports conflict as to the attendance, and organizers boasted of 2,000 participants, but the number was probably closer to 1,200. Regardless, it was a surprisingly strong turnout, many more than the planners had been prepared to register.  

They were an eclectic group as well. People came from California, Texas, and New York, of course. But a vocal contingent from Chicago made the trip, and was joined by smaller groups from as far away as Utah and Washington. The conference was attended by MeCha students and Young Lords, and by more traditional leaders from the Puerto Rican Forum, LULAC and the G.I. Forum. Representatives from the Southwest Council of La Raza and the Midwest Council of La Raza attended. So did José Angel Gutiérrez, the MAYO activist and founder of La Raza Unida Party, a budding Chicano political party. The radical land grant activist Reies López Tijerina was out of prison, and under the same roof with Nixon’s new CCOSS chairman, Henry Ramirez. University professors and social service providers and federal employees came in from around the country. Cesar Chavez sent a letter of support, but the UFW does not appear to have played a significant role.

The planners had attempted to create a welcoming and pan-Hispanic environment for this diverse crowd. They named some conference rooms for nineteenth-century Puerto Rican

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17 Donald Maldonado Phillip Sanchez, October 29, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research; The group so overwhelmed the hotel’s food service staff that the kitchen closed, and the ventilation system was no match for the chain smoking that shrouded the proceedings in a haze.
independence figures and in others honored explorers of the Southwest. More importantly, the agenda was filled with items they believed all the groups would care about: political strategy, job training, equal opportunity, unions, and education, along with housing and economic development. If all went according to plan, conference participants would gather on Sunday morning to vote on resolutions. In the afternoon they would establish a structure and plan a strategy for their coalition. And on Monday morning, the congressmen would tell the press of the many gains made over the weekend, and about how 1972 was going to be the year when the Spanish-speaking became a real player in American politics.

The National Question

The first accomplishment had been simply getting Mexican American and Puerto Rican activists in the same rooms, no small feat considering the experiences of both the Johnson and Nixon administrations. Frank Espada, a Puerto Rican antipoverty activist who helped organize the event for Badillo, recalled that, “prior to that time, these groups were not talking to each other at all.” The reason, he said: “nationalism.” The Puerto Rican activists whom Espada knew in New York had been involved in the independence movement, and Chicano cultural nationalism, especially the notion of “La Raza,” did not typically resonate with them. He knew a

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18 See room chart in Box 21, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
19 National Spanish Speaking Coalition, “Agenda, National Spanish Speaking Coalition Conference, October 23-24, 1971,” Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research. We are fortunate that a few audiotapes of the conference remain to complement archival sources and the event’s scant news coverage. Brief summaries of the proceedings and personal reactions, some written by employees of the Office of Economic Opportunity, provide a further glimpse into its character.
few Chicano leaders and began calling to invite them to the conference anyway. “I simply said, ‘why not? We have nothing to lose.’” And, as it turned out, “they were hot to trot.”20

Nationalist politics still nearly derailed the conference at its beginning. Herman Badillo tried to give his opening remarks, but was “booed down” by Puerto Rican independentistas in the crowd. They considered Badillo a “piti-yankee,” Espada remembers, a sellout to the imperialists, because he did not support independence. After the rough reception, Badillo walked out and stayed away for most of the weekend.21 Badillo himself remembers “radical groups…the ones who shot members of Congress…who believed in Puerto Rican independence” ultimately “made it impossible to settle on realistic goals” during the two-day event.22

Edward Roybal took control after the independence debacle, and calmed the crowd. He challenged them to show “mutual respect for each other,” to look beyond “past disagreements…differences in ideology, status or party affiliation,” and to “end once and for all” the “envidias [jealousies]” that kept them from uniting. Far too long had they allowed themselves to be “drained politically and culturally,” to be “overwhelmed” and left “weak and isolated.” They needed more than “symbolic cultural solidarity.” They needed solidarity, and they needed it in politics.23

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20 Frank Espada, interview by author, February 23, 2011.
21 Ibid.
22 Herman Badillo, interview by author, March 3, 2011.
An Ethnic Americanism Born in the Southwest

The congressmen’s attempt to construct a pan-ethnic political coalition was at its core a community-building project. Like all such endeavors, it necessitated a selective interpretation of the past and the present to succeed. It required people to reconsider, transform, or shed deeply personal beliefs. The process would take more than a weekend. Sources show fault lines within and between the groups, but also the ways in which the activists, intellectuals, and politicians (and those who fancied themselves all three) negotiated these divisions in search of common ground. At the nexus of official plans and presentations, counter-plans and spontaneous audience reactions, we glimpse both successful and failed appeals to pan-Hispanic solidarity.

On Saturday of the conference, in the first of two keynote addresses aimed at inspiring a shared sense of purpose, Montoya appealed to the participants to see pan-Hispanic organizing as the fulfillment of American citizenship. “We are here as founders whose forebears settled America before the Pilgrims began their voyages,” he opened, with “a better claim to recognition on the basis of prior occupancy” than all but “the Indian.” While he openly acknowledged their history as a people apart, he sought to do so without weakening their loyalty to the country. He thus spoke delicately of conquest. He mentioned the “Mexican War,” after which “many of our people have lived as second-class citizens.” The Senator then spoke of 1898, since which “others of them have led lives distinguished solely by economic exploitation and denial of equal opportunity.” The link between these complex and divergent histories was not colonialism, however. Such a critique would demand decolonization, expulsion of the gringo, and national liberation. Instead, he argued, exclusion from American civic institutions was what held them
together, a vision of an ethnic community forged in its quest to share equally in the economic benefits and the legal protections of U.S. citizenship.\textsuperscript{24}

Montoya denied the potential for any “foreign” nationalism to captivate this group, and downplayed the importance of religion or language. Instead, a secular code of conduct defined their common history. They were marked by their virtue, patience, and essential reasonableness. Other groups had “pounded upon portals of American life with gun butts and clenched fists,” but Montoya called upon them to “show our culture, heritage and maturity by calmly and unitedly calling upon the American people for full justice.” Someone in the audience demanded “an eye for an eye,” to wild applause. The Senator mildly reiterated his call for maturity, moderation, and nonviolence.\textsuperscript{25}

Their people’s suffering was, of course, deplorable. Montoya decried police brutality, bigoted judges, unrepresentative draft boards, shady employers, insensitive doctors, and indifferent teachers. He criticized condescension and stereotyping by advertising firms, and excoriated banks for refusing to lend to Spanish-speaking businesses. “Yet of all the second class treatment inflicted upon our communities,” he claimed, “the worst has come from the national government itself.” It was a “true national disgrace,” that “we are qualified to die for America and be mentioned in holiday speeches, but not good enough to rise to the top by merit in our own government’s civil service.” Particularly shameful was the government’s antidiscrimination

\textsuperscript{24} Joseph Montoya, “Unidos,” Box 76, Folder 17, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research; Tape #10 “D.C.,” Box 108, Folder 10, José Angel Gutiérrez Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
apparatus, whose equal employment opportunity programs, under current leadership, were
“usually shells and shams.”26

Against a backdrop of widespread poverty, the farmworker movement, Vietnam protests, deep distrust in the justice system, and dilapidated housing, that Montoya saw the Civil Service Commission as perhaps the greatest offender was revealing. It was an argument for middle-class inclusion as the best means to group progress, a liberal way of supporting the government while appearing to attack it. Montoya urged his audience to unite not just for their own gain, but to revive the country’s promise. It was essential to his vision that America’s mistreatment of the Spanish-speaking people had been ugly, but that this ugliness was exceptional to the national character. Therefore, despite his stated disappointment in American government, he called upon the assembled to “retain faith in this country, its ideas and institutions.” “Within the institutional framework of this nation, we must create a new path,” he argued. For these reasons and more, the three branches of Spanish-speaking community—for Montoya these were the Hispano, Chicano, and Boricua—must unite and mobilize.27

The reaction to Montoya’s speech was tepid. One man began to shout “Unidos!” over and over again, but failed to rally others. A woman rose to the microphone and denounced the speech as “a lot of empty rhetoric” and the conference as “just an enhancement for your political ambitions.” Judging by the crowd’s reaction, more than a few agreed. For many, the Senator, with his high-pitched voice and clipped diction, epitomized a politician out of touch with his

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
constituents, and the antithesis of the hip and impassioned activists who reserved their support for more charismatic and forceful critics of the status quo.  

Someone called for Reies López Tijerina to take the microphone, hailing Montoya’s bitter foe as “our leader.” For Tijerina, it was delicious revenge. “I bet he [Montoya] never imagined that his organizational work at uniting all the different groups at the nation’s capital would be so that I would speak to them,” he remembered. “Montoya was crushed, and I thought this was but a dream.” The land grant activist came to the stage amid great adulation. “All the time he wants!” screamed a supporter. His memory of triumph notwithstanding, Tijerina gave a rambling speech, in which he chastised the politicians and accused New Mexico police of drugging and raping his wife while he was in prison. The only reason he attended the conference, he said at the time, was to unburden himself of the crime they had committed against his family. Newspapers ran this sensational story rather than provide coverage of the policy and strategy debates taking place in the meeting rooms.”

A Temporary Cultural Conquest of Nationalism

Montoya’s argument for a pan-Hispanic community forged through the collective exercise of American citizenship left attendees nonplussed, but the audience had far more praise for the second day’s major speechmaker. Joseph Monserrat was born in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, his family migrated to New York, and he grew up in East Harlem during the Great Depression. From 1950 to 1969, he directed the New York office of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor’s

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28 Ibid.
Migration Division, the principal agency charged with ameliorating Puerto Ricans’ conditions on the mainland. His “Bronx Yiddish accent” on full display, he struck all the right notes in a rollicking, unscripted half-hour sermon on the many cultural affinities of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans. He would switch suddenly from shout to whisper, building from prose to song, and he stirred the crowd.

Like Montoya, Monserrat argued that persistent exclusion and discrimination had provided common ground for the Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans. His imagined political community was not enclosed neatly within the American story, though. Nor did it depend upon U.S. citizenship or institutions for validation. Instead, it was something more personal, a latent truth only needing recognition to have meaning. Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans existed as members of a family, he argued, prior to and independent of any national identity. The two groups had differences, of course. But he said that any “heated discussions” occurred primarily “because we’ve never sat down this way before and talked in a large group,” and because, as a people, “we’ve got a lot to say.” Disagreements over policy or strategy merely demonstrated that this family, “la familia de la raza,” was “beginning to unite itself, and united it is.” He called upon the two peoples to defend their common interest by converting their familial bond into a political one.

Whereas Montoya avoided talk of racial difference, drawing upon American citizenship, Monserrat cast his gaze beyond the nation’s borders to embrace and redefine it. The turmoil the

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32 Tape #11, Side A, Box 108, Folder 11, Josè Angel Gutiérrez Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.
United States was experiencing was its part of a “worldwide social revolution,” he said. “The nonwhites of the world are saying we’re tired of carrying the white man’s burden and we’re going to shift some of that burden over onto him.” Mexican American and Puerto Rican unity required rejecting “the whole crazy scheme around skin color” practiced in the United States. “We, who are the integrated people of the country, because we are black and we are white and we’re Mexicano and we are Indio,” he argued, must not accept “the color values” of blacks or whites. To do so would “divide our own family in half,” and lead the family to “begin to use terms we have never permitted ourselves to use.” Denying that they had sought to benefit way from the establishment or maintenance of America’s color line, or that Mexico or Puerto Rico had their own racial hierarchies, was a powerful act of forgetting. On the other hand, given the tendency of others to build pan-Hispanic solidarity out of anti-black sentiment, the argument can be seen as a step toward ethnic inclusiveness and interracial cooperation. The Spanish-speaking people were at once a multi-racial and therefore putatively non-racial coalition for humankind.33

However much Monserrat argued that these people existed independently of national constraints, they needed to assert power within a national space, something that required them to come to grips with their common place in the United States. First, their historical primacy in North America justified their claims. Monserrat, like Montoya, portrayed his people as predecessors of Anglo America, calling Ponce De León “the first Puerto Rican migrant.” The crowd erupted with cheers and laughter when he explained their shared history of having preceded the Mayflower, “that very overcrowded little ship from whom everyone in America

33 Ibid.; On racial identity among Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, see, among others, Neil Foley, Quest For Equality; Lorrin Thomas, Puerto Rican Citizen; and Ruth Glasser, My Music is My Flag Puerto Rican Musicians and Their New York Communities, 1917-1940 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
wants to be a descendent of.” Had they known it would later be so important, “we would have been there to greet them not only with frijoles, we would have greeted them in Spanish.”

Unlike Montoya, proud descendent of Spanish explorers, the New Yorker acknowledged their people’s shared immigrant history. Unlike the majority of immigrants, however, whom he described as having been swallowed up by Americanization, his people would amass the power to defend their language, their culture, and their community. They would break the tradition of a coercive melting pot. They would transform the shame that generations of immigrants had felt at being outsiders, redeeming their sacrifice and the nation at the same time through their pursuit of cultural and political autonomy.

In this context of worldwide revolution, this American outsider, “la familia de la raza,” could both improve its condition and prepare the United States for the dawning epoch in which nonwhite peoples had their say. They were a timeless group, extant prior to the American nation. And yet they were a new people poised to shower their gifts of enlightenment and tolerance upon the country, educating and enabling it to meet a new day in world history. All they had to do was unite.

To sustained shouts of approval, Monserrat concluded by leading the crowd in a version of “La Cucaracha,” its lyrics reconfigured to commemorate the coming together of Chicanos and Boricuas. The crowd began to chant “Unidos! Unidos! Unidos!” It is unclear if Saturday’s meetings, or the socializing that evening, had actually convinced people to see each other in a

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34 Tape #11, Side A, Box 108, Folder 11, José Angel Gutiérrez Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.
35 Ibid.
more positive light, or if Monserrat was simply the better speaker. Regardless, there was good feeling heading into the conference’s last hours.

**Outcomes and Accomplishments**

Over two days, the participants reached consensus on most of their nascent coalition’s principles and objectives. Committees presented more than 100 resolutions to the assembly, usually broad statements appealing to all members of the coalition, and the overwhelming majority of these were accepted. They called for an end to the Vietnam War. They called for fair funding in antipoverty programs. They criticized all levels of government for failing to achieve “acceptable patterns of employment” for their people, and to enforce equal opportunity legislation in the private sector.\(^36\) They demanded a “fair share formula” so that government jobs and public resources allocated would “reflect the ethnic population served,” and that statistics be specific enough to ensure a reasonable distribution both for Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans.\(^37\) They demanded control of the educational process, open admission to universities, and the training of bilingual and bicultural teachers. They called for official recognition “that the language of our people is Spanish” and for HEW Title VII bilingual programs so that their people could “retain a Spanish language identity.”\(^38\) In an important demonstration of common ground on a volatile issue that affected each group differently, they defeated a resolution supporting Roybal’s efforts to place sanctions on employers who hired undocumented workers.

\(^36\) Tape #11, Side A, Box 108, Folder 11, José Angel Gutiérrez Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.

\(^37\) Tape #11, Side B, Box 108, Folder 11, José Angel Gutiérrez Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.

\(^38\) Ibid.
Finally, they resolved to create lobbying and political action groups in Washington to urge government responses to these and other needs.³⁹

Despite these areas of agreement, not all was perfect harmony. No doubt disquieting to the congressmen who had brought them together, those participants who remained until Sunday seemed genuinely poised to reject Democrats and Republicans. The Chicano party, La Raza Unida, had won control of two Texas counties and had begun statewide campaigning in Texas. It was a clear alternative for independent political action, and its leader was organizing at the Unidos conference.⁴⁰ In the end, however, third party advocates were forced to accept a compromise resolution promising to “study” the feasibility of such a move.⁴¹

The greatest controversy arose from the place of Puerto Rican concerns within the conference. According to one account, the Federal Systems workshop was dominated by Puerto Ricans who demanded, among other things, that the conference focus on correcting the “alleged imbalance in Federal employment and other benefits between Puerto Ricans and Mexican-Americans.” A group of Puerto Ricans disrupted the proceedings. They demanded “a separate Cabinet Committee for Puerto Ricans” and for the Senate to refuse to confirm Henry Ramirez, who had fired two Puerto Ricans in one of his first acts in charge. In the end this resolution was defeated 22-20, but its terms and the closeness of the vote showed the extent to which national rivalry continued to threaten the conference.⁴²

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⁴⁰ Montejano, *Quixote’s Soldiers*, 192.
⁴² Jose Toro to Phillip Sanchez, October 27, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
Puerto Rican independence politics deeply divided the political strategy committee as well. Activists put forward resolutions asking the United Nations to take up the case for Puerto Rican autonomy. Was the colonization of a Spanish-speaking people a common concern for all Spanish-speaking people in the United States? The conference planners took the position that the island’s political status was for its residents alone to determine. This was hardly satisfactory for those in attendance who considered themselves Puerto Ricans, despite their residence on the mainland. “So we’re second class Puerto Ricans, and second class Americans?” one woman asked. Another Puerto Rican argued that the conference was not the place for such a resolution, and urged political action in New York and Chicago instead. However, another view circulating was that this question was a defining test of the Spanish-speaking people as a common enterprise. Someone insisted that the audience had an ethnic obligation to align with Puerto Rican independence. “We want you to understand that they are part of the raza, although they are in the Caribbean,” he said. In by far the closest vote that the committee took, the resolution went to a recount and was finally defeated by 2 votes out of more than one hundred cast. Several minutes of applause and uproar followed the vote, further straining the coalition.

On Sunday, crucial issues remained, but so many participants had departed that the conference’s political balance shifted just as the final resolutions were being voted upon. One observer noted that while Monserrat had been “able to bring people together” after Saturday’s contentious meetings, “as soon as the presentation and discussion of the resolutions started, there

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43 Tape #12, Box 108, Folder 12, José Angel Gutiérrez Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.
44 Ibid.
seemed to be no unity.”*45 Federal employees in attendance argued that radical voices, especially those of Puerto Ricans from the Northeast, came to dominate the proceedings.46 Another participant saw the obvious “fear of most delegates to engage in heated debate over conference issues with the politically-oriented and bull-dozing tactics of Puerto Ricans.”**47

The entire conference nearly collapsed during the critical debate over how to structure the Spanish-speaking political organization. Rather than construct a “permanent coalition,” they were only able to muster a temporary committee. Even this tentative step showed the boundaries of pan-Hispanic solidarity. Delegates fought over the board’s composition, with a vocal group refusing to admit Cubans at all. One participant recalled that “when the Cubans were mentioned as possible delegates, the Puerto Rican delegates rose up in arms,” with the Young Lords and other young activists threatening “to overcome and crowd out the Conference Chairman's control of the assembly.”48 “We’re being racist against our own people,” pleaded defenders of Cuban involvement, but they were “shouted down” by those claiming that, “they [the Cubans] don’t share our problems.”49

Their compromise established a 53-member committee with a carefully apportioned membership. Fifteen Chicanos and two Puerto Ricans would be selected from the Southwest, fifteen Puerto Ricans and two Chicanos from the Northeast, and eleven Mexican Americans and

45 Leonor Muñoz, “Memorandum for the Director,” October 26, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
46 Aurora Arredondo to Phillip Sanchez, October 27, 1971; and Muñoz, “Memorandum for the Director,” both in Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
47 Memorandum, Thomas H. Martinez to Joseph Montoya, November 5, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
48 Ibid.
Puerto Ricans from the Midwest.\textsuperscript{50} The remaining quota would be allocated among “other Latin American citizens.”\textsuperscript{51} In a tense atmosphere dedicated to unifying of the Spanish-speaking peoples of the United States, no places were reserved for Cubans, who remained a Spanish-speaking people apart.

**Backlash and Disappointment**

The “pioneering coalition” predicted at the start of the weekend was much less than that by the end.\textsuperscript{52} Able to agree on certain common claims, the assembled groups were nonetheless bedeviled by factions and were far from having established even the appearance of pan-Hispanic solidarity. In fact, the politicians who planned the event proceeded to back away from it even before its conclusion, canceling their Monday press conference. Newspapers reported that Roybal and Badillo “left the conference discouraged, even angry.” Unity was “an idea whose time has not yet come,” lamented Badillo.\textsuperscript{53} Montoya abjured further involvement, citing “restrictions upon the use of congressional offices and staffs for other than strictly congressional business.” He directed activists’ inquiries to Paul Sedillo, a leader in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and chairman of the Unidos Conference’s task force.\textsuperscript{54}

The congressmen had learned several lessons that would have been familiar to Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, or any national figure trying to harness pan-Hispanic politics. Big events to bring the populations together required great expenditures of time and effort, but

\textsuperscript{50} *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1971.

\textsuperscript{51} Thomas H. Martinez to Joseph Montoya, November 5, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.

\textsuperscript{52} *New York Times*, October 24, 1971.


\textsuperscript{54} Joseph Montoya to Samuel Gonzales, November 30, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
offered highly uncertain gains. Roybal and Badillo had needed a large and diverse crowd to show other power brokers, especially those in the Democratic Party, that they were to be respected and courted. They could hardly endorse calls for a third party. Puerto Rican independence was yet another political minefield. Moreover, the big tent approach meant having to tame a raucous and divided crowd. The mainstream politicians were also vulnerable to being outshone by more charismatic leaders like Tijerina. They could not have enjoyed being ridiculed as self-interested hacks, and could not count on their supporters to defend them successfully against the militants. “Unless the moderates stop being afraid of offending somebody,” Badillo grumbled, “coalition will have to wait—another generation maybe.”

Although they were attacked from the radical left, the congressmen did not avoid the scorn of traditionalists for their foray into pan-ethnic politics. Henry B. González—who did not attend the conference—spoke out against its particularism even before it opened. He said that “we should not pretend that the problems of the Spanish-surnamed are so unique that the program would not benefit all Americans,” and expressed his fear that organizers were isolating their constituents and making it difficult to find ways “to enlist majority support” for their goals. Montoya faced a more complicated political terrain still. Militants were deriding him as a do-nothing or enemy, yet he would be criticized allowing the militants to attend his conference in the first place. A Las Cruces woman called his attempt to be an ethnic leader “belittling.” “Yes, you are Spanish-American,” she wrote, “but heretofore you have been bigger than

56 Los Angeles Times, October 22, 1971.
57 Joseph J. Quintana, Jr. to Joseph Montoya, October 25, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
Spanish-American, Anglo….You have represented all of us and that is why we vote for you.”

“Do not, I beg of you, at this late date become a Chicano.”

**Pride and Optimism**

Despite the politicians’ discouragement, the Unidos conference tapped into a growing interest in pan-Hispanic alliances, and encouraged organizing across the country. A Colombian living in New York wrote Montoya of his excitement “that so many Hispanic people of all nationalities” had shown “enthusiasm” for a common goal, and offered to raise funds for the coalition. A LULAC leader from El Paso praised “the principles of the conference, especially in uniting all of our forces…to eliminate the thorny problems that have plagued our ethnic group for so long.” A councilman from Pueblo, Colorado reported that the event had “attracted attention from all levels of society in our state and community.” He had a taped copy of Montoya’s speech played on the radio, and was planning to hold a state follow-up conference the next month. Vilma Martinez, who later became General Counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund (MALDEF), congratulated Roybal “for having conducted the first meeting”

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58 Such correspondence appears more frequently in Montoya’s records as he became more outspoken against discrimination, especially in the many federal workplaces that drove New Mexico’s economy. Doris M. Mawson to Joseph Montoya, October 29, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.

59 Luis Vargas to Montoya, October 27, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.

60 E.J. Moreno to Joseph Montoya, October 26, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.

61 Henry G. Reyes to Montoya, October 28, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
of its kind, arguing that “without unity we will undoubtedly remain on the bottom of the totem pole, even if 100% of us were to be educated.”

Pan-Hispanic cooperation suggested a business opportunity as well. A New York-based educational publisher found it “beautiful to have the opportunity of meeting our Chicano brothers” and requested a conference mailing list so that she could send catalogs to the bilingual educators in attendance. She founded a group of Puerto Rican teachers from the area “to discuss the results and future” of the coalition. They had been angry about “the involvement and disruption of political groups” at the event, and were concerned that the “continuance of this National organization” might be in jeopardy.

Even those frustrated at the fractiousness they observed in October could argue that moderate voices had to take charge because, for better or worse, the groups were stuck with each other. One Unidos participant had learned “that the Hispano-Chicano elements of the Southwest, Northwest and Mid-West” had better “sharpen up their political acumen” and learn “to compete against the sharper and keener political minds of the Puerto Ricans, Cubans and other Latin Americans, who have been oppressed peoples and have lived in controversy most of their lives.” He urged an end to “the easy-going up fix methods and ‘hasta mañana’ ways of the Hispano-Chicano” and called on them “to study, learn and associate more with other ethnic minority members who composed “LA RAZA COSMICA, LATINA u BRONCE.” If the Hispano-Chicano subgroup did not “compete against them to make a better and more unified plan to win

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62 Vilma Martinez to Edward E. Roybal, January 13, 1972, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
63 Dolores Armada to Joseph Montoya, October 27, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research; Armada to Montoya, November 9, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
the many battles ahead,” none would “obtain an equal share of our goals” or receive “our civil and human rights guaranteed under the Constitution and Laws of the United States of America.”

The Unidos conference inspired another view, in which pan-Hispanic politics was not a productive competition among regions and ethnicities but the transcendence of their differences. This perspective had strong appeal in the Midwest, because the region contained large, but not overwhelming, populations of Mexican American and Puerto Ricans. Indeed, one participant remarked that “the Chicano and Boricua of the Midwest displayed a stronger unity than any other region” at the conference. “The Midwest, without a doubt, will be the laboratory for the ‘Unidad’ between the Mexican-Americans and the Puerto Ricans,” he predicted. Chicago activist Samuel Gonzales remarked that Midwestern activists, lacking a “national level” representative of their own, needed the congressmen to continue the pan-ethnic project. He argued that, “the key to a strong coalition of Latinos across this nation lies in the Midwest where large communities of Chicanos and Boricuas live and struggle for common concern” and was impatient, and angry at their apparent abdication of leadership. In the following months, his coalition continued to grow and educate potential members in Illinois.

Unlike those who viewed nationalism as a building block for pan-ethnicity, Gonzales saw it as a transitory phase, and called upon the groups to embrace a new primary identity. He

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64 Memorandum, Thomas H. Martinez to Joseph Montoya, November 5, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
65 Donald Maldonado, Untitled Report, October, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
66 “We find it alarming to read your letter which sounds like a speech to an interested, but uncommitted audience. We are past that here. We do not have to be sold on the concept. We accept them and the challenge of organizing. We are now throwing the ball back to you for the leadership and push that this Coalition must have,” he wrote. Samuel Gonzales to Joseph Montoya, November 17, 1971, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research, Box 158, Folder 14.

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argued that “acting alone as Chicanos, Boricuas, etc., we can never make it as a political power,” and called upon them to “Unite and Act as One People and support each other nationwide, as well as on a state and local level.” The process was simple: “We strengthen the unity between us, first. Then we rid ourselves of the detrimental practice of separatism thru national identity (like Chicano, Boricua, etc.; which the astute Anglo will try to use to split us), and instead, embrace the universality of La Gente Latina.” Their common experience, regardless of nationality or region, was their suffering in the United States. In Gonzales’ vision, it would propel them forward: “We all feel the painful flames of oppression into which we have all been cast by the Anglo society. But what they (Anglos) do not [know] is that those same flames have welded our people together in an unbreakable bond of unyielding determination to see all our people Free of social discrimination and all that it entails.”

**Public Sector Workers and a Developing Pan-Ethnic Consciousness**

Gonzales’ ambition for personal and group transformation was one that few political activists could achieve. The Unidos conference did succeed in more modest ways, though. The event resonated strongly among federal employees, one of its major audiences. After all, these public sector workers had much in common heading into the weekend. Regardless of region or nationality, they had the same employer, the federal government. They operated within roughly the same pay grades, they encountered the same affirmative action programs not designed to include them, and they most often did so in the same city, Washington. These facts suggest that they could be uniquely disposed to the conference’s message of pan-Hispanic unity.

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67 Samuel Gonzales, “Only Through Unity Will We Get Equality and Justice,” Box 163, Folder 3, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
Employees of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) were a particularly strong presence at the conference. Most were based in the Washington, D.C. headquarters, but others came from offices in Denver, Dallas, Chicago, New York, and San Francisco. They were Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Cuban-American. With few exceptions, the event gave them tremendous hope. “History was made at this past weekend,” wrote one OEO worker. “Never before had 2,000 Spanish-Speaking ethnically diverse individuals of the ‘Latino’ communities across the nation met to discuss differing problematic issues and at the same time strive for common goals,” he enthusiastically reported. 68

Another OEO staffer remarked that, while the conference’s resolutions were important, “the simple fact that two thousand people, separated ideologically and ethnically came together for a common goal, which was unity, and attained it, marks that occasion as a success.” 69

A field representative based in Minnesota believed he had witnessed “a major turning point” and “one of the most historic moments of the Spanish-speaking community and our society as a whole.” He was thrilled to have been part of a “union” which he felt “was not motivated by dissent, hate or anti-American feeling” but one “full of hope and a desire to make the dream of America a reality to everyone.” 70

Indeed, the weekend was personally transformative and professionally rejuvenating, reminding many why they had first gone to work for the OEO. One expressed his great thanks, for being allowed to attend, since he had “achieved a better understanding of my fellow ‘Latino

68 Carlos A, Guffain, “Memorandum For The Director,” October 26, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
69 Frank Fuentes, Jr., “Memorandum For The Director,” October 27, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
70 Donald Maldonado, Untitled Report, October, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
brothers’ of all ethnic groups.” Another reflected that “it was indeed a momentous occasion for me to observe and participate in a bipartisan effort to unite” all of the groups. She celebrated “the growth process that is occurring in our people,” their ability to “come together to express frustrations, injustices, needs and problems…to develop goals, set priorities, establish measurable objectives, evaluate processes…united in a common cause which transcends factions, geography, etc.” For her, it “was no more and no less than the OEO philosophy as I see it.” Considering that this was not necessarily a day off, but a weekend spent in a smoky and hot motel, such words take on added significance.

These government workers were self-aware agents of pan-ethnic uplift, which they hoped to achieve via their people’s incorporation in American institutions. They were beginning to organize themselves to promote their interests and gradualist politics. One public employee in Denver had listened to tapes of the conference, and agreed with Senator Montoya that “there has been too much militancy, and organized civil delinquency.” (Indeed, most federal workers who mentioned the conference’s overt expressions of nationalism did so disapprovingly.) He declared his support for Montoya’s “kind of leadership,” and said that a similar philosophy had “produced a large Union in ‘IMAGE’ Incorporated Mexican American Government Employees.” IMAGE was then uniting Mexican American public employees throughout the West. Soon it would expand east and change its name to accommodate the sensibilities of Puerto Ricans and other Spanish-speaking Americans in the federal civil service. In line with the

71 Carlos A, Guffain, “Memorandum For The Director,” October 26, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
72 Vilma Gorena-Guinn to Phillip Sanchez, October 27, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
conference’s animating spirit, they would argue as one people in the federal battle for affirmative action (see Chapter 9).  

Conclusion

The Unidos conference left a mixed legacy for pan-Hispanic politics. The “Spanish-speaking Coalition” continued to be represented publicly by Paul Sedillo, director of the U.S. Catholic Conference’s Division of the Spanish-speaking. He called for an interest-based organizing to avoid the conflicts that beset the October event. The goal was to identify “platforms…to support without having to get into any cultural differences between Puerto Ricans, Cubans and Mexican Americans,” he said. They would continue to pursue the balance of power in national elections by limiting their leadership to those without party ties. “We have to form a block and not be traditional Democrats or traditional Republicans because they have given us a job every now and then,” he said. Nevertheless, he encouraged the coalition to target the poor, “the real experts on housing and unemployment.” Pan-ethnic power could not be achieved “by continually supporting individuals who are going to address themselves only to the elite.”

Although Sedillo planned a follow-up conference in Washington at the end of April 1972 to “implement the policies of the entire Spanish-speaking people of the country,” no record of it exists in the major U.S. newspapers. Instead, MAPA, LULAC, and the G.I. Forum held a “National Chicano Political Caucus,” ostensibly including Puerto Ricans, in San José, California

73 Leo A. Espinosa, to Joseph Montoya, November 6, 1971, Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
74 Jim Maldonado, “Chicano movement: political aims,” Santa Fe New Mexican, February 15, 1972, Box 163, Folder 3, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
during that last week in April. Opponents of these “traditionalist” groups led a walkout in which activists endorsed the La Raza Unida Party—the Chicano third party—to organize nationwide, and supported a series of resolutions focusing on “all Chicano organizations working for the liberation of Chicanos.” Nationalist politics, however complicated, continued to proceed more easily than pan-ethnic politics.

The Democratic congressmen who planned the Unidos conference were not united either. Badillo backed away from working with Roybal to further the balance of power strategy, endorsing Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern in April, and calling the Senator the “best hope” to aid the urban poor. Badillo seems to have wanted the conference’s resolutions introduced at the Democratic National Convention. However, at least as of June 1972, Roybal believed that this would “jeopardize any chance of building a truly bipartisan organization dedicated to the best interests of our people.” Despite Roybal’s effort to keep what remained of the Spanish-speaking coalition unaligned as long as possible, he and Badillo ended up joining the Democratic National Committee’s “Latino Caucus,” and pressing for specific promises of “proportional representation” from the McGovern campaign. By August, Joseph Montoya had become chairman of the McGovern effort in New Mexico. Against Richard Nixon, the balance of power would have to wait.

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To obtain power and independence in the U.S. political system, Mexican American and Puerto Rican congressmen had tried to create something new. As of 1972, however, the Spanish-speaking political community they had hoped to build was still divided by region, nationality, and by interest. Beneath the veneer of unity that pan-Hispanic political activists attempted to maintain lay fundamental weaknesses born of inconsistencies unresolved and trust not yet established. That did not mean that the notion of a “Spanish-speaking Vote” was unimportant. The Nixon administration would make skillful use of it as the president marched toward a landslide reelection in 1972.
Chapter 8:

Nixon’s “Brown Mafia” and the Middle-Class Road to Ethnic Votes in 1972

I’m tired of people like Sargent Shriver…coming here and telling us how poor we are. He and all the others are giving us a psychological whipping.…We’re tired of all the empty promises. They [the Democrats] had plenty of years in the White House and they didn’t show us much.

— Armando Mena, Nixon supporter, 1972

Richard Nixon believed solid evidence justified his prejudices. The president had accumulated a trove of racial wisdom during his decades in public life. His reading, his travels, his many occasions to interact with foreign dignitaries, all led him to believe that the globe was divided into several racial civilizations, each at a different stage of development. Thanks to migration, both coerced and voluntary, the United States of America included countless representatives the world’s supposedly unequal societies. They posed special dilemmas for policymakers in the era of equal opportunity.

As the 1972 campaign was in the home stretch, Nixon held forth on the matter to an American Dental Association delegation visiting him in the Oval Office. “There’s always a question these days saying environment is everything,” he told the dentists. “Now we’re beginning to find that inheritance makes a great deal of difference.” To test his hypothesis, Nixon asked if African Americans made good dentists, and about Howard University’s dental program in particular. His guests seemed uncomfortable, but informed him that Howard did not, in fact, turn out many top-flight dentists. They responded in much the same way to a similar question about Mexicans in the dental arts. The president felt that Cubans must be different, but

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let the matter go. In any event, he said, leading a nation that clamored for equality in everything, even as some groups were just not up to standard, was a real challenge. But what was a president to do?

Do you tell the Brown and the Black that he’s destined to [fail]? No, you don’t tell him that….I have a different theory about this. My view is sort of a combination of genetics and environment. What is the oldest civilization? The oriental? What is the next oldest? Well, it sure ain’t the blacks. It’s probably the whites, but we aren’t very old. Western Europe? We were still eating each other, you know, and they had a great civilization in China and Japan. Then, the blacks. My God, they’re very close to the savage business. You see? When we talk about these things…if we just give them enough education and the same opportunity, that all of a sudden they are going to be equal? It’s not going to happen.

Instead, he declared, “What’s going to happen is over a period of time, they may develop the potential but it’s going to take, we’re not talking in terms of 5 years or 10 years or 25 years. We’re talking here in terms of hundreds of years.”

Of course there were exceptions. Nixon believed that every benighted civilization produced a few talented people who could hold their own with anyone, regardless of race. The Irishman Edmund Burke, Massachusetts’ African American Senator Edward Brooke, and the black football star Gayle Sayers were some examples he cited. “We got Brooke, and we've got that fellow, the head of Equal Opportunities, the thin fellow from Philadelphia [William H. Brown III]. He's got it,” Nixon once told domestic policy advisor Daniel Patrick Moynihan. While African Americans were on the bottom of his racial scale, he continued, “you have a hell of a time also, may I say it, with a lot of Mexicans.”

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2 OVAL 801-19; October 17, 1972; White House Tapes; NPM.
3 WH 10-116; October 7, 1971; White House Tapes; NPM.
Regardless of his belief in a group’s inferiority, Nixon was pragmatic enough to appreciate that common sense was not always presidential. The United States was a democracy, after all. He explained to Moynihan:

My theory is that the responsibility of a president, in my present position, first is to know these things....But also, my theory is, that I must do everything that I possibly can to deny them....I'm putting it out all over this place that we have got to proceed on the assumption, not that everybody is equal, but that everybody should have an equal opportunity, and that anybody might go to the top.4

This way of thinking strongly influenced the administration’s outreach to Spanish-Speaking voters in 1972. The White House would identify and elevate talented Mexican Americans to positions of influence. Their stories of success and association with the presidency would demonstrate that Nixon honored cultural difference as an important dimension of American life, yet still show that an ethos of competitive individualism remained at the core of Americanism. Nixon praised individual social mobility, entrepreneurialism, professional networking, and white-collar affirmative action as the solutions for the social inequality of the “Spanish-speaking” American. As opponents attacked his alleged indifference toward the poor of this group, Nixon targeted the middle class, and those talented go-getters who aspired to join it.

Although the White House targeted Mexican Americans first, its argument that individual respectability and aspiration constituted ethnic authenticity was sufficiently elastic to apply to other Spanish-speaking Americans. The administration’s desire to use the pan-ethnicity’s numbers remained in tension with its short-term interests and long-term prejudices. The administration continued to conceive of a national Spanish-speaking vote, and promoted the idea

4 Ibid.
of a single, national Spanish-speaking community, while subordinates systematically determined which of its components deserved federal dollars and campaign visits. Campaign research was ethnic research, as Mexican American political insiders advanced judgments about and withheld funds from ethnic groups—Puerto Ricans, especially—whom they deemed unlikely to support the president. The White House invoked pan-Hispanic unity with some success in 1972, but undermined the concept’s long-term utility by distributing material rewards in ways that heightened perceptions of difference among the Spanish-speaking populations.

A Minority for the New Majority

The administration housed its effort to win the Spanish-speaking vote in the Committee to Re-elect the President (CREEP), which it had established in the spring of 1971 to consolidate its control over the campaign. From its offices at 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue, the CREEP appropriated minority and ethnic outreach functions ordinarily undertaken by the Republican National Committee. The RNC’s Mexican American program was one of those assumed by the CREEP, where it would be overseen by Nixon’s chief political advisor and interest group liaison, Chuck Colson.  

Colson’s staff found evidence to confirm their boss’s belief that Spanish-speaking Americans could be Nixon supporters. An October 1971 poll of Mexican Americans in Orange and Los Angeles Counties showed that 83.6 percent were Democrats, and almost 8 in 10 believed that Democrats would “keep the country prosperous,” but that 75.9 percent—a slightly

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5 As Nixon’s political counselor and interest group liaison Charles W. Colson built a staff of nearly two dozen by early 1971, the RNC’s Mexican American and Catholic outreach program was cut drastically. See Reeves, Alone in the White House, 297; and Mason, Quest for a New Majority, 131-2.
greater percentage than among nominal whites and 20 percent more than among blacks—identified as members of “the silent majority.” Moreover, their party loyalties were flexible. At least 30 percent indicated that they voted for Republicans at least half of the time.\(^6\)

Such information convinced Colson to make the “Spanish-speaking” one of four key “Interest Groups,” (along with Labor, “Middle America,” and the “Ethnic-Catholic” group) that the White House would make special efforts to target in 1971.\(^7\) They were “fertile ground to be plowed hard,” said Colson, who called upon Domestic Council director John Erlichman to find “ways to get better identification” with these voters. He wanted Erlichman to push “the Spanish-speaking press” and “the Spanish-speaking organizations with whom we have been developing contacts” to do more to help the administration.\(^8\)

Faith in this population’s cultural homogeneity overcame the CREEP’s concerns about its political divisions. CREEP staff gave the impression that “each group must be handled separately with specially-tailored appeals.” Cuban-Americans, “upwardly mobile and avidly anti-Communist,” were the most likely to support Nixon, while Puerto Ricans, “the nation’s most impoverished minority,” were “least attractable.” Despite these differences in economic status and foreign policy views, the CREEP argued that cultural tendencies predisposed the meta group to conservative appeals. “All Spanish-speaking Americans share certain characteristics – a strong family structure, deep ties to the Church, a generally hard-line position on the social

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\(^8\) Memorandum Charles W. Colson to John Ehrlichman, December 20, 1971, Box 4, EX HU, WHCF, NPM.
issue,” they claimed. Nixon could produce “some movement” in their voting patterns if he convinced them that he “has recognized their social and economic problems.”

**Surrogate Failures**

Despite the White House’s great hopes for pan-Hispanic politics, the public faces of its Spanish-speaking outreach program suffered several initial setbacks. First, the aggressive drive to reorganize the Cabinet Committee for electoral duty made it more difficult to balance the claims of Puerto Ricans and Cubans with those of Mexican Americans. Days after being named chairman, Henry Ramirez fired two Puerto Rican employees, who then accused the CCOSS of pervasive discrimination against their people. Republican Senators Jacob Javits of New York and Charles Percy of Illinois held up Ramirez’s confirmation until the administration promised to name additional Puerto Ricans to the Cabinet Committee staff, but this concession did not end the problems. Ramirez feuded with CCOSS Executive Director Ed Aponte, a Puerto Rican appointed in October of 1971 to satisfy the Senators. Ramirez recalls that Aponte insisted on controlling the CCOSS east of the Mississippi River, where Puerto Ricans were more likely to live, and on developing programs for the island’s population, both moves Ramirez resisted. Ramirez soon announced that Aponte was out, and that Reynaldo Maduro, a Puerto Rican Republican, would replace him, again angering the Senators.

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12 In New York’s Spanish-language press, Javits stated his displeasure. He claimed that Maduro, who had been living in Mexico for the previous decade, “does not know the Puerto Rican communities in the United States very well, especially those living in New York City; he could not represent them since he does not know its necessities; how to meet their objectives, and how to help them obtain the recognition that they are entitled to.” Luisa Quintero,
Believing that regional ethnic rivalries made a joint White House conference likely to “end in disorder,” the administration sent staff to court these voters where they were.\textsuperscript{13}

However, the White House had to warn surrogates that, “the most sensitive area of the entire Spanish-speaking picture is the resentment of Puerto Ricans against Mexican Americans.” A briefing memorandum for Puerto Rican areas outlined a policy “not to mention Henry Ramirez,” the Cabinet Committee, “any Mexican American, or any issue seen as wholly Mexican, such as bilingual education.”\textsuperscript{14}

Nevertheless, administration surrogates had trouble persuading audiences outside of Washington that they could help them, stumbling in their unfamiliarity with local ethnic nuances. Ramirez, for example, failed to take the measure of nationalist sentiment when on a mission to consolidate support among Miami’s Cuban exile community. He apparently committed the cardinal sin of telling the Cubans to focus on U.S. politics and “to forget about the return to the homeland.” According to Edgardo Buttari, a Miami power broker on the CCOSS advisory committee, “a Democrat properly instructed, would have caused less harm than he did.” Even Ramirez’s choice of meeting place had been a disaster. He convened the Cubans, Buttari claimed, at a former “Mexican restaurant that went bankrupt precisely for being Mexican and located in…Little Havana.” Buttari advised the administration to “avoid any handling” of Cuban affairs by “Mexican functionaries” such as Ramirez, since “the Cubans feel greatly hurt by the

\textsuperscript{13} Russell Dean to Clark MacGregor, June 16, 1971, quoted in Graham, \textit{The Civil Rights Era}, 318.

\textsuperscript{14} “Briefing for Puerto Rican Areas,” Box 17, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
Mexicans for their pro-Castrism and the persecution to which they have subjected the Cubans” since the Cuban Revolution.15

In October of 1971, Robert Finch, Henry Ramirez, OEO Director Philip Sánchez, and Department of Health, Education, and Welfare staff traveled to Chicago and New York to demonstrate Nixon’s desire to bring federal attention to the Spanish-speaking communities there.16 In spite of their professedly pure intentions, the delegation found no shortage of anger and resentment. The Chicago meetings were characterized by “verbal assaults, punctuated at times by cursing and walkouts.” According to one witness, “both Ramirez and Sánchez got roasted,” serving as “punching bags for” the disgruntled Chicagoans. The activists bitterly resented that federal jobs and programs for the Spanish-speaking all seemed to go to elsewhere, especially the Southwest. Puerto Ricans protested for a representative on the Cabinet Committee, since Ramirez then appeared to be purging Puerto Ricans from the operation.17

Although the press saw the Chicago trip as a debacle, Finch remained sanguine about converting Mexican American and Puerto Rican resentment into Republican gains. “After having two miserable damn days with that Cabinet on Spanish-speaking” he told the president, “I think they’re up for grabs.” “There are four-hundred thousand of them in Chicago alone,” he marveled. Illinois politicians had gerrymandered the group out of any influence, and they were angry about it. “We’ve got a little something going there,” he said. “You can get a big chunk of

15 Edgardo Buttari to Charles G. Rebozo, undated, Box 21, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
16 Their stated aim was “to upgrade the Spanish Speaking people’s position in the federal government by assuring that they have access to positions of power” and to ensure that “programs, grants, and dollar expenditures, reach Hispanic communities in numbers proportionate to their population.” Press Release, “Statement by Acting Chairman Henry M. Ramirez before a group of Spanish speaking community leaders on the eve of the Regional Council meeting in Chicago, Illinois” October 14, 1971, Box 19, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
that vote.” “You really think it is [so]?” asked the President. “It’s not what we’ve done. It’s what the others haven’t,” Finch said, repeating the Republican mantra on this group.¹⁸

The one indisputable bright spot had been Treasurer Romana Bañuelos. However, within weeks of her nomination newspapers were revealing that something more than hard work was behind her success: undocumented immigrants. In October of 1971, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agents raided her Gardena, California food processing plant, accompanied by a Los Angeles Times reporter. A sensational Times editorial recapped the raid, telling of “workers cower[ing] in lavatories and lockers, sprint[ing] across the yard to scale fences, scattering aprons and hats as they ran” from the INS. All told, 36 of the plant’s 300 workers were detained on suspicion of immigration violations, and some were deported that very evening. With her name appearing in a slew of articles on the subject, Bañuelos came to symbolize the unscrupulous employer who exploited illegal immigrants at the average American’s expense.¹⁹ Adding to the White House’s embarrassment, the Washington Post reported on the day after the raid that an undocumented immigrant gardener had been employed on Nixon’s own property at San Clemente the year before.²⁰

¹⁸ OVAL 594-5; October 18, 1971; White House Tapes; NPM.
¹⁹ “Justice in the Immigration Problem,” Los Angeles Times, October 8, 1971; “Treasurer’s Firm Raided For Aliens,” Chicago Tribune, October 6, 1971; “The Illegal Alien: Growing Threat to U.S. Workers,” read one 1972 Los Angeles Times headline by Harry Bernstein, the reporter who had accompanied INS agents on their raid of Bañuelos’s factory. Los Angeles Times, October 22, 1972; the publicity ultimately led to passage of a California state law, signed by Governor Ronald Reagan, making it a crime to knowingly employ an undocumented worker. Reagan pronounced the bill fully compatible with a recent change to state law that made undocumented aliens ineligible to receive welfare payments. Using language that would be familiar decades later, Reagan justified state enforcement of immigration law by criticizing “the federal government’s failure to meet its own obligations in this regard,” and because it had “become increasingly clear that we can no longer wait for Congress to enact legislation to effectively cope with the problem.” Richard West, “Reagan Signs State Ban on Hiring Illegal Aliens,” Los Angeles Times, November 9, 1971.
The Nixon administration launched attacks on the *Los Angeles Times* for the paper’s coverage of the Bañuelos immigration controversy.  

Bañuelos’ labor practices continued to attract undesirable attention. In March of 1972, Teamsters Local 630 struck against her company for refusing to pay above the 5.5 percent wage raise guideline set by federal administrators charged with holding down inflation.²¹ Two weeks later, 700 L.A. Teamsters and Chicano activists picketed outside a G.I. Forum and LULAC testimonial dinner for Nixon’s highest-ranking Mexican American appointees, including Bañuelos.²² As the strike wore on, the Teamsters brought a complaint before the National Labor Relations Board, accusing Bañuelos’s firm of bargaining in bad faith. After the election, the firm

was found guilty of unfair labor practices because Bañuelos’ son threatened to give immigration authorities the names of undocumented employees who supported the strike.23

The “Brown Mafia”

As the surrogates struggled in the field, the CREEP formed a “White House Spanish Speaking Constituent Group Task Force” to coordinate administration outreach among this population. Jokingly known early on as the “Brown Mafia,”24 it included CCOSS Chairman Henry Ramirez, and Carlos Conde, a former Houston Chronicle reporter and current White House media staff member. Joining them was Antonio Rodriguez, a young San Antonio businessman and John Tower campaign worker who had been CCOSS Executive Director before the 1971 relaunch. Alex Armendaris, a Mexican American political consultant from Indiana, was the group’s director.25 He reported to William “Mo” Marumoto, a member of Chuck Colson’s staff. Marumoto was a Japanese American political operative who had been raised in a Mexican neighborhood in Santa Ana, California. Meeting on Mondays, the Brown Mafia organized and analyzed research on the Spanish-speaking vote, wrote talking points and scheduled speaking appearances for administration surrogates, secured jobs and grants for Republicans and pro-Nixon Democrats, and raised money for the campaign. They delivered pro-administration speeches as well. Conde and Rodriguez served more frequently as media contacts. They helped draft the parts of the Republican platform referencing the Spanish-

24 According to Brown Mafia member William Marumoto, this was supposedly in reference to JFK’s “Irish Mafia.” Senate Select Committee, Watergate and Related Activities, Book 13, 5278
speaking, and generally coordinated the political activities of the White House’s high-ranking
Spanish-speaking officials. They also worked to deny federal funds to groups they deemed
insufficiently supportive of the administration, to direct federal money to Nixon fundraisers, and
to fire or transfer enemies in the civil service.

The Brown Mafia labored to convey an impression that the all-important “Spanish-
speaking vote” remained Nixon’s for the taking, and worked to reassure the White House that
they could win this vital bloc over to the Republican side. These Mexican American
Republicans wanted support for their people and to advance themselves in politics. Their
partisan and ethnic loyalties produced a situation of constant tension, in which they had to
underscore the national Spanish-speaking vote’s importance, while analyzing it in ways that cast
doubt on the utility of a pan-Hispanic approach to politics.

The Brown Mafia’s confidential “Plan to Capture the Spanish Speaking Vote,” submitted
in the spring of 1972, illustrates this duality. Using statistics available because of Nixon’s
pressure on the Bureau of the Census, the Brown Mafia identified five crucial states (California,
Texas, Illinois, New York, New Jersey) and one less important state (New Mexico) where
Spanish-speaking voters could “easily determine the outcome of the election.” Because almost
60 percent of Spanish-speaking voters lived in 44 counties in those states, which together held
179 electoral votes, targeting them would be an efficient operation. The Brown Mafia further
underscored the bloc’s importance by showing that they were far more numerous in most of
those states than supporters of Alabama Governor George Wallace.26

26 According to CREEP documents, Nixon would take Florida, Colorado, and Arizona “without heavy reliance on
the Spanish speaking.” Confidential Memo, “The Plan to Capture the Spanish Speaking Vote,” in Senate Select
Committee, Watergate and Related Activities, Book 19, 8620.
Nixon Campaign Poll of Major States in “The Plan to Capture the Spanish-Speaking Vote”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>“No. SS 18 and Over” (1972)</th>
<th>“Republican or Democrat Plurality” (1968)</th>
<th>“Wallace” (1968)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>2,107,895</td>
<td>223,346 (R)</td>
<td>487,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>1,081,527</td>
<td>38,960 (D)</td>
<td>584,269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>1,065,831</td>
<td>370,538 (D)</td>
<td>358,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>296,632</td>
<td>210,010 (R)</td>
<td>624,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>254,117</td>
<td>39,611 (R)</td>
<td>25,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>195,196</td>
<td>134,960 (R)</td>
<td>390,958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>202,176</td>
<td>96,207 (R)</td>
<td>46,573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>182,511</td>
<td>74,171 (R)</td>
<td>60,813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>244,922</td>
<td>61,261 (R)</td>
<td>262,187</td>
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Its reliance upon raw population figures to show that this group was worthy of significant resources was an example of the Brown Mafia’s tendency to overlook the ways that differences

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27 Ibid.; The Brown Mafia’s analysis complemented administration research which in April of 1972 showed that Nixon had 90 electoral votes safely secured. Although the White House was confident of winning New Mexico and Colorado, it still appeared that the “large key swing states,” including California, Illinois, and Texas, would demand “all-out effort.” In addition, Pennsylvania, Michigan, New York, and Connecticut, at least two of which were likely to have substantial numbers of Puerto Rican voters, constituted “major opportunity states,” those Nixon had lost in 1968 but that looked promising for 1972. Memorandum, Cliff Miller to John N. Mitchell, April 25, 1972, Box 46, CF PL, folder [CF] PL [Political Affairs] 9/1/71-4/30/72, White House Special Files, WHCF, Subject Files, Confidential Files, NPM.
in citizenship status mattered to the “Spanish speaking vote.” It did not matter that “Spanish-speaking” Americans in New Mexico, for example, were far more likely to be citizens, and thus voters, than those in California. Its approach also gave equal weight to Mexican American and Puerto Rican areas, even though the Puerto Rican areas may have had higher rates of citizenship, and thus more potential electoral influence.

The plan admits that “Spanish speaking community is highly segmented,” both in terms of its “three major subgroups” (Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans), as well as by “income or class” within the first two subgroups. The “income or class” differences were more salient than nationality when determining the “main concerns” of the small middle classes of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, as well as the “urban poor” whom they believed most likely to influence the election.28

Mexican American and Puerto Rican Campaign Issues29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Speaking Middle Class Issues</th>
<th>Spanish Speaking Urban Poor Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>Bilingual Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual Education</td>
<td>Job Training Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>Unemployment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job Improvement Programs</td>
<td>Discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Citizen Programs (non-institutional)</td>
<td>Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and Order</td>
<td>Police Brutality</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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29 Ibid., 8622.
On the other hand, the plan describes this pan-ethnic population as “a community apart,” one “most conscious of the fact that they are treated differently from other white populations” but “want[ing] very much to belong.” Despite the significant differences in relevant issues and this erasure of the pan-ethnic population’s racial heterogeneity, the Brown Mafia argued that Nixon’s overall record on behalf of this meta group was so impressive compared to previous presidents’ that it could overcome weakness on any given issue.30

The Responsiveness Program

In the coming months, the president’s men would convey Nixon’s understanding of this pan-ethnic group, at times generously and at times ruthlessly, and almost always through the medium of taxpayer dollars. The key, according to a March 1972 memorandum by White House recruiter Fred Malek, was “Increasing The Responsiveness of The Executive Branch.” Malek called for executive branch departments to “systematically but discreetly seek out opportunities for improving services to target groups and geographic areas” where the campaign hoped to make inroads. Less discreetly, Malek scheduled meetings with federal managers, to which he brought color-coded maps indicating where the officials were expected to direct federal money for maximum political benefit.31

The Brown Mafia followed this vision for “capitalizing on the incumbency.” Its “Plan to Capture the Spanish Speaking Vote” recommended deploying grants, patronage jobs, and federal programs to “fill in any gaps in the President’s record” and for government agencies to focus on

30 Ibid.
“publiciz[ing] favorable Administration activities” on behalf of this group. Federal programs that served them should be mined for valuable political intelligence. Likewise, programs “which serve as havens for opposition political operatives” were to be “closely supervised,” and made to “devot[e] all their energies toward solving the problems of the Spanish speaking poor (particularly in September and October).”

The administration also had a federally-funded staff of researchers and political operatives in the Cabinet Committee, which by December of 1971 had become “closely allied with Colson’s shop.” CREEP’s deputy director Jeb Magruder prioritized “full politicization of the Cabinet Committee” and deployment of its budget—slated to increase from $800,000 to $1.3 million in July—in service of Nixon’s reelection. That the Hatch Act prohibited almost all of the Cabinet Committee’s staff of 35 from engaging in partisan activity did not apparently register as a sufficient objection.

With the Cabinet Committee to provide research, publicity, and speakers, the White House established a patronage fund of more than $40 million tax dollars for distribution to supporters. The Brown Mafia encouraged federal agency leaders to direct grants toward Spanish-speaking communities, and to publicize those efforts widely. To ensure that the money went to the right places, the group helped put dozens of allies in high-level jobs in regional

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offices of the OEO, the Department of Labor, the Small Business Administration, HUD, and the
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, among other agencies.  

The Brown Mafia used federal dollars to punish perceived opponents as well. Antonio
Rodriguez worked with the Domestic Council on “reidentifying SS [Spanish-speaking] groups
who have applied for federal grants at DOL [Department of Labor]...who are unfriendly toward
the Administration.” One such malefactor was Development Associates, a minority-owned firm
based in Washington, DC. Even its vice president was supporting the Nixon campaign in Texas,
Alex Armendaris believed that it had “close ties with the DNC and Cesar Chavez.” Marumoto
called it “a classic example of a firm, not necessarily on our team, which is making a
comfortable living off us.” The Brown Mafia recommended terminating the company’s
contracts, but first invited its president to the White House to ascertain his willingness to donate
money and free printing services to the reelection campaign. After he reportedly refused, he
received a congratulatory notice informing him that Development Associates had “graduated”
from the Small business Administration’s (SBA) 8(a) program. This “graduation” earned the
privilege of competing against all other government contractors, and the loss of any grants
received once the fiscal year ended.  

The White House expected Spanish-speaking business owners receiving contracts to be
on the “team.” Benjamin Fernandez, the California Republican moneyman and National
Economic Development Association (NEDA) cofounder, gave them a means to do so. In March
1972, he launched the “National Hispanic Finance Committee for the Reelection of President

35 On the $40 million in grants, see Memorandum, Bill Marumoto to Chuck Colson, “Weekly Report for Spanish
Spea [sic],” April 28, 1972; and Memorandum, Bill Marumoto to Chuck Colson, “Weekly Report for Spanish
Speaking,” June 2, 1972, both in Senate Select Committee, Watergate and Related Activities, Book 13, 5569, 5588.
Nixon,” (NHFC) aiming to raise $1 million for the campaign. Whereas Edward Roybal and
Herman Badillo had sought to build an ostensibly non-partisan grassroots electoral coalition,
Fernandez envisioned his Republican fundraising network as constituting true ethnic power.
“Under the umbrella of the Republican Party,” he claimed, “we can have a greater voice in the
governing of our own.” Joint fundraising, he said, was “the basis for a national political
coalition of Spanish-speaking minorities.”37

The NHFC, government agencies, and federal grant recipients soon developed a close
relationship. The case of J.A. Reyes, chairman of the Washington, DC area NHFC, is
instructive. His consulting firm qualified for minority contractor status and received hundreds of
thousands of dollars in federal grants in 1971. In 1972, however, the firm doubled its haul of
federal dollars, including a $200,000 noncompetitive grant from the OEO to evaluate an
emergency food and medical services program for migrants. Lower-level OEO staff had rejected
the evaluation as unnecessary, since similar studies had been performed recently. However,
Peter Mirelez, appointed head of OEO’s migrant division in February of 1972 in the White
House effort to incorporate Southwestern community elites, overrode them.38 The contract was
then canceled for substandard work, but OEO higher-ups had it reinstated. Administration
staffers directed another $200,000 grant, this time from the Office of Minority Business
Enterprise (OMBE), to Ultrasystems, Inc., which CREEP claimed “strongly supports the

38 Mirelez was once a member of the Mexican-American Ad Hoc committee that had protested the EEOC’s
indifference to Mexican Americans in 1966.
Administration.” Indeed, the vice president of Ultra-Systems, Inc. was Fernando Oaxaca, national treasurer of the National Hispanic Finance Committee to Reelect the President.39

A National Publication for a National Minority

Early in 1972, the national press had discerned a White House “Chicano strategy,” and began tracking the potential “Republicanization of the Mexican-American.” The Wall Street Journal ran an article on “Senor Nixon” [sic] and his plans to win the “brown vote,” noting of the appointments, grants, and even the unusual appearance of Republican aid to Chicano political party La Raza Unida. As the White House’s play for the Spanish-speaking vote became clear, opponents questioned the administration’s sincerity, with labor and the Democrats arguing that Nixon’s strategy was a fraud. The AFL-CIO called it “an attempt to convince Mexican-Americans that an administration which has consistently turned a deaf ear to the problems of the poor really cares about the Chicano.” Henry B. González and Edward Roybal observed that Nixon was for limiting the United Farm Workers’ ability to use the boycott to bring intransigent employers to the negotiating table. It was rank hypocrisy, they argued, for Nixon to be with “one hand wooing the Mexican-American and Puerto Rican voters, and with the other using every means at its command to smash the only effective hope for the poorest among them.” While Democrats tried to maintain partisan loyalty by equating ethnic identity with solidarity for the less fortunate, Texas’s Republican Party chairman spoke candidly of a different approach. “I don’t see any way of courting the entire Mexican-American bloc vote,” he told a reporter.

However, he said, “we want to appeal to the middle-class Mexican-American that is emerging today.”

Among the beneficiaries of the administration’s middle-class strategy was a Denver sociologist and aspiring publisher named Dr. Daniel T. Valdes. Valdes had written his University of Colorado doctoral dissertation on the political behavior and voting patterns of “Americans with Spanish names.” After several years in academia, he had taken an interest in ethnic publishing. In search of money to start his own magazine, he wrote to the Nixon administration. The Brown Mafia believed that Valdes’ magazine, La Luz (The Light), would be the first of its kind, a national “SS magazine” (Spanish-speaking) modeled on the “Ebony-Life format.” It had tremendous potential, and in March of 1972, they helped get this publication off the ground. With La Luz in need of cash, Nixon operatives connected Valdes to national advertisers friendly to Republicans. In return, the publisher agreed to print several positive articles on the administration’s Spanish-speaking initiatives, including flattering profiles of its high-ranking appointees. The Brown Mafia went to work, designing covers and cranking out

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content for the fledgling magazine, which ran to more than seventy pages an issue.45 Within a year, La Luz claimed a circulation of more than 115,000, and would publish into the 1980s.46

The synergy between La Luz’s approach to ethnic marketing and the Nixon administration’s strategy for capturing an electorate was striking. Valdes aimed the magazine at “the lower middle and middle classes and the emerging upper middle income Hispanos,” the same population the administration was targeting. Nixon considered himself a friend to the “forgotten minorities,” and the publishers were catering to an “underserved ethnic group” of “twelve million highly ethnic Americans” hitherto “reading Anglo magazines only” and left “without a national magazine of their own.”47

Valdes’ version of Hispanic pan-ethnicity was safe and consistent with the White House’s effort to portray Spanish-speaking Americans as an emerging minority with mainstream values. He wrote in La Luz of a “new consciousness” developing among the country’s Mexican Americans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, as well as its Central and South Americans. It could be seen in “the positive sense of self-development, self-determination, and self-control” that they were beginning to exert within America’s politics, culture, and economy. The magazine elided the difference between national identity and pan-ethnic cultural solidarity to suggest that pan-Hispanic consciousness was a lot like “German pride, Irish pride, Italian pride,” all of which had “propelled these groups into the full stream of American life.” The Nixon administration preferred this kind of approach emphasizing broad cultural solidarity—which led to discussions

46 Memorandum from Marcella to Joseph Montoya, January 11, 1973, Box 163, Folder 7 Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
47 Ibid.
of family, religion, and tradition, where Republicans might compete—instead of nationalism, which raised questions about conquest, racial difference, and separatism.48

The magazine cast pan-Hispanic identity both as a fundamental truth and a means of elevating the Spanish-speaking American’s importance in the market and polity. Nationalism, in particular, was an obstacle to be overcome. *La Luz* regarded the “restrictive political perspective” or the “restrictive, regional perspective” which defined people by nationality as failing to grasp how “the Hispano in America and throughout the world exists simultaneously” on both “political and cultural levels.” Instead, it was the “cultural common denominator” that served as “a binding force which transcends all politics or nationalistic feelings.” This sentiment had a sort of “mystical quality,” known only to its possessors. *La Luz* did not dwell on many particulars, but defined this “Hispanidad—the essence of Hispanic culture” as a collection of “language, religion, values, [and] customs.”49 Despite the emphasis on language, the vast majority of the magazine was in English.

A recurring collection of leadership profiles, “Here Comes La Gente,” was conceived to show that “despite the diversity of national, cultural, and racial types among our people, we all fuse into a single ‘peoplehood,’ an integrated entity, under the umbrella concept of ‘La Raza.’” Its subjects varied, and defied easy political classification. The inaugural issue profiled Mexican American journalist Ruben Salazar, who had been killed in 1970 while reporting on Chicano anti-war protests in Los Angeles. It spotlighted Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, Father Joseph Lara, a Colorado priest, and Casimiro Barela, an influential Spanish American politician during

48 Daniel T. Valdes, “Personal Letter” and “Publisher’s Statement,” in *La Luz*, April 1972, 6, 7. In Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
Colorado’s first decades of statehood. The mini-biographies of Hispanic luminaries, collected in one place, taught a larger lesson to the Americans of Spanish origin: to see themselves “a microcosm of the vast Hispanic world in all its complexity.”

The magazine encouraged readers to see the Nixon administration’s advocates for “la raza” in this tradition. Readers who learned a thing or two about golfer Lee Trevino, or Diego Rivera, or a 19th-century statesman, could turn the page and read about Henry Ramirez and his Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish Speaking People. Large photos of Nixon and Ramirez, alongside quotes conveying the administration’s concern for the Spanish speaking, appeared in an inaugural issue profile on the CCOSS. The second issue devoted its cover to Leona Saenz, a regional director in the Department of Labor’s Women’s Division and one of those many Spanish-speaking officials whom Nixon claimed credit for elevating to prominence in government. Her story showed there was no contradiction between serving the country and being a full member of America’s second largest minority. “In addition to holding down an important job, she is an outstanding mother and wife,” reported La Luz. In short, she was the perfect example of “our modern U.S. Hispana.”

Electoral College Matters

Images were one thing; votes another. Even as the Brown Mafia worked to advance pan-Hispanic solidarity via the media, they knew the administration’s electoral priorities remained the Mexican Americans, particularly in Texas and California. Because their careers would undoubtedly be influenced by electoral outcomes, the operatives maximized their effort to

50 Ibid.
51 “This Month’s Cover,” La Luz, May 1972, 1. Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
succeed in the areas Nixon most cared about.52 As the campaign moved into the summer of 1972, they commissioned a “top reputable political survey company” to ask hundreds of Spanish-speaking people in Los Angeles, San Antonio, Chicago, and New York City their views about government, the president, and a variety of policy issues.53 Almost 85 percent of the interviews were conducted in Spanish, despite census reports indicating that a majority of “Spanish Origin” Americans were English dominant. While the survey used Spanish language to define the meta-group, it used nationality to divide it. The firm took common nationality between interviewer and interviewee to be a prerequisite for valid results, and therefore “Mexican Americans interviewed Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans interviewed Puerto Ricans.”54 Conscious of differences in nationality, they nonetheless assumed racial homogeneity among respondents, asking them leading questions about their “neighborhoods,” and whether “blacks had been given too much advantage.”55

The results showed very low rates of support for the president, including 75 percent disapproval in New York, 70 percent disapproval in Chicago, and only 29 percent approval in Los Angeles, but it is the Brown Mafia’s interpretation of those results that stands out.56 Though the rating of Nixon was not much more popular in Ed Roybal’s district than in Herman Badillo’s, the group’s verdict on New York was caustic. “A New York Puerto Rican does not look like a promising constituent for anybody,” it began. The Brown Mafia singled out New York Puerto

52 They spent approximately 35 percent of their time and resources on California and 25 percent on Texas. Memorandum, Alex Armendariz for Bob Marik, “Campaign Report,” November 14, 1972, in Senate Select Committee, Watergate and Related Activities, Book 19, 8782, 8785.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., 30.
56 Ibid., 28-33.
Ricans as apathetic toward their lives and their government, even though many of their responses were quite similar to those of respondents in other cities. The campaigners wrote that the survey showed that Puerto Ricans did not care about education, were motivated by a desire for money and gifts above all other goals, and were sustained by the hope of winning the lottery. Even worse, “since some Puerto Ricans are black—and no one knows how many,” the campaign could not use two favorite polarizers—busing and the “black/brown issue”—with them. Calling a positive campaign in New York “hopeless,” the Brown Mafia recommended a concentrated “effort to denigrate the opposition and keep the electorate home, leaving them with no candidate.” They argued that “simple slogans” could persuade this “uneducated a political [sic] audience, addicted to media” to stay home. They suggested McGovern’s record on drugs, for example, or variations such as “McGovern, the rich man’s candidate, McGovern, the college kids [sic] candidate.” These suggested an awareness of New York Puerto Ricans’ economic plight, even as the rest of the memo ignored the role of economics in its rush to paint them as a culturally backward electoral wasteland.57

San Antonio, in contrast, was a model of the possible. Nearly one half of the respondents there approved of Nixon. Encouragingly, the report noted the city was “surprisingly reflective” of the state’s overall politics, which were conservative and trending Republican. Moreover, a healthy 40 percent of respondents were middle class. While it had been lamentable that the administration was unable to use racial polarization in New York, in San Antonio it was a positive. Race was not a major issue among this “self-confident” group, the Brown Mafia reported. They had been caught off guard to find that the “neighborhood question was taken

57 Ibid., 28-29.
literally,” with a “surprising” number of respondents wanting someone to pave the streets and put in a decent sewer system,\(^58\) not someone to stop blacks from moving in next door.\(^59\)

Even La Raza Unida (LRU), the party of Mexican American ethnic nationalism, could help Nixon. The survey of San Antonio revealed that 62.3 percent already approved of the third party. Republicans could help the group register these people, depriving Democrats of potential votes in the process. Furthermore, the LRU illuminated new electoral segments for the Nixon campaign, most importantly the nearly 20 percent of respondents who disapproved of the party. These Mexican Americans were “a natural Republican target.” The Brown Mafia suggested sending John Connally to reach out to these conservative Mexican Americans, and maybe even steal away some of the Kennedy magic. “After all,” the report concluded, “he was shot too in Dallas.”\(^60\)

The Nixon campaigners sought to aid the LRU in a variety of ways. Early in 1972, Antonio Rodriguez, Alex Armendaris, and William Marumoto all lobbied the administration to grant $75,000 for the political party to hold its convention. The Brown Mafia believed that under party leader José Angel Gutiérrez, elected in September of 1972, LRU would try to “maintain a balance of power in the two major parties,” which they perceived to be advantageous for Nixon. White House documents state that Gutiérrez had approached them over the summer “for a quiet Republican contribution” to the emerging party in exchange for its willingness to condemn George McGovern at its convention. Cesar Chavez, who had already endorsed

\(^{58}\) Annual flooding of the city’s largely Mexican American West Side persisted into the decade. See Montejano, *Quixote’s Soldiers*, 25.


\(^{60}\) Ibid., 32-33.
McGovern, then had his invitation to speak at the event canceled. Furthermore, a CREEP memorandum states that “in a meeting off the convention floor” unnamed sources again pledged “to publicly condemn McGovern” in exchange for an $8,000 contribution to the campaign of Ramsey Muñiz, the LRU candidate in the Texas gubernatorial race. Gutiérrez also killed in committee a “dump Nixon” resolution that had been widely supported. In September, people claiming to be LRU members heckled Ted Kennedy as he stumped for McGovern in Los Angeles, holding signs proclaiming “What have we gained from the Democrats?” and “Raza sí, Kennedy no,” and “send the Irish back to Ireland.” In October, LRU forced California’s Mexican-American Political Association (MAPA) convention into a deadlock that prevented the organization Roybal founded from endorsing a presidential candidate. In the campaign’s homestretch, OEO director Phillip Sánchez intervened to ensure that party affiliates in Texas would receive funding for health centers they were planning to operate.61

In another campaign twists, the Brown Mafia tried to make New Mexico land grant activist Reies López Tijerina into an administration asset. Tijerina’s occupations of federal land and shootouts with law enforcement officers had made him a Chicano movement hero, but had made him federal prisoner as well. Out on parole since July of 1971, Tijerina met with Henry Ramirez in the Chairman’s office and discussed his “probation, parole, and the possibility of a full Executive pardon.” Tijerina claimed confidence that a strong majority of Spanish-speaking Americans would favor a pardon. Although no deal appears to have been reached, Henry

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61 For Kennedy and MAPA, see Carl Greenberg, “La Raza Unida Members Heckle Kennedy at Rally for McGovern,” Los Angeles Times, September 11, 1972 and Frank Del Olmo, “Latin Group Won’t Take Position in Race for President,” Los Angeles Times, October 16, 1972, respectively; For others, see Memorandum, William Marumoto to Chuck Colson, June 2, 1972; Memorandum, Alex Armendariz to Frederic Malek, September 8, 1972; Memorandum, Alex Armendariz to Chuck Colson, September 14, 1972; Memorandum, Alex Armendariz to William Marumoto, September October 30, 1972, all in Senate Select Committee, Watergate and Related Activities, Book 13, 5589, 5677, 5679, 5678.
Ramirez informed his superiors of his belief that Tijerina “would work with us in return for due considerations.”

The White House looked to co-opt mainstream activists as well. The goal was not open support for Nixon, but to “neutralize” organizations such as the Southwest Council of La Raza (SWCLR) “by keeping them from supporting the Democrats.” In the spring of 1972, the CCOSS hired SWCLR’s E.B. Duarte to augment its Public Information Office. In what was considered “a beginning effort to de-politicize” the group, the Brown Mafia began working to help it obtain $30,000 from the Department of Labor to hold its national conference, and to arrange administration surrogates to speak at the event. SWCLR had also submitted a $6 million dollar proposal to HUD, along with another sizable grant request to the Office of Minority Business Enterprise. The OMBE proposals were well received within the agency, but the administration refused to finalize them before the election, hoping to maintain SWCLR’s neutrality.

**Triumph of the Middle Class Strategy**

As the Brown Mafia leveraged executive authority behind the scenes, the administration was confident in public. After spending a September day talking about the American dream to Mexican Americans in the struggling cities along the Rio Grande, the president spent a few hours

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62 Henry Ramirez to Alex Armendaris, August 29, 1972, quoted in Senate Select Committee, *Watergate and Related Activities*, Book 13, 5316.

living it up at John Connally’s ranch east of San Antonio. “Under a red and gold tent erected on Connally’s oak-shaded lawn,” the First Family joined “about 200 wealthy guests” for a sumptuous dinner. The Nixons banqueted in good company. Budweiser’s August A. Busch Jr. and the actress Eva Gabor were there. So was Mario Proccacino, who had been a white backlash candidate for mayor of New York in 1969. The guests satisfied their elite sensibilities with “prime ribs in wine sauce” and “pastry stuffed with crab meat.” Lest anyone mistake this for rich man’s affair, black-eyed peas offered a taste of the down-home.64

About 12 miles away on the Floresville courthouse lawn, Democratic vice-presidential candidate Sargent Shriver addressed a rally over beans, tamales, and cold beer. Shriver, who had directed Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, had flown down to contrast McGovern’s campaign—for the working man, the poor, and the minorities—with Nixon’s for the blue bloods. “Don’t let it worry you what the millionaires are doing,” over at Connally’s, he told the crowd. “All of us are more numerous than the millionaires and we will win if we stick together.”65

With Nixon’s middle-class outreach in full swing, McGovern’s team spent the last two months of the election trying to convince Spanish-speaking voters that the president’s overtures were insincere and disempowering because they did not target those who needed the most help. In their view, ethnic solidarity, ethnic authenticity, demanded that voters stand with the poor of their own group. A McGovern surrogate told the MAPA convention that Republicans “have no understanding of people that are powerless,” and that the political group had to endorse the Democrat.66 The liberal Democrats at the top of the ticket took a dim view of federal aid, which

suddenly appeared to be politicized. Shriver criticized the administration for “using the power of programmatic money” to gin up support for Nixon, but expressed confidence that “the Spanish-speaking people, the Chicanos of America, are not for sale to the Republicans or anyone else.” McGovern accused the Nixon campaign of spending federal money in minority communities “for the purposes of reducing registration and voter turnout.” A member of the National Latino Democratic Caucus may have had a clearer idea of the administration’s motives. “It’s definitely true that the Republicans are funneling a lot of money into the Latin community,” said Miguel Velasquez of Chicago, “but to win votes, not to squelch them.”

Indeed, many voters did not share the view that true ethnic identity manifested itself in attention to the poor. Many Spanish-speaking Americans were upwardly mobile themselves, and were paying attention to the political system’s responsiveness to their class ambitions and interests, and their urges for status and recognition. The administration’s high-level appointees, icons of incorporation in the establishment, seem to have resonated with the growing Mexican American middle class. Armando Mena, who claimed to have been an alternate delegate for Robert Kennedy in 1968, now saw things differently and was working on the Nixon campaign in East Los Angeles. “I’m tired of people like Sargent Shriver…coming here and telling us how poor we are,” he said in the last days of the campaign. “He and all the others are giving us a psychological whipping…They [the Democrats] had plenty of years in the White House and they didn’t show us much.” For all the media controversy surrounding her undocumented employees, Romana Bañuelos ranked as one of the most visible members of the administration.

militants kind of do us a favor when they criticize” her, Mena said, “because everybody loves Mrs. Bañuelos.”

Two weeks before the election, Nixon greeted his high-ranking Spanish-speaking appointees in the Cabinet room, opening grandly and clumsily: “Around this table are the most appointees at this level of, shall we say, Spanish-speaking background, or, that we have ever had in this government.” They represented a different kind of minority, he said:

I think that what really distinguishes the group that all of you come from some of the other minority groups, and particularly the Negro group, which all of us, of course, feel deserves special attention because of the historical background...but what distinguishes you, is that you do not face the problem of racism...Our Mexican-Americans, most of them are poor....they have lower income than blacks...But, on the other hand, they are proud. They just don’t want to sit there on their fannies and take the welfare. They will, like anybody else. But they’d rather not....It’s the character. They’re proud. They will work. They have the drive. They have the ability to go up.

After praising his audience’s character and determination, Nixon confidently reflected on his prospects, not just for victory, but for establishing a new base among the Spanish-speaking. “We’re going to get a bigger percentage of the voters than we’ve ever gotten before....Whatever the percentage is...we believe that this group should be on our side, should be with us, should be part, should act, so we’re going to continue to work on it....In the next four years, we want to use you as a beginning.” He called upon the appointees to be role models for young children in the barrios, and to recruit more doctors and lawyers and other professionals to the civil service, to bring “representation in this government that is worthy of the region you come from.” They were like Jackie Robinson breaking baseball’s color barrier, he said, and the president was a wise

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70 CAB 109-1; October 27, 1972; White House Tapes; NPM.
Branch Rickey, an odd twist considering his invidious black/brown comparisons only moments earlier. Together they would keep America great. The best and brightest of the group could be a national asset, even if the President of the United States left unsaid his belief that the majority of them remained decades if not centuries behind.

**Landslide**

A few days before voters headed to the polls, the Brown Mafia report ridiculing Puerto Ricans and calling for a negative campaign leaked to the press. Democratic spokesmen immediately denounced it as a “model of bigotry.” Louis Velasquez, now identified as McGovern’s “Chicano coordinator,” said that it showed “the low esteem in which Nixon really regards the Latino community.” More than anything else, however, it demonstrated that Republican operatives viewed the “Latino community” as a rather differentiated political entity. It revealed that, at least as far as politics were concerned, there was no single “Latino community.” The campaign effectively over, Nixon would win 49 states just a few days later.

In the following weeks, numerous analyses appeared on the voting behavior of the nation’s Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. Several heralded the emergence of a Spanish-speaking vote, but did little to clarify the concept. In fact, they reported significantly different outcomes, depending on their chosen unit of electoral analysis. The day after the election, the *Washington Post* reported that “Latin voters, which means Puerto Ricans in New York, Cubans in Florida and Mexican-Americans in Texas and California” gave Nixon 24

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percent of their vote, an increase of 7 percent from 1968.\textsuperscript{72} A few days later, the paper reported a CBS analysis giving Nixon 31 percent of the nation’s “Spanish-speaking vote,” and 49 percent of that vote in Texas and Florida. Puerto Ricans, so maligned by the Brown Mafia, still gave Nixon 24 percent of their votes, according to CBS.\textsuperscript{73}

A cautious White House predicted that when all was said and done, Nixon’s share of the nation’s Spanish-speaking vote would probably be between 26 and 30 percent.\textsuperscript{74} Internally, however, staff felt a special pride at the outcome in Texas. They had been fixated on San Antonio, which they believed had provided the crucial margins for Kennedy in 1960 and Humphrey in 1968. Back in 1960, Nixon picked up 17 percent of the city’s Mexican American vote. In 1968, however, that number was down to 6 percent, only one point better than Goldwater had done among those same voters in 1964.\textsuperscript{75} In 1972, though, the president carried Bexar County by almost 40,000 votes out of roughly 210,000 ballots cast.\textsuperscript{76} The CREEP sampled San Antonio Mexican American voters by class, and concluded that Nixon had won 20 percent of the vote in a low-income precinct, almost half in the middle-income area, and nearly 70 percent of those in the upper-income precinct.\textsuperscript{77} The president took majorities in three lower Rio Grande valley counties as well (Hidalgo, Willacy, Cameron). With “continued communication and cultivation,” the gains made in 1972 “can be translated into broader support

\textsuperscript{76} Memorandum, Herbert G. Klein for Richard M. Nixon, November 13, 1972, Box 48, WHSF, WHCF, PL.
\textsuperscript{77} Castro, 212.
for the President and the party,” wrote Communications Director Herbert Klein. “We will follow through.”  

Sampling of Nixon Results in Texas

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>% Mexican American</th>
<th>% Nixon in 1972</th>
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<tr>
<td>Starr</td>
<td>98</td>
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<tr>
<td>Webb</td>
<td>86</td>
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<td>Hidalgo</td>
<td>79</td>
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<tr>
<td>Willacy</td>
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<td>62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
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<td>Nueces</td>
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<td>Harris</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>61.7</td>
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In California, Mexican American leaders were less confident that a definite realignment was underway, regardless of the candidate they had supported. Herman Sillas, chairman of the state Democratic Party’s Chicano Caucus, reported that Nixon had gained little in the barrios, but that he had “made tremendous inroads, maybe 50% overall” in middle-class precincts. A DNC staffer interpreted the results as “telling the Democratic Party to shape up, showing it that we want more than tokenism.” Ignacio López, a Los Angeles coordinator for “Hispanos with Nixon,” was not sure that the Republicans’ gains would be durable. A former antipoverty

78 Memorandum Herbert G. Klein for Richard M. Nixon, November 13, 1972, Box 48, WHSF, WHCF, PL.
79 Ibid.
worker and a registered Democrat, he felt that a good amount of Nixon’s support came as a result of voters’ disenchantment with McGovern. After all, he had encountered many voters who “cared very little for either candidate.” Nevertheless, many had switched, and “if they [Republicans] want to keep these new friends…they’ll have to follow up consistently,” he said. López planned to remain a registered Democrat for the time being. However, this could change, depending on that follow up. For him, it was “up to the Republicans now.”

Conclusion

The 1972 presidential campaign revealed and contributed to the fragile state of Hispanic ethnic consciousness and organization in American politics. Both major campaigns had to account for the strong feelings of national difference that divided this electorate. Partly because of this, they attempted to define economic segments as the authentic representatives of the pan-ethnic group. With many more resources at its disposal, and little guilt about deploying them for the president’s benefit, the Nixon campaign could target the middle-class, especially the Mexican American middle class, with honors and recognition, hoping that their co-ethnics would follow. However, McGovern’s weakness as a candidate makes it difficult to assess the extent to which the administration’s campaign was capable of fundamentally reorienting politics for this vast and differentiated group of voters. Moreover, it was clear by election time that Nixon’s team did not view all Spanish-speaking Americans as equally worthy. As the administration’s cynical politics became more fully understood through the Watergate investigation and other congressional inquiries, Republicans would have substantial amends to make with this electorate. All the

same, the notion of the Spanish-speaking voter as possessing the “balance of power” would persist far beyond 1972. Both parties were now obligated to appeal to these many populations as a single bloc, however complicated that task might be, and set themselves to using affirmative action and statistical policy to institutionalize a “Hispanic” presence in government.
PART IV. INSTITUTIONAL LEGACIES
Chapter 9

Towards a Representative Bureaucracy:


The Spanish American does not want to be carried as a liability; he wants to work and share in and helping this country grow to be strong and self-sufficient. He (or she) wants to participate, with dignity and pride by occupying a respectable position in the mainstream of society.

— William Bacó Imandt, General Services Administration’s Office of Civil Rights, 1974

There are many who do not consider Hispanics as a minority group—they look upon the Spanish speaking as ‘Whites.’ I feel, at times, that Anglo bureaucrats have deliberately created such a situation to put Brown Brothers against Black Brothers.

— Edward Valenzuela, President of IMAGE, 1977

As a boy, Carlos F. Esparza shined shoes, set pins, and even sang for the patrons at his father’s bowling alley in El Paso, Texas. His childhood afternoons and weekends spent among the paying customers nurtured his sense of entrepreneurship, and when he reached college age he chose to major in business at nearby Texas Western College. Esparza’s father was born in Mexico, and had been repatriated during the Great Depression. But neither this painful memory nor Carlos’s business background prevented the younger Esparza from seeking a job with the federal government upon his graduation. After taking the civil service examination, he found out that his application would be receiving a boost. An obscure civil service provision awarded additional points to candidates from states generally underrepresented in the federal bureaucracy. At that time, under-representation was a geographical concept.

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1 House Committee on the Judiciary, Hearings on Federal Employment of Spanish-Speaking Americans, 93rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1974, 69.
So in 1964, at the high water mark of postwar liberalism, when it seemed government could solve any problem, Carlos F. Esparza packed up his belongings and moved across the country to Washington, D.C. to begin conducting employee background investigations at the Civil Service Commission, the federal government’s personnel management agency. He may not have been on the cutting edge of reform, but the position suited him just fine. It was a good job.

Upon his arrival in Washington, he found lodging at a YMCA. Soon, he was moving out and into an apartment. He stopped at a furniture store to pick up a few things, and when he went to pay the clerk asked him a question he would remember almost a half-century later: “Are you with an embassy, or do you pay taxes?”

“That’s how few Hispanics there were in Washington, DC in 1964,” Esparza remembered. Indeed, compared to West Texas—or to many East coast cities for that matter—Washington had a small Latino population. The 1970 census, the first for which even sampled numbers would be available, counted 15,671 people of “Spanish Origin” in the city itself, and another 55,000 in nearby suburbs. More than 750,000 people lived in the District at the time, meaning the Spanish Origin population constituted just over two percent of the city’s total. They were a small minority, something felt in day-to-day interactions with cab drivers, bosses, landlords, and furniture store clerks. However to Esparza, the city’s ethnic composition had an even greater significance. It helped explain—at least in part—the poor living conditions that

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3 Carlos F. Esparza, interview by author, March 1, 2011.
Mexican people endured in the Southwest. “We were invisible,” he recalled. “We were not represented in government….Who the heck knew [about their problems]? Who cared?”

In 1970, Richard Nixon established the Sixteen-Point Program, an affirmative action plan for Spanish-speaking Americans in the U.S. government, and Esparza applied to join its small office. Over the years, he worked to recruit more Spanish-speaking Americans to the federal service, ultimately rising to director of the renamed Hispanic Employment Program.

Esparza was hardly the only one inspired by the possibility of a more ethnically representative bureaucracy. Nixon’s extension of affirmative action to Spanish-speaking Americans was stronger on symbol than on substance, encouraging public employees to organize themselves to ensure its proper and thorough implementation. Some activist employees worked for government entities beholden to the White House, such as the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish Speaking People (CCOSS). Others, like Carlos Esparza, worked for the Civil Service Commission, where they had a slightly more independent role. Still others occupied a third position, of affirmative action coordinators for various federal agencies. In 1971, these activists decided that federal affirmative action efforts were moving too slowly, and joined with rank-and-file federal workers to form an advocate for Spanish-speaking public employees.

Several factors encouraged them to institutionalize Hispanic identity in government. Not content to be counted as either “white” or “nonwhite,” or lumped in with blacks under a general heading of “minority” employees, they demanded to be recognized as their own national minority group. Though the organization originated among Mexican Americans in the

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6 Ibid.
Southwest, their employer—the country’s largest and with operations in every region—encouraged the activists to broaden their perspective on ethnic organization. Soon, its leaders embraced Hispanic identity as a means to building national power. By establishing “Hispanics” as a protected component of the federal workforce, they further legitimized this group as a national minority, one defined by a common cultural inheritance and unique set of social problems that they, the Hispanic government workers, were uniquely qualified to remedy.

The Importance of Government Work

During the second half of the twentieth century, the growing federal government faced pressure to fight discrimination and promote equality in workplaces across the land. It was, according to one historian, “a time of upheaval and repositioning.” Americans long denied good jobs because of their race or gender used affirmative action to gain access to well-paid work. In addition to calling to redress private sector discrimination, these advocates sought for the public sector, especially the federal government, to open its ranks.

It was only natural. Public sector jobs have long held special importance for individuals facing discrimination or otherwise lacking labor market power. This was true of the Irish immigrants in the nineteenth century when they began to fill the ranks of municipal workers in the urban North thanks to their support for the Democratic Party. It was true of African Americans in the middle third of the twentieth century, when federal expansion made Washington something of a boomtown for blacks leaving small towns of the South. It was hardly a perfect situation, in this case. Washington was a Jim Crow city and federal managers

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7 MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough*, 3.
freely discriminated on the basis of race. The civil service did not allow collective bargaining until the 1960s. Nevertheless, compared to agricultural, domestic, or day labor—even many professions open to blacks in the South—federal work was attractive, drawing African American migrants to Washington, DC just as heavy industry drew them to Baltimore or Chicago, or Detroit. During the two decades after 1940, the city’s black population rose from 187,266 to 537,712, with untold numbers of them federal job seekers and their families.8

The nation’s capital was a less likely destination for Mexican American or Puerto Rican migrants. It was not in the traditional migrant stream for either group, and it was a long way to travel for an entry-level job.9 Still, the federal government employed vast numbers of Americans across the country. It held out the prospect of gainful and respectable employment in post offices, on military bases, and in regional offices of government agencies throughout the Southwest, New York, and the industrial Midwest, where large numbers of these Americans lived.

By the 1960s, money was only part of the story. In an age of group consciousness and ethnic activism, federal employment offered minority workers a chance to see their own personal advancement and the progress of their ethnic group as deeply intertwined. Federal employees who administered programs to remedy social injustices felt this acutely. David E. Castillo grew up on San Antonio’s predominantly Mexican American West side, and had worked to build the Great Society in Lyndon Johnson’s Model Cities Program. He eventually transferred to the

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9 Because the Bureau of the Census did not distinguish these populations with a nationwide identifier in the 1950 and 1960 censuses, the numbers who migrated for jobs with the federal government in Washington remain uncertain.
Social Security Administration, but had come to regret the decision. Castillo explained his desire for another transfer in a letter to CCOSS Chairman Henry Ramirez. He wanted to “be of greater benefit to the ‘Mexican American’ people as a whole,” and help them “advance beyond the level in which we now exist.” Homer L. Ureste, a Corpus Christi man, also wrote to the Cabinet Committee in search of a good job. Confessing to “need[ing] a job to support my family,” Ureste told Ramirez that he would spread the benefits broadly if hired, “help[ing] Mexican-Americans find jobs and security within the government agencies” and in the private sector.

Public employment could have a patriotic dimension as well. For some Spanish-speaking Americans, this made their inability to secure such work doubly painful. Abel Martinez already held “a good job” at a technology firm but wanted to return to the federal sector. “I was helping my Government,” he wrote, “plus, doing something about how the tax money was spent.” Martinez had failed his civil service examination, however, because he lacked familiarity with some of the testing language. “I am a true American,” he pleaded, “and I would do anything for my country.” His slight deficiency in English should not disqualify him from serving the American people.

By the late 1960s, federal managers would understand these individual stories in the context of political demands from organized ethnic groups. Minority activists viewed the bureaucracy’s composition as a crucial measure of their own power and progress, and new federal employment statistics developed in the 1960s made the racial distribution of public jobs

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10 David E. Castillo to Henry M. Ramirez, undated, Box 7, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
11 Homer L. Ureste to Henry M. Ramirez, Box 7, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
12 Abel Martinez to Charles M. Teague, undated, Box 7, Folder 3, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
an even more controversial issue. Affirmative action’s proponents argued that, when aggregated, the thousands of unfulfilled quests for meaningful and remunerative employment—and sometimes even those that never began because of poor recruitment—formed a compelling portrait of exclusion. The consequences for ethnic communities were said to be severe. Many argued that having contacts in Washington or a nearby federal office helped ensure more favorable treatment of grant requests, for example, or faster and more meticulous processing of discrimination complaints. According to Carlos Esparza, the prevailing belief was that, “if we have Hispanics who are in government, they would help to make sure that those services really went out to the community, to the people who needed them…it wasn’t just about getting people jobs. It was what they would do when they were in those jobs.” Public employees arguably mattered more for Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans than for some other groups, given their limited lobbying presence in Washington.13

A more equitable distribution of public employment might rectify economic inequality as well. Reflecting on why he began to work for affirmative action, Esparza demonstrated his view of the connection between public employment and the distribution of the country’s wealth.

I figured, I will do whatever I can because here are people [who] in 30 years had a retirement, they had a pension, they had holidays. They had health insurance…I just felt, why don’t we have these jobs?....The impact on the economy, on the Hispanic community, was in the billions then...[because] of not having these jobs like everybody else had jobs. We were just as able as they were. But we were invisible.14

13 Esparza, interview.
14 Ibid.
The Ethnoracial Geography of Federal Employment

To track the federal government’s hiring and promotions of minorities, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) had begun conducting a minority employment census in 1961. Though the terms and techniques the CSC used would change over time, by 1967 the Commission’s “Study of Minority Group Employment in the Federal Government” tallied the number of employees belonging to one of five populations: Negro, Spanish American, Oriental, American Indian, and Aleut and Eskimo. Since civil rights policy forbade supervisors from asking employees their race, the survey was accomplished by means of a “visual identification system.” Supervisors observed their subordinates, and reported the aggregate statistics on to the Civil Service Commission.15

The 1967 report reinforces Esparza’s argument about the relative “invisibility” of the Spanish-speaking government worker. There was a clear interest in “Negro” employment, about which it provides more than 150 pages of tables for Washington, DC and across the land. However, as in the decennial census prior to 1970, it only provided detailed data on Spanish Americans for the Southwestern states and the New York City metropolitan area. Almost 80 percent of the federal government’s 68,945 Spanish American employees labored in the Southwest. In the New York Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area, 5,383 of 122,498 workers, or 4.4 percent, belonged to the “Spanish-American-Puerto Rican” category.16 Altogether, Spanish Americans comprised approximately 2.6 percent of the government’s 2.6 million

16 However, a full two-thirds of these were employed in the postal service. They were thus relatively well compensated, but not in position to influence policy. Ibid., Table No. 5-15, 169.
employees. The report reinforced a prevailing notion that Spanish Americans were important only in two places, and underscored activists’ perception that their employment needs ranked below those of African Americans.

The figures provided are nonetheless instructive. They suggest that a complex set of influences, such as personal networks, local power relations, the availability and type of jobs, determined who got hired. For example, while Spanish Americans constituted 10 percent of federal employees in Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas, there were great discrepancies in their representation within the region.

"Spanish American" Employment in Five Southwestern States, 1967

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of Spanish American Employees</th>
<th>Percentage of Employees who are Spanish American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>2,251</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>15,297</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>4,397</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>6,741</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>25,872</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further breakdowns reveal how even state-level data obscure an accurate understanding of the ethnic geography of federal employment. Texas’ cities, for example, had very distinct patterns of “Spanish American” employment.

17 Ibid., 155.
18 Ibid., 157, 158, 161, 163, 164.
“Spanish American” Employees in Three Texas Cities, 1967\textsuperscript{19}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Number of Spanish American Employees</th>
<th>Percentage of Employees who are Spanish American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dallas</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>789</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Antonio</td>
<td>15,387</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Added to this variation were discrepancies in job type. For instance, almost a third of Spanish American federal workers in San Antonio were classified according to the General Schedule (GS) system (the government’s white-collar pay system) and almost two thirds were on the Wage Board system (usually blue-collar workers). Only 6 percent held a position with the post office. In contrast, more than half of the Spanish American federal employees in Dallas worked for the post office department.\textsuperscript{20}

The CSC further obscured these variations in its attempts to show great racial progress in the bureaucracy. The chart below, for example, taken from the November 1969 survey, illustrates a significant boost in “minority” representation in desirable jobs.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 165, 167-168.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 165.
Of course, “minority” did not hide from Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans their almost total absence from the federal core. The CSC’s November 1970 minority employment survey, which measured “Spanish-surnamed Americans” in all states and territories, showed they held only .6 percent of the general schedule (GS) jobs in the nation’s capital. The city’s federal workforce of over 174,000\(^{21}\) contained less than a thousand “Spanish-surnamed Americans.” More frustrating still, only a handful of high-level positions belonged to members of this group.\(^{22}\)

\(^{21}\)This number does not include Maryland and Virginia, two sites of additional federal employment.

\(^{22}\)The November 1970 report also showed that the overall numbers had increased just slightly. As of that year there were 74,449 Spanish-surnamed Americans in the federal workforce, about 2.9 percent of the worldwide total. In this
At the agencies of greatest interest to their organizations, the nationwide comparison with “Negro” employment was bound to cause envy and frustration. Blacks occupied half of the positions at the EEOC, for example, while Spanish-surnamed Americans held under 10 percent. That 5 to 1 ratio was actually among the more favorable comparisons for the latter group in federal employment. More common were the 1.4 percent of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) employees who were Spanish-surnamed, compared with 21.7 percent of the agency’s employees who were black.  

The federal government drew from its surroundings, especially for the lower ranks, which is a partial explanation for why in 1970 African Americans held 33.9 percent of federal jobs in Washington, DC. As a rule, however, blacks in the federal government were at the bottom. They filled between 60 and 90 percent of the lowest paid jobs in the DC-area civil service, depending upon the salary schedule consulted.

These different positions—blacks in the civil service but low in rank, and Spanish-speaking Americans feeling frozen out—led activists from the two groups to pursue different affirmative action strategies. Spanish-speaking Americans’ mixed record of success, even within the Southwest, did not lend itself to a simple explanation. Instead, it encouraged activists to set their sights on the entire system, where the picture would clarify and the lines of difference become sharper.

report, the decision to grant “minority group status” was still based on visual observations, but also on supervisors’ “knowledge of what each employee considers himself to be, or is regarded to be in the work environment or in the community.” U.S. Civil Service Commission, Minority Group Employment in the Federal Government, SM 70-70B (Washington, DC, 1970), 2.

23 The data for Spanish-surnamed Americans were presented alongside “Negro,” “Oriental,” and “Indian” statistics. Ibid, 218-282.

24 Ibid, 308.

25 Ibid.
A “Philadelphia Plan” for Federal Employment

Armed with evidence that the national government had still not recognized them as equals, government employment activists in the Southwest began to mobilize in 1970. California had the lowest percentage of Spanish-surnamed American federal employees of any state in the Southwest. It was home to major federal agency offices, as well as many politically active Chicanos. It was hardly surprising that it took the lead. In the summer, a coalition of Californians representing the G.I. Forum, LULAC, the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) demanded that President Nixon extend affirmative action to their people. They had learned that less than 3 percent of the federal workforce was “Spanish American” (15 percent was black), and only about three-dozen of the approximately 9,000 highest-ranking\(^{26}\) civil servants belonged to their group. They called upon President Nixon to meet with them and sign an “executive order similar to the Philadelphia plan” that would set “specific federal employment goals” for the country’s “10 million Spanish Americans.” With this simple step, they argued, “America’s most ignored minority” would within a year’s time gain tens of thousands of good jobs. Nixon could “end the paradox of Spanish Americans being equally employed by the federal government only in military positions,” but time was running out. “The Spanish American,” they warned, “will no longer be ignored and shortchanged.”\(^{27}\)

\(^{26}\) This apparently refers to political appointees, those above the top grade (15) in the General Schedule.

\(^{27}\) Telegram, Gorbert Gonsales to Richard Nixon, July 28, 1970, Box 7, HU 2, WHCF, NPM.
Like his predecessors, Nixon viewed the civil service as a means to gaining popular support for his party, or at least for himself. When Mexican American leaders used African Americans’ relatively high levels of federal employment to focus attention on how “underrepresented” their group was, they seemed to confirm the administration’s belief that competition and not cooperation was the defining feature of the two groups’ relationship. Nixon could justify extending affirmative action to Mexican Americans in the name of fair treatment for all minorities, and gain credit for rectifying Democrats’ unfair practices. A predictable combination of budgetary restrictions, labor protections, and bureaucratic turf wars might hinder its functioning. Even then, the change would sow discord among Democratic constituencies, forcing white liberals to confront dissension in the ranks of their “minority” allies.

Just days after the 1970 midterm elections, the Civil Service Commission announced the beginning of a program to remedy imbalances in the government’s affirmative action regime. The Sixteen-Point Program, as it was known, contained a list of steps that the CSC would take to help “Spanish-speaking American citizens” find jobs with the federal government. Many of the “points” were redundant, but in essence the plan called for greater recruitment from colleges and high schools, and increased use of bilingual ability as a placement factor. It also requested that agencies generate special reports on Spanish-speaking Americans, focusing on their numbers and mobility through the bureaucracy.28

Presidential surrogates and allies hailed the new program. Government workers, they suggested, were both the antidote to “Spanish-speaking” Americans’ powerlessness and a check

28 “President Nixon’s Sixteen Point Program,” Box 4, Folder 4-1, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
on societal disorder. Manuel Lujan, Jr., a Republican congressman from New Mexico, expressed this vision at a Department of the Interior affirmative action conference, held shortly after the Sixteen-Point Program’s announcement:

An individual with a good job—whether in Government or in the private sector—has the basis for personal pride that carries with it the ingredient of personal dignity. If he has seen Government acting to help him get that job or form a business that employs not only himself but others, he will tend to trust his Government. By becoming an active, productive member of society, he acquires a new voice in the management of community affairs.29

The Cabinet Committee’s Henry Ramirez believed that middle-class federal employees had a unique role to play in bringing advancement for his people. He argued that those between grades 9 and 15 on the GS scale, in “the growth positions, the promotable positions,” were in a unique position to “deal with nationwide issues that affect various segments of our society.”30 Ramirez predicted “little change in the status quo…until qualified Spanish-speaking persons are employed in representative and effective numbers at every level of the Federal government.”31 Indeed, he regarded civil service incorporation as “just as important” as this group’s growing electoral clout. Lest anyone doubt their qualifications, Ramirez reminded audiences that the people hired under Nixon did not get their jobs “just to fill some arbitrary ethnic quota,” but “because of their skills and their proven records of success…because the Spanish speaking

31 Henry M. Ramirez to Morris A. Sims, August 9, 1973, Box 7, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
community is in fact an untapped reservoir of unquestionable talent.” The “silent minority” was getting what it deserved under Richard Nixon, and Ramirez was pleased to spread the word.

In a move designed to mold Spanish-speaking Americans into a unified a constituency and advance Ramirez’s mission to convert them into Republicans, his Cabinet Committee nurtured the idea of a racially-drawn battle for good jobs, one in which black and “Spanish-speaking” were mutually exclusive categories. The CCOSS argued that African Americans’ disproportionate share of federal employment hurt the Spanish-speaking people and warped the nation’s civil rights priorities. Blacks’ control of federal jobs allowed them, for example, to train the civil rights bureaucracy on racial discrimination at the expense of “national origin” claims. A Cabinet Committee report held that African Americans

have the edge of experience in EEO matters, making it very difficult for Spanish Speaking Americans to secure competitive EEO positions. Unfortunately, the needs and the problems of the Spanish speaking people are different, specially [sic] in the subtlety of discrimination, than those of the blacks. As a result, the EEO effort has not adequately solved the problems, nor satisfied the needs of the Spanish Speaking people. 33

This point of view was not merely a Nixonian invention. Cabinet Committee staff heard it from their constituents. The American G.I. Forum’s (AGIF) San Antonio chapter sent the message when asking the CCOSS to help one of its members in 1973. Armando T. González worked at Laughlin Air Force Base for 19 years and, according to the Forum, had been “forced to resign under discrimination and duress.” There had been an accident at a business González

32 “An address by Henry M. Ramirez, Chairman CCOSSP Before Senate Staff Assistants,” January 25, 1974, Box 7, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.

33 “Civil Service Commission: Its Lack of Responsiveness to the Needs of the Spanish Speaking People [Draft],” Box 5, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
owned, and he had exercised his “civil rights” to leave work in order to resolve it. He had looked to his union and to his congressman for support, but to no avail. The Forum considered his case as

one of the many reasons why this Organization is of the consensus that Equal Employment Opportunity, Civil Rights, War on Poverty, integration, etc., as a whole, are not applicable to Mexican-Americans. Because it makes no difference how right we are, we are always wrong. To the Afro-American, it makes no difference how wrong they are, they are always right.

Such government “provincialism,” the Forum argued, left Mexican Americans who sought government assistance “continually humiliated, harassed, and embittered.” They were pleading for the Cabinet Committee’s help to “enabl[e] us to retain our dignity as equal Americans.”

Government favoritism was not only damaging to their people’s self-respect. It caused deep economic wounds. In Los Angeles, for several years a site of conflict between Mexican Americans and African Americans over federal resources, the Forum chapter complained to the Cabinet Committee of systematic federal employment discrimination against area Chicanos. It demanded “balanced minority hiring in tax-funded systems” to correct for those jobs African Americans had gained at Chicanos’ expense. Since Mexican Americans were Los Angeles’ largest minority population, “ethnic parity” required them to be the best-represented minority group in the area’s federal workforce. However, in Los Angeles, “the Black employee group is 5.6 times as large. Chicanos don’t even outnumber Orientals by 2:1.” The report claimed that as a result, “221-226 jobs which should be in the Spanish-speaking category, based on population

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34 Jesus Perez to Henry M. Ramirez, March 16, 1973 Box 4, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.

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figures,” had “wound up in the Black employee category.” This imbalance constituted a “direct annual loss of $2.6-2.8 million in income” for “Spanish-speaking households and communities.”

The Forum report continued the tradition of claiming that their patience and patriotism made them a sort of morally superior group, an increasingly inaccurate assertion given the rise of Chicano militancy. The report came very close to stating that the high numbers of blacks in government was direct compensation for violent acts, conceding that it was “probably too easy and over-simplified to believe that the loss [of federal jobs] is a negative reward for failing to have a Watts, a Symbionese Liberation Army, a takeover of offices, etc.” Still, it argued that the American system ceases to be viable if one predominant and deprived minority, which consistently has worked within the system, overrepresented among both battlefield casualties and Congressional Medal of Honor recipients, will continue today to be ignored if it does not engage in violence and dramatic attention-getting and disruption.

Setting themselves against the violence and disorder of the day, the employment activists clung to the hope that their dignity and good conduct would yield a favorable response.

The Forum’s stated goal was an affirmative action program that would work “toward minimizing ethnic differences” and reducing “the potential for friction between the two largest minority groups.” Citing 1970 census data, however, it predicted that “the Spanish-surnamed population should exceed the Black population by 20% in L.A. City and 100% in L.A. County,”

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35 “Support for Balanced Minority Hiring in Tax-Funded Systems,” February 21, 1974, Box 6, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
36 Ibid.
and argued that parity should soon follow. However, at a time of recession and federal retrenchment, such demands would almost certainly raise the level of conflict between Chicanos and blacks that the Forum supposedly wanted to avoid. Indeed, there seemed little that would meet their criteria of defusing ethnoracial tensions as long as the dominant comparison was between African Americans and Mexican Americans.

**Protest and Organization**

The Sixteen-Point Program would by itself do little to bring Spanish-speaking Americans the parity they desired. Astute observers could discern the program’s limitations the moment it was announced. The administration did not establish it with an executive order. It was not announced on White House stationery. Nor did it carry a presidential signature. It was—literally—a press release. As a result, agencies moved slowly to comply with its directive to recruit scores of new Spanish-speaking government workers. The Civil Service Commission admitted that “dramatic increases” in Spanish-surnamed employment were not made in the program’s first year because of “budgetary restrictions,” and because existing agency affirmative action programs—the “EEO Plans of Action”—were “not fully applicable” to the targeted population. A 1972 assessment blamed “insufficient agency headquarters leadership” for the slow progress, and again noted that “EEO Action Plans for the most part did not cover the problems of the Spanish-speaking.” Many federal managers viewed the program as a temporary

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37 Ibid.
38 “Briefing Paper, Sixteen-Point Program,” Box 18, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
measure, and did not take it seriously. This was hardly an unreasonable position, given the bureaucratic signals sent about its importance.39

Advocates knew they would have to fight to see the affirmative action program fully implemented; so while it was more symbol than substance, they embraced it. When Gilbert Chávez learned about the program, the Mexican American public employment activist at the Department of Education rejoiced. At last, he recalled, they had some acknowledgment “from the White House that…it’s about time that…we increase Hispanics in the federal service.” It may have been “just a memorandum,” but “the people took it to be an executive order….we ran with it.”40 Carlos Esparza told managers that he was administering “a White House program, a White House initiative…[And] that starts affirmative action right there in 1970.” Never did he admit that the Civil Service Commission was basically powerless to enforce the initiative.41

Even before the program’s announcement, there was much to unite Spanish-speaking federal employees. They had a latent bond from toiling in the same bureaucracy. They knew of its mysteries, of its frustrations, and they sought to understand its intricacies, whether to get ahead or simply to be more effective at their jobs. Many occupied roughly the same pay grades, and shared a professional background. They frequently belonged to the same civil rights organizations, such as the American G.I. Forum or LULAC. Some were members of political groups such as MAPA, while some had worked together during the War on Poverty. Others had

39 “Attachment to CSC Operations Letter 273-747,” January 9, 1974, Box 4, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
40 Gilbert Chávez, interview by José Angel Gutiérrez, November 30, 1997, University of Texas at Arlington Center for Mexican American Studies Oral History Project, Interview No. 119, transcript, library.uta.edu/tejanovox/xml/CMAS_119.xml [accessed December 5, 2011].
41 Esparza, interview.
met in events sponsored by the ICMAA or CCOSS. While they had much in common, no organization was devoted specifically to their concerns.

They did, however, have regularly scheduled opportunities to protest. Civil Service Commission officials would travel around the country to explain federal employment policies. These Equal Employment Opportunity conferences became scenes of intense emotional outpourings as federal workers confronted supervisors over the slow pace of change. Indeed, the supposedly responsible upholders of order, and faith in the establishment, proved they were as willing to use protest tactics as any campus radicals.

At a March 1971 EEO conference in San Diego, government workers and local Chicano activists formed a picket line that encircled the Stardust Motel hosting the event. Manuel F. Alvarado, a 20-year federal employee and an officer of the state’s American G.I. Forum, led the protestors. Holding a stack of files he claimed was evidence of more than 6 years of discrimination at the Alameda Naval Air Station in Oakland, he demanded admission to the conference. After he was refused a place, he derided the event as a “sham,” with an audience handpicked for its quiescence. Chicanos had repeatedly presented their demands for fairness in the civil service, but federal administrators “don’t want the truth” he fumed to reporters. “They don’t want the trouble.”

With Alvarado leading the demonstration outside, a group of federal workers in the conference room waited for the right moment. Nicholas Oganovic, the top career official at the Civil Service Commission began to deliver his remarks. When it appeared clear that he would

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42 Chávez, interview, 40.
43 Manuel F. Alvarado to Richard M. Nixon, March 10, 1971, Box 7, HU 2, WHCF, Subject Files, NPM.
only be addressing the problems of “minorities” in general, they rose and walked out. The
protestors were tired of meetings that discussed equal employment in the federal government
without addressing their specific issues and concerns.\textsuperscript{45} They were not there to hear Oganovic’s
plans for including “his physically handicapped friends,” or anyone else, as one activist later put
it.\textsuperscript{46}

The demonstrators showed sophistication and advance planning. They coordinated their
action with members of the Chicano Federation of San Diego, and arranged for a press
conference, at which they denounced the CSC event as “meaningless bureaucratic play very
deftly circumventing the intent of President Nixon’s declaration.”\textsuperscript{47} They denounced “the
consistent paternalistic mentality of Eastern bureaucrats who cannot conceive beyond their racist
attitudes that Chicanos” could occupy positions of responsibility in the civil service.\textsuperscript{48} News of
the disruptions ran in local papers, the \textit{Federal Times}, and the \textit{Washington Post}.\textsuperscript{49}

An EEOC District Director from San Francisco named Edward Valenzuela led the
walkout. His involvement in the protest was a long time coming. He began his public sector
career in 1961 when he got a job teaching in an Oakland City College apprentice program for
concrete workers, using expertise he had learned in his family’s concrete business. While
working at another junior college, he began organizing adjunct faculty into an association to

\textsuperscript{47} “Chicano Federation of San Diego County, Inc.,” in House Committee on the Judiciary, \textit{Hearings on Federal
Employment Problems of the Spanish Speaking}, 412.
\textsuperscript{49} Mike Causey, “Banquet Audience System Sabotaged,” \textit{Washington Post}, March 13, 1971; Oganovic, a thirty-year veteran of government, would announce his retirement two weeks later. Newspaper stories do not give the reasons for his departure, but Carlos Esparza recalls that he was forced to retire for his handling of the Mexican Americans, a way of signaling Nixon’s concern for that population. “Civil Service Director Retires After 30 Years,” \textit{New York Times}, March 28, 1971.
address their grievances. Also during the 1960s, he joined the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA). He devoted himself to MAPA’s campaigns for public employment, especially to get more Chicanos into postal jobs, and became a statewide officer. In 1967, Valenzuela found a way to get paid for his civil rights activity when Vicente Ximenes recommended him for a position with the EEOC. Had Valenzuela not supported streamlining federal hiring before, his own application experience would surely have converted him. It took “nine months of application, re-application, extensive correspondence, phone calls, interviews, re-interviews, and other meetings” before he officially got the job.50

After starting work at the EEOC, Valenzuela joined an organization called the San Francisco Civic Center Forum (CCF), which he described as “a group of professional Spanish Speaking, Spanish Surnamed persons who hold federal, state and local government jobs, and representatives of Chicano and Latino organizations.”51 His membership in the CCF refined his thinking about the connection between public employee activism and ethnic identity. “We [in the CCF] had generally tended to consider ourselves a ‘Chicano’ organization,” Valenzuela recalled. The many South Americans and Central Americans in the Bay Area were “uncomfortable with the term ‘Chicano’ [and] preferred to be called ‘Latinos.’” They resolved the question by putting public employment goals ahead of national origin distinction, something reflected in the group’s name.52

The Sixteen-Point Program spurred the CCF to action. The group began surveying federal agencies in the Bay Area to determine how, if at all, it was being implemented. The results prompted them to organize the San Diego walkout. Valenzuela explained to Robert E. Hampton, the Republican Chairman of the Civil Service Commission, that “little or no efforts had been made” to implement the program. Public employees and activists were furious, having been promised improvement only to see such little change.

The CCF issued a public call for the federal government to end its “do as we say, not as we do” employment system. They demanded a radical overhaul of hiring and promotion practices, and argued that the Supreme Court supported their demands. The *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* decision, issued less than a week before their walkout, held that employment practices having a “disparate impact” on particular classes of workers would be subject to additional judicial scrutiny. Reading the ruling into its own situation, the CCF argued that the “complicated selection requirements and procedures” of the civil service represented “formidable barriers to the employment of the Spanish speaking,” and were therefore quite possibly illegal. They recommended eliminating citizenship requirements and “non-validated tests” from federal personnel protocols to ensure compliance with the ruling. The group even challenged the government’s authority over personnel selection, seeking to formalize the involvement of


\[\text{\textsuperscript{54}}\] Ibid.

membership organizations “with knowledge of the Spanish-speaking community” in recruitment and selection.56

After the 1971 protests, other California federal workers, likely in conjunction with the Civic Center Forum, peppered the Nixon administration with letters demanding enforcement of the Sixteen Points. In the summer of 1971, a San Bernadino group criticized federal officials for their “defensive and evasive attitude” about hiring more Mexican Americans. They portrayed themselves as decent citizens opposed to an insensitive system. “We, the professional segment and co-leaders of the Mexican-American community, have complied with our duty,” read one note to the president. “Is there or is there not a 16-Point Program? Or a President and officials that back up a Plan?” it asked.57 Another California activist wrote to the president that while the Sixteen-Point Program had once kindled “a new Hope…this hope has been dispelled by the lack of effective implementation.” His group demanded an executive order to enforce the program, and announced its support for “the National EEO Chicano Conference,” (the “Spanish-Speaking Coalition” conference), being held by Edward Roybal and Herman Badillo in October of 1971.58

Building on their protest activities, activists began to assemble their local organizations into something larger. In May of 1972, public sector workers from around the Southwest met in Albuquerque—scene of the 1966 EEOC walkout that had raised many of the same issues about government fairness—and founded an organization that they called Incorporated Mexican

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56 Ibid.
57 Frank V. Martinez to Richard Nixon, July 7, 1971, Box 17, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
58 Manuel Banda, Jr. to Richard Nixon, October 18, 1971, Box 16, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM. Valenzuela also led the federal employment segment of the UNIDOS conference. “National Spanish speaking coalition conference, October 23-24, 1971,” Box 158, Folder 14, Joseph M. Montoya Papers, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research.
American Government Employees (IMAGE). Edward Valenzuela and Denver government workers activist Joe J. Garcia were named its first co-chairmen. At IMAGE’s first convention the following year in Denver, the group elected Valenzuela its president. The group soon had chapters in California, Nevada, Phoenix, and Denver, Washington, DC, Kansas City, Texas, New Mexico, and Utah. At first, dues were two dollars a month, and the organization had no paid staff.

IMAGE quickly gained support from other ethnic activists in government. Henry Ramirez wrote shortly after it formed in 1972 to “encourage” the group “to continue with [its] highly outstanding efforts.” IMAGE members should know that Nixon was behind them. “The president has continually suggested to me,” wrote Ramirez, that Spanish-speaking Americans’ progress depended upon them “evolv[ing] vigorous national groups who can advocate” for their interests. Ramirez was therefore happy that they had taken “such a giant step” in forming IMAGE. At the time, Ramirez saw the group as one more lever in the fight to incorporate this underserved minority in the civil service. Its success would make him look good, and help his boss.

IMAGE cultivated allies in the Civil Service Commission as well. Higinio Costales, who had become head of the Sixteen-Point Program, was at its founding convention. Carlos Esparza, too, remembers working with IMAGE, despite his need to maintain some professional distance from the group. IMAGE was “very into the political deal,” he recalled, whereas he was a “career

59 There were actually two existing organizations called Incorporated Mexican American Government Employees (IMAGE), one based in Los Angeles and the other in Denver.
61 House Committee, Hearings on Federal Employment of Spanish-Speaking Americans, 68.
62 Henry Ramirez to Joe Garcia, June 12, 1972, Box 17, Robert H. Finch Files, SMOF, NPM.
guy” and an “independent.” Nevertheless, he developed a close friendship with Gilbert Chávez, president of the DC chapter and later the national organization’s president. They would socialize, visit each other’s house, and attend parties together. From time to time, Esparza attended IMAGE meetings, and conferred with the group’s leadership. As he remembered the relationship, “They were my friends. They helped me and I helped them.”

The Civil Service and the National Question

Nixon’s use of affirmative action to court Spanish-speaking voters sustained bipartisan attention to his progress. Democrats had an interest in showing that he had done little, while Republicans were eager to show how far the group had come, and how they were willing to do so much more, if only certain barriers could be removed. California’s Don Edwards, the Democratic chairman of the House Judiciary Committee’s Civil Rights Oversight Subcommittee, called hearings on Spanish-speaking federal employment problems in the spring of 1972. Civil Service Commission officials, including Higinio Costales, director of the “Spanish-speaking Program” (which the Sixteen Point Program had been renamed), testified. Joining them was CCOSS Chairman Henry Ramirez and EEOC Commissioner Vicente Ximenes. They were asked their views on the best way to improve the Spanish-speaking Americans’ employment by the federal government. Evidently, IMAGE had not yet emerged as a major player, for none of its members testified.

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63 Esparza, interview.
Congress wanted to know how much progress had been made, and for whom, something that required accurate statistics. Irving Kator, the Civil Service Commission’s assistant executive director, admitted that the CSC had little data on this group. What data they had, historically at least, they “were not particularly analyzing.” However, working in consultation with the CCOSS, Kator could now identify the number of Spanish-speaking Americans working in each agency, and in every standard metropolitan area.64

The desire to measure this national population raised questions about the proper way to define it in light of its heterogeneity. Some witnesses thought “Spanish surname” was the appropriate measure, while others argued for “Spanish speaking,” and still others spoke of a “Spanish descent” population. At one point, California Democrat Jerome Waldie, plainly exasperated, asked if “anyone in this wide mass of Government ha[d] any statistics on what this group is comprised of?”65

Congressmen were uncertain about the specific causes and nature of this minority’s disadvantage. They probed intra-ethnic distinctions, casting doubt on the pan-ethnic approach. Waldie, for example, questioned the broad applicability of “Spanish descent,” asking if “different degrees of disability resulting from the minority status” inhered “within the category ‘Spanish-speaking Americans.’” Since advocates used “Spanish-surnamed” and “Spanish-speaking” interchangeably, he asked Ximenes which was actually “more descriptive of the disadvantaged American.” Johnson’s former aide acknowledged asking the Census to use “Spanish-surnamed,” the category it employed in the Southwest, because he could count on it to

64 House Committee, Federal Employment Problems of the Spanish Speaking, 11, 12.
65 House Committee, Federal Employment Problems of the Spanish Speaking, 49.
“bring us the highest percentage into the statistics.”\(^\text{66}\) Congressmen still wanted to know how many federal employees were Mexican Americans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and other nationalities, however. Ximenes vigorously fought their attempt to separate the groups, claiming that “for the entire Southwest and, for our Nation, the attitude toward the Spanish speaking has been that of the conquered people,” and “an attitude of colonialism toward this entire group.”\(^\text{67}\)

Whether Ximenes’ argument had the same merit for the Cuban exiles receiving extensive U.S. support as it did for Puerto Ricans, inhabitants of an actual U.S. colony, civil rights policies supported Ximenes’ favored solution. CSC chairman Hampton informed the congressmen that to collect national origin data would constitute “an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy” and that to “identify Spanish-surnamed employees as Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, or Cubans…would not be reliable,” given the standard method of visual identification.\(^\text{68}\)

Robert McClory, a Republican from suburban Chicago, found little comfort in these explanations. Chicago was one city where substantial numbers of both Mexican and Puerto Rican migrants had settled. He had observed that the “two groups speak just a little bit differently, apparently, and they want their own distinct leadership and they have their own distinct way of wanting to achieve their goals.”\(^\text{69}\) Higinio Costales, however, dismissed this concern. He acknowledged “these interests among specific groups” but found them no different from those in “Anglo society.” He instead likened Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans to two fraternal orders. “I think the Knights of Columbus are much different and they want their own


leadership compared to the Masonic order and this type of thing,” he testified. After a while, McClory seemed satisfied with this answer, for it was consistent with his stated goal of wanting to “help to reconcile these points of view in order to get them [Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans] to work closely together.” Despite their discomfort with pan-ethnic terms, politicians had a strong interest in streamlining the process of governing these various communities. Harmonizing ethnic identities would make their lives easier.

The Pan-Hispanic Turn

While affirmative action was a stage in African Americans’ campaign to undo the legacies of slavery and discrimination, for Spanish-speaking Americans it was something else. It was a challenge to and guide for their ethnic consciousness. In congressional hearings and in their day-to-day interactions, Costales, Esparza, Valenzuela, and other affirmative action advocates learned that the fight for good jobs required them to explain what, if anything, united all Americans of “Spanish heritage.” One reason that the Sixteen-Point program had been ineffective was supervisors’ perception that its intended beneficiaries were not a nationwide minority population. The Civil Service Commission fought “a misconception among agencies that the Program was regional (Southwest) and therefore had regional limitations.” To combat this perception, program administrators sought to define themselves as a legitimate and worthy minority group. “Who are the Spanish-Speaking?” asked one of their efforts. They were “all Americans of Spanish origin or heritage.” The program, as one 1973 bulletin explained,

70 Ibid.
71 “Attachment to CSC Operations Letter 273-747,” January 9, 1974, Box 4, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
extended “to all persons of Spanish origin or heritage whether or not they speak Spanish or have Spanish surnames.” If these terms were confusing, another program memorandum clarified that the “program includes Puerto-Ricans [sic], Cuban-Americans, and other Americans of Spanish heritage, as well as Mexican-Americans.”

The challenges they faced gaining acceptance as a national pan-ethnic minority convinced advocates that only by broadening their perspective on ethnicity would they make affirmative action work. They cast themselves as agents of the change. Carlos Esparza, Costales’ deputy and successor at the Spanish-speaking Program, wanted to transform the federal relationship between the Spanish-speaking populations. “At one time in the early days,” he recalls, “Puerto Ricans felt that everything is being controlled by the Mexicans….There was friction there.” Esparza worked to diminish this tension by making affirmative action, in his words, more “pan-Hispanic.” “I wanted to make sure that everybody knew that we were in for all Hispanics. It didn’t matter where they were coming from, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and backgrounds or whatever. We’re all going to be in this together.”

Hary Puente-Duany, who joined IMAGE while he worked for Esparza, thought the name should be changed to the Hispanic Employment Program: “we wanted to start using the term Hispanic because it applied to all the communities.” Prior to that, “all of them were working separately. And what we wanted to do was say, we together would have a better chance. The term Hispanic or Spanish

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72 “Sixteen Questions on the Sixteen-Point Program,” Box 4, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
73 “Attachment to CSC Operations Letter 273-747,” January 9, 1974, Box 4, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
74 Esparza, interview.
speaking brought us closer together. One group, monolithic group, as opposed to different
groups.”

Federal affirmative action policies fueled IMAGE’s growth by connecting public
employment activists of all nationalities in a nationwide pan-Hispanic network rooted in the
workplace. Under the program, the Civil Service Commission required each federal agency to
have a “Sixteen-Point Coordinator.” Though agencies moved slowly to revamp their hiring
practices, many took this relatively easy and visible step. Coordinators, with a shared mission
but largely stymied in executing it, were ripe to join the new organization. In Hary Puente-
Duany’s words, the program was IMAGE’s “lifeline.” As he remembers, “that’s when we
started meeting and saying, ‘Hey, us being just there is not enough. We need to do something a
little bit more.’” The coordinators began monthly meetings, “plotting strategies about how to
make the program more visible,” he recalls. Many began attending IMAGE meetings.

Sixteen-Point Program coordinators and other Spanish-speaking employees shared
information through La Mesa Redonda (The Round Table), a monthly CSC publication. It
explained strategies for navigating the federal bureaucracy. It directed coordinators to the offices
that kept the applications and maintained the civil service eligibility lists that were the key to
placing employees in the system. It sought to recognize success and boost morale with laudatory
profiles of administrators who demonstrated skill at hiring Spanish-speaking Americans within
the existing merit system. By bringing Mexican American, Cuban, and Puerto Rican employees

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76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
into a national network, the federal government narrowed their historic divisions, and gave them incentives to present themselves going forward as a single group.

As affirmative action expanded and the activist web grew denser, IMAGE became a pan-ethnic organization. The first national convention in February of 1973 dropped “Mexican American” from its name. Intending “to bring in Puerto Rican and other Latino groups interested in the objectives of the organization,” it would be “IMAGE, a National Spanish Speaking Organization Concerned with Government Employment” going forward. While the CCOSS observed that, “some chapters still consider the organization to be solely Mexican-American,” the larger organization made increasing reference, first to the “Spanish-surnamed aspirant to government service,” and by 1976 to “Hispanic Americans interested in government service.” Puente-Duany recalls the ethnic transformation that IMAGE was helping to forge: “That was a big compromise on their [Mexican Americans’] part,” to change the organization’s name and give up some power and recognition in order to build a national organization. “They felt…hey we are the big chingónes, we’re the big number. And as a Cuban, I used to say, ‘you have the Puerto Ricans who are all citizens. And they have the power of the island. And then

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78 IMAGE Pamphlet, Box 5, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD; Valenzuela, “The Spanish Speaking and Government Employment,” 80.
79 “Assessment of Organizations,” March 27, 1974, Box 5, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
80 IMAGE Pamphlet, Box 5, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
you have the Cubans, we have the money and the politics. You need the other two along.” As
Puente-Duany remembers, “A lot of the compromise had to be within our own community.”

**Growing and Changing**

A name, of course, was no substitute for action. IMAGE gained credibility with
government workers by pressuring federal managers outside of traditional dispute resolution
channels. Counseled to work through the Civil Service Commission, IMAGE often went
directly to heads of agency departments to press their case. After all, according to Puente-
Duany, the CSC “was just the cheerleader. The agencies were the guys on the field.” IMAGE
filed third-party complaints against federal agencies, pressuring departments and commissions to
hire more Spanish-speaking employees, and advocating for individual job applicants.

In 1973, Puente-Duany, then working at the CCOSS, helped IMAGE investigate four
government agencies believed to have exceptionally bad records of hiring Spanish-speaking
Americans. The group’s “Project Compliance” made the case that the four agencies had
systematically discriminated against Spanish-speaking Americans in hiring and promotions.
Along with California congressmen Edwards and Waldie, Valenzuela held a press conference in
January 1974 to announce the findings. Project Compliance took the Interior, Transportation,
and Justice Departments, as well as the Veterans Administration to task for having “blatantly
disregarded the mandate and responsibilities” of “providing equal employment opportunity to

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82 Puente-Duany, interview.
83 Ibid.
Americans of Spanish heritage.”84 IMAGE leaders wanted officials to understand that high principles were at stake. They demanded jobs in the name of the Sixteen-Point Program, but also on the basis of “constitutional rights and natural rights as proclaimed two hundred years ago” and as an illustration of the “moral primacy of man over government.”85 The group threatened a lawsuit to compel action,86 and called for additional congressional hearings into federal discrimination. Valenzuela later claimed that these efforts resulted in new affirmative action coordinators for the targeted agencies, better recruitment plans, and the abandonment of some tests believed to have discriminatory outcomes. Even more important, according to Valenzuela, was the strong message this middle-class organization was sending. Federal employers “were starting to realize that the nation’s second largest minority was not as docile as they had been led to believe.”87

IMAGE flourished with this forceful pan-ethnic strategy, starting new chapters and affiliating existing public employee organizations. Though the majority of its chapters were in the Southwest, the group branched out to Miami, Chicago, Cleveland, New York City, Detroit, Georgia, and all around the Washington, DC metropolitan area. A 1975 IMAGE Directory shows that twenty-six of its forty-two chapters were in the Southwest, three were in the mountain region, and one was in the Pacific Northwest. It had six chapters in the Midwest, three in the Southeast, and two in the Northeast, and one in Washington, DC. By 1976, IMAGE claimed

85 House Committee, Hearings on Federal Employment of Spanish-Speaking Americans, 58.
sixty chapters and over seven thousand members, slightly less than 10 percent of this group’s total number in the federal workforce.\(^8^8\)

While contemporary efforts to build pan-ethnic political organizations often failed—the UNIDOS/Spanish-speaking coalition most notably—IMAGE was able to succeed for several reasons. First, its focus on public employment allowed the organization to avoid or accommodate potential controversies rooted in nationality. Puerto Rican independence, Mexican land grants, or Castro’s regime were all outside of its specific mission and could be deflected. IMAGE also changed its constitution to establish an organizational structure that promoted representation for separate nationality subgroups, as well as pan-Hispanic alliances. In addition to the chapter leaders, who usually reflected the dominant ethnic group in the area, the organization’s executive board assigned one member from each of the 10 federal regions. The organization was thus structurally pan-Hispanic, while permitting Mexican Americans to dominate much of the Southwest, and Puerto Ricans and Cubans to exert more influence in the East.

Second, group cohesion was easier because the majority of IMAGE members were white-collar workers. They did not, therefore, have to answer many difficult questions about class diversity and economic fairness within their own group. Third, the organization was bipartisan, with both Democratic and Republican presidents during the 1970s. In the mid-1970s, one CCOSS report concluded that the organization’s leadership exhibited a “good split” between

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left and right, including some leaders it considered “management oriented.” Its reasonable goals and ethnic moderation were consistent with both major parties’ objectives, and earned IMAGE a seat at the table during Republican administrations. Valenzuela would be invited to meetings at the Nixon White House alongside the leaders of LULAC and the American G.I. Forum.

IMAGE also grew because it aligned members’ professional and economic interests with notions of group loyalty and uplift. If one objective was to help members advance in the civil service, another was “to counter social and ethnic discrimination, open or subtle, wherever and whenever it is encountered against the Spanish surnamed.” This objective dovetailed with the image of the government worker as community role model and champion of the downtrodden. Less politically, one of IMAGE’s earliest goals was “To enhance the promotion of ethnic pride, cultures and comradeship through organized and regular social gatherings which will serve to bind us closer together.” In Washington, DC, for example, IMAGE provided a pan-Hispanic social outlet for its members, holding parties and other gatherings. These events served to strengthen members’ bonds with the organization and each other. Puente Duany remembers, “the thinking there was that you wanted to develop a cadre that would be happy, that would work in volunteer activities and would go to meetings.” IMAGE parties were open to the larger community as well, and served to bring in new recruits. As they listened to music and drank,

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89 “Assessment of Organizations,” March 27, 1974, Box 5, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
91 IMAGE Pamphlet, Box 5, Central File, Records of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish-Speaking People, RG 220.15.6, National Archives, College Park, MD.
partiers would discuss supervisors and new job opportunities, or provide tips to job-seeking friends.  

IMAGE national conventions also blended professional opportunity and social life. Members discussed public employment data and opportunities, rules for designing affirmative action plans, key Civil Service Commission regulations, court decisions, and affirmative action in education. IMAGE billed these events as a chance “to meet and develop contacts with Spanish Speaking individuals, to gain access to qualified skills banks, and present their agency’s progress in EEO activities.” The 1974 convention agenda testifies to the group’s growing prominence. Among those scheduled to attend the Las Vegas affair were the national presidents of LULAC and the American G.I. Forum, the Chairman of the Civil Service Commission, the Governor of Nevada, as well as the Lieutenant Governor (and future U.S. Senate Majority leader) Harry Reid. 

The spectrum of issues addressed at these conventions also widened. In addition to the customary resolutions on hiring and promotion, the 1975 assembly resolved to support the Voting Rights Act’s extension to “language minorities,” as well as to oppose “the importation of illegals to this country for the explicit purposes of exploitation and strike-breaking.” Other resolutions sought to bolster Hispanics’ position in national affairs. IMAGE called for a better

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92 Puente-Duany, interview.
census in 1980, and a “National Convention composed of all National Hispanic Organizations” to be held in early 1980.95

As IMAGE grew in importance, corporations took an interest in its activities. Federal managers had learned early on that they could meet their hiring goals by recruiting at IMAGE conventions. By the 1980s, however, big businesses had caught on. Coca-Cola, Budweiser, and Coors were among the corporations assuming such prominence at IMAGE events that they eventually rented almost a quarter of the group’s exhibit space, becoming an important means by which the organization financed its activities.96

With the membership expansion of the 1970s, power in the organization began to shift. Though it did not have as many members as the Southwest region, the Washington, DC chapter had advantages that allowed it to amass significant influence. First, the majority of Sixteen-Point coordinators belonged to it. Their responsibilities gave them the freedom to travel at government expense, trips they could arrange to coincide with IMAGE events such as executive meetings. Members in lower pay grades were forced to pay out-of-pocket if they wished to attend these meetings. With this mobility, the Washington contingent could play a leading role building the organization and shaping its future course.97

The chapter also had representation from all three major Spanish-speaking populations. Its heterogeneity encouraged aspiring leaders to master pan-ethnic politics, which would enable them to achieve national success. The chapter’s president, Gilbert Chávez, credits his election as

95 “Resolutions of the 1975 IMAGE National Convention,” in DeBaca, The Ford Administration and Hispanic America, Reel 1, Frames 0455-0482.
96 Puente-Duany, interview.
97 Ibid.
IMAGE’s national president in 1976 to his ability to adopt a pan-ethnic approach. He remembers telling Valenzuela how he was able to defeat him in the election:

‘Well,’ I says, you know, ‘you, you were thinking that, that only Mexican Americans [are] in the Hispanic community,’ I says. ‘The Hispanic community is all over the country not just in Phoenix, Arizona. And that’s how I beat you. By planning and looking to the Hispanics across the country to coalesce on the same issue of employment’….That gave us strength especially with the Puerto Ricans in New York, Chicago. A lot, because a lot of New Yorkers...And they, and they became a very strong ally, as they are today, of IMAGE in the Midwest and in the Northwest. So, we, we bridged that whole gap.98

This ability to bridge gaps and establish a “monolithic group,” as Puente-Duany put it, had come in part from doing battle with other established interests. IMAGE leaders distanced themselves from other minorities, most often African Americans. The group lobbied Congress to separate the federal “Spanish-speaking Program” from the larger EEO program under the cultural logic that “tying Hispanics with groups that had similar but not equal problems is tying Hispanics to preconceived notions of what the solutions should be.” Most EEO directors came from the “dominant minority group majority.” They viewed affirmative action for Hispanics as “a danger” and “subtracting from possible gains for their group.” As a result, IMAGE claimed, they “diluted and undermined” affirmative action, and “sabotaged” it. The result was as unfair as it was plain: “blacks comprise approximately 17% of the Federal work force while representing only 11% of the population.”99 Though Valenzuela later wrote of his feeling that “at times, that Anglo bureaucrats have deliberately…put Brown Brothers against Black

98 Chávez, interview, 11-12.
Brothers,” his organization, and in a larger way the pan-Hispanic institutional presence in government, drew strength from this rivalry over the years.100

Civil Service Reform and “Underrepresentation” Transformed

The Hispanic struggle for federal jobs reached an apparent turning point when Congress passed the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. The law declared that, “it is the policy of the United States…to provide…a Federal work force reflective of the Nation’s diversity,” and committed the national government “to achiev[ing] a work force from all segments of society.”101 While the 1883 civil service reforms regarded diversity in geographic terms—something that had worked to Carlos Esparza’s benefit in 1964—the 1978 law enshrined “all segments of society” as an ethnoracial concept. Ethnic blocs, not states, were the meaningful components of America.

A slight change to the 1978 legislation made a difference in what this would mean for Hispanics. Representative Robert Garcia, Herman Badillo’s replacement in Congress when the latter left to run (unsuccessfully) for Mayor of New York in 1977, introduced what became known as the “Garcia amendment.”102 It required each executive agency to “conduct a continuing program for the recruitment of members of minorities” that would eliminate their “underrepresentation” in the civil service. It defined this status as “a situation in which the number of women or members of a minority group within a category of civil service

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employment constitutes a lower percentage of the total number of employees within the employment category than the percentage women or the minority constitutes within the civilian labor force of the United States.” With the proportion of the population that was Hispanic growing each year, the amendment theoretically committed the government to recruiting and training an ever-growing number of Hispanic civil servants.103

In May of 1977, the Office of Management and Budget had introduced a new set of standard reporting categories, requiring all federal agencies to include “Hispanic” Americans in any statistics they compiled (see Chapter 10). The efforts of IMAGE and many others to convince federal officials that their multiple national origin constituents were, in fact, a single American minority, proved very meaningful: under the terms of the Garcia amendment, the Office of Personnel Management (formerly the Civil Service Commission) and the EEOC would only monitor the hiring of “those groups classified as ‘minority’ for the purpose of data collection.” By demanding distinction from the rest of the “white” population, the activists could now use the law to their advantage, and not have to rely upon a presidential press release.104

“You’re looking at a spider web,” Harry Puente-Duany recalled. “And people don’t realize it, that in order to get the government to move there was a lot of things done that were joined….without all the pieces in place, things would fall out.” Puente-Duany, a future IMAGE president himself, would quote from the regulation issued to enforce the “Garcia amendment” whenever he dealt with federal managers. At last, he felt, there was “regulatory weight” behind

103 “5 cfr 720 § 720.202 Subpart B—Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program,” http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr;sid=c091d1fff9688ad40d91ac272ec3d8af;rgn=div5;view=text;node=5%3A2.0.1.1.3;idno=5;cc=ecfr#5:2.0.1.1.3.2 [accessed February 7, 2012].
104 Ibid. Under the new regulations, Hispanics could belong to any race.
the affirmative action effort. In a very real sense, Hispanics had become a fixture in the federal government. They were becoming a national minority.

Conclusion

Reflecting on his three decades of government service, former IMAGE president and activist Gilbert Chávez talked of getting what was likely his final government job, a placement in Texas:

I always told people I think it’s good if you go to Washington, but … the people that you advocate for the real forceful speakers and voters in this country are Hispanic or out here, out here in the Southwestern states. And that’s the reason I feel, went out here because I hear there’s many more things you can do here. And then, knowing what you know about Washington and what you learn you try to pass it on to people.106

Chávez, whose activist career was built on gaining the trust and confidence of Mexican Americans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans, and convincing them to ally with each other as Hispanics, acknowledged an essential truth about the growth of Hispanismo. Federal workers did not change the map, did not transform their own origins, or radically reorient the ethnic politics of their home regions. In the 1970s, they built an organization around the ideal that all “Hispanics” in government were obligated to join together to protect and ensure fair treatment for their communities. Their actions gave them a foothold in national power, and legitimated other pan-Hispanic claims for inclusion, producing official recognition of their people in a truly national institution, the federal civil service.

105 Puente-Duany, interview.
106 Chávez, interview, 60.
Their efforts continued to bear the imprint of Nixon-era racial polarization long after the president resigned. In a way, they carried on the work of the Cabinet Committee, which would not survive much past the Watergate investigation, in which many of the Brown Mafia’s activities were discovered. IMAGE embraced the notion of pan-ethnic organization, deriving unity through separation from black groups. It did not exhibit animosity toward management in general. It was not and did not seek to become a union, and it welcomed partnerships with corporations trying to promote “diversity” in their ranks. In all, IMAGE leaders sought to contain the unrest and rancor of the 1960s and early 1970s protest movements by presenting themselves as careful and moderate experts in the administration of government to their people. As they sought to occupy a respectable place in the society, to join the establishment, they won the support of powerful politicians and some government administrators. Although they would make only limited gains in their main goal—increasing the number of Hispanic public sector workers—their activism pushed national leaders to adopt an approach to governance in which membership in large ethnoracial blocs constituted the legitimate basis for claims on the state, and in which ethnic professionals, as much if not more than elected officials, spoke for the claimants in the new multicultural order.
Chapter 10

“In statistics, as in our children, lies our future”: Becoming Hispanics, 1970-1980

The only way to be the largest minority group in the country is to recognize Puerto Ricans, Central Americans, Cubans and South Americans as Hispanos, too. Unless Hispanos unite, we’re not going to make any headway as the largest minority in this country.

— Graciela Olivarez, Community Services Administration, 1979

Statistical visibility is policy visibility.

— Edward Roybal, 1979

By the late 1960s, federal statisticians felt their system buckling under the weight of new demands. One observer declared that “there has literally been an explosion of surveys, research, and analyses” necessary to administer federal programs dealing with “job training, education, income maintenance, health care, and public safety,” among other concerns. “The resulting flood of new data requirements,” the statistician concluded, “has literally burst open the traditional confines of our statistical system.”

As data became more extensive, groups lacking in political strength came to rely upon it to formulate claims on the federal system. Spanish-speaking Americans were one such group. To move beyond the obstacles to mobilizing their vote nationally, their large numbers of non-citizens, and their subordinate status within both parties, determining their overall numbers

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1 UPI, “Hispanic unity urged,” Roswell Daily Record, September 10, 1979, in Box 1, 1980 Census Community Services Representative Files (1972-1980), RG 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives, Washington, DC.

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became a major priority for their organizations. Ricardo Zazueta, Director of Operation SER, a manpower training program run jointly by LULAC and the American G.I. Forum, may have expressed the sentiment best when testifying before Congress in 1974. “There is no doubt,” he said, “that in statistics, as in our children, lies our future.”

However, federal statistics possessed serious shortcomings for understanding the many populations for whom Zazueta spoke (see Chapter 5). The techniques used in the 1970 census were a patchwork that reflected the different historical incorporations and ethnic sensibilities of the various Spanish-speaking groups. Nevertheless, as with the Cabinet Committee and affirmative action, federal statistics presented Spanish-speaking groups from all nationalities with a common target for reform. The public and participatory nature of the decennial census provided a common forum for these myriad interests, allowing them to discover one another, to overcome ethnocentrism, to build friendships and alliances, and to join together to lobby for collective representation.

Over the 1970s, activists, politicians, and bureaucrats brought a measure of uniformity to the “loosely concocted mixture” that was the country’s “Spanish Heritage” population. The fragmented and differentiated regime, ethnically divided according to region, was recast in an integrated national mold. It happened over the objections of people who thought that the Spanish-speaking groups did not belong together, as well as those who wanted less ethnic data gathered altogether.

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4 House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Economic and Social Statistics for Spanish-Speaking Americans, 93rd Cong, 2nd sess., 1974, 94.
The decade-long contest to achieve national statistical recognition brought most if not all of the key strands of pan-Hispanic politics together. It required ethnic leaders and organizations in and outside of government—Edward Roybal, the Cabinet Committee, and the Southwest Council of La Raza are examples—to define their group’s boundaries and provide a narrative of their common history. Statistical recognition was considered meaningful evidence of presidential concern, which tended to override the concerns of career statisticians. Their ethnic creation caused conflict with bureaucrats defending professional standards and principles of objectivity. The statistical fight was also a fight for jobs. Activists argued that they would never achieve “statistical visibility” until their group was employed in the making of statistics, from policymaking positions down to door-knocking census enumerators.

Activists seeking an expansion of ethnic data faced federal leaders eager to maintain authority over a restive and disillusioned populace, and to be seen as promoting bureaucratic efficiency in a time of scarcity. The collapse of faith in Keynesian economic management during the economic crises of the 1970s had limited the state’s capacity to mediate among economic classes, imparting additional urgency to federal management of ethnic difference. The government sought to make its subjects “legible,” in James C. Scott’s memorable phrasing, “to create a terrain and a population with precisely those standardized characteristics that will be easiest to monitor, count, assess, and manage.” President Carter’s own desire to be seen as a new type of Democratic leader, a competent administrator and promoter of government efficiency, as well as his need for minority support, also help explain why new statistical standards recognizing “Hispanics” as a national minority came about during the decade.6

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6 Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, chap. 2; Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 78, 81-82.
As usual, though, state recognition of pan-Hispanic solidarity in the later part of the decade would produce new challenges for its champions. Activists claimed that national censuses undercounted them, depriving them of federal funds and electoral influence, because the government did not comprehend their group’s cultural difference. Opponents, however, suggested another explanation. Alleged “undercounts” occurred because so many Hispanics were in the country illegally. Historian David Gutiérrez has argued that Mexican Americans drew closer to Mexican immigrants in part because anti-immigrant hostility affected them, regardless of legal status or citizenship.7 The debate over counting undocumented aliens in the census required activists, regardless of national origin, to reconsider their ethnic bonds. As opponents covered all Hispanics with the stain of illegality, advocates, including a number of Puerto Ricans, defended themselves by embracing the cultural citizenship of a pan-Hispanic community. Formal citizenship still mattered greatly, however, as elected officials who held their seats because minority constituents chose to exercise the franchise, Edward Roybal and Herman Badillo especially, helped ensure that non-citizens would be counted.

Ultimately, the decade saw the convergence of bureaucratic and political categories. The people who entered the 1970s as Chicanos, Boricuas, Latin Americans, Hispanos, Spanish-speaking Americans and Spanish-surnamed Americans left it, in political discourse and in official statistical policy, as Hispanics. They were a greater number, and, to some, a greater threat.

Organizing Against the Census, 1970-1973

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7 Gutiérrez, Walls and Mirrors.
When preliminary findings of the 1970 census were released, *U.S. News and World Report* described the “shock and disbelief” that some state and local officeholders expressed. The “bigger than expected” population shifts caused by the exodus of rural America to the cities and suburbs, and the great movement of Americans to the South and West, portended a “significant transfer of power” to the growing areas.8

For Mexican Americans, whose greatest concentrations were among those areas in the Sunbelt, this was potentially positive news. With a “good” count, they stood to gain in legislative reapportionment, federal aid dollars, and, less directly, political influence. The importance of the findings ensured the inevitability of conflict over the techniques used to enumerate the various Spanish-speaking peoples. Even before preliminary state totals were released, California activists filed a federal lawsuit against the Bureau of the Census. The Confederación de la Raza Unida and the San Benito County Consumers Co-Op sought to enjoin the Bureau from publishing its Spanish Heritage statistics. They charged it with what the *Wall Street Journal* called “upper-socioeconomic bias” against “Spanish-Americans” for using a mail-out/mail-back system of enumeration, and with discrimination against them in employment. As a result of Bureau bias, the plaintiffs argued, the 1970 census had failed to count more than 5 million of their people.9

Political groups’ interest in the statistics demanded more detailed figures. “Deluged with requests from Chicano politicians and others,” in the spring of 1972 the Bureau released

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preliminary results of the Spanish heritage tabulations for some states. Language and surname data suggested that more than half of this group lived in Texas and California. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, California’s “Latin American heritage” population had doubled since 1960. It was now more than twice as large as state’s black population, the newspaper remarked.¹⁰

The findings for California and Texas might have been expected. Similarly, few would have been surprised to learn that 811,843 of New York State’s 872,471 Puerto Ricans lived in New York City. However, the new “Spanish Origin” identifier managed to reveal altogether new populations. In New York City alone, it highlighted the existence of almost 400,000 additional persons who might have been Dominican, Cuban, Spanish, or of some other “Hispanic extraction,” as the *New York Times* put it.¹¹

Ethnic activists and urban politicians’ default position toward these findings was one of extreme skepticism. The national measurement of first and second generation Puerto Ricans in the 1970 census—1,379,043—was less than the 1,454,000 Puerto Ricans who had been identified by the 1969 Current Population Survey (CPS). Community leaders could not fathom that there might be fewer Puerto Ricans on the mainland in 1970 than there had been the year before.¹²

On the West coast, representatives of the American G.I. Forum, LULAC, IMAGE, and Mexican American Legal Defense Fund (MALDEF) established the “Mexican-American Population Commission of California” to demand a more accurate count. They accused the Bureau of “abdicat[ing] its responsibility” in 1970, adopting for themselves a “quasi-

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governmental role” of overseeing its findings. Compiling data from Census surveys, the California State Education department, and the U.S. Department of Labor, they generated their own set of facts with which to dispute the 1970 count. In June of 1973, they announced that 3.75 million “Spanish-surnamed” people lived in the state, almost twice as many as the 2 million “persons of Spanish Origin” announced by the 1970 tally. The activists intended the results to serve as a message for “every politician in this state.” Powerful interests had better incorporate this group in their plans, they said, because “in 10 years Mexican-Americans are going to be a strong economic and political force in California.”

Activists’ challenges to the census dovetailed with the Bureau’s own evolving methodology, which in turn produced further challenges to bureaucratic authority. In 1973, Census officials reassigned all children under 14 years of age to the Spanish Origin category if their mothers were, regardless of what the “head of household” had listed. The seemingly minor change created roughly 300,000 additional Spanish Origin children, and instantly boosted the group’s population by about 3 percent.

The Bureau’s March 1973 Current Population Survey (CPS) was another flashpoint. It showed about 1.5 million more Spanish Origin people—a 17 percent increase—than had been counted in the decennial census taken in April of 1970. The Bureau claimed that some of the growth came from its use of new identifiers, and that two thirds was likely due to an increase in births over deaths, as well as to immigration. Activists from the Mexican-American Population

14 Previously, a child under 14 was assigned to Spanish Origin category if the “head of household” identified himself as “Spanish Origin.”
Commission, however, argued that the new numbers “vindicated” their earlier criticism. Bureau officials were now “admitting their past mistakes,” they said. The statistics affirmed their role as leaders and interpreters of the disenfranchised masses, proof that a bureaucracy without their involvement, a “totally academic approach,” would fail to incorporate their minority, fail to comprehend their “different lifestyles and outlooks which require new mechanisms to accurately count population.”  

Newspapers followed this line, and mistakenly called the 1973 CPS a “recount” that had “discovered” the population gain, or suggested that it was a revision of the 1970 census, rather than a distinct survey conducted at an entirely different point in time.  

Census activists found allies among the federal government’s in-house civil rights advocates. Louis Nuñez, the former leader of the Puerto Rican educational advocacy organization ASPIRA who had been named deputy staff director of the United States Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) during Nixon’s re-election campaign, was one such supporter. In 1973, he proposed that the USCCR investigate a possibly massive undercount of Spanish Origin people in the 1970 census.  

The inquiry produced *Counting the Forgotten: The 1970 Census Count of Persons of Spanish Speaking Background in the United States*. A 112-page indictment of Bureau ineptitude and insensitivity during the decennial census, the report transformed what statisticians saw as a technical problem into a civil rights question and a manifesto for institutionalizing pan-Hispanic identity. It found “strong evidence” that the country’s “Spanish-speaking background population was substantially undercounted” in 1970, and “probably…by appreciably more than”

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the 7.7 percent that the Bureau acknowledged undercounting blacks.\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Counting the Forgotten} made language the core characteristic of “the nation’s second largest minority population.” It criticized the Bureau for not sending out Spanish-language questionnaires, for failing to provide sufficient Spanish instructions, and for not hiring enough bilingual enumerators.

The report faulted the Bureau’s statistical methodology as well. It had been “insensitive” to use a “variety of indices” to measure the group. Census officials had erred by sampling the population, something they had been forced to do when Nixon compelled them at the eleventh hour to ask the “Spanish Origin” question. The report called upon the Bureau henceforth to employ “a uniform measure” to identify this population, and to furnish it “the same consideration given to nonminorities in the Bureau’s methodology and data collection techniques.” \textit{Counting the Forgotten} recommended an affirmative action program at the Bureau, inclusion of Spanish-speaking people on Census advisory committees, and asking the Spanish Origin question of 100 percent of respondents. Finally, it called for the Bureau to solicit input from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which presumably recognized “the need for Spanish speaking background statistics.”\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{Establishing Controls: The Office of Management and Budget, 1970-1973}

Although civil rights advocates’ efforts to establish Hispanic Americans as a singular presence in the nation’s statistics frustrated many officials, their efforts were congenial to government objectives. As Scott has argued, one of the modern state’s “utopian, immanent, and

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., vi.
\textsuperscript{20} One of the important pieces of evidence cited was a CCOSS report estimating that 12 million people of “Spanish-speaking background” resided in the United States in 1971. Ibid., iii, iv, 48, 11, 100.
continually frustrated goal[s]” has been to “reduce the chaotic, disorderly, constantly changing social reality beneath it to something more closely resembling the administrative grid of its observation.”21 This was made somewhat less utopian in the United States in July of 1970, when Richard Nixon’s executive order 11541 established the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). A Statistical Policy Division (SPD) within the OMB would be the federal government’s “central coordinating agency” for data, serving to “prevent duplication, achieve balance, develop procedures, and provide leadership for an integrated system of governmental statistics.”22 A 1971 OMB report noted that the “proliferation of statistical collection activities” in dozens of federal agencies had led to “wide disparities in the quality of data and the standards used,” trouble with comparability, “overlapping collection activities,” and other “operational inefficiencies.”23 One agency would report as many as 15 ethnoracial categories while another reported as few as one (“minority”). Most agencies reported minorities according to five categories, but used “various categories for persons of Spanish heritage.”24

Federal managers saw a situation in desperate need of direction. Their solution was standardization. SPD statistician Milo B. Sunderhauf predicted that “the specification of categories will become a necessity as agencies look to OMB for leadership” in the coming years. OMB’s interventions would lighten the burden on government departments and committees, so that they would “no longer have to waste time in trying to reach agreement on minority

21 Scott, Seeing Like a State, 82.
24 Ibid.
categories to be reported.” Statistical management would remove “one more obstacle to the easy exchange of program information,” promoting overall government efficiency.\(^{25}\)

The imperative to standardize had specific implications for the perennially frustrating “problem of identifying Spanishness.” As Mexican American activists had found when attempting to form their own coalitions in the early 1960s, and as they later discovered interacting with Puerto Ricans and Cubans, the first problem was picking an identifier. Federal agencies used many different terms to measure this population, and their techniques for reporting also varied. Some government departments (the EEOC and the Federal Housing Administration, for example) obtained data by visual observation. Others used self-identification. This difference complicated the terminology available (could one visually observe a “Spanish-speaking” American?), and raised other questions. Statistical managers did not know to which race these Americans properly belonged. Some group members desired to identify themselves racially as “white,” while others preferred “brown” or “Indian,” and still others chose “black.”\(^{26}\)

The solution to these dilemmas was to be selectively superficial, to create, in historian David Hollinger’s words, a sort of “race equivalent.”\(^{27}\) The OMB believed that its new category “should yield consistent results” whether using self-identification or visual observation, “and be sufficiently general to encompass all minority groups.” Its requirements homogenized nationalities, because terms had to be “those that an observer can readily apply, e.g., a general category of persons of Spanish origin, versus a particular national origin such as Cuban.” This


\(^{26}\) Milo B. Sunderhauf to Margaret E. Martin et al, August 13, 1971, Box 23, Office of Statistical Policy Division Program Records, 1974-1980, RG 51, Records of the Office of Management and Budget, National Archives, College Park, MD.

reliance on a visual cue to “Spanishness” was broadly consistent with the OMB’s objective of “identify[ing] the individual as a member of the group even though he may no longer be conscious of his origin or even if he may be actively trying to avoid identification with the racial or ethnic group.” Such quasi-racial requirements led OMB to reject existing identifiers such as “Spanish surnamed,” or the increasingly popular “Spanish-speaking.” Such characteristics did not define the population that managers were truly concerned about measuring, those whose visual appearance marked them for different treatment in society.  

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights increased the pressure to standardize, with particular recommendations for this group. Civil rights organizations and some federal agencies were demanding an accounting of the race and ethnicity of those benefiting from federal programs. The USCCR’s 1973 report, To Know or Not to Know: Collection and Use of Racial and Ethnic Data in Federal Assistance Programs criticized the lack of an effective “system of racial and data collection” and the federal government’s reliance upon “ad hoc and even haphazard observations” about program participation. As with the census, proper data required standardization of practices and categories. Acknowledging the “considerable controversy” over the appropriate terminology for the “Spanish Surnamed/Spanish Speaking/Spanish Origin/Spanish American” group, the report nonetheless denounced the old system. “It is the essence of prejudice to expect that all members of a group bonded together by ancestry and common experience will share any single characteristic,” such as the Spanish language. An intelligent and “generally acceptable terminology,” it said, would “connot[e] minority group

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28 Citing the Bureau’s success with “Spanish Origin,” Sunderhauf recommended that metric for observer identification, and national identifiers (Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban”) to be included for self-identification. Sunderhauf to Martin et al, August 13, 1971.
membership, but not necessarily minority group characteristics.” How did one define minority
group membership without suggesting the characteristics shared by group members? This
statement suggested the government’s trouble in defining this group’s difference, since neither
language nor race were fully acceptable. The USCCR determined that nationality trumped race,
and that there was “a great need for data” on “country of origin,” since for this group,
“distinctions based on national origin rather than race are seen as the meaningful ones.”

The report helped spur officials to consider their next move. Internal documents show
that OMB was feeling the pressure from a great many “minority interest groups,” and expected
that “the ‘women’ groups” would soon demand “additional sexual data.” SPD staff admitted that
“despite prior, intensive efforts,” they still lacked a “cohesive, well-thought-out policy in these
areas.” As of 1973, they had no real idea of the quantity of racial and ethnic data the government
gathered, the cost of its collection and storage, the percentage that ever got evaluated, and what,
if any of it, was useful. The OMB was adrift. It could not remain so for long, however. As one
internal analysis concluded, “continuing external pressures, political sensitivities and potential
programmatic benefits all seem to demand that OMB provides some guidance and soon—or at
least determine internally where we stand.”

Congressional Pressure, 1971-1976

As the executive branch debated, Mexican American and Puerto Rican leaders in

29 While the NAACP and Japanese American Citizens’ League were said to be “reconsidering their policies with
regard to racial and data collection,” the MALDEF was all for the change, and the Southwest Council of La Raza
had no opposition. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, To Know or Not to Know: Collection and Use of Racial and
31, 38, 40n42.
30 “Draft,” May 18, 1973, Box 23, Office of Statistical Policy Division Program Records, 1974-1980, RG 51,
Records of the Office of Management and Budget, National Archives, College Park, MD.
Congress moved to force the government to create a separate place in federal statistics for their group. Representatives Edward Roybal and Herman Badillo, unable to mobilize a Spanish-speaking political coalition, looked to statistics to make their claims. However, federal data publication still did not always acknowledge their people. The unemployment rate, for example, was catalogued every month for blacks and whites, but not for their group. In the fall of 1971, as he lamented the lack of unity among Spanish-speaking activists, Badillo tried to force the bureaucracy to show “exactly where we stand,” so that America’s second largest minority could receive the “full and fair share” of federal resources that its collective numbers deserved. He and Roybal, along with Senator Hubert Humphrey, introduced resolutions to compel the Bureau of the Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics expand statistical attention to this group.\(^{31}\)

Although the resolution did not pass, Roybal introduced another version of it in March of 1973. This resolution, H.J. Res 406, cited the “racial, social, economic, and political discrimination” that prevented his group of from enjoying the “basic opportunities they deserve as American citizens.” They could not “lift themselves out of the poverty that they now endure” because the lack of “regular, nationwide evaluation” prevented policymakers from making an accurate assessment of their “urgent and special needs.”\(^{32}\)

The protests of the Census, the publication of *Counting the Forgotten* and *To Know or Not to Know*, and now Roybal’s resolution kept alive the question of what it would take for an accurate accounting the country’s Spanish-speaking Americans. They served as the impetus for House hearings on federal statistics for all Spanish-speaking Americans in the summer of 1974

\(^{31}\) For Badillo’s remarks, see Cong. Rec., 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 117: 41901; For Humphrey’s remarks, see Cong. Rec., 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 117: 41669-41670.

and the spring of 1975.

During the hearings, a number of advocates, academics, bureaucrats, and elected officials testified that consistent national enumeration and reporting of this group would show fairness to their minority, bring greater efficiency to government, and validate individuals’ right to information. Alex Zermeno of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR)\(^{33}\) argued that the data would allow this group to claim an “equity position” in policymaking, and promote impartial administration. Without good statistics, minorities were at the mercy of any administration bent on “ politicizing the government services that are supposed to be provided.” The Watergate investigation showed what it was like when groups “couldn’t make [their] case on facts, on statistics” and thus were “forced to play the patronage game.” It was time to end the government’s “statistical atrocities” and fulfill the public’s “right to quality information,” he argued.\(^{34}\)

The advocates’ common demand was for an official category that would place all Spanish-speaking people under a single banner. They framed their demand as essential for good data and government efficiency. The NCLR argued that a “common identifier” would “ reduce confusion” and “provide for increased accuracy.” The USCCR deemed it “very important” for the Census and OMB to come together to establish “a standard Spanish origin category.” Roybal called for OMB to take the lead in establishing a consistent identifier, with “Spanish origin or descent” or “Spanish-speaking background” as possible options.\(^{35}\)


\(^{34}\) House Committee, *Economic and Social Statistics for Spanish-Speaking Americans*, 1974, 121-122, 131.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 123.
A mandate that collectively distinguished these populations from the mainstream did not sit well with some House members, however. Congressmen such as Texas Democrat Richard White portrayed themselves as allies of the cause, but skeptics of the method. For White, assimilation was synonymous with improved material condition. He therefore wondered if such a statistic would outlive its importance once this group had advanced economically. The statistic might even impede group progress, he suggested. When he was a member of the Texas state legislature, he recalled, Mexican Americans had sought to eliminate “Mexican” as a designation on birth certificates. Reviving the difference might make it difficult for this group to assimilate, which was a problem since, as he put it, “we’re all Americans.”

Besides perpetuating harmful social divisions, a standard national statistic might not be sufficiently precise. William Lehman, a freshman Democrat from South Florida, feared including his constituents and their “success-oriented Cuban culture” in the same category as another “minority.” He cautioned against any effort to view “all Spanish surnames as a monolithic thing,” claiming that there existed “more difference between the Cubans and the Mexicans or the Puerto Ricans and the Cubans than there is between the Anglos and the Cubans, or the blacks and the Mexicans, and so forth.” Cubans’ rapid structural assimilation—their “mobility of class,” Lehman called it—raised doubts about considering the country’s Spanish-speaking populations “as a kind of a block group.” As far as he was concerned, it was an open question if government could even produce a statistic of “any value to help us solve our problem.”

White also wanted to make sure that public policy focused on members of this “minority” who actually needed help. He had “never seen a Spaniard from Spain who has had

36 Ibid., 116, 118, 124, 113.
37 Ibid., 23.
the economic problems or assimilation problems…they are blonds, with blue eyes, and sometimes the second generation seems to have no problem.” It was awkward, but he recommended at least clarifying the region involved with an identifier like “Western Hemisphere Spanish-speaking origin.”

Congress continued to debate, and Roybal’s resolution languished, but activists continued to press their case. In January of 1975, Roybal introduced H.J. Res 92, which requested that the OMB “develop a Government-wide program for the collection of data with respect to Americans of Spanish origin or descent.” Advocacy groups lined up behind the effort, displaying an organizational unity that they wished to see reflected in the statistics. The American G.I. Forum, LULAC, IMAGE and “all the major national Spanish-speaking organizations” had formed a D.C. lobbying organization called Raza Association of Spanish Surnamed Americans (RASSA), and in 1975 renamed it the National Congress of Hispanic American Citizens (NCHAC). Claiming to speak for 3 million members in 95 organizations, this new “El Congreso” weighed in for a single, “Spanish Origin or descent” category that would also allow people to indicate their national origin.

The National Council of La Raza may have been the most vocal supporter of a national and pan-Hispanic approach to data gathering. Policymakers typically encountered the powerful voices of their region—be they Mexican American, Puerto Rican, or Cuban—demanding recognition of their primacy in that area. Nevertheless, the NCLR’s, in its report on The

38 Ibid., 125.
40 The previous year, this organization was known as Raza Association of Spanish Surnamed Americans (RASSA). El Congreso, as it was known, was headed by Manuel D. Fierro. Its name paid homage to El Congreso del Pueblo de Habla Espanola (the National Congress of the Spanish-speaking People), the popular front-era organization headed by Fierro’s mother, the labor and civil rights organizer Josefina Fierro de Bright. Ibid., 36.
**Hispanic American: A National Planning Policy Issue for the 1980 Census**, condemned them for their faulty “regional conceptualization” of what it called the “Hispanic issue.” Legislators and bureaucrats had divided New York, South Florida, and the Southwest “into Puerto Rican, Cuban and Mexican American spheres of influence,” the report argued. Federal statistics, however, showed that more than a million Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans lived beyond “the regions with which they are ‘ethnically’ identified.” This required a new way of thinking about the country, one devoid of “regional ethnocentrism.” A uniform countrywide statistic would promote an awareness that “the Hispanic American issue is a national question.”

After four years, it appeared that the Congress agreed. On October 29, 1975, the Roybal resolution passed the House, and the Senate ordered it out of committee by a voice vote. It was the only law of its kind, mandating data collection for a specific ethnoracial group. It called for the increased use of Spanish language questionnaires and bilingual enumerators during censuses. It required monthly instead of quarterly unemployment statistics. Overall, it legislated “a comprehensive Government-wide program” on data collection for “Americans of Spanish origin or descent.” The goal was “a reliable and comprehensive socioeconomic profile” of this group, “on par with that available for the general population of the United States.”

On May 21, 1976, the resolution passed the Senate and on June 7, the House concurred. President Ford signed it in the Rose Garden little more than a week later, with Roybal and Badillo looking on. Congress had given its endorsement to this minority’s statistical emergence.

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41 Ibid., 48-52.
The OMB and Directive 15, 1975-1977

The Roybal resolution and congressional extension of the Voting Rights Act in 1975 to “language minorities” provided additional motivation for OMB staff to produce a set of statistical requirements that could meet current demands. In response to congressional pressure, OMB “instructed” the EEOC and HEW Office of Civil Rights (OCR) to adopt “a single set of racial and ethnic categories” for educational reporting, beginning in the fall of 1975.44 Both agencies had previously used the Spanish-surname designation, seemingly for good reason. In 1967, the OCR had attempted to put Mexican-Americans in the “other” racial category, but “the intensity of the objections” that emerged required it to change course. The lesson, OCR leaders explained, was that any category that did not also allow Spanish-speaking Americans to list their race as “white,” “will not be fully effective.”45

After 10 months of work, the Federal Interagency Committee of Education (FICE), of which the EEOC and OCR were a part, accepted “Hispanic” as one of five racial/ethnic classifications.46 The category was defined as “a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.” The FICE also

46 American Indian or Alaskan native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black/Negro, not of Hispanic origin; Caucasian/White, not of Hispanic origin; and Hispanic were the choices.
permitted asking if a person belonged to one of four races, followed by a question asking, “is your ethnic heritage Hispanic?”

The agencies wanted to eliminate as much discretion as possible, even from surveys employing self-identification. They had debated including an “Other” category, to act as a sort of “escape valve for the sensitivities of those persons who cannot classify themselves within the government’s categories.” In the end, however, they did not. The OCR’s director gave two reasons: first, most federal surveys did not use self-identification; second, the five identifiers “represent[ed] the five major groups in which the society as a whole places people.” Even if a person did not consider himself to belong to a group, society would, and thus it was important to count that person with that group. Over the previous 15 years, advocates had come to regard self-identification as a fundamental right of individuals, and an expression of group self-determination. The OCR, on the other hand, argued that allowing people to choose “other” for their race “would invite abuse by pranksters and the lazy.” There was clear distance between the bureaucracy and the advocates.

The federal government continued to refine its approach, and in late 1976, the OMB and the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a draft of new racial and ethnic categories. These draft regulations also presented two possible routes to acceptable data. The first was a two-part question in which respondents indicated their membership in one of four racial categories (American Indian or Alaskan native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, and

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48 Marin H. Gerry to George E. Hall, November 12, 1976, Box 23, Office of Statistical Policy Division Program Records, 1974-1980, RG 51, Records of the Office of Management and Budget, National Archives, College Park, MD.
White), and then explained whether their “ethnicity” was either “Hispanic origin” or “Not of Hispanic origin.” The second route was to ensure all data could fit within “minimum acceptable categories.” These were American Indian or Alaskan native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, not of Hispanic origin; White, not of Hispanic origin; and Hispanic.49

Federal employees recognized that the new categories would be of major importance. Those who felt their group had been excluded pushed to get in, or stay in, while others sought to protect the system from what they saw as unwarranted political interference. After the new standards were released for comment in December of 1976, OMB Deputy Director Fernando Oaxaca, a Nixon fundraiser whose business had received substantial grants during the 1972 campaign season, endorsed them heartily. Many government workers, though, were confused, or angered by the new categories. Some challenged the rigidity and many of the assumptions of the new order. The staff of HUD wondered how to use the new Hispanic term. “Shouldn't this format allow Mexican Indians to be classified also as Hispanic? Also, what about Philippines -- Asian Hispanic?” On the section dealing with race/ethnicity, a HUD employee wrote, “I find this very confusing -- is it supposed to be?”50 Civil Service Commission employees dismissed the new categories as “a mixture of racial, cultural, and geographic identification with some current social preferences intermixed.” Since many of the identifiers were “not, for the most part, mutually exclusive,” they argued for allowing people to select an “other” or “unidentifiable” category. The new standards were plainly “inadequate and too important to go

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50 Fernando Oaxaca to Katherine Wallman, December 30, 1976; Bill Hamm to Katherine Wallman; in Box 23, Office of Statistical Policy Division Program Records, 1974-1980, RG 51, Records of the Office of Management and Budget, National Archives, College Park, MD.
forward without being revised.”51 One government worker wrote extensively on the proposed revisions, suggesting that “this whole thing is a bit like rewriting history to match current preferences for what it ‘could’ have been-not what it was or in fact is!”52

Particular confusion arose with respect to the statistical fate of Portuguese Americans. SPD staff debated with citizens and other bureaucrats who called for this group to be included in the Hispanic category. The controversy inflamed the passions of anyone within arm’s reach of a dictionary, including “a frustrated ancient and medieval historian” at the Department of Justice. He read the proposed regulation and provided his own interpretation of Roman administration in Iberia. A Rhode Island college’s affirmative action officer exploited one supposed basis for anti-Hispanic discrimination to argue that “since the Portuguese surnames are very similar in sound” to Spanish ones, Portuguese Americans ought to be included.53

As others asked for clarification, Katherine Wallman of the SPD wrote, probably to chief statistician George Hall, for guidance. Some of the common and, she hoped, “easily resolved” questions revolved around the classification of “Mexican Indians” (Hispanic), Filipinos (Asian), about “mixed race people,” and whether race could ever be collected without the accompanying question on ethnicity (no). Written toward the end of March of 1977, her message ended with a

52 John Carey to Katherine Wallman, undated, Box 23, Office of Statistical Policy Division Program Records, 1974-1980, RG 51, Records of the Office of Management and Budget, National Archives, College Park, MD.
simple plea: “HELP!”  

Despite Wallman’s anxiety and confusion, the new regulations were on their way. On May 12, 1977, OMB director Bert Lance approved the revised categories in “Statistical Directive 15.” Effective immediately for new and revised federal surveys, the regulation demanded that all federal statistics be brought into conformance by January 1, 1980. Directive 15 received very little fanfare at first. Statisticians knew its importance, however. Wallman wrote an article explaining the changes, arguing that the revision created, “for the first time, standard categories and definitions for use at the Federal level in reporting on racial and ethnic groups.”

Backed by the authority of the federal government, it set the terms of official ethnic identification going forward. It would play a central role in organizing the benefits and burdens of Americans’ ethnic identities, and would go essentially unchanged for decades.

The 1980 Census

Although the federal government established new official categories of Americans, the “authoritative tune to which most of the population must dance,” the precise ways in which they, especially the Hispanic category, would exert their influence remained to be seen. As late as 1977, it seemed high-ranking officials at the Bureau of the Census did not consider “Hispanics” sufficiently important to merit asking all Americans a question to determine if they were of

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54 Cathy to George, March 24, 1977, Box 23, Office of Statistical Policy Division Program Records, 1974-1980, RG 51, Records of the Office of Management and Budget, National Archives, College Park, MD.
56 Scott, Seeing Like a State, 83.
“Spanish Origin.” The Bureau was testing a generic “ethnic origin” question instead. One of its benefits, a Census official said at the time, was that it “avoids forcing everyone to answer a Spanish-origin question.” The group was, after all, a “fairly small (about 5 percent) component of the total population.”

The possibility that this group would not have a separate place in the census did not sit well with the Spanish Origin Advisory Committee on the 1980 Census. Created in 1975 to consult with statisticians and administrators, the advisory committee drew its membership mostly from academia and moderate advocacy organizations, including LULAC, IMAGE, and MALDEF. Its members were profoundly distrustful of the Bureau, even more so after one Census administrator explained that they were just one of many “minority groups” clamoring for space on census forms. One committee member stated their demand to be counted “on the basis of human rights and legal principles under the Constitution, not on the basis of demographics or principles of social science.” African Americans and Indians were listed on all of the forms, and their group must not be treated differently.

The advisory committee hoped to take advantage of the pan-ethnic group’s larger numbers while ensuring respect for national origin differences. After learning of the OMB’s directive to use “Hispanic,” and insulted that it had no input in the change, they initially called for the term to be removed from the census. They preferred “Spanish Origin” with the option to

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list nationality. One advisory committee member argued that the Roybal resolution of 1976 (Public Law 94-311) affirmed “the right of citizens of Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban and other Spanish origins to be so identified,” and the Voting Rights Act of 1975 demanded national origin data. In the same letter, however, she argued that the pan-ethnic population constituted “the second largest minority group, people having a historical, legal and social background different from the mainstream of immigrant groups.” National identity was, in this formulation, a building block essential to sustaining the larger pan-ethnic whole. Or, as the committee member explained, “our development as national minorities implies continuing affirmation of our interests as specific communities.”

The Bureau’s test censuses confirmed that an umbrella term was necessary, but not sufficient. In a 1977 test in Oakland, respondents were given the chance to identify themselves as “Spanish/Hispanic.” However, many community leaders rejected such “global labels.” As one put it, “they see a brown face, they see a Mexican… but we are not Mexicans, we don’t talk Mexican, we talk Spanish. We don’t eat the same food. Our culture is different, we don’t have the same holidays or the same heroes…. We are two different entities.” Similar views prevailed in Travis County, Texas, where respondents wanted “their identity to reflect their nationality.”

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60 Ibid.  
Subgroups within the Spanish-speaking also needed this option to protect their interests. One Puerto Rican leader on the West Coast said that his people were “sandwiched between two powerful minorities, the Blacks and Mexican Americans.” When Puerto Ricans “demand their rights, they find the Chicanos are in control,” and while the latter “fight hard for what they want…the benefits they win are only for their own people.” The desire to ensure a full count of nationality groups led to some curious suggestions. In February of 1978, the advisory committee recommended that “people who respond that they are two or more ethnic groups,” a person of Mexican and Puerto Rican ancestry, for example, “should be counted as half of one and half of the other.”

“There’s a large invisible Hispanic community out there” - Selling the 1980 Census

For all these national origin differences, the public campaign to encourage census participation strongly promoted pan-Hispanic solidarity. The Bureau’s Spanish language promotional pamphlets, for example, encouraged “every one of the members of the Hispanic family” to complete the census. Participation was vital to ensuring that their group received a fair share of federal resources and legislative representation. “Assure yourself that they count you on the census and that you are included along with other Hispanics,” the brochure

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counseled. Grace Olivarez, a top official in the Community Services Administration, framed the choice clearly: “The only way to be the largest minority group in the country is to recognize Puerto Ricans, Central Americans, Cubans and South Americans as Hispanos, too. Unless Hispanos unite, we’re not going to make any headway as the largest minority in this country.”

A budding Spanish-language media industry used even broader ethnic appeals to stimulate the count. The National Association of Spanish Broadcasters (NASB), an industry group founded in 1979, was eager to develop a U.S. Hispanic market. However, it lacked a “basic body of raw data” for marketing and “defining the potential Hispanic audience” for its members. A good and “accurate Hispanic figure,” the NASB hoped, “would go a long ways toward resolving the existing confusion as to the size, make-up and characteristics of the Hispanic market in the United States.” The NASB encouraged Spanish-language media to play an active role in promoting census participation. Spanish broadcasters, they claimed, were in a unique position to tap “a large invisible Hispanic community out there” composed of the people who “listen to Spanish stations but who in fact never venture out of the Hispanic community because they’re afraid.”

Like Edward Roybal, IMAGE, and other builders of pan-Hispanic solidarity, Spanish-language media executives positioned themselves as vital intermediaries between business, government and an important national group. The Spanish Information Network (SIN), which had become the country’s first national Spanish-language television network in 1976, was one

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interest with a strong desire to promote a pan-Hispanic image. The network described itself as “the leadership medium throughout Spanish USA,” the term it had coined for the country’s Hispanic market. Its executives conceived of the 1980 census and the 1980 election as twin tests of Hispanic representation. Since both would determine “the success of Hispanic aspirations” in the new decade, the network linked the two civic exercises in a media campaign called “Destino 80.” To help this population reach its “destiny,” and to sell advertising space, the network would produce seven primetime election-oriented specials. These would include profiles of the parties and their candidates, interviews with elected officials, and interactive programming designed to demonstrate to viewers “how elections can benefit Spanish USA.” As part of “Destino 80,” the network would regularly remind the audience to register to vote and complete the census.70

The network did all it could to convince corporate America that its audience was fully patriotic and mainstream, yet just different enough that it could be reached only through SIN. Appealing to marketing executives as both “citizen[s] and as…advertiser[s],” its executives wanted them to see the purchase of ad time for “Destino 80” as “good for your country, good for your company.” They explained that the Spanish language—which separated it from other networks—had been “the dominant language throughout much of what is now the United States of America” well “before the arrival of English-speaking colonists.” The network’s audience had become something of an “‘invisible man’ in American life, suffering from bigotry and discrimination for his insistence upon clinging to his culture, heritage and native language,” but times were changing. SIN aimed to market the recent “awakening of Spanish aspirations,” including the “renewed pride of heritage,” and “rising sense of necessity for a strong Spanish

participation in the American political process.” So conceiving a pan-Hispanic history and identity, it informed sponsors that 1980 would be “the year of opportunity for your company to identify itself with this movement---reach out to tell America’s Hispanics: ‘we care.’” In addition, the programming package was “attractively priced, making it an affordable investment in America’s fastest-growing market, soon to be the largest cultural group in the nation, Spanish USA!”  

Electoral Clout

While media pitchmen believed that the census would confirm the emergence of a national market in important cities from coast to coast, political organizers imagined that it could bring much-needed electoral clout. “With equitable reapportionment, the decade of the 1980’s will witness the greatest Latino political advances in history,” wrote the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SWVREP). Without a good census count to provide the basis for fair redistricting, however, “the 80’s will be a decade of continued frustration.” As MALDEF organizers explained to a group in Compton, California, “We are forging a political weapon out of our raw numbers.” Census participation and voter registration together would expand democracy and bring much-needed political power to the Hispanic people of the United States.

The Carter administration, the first Democrats to direct a census in thirty years, was

71 Ibid.
particularly interested in boosting civic participation among these Americans. Preparing to meet with White House officials, Census Director Manuel Plotkin solicited research on the Bureau’s attempts to get an accurate count of this population. It was “of particular significance for a Democratic president” that minority leaders had shown a “heightened awareness” of census participation, one confidential memorandum reported. By handling the census properly, the administration could show “sensitivity to their aspirations” and stimulate “growing civic awareness” that could “lead to positive results however hard they may be to quantify.” Plotkin could inform the administration that the number one census improvement for 1980 was “to help obtain better counts of Hispanics.” The Bureau would make Spanish language questionnaires available upon request, include Spanish language instructions on its envelopes, and require 100 percent of Americans to be asked if they were of “Spanish Origin.” “From a political point of view,” the last of these developments was critical. The new census would provide guidance to administration strategists hunting for votes in the fall, “since the crucial variable in any linkage between voting behavior and nationality is the person’s self-view on this dimension of his background.”

The Census and Immigration

As the administration certainly knew, however, census participation and political participation were not necessarily open to the same people. A liberal immigration law passed in 1965 had abolished racist quotas on European immigration, but also instituted annual limits on

legal immigration from the countries of the Western Hemisphere. Along with population growth and economic change in Latin America, and the end of the U.S.-Mexico guest worker program, the new laws made a growing migrant stream increasingly an undocumented one.

The migrants and their impact on American life had become the subject of media coverage that heightened fears of a population supposedly living beyond the law. Readers of the *Los Angeles Times*, for example, learned of “L.A.’s ‘Hidden Population,’” which in 1975 was perhaps a half a million undocumented persons. Journalists did not have to work very hard to find a sensational angle. That same year, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) head Leonard Chapman conducted a speaking tour and media blitz aimed at elevating public concern over a “silent invasion” of illegal immigrants. At a time of joblessness, taxpayer revolts, and government debt crises, he highlighted the especially pernicious fiscal consequences of undocumented immigration. He claimed that the migrants were “milking the U.S. taxpayer of $13 billion annually,” stealing jobs away from their rightful occupants, consuming costly government services, and evading taxes.

Meanwhile, activists and organizations concerned with population growth issued dire warnings of undocumented immigration’s environmental and social consequences. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, one group predicted that by 2020, the U.S. population would be in excess of 500 million people, 209 million of whom would be “Hispanic illegal aliens or their offspring.” Based on growth figures from the 1970s, claimed the newspaper, “Hispanics will be the

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77 Quoted in Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 188.
majority” of Americans. With immigration sweeps and apprehensions growing throughout the decade, and with persistent unemployment, illegal immigrants were again becoming a significant societal concern.

Many could not separate illegal immigration from the potential for a Hispanic-dominated United States. Census promotion inadvertently reinforced this misperception. Advocacy groups and the Bureau were encouraging everyone to be counted, regardless of immigration status. Democratic congressman Robert Garcia held hearings around the country to encourage participation, hoping to allay fears that immigration authorities would use the census to target the undocumented. In his zeal to advertise the Bureau’s pursuit of a complete and accurate count, Director Plotkin unfortunately vowed to “flush out illegal aliens by searching pool rooms, bars and slums.” The remarks were doubly damaging. The Census Advisory Committee on the Spanish Origin Population claimed that Plotkin’s remarks “have actively reinforced the general public’s prejudices and discrimination” by suggesting that they were an idle, poor, and drunk group. The director also seemed to imply that illegal aliens would be measured as a separate category, which was neither the case nor something advocates desired.

How much the undocumented immigrants would actually influence the census was unclear. The Los Angeles Times editorialized that in many places, their impact would be little. It was almost a waste of time to try to locate them, for “the illegal alien is like the will-o-the-wisp –

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here one moment, there the next and then gone.”80 With a growing media focus on illegal immigrants, with so much money and power believed to be at stake, and with Hispanic groups and the Bureau making such a visible effort to motivate census participation, it was unsurprising that an opposition would arise to protect the advantages of citizens.

Some of the opposition coalesced around the ostensibly color-blind issue of legislative reapportionment based on a census that had included millions of aliens. One California Republican recommended that anyone concerned with “the economic and social implications” of undocumented migration consider the “flat-out political implications.” His demagogic example was a hypothetical “district with perhaps 50,000 citizens and 450,000 illegals.”81 The conception of the census as purely an instrument of apportionment ostracized all aliens, regardless of their legal status. “These people do not have the right to affect the outcome of an election because they are not citizens and cannot vote,” claimed one opponent of counting aliens.82

In December of 1979, the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), a year-old lobbying group, sued the Bureau of the Census in federal court to stop it from counting illegal aliens. Joining FAIR were three Republican representatives from Illinois, one from California, and a Democratic Senator from Kentucky, Walter Huddlestone. The lawmakers claimed to fear that urban areas with large immigrant populations were unlawfully benefiting at their constituents’ expense. The crux of FAIR’s argument was that counting the undocumented

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violated the “one man, one vote” principle. “These people have no right to be here, and yet they are being counted the same as if they were citizens,” said FAIR’s Barnaby Zall. This view held that illegal immigrants “enhanced” the votes of people living near them, and “diluted” the votes of those who resided elsewhere. According to the suit, California should only gain two congressional seats after 1980, but would unjustly gain eight thanks to illegal immigration. Instead of losing four seats, New York might lose just one because of its undocumented immigrant population.

Other opposition was rooted in citizenship claims, with special meaning in the context of America’s racial history. The counting of illegal aliens had particular significance for many African Americans. For most of the twentieth century, very low rates of black immigration meant that African American communities were overwhelmingly native-born. The brief gains of the 1960s were followed by a fear of slipping back during the difficult economic times of the 1970s. The steady drumbeat of projections that Hispanics would soon overtake blacks as “America’s largest minority” could not have sat well with people feeling they had not yet solidified an equal status in American life. Testifying before Robert Garcia’s subcommittee hearings on the census, Marion Hill, a youth group director with the NAACP, argued that a census that did not identify the undocumented by that status was a “phony count.” “They work for nothing,” he said of the immigrants, making it impossible for him to get summer jobs for black and Mexican American kids. The undocumented appeared to bring along a large increase

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in tuberculosis and venereal disease, and food safety was now questionable. African Americans had the most to lose, he argued, from including this group. They suffered high unemployment and now faced having their legislative districts “cut up” as a result of illegal immigration. He angrily reminded Garcia and Edward Roybal that, “Blacks didn’t come here or sneak here, they were brought here against their will to lose their freedom,” while “other people sneak in this country and they gain their freedom.”

Joseph E. Grimmett, an NAACP vice-president, had sat through the hearings and been disturbed by what he heard. The NAACP had long championed the interest of all minorities, he said, and he was deeply concerned to find that “minorities are now attacking what blacks get.” He had even observed “some things that border on racism” during the hearing. “Blacks are getting more and more concerned about illegal aliens,” he said. They and Mexican Americans “have mutual problems about illegal aliens,” however. He called for the two groups to “address them” and “stop fighting.”

Garcia and Roybal, however, countered arguments against a comprehensive count by reducing nationality and legal status to minor issues. Instead, they elevated minority solidarity and taxpayer fairness above the concerns of citizenship. Garcia claimed that the shared interests of minorities, regardless of legal status, trumped all considerations. He had heard similar complaints about job taking, only from Puerto Ricans who feared competition from South and Central American immigrants entering the New York garment industry. He reminded the audience that “the whole world is looking at minorities and they just love to hear us fight,

88 House Committee, Oversight Hearings on the 1980 Census Part VII—Los Angeles, Calif., 71-73.
because the more we fight amongst each other, the better it is for them.”

Garcia had been born in the Bronx, but claimed sympathy with the undocumented. He understood the Los Angeles community’s sense of distrust, their strong fears of disclosing information to the government. He told the story of his father-in-law, a Mexican national who crossed into Texas to work and for four decades “lived in fear” and “never went back to visit his family in Mexico.” The man who “pays taxes and works all his life” should not have to be “afraid that some arm of the federal government will come down on him,” he said. Roybal echoed those remarks, and said that “undocumented workers” should instead be called “undocumented taxpayers,” for they were contributing to the system without receiving its benefits for fear of deportation.

It was a delicate balance for Democratic congressmen who traded on the notion that minorities formed a single community of interest. Garcia’s attempt to promote minority solidarity was at odds with the logic of census enumeration that he, himself, was advancing. In the name of a better count, and to ensure a decent distribution of census patronage, Garcia was advocating that “if it is a black community, then let it be blacks who count blacks. If it is a Hispanic community, let it be Hispanics who count Hispanics.” Strict ethnic and racial representation on one hand, and minority cooperation on the other, were difficult to square with one another. This situation was especially complicated when an indeterminate number of one minority’s members were suspect for their lack of citizenship.

The census again exposed fissures among minorities, yet also revealed that incentives for an accurate count could encourage people of differing legal statuses but similar ethnic

89 House Committee, Oversight Hearings on the 1980 Census Part VII—Los Angeles, Calif., 54, 73.
91 House Committee, Oversight Hearings on the 1980 Census Part VII—Los Angeles, Calif., 7.
backgrounds to embrace a common cultural citizenship. In February and March of 1980, Garcia held hearings in the South Bronx, where witnesses were strongly in favor of amnesty for all undocumented immigrants. A certain sense of pragmatism was involved. Community organizer Carmen Arroyo testified that “we have to share all of our services” with the undocumented already. Unless they were counted, legal residents would have to share federal payments to New York City with them, too. “We unite ourselves with these people,” she declared. “We do not want them to be asked to leave or be deported.” Her goal was to see everyone counted, so that each state could support a “Latin American university” in which “our men, women, and children can be educated and prepared” to enter professions and careers helping their community. Pan-ethnic solidarity, not legal status, had become the question. Garcia thanked Arroyo for being a “Puerto Rican speaking on behalf of all Hispanics.” “From my perspective,” he said, “we are all Hispanic.”

Profound skepticism in government’s trustworthiness further encouraged the witnesses to embrace a united ethnic front. One made the case that “U.S. military intervention, economical and political intervention in the Third World countries” was responsible for bringing the undocumented to the United States. They were in America “because the U.S. supports our dictators to destroy our lives, to destroy our freedom, to destroy our natural resources,” she said. No government that did these things could be trusted to maintain confidentiality. Likewise, a Catholic priest testified that he could not “get up in church and say don’t worry, they won’t use the information.” After a decade of failed urban renewal, and one that “showed us that the FBI are not the glorious people of our country, that the CIA have done some nasty, nasty things to

our own people, as well as others,” they would “have a hell of a time convincing…Dominicans, Ecuadoreans, South Americans” and others to give their information to the government. The witnesses demanded amnesty as a precondition for participation in the census. Garcia claimed that this was the next step. “People should not live in fear,” he said, reviving the nationalist mantra that “we are all sons of immigrants, every one of us...we are the misfits, we are those people who have been rejects of other societies, and we have made this country great.”

The undocumented did not get amnesty in time for 1980, but the Carter administration took several steps aimed at placating Hispanic critics and promoting alien involvement in the census. In October 1979, the administration relaxed civil service regulations so that legal aliens could be among the 270,000 people hired as temporary census enumerators. This had been a major demand of advocates who argued that cultural and language differences between enumerators and the population kept their count artificially low. In November 1979, citing the government’s need to obtain cooperation with the census, Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti ordered the INS to suspend raids of residential neighborhoods for six months. The Carter administration also joined New York State and New York City in opposing the FAIR lawsuit. A District Court ruled against FAIR, as did ultimately the Supreme Court, allowing the census to count undocumented immigrants.

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93 House Committee, Oversight Hearings on the 1980 Census Part XIX—Bronx, New York, 71, 66-68.
95 Previously, aliens could only have been hired after a search for citizen employees had been exhausted. “Noncitizens to Work on ’80 Census,” New York Times, October 3, 1979.
A Future Together

Americans who opened their census forms in the spring of 1980 discovered that the seventh question asked them if they were “of Spanish/Hispanic origin or descent?” For 14.6 million people, roughly 6.4 percent of the population (up from 4.5 percent in 1970), the answer was affirmative. It was an increase of more than 5 million people in a decade.98 Although the new numbers failed to satisfy many advocates, the Bureau of the Census considered them a complete count. In 1985, it released a full report of the findings under the cumbersome title of “We, the Mexican Americans, the Puerto Ricans, the Cubans, and the Hispanics from the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Spain.” Published in Spanish and English on alternating pages, it was written from the perspective of a population on the march. “We really have a story to tell—about our progress in the 1970s and what lies ahead for us in the 1980s,” it began. The past decade had seen their population increase by 61 percent, a time of “amazing growth.”99

There had been amazing growth within the Bureau as well. In 1970, its report on Mexican Americans provided question marks in lieu of population figures for 90 percent of U.S. states. The 1980 map included data for the entire country, with states shaded to reflect their population of Hispanics. After briefly comparing some of the Hispanic subpopulations, the report used the data to make national claims. It presented a picture of a “young community”

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with a median age of 23.2 years (the total population averaged 30 years of age). It could compare the median income of Hispanic families with those of Whites and Blacks (it was between the two, though closer to the black figure). It could argue that Spanish was “our language, our bond” by identifying the number of people who spoke Spanish at home as a component of the nation’s population (5 percent).¹⁰⁰

The new data validated a growing sense of pan-ethnic solidarity as well, portraying a people “across borders east to west, north to south.” “Through our ancestors,” it read, “we trace our roots in the Americas back five centuries!” It spoke of this people’s “common heritage from Spain and a common mother tongue, Spanish, probably our strongest bond.” “While we have varied origins,” it concluded, “we are one people.” “We will have an even greater impact on our society in the years ahead,” it predicted. “We have a growing sense of ourselves as a national community—we identify strongly with our roots and are working more closely together toward common objectives.” The report’s authors optimistically informed the American people that, despite the many challenges that lay ahead, “the prospects are brighter than they were a decade ago that getting our share of opportunity in America will be, not just a dream, but a reality.”¹⁰¹

Officially and at last, this was a national minority.

**Conclusion**

In 1970, the federal statistical system’s treatment of “Spanish-speaking Americans” was fragmented, reflecting a heritage of assimilation in conflict with the pluralistic needs and sensibilities of the day. However, an emerging pan-Hispanic coalition of activists, politicians,

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¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 11, 19, 17.
¹⁰¹ Ibid., 3, 21-23.
and middle-class advocacy organizations sought to establish a separate place for all their people in the nation’s statistical system, and thus the political arena. Their ability to portray a united front of constituents hailing from various national and racial origins, and to speak the language of bureaucratic efficiency and rationality in addition to justice, made a difference. It also mattered that Republicans’ had made a point of courting Spanish-speaking voters. There were few in government, including those in the statistical agencies, who thought that extending additional coverage to this constituency was a bad thing in and of itself. It was the details that bedeviled them.

The census question itself reshaped pan-Hispanic solidarity. It framed a continuing conflict with African Americans as an essentially zero-sum game, one that called upon Mexican Americans and other Hispanics to make multiple judgments at once about nationality, citizenship, race, and how much these would determine the boundaries of their ethnic community. Americans of Hispanic descent were certainly not of a single mind regarding the immigrants, or each other. For better or for worse though, the members of the nation’s second largest minority were going to be linked with ever more people from countries to which they, as Americans, had little or no personal connection. Whether these immigrants would be assets or liabilities for Hispanic leaders would remain to be seen. In official records and in the broader culture, they were becoming inseparable.
Epilogue

From “Shotgun Wedding” to “Sleeping Giant”

During the 1960s and 1970s, U.S. political leaders instituted race-conscious policies and official celebrations of ethnicity in an attempt to right social wrongs and maintain their own legitimacy. As one step in reconstructing America to make ethnic and racial diversity its very essence, they institutionalized Hispanic pan-ethnicity in civil rights policy, federal statistics, and electoral politics. The scholar George I. Sánchez had argued in the 1950s that only “a veritable shotgun wedding” could make the “Spanish Speaking Groups” of the United States “appear to be culturally homogeneous.”

By the late 1970s, that marriage had occurred and the honeymoon was beginning.

An October 1978 issue of *Time* heralded the change. Its cover displayed a collage of faces, all varying shades of brown. “Hispanic Americans,” it advised simply, “Soon: The Biggest Minority.” Profiles of Los Angeles, Miami, and New York attempted to capture the characteristics supposedly distinguishing this group from the Anglo mainstream (language, Catholicism, family orientation, patriarchy), and those dividing its members (nationality, dialect, class). The story judged a fourth group, “the ‘Illegals,’” a separate population altogether. This demographic variety notwithstanding, *Time* expected its readers to think of these populations as a whole and was not above trafficking in stereotypes to make the point. “Most intangibly,” it submitted, “latinos [sic] offer the U.S. an amalgam of buoyancy, sensuousness and flair that many northern peoples find tantalizing or mysterious—and sometimes irritating or threatening.”

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1 “Book Review,” George I. Sánchez to Julian Samora, February 20, 1952, Box 42, Folder 5, Julian Samora Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin.
Whether one approved or not, they were undeniably part of the country’s future. The “American melting pot” was “bubbling once again” and Hispanics would be making their contribution to “the perpetually unfinished story of American pluralism.” As far as *Time* was concerned, it was their “Turn in the Sun.”2

The “Decade of the Hispanic” was beginning. A political corollary of this demographic prominence and cultural visibility was a growing interest in the country’s “Hispanic Vote” (or, sometimes, “Latino Vote”). Since at least the early 1970s, Edward Roybal and other politicians had tried to mold these constituencies into an active and engaged pan-ethnic electorate. In 1976, Roybal and Herman Badillo founded the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. That same year, Roybal established the National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO). Despite the growth of pan-Hispanic institutions, a “united political front” of Hispanics remained elusive. “One of the things we find is that Hispanics many times divide among themselves instead of coordinating activities,” lamented Roybal in 1980.3

The idea that Latino groups shared an obvious interest in uniting required leaders to justify why they so often did not. One explanation suggested by Roybal’s remark was that petty rivalries prevented the natural cohesion from occurring. According to this view, echoed in hundreds of news stories since the 1980s, the “Hispanic Vote” was really a “sleeping giant.” Even those who mocked the term found it difficult to avoid. As the journalist and “Brown Mafia” campaigner Carlos Conde facetiously remarked on the occasion of Antonio

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Villaraigosa’s election as Mayor of Los Angeles in 2005, “It’s beginning to sound a bit tedious but the ‘sleeping giant’ has awakened. Again and again and again!”  

The expectation of inevitable and impending pan-Hispanic power, simply waiting to be realized, obscured a complicated set of intra-group relationships. One major survey conducted in 2002 suggested that pan-Hispanic solidarity was still very much in formation. National origins remained far more popular than pan-ethnic terms as the first or only way that Latinos described themselves. Although 81 percent of respondents said they had used the term Latino or Hispanic to describe themselves, only 14 percent believed that they shared “one Hispanic/Latino culture.” Nearly half believed that “Hispanics from different countries” were “not working together politically.” Moreover, immigrants of varying legal statuses provided much of the group’s recent population increase, and converting their presence into votes would take time. New sources of immigration, especially from South America, introduced a further complexity into the country’s Latino population.

Political fragmentation reinforced Latino leaders’ tendency to base their appeals on their group’s aggregate numbers and contribution to American society. In 2003, the Bureau of the Census reported that Hispanics had become the country’s largest minority, with upward of 37 million members. Hector Flores, the president of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), said that the Census only stated the obvious, that Latinos were “working everywhere, paying taxes, trying to reach the American dream.” Their numbers, upright conduct, and

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commitment to the country justified more resources for their communities. Since their group comprised such a large share (almost 13 percent) of the American people, officials would be foolish to neglect them. One representative of the National Council of La Raza argued that this young group included the country’s “future taxpayers and voters,” and was therefore worthy of public investment. For the executive director of NALEO, “because such a large section of the country is Latino” it was “in America’s self interest” to ensure their success.6

Of course, it had never been sufficient for Latino leaders to argue that their numbers alone entitled them to benefits and power. They still labored to fashion “America’s largest minority” into a cohesive unit capable of deciding political and policy questions. Said one LULAC official in 2003, “I’m not sure how long it is going to take us,” adding that, “We Latino leaders are very much aware that we've got to find the keys to unlock our passion as an interest group.”7 The belief in a national Latino vote waiting to be “unlocked” is a testament to the multifaceted struggle undertaken by pan-Hispanic activists during the 1960s and 1970s. The recognition they earned, both for their people and themselves as leaders, has enabled the “sleeping giant” narrative to persist. The mass media’s interest in promoting a Hispanic market has helped. Finally, and frankly, not a small amount has been fueled by popular fears and racist stereotypes.

With the 2012 election approaching, Time magazine published another cover with an updated collage of brown faces. The title read: “Yo Decido (I decide). Why Latinos Will Pick the Next President.” The accompanying story focused on how the Republican Party’s hardened

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stance on immigration since the early 1990s had caused it to lose support among Latino voters. Despite its eye-catching headline ("Why Latino Voters Will Swing the 2012 Election"), the story contains a number of qualifications. It acknowledged that "the first rule for winning the Latino vote is to realize it’s a voter bloc in name only." The author added, "There is a common ancestral language that binds nationalities, family histories and geographic allegiances. But that’s about it." The story then gives examples of the political diversity likely to occur within such a heterogeneous population, attributing these differences to nationality, nativity, and age (it makes no explicit reference to income or wealth). A story about the "Latino Vote" can hardly end by questioning the concept’s utility, however. With these concessions made, it returns to "those things that distinguish Latinos from other ethnic groups." Median age, views on marriage and abortion, and political engagement (as well as their disproportionately harsh experience amid the recession) are factors given to determine how they will vote.

The key individual whom Time profiled was a public employee and political independent named Daniel Valenzuela. It attributes his victory in a Phoenix city council race to what it identifies as a "Latino" mobilization against the anti-immigrant backlash that has for years played a signal role in Arizona politics. Republican nativism offended otherwise conservative Latinos, furnishing Valenzuela an opportunity to "finally activate the Latino vote in Arizona." It’s dubious whether Arizona is the place to draw lessons about the larger "Latino vote," given that its Latino population is about 90 percent of "Mexican Origin." But the story concludes with a glimpse of Valenzuela, who while out registering voters acknowledged that, "We are closer…to the beginning than the end." 8

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8 Ibid.
Given the fragile state of pan-Hispanic identity, the closing quote carries two meanings. The first and most obvious is that Latino political activists see themselves as far from achieving the power they desire. The second speaks to a different aspiration. The notion of a pan-ethnic electorate poised for greater influence, highlighted both by activists and such media outlets as *Time*, not only reflects but constitutes pan-Hispanic identity, in politics and beyond. Every two to four years, the story draws the diverse populations into contact with one another. This narrative offers an alternative to national identity’s demands, and to the rivalries born of these. Political identity, for a time at least, defines the group, and not the other way around. A community on the margins of American society, primed to make its collective voice heard, yet frustrated time and again by insensitive parties or internal disunity. If only we join forces, the leaders and activists say, this could be the year, our year.

It has been almost 150 years since Whitman’s prophecy to the citizens of Santa Fe. Then, with a nation gashed and bloody from the Civil War, the great poet spoke of a people who could redeem the nation by the “nature of their being.” He wrote that they would, “like a giant stream that for generations and years and centuries flows underground unseen by human eye…suddenly arise to the full surface, in full flood and majestic grandeur.” The country has now recognized their difference. It awaits their power.

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