
# The New Latinos and Houston's Global Pueblo

*by Jan Swellander Rosin*

The voices of the most recent Latino immigrants to the United States not only echo earlier generations of migrants, but also reflect a new global economic reality which transforms rural peasants into members of a transnational labor force with their feet planted in two worlds. They are driven from their homelands by powerful social forces that lead them to the United States where they transform communities. Houston, Texas, has become a major hub for Latino migration from all of Latin America, predominantly from Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. The South American nations of Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Venezuela also contribute to the diverse mix. The majority of this population is very recent with sixty-one percent arriving since 1990. According to the 2000 census, one out of three Houstonians were Latino.[1] In 2005, Harris County contains the second largest Latino community in the United States after Los Angeles and is the most popular destination for Central American immigrants in Texas.[2] While Mexicans still dominate with eighty-one percent of Hispanics, Houston Latinos are much more diverse than during earlier historical periods.[3] The New Latinos have emerged as the fastest growing ethnic group in Houston and will probably equal Anglos in population by the year 2015.[4]

This explosive Latino demographic growth is mirrored at the national level. In 1970, there were only 760,000 Mexican-born residents in the United States. By 2004, that population grew by fifteen times.[5] Even trying to count the Latino population presents serious problems because so many of them have entered the nation *sin papeles*, without papers. One immigration historian calls attempts to accurately estimate the number of undocumented aliens in the nation "BOPSAT" or "a bunch of people sitting around a table."[6] What is clear is that since the mid-1980s, illegal immigration has surged into the United States, especially from Latin America. In fact, some highly respected experts believe that illegal has exceeded legal immigration since 1995.[7]

It is estimated that the 2004 unauthorized immigrant population in the United States was 10.3 million or 29 percent of the total foreign-born residents in the nation. Mexicans made up 57 percent of the undocumented, followed by other Latin Americans with 24 percent.[8] Illegal immigration was a relatively small part of Mexican migration in the early 1980s comprising only 18 percent of the total, but between 2000 and 2004 it is estimated that 85 percent of Mexican migration to the U.S. has been undocumented.[9] As a result, half of all Mexicans living in the United States are unauthorized.[10] This same phenomenon has been true for Central American

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migrants. About 86 percent of this massive new undocumented population has arrived in the United States since 1990.[11] Texas has become the number two home for unauthorized immigrants after California.[12] It is impossible to consider the New Latinos separate from the phenomenon of illegal immigration.

## THE FORCES OF MIGRATION

The University of Houston sociologist, Nestor Rodriguez, considers the forces driving this migration beyond the control of governments.[13] Mexicans left behind poor economic conditions and a social system that stifles development and maintains income inequality by favoring family connections over education and hard work. Mexicans complain that, "It seems like there's a limit to how far up a poor person can go."[14] Salvadorans escaped a twelve-year civil war that took 75,000 lives and impressed twelve-year-old child soldiers into competing armies. One seventeen-year-old Salvadoran reported, "There are a lot of people there without hands, because they were booby-trapped by grenades or homemade bombs."[15]

Guatemalans fled a thirty-six-year guerrilla war in which the government initiated a scorched earth policy against the indigenous people that included aerial bombardments and artillery attacks. The government campaign left 100,000 people dead and one million displaced.[16]

Honduras suffered the ravages of serving as a haven for anti-Sandinista contras fighting the Marxist Nicaraguan Government and was devastated by Hurricane Mitch in 1998. A thirty-five-year guerrilla insurgency and drug-related violence convinced many Colombians to flee their homeland. With a murder rate nine times that of the United States, Colombian sociologist Hugo Acero said, "We are finishing off entire generations...We are exterminating our youth."[17]

Poverty, extreme income inequality, and violence feed all these movements. In many Latin American communities, especially in Mexico, making the trip to *El Norte* is a male cultural rite of passage. Young men follow in the footsteps of their fathers, uncles, brothers, and friends. Many rural areas of Central America have no teenagers. Immigrants also do it *por los hijos*—for the children. They cannot afford to send their children to school in their homelands. In the United States, their children can go to school without charge and even get a free lunch.

The trip north is not taken lightly. Elders and religious leaders are consulted. Families often go into debt or mortgage their homes in order to finance the trip of a family member. Mexican migrants leave small votive paintings at religious shrines and Guatemalan Mayans perform Pentecostal *ayunos* ceremonies to insure that God will protect them on their dangerous journey.[18] Their treks can take three months and are very dangerous. Central American migrants walk to the southern border of Mexico, the Suchiate River where "you're killed like a dog and they throw you into the river and nobody does anything."[19]

Passing through Mexico is called "crossing the beast" because migrants are often robbed, assaulted, raped, and murdered by corrupt government officials and vicious Central American gangs called *maras*. One Mexican activist said, "There is a hidden war going on here, a Cold War . . . It's worse every day. There are the daily assaulted, the daily injured, the daily dead."[20] The poorest migrants who cannot afford to hire *coyotes* to smuggle them into the United States, stowaway on northbound trains known as the "Beasts of Death."[21] Everyday people are killed on the trains either when they fall under the wheels and lose their limbs or when they are thrown off by machete-wielding gang members. Children as young as ten or eleven make the dangerous journey alone or with smugglers. Some of them find help from a Good Samaritan or one of a dozen shelters operated by the Roman Catholic Church along the Guatemalan and United States borders with Mexico.[22]

When migrants reach northern Mexico they must negotiate another hostile border. Mexican and American *coyotes* offer to get them into the United States for a price—pay half up front and the family pays the other half once the migrant is safely in the United States. Migrants are held prisoner in crowded trailers or hotel rooms until families raise the necessary cash or they are consigned to lives in indentured servitude. Desperate people are floated across the Rio Grande in inner tubes, walked across hot, dry Arizona deserts, packed into stifling trailers of eighteen wheelers, or transported in minivans. Some die of exposure, asphyxiation, or heat stroke. Others are abandoned by their guides in the middle of nowhere if they cannot keep up the pace. If they are caught by Mexican or American authorities at either border they are sent back home and must try again. And many try again and again. They are often traumatized and some are "walking time bombs" suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.[23]

One expert equates United States government attempts to staunch this flow of illegal immigration to "spitting in the wind."[24] Its main results have been opposite to those intended. Before the Immigration Act of 1965, there were no numerical restrictions on immigration from the Western Hemisphere. In both 1965 and 1976, the U.S. government established limits on the number of immigrants admitted legally from both North and South America. Migrants, primarily from Mexico, continued to follow established circular migration patterns despite the new limits and became "illegal" immigrants.

During the 1980s, Americans became very concerned about the number of undocumented aliens and passed legislation designed

## Did you know?

- **In 2005, one out of ten Mexicans lives in the United States.**
- **One out of five Mexican men between the ages of twenty-six and thirty-five live in this country.**
- **Mexicans make up almost 66.9 percent of the 38 million Latinos in the nation.**
- **The next largest groups are Central and South Americans (14.3 percent), Puerto Ricans (8.6 percent), and Cubans (3.7 percent).**

"Status Quo: In Latin America, Rich-Poor Chasm Stifles Growth," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 18, 2005, sec. A, 4; Roberto R. Ramirez and G. Patricia de la Cruz, *The Hispanic Population in the United States: March 2002*, Current Population Reports, P20-545, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington D.C. (2002).

to legalize the existing undocumented population and stop the continuing flow. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) included employer sanctions against bosses who knowingly hired illegal aliens and strengthened border enforcement. The border patrol began to tighten control at the most popular urban crossings with highly publicized border control operations. Most importantly, IRCA established the precedent of awarding amnesty to illegal immigrants who had lived in the U.S. for several years, which attracted even more hopeful migrants. Illegal immigration slowed for about two years but then renewed with a vengeance.

Border states like California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas became very concerned about the costs of illegal immigration to both their state and local communities. In 1994, California voters approved Proposition 187 which attempted to deny undocumented immigrants access to state social services including public schooling, medical care, and welfare. The California proposition was critically weakened by the courts and never really implemented, but the federal government was forced to respond. In 1996, Congress passed three laws designed to address the social and political problems associated with heavy immigration. First, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act denied both legal and undocumented immigrants access to federal public benefits, such as Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, and food stamps. Second, the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act made it easier to arrest, detain, and deport non-citizens. Third, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act expedited the deportation of undocumented aliens who committed crimes in the United States, funded 5,000 additional Border Patrol agents, and authorized the building of a fourteen-mile-long triple fence along the border at San Diego, California.

One unexpected consequence of these American policies was the rise of vicious new international gangs known as *Mara*

# The Houston Catholic Worker: Casa Juan Diego, 1981–2004

***by Carol Ellis***

On November 2, 1993, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) conducted a sting operation against undocumented immigrants living at Casa Juan Diego, a Catholic Worker House of Hospitality, in Houston, Texas. After receiving what the INS claimed was fifty "complaints a year for the past three years" from the Casa's neighbors, the INS moved in. Posing as employers anxious to hire the men of Casa Juan Diego, immigration officials appeared at 6:00 a.m. in an unmarked van. Some of the agents, according to Mark Zwick, a Catholic Worker and co-founder of the Casa, "chased his residents through his property and up to the center's front door." Meanwhile, other officials offered the immigrants five dollars per hour, loaded them in a van, and drove them to a staging area in Cleveland Park near Memorial Drive, where they were detained.[1]

The sweep conducted that day by INS netted them 111 undocumented aliens. A little more than a week after the sweep, protestors converged on the federal courthouse in downtown Houston to voice their objections to INS tactics. Zwick used the event to invite his business neighbors to help him in his long-held dream: building an employment center for the immigrants. That, he believed, would help cut down on the numbers of men milling about the street. His neighbors never helped him in that effort, but eventually, through a healthy bequest, the Zwicks bought an old steel-fabrication factory and turned it into another shelter for immigrant men called the Padre Jack Davis House.[2]

The immigrants who lived at Casa Juan Diego were refugees who had fled poverty or war-torn countries in Central and

*Louise Zwick (r) confronts immigration officials after the arrest of guests as Casa Juan Diego.*

All images courtesy Casa Juan Diego

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*Salvatrucha* or MS-13. Young, undocumented Central American men growing up in Los Angeles during the 1990s formed their own gangs to protect themselves from the rival Mexican 18th Street Gang in the barrio communities. When these Central American gang members were convicted of crimes in the United States, they were quickly deported to their home countries. These largely Americanized felons were penniless, unskilled, and unwanted outsiders in their homelands. Some did not even speak Spanish very well. They quickly exported their outlaw lifestyle sowing gang methods and culture in the fertile soil of small, unstable Central American nations. Officials estimate that at least 70,000 gang members operate in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.[25] These nations now suffer the highest murder rates in the world and have instituted major government crackdowns against all gang activity.[26] Under government pressure, the *maras* are now reentering the United States and establishing gangs in thirty-one states and several major cities, including Houston.[27] They are known for their machete wielding brutality.

Another unintended consequence of employer sanctions against hiring unauthorized workers was a booming black market in fake green cards and social security cards. According to law, employers could not "knowingly" hire illegal workers. Several types of documents were ruled acceptable by law. Workers provided their bosses with forged documents which protected the employers under the law. One immigration lawyer said that a fake document "only has to pass the laugh test."[28] Immigrants could easily buy fake papers at flea markets for $50-$150.

Most importantly, these policies did not halt or even slow illegal immigration. The social and economic forces driving migrants were seemingly unstoppable. Instead, migrant pathways simply changed. A Mexican consul said, "The migrant flow is like the flow of water. When it hits an obstacle, water seeks its own path. The same

South America. They arrived in Houston with few possessions and required almost everything to sustain life—food, clothing, a place to live, medical treatment, diapers for their babies, as well as shoes for their feet. Unlike governmental welfare agencies that operated during normal business hours, where ticket-clutching patrons filled out forms as they waited to be called so that their needs could be determined, the items given at this refugee station were not supplied in a regulated fashion. The Casa was not open only from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. because immigrants did not arrive by some pre-determined timetable. They came night and day, seven days a week. The founders of the House, Mark and Louise Zwick, were there to welcome them and provide all that they needed, regardless of the hour or the want.

The Zwicks have operated Casa Juan Diego for twenty-four years. It is one of dozens of Catholic Worker Houses of Hospitality in the United States.[3] They are its primary caretakers. The work is not glamorous. The hours are long. There is no pay. The job is often dirty and underappreciated. Accepting people into Casa Juan Diego means admitting all of their problems as well. Nevertheless, Mark and Louise Zwick are dedicated to the undocumented immigrants that show up on the Casa's doorstep. Their job, as they see it, is not merely to work for those in need, but to put their love in action by serving the poor. The Zwicks believe that the filth, the danger, the worries are all worth it. As Mark Zwick once told a newspaper reporter, "[T]hat is where the fire is needed—born with the love of the poor and of the refugees, not just love of ideas."[4]

Mark Zwick's sentiments toward Houston's most abject population, and his association with the Catholic Worker movement, sprang from the life's work of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. Born on November 8, 1897, in Brooklyn, New York, Day's concern with life's downtrodden led her to join the Socialist Party in the late 1910s. In 1927, after the birth of her daughter, she converted to Catholicism but she never lost interest in the plight of the poor. Maurin, born May 9, 1877, in Oultet, France, had once been a member of the pious De la Salle Christian Brothers. He subsequently left the order and migrated to the United States in 1908. Day and Maurin founded the Catholic Worker movement in New York City in 1933.[5]

The couple began by publishing a newssheet called the *Catholic Worker*. Day's and Maurin's periodical expressed a radical concern


*The first purchase of Casa Juan Diego was at the corner of Durban and Rose in 1982. It burned in 1985 with the second fire.*

for social equality and reminded Catholics that the church's social program rebuked unrestrained greed and placed the interest of workers above that of corporations and states. Equally pervasive within the pages of the *Catholic Worker* were the three overarching principles upon which Day and Maurin built their movement: personalism, pacifism, and voluntary poverty. Established at the height of the Great Depression, New York's citizens responded positively to the broadsheet.[6]

Personalism is a radical doctrine that stresses an abandonment of materialism, an absolute renunciation of violence, and a commitment to a system of just labor. Catholic Workers voluntarily take on the involuntary poverty of others. They believe this shows respect for the poor, and dedication to the works of mercy.[7] Christian anarchy rather than secular hierarchy is another tenet of the Catholic Worker movement. Workers eschew government bureaucracy. They have no bylaws or articles of incorporation. They elect no officers, hold no elections, and write no constitutions. They live a communal existence.[8]

Such an existence, Day and Maurin believed, demonstrated love for the poor. One way in which the Catholic Worker founders expressed their love for those in need was in their house of hospitality. They opened their first one in a former barbershop in Manhattan in New York City several months after beginning publi-

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happens with migrants."[29] Unfortunately, new immigration pathways passed through much more treacherous terrain, such as the deserts of Arizona. It became much more difficult and dangerous to enter the United States. As a result, undocumented immigrants were less likely to follow traditional patterns of circular migration between the United States and their home countries. Instead, they abandoned the sojourner mentality and adopted the strategy of permanent settlement. Men led the migration, but they brought their families to the United States as soon as possible. Because of laws passed to discourage undocumented immigration, this growing population lost access to many social services.

This New Latino population is young, with a median age of just twenty-five. More than half do not have a high school education and 75 percent are noncitizens.[30] Because of their heavily undocumented status, it will be difficult for them to become naturalized citizens. Many unauthorized Latinos come to Houston from the southern border and then disperse to other parts of the country. In their prime childbearing years, Hispanics produced 43 percent of the newborns and 44 percent of children under the age of four in Texas in recent years.[31] Unauthorized families are often of "mixed status" containing both foreign-born and native-born citizen members. Their family income is 40 percent less than legal immigrant or native-born families. About one third of these families live in poverty and most lack access to health insurance.[32]

With low levels of education and limited knowledge of English, they tend to work at low paying jobs in construction, retail sales, food services, building cleaning and maintenance, production, and agriculture.[33] One scholar calls the New Latino immigrants a "manual labor migration."[34] Some are forced to work as *esquineros* or day laborers standing on street corners waiting to be hired by a contractor. Mark Zwick, director of Casa Juan Diego, says, "They will do the dirt work, the slop work . . . to tear down this awful building, clean up this awful mess. And they will do it. It doesn't make any difference what it is, they will do it."[35] Day laborers often work eight to ten hours a day for $50-60 per day at whatever manual labor is needed. Sometimes they are paid with a bad check or not paid at all. Sometimes they are physically assaulted. Native Houstonians often complain that *esquineros* are trashing neighborhoods, urinating behind fences and buildings, and scaring residents.[36] Efforts by local authorities to set up official, regulated day labor sites have been met with a "not in my backyard" mentality.[37]

These modest *trabajadores* or workers are global players with one foot still planted in their homelands. They change lives back in their hometowns with their remittances. The ability to send money home motivates migration, reflects strong family ties, and demonstrates personal reliability. Between 40 and 60 percent of all foreign-born Hispanics in the United States regularly send money home to their families. Most remittance senders are recently arrived, young, married men with limited education, low earnings and little familiarity with formal banking systems. Two-thirds send an average of $200 at least once a month. The average individual annual remittance is $3,000.[38] These modest amounts add up to massive income flows within the global economy.

In 2004, Latin American nations received $30 billion in remittances from emigrants in the United States. Texas Latinos contributed over $3 billion to that flow.[39] Remittances have grown dramatically since 1980 and seem to be immune to economic downturns in the U.S. economy. Mexico received $16.6 billion in 2004 making it the top remittance-receiving nation in the world. In November 2004, remittances became the most important source of foreign exchange for the Mexican economy surpassing both oil and tourism.[40] El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Ecuador all receive more than five percent of their gross domestic product from remittances.[41] This money serves as both "safety valve" and "fuel pump" for Latin American nations. Seventy percent of this money is spent to cover basic living expenses, healthcare, and education. The remaining 30 percent is spent on family investments or community development.[42]

Foreign remittances have both positive and negative effects on the receiving nations. On one hand, they provide foreign currency, finance imports, contribute to the balance of payments, and increase national income. On the other hand, they weaken the national labor force and may reduce the incentive for the rest of the family to work.[43]

Both receiving nations and international businesses are well aware of the importance of the New Latinos as players in the global economy. They have both adopted strategies to try and tap into the rising flood of remittances. Most immigrants send their money home via postal or money orders, wire transfers, or banks. Institutions that perform these transfers charge a 10-15 percent fee. After 1990, this potential source of fat profits attracted an exploding number of new institutions to handle the remittance transfers. Western Union and Moneygram dominate the American market, but there are many competing companies.[44]

Latin American banks entered the Houston market in order to tap the lucrative trade. *Banco Popular* expanded from Puerto Rico and advertised its mission to serve the working classes and unbanked. It operates in six states and has six branches in heavily Hispanic parts of Houston.[45] El Salvador's fourth largest bank, *Banco de Comercio*, established storefront money-transfer locations known as *Bancomercio de El Salvador* in Houston's Salvadoran enclaves.[46]

Immigrant home nations also understand the powerful transnational role played by their expatriate citizens in their own economies. Sending governments are very anxious to encourage the continued flow of remittances to their countries. In order to do this, they need to maintain strong ties with their absent citizens. During most of the twentieth century, Mexico either considered emigrants "traitors" to their nation or simply ignored their problems in the United States. But, during the 1990s, when remittance flows skyrocketed, President Carlos Salinas instituted a policy of dual nationality so that Mexicans who became naturalized American citizens would suffer "no loss of Mexican nationality." After the 2000 election, President Vicente Fox proclaimed Mexican emigrants "heroes," who despite being forced to leave their homeland still loyally sent billions home each year. Fox created a special office within the foreign affairs ministry to deal with emigrant problems overseas and supported voting rights for Mexicans living abroad. He also worked hard to reduce the fees for remittance transfers.

Mexican consulates increased in number and became much more aggressive about defending the rights of their citizens living in the United States. Consuls also began to issue the *matricula consular* so that undocumented immigrants could identify themselves to the police and state governments with an official Mexican identification card. These documents were issued with no indication of the immi-

gration status of the Mexican migrant. Local U.S. governments, police forces, utilities, and some airlines recognized the new ID card. Some states began to accept it for getting a driver's license. Although the U.S. federal government did not recognize the *matricula consular* for its own functions, it did not ban other institutions from accepting it as valid identification.[47] Vicente Fox also encouraged both documented and undocumented Mexicans to actively lobby the U.S. Congress on behalf of the Mexican government.[48]

Other emigrant nations followed the lead of Mexico in order to maintain strong ties with their expatriates and ensure the continued flow of remittances. El Salvador also instituted a form of dual citizenship. The Dominican Republic and Colombia allowed emigrants to vote from abroad. Colombian expatriates gained the right to elect their own representative to the national legislature.[49] Guatemala, Peru, Honduras, and El Salvador also began to issue their own versions of the *matricula consular*.[50]

Latin American governments also attempted to tap directly into the huge flow of remittances. Government officials came to view this money sent home to families as a potential solution to their national development problems. They encouraged immigrants to join Hometown Associations (HTAs) in the United States. Latino settlers in the U.S. who came from the same village or region joined social organizations to promote the wellbeing of their hometown communities by raising money to fund public works or community improvements.

There are more than 550 Mexican and 200 Salvadoran hometown associations in the United States.[51] They are also common among Guatemalans, Guyanese, Dominicans, Colombians, and Nicaraguans. Latino immigrants in the United States have invested funds in these private/public partnerships for community infrastructure (roads, street, and building repair), equipment (ambulances, medical equipment, vehicles), and education (scholarships, school construction, school supplies). The five Houston area HTAs have financed expansion of a church, paved village streets, expanded a community hall, built a baseball field, installed an electric pump on a community well, landscaped a town square, purchased computers for a school, and sent truckloads of coats, blankets, and food.[52]


*Bancomercio—The fourth largest bank in El Salvador expanded into the American market in order to provide storefront money-transfer services in Houston's Salvadoran enclaves.*

Most projects are tangible and limited in scope. It is estimated that Mexican communities gain $30 billion in development projects each year through HTAs.[53] With these projects, immigrants in the U.S. not only enhance their hometowns, but also gain political muscle because they are able to insist on higher standards of government transparency and accountability. Political power shifts within the community toward the remittance senders and their families.[54]

## THE NEW LATINOS IN HOUSTON

The New Latinos have their other foot firmly planted in American communities. This recent wave of migration has transformed the social geography of Houston. Recent Latino immigrants have not restricted themselves to the traditional Mexican barrios. During the 1980s, the new Gulfton Latino enclave arose in southwest Houston near Loop 610 along Bellaire to Chimney Rock. During a Houston economic downturn, Hispanics moved into apartments with high vacancies offering low rents and "No Deposito."[55]

During the same period, the Spring Branch area also became an immigrant hotbed as Latinos from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador joined Koreans, Japanese, Chinese, and Indians. The same transformation took place in Alief, Aldine, Spring, Bellaire, Fifth Ward, Magnolia, and the East End.[56] As African Americans moved out to the suburbs, Latinos spilled over into traditionally black neighborhoods in South Park, Kashmere Gardens, Sunnyside, and the Third and Fifth Wards.[57] Inner city or older suburban neighborhoods were not the only ones transformed. While the area within the city limits of Houston had 40 percent Hispanic residents in 2003, the entire Houston area PMSA (Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area), including all the surrounding bedroom communities, also had 32.6 percent Latinos.[58] Between 1990 and 2000, all of the major suburban communities saw substantial increases in the relative size of the Latino population.[59]

Public schools were one of the institutions impacted most strongly by the settlement of young Latino families. In 1970, every census tract within Spring Branch Independent School District in one of Houston's older suburbs was 99 percent white.[60] By 2005, the school district was 53.8 percent Hispanic and only 34.1 percent white.[61] The larger Houston Independent School District (HISD) was 59 percent Hispanic in the same year.[62] Poverty compounded the challenges faced by HISD where four out of every five students qualified for free or reduced lunches.[63] Paralleling national trends, the New Latino student population suffered the highest rates of school segregation in the public schools resulting from socioeconomic housing patterns.[64]

Public schools had to deal with large populations of students who did not come to school knowing English. School districts set up bilingual programs for students and scoured the nation for Spanish-speaking teachers. Administrators and teachers had to communicate with parents who were unfamiliar with both English and the expectations of the American school system. Some districts set up special Hispanic parent committees to solicit input from the ethnic community. Other districts established centers which gave parents access to English language instruction and information on available social services.

Every campus experienced its own unique demographic revo-

lution. Community change did not proceed without controversy. Native-born parents fought changes in attendance zone boundaries when they impacted the ethnic make-up of their children's schools. In some districts, newcomer Latino parents began to organize in order to gain more political power in school politics. Even local colleges had to adjust to the rising flow of New Latino students. North Harris College offered free computer access and online classes for Spanish-speaking students.[65] In 1991, Texas became the first state to grant undocumented students, who had spent most of their lives in Texas, the right to attend Texas colleges and universities at the resident tuition rate.[66]

By 2003, Spanish was the primary language of thirty-six percent of all Houstonians.[67] This meant that the City of Houston had to find new ways to communicate with much of its population. Neighborhood public health clinics did not just provide medical services, but also English classes for their clientele. Three out of five patients in these clinics were Latino. This young population needed pediatric services, children's vitamins, and immunizations for their American-born children. Medical personnel also had to deal with diseases such as tuberculosis, whooping cough, and measles that previously had been largely controlled in the United States. A lack of interpreters left many recent immigrants bewildered by their doctors' instructions.[68]

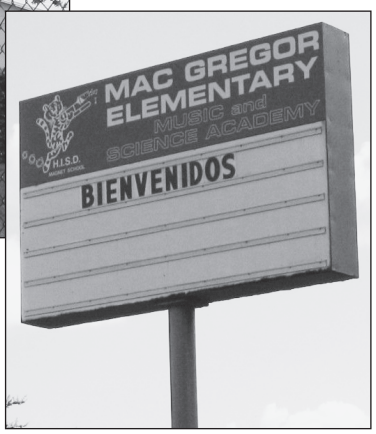
The city also experienced a dire shortage of Spanish-speaking social workers and mental health therapists. The University of Houston began to offer special scholarships to Spanish-speaking students willing to enter the graduate social work program.[69] Latinos could also take their driver's license tests in Spanish. The Houston Police Department had to change its law enforcement strategies. In 1979, the bilingual Chicano Squad was created to handle crimes in barrio neighborhoods. Most of the squad's members were second-generation Hispanics who had grown up in Mexican barrio neighborhoods. The same squad continued to work with the more diverse Latino population later in the century.[70] Because of the huge size of the undocumented Latino population, the City of Houston adopted a "hands off" policy toward immigration in 1992. Houston police officers were forbidden to enforce immigration laws in most cases. This "don't ask, don't tell" strategy was designed to encourage illegal aliens to cooperate with the police and report crimes within their community.[71] In 1991, the mayor of Houston created the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs to deal with the unique problems of the city's foreign population.[72]


The Spanish language echoed throughout Houston as the New Latinos created their own world in their new home. Recent immigrants listened to a wide variety of Spanish language radio stations pulsing to a "Tejano" Latin beat. A dozen Spanish language newspapers catered to different segments of the Latino community. Houston's premier daily newspaper, the *Houston Chronicle*, purchased *La Voz* in 2004 in order to better serve their Spanish-speaking customers. They also published *La Vibra* to cover the local and national entertainment scene in Spanish.[73]

By 2005, seven Spanish language television stations served the community. Miami-based *Univision* dominated the local Hispanic television scene by appealing to a broad cross cultural audience. Despite the fact that most of their audience was Mexican in background, *Univision* programs were accent-neutral and avoided words that varied in meaning from one Latin American country to another. Latinos learned about the news, enjoyed flashy musical variety shows, and followed their beloved *telenovelas* or extended miniseries soap operas. A recent study found that *Univision* was the second most important institution among Hispanics living in the United States after the Roman Catholic Church.[74] Other networks, however, were targeting more specific segments of the Latino market. In 2004, David Batres launched "*Salvadorenos de Corazon*" (Salvadoran from the Heart) in the local television market. His Central American themed program captured 20-25 percent of Houston's Latino market.[75]

The New Latinos also brought their religion to Houston. Since 1990, the Roman Catholic population in the Houston-Galveston diocese doubled, fed by Latino immigration. Hispanics grew from just six percent of area Catholics in 1960 to forty-five percent in 2004.[76] In response to this rapid growth, the Houston-Galveston diocese was elevated to an archdiocese by the Roman Catholic Church.

But not all was well within the denomination that had comfortably claimed all Latin Americans as its own for hundreds of years. Many Hispanics were leaving the Catholic Church in the United States and Latin America. Protestant denominations like the Pentecostals, Methodists, Episcopalians, Southern Baptists, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses made significant inroads. Many of the Central American immigrants in Houston came from countries where 10 to 30 percent of the population were Protestant evangelicals. Mormon Spanish-speaking missions in Houston were twice as successful as those for the English-speaking.[77] Evangelical Protestant Mayans established their own churches in Houston while still maintaining strong ties to their home churches back in Guatemala. These churches helped to maintain Mayan culture and quickly connected newcomers with an ethnic support network. Their Houston congregations also provided financial support for their churches back home.[78]




Established, old-timer Houston churches also reached out to newcomer immigrant congregations. In Spring Branch, many Anglo, mainline Protestant congregations shared their campuses with small, ethnic churches until they could

afford to buy or build their own sanctuaries. Some churches initiated separate Spanish language ministries. Houston's Lakewood Church, the nation's largest mega-church, hired a famous Latin American minister, Marcos Witt, to lead their Spanish services. The church's Latino ministry paralleled the English services and had full access to all the resources of the congregation. Witt's services were even televised.[79]

Enterprising New Latinos were not just investing in their homelands. They were also building their own businesses in Houston. Growing businesses required capital and local banks were more than willing to provide that help. During the 1990s, financial institutions realized the untapped potential of the Hispanic market. The *matricula consular* enabled many undocumented Latinos to open bank accounts. Major American banks like Wells Fargo and Citibank welcomed new unauthorized customers. *Banco Popular* targeted the working class, unbanked Latino population, and provided micro loans for small home and storefront businesses.[80] Laredo National Bank, which operated in Mexico City, Monterrey, Guadalajara, Laredo, San Antonio, and McAllen entered the Houston Hispanic market in 1999. It offered check cashing for customers who did not have accounts, small consumer loans, bill paying, and even a U.S. Postal Service center.[81] *Aquila Bancorporation* became the first Hispanic-owned financial institution in Houston organized under the community development banking laws in 2001. The bank served low to moderate income Latinos living inside Loop 610. Its goal was to revitalize inner-city communities by providing capital to small entrepreneurs in the unbanked, underserved immigrant community.[82]

Between 1993 and 2003, the number of Small Business Administration loans issued to Hispanic businesses quadrupled.[83] This availability of capital allowed Latinos to open a wide variety of small businesses including *carnicerias*, *taquerias*, restaurants, janitor services, and building contractors. Others became multi-million dollar enterprises, such as La Espiga De Oro Tortilla Factory and the public relations firm of Carreno, McCune and Co. By 2003, there were 41,000 Hispanic-owned businesses in Houston.[84]

All of this economic activity meant that the New Latinos offered an irresistible market opportunity for American business. Perhaps the best local example was Fiesta Mart. Founded in 1972 by Donald Bonham and O. C. Mendenhall, Fiesta Mart offered full service grocery stores with many Hispanic products not available in other stores. The first store served the North Side barrio. By 2005, it had fifty stores in Houston, Dallas/Fort Worth, and Austin. Fiesta Mart was also the fifth largest supermarket chain in Houston.[85] Sociologist Nestor Rodriguez said, "It is still one of the best ways of following the Hispanic population here. Wherever a Fiesta opens, there is bound to be a Hispanic settlement nearby."[86]

In 2001, rather than shying away from the Bellaire barrio once known as the "Gulfton Ghetto," Houston developers built the new Plaza of the Americas to house retailers catering to Hispanic consumers.[87] Latin American companies anxious to expand into the United States like Pollo Campero, a fried and rotisserie chicken chain from Guatemala, were located in the new shopping center.[88] The Latino market spurred tremendous excitement and sparked the publication of a new Houston Hispanic Yellow Pages in 2004. Local department stores began to carry cosmetic lines designed to complement the skin tones of Latino women. Geico Insurance marketed car insurance policies specifically to the Hispanic market. Blue Bell Creameries offered Latinos new ice cream flavors like *tres leches* with pineapple and coconut. The Houston basketball superstar Hakeem Olajuwon began to promote Pure Tejano Water in brightly colored bottles.

Several Hispanic marketing firms helped American companies to sell their products to the Latino market. Lopez Negrete Communications, Inc., the fifth largest Houston advertising firm, shaped the messages for Microsoft, Bank of America, Tyson Foods, and Wal-Mart. Alex Lopez Negrete used "Spanglish," a mixture of Spanish and English to appeal to his audience and produced Sonic Drive-In's first Spanish language television commercials.[89]

Local Hispanic realtors and home builders were also anxious to help the New Latinos become homeowners. Banks and realtors offered "Homeownership 101" classes in both English and Spanish. Local homebuilders hired bilingual sales persons. Two South Texas home builders, Armadillo Homes and Obra Homes, entered the Houston market to construct affordable houses with three, four, or five bedrooms.[90] Other key signs of rising Latino consumer power were the introduction of Latin American "futbol" or soccer at Reliant Stadium to packed crowds and the addition of record setting "Go *Tejano* Days" at the annual Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.

All of this economic clout did not necessarily translate into power in the Houston political scene. Political experts referred to Houston Latinos as a "sleeping giant." Their average age was very young and older people tend to be much more dependable voters. The majority of the New Latinos was undocumented and could not become naturalized citizens with the right to vote. Even among Hispanic citizens, less than half were registered to vote. This new population was also very diverse and unpredictable. It was not clear whether it would favor one political party over the other. Several well established Mexican American political organizations including the League of United Latin American Citizens, the Association for the Advancement for Mexican Americans, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and La Raza Unida tried to mobilize the New Latinos. Some Hispanic and African American leaders called for united action among both "communities under siege."[91] Other Latino politicians expressed doubts about such a biracial political strategy. Orlando Sanchez, a Cuban-American Republican who nearly became Houston's first Latino mayor in 2001 said, "There will be a Libertarian in the White House before there is a black-brown coalition in Houston."[92] Latino political power remained more mirage than reality in Houston.

The two issues that seemed to prompt the most grassroots activism among the New Latinos were immigration policy and labor


*Churches created by and for the Latino community dot the Houston landscape. The Lakewood Church has even hired a Latin American minister to lead services in Spanish.*

conditions. Recent undocumented immigrants wanted the United States government to reestablish the 1980s amnesty program and Hispanic laborers wanted decent working conditions. New Latinos were more likely to die or suffer injury on the job than any other ethnic group. They also had less access to health insurance and medical care. Workers often did not receive the wages they had been promised. Labor unions that had traditionally resisted immigrant labor tapped into these frustrations by beginning to organize and educate both legal and undocumented Latino workers.

The local AFL-CIO union began to investigate prevailing-wage violations and taught immigrants how to sue for their back wages.[93] At AFL-CIO Labor Day celebrations, recent immigrants became the stars of the show. Union leaders stressed the theme that, "Immigrants have built America, and they're going to continue to build America alongside other workers."[94] In 2003, the union also sponsored Houston workers participating in a national "freedom ride" where eighteen buses carried 900 immigrant workers to Washington, D.C. to demand changes in workplace protections and more visas to encourage family reunification.[95] The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) worked to organize janitors in commercial office buildings. Houston members of the SEIU led the nation in a strike against ABM Janitorial Services in 2005. After Houston workers walked out, janitors in thirty other cities struck in sympathy. Most of the local strikers were immigrant women making $5.25 per hour.[96] Perhaps the sleeping giant was beginning to stir.


*Immigrant men who are Catholic Workers at Casa Juan Diego.* Courtesy Casa Juan Diego

The New Latinos are a dominant force in Houston, the nation, and their homelands. Houston has become the number two center of Hispanic settlement in the nation and moves to a more Latin beat. The U.S. government is faced with a seemingly intractable problem of controlling our border with Mexico and incorporating this new population into the national community. This wave of migration is particularly unique in American history because of the issue of illegal immigration. While Asians suffered an extended period of "illegal immigration" because of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the national origins quota system, the numbers involved in that migration were miniscule compared to what the United States is experiencing during this period. Presently, more than one half of all immigration to the United States is illegal and more than eighty percent of the undocumented are Latinos.

This completely changes the process of assimilation for the unauthorized Latino first generation. These immigrants live in an illegal shadow world of forged documents, cash payments, uncertainty, and fear. They cannot hope to gain political clout without the right to naturalize. Their children born in the United States possess that cherished legal status and American citizenship. Until those children reach adulthood, however, the latent political and economic power of the New Latinos cannot be fully unleashed.

The New Latinos are also a very diverse group. Just because Americans conveniently group all Latin Americans into the classification "Hispanic" or "Latino" does not mean that they all have common interests. Broad generalizations are very risky when comparing Mexicans to Colombians or highland Mayans to urban Venezuelans. The Hispanic media may serve to homogenize these disparate groups with their ethnically neutral Spanish and culture. Political realities, government policies, and cultural assimilation also will encourage the development of a Pan-Latino identity just as it did with earlier generations of immigrants. At this point in their American history, many New Latinos still straddle two worlds—their homeland and their new American communities. Their transnational character not only shapes their mentality, but also world financial flows, business trends, and even religious movements.

Additionally, the New Latinos exert a very strong influence on their home nations. Starting out poor and dispossessed, they become the engines of change for their own families and countries. Their remittance flows finance both higher standards of living and political expectations. Home nations must beware because most Latino immigrants begin to send less money home after about ten years when they establish their own families and businesses in the United States. Latin American nations that remain heavily dependent on remittance flows will either have to learn to live without them or continue to lose entire generations of their young people. The New Latinos are certainly proving that they have the power to change two worlds. ■