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REPORT 7

## COMING OUT AND MAKING HISTORY:

*Latino Immigrant Civic Participation in San Jose*

Series on **LATINO IMMIGRANT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**



SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA





**COMING OUT AND MAKING HISTORY:**

*Latino Immigrant Civic Participation in San Jose*

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Cover image: San Jose's May 1, 2006 mega-march coincided with similar protests for immigrant rights throughout the United States. Police estimated the crowd at 100,000, and activists estimated as many as 330,000, according to a report in the Spanish-language newspaper, *El Observador*. By either count, the march represented the largest demonstration in San Jose's history. This photo of Santa Clara Street was taken from the eighteenth story of the San Jose municipal building.

Photo credit: Sharat G. Lin, San Jose Peace and Justice Center. <http://www.sanjosepeace.org/>

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## PREFACE

The history of immigrant civic engagement in the United States has many chapters, but they must be read as taking place either before or after the spring of 2006, when more than 3.5 million people took to the streets in an exercise of “extreme civicness.” In dozens of cities across the United States, especially in the West and Southwest, these marches represented not only a collective process of “coming out” into the public sphere for immigrants. They were also the largest public protest ever seen in many cities on any issue of concern. San Jose was one such city, where the police estimate of 100,000 participants far surpassed all previous forms of collective civic action in the history of Silicon Valley. Estimates by advocates were far larger.

The report that follows captures participants’ perspectives on this watershed event, combining the story of the march itself with a synthesis of community organizers’ retrospectives on the significance and implications of the march. The collection is written from the perspective of a local “embedded journalist,” and chronicles a community forum held three years after the march on April 25, 2009.

Bringing together activists from local churches, trade unions, community develop-

ment organizations, youth and civic organizations, this gathering offered the first opportunity to have a structured conversation to reflect on the experience. Co-sponsored by the University of California, Santa Cruz’s Center for Labor Studies and made possible by a grant from the University of California’s Miguel Contreras Labor Studies Development Fund, the forum was held at the San Jose regional headquarters of the Service Employees International Union, with support from its Latino Caucus. The forum’s convening committee was composed of the following community leaders, who were pivotal in organizing the 2006 march: Salvador Bustamante (Strengthening Our Lives), Alberto Carrillo (Santa Clara County Office of Human Relations), Martha Campos (Comité César Chávez), Teresa Castellanos (Santa Clara County Office of Human Relations), and Rosario Vital (*El Observador* Spanish-language weekly newspaper).

This report, *Coming Out and Making History: Latino Immigrant Civic Participation in San Jose*, gives voice to these community leaders, as well as to the approximately forty other participants present at the forum; and we wish to thank Rosario Vital for her work as

the chronicler of this dialogue. Part of a larger series of reports sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson Center Mexico Institute, *Coming Out and Making History* also represents the bridging of a public multi-stakeholder discussion

with applied research on Latino immigrant civic engagement.

Jonathan Fox  
Shannon Gleeson

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On May 1, 2006, the immigrant marches held throughout the country filled the headlines and were the lead story in all the mainstream broadcast media. For five months, Congress, radio stations, and television programs all debated immigration reform. After the first big demonstration in Chicago on March 10, immigrant communities all over the country began to speak out in the immigration debate.

In Silicon Valley, immigrant communities and their allies did their part to contribute to the largest mobilization for civil rights in this country's history.

The spark that set off this nationwide mobilization was HR 4437, a proposal on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives. This bill would have threatened to make criminals out of 12 million men, women, and children because of their illegal presence in the United States. It also would have threatened criminal penalty against any person assisting an undocumented immigrant—including those who provided services, food or housing. In other words, Congress sought to criminalize acts of decency and humanitarianism among families and communities.

In Silicon Valley, students protested. Their need to participate in a debate that was relevant

to their lives, to young people, and to the future in general, propelled them into the streets. They organized vigils in the community, and these led to the marches, which in turn culminated in one of the biggest mobilizations ever in the Bay Area.

Silicon Valley (Santa Clara County) is the engine of the nation's global economy. In this region, the world's wealth (economic, intellectual, labor) has created the Internet, a worldwide web that has shown us that the world is fully integrated and that isolation is no longer possible in the global economy.

According to the 2000 Census, Santa Clara County has the highest percentage of foreign-born residents (36.3 percent) of any county in the state. Los Angeles County follows with 36.0 percent, and San Francisco with 35.8 percent. In 2006 Santa Clara County received more Asians than any other county in the United States. The Asian population has grown by 20 percent in just the past decade.

Santa Clara County is made up of fifteen cities; San Jose is the largest of these. According to one estimate, there are approximately 260,000 undocumented immigrants in the county, of which 200,000 are Latinos, and approximately 50,000 are of Asian origin. The

overall number of immigrants in the county is about 600,000.<sup>1</sup>

The city of San Jose, meanwhile, is also made up of a diverse population. Currently the predominant ethnic group in the city is Hispanic, constituting 32.2 percent of the total. Non-Hispanic whites represent 31.3 percent, and Asians are 30.3 percent of the city's population. Mostly Latinos, especially Mexican-Americans, came out into the streets to protest that afternoon on the first of May.

### The Heart of Silicon Valley

San Jose is considered the heart of Silicon Valley, because of its concentration of international high-tech companies. In fact approximately 4,500 companies employ more than 182,300 people in high-tech jobs in the San Jose Metropolitan Area.<sup>2</sup>

The city is also known as a home of union leader César Chávez. In the 1950s, he lived in the “Sal Si Puedes” [“Get out if you can”] barrio of East San Jose, and advocated for the rights of construction workers, factory workers, and hotel and restaurant workers, most of whom were Latino immigrants. César's greatest contribution was his support of the farm workers' struggle and the creation of the United Farm Workers' union (UFW).

The local response to the immigration debate was the result of several years of organizing in the immigrant community. The Justice for Janitors Campaign took on an international flavor in San Jose with SEIU Local 1877, a union that has organized immigrant workers in the high-tech industry in San Jose for more than twenty years. Community organizations like Voluntarios de la Comunidad and the Services, Immigrant Rights and Education Network (SIREN), as well as the unions, had already actively participated for more than six

years in the struggle to get driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants.

“Our key to success in becoming a global force is to understand that we live in San Jose, in the capital of the Silicon Valley, and we've got a global struggle happening right here, with whites, blacks—and if they are not part of this struggle for immigration reform, this doesn't have a future.

We have to understand that we've got every ethnic group in the world right here in the Silicon Valley. And if we act from that place, we can turn that into a position of strength. We have to build a global struggle through the Internet, through the media, because that is the particular advantage we have in organizing here.”

**Arturo Gómez, Somos Mayfair**

The infrastructure in Santa Clara also supported this organizing. The Board of Supervisors invested in aid to permanent residents who were in the process of getting citizenship; it invested in research on immigrant communities; it funded an immigrant hotline; and it invested in a national model of healthcare for children regardless of immigration status. These local investments created a strong relationship among diverse community members, encouraging contact and effective collaboration.

The relationships created through this organizational collaboration, between the Santa Clara County Office of Human Relations and various community organizations, produced diverse alliances in many projects, and more than 120,000 people were assisted in their citizenship process.

These pre-existing relationships also facilitated a community response to HR 4437. After the demonstration in Chicago on March

10, 2006, SEIU Local 1877 issued a call to all pro-immigrant organizations, associations, union movements, and churches, to discuss a response to the anti-immigrant law that threatened our community. The first meeting produced an agreement and a coalition that would call for a march on April 10. This new coalition was dubbed the *San José Immigrant Rights Coalition*.

SEIU Local 1877's power to gather social forces together at a critical moment was not just a result of the organizing it had done among immigrant workers. The union had also had a social and political presence on a range of issues that affect workers, both in and out of the workplace; and it connected local efforts to the state and national campaign.

### The History of Immigrant Organizing

There is a long tradition of coalition work in San Jose. This coalition work was strengthened after the passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which contained provisions enabling the legalization of formerly undocumented persons. As more undocumented persons successfully gained legalization under IRCA, this increased the pool of persons eligible for citizenship, requiring coalitions to improve service capacities to meet new demand. Similarly, coalitions were strengthened by the need to oppose the California state ballot initiative, Proposition 187 ("Save Our State"), which attempted to deny even means-based social services to immigrants and families.<sup>3</sup> The threat of Proposition 187 galvanized and strengthened organizations, which came together to fight the measure through protests organized by the Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Services. This network met weekly to coordinate demonstrations and protests against

187 in downtown San Jose and in front of the Robert F. Peckham Federal Building.

Yet after fighting—and winning—this battle, the immigrant community had to face another one. This time, it was over the denial of driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants. California stopped issuing driver's licenses to anyone who could not prove his or her legal residence after then-Governor Pete Wilson signed the measure on October 4, 1993. This posed problems for the undocumented community, but it also led to renewed organization and to the formation of a local coalition.

The San Jose Coalition for Drivers' Licenses was made up of various pro-immigrant organizations. After several attempts and failures, the coalition realized that it was fighting for something that was not going to solve the underlying problem. While the struggle over licenses continued, it wasn't long before the community would have to confront HR 4437, also known as the "Sensenbrenner Bill." This bill once again had the effect of bringing the organizations together—among them, a wide range of clergy. It was this legislative proposal that put the community to the test and developed its maximum capacity for organizational power.

### HR 4437

The Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (HR 4437) was one of the most anti-immigrant pieces of legislation ever proposed; it was intimidating, unfair, and inhumane, and it offended the community. The content of the bill shook immigrants like a social earthquake. It was approved on December 16, 2005 by the U.S. House of Representatives with 239 votes in favor and 182 against.

This measure irritated the immigrant community and the larger community as well, because it criminalized undocumented people, prohibited aid to them, and established a mandatory system to verify employees' work authorization status. The measure included fines of \$40,000 for employers who hired undocumented workers. Employers caught violating the law repeatedly could face imprisonment of up to 30 years.

The bill also increased the number of U.S. Border Patrol personnel stationed at the border and authorized the hiring of 250 port-of-entry inspectors each year for three years. In addition, it mandated construction of a 700-mile wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, along with the use of high-tech sensors, physical barriers, cameras, lights, and roads.

Millions of individuals and thousands of pro-immigrant organizations in the United States protested this bill. They said it would separate families and result in massive deportation. People all over the country were astonished by the bill's attempt to call someone a criminal for working to feed their family, whether here, or in their country of origin.

## NOTES

- 1 See "SCC Model of Immigrant Integration: Overview of SCC County Programs." Media presentation. Immigrant Relations & Integration Services. Santa Clara County Office of Human Relations. San Jose, CA: Created 26 June 2009. Go to: <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/events/docs/SCC.Wash.D.C.Pres.2009.final.version.pdf>. For more on the Santa Clara County Latino and foreign-born populations, please see the charts and tables at the end of this report.
- 2 See "Local Economic Information." Significant Facts: Metropolitan San Jose. *The Chamber Advocate* <http://www.sjchamber.com/business/info.php>
- 3 Proposition 187 was a ballot initiative that sought to bar undocumented immigrants from using social services, including healthcare services, and to bar their access to the public education system. Although it was passed by a majority of voters in 1994, its main provisions were never implemented as a court later ruled the initiative unconstitutional. In 1999, then-Governor Gray Davis ended the state of California's appeal of that court ruling, effectively nullifying the proposition.

### The First Signs

The 2006 marches in San Jose were planned in an anti-immigrant climate. Criminalizing working people whose transgression consisted of contributing to society with their labor was seen as unfair to the whole community. This was an emergency that threatened everyone, which is why people organized and, with exemplary courage, turned out to protest.

They were inspired by Chicago's path-breaking demonstration on March 10, 2006, when 100,000 people turned out. This was a crucial mobilizing factor for many immigrant families, as well as for the friends and family members of undocumented people.

At that time, the so-called "Washington Coalition," along with unions and churches, tried to assemble a caravan. This coalition, too, was inspired by the Chicago mobilization, and issued a call to immigrants to make their opinions heard. At the local level, the pro-immigrant group, *Voluntarios de la Comunidad*, called together the media and the community to see the caravan off. The caravan was supposed to leave from the intersection of Story Road and King Road, a

thoroughly Latino area of town, located in East San Jose.

Sacramento was the caravan's final destination. After so many people arrived unexpectedly, droves of supporters decided to walk to downtown San Jose first.

### Marches and Walks Coincide

Meanwhile, less than a mile away from Story and King, people gathered to honor union leader César Chávez. The tradition was to walk from Mexican Heritage Plaza to César Chávez Plaza downtown and end at a festival commemorating Chávez's birthday.<sup>1</sup>

In 2006, the day of celebration, which included the traditional walk and festival, was scheduled for March 25. The pro-immigrant caravan group and the César Chávez march met at midday at the intersection of 24th and Santa Clara streets (roughly a mile from city hall) and merged, moving together to downtown San Jose. Everyone was chanting the same slogan, "*si se puede*."

Demonstrators traveled about three and a half miles that day. In that first, unexpected public demonstration, participants waved their countries' flags. The lineup of speakers who

paid homage to César Chávez did not address HR 4437.

“There is a deep wisdom in the community that usually does not have an outlet or the right to be exercised. It’s incredible to notice that the “*sí se puede*” phrase made popular in the ‘60s is still alive in this historic moment.”

**Teresa Castellanos**, Office of Human Relations, Santa Clara County

This was just the beginning. Three days after this first march, people started working on the second march, and thirteen days later were planning something even bigger.

### April 10, 2006

With the strong showing on March 25, San Jose shifted towards planning for a larger event. The presence of some 25,000 people downtown was an indication of the political need to express an opinion in the public debate.

The first demonstration was the first step toward generating support and exposing immigrants’ reality. On March 28, the California Federation of Labor held a meeting in Los Angeles, attended by Salvador Bustamante of San Jose, representing SEIU Local 1877. In this meeting it was agreed that a march would be organized for April 10, so SEIU Local 1877 called for the march in San Jose.

There was a tremendous amount of energy and support, and different community groups joined the effort to plan the April 10 protest. These included the Comité César Chávez; the Mayfair Improvement Initiative (now *Somos Mayfair*); the Services, Immigrant Rights and Education Network (SIREN); the Center for Employment Training (CET); Voluntarios de la Comunidad; SEIU Local 1877; United

Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 5; Carpenters Local Union No. 405; Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 9423; Laborers Union Local 270; SEIU Local 521; Roofers Union Local 95; Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 393; HERE Local 19; the South Bay Labor Council; the Latino Caucus; Working Partners USA (WPUSA); People Acting in Community Together (PACT); the Interfaith Council; and Californians for Justice, among others.

In the process of planning for the April 10 march, unions, the César Chávez Committee, and the Interfaith Council led this movement that grew larger each day. This is how the *San Jose Immigrant Rights Coalition* was formed: diverse organizations working for the same cause, under the same name and representing not their organization but the march for immigrants. Leaders met regularly and decided to work, despite multiple constraints on time and resources, to continue with this immense community undertaking.

By extending their hours of service, sacrificing the personal time they would have spent with their families and friends, they took the reins until they had reached toward what everyone wanted throughout the United States. The San Jose Coalition took on a huge commitment, and it showed in the surprising results of its work.

The April 10 march called out church and city authorities. For the first time, representatives of the San Jose City Council and of Santa Clara County joined in to recognize the huge contributions of the immigrant community to Silicon Valley. A mobile stage had been installed in the parking lot where one of the most popular outdoor Latino markets in this neighborhood is held. The march was launched with blessings from the clergy and from several authorities; it was radiant with

colors and with the signs symbolizing people's opinions and feelings.

Organizers asked marchers not to use flags from other countries, and to emphasize the use of the U.S. flag—recalling criticisms in the mainstream U.S. media from prior marches. This march was scheduled for 4:00 p.m., and left from the same location as the previous one. The intersection of Story and King once again supported a collection of working people—the shouts, tears, hopes and democratic yearnings of the immigrant working class that has contributed to the wealth of the Silicon Valley.

“The use of American flags sent an important message. The flag hadn't been used for a long time in a massive event like that. Immigrants got the message that we are part of America. The use of U.S. flags had positive results. After the march some friends asked me why they are using the flags and the answer was...because we belong in this place.”

**Teresa Castellanos**, Office of Human Relations, Santa Clara County

Families, workers, and students carried different signs expressing their rejection of HR 4437. “NO to H.R. 4437,” “We're asking for a fair and humane reform,” “Why bite the hand that feeds you?” or “No human being is illegal.” One by one the signs went by, representing many hours of preparation by unions, activists, and community members.

The number of participants increased to 30,000. And even greater than the number of people participating were the feelings that were mounting in the community. There was fear, but there was also hope that a step could be taken toward significant change.

Union members were a backbone of the march. From beginning to end, they were the driving force of this great moment that made

the news in San Jose and, this time, throughout the world.

“We had major participation by the Communications Workers [union] and there were monitors from the Carpenters, the Laborers. The South Bay Labor Council was involved. The biggest [union] participation was probably from the janitors, [SEIU] Local 1877. We had to have an orderly situation, but I don't think that the march could have been controlled or organized. It could not have occurred without the trade union movement...”

**Fred Hirsh**, Plumbers Union Local 393

This march was a community event, where families and friends had a chance to meet other people in their own communities. Multiple generations interacted in the same space, and executive directors and rank-and-file organizers walked together on the same side.

In an effort to reflect the Silicon Valley's diversity, march organizers scheduled different stops along the route and followed marchers with a mobile stage. At each stop, immigrants belonging to different community groups spoke about their migration experience, and about their hopes and dreams. Latinos, Africans, Vietnamese, and Filipinos spoke of the universality of the immigrant experience.

## NOTES

- 1 In honor of Chávez's lifetime of work on behalf of *campesinos* and his deep commitment to economic and social justice, in 2000 the governor of California declared Chávez's birthday a state holiday, the first official holiday commemorating either a Mexican-American or a labor leader in the United States.

## MAY FIRST: A Matter of Recognition

### Preparations

San Jose managed to organize thousands of people in peaceful protest in only three weekends. This contributed to the larger effort in which San Jose joined forces in the lesson that immigrants gave the United States and the entire world.

Churches, community organizations, and the media distributed flyers, publicizing the departure point for the march. *The San Jose Immigrant Rights Coalition* met morning, noon and night. A tremendous feeling of solidarity began to circulate. As everyone pitched in with their time and ideas, this energy produced the march that touched the hearts of many people who had not yet considered these issues.

Flyers that read, “We Are America,” were handed out left and right all over San Jose. Churches lent themselves to the cause; after Mass they allowed announcements at the pulpit about the May 1 march, described as the National Day of Action and Family Unity.

*The San Jose Immigrant Rights Coalition* announced that the meeting point would once again be the intersection of Story and

King, at 3:00 p.m. This time the destination was Arena Green Park, at the intersection of Autumn and Santa Clara, a major intersection downtown.

People assumed that the number of participants would be even greater than the one three weeks prior where people were unable to even get to the city of San Jose. The starting and destination points were established in coordination with the local police and following their instructions. The word got out to everyone to use the U.S. flag, to wear white T-shirts, and to keep the streets clean.

### The Churches in the Marches

The march involved many of San Jose’s churches, and the presence of a wide range of clergy was a symbol of respect.

The religious side of the movement was represented by the Interfaith Council, which comprised the Catholic Diocese of San Jose; the San Jose Human Rights Commission; Saint Julie Billiard Parish; the Espíritu Santo Pentecostal Church, Most Holy Trinity and Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic churches; the Lutheran Church; the Universalist Unitarian Fellowship of Sunnyvale; the Presbyterian

Church of San Jose; the Ministerial Alliance of the Disenfranchised Community; the Shir Hadash Congregation; the South Bay Islamic Association; and the South Bay Labor Council. The key organizers of the religious coalition were Reverend Carol Been and Father Jon Pedigo.

Faith-based leaders began to take a position on migration issues in March. In a conference on March 14, the Interfaith Council announced its opposition to the immigration reform proposal presented in the House of Representatives.

“Clergy joined in, and churches worked in each of their parishes to get the message out. The Catholic Diocese of San Jose and the Interfaith Council motivated their community.”

**Father Bill Lenninger,**  
*Catholic Diocese of San Jose*

“Spirituality was part of this movement. A person joins a movement to help a brother or sister.”

**Martha Campos,** *Comité Cesar Chavez*

The religious community could not distance itself from immigrants’ pain and from the social injustice that they had seen affecting their congregations. Their presence was essential, and it gave the movement greater credibility in the eyes of the authorities.

Spiritual leadership symbolized respect and authority, and spirituality also played an important role in the planning of the marches. For instance, the Mexica spiritual leader Ray Baeza would recite an indigenous blessing at the beginning of the organizational meetings, in an effort to help community members leave their differences aside. In addition, faith is an important element in the immigrant community. While immigrants may lack documents—

driver’s licenses and work permits, for example—their faith helps them survive from day to day.

As part of the effort to humanize the 12 million undocumented residents in the United States, community members worked with spiritual leaders to confront the physical violence that the passage of HR 4437 would have meant. With “soul” power (faith and spirituality), these twelve million people drew on the spiritual force that Dr. King taught the United States forty years ago.

### How the Media Contributed

In San Jose, Telemundo’s Channel 48 and Univisión’s Channel 14 played a crucial role. Spanish-language radio, and local print weeklies, like *El Observador*, *La Oferta*, *El Mensajero*, and *Alianza*, were also very important in providing broad coverage.

Details of the march were published in a timely way each week by the print media, including on their editorial pages. Daily broadcasts on television and on radio also focused on the details of this huge event, the likes of which had never been covered in the media.

Latino-oriented media identified with immigrants’ reality. Reporters for these media are also immigrants, and saw themselves reflected in the suffering; the pain could have been their own, or that of undocumented friends or family members. They covered events closely as they unfolded, starting from the moment the anti-immigrant proposal threatened an entire community.

While Latino-oriented media continued to produce editorial pieces showing how immigrant families were dealing with this difficult situation, they were also reporting on something that had become front-page news in English-language media.

## A CALL FOR RIGHTS

### 100,000 MARCH THROUGH DOWNTOWN SAN JOSE BAY AREA

**RALLIES:** DEMANDS RING OUT FROM SAN FRANCISCO TO SALINAS FOR FAIR REFORMS

by Patrick May, Mary Anne Ostrom and Rodney Foo

Joining more than a million immigration-rights marchers in cities around the state and across the country, an estimated 100,000 predominantly Mexican-American demonstrators on Monday turned a wide swath of San Jose into raucous street theater, stepping forward to be recognized by America and insisting they be treated with respect.

"I'm not illegal," said one placard bobbing high above the protest's teeming nexus at San Jose's Story and King roads. "I am human."

Energized by both the midday sun and the spotlight of a growing national debate over immigration reform, Bay Area rallies from Salinas to San Francisco mirrored the San Jose gathering—a rollicking sprawl of humanity with message T-shirts, blasting horns, kids in strollers, seniors with umbrellas, and an endless billow of stars and stripes.

"We want to tell the world we're here," said restaurant manager Samuel Montano, 45, selling American and Mexican flags—at a ratio of about 5-to— to East Side marchers. "We don't want to hide or be scared. We work, we pay taxes, we want to be here. And we want to wave this flag," he said, pointing to the red, white and blue one...

*San Jose Mercury News - Tuesday, May 2, 2006*

It was quite an achievement to shake up the newsroom of the most influential newspaper in San Jose. With pressure from the community, the *San Jose Mercury News* dedicated front-page space to the story, and television channels like ABC 7 News, NBC Channel 11, Channel 4, and Channel 5 sent crews to East San Jose to provide special coverage.

"The involvement of Spanish-language radio was really important in 2006. As a participant I doubt we would have gotten as many people if it hadn't been for the participation of the media. In English they didn't cover it until after millions of people had already come out into the streets."

**Martha Donayre**, *Love Sees No Borders*

"Publicity in the Spanish language media was crucial to the march's success. The print media completed what the radio and television couldn't cover.

"The media helped and were good collaborators. They made it possible to get the message about these marches out to more people. The media worked hard to spread the word."

**Alberto Carrillo**, Office of Human Relations,  
Santa Clara County

Radio listeners were glued to El Piolin's and El Cucuy's popular national programs. Both of these radio personalities have been recognized for their remarkable work mobilizing these huge marches across the country.<sup>1</sup>

## The First Hours

The big day arrived. Weather conditions were favorable and many people went out into the sunlight, leaving behind the darkness in which they had hidden for many years.

The euphoria of that moment was incredible. Little kids were carrying their flags, mothers pushing their strollers, and thousands of fathers carried on their shoulders their reason for being: their children, many of whom were probably born in this country. Elders joined the march too; entire families were part of this movement that changed the course of U.S. history.

Men and women, some holding each other, smiled shyly. Many cried for the years of humiliation they had endured. And others because of society's rejection of them as working people, whose physical effort nevertheless has contributed for decades to this country's progress.

It was an orderly, civilized march; at each corner there were volunteers ready to pass out bottles of water and to cheer on other citizens in the same situation as themselves.

Solidarity reigned that May 1. Flags were given away, along with water and tacos, and everyone was smiling happily, waiting eagerly for the big moment. May Day had turned into a big party. Gradually, whole families started showing up, ready to go out and protest. Young people, on the other hand, had started "revving their engines" and their shouts of "*Viva!*" could be heard from very early in the day as they warmed up for the march.

The first people to arrive milled around the intersection in this festive atmosphere. These early arrivals also carried signs that expressed their feelings of frustration. "Because I'm Mexican they say I'm illegal. Check your

history, I'm in my homeland," said one of the first signs carried by many immigrants, proud of their race and of their contribution.

The television channels started their first reports. Mi Pueblo, the biggest supermarket in Santa Clara County, closed its eleven stores in solidarity on that historic day, and donated bottles of water and plastic bags.

"It was a demonstration of unity, adopted by the community."

**Adriana González**, community activist

For the first time ever, La Tropicana, the most popular mall in East San Jose, was silent and abandoned. Not a single business was open. Businesses decided to close and join this social cause. Everyone had respected the request not to open businesses in solidarity with immigrants. Local *taquerías* like El Savoy and Nacos Tacos handed out free tacos. The supermarkets gave out water during each leg of the scheduled march.

## The Departure

As the day went on, more people joined the May Day party, and more families gathered at the intersection. After midday, the intersection of Story and King was crowded and traffic grew impossible. Police were forced to block off some streets, as well as some exits of Interstate 280 along with the highway's northbound and southbound lanes.

The schedule had to be pushed forward due to the number of people. The march set out at 3:30 p.m., heading up King Road and turning left to go into Alum Rock. Once it passed the 101 overpass at Santa Clara Street, with downtown now in sight, the march continued down that street to its destination, Arena Green Park.

It was amazing to see that afternoon, how marchers filled up four lanes across, and to see them coming from far away. A sea of people came out in an orderly way to protest and demonstrate to the country and the whole world that these people have dignity, that they earn their money honorably, and are part of this country's success.

The march covered just over four miles, and normally would have only taken an hour and a half to walk. Yet, due to the number of people present that day, it took three hours for everyone to arrive. Two hours had gone by and people were still leaving from the departure point, according to the weekly newspaper, *El Observador*.<sup>2</sup>

By 6:00 p.m., the first participants arrived and gradually trickled onto the stage that had been prepared for the speakers. The event began with a blessing from the priests, and with a prayer, while everyone held hands. This community prayer unified the participants, allowing them to share a common faith. It lifted the collective heart of the community to hear the words of praise uniting them in a kind of solidarity and companionship that had never been experienced in any other place in San Jose's history.

The most emotional moment was the minute of silence that the gathering observed to honor those migrants who had lost their lives in their attempt to cross the border; it ended with strong applause.

"Immigrants' needs were really brought out into the open. Their stories inspired people to be civic citizens and to be active on their own issues. The mass movement taught everyone how important civic participation is."

**Julia Curry**, adviser, Student Affairs in Higher Education

As is tradition in Chicano marches, Aztec dancers led the way, purifying the path. They danced without stopping for more than four miles. Second in the procession came an indigenous Ohlone community leader who followed in the footsteps of the dancers, and she was followed by the religious leaders.

### The Historic Mile-Long Banner

One of the cultural expressions that made a lasting impression around the event was the creation of a mile-long white banner. Supporters had written messages, thoughts, and concerns about immigration reform on this historic *manta*. For example, "We want to work in peace: The Mendozas" was one message. The banner had been on public display for two weeks for this purpose, recording the collective petitions of thousands of immigrants to the government.

Thousands of people signed the banner on May 1, the strength of immigrant men and women carried the banner, and it was a focal symbol during the march.

### Effort and Direction

This participation would never have been achieved without the work of the *San Jose Immigrant Rights Coalition*, which designed the route, organized the departure, coordinated traffic, and arranged the destination point. And everything was done with goodwill—with heart and soul, as well as discipline.

Some people didn't go to work that day, but at that moment it was better to have less income in the household than to have fewer family members in it. In other words, that day everyone was conscious of the risk of being arrested or criminalized for not having the right papers. Not taking into consideration the human values of each person—their honesty

and their ability to do work that others don't want—was seen as inhumane.

People bravely went out into the streets to make sure their rights were respected. Those rights were being trampled by a proposal written in isolation, at a desk somewhere, without thinking about the social and human reasons that cause people to come to this country.

The masses offered a unique lesson in civics that day. They didn't need violence or fights to demand respect for the working class. Men, women, young people, children, and elders helped give undocumented immigrants human faces; "undocumented" is synonymous with work, honesty, respect, struggle, and peace.

### Reflections after the March

"The day after the marches, the *Mercury News* put us on the front page. This was very important for all of us."

**Martha Campos**, Comité César Chávez

"A Call for Rights; Bay Area Rallies: Demands Ring Out from San Francisco to Salinas for Fair Reforms," announced the *Mercury News* in its front-page headline May 2, 2006. The paper assigned twelve reporters from its editorial team to cover this historic event. The *Mercury News* drew on numbers from the San Jose Police Department, reporting that 100,000 people had attended the immigrant march. They editorialized:

"Many went at the risk of being fired; we admire their courage. Others had permission of employers who recognized it as an exceptional event at a critical moment; we applauded their forbearance. The impressive rally in San Jose, attended by tens of thousands, was scheduled for late afternoon so students could go to school first. All of the marches across the country were reportedly peaceful."<sup>3</sup>

According to independent journalist Sharat Lin, reporting in the May 12 edition of the weekly *El Observador*, 330,000 people attended the event. Lin based his estimates on photographs taken of Santa Clara Street from the eighteenth floor of the San Jose municipal building, from which the entire street is visible (see cover). This alternative estimate was a reminder of the contribution that grassroots community media can make.

"With organization, everything can be prepared. It's important that these events be communicated to all the media so that the marches are more successful."

**Graciela Díaz**, Somos Mayfair

"People did a great job with the press in the marches. We had good coverage. The articles in the *Mercury News* were crucial because it is very influential with the white middle-class folks who were on the other side of the game."

**Father Bill Lenninger**, Catholic Diocese of San Jose, Human Concerns Commission

"I saw how the planning went, how information was sent out, maybe through the parish, the television, the radio. People who were involved worked really hard. And that commitment that we saw three years ago has to continue."

**Patricia Núñez**,

Our Lady of Guadalupe Church

The editorial content and the covers were consistent over the weeks that followed, and the articles fulfilled people's expectations because they were what the moment called for. Although some reporters for the English-language media had limited Spanish, they managed to produce very sensitive reports.

## In a Diverse Community, Latinos Led the Way

San Jose is characterized by its diverse community. But despite the involvement of a considerable number of people from other racial groups, Latino groups were predominant in the May Day marches. However, even though they were in the minority, the presence of other ethnic groups was important, to demonstrate our city's diversity.

"One of the things we noticed was that the progressive white movement was not very involved. I remember back when there was the Central American peace movement [in the 1980s]; there was a lot of participation from progressives and I think that's one of the spaces we need to recover, because they are similar movements, with similar connections; they are the same people, and I think that's one of the things that was missing in this pro-immigrant movement."

**Teresa Castellanos**, Office of Human Relations, Santa Clara County

"We should establish strong alliances and coalitions with everyone. I don't speak only for Muslim issues and concerns, but for the situation of Latinos, African-Americans, Asians, Chinese."

**Samina Faheem Sundas**,  
American Muslim Voice

"The march is a very Latino movement. That's not bad, but we're not the only immigrants, and I really think that as local leaders we should have met more often.

"We need more diversity. The march left from Story and King and came downtown. Immigrant issues also affect other communities."

**Martha Donayre**, Love Sees No Borders

The marches showed that the Latino community is strong, integrated and united through solidarity, and brave. Although there are other groups that face the same problems, for some reason they have not demonstrated publicly.

## What These Marches Meant

"The May Day march was a way of giving voice to people who couldn't express what they needed. It was a reason to keep fighting."

**Isabel Castañeda**, community activist

"The prevailing feeling was one of unity. We all want to fight for something positive for ourselves, and I saw a lot of people crying."

**María Teresa Bárcenas**, Somos Mayfair

"Even though there were people who wanted to suppress the marches, giving out misinformation to scare people off and create fear, the people came out to march and there was unity."

**Sandra Mendoza**, Somos Mayfair

"The marches were spontaneous movements. But we shouldn't underestimate the capacity of the coalition that shaped it. It was an orderly march with good media coverage. It was projected in a positive way. Achieving that kind of order is all to the credit of the coalition."

**Salvador Bustamante**, SEIU 1877

"We can feel really proud, as well as humble for what we did. We had the opportunity to be part of this great historic movement. It's an honor to serve our community and we are going to get the reform."

**Martha Campos**, Comité César Chávez

“Everyone thought that immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, were going to be in hiding, and I think their courage and commitment to change and social justice impressed everyone.”

**Samina Faheem Sundas,**

American Muslim Voice

“There were feelings of frustration, anger, and fear, but everyone came out.”

**Ray Baeza,** Latino Caucus, SEIU 521

The Latino community showed its power. When the San Jose police realized that they couldn't control the masses of people on May 1, 2006, they moved aside. The distance they kept from the marchers was a symbol of respect.

When people do not resort to violence, they win a number of battles. Respect is one of them. Children and the elderly are also a symbol of respect because they symbolize the family unit.

The marches were an intelligently planned reaction, but when things are done with pas-

sion and heart, the results are even better. The success of the march is also due to all of those who came out to protest. Others left their jobs and nothing would have been possible without a population willing to fight peacefully for what is theirs.

The way people behaved during the marches, and the slogans they chanted, were not offensive. The words were fair and necessary to demand a halt to the attempt underway to criminalize the community.

## NOTES

- 1 Eduardo Piolín Sotelo established his career in San Jose, and would later become a household name in Los Angeles.
- 2 *Crónica de una marcha. El Observador* (San Jose). 5 May 2006.
- 3 “Immigrants’ Clout Emerges From Shadows—Voices Have Become Impossible To Ignore As Millions Join In Marches Nationwide,” *San Jose Mercury News*, May 2, 2006.

## CONCLUSIONS

### The March Inspired New Leaders

If there is something that the march achieved where books could not, it was the active participation of young people. The May Day march brought together and motivated young students to be part of this great movement. One result of this was the expansion of a group of energetic youth, Student Advocates for Higher Education (SAHE).

SAHE was established in 2003 to support undocumented students (in high school and college), so they would not feel isolated.

“The march on May 1st was an opportunity to get involved, to help and to make change happen. Participating helps us visualize what it means to struggle; it helps us learn about social movements. You read about it in a book or you experience it. The march educated us, too, and helped us get in touch with more people.”

**César Juárez**, Student Advocates for Higher Education

“We were able to express the real needs that our community felt at that moment.”

**Eric Lara**, Student Advocates for Higher Education

“The 1st of May gave us the opportunity as young people to get involved in something, to be conscious of what was happening. If it hadn’t been for this opportunity, I wouldn’t have understood my community’s needs, and this gave me more of an idea of it. I learned leadership skills that you didn’t even know you had inside yourself. For a lot of us, it helped us bring those abilities out.”

**Diana Jauregui**, Somos Mayfair

“People should think about young people in every movement. I was one of those who participated three years ago and I didn’t know anything about organization. I grew a lot in that way. We have to create more and better leaders.”

**Marisol Murguía**, Comité César Chávez

Echoing young people’s positive experience in the May Day march are others who think it is vital to include youth in our city’s movements.

“We have to pull in the commitment of other people and focus on high school students, especially those coming from schools where family members are undocumented.”

**Jesse Castañeda**, community activist

Youth and children participated in the march. From a very young age, children know about immigration problems from their parents.

In the city of San Jose, the total high school student population is 54,069, and there are 76,272 students in community colleges. These young people represent a total of 130,341 of the city's residents. However, the number of residents 25 years of age or older is 611,985. These are important numbers to consider when thinking about where to focus energy and efforts.

The students themselves in these testimonies urged greater participation, reflecting that in any social movement, youth are a pillar of their success. It is true that young people played an essential role in this mass protest. We should remember that they are the intellectual force of the next social movements.

### Responding to Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

The May 1 marches were another chapter in the history of non-violent acts. May 1, 2006 was a symbol of peaceful struggle. It was a protest that used flags instead of weapons. Instead of violence it used the word; instead of fleeing, immigrants confronted problems with dignity, strengthened by the slogan, "*sí se puede.*"

"I participated in the movements of the '60s and the '80s, where young people were in the majority. In this 2006 march, the face of the march was made up of children and old people. Their presence changed the feeling of the march."

**Pia Moriarty,**  
Center for Employment Training

"First, we were able to stop HR 4437. Second, the immigrant movement changed its face. Many immigrants now wanted to get their citizenship and joined forces with renewed energy. Finally there was a huge wave of new voters. Despite the negatives, a lot of people voted for a change."

**Martha Campos,** Comité César Chávez

"We were able to mobilize people. We have the numbers now so that Congress will listen to us. Small groups can influence the whole country, and leaders can communicate. A lot of people think that participating in the march was the end of the story, but the struggle continues."

**Robert Yabes,**  
Catholic Charities of San Jose

"We managed to stop an action that was trying to criminalize us as immigrants and those of us who work with immigrants. We transformed history, and even though there were a lot of reprisals, the strength of the immigrant vote was felt."

**Arturo Gómez,** Somos Mayfair

The marches changed anti-immigrant sentiment. In early March 2006, the Minutemen established headquarters in the city of Campbell, ten minutes from San Jose. Each Saturday in Campbell (an affluent suburb of San Jose), at the intersection of Hamilton and Bascom avenues, men and women came out to protest with offensive signs that read, "Go back to Mexico." When the marches happened, the group shrank so much that on one weekend, only one representative of the anti-immigrant group appeared in the habitual protest.

It was not only an issue of numbers; it was also the presence of families. The message of the march was peaceful and humane. There

was, and still is, a reason for it: because families are demanding their right to be together. No one has the right to separate families. This is not just a simple immigration issue. It is a social and family matter that involves thousands of children separated from their parents.

### Civic Participation: “Today We March; Tomorrow We Vote”

Citizen participation in elections has been increasing. In the 2000 elections, 70.7 percent of registered voters turned out. In 2004, it did not increase, but in 2008 it shot up to 85.9 percent, according to statistics from the Office of Voter Registration in Santa Clara County.

Although the number of voters is increasing, the electoral strength of the Latino vote was not reflected until the November 4, 2008 elections.

“We have *compañeros*, brothers and sisters, and friends who are undocumented, who are out there mobilizing the vote. There are other ways of fighting that don’t necessarily have to do with marches.

“The face of the electorate has to change. For many years a minority has been making decisions that affect our lives, and we’ve been out of the picture.

“It’s time for us to understand that besides marching, we have to participate in the civic political process, because that’s the way we’re going to make the changes that we need as immigrants.”

**Salvador Bustamante**, SEIU 1877

In the days following the march, the immigrant community and its allies shifted the public concept of undocumented workers. The local media focused on the topic, supporting the marches and exploring the story of their success, as well as their significance.

### Cultural Expressions

After the march, the community continued to express itself culturally. Community filmmakers made a video documentary called *El Gigante Awakens*, which tells the story of the march with images. Local artists were inspired to compose *corridos* to honor immigrants; plays, poems, and written pieces emerged as part of the movement too.

### An Anti-Immigrant Reaction

“There were reprisals, and there is still racism, because after this march we heard about people who lost their jobs and groups who are against immigration who raised their voices even more. Anti-immigrant laws. The government got stricter in applying its immigration laws.”

**Isabel Castañeda**, community activist

“There were reprisals that brought our spirits down, and we never focused on what we achieved that great day. That’s why it’s important to grasp what we actually accomplished.”

**Teresa Bárcenas**, community activist

During 2007 and 2008, the raids and the execution of deportation orders in nearby cities like Sunnyvale, Santa Clara, East Palo Alto, San Francisco, San Leandro, San Rafael, Richmond, and Oakland intimidated San Jose’s population.

A report published April 28, 2009 by America’s Voice indicates that in 2007 and 2008, 98 percent of the immigration-related arrests in workplaces, and almost 90 percent of all arrests in workplaces, were of undocumented workers as opposed to employers. Immigrants also face other problems in San

## LESSONS LEARNED

BY DELIA NÁJERA, SAHE

*Week after week  
Ideas are brought to help the dreams  
Of those that are young  
In life and at heart*

*Tension is felt  
For we all want to lead  
Leave a mark in this world  
For our children to see*

*Yet  
We sometimes forget  
The passion  
That got us here*

*But...we remember  
The tears and the smiles  
The late nights and trials*

*We are human you say  
Mistakes will be made  
Important is not the mistake  
But the honesty and the lesson*

*Crucial is the understanding  
That  
The hand that holds the banner  
Is as important  
As the hand that wrote the banner*

*Triumph will not be achieved  
If...We judge one another  
If...We can't put our own struggles aside  
And think of our neighbor*

*We will only win  
When our  
Comrades, friends, and love  
Prevail*

*Remember...  
Together we come  
To achieve one goal  
To have justice, liberty and peace*

*Mistakes will be made  
Battles will be lost  
But never  
Let dreams die*

*For they are the future  
They are the hope  
For now  
We have won the battle  
And afterward  
We will win the war*

## LECCIONES APRENDIDAS

POR DELIA NÁJERA, SAHE

*Semana a semana  
Ideas vienen para ayudar a los sueños  
de aquellos que son jóvenes  
de la vida y de corazón*

*la tensión se siente  
de todos aquellos que queremos liderar  
dejar una huella en este mundo  
y hacer que nuestros hijos la vean*

*ahora  
algunas veces olvidamos  
la pasión  
que aquí nos trajo*

*pero... recordamos  
las lágrimas y sonrisas  
las traspasadas y los ensayos*

*Somos humanos dijiste,  
Errores serán cometidos  
Lo importante no es el error  
Pero si la honestidad y la lección*

*Es crucial la comprensión  
De la mano que sostiene una banderola  
Es tan importante  
Como la de la mano que escribió la banderola*

*El triunfo no se logrará  
Si nos juzgamos unos a otros  
Si no dejamos nuestras propias luchas a un lado  
Y si no pensamos en nuestro prójimo*

*Solo ganaremos  
Cuando nuestros  
Camaradas, amigos y amor  
Prevalezcan*

*Recuerda...  
juntos vinimos  
para alcanzar una meta  
lograr justicia, libertad y paz.*

*Errores serán cometidos  
batallas serán perdidas  
pero nunca  
permitan que los sueños mueran*

*Porque ellos son el futuro  
ellos son la esperanza  
Por ahora  
Hemos ganado la batalla  
Y luego  
ganaremos la guerra*

Jose, such as the disproportionate arrests of Latinos and the impounding of vehicles belonging to undocumented immigrants by the local police.<sup>1</sup>

While, there haven't been any raids, there are frequently vehicle checkpoints. The results of five samples taken from San Jose checkpoints during 2008 indicate that immigrant drivers without driver's licenses frequently are forced to turn over their vehicles.

Recent marches show that there are people who continue to seek change, but there are others who feel intimidated by the local police.

### Next Steps

At the discussion table, participants agreed that this struggle should continue in one form or another. There was a proposal to promote electoral participation, including a voter registration drive and a get-out-the-vote drive directed at citizens. There was also a proposal to keep pressuring local government through phone calls or lobbying.

Supporters contend that the time for immigration reform is now or never. Even though the situation can be grim due to the economic crisis the United States is facing, it's time to work intensely on legalization.

Nothing will be achieved without mobilization and struggle every step of the way. San Jose has had youth participation, and current leaders are also urging that they be involved in this kind of social work.

### Lobbying

"There has to be a connection with our local government representatives."

**Father Bill Lenninger,**  
Catholic Diocese of San Jose

"If you look at the other side, they are aggressive. They send out mailings, they are consistent in their messages, they talk to their representatives. They know about our strength, the numbers, our ability to mobilize, but they also know our weaknesses. We should keep calling our representatives; we need to educate our representatives."

**Robert Yabes,** Catholic Charities  
of San Jose

### Mobilizing Everyone

"With the marches we understood that we are all community leaders. We should work to keep the movement going."

**Delia Nájera,** SAHE

"We have to mobilize the community. It's an opportunity to move to other communities and create a more inclusive movement. In San Jose we have the responsibility and the opportunity to connect with other communities to make this a lot bigger than it is.

"We don't have a lot of time to convince President Obama that now is the time, because if he doesn't make a decision, we are going to lose another four years. This is the time to convince him."

**Jaime Alvarado,** Somos Mayfair

"The political moment for a humane immigration reform is now. There is no other moment. If we lose it, we are going to regret it because we are going to see powerful forces that are not going to want to re-elect Obama, and if he is not re-elected, immigration reform is going to be further away than ever."

**Arturo Gómez,** Somos Mayfair

“Sit down to work more in coalition to unite our voices.”

**Martha Donayre**, *Love Sees No Borders*

While roundtable participants declared that people should organize, and get out the vote to keep putting pressure on authorities, they will have to go back and sit down together to talk about a new strategy.

“The leadership on immigration reform from the Congressional Hispanic Caucus should be applauded, and we appreciate the President’s continued commitment to this issue,” said Janet Murguía, the president and chief executive officer of the National Council of La Raza. “We are dedicated to working with

the administration and leaders in the House and Senate from both sides of the aisle to make the President’s campaign promise of immigration reform a reality this year.”<sup>2</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 For more on this, see the article, “Sobriety Checkpoints Catch Unlicensed Drivers.” *The New York Times*. 13 February 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/14/us/14sfcheck.html?pagewanted=all>
- 2 See “NCLR lauds Congressional Hispanic Caucus and Obama’s Commitment to Immigration Reform.” New release. National Council of La Raza. 18 March 2009. <http://www.nclr.org/content/news/detail/56330/>

## FOLLOWING THE MARCHES

The mass marches of May 1, 2006 left a deep impression on the United States. The millions of immigrants who grew up in other countries brought their ideas about May Day to the United States. Now, advocates hope that May 1 will commemorate workers' struggles—a meaning that had been lost in this country.

The 2008 election included immigration issues, and campaign rhetoric was forced to change when anti-immigrant forces discovered it was not so easy anymore to scapegoat the immigrant community. When they did this in the last election, they realized that anti-immigrant rhetoric did not produce the result they hoped for.

"Immigration reform is our goal. Those of us who are citizens don't see it as important as those of us who aren't. We have to put a human face on the problem. There are so many needs—rights, Social Security accounts, licenses.

"We have to reach people who have money, and reach white people who have greater influence. How can I convince them, in churches, schools, and political leaders? I propose a website that will help us get the word out quickly."

**Isabel Castañeda**, community activist

"Something that changed after the marches was the mindset of young people. I see people in this meeting and this change should be permanent, not just a one-day fever, or for two months or one or two years and then I forget about this struggle and go on with my own.

"If there really was a change in young people's minds then it's necessary to accept that there are pressing needs like immigration reform, like health insurance for working people, a good education for you, the children and our grandchildren. These are things that are going to be there, and they are going to be reasons for us to keep fighting."

**Salvador Bustamante**, SEIU 1877

"We have to be ready to try to include a range of ethnic groups, a range of national groups. We have to see the whole picture of what immigration is. We have to be part of this globalization in order to make the changes that will not only change San Jose but the nation."

**Fred Hirsh**, Plumbers Union Local 393

On April 27, 2009, *The New York Times* published an article on a survey of almost 1,000 Americans. Respondents were asked

whether undocumented immigrants should keep their jobs and eventually apply for U.S. citizenship, whether they should stay at their jobs as temporary guest workers but not to apply for citizenship, or whether they should be compelled to leave their jobs and the United States.

Forty-four percent chose the citizenship route option; 21 percent chose the guest worker profile; and only 30 percent said they would support the demand that immigrants leave the United States. In comparison, in the same survey conducted in 2007, 38 percent chose the citizenship route; 28 percent chose temporary status; and 28 percent chose removal.

These data indicate that the struggle for reform still needs to be strengthened. Ordinary people are essential in the continuing search for allies on immigration reform.

Migration issues have faces, voices, and feelings, as was reflected in the thousands of stories published in different local media. Americans have become conscious of this and have accepted that their system needs changing.

### The Future of the Movement

Four years after the historic march, the U.S. government is facing the worst of crises. President Barack Obama has a lot to deal with simultaneously.

At any given moment there are competing demands: the economic crisis, the housing problem, the healthcare system, immigration reform, and other issues concerning the country's progress.

In response to a question by the Washington correspondent for *Noticiero Telemundo*, Lori Montenegro, in April 2009, President Obama reiterated his commitment to broad immigration reform.

"We want to move along with this process. We can't continue with a broken immigration system that isn't working for anyone. It isn't good for U.S. workers. It's dangerous for Mexicans who attempt to cross a dangerous border to try to come to work. It also puts pressure on border communities who have to deal with a larger number of undocumented immigrants. And it makes those undocumented immigrants stay in the shadows, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation while reducing U.S. salaries. So I hope we can call together a working group with legislators like Luis Gutiérrez, Nydia Velásquez, and others to begin to discuss the outlines of what legislation might look like. Meanwhile, what we're trying to do is to take certain key administrative measures to keep the process moving and set up the groundwork for legislation. Because the people of the United States have to know that if we put together a plan it will be one that we can put into action."

Apparently, Obama is open to dialogue and to implementing a plan. So roundtable participants feel it is important to work on this. They suggest that establishing democracy through political participation is an important contribution to the United States.

"The growth of the immigrant population in the civic political process is a fact. Through this growth, we are helping to build democracy in the United States. This is a direct result of the marches."

**Salvador Bustamante**, SEIU Local 1877

President Obama has gotten the message through the election results. People voted for a change.

Even though President Obama has not talked about a specific date for the passage of immigration reform, the big organizations have to have a plan up their collective sleeve that will let them join forces and produce results. He has already explained that it has to be realistic, and that it has to help immigrant families.

“Obama, I voted for you. Come through for me. I want a fair immigration reform. I can’t believe that nothing has been done since I participated in the [2003] “Freedom Ride.” We had four clear points to start legalization and now they say there is nothing. This makes me angry.”

**Martha Campos, Comité César Chávez**

“President Obama has to take a balanced approach that will get congressional support while creating broad reform. He has already been criticized for budgeting \$27 billion for border security. What comes next is like putting the house in order and repairing the door to discourage incoming drug traffic and other social diseases that threaten reform.

“Calling the president and pressuring him, asking him for the same commitment.”

**Jaime Alvarado, Somos Mayfair**

The good news is that President Barack Obama has a commitment to the issue and is working on it. The president has gotten the message and knows that family values should be respected. The central argument that coalitions, unions, and individuals have to draw on is this: no more separated families.

The immigrant community has made it clear that they are working people who contribute with their whole families, who pay taxes, who contribute to the economy with their labor, and who do a range of jobs

that produce a major part of the country’s wealth.

“Of the almost 2.2 million immigrants deported between 1997 and 2007, more than 100,000 were parents to children born in the United States, according to the Department of Homeland Security,” writes journalist and author Jorge Ramos in his recent book, *Tierra de todos*.<sup>1</sup>

In Silicon Valley, the immigrant community came together as one through the *San Jose Immigrant Rights Coalition*. In its short lifetime, this coalition unified the unions, the faith-based community, and the base communities to develop a unified and democratic response in a debate about an issue that threatened their future. This effort was multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multigenerational, and multiethnic. More than 80 organizations came together to form the coalition, and this commitment produced a collective, non-violent response to an anti-immigrant law. It also produced the biggest march in the history of San Jose and the Bay Area. According to the media estimates, between 100,000 and 330,000 people became aware of their political power in a city of less than a million.

The national mobilization of the immigrant community on May 1 reminded the United States of its immigrant roots and of immigrants’ historic role in workers’ struggles. This was the biggest civic demonstration in the country’s history. It put a halt to the anti-immigrant bill and was an important turning point in the political development of the city’s Latino, immigrant, and progressive communities.

Building on the work that others had done before them, in 2006 this community took the next step of creating a more democratic and inclusive society. This community came out into the sunlight to join the historic struggles of other communities—African-

American, Asian, women, and LGBT—to be included in the “American Dream” of equality. In San Jose, children, youth, artists, women, workers, and entire families joined the historic struggle for civil rights in the United States. Children and youth remembered the day that they marched in the streets with their whole families. And in this collec-

tive reflection, participants remembered that beautiful day.

## NOTES

- 1 Jorge Ramos. *Tierra de todos: Nuestro momento para crear una nación de iguales*. Vintage Español. 2009. Division of Random House Inc., New York, 22.

## APPENDIX I

### List of organizations that contributed to the May 1, 2006 march

#### San Jose Immigrant Rights Coalition:

ACLU of Northern California	Community Health Partnership
ACORN San Jose	Community Homeless Alliance Ministry
ANSWER Coalition	Conjunto Libertad
Asian Law Alliance	Contingente Juvenil
Bay Area Immigrant Rights Coalition	CTC
Brown Berets	Day Worker Center
Californians for Justice	Deanery 8, St. John Vianney
Calpulli Tonalehqueh	Dolores Huerta Foundation
Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform	El Comité por la Preservación de la Fe
Catholic Charities San Jose	Enlace Evergreen
Catholic Diocese of San Jose	Fiesta Educativa
Catholic Diocese of San Jose, Human Concerns Commission	Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Silicon Valley
Center of Employment Training (CET)	Holy Cross Church
Centro Azteca	Iglesias Cristianas
Comité César Chávez	Iglesias Pentecostales de San Jose, Aposento Alto
Comité Defensa del Barrio	Interfaith Council on Religion, Race, Economic & Social Justice
Communication Workers of America Local 9423	Just Faith in St. Joseph Parish
	Justicia Social
	Laborers, Local 270

League of United Latin American Citizens  
(LULAC), Evergreen Valley College  
chapter  
League of United Latin American Citizens  
(LULAC), San Jose State University  
chapter  
Legal Aid  
Liga del Pacífico Fútbol “8”  
Loaves/Fishes/Círculo Colombiano  
Love Sees No Borders  
MAIZ  
Mayfair Improvement Initiative (Somos  
Mayfair)  
Most Holy Trinity/Jesuit Order  
Nuestra Casa  
Nuestro Camino  
Our Lady of Guadalupe Church  
People Acting in Community Together  
(PACT)  
Plumbers & Fitters, Local 393  
Promotoras de la Comunidad  
Provedoras Latinas Unidas (PLU)  
Raging Grannies  
San Benito Building Trades Council

San Jose City College  
San Lorenzo Community  
Services Employees International Union,  
Local 521 and Local 521 Latino Caucus  
Services Employees International Union,  
Local 1877  
Services, Immigrant Rights, & Education  
Network, SIREN  
Sharat G. Lin  
Social Justice Committee, Christ the King  
Church  
South Bay AFL-CIO Labor Council  
South Bay Mobilization  
St. Elizabeth Church (Milpitas)  
St. Joseph Parish, *Just Faith*  
St. Julie Church  
Student Advocates for Higher Education,  
SAHE  
The Voices Project  
UNITE-HERE!, Local 19  
United Food and Commercial Workers,  
Local 428  
Voluntarios de la Comunidad  
Working Partnerships USA

## APPENDIX II

### Facts and figures on Santa Clara County's Latino and immigrant populations<sup>1</sup>

*Santa Clara County has more immigrants than any other county in northern California.*

*In 2000, ballot materials were translated into Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Tagalog.*

*Over 260,000 undocumented immigrants live in Santa Clara County. 200,000 are Latino; more than 50,000 are Asian.*

*Over 49 percent of the population in Santa Clara County speaks a language other than English at home.*

*Students who study English as a second language in the San Jose Unified School District come from homes where as many as forty different languages are spoken.*

*In 1970 more than 80 percent of San Jose's population was white; today less than 30 percent is white.*

*The City of San Jose is among the top five most integrated cities in the United States.*

**SANTA CLARA COUNTY HAS CREATED SEVERAL PROGRAMS TO SERVE THE IMMIGRANT POPULATION, INCLUDING:**

- SCC CITIZENSHIP INITIATIVE
- FUNDING FOR IMMIGRATION LEGAL SERVICES
- IN 2000, HOSTED THE SUMMIT ON IMMIGRANT NEEDS AND CONTRIBUTIONS
- IMMIGRANT LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
- IMMIGRANT HOT LINE
- IMMIGRANTINFO.ORG
- PRENATAL CARE FOR ALL
- KNOWLEDGE OF IMMIGRANT NEEDS SPEAKERS BUREAU
- IMMIGRANT SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
- IMMIGRANT CULTURAL PROFICIENCY INITIATIVE
- BIMONTHLY IMMIGRANT FORUMS
- HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION ON IMMIGRATION IN SILICON VALLEY
- BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LASTING DIALOGUE INITIATIVE
- CITIZENSHIP DAY (HELD IN 19 LANGUAGES)

**SANTA CLARA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS HAS ENGAGED IN VARIOUS FORMS OF IMMIGRANT ADVOCACY, INCLUDING:**

- SUPPORTED DRIVER'S LICENSES FOR THE UNDOCUMENTED
- OPPOSED HR4437
- OPPOSED PRESENCE OF MINUTEMEN
- SUPPORTED STATE FUNDING FOR STATE NATURALIZATION PROGRAM.

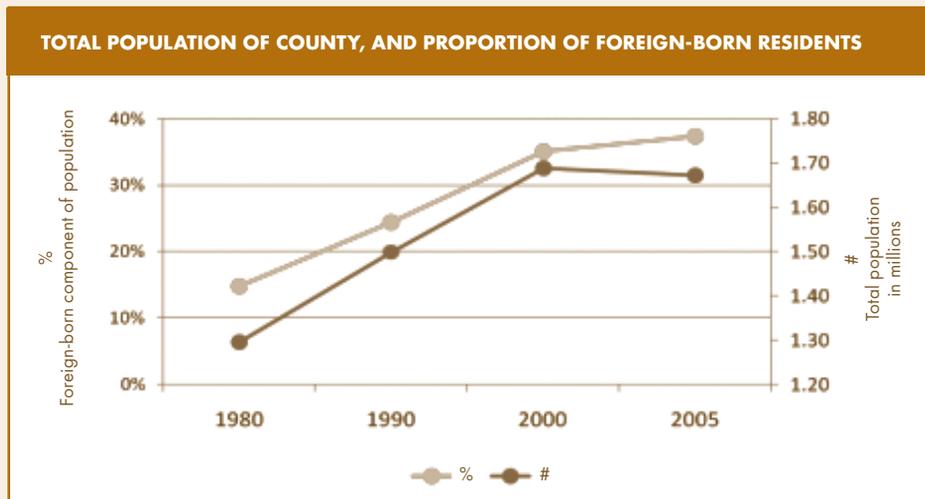
## NOTES

- 1 Source: Teresa Castellanos (Santa Clara County, Office of Human Relations). "SCC Model of Immigrant Integration: Overview of SCC County Programs" Latino Immigrant Civic Engagement Trends Conference. Washington, DC: Mexico Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. June 25-26, 2009. <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/events/docs/SCC.Wash.D.C.Pres.2009.final.version.pdf>

## APPENDIX III

### Charts and tables

Chart 1. Growth in foreign-born population as a share of total population, Santa Clara County, 1980-2005



Source: Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008. Data: San Jose Metropolitan Area (Santa Clara County, 7400)

*Table 1. Santa Clara County: Hispanic population, percentage born in United States vs. percentage born abroad*

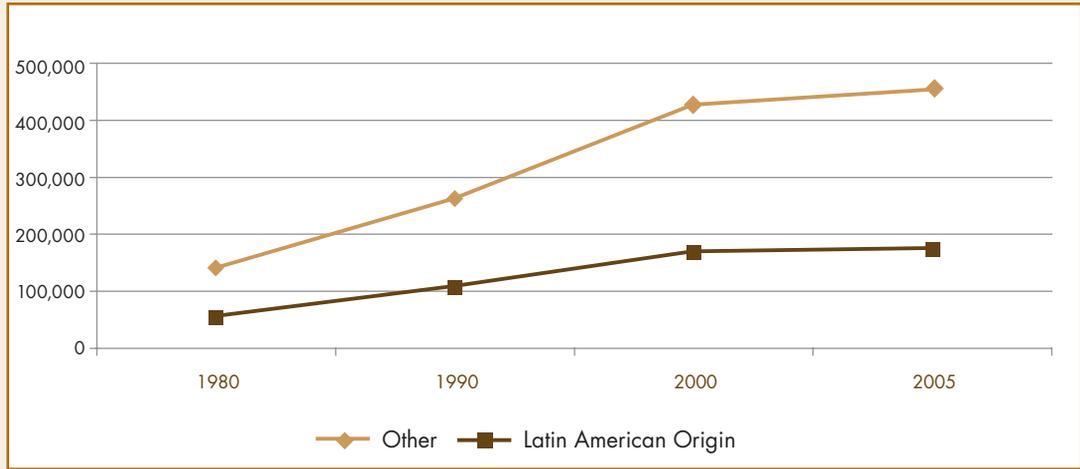
	NATIVE-BORN	FOREIGN-BORN
1980	77.00%	23.00%
1990	66.20%	33.80%
2000	58.77%	41.23%
2005	58.88%	41.12%

*Table 2. Santa Clara County: Immigrant populations from top five sending countries*

1980	%	1990	%	2000	%	2005	%
MEXICO	19	MEXICO	20	MEXICO	24	MEXICO	23
PHILIPPINES	10	VIETNAM	13	VIETNAM	15	VIETNAM	14
VIETNAM	6	PHILIPPINES	12	PHILIPPINES	10	INDIA	11
OTRO	6	CHINA	4	INDIA	8	PHILIPPINES	9
CANADA	5	ABROAD, NS	4	CHINA	6	CHINA	8

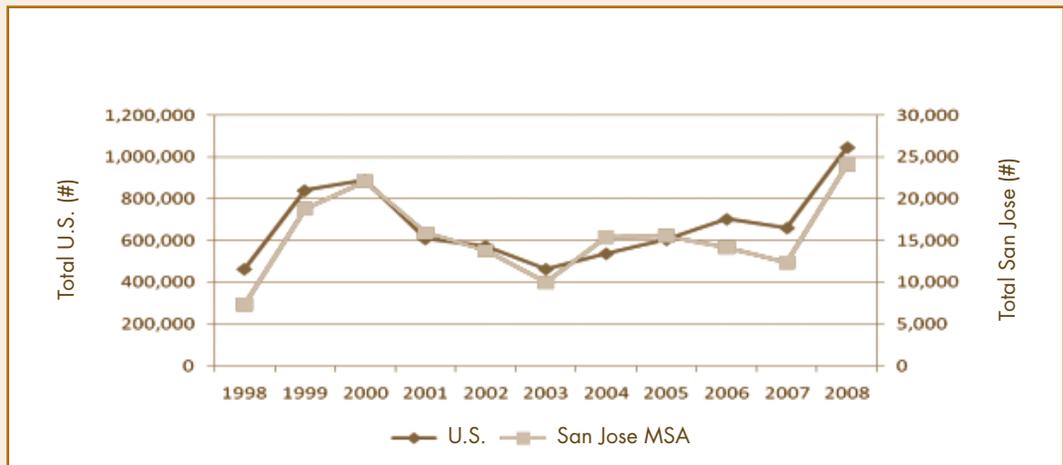
Source: Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008. Data: San Jose Metropolitan Area (Santa Clara County, 7400)

Figure 2. Number of foreign-born residents who are naturalized U.S. citizens, Santa Clara County, 1980-2005



Source: Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008. Data: San Jose Metropolitan Area (Santa Clara County, 7400)

Chart 3. Persons naturalized, Total United States vs. San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara Metropolitan Statistical Area, FY1998-FY2008



Source: Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, Annual Flow Reports <http://www.dhs.gov/files/statistics/publications/> (Note: Most recently available data were used for each fiscal year.)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**ROSARIO VITAL** is a photojournalist and the editor of the bilingual San Jose newspaper *El Observador*. In addition to her twenty years of experience in print media, she is also a radio and television journalist, broadcasting daily local news on Univision HD Radio and Telefutura KFSF in the mornings and in the afternoon on 1010 La Grande AM. Born in Lima, Peru, she holds a bachelor's degree in Communication Sciences from the University of Lima.

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