REPORT 1

CHARLOTTE:
A WELCOME DENIED

SERIES ON LATINO MIGRANT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Helping Empower Local People (H.E.L.P.)

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

This report is part of a series on Latin American immigrant civic and political participation that looks at eight cities around the United States: Charlotte, NC; Chicago, IL; Fresno, CA; Las Vegas, NV; Los Angeles, CA; Omaha, NE; Tucson, AZ; and Washington, DC. This series, funded by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, is part of an initiative, based at the Woodrow Wilson Center, on Latin American immigrant civic and political participation, led by Xóchitl Bada of the University of Illinois at Chicago, Jonathan Fox of the University of California, Santa Cruz, and Andrew Selee and Kate Brick of the Woodrow Wilson Center's Mexico Institute. The reports on each city describe the opportunities and barriers that Latino immigrants face in participating as civic and political actors in cities around the United States. This collection explores recent trends in Latino immigrant integration in the aftermath of the 2006 immigrant civic mobilizations, highlighting both similarities and differences across diverse cities and sectors.

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CHARLOTTE: *A Welcome Denied*

On Monday, April 10, 2006, more than a million Latino immigrants took to the streets in cities across America to call for immigration reform that would make legal the status of millions more undocumented immigrant workers in this country.[1]

On that sunny spring afternoon in Charlotte, N.C., a crowd estimated by organizers at ten thousand gathered uptown in Marshall Park and joined the nationwide chorus with shouts of "Si se puede!" It was a sight that a decade ago would have been unimaginable—a metaphor for Charlotte's transformation from a traditional New South city to a multicultural mélange with a distinctly Latin flavor. As a professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte involved in local Latino-oriented research commented recently, "Charlotte is rapidly changing from black and white to black, white, and brown. That's how we should think of ourselves."[2]

LATINO MIGRATION TO CHARLOTTE AND THE SUNBELT SOUTH

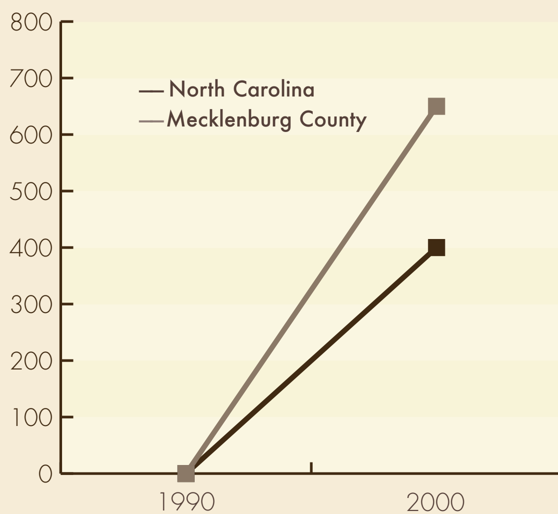
Like several other large Southern cities with diversified economies, Charlotte has recently become home to a sizeable Latino population. These new residents have appeared relatively suddenly in cities where, a decade or two ago, there were few Latinos.

Between 1990 and 2000, North Carolina registered the highest rate of increase in Hispanic population of any state—from 76,726 to 378,963, or 394 percent. During the same period, the Hispanic population in Mecklenburg County, of which Charlotte is the county seat and largest city, rose from about 6,000 to almost 45,000—an increase of 620 percent (see Figure 1).[3] By 2004, Mecklenburg's Hispanic population had grown even more, to 66,000—an increase of 887 percent since 1990.

North Carolina is now home to a Hispanic population of approximately 601,000. Reliable estimates of the number of undocumented residents are difficult, but the Pew Hispanic Center estimates that North Carolina has roughly three hundred thousand undocumented immigrants. That would mean the state now ranks eighth among those with the largest undocumented populations.

The rapid growth in the Latino population of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County has been described as unprecedented for a community with little experience in dealing with a large number of international migrants.[4] Roberto Suro, former director of the Pew Hispanic Center, has remarked that the speed of

FIGURE 1. *Hispanic Population Growth, %*



Source: Author's elaboration from Harrison et al., *Mecklenburg County Latino Community Needs Assessment,* UNC Charlotte Urban Institute

Charlotte's influx makes this experience unique in the country.[5] Charlotte-Mecklenburg is ranked fourth in the nation's "Hispanic hyper-growth" metro areas, and Hispanics represent almost one-fourth of all new residents. The most recent census estimate places the Charlotte region's Latino population at 66,043, but considering that they are routinely underreported in the census, Latino community leaders and key service providers suggest the population is approaching 100,000.[6]

LOOKING AT LATINO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: THE ROUNDTABLE CONFERENCE

On September 14, 2007, a roundtable conference was held in Charlotte for the purpose of exchanging views on the key trends and challenges concerning civic and political participation and integration of Latin American immigrants in Charlotte. One of several such gatherings in diverse cities throughout the United States, the conference was sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Charlotte Helping Empower Local People (H.E.L.P.). H.E.L.P., an affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation, is a grassroots organization that works to bring together, train, and organize citizens for the public good.

The conference was hosted by Xóchitl Bada and Andrew Selee of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Christopher Bishop, lead organizer for H.E.L.P. Attending were representatives of several Latino assistance organizations, religious leaders, an academic expert on local Latino issues, a Duke University student intern with Charlotte H.E.L.P., a union organizer, and a union member (see Appendix A for a list of participants).

After the conference, follow-up interviews were conducted with ten of the participants. Their comments—either during the conference or in interviews—are woven into the narrative that follows.

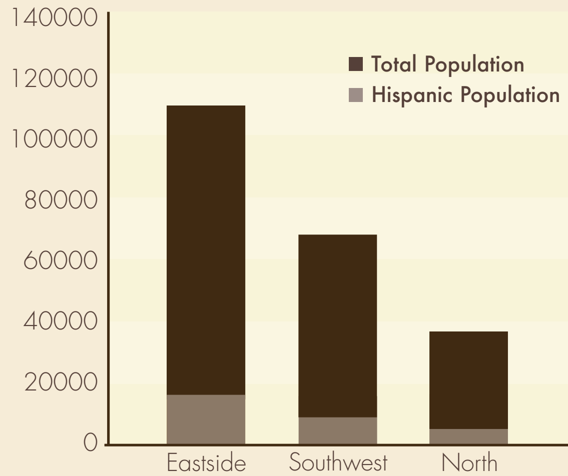
CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW LATINO IMMIGRANTS

The newcomers in the recent wave of Latino immigrants coming to Charlotte, in general, are different from their predecessors. Earlier immigrants were likely to have come there after first landing in other traditional Latino gateways such as Los Angeles or New York, where migrants typically join well-established Latino communities. For many recent arrivals, North Carolina and Charlotte are their first homes in the United States. They are more likely to be young, unmarried, and male. Sixty-one percent are male, and 33 percent are males who were aged between eighteen and thirty-four in the year 2000.[7] Most are employed, most are from Mexico, and many are from rural areas. They are also poorer and less well-educated than their predecessors. Of those over age twenty-five, 48.7 percent have less than a high school education. Few speak English, and many are illiterate in Spanish.

These new migrants take their place in a Latino community that is overwhelmingly Mexican, with significant populations from Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Cuba, as well as smaller groups from other Central American and South American countries (see Figure 2).

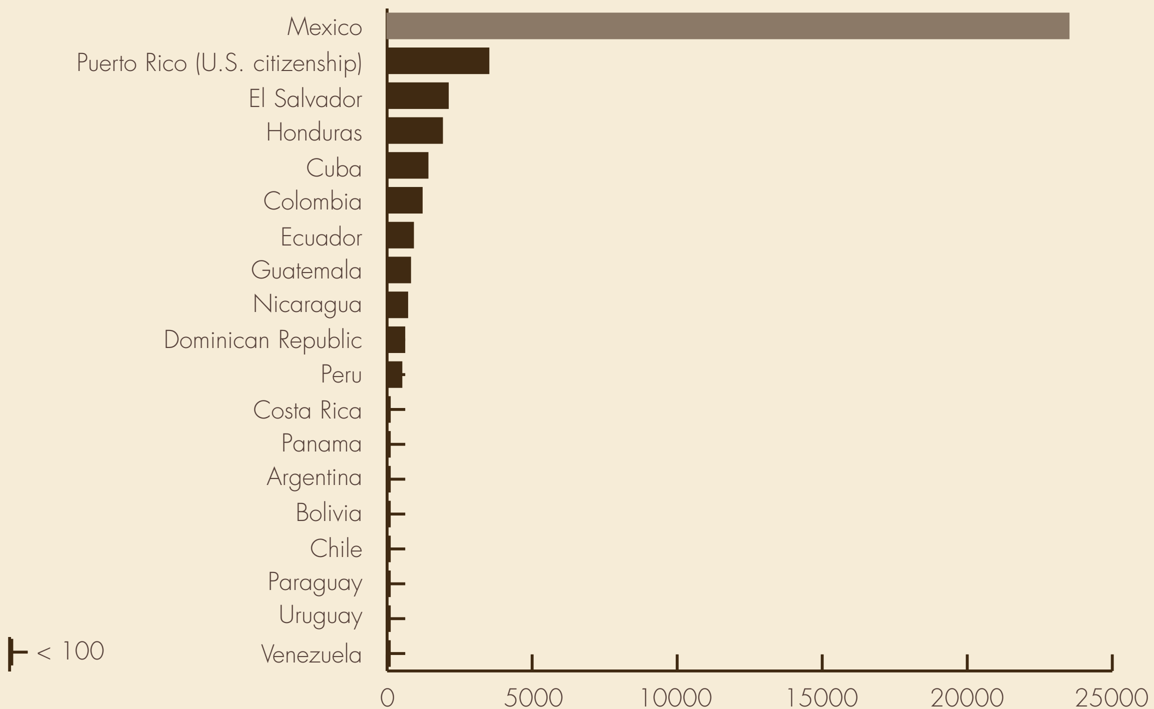
As of 2006, the majority of Latinos in Mecklenburg County lived in three suburban areas of Charlotte (see Figures 3 and 4). In Eastside Charlotte, 14,783 Latinos comprised 13 percent of the total area population in 2000; 62 percent of these were Mexican. In Southwest Charlotte, 9,674 Latinos equaled 14.2 percent of the total area population, with large numbers of Central Americans and South Americans as well as Mexicans. In North Charlotte, 5,995 Latinos made up 15.9 percent of the total area population. Almost all are Mexican, and represent the highest concentration of newly arrived international immigrants. In this area there are fewer family-structured households; tensions between Latinos and African Americans are on the rise and incidents of crime targeting immigrants are increasing.[8]

FIGURE 3. *Charlotte's Hispanic Population Concentrations, 2000*



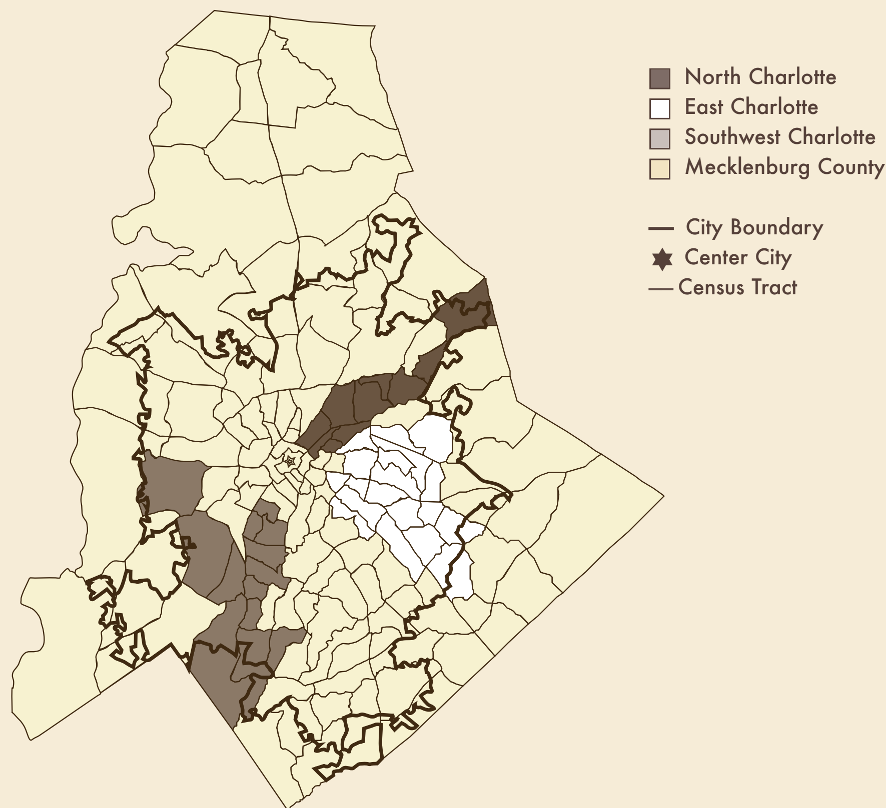
Source: Author's elaboration from Harrison et al., *Mecklenburg County Latino Community Needs Assessment*, UNC Charlotte Urban Institute

FIGURE 2. *National Origin of Mecklenburg County's Hispanic Population, 2000*



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population 2000, File 4 (SF4), quoted in Harrison et al., *Mecklenburg County Latino Community Needs Assessment*, UNC Charlotte Urban Institute

FIGURE 4. *Mecklenburg County Hispanic Settlement Clusters, 2000*



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population 2000, Summary File (FS1), quoted in Harrison et al., *Mecklenburg County Latino Community Needs Assessment*, UNC Charlotte Urban Institute

Because most of those who arrived during the 1990s were male pioneers without families, there was less immigration due to family reunification than is common in areas with more established immigration patterns. More recently, however, wives and families have begun to arrive, marriages have been formed, and new families are being established, as evidenced by the number of births and children attending public schools.

THE FORCES THAT ATTRACT MIGRANTS

In recent years, cities of the Sunbelt South like Charlotte have experienced a thriving economy. Charlotte's overall population grew by 20 percent during the past ten years, and the city has added more than 155,000 new jobs. At the end of 2006, Charlotte's unemployment rate was 4.1 percent, with a resulting strong demand for workers in all job categories. Return migration of Southerners and domestic migration from other parts of the United States combined to create solid economic growth.[9]

Meanwhile, traditional immigrant gateway cities experienced tightening economies and slowing job growth. The rising cost of living, particularly in housing; declining quality of life; problems with crime, drugs, and schools; plus anti-immigrant legislation and growing tensions with majority populations encouraged new immigrants to search elsewhere. They sought out cities like Charlotte with booming economic growth, and they heard reports from earlier immigrant pioneers of good jobs and a favorable quality of life. For many, the South's traditional emphasis on family and faith seemed familiar.

It is important to note that while the Latino population in North Carolina and several other

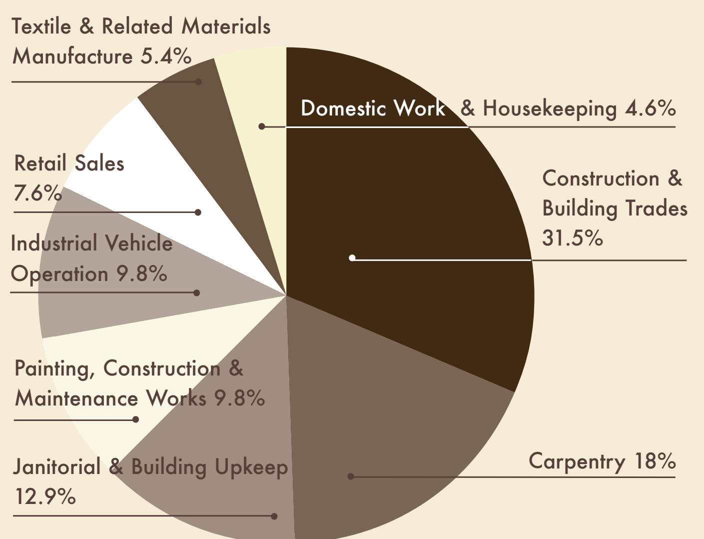
Southern states has grown dramatically, that growth is only part of the picture. At the same time, both white and black populations have also grown. Across these states since at least 1990, both whites and blacks have contributed greater numbers than have Latinos to the total population increase. The Southern states are drawing not just Latinos, but others as well. For example, while nationwide employment of African American workers increased 14 percent between 1990 and 2000, it grew by 20.7 percent in the Southern "magnet" states and 40.5 percent in Mecklenburg County.[10]

Some anti-immigrant voices have suggested that Latino immigrants settle where generous public services are available, but the North Carolina experience counters this assertion. North Carolina has one of the weakest state-funded public benefit programs for immigrants, yet over the past fifteen years it has had the fastest growing Hispanic population in the nation. This suggests that immigrants are coming to areas with expanding economies for job reasons and relatively low housing costs, not for public services.[11] It appears that the same conditions that draw migrants from other parts of the United States and other countries are also attracting Latinos: "A mutually reinforcing relationship exists between cities with expanding service-based economies and growing immigrant populations. Indeed, some argue that one cannot exist without the other."[12]

Charlotte's rapid growth has been driven by the service and financial industries, and that growth has fueled demand for construction, transportation, and public utilities. As non-Hispanic workers have come to fill white-collar jobs in the city, Latino workers have come to fill construction, landscaping, and other positions that have resulted from the city's growth. With dependable wages in a prospering economy and with formal and informal recruitment by receptive employers, Charlotte has attracted documented and undocumented workers both from Latin America and from more established immigrant gateway cities.

Most of the recent immigrants have quickly found jobs. Measured in the year 2000, the employment picture varies among counties in the Charlotte region. In Mecklenburg and Union counties, the largest concentrations of Latino workers were employed in the construction and services industries—50 percent in Mecklenburg and 40 percent in Union. In Gaston County, nearly 60 percent of Latinos worked in manufacturing. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, leading occupations of Mecklenburg County's Latino workers include construction workers (18,424), carpenters (10,526), janitors and building cleaners (7,577), painters, construction, and maintenance workers (5,752), industrial truck and tractor operators (5,750), retail salespersons (4,494), pressers, textiles, garment, and related materials workers (3,206), and maids and housekeepers (2,689).

FIGURE 5. *Leading Occupations of Mecklenburg County Latino Workers, 2000*



Source: Author's elaboration of data from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Current Population Survey,* March 2005 Supplement

There is little evidence that the gains in employment for Latinos have been accompanied by losses for non-Latinos. If Latino job growth were the cause of lost jobs among non-Latinos, one would expect to see below-average job gains for non-Latinos in counties with higher Latino job growth. That is not generally the case, however. Several counties with extremely rapid job growth among Latinos also had well above-average job growth among other categories (for example, Cabarrus and Union counties, which adjoin Mecklenburg County). Places with below-average job growth in other areas of the country exhibited this phenomenon for Latino and non-Latino workers alike. In other words, employment has tended to grow at relatively fast or slow rates for Latinos and non-Latinos in any given location.[13]

THE LATINO CONTRIBUTION

Latino migrants play a critical role in the economic sustainability of communities like Charlotte. The estimated impact of Latino workers on the Charlotte metropolitan economy, measured in 2004, was $1.9 billion. This figure includes 16,900 new jobs created by these Latinos' economic activity.[14]

A study released in 2006 by the Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reported that Hispanics annually contribute $9.2 billion to the state's economy through purchases and taxes. If recent trends continue, that figure could increase to $18 billion by 2009. Hispanics annually contribute about $756 million in direct and indirect taxes, while costing the state about $817 million for education, health care, and correctional services.

This apparent net cost to the state budget should be viewed within the broader context of Hispanics' role in the state economy. The effect of the Latino community on the construction industry is especially striking. The Kenan study says that 29 percent of all North Carolina construction workers are Hispanic, and that if those workers were withdrawn, there would be a loss of $10 billion value in construction, $2.7 billion in construction material and labor, $145 million in equipment and building rental, and 27,000 housing units. Construction labor costs in the state would rise by almost $1 billion.[15]

DIFFICULTIES FACED BY NEW IMMIGRANTS

Language and Cultural Barriers

Without question, the greatest barrier faced by newly arrived Latinos is that of language. Most have little or no English-speaking skills, and most work long hours with little free time to attend classes in English as a Second Language (ESL). Many are also engaged in child rearing, which limits their mobility. ESL classes are sometimes located where they are difficult to reach by public transportation or are held during the day when working Latinos cannot attend. Thus learning English can be a slow process even for those highly motivated to do so.

Those who are illiterate in their native language or who do not speak Spanish, of course, face even more difficulty. A considerable proportion of recent Latino immigrants have little formal education and are functionally illiterate, so when English language materials are translated into Spanish, these materials still may not be understood.[16]

The other side of the language barrier is equally important. Among government and service agencies, there is a shortage of Spanish-speaking staff. This problem ham-

pers the effectiveness of many organizations that furnish essential information and provide basic services and guidance to newcomers. For example, the Carolinas HealthCare System has determined that it takes 17.6 percent longer to care for a Spanish-speaking patient than for an English-speaking patient.[17]

In addition to language problems, immigrants needing assistance from public services cannot automatically expect the staff to have any knowledge of their culture. Without cross-cultural training, a receptionist would not know that a woman from Guatemala who enters the office might speak a language other than Spanish (approximately 45 percent of Guatemala's population is Mayan and speaks one of twenty-one Mayan languages), or that the literacy rate among Mayan women in Guatemala is 30 percent, compared to 63 percent for all Guatemalan women. Although cultural competence might not solve the communication problem, it certainly would help a receptionist to find appropriate resources.[18]

Likewise, Latinos need cross-cultural training to understand the expectations of their new community in terms of being a good citizen and neighbor and abiding by the law. Some, for example, are accustomed to corruption among the police in their country, so when they receive a traffic ticket they may think they are supposed to pay the police officer to have it eradicated. Immigrants need to know how to find housing and how to avoid exploitation by landlords, how to ride the bus, how to register their children in school, and how to obtain medical and legal services. Currently, many receive this information from Latino service organizations, but service providers indicate they are able to reach only a small fraction of the entire population.

Limited Access to Public Services and Insufficient Latino Service Organizations

A "spatial mismatch" hampers the effectiveness of public services available to Latinos in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area, according to an important local study.[19] While Latino populations are concentrated in the east, southwest, and north corridors of Charlotte, most public offices they need to contact are located in the center of the city. The Latino community, like other relatively poor populations, relies heavily on public transportation. Most Latinos live a considerable distance from the city center, and the frequency and density of bus service declines in suburban areas; thus many have difficulty getting to the services they need.

Several Latino groups currently operate in the Charlotte area to assist the community with health care, translation, English language instruction, and legal assistance. Some were established to serve people from a particular country. For example, after two hurricanes in El Salvador in 2004 caused widespread damage, Salvadorans in the Charlotte area banded together to form UNISAL, to assist people in their home country. They continued to work to assist local Salvadoran immigrants and, as time went by, they also began to serve other Latino immigrants.

Some organizations, such as Mi Casa, Su Casa and the Latin American Coalition, from their beginnings served immigrants from any country; others are religiously based. In many cases, these groups compete for funding from the same sources. Since the economic downturn following September 11, 2001, leaders of these organizations report that funds are more limited and harder to secure. Similarly, each group struggles to find enough volunteers. Unlike many communities, Charlotte has no

central, overarching organization that espouses a shared Latino agenda and coordinates the efforts of smaller groups.

Each group is proud of the good work it is doing, and all representatives agreed that the needs for assistance far outweigh the services they are able to provide. Service providers typically work long hours to solve urgent problems for their constituents. This necessity to concentrate on "putting out fires" keeps them from being able to cooperate with each other and coordinate their services for greater effectiveness. "Organizations have the best intentions, but don't cooperate with each other. There is a lack of resources—not just financial, but human resources," said a Latino activist.[20] "With so many day-to-day problems, we don't have time to learn how to provide services better," said another. "We address all problems. Obviously we are growing and satisfying needs, but not getting better preparation for satisfying those needs. Our idea now is to get people from different organizations together. It's hard. We don't have time."[21]

Participants agreed that the subject of cooperation and coordination had come up among them before, but they have not been able to make much progress in this direction. "I see some familiar faces here. . . . Often I go places and I see familiar faces, but we don't work together later. Something real has to happen," commented a veteran Latino activist.[22] Follow-up interviews with participants revealed various explanations for this phenomenon. One Latino religious leader feels that the concept of working together toward common goals is not familiar to most immigrants. "In general, Latinos do not go to many organized activities," he said. "Latinos don't work with other organizations. They work hard on their own. . . . We don't have the tradition to work together."[23] Interviews with other leaders showed some agreement and some disagreement with this opinion.

Another explanation for the lack of coordination is competition among agencies. Professional jealousy—wanting to be the first to offer a particular program—as well as personality conflicts were cited. "Competition between one group and another is also common and natural," explained one participant. "But we have so few resources and so much pressure. If we keep fighting, saying, 'This is my territory,' we are fighting over crumbs. It makes no sense. We need to share more in these times. . . . We should look at each other like brothers and sisters. The struggle will be harder [if we are] divided."[24]

Perhaps illustrating the difficulty of cooperation, one activist explained that leaders have different views of how assistance should be offered. "Latino organizations are pretty much in agreement over what needs to be done, but how to do it is very different," she explained. "What is the role of a leader? Is it someone who creates a victim to lead, or is it one who builds and allows the next leader to emerge? We don't have enough of this [the latter] type of leadership in this community. With capacity building, we could have more people around the table. It's just a vicious circle if we don't go beyond the victimization approach."[25]

In spite of these differences, all participants professed the willingness to cooperate and the opinion that such cooperation would be a significant improvement over current efforts. Some expressed the desire for more meetings such as the roundtable conference to facilitate the exchange of ideas and growth toward a common Latino agenda. All agreed that they needed to be more proactive, and less reactive, in their efforts to organize.

"Some resent that Mexicans dominate by numbers, and others resent that leadership

positions are taken by South Americans. There are class differences, national differences, but these are relatively minor compared to what we share. Non-Hispanic observers have this notion of Hispanics or Latinos, but once they start approaching the subject in a more sustained way they become aware of the differences. But we share a lot—enough to build an identity. We have more in common than not," said a Latino religious leader.[26]

Participants also agreed on the value of forming alliances with Anglo- and African-American organizations that could be helpful for support and counsel. An African-American minister pointed out that the Latino organizations' experience is familiar to veterans of the struggle for African-Americans' civil rights and offered solidarity and support: "The African-American community went through fifty years ago the same thing you are [going through now]. . . . It's good to take time to slow down and do the organizing piece and find leaders and get egos out of the way."[27]

Education

Latino families with school-age children face a system that is stretching to welcome them and others. In 2006, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) enrolled 13,307 students in the Limited English Proficiency program for those who have little or no English-speaking skills. Of these, 9,000 were Spanish-speaking; by comparison, ten years ago CMS enrolled only 1,732 students in the entire program.

Many immigrant children learn English and succeed; however, many others drop out of high school, knowing they probably will not be able to afford college. Thus their lifetime earning potential and ability to contribute to their community are limited. A prime factor in this difficulty is the current policy of North Carolina's state-supported four-year colleges to charge out-of-state tuition for students without documentation or proof of residency.

A recent about-face in North Carolina's two-year community college system makes the problem worse. In November 2007, the community college system ordered the state's fifty-eight campuses to admit undocumented immigrants, overturning its existing policy of letting each college set its own rules for these applicants. However, in May 2008, after a new president of the system took office, this policy was reversed, and undocumented students were declared ineligible to attend community colleges except for ESL and other special non-degree programs. It should be noted that even when these students were admitted, the requirement that they pay out-of-state tuition meant that few could afford to attend. In Charlotte, for example, out-of-state tuition at Central Piedmont Community College costs $7,950 annually, compared to in-state tuition of $2,190. Before the ban, state community college officials estimated that only 112 of 297,000 degree-seeking students were undocumented.

Even before undocumented students were banned, the president of Stanly Community College (about forty miles from Charlotte) pointed out the irony of the tuition policy: "These same people we can't admit without paying out-of-state tuition can graduate as valedictorian from any high school in Stanly County."[28] In 2006, the North Carolina General Assembly, like eighteen other states, debated the prospect of offering in-state tuition for undocumented immigrant students who cannot provide proof of residency. The legislation failed. Currently, ten other states allow undocumented immigrant students to qualify for in-state tuition.

Health Care

Access to affordable health care is a significant problem for most Latino immigrants. Few work in jobs that provide health insurance, and many cannot afford insurance for themselves or their families. As a result, few receive basic preventive care that could help them stay healthy. Instead, many wait until an illness becomes urgent and then seek care from public clinics or emergency rooms. This situation is unfortunate because emergency room care is designed only to stabilize a crisis, not provide continuity of care. It is also far more costly to provide than regular care from a primary physician. North Carolina Latinos share this plight with the total of approximately 1.3 million state residents who do not have health insurance. In 2005, the cost of medical care for these uninsured patients totaled $1.4 billion.[29]

Preventive screening is offered by some Latino churches and service agencies with help from Presbyterian Hospital and Carolinas Medical Center, as well as donated services by a few physicians. The need for these services is evidenced by the fact that a recent health screening event drew eight hundred people. The director of one organization providing such care is quick to say that these groups do not come close to meeting the needs of the total community.[30]

Forty-five percent of Mecklenburg County Latinos in a recent study said they needed access to medical care or assistance obtaining health insurance. They stressed the difficulty in finding a Spanish-speaking doctor, clinic, or hospital; difficulty finding affordable health insurance; and difficulty paying for medical expenses. Sixty-one percent said they do not see a doctor regularly, and two-thirds did not have health insurance for themselves; 41 percent did not have health insurance for their children.[31]

Signs point to a growing demand for health care services as young male immigrants start new families or are joined by their wives and children. Carolinas HealthCare System reported that 30 percent of all patients seen in 2005 at Carolinas Medical Center clinics were Hispanic. The system's four ambulatory care clinics saw a 20 percent growth in the number of Hispanic patients between 2002 and 2005. The Northpark clinic, which served almost half of those treated, reported a 41 percent increase in the number of Hispanic patients within that time.[32]

Poverty

In Southern cities such as Charlotte that have attracted large numbers of recent immigrants, the earnings of Latino workers average 47 percent of those of Caucasian workers. Although overall poverty rates in the six Latino "magnet" Southern states dropped from 15.8 to 14.7 percent, the poverty rate for Latinos grew from 19.7 to 25.5 percent.[33]

Many Charlotte Latino households are composed of more than a simple nuclear family, often including extended family members or nonfamily members. The average North Carolina Hispanic household includes 3.7 persons, compared with 2.4 persons in the average non-Hispanic household, and earns $32,000, compared with $45,700 for non-Hispanics.[34] In Charlotte, by comparison, median household income is $46,975.

These figures are more striking when one considers the affluence of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area. Charlotte is sixth among the United States' largest one hundred cities in terms of proportion of high-income households. More than 25 percent of Charlotte households earn more than $79,356 annually. During the period since 1980, Charlotte has

been the fourth fastest-growing large American city in terms of affluent residents. Although Latino workers have helped build and sustain the city's prosperous service-oriented economy, they enjoy few of the benefits they have helped to create. Median household income for Latino residents is only 77.6 percent of the countywide median. It is estimated that 22.5 percent of Latinos live in poverty and 34.9 percent live in crowded conditions. About one-third pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing.[35]

Increasingly Hostile Climate

Latinos report that a few years ago, when the number of Latino immigrants in North Carolina was smaller and a booming economy needed low-cost labor, relationships with the nonimmigrant public were generally perceived to be good. The state government had programs to assist newcomers, and in Charlotte, Mayor Pat McCrory often appeared at Latino-sponsored functions and welcomed immigrants to the labor force. "In the late '90s the mayor was highly available to the Latino community and appeared at our events when he was invited," recalled a Latino service provider. "'Thank you, Latinos,' he would say. But the coin flipped around 2006. Now he is less accessible to our community," she said. "We invite him and he doesn't come. Now he is talking against our community." This about-face was especially disappointing to her, she added, since she had personally worked in the mayor's re-election campaigns. "I believed in his leadership then," she said. "Now I feel very disappointed."[36]

Latinos report that in recent years their initial warm reception by the broader community has cooled as well. Reasons for the chill probably begin with their population's extremely rapid growth. Between 1990 and 2000, the Latino population for North Carolina grew by nearly 400 percent—faster than for any other state for the same time period—and for Mecklenburg County increased by more than 600 percent. With the great majority of these people in low-wage jobs with no health insurance, medical facilities and social service agencies began to be strained. The Latino workers who had originally been welcomed as an inexpensive and reliable source of labor for a booming economy began to be perceived as an emerging problem. "At first, Latinos were seen as disposable individuals," commented a veteran Latino service provider. "The problems started when immigrants began to have needs."[37]

The immigration reform rallies of spring 2006 made the general public more aware of the size and potential power of the Latino community. Opinions of participants at the roundtable conference varied as to whether the rallies also turned public opinion in a negative direction. "They made us more visible, but didn't cause negative feelings," said one. "Any time this country enters a crisis, nativism always emerges. The same is true of all other countries. The rallies may have been the wind that fans the flames, but they were not the fire."[38] Others disagree. "Everything was fine until the rallies," said a Latino religious worker. "After that, some radio stations started talking like we are the problem. People were influenced by the media, and this caused a backlash. . . . Discrimination has been worse since the rallies. People didn't know so many Latinos were here. Before, they thought of Latinos as a problem. . . . After the rallies, they saw us as a big problem."[39]

"Public opinion now is mostly negative," said another. "One of the beauties of the democratic system is that the politicians really do represent the opinions of the people. In

what people see on local TV and in the newspaper, there is a general negativity towards illegal immigrants. 'Hispanic' becomes a synonym for 'illegal.' It's 'us vs. them' in the local news, and Hispanics are always 'them.' The political system efficiently reflects this. Politicians compete to show who is most anti-immigrant, and this is growing."[40]

As anti-immigrant sentiment has risen, efforts have increased to restrict opportunities for undocumented people. In 2004 the North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles reduced the number and types of identification that can qualify for obtaining a driver's license. In 2006 the legislature acted to require anyone applying for or renewing a driver's license to show proof of a valid Social Security number or visa. Thus, as an undocumented resident's driver's license expires, he or she is unable to obtain another.

In 2006, the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Department became one of the first in the nation to train deputies with the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency under its 287(g) program (named for section 287(g) of the federal Immigration and Nationality Act). Deputies are then authorized to screen for immigration violations during routine enforcement activities, detain offenders, and turn them over to ICE for deportation. The department checks the immigration status of every person arrested.

As of January 2008, some 3,175 people had been processed for deportation, according to the sheriff's department. Following Mecklenburg's lead, several other North Carolina counties have begun similar programs, including Cabarrus and Gaston, which adjoin Mecklenburg County. According to ICE officials, North Carolina has more pending requests to implement the 287(g) program than any other state.

The sheriff's department says it only detains "immigration offenders encountered during their regular, daily law-enforcement activity."[41] The program is depicted as targeting felons and dangerous criminals. However, conference participants paint a different picture. Anecdotal evidence abounds concerning deputies (sometimes with ICE officials) knocking on immigrants' doors in pursuit of one person, and then rounding up, jailing, and deporting any undocumented person who happens to be there. Latinos report that families are routinely separated and parents are taken to jail while children are left behind alone or with a neighbor.

In addition, immigrants are routinely stopped for driver's license checks, since law enforcement officers know they may likely not have a valid license. According to a recent estimate by a local Latino newsman, most immigrants arrested and ordered deported under the program have been stopped for driver's license checks or minor traffic violations—not the 29 percent reported by the sheriff's department. "Only about thirty have been aggravated felons," said Rafael Prieto, editor and publisher of *Mi Gente*.[42]

"I have lived in Houston since 1985 before coming here," said a local union member. "I have papers, and recently I was stopped by the police. I speak English, so I was OK. If you don't speak English, they take you in."[43] A religious leader said, "A couple of weeks ago I read in *La Noticia* [a local Spanish newspaper] of a case where ICE came looking for a husband with an arrest order. He was working in Georgia. His wife, who was a permanent resident, told them he was not there. Their children, two boys about twelve or thirteen, were at the bus stop waiting to go to school. They took the sons to jail and held them hostage until the husband

came home."[44] "In many cases they just go to houses and ask for ID. I know families who have had this happen," said another religious worker. "The official reports are not true. It is illegal for them to do this."[45]

"People are frightened to the extent that they wonder if they will come home and be involved in a chain of collective arrests, even if they are not the target," said a Latino legal assistance provider. "If you have a revoked license or you are simply at someone's apartment and you get an ICE hold, you have almost no chance of being bonded out. This also means the bail bond people are exploiting immigrants in this situation. People are paying bail thinking they will be freed, but an ICE hold keeps them in jail. . . . ICE is pushing people to waive their court appearances and sign for voluntary deportation, to give up their right to a hearing before a judge. If they ask for a hearing, they [will] stay in jail longer, but there is a possibility they might be allowed to stay [in the country]. Most have no access to justice. The immigration court system has no public defenders."[46]

"Nationwide, immigrant workers have been willing to organize," said a union organizer. "In spite of their fears, there has been no problem organizing. The same was true in Charlotte, but now there is so much fear of deportation. People are afraid if they become visible they are taking a big risk, and this is true . . . . The whole atmosphere has changed."[47] "The program has affected relationships with law enforcement," said a Latino religious worker. "People don't feel confident to call when they need law enforcement, even if they are documented. Just because they are brown or look Latino, they are seen with different eyes . . . . Many are avoiding contact."[48] "[The sheriff's program] has created fear that affects people psychologically," said another. "People do not trust the police now . . . . The result is oppression of immigrants."[49]

This climate, of course, also hinders Latinos' desire to participate in a variety of activities. One Latino service provider reported that families are now afraid to volunteer with her organization: "They feel afraid to come out, and they try to be invisible because of the police," she said. "They really are terrorized."[50] Another, who came to Charlotte as a refugee from El Salvador, summed it up best. "I moved to this city because I wanted quality of life. Since one year ago, there is not quality of life. I can't breathe that freedom that I used to breathe. . . . Now mothers are afraid to go grocery shopping, hospitals are not giving medical care. . . . There is a black cloud over the city of Charlotte. We need to work together so we can see the sunshine again."[51]

Local publicity surrounding recent deaths resulting from drunk driving by undocumented immigrants and Latino gang activity also has had a chilling effect on mainstream attitudes toward immigrants. Rep. Sue Myrick, a local Republican congressional representative, has voiced a strong position against illegal immigration, as has Republican Mayor Pat McCrory, who is running for governor. In speeches across the state, McCrory has made reducing illegal immigration a major campaign theme and has frequently cited exaggerated, unproved statistics concerning Latinos.[52] Media coverage of all these subjects has served to increase public resentment of undocumented immigrants.

Fears over illegal immigration also are fueling resurgence in regional membership in the Ku Klux Klan. Virgil Griffin, Imperial Wizard of a Mount Holly-based Klan chapter near Charlotte, told *The Charlotte Observer*

on February 10, 2007 that membership has recently grown faster than he has seen since he joined the Klan in the 1960s.

LATINO AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS

Latinos in a Southern city such as Charlotte with a significant African-American population face another challenging dynamic: tensions often exist between the two communities—for several reasons. Newly arrived immigrants are moving into areas of the city that have for many years been primarily African-American—particularly in the northern and eastern corridors. Thus there is an instinctive territorial reaction, and the language barrier makes it difficult for new neighbors to get to know each other as individuals. Similarly, Latinos and African-Americans often compete for the same scarce resources because of poverty, lack of health care, and other issues. A recent local study revealed that black-on-Latino crime and media that highlight violence and reinforce stereotypes are also causes of tensions between the two communities.[53]

"They [Hispanics] think that they [African-Americans] don't want them. [The African-Americans] think the Hispanics are taking something from them. This is what our people think. First that they don't want them, second that they think they are taking something—perhaps their work, perhaps their place within society," said a Latino religious leader quoted in the study.[54]

Many African-Americans believe that Latinos are taking jobs that African-Americans would otherwise have, although, as discussed earlier, studies show that employment percentages in the Charlotte area have grown for African-Americans and Anglo-Americans, as well as Latinos. "We hear that Latinos are taking jobs that Americans don't want," said a local African-American minister. "In construction they are doing 90 percent of the work. There are a lot of African-Americans who would love to do some of those jobs. There is a perception that Latinos get jobs over African- Americans because they are willing to work for a lower wage and they desire to work. If workers win better wages and employers lay people off, the African-Americans will be laid off first. That's how the African-American community sees this. This is what we have to overcome."[55]

In addition, many African-Americans see the Latinos' struggle for acceptance as being easier than their own. There is a sense that the larger community caters to Latinos, while African-Americans during the civil rights struggles of the 1960s made gains only by sacrifice, struggle, and, oftentimes, bloodshed. Rather than seeing this as a sign of progress in American society, many African-Americans see it as injustice. They feel that Latinos have been given a fast track to success. "It's like the big sister-little sister syndrome," an African-American minister explained in a recent local study. "When the older children came along, mommy and daddy might have been struggling. But when the younger children come along times are different, and the older children have a tendency to say, 'Well, you didn't do that for us!'"[56]

The local study outlined a number of suggestions for improvements in relationships between the Latino and African-American communities. First, extended conversation between these groups needs to take place, and this will be greatly enhanced by efforts to learn one another's language. Through such conversations, the communities can discover issues they have in common, such as the need for better health care and education, and unite to

work on these issues. Because the church is a powerful influence in both cultures, outreach efforts should begin from each tradition, and the power of the pulpit should be used to promote compassion and respect for each community. The two communities' common experience of discrimination can be used as a unifying force, the study pointed out.[57]

Although this common experience is often seen as a source of tension, it may hold the greatest promise for meaningful communication between the two communities and could also inspire the larger Anglo population to empathize and help work for justice. At least two African-American ministers professed the willingness to bridge this divide and recognized that African-Americans may have a special capacity for doing so. The African-American minister who was offering hard-won advice to Latino groups seeking to organize for greater effectiveness ended his comments thusly: "We are available, and we're glad to help however we can. And you can help us learn your language."[58] "I think African-Americans are more equipped to learn to understand and get along with immigrants than whites are," said another African-American minister. "We've been down that road. We know what they're going through, and it should be easy for us to reach out and accept them. We don't have as much to lose as white Americans do."[59]

Participants in the roundtable conference agreed that greater efforts need to be made to link Latino and nonimmigrant communities, both African-American and Anglo-American, to work for improvement in many areas of common interest. "[The need for justice] is not just an immigrant issue," said a Latino activist. "It's a human rights and civil rights issue. We need to take the message out of an immigration rights frame and put it in a civil rights and human rights frame. Many of these same issues—the need for higher wage jobs, transportation, and health care—apply to African-Americans, to any nonaffluent people."[60]

One minister, an African immigrant heading a predominantly Anglo denomination's mission congregation in a low-income African American neighborhood, said the time for such linking is now. "We . . . want to connect but don't know how. We don't know the Latinos' language, and we wonder if they want to connect with us. I'm seeing now that some African American congregations want the connection, and I worry that window will close. The Latinos are pulling back because of the climate now."[61]

COMMUNITIES OF FAITH: POTENTIAL FOR LEADERSHIP

With more than seven hundred houses of worship, Charlotte has long been known as a "city of churches." Although these churches frequently work together to assist poor people, they work relatively independently in their outreach to the Latino community. Several chiefly Anglo denominations employ Latino directors of outreach programs offering worship opportunities and practical assistance for immigrants. Others provide office space for Latino service organizations. In May 2006, an interfaith clergy-led organization, Mecklenburg Ministries, conducted an ecumenical workshop designed to help church members understand and welcome Latino immigrants. But few churches have publicly shown support for Latino immigrant political issues, such as, for example, the 2006 immigrant rights marches. In this traditional Southern city, churches wield significant power. If they should choose to become involved, they doubtless could play a significant role in influencing public debate on immigration reform. So far, however, their role

in the Latino community has been limited to one of service and outreach.

About 70 percent of Latinos in the Charlotte area are Roman Catholic, and Latinos comprise about 50 percent of all Catholics in the Western North Carolina diocese.[62] Their presence has been met with mixed reactions among Anglo Catholics, and the diocese has employed varied approaches in working with these immigrants. "Our tradition has had different ways of solving this issue," said a diocesan worker. "One hundred-fifty years ago there were Irish and Italian immigrants, and it was solved by ethnic parishes. As these immigrants became more assimilated, their kids discarded that tradition. Here, for example, Our Lady of Guadalupe is an ethnic parish. I think we need more, but there is a debate in the church as to whether this is appropriate or not. The ethnic parish can be an oasis, a place to help so the transition can happen at the proper pace. It takes time. There is a natural rhythm as people have kids and develop roots."[63]

Our Lady of Guadalupe Roman Catholic Church provides its Latino members with worship, social connections, and help with practical needs such as food and medical care. "For twelve years we have formed a strong community," said a church official. "People come there and say, 'How can I receive help?' Then later they come back and say, 'How can I help?' It is a long process, and now we are seeing the fruits of our labor. We have accomplished a lot working in this manner—giving and taking and giving."[64]

In another multiethnic Catholic congregation, Our Lady of the Assumption, Latinos number about one-third of the total. In chiefly Anglo churches, Latinos attend Spanish-language mass, but their welcome is often lukewarm, said a diocesan worker. "We see tensions. . . . Immigrants arrive and look for a church. There are already Catholics established there. They built that church with their resources. There is a lack of understanding of the different cultures. . . . There is some resistance and some ignorance. Sometimes [the Anglos] don't resist, but they don't know what to do."[65]

A diocesan youth worker reported that it has become more difficult in recent years to draw Latino young adults to church activities. He attributes this problem partly to young people's adaptation to American culture and a lack of parental involvement, but also believes Latino youth often feel like outsiders. "Most of our kids try to get into the [Anglo] youth groups," he said. "They speak English, but they don't feel welcome, and this doesn't succeed. Some churches will have a Hispanic young adult group in English and an Anglo young adult group, but we don't want that. We are trying to get them together. Some churches welcome this and some don't. It is a process. In my work I feel we are working *for* the Hispanics but not *with* the Hispanics."[66]

This same worker worries about what will happen if the trend continues. "At Our Lady of the Assumption, for instance, they recently had more than five hundred kids for the first communion classes—age seven to ten. If we don't have something to offer them as they grow . . . we will lose them. Gangs and other problems in the schools are growing. There is only one Boy Scout troop that speaks Spanish. The churches, associations, and YMCAs need to do more to integrate kids into these activities."[67]

Another diocesan worker reported that the church needs greater participation from Latino members, who often think of themselves as a minority and do not feel entitled to leadership positions within Anglo churches.[68]

Evangelical and Pentecostal churches attract Latino immigrants who have attended similar churches in their home countries or who change denominations when they come to the United

States. These churches often have more Spanish-language programs and are perceived as more welcoming. Because their traditions are somewhat entrepreneurial and it is usually easier to become a pastor, they are able more quickly to appoint Spanish-speaking people to head churches than are the Roman Catholic and more established Protestant denominations.

Although mainline Anglo Protestant churches are sometimes involved in denominational outreach programs, there is little involvement with Latino immigrants at the parish level. Anglo Protestant ministers at the roundtable conference explained that they would like to facilitate this involvement, but are not sure how. Although they may have hosted ESL classes or made similar gestures, their congregations are isolated from most Latino immigrants. "I'm here today to learn how we as a congregation can get involved," said one. "We see our charge as the social gospel, and we recognize the hostile climate around us."[69] "How can we get beyond the segregation in our churches?" asked another. "My parish is interested in relating to immigrants, but I don't think the immigration issue has risen to the top as it should. We need to identify some things we can hold up as mandates, and it's helpful today to hear some of these things and see how we can work together."[70]

Although tensions sometimes exist between the Latino and African-American communities, one African-American minister described in an interview his personal journey concerning his duty toward Latino immigrants. Minister of a small Baptist church in an African-American neighborhood that is becoming increasingly Latino, he had for some years felt critical of immigrants who had entered the country illegally. After talking with other ministers and reflecting on his faith, he experienced what he called a spiritual awakening. "I began to see that these are God's people also, and I began to try to understand the whole picture, not just one side," he said. He became active in Latin American issues with the H.E.L.P. organization and began trying to educate his congregation. "If I hear derogatory comments, I try to help them see that, even though we may disagree with how some [Latinos] entered this country, now that they are here we need to deal with issues with a true understanding of the compassionate spirit that Christ taught us to have," he explained.[71]

Conference participants expressed impatience that, in spite of their capacity for influencing public policy debate, most Charlotte churches are reluctant to stand up for issues of justice and fairness that affect Latinos and others. A union organizer pointed out that in other cities churches have been at the center of the struggle on workers' issues and that such leadership is critically needed in Charlotte.

With the lowest rate of unionization in the nation, North Carolina has a strong antilabor history, owing in part to a violent strike at the Loray textile mill in Gastonia in 1929. "Labor has virtually no presence in Charlotte," said the organizer, whose Unite Here union represents approximately 1,200 members in the hotel, laundry, food service, manufacturing, and distribution industries, including a growing number of Latinos. "In Los Angeles with Hotel Workers Rising, the churches were right there, leading the politicians," he said. "In Chicago, four hundred clergy signed on in favor of the union. In Phoenix, San Francisco, and in [other areas of] the southeast . . . the churches and politicians have been willing to stand with [the unions.] The churches [there] have been showing leadership."[72]

In Charlotte, however, such involvement is rare. "We are in process and in change, but unfortunately churches only preach in most

cases. Not many churches—Anglo or Latino—are talking about immigration reform," said a denominational Latino leader. "Most of the churches are interested in immigrants to have more people in church, but most are not fighting to change their realities—for immigration reform or health care or college access. You would think that faith would have a good effect and that in the Bible Belt it would be very different, but I don't see it. Sometimes, sadly, it is worse."[73]

"Churches everywhere tend to get too comfortable with the way society is organized and need to be woken up," added a diocesan worker. "They could work for general improvement in civility, solidarity, and the sense that we have duties to those in need and we have to share our resources. They could . . . work for immigration reform. They would have to allow for different views and allow room for disagreement on exactly how [goals should be reached], but they could emphasize the need to promote humanity, family life, justice, and mercy."[74] Participants pointed out, however, that Latino and other organizations seeking to work with churches should understand that a pastor's role is to promote unity in the church, so it is difficult for a pastor to take sides on a controversial issue. For this reason, it is necessary to identify common ground or specific tactics that might fit various ideologies among members. Still, commented an African-American student, "The leaders of the churches are the priests and pastors. If people don't hear something from the pulpit, it doesn't come home to them. The problem is that we live in an era of political correctness and we don't want to offend people. . . . Some pastors feel trapped by this. They're afraid if they offend people they will leave. If you look at the civil rights movement, people [participated] because they heard it from the pulpit. This is so important. People are looking to their pastors for guidance."[75]

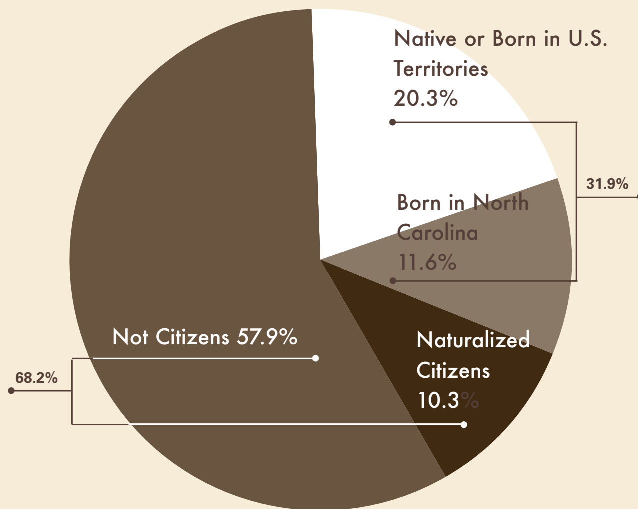
Conference participants agreed on the importance of the churches' potential for leadership. "In Charlotte, after the politicians, the churches hold the most power," said one. "If we can unite, we can do a lot."[76] "Charlotte has a pivotal role to play if it can open its arms," added a local priest. "We must realize we're in this thing together, and what affects you affects me. . . . We should put pressure on the bishops to make this a priority. There's nothing wrong with challenging the church leaders. . . . We need to take down the barbed wire that surrounds our churches. That is the purpose of the church."[77]

THE TORTUOUS PATH TO CITIZENSHIP

Although many Americans resent Latinos coming to this country illegally, few understand the difficulties involved in legal immigration that lead many to make this desperate choice. Similarly, many Americans think that those who come illegally could, if they wished, simply "get documented" and become citizens. The roundtable discussion cleared up several myths and misconceptions in this area. For many immigrants, it is difficult to decide to seek citizenship, and there are myriad difficulties even for legal permanent residents who want to become American citizens. A veteran Latino service provider, for example, reported that it took fifteen years for her to become a citizen. Of North Carolina's 30,617 foreign-born residents, only 4,633 have become citizens (see Figure 6).

"You can't go from nothing to citizenship," explained a Latino legal assistance provider. "It is not a straight path. Most people think all you have to do is apply. Once you've been here six months . . . you can't adjust your status unless you go back; (however), if you go back after you've been here more than a year, you have to

FIGURE 6. *Citizenship Status of Latino Mecklenburg County Residents, 2000*



NATIVE-BORN	14,337
Born in North Carolina	5,205
FOREIGN-BORN	30,617
Naturalized Citizens	4,633
Not Citizens	25,984

Source: U.S. Census, Census of Population 2000, File 3 (SF3), quoted in Harrison et al., *Mecklenburg County Latino Community Needs Assessment*, UNC Charlotte Urban Institute

wait three to ten years to come back legally. There are so many barriers. Once you start, it would take seven or eight years. [Then there is the cost.] The price of naturalization is $655."[78]

Recent research by the Pew Hispanic Center found that only 20 percent of all Latinos in North Carolina are eligible to vote—that is, are citizens over the age of eighteen. They number 120,000, or 2 percent of the state's eligible voters.[79] Of course, not all eligible Latino citizens are registered to vote, and increased civic engagement is important to encourage robust participation by these new citizens in the electoral process. Participants agreed that more is needed to assist immigrants who want to become citizens. Not enough classes are available, for example, to help them learn English and the required knowledge of U.S. history. Religious congregations could help with this, it was pointed out.

Latino representatives at the conference discussed whether most immigrants really want to become citizens. "All immigrants eventually want to go back," said a Latino activist who has lived most of her life in the United States. "Your heart, your memory of your early years are all there. But I don't know how many would go back. You become very dependent on the way of life here—the level of earnings and your survival. People used to go back and forth every six months, but now they can't do it as easily. Now they have brought their families and children. [They] are passing through a transition where they are putting down more roots. Their heart may want to go back, but their [way of life] means they stay. I think most want citizenship."[80]

A religious worker pointed out that many who do not pursue citizenship feel unwanted. "One hundred percent want to be legal. How many want to be citizens, I don't know. U.S. society is not a welcoming society to non-Anglo immigrants—especially people who are uneducated or do not dress nicely," he said. "How do you expect [immigrants] would want to stay here? There are two sides to this issue. It's not just that immigrants don't want to contribute. It's also that they are not treated nicely. If the attitude of American society were different, it would make a big difference."[81]

CONCLUSIONS OF THE ROUNDTABLE CONFERENCE

Exploring the issue of civic engagement among Latino immigrants from several perspectives, the conference highlighted a number of areas in which more effective efforts can aid that engagement.

The conference clarified the need for greater cooperation and unity among Latino organizations to make them more effective in serving their community and working toward a shared Latino agenda.

It also pointed out the value of and potential for increased communication and joint action between Latinos and non-Latinos, particularly through the churches, which collctively are a significant force in Charlotte. Participants on both sides of the dialogue expressed a willingness and desire to make this happen. Representatives of religious organizations recognized the need to reconcile their religion's principles of justice and compassion with the real world that Latino immigrants face, through education and action within their congregations.

The need for greater visibility for labor unions in Charlotte and North Carolina was apparent, and the discussion of workers' issues proved educational to many participants.

Paths to citizenship were outlined and recognized for their difficulty in both practical and emotional terms. The need was noted for more English and citizenship classes to take place on realistic schedules. Participants expressed a desire also that non-immigrants learn Spanish to help bridge the language barrier and promote cultural understanding.

In follow-up interviews, participants were asked what they felt were the greatest needs of immigrants, which, presumably, if met would contribute to their ability to become more deeply involved in Charlotte's civil society. A variety of answers emerged: immigration reform, English language instruction, education in cultural norms, driver's licenses, college tuition assistance, improved health care, better wages to eliminate the need for second and third jobs, benefits, and pensions.

Perhaps the clearest summary came from a veteran Latino activist now involved in legal assistance: "They need a network of support—not just occasional pockets of support—that addresses the emergencies people are living through, and also adds policy advocates and strategy builders who will work toward changing the local climate and influencing the legislative process."[82]

SIGNS OF PROGRESS

Since the roundtable conference in September 2007, a number of events have taken place in Charlotte that suggest progress in establishing greater understanding and community between Latinos and non-Latinos.

- A Citizenship Day event offered assistance to permanent legal residents wishing to apply for naturalization. The event was organized by H.E.L.P.; the American Immigration Lawyers Association; and Latino service organizations UNISAL, Jesus Ministry, and Mi Casa, Su Casa. Attorneys and paralegals from the American Immigration Lawyers Association and students from Charlotte School of Law and Wake Forest University School of Law volunteered their services, offering advice and filing documents.

  At H.E.L.P.'s invitation, the event was cosponsored by two local members of Congress, Rep. Sue Myrick and Rep. Robin Hayes. Myrick sent a staff member to the event; Hayes made welcoming remarks and observed for part of the day. On departing, he commented that it was encouraging to participate in such a positive event related to the immigration issue. Of the one hundred immigrants who attended, ten were able to have their naturalization paperwork completed and filed, sixty are being tracked by the participating attorneys for follow-up, and thirty were informed as to what additional requirements they need to fulfill for filing.

- The Latin American Coalition and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community Relations Committee (a branch of city-county government) plan to cosponsor an African American-Latin American Summit at a large local African-American church.

- The Latin American Coalition has begun a series entitled "Immigration, Globalization and Our Values" to expand knowledge on these subjects. The first meeting drew about twenty Anglo, African American, and Latino participants.

WHAT DOES CHARLOTTE'S FUTURE HOLD?

With its strong work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit, the Latino community in Charlotte-Mecklenburg is a rich resource of human capital. But a looming uneasiness among the non-immigrant population may only become stronger as demographic factors continue to play out, and discrimination against these new residents may cripple their power to make a positive contribution.

Because of a steady influx of young immigrant adults, a greater share of the Latino population is still in its prime childbearing years than is the case for the majority population. In addition, Latino immigrants tend to have higher birth rates. Thus the ethnic mix of school-age and pre-school-age children is changing quickly. Between 1990 and 2000 in Mecklenburg County, the Hispanic population aged zero to four grew by 711 percent, while that of children aged five to seventeen grew by 523 percent. In 1990, the county had 399 school-age children who spoke little or no English; by 2000, this figure had grown by more than 500 percent to 2,035.[83]

As the families of recently arrived immigrants continue to join husbands and fathers, and as new families are formed, this trend will likely accelerate. Similarly, the needs of growing low-income families with no health insurance may be expected to strain the county's resources in health care and other public services. With city and county budgets already stretched, and with little political will to increase taxes, the public sector's ability to successfully meet this burgeoning demand is questionable.

The Pew Hispanic Center's recent study of North Carolina's eligible voters finds that Latinos eligible to vote tend to be younger than the total electorate, with 36 percent in the eighteen-to-twenty-nine age group, compared with only 21 percent of all voters.[84] As large numbers of native-born Latino children mature and join their ranks, the eventual effect of these Latino voters on the electoral process is interesting to anticipate.

As noted in a landmark study by the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners, in its Vision 2015 mission statement, has outlined goals for the county's near-term future.[85] Two key components of this statement seem relevant to prospects for Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Latino immigrant community. "We will have respect for and will celebrate the diversity of and promote equality of opportunity for all of our citizens," says one provision. Another states, "All residents will have the opportunity to share equitably in the community's prosperity."[86] In view of the recent climate of law enforcement policies and public opinion regarding Latino immigrants, it will be of great interest to see whether these noble goals become a reality for Charlotte's newest neighbors or, as one could argue today, a bitter irony.

NOTES

1. This report makes interchangeable use of the terms "Latino" and "Hispanic."
2. Owen J. Furuseth, Associate Provost for Metropolitan Studies and Extended Academic Programs, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.
3. Jana Harrison et al., *Mecklenburg County Latino Community Needs Assessment* (Charlotte: UNC Charlotte Urban Institute, June 2006), http://www.ui.uncc.edu/docs/DocumentArchives/LACNAP_Report_Final7-11-06.pdf.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Alan Gordon et al., "Immigration: Legal and Illegal," The Mayor's Immigration Study Commission, City of Charlotte, N.C., 2007.
10. Rakesh Kochhar et al., *The New Latino South: The Context and Consequences of Rapid Population Growth* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, 2005).
11. Harrison et al., *Mecklenburg County Latino Community Needs Assessment*.
12. Ibid., p. 2.
13. Kochhar et al., *The New Latino South.*
14. Harrison et al., *Mecklenburg County Latino Community Needs Assessment*.
15. John D. Kasarda and James H. Johnson Jr., *The Economic Impact of the Hispanic Population on the State of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise, Kenan-Flagler Business School, 2006).
16. Harrison et al., *Mecklenburg County Latino Community Needs Assessment.*
17. Gordon et al., "Immigration: Legal and Illegal."
18. Harrison et al., *Mecklenburg County Latino Community Needs Assessment.*
19. Ibid.
20. Adriana Gálvez-Taylor, Latin American Coalition.
21. Cristina La Paz, Mi Casa, Su Casa.
22. Teresa Villamarín, Charlotte Coalition for Social Justice.
23. César Carhuachín, Presbytery of Charlotte.
24. Villamarín.
25. Gálvez-Taylor.
26. Manuel Aliaga, Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte.
27. Rev. Gregory Moss, St. Paul Baptist Church.
28. *The Charlotte Observer*, November 28, 2007.
29. Gordon et al., "Immigration: Legal and Illegal."
30. La Paz.
31. Harrison et al., *Mecklenburg County Latino Community Needs Assessment.*
32. Gordon et al., "Immigration: Legal and Illegal."
33. Kochhar et al., *The New Latino South.*
34. Kasarda and Johnson, *The Economic Impact*.
35. Harrison et al., *Mecklenburg County Latino Community Needs Assessment.*
36. Maudia Meléndez, Jesus Ministry.
37. Ángeles Ortega-Moore, Latin American Coalition.
38. Gálvez-Taylor.
39. Ricardo Veloz, Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte.
40. Aliaga.
41. http://www.charmeck.org/Departments/MCSO/immigration.htm
42. Rafael Prieto, *The Charlotte Observer*, October 2, 2007.
43. Esteban Aguilera, Unite Here union.
44. Veloz.
45. Carhuachín.
46. Gálvez-Taylor.
47. Christopher Baumann, Unite Here union.
48. Aliaga.
49. Carhuachín.
50. La Paz.
51. Ana Miriam Vázquez, UNISAL.
52. *The Charlotte Observer*, January 19, 2008.
53. Channing Matthews, *The Heart of Our Difference: Assessing Racial Tensions in Mecklenburg County* (Charlotte, N.C.: Charlotte H.E.L.P., 2007).
54. Haydee Garcia, Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, Charlotte.
55. Rev. Fred Wilson, Life Baptist Church, Charlotte.
56. Matthews, *The Heart of Our Difference*.
57. Ibid.
58. Rev. Moss.
59. Rev. Wilson.

60. Gálvez-Taylor.
61. Rev. Himie-Budu Shannon, Episcopal Chapel of Christ the King, Charlotte.
62. Aliaga.
63. Aliaga.
64. García.
65. Aliaga.
66. Veloz.
67. Veloz.
68. Aliaga.
69. Rev. Russ Dean, Park Road Baptist Church, Charlotte.
70. Rev. David Hodges, Episcopal Church of the Holy Comforter, Charlotte.
71. Rev. Wilson.
72. Baumann.
73. Carhuachín.
74. Aliaga.
75. Channing Matthews, Duke University intern with Charlotte H.E.L.P.
76. Vázquez.
77. Rev. Shannon.
78. Gálvez-Taylor.
79. Pew Hispanic Center, "Hispanics in the 2008 Election: Fact Sheets" (Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, 2008).
80. Gálvez-Taylor.
81. Carhuachín.
82. Gálvez-Taylor.
83. Kochhar et al., *The New Latino South*.
84. Pew Hispanic Center, "Hispanics in the 2008 Election."
85. Harrison et al., *Mecklenburg County Latino Community Needs Assessment*.
86. http://www.charmeck.org/Departments/BOCC

Appendix A: *Participants*

Latino Civic Engagement Roundtable Conference

September 14, 2007
Charlotte, N.C.

ESTEBAN AGUILERA	Unite Here union
MANUEL ALIAGA	Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte/ Hispanic Ministries
XÓCHITL BADA	Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Mexico Institute; Department of Sociology, University of Illinois, Chicago
CHRISTOPHER BAUMANN	Unite Here union
CHRISTOPHER BISHOP	Charlotte Helping Empower Local People (H.E.L.P.)
CÉSAR CARHUACHÍN	Presbytery of Charlotte/Latino Ministries
KELLY CARPIO	UNISAL
REV. RUSS DEAN	Park Road Baptist Church, Charlotte
OWEN J. FURUSETH	Department of Geography and Earth Sciences and Metropolitan Studies and Extended Academic Programs, University of North Carolina at Charlotte
ADRIANA GÁLVEZ-TAYLOR	Communities for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, Latin American Coalition
HAYDEE GARCÍA	Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church
REV. DAVID HODGES	Episcopal Church of the Holy Comforter, Charlotte
CRISTINA LA PAZ	Mi Casa, Su Casa
CHANNING MATTHEWS	Duke University, Charlotte H.E.L.P.
REV. GREGORY MOSS	St. Paul Baptist Church, Charlotte
ÁNGELES ORTEGA-MOORE	Latin American Coalition
ANDREW SELEE	Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Mexico Institute
REV. HIMIE-BUDU SHANNON	Episcopal Chapel of Christ the King, Charlotte
ANA MIRIAM VÁZQUEZ	UNISAL
RICARDO VELOZ	Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte/Hispanic Ministries
TERESA VILLAMARÍN	Charlotte Coalition for Social Justice
REV. FRED WILSON	Life Baptist Church, Charlotte
JOYCE DEATON	Reporter and Writer

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

Lee H. Hamilton, President and Director

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Private Citizen Members: Robin B. Cook, Donald E. Garcia, Bruce S. Gelb, Sander R. Gerber, Charles L. Glazer, Susan Hutchison, Ignacio E. Sanchez

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