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THE OMAHA SITE:

Migrant Civil Society Under Construction

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OMAHA, NEBRASKA



THE OMAHA SITE:
Migrant Civil Society Under Construction

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Cover image: In the upper photo, running clockwise, Latino community leaders Mariela Muñoz, Samuel Carbajal, Noé Diego Ramón, David Pérez, and Angel Freytez participate in the workshop, "Leadership, Empowerment and Civic Engagement: Reclaiming Our Heritage and Building Networks Across the Americas," held in Omaha, NE, June 5-7, 2009. The workshop was organized by the Office of Latino/Latin American Studies of the Great Plains (OLLAS), with the support of other local, national, and international organizations.

(Photo by Jared Westbrook/OLLAS, University of Nebraska at Omaha)

In the lower photo, demonstrators gather before a city council meeting in Fremont, NE, on July 28, 2008, to protest an ordinance that would have penalized property owners for renting to undocumented persons. The demonstration was attended by OLLAS staff members. The man's shirt reads, "Building Fremont's Future Together."

(Photo by Greg McLawsen/Nebraska Appleseed)

Cover design by Anna Berlett, OLLAS-UNO

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PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is part of a series on Latin American immigrant civic and political participation that explores experiences in nine different cities around the United States: Charlotte, NC; Chicago, IL; Fresno, CA; Las Vegas, NV; Los Angeles, CA; Omaha, NE; Tucson, AZ; San Jose, CA; and, Washington, DC. This series is part of an initiative sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson Center Mexico Institute, and was funded by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The project is led by Xóchitl Bada of the University of Illinois at Chicago, Jonathan Fox of the University of California, Santa Cruz, and Andrew Selee, Director of the Woodrow Wilson Center Mexico Institute. The project was first coordinated by Kate Brick, followed by Robert Donnelly.

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, with an emphasis on recent trends in Latino immigrant integration following the 2006 immigrant civic mobilizations.

The research questions are informed by a comparative approach that highlights both similarities and differences across diverse cit-

ies and sectors. The project also includes a series of background reports on important cross-cutting issues, such as the role of the Spanish-language media, the responsibility of faith-based organizations, and the involvement of youth. Project research products are accessible online at: www.wilsoncenter.org/migrantparticipation.

This report, *The Omaha Site: Migrant Civil Society Under Construction*, was fundamentally informed by a roundtable held in Omaha in late 2007, which brought together researchers, service providers, and community leaders—some migrants and some native-born—to discuss the challenges and advances of Latino immigrant civic engagement. That event also sought to provide a platform and a voice for immigrant concerns, and the words of its participants are reproduced throughout. The report includes a record of the roundtable, as well as chapters by Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado and Lourdes Gouveia, both from the Office of Latino/Latin American Studies of the Great Plains (OLLAS) of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, who comprehensively analyze the history, politics, economics, and demography that are today shaping Omaha's incipient migrant civil society.

We wish to thank all the workers, students, community leaders and agency directors who took time from their eternally packed schedules to participate in our interviews and roundtable (strategic encounter) in Omaha. They will recognize their contribution throughout the report. Thanks to Sergio Sosa for helping to organize the Omaha roundtable and commenting in the early drafts of the rapporteur's report that appears at the end of this document. Thanks also to Rebecca Valdez, Director of the Latino Center of the Midlands, for her continuous generosity in

allowing us to use her wonderful center to hold our meetings. As always, OLLAS staff and volunteers' utmost professionalism, and profound dedication to our OLLAS mission, are the true reason this and all our projects are successful and worthy of respect by our colleagues and community members. We wish to offer a special thank our students, Yesenia Nuñez and Maria Olvera for helping us make the roundtable a success and with interview transcriptions. Finally, thanks to Anna Berlett, our talented student who designed such a unique cover for our report.

POWER RELATIONS, LABOR MARKETS, AND THE FORMATION OF A “MIGRANT CIVIL SOCIETY” IN THE CENTRAL PLAINS

Lourdes Gouveia

Migrants to the Great Plains find themselves immersed in social contexts that have undergone profound change in recent decades. In Nebraska and other “new destinations” in the Midwest, rural-urban inequalities, sharpening for years, accelerated in the face of the 1970s recession and grew even more acute in a subsequent period of economic restructuring. That restructuring, ascendant in the 1980s and 1990s, was premised on low-wage labor; generous subsidies to large businesses willing to relocate to those non-metropolitan areas most affected by the agrarian crisis; and the scrapping of age-old programs and accords created to protect small businesses, farmers, and workers. The result has been an acceleration of uneven development within the state, which has added an even greater number of workers and middle-class persons to the ranks of economic losers.

This economic restructuring particularly affected the nonmetropolitan areas where most of Nebraska’s new Latin American migrants initially settled (Gouveia 1994). Many of the present-day descendents of the first European settlers to these areas viewed the arrival of large numbers of low-wage immigrant workers as another powerful force pushing them toward

higher levels of social and political—and now cultural—exclusion. Some have resisted by blocking the social and political integration of Latin American migrants whom they considered undeserving of certain rights or unprepared to assume control of their own destiny (Vogt et al. 2006). In one of those ironic twists of history, the excluded of yesterday have become the excluders of today.

Yet in new migrant destinations in the Midwest, such processes of exclusion and the attendant hardening of existing social and power hierarchies have not always arisen in organizations that are openly hostile to migrants. In fact, such processes also are activated through the everyday exercise of privilege—whether based on ethnicity, status, or class—as well as through those practices that, however well-intentioned, are laden with deep-seated paternalist assumptions. These practices weaken organizational efforts informed by principles of participatory democracy, and within which migrants may function as “co-protagonists,” on equal footing with other community leaders in the course of exercising their right to citizenship.

At the same time, in new destination cities such as Omaha, social relations between old

and new settlers tend to be somewhat more dynamic and power hierarchies a little less rigid when compared to smaller communities. This is largely due to the city's greater socioeconomic and ethnic diversity; more opportunities for social mobility; and a greater density of those institutions, resources, and social actors committed to more inclusive political agendas. These different and changing social contexts are highly determining of the particular rights and organizational capacities that migrants may acquire in their integration process.

Valuable studies in recent years have examined the creation of migrant organizations in areas of long-term migrant settlement. These contributions have provided a clearer picture of the different arenas for collective action that are available to migrant organizations—referred to collectively as “migrant civil society” by Jonathan Fox (2006). These arenas of action include public spaces, the media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations, and migrant-run grassroots communities.

Studies of areas of long-term settlement also have enabled a better understanding of migrant organizations' transnational practices, their struggles for the rights of their members, and their efforts to activate social citizenship—and even substantive citizenship—in both countries of origin and in countries of destination (Goldring and Krishnamurti 2007; Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller 2003). A central question in these studies has been whether these transnational migrant organizations have not only allowed their members to become new social and political actors in their communities of origin, but become effective vehicles for integration in their communities of settlement (Portes, Escobar, and Radsord 2005; Bada, Fox, and Selee 2006).

In this study of Omaha, we too are interested in understanding how migrants manage to claim—and incorporate themselves into—new socioeconomic, public, and political spaces through these transnational and local organizational practices. However, we wish to go beyond an ethnographic profile of the types of organizations that have developed in new destinations and get a better understanding of how the “migration-exclusion-inclusion” dynamic operating at the local level conditions the construction of a migrant civil society (Pérez-Sainz and Mora-Salas 2007).

With the notable exception of those researchers who work and reside in such places, the geographic dispersal of migrants to “new destinations” largely escaped the notice of most migration scholars until the release of the 2000 Census. Efforts to underscore the considerable growth of the Latin American migrant population in Nebraska prior to the census count were often met with skepticism. The success of new theories of migration, such as the “cumulative causation” theory, had inadvertently become a lens cap impeding the detection of important detours of new migrant streams toward largely untraveled routes. Contrary to what these theories predicted, Latin American migrants were headed toward places where migrant flows of co-ethnics had been insignificant, interrupted for dozens of years, or virtually non-existent.

Researchers today are increasingly interested in learning more about the causes and implications of the geographic distribution of migrants into new and emerging areas of settlement. Recent works, based partly on studies that some of us conducted at the beginning of this process, correctly identify as one of its principal causes the profound economic and industrial restructuring that began in the 1970s and that continued into the 1980s and

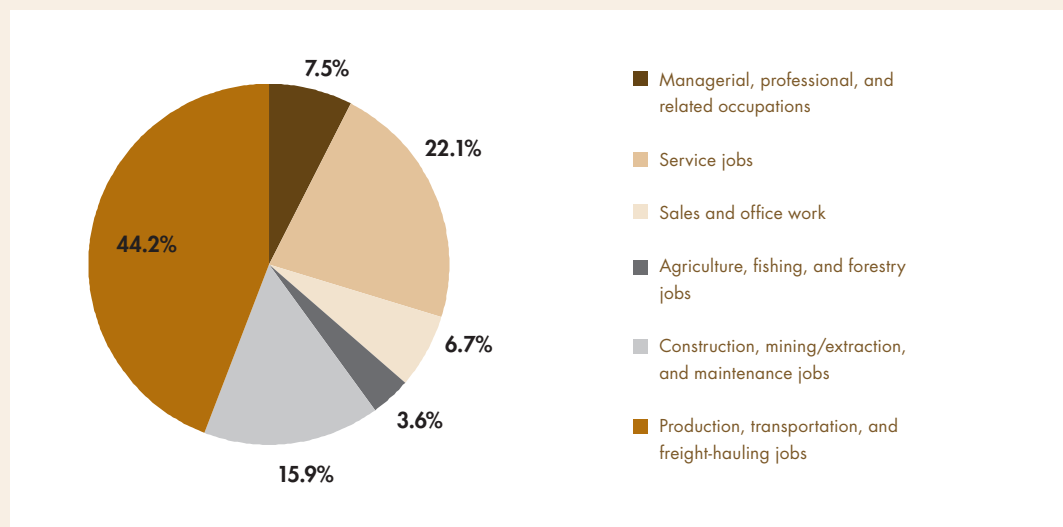
beyond (Gouveia 1994; Gouveia and Sáenz 2000; Massey and Capoferro 2008; Leach and Bean 2008; Zúñiga and Hernandez-León 2005; Diaz McConnell 2008).

Agreement exists that multiple causes explain the dispersion of migrants into new areas of settlement. In addition to those mentioned, authors point to changes in U.S. immigration policy, stricter border enforcement policies at the U.S.-Mexico border, and the search for places offering a higher quality of life (Massey and Capoferro 2008; Leach and Bean 2008; Gouveia, Carranza, and Cogua 2005). Undoubtedly, the predictive power of the “cumulative causation of migration” theory kicks in once potential migrants leverage the social capital accumulated by those who arrived even just a few months earlier. The availability of this social capital in places of settlement is, however, geographically differentiated. Generally, those communities and families farthest from Omaha are also the most deprived of valuable social capital.

Migrants in Nebraska, whether far from or near Omaha, are welcomed by employers. Yet to remain in the workforce, the vast majority must accept conditions that adversely affect not only their social mobility but also their ability to organize in defense of their rights. Such conditions are enforced by the malleability of the labor pool and by the fact that employees are willing to work unpredictable hours and accept minimal labor protections and benefits. Additionally, migrant workers become resigned to living under the constant threat of exclusionary efforts by anti-immigrant groups, and must also contend with the enforcement mandate of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE), whose actions may go undetected by national pro-immigrant organizations.

It is worth examining the labor market migrants to Nebraska enter (Figure 1). Between 2005 and 2007, of those Latino workers born outside of the United States who were 16 years of age or older, a plurality (44.2 percent) were

Figure 1. Hispanic/Latino foreign-born population in Nebraska, 16 years of age or older, by occupation, 2005-2007



Credit and source: Calculations for pie chart by Yuriko Doku for OLLAS. Chart based on data from the U.S. Census' American Community Survey, 2005-2007.

employed in manufacturing, transportation, and freight-hauling. Importantly, in the case of Nebraska, manufacturing includes primarily deskilled labor in industries like meatpacking, which entail few opportunities for upward social mobility. Another 38 percent of foreign-born Latino workers toil in the service and construction sectors, where similar conditions prevail (Gouveia 2006).

Along with the structural labor-market disadvantages that prevail in new areas of settlement, other factors, such as levels of educational attainment, also influence workforce participation. Most Latin American migrants,

who are 25 years of age or older, have relatively little education (Table 1), with 65 percent not having finished high school versus a 50-percent graduation rate for the Latino population overall. However, the latter group's rate of completion of a four-year university degree is not much higher than that of the overall foreign-born Latin American population (9 percent and 8 percent, respectively). At the roundtable we organized in Omaha, participants identified lack of sufficient education as the first barrier blocking enhanced civic and social integration by Latino immigrants. Participants defined education broadly as including formal educa-

Table 1. Hispanic/Latino population in Nebraska, 25 years of age or older, by level of education, 2000 and 2005-2007

Education	2000		2005-2007	
	Total Hispanic/Latino %	Foreign-born Hispanic/Latino %	Total Hispanic/Latino %	Foreign-born Hispanic/Latino %
LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL	53.4	71.8	49.6	64.7
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE	21.5	14.4	24.4	18.9
TECHNICAL OR JUNIOR COLLEGE DEGREE	17.1	7.5	16.6	8.6
COLLEGE GRADUATE	5.2	3.4	6.7	5.6
GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL DEGREE	2.8	2.9	2.6	2.2
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Calculations by Yuriko Doku for OLLAS based on the U.S. Census, PUMS, 2000 and the American Community Survey, 2005-2007.

tion, knowledge of civil rights, and knowledge of sociopolitical conditions.

“It wasn’t even a job that I wanted to stay at, but I was making enough money so that I could go to school. The problem was with the Social Security card I was using. Now it’s been a year that I haven’t had a job. It really closes a lot of doors for you.”

—From an interview taken December 4, 2007

“More than anything, I really like to participate with indigenous persons like me even if a lot of people put us down because we speak another language; lots of people say, ‘Well, they’re hicks.’”

—From an interview taken November 17, 2007

Participants identified fear as the second barrier, defined as the fear caused by anti-immigrant attitudes, raids, lack of documents, and hostile labor environments prohibiting migrants from raising their voices and demanding rights. *For more responses from Omaha migrants on this issue, please see Appendix I: Rapporteur’s Report.*

While a large plurality of Latino immigrant workers are occupied in traditionally low-skilled sectors, as Table 1 suggests, there exists an incipient socioeconomic diversification of the Latin American population in Omaha. New waves of migrants appear to have more—rather than fewer—resources and human capital. Among other national-origin groups, Colombians, Peruvians, Venezuelans, and Mexicans are counted in the ranks of professionals who have migrated to Omaha from larger metropolitan areas, in response to the demand for skilled labor, which is becoming almost as strong as the demand for low-skilled workers (Gouveia and Powell 2005). As evidence, even in the midst of the current eco-

nomics crisis, Nebraska’s unemployment rate chronically ranks among the lowest of any state in the country.

In summary, specific historical and structural conditions have shaped what we today call “new destinations” and influenced the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion occurring in these communities. In the next paragraphs, we attempt a summary of the general characteristics and forces that appear to be shaping the emergence of new destinations, with the caveat that the intensity with which such forces manifest themselves varies between urban and nonurban spaces. We will conclude this chapter with a somewhat more detailed look at Omaha, the epicenter of Nebraska’s incipient migrant civil society. Among the conditions and dynamics examined are the following:

- The exodus of youth and the emergence of an aging and highly mobile population (Drozd and Deichert 2008).
- The persistence and prevalence of rural areas, whose traditional economic base consisting of small farms and small businesses has suffered continuous losses in the post-World War II era. The acceleration of this process of economic decline in the current era dominated by the neoliberal economic model and by global competition in the agri-business sector (Gouveia 2005).
- The emergence of new nonmetropolitan communities and ethnic enclaves that function as platforms for restructured industries with devalued labor pools. Meatpacking plants fall into this category, as they recruit new employees on a continuous basis and are able to feed off of

foreign-born labor forces, which generally comprise Latin American migrants but more recently have also included African refugees (Semple 2008).

- The dismantlement of social welfare systems and the subsequent privatization of services, such as healthcare—a trend that drives up the cost to obtain services (Carter 2008).
- Small and racially homogeneous communities and areas with conservative political cultures that allow the germination of exclusionary practices and discourses targeting ethnic minorities and particular racial groups (Vogt et al. 2006).
- Urban and rural communities whose history of immigration is selective and where robust migrant civil society—whether recently or in the more distant past—has never consolidated itself.
- Low cost of living, coupled with relatively high quality of life (plentiful housing, low crime rates, and little gang activity; abundant open space and good schools) (Gouveia and Stull 1997).
- Insufficient government funding, resources, and political will for facilitating the incorporation of migrant and non-migrant populations within economic systems that encourage practices of environmentally sustainable development and that seek the realization of social and cultural equality.
- Increasing legislative activism designed to promote anti-immigrant laws, ordinances, and policies (Hamill 2009; Ferak 2009).

- The growing presence of nongovernmental and faith-based organizations that offer services for immigrants and that take up the defense of migrant rights. The perspective of such groups ranges from civically and socially inclusive to paternalistic and disinterested in promoting political participation (Garbacz 2008).

Omaha: A New Migrant Community in the Midwest

Firmly ensconced in the U.S. Midwest, Omaha, NE, is only an hour by air from Chicago, IL, a city with which it shares a similar history of immigration. In Omaha, as is the case in Chicago and in other parts of the country, the descendents of prior waves of immigrants both celebrate and decry the city's new "aliens." Yet throughout Omaha's history, it has been immigrants—Germans, Czechs, Poles, Irish, Lithuanians, Italians, and Mexicans—who have forged the city's character, stamping it with a unique urban and multiethnic identity.

In important ways, the history of Omaha reflects the history of the Omaha meatpacking economy. Particularly in the second half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, labor recruitment brought generations of European-descended migrants to work in the city's slaughterhouses. However toward the end of the 1970s, these workers had begun to quit the industry, while, at the same time, the industry had begun to relocate production facilities away from urban centers—where unionization levels were strong—to rural and more remote communities elsewhere in the Midwest. In the 1980s, the industry further shifted course as enormous conglomerates, such as Tyson, IBP, Cargill, and ConAgra, grew in strength and consolidated their control over

the world market. These companies established production methods that put meatpacking under the roofs of immense semi-automated factories. Today, thousands of workers toil in these plants processing equally thousands of head of cattle, whose meat is ultimately packed into small boxes and distributed to consumers around the world (Gouveia 1994; Stull and Broadway 2004).

To ensure a cheap workforce, meatpacking companies have engaged in extensive recruitment campaigns, diverting workers away from traditional migration destinations and pulling them out of communities of origin, to get them to settle on the Midwest's icy and vast plains in the small towns that are the new sites of production. Companies first focused efforts on attracting Asian refugees, but campaigns soon thereafter began targeting Latin American immigrants. The campaigns succeeded in part due to the backing they got from state and local governments. Although the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act enabled amnesty and the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) provision allowed many immigrants to get legal work permits, employers nevertheless hired many other workers who were undocumented (Gouveia and Stull 1995).

Immigrants were considered receptive to recruitment messages since it was taken for granted that they would be willing to trade their community of origin or a traditional migration destination, such as Los Angeles, CA, for a new job and home in a place that promised a higher quality of life and where social and labor vulnerabilities were lower. In fact, the arrival of Latino immigrants to rural Nebraska in the 1980s and 1990s in some cases reversed the severe depopulation that many small communities had been facing given the steady exodus of native-born residents.

By the end of the 1990s, the Mexican, Guatemalan, and Salvadoran families who had been among the first Latino settlers to rural Nebraska had begun a process of internal migration to Omaha and other cities. A cause behind this migration was a desire to overcome the barriers on upward social mobility that were considered too formidable in the more rural parts of the state. Perceiving this “counterflow,” old and new investors in the meatpacking industry migrated too, shifting production facilities to Omaha's traditional meatpacking district. Today, more than seventeen large and small factories process meat in Omaha and adjacent towns, utilizing thousands of Latin American immigrant workers. Predominantly, these workers and their families live on the city's south side, where prior generations of European immigrants and their descendents had lived in similar ethnic enclaves before leaving in the 1970s and 1980s for Omaha's western suburbs.

The conditions described up to now represent factors that have uniquely shaped the levels of civic engagement and political participation of Latino immigrants in Omaha and other new gateway cities. In large measure, however, these conditions represent barriers rather than catalysts for involvement in the democratic process. And so the first question posed at the roundtable we held in Omaha was also the most pressing: “What are the main challenges and opportunities that have arisen in the process of integration?” Responses to this question—in verbatim voice of the immigrant leaders who participated—both corroborated and supplemented the description above and are included in Appendix I.

Over the next two chapters, we will report on Omaha's migrant civil society from a variety of perspectives. In Chapter 2, *Immigrant Population Growth and Its Impact on*

Integration and Political Mobilization: A First Look, Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado describes the demographic phenomenon that is Latino immigration and places it in the context of immigrant integration and political mobilization in Omaha. The third chapter, *Three Formative Moments for the New Migrant Civil Society in Omaha, Nebraska*, by Lourdes Gouveia, traces the history of migrant civil society in Omaha,

focusing on three key eras. We conclude with a brief epilogue of the evolution of Omaha's migrant civil society in the years following the roundtable, "Latin American Migrants: Civic and Political Participation in Binational Context," held December 16, 2007. This concluding chapter functions as an informative introduction for the rapporteur's report of the roundtable, which appears as an appendix.

IMMIGRANT POPULATION GROWTH AND ITS IMPACT ON INTEGRATION AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION: A FIRST LOOK

Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado¹

There has been a relatively small Latino (mostly Mexican) presence in Omaha since the 1880s, when Mexican rail workers were recruited to work for the Union Pacific Railroad. In the aftermath of the Bracero program, by the early 1970s, there was a perceivable, though still small, increase of Mexican workers in Omaha packing plants. For this reason, Gouveia and colleagues have characterized Omaha, as a “re-emerging destination for Mexican immigrants, and a new destination for immigrants from Central and South America” (Gouveia, Carranza, and Cogua, 2005). According to the 2007 U.S. Census estimates, there are approximately 132,477 Latinos in Nebraska, with nearly 35.2 percent (46,681) residing in Douglas County. Latinos now make up 9.4 percent of the total population of Douglas County. The Latino population in Douglas County and in the state increased 310.6 percent and 258.3 percent respectively in the period from 1990 until 2007. The U.S. Census estimates that nearly 42.4 percent and 40.9 percent of the Latino population is foreign-born in Douglas County and Nebraska respectively.²

Conservative projections for Latinos as a percentage of the total population of Nebraska indicate that their proportion will triple in the

next quarter century, regardless of any changes to the current immigration policy. Table 2 below shows population projections for the Hispanic/Latino population based on 2005 Census estimates. Observers on the ground believe the population is actually growing at a faster pace than the Census is able to capture. Nonetheless, the figures accurately show that this population is becoming, and will continue to become, an increasing proportion of the total state population.

In the past fifteen years, the Latino population has been consolidating its sociocultural and economic base in South Omaha, the old meatpacking district located in the southeastern part of the city. This migrant population has revitalized a previously moribund community. The closing of the stockyards and older packing houses, as well as the exodus of the first major wave of European meatpacking workers to the western suburbs of the city, beginning in the early 1970s, left an aftermath of dilapidated houses and boarded up businesses in South Omaha. Today, this community’s business district is again abuzz with activity, revitalized by Latino-owned businesses. Immigrant-based and non-governmental organizations have sprung up to support these Latino businesses and entrepreneurship develop-

Table 2. Projections for Hispanic/Latino population growth and general population growth in Nebraska, 2005-2030

Year	Total Hispanic/Latino population	Hispanic/Latino proportion of total population	Total Nebraska population
2000 CENSUS	94,425	5.5	1,711,263
2005 EST.	119,167	6.8	1,748,417
2010	146,843	8.2	1,786,940
2015	177,501	9.7	1,826,614
2020	212,307	11.4	1,863,112
2025	252,241	13.3	1,894,301
2030	296,282	15.4	1,920,528

Source: Population Estimates Program, U.S. Census. Prepared by Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado, OLLAS, University of Nebraska at Omaha (November 2007).

ment as well. They include the first Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in the state of Nebraska, the Midlands Latino Community Development Corporation and a Latino-run microenterprise incubator in the Juan Diego Center, which is part of the larger, faith-based Catholic Charities organization. Contributing to the revitalization of South Omaha has been a parallel effort on the part of the City of Omaha to make the “24th Street Corridor” in South Omaha a commercial destination through federally funded community development block grants and promotion of cultural events such as the Cinco de Mayo Parade and other communal and religious events.

As Table 3 shows, 68 percent of foreign-born Latinos and 57 percent of all Latinos lived in South Omaha during the combined years of 2001-2005, the last years for which we have residential data. It is also clear from this table that, when compared to 2000 alone, this population has been expanding its socioeconomic base beyond South Omaha and mov-

ing into adjacent and more ethnically diverse neighborhoods.

As the Latino population grows and becomes increasingly visible in areas they were never to be found before, so does the hostility against it. A small—but increasingly loud and organized—number of nativist groups are at the forefront of this anti-immigrant campaign. Politicos, seeking to prove their anti-immigrant *bona fides*, have joined them and become increasingly bold in their support for symbolic and real barriers to civic and social integration. State senators and members of local city councils have been promoting local and enforcement-heavy “solutions” to the immigration problem in the last couple of years. A case in point was Legislative Bill 963 introduced by Senator Mike Friend in the 100th Legislature, 2007-2008 Second Session of the Nebraska Unicameral, at the behest of Nebraska Governor David Heineman. The bill proposed to limit the awarding of state

and local benefits to U.S. citizens only. Owing to the already cumbersome requirements for obtaining benefits in Nebraska, opponents of the initiative state that it is a backhanded attempt by the governor to dismantle the so-called “Nebraska Dream Act” of 2007, a bill passed over the veto of the governor to grant all graduates of Nebraska high schools in-state tuition at the state’s colleges and universities—regardless of immigration status.³ Subsequently, the bill was killed in the Nebraska Legislature’s Judiciary Committee, over the loud objections of the governor.

These developments challenge the integration prospects of Latino immigrants. However, they can also trigger a variety of mobilization efforts on the part of the immigrants themselves—albeit with uneven results and not always proportional to their growing numbers. Those efforts can be grouped along three general categories: 1) electoral; 2) civic engagement in public spaces; 3) legislative advocacy; and, 4) labor mobilization. In the rapporteur’s

report for the Omaha roundtable, located in Appendix I, as well as in Appendix II, immigrants add their own voices to these expressions of political mobilization and also express frustration with the obstacles that stand in their way.

Electoral Representation: Until the election of Mark Martinez to the Omaha Public Schools School Board in 2004, there was no Latino representation at any level of government. All of the elected representatives for the South Omaha community are white and to a large extent represent what remain of the historical Central and Eastern European communities that predominated in South Omaha until recently. Even though the levels of Latino inhabitants reach beyond 50 percent in some of the precincts in Omaha’s Ward 4 (the area covering most of South Omaha), the low numbers of Latinos eligible to vote, the mostly tepid efforts of mainstream partisan organizations to reach out to and mobilize Latino voters in Omaha, and the

Table 3. Concentration of Hispanic/Latino population in Douglas County, NE, by geographic quadrant, 2000 and 2001-2005

CATEGORY	2000					2001-2005						
	Northwest	Southwest	Northeast	South Omaha	Rest of Southeast	Total	Northwest	Southwest	Northeast	South Omaha	Rest of Southeast	Total
TOTAL HISPANIC/LATINO POPULATION	8.5	10.1	16.0	58.1	7.3	100	10.2	11.0	15.6	56.9	6.3	100
LATINO FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION	5.9	6.8	12.4	69.9	5.0	100	6.0	9.2	12.6	67.9	4.3	100

Source: Yuriko Doku and David Drozd’s calculations for OLLAS based on U.S. Census, 2000 Census PUMS, and 2001-2005 ACS: Public Use Microdata Area, 5% PUMA 901, 902, 903, and 904. Note: South Omaha defined as territory encompassing zip codes 68105, 68107, and 68108.

lack of viable Latino candidates mitigate against the possibility of direct Latino representation in the formal political sector.

By 2006, of the entire Latino population statewide over the age of 18, less than half (47 percent) were U.S. citizens, minimizing the electoral impact of the significance of the growth of the Latino population in Nebraska. Similarly, this trend reflected a nationwide pattern of growing divergence between the total Hispanic population and the numbers of Hispanic voters (Ayón 2006). This point raises questions as to where and how this segment of the Latino population manifests and articulates its political and social interests regardless of immigration status and to what extent their basic civil and human rights are subject to debate. Nearly 85 percent of Latinos under the age of 18 are already U.S. citizens and undoubtedly will have a growing presence in the workforce and on voter rolls in the 21st century (Benjamin-Alvarado 2006).

In fact:

- More Latinos are running for and being elected to public office. In 2008 Rebecca Barrientos Patlan, a second-generation Latina from South Omaha ran for the District 5 seat (South Omaha-Bellevue area) of the Nebraska Legislature being vacated by Senator Don Priestler because of term limits. She is a Republican and the first Latina candidate for the state legislature. She did not win and it remains to be seen why her campaign did not resonate with Latinos and/or the long-term residents of the district. On the other hand, Rebecca Valdez, also a second-generation Latina, won a seat on the Nebraska Board of Education during the same election season.
- The numbers of eligible Latino voters (U.S. citizens, 18 and older) will quadruple

by the year 2030. The growth of the Latino population is not nearly enough to “over-run” the state, as some pundits and nativists claim, but it will certainly be enough to turn a close election at all levels in Nebraska (Benjamin-Alvarado 2006).

- Although eligible Latinos are registered in lower numbers than the total population of Nebraska (47 percent versus 69 percent), they turned out in high numbers in the 2004 general election (78 percent). Recent elections show even more significant gains.
- As the next section will show, the Omaha Latino vote has shown unexpected strength and was deemed decisive in the Second Congressional District 2008 presidential vote and in the 2009 mayoral election.

Civic Engagement in Public Spaces: One of the most public manifestations of new immigrants’ concern with the political process became evident not in the voting booths, but in the participation of nearly fifteen-thousand Latinos and their supporters in a pro-immigration reform march in downtown Omaha on April 10, 2006. The march was organized by a loose coalition of immigrant, Latino and Latino-serving institutions in the community. Subsequent analyses have generally described this march, as with many others across the country in mid-sized new destinations, as stand-alone efforts not representative of a wider social movement (Benjamin-Alvarado, DeSipio and Montoya 2009; Barreto et al 2008). The next section, as well as the immigrant voices contained in the attached rapporteur’s report, reveals an even broader array of immigrant mobilization actions in public spaces.

Legislative Advocacy: New immigrants have not been absent from organizing to pro-

test or support legislation that affects them in very direct ways. Some workers have gone as far as admitting to be undocumented while offering testimony during hearings, unafraid of the heavy presence of state troopers in the state Capitol and inside the hearing room itself. This was the case during last year's and, particularly, this year's legislative sessions and during hearings of the first anti-immigrant ordinance introduced—and rejected—by the Fremont, NE, city council.

Labor Mobilization. The Omaha chapter of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW, Local 271) has been the main organizer of workers in the meatpacking industry in Omaha, NE, and across the Midwest. UFCW convened a national meeting in Omaha in October 2007, to bring to light worker abuses in the wake of the December 2006 raids at Swift Company meatpacking plants across the Midwest by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency of the Department of Homeland Security. This strong and public show of support for documented and undocumented immigrants represents a rupture—not continuity—with the official stands on immigration that have been assumed by labor unions in past decades. The new stand was dictated by the dramatic turnaround taken on February 15, 2000, when the AFL-CIO, to which the UFCW belonged at the time, endorsed a policy of amnesty for undocumented workers. As the next section details, the fact that the event took place in Omaha had a lot to do with the ten or so years of work that had been accomplished through immigrant-based labor organizing strategies. These efforts had not only begun to gestate outside the union, but had overwhelmingly surpassed the latter's initial—

and rather meager—successes at organizing a changed industry, where Latino immigrants now made up the majority of its workforce (Gabriel 2008).

To a large extent the spaces provided for and carved out by Latinos in Omaha have been on the margins of mainstream social and political institutions. Opportunities for legal integration on the part of Latino immigrants are forbidding or plainly nonexistent. This owes largely to the unresponsive nature of federal immigration laws and policies. But as Smith and Bakker (2008) state, immigrants “resist, as they attempt to politically construct new spaces for practicing citizenship across borders.” Latino numbers will continue to grow, and their political impact will continue to be felt, albeit not always proportional or parallel to that growth. This ebb and flow of Latino civic and political integration in Omaha, and the inclusion-exclusion dynamics that condition it, is best captured by examining it across time. Lourdes Gouveia does just that in the next chapter.

NOTES

- 1 Lourdes Gouveia contributed additional material for this chapter with the assistance of Yuriko Doku.
- 2 OLLAS calculations provided by Yuriko Doku based on the 2007 American Community Survey and the United States Census 1990 Summary, Tape File 1 – 100% data. U.S. Census Bureau. All figures have been rounded upward to the nearest whole decimal.
- 3 Martha Stoddard, “Nebraskans speak out against effort to deny benefits to illegal immigrants,” *Omaha World Herald*, (January 21, 2008) Online edition. www.omaha.com.

CHAPTER 3

THREE FORMATIVE MOMENTS FOR THE NEW MIGRANT CIVIL SOCIETY IN OMAHA, NEBRASKA

Lourdes Gouveia

Compared to Nebraska's nonmetropolitan areas, Omaha offers a more appropriate context for the appearance of a migrant civil society. Its history of unionization in the large slaughterhouses, led by old European migrants during the first half of the twentieth century, is similar to the political history of Chicago. However, in contrast to Chicago's history, among other factors, Omaha's small total population—particularly, the small Latino population—inhibited the growth of spaces for organization and capacity building for ethnic and migrant mobilization (Gzesh 2007). As the previous chapter made clear, the demographic explosion and the diversity of migrants from the first, second, and third generations have begun to have positive effects on these organizations' growth and effectiveness.

We can divide the recent development of a new Latino/Latin American migrant civil society in Omaha and, in general, in Nebraska, into three approximate periods, with combinations of more-or-less discernible social actors. The first period occurred in the second half of the 1990s when migrant population growth began to be felt in the new destination communities' main institutions. The second ran

from 2000 until 2006, the year in which there were major immigrant protest marches. The third began at the end of the marches and continues into the present.

The First Period (Mid-1990s through 1999): Old Civil Organizations and New Migrant Leaders

Ethnic organizations have always played an important role in the political incorporation of new migrants in the United States (Portes, Escobar, and Arana 2008). As we have suggested above, these organizations do not have a strong presence in Nebraska. Mexican-Americans of the second and third generations participated in the Chicano movement in the 1960s, but the scale was proportional to their small and homogeneous population. However, in the 1970s, that activism produced at least three very important organizations, still operating today: the Chicano Awareness Center, known today as the Latino Center of the Midlands; the Nebraska Association of Farmworkers, renamed simply NAF; and the Nebraska Mexican-American Commission, which the state's governor appoints. Having suffered years of social and

civil exclusion, the Mexican community's desire to fight for respect for its cultural identity and its rights were the motivating forces behind these organizations. However, as happened in the rest of the United States and as is noted in the attached report, with the decline of the social movements of the 1960s, these organizations began little by little to transform into social service agencies, often with welfarist overtones.

At the beginning of the 1990s, these ethnic organizations were surprised by a sudden wave of clients whose sociodemographic characteristics were far distanced from that of their traditional clients. At the end of the 1980s, this clientele consisted principally of citizens, that is the children and grandchildren of old Mexican migrants. A smaller segment was made up of experienced seasonal agricultural migrants or those exiled from the Bracero program. Those who were now knocking on the doors of these organizations had little knowledge of English. They were also unaware of their rights and of the institutions that could potentially defend those rights. The transformed Latino organizations were not prepared to assume a new round of struggle. Among other things, the dismantlement of the welfare state had resulted in an expansion of nongovernmental organizations like the United Way and the Salvation Army. These became principal providers of resources to help vulnerable populations and the organizations that serve them. Many had a top-down welfarist approach and were dusting off the old "assimilationist" paradigms that the Chicano movement had tried to abolish. This was particularly evident in the old organizations' new ground rules and documents. The institutional memory of the struggles to politically and civically incorporate the most excluded, as well as the memo-

ries of the migration experience, had begun to fade.

The role of the church was fundamental in this first period, although not everywhere and only in a few churches. In Omaha, the Church of the Virgin of Guadalupe, founded in 1944 by Mexicans in the twentieth century's first wave of immigration, played an important and leading role in incorporating migrants in the city. Initially, the church's actions were also predominantly welfarist (Arbelaez 2007). However, the bishop sent a progressive Irish priest, Damian Zurlein, to Mexico to learn Spanish, and on his return in 1990, he was assigned to be the parish priest for the church, which is located in South Omaha. This launched a new stage of activism in defense of migrants' labor rights in the meatpacking plants. In 1998, the church facilitated the hiring of the first Latin American immigrant as a community organizer for Omaha Together One Community (OTOC), an interfaith and multicultural organization founded in 1992. That strategy would prove decisive at the end of this first formative period and at the beginning of the next one, when the migrant community made gigantic strides in organizing meatpacking workers and participated in other high-visibility activities (Gabriel 2008).

The increase in the migrant population, Nebraska's anti-immigrant policies, and grassroots organizations' resistance to them were mixing with a certain combustibility toward the end of this first period. The federal immigration agency, INS (the acronym of its name at that time), chose Nebraska to run a pilot project for immigration control in the interior of the country, which it dubbed "Operation Vanguard" (Gouveia and Juska 2002). Moreover, organizations like the OTOC in Omaha, and the new Iowa/

Nebraska Immigrant Rights Network, which formed in the core of the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest, launched new initiatives that strengthened ties among leaders and organizations inside, and also beyond, these two states. Under the leadership of its Guatemalan organizer, the OTOC accumulated impressive triumphs, such as the formation of soccer leagues, workers' committees in the meatpacking factories in Omaha and Council Bluffs, Iowa, and a campaign to demand dignified and effective treatment from the immigration offices in that city. The campaign used tactics such as inundating the mailboxes of Members of Congress and immigration officials with more than ten-thousand postcards, demanding immigration reform and labor rights, and blocking the doors of their local offices (Gabriel 2007).

This first period culminated when the workers' committees from the meatpacking plants launched a media campaign and called Gov. Mike Johanns to a meeting in the basement of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. The workers, recently trained to speak in public and to run meetings with an extraordinary discipline, testified before the governor about the abuses that they were suffering in the plants. The participants went beyond just complaining. They had come armed with a series of concrete demands that were broadly reported in the local press. For the very first time, Nebraska's Anglo population had to face the conditions under which these workers produce the very food with which these long-time residents have such a strong cultural identification: meat. For many, the labor and civil rights violations came not only as a surprise but also as a horrifying revelation. These events seem to indicate that a formative process for migrant civil organizations had entered a new stage of

inevitable progress. As we will see, it did not last for long.

Second Period (2000-2006): Multiethnic Advances and Precursors to Nativist Backlashes

The advances that began to gestate in the prior period were consolidated during the second one, and they are perhaps the most important in the recent history of this migrant civil society. As a result of his meeting with the workers' committees, the governor issued his historic "Nebraska Meatpacking Industry Workers Bill of Rights." Its first article declared the right to organize in unions. The Nebraska Legislature added teeth to this bill of rights by making it law and adding the requirement of appointing an inspector to monitor compliance. Around this same time, Governor Johanns appointed a commission to study the impact of Operation Vanguard on Nebraska's economy and society. The final report underscored its negative impact and contributed to the termination of that operation in 2000.

During this period, the state legislature passed a series of relatively beneficial laws for immigrants, including a local version of the "Dream Act," a law that permits undocumented children to enroll in Nebraska's state colleges and universities (Gouveia 2006). Hundreds of workers, some of them without papers, also gave public testimony in favor of a bill to grant driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants, although ultimately the legislation was not passed. Added to these achievements were historic organizational victories by unions in three meatpacking plants predominantly employing undocumented immigrant labor. These triumphs were the product of an alliance between Asian

and Latin American workers' committees, which were trained by the OTOC and the union that dominates this sector, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW). Churches and NGOs led by Latin Americans and non-Latin Americans joined the unions in these struggles. This coalition, strengthened by the presence of churches of various ethnicities and denominations, organized and participated in the People's Freedom Caravan, sponsored by the AFL-CIO. Once again, it seemed that not only the Latin American organizations but an increasingly multiethnic and multi-sectoral alliance was emerging as a new and important political force.

However, the raids on the meatpacking plants started up again, stepping on the heels of the cessation of Operation Vanguard. On December 5, 2000, in the midst of a campaign to organize a union at Nebraska Beef, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (today Immigration and Customs Enforcement, ICE) entered the plant and arrested and deported hundreds of workers just before the Christmas holidays.

The federal and state elections in 2004 and 2006 portended an even more ominous change in the political climate. The greater visibility of Latinos in local communities, schools, and even the suburbs, as well as in public spaces that they previously had not occupied, was making things more and more uncomfortable for nativist groups. For the first time in Nebraska, those nativist groups began to form their own organizations and to occupy public spaces that they had never occupied before. Candidates running for office, who only a few years before had fought for migrant rights and publicly recognized the need for the immigrant labor force, began to respond to the anti-immigrant voices and to

support anti-immigrant legislation at the federal and state levels (Gouveia 2006).

Third Period (2006 to the Present): Marches and Local Anti-Immigrant Policies—A Return to Invisibility?

The third period in the development of Omaha's migrant civil society was marked by major protest marches in the spring of 2006. The questions that many have asked since then—and which are far from having a definitive answer—are: “Did these public demonstrations actually accelerate the climate of anti-immigrant policies to which the marches themselves were responding?” or, to the contrary, “Did the impressive coalition that consolidated during those protest marches make it possible to strengthen the formation of migrant organizations and their civic incorporation into the destination communities?”

Unforeseen factors, beyond those associated with the new destination communities discussed in the first chapter, slowed the development of sustainable organizations. One noteworthy factor was the perennial problem of volunteer groups. With few exceptions, the leaders of the 2006 marches retired to their “true” occupations. Many faced the danger of losing their already insecure jobs, especially since they had skipped work in order to participate in the marches. Another factor was the climate of fear that was unleashed with even greater ferocity after spring 2006. All of this produced a deep feeling of resignation that the participants in the Omaha roundtable clearly articulated. One participant noted that the organizations' efforts ceased after the marches and that the protests had not produced the desired result. He exclaimed, “We all shouted, ‘*¡Sí, se puede!* Yes, we can!’ But we couldn't.” Academics and other analysts of the event ex-

pressed a similar pessimism or perhaps a cautious optimism (Chapter 2, and Benjamin-Alvarado, DeSipio, and Montoya 2009). However, still others, writing about more traditional destinations, seem to be more optimistic (Bada, Fox, and Selee 2006; Shannon 2007).

It is clear that these trajectories of civic integration do not follow any sort of predictable line that goes from less to more mobilization or from less to more occupation of public spaces. As of now, we have observed an oscillation between efforts and moments of confusion and disorganization, followed by other periods of major mobilization. The exclusionary forces—consisting of raids, fear, job insecurity, and a lack of empowerment and training for migrant organizations—are powerful. The voices of the migrants, materialized in the attached rapporteur's report, leave no doubt about that. On the other hand, these forces are influenced by other at times equally circumstantial factors, such as the change in the city's electoral map, which trigger new organizing efforts and catalyze new forms of civic participation. As a sample of this constant and unresolved tug of war between exclusionary and inclusionary forces, let us review the latest indicators of political-campaign and legislative mobilization.

The historic presidential election of 2008 opened a space for unexpected civic participation by the Latino population, especially new citizens who were voting for the first time in a U.S. presidential election. Nebraska is one of two states that allow its electoral votes to be split according to congressional district (the other is Maine). Congressional District 2, comprising principally Omaha, broke ranks with the rest of the state, and gave its electoral vote to Barack Obama. Initial estimates had already suggested that the Latino vote would be decisive. In the precincts concentrating high levels of Latino voters, the vote increased

between 10 and 15 percent (Benjamin-Alvarado, personal communication). This type of mobilization was not limited to those who were able to vote. Undocumented fathers and mothers participated along with their children, who were citizens, in efforts to get out the Latino vote (Gouveia, fieldwork observations, October 2008).

On the other hand, in January 2009, the Nebraska Legislature introduced more than a dozen anti-immigrant bills. The proposals are faithful copies of laws in states like Arizona, which has made it mandatory to use an electronic migrant-status verification system when hiring all employees (E-Verify). State Senator Karpisek of Lincoln reintroduced, in the name of Governor Heinemann, a bill that denies public benefits to undocumented people. It had been defeated in the previous session. *See Chapter 2.* Resolutions were also added to require that communities and local police forces sign agreements with ICE to facilitate raids and deportations of undocumented persons.

In the regular meetings of organizations like the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in Omaha, it became clear that neither the organizations charged with providing services to immigrants nor the immigrants themselves were aware of these laws and much less of their consequences. This linguistic isolation coupled with isolation from major channels of trustworthy information corroborated what the participants in the Omaha roundtable warned were some of the principal barriers for social and civic integration.

However, similar to what happened during the marches, the Latino community in general felt targeted by the legislative bills and the anti-immigrant discourse that accompanied them. This shared sentiment unleashed a new wave of activities and spontaneous organizational alliances that aimed to defeat these

laws. In a forthcoming publication, we will detail how one of these alliances, between academics and migrant grassroots organizations, led efforts to fill the information and civic-formation vacuum for these new grassroots social actors. In a hearing room in Nebraska's Capitol, an impressive number of day laborers, slaughterhouse workers, construction workers, and people who work on cleaning crews confronted members of the "Minutemen" and other local nativist organizations. Even though this type of legislative mobilization was not entirely successful, it did manage to rein in some of the bills, as well as some of the more injurious aspects of them. This work was undoubtedly nurtured by the work

that had been done around the marches and during the political-campaign mobilization of the presidential election. Both experiences had repercussions for the election of Omaha's mayor, which was held a few weeks before this document was finalized. Latinos came out again to vote, and, together with the African-American community, they forcefully contributed to the defeat of a candidate who had run an anti-immigrant campaign (Goodsell 2009). The return to invisibility seems to have been fleeting. However, given the great exclusionary forces that migrants confront in new destination communities, moments of major mobilization and the creation of new migrant organizations may be equally fleeting.

CONCLUSIONS

The Current Organizational Panorama, Transnationalism, and Local Integration

We have no doubt that the construction of a migrant civil society in the Central Plains is in full apogee and that Omaha is its epicenter. We can look through an additional lens to view this phenomenon in terms of the number and type of migrant and nonmigrant organizations in the city. Based on interviews done during this project as well as under a complementary project financed by the Ford Foundation, we have been able to detect the presence of approximately fifty organizations in Omaha. *Visit the OLLAS website at www.unomaha.edu/ollas, for a preliminary inventory of these organizations.*

Many of these are NGOs providing services or lobbying in favor of migrants and which are led by nonmigrants. However, we were also able to observe a relatively large number of organizations led by Latin American migrants or second-generation Latinos. In this second group, organizations provide immigrants with social services (11), are Spanish-language media ventures (4), or hometown associations (11). The size and stability of these organizations vary proportionally to the conditions of social exclusion and legal and job insecurity that their leaders and principal members face.

Hometown associations are among the most vulnerable migrant organizations. Local migrant leaders used “hometown associations”

as a generic term to indicate the presence of a myriad of informal and virtually invisible organizations. In Omaha, these include four soccer leagues. These teams comprise individuals originally from the same state, or even town, who are generally also coworkers in meat-packing plants or construction companies. As discussed in Chapter 3, these leagues have operated as platforms for the organization of workers’ committees in Omaha. From the interviews, we were able to deduce that their transnational nature arose principally from the utilization of family or business ties to supply and train the teams. Pixam Ixim is an organization formed by Guatemalan Mayans in 2007. This organization was born as part of a Catholic prayer group but has evolved into a social civic organization concerned with the formal and cultural education of its members. Its leaders have been faithful attendees at our capacity-building workshops for migrant organizations and they have just received funding from a new philanthropic initiative hosted by the Omaha Community Foundation, the Futuro Latino Fund. All these initiatives must be studied through longitudinal research if we are to arrive at a better historical understanding of the development of a migrant civil society in Nebraska in the 21st century.

In contrast to what occurs in other states, these organizations did not have a political bent, and they focused principally on cultural activities in the destination community. Direct contact with the communities of origin is inevitably reserved for those who are able to travel back and forth. This is the case with Purepechas, a dance group that works with young people from the town of Capacuaro, Michoacán. These characteristics seem to corroborate the thesis of Portes, Escobar, and Arana (2005) that immigrants coming from rural areas who are less educated and face a more hostile reception will also be less likely to construct formal transnational organizations. If they do manage to start an organization, it is less political.

Interviews with Latino leaders allow us to extrapolate additional insights about the complexity of this phenomenon. Asking if their organizations work with some group or community in another country, 40.7 percent (11 of the people interviewed) said they did. However, almost all the work done with these groups is sporadic (for example, assisting consular offices in the task of distributing information, establishing mobile consulates, cultural exchanges, or “Sister Cities” type of work). However, associations like the Purepechas, who at first had indicated that they did not participate in projects in their home communities, later talked at length about the annual trips that one of their members made to communities of origin in order to participate in the *Baile de los Viejitos* (Dance of the Little Old Ones). The interview made it clear that they had invested resources and considerable time in making this trip and had even confronted the possibility of being detained at the border. Some days before this member’s departure, the group had presented the same dance in Omaha. According to the group’s director, “The dances, in both places,

are organized for the purpose of strengthening cultural alliances, community obligations, and family ties, similar to other parts of the United States.” Finally, the directors of Hispanic media organizations are also involved in transnational activities, including sponsoring the training of young soccer players and of teams coming from both places. A long list of activities, discovered by accident or because of the tenacity of the researchers, suggests that this transnational field may be much deeper than what has been captured when using conventional research methodologies.

However, contrary to what we have observed in cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles, in new communities, transnational organizations’ ability to mobilize resources or to attract the interest of governments in the communities of origin is quite limited. To go from being a football team to being something closer to what is the “ideal type” of hometown association can be a difficult task within the social contexts that exist in the new destinations and given the characteristics of most of the migrants who settle there.

This brings us once again to the question posed at the beginning about whether these transnational organizations, focused on the defense of their own cultures of origin, are also vehicles for integration in the destination societies (Portes, Escobar, and Radsord 2005; Bada, Fox, and Selee 2006). What we take away from the interviews and the ongoing work among these organizations is that, in fact, many of them become important and explicit platforms for achieving civic integration. This is the case with the *Asociación de Charros La Amistad* (Friendship Charro Association) mentioned in the rapporteur’s report. The mission of this group is not so different from that of the mission of the old Chicano Awareness Center.

THE FRIENDSHIP CHARRO ASSOCIATION is an organization that is the product of relationships with other hometown associations in Omaha. A group of recently arrived immigrants observed how our children were losing their language, our traditions, and our values. For many immigrants our future has a name, *Our Children*. As a nonprofit organization, the Friendship Charro Association is dedicated to involving the Latino-origin population in living the traditions and values that we have learned from our ancestors, as well as in forming new values and traditions in the United States. Through close attention to the meaning of what our community is and of the identification and construction of grassroots networks of people, it is also our responsibility to contribute to the development of more leaders, to educate ourselves, to be involved in the education of our children, and to participate civically and to work with our daughters and wives.

The absence of major concentrations of migrants coming from a single community, state, or even country, in some cases, can result in the abandonment of an organizational model based on hometown associations, favoring instead multiethnic and multinational federations or alliances. The increase in socioeconomic diversity and in the origins of migrants

that we observed earlier, as well as the relatively better opportunities for social mobility that are found in Omaha, could benefit the construction of a civil community of immigrants in this part of the country. At this moment, we find that it is being constructed, but its profile is yet to be decided.

APPENDIX I

Rapporteur's Report

29

THE OMAHA SITE: *Migrant Civil Society Under Construction*

LATIN AMERICAN MIGRANTS: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN BINATIONAL CONTEXT: OMAHA, NEBRASKA ROUNDTABLE¹

December 16, 2007

Rapporteur: Lourdes Gouveia, Principal Investigator, with Alejandra Toledo and Yuriko Doku,² Office of Latino/Latin American Studies (OLLAS), University of Nebraska at Omaha; and, Sergio Sosa, community organizer, Heartland Workers Center

Note: Appendix II includes detailed charts that break down the verbatim responses of roundtable participants to four main questions on the advances and challenges of Latino immigrant civic engagement in Omaha.

On December 16, 2007, a group of forty Latino/Latina migrant community leaders and members came together in Omaha, NE, for a roundtable to address four basic questions:

1. What are the major challenges and opportunities Latin American migrants

face in the process of integration into local communities?

2. What forms do civic and political participation take among Latin American migrants residing in Omaha?

3. To what extent do these Omaha-based Latin American migrants participate in transnational activities?

4. What kinds of civic and political mobilization strategies have been utilized and have, or have not, been effective in the past?

The overwhelming majority of the roundtable participants were from Mexico (about 80 percent). A small number of participants were from Guatemala, Colombia, and Venezuela, and some U.S.-born second- and third-generation Latinos/as were also present. Exact numbers are not available because several individuals arrived late and failed to register at the door. Participants were drawn from interfaith organizations and from industries such as meatpacking, fast food, construction, and cleaning. An array of community agencies and educational institutions, including OLLAS, were also rep-

resented. Previously conducted interviews with community leaders also yielded a number of roundtable participants.

A participatory, “binational”³ approach was employed from the start. A community organizer advised us during the entire process—from the organization to the writing of this report. The organizer in turn discussed the project and vetted the roundtable questions and the format with some fifty community members and leaders at each stage. Our main goal was to organize a roundtable where the “grassroots”—rather than the “grasstops” (or established agency and community leaders)—were represented. We worked hard to go deeper into the more invisible segments of migrant civil society and to make sure that these voices were heard first and above those of the grasstops. The format agreed upon consisted of one collective, introductory session in which the project was introduced and a general discussion about its objectives and the agenda and rules to conduct it took place. Representatives from the community, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and OLLAS made short presentations during this session. We subsequently broke into three working groups ranging in size from ten to fifteen individuals. We gave individuals the option of whether to join an English- or Spanish-speaking group. Generational lines tended to define who opted for which group. However, some third-generation individuals with somewhat limited Spanish-language skills and some first-generation participants with limited English skills joined group discussions conducted in other than their native language. Despite varying levels of Spanish- and English-language proficiency, bilingualism was universal, and everyone was able to understand both languages while the main sessions were conducted only in Spanish. Each group discussed the four major questions outlined above and

presented their conclusions during the final collective discussion.

The roundtable was perhaps the most important of the three major components of a research project funded by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (WWICS). Lourdes Gouveia and Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado were co-principal investigators for the Omaha-based project. Sergio Sosa, a community organizer, assisted us as the coordinator and was the main facilitator of the roundtable and of the companion interviews. The project is itself part of a larger multi-city study conducted under the coordination of Jonathan Fox of the Department of Latin American and Latino Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz; Xóchitl Bada of the Latin American and Latino Studies Program of the University of Illinois, Chicago; and Andrew Selee, Director, Woodrow Wilson Center Mexico Institute. Kate Brick served as coordinator of the project at the time of the roundtable.

INTRODUCTORY SESSION

The roundtable began with general introductions and a welcome by Sergio Sosa from OTOC (Omaha Together One Community), Lourdes Gouveia from OLLAS, and Diana Rodriguez from the Mexico Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

Lourdes Gouveia spoke briefly about a lack of migrant-led organizations and about opportunities for developing migrant leadership in Omaha and Nebraska as a whole. This view is shared by many in the Latino community and was confirmed in pre-roundtable interviews with community leaders. Worse, we know relatively little about who constitutes or could constitute such leadership, what kinds

of organizations function effectively and what barriers impede sustained immigrant integration, particularly with regard to civic and political engagement. Interviewees concurred with what many of us already knew or suspected. Lack of time, lack of resources, and living in a state that has, of late, joined others in becoming a platform for campaigns of calculated harassment of Latino immigrants and their families in their workplaces, homes, and public spaces are some of the great obstacles to integration. Yet, there are hidden and unexpected opportunities for enhancing mobilization and organizing as well. It is our hope that this collaborative project, which extends beyond the Woodrow Wilson grant period, brings us closer to an understanding of both the barriers to and opportunities for integration and that opens new spaces for dialogue and action.

Diana Rodríguez explained the Mexico Institute initiative under which this project falls. A major purpose of this initiative, which includes similar roundtables in several other cities in the United States, is to understand how the relationship between immigrants and their host states or communities varies across such communities. A major product of this project will be a study that will analyze the factors that appear to affect levels of participation and the mobilization dynamics across the cities included in the study. The study is expected to provide answers to questions such as, “What has worked?” “What has not?” “How do we help each other?” “How do we enhance the power of these communities?”

Sergio Sosa spoke about the need to create spaces where the voices of the immigrant base are listened to and how such voices must be better represented in academic analyses of the

immigrant experience. He then spoke about the fact that we live in a highly fragmented society where “we” (meaning migrants) are not protagonists of anything. According to Sosa, immigrant workers and families are excluded, in the sense of being thrown out of the system—from technology, from political decisions, from being able to propose alternatives about anything in our places of work. Sosa said the only way to end such exclusion is to say, “Enough! *¡Ya basta!*” We are human beings and thus, “[E]ven if I am an immigrant, even if I don’t know how to read and write, even if I only have a second-grade education, even if I don’t speak English well, I am a person, and because I am a person I have value, and because I am a person with value, I am able to express what I carry inside of me, and what I carry inside of me is a piece of our lived history.” Telling our histories as immigrants and as workers—a major objective of the meeting, Sosa said—is the first step toward discovering our common history. In his words, “[E]ngaging in a critique of that history is how we then move toward the creation of a collective imagination and ultimately to the question of whether we came here simply to complain about our situation or to do something about it.” He noted that workers from what was formerly ConAgra knew full well about the long history of exploitation and oppression they have endured. When these workers finally decided to tell their stories (*historias*), they were able to imagine what had been until then unimaginable for many immigrant workers in meatpacking: the creation of a union that could improve their lives, the treatment they received from their supervisors, their salaries.

Participants were divided in three groups at this time in order to consider the four major questions posed above. Instructions

were given as to how the report to the entire group should be organized upon our return to the large room. Each group named one of its members to report back to the entire audience during the final “plenary” session. Appendix II contains verbatim and paraphrased responses by the three groups to the four main questions that guided the roundtable.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS: SUMMARIES FROM DISCUSSION GROUPS.

1) What are the major challenges and opportunities Latin American migrants face in the process of integration into local communities?

Chart I in Appendix II contains a summary of responses to this first question by discussion group members and in the language used by each group. Several insights can be gleaned from the answers contained in the chart and from the context in which they were offered, as obtained from full transcriptions of each group session and the concluding plenary. Although the question asked about opportunities and barriers or challenges, most groups were eager to discuss the barriers and said little or nothing about opportunities for integration and collective action. This is surely meaningful in itself. Predictably, groups spent most of their time on this first question. It provided the first opportunity for an open discussion about all the issues that came to mind when group members considered this broad question.

Consistent with national and local research findings, insufficient knowledge of English and, more broadly speaking, the language barrier between immigrants and nonimmigrants, emerged early, if not first, in all three groups as a major or as the most important

challenge to integration. Low levels of education and an insufficient knowledge of the host country’s laws and system of rights, together with an economic reality that forces most immigrants to worry about bread-and-butter issues (“survival mode”), also were seen as barriers preventing immigrants from acquiring the education and information necessary to achieve desired levels of integration and political participation.

All groups spoke of “fear,” but the causes or consequences of such fear seemed to vary across groups. Group 1, the English-speaking group, related “fear” mainly to the absence of something they defined as lack of “cultural sensitivity” or the stereotyping of immigrants in the media. The implication was that a distorted picture of immigrants and Latinos as a whole created “fear” among the larger non-Latino community which appears uninformed or misinformed about the richness and historical depth of Latino and immigrant cultures and its indigenous past.

In contrast, groups 2 and 3 spoke of fear primarily as a condition that has become prevalent within immigrant communities and can virtually paralyze them in important ways. In group 2, participants mentioned undocumented status as a cause of fear, and the lack of participation in events such as marches as one concrete consequence. In both groups 2 and 3, participants spoke of fear as a reason why immigrant workers often fail to demand labor rights and participate in unions. The cause of such fear was not simply undocumented status (group 2), but the fact that workers often do not know they have rights or exactly what those rights are (group 3). The latter comment underscored a point Sosa made earlier about that moment in which fear may give way to action as workers begin to recognize that their indi-

vidual conditions are but part of a larger and potentially powerful collective history from which they can begin to imagine the possibility of a collective response to collective labor conditions.

All three groups also spoke of the state of fear growing in communities targeted by raids and other immigration enforcement actions, although groups 1 and 3 made that point more explicitly. Racism and discrimination were explicitly discussed as barriers to integration in Spanish-speaking groups 2 and 3, while it appeared to be less of an issue during the discussion of “cultural sensitivity” and media stereotyping in group 1 as mentioned earlier.

Two more points deserve commentary. The first was a discussion that emerged explicitly in group 2 only (although it emerged in question 4 among group 1 participants who have a similar composition), and was raised by second- and third-generation Mexican-American participants. This was the issue of intra-Latino and, more precisely, inter-generational conflict among Latinos. Participants spoke about, sometimes sparred over, the sources of those conflicts and who was to blame, the older Mexican-American community that was intolerant of new arrivals, or the newer arrivals who sometimes failed to do enough to learn the laws or get involved with their children’s education. Turf battles, egos, and competing claims to protagonist statuses and funding sources surfaced as concerns that needed to be addressed if the community was to be more united.

The second point, which also came out at various points during the afternoon, is the concern many expressed about the growing distance between children and their parents and the “loss of values” many see resulting from these children’s rapid acculturation to an

American lifestyle that is not always healthy for families. *For more information, please see Chart I in Appendix II.*

2) What forms do civic and political participation take among Latin American migrants residing in Omaha?

Chart II summarizes the responses to question 2 by each discussion group. Group 1, made up of more established leaders or heads of organizations for the most part, had no difficulty naming a number of civic engagement activities in which they participated. Groups 2 and 3 concentrated mainly on what was not so effective when it came to immigrant organizing. All groups described the spring 2006 marches as a watershed event that revealed the head of the “sleeping giant” (although group 3 discussed it mainly under question 1). Yet, this realization was coupled with a collective lament about the lack of follow-up, or the failure of the marches to capitalize on the energy and cross-generational collaborative work to produce a coherent plan for long-term political participation. The groups found plenty of blame to go around. Some group members argued that documented Latinos do not care about the fate of the undocumented and see no point in participating in efforts to support them. Others spoke more generally about apathy among those youth and adults who suffered less from lack of time than from lack of organization of time, inhibiting their participation. Across the board, and not only during this part of the discussion, participants argued that “temporality” or “perceived temporality” by migrants negatively affects rates of participation and it is one of the most important challenges to overcome. Some cited the media as a vehicle for effective mobili-

zation; others noted the dearth of Spanish-language media or the failure of the media in general to provide sufficient information on those issues and on those candidates whose positions may be critical to Latinos. Group 3 spoke of a lack of hope among the most vulnerable migrants. *Please see charts II and IIa of Appendix II for a detailed compilation of the answers to this question.*

3) To what extent do Omaha-based Latin American migrants participate in transnational activities?

Chart III provides a complementary summary of some of the type of answers given in the original language of the group. The answers reveal the ambiguity of the term “transnationalism” and the disparate ways in which academics and nonacademics use this term. Groups 1 and 2 offered the following as examples of what constitutes participation in country of origin: sporadic participation in actions such as disaster relief; collaboration with equally sporadic consular events such as the Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior (IME)’s binational health week; and cultural or religious events that celebrate country-of-origin traditions. Rarely did they reference simultaneous or concomitant participation in such rituals in their countries of origin. That does not deny the fact that a great number of individuals do travel to their communities to participate in such celebrations as evidenced by the proliferation of bus lines operating out of Omaha and reporting increased demand during such celebrations. Group 3 did not address the question and focused instead, once again, on barriers to integration. The experiences offered by the various groups appear to support the point made earlier, in the introduction, about the

incipient or episodic nature of binational civic engagement. *Please see Chart III in Appendix II for a detailed compilation of answers to this question.*

4) What kinds of civic and political mobilization strategies have been utilized and have, or have not, been effective in the past?

Chart IV offers a summary of themes that emerged during group discussions about question 4. Groups often began by recalling once again the forces that divide the migrant and Latino communities. Group 1 focused first on divisions, whether among Latinos or between Latinos and non-Latinos, emerging from class, race, and nationality differences. The group characterized this division as lack of tolerance or acceptance. Group members particularly emphasized class divisions as the more serious challenge and spoke for a need of what they labeled “class assimilation.” In many ways, the discussion about this latter issue revealed a certain sophistication—even if not necessarily well-articulated—in community analyses about the differences between acculturation and integration that parallels those of academics. While all participants rejected the old assimilation canon, which argued that complete acculturation is necessary for successful integration into the mainstream institutions of their communities (economic, education, political), they all agreed that “integration,” understood as a give and take between old-timers and newcomers, is part and parcel of every immigrant’s master plan. Some of the organizations and activities mentioned in the Conclusions chapter of *The Omaha Site* are viewed as vehicles for such integration. These include cultural organizations such as

the Friendship Charro Association or that of the Purepechas, which, while dedicated to the preservation of their respective heritages, also emphasize learning about the society in which their children are being raised.

The groups suggested a laundry list of initiatives that could be effective for political mobilization in the future. These included promoting the Latino vote, organizing multi-country events, or inviting groups from different nationalities to support a particular national group's projects or struggles, such as the city's efforts to end "Charreadas," the time-honored Mexican rodeo sport. *See the Conclusions chapter for an epilogue of this organization's history.* This call for increased solidarity was evident across the groups and speaks to the high levels of motivation and commitment that represent community strengths mentioned both in the roundtable and in the interviews. Other suggested initiatives included:

- Leadership training (often phrased as a need for more education and learning English in order to be more effective);
- Improved community organizing;
- Access to and/or the generation of more media sources

Please see Chart IV for a detailed compilation of responses.

CONCLUDING SESSION AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

Many of the insights emerging from the final plenary, where each group presented its answers to the four questions, were included in the last section of this report. At this point we

wish to offer some brief final reflections about the issues discussed in the final session.

It is clear that the marches constituted a watershed moment in the local political landscape engaging immigrants and Latinos in common causes and collective strategies to address immigrant or civil society issues in general. In the introduction we raised the question of whether the marches had produced any new forms of engagement and stronger collective organizations. There was a healthy discussion during the concluding session about how to move forward, which seemed to suggest that there were, in fact, intangible benefits that only now we may begin to capture. In all groups, there was a newly gained commitment to promote the Latino vote as the clear next step, an apparent tribute to the chant, "*Hoy marchamos; mañana votamos.*" Indeed, several important voter mobilization campaigns, bringing together some of the organizations that collaborated during the marches (including OLLAS), are underway.

The other issue has to do with the extent to which migrant participation in civil society is as minimal as many participants seemed to believe it is. It may be that there is a tendency to undervalue certain forms of participation. Sergio Sosa, the roundtable facilitator, spoke to this latter issue by noting that we all participate, whether in marches, or when working on legislation to provide driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants, or in get out-the-vote campaigns. It is also not true, in his view, what some participants said during the group discussions about never having participated in their communities before they came to Omaha. He pointed out how they failed to take note of the many ways in which they did so, and much of that had to do with participation in local churches and schools. Similar forms of participation are going on here.

When discussing strategies to raise levels of civic engagement and political participation, all groups showed a profound preoccupation with the low levels of education that characterize a large portion of the migrant population and the need to make sure that their children do better in school. Lack of information and dissatisfaction with those media outlets that are considered incapable of imparting such information in ways that complement, or make up for, low levels of formal education were companion themes and spoke to the broader notion of capacity-building.

Perhaps it is important to end with a final reflection as to what was not discussed or what could have been discussed in greater depth. Among such issues are those related specifically to gender. We heard how racial and class differences affect migrant organizing. We learned little about how gender may also do so—either positively or negatively. We complained about the lack of youth participation and alluded to the need that they do better in school. Yet we were unable to explore the reasons for this. There was minimal youth representation at the roundtable. We also said relatively little about the role that sending states or consular offices play—or should play—in their relationship with migrant organizations and with sending and receiving communities.

Despite these omissions and the short time we had to discuss these issues, participants expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to discuss them openly. There was a firm commitment made to continue the discussions after the report was produced and to continue

the search for the best strategies for migrant integration and civic engagement in Omaha and in Nebraska as a whole.

NOTES

- 1 While major funding for the project was provided by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, funding from the Ford Foundation and OLLAS' institutional grant from the U.S. Department of Education allowed us to broaden the scope of the project and thus achieve a richer set of interview responses.
- 2 We owe a deep appreciation to the workers, students, community leaders, and agency directors who took time from their eternally packed schedules to tell their stories and discuss their ideas for a more integrated and organized migrant and Latino community during their only day of rest, Sunday. We wish to acknowledge Sergio Sosa for his comments to earlier drafts of this report and for providing major assistance with the organization of the Omaha roundtable. Thanks to Yesenia Nuñez (OLLAS work-study) and Maria Olvera (OLLAS volunteer) for their help in organizing and assisting us during the Omaha roundtable. Thanks also to Rebecca Valdez for allowing us to use the facilities of the Latino Center of the Midlands and for participating in the roundtable. Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado, co-principal investigator for this project, facilitated one of the roundtable group discussions and participated in various phases of this project.
- 3 Jonathan Fox (2006), defines a binational approach as one which takes into account migrants' "distinctive perspectives, priorities and organizing repertoires."

APPENDIX II

Charts and Results from the Roundtable, "Latin American Migrants: Civic and Political Participation in Binational Context," Omaha, NE, December 16, 2007

CHART I. WHAT ARE THE MAJOR CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES LATIN AMERICAN MIGRANTS FACE IN THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATION INTO LOCAL COMMUNITIES?

Latin American Migrants: Civic and Political Participation in Binational Context in Omaha, NE, December 16, 2007.

Challenges and Opportunities	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
1. LANGUAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language, communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language, accent "Children and young people feel isolated; they don't have the support of their parents because they don't speak the language, and they lose interest in school." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaking English "There's not enough news in English."
2. FEAR/STATE CLIMATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Lack of cultural sensitivity, media portrayal" Fear environment and uncertainty, after the raids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fear of labor organizing in the meatpacking plants Legal status concerns "keep people from joining unions in the meatpacking plants." "Nebraska is very Republican, conservative, and controlled by the 'white man.'" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fear in the workplace Insecurity in the workplace Undocumented people are afraid of declaring their rights, or they are not aware of the rights they have.
3. EDUCATIONAL AND CIVIC INTEGRATION DEFICIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low education, low cultural levels, problems with adapting to U.S. society Differences between children of immigrants and their parents. And differences between Chicanos and immigrants. Lack of knowledge of U.S. laws 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of education Lack of participation in children's education Less time devoted to studying
4. ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The priority is on eating." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low salaries; overworked workers with more than two jobs
5. RACISM/ DISCRIMINATION		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Racism and discrimination Discrimination in the bureaucracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Racism and discrimination
6. CONFLICTS AMONG LATINOS/ OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOLIDARITY		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Differences and conflict between immigrants and other Latinos ... there should be union among us." The need to find a bridge to connect generations of immigrants and Chicanos Greater participation on the part of Chicanos is necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of values; disconnect from the family structure

CHART II. WHAT FORMS DO CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION TAKE AMONG LATIN AMERICAN MIGRANTS RESIDING IN OMAHA?

Latin American Migrants: Civic and Political Participation in Binational Context in Omaha, Nebraska. December 16, 2007.

Form of Participation/ Mobilization	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
1. PUBLIC MOBILIZATIONS (MARCHES) (LIMITS/ OPPORTUNITIES)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marches: Sleeping Giant Initiative. • Communication: the media, "there was a lot on the radio." • "Intergenerational integration. No follow-up." • Last year only (marches, voter registration, no follow-up, raids). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marches: No action, follow-up plan, or voter registration campaigns • Insufficient time to plan community projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Right now, since the marches are finished with, a lot of people have gotten charged up ... we have to vote."
2. ELECTORAL (LIMITS/ OPPORTUNITIES)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic participation • Latino voting campaigns for those who can become citizens and who can support immigrants. • Civic engagement by young people is lacking. There is little interest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Latino vote is missing. • Lack of information and interest • Immigration status in order to vote • Lack of political interest by young people • Lack of communication media for Spanish-speaking people • There is a lack of civic engagement because of the lack of information and because of political apathy. "There is no hope." "Lack of confidence in the bad system from their countries of origin." • Lack of time.
3. LABOR AND CIVIL RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer vigil against police brutality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve oneself more in organizing the meatpackers and join the union. 	
4. PROMOTE CULTURAL HERITAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ticota, indigenous collection of theater and arts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve oneself more in organizing the meatpackers and join the union. 	
5. LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation focusing on education (Dream Act, Access to College, LB239). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is necessary to support organizations, such as the <i>charros</i> of Nebraska 	

CHART IIA. OBSTACLES TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT MENTIONED BY PARTICIPANTS IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION #2

1. OBSTACLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Economy fell (foreclosures, deportations); no spending based on fear (raids)• Documented Latinos do not care about undocumented issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of involvement because people are here only temporarily and do not perceive the benefit of political participation• Education and health plans are needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transience. Many immigrants think that their sojourn is temporary, leading them not to become politically involved.
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CHART III. TO WHAT EXTENT DO OMAHA-BASED LATIN AMERICAN MIGRANTS PARTICIPATE IN TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVITIES?

Latin American Migrants: Civic and Political Participation in Binational Context in Omaha, NE. December 16, 2007.

Type of Transnational Participation	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
1. PARTICIPATION IN CONSULAR EVENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host mobile consulate • Binational health week with Mexican consulate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participated in <i>Informational Days</i> (Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, Casa de Cultura, León, Guanajuato, México) 	
2. MAINTAIN HOME-COUNTRY CULTURAL HERITAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining connection cultural links • Aztec dance on December 12 for Our Lady of Guadalupe Church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite other communities to participate in our festivities; for example, communities of Colombians, Guatemalans, and Mexicans. • “We have a Mexican who comes every year and demonstrates the Mexican culture in the public schools of the city.” 	
3. MAKE COMMON CAUSE BETWEEN “LATINO” AND “STRUGGLES”		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite other Latinos to join in the struggle with us. • Build common cause among Latino groups regardless of national origin. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of information
4. BARRIERS TO INTEGRATION			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little participation in their countries of origin. “We did not participate in anything.” Or participated only in youth groups. • Immigration status • Absence of effective Spanish-language media • How can we become better informed? • Lack of interest on the part of young people • Absence of interest on the part of parents in their children’s schoolwork

CHART IV. WHAT KINDS OF CIVIC AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION STRATEGIES HAVE BEEN UTILIZED AND WHICH HAVE OR HAVE NOT BEEN EFFECTIVE IN THE PAST?

Strategies	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
<p>1. PROMOTE CITIZENSHIP, CONSOLIDATE LEADERSHIP, AND STRENGTHEN MIGRANT-BASED ORGANIZATIONS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote citizenship and the Latino vote 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unions, forging of deep internal leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Motivate each other; motivate one another collectively.” “Organization is necessary.”
<p>2. PROMOTE EDUCATION AND DEMAND QUALITY INFORMATION</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “We have to educate ourselves.” “We need more educational programs.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in the family, neighborhood, and schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The need to learn English “Taking time to participate in the education of our children” “Inform ourselves, to find information” “More efficient means of communication”
<p>3. ADDRESS FORCES THAT DIVIDE US AND ENHANCE THOSE FORCES THAT UNITE US</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “We almost have a lack of tolerance for each other.” “We’ve assumed all those tenets of racism and internalized them, and we then exercise them upon each other.” “Yeah, but it’s not even tolerance; tolerance is what you put with.” “It’s a lack of acceptance.” “Venezuelans, Colombians, or Cubans.” (National-origin distinctions no longer matter.) “In the immigration debate they are painting us with the same brush.” No dialogue as long as there are “haves” and “have-nots” “Community autonomy” or “cultural autonomy” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The need to invite Latino communities to participate in festivities sponsored by national-origin groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Solidarity among everyone”

APPENDIX III

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