

# Immigrant or Latino? Multiethnic Mobilization and Collective Identity in the Immigrant Rights Movement

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Photo by Tyler Hicks, *New York Times*, 11 April 2006.

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April 30, 2007

For Eduardo  
who continues to inspire me  
and kept me laughing all year

## **Abstract**

Immigrant rights protests drew millions of people into the streets during the spring of 2006. However, the mobilized immigrants had a very particular face in the national debate. 'Immigrant' came to signify Latino. This project explores collective identity formation within the immigrant rights movement through the experiences of the South Asian community. What was the extent of South Asian immigrant participation in New York and the Twin Cities mobilizations? How does issue framing affect prospects for multi-racial mobilization? I use semi-structured interviews with organizers to investigate collective identity formation and to understand how organizations frame the issues. Greater understanding of the process of identity construction and identity transformation for broader political mobilization are crucial for today's increasingly pluralistic society.

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## Acknowledgements

This thesis owes its life to many people. For their intellectual help at some point in this process, whether talking about methods, reading the paper, offering feedback, or providing an uplifting remark when needed: Dianna Shandy, Paul Dosh, Adrienne Christensen, Paru Shah, Dan Trudeau, and the other Political Science Department faculty. David Blaney deserves a special (and gigantic) thank you. How many professors would agree to advise an honor's thesis while on sabbatical? Over the last four years, you have challenged my understanding of development, pushed me to think about poverty from many different angles, and opened the doors to political economy. Thank you for your intellectual guidance, personal support, and high standards. You have successfully stretched my brain. Hopefully the next time we meet, we will both be wandering around India, Tanzania, or somewhere farther afield.

To MIRAC, AFFIRM, and all of the organizers I spoke with in New York and Minnesota, thank you for providing inspiration and hope. I will not list your names, but you know who you are. The work you do is vitally important and you are not recognized nearly enough. Although I have never met you, Monisha Das Gupta, I had tingles when I read your book and dissertation. Your work asked me to continue questioning my own and provided a model for undertaking engaged research.

Over the last year, my friends in the Political Science Colloquium kept me motivated and working. We're done! Wow. Ihotu, thank you for your thoughtful presence. I have enjoyed our growing friendship and conversation. Thank you for distracting me when I needed it! Elianne, thanks for being on the same page and for lots of side-whispering about identity during class. Molly – library explorer – you have been a wonderful support over the last four years. I promise I will let you drag me away from the books more often next year.

Jess – we're both going to graduate this year! Thanks for calling long distance and for making me figure out how to phone over the computer. Dad, thank you for always keeping me supplied with books and for not shutting the light off on me when I should have been sleeping rather than reading (and for providing glasses when my eyes started getting bad). Mom, you are ultimately responsible for this paper. Thank you for inspiring a deep sense of questioning within Jess and I, for your unyielding support, for your sometimes embarrassing daughter-advocacy, and for your sense of adventure.

Finally, Eduardo, this paper would not have had any inspiration or come to fruition without you. Thank you for cooking dinner when I hadn't eaten properly, for talking until 3am about organizing, for making me laugh, and for more things and ways than I can ever thank you for. I am still not sure how this all started, but the last three years have been wonderful.

## Foreword

In the spring of 2006, I sat at a computer half-way around the world in Rajasthan, India, reading an article and looking at pictures of recent immigrant rights marches in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Minneapolis-St. Paul. A sea of people waving Mexican and American flags filled the picture. I had never seen marches so big in the twenty-two years of my life. Forty-thousand in St. Paul, where I normally attend college, was unheard of. That number would be equivalent to every single person in my hometown area turning out for a march – and then adding another ten thousand people. I longed to be home where friends were obtaining permits, printing flyers, and working to turn people out.

However, as I continued to look at the pictures from March 25<sup>th</sup>, to April 9<sup>th</sup> /10<sup>th</sup>, to May 1<sup>st</sup>, I realized that certain faces were missing. Latinos are certainly not the only immigrants in the United States. Where were the Asians? The African immigrants?

Once I returned in the Fall, I began to hear comments like “well, when we’re talking about immigration and the immigration problem, we’re really talking about Mexico” at talks on immigration. But, were we really talking just about Mexico? And, was immigration even just a ‘Mexican’ problem? Was it even a problem? As University of Minnesota historian Donna Gabbacia pointed out, why is it considered abnormal to migrate? How did it become ‘normal’ to stay in one place?

I started from these questions, but I also wanted to better understand this movement that was turning millions of people out into the streets. I have been involved in campus organizing and activism during college, but this was an issue that seemed more real and immediate than the longer-term projects oriented towards incremental change that we worked on on-campus. This research coincided with my own point of weariness with the

organizing I had been involved in. I longed to be involved in something that spoke to *all* of the different parts of me. On campus, I often feel forced to choose between organizing with progressive political action groups or racially/regionally based cultural groups that seemed to spend less time organizing.

As a multiracial Japanese-Pennsylvania Dutch (German) American who grew up in a small town, I routinely find myself in a bridging or choosing position. Usually, I end up choosing and only doing a little bridging because I can't find an organization that speaks to all the various pieces. I sometimes wonder if there is a group out there for me, or if I will always have to be choosing or put in the highly energy-consuming position of bridging. Friends who understand this challenge most acutely are, more often than not, other racially mixed young people or international students walking the borders between cultures and nations, no longer quite sure where they belong.

My own history is one of two intersecting stories. On my mother's side, I am fourth generation Japanese American, or *happa yonsei*. On my father's, my sister and I are tenth generation Pennsylvanian Hanoverians. The only other mixed kids I met were my sister and cousins and we rarely talked about our race or identity until I was sixteen. From our experiences, it was hard to tell if what we were experiencing – being asked if we were exchange students at school, people assuming that we spoke Chinese, feeling very in-between and neither fully part of Hanover or part of an Asian American community – was unique to our family and our individual selves or if other people also dealt with this. I have been asked if I was Latina, Native-American, and Chinese. I don't know that my sister or I ever felt like we experienced something we could label outright discrimination, but we had a strong sense of feeling different. We just were not sure where it came from.



I think the draw to study immigrants and identity has been a way for me to sort out my own place and my own in-betweenness. The particular in-betweenness that immigrants may experience is different than mine, but there are elements of similarity. The story of the vilified immigrant is far from new. In my own family, my grandparents were rounded up, shipped half way across the country, and stored in internment camps for two years when they were my age because our government questioned their loyalty based on nothing more than their ethnic roots. For my generation, vilified immigrant took a different form. When September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and subsequent backlash happened, I was attending an international school in New Mexico. I watched as our Palestinian economics teacher shaved his beard in an attempt to look less 'Muslim.' An Egyptian friend returning from winter break that year was detained for 24 hours in New York. A year later while we were in our first year of college, there was indignation about male friends from Muslim countries having to get finger-printed through the SEVIS system, but the indignation did not go much beyond our conversations over the web. The arguments our government used to justify racially profiling Muslim and South Asians were frightfully similar to those that had been used against my grandparents a generation before. In 2007, Latinos are being subjected to the same villainization that was used to justify the exclusion of my great-grandparents a century ago. The language of post-9/11 anti-terrorism and border security is being unified to marginalize both Latinos and Muslims and South Asians. Yet, how many Japanese Americans have openly supported the struggles of today's vilified immigrants? How many South Asian or Muslims targeted by the anti-terrorism laws (many of whom are also immigrants) turned out for the immigrant rights marches? Why is it so hard for us to come together and is there any place that those of us who are 'in-between' will ever have a home?

While trying to answer some of these questions through my research, I have also struggled with my role as a scholar during the last few months. I have had the privilege of talking with numerous organizers in New York and the Twin Cities and been inspired by the work that they do. Most of them have an analysis as astute, or even more so, as any scholar, although less couched in academically-cited theory. What is the role of the scholarly project? Additionally, in this instance, I am an activist, yet I am also a scholar. How do I balance these two roles? How do I maintain a commitment to a process of rigorous evaluation without letting the idealistic side of me run away with the scholarly part? In the end, as I stayed up late one night organizing the bibliography, I realized that these are not necessarily two opposing roles. I have been given a gift over the last year to think, to read an enormous number of articles, to engage with organizers in two cities, and to reflect. Full-time organizers barely have time to respond to e-mail. Theory informs practice and action re-informs theory. Sometimes balancing the two can be difficult. My hope is that this document begins a larger discussion about the relationship between the two through the experiences of the immigrant rights movement to build a stronger, more effective social justice movement.

## Chapter 1: **Introduction**

During the spring of 2006, protests from New York to Chicago to Los Angeles to small towns in between drew millions of people supporting immigrant rights into the streets. The first march took place in Washington, DC on March 7<sup>th</sup> and gathered between 20,000 and 40,000 people (Wang and Winn 2006). Three days later, on March 10<sup>th</sup>, it was followed by a march in Chicago that gathered between 100,000 and 300,000 people rallying to the cry of “*El Gigante Despierta*” (“The Giant Wakes”) (Wang and Winn 2006, Bernstein 2006). While those first marches in Chicago, Washington, D.C. and other places may have registered some opposition to HR 4437, the Los Angeles march was a national turning point. In Los Angeles, organizers expected 20,000 people for the *Gran Marcha* (The Grand March) on March 25<sup>th</sup> (Watanabe and Becerra 2006). Instead, over 500,000 (police estimated) to over a million (organizer estimated) immigrants and allies took to the streets, splashing photos on papers around the country of hundreds of thousands of protesters loudly claiming their rights as immigrants while waving Mexican and American flags (Wang and Winn 2006, Bernstein 2006). The march spurred other cities into action, laying the example for a “National Day of Action” on April 10<sup>th</sup> that spurred more than 170 events (Wang and Winn 2006); the subsequent, although hotly debated, *El Día Sin Inmigrante* (the Day Without an Immigrant) boycott on May 1st; and national actions on Labor Day in September. The ability to emerge from all over the country and turn out masses of people time and time again lent the immigrant rights marches in the spring of 2006 much of their power. For many young people, the marches were the largest protest action they had seen in their lives.

Others may not have experienced such mass demonstrations since the Vietnam War over three decades ago. Immigration was the hotly debated topic of the spring and summer.

Primarily, marchers were responding to the passage of H.R. 4437 in mid-December 2005. H.R. 4437 did not become law, but if it had, the law would have turned undocumented immigrants into felons and severely penalized anyone providing assistance to them. The legislation would have also largely expanded the number of offenses resulting in deportation for a non-citizen, legalized indefinite detention, and eliminated the diversity visa lottery.<sup>1</sup> The bill and subsequent mobilizations re-politicized immigration and brought it to the forefront of the national agenda. The millions of marchers galvanized to send a message that H.R. 4437 had gone too far. Unions, churches, and the ethnic media played a major part in the mobilizations.

However, the mobilized immigrants had a very particular face in the national discussion. The 2006 marches did not attract all immigrants; they attracted Latino immigrants. Anyone watching the news or reading the paper last spring would be familiar with images featuring brown-skinned immigrants waving Mexican and American flags and shouting “*Si se puede.*” Nationally, the marches attracted very few non-Latino immigrants, even though H.R. 4437 and Comprehensive Immigration Reform would have had profound effects on the lives of all immigrants.

The national media portrayed, the immigrant rights movement as a movement for Latino rights. However, this research asks: What factors affected who was mobilized by the Spring 2006 immigrant rights actions? Why didn’t the immigrant rights movement resonate with all immigrants? Finally, what are the possibilities for a broader multiethnic/multiracial immigrant rights movement? This paper examines these research questions by focusing on

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<sup>1</sup> The diversity visa program is a drawing for 50,000 permanent resident visas from countries with low immigration rates to the United States.

another group that made headlines for the nativist backlash leveled against them beginning in 2001— South Asian immigrants.<sup>2</sup>

In theory, South Asians might have been expected to take a large and active role in the immigrant right movement. The September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks sparked new worries over border control and immigration. Over a thousand immigrants, primarily South Asian and Arab immigrant males, were rounded up and detained for suspicion of terrorism in the weeks following 9/11. In some areas, whole neighborhoods were emptied out. Sikh men across the country were often the targets of frustration and racial slurs because others assumed their turbans indicated association with Osama bin Laden. Since then, proponents of stricter border control often couch their arguments in anti-terrorism language. Even the title of H.R. 4437 – the Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act – makes this connection. Fear is a powerful tactic. Bills are passed more easily if immigrants can be tied to rising crime rates, terrorist attacks, and draining public funds. In late 2003, the New York Post reported that 60 percent of Americans thought that immigration levels were a threat to the United States (Post Wire 2003).

Some argue that Latinos mobilized because H.R. 4437 targeted undocumented immigrants, Latinos make up the largest group of undocumented immigrants, and therefore, they were most affected. While Mexicans do indeed make up the majority of undocumented migration and Latin Americans make up more than half of the U.S. foreign-born population (Larsen 2004), Asians are not an insignificant proportion. Asians represent an estimated 13 percent of the undocumented population (Passel 2006) and about 25 percent of the foreign-

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<sup>2</sup> The terms “Latino” and “South Asian” are slippery and their use entails problems because they are themselves multiethnic and multiracial. I will return to this issue at the end of the chapter.

born population overall<sup>3</sup> (Larsen 2004). However, Asian and other non-Latino groups were largely absent from the immigrant rights movement mobilizations in the spring of 2006.

The immigrant rights movement failed to resonate with non-Latino groups on a national scale. The newspapers showed a lack of collective identification. Discussing inter-immigrant divisions around the May 1<sup>st</sup> Immigrant Rights actions, the New York Times observed:

The divide was visible in New York City, where immigrants from different countries lived side by side. In Ditmas Park, the door to La Nueva Union, a Mexican Bakery, was locked, while a nearby film developing shop, owned by a Pakistani man, remained open. (O'Donnell 2006)

The article continued:

In the Sunset Park neighborhood of Brooklyn, which is home to large numbers of Hispanics and Asians, about 3,000 people, mostly Hispanic, turned out for a midday rally, although Asian-owned businesses largely remained open. That was to be expected said Artemio Guerra, a rally organizer, who said legislation pending before Congress that would overhaul immigration law was a “racial attack on Hispanics.” (O'Donnell 2006)

One could argue that non-Latino immigrants did not have a visible presence at the rallies simply because their numbers are far fewer. While this may hold true in some areas, New York has one of the most diverse immigrant populations in the country. Latinos make up only about a third of New York's foreign-born.

Non-Latino communities did not identify with the immigrant rights movement for complex and multi-faceted reasons. In the previous quote, Artemio Guerra indicates that people understood the legislation as a targeted racial attack. Since Latinos were the implicit targets of the attacks, Latinos responded and their Asian neighbors did not. Different

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<sup>3</sup> This foreign-born figure is determined by the U.S. Census, which undercounts the undocumented population.

economic status may also account for some of the reason. Most South Asian immigrants enter the U.S. through a very different immigration processes than Latinos. Asian Indians outperform any other ethnic or racial group in terms of educational or economic achievement as a group (Le 2007). In part, this high achievement can be tied to a selection bias within the immigration process itself. Many Asian Indian immigrants enter the U.S. on H1-B visas for highly skilled immigrants. Social movement organization structure may also affect mobilization. Movements build on existing networks of organizations. Milkman (2006) argues the importance of the labor movement, particularly the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), for the huge spring turnouts. Race may also play an important role in the movement's identity formation.

In a more subtle perversion of race, South Asian and Latino immigrant communities are subject to the dominant racializations of their communities. They may separate themselves from each other, consciously or unconsciously, to disassociate themselves from the others' negative stereotype. This process of racialization was one of the most significant factors affecting mobilization in the immigrant rights movement. Juan, a day laborer from El Salvador commented in response to immigration crackdowns "Here there are no Iraqis, no Muslims....We are Central Americans and Mexicans. Yet, we are the ones suffering the consequences here" (Swarns 2003). Juan's comment above implies that his community is not Muslim and therefore they, as Latinos, should not be suffering. He does not challenge the idea that *Muslims* as a group should be held accountable. Similarly, South Asian immigrants may distance themselves as "legal" immigrants versus undocumented Latino immigrants. Class, race, legal status, and religion are all bound up within a racialization of immigrants that defines immigrants as undocumented, brown-skinned, low-wage Latino laborers. Ultimately, the immigrant rights mobilizations attracted very few non-Latino

immigrants because the movement was not effective in challenging that racialization. The story was about Latino immigrants, so Latinos turned out at the marches.

This lack of collective identification impedes joint political mobilization and the creation of a broader immigrant rights movement. Understanding how political identities are forged and what causes groups to work together or fight against one another is crucially important for today's world, far beyond immigration. Current Census projections estimate that by 2050, Hispanics will compose a quarter of the U.S. population, blacks 15 percent, and Asians 8 percent (U.S. Census 2004). The white, non-Hispanic population is expected to make up just half of the overall population.<sup>4</sup> Changes in immigration law spurred much of this demographic change. The passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act replaced an immigration system based on national origins with one that prioritized family reunification. Under this system, U.S. citizens and permanent residents could sponsor family members. Immigration from Asia and Latin America has transformed the face of America over the last half century. By 2050, whites will no longer be the majority.

In the past year, the immigrant rights movement has been widely written about. However, most of the research was devoted to immediately pressing questions able to be analyzed in a shorter time frame, such as tactical evaluations of the “Day Without an Immigrant” or the role that Los Angeles DJs played in mobilizing marchers. While the Social Science Research Council published numerous articles online over the summer of 2006, few peer-reviewed articles have been published. Funders, such as the Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees, commissioned studies but these articles focused more on general information gathering for deciding where to direct resources. This project applies social movement concepts such as collective identity, framing, and resource

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<sup>4</sup> The Census does not consider Hispanic a race. Hispanics may identify as any race although in popular conversation Hispanics, or Latinos, are often portrayed as a separate racial group.



mobilization to the immigrant rights movement to better understand why certain groups of people were mobilized and not others. This specific case of the immigrant rights movement can help theorists better understand the process of identity formation. Whether minority groups can transcend racial, ethnic, class, and religious lines to work together, or whether they will compete will have profound affects on the United States in the coming years.

### **Case Studies**

The following chapters use newspaper articles, rally flyers, and interviews with immigrant rights organizers to build case studies of New York and Minneapolis/St. Paul (The Twin Cities), Minnesota. Both New York and the Twin Cities are multi-ethnic urban areas in which the immigrant rights movement has been strong. However, they provide different contexts to compare collective identify formation within the movement. New York City has historically attracted a highly diverse immigrant population while the Twin Cities are a relatively newer immigration settlement site. Between 1990 and 2000, the foreign-born population grew 57%, from 19.8 million to 31.1 million (Lyman 2006).

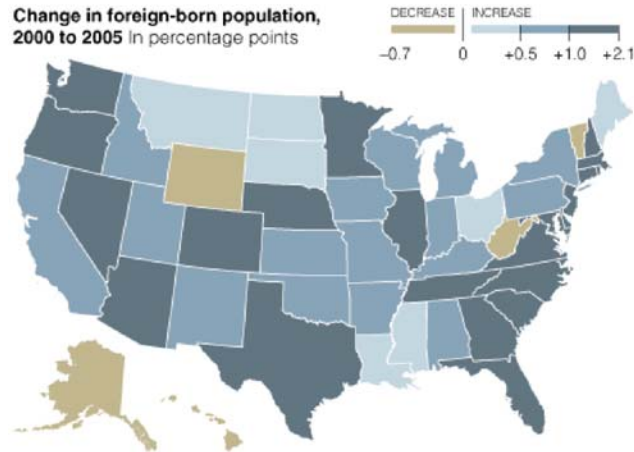
While the 2006 American Community Survey released by the Census showed that the largest numbers of immigrants continue to live in California, New York , Texas, Florida, New Jersey, and Illinois, immigrants are increasingly moving into places previously unaccustomed to large populations of Latino or Asian immigrants. For example, a study by Jeffrey Passel at the Pew Hispanic Center showed that although the majority, 58 percent, continue to move to the five historical gateway states, 24 percent of immigrants move to 9 second-tier states, and 11 percent settle in the 11 third-tier states, including Minnesota (Lyman 2006). Whether undocumented or legal migration, Mexicans still account for the

vast majority of the immigrant population, but other countries are quickly rising (see Figure 1).

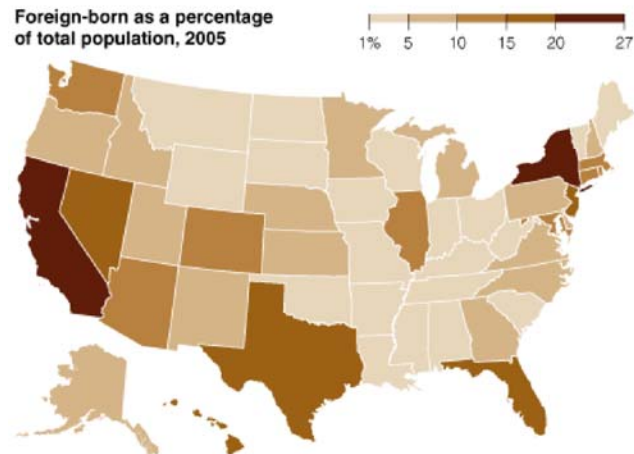
South Asians represent a relatively new immigrant group in the United States, but their numbers are growing quickly. India alone accounts for the fourth highest number of foreign-born populations in the United States, as Figure 1 shows. In 1965, approximately 7,000 Indian immigrants resided in the United States. By 1980, that number had grown to more than 387,000, by 1998 the population was 815,000, and today, more than 1.7 million Indians and Indian Americans live in the United States according to the latest Census (Kamat et al. 2004). While many South Asian immigrants come to the U.S. on H-1B visas for highly skilled workers, this is decreasingly less true of the South Asian population in New York. New York City has a higher amount of socioeconomic diversity among South Asian immigrants (Khandelwal 2002). For example, South Asian immigrants run garment businesses, man newsstands, and drive taxi cabs in high numbers. Approximately fifty-eight percent of taxi cab drivers surveyed in 2003 were from South Asia (Community Development Project 2003). New York and Minnesota as cases offer two contrasting contexts to explore differing racial, economic, structural, and demographic characteristics affecting collective identity formation.

## The Foreign-Born Population

Change in foreign-born population,  
2000 to 2005 in percentage points



Foreign-born as a percentage  
of total population, 2005



Top Countries of Birth	2000	2005	Percent Change
Mexico	9,092,288	10,969,941	+20.7%
China	2,006,223	1,761,360	-12.2
Philippines	1,358,228	1,593,421	+17.3
India	1,017,320	1,422,492	+39.8
Vietnam	984,584	1,066,085	+8.3
El Salvador	810,814	987,499	+21.8
Korea	865,102	982,818	+13.6
Cuba	855,704	895,861	+4.7
Canada	802,122	819,280	+2.1
Dominican Republic	676,615	700,845	+3.6
United Kingdom	666,108	673,176	+1.0
Guatemala	476,510	625,652	+31.3
Germany	692,283	624,187	-9.8
Jamaica	543,980	592,125	+8.9
Colombia	507,955	556,407	+9.5
Haiti	418,417	476,725	+13.9
Poland	465,260	460,342	-1.1
Italy	468,456	392,887	-16.1
Honduras	278,894	378,605	+35.8
Peru	272,904	371,716	+36.2

Sources: Census Bureau; Queens College Department of Sociology

The New York Times

**Figure 1. Foreign Born Population.**  
Reprinted from Lyman (2006).

## *New York*

New York has been a traditional site for immigrant settlement since it was founded. As noted earlier, the immigrant population is very different in New York than most of the rest of the country. Of the eight million people living in New York City, some 36 percent are foreign-born and nearly half (47.6 percent) speak a language other than English at home according to the 2000 census (New York City 2004). New York's immigrant population is highly diverse, unlike the rest of the country, as figure 2 illustrates. No single racial or ethnic group accounts for much more than a third of the foreign-born population (Latinos account for 32 percent of the foreign-born) and the Caribbean, Asia, and Europe each account for about 20 percent of the remaining foreign-born.

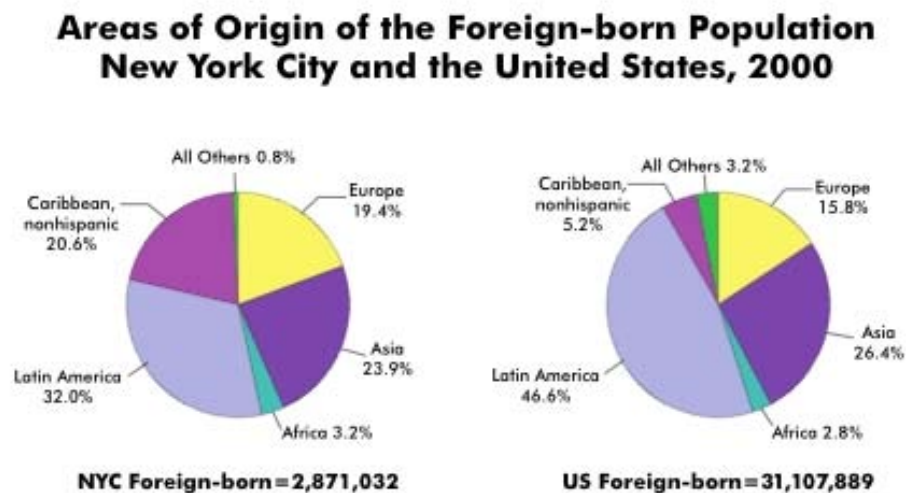
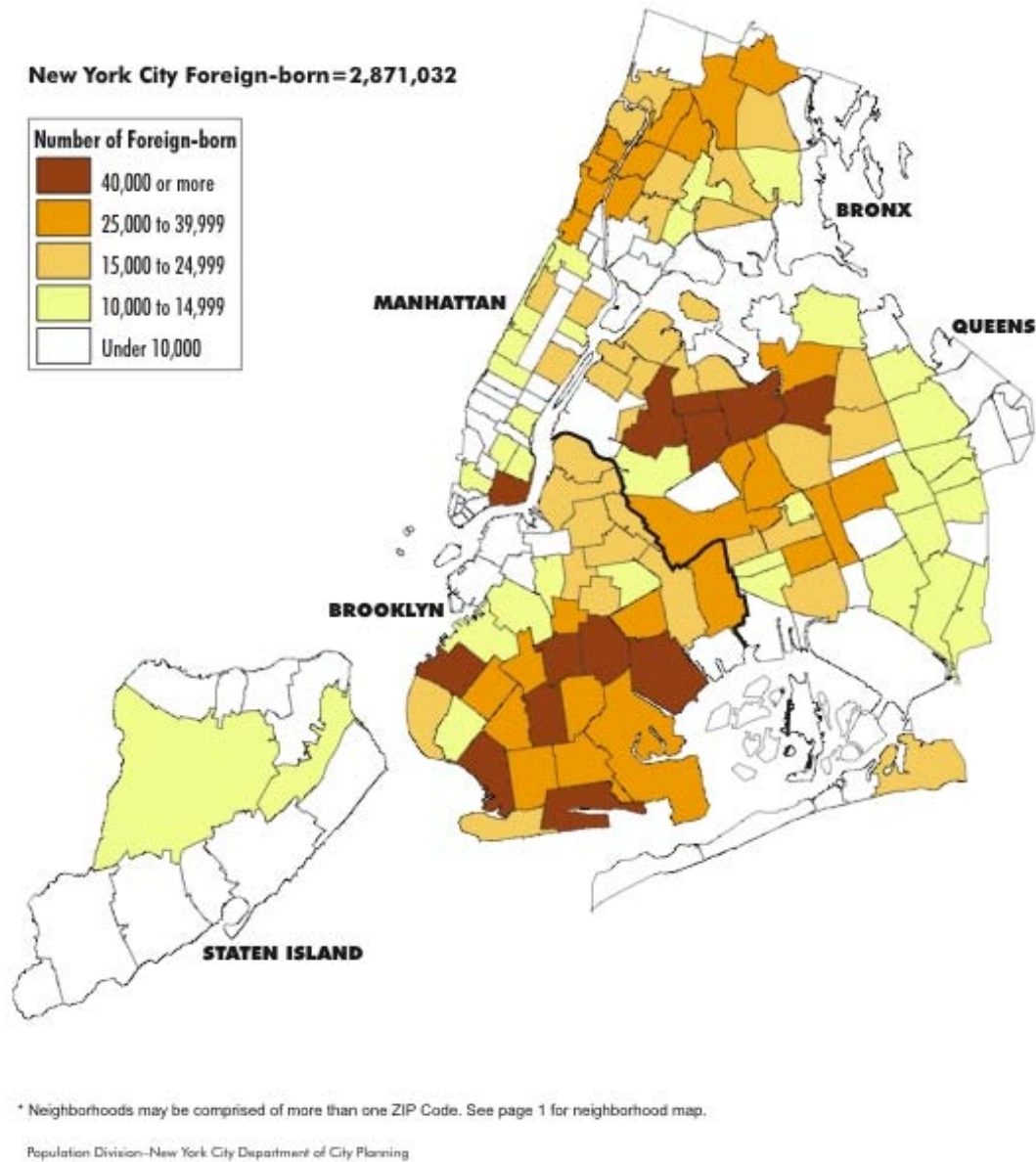


Figure 2. Area of Origin of the Foreign-born Population in New York City and the United States, 2000. Reprinted from New York City (2004).

Within New York City, the foreign-born live largely outside of Manhattan. Figure 3 shows the number of foreign-born living in New York by zip code. Clearly, Queens and Brooklyn have the highest populations of immigrants.



**Figure 3. New York Foreign-born population by zip code.  
Reprinted from New York City (2004).**

Figure 4 maps the largest immigrant neighborhoods in the city. Immigrant groups with at least 10,000 residents in that neighborhood are typed in bold and italicized if they have at

least 7,500 residents. Within each neighborhood, certain foreign-born groups often dominate numerically, although New York City neighborhoods also have a great deal of diversity within them. For example, the Queens neighborhood of Flushing has large populations of Koreans, Indians, and Chinese.

**Top Immigrant Neighborhoods with the Largest Foreign-born Groups  
New York City, 2000**



Neighborhoods with over 20,000 foreign-born residents were examined and the following rule of thumb was generally used: A foreign-born group was represented in **bold type** if it had at least 10,000 residents in a neighborhood and was *italicized* if it had at least 7,500 residents. In Staten Island, the largest immigrant group in the northern and southern sections of the borough were shown.

Population Division—New York City Department of City Planning

**Figure 4. Top Immigrant Neighborhoods with the Largest Foreign-born Groups, 2000. Reprinted from New York City (2004).**

In short, the immigrant population in New York is unique both in its sheer diversity and in its relatively equal representation of Latino, Asian, Caribbean, and European immigrants.

Although the immigrant population is increasing in nearly every state, New York continues to be a major locus of the immigrant population in the United States.

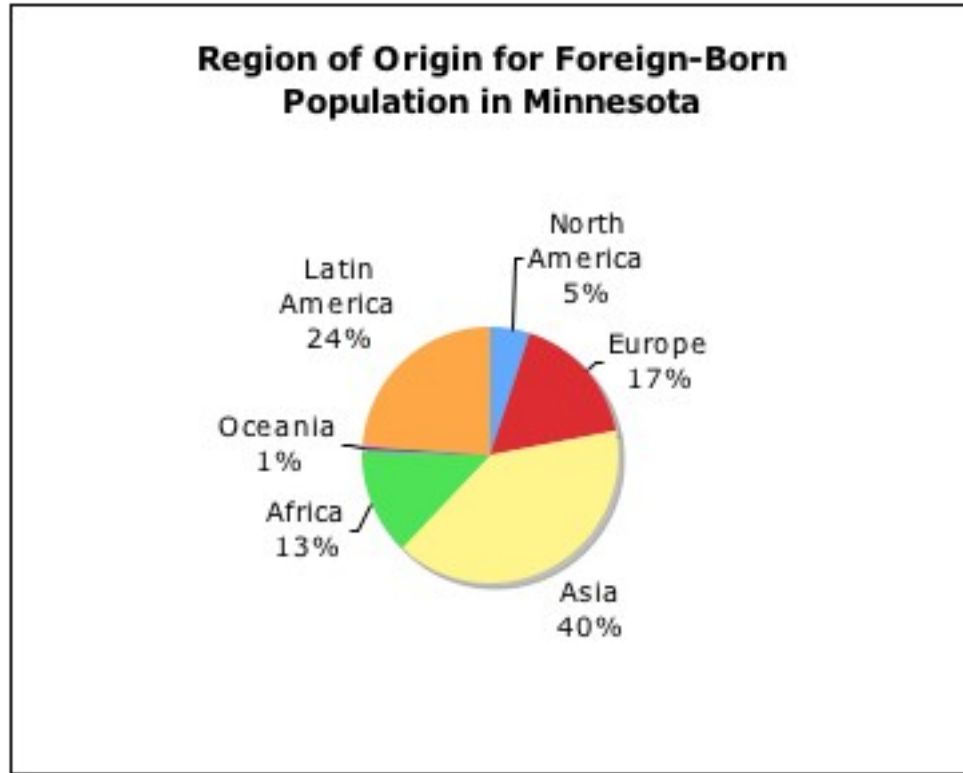
### ***The Twin Cities***

The Twin Cities, on the other hand, are a relatively new site of immigration for Latino and Asian immigrants.<sup>5</sup> The Twin Cities has long been a major refugee resettlement site, leading to a highly unique ethnic and racial context (See Figure 5 for the location of origin of the Foreign-Born in Minnesota and Figure 6 for the number of Foreign-Born in the Twin Cities Metro Area). While Minnesota's share of foreign-born residents at 5 percent is far lower than the national average of 12-13 percent, Minnesota's proportion of refugees is much higher. Refugees constituted 46.2 percent of Minnesota's foreign-born population in 1987 and 24.3 percent in 1998 compared with 8 percent of the national immigrant population in 1998. Because they are invited by the U.S. government under specific circumstances, refugees have a unique legal status among immigrants. Nationwide the largest numbers of immigrants, by far, come from Mexico. Yet, in Minnesota, Mexico has only been the top country of origin since 1995. Mexican, Hmong, and Vietnamese made up the largest minority ethnicities in Minnesota according to the 2000 census (Ronningen 2003). However, most immigrants are concentrated within the cities. Except for a few Ethiopian and Somali populations drawn in by food processing plants, the only immigrant groups that

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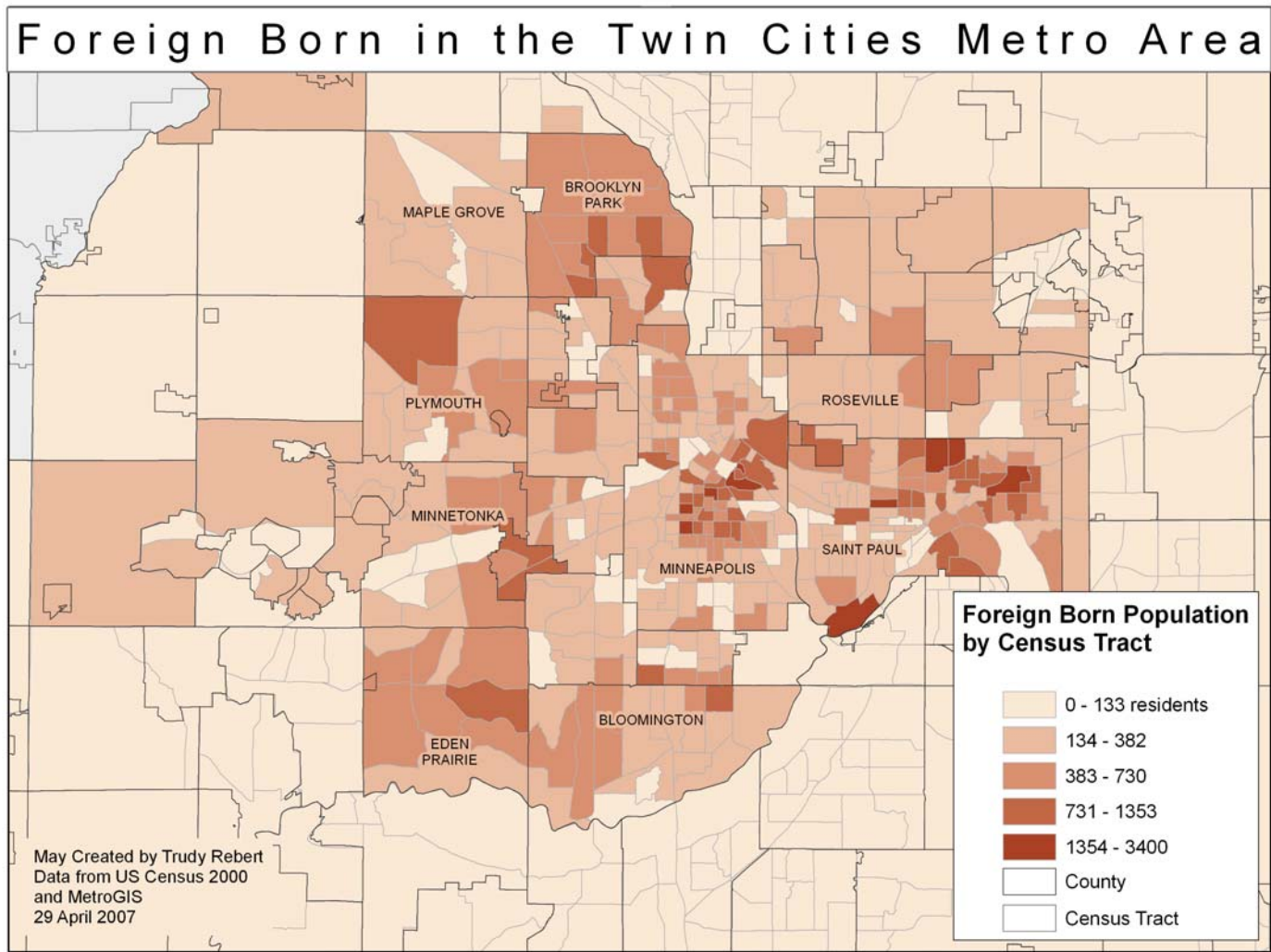
<sup>5</sup> While a new site for Latino and Asian immigration, the Twin Cities is hardly a stranger to immigration. In fact, by historical comparison, the foreign-born population in Minnesota is as sixth as large as it was a hundred years ago. In 1900, immigrants accounted for 29 percent of the Minnesotan population; in 2000, the foreign-born made up just 5.3 percent (Minneapolis Foundation). However, while 2/3 of the foreign-born population in 1900 came from just 3 countries – Germany, Sweden, and Norway—today the foreign-born population is far more diverse and much less likely to be racially constructed as white. In 2000, 17 percent originated from Europe, 40 percent from Asia, 24 percent from Latin America, and 13 percent from Africa (Minneapolis Foundation).

most rural Minnesotans are familiar with are the Latino groups. Growing Somali and Ethiopian populations have changed the Twin Cities in recent years. The South Asian immigrant population in Minnesota is growing quickly, but tends to be concentrated in the suburbs rather than the urban core like many other immigrant groups (See Figure 7).

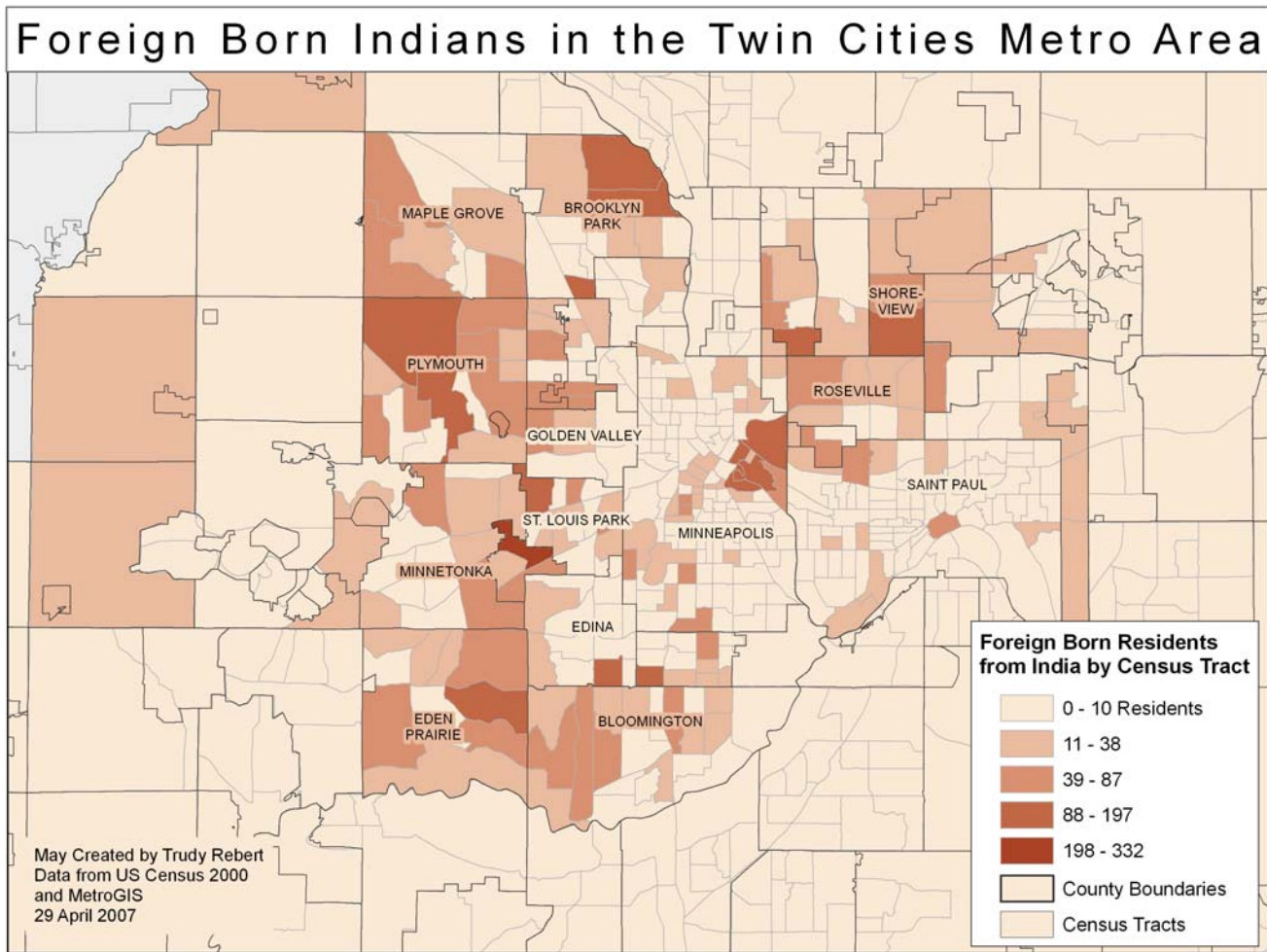


**Figure 5. Region of Origin for Foreign-born Population in Minnesota.**  
Recreated from (Ronningen 2003).





**Figure 6. Foreign Born Population in the Twin Cities Metro Area.**



**Figure 7. Foreign Born Indian Population in the Twin Cities Metro Area.**

## **Methodology and Data Limitations**

Semi-structured interviews with immigrant rights activists provide insight into framing and the process of collective identity formation. Between December 2006 and February 2007, I interviewed 17 activists working with organizations at the forefront of the immigrant rights movement -- 10 in New York and 7 in the Twin Cities. Interviews lasted for approximately an hour each and subjects were chosen based on work with and knowledge of grassroots, community-based immigrant rights organizations and/or familiarity with the South Asian community. Interviews covered organization the interviewee worked with, such as its purpose and membership, the interviewees personal perceptions of the immigrant rights movement and South Asian involvement, messaging and tactics, and changes over time. Additionally, I asked organizers what they thought some of the advantages and disadvantages might be to a more multiethnic immigrant rights movement. Newspaper articles, organizations' websites, and scholarly articles also provided data.

Characterizing the organizers and organizations represented is difficult because the categories are so fluid. Sometimes organizers of South Asian descent work with organizations with a primarily Latino base, or sometimes Latino organizer work with organizations with a primarily white ally membership. Roughly speaking, in New York, three organizations were larger coalitions or national organizations. Most organizations were smaller immigrant-community based organizations. One organization was explicitly organizing one ethnic group of South Asians, but three organizers identified as being of South Asian descent. In the Twin Cities

The sample of organizers is not representative. At best, enough interviews were conducted to provide a general view of some of the movement dynamics in each city among

grassroots organizers in the Latino and South Asian communities. However, the interviews are not representative of the immigrant rights movement as a whole. Research was limited by time and access. Organizers are extremely busy people and my research timetable happened to coincide with several disrupting events. In the Twin Cities, I spoke with five organizers from organizations connected with a legislatively-focused coalition, one organizer connected with a Latino organizing network, and one representative of a South Asian organization. Overall, nine organizers identified themselves as immigrants or children of immigrants. Organizers from unions and D.C.-based lobbying groups are noticeably absent from this study.

While this sample of organizers is not exhaustive and may not be representative, it is the first attempt to do research that I know of to do research on the immigrant rights movement at this localized level. The interviews provide data to understand the process of identity formation at a grassroots level and the organizers interviewed sit on the front lines of this process by working directly with immigrants and their allies. As a result, several events complicated the interview process. In mid-December, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raided the Swift meatpacking plant in Worthington, Minnesota, just a few hours south of the Twin Cities and capturing the time and attention of many organizers when I was about to interview them. While national organizations may provide funding and set the lobbying agenda, these small, grassroots organizations are the actors who organize the marches, put up flyers, and talk with the community month in and month out. The focus on locally based grassroots organizations is not comprehensive, but these organizers provided invaluable data on specific and localized movement dynamics influencing the process of identity formation.

The terms “Latino” and “South Asian” encompass not one, but many immigrant groups coming from a broad array of countries, representing many different languages, and arriving on a diversity of legal or illegal statuses. However, this paper analyzes mobilization at the broader scale of “Latinos” and “South Asians” for several reasons. First, in many cities, groups organize on the basis of Latino or South Asian identities. This is not to say that intra-group tensions do not exist, but in many cases people already mobilize on the basis of these larger regional groupings. Second, immigrants often face similar issues in the United States with others of their broader regional group because of factors such as shared histories and languages, or the collective grouping that others impose because they cannot determine the difference between an Indian or Pakistani or a Mexican and a Salvadorian. Third, because march organizers cannot keep data on who specifically showed up to an event, most of the data about who was mobilized was based on observation. Since most people cannot determine who is Pakistani and who is Indian based on physical appearance, it makes sense to look at these issues from a “Latino” and “South Asian” scale. Throughout the paper, I often resort to statistics on Indians or Mexicans to provide a proxy for South Asians and Latinos respectively. This data is not ideal, but data specifically on Bangladeshis and Guatemalans, for example, is often difficult to find.

The paper proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 builds a theoretical background in collective identity formation and mobilization grounded in social movement theory. The dominant Social Movement approaches do not adequately examine the process of identity formation, but this chapter theorizes about the interactions between framing and collective identity processes. Chapter 3 develops the history and a demographic picture of South Asian immigrants. It specifically highlights the ways that South Asian identity has transformed over time. Chapter 4 presents the case studies. It begins by looking at how the

movement unfolded in each city and uses data from interviews and newspaper articles to systematically evaluate the importance of factors internal to the movement and external to the movement for mobilization. Chapter 5 investigates the development of panethnicities and multiethnic coalitions as a basis for how a multiethnic immigrant rights movement might be forged while looking at the benefits and drawbacks of creating a more multiethnic movement. Chapter 6 provides concluding thoughts for both Social Movement theorists and organizers.

## Chapter 2: **Literature Review**

### **Social Movement Theory**

As the world pulls increasingly closer through processes of economic globalization and grows more defined by economic networks rather than states, political scientists are turning to new questions. Rogers Smith (2004) notes that during the Cold War, the so-called “big questions” revolved around the debate between capitalism and socialism. In the nearly two decades following the Cold War, transnational inter-governmental organizations like the World Bank, and European Union, transnational economic agreements such as NAFTA and the World Trade Organization, and transnational social movements have proliferated and become increasingly powerful. Today, the greatest fears facing the OECD nations do not center on the spread of communism, but with the spread of transnational resistance and opposing networks, such as Al-Qaeda.

Over the last few decades, the world has experienced an increasing number of international migrants, often following the shifting economic landscape. The world now contains more than 175 million international migrants.<sup>6</sup> Migrants moving from their country of birth and/or citizenship often remain outside of the formal political system because entry into the system is generally contingent upon citizenship. From this position, migrants are forced to develop new avenues to advocate for their rights and interests. How these migrants will negotiate their political identities and how the sending and receiving

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<sup>6</sup> Between 1965 and 1990, the number of international migrants increased from 75.2 million to 119.8 million, but the number of international migrants as a percentage of the world population held steady around 2.3 percent (Castles 2000). Between 1990 and 2000, the number of international migrants has grown rapidly. As of 2000, there were 174,781 international migrants, or about 3 percent of the world’s population (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division 2002). The number of international migrants has doubled since 1970.

societies will respond has become a central political issue. Across the globe -- from the 2005 riots in France, to the construction “Non-Resident Indian” status, to the rise of an immigrant rights movement in the United States -- migration has driven the need for new political identities and new modes of organization. These changes have thrust issues of political identity to the forefront, yet we have little understanding of how these political identities are formed.

Despite the importance of identity issues, most social movement theory has little to say on the matter. The two dominant theoretical paradigms, Resource Mobilization and New Social Movement theory, both treat identity as relatively given. Identities simply exist without a historical beginning or end. Snow and Benford (1988) are one of the few exceptions, although they refer to “ideational elements” rather than using the word “identity.” Snow and Benford (1988) note:

The relationship between ideological factors – values, beliefs, meanings—and identification with social movements and participation in their activities has rarely been treated systematically or dialectically in either the theoretical or empirical literature.....ideational elements tend to be treated in primarily descriptive rather than analytical terms. What this treatment typically involves is a description of movement ideology or value orientation as prefatory to the analytic task of explaining the emergence and operation of social movement.

This chapter sews together the relationship between framing and collective identity to build an understanding of the process of identity construction. I will briefly outline below the contributions of the two dominant social movements theoretical approaches, Resource Mobilization and New Social Movements. I then specifically discuss how social movement theory, including Snow and Benford’s (1988) concept of “framing” and others’ work on “collective identity” (Gamson 2003; Polletta and Jasper 2001), may help explain the formation of political identities. However, I argue that social movement theory, even where



framing and collective identity are considered, tend to overlook the *processes* of identity construction. Instead, social movement theory characterizes identities as already existing and waiting to be mobilized along that particular axis. Moreover, social movement theory also assumes that individuals are the fundamental unit of organization. However, this may not be the appropriate scale to examine movement mobilization.

### **Resource Mobilization**

In the 1970s, Resource Mobilization (RM) emerged as the dominant theoretical paradigm in social movement theory. RM, associated primarily with scholars Tilly, McCarthy, and Zald, developed a rational, cost-benefit approach to social movements clearly influenced by the quantitative revolution's empirical focus in the social sciences. According to RM theory, an endless number of concerns, or potential social movements, exist at a given time. Internal factors such as a movement's ability to acquire resources and mobilize people are ultimately responsible for differentiating potential concerns from concern-generating social movements. Social movement actors make rational decisions and join social movements based on a positive cost-benefit analysis. Several critiques led to the development of sub-camps within RM theory. William Tarrow developed the idea of Political Opportunity Structure, which focused on external factors in social movement emergence and success. Political Opportunity Structure implied that the external setting determined the 'opportunities and constraints' for movement success, directly contrasting RM theory's prioritization of internal factors. Doug McAdam later developed the Political Process model to reconcile the internal/external factors split between early RM theorists and the Political Opportunity Structure theories. This third model attempted to integrate the external and internal factors. However, all of these models stayed within the bounds of

rational actor theories and focused primarily on questions of movement emergence, strategy, and success. While the specific emphasis of these models differed (external vs. internal factors), the main theorists routinely collaborated on research.

### **New Social Movements**

In the mid-1980s, New Social Movement theory emerged to challenge the dominant paradigm of Resource Mobilization. New Social Movements rejected the Resource Mobilization idea that movements emerged from a group of competing concerns and replaced it with the argument that movements emerge from fundamentally new societal contradictions. The Women's movement, peace movements, and gay rights movements are typically considered "New Social Movements" because of their a greater focus "on cultural and symbolic issues that are linked with issues of identity rather than on economic grievances that characterized the working-class movement (Melucci 1985, 1989 cited in Johnston et al. 1994). In some ways, this represented a return to Political Opportunity Structure's focus on the role of external factors. However, New Social Movements argued that changes in the broader culture and socialization pattern created new identities whereas Political Opportunity Structure concentrated on the openness for action within the particular setting. As Melucci (1989, 177-178 quoted in Johnston 1994, 9) characterized the shift, "The freedom to *have* which characterized... industrial society has been replaced by the freedom to *be*" [emphasis added]. While Resource Mobilization has remained the primary social movement approach in North American academic circles, the New Social Movement approach dominates social movement studies in Europe. New Social Movements deal overtly with identity. However, emerging identities are simply assumed to arise out of

changes in the social structure (Johnston, Laraña and Gusfield 1994) and discussion does not further theorize about the process of identity formation.

Snow and Benford (1988, 197) comment that in New Social Movement theory, “movements are seen primarily as the carriers or transmitters of programs for action that arise from new structural dislocations.” Identities simply exist for both New Social Movement and RM theorists. The difference for New Social Movement theorists is the changing salience of some identities over time. Both Resource Mobilization and New Social Movements assume a common identity among participants, whether through societal changes or because of class, rather than looking at *how* an identity is forged and who is “in” and who is “out.”

### **Framing**

Snow & Benford seek to redress the absence of ideational and belief elements from the study of social movements. They claim that movements do not simply carry and transmit mobilizing beliefs and ideas, but “are actively engaged in the production of meaning for participants, antagonists, and observers” (Snow & Benford 1988, 198). According to Snow & Benford (1988), ideational and belief factors are developed through framing. To frame is to “assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow & Benford 1988, 198). Snow and Benford (2000) describe framing as a way of making sense of the world. The framing task is an internal social movement task with external consequences. Framing is how the story gets constructed; it identifies the problem and offers a set of solutions. The framing process turns a fact into a concern and, depending on the success of the framing, mobilizes a movement.

Snow and Benford (1988) characterize participant mobilization as a function of the “robustness” of the framing effort, the ability of the frame to align with larger belief systems, the relevance of the frame in the everyday lives of participants, and the timing of movement in the scheme of a larger “cycle of protest.” Framing does three things. It must 1) diagnose some aspect that needs change, 2) propose a solution to the problem, and 3) develop a reason and rationale for trying to engage and correct the problem (Snow & Benford 1988, 199). For most movements, the first step, referred to as “diagnostic framing,” is fairly easy. For example, HR 4437 would severely and adversely affect the lives of immigrants. In contrast, agreement tends to be much harder to forge around the causal factors. For example, is the crackdown on immigration based on an attack on worker’s rights or a racist act? Depending on which factor is highlighted, potential allies change. If HR 4437 is an attack on worker’s rights, labor unions are expected allies. If HR 4437 is framed as a racist act, civil rights organizations and other communities of color, such as African Americans or people of South Asian descent might be allies.

Framing success is limited by several factors including what Snow and Benford (1988) term the “infrastructural constraints of belief systems,” “phenomenological constraints,” and cycles of protest. The constraints of belief systems deal with the *centrality* of the issue and its importance in relation to other issues people care about, the *range* of ideational elements the movement encompasses, and the *interrelatedness* to other issues (Snow & Benford 1988, 205-207). The particular issue a movement raises is competing against a host of other factors in people’s lives. The movements that are most successful in mobilizing people have a high “hierarchical salience” (Snow & Benford 1988, 205), otherwise consciousness raising and political education become more important tasks. *Range* and *Interrelatedness* deal with the beliefs and values that the movement pulls upon.

Movements must strike a balance between a frame that is highly specific and links to one belief but risks drawing in fewer people, such as immigrant rights are human rights, and a frame that links many issues and risks a watered-down message while driving away sympathizers who don't agree with all the messages. This type of framing might link immigrant rights to human rights, anti-globalization struggles, racism, worker's rights, and the wall between Israel and the Palestinian Territories (because the proposed wall between Mexico and the U.S. is essentially the same).

“Phenomenological constraints” refer to how the framing matches up to participants lived reality. The most successful framing efforts align the understandings of reality people hold from many areas of their life including empirical data, lived experience, and common understandings with “cultural narrations” of what is happening. Framing is also limited by its timing. If the movement emerges later in a cycle of protest (a period of prolific protest), the framing effort is limited by the understandings that earlier movements established.

Snow and Benford's “Framing” concept helps explain how and why individual participants are mobilized, but it does not adequately take into account the interaction and hierarchy of different identities. While a few factors limit the framing process, framing is essentially in the domain of the social movement. In Snow and Benford's view, the movement actors have control over how they define the problem and solution. The success of the frame is simply limited by other, external, factors. However, this view does not recognize the intensely dialectical nature of framing. Framing is an on-going process of negotiation. Identities are negotiated both within the movement and between the movement and external actors, such as the government, the media, and other organizations. For example, the social movement's frame may stress that all immigrants are affected by H.R. 4437 and that all immigrants must respond. The media might frame H.R. 4437 as an

attempt to control high numbers of *illegal* Mexican immigrants. The media framing will compete with the social movement framing to determine whether the individual Indian's immigrant identity is mobilized and the person goes out to the march, or whether they diagnose H.R. 4437 as an undocumented Mexican issue and stay home. Individuals hold several identities but the social movement's framing competes with frames from other areas of society to prioritize certain aspects of an individual's identity.

### **Collective Identity**

While "framing" glosses over the dialectical process by which a movement is realized, the concept of "collective identity" deals explicitly with the tensions between individuals and group. Each individual can have his/her own framing, but it is only through a group collective identity that people work together. In their review of the concept, Polletta and Jasper (2001, 285) define collective identity as "an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution." Johnston et al. (1994, 15) adds, "[Collective Identity] is built through shared definitions of situation by its members, and it is a result of a process of negotiation and 'laborious adjustment' of different elements relating to the ends and means of collective action and its relation to the environment. By this process of interaction, negotiation and conflict over the definition of the situation, and the movement's reference frame, members construct the collective 'we.'" Collective identity is a muddled concept that Polletta and Jasper (2001) note has been both too narrowly represented and asked to encompass too much.

While it is clear that no one agreed upon definition of collective identity exists, the definitions do point to a set of common characteristics does exist. Scholars stress that collective identity is not simply an aggregation of individuals' identities but that collective

identity is a *interactional* and *relational* process of definition and redefinition of who a group is based on individual identity, definitions imposed from outside, and group processes (Polletta and Jasper 2001; Johnston, Laraña and Gusfield 1994). Collective identity organizes individuals into broader groups based on common characteristics. Gamson (2003) draws on the literature surrounding the creation of ethnic identity (which may be seen as one sort of collective identity), to theorize that collective identities are created through Taylor and Whittier's (1992) "boundary construction" and ethnic identity scholar Nagel's (1994) "identity negotiation". Boundary construction establishes the differences between groups. It is a way of defining who we are by delineating who we are not. For example, an anti-war group may define themselves by saying that they *are not* supporters of the war in Iraq, *are not* for increased military spending, and *are not* in favor of U.S. interventionism. Identity negotiation refers to the external factors that limit boundary construction. Collective identities are negotiated within existing political policies and institutions, immigration policies, and resource policies. For example, a person who identifies primarily as Mexican-American may be told that they are defined as Hispanic by census definitions and Latino at their after-school activity uniting children from many different Latin American countries. Both Gamson (2003) and Klandermas (1994) stress the instability of collective identities and Gamson (2003, 337) additionally underscores attempts to blur and deconstruct group identities. While first generation Indian immigrants might join a Gujarati group based on a common language and region, their children may be more likely to join a broader South Asian youth collective, and their grand-children might challenge the notion that the term "Asian" in the U.S. refers to East Asians.

## Revising Social Movement Theory

These two processes – framing and collective identity – work together. The collective identity of a group can limit how a group constructs the frame and the frame can then, in turn, limit where the boundaries of collective identity will be drawn. Any actor, from individuals to groups, to media can frame. However, collective identity is a far more dialectical process that takes place between different actors. Stated alternatively, a social movement's framing and sense of collective identity do not just adapt to the landscape of available identities but also shape the landscape.

Additionally, collective identity and framing are created at different scales. Collective identities can only be produced by groups, though individuals, organizations, or movements can each construct their own framings. However, the social movement literature continues to hold the individual as the fundamental unit of mobilization. It is individuals who act within their individual rational self-interest to join movements.

Social movement theory explicitly treats individuals as the fundamental unit of organization, but this may not be the appropriate scale to examine movement mobilization. Social movements both take established identities as given and can draw identities along new axes, such as the rise of an Asian pan-ethnic identity. But movements also face constraints in this process. While identities may change in the long run or through social movement processes, identities remain fairly static in the short run for most people. Each person holds several different primary identities: woman, person of color, college student, etc, but an individual cannot create a new identity drawn on a new axis by themselves because others will not recognize it. For example, an individual cannot suddenly decide that they are a "glassist," a person who organizes around wearing-glasses identity. Identities form through groups and through group processes of framing, collective identity creation, and



consciousness raising, just to name a few. However, identity construction takes time and requires negotiation with a group of people and the outside world. Thus, when a movement is beginning, it is somewhat limited to already existing identities and the boundaries that those identities have drawn. We are divided as "Latino" or as "Mexican" and "South Asian" or "Indian" because society says that those are different and we have come to accept and live those identities.

If groups, rather than individuals, are thought of as the fundamental unit of organization and assuming that identity boundaries are fairly static in the short run, the process of social movement mobilization changes. Groups may cooperate or compete depending on what they see as in their interest. The immigrant rights movement has jointly organized Latinos and workers by framing a combined struggle and using existing networks of communication and infrastructure (largely developed in California through coalitions with labor unions through the 1990s (Milkman 2006)). How does the movement construct an argument to bring South Asian immigrants in or draw a boundary that, deliberately or not, keeps them out? Thus far, the movement has not created a collective action frame that develops a reason for that group to join. If groups with different identities are to work together, they need a common frame to link the struggles of the separate groups. Over time, through discussions and joint processes, two separate groups may forge a single collective identity. For example, a larger pan-ethnic "immigrant" identity may emerge but the construction and negotiation of such an identity will take time.

Unlike the implied conception of set identities that are simply mobilized through frames in the social movements literature, I have argued that movements are both shaped by and re-shape the landscape of available identities. The social movements literature tends to use individuals as the organizing unit. However, a group scale may be the more appropriate

unit to examine movement mobilization because identities are fairly static in the short run. In order to forge identities along new axes, social movements must start from coalitions built through a common frame that draws new boundaries. For example, if the movement wants to incorporate broader South Asian participation, focusing on racial profiling in detention and deportation or contesting the narrative of homeland security might be some ways to re-frame the movement. Thus far, the immigrant rights movement has organized around labor and Latino identity axes. If a broader pan-ethnic immigrant identity is desirable for greater political reach, the movement must re-examine the current social movement frame and critically explore what frames are possible within the current framing environment. However, if groups find it more beneficial to compete, a broader identity may not be desirable. The concepts of collective identity and framing inform how the immigrant rights movement has mobilized participants and how changes in framing and collective identity might mobilize new groups. The next chapter explores some of the ways that South Asian American identity has changed over time as a prelude to understanding the limits and possibilities of South Asians and Latinos mobilizing around a common immigrant identity.

### Chapter 3:

## From “Hindoo Invasion” to “Model Minority”: Shifting Constructions of South Asians

While today’s Indian immigrants to the U.S. might identify as “Asian”, “South Asian”<sup>7</sup>, “brown”<sup>8</sup>, “Desis”<sup>9</sup>, “minorities”, or “people of color” among other ethnic and racial identities, these identities are constantly shifting. The life of a ‘model-minority’ Asian Indian immigrating on a H-1B professional visa to work as a doctor could hardly be more distant from an undocumented Mexican immigrant cleaning a hotel room. However, a little over a hundred years ago, marriages between Punjabi<sup>10</sup> men and Mexican or Mexican American women provided the basic pattern of South Asian family life in the United States (Leonard 1997). Identities are rarely as stable or sure as they seem in a particular moment. Following the argument of the last chapter, I argue that identity is a process of negotiation between imposed identities and internally community-constructed identities. Identities emerge in response to a combination of transnational, national, and local factors, including patterns of immigration. As this increasingly globalized world shrinks distance and space and alters economic and political power, the primacy of different identities is shifting and the

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<sup>7</sup> According to SAALT, “South Asians” include individuals who trace their ancestry to Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives Islands, Nepal, Pakistan, or Sri Lanka and those in the South Asian diaspora who trace their ancestry to one of the preceding countries but may live somewhere else. South Asians have settled in many areas of the world and there are sizeable South Asian populations in such geographically diverse areas as South Africa, Uganda, the United Kingdom, Trinidad, Guyana, Malaysia, and Singapore among others.

<sup>8</sup> Prashad’s (1997) book about South Asian identity is called *The Karma of Brown Folk*.

<sup>9</sup> “Desi” is a colloquial term with two definitions: it might be used to refer to a person from India or a person from anywhere in South Asia. It comes from the Hindi/Urdu word “Desh,” meaning country, and is literally translated as “person from my homeland.”

<sup>10</sup> Punjab can refer to a state in northwest India or in Pakistan. Before independence and the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, the two Punjabs were one state in the British Empire. In Figure 8 depicting a current political map, the Punjab is the long state in eastern Pakistan and the roundish state just north of Rajasthan in India.

lines that identity is drawn along are changing. This chapter traces the immigration history and shifting South Asian identity in the United States from Punjabi-Mexican marriages to the development of the ‘model-minority’ image.



Figure 8. Map of South Asia. Reprinted from (Center for South Asian Studies).

### The First Wave of South Asian Immigrants

From the mid-1800s through the mid-1940s, Asian immigrants provided much of the cheap labor on the West Coast, first through Chinese migration and then through Japanese migration. The Punjabi migrants followed Chinese and Japanese migration shortly

after, often doing work that the Chinese and Japanese refused to do. In 1912, Superintendent H.A. Mills of the Immigration Commission commented, “We are using Hindus for cleaning our ditches. The Japs won’t do it and the Chinese have gotten too old. You can’t get the younger generations of these people into any of this common work. But the Hindus are very efficient at this work” (quoted in Takaki 1989, 302). The first wave of South Asians came to the United States, primarily from the Punjab region, between 1900 and 1947 (Leonard 1997) (See Figure 8 and footnote 10). Exact numbers are hard to pin down, but Takaki (1989, 294) reports that 6,400 South Asians had entered the U.S. by 1920 and that between 1908 and 1920 immigration officials had turned away another 3,453 prospective immigrants (297). This number was nowhere near the hundreds of thousands of Chinese and Japanese that migrated but it was large enough that anti-immigrant groups evoked fears of a “Hindoo Invasion” (Das Gupta 1999). In comparison to today’s migrants from South Asia, this first wave was fairly homogenous. The overwhelming majority of immigrants were male, Punjabi-speaking farmers. Although referred to as “Hindus,” 85 percent of this first wave was Sikh and 10 to 12 percent were Muslim (Leonard 1997, 43). Most settled on the West Coast, largely in California. The Punjabis faced similar racism and discrimination as their Japanese and Chinese counterparts. While Asian immigrants did not collectively identify as Asian,<sup>11</sup> these early immigrant groups of color intermixed and had more contact than we might think.

Like other early Asian immigrants, the contours of South Asian migration were heavily shaped by U.S. legislation. The first congressional limits on South Asian migration were imposed with the Immigration Act of 1917 which barred immigrants from the “Asiatic

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<sup>11</sup> According to Espiritu (2004), a broader pan-ethnic Asian identity did not emerge until the late 1960s and 1970s. Before this, people were more likely to identify by the province or nation of origin.

Zone,” effectively expanding the zone of exclusion to include everyone from Asia,<sup>12</sup> and added literacy requirements for immigration (Takaki 1989; Leonard 1997). The Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 signed between Japan and the United States ended the immigration of Japanese workers, but made no mention of women. Thus, Japanese ‘picture brides’ were able to immigrate. Because of the lack of funds and strict immigration laws without a sovereign national government to advocate for them, the Punjabi’s were rarely able to bring their wives or families. This policy created highly skewed sex ratios within the Punjabi community. In 1930, Leonard (1997, 41) reports 1,572 men for every 100 Punjabi women. Many ended up marrying Mexican or Mexican-American women, particularly in California’s Imperial Valley, a major agricultural area bordering Mexico in southeastern California. These marriages coincided with an increased number of Mexicans migrating across the border because of the Mexican Revolution (Leonard 1997). The first “Hindu-Mexican” marriage took place in 1916. Often, the marriages followed a sister-partner pattern where one sister would marry a Punjabi immigrant and then match her sister with another. Leonard (1997) notes that in these early decades, “Mexican-Hindu” life was the primary pattern of family life among South Asian migrants.

While significant numbers of Punjabi migrants were marrying Mexican women, the Punjabis did not identify racially with Mexicans and showed little solidarity in Mexican and Filipino/a farm worker’s organizing efforts through the 1920s and 1930s (Das Gupta 1999). Instead, the Punjabi community was fighting courtroom battles over whether they could be considered white and thereby eligible for naturalized citizenship. A federal law from 1790 reserved naturalized citizenship for “whites,” providing the basis for the denial of

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<sup>12</sup> The “Asiatic Zone” was defined as areas west of the 110<sup>th</sup> parallel and east of the 50<sup>th</sup> meridian. This legislation expanded on the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (barring Chinese immigration) and the 1907 Gentleman’s Agreement with Japan during which the Japanese government agreed not to issue passports to laborers as long as students could continue migrating to the U.S. (Leonard 1997, 48).

“Mongoloid” Japanese and Chinese naturalization. However, the classification of the South Asian immigrants was murkier. Both the *U.S. v. Balsara* (1910) and *Ajoy Kumar Mazumdar* (1913) decisions determined that the South Asian migrants were Caucasian and therefore white and eligible for citizenship (Takaki 1989). However, in 1923, *U.S. v. Bhagat Singh Thind* overruled the previous decisions. The Court argued that South Asians were in-eligible for citizenship because they were not white in the “understanding of the common man” and that a “white person” was someone from northern or western Europe (Takaki 1989, 299). The decision paved the way for the application of the 1913 California Alien Land Laws which prevented leases over three years or ownership of Californian land to those ineligible for citizenship (i.e. Asians) and the application of anti-miscegenation laws<sup>13</sup>. The level of racism and discrimination these early immigrants faced may be hard to fathom from today’s “model-minority” image. However, Indian Nobel Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore cancelled a planned trip to the United States in 1929 after a speaking engagement in Canada commenting, “Jesus could not get into America because, first of all, He would not have the necessary money, and secondly, He would be an Asiatic” (Takaki 1989, 298).

The 1924 Immigration Act effectively sealed off all remaining legal immigration from Asia, including the Japanese picture brides. The act established a quota system based on national origin for U.S. immigration but denied quotas to people ineligible for citizenship (Takaki 1989). If you were “Asiatic,” you were not white, and therefore not eligible for citizenship and denied legal migration. The quotas remained in place until 1965. By 1940, the Asian Indian<sup>14</sup> population had dropped to just 2,405, with 60 percent of the population living in California and more than half of the population over the age of 40 according to the U.S. Census (Takaki 1989, 313-314).

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<sup>13</sup> Anti-miscegenation laws were not repealed in California until 1948.

<sup>14</sup> “Asian Indian” is the current census category and was added to the census in 1980.

Once the supply cheap Asian labor was cut off, cheap Mexican labor was institutionalized through the Bracero Program in 1942. The Bracero Program brought 4 million temporary legal Mexican farmworkers to the United States between 1942 and 1964 (Prashad 1997, 72). The program was negotiated between the U.S. and Mexican government, but the Mexican government could do little to monitor compliance with the minimum working standards they had negotiated once migrants were in the United States (Hing 2004). Furthermore, the federal agency charged with overseeing and enforcing the provisions, the Farm Security Agency, was severely underfunded and understaffed. As a result, U.S. employer manipulation and exploitation of the Mexican Braceros was rampant, but this system worked well for employers. In California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, Braceros made up a quarter of all farm labor (Hing 2004, 128). The cheap labor supply helped build U.S. dominance in agriculture. One program U.S. administrator commented that the Braceros provided a “captive labor force...unnatural in our free competitive economy,” (Hing 2004, 128). Business interests colluded with the government to use immigration policy as a method of circumventing the competitive free market to provide cheap labor.

### **South Asian Immigration Today**

#### ***The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act***

By 1965, the immigration system established in 1924 had grown outdated and ill-suited for the United States' changing role in the world. The United States could no longer maintain its pre-war isolationist stance. Directly after World War II, President Truman argued for overhauling the quota system, but was overridden by Congress. Later, both Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy tried to change the quota system (Le 2006).



Eventually, Kennedy successfully set the stage for immigration reform during a time of growing fears about the Soviet Union (Le 2006) and the U.S. desperately needed highly skilled laborers in the sciences (Prashad 1997). In 1963, Kennedy asked Congress to change the immigration system so that “highly trained or skilled persons may obtain a preference without requiring that they secure employment before emigrating,” (Prashad 1997, 74). However, it still was not until Johnson’s term in 1965 that the Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, was passed. Congress hoped to prove that the U.S. was not a racist nation and to attract highly skilled foreigners (Prashad 1997). The time was right. By the mid-1960s, the Civil Rights movement was in full swing and a period of intense social change was underway. The 1965 Immigration Act followed on the heels of several major social policy changes, including the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act.

The passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act abolished the national origins quotas and replaced it with family reunification as the central priority. Under this act, U.S. citizens and permanent resident could sponsor the following categories of immigrants for their green card, in the following order of preference (Le 2006):

- 1) Unmarried Children of U.S. citizens under 21 years old
- 2) Spouses and unmarried children of permanent residents
- 3) Professionals, scientists, and artists “of exceptional ability”
- 4) The married children over 21 years of age of U.S. citizens and their spouses and children
- 5) Siblings of U.S. citizens and their children
- 6) Workers in occupations with labor shortages
- 7) Political Refugees

In addition, immigrants who could invest at least \$40,000 were exempt (Le 2006). The 1965 Act initially set a ceiling of 290,000 annual immigrants, with 120,000 visas for the Western Hemisphere and 170,000, and a limit of 20,000 visas for any one country, for the Eastern Hemisphere (Bernard 1998).

The 1965 Act radically transformed the racial composition of the United States over time. By 1970, most immigrants were from Latin America or Asia and by the early 1980s, more than half were from Asia (Ueda 1998). Congress initially did not expect a big increase in Asian immigration because so few Asians resided in the U.S. prior to the 1965 immigration law (Le 2006). However, European migrants took very few of the allotted visas. European economies were thriving and most European migrants had few direct relatives to unite with because most had migrated much earlier. Instead, Latin American and Asian migrants dominated new immigrant flows.

### ***The New Wave of South Asian Immigrants***

Educated during the post-independence Nehruvian modernization boom, a highly educated group of Indians with a dearth of job opportunities in their home country used a new class of professional visas to their advantage. Between 1966 and 1977, 83 percent of Indians immigrating to the U.S. entered under preferences for professional and technical workers (Takaki 1989, 446; Das Gupta 1999, Prashad 1997). They added approximately 20,000 PhD level scientists, 40,000 engineers, and 25,000 doctors to the U.S. workforce. This first wave of migrants has since used the family preference system to bring their families to the United States.

Today, South Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing groups in the United States. Between the 1990 and 2000 censuses, the number of Bangladeshi Americans grew between 248 and 385 percent<sup>15</sup> and the number of Indian Americans grew between 106 and 133 percent. Asian-Indians are by far the largest national group among South Asians with more than 80 percent of the population (SAALT 2005). From a paltry 2,405 Indian

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<sup>15</sup> The Census gives these figures as a range.

Americans living in the U.S. in 1940, the population has grown to 2.32 million, making Indian Americans the second largest Asian-American group after Chinese Americans (Srireika 2006). As a whole, the population of Asian Americans is expected to triple to 8 percent of the U.S. population between 1990 and 2020 or 2024 (Leonard 1997, 68).

As a group, South Asian immigrants tend to have high education and economic statuses. Sixty-four percent of Indians and 54 percent of Pakistanis report holding a Bachelor's degree or higher (SAALT 2005a). Asian Indians have the highest educational and economic rates of all Asians and, many times, higher than the white population as well. Asian Indians have a median personal income of \$26,000 and a median family income of \$69,470, according to data from the 2000 Census (Le 2007). However, some evidence shows that this overall high economic and educational status is dropping as more immigrants sponsor family members who may be less skilled and have lower levels of education (Leonard 1998; SAALT 2005a). Despite the high socioeconomic profile, Leonard (1997) notes that Asian Indians are still viewed to have a relatively low social standing by other Americans. Leonard (1997, 89) cites a 1992 study of 33 ethnic and religious groups. Of these groups, Asian Indians statistically had the highest level of education and ranked fifth in household income, yet ranked 28<sup>th</sup> in social standing.

### ***Asian Indian Identity***

South Asian identity has been transformed since the early 1900s and it continues to remain in flux. In 1975, the same question of Asian Indian whiteness contested in the *Thind* case over a century before was debated again. This time the Office of Federal Contract Compliance, in an attempt to clarify the definition of "minority groups," decided that Asian Indians were indeed white, and therefore not entitled to affirmative action benefits (Takaki

1989). The Asian Indian community may have had less confusion internally about whether they were white, but the community did wrestle with whether they should seek minority status. The leaders of the India League of America were concerned about a negative backlash if employers filled their affirmative action quotas with Indian Americans, who did not seem themselves as truly disadvantaged.

Other Indian American groups disagreed. As the Association of Indians in America, another Indian American group, stated to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission in 1975,

The language of the Civil Rights Act clearly intends to protect those individuals who might be disadvantaged on the basis of appearance. It is undeniable that Indians are different in appearance; they are equally dark-skinned as other non-white individuals and are, therefore, subject to the same prejudices....While it is commonly believed that the majority of Indians working in this country are well-educated and employed in jobs of a professional nature, their profiles are not unlike those of Korean and Japanese immigrants. Vis a vis other professionals, Indians are disadvantaged for reasons of racial discrimination. (Takaki 1989, 447)

South Asian immigrants moved back and forth between being categorized as Caucasian (a.k.a. non-minority) and as Asian (a.k.a. minority) by the U.S. government. In 1974, the Federal Interagency on Culture and Education (FICE), the government agency charged with standardizing racial and ethnic categories in the government, debated whether immigrants from South Asia were white because they were “Caucasians” or whether they were Asian because they were immigrants from the Asian continent (Das Gupta 2006, 37). FICE ruled that immigrants from South Asia were “Caucasian/White,” along with Arab immigrants. However, in 1977, the Association of Indians in America’s view won out and South Asian Americans were re-classified under the category of “Asian and Pacific Islanders” by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (Das Gupta 2006). However, the debate struck at the very heart of the tension over identity within the South Asian community and with the larger U.S. society.

The debate highlights the difficulties of defining a socially constructed concept and incorporating new groups into a black/white racial paradigm. Few would argue that South Asian immigrants are white based on skin color, but most are not black either and the word “Asian” in the U.S. connotes East Asian features. Where, then, do South Asians fit? Is race determined by biology? Or skin color? Or class? Or some other combination of factors that we *know* but cannot quite *define*? At the same time, how can a group claim minority status when one is not even sure whether they are disadvantaged?

Nowhere is race so contentious and confused as in the Census. When a government entity must enumerate the number of people belonging to a certain racial group, the precise definitions of words that might be used loosely in daily life become especially important. Numbers are power. Population determines the political power of a group, whether they are ‘disadvantaged,’ and whether they will receive resources. The Association of Indians in America (AIA) realized that they needed to be correctly enumerated in order to claim minority status (Das Gupta 1999). Prior to the 1980 Census, the AIA campaigned to change the Census form. Formed in 1967, the AIA was one of the earliest Indian groups formed and focused on political issues of importance to Indian immigrants in the United States. In the 1970 Census, respondents could identify themselves as White/Caucasian, Black/Negro, American Indian, or an Asian category of Japanese, Chinese, Philippine, Hawaiian, Korean, or other<sup>16</sup> (Das Gupta 1999). This categorization scheme was confusing for many Indian immigrants. Some checked “black”, some checked “American Indian”, and some checked “other” finding no suitable category. Although Indian immigrants were supposed to check “other” according to the Census, the “other” category was then lumped together with the White category for counting. The AIA advocated self-identification on the Census, but

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<sup>16</sup> Racial self-identification was introduced with the 1960 Census (Skerry 2000).

strong debate ensued over what the appropriate title was. The AIA recommended “Indian,” but others argued in favor of linguistic and regional origins such as “Tamil,” “Gujarati,” “Punjabi,” etc. Others pushed for “Hindu” as the major Indian religion and others for “Bharatiya,” a reference to the Hindi word for the pre-colonial, undivided India, *Bharat* (Das Gupta 1999). The AIA successfully gained an “Asian Indian”<sup>17</sup> category by the 1980 Census.

Das Gupta (1999) argues that in winning the Asian Indian category, the AIA secured Indian immigrants a racially ambiguous status, somewhere between black and white. This raises the question, in a dichotomous racial system of black and white, what are South Asians? Some proponents of segmented assimilation hypothesize that incoming groups can assimilate into one of two distinct cultures in the U.S. (Jaynes 2004, Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Incoming immigrant groups either move up (toward whiteness, eg. Asians) or downward on the socioeconomic scale (towards blackness, eg. often Latinos). This view sees the U.S. socioeconomic structure as anchored by two poles, and these economic poles line up closely with race. South Asians are generally perceived to be assimilating upward and maybe someday, like their Irish forbearers, they too might be absorbed into whiteness one day.

South Asians, along with many other Asian groups, are defined as “model minorities.” The model minority image constructs Asians as non-White but occupying a status more akin to whites than black minorities. Asians, as model minorities, are viewed as well educated and middle-class. They have “made-it” and successfully pulled themselves up by the bootstraps. Being labeled “middle-class” comes with very real advantages. Jaynes (2004, 107) argues that

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<sup>17</sup> The Census panel compromised on “Asian Indian” so as not to confuse the group with Indian Americans (Native Americans).

Flight from stereotyped racial identities can offer large monetary payoffs. Minorities labeled “middle-class” and therefore “acceptable” are not subjected to the most damaging discriminations. Because doors are not peremptorily slammed in their faces, they enjoy much better opportunities than minorities labeled “unacceptable.”

While debating the merits of the model minority image, Das Gupta (1999, 139) recounts the comments of a Harvard medical student who shouted out one stark advantage, saying “I’d rather be a model minority than have a White woman passing me clutch her purse.” With strong advantages, it makes sense that those constructed as “model minorities” would continue to desire to be constructed as such.

But occupying a space of “almost white,” a situation of racial ambiguity, has its limits as well. While the first post-1965 wave of Indian immigrants may have been protected some against the most egregious acts of racism by their class and profession, South Asians are racialized like other minority groups. The stereotype may be different, perhaps even positive, but South Asians still lack the power to define themselves. This imposed stereotype impedes coalition building with other groups of color. For example, if Asian minorities can pull themselves up and live the American Dream, some argue, we must live in a color-blind society. Thus, the problem must be with the blacks, not with racism. In failing to actively dismantle it, the model minority construction trades gains for a few groups at the expense of the potential of building broader minority political power.

The model minority image serves to separate minority groups and render the discrimination that South Asians do face invisible. South Asians, like other Asian and Latino groups, are “perpetual foreigners.” No matter how many years or generations an Asian or Latino’s family has been in the United States, others will question their “Americaness.” “Foreigner” remains their default status. Prashad (1997, 82) identifies the intersections between the “model minority” and the “perpetual foreigner,” writing

Regardless of our commitment to reside in the United States, we will be seen as forever immigrants. But we are seen as good immigrants, not like those bad immigrants who travel illegally across the Rio Grande, despite the fact that only about 41 percent of “illegal” immigration comes across the U.S.-Mexican border. Only 8.5 percent of the U.S. population are first-generation immigrants. Of these, 85 percent entered legally (75 percent via family reunification or employment preference and 10 percent as refugees). Only about 15 percent come “illegally,” yet their presence defines the debate on immigration.

Although Mexicans still represent the largest undocumented population in the United States, between 2000 and 2002, Indians were the fastest growing undocumented population with a growth rate of 133 percent and comprising 3 percent of the total undocumented population (Srireika 2006). Some within the South Asian community are fearful that newer immigrants lower on the socioeconomic scale may pull the image of the larger South Asian population down with them, maybe even to the status of Mexicans. Of the cab drivers, one professional noted that they are “spoiling things for us,” even “ruining our image” in the United States. He continued:

In just five years they’ve undone all the good work. These uncouth chaps, straight out of Punjab, can’t even speak proper English—can’t even drive. I don’t know how they got here. Must be through Mexico or something. I don’t know why they let them in.  
(Varadarajan 1998, 96)

As this quote reveals, simply because the cabbies and the professional may both be from India and considered part of the same group, they may not identify with each other. Similarly, the same immigration laws may limit Mexican and Indian immigrants but some Indian immigrants may actively try to distance themselves from the lower class, ‘illegal’ Mexican immigrants. It is seemingly irrational that even in their foreigner status, those constructed as the “model minority” have advantages over their undocumented and vilified counterparts.



Yet, there is a danger in becoming too comfortable in the model minority status. Perpetual foreigners, no matter how many years or generations they have been in the U.S. will always be assumed to be foreign, as something less than American. As such, their patriotism can be called into question and stripped of model minority status as quickly as it was granted. In the weeks after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, more than a thousand men, primarily South Asian and Arab, were rounded up and detained on suspicion of terrorism. For many, their only crime was supposedly looking like the terrorists. On September 15<sup>th</sup>, Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh man, was gunned down at a gas station in Mesa, Arizona. His murderer, Frank Roque, shouted “I’m an American! I’m a damn American all the way! Arrest me! Let those terrorists run wild!” when he was arrested (SAALT 2005b). More recently, reports of increased racism and bias due to public concern over outsourcing to India has surfaced (SAALT 2005c).

### **The Emergence of a South Asian Pan-ethnicity**

Not only has the wider society’s view of South Asians changed over time from the “hindoo invasion” to “model minority” to “terrorist,” how South Asians see themselves has been shaped and transformed by U.S. society. South Asia, as a region, encompasses a huge diversity of languages, religions, castes, and governmental structures. As a result, it was not unusual for many of the first wave of post-1965 South Asian immigrants to join South Asian organizations based on religion, region, or language. For example, one might join the Tamil Association or the Sikh Gurudwara community or a Marathi cultural association. Many first generation immigrants remained separated by the divisions experienced in South Asia.

However, since the 1980s and increasingly in the 1990s, activists have increasingly organized around a South Asian identity (SAALT 2005d; Lehrer et al. 2005). Punjabi Sikhs

are organizing with Pakistani Muslims and Hindu Tamils on the basis of a common experience as immigrants and people of color in the United States. Das Gupta (1999; 2006) differentiates between what she calls “place-taking” organizations, like the traditional regionally based organizations, and “space-making” organizations, such as those that organizing around a South Asian collective experience. A “place-taking politics” is essentially an assimilative strategy, it does not challenge the established structures. Das Gupta (2006, 54) explains: “It struck the accommodating medium between the reinfusion of U.S. society with culturally different immigrant workers and their (tentative) absorption in the national body through their participation in conventional politics.” This approach is more likely to embrace a model-minority image and use it to its advantage. Das Gupta cites the Association of Indians in America (AIA) as a prime example of this sort of politics.

In contrast, “space-making” politics radically challenges the existing power structures and opens up new avenues for engagement. Das Gupta (1999, 6-7) writes:

In articulating a “South Asian” identity by specifying how racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and labor exploitation play out in their lives as immigrants from a certain part of the Third World, the organizations that spearhead the second moment enable a politically radical response to their situation in the United States. The radicalism of the response lies in seeking to fundamentally transform social and economic relations such as patriarchy, heterosexism, capitalism, and racism. By examining the intersections of these systems of oppression, the second movement is able to bring greater clarity, than the first, to how exactly South Asians can be aligned with other people of color in this country....the second moment forges tactics of political participation that are not contingent on citizenship because many of those who are part of this moment do not have citizenship and may never be eligible for it. Thus, limited access to conventional channels such as petitioning or lobbying elected representative, which are privileges of citizenship, does not mean that these immigrants abandon their yearning to live in a just society. It provokes them to find alternative sites of strategies for struggle.

A space-making politics seeks to build alliances across racial, ethnic, and religious lines for greater power. The 9/11 backlash, growing socioeconomic diversity within the South Asian immigrant community, and an expanding American-born second and third generation have all helped expand identification as a “South Asian.” However, South Asian identities are still fairly new.

Since the first immigrants from the Indian sub-continent arrived in the United States around the turn of the last century, South Asian immigrants have been constructed as a threatening “hindoo invasion,” as “model minorities,” as terrorists, as white, as Asian, and as brown. Over time, South Asian immigrant’s views of their own identities has in some cases changed and diversified. How these frames and identities continue to transform has profound implications for the immigrant rights movement and future political organizing across the United States.

## Chapter 4:

### **“*Sí Se Puede*” But “*Kyaa Hum Kar Sakte Hain?*”: The Immigrant Rights Movement in New York and the Twin Cities**

*The impact that [the marches] had politically was strong, I think we were able to move Senators to come out with something more benevolent at the federal level. At the state level, we showed the Governor and some politicians that we don't give a crap, that's we're not going to be able to still be segregated and in the shadows, that we have a lot of power if we want. That's the political. At the grassroots level, I think we had a lot of confidence to people to say "I can do it." I can be very powerful if we're united and we're fight for one common with one goal."*

-- Organizer E

#### **A Movement Unfolds**

New York City and the Twin Cities were both sites of large, successful immigrant rights marches (For a map of the immigrant rights marches nationally, see figure 7). On February 12, Minnesota organizers held one of the earliest spring marches for immigrant rights gathering around 2,500 people to march from Lake Street and Chicago, a street at the heart of the Minneapolis immigrant community, to the Holy Rosary church. The march did not have a target, but it helped instill a sense of pride among people, according to organizer D. However, the march in LA helped galvanize the rest of the country, including Minneapolis/St. Paul. Minnesota organizers were taken by surprise when 40,000 (Blake 2006) people turned out for a march on the state Capitol in St. Paul on April 9<sup>th</sup>,<sup>18</sup> perhaps the largest social justice march in Minnesota's history (Martinez 2007). Less than a month later, 1,500 people gathered in Minneapolis' Powderhorn Park for “*El Día Sin Inmigrante.*” The number was small, particularly compared with the high turnout in April, but some

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<sup>18</sup> Although the St. Paul rally was held a day before the National Day of Action, April 9<sup>th</sup> was a Sunday, so fewer people had to negotiate work schedules to attend the rally, a calculated decision on the part of organizers.

organizers speculated that the boycott drew more participants. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, more than 1,600 students were absent from Minneapolis Public schools and 16 of the 36 Chipotle restaurants, the Swift meat processing plant in Worthington, MN, and many of the Latino businesses on Lake Street closed for the day, according to the *Star Tribune* (Hopfensperger et al. 2006).

In New York, the story followed a similar trajectory. Feeling emboldened by the large turnout at the Los Angeles march (Rebert 2007, Interview F), New York rallied 300,000 people in downtown New York on April 10<sup>th</sup> (Wang and Winn 2006). On May 1<sup>st</sup>, several events took place. Afternoon actions concentrated around the neighborhoods and a larger rally took place later in the day. According to an article by CNN (2006), 12,000 people turned out to form eight human chains – five in Manhattan and one each in Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx -- at 12:16 to symbolize the day the House of Representatives passed H.R. 4437 on December 16, 2005. The chains were followed by a 4 pm rally in Union Square that gathered “tens of thousands” according to the *New York Sun* (Hope 2006). New York did not hold a rally on Labor Day, as many cities did, choosing instead to hold a rally on October 21 (NY United for Immigrant Rights 2006). However, which immigrant groups did these marches mobilize? And what factors affected their mobilization?

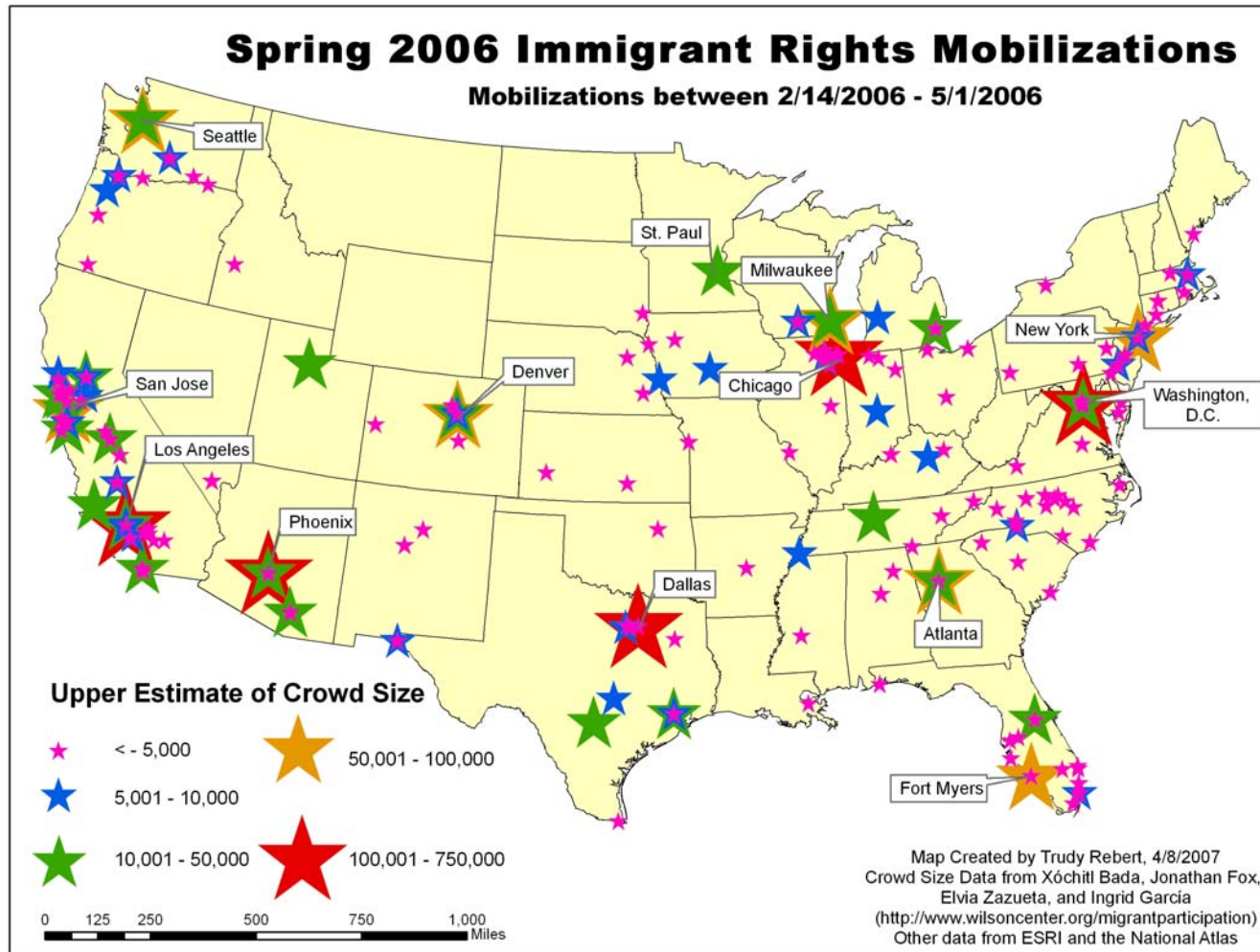


Figure 9. Map of Spring 2006 Immigrant Rights Mobilizations.

## South Asian Participation

Determining the actual involvement of various immigrant groups is difficult at best. If one takes into account the vast numbers of Mexicans in the country proportionally to other immigrant groups, what counts as a significant level of participation from other immigrant groups? In Minnesota, it is fair to say that the immigrant rights march is a Latino movement. With the exception of perhaps a hundred Somalis (out of 40,000 people) who turned out to the April 9<sup>th</sup> rally, the movement has mobilized almost entirely Latinos and white allies (Rebert 2007, interviews D, H, I). In New York, the situation is bit harder to determine. Some organizers claimed that it was a very multiethnic movement (Rebert 2007, interviews Q, J); others said it was still mostly Latino (Rebert 2007, interviews B, F, M). If there was one city one would expect an multi-ethnic movement, it would be New York because the population is fairly evenly composed of different groups. After May 1<sup>st</sup>, the New York Times ran an article about the mixed turnout across the city's different immigrant communities, as noted previously on page 13 (O'Donnell 2006). However, the Village Voice presented a different picture, one in which:

...Mexican day laborers and landscapers from New Jersey and Connecticut marched alongside Senegalese street vendors, Chinese waiters, Puerto Rican independistas, Bangladeshis shop owners, Caribbean nannies, Uruguayan musicians, Dominican busboys, and revolutionary Filipinos.

This may point to an immigrant rights movement leadership that is very multiethnic and cuts across immigrant groups, but that did not mobilize a broad array of non-activist community members. March participants were still largely Latino although some non-Spanish speaking groups did turn out (See Figure 10).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Organizer G (Rebert 2007) commented that Hispanic, East Asian, and Southeast Asian communities were most involved.



**Figure 10. Bin Liang, 58, wore a sign supporting immigrants at Chatham Square before a march in Manhattan (Yee 2006).**

Across the country, few South Asians turned out for the marches. Partha Banerjee, head of the New Jersey Immigration Policy Network that helped organize an April 10<sup>th</sup> rally in New Jersey commented “A handful of South Asians like us who are in leadership positions were there, otherwise they are hard to find” (Swapan 2006). South Asians in New York were much more likely to be involved in the immigrant rights movement than in Minnesota, but Organizer Q still commented that South Asian involvement was “Not very good, not very good. Very few of us were there...very few of us were actively involved.” New York has multiple political organizations explicitly working with the South Asian immigrant community such as DRUM (Desis Rising Up and Moving)— a major leader on immigrant rights issues – in Queens; Adhikaar, a Nepali human rights group also in Queens; Andolan, a South Asian labor rights organization; and others. However, New York is far



from being the only site of South Asian migration. In the Twin Cities Metro, the 2006 American Community Survey estimated that between 12,620 and 19,170 persons of Asian Indian descent. Asian Indians are the third largest Asian group in Minnesota after the Hmong and Vietnamese (Carlson 2002), according to the 2000 Census. However, Minnesotan South Asian organizations are still primarily organized along regional, linguistic, or religious lines (Indian Association of Minnesota 2005). In Das Gupta's terminology (2006), Minnesota has place-taking organizations. New York has far more space-making organizations by comparison.<sup>20</sup>

Rajen Anand, president of the National Federation of Indian American Associations argued that the Indian American community was slow to get involved because "Our community is not easily aroused...?As long as it doesn't affect my family, I'm not concerned"—that's our philosophy" (Swapan 2006). This seems somewhat too simplistic a response however. Immigration reform affects all immigrant groups, whether one is here legally or undocumented. Hamid Khan, from the South Asian Network based in Los Angeles commented:

South Asian presence is minimal...we need to explore this a little further...Internally, we need to look at how South Asians look at immigration. There is also the issue of how South Asians migrated to the United States. Majority of South Asians do come to this country on a valid visa... We need to talk about class bias. (Swapan 2006).

While I agree with Khan that we need to investigate the issue further and that class bias does play a part, his reasoning is unsatisfying. Factors relating to the internal structure of a social movement as well as factors out of their control affects which immigrants are mobilized when a call goes out for immigrant rights. The next section expands on some of these factors.

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<sup>20</sup> See page 52-53 for a definition of place-taking and space-making organizations.

## **Factors Affecting Mobilization**

Numerous factors exist that are likely to both increase participation among a broader array of immigrant groups and that detract from participation. This first set of factors falls under the control of the immigrant rights movement. The second set of factors is outside of the movement's control.

### ***Internal Factors***

#### *Language*

Language differences present challenges to organizing with any non-English speaking immigrant group. However, the sheer diversity of languages can be a barrier to mobilizing non-Latino groups. Helen Gym of Asian Americans United in Philadelphia hypothesized that having a common language has helped Latino groups be better organized. Gym noted that communicating with Asian groups is difficult because “You have to distill massive amounts of legislation, measures and news, and then you have to translate into you vernacular for Asian immigrants” (Fears and Williams 2006). She continued: “In Philadelphia alone, there are three major Chinese dialects: Cantonese, Mandarin and Fujianese.” In the Twin Cities, the spring marches tended to be advertised in English or Spanish. In New York, the flyers covered a much larger array of languages. For example, the May 1<sup>st</sup> coalition's website had flyers available for download in English, Spanish, Arabic, Bangla, Haitian Creole, Russian, Chinese, and Korean (May 1<sup>st</sup> Coalition 2006). Generally speaking, far more Americans speak Spanish than Hmong or Somali, which may inhibit getting the word out to those groups in the Twin Cities. However, language translation tends to follow the organizations. If the movement can attract organizations that work with

Bangla, Somali, or Hmong-speaking immigrants, the language will follow. In this regard, bringing *organizations* into the movement is crucial. Language ability follows organizations.

### *Existing networks*

While these massive protests could not have been successful without the issues strongly resonating with people, the spring mobilizations also could not have happened without extensive organizational resources.<sup>21</sup> The spring marches built on past organizing around immigrant rights and off of existing networks of people and organizations. Although the action of spring 2006 represented a turning point for the visibility of immigrant rights, it was by no means the ‘beginning’ of immigrant rights work. New York organizer G commented, “[immigrant rights work] has been going on for a very long time, but it was very piece-meal, people doing their own thing. It wasn’t the national movement we saw last year” (Rebert 2007). For example, previous organizing around Proposition 187 in 1994, legislation that sought to eliminate all access to social services for undocumented immigrants, and organizing around labor issues laid the groundwork for spring 2006. The spring actions brought together this piecemeal work, but certain groups and certain regions already had more experience organizing around immigrant rights. Experienced groups may have had greater resources and an easier time mobilizing. Ruth Milkman (2006), a professor at UCLA who has published widely on immigrants and the labor movement, claims:

In California, then, and especially in Los Angeles, the labor movement has been a potent vehicle of Latino immigrant mobilization, both in the workplace and at the voting booth. That is why L.A. was at the epicenter of the immigrant rights movement that

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<sup>21</sup> Jayadev (2006) argues that the marches were successful because people organized themselves and that “the corraling of this energy by traditional organizers may in fact be the only thin that can threaten it.” While I agree that the marches were only so successful because they broke the traditional organizer-participant mode and relied on everyone to become organizers, events like these simply cannot happen without organizations to provide resources – insurance, permits, funding, photo-copiers, etc – and set the structure.

emerged this past spring....The Labor-Latino coalition that developed in the region in the aftermath of Prop. 187 has flourished ever since, stacking up huge electoral successes, winning hearts and mind of in the immigrant community, and building lasting organizational capacity.<sup>22</sup>

The labor unions, particularly SEIU, have grown increasingly interested in working with Latinos and recognized them as an increasingly important demographic. The SEIU has spearheaded campaigns to organize previously un-organized sectors, such as janitors in their Justice for Janitors campaign across the country. While Latinos might have more experience with grassroots organizing work, South Asians have far less<sup>23</sup> and far fewer numbers. Milkman (2006) noted “At this point everyone in the labor movement can see the potential of immigrant organizing as a source of revitalization for the ailing national union movement, and so all parties are trying to ride that wave.” This relates to the next point.

### ***External Factors***

#### *Political Expediency*

Elected officials are also trying to ride the Latino wave. Both the Republican and Democratic parties have worked hard to attract the Latino vote as their population has grown. In response, Latinos are a constituency that is both socially conservative (attractive to Republicans) and economically left leaning (attractive to Democrats). In 2004, exit polls showed that Bush received 44 percent of the Latino vote. In the 2006 mid-term election, the tide shifted and 69 percent of Latinos voted for Democrats and just 30 percent for

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<sup>22</sup> Milkman (2006) also argues that the Change to Win (CTW) Federation, which split from the AFL-CIO in 2005 led by SEIU, supported the McCain-Kennedy bill and the creation of a guest-worker program because they had greater incentive to support the bill with the most likely chance of passing due to their large immigrant membership. This contrasts with the AFL-CIO who opposed any guest worker provisions and whose membership remains more native-born.

<sup>23</sup> Organizer Q (Rebert 2007) also noted that some communities may have had a longer history of work with the grassroots. This organizer gave the example of South Asians, noting that the South Asian community did not really have a history until 9/11.

Republicans (Pew Hispanic 2006). The 2006 election outcome was undoubtedly influenced by the proposed anti-immigration legislation, but politicians cannot ignore the growing demographic power of Latinos. No other largely immigrant group holds such sway; Asian and African immigrant groups simply do not have the numbers.

### *Social Networks and World View*

Latinos have ‘proved’ their commitment for many organizers and importance for politicians in a way that other groups have not. Milkman (2006) notes that unions now claim that foreign-born workers, particularly Latinos, are now seen as more receptive to unions than native-born workers. Milkman claims that the strong social networks that many immigrants rely upon for basic survival aid in galvanizing unionization. She also claims that “for Latino immigrants in particular, class-based collective organizations like unions are highly compatible with past lived experience and world views...And crucially, the shared experience of stigmatization among immigrants” also aids in unionization.

This argument may hold some validity. Many Latino immigrants coming to the United States have experience with collective organizing in their home countries and Latino immigrants in many areas have built strong social networks. However, other groups have as well. South Asia is rife with political organizing, though class status may also play a role in exposure to organizing. Professional South Asian immigrants may have had less exposure to organizing in both their home country and in the United States than their working-class counterparts.

## *Class*

Class status, although rarely discussed, also played a large role in determining who was likely to be mobilized by the spring marches. Class shapes the type of employment an immigrant will take and how an individual can access the legal system. South Asians in New York, where several South Asian organizations were very active in the spring mobilizations, tend to be a far more socioeconomically diverse group than South Asians in the Twin Cities. For example, in New York, South Asians make up 55 percent of all taxi cab drivers in the city (Mathew 2005). In Minnesota, South Asians (mostly Indian), tend to be more similar to the last generation of Indian immigrants who landed in New York – more professional. Many came on H1-B professional visas and particularly those who came between 1997-1999 arrived as tech workers in the IT industry to help shore up U.S. computing systems in the lead up to the Y2K bug (Rebert 2007, Interview P).<sup>24</sup> These professional immigrants, like native-born workers, are not very likely to see themselves as having much in common with working class immigrants who work cleaning buildings, driving cabs, or running street food stands.

Despite the “model minority” image of South Asian Americans nationally, in truth, the community is far more stratified, although the working class South Asians may be more heavily concentrated in areas like New York and Chicago. Prashad (2004) commented on the divisions in the Indian community remarking:

People [able to give large amounts of money to political campaigns] are far from the American desi community: a full quarter of Indian Americans live in households with incomes below \$25,000 - even though Indian Americans reported the highest median household income (\$49,696). This means that the rate of inequality in the

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<sup>24</sup> In New York, interviewees often highlighted that there were a lot of working class South Asians, I think because this is incongruent with the stereotype of Indian immigrants. In contrast, Interviewee P did not mention this in the Twin Cities. When asked about common occupations, Interviewee P noted entrepreneurs, industry people, and a few business people – all more professional work.

community is very high, with a few millionaires and a considerable number who live in the basement of U.S. society. You cannot go into an urban hospital in the U.S. without being treated by either an Indian doctor or an Indian nurse. Yet, a fifth of Indian Americans have no health insurance, a higher percentage than the national average.

Anecdotal evidence implied that the marches attracted primarily working class immigrants with little ability to legalize their status. Interviewee N (Rebert 2007) commented that among her students,

I think there was a shame and...association of...if I say I'm connected to this then that indicate something about my class position. And so, I think [immigrant rights in spring 2006] was a really hard thing to talk about, because people just didn't want to...I think it was definitely something like people were trying to be like "well, I'm in school and upwardly mobile and I'm going to get a college education and then get a high paying job and these are not issues that really concern me.

All of these factors – language, existing networks, political expediency, worldview, and class– intersect in the way that the story is framed. These issues only become important in mobilizing people when the story frames them as important.

### **The Framing: Racialization**

The way that groups frame and narrate the issues at hand affects who may be mobilized. Groups at the top of the racial and class hierarchy have created a clear picture of *who* immigrants are through the media, through outreach, and through their framings, their telling of the immigrant rights story. The dominant framing presents a very specific view of who immigrants are. Multiple organizers, immigrants, and news articles implied a Latino framing. Subhash Kateel, head of anti-deportation group Families for Freedom in New York, remarked:

Somehow “comprehensive immigration reform” has come to mean the legalization of “Mexicans.” The press has framed the issue in the

context of tension between the black community and what they call the Hispanic community. New York papers talk about it as if there's no such thing as black immigrants.

If you live in Brooklyn, half the people you see on the street are immigrants, including white immigrants from all over the world. A significant chunk of the population of New York, and a significant number of the people being deported, are black immigrants....

The debate is framed as Mexican immigrants vs. black citizens. That's just not what it looks like. The bulk of our members are black immigrants. Our supporters come mainly from Dominican and West Indian communities. We need to let people know what the real stakes are in the black community if the immigration issue doesn't get settled. (Kateel 2006)

Kateel reveals the ways in which the current debate has invisibilized non-Mexican immigrant groups. Organizer D (Rebert 2007) likewise observed,

I don't think it's a Latino movement per se, but probably 80 or 90 percent is Latino...the reaction is Latinos [mostly] because it hit us the most because...when [people] think about immigrants, most people don't think about nothing else than Latinos. If you speak about 'illegals,' they don't think about no one else but Latinos. So, it hit us the most and therefore we are reacting.

Although the national debate portended to be about immigration, the immigrant subjects had a very particular image: illegal, brown, and Mexican. All the pictures printed in *Time* and *Newsweek* articles about immigration and the immigrant rights movement between March and June showed Latino immigrants: crossing the border, working at meatpacking factories, cleaning suburban houses, and being deported.<sup>25</sup> So, when H.R. 4437's debate attacked 'illegals' and immigrants, Latinos responded.

Similarly, the criticism of the rallies quickly focused around two issues: language and flags. For example, on March 30, 2006, the New York Times ran an editorial by Linda Chavez, the chairman of the Center for Equal Opportunity in Sterling, Virginia and the

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<sup>25</sup> The author examined *Newsweek* and *Time* issues between March and June to obtain this information.



director of the United States Commission on Civil Rights under President Ronald Reagan. Chavez criticizes the tactics of the “Hundreds of thousands of flag-waving demonstrators” who had taken to the street the previous week arguing that

Despite their victory in this round, supporters of comprehensive immigration reform must be careful in their tactics, including what symbols they embrace. Although American flags were widely visible among the crowd of a half-million in downtown Los Angeles (organizers had asked marchers to bring them), reports indicated that they were outnumbered by those of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and other countries. And if history is any guide, those foreign banners could spur an anti-immigrant reaction.

Chavez addresses the *Latino* organizers and immigrants attending the marches and urges them to re-think their tactics, arguing that they should be trying to show the rest of the country that they are like them, rather than constantly reinforcing their difference. However, when Chavez refers to the rest of the country, it is clear that she is referring to white America: the America that has the power to accept or deny new groups and to make and change legislation. She notes: “Unfortunately, many Latino leaders play right into the hands of those who claim they are different from the Germans, Italians, Poles, Jews, Irish and others who came here in another era.” And she continues, “Instead of presenting themselves as an aggrieved, foreign presence, immigration advocates ought to be explaining how similar Latinos are to other Americans in their values, aspirations and achievements.” Other articles note that HR 4437 galvanized demonstrators “especially Mexicans and other Latin Americans who predominate among illegal immigrants” (Bernstein 2006) and an April Washington Post article focusing on the involvement of non-Latino immigrant groups begins “The recent demonstrations by hundreds of thousands of immigration supporters appeared to have one distinct face: Latino” (Fears and Williams 2006). The picture of immigrants and the immigration issue were racialized with a Latino face.

I use racialization in this paper according to racial formation scholars' Howard Winant and Michael Omi's definition, "to signify the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group" (Omi and Winant, 1994). However, in this particular case, "immigrants" have been racialized before, but in the context of 2006, they are racialized differently. Today's immigrants are racialized as low-income, "illegal" Mexicans who trek across the Southwest border.<sup>26</sup> Other groups are racialized in different ways, but these too hold very real consequences for the treatment people receive.

A century ago, Asians were the immigrant threat. Cartoons depicted opium-smoking Chinese immigrants as the "yellow peril" and South Asian immigrants as the "Hindoo Invasion."<sup>27</sup> Today, Muslims (and people perceived to look like Muslims) are perceived as threats. While Latinos are racialized as illegals who will take your job, Muslims are terrorists or terrorist sympathizers. African Muslim organizer L (Rebert 2007) recounted:

...when I went to Chicago, [the store clerk] asked me, [while] trying to get money from the transfer company...they [told] me, "I have to check on the government list, I'm gong to call somebody."

And I asked, "why?"

He said, "well, if you're Latino, you're just the drug dealers and stuff like that and if you're dressed like this [in the *Hijab*], then you're Muslim and terrorism and name check.'"

Although rarely so blatant, this racialization and coding based on skin color, clothing, or accent happen all the time.

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<sup>26</sup> We could extend the category of Mexicans more broadly to "Latino" since most people cannot visually distinguish a specific country of origin.

<sup>27</sup> This construction is particularly ironic because most the men of the "Hindoo Invasion" were Punjabi Sikhs.

Through a similar process, Muslims<sup>28</sup> and those perceived to look like Muslims were racialized as terrorists after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. Lee (2004, 132) summarizes:

In the search for the perpetrators, entire Middle Eastern and Muslim immigrant communities were vulnerable to blanket racializations as “terrorists,” “potential terrorists,” or accomplices and sympathizers. Within days of the attacks, law enforcement officials had arrested more than 1,200 people, only a handful of whom would be proven to have had any links to terrorism.

Additionally, the U.S. government required these potential terrorists to register under two programs. The first program required over 80,000 men from 25 (24 of which were predominantly Muslim) countries to be registered, fingerprinted, photographed, and interviewed (De Genova 2006, Lee 2004). The second, the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), targeted students. All international students were required to register their names, addresses, and other information with the federal government (Lee 2004). The Muslim-equals-terrorist racialization culminated with several hate-crime murders in 2001, beginning with the previously mentioned murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi.<sup>29</sup>

Post-9/11 nativism increasingly unifies the language of antiterrorism and border security to marginalize Muslims (and those perceived to be Muslim) and immigrants. Beyond H.R. 4437's longer title, the transfer of immigration services is one of the most striking examples of this unification. In 2003, Immigration and Naturalization Services were transferred to the newly created Department of Homeland Security (Lee 2004). Survey results show that both Latinos and Middle Easterners feel less secure since 9/11 and that incomes and remittances have dropped (Tirman 2006).

Yet, thus far, groups are not uniting around a common immigrant experience. Instead, Latinos and South Asians continue to maintain social and political distance from

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<sup>28</sup> According to Tirman (2006), Muslims in the United States are about equally from South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and Southeast Asia.

<sup>29</sup> Filmmaker Valerie Kaur (2006) deals with the post-9/11 backlash in *Divided We Fall*.

each other and each other's negative stereotypes. When both Latino and South Asians are negatively stereotyped, why would they risk association with another group's negative racialization? Organizer D (Rebert 2007) explained:

But there is a reality as well as how each one of the groups see themselves. So, within Minneapolis, there are cases, there are individuals within each group that understand the situation, but when you have a group vision of themselves, they don't see as illegals and they have, they feel they are a special group within this. They basically will distance and not interest in participating. And I have heard, but I can't say for sure, that within the Somali community there are people without documents, but the people within Somali organizations are not interested in working with them. I don't know if you had heard about this, but it's pretty interesting. Because they are afraid that ICE is going to come and start penalizing them. So, if you own people is afraid to work with you because, so there is no way that I can confront them...

Additionally, immigrants are not immune from constructions about other groups that we are fed through the media, laws, and popular discourse. If the debate continually comes back to "illegals" and South Asian immigrants do not see themselves reflected in that narrative, they may get the message that the debate does not affect them, even if immigration reform has the potential to inflict profound change upon their lives. If South Asians see the debate as a Mexican issue in the popular discourse, mobilizing them will be harder even if South Asian immigrant organizations are trying to do so. Organizer M (Rebert 2007) observed this, commenting,

To me, [immigration] was being framed as a border issue, as a Latino issue. You know, I think that the way that [the] "movement," or the larger-scale organizers were framing wasn't so different from how the press and how the mainstream media was framing it. And I think that while there was all this other shit going on around homeland security and the war on terror and this and that, I think that how and who was painted as undocumented and targeted by the laws and most impacted by the laws was framed, I think, as Latino.

## Differential Framing Power

This racialized story was but one framing. Other framings, other tellings of this story explained it differently. The way that groups frame and narrate what the issues at hand affects who may be mobilized. Some groups have framed the immigrant rights movement as a labor rights issues, others as a human rights issue, and others as a continuation of colonialism. For many faith organizations, the immigrant rights movement is simply about justice and they see undocumented immigrants as one of the most exploited groups and in need of the most help.

Different framings may resonate with different groups. For example, a worker's rights framing says:

They are trying to create an easily exploitable underclass....This is not just about underpaid Latino workers, but workers across the community." -- Michael Andrade, Representative for the National Mobilization Against Sweatshops (Hope 2006).

A colonialism framing by Ecuadorian Indian, Alvaro Andrade (Ferguson 2006),

The way I see it, 500 years ago, they tried to get rid of our people...When Columbus and then the pilgrims came, they put us down with disease and made us slaves. Now they're all freaking out because they look at it as the browning of America. But it's not. It's the re-browning of America. Because we are the true Americans. We're the future of America. So now you say you're going to build a wall along the border? So who's gonna build it?

A Human Rights framing by an organizer G (Rebert 2007) in New York:

We're really trying to do it from a human rights framework. We're saying, we're putting it in family values – no to detention that separates our families, and even though in New York we're not that concerned with Border issue, we are saying no to border issue and we're trying to see it as a national issue because detention and deportation affects some groups more than the other and similarly the border issue one group more than the other, something we're trying to make it into the national issue, similar to what I was saying earlier, if people come here, they should be able to choose how and where to live and so that's the five points includes legalization for all, worker's rights regardless of immigration status, family reunification,

no to deportations, and also the driver's license issue, no to Real ID Act.

A police state framing by organizer H (Rebert 2007),

This is about what it means to be in this country, like how we treat our neighbors...Right now what we're fighting about is whether or now we want to live in a police state. It's not about immigrant rights, you know, it's about whether we think the police should have the right to enter our workplaces and throw us in vans and deport us out of our country. I mean, that's terrifying. And, it's immigrants now, and it's particularly undocumented immigrants, and it's particularly Muslims. But, next year, five years from now, we go after the most vulnerable and then we go after the mainstream.

All of these framings have the potential to cut across racial and ethnic lines to mobilize a broad range of people. Social movements have acted as social change mechanisms that challenge, re-frame, and re-articulate the dominant construction of an issue or group in the past.<sup>30</sup> Like earlier black power, feminist, and gay New Social Movements, some see the immigrant rights movement as challenging the very notion of what it means to be "American." One organizer joked that the movement is "asking those little white lumps of lard to finally dissolve into the American melting pot."

Yet these framings rarely have the opportunity to truly challenge the dominant racialized story. All organizations within the movement are not created equal. Some organizations have more power and others have less power over how the movement projects its collective identity. A similar dynamic between legislatively-oriented and transformation-oriented grassroots organizations took place in both New York and the Twin Cities.

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<sup>30</sup> Racial formations theorists Omi & Winant (1994, 4) observed, "By challenging existing patterns of race relations, the black movement created new political subjects, expanded the terrain of political struggle beyond "normal" politics, and inspired and galvanized a range of "new social movements"—student, antiwar, feminist, gay, environmental, etc. The black movement's ability to *rearticulate* traditional political and cultural themes and in so doing mobilize a mass base of adherent is, we believe, a striking feature of racial politics in the postwar period."

### *Fighting for Different Goals*

The immigrant rights movements in the Twin Cities and New York took different forms, though, they also had some similar elements. In the Twin Cities, the marches were organized by two coalitions: the Alliance for Fair Federal Immigration Reform of Minnesota (AFFIRM) and the Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Coalition (MIRAC). In Minnesota, AFFIRM, a coalition of organizations, began as a response to then Governor Jesse Ventura's attempts to change the identification requirements in order to get a driver's license (Rebert 2007, interview I). This later ballooned into a national issue known as the Real ID Act. AFFIRM later organized around unionization issues at a local Holiday Inn in 1999 and a report that Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty released December 2004 on the cost of immigration to Minnesota<sup>31</sup>. AFFIRM takes a more legislative bent, seeking to advocate for fair immigration legislation at the local, state, and national level. With the exception of one Somali organization, AFFIRM consists primarily of organizations working with the Latino community in Minnesota and allies. AFFIRM tends to be the clearinghouse for established organizations who wish to unite around immigrant rights in Minnesota. They have a vast array of resources, both monetary and in professional expertise, at their disposal from the unions and faith community. The faith community is particularly active in AFFIRM, including Jewish, Catholic, and inter-faith Christian organizations.

MIRAC is a newer entity that formed last spring and has a far more debated history. If you were to ask five different people how they started or what they were, you would get five different answers. Some see MIRAC as a network of individuals rather than a coalition or an organization. According to one MIRAC member (Rebert 2007, Interview D), MIRAC

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<sup>31</sup> The report was highly controversial and only reported on the costs of immigration while not acknowledging the benefits of immigration that economists have measured to be far higher.

began as a loosely defined group interested in taking some sort of action to respond to the legislation; according to another member, MIRAC was an offshoot of AFFIRM, to another, MIRAC wants to be part of AFFIRM. Whatever MIRAC's relationship with AFFIRM, the group that eventually became MIRAC began as a meeting of concerned individuals at a restaurant in early 2006 (Rebert 2007, Interview D). Some of the early members also worked for AFFIRM organizations, but many were unaffiliated with an organization. Rather than forming a specific policy agenda, MIRAC focuses on taking to the streets and keeping the pressure on lawmakers and the public. In contrast to AFFIRM meetings, which run on a strict agenda and take place in English, MIRAC meetings run organically and more often than not, in Spanish. MIRAC members are a motley crew of Latino immigrants and Latin-American-loving white allies with strong connections to the Latino community coming from anti-war, labor, and socialist circles. As a new organization without legal status, MIRAC has limited resources on its own and must seek out partnerships with more established organizations in order to obtain the permits and financial backing for marches and other actions. However, MIRAC is especially effective at mobilizing the Latino community by working with local churches and the local Spanish-language media.

While MIRAC and AFFIRM have often worked together, particularly around the April 9<sup>th</sup> march and more recently to develop an educational curriculum about immigration, a lot of tension exists between the two groups. According to some AFFIRM associated organizers, because MIRAC is a loose coalition of individuals, little accountability exists. To some MIRAC organizers, AFFIRM is too dominated by older allies and works on too traditional a model of organizing. AFFIRM meetings target organizations while MIRAC has held community meetings in basements after church lets out to determine what the Latino community wants to work on. While tension exists, from an outside political perspective,



AFFIRM and MIRAC complement each other well, with AFFIRM focused on the legislative aspects and MIRAC focused on grassroots mobilization. Each has different ways of working. MIRAC is the more radical, young, immigrant-led group while AFFIRM incorporates a more white, older, crowd of professional social justice workers.

While far more coalitions in New York exist, immigrant rights organizing seems to break down along similar axes. The New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) is the major mainstream established coalition of around 150 organizations working across the state. NYIC has four major areas of work: policy analysis and advocacy, civic participation and voter education, community education, and training and leadership development (New York Immigration Coalition 2005). They formed in 1987 in response to one of the last major rounds of immigration reform, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Immigrant Communities in Action (ICA) is the more radical, immigrant-led, community-organizing-focused coalition in New York. ICA includes seventeen organizations and one other coalition of six Filipino organizations (Immigrant Communities in Action 2006). However, Immigration Coalition members tend to have more credibility with and accessibility to legislators while ICA takes a stronger immigration stance. For example, ICA participated in an October 21<sup>st</sup> march as part of the New York United for Immigrant Rights coalition that demanded 1) full legalization, 2) keep families together, 3) civil rights for all, in particular, an end to deportation and detention, 4) equal rights for all workers, 5) defend minority voter's right to vote, 6) an end to discriminatory immigration policies including targeting black, LGBT, Muslim, and HIV positive immigrants, 7) stop profiting from immigrants suffering through jails and detention center, 8) create community safety, 9) no more deaths on the border, and that 10) everyone must take a stand. Like MIRAC, ICA and New York United focuses less on what is legislatively "feasible" and more on mobilization.

New York organizations have a long history of work around immigrant rights. Many organizations rallied around post-9/11 abuses particularly targeting South Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants. In New York, as in Minnesota, the more radical, immigrant-led organizations clashed with the more established organizations over tactics and messaging. The more established organizations took the lead on April 10<sup>th</sup> organizing and procured extensive financial resources. The April 10<sup>th</sup> rally in New York was dominated by the labor and religious organizations and featured major political speakers, such as Senator Clinton. In both cities and nationally, groups clashed over the May 1<sup>st</sup> boycott. Many agreed with New Mexican Governor Bill Richardson's statement, who is himself Latino, that the boycott sent the wrong message, the immigrants "come to America to work, yet they're not working" (CNN 2006). Others felt that it was asking immigrants to do too much and too risky. Andrew Friedman, executive directory of Make the Road by Walking, a community-based organization in Brooklyn's Bushwick neighborhood working primarily with Dominican and African-American populations, urged:

As a movement for immigrant rights gains momentum, a nationwide boycott and general strike is not the best way to push for just reform. As a tactic, it is just too risky. Immigrant workers who skip work are likely to lose their jobs, and most are already economically vulnerable. A tactic that hurts those it purports to support is simply irresponsible.

Organizers are naïve regarding the tremendous undertaking of a nationwide boycott. It would be exceedingly difficult to pull off, and its almost certain failure will distract from the huge benefits immigrants bring to the U.S. (Friedman 2006)

Others saw the boycott as an effective way to show the economic power of immigrants and as a powerful show of solidarity with workers around the world by staging

the action on May 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>32</sup> In New York, the split led to two major events on May 1<sup>st</sup>. The New York Immigration Coalition called for people to build human chains at 12:16 p.m., coinciding with many people's lunch breaks, in different neighborhoods around the city to symbolize the December 16, 2005 passage of the Sensenbrenner bill, HR 4437. CNN (2006) reported that around 12,000 people turned out to form eight chains. Later in the day, other groups organized a rally in Union Square. One immigrant rights organizer uninvolved with the May 1<sup>st</sup> boycott planning described the May 1<sup>st</sup> organizing coalition as the "anarchist" organizations, partly because of the predominance of Marxist-oriented immigrant workers organizations and socialist groups.<sup>33</sup> The anarchist label may not be completely accurate because the coalition also included a large number of immigrant-led organizations. However, the coalition certainly pulled the event together on a paltry \$10,000 budget, according to the Village Voice (Ferguson 2006). The organizer noted that planners were unprepared for the sheer number of people who showed up, but that consequently the Union Square march was "the most powerful action I've been at in my entire life" (Rebert 2007, Interview F). Police gave way to the burgeoning crowd and allowed the throngs of people to spill out onto Broadway an hour before the rally was supposed to end because of the crowding. The May 1<sup>st</sup> event lacked the large church and union backing that the April 10<sup>th</sup> mobilization had, but featured the voices of immigrants and community organizers rather than bigwig politicians as a result. Reverend Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, Transit Workers Union President Rogers Toussaint led the march. While numerical estimates for

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<sup>32</sup> May 1<sup>st</sup> is recognized as International Worker's Day in many other countries around the world. The United States celebrates its own labor day in September. Some critics argue the U.S. deliberately created a September labor day to inhibit international solidarity and disassociate the U.S. labor movement from the radical left.

<sup>33</sup> Organizing coalition members included the International Socialist Organization, the Workers World Party, Radical Women, the Pakistan USA Freedom Forum, the Troops Out Now Coalition, the Latin American Workers Project, the Association of Senegalese in America, and the Justice 4 Immigrants Filipino Coalition, among many other organizations. For a complete list, see their website at <http://www.may1.info/>.

the march are hard to come by, observers commented that the crowd stretched 26 blocks long as they marched toward Foley Square, home of homeland security, in downtown and that the crowd felt bigger than the 125,000 that showed up on April 10<sup>th</sup> (Ferguson 2006). The one thing that is for sure is that May 1<sup>st</sup> rally in New York was pulled off by the more radical organizations, including a host of immigrant-led grassroots organizations.



**Figure 11. Immigrants and their supporters gathering in Queens, NY on May 1st (Estrin 2006).**

In the Twin Cities, the story was similar. While April 9<sup>th</sup> was jointly organized by MIRAC and AFFIRM, MIRAC organized the all-day community rally at Minneapolis's Powderhorn Park and Isaiah, an AFFIRM member, hosted an alternate event earlier in the day. Many Twin Cities organizers measured the success of the actions in the number of people who didn't go to work rather than in those that showed up to the rally. The Minneapolis and New York marches joined more than 100 actions across 39 different states (WABC 2006).

Here lies the central distinction between MIRAC and New York United on one hand and the legislatively-focused AFFIRM and the New York Immigration Coalition on the

other: When talking with organizers from the smaller, more left-wing organizations, the interviewees repeatedly stressed that this movement was a way towards transforming individuals and transforming consciousness. It was not simply about papers. As organizer D (Rebert 2007) expressed:

My wish is, the papers are important, but most important is raising consciousness among individuals. And that's what I don't think we're doing as much as I wish, because, again, what happens when you give papers to someone? How has this individual transformed from being so selfish to be[ing] a community more inclusive, a more inclusive community service oriented [individual]?

Organizer H (Rebert 2007) pointed out the different orientation of MIRAC and AFFIRM noting:

MIRAC is a left-wing organization, AFFIRM is not. AFFIRM is a progressive coalition that acts more left-wing....MIRAC is able to push AFFIRM to take more left-wing stances and AFFIRM is able to maintain a more mainstream profile and have that image in the media. And those both have their values.

The legislatively focused organizations, on the other hand, have united around a specific goal. Therefore, the legislatively based organizations may have slightly different interests.

The organizations pushing for more radical change sparred with the mainstream organizations not only over actions, but also over messaging. The "Today we march, tomorrow we vote" and "We are America" slogans proved particularly contentious.<sup>34</sup> A Washington Post article on the subject reported the apt reflections of Georgetown History professor Micahel Kazin who noted that the tensions within the movement reflected a division between groups whose main focus is to work within the system to gain legalization

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<sup>34</sup> Organizer J, who worked with a major immigrant rights coalition in New York, noted "I know that there are groups uncomfortable with some of that messaging, like "We are America" or, what else did we have, "Legalize don't criminalize," which we didn't use that much actually..."We want to do state-specific [messaging], which was how the "I love immigrant New York" came about, and in terms of the national work, I mean we are both funded by some of those national groups, so we have to use their messaging to some extent..." (Rebert 2007).

for immigrants and those who are trying to build a more radical grassroots movement. The article quoted:

There's a typical division, you might say, between people who see the need to put pressure on people on the inside and are very happy to have Teddy Kennedy speak at the rally, or even [John] McCain, and folks at the May 1<sup>st</sup> rally who would not feel comfortable with Congress people. (Williams and Brulliard 2006)

In another example, Organizer H (Rebert 2007) commented on the ways that MIRAC and AFFIRM's framings differ over guestworkers:

As an organization, we stand for immigrant rights and...I think we think MIRAC's principles fit within AFFIRM's principles, but go further at times. At times, they don't. At times it's really just a question of messaging. So, there was a question of guestworkers became a huge divisive question. When really, if you look at AFFIRM's principles, AFFIRM by definition doesn't support guestworker programs because they don't support any legislation that doesn't support worker's rights. And there will never be any guestworker programs passed that fully support worker rights. It's a logical impossibility... we also... don't...support any legislation that doesn't provide for a pathway to legalization or a pathway to citizenship for every immigrant to this country. That's the definition of a guestworker program is that there is no pathway to citizenship for a temporary worker. Thus, we don't support guestworker programs. But, you know, in our publications, we don't say that because it's a divisive term. I mean, this is not me, I can go either way, but the idea is that there is a political strategy in not saying and not speaking to the language of guestworker program but speaking to our values as opposed to what we oppose whereas MIRAC it's a different route.

Because AFFIRM wants to stay within the mainstream and promote a political strategy, AFFIRM has different framing interests than MIRAC.

Often, the more established organizations and coalitions have more resources, both monetary in accessing established channels of power such as the media and Congress. They are often closer to the mainstream view, partly because this is probably where they get their funding. They primarily use official channels to affect change. For example, they focus on

legislative change to get immigrants documents. At the same time, because part of their power to affect change comes from their proximity to official power (eg. legislators), they are less likely to put these relationships on the line to risk the radical, transformative change that Organizer D hoped for. This situation was precisely what happened across the country on May 1<sup>st</sup> and in St. Paul on Labor Day. In St. Paul, AFFIRM and MIRAC attempted to organize a march to a large, annual Union-run Labor Day celebration. At the Labor Celebration, the immigrants were supposed to have a chance to pose questions to political candidates. However, a week before the event, the Unions pulled out and completely cancelled the event. Organizer D (Rebert 2007) explained

But contradictions came when us, the illegals, were going to be asking for papers and unions had commitments, or has commitments, with people running for different government positions and then the marriage between unions and political parties which disabled them from being able to ask for their rights. Because there is an embedded commitment where unions cannot ask because they're public commitment and they felt like they cannot ask. To me, you commit to a political party, you are in a tough position. You are in a tough position because you cannot demand from that political party things. And...some of the unions have those commitments, and when we had this group of individuals that don't have commitments and they wanted to fight for their rights, the unions felt very insecure about the situations. How can we be asking to our candidates for these and compromising our candidate? -- that was probably the fear.

In this case, the momentum was so great that the actions went on without the legislatively-focused organizations, albeit with fewer numbers. The results of the May 1<sup>st</sup> pushed the more powerful organizations into a slightly more critical position. However, the organizations seeking transformative change still rarely have the power to construct themselves. The dominant racializations have been built up and reinforced over time. If the immigrant rights movement can challenge the black and white, illegal versus legal, deserving versus undeserving polarity that the dominant story has portrayed, the movement will attract

participation from more immigrant communities and gain more political power. The groups that are mobilized will not change until the framing, the story, that they hear includes them.

Both New York and the Twin Cities had active and successful immigrant rights mobilizations. Yet, in both places, the movement primarily mobilized Latinos. Several South Asian organizations actively helped plan and organize in New York, but the immigrant rights movement failed to resonate broadly with non-Latino communities. Several factors affect mobilization.

First, a diversity of languages and pre-existing networks used to working with Latinos made it easier to get the word out to Latinos. Second, the growing Latino population makes Latinos a politically important demographic in a way that other groups are not. The labor movement and politicians both court Latinos. Third, The immigrant rights movement also seems to gain more participation among working class immigrants, although hard data on this is difficult to obtain. However, racialization and differential framing power played the most significant roles in mobilizing a Latino, rather than pan-ethnic, immigrant movement.

The dominant framing repeatedly told the public that immigrants and immigrant rights were about 'illegal' Latino immigrants. More inclusive framings existed, but organizations lacked the power to make these alternative framings heard. In this movement, resources matter. In both cities, a similar dynamic existed between resource-rich legislatively oriented organizations focusing on what was politically feasible and more left-wing, often grassroots focused, initiatives who saw the movement as a way to transform people's consciousness. The legislatively focused organizations were less willing, or less able, to challenge the illegal versus legal, Latino versus patriotic American paradigm. Thus, the story



remained about Latinos. Other groups did not think the debate concerned them, so they stayed away. Instead of unity over a common immigrant experience, groups often distanced themselves from others' negative stereotypes.

## Chapter 5:

### **Bridging the Gap: Mobilizing the Rainbow**

Despite the distancing occurring thus far, most organizers expressed desire for a more multiethnic immigrant rights movement. More groups mean more numbers and more power. But it also adds something else. Organizer L commented:

The advantage [of a multiethnic movement] is that all people of color and gender are coming together and demanding for change. That's beautiful...And when [the politicians] see all these people marching together, [the people] can't be wrong.

Organizer L's comment implies that the power of a multiethnic movement goes beyond numerical power. A multiracial movement garners a type of moral power and the ability to disrupt and re-frame the dominant story. Then the story is not just about Latinos as the dominant framing tells us, but it's also South Asian, Arab, and African immigrants opposing this legislation and standing up for immigrant rights. Indeed, how *can* so many different people be wrong? A multiethnic orientation holds the potential to challenge the current illegal Mexican racialization by blurring the categories that the dominant framing has constructed and moving the movement to the moral high ground. Currently, the immigrant rights movement is forced to prove that Latinos are hard working people with 'American' values rather than crime-inducing threats. On the other hand, Asians are seen as model minorities and as hard-working people who value education. Combining groups with competing stereotypes into an alliance of mutual gain challenges the racializations the dominant group has constructed. If the movement cannot be summed up as a bunch of 'illegals,' it becomes a diverse group of *people*.

Organizer H expressed her hope that a multiracial movement could help address issues of distrust and racism:

In just a very long-term strategic role, if we do not have, or are not building coalition right now, does that matter what legislation we pass? Because they'll just go after another group and because we don't have that unity, you know, they'll have to wage their own battle. So, I think there is that bigger piece. I think there is also a local piece, the relationships between immigrant communities here, that are all facing a lot of issues, similar struggles, but are not unified, or not in conversation. There is a lot of racism between different immigrant groups and I would hope that this movement would be something that could address that [racism] because the anti-immigrant movement is ultimately about racism. If we're going to mobilize against it, we need to address those issues of distrust and prejudice that exist between us.

Although desirable, organizers also recognize difficulties in forging a multiethnic, multiracial movement. Organizer H also noted, "the main disadvantage is it's hard," (Rebert 2007, Interview H). Taking the time to build trust, bringing people together when they are segregated in different parts of the city, bridging language differences, and dealing with a variety immigration concerns is hard. Organizer G (Rebert 2007) gave an example of some of these difficulties, but remained optimistic:

The language issue and different issues affecting different people more, for example, like the Filipinos have the longest backlog in family reunification. They have to wait 15-20 years to bring their son or daughter here, so for them, if they could change that one policy, it would be okay. And, whereas, for [a] Bangladeshi man, not having FBI come to you in the middle of the night would be the biggest priority. I think the diversity of issues would pose [a] challenge, but, I think in terms of the advantages of it, I think we're all in it together. It affects all of us directly or indirectly and we do need to be in it and come together. I truly believe that.

If, as these organizers suggest, a more multiracial, multiethnic movement is desirable, how do we combat the distancing occurring between groups? How do we overcome the challenges diversity poses in order to work together? In the past, one way that groups have formed long lasting coalitions and built a sense of common fate was through the formation of new identities. New Social Movements repeatedly built on emerging political identities

such as the gay rights movement and the feminist movement. However, crossing racial and ethnic identities to build an immigrant identity poses particularly difficult challenges. The formation of Latino, Black, Native American, and Asian pan-ethnic identities serve as some of the strongest examples of how to cross deep-seeded ethnic divides and unite people.

### **The Panethnic Organizing Model**

Before the 1960s, racial distancing was the norm among Asian groups. Like different immigrants do today, Asian groups sought to distance themselves from the negative construction of Japanese Americans during World War II. The American government interned more than 100,000 Japanese-Americans in the name of homeland security. The government surmised that because of their ancestry, Japanese Americans were all potential spies for the Japanese government. Instead of standing with their phenotypically similar Japanese Americans, some Chinese, Filipinos, and Koreans Americans wore buttons or ethnic clothing to signal that they were *not* the Japanese enemy (Espiritu 1992, 23). Yet, a generation later, Asian Americans traded this distancing for solidarity.

Asian Americans began to work together around an Asian American collective identity rather than through separate ethnic groups. By the 1970s, new<sup>35</sup> panethnic identities emerged to form a base for organizing around Latino, Asian, and Native American identities. Even more recently, many Indian, Pakistani, Nepali, and Bangladeshi groups are forging a South Asian identity. Lopez and Espiritu (1990, 198) define panethnicity as “the development of bridging organizations and solidarities among subgroups of ethnic collectivities that are often seen as homogenous by outsiders.” These emergent identities

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<sup>35</sup> Black and white panethnicities emerged much earlier in U.S. history. I would conceptually separate the formation of white panethnicity from the other panethnicities discussed due to the unique status of privilege and power that white panethnics hold.

have bridged enormous differences – both cultural and structural -- to work together around issues of common interest. Asian America encompasses more than 30 ethnic groups and languages (Okamoto 2003, 817). Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, and other Asian groups have different immigration experiences, histories of war and tension in their home countries that may continue to affect intergroup relations in the United States and religious and linguistic differences, differences (Okamoto 2003; Lopez and Espiritu 1990). Asians span the spectrum with some of the highest (Indian Americans) and lowest average incomes in the country (Hmong Americans).

Research by Lopez and Espiritu (1990) and Espiritu (1992; 2004) stress the primacy of structural factors, such as the Census and State resource distribution, over common cultural factors in the creation of panethnicities. The Census tells us that America is made up of six groups of people: Whites, Blacks, American Indians or Alaskan Natives, Asians, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders<sup>36</sup>, and Hispanics.<sup>37</sup> On the basis of this classification, the state divides and distributes resources and constructs differential policies.<sup>38</sup> Asians constitute one group. Thus, social, economic, and political forces both arbitrarily create racial categories like “Asian” or “Hispanic” through state categorization mechanisms like the census and then lend meaning to these categories by distributing resources along

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<sup>36</sup> Asian and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders were not considered separate groups until the 2000 census.

<sup>37</sup> The Hispanic question was separate from the race question on the census. In 2000, question 5 asked “Is this person Spanish/Hispanic Latino?” Possible responses included “Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano,” “Puerto Rican,” “Cuban,” or “other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino.” Hispanics may be of any race. Question 6 asked about the person’s race. Possible answers included “White,” “Black, African American, or Negro,” “American Indian or Alaskan Native” with space to write your principal tribe, and a host of Asian boxes including “Asian Indian,” “Chinese,” “Filipino,” “Japanese,” “Korean,” “Vietnamese,” “Native Hawaiian,” “Guamanian or Chamorro,” “Samoan,” “Other Asian,” or “Other Pacific Islander.”

<sup>38</sup> Omi and Winant (1994, 3) argue “How one is categorized is far from a merely academic or even personal matter. Such matters as access to employment, housing, or other publicly or privately valued goods; social program design and the disbursement of local, state, and federal funds; or the organization of elections (among many other issues) are directly affected by racial classification and the recognition of “legitimate” groups. The determination of racial categories is thus an intensely political process. Viewed as a whole, the census’s racial classification reflects prevailing conceptions of race, establishes boundaries by which one’s racial “identity” can be understood, determines the allocation of resources, and frames diverse political issues and conflicts.”

these lines. While Asians may not identify with each other when they first come to the U.S., the census category “Asian” lumps them together and then makes those categories real through resource access. Posed alternatively, it was the continual outside lumping of all Asians into a homogenous group rather than shared cultural factors that proved most important in bringing groups together. Espiritu claims that while structural factors lead to panethnic identification, a common cultural identity would emerge once panethnicity takes root. Espiritu (1992, 154) writes:

Asian Americans came together because they recognized that pan-Asian alliance was important, even essential, for the protection and advancement of their interests. But this is not to say that pan-Asian ethnicity is devoid of cultural sentiment. On the contrary, while panethnic groups may be circumstantially created, they are not circumstantially sustained. Once established, the panethnic group—through its institutions, leaders, and networks—produces and transforms panethnic culture and consciousness. In the process, the panethnic idea becomes autonomous, capable of replenishing itself. Over time, it may even outlive the circumstances and interests that produced it, creating conditions that sustain and revivify it.

Pan-Asianism emerged with the greatest force on college campuses in the late-1960s. Campuses provided some of the greatest inter-Asian contact and Asian students alienated from the dominant white society began to see their similarities. They began to develop *Asian American* strategies (Espiritu 1992). Many of these Asian college students were second or third generation and, thus, perhaps better able to overlook antagonistic pasts that separated members of the first generation. For example, unlike their parents, they had not experienced the Japanese invasion of Korea. Rather, they came together to build a collective identity on the basis of a common present in the United States. Asian groups banded together to increase their political power and to gain funding for social service delivery (Espiritu 1992). Pan-Asian alliances responded to anti-Asian discrimination during the Vietnam War and to lobby for concerns framed in an Asian interest. In forging a collective identity, Asian

Americans accepted their common census category and re-formulated and re-framed it for their own advantage.

Groups employing an Asian American collective identity used their new-found power to turn the racial homogenization of Asians on its head and define themselves on their own terms. For example, the Deputy of the Asian American Health Forum spoke about the political success of a pan-Asian coalition urging the government to separately collect health data based on national-origin groups rather than as a homogenous Asian group, commenting:

We couched the needs of the subgroups within the larger Asian Pacific framework. We always approach policymakers as a united Asian Pacific group. The reason is that we are much more formidable when there are more of us. If we're looking to affect policy nationwide, then we have to be pan-Asian. We'll be wiped out if we lobby as a separate ethnic groups. (Espiritu 1992, 101)

While college campuses provided the initial space for connecting around an *Asian* collective identity, organizations built upon that space, organized, and developed political power. Structural factors created the conditions for the emergence of a pan-Asian identity, but organizations gave that identity power.

Increased advocacy along pan-Asian lines was not without controversy however. From the beginning, pan-Asian groups faced criticism that Chinese and Japanese concerns dominated because of their larger population and higher levels of education. Panethnicities can mask differences among groups, such as the difference of income levels between the Hmong, who came to the U.S. as refugees, and Asian Indians arriving primarily on professional visas. Espiritu (2006, 227) notes: "In the past two decades underrepresented groups within the pan-Asian coalition have decried the dangers of an Asian American cultural and political agenda that erases differences or tokenizes and patronizes its less dominant members." In response, Filipino Americans have occasionally tried to operate

outside of the pan-Asian framework. Filipino Americans might have the numbers to successfully advocate on their own as one of the largest Asian groups in the United States. Colonized by the Spanish, Filipino culture and historical experience is distinct among Asian groups. On the basis of language and shared colonial history, Filipinos have been courted by Latino groups while they have been sought out by Asian groups on the basis of geography. Simultaneously, we see an increasing affinity towards a pan-ethnic Asian identity and an increasing amount of geographic and class diversity post-1965 immigration reform that challenges a pan-Asian identity as new groups question what it “means” to be Asian.

Thus, the formation of a pan-Asian identity crossed numerous historical, ethnic, economic, and phenotypic lines. In examining the success of a wide-array of multiracial formations, sociologist Gary Delgado (2003, 104) of the Applied Research Center notes that some of the most interesting work is happening in multiethnic rather than multiracial organizations, such as those adopting a pan-Asian identity. Delgado (2003, 13) quotes an organizer with the pan-Asian organization CAAAV in New York who observes, “There is as much difference between Korean entrepreneurs, South Asian cab drivers, and Vietnamese seamstresses as there is between any one of these groups and Latinos or African Americans.” Delgado cites the framing power of these organizations in their success, commenting “A major strength of these organizations is their ability to use the sophisticated political analysis and infrastructure of organizations in their countries of origin,” (Delgado 2003, 13). If a pan-ethnic Asian identity can bridge the many gaps between Asians, could a pan-ethnic immigrant identity work to forge unity within the immigrant rights movement?



## Forging a Common Immigrant Identity

Factors exist that both inhibit and promote organizing around a pan-immigrant identity. Lopez and Espiritu (1990) and Espiritu (1992; 2004) emphasize the role structural factors, like racially lumping all Asians into one category, in creating pan-ethnic identities. From one perspective, immigrants may not share this common lumping category. From another, immigrants are strongly differentiated from citizens. For example, the law makes strong distinctions between different types of immigrants and treats them very differently according to visa status. During the December 2006 Swift meat-packing plant raids in Worthington, Minnesota, immigrants here on Temporary Protected Status (TPS)<sup>39</sup> – some Salvadorians and Guatemalans – were separated from the undocumented workers, who were largely Mexican. The state also strongly distinguishes between the rights granted to undocumented immigrants, low-skilled immigrants, refugees, and professional immigrants.

Other factors may also contribute to lack of identification across different immigrant groups. Delgado (2003) cites a 1994 study conducted by the National Conference of Christians and Jews that showed little difference among racial stereotypes held by Blacks, Latinos, and Asians. The study suggested that people of color hold many of the same stereotypes as Whites: more than 40 percent of Blacks and Latinos thought that Asians were “unscrupulous, crafty and devious in business;” Asians (68 percent), Whites (50 percent), and Blacks (49 percent) agreed that Latinos “tend to have bigger families than they are able to support;” and Asian and Latino immigrants agreed that the U.S. was the land of

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<sup>39</sup> TPS is similar to refugee status, but supposed to be for a shorter time period. TPS is usually granted in 12- or 18-month increments to people who cannot return to their country momentarily because of danger from war, natural disaster, or other conditions, but are expected to in the near future. TPS is similar to refugee status and recipients can work, but the status comes with fewer benefits. TPS is currently granted to seven countries including Burundi, El Salvador, Honduras, Liberia, Nicaragua, Somalia, and Sudan (Martin 2005).

opportunity and that African Americans were simply “not embracing the achievement ideology.”

Rich (1996) adds a process of selective assimilation called “queuing” to help explain racial distancing between groups. Essentially, minority groups “queue” for access to jobs and resources controlled by the White majority. The ethnic groups perceived to hold values closest to the white majority are given jobs and resources first. Groups aspiring to those values may be given jobs second. Groups are pitted against one another to position themselves closer to the privileges of whiteness. The group may not ever achieve whiteness, but distancing themselves from groups lower in a racial hierarchy can have large pay offs. Groups compete on racial and ethnic lines because they are pushed into that position by dominant groups.

On the other hand, structural factors do exist that could pull groups together. United States law *very* stringently differentiates between citizens and non-citizens. Legislation such as the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), both passed in 1996, expanded the number of offenses for which any non-citizen can be deported, *including* green card holders. Without citizenship, an individual can be deported. Undocumented individuals are in an extremely precarious position, with no legal guarantee of labor rights, police protection, or so many other protections that U.S. citizens often take for granted. Without citizenship, individuals are at the whim of the state. A structural basis exist for an immigrant identity, but without a powerful structural framing of immigrants’ common fate as non-citizens, little basis exists for building a collective immigrant identity.

Organizations have a strong role to play in helping forge a panethnic immigrant identity. In fact, they are the only ones who can. Organizations do three things. First, they

can open a space to bring people together and get to know one another; second, they re-frame the relevant issues; and third, they provide the leadership and structure. According to New Social Movement theorists, “one of the main goals of a movement based on a collective identity is to gain recognition or acceptance for stigmatized or new social identities,” (Okamoto 2003, 813). Organizations serve as a locus for broadening and transforming a racialized and stigmatized ‘immigrant’ identity to an immigrant identity that serves as a basis for collective power.

In both the Twin Cities and New York, immigrant groups often live in different areas of the city and may not interact with individuals from other groups on a daily basis. Even if different groups live in the same neighborhood, language and stereotyped perceptions about the other community may keep groups from interacting. As organizer G (Rebert 2007) previously noted, this segregation and dearth of daily interactions could pose difficulties to forming a multiethnic movement. However, organizations provide a mediated space where people can come together and begin to know one another. Organizer Q (Rebert 2007), who sees her organization as building a multiracial immigrant rights movement, identified the process of bringing people together so that they can realize their connections with one another as a critical factor. Organizer Q further noted that you have to create situations “where people have to come together, where people come in and share their stories...[it’s] about having regular community meetings where you are conscious about bringing in other groups.”

In general, most organizers and organizations recognize the importance of the human connection component of organizing and bringing people together. Organizer I (Rebert 2007) works with a primarily Latino immigrant rights coalition, but recognized:

the other thing is to learn about each other and to learn about what people’s struggles have been and to hear about what other people

would like to see come out of this movement.....But how do we create trust amongst each other?

These connections among organizers *and* community members are important. They may be as simple as monthly potlucks or may more take more work. Organizer G (Rebert 2007) works with a grassroots based multiethnic organizations with over 50 nationalities represented. When asked what the most important factors were for maintaining the coalition, organizer G replied:

There has been an active effort by the leaders of ICA. There were four organizations in the steering committee at the beginning, and now there are three, and they've made a conscious effort to have a lot of conversation. We haven't been meeting as regularly recently, but we used to meet a lot, talk about what is going on in each other's community, the face-to-face conversation with each other. I think that has helped and trying to make sure that at every meeting there are interpreters available, to make sure everyone has a voice – that kind of thing has helped. But it's not easy. When there are ten people speaking four different languages and not understanding each other, it's hard.

The problem is that building relationships takes a lot of time – time that organizers do not always feel that they have. Organizer I (Rebert 2007) observed,

I think in some sense, the movement is impatient, but in some sense, we need to be impatient. You know, we don't have a lot of time, but we haven't taken the time to really get to know one another. And I think that's hurt us, you know, it's easier to move along when you communicate with and you can mobilize those people and you can just go, and the other is about relationship building. It takes time.

However, spending time to bring people together is time well spent and will only make the immigrant rights movement stronger. If they are to build a multiracial immigrant rights movement, organizations need to prioritize relationship building between communities. People need to be able to share their stories and recognize the intersections between their situations if the dominant framing that says immigrant rights is only about Latinos is to be deconstructed. The grassroots, more radical organizations need to continue to push the

legislatively focused organizations to expand their framing and to place importance on relationship building. These meetings are only a first step, but if people come together and organizations rally people around a common 'immigrant' experience, a collective immigrant identity may well take on a life and power of its own as it did with the emergence of a pan-Asian identity.

## Chapter 6:

### **Conclusion: Are Immigrants Enough?**

As shifting economic forces have changed the global landscape, people are moving across the planet and coming into contact with one another with ever-greater physical ease. However, these interactions have not come without tension. In 2007, the Twin Cities battles over whether Muslim cab drivers can refuse to carry passengers with alcohol, Samuel Huntington drums up fears that Mexican immigrants threaten to divide the country in two because of their failure to assimilate, and pundits claim that the French election will be decided on the basis of national identity. These changes call for new modes of organization.

In 2006, the immigrant rights movement forcefully challenged the Sensenbrenner view of what it means to be American. Yet, the immigrant rights movement mobilized primarily Latino immigrants in New York and the Twin Cities. Although South Asian immigrants would have been profoundly affected by immigration reform and H.R. 4437, the immigrant rights movement failed to resonate with the mass of South Asians. With comparatively few resources, organizations proposing a more radical and inclusive pan-immigrant framing were drowned out in the process of collective identity formation. As a result, immigrants continued to be racialized as undocumented, low-income Latinos and this gave non-Latino groups the image that immigrant rights do not affect them.

Yet, as we have seen, Social Movement's framing and sense of collective identity do not only adapt to the landscape of available identities, they also have the ability to shape that landscape. Identities are continually re-negotiated and changed. Despite the largely Latino orientation of the movement thus far, most organizers expressed the desirability of a more multiethnic immigrant rights movement. Forming a more multiracial movement would

increase numerical power and would also disrupt and reconfigure the dominant racialized framing. A multiracial immigrant rights movement refuses to accept the dominant dichotomy of legal versus illegal, deserving versus undeserving. However, building such a movement poses challenges. For example, Latino and South Asian groups have distanced themselves from one another, neither wanting to be associated with the other's negative racialization. Past experiences organizing around an Asian pan-ethnicity may provide a powerful model for overcoming the racial divides that separate groups. Identities are more fluid than we often assume. A pan-immigrant identity cannot emerge over night, but it may be possible in the long run. A pan-immigrant identity would build and organize around the common experience of life as an immigrant, as a non-citizen, in the United States. However, in order for a pan-immigrant identity to emerge, organization's deploying this identity must successfully compete with other actors in the process of collective identity formation.

While Snow and Benford's research (1988) helps conceptualize why individuals are mobilized, the Social Movement's literature needs to pay greater attention to the development and changing nature of political identity. This work has examined the process of group identity formation and the re-orientation or re-identification of people into larger groups. The relative inability of the smaller grassroots organizations to make their framing heard shows that in addition to the framing constraints Snow and Benford (1988) identified, power relations within the movement affect which organizational framing has the greatest influence on collective identity formation. Some organizations have greater resources to get their framing heard through visibility and access to policy makers and the media. The We Are America coalition's endorsement of the slogan "Today We March, Tomorrow We Vote" enjoyed far reaching visibility because of resources from organizations like SEIU and the AFL-CIO. In this struggle, the New Social Movement's observation that societal changes

create new identities holds true, but so does the Resource Mobilization's key assertion that resources count. Resources influence the very ability of organizations to assert and shape emerging identities. Rather than one perspective taking priority over another, it is the very dialectical nature across scales of external and internal factors, of societal changes affective identity salience, and of organizational resources that affect who the movement manages to mobilize.

This study shows that different framings compete both within the movement and between the movement and external actors to form collective identity. However, the Social Movement literature needs more research to effectively understand the process of identity construction and transformation. This process may be best observed from a group rather than an individual level. In the short run, identities seem fairly static. However, in the long run, movements may forge new collective identities through the construction of a collective action frame that unites several groups around common interests, such as the immigrant experience. In the long run, organizations can, in effect, expand or re-align the group's boundaries. But questions remain: What factors contribute to the resonance of certain identities over others? Which factors contribute to faster adoption of emerging identities? How do groups band together? These questions are not simple, nor are they exclusive to one type of analysis. We need more research on identity formation from a variety of scales and perspectives.

For organizers, this research may provide several insights and raise new questions. First, a pan-immigrant identity may be possible, but it need not come at the expense of other identities. A pan-Immigrant identity need not come at the expense of other identities. Identities are complex and multi-layered. A person identifying as an "Asian Indian" on the census might identify as a Hindu in a religious context, as a Gujarati while in a group of



Indian nationals, as an Indian while among a group of immigrants from the sub-continent, as a South Asian among a group of people of color, and as a person of color within a group of people who are predominantly white. This person might belong to organizations at any of these levels and might organize around any of these identities. Identity is similarly complex for many immigrants coming to the U.S. from the developing world who find themselves constructed as “people of color” or lumped in a pan-ethnic “Asian American” or “Latino” racial group. A pan-immigrant identity could come to the forefront for political organizing. Organizations have a key role to play in this process by bringing people together, constructing the framing and analysis, and providing leadership and structure. However, looking at the possibilities for new political identities raises the question: Are immigrants enough?

Numerically, immigrants might be enough in New York. With nearly half of the households in New York containing a foreign-born member, a strong pan-immigrant identity has the potential to transform politics. However, in the Twin Cities, the foreign-born population is not nearly as large. A larger question looms beyond just the numerical power of a multiracial immigrant rights movement. Organizer H (Rebert 2007) commented:

But that piece is key because there are a lot of things outside of comprehensive immigration reform that communities are working on and unless we're willing to go there, folks aren't going to be willing to come here. I think that's also true for, like, the black community for instance. We haven't been nearly as involved with leaders in the black community on the North Side as we need to be and part of that is because we're not framing this in a way that people think this is about them too, even though *we* know it's about them too. We know, or I know, or some of us know, that it's about them too, that the ICE separation ordinance is an anti-racial profiling piece of legislation, right? So, that if we're fighting racial profiling, than... that's an immigrant rights issue. There are ways to form alliances that are [more] about messaging than about relationship, but if we're not willing to make those efforts, than we're not going to be able to bring folks to the table. But it also blurs the message a bit. So, if we do take those stances, then are we as effective, exactly, in passing

comprehensive immigration reform on a national level? Or are we starting to think about a broader social justice movement? And what do we want to do? I don't know.

Many immigrant rights organizers struggle with this question. What is the goal of the movement? Does the movement seek comprehensive immigration reform or broader social justice? If the goal is a broader social justice movement, there is a moral and strategic imperative to include other, non-immigrant, marginalized groups such as African-Americans and Native Americans. If the immigrant rights movement doesn't make connections with these groups, the movement risks continued racial distancing between groups as some evidence points to between African-Americans and undocumented Latinos. However, I wonder if these two strategies are truly mutually exclusive. Some electoral victories may be necessary to maintain morale and membership while on the road for social justice. How then do you balance the tension between the desire for immigration reform and a longer-term fight for social justice that encompasses many different groups?

Perhaps it is the very emergence of a sustained immigrant rights movement and a pan-ethnic immigrant identity that could lay the groundwork for a broader social justice movement. Kaufman's (2003) research looking at coalitions between African-Americans and Latinos suggests that strengthening a Latino pan-ethnic identity may help Latinos later build stronger alliances with African-Americans. This claim seems counterintuitive at first, but Kaufman (2003) argues that a Latino pan-ethnicity might socialize Latinos to build a shared sense of fate. However, it's not guaranteed that the Latino leadership will foster this shared sense of fate. Building a sense of shared fate depends upon where the leadership diagnostically frames the problem. Structural framing analyses build a sense that "we're all in it together" while a competitive model sees a finite pie where the advancement for one group must come by stepping upon or at the expense of another group. At the moment, the

tendency towards exceptions is one of the challenges the immigrant rights movement faces. For example, recently the United States failed to renew Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Liberians in the United States, considering the country now politically stable and TPS immigrants able to return. TPS was first granted to Liberians in 1991. Today, many Liberians TPS holders have raised children in the U.S. and built lives here and feel unable or unready to return to Liberia. Liberia has one of the highest rates of poverty in the world. As a result, the Liberian community has put out a call to rally locally in Minnesota and in D.C. among legislators to renew their TPS status. While the legislation needs to move quickly in order to give Liberian TPS holders the renewal they hope for, the downside is that the diagnostic framing and hope for making an exception limits political power. The problem here is not solely with expiring Liberian TPS, but rather with TPS and the immigration system broadly. To many, TPS may be more politically acceptable than granting a group refugee status because it is supposedly temporary. However, it is difficult morally and practically to allow a population to live here for a period of ten to twenty years as they build their lives and then order them out.

Although her study's purpose is to investigate different conceptions of citizenship, Gálvez's (2007) study also sheds light on the consequences of the scale of diagnostic framing. The study examines different framing and mobilization patterns among two Mexican immigrant organizations in the Bronx. Gálvez (2007) argues that one organization was far better at empowering members and mobilizing members from a greater diversity of socioeconomic and regional backgrounds because they cast their success or failure in structural limitations. On the other hand, the second organization focused on individual success or failure and was oriented towards rising above one's immigrant status. When members of the first organization had problems, they drew on each other for support while

members of the second organization dealt with issues individually and often dropped out of the group during periods of trouble. A multiracial immigrant identity could similarly serve to further a broader social justice movement if it socialized members to a sense of shared fate and collective identification.

Organizations successful working across racial and ethnic lines also stress the importance of leadership. To be successful, organizations have to be willing to challenge members, question their own assumptions, and provide leadership. Anner (1996) examines the successful multiethnic organizing work and multiracial alliances around which the Coalition Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAA AV) engaged. Anner (1996) recalls that when a bill was introduced in New York that would have made it legal for cab drivers to refuse transit to people based on their appearance, many of their cab drivers member's supported it. However, the organization refused to, arguing that it was racist. CAA AV did not stop there though. They challenged their members and appeared at public hearings to speak against the law. Anner (1996, 159) quotes CAA AV organizers Osman arguing, "The best way to overcome prejudices between [communities of color]...is to work together in solidarity with each other to build unity." CAA AV also built relationships with Puerto Rican and African-American groups against police brutality, further forging a sense of shared fate and interest. While they must listen and respect their membership to remain relevant, organizations also need to provide leadership. At times, this may mean respectfully challenging and educating membership or engaging in dialogue across groups. Overall, bringing groups together remains central.

While the paper has discussed the structure of the movement, it has not yet touched on the structure of the organizing. The words of one organizer in particular sparked a lot of thought. Organizer M commented,

[One] thing we found was that a lot of the organizing was doing a few things, kind of following this compartmental approach to organizing in general that happens a lot in the U.S. So...you come to one meeting if you're a worker and to another meeting if you're a tenant, and another meeting if you're a welfare recipient, you go to another meeting if you're an immigrant. It's like you have to keep going to a million meetings, but then also it was really isolating people's multiple struggles and identities. [It was] also really saying that the problem was just out there and once you fix the problem, everything would be okay. As people started coming to [our organization], there was a deeper recognition that...the laws not only affected people in multiple ways at once and needed to be addressed that way, but also, it wasn't just on the streets that the organizing needed to happen, but that our process and that deeper emotional and, kind of, psychological impact of the laws on individuals, and whole families, and communities also needed to be addressed. So just a recognition of the need for a holistic approach that really addressed...that linked personal transformation to social transformation and didn't just see immigrants, particularly immigrant women, as just problems to be fixed. Similar to the rationale that a lot of the laws used that "oh, if we fix you here, if you learn English here, if you become legal here, then, you'll be okay. But, you know, really challenging those notions and saying that immigrant women aren't just victims but that there's a lot of power there as well.

Organizing work entails a tension between short-term gains, like Comprehensive Immigration Reform, and building a social justice movement, but it also contains a tension in the way that we organize. Organizer M faults traditional organizing work with being too compartmental, in many ways, replicating a capitalist division of labor. The organizer works with an organization that operates on a different approach that aims for depth of relationships rather than quantity. M argues that the laws affected people in many ways at once and organizing work should be able to respond with holistic approach. M further challenges organizations to turn victimization into strength. However, how does one negotiate the commonality and differences among people? Should organizing work ask people to rally around one concrete aspect of themselves or is there some way to address the many parts of each person? How do we create organizing spaces that are empowering and inclusive? What would a new model of organizing look like? I am not sure that these

questions are directly answerable, but they are crucial. If we do not answer them, we are constantly forced to choose between which of our identities – as tenant, as woman, as immigrant, or as person of color – deserves the most of our attention. People grow weary and problems fail to be addressed in any substantial, structural way.

Theory implies the need for greater focus on framing and power dynamics in shaping collective identity. Creating a pan-immigrant rights movement takes time and relationship building. Organizations, however, are strapped for time and resources. However, taking the time to build relationships and develop a sense of common fate through a structural analysis may be time well spent to build greater political power. How organizations deploy framings to mobilize emerging identities will have critical impacts on politics and for social justice. Yet, as theorists and organizers wrestle with questions of movement structure, tactics, messaging, the organizing process, time, and resources, the immigrant rights movement still rallies to the cry of “Sí se puede.” Will we soon begin to ask in Hmong, or in Oromo, or in French, or in Hindi “Hum kar sakte hain?” Or is it time to find a new rallying cry altogether?

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