

## Immigration, Intergroup Conflict, and the Erosion of African American Political Power in the 21st Century

By Frank Morris and James G. Gimpel

- While social scientists continue to debate the impact of large-scale immigration on low-skilled American natives, these same Americans certainly believe that high levels of immigration threaten their economic well-being. Current research shows that these fears are as much alive among African Americans as Caucasians.
- Conflict between African Americans and Latina/os for group position, status, and political power is increasing as most immigrants of Hispanic ancestry settle in areas proximate to African American populations in the nation's largest cities.
- African American gains in office-holding appear to be leveling off at higher levels of office, while Latino gains are rapidly rising. These gains are coming at the expense of non-Hispanic white office-holders and African Americans, though African Americans are more threatened given their smaller overall numbers.
- Steadily rising immigrant populations will continue to change the racial complexion of U.S. House representation in a number of California, Texas, and New York congressional districts within the next 20 years.
- With the 2010 census redistricting, just a few years away, as many as six seats currently held by members of the Congressional Black Caucus could be given up to Latino candidates.

A new awareness has dawned on observers of ethnic and racial politics in America. As the immigrant population has dramatically increased over the past 40 years, the prospect that these new arrivals may compete with subsets of American natives for jobs, housing, positional status, and political representation has become a reality. Recent studies have begun to document, in rising levels of detail, the tension that has emerged between immigrant groups and lower-skilled American natives, a high proportion of whom are African American (Gay, forthcoming; McClain et al. 2006; Kim 2000; Vaca 2004; Hirschman, Kasinitz and DeWind 1999).

Up to very recently, it has been considered politically incorrect, or at least impolite, to suggest that minority groups within American society may not get along well or actually wind up in not-so-friendly competition for scarce resources. The wishful thoughts of those who imagine a blissful rainbow coalition have politicized discussions of interethnic relations, pushing out warnings about the crowding taking place on the lower rungs of the nation's socioeconomic ladder.

This disdain for public discussion of a now painfully evident reality seems odd given that interethnic conflict has had such a ubiquitous presence throughout U.S. history. One need not have taken a college history course to recognize that immigration and immigrant-native conflict are not merely 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomena. A serious body of academic research suggests that periods of peaceful interethnic relations in the United States may stand out as exceptions rather than the rule (Billington 1963; Olzak 1992; Shanahan and Olzak 1999; Olzak and Shanahan 2003). But the consequences of the ongoing demographic transformation cannot be ignored forever,

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and a mounting body of research has broken through the multicultural wall of silence to sound alarm bells that the nation's new diversity is not being embraced in all corners.

In this essay, we survey the recent literature on interethnic competition and evaluate its sources and consequences. The rising immigrant tide is especially detrimental to the employment prospects and income levels of natives who occupy the lower rungs on the socioeconomic ladder, a large share of whom are African American. While reservations about immigration are clearly traceable to the economic insecurity among lower-skilled and less-experienced workers, this is by no means the only source of unease. Rival ethnic groups also compete for social status, and for political power. In the latter half of this essay, we examine the implications of the rapid rise in the immigrant population for the political representation and influence of African Americans. We conclude with some observations about the durability and future of multi-minority political coalitions.

### Competition for Economic Goods

Economic competition among ethnic groups has long been considered an explanation for intergroup tension and racial antagonism (Bonacich 1972; 1976; Forbes 1997; Cummings 1977; 1980; Cummings and Lambert 1997; Olzak 1989; 1992). Such discord might be avoided except that the competition among low-skilled and unskilled laborers in the American economy seems to have all of the qualities of a zero-sum game. The only-one-winner characteristic of this particular marketplace is, in part, the result of where the competition takes place relative to where employment is most readily available. This is the so-called mismatch between the geography of the low-skill workforce and the geography of employment (Holzer 1996). Urban areas in the United States have not been known for having a surplus of jobs for low-skilled workers since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And yet in 2000, 65 percent of California's foreign-born population was packed into the state's five most urban counties, compared with just 51 percent of the native-born. The figures for Texas indicate a more dispersed immigrant population, but only slightly so: 58 percent lived in that state's five largest counties, compared with 42 percent of native-born Texans. New York's immigrant population, concentrated in the five borough counties and Long Island, is even more densely concentrated than that of either California or Texas: 73 percent of the foreign-born live in the city, compared with just 41 percent of the native-born.

To be sure, Latinos, Asians, and other groups of more recent immigrant ancestry are also showing a remarkable capacity to settle in locations other than the traditional immigrant ports of entry (Logan 2001; Suro and Singer 2002). While Latinos are still highly segregated from Anglo-whites in suburbia, and show nothing like white levels of residential mobility and income growth, they are better able to sidestep the residential isolation that impedes African American prosperity. When asked by survey researchers, Asians and Latinos are more likely than native-born African Americans to report that they have the same opportunities as whites (Chong and Kim 2006, 340). Most of the natives that are trapped in the worst big-city labor markets are African American. The instrument of their isolation is, in part, sustained high levels of immigration into adjoining areas, and to areas exhibiting employment growth in the low-skill labor market where employers commonly show a preference for immigrants over African Americans.

The sustained flow of immigrants directly into or adjacent to hard-pressed, historically African American locales raises questions about whether competition between groups for scarce resources erupts into frustration, violence (Baldassare 1994), or at the very least, feelings of contempt for rival groups (Kaufmann 2006). Given the poverty and unemployment of many big-city neighborhoods, there is every reason to believe that the pressures caused by sustained high levels of immigration might lead to social strains within a community. Particularly at the bottom rungs of the social and economic hierarchy, one might expect that competition between immigrants and the native-born, as well as among rival immigrant groups, might produce resentment, higher levels of social disorder (Johnson, Farrell and Guinn 1999), psychological stress, and even higher levels of mortality (LeClere, Rogers and Peters 1997). More generally, we live in an era of weak political institutions that hardly provide the social control functions provided during the last great immigrant influx (Janowitz 1978). While today's service bureaucracies are capable of controlling outputs, they lack the communal ties that afforded local political party organizations early in the last century the capacity to shape both inputs and outputs.

Interethnic competition for economic goods predates the U.S. Civil War. Irish and African American relations have been noted as especially conflicted, since the Irish arrived in large numbers, and were as uneducated and unskilled as free African Americans (Diamond 1998). Many historians have noted that hostility among ethnic groups in the 1840s and 1850s was the result of competitive pressures put on natives by the emergence of lower-cost labor (Ernst 1948; Billington 1963).

During Reconstruction, African American skilled workers and semi-skilled African American laborers were replaced by immigrants whenever there was an increase in their supply. The African American labor supply was preferred only when (white) immigrant labor was cut off (such as during World War I) and during the period of restrictive immigration quotas from the 1920s to the mid 1960s.

Recently accumulated evidence suggests that the Great Black Migration from the South to northern cities, a development that greatly advanced African American economic progress, would have occurred decades earlier had immigration restrictions been in place (Collins 1997). African Americans moved at times and to places where the foreign-born were less prominent (Collins 1997, 629; Drake and Cayton 1962). Labor market competition resulting from generous immigration is also said to have resulted in displaced hostility toward African Americans in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, because they possessed less power to fight back (Olzak 1989).

In more recent years, low-skilled and uneducated whites have been found to express the most virulent racism because of the glut of unskilled immigrant and African American workers thought to be ready to take their jobs (Cummings 1977; 1980). Intergroup hostility, by these accounts, may well be an expression of self-interested calculations anchored in perceived economic vulnerability.

Mounting evidence points to the economic dislocation of African Americans resulting from high levels of mass immigration (Borjas 1998, 2001; Stevans 1998; Johnson and Oliver 1989; Bluestone and Stevenson 2000). To be sure, the *average* impact of immigration on an entire population may be slight, as many of the traditional econometric analyses have indicated, but the community or sectoral effects may still be considerable. Even if we grant the controversial contention that mass immigration is a net economic benefit to the society, the costs are borne disproportionately by those at lower socioeconomic strata, particularly African American men, while the benefits accrue at the top of the socioeconomic and racial hierarchy (Borjas 2001).

When asked, many African Americans in the nation's largest cities marvel at the capacity of immigrants to open stores in majority-African American neighborhoods. Immigrants are able to pool capital and secure financing in ways that baffle outsiders, leading respected African American leader Andrew Young to remark recently that very few mom-and-pop stores in African American ghettos were actually owned by African Americans, but instead owned by price-gouging Korean and Arab immigrants. He was derided for being insensi-

tive, but his remarks contained an undeniable kernel of truth discussed in much of the social scientific literature (Baldassare 1994; Kim 2000; Kim 1999). Throughout U.S. history, many African American activists and scholars such as Fredrick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, A. Phillip Randolph, and even Mexican American labor leader Cesar Chavez, have implored American economic elites not to turn overwhelmingly to immigrant labor to keep wages low and displace American-born workers. Their pleas usually went unheeded, but contemporary African American political leaders now take policy positions out-of-step with the past political leadership that unashamedly spoke out for reduced immigration. When African American leaders, such as Young, do speak up, they generate a firestorm of controversy.

The understandable conclusion drawn by many African Americans from their commonplace observations of immigrant upward mobility is that American society continues to prefer immigrants to native-born African Americans, as it has in decades past. If the door to immigration were not so wide open, African Americans might be able to access capital and financing and open these stores themselves. Other employment sectors aside from retail trade may be more open to African Americans were it not for the fact that these niches in the labor force have been monopolized by immigrant labor (Waldinger 2001). As it stands, the pay level for many of these jobs is so low, few natives are willing to apply, much less work them. Little wonder that African American attitudes display remarkable ambivalence toward immigrants, and vice versa.

Finally, while economists may continue to debate various economic indicators to evaluate whether the low-skill labor market really is a zero-sum game (for a summary see Lim 2001), students of public opinion have shown that minorities *believe* that as one group gains, another loses, and that one group's misfortune becomes another's opportunity (Gay, forthcoming; Ha and Oliver 2006; Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Nelson and Perez-Monforti 2006). Unskilled natives may worry that the influx of immigrants may be injurious to their livelihood, even if the reality is more complex. Workers evaluate immigration policy in accord with their position in the labor force (Scheve and Slaughter 2001, 133). Data analyses originating from the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (Boston, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Detroit) indicate that African American respondents perceive themselves to be in a battle with Asians and Latinos for economic opportunity (Kaufmann 2006). More than two-thirds of African Americans perceived themselves to be in a zero-sum competition with Asians in Los Ange-

les, and 61 percent reported that Latinos are zero-sum competitors. The figures for other cities were less lopsided, but still large enough to suggest that the level of perceived threat could drive antagonism and divide these populations against one another.

### Competition for Status and Political Position

Groups also compete for political and social status, not just for limited economic goods such as jobs or housing. Certainly, the relevant academic literature examines ethnic competition and conflict over noneconomic goods — status, positional goods, recognition, and community symbols. One of the foremost students of ethnic conflict in Asia and Africa argues that it cannot be adequately explained — at least in those contexts — simply in terms of economic factors (Horowitz 1985). A similar emphasis on the noneconomic sources of intergroup conflict is found in the extensive literature on status conflict in the United States (Blumer 1958; Bobo and Hutchings 1996). An important theme of this work is that status conflicts arise during periods of economic growth and prosperity, when the upward mobility of emergent groups causes social strains between them and previously established groups (Lipset and Raab 1973; Cain and Kiewiet 1986; Hofstadter 1979). Thus, it was only after attaining economic gains beginning in the post-Civil War era that Jews in America sought commensurate status recognition and then began to experience social discrimination (Higham 1975, 138-173).

Economic competition may not be the only source of prejudicial attitudes — frequently residential proximity is quite enough (Blalock 1956). In his thorough literature review, Forbes (1997) found at least 21 quantitative studies that backed up V.O. Key's (1949) contention that negative attitudes toward African Americans on the part of whites were strongly and consistently associated with the concentration of African Americans in their communities (p. 101). This line of research suggests that group size is threatening, not economic competition, *per se*. Whites may not fear that African Americans or immigrants will take their jobs, but they might fear the potential political power that accrues with numbers.

The recent research of Paula McClain (2006) and her colleagues underscores the fact that recent immigrants regularly express contemptuous attitudes toward native-born African Americans, and that these are most likely attitudes brought with them rather than acquired in the United States. Interestingly, this prejudice

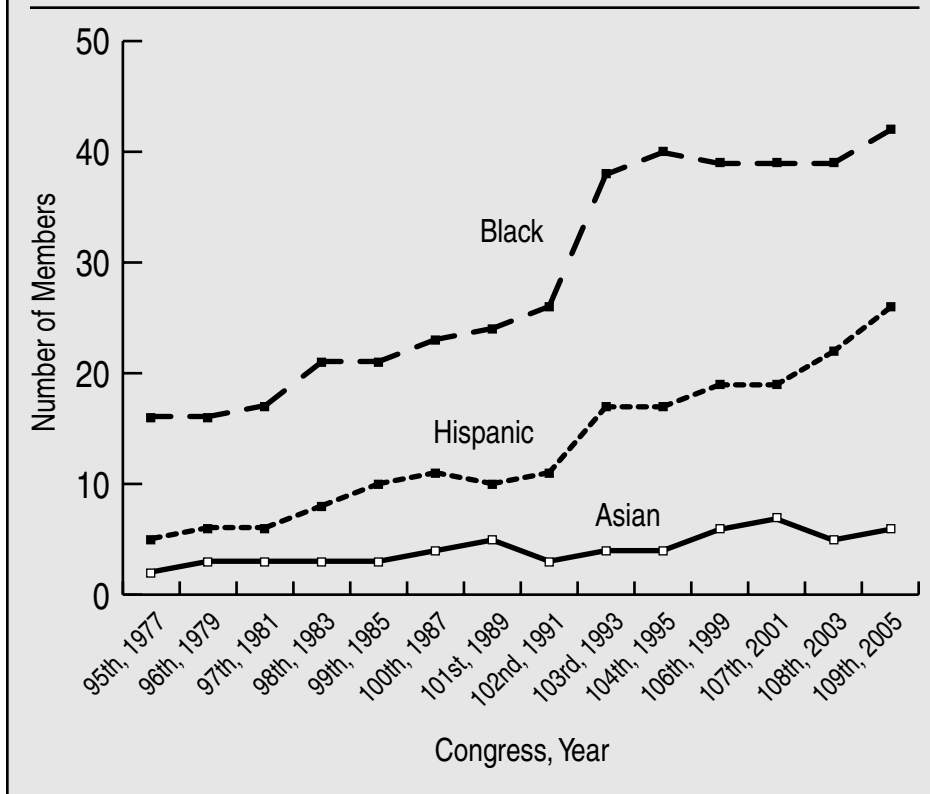
is present in spite of the fact that Latinos and Asians are often privileged over native-born African Americans in the housing and labor markets — in spite of their recent arrival (Kaufmann 2006; Holzer 1996; Wilson 1996; Massey and Denton 1993). Their success in the labor market can be accounted for by the large supply of employers who hire immigrants (legal and illegal) who will work for lower wages and without benefits (Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991). All evidence points to the relative economic advantage of Latinos and Asians over similarly skilled African Americans, yet the negative views of immigrants toward African Americans remain firmly anchored, suggesting that economic insecurity is far from the only wellspring of disparaging racial stereotypes (Johnson, Farrell and Guinn 1999; McClain et al. 2006).

There is also increasing evidence that the political arena is a venue for the logic of the zero-sum game. Serious cracks in the rainbow coalition have been noted for at least 10 years, as 45 percent of African American voters supported California's Proposition 187 (Franklin and Seltzer 2002). In the years since, Latinos and African Americans have been in more regular conflict over such political spoils as municipal jobs, additional council seats, and other perks and benefits associated with holding influential political office (Alozie and Ramirez 1999; Cose and Murr 2006; McClain 1993; Vaca 2004). Latino-African American political coalitions in major cities appear to be more fragile than they were just a few years ago (Kaufmann 2004). Younger generations appear less willing to see themselves as part of a rainbow than older generations who remember the original efforts by minority leaders to form a unified front against white control of public office.

### African Americans and Latinos and the Quest for Political Office

In Congress, African American gains in office-holding were greatly enhanced by the creation of majority-minority congressional districts following the 1990 census (see Figure 1). Thirteen additional majority-African American congressional districts emerged, and predictably, they produced 13 new African American representatives. By creating these districts, however, Republicans were able to win many of the adjoining districts in the 1992 and 1994 elections. Ironically, then, the creation of these districts bolstered minority representation, while assisting the political party usually typecast as hostile to minority interests (Lublin 1999). Latino-majority districts also emerged from the 1990s redistricting, produc-

Figure 1. Trends in Latino/a, Black and Asian American Representation in the U.S. Congress, 1977-2005



ing six more Hispanic members of Congress than had been serving before.

By the late 1990s, African American gains in Congress had leveled out in the low 40s (see Figure 1). There are only so many African American constituents that can be concentrated in majority-minority districts, and given that the African American population is growing slowly, and given the reluctance of white voters to support African American candidates, the prospects for additional African American gains seem quite slim in the near to mid-term. The prospect for continued Latino gains, on the other hand, is very bright. Their numbers in Congress rose steadily from the mid-90s to 2005, to stand at 26. Whereas African Americans gained only two seats since the 1994 GOP takeover of the House, Latinos gained nine seats (Asians, a far smaller population, also gained two).

The steady rise in Latino political power may not constitute a trend, but there is good reason to believe that it does. First, the Latino population continues to grow at an astounding rate, through the processes of both legal and illegal immigration. Across states, the average Latino growth rate from 2000 to 2004 was 23 percent, compared to just 9 percent for African Americans

— undoubtedly an underestimate of Latino growth due to the inability to accurately count illegal entrants. In the 11 most populous states, where new African American members of Congress would most likely emerge, the Latino population grew four times faster than the African American population, with Pennsylvania, Georgia, Florida, and Texas leading the way.

Were the Latino population sprinkled evenly or randomly among the Anglo-white population, perhaps there would be no reason to believe that Latinos were destined for greater political representation at all levels of office. But the figures listed in Table 1 (page 6) indicate that Latinos are highly segregated from the non-Hispanic white population, particularly in

the most populous states: California, Florida, Texas, and New York.

If Latinos are not settling among the native-born white population, then where are they settling? First, they are settling among Latinos who have arrived previously. This pattern is the result of network-based chain migration, along with the advantages of moving to areas where language and culture are familiar (Logan 2001). Second, they are settling in areas where there is affordable housing, and some modicum of employment in the low-skill labor market.

This combination of factors leads many to migrate to the large cities where Latino populations have existed for decades: Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago (Suro and Singer 2002). Through the first five years of this decade, there are no signs that the Hispanic population in these traditional immigrant destinations is diminishing, although there is considerable churn.

Pull factors lead other immigrants to cities and older suburbs in places where the Latino population has not been a longstanding presence, including locations in Nevada, Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, and even some rural states. In search of low-cost housing, but desiring to be as near as possible to

**Table 1. Segregation of Ethnic Groups Across Census Tracts Using the D-Index, by State, 2000**

State	Asian-White	Black-White	Hispanic-White	Hispanic-Black	Non-Citizen-Black	Non-Citizen-White
New York	61	80	70	54	55	52
Texas	53	59	58	61	57	45
Florida	42	62	59	62	59	50
California	52	63	56	52	55	40
Georgia	51	57	51	60	54	50
Illinois	54	78	65	77	77	56
North Carolina	51	51	45	43	49	41
Maryland	51	65	55	60	56	54
Louisiana	55	59	42	58	62	49
Michigan	56	80	46	73	76	51
Virginia	53	52	51	58	61	55
Ohio	51	73	49	68	69	47
Pennsylvania	55	75	62	66	65	48
New Jersey	47	70	62	56	60	47
South Carolina	48	46	40	51	56	41
Alabama	54	60	43	61	62	49
Mississippi	52	49	37	53	58	47
Tennessee	53	69	47	59	63	47
Missouri	51	75	42	68	68	50
Indiana	51	74	53	63	65	49
Arkansas	54	66	48	67	69	51
Massachusetts	51	65	62	48	51	45
Delaware	38	46	42	40	47	33
Connecticut	37	67	62	36	51	39
Wisconsin	53	81	53	69	72	48
Kentucky	54	61	44	52	58	51
Oklahoma	54	58	42	53	52	50
Washington	45	56	44	57	43	39
Minnesota	53	65	48	48	46	50
Colorado	40	65	46	61	51	43
Arizona	37	48	52	38	41	45
Kansas	51	61	52	57	55	53
District of Columbia	26	80	60	64	58	47
Nevada	33	48	42	36	38	42
Nebraska	49	69	51	68	64	52
Iowa	52	63	49	54	52	52
Rhode Island	49	62	69	29	39	52
Oregon	46	59	39	60	53	40
West Virginia	55	59	40	55	56	51
New Mexico	40	42	40	45	42	44
Hawaii	43	54	30	52	60	35
Alaska	44	51	32	32	42	36
Utah	40	52	40	39	44	44
New Hampshire	42	49	44	41	42	36
Maine	46	47	35	44	47	32
Idaho	37	53	40	61	54	38
South Dakota	45	54	41	41	45	46
North Dakota	52	60	38	53	57	41
Wyoming	43	59	31	46	50	34
Vermont	43	43	29	39	42	33
Montana	39	53	29	50	55	32
<b>All States</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>20 Largest</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>48</b>

**Source:** U.S. Census, 2000, and authors' calculations.

States are ranked here in order of total size of African American population.

The D-index indicates what percentage of the minority population would be required to move for it to be equally distributed across all census tracts in the state. The higher the value of D, the greater the degree of group segregation or concentration.

prospective employers (for example, in the construction trades), these immigrants find themselves settling in urban areas, proximate to established African American populations, placing upward pressure on housing costs, while filling various low-skill labor market niches (Waldinger 2001). They may not choose to settle in majority-African American neighborhoods, as most evidence suggests that African Americans and Latinos are about as segregated from one another as African Americans and non-Hispanic whites (see Table 1) but they will settle proximate to African American neighborhoods within jurisdictions such as Prince Georges' County, Md., and DeKalb County, Ga., commonly within the same state legislative and congressional districts. One could describe this settlement pattern as a kind of "segregated proximity."

While Latinos are slow to mobilize politically, the resulting increase in the size of Hispanic populations proximate to but not fully integrated with African American populations will eventually reshape local electorates at these locations, changing the mix of political interests expressed at the polls. The

changes are emerging at the local levels already, for local government council, school board, city mayoralities, and state legislative seats. Between 1991 and 2001, the number of all Latino officeholders grew by 26 percent, compared with only 18 percent for African Americans. Over this same period, Latino growth in state-level legislative and executive positions outpaced African American growth by 55 to 23 percent. Latinos still hold fewer elective and appointive offices than African Americans, but this gap is rapidly closing (Bositis 2001; *Statistical Abstract* 2006).

Up to now, Latino gains in public office have been fastest at lower levels of office, positions that serve as “farm teams,” or minor league training grounds, for candidates seeking higher office (Franklin and Seltzer 2002). The etiology from there is predictable: increasingly crowded and divisive primaries are likely to emerge, retiring African American incumbents will be replaced by aggressive Latino challengers, or Latinos will challenge African American candidates, winning few seats at first, but gradually gaining leverage. This has already happened in a number of large and medium-sized cities. In Providence, R.I., for example, African American officeholders appear to be in full retreat in the face of advancing Latino political power. The city of Chicago’s Latino population grew by 200,000 between 1990 and 2000, but it also tallied 150,000 fewer whites, and 20,000 fewer African Americans. Entrenched white and African American incumbents may continue to hold the city council seats from the wards to which these Latino populations are flowing, but once they retire, Latino candidates will almost certainly be elected. Latinos are already betting that they will have a serious candidate for the Chicago mayoralty in 2007.

Commonly, interethnic battles for local office are waged behind the scenes rather than in official primaries. Candidates will challenge each other’s bid for ballot positions at local boards of elections. Ironically, liberal candidates usually operating as Democrats will be charged with being anti-democratic, or even racist, for seeking to eliminate African American, Latino, Asian, or gay rivals well before an election. Counting the number of direct primary challenges in which Latinos and African Americans find themselves competing against one another may miss an important part of the competitive gaming that takes place out of the public eye. Nevertheless, we can expect the number of contested primaries to increase in those areas where the party apparatus is unable to broker the conflict before an election.

## The Coming Rollback in African American Representation in the U.S. House

Based on Hispanic settlement patterns, and the growth of this population, we can examine several cases in which sitting members of Congress in a number of states find themselves representing increasingly diverse populations out of which could emerge primary challenges or some other form of seat turnover in the near future. Many congressional districts held by African American members have large and rising Latino populations, but few of the districts occupied by Latino members have growing African American populations out of which we might imagine future African American gains.

In fact, the districts held by members of Hispanic ancestry are more lopsidedly Latino than the districts held by African Americans are weighted toward African Americans. For illustration, consider the Los Angeles-area districts of Congressional Black Caucus members Maxine Waters (D-Calif., 35<sup>th</sup>), Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-Calif., 37<sup>th</sup>), and Diane Watson (D-Calif., 33<sup>rd</sup>) (see Figure 2, on page 8). These members serve plurality Latino constituencies, at 47, 43, and 35 percent in 2000, respectively, although actual turnout is exceedingly low in all three. The venerable African American politician, and California state assemblyman, Mervyn Dymally, summed up the truth of the situation saying, “There are no safe African American districts anymore” (Mitchell 2006).

But if we take three nearby Latino districts, those of Xavier Becerra (D-Calif., 31<sup>st</sup>), Hilda Solis (D-Calif., 32<sup>nd</sup>), and Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-Calif., 34<sup>th</sup>), these all have overwhelming Latino majorities (70, 62, and 77 percent).

Figure 3 (page 9) shows what the population of these congressional districts would have looked like in 1980 if the same congressional district boundaries had been in place then as now. The map for 1980 makes it abundantly clear that the neighborhoods lying within the contemporary Watson, Waters, and Millender-McDonald districts were almost entirely majority African American in that era (see Figure 3). But just 20 years later, the majority African American character of those locations had drastically eroded, cut by 50 percent, whereas the number of majority Latino neighborhoods had more than doubled.

The upshot of these figures is clear. When Representatives Waters, Millender-McDonald, and Watson retire, their seats could well be taken over by Hispanic contenders. But when Becerra, Solis, and Roybal-Allard

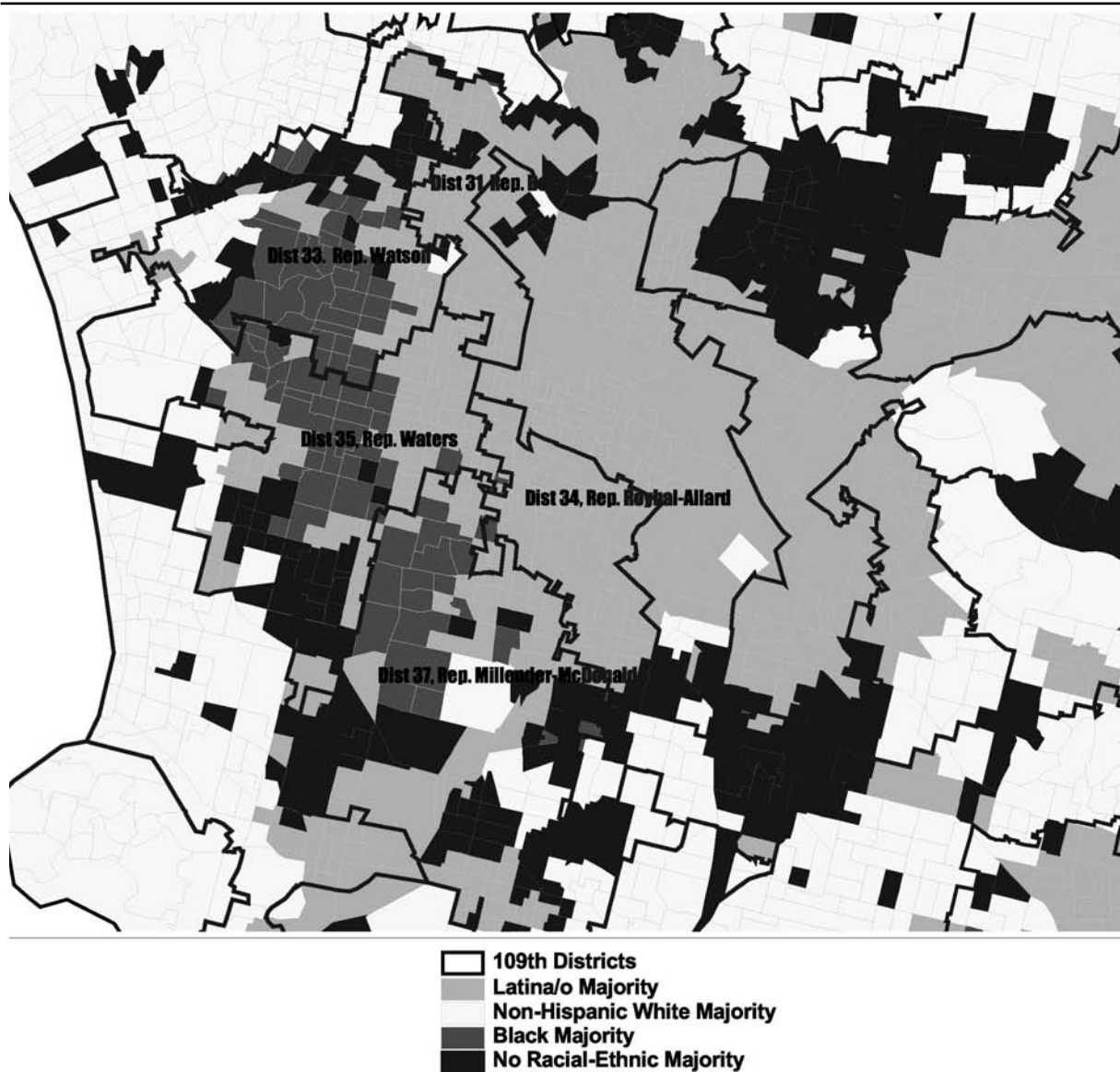


retire, their successors will almost certainly be Latinos. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y., 15<sup>th</sup>) is a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus, yet his Harlem seat could easily be taken over by a Hispanic candidate upon his retirement, given that half of that district's constituency is Latino. Texas Black Caucus members Al Green (D-Texas, 9<sup>th</sup>), Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-Texas, 18<sup>th</sup>), and Eddie Bernice-Johnson (D-Texas, 30<sup>th</sup>), have larger African American constituencies than their California counterparts, but all have growing Latino constituencies that could result in a loss of one or more of these seats due to retirement or redistricting with the 2010 census (see Tables 2 and 3, pages 10 and 11). By the beginning of the next decade, there could be six or seven fewer African American Democrats in Congress than there are today.

There will be no rollback of Latino congressional representation — it will continue to expand as immigration continues and immigrants have families and naturalize.

In addition to the population growth associated with immigration, several explanations account for why Latinos are making such impressive gains in office holding. First, Latinos are working within both parties, advancing in locations where African Americans would never consider running. Whereas African American gains have come almost entirely within the Democratic Party, about one-third of Latinos regularly vote Republican, and support GOP candidates. Presently, five of the 26 Latino members of Congress are Republicans. In local elections, the propensity for Latinos to support white candidates was well exemplified in the 2001 New York

Figure 2. Los Angeles Area 109th Congressional Districts and Majority Population of Census Tracts, 2000



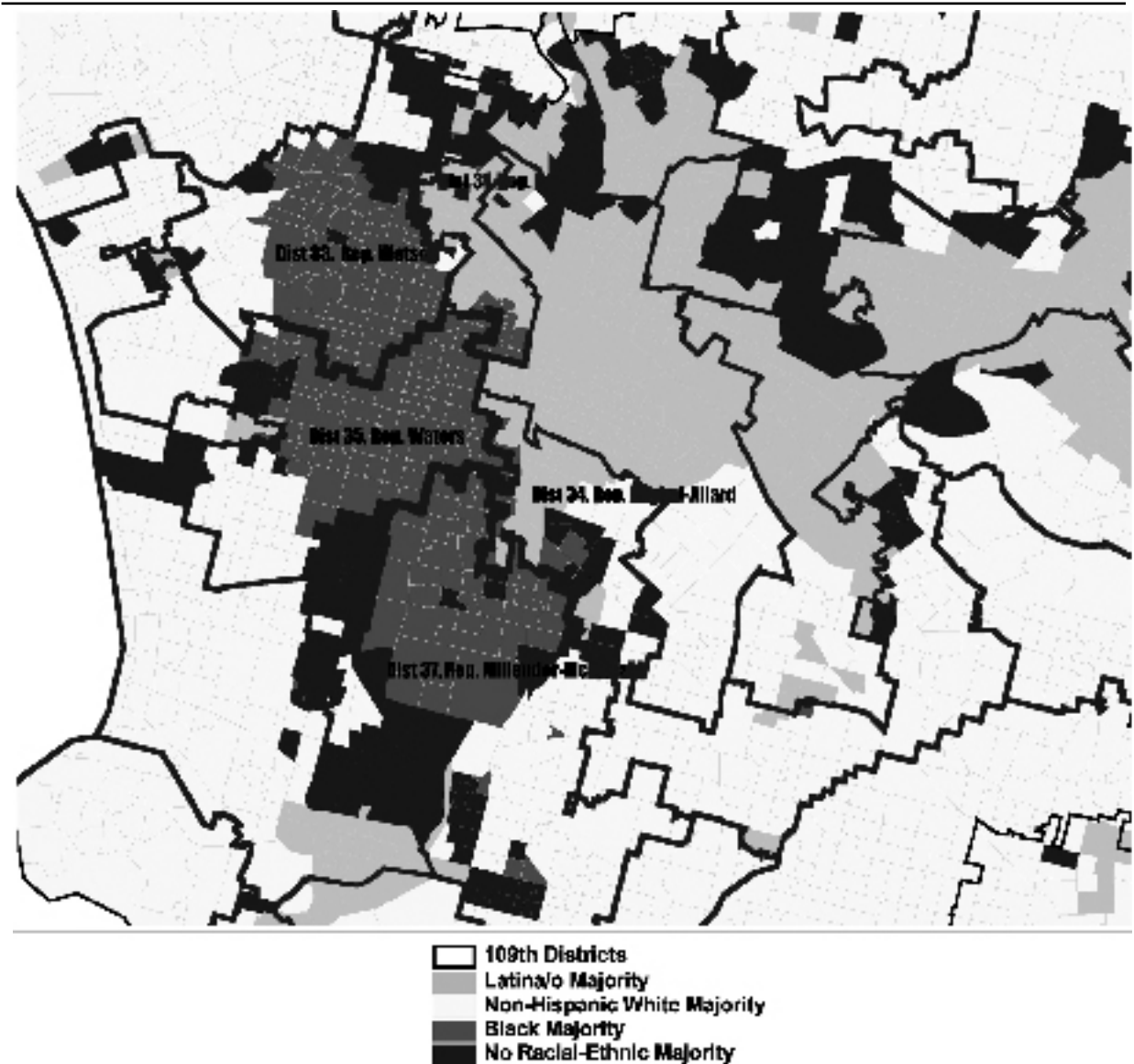


mayoral race in which Latinos strongly supported the election of Michael Bloomberg over Mark Green (Logan and Mollenkopf 2002), or in the 2002 New York gubernatorial election, in which George Pataki won considerable support from Latinos in his defeat of a African American candidate, H. Carl McCall — though this support was arguably the result of apathy and low turnout among the City’s Latinos, rather than their enthusiasm for Pataki. The support of Latinos in San Antonio for Anglo Democrat Phil Hardberger (for mayor) over Hispanic candidate Julian Castro, suggests a willingness of Latinos to abandon ethnicity as a cue in some circumstances. The affinity for the GOP in some locations (e.g., Texas, Florida) provides Latinos with far more pathways

for their upward political mobility than African Americans currently possess.

Moreover, Latino candidates span the ideological spectrum, whereas it is still rare to find African American candidates who stray far from the liberal left. New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson is a centrist Democrat and Mexican American and Florida U.S. Senator Mel Martinez is a Republican and of Cuban ancestry. Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and recent New York City mayoral candidate Fernando Ferrer are both liberals, while the current Miami Mayor, Manny Diaz, is a registered independent. Without question, today Latinos have a broader set of political options than African Americans (Sawyer, 2005, 271-272).

Figure 3. Los Angeles Area 109th Congressional Districts Used for Reference and Majority Population of Census Tracts, 1980



**Table 2. Racial and Ethnic Composition of 109th U.S. House Districts of Black Members of Congress**

Black Members	State; Dist.	% White	% Black	% Hispanic
Charles Rangel	NY 15	16.4	30.5	49.7
Maxine Waters	CA 35	10.4	34.1	47.4
Juanita Millender-McDonald	CA 37	16.6	24.8	43.2
Sheila Jackson Lee	TX 18	19.7	40.1	35.6
Diane Watson	CA 33	19.9	29.9	34.6
Eddie Bernice Johnson	TX 30	21.9	41.4	34.2
Al Green	TX 9	17.4	37.0	32.8
Kendrick Meek	FL 17	18.4	55.2	21.2
Barbara Lee	CA 9	35.2	26.0	18.7
Edolphus Towns	NY 10	16.2	60.2	17.2
Gregory Meeks	NY 6	12.8	52.1	16.9
Donald Payne	NJ 10	21.4	56.6	15.0
Alcee Hastings	FL 23	29.4	51.2	13.7
Major Owens	NY 11	21.4	58.5	12.1
Gwen Moore	WI 4	50.4	33.0	11.2
Jesse Jackson, Jr.	IL 2	25.6	62.0	10.4
David Scott	GA 13	42.1	40.7	10.2
Cynthia McKinney	GA 4	32.0	53.1	8.5
Corrine Brown	FL 3	38.4	49.3	8.0
Albert Wynn	MD 4	27.6	56.8	7.5
Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick	MI 13	28.9	60.5	7.2
Melvin Watt	NC 12	44.6	44.6	7.1
John Lewis	GA 5	34.4	55.7	6.1
Danny Davis	IL 7	27.3	61.6	5.8
Emanuel Cleaver	MO 5	66.3	24.2	5.6
Bobby Rush	IL 1	27.3	65.2	4.8
Julia Carson	IN 7	63.0	29.4	4.4
William Jefferson	LA 2	28.3	63.7	3.8
Sanford Bishop	GA 2	50.3	44.5	3.5
G.K. Butterfield	NC 1	44.0	50.5	3.1
Chaka Fattah	PA 2	29.9	60.7	3.0
Harold Ford	TN 9	34.9	59.5	3.0
Robert C. Scott	VA 3	37.7	56.0	2.6
Stephanie Tubbs Jones	OH 11	38.8	55.5	2.3
John Conyers	MI 14	32.1	61.1	1.8
Elijah Cummings	MD 7	34.2	58.8	1.7
James Clyburn	SC 6	40.3	46.7	1.5
Artur Davis	AL 7	35.5	61.7	1.3
William Lacy Clay	MO 1	45.8	49.7	1.3
Bennie Thompson	MS 2	34.5	63.2	1.2
<b>Average of all Districts</b>		<b>32.2</b>	<b>49.6</b>	<b>12.0</b>

**Source:** U.S. Census for the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress; also reported in Michael Barone and Richard E. Cohen, *Almanac of American Politics 2006*, Washington, D.C.: National Journal.

Previous studies of local politics have shown that whites more readily coalesce with Latinos than with African Americans (Meier and Stewart 1991). The predominant form of racially polarized voting in big-city elections is between whites and African Americans, not whites and Latinos. This is because white voters are more accepting of Latino candidates than they are of African American candidates — partly, perhaps, for ideological reasons. Latinos are viewed as less politically extreme, and less threatening to white interests, than African

Americans. Racial affinity also plays a role. Latinos are ethnically distinct from Anglo whites, but most identify *racially* as white. This no doubt explains the ready acceptance among white Coloradans of candidates such as Ken Salazar, and his brother John — both elected with white majorities, or the ready acceptance of Bill Richardson among white New Mexicans, or Dennis Cardoza (D-Calif., 18<sup>th</sup>) among white Californians. As Table 1 shows, whites and Latinos are commonly less segregated by neighborhood than African Americans and Latinos, although this is not true in all cases.

To be sure, challenges to white liberal candidates by surging Latinos have resulted, and will continue, but no one expresses much concern about the declining white representation of minority populations. And in the long term, the sustained flight of whites out of cities suggests that white presence on various municipal governing bodies should diminish anyway. Moreover, while African Americans and Latinos commonly occupy adjacent rather than the same neighborhoods, they more often reside within the same vicinity (e.g., county or city), than whites and Latinos. In addition, the propensity to use race and ethnically based criteria to define “communities of interest,” to draw Congressional district lines, has ensured that the

average white member’s congressional district contains very few African American or Hispanic constituents, rarely enough to field a serious African American challenger.

African American candidates may be successful reaching beyond their base, following the example of U.S. Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), and the efforts of former Rep. Harold Ford (D-Tenn.). Republicans may also have some success in recruiting competitive African

American candidates. But these pro-business, low-tax/low-spend officeholders pursue deracialized campaign strategies in which they deemphasize racial and ethnic interests. Such an orientation is not likely to satisfy highly race-conscious African American constituents who skeptically view them as sell-outs to corporate or Republican influences. Nevertheless, in the face of growing Latino populations, and shrinking African American majorities, deracialized strategies, and African American movement toward the much-loathed Republicans, may be the only pathway to further expansion of African American office-holding.

## Group Conflict and the Future of African Americans in Congress

We conclude by reconsidering the future of the multi-minority or “black-brown” coalitions that were once a predictable fixture of city politics in much of the country. Their future for African American representation is in doubt largely because the rising Latino numbers suggest that they don’t need African American support to be elected. Clearly the Hispanic members of Congress identified in Table 3 do not need African American support as much as the African American members need Latino support. This emerging Latino independence of African American voters will only grow as Latino political power catches up with the sheer numerical force of the Hispanic population. That immigrants may jump ahead of African Americans on the socioeconomic hierarchy is important for determining whether they compete or cooperate (Garcia 2000). To the extent that Latinos do not find themselves in the same boat as African Americans, for instance, working in a political coalition will be more challenging.

Competition and conflict were commonly viewed by the American founders as a normal and even healthy condition, and the very goal of proper

institutional design is said to be the *civilizing* of conflict. Having said that, however, there is a growing awareness that in our nation’s history some groups — and one in particular, African Americans — have consistently experienced unfair competition and conflict (Chong and Kim 2006). Olzak reminds us, for instance, that the intergroup competition and conflict associated with the great wave of immigration toward the end of the 19th century actually resulted in competition that led to the increased occupational segregation of African Americans (Olzak 1992).

Societies are not properly and naturally harmonious, or there would be no need for politics. But too often the demand for tolerance of diversity has made it difficult to evaluate intergroup relations straightforwardly or honestly. By drawing on the rich, emerging literature that is attempting to pin down the facts about the nature of interethnic relations, we hope to initiate fruitful discussions across political lines. In this spirit, we hope that this essay contributes to a more realistic assess-

**Table 3. Racial and Ethnic Composition of 109th U.S. House Districts of Latino/a Members of Congress**

Latino/a Members	State; Dist.	% White	% Black	% Hispanic
Jose Serrano	NY 16	2.9	30.3	62.8
Joe Baca	CA 43	23.4	12.4	58.3
Robert Menendez	NJ 13	32.3	11.3	47.6
Mario Diaz-Balart *	FL 25	24.3	10.0	62.4
Nydia Velasquez	NY 12	23.3	8.8	48.5
Ed Pastor	AZ 4	29.3	7.5	58.0
Jim Costa	CA 20	21.4	7.2	63.1
Charles Gonzalez	TX 20	23.4	6.6	67.1
Lincoln Diaz-Balart *	FL 21	21.0	6.5	69.7
Linda Sanchez	CA 39	21.0	6.1	61.2
Henry Cuellar	TX 28	27.9	6.0	64.5
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen *	FL 18	29.7	5.7	62.7
Dennis Cardoza	CA 18	39.1	5.6	41.9
Lucille Roybal-Allard	CA 34	11.4	4.4	77.2
Xavier Becerra	CA 31	9.8	4.2	70.2
Luis Gutierrez	IL 4	18.4	3.7	74.5
Grace Napolitano	CA 38	13.6	3.6	70.6
Silvestre Reyes	TX 16	17.4	2.9	77.7
Raul Grijalva	AZ 7	38.6	2.8	50.6
Ruben Hinojosa	TX 15	27.2	2.7	69.0
Hilda Solis	CA 32	14.8	2.6	62.3
Solomon Ortiz	TX 27	27.6	2.5	68.1
Devin Nunes *	CA 21	46.4	2.1	43.4
Henry Bonilla *	TX 23	41.0	1.6	55.1
Loretta Sanchez	CA 47	17.3	1.5	65.3
John Salazar	CO 3	74.6	0.7	21.5
<b>Average of all Districts</b>		<b>26.0</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>60.5</b>

\*Indicates Republican Member.

Source: U.S. Census for the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress; also reported in Michael Barone and Richard E. Cohen, *Almanac of American Politics 2006*, Washington, D.C.: National Journal.

## Center for Immigration Studies

ment of the challenges that mass immigration poses for America in the early years of the new millennium.

African Americans continue to lack the same opportunities for education, employment, housing, health care, and venture capital available to others. African Americans' loyal political attachment to the Democratic Party has not resulted in satisfactory policy responses to many of these problems, especially during the period congruent with the high immigration of the last 40 years. Arguably, the African American demand for affirmative action benefits other minority groups more than it does African Americans, in spite of the fact that the latter have borne the disproportionate costs of political support.

In summary, African Americans have an abiding policy interest in the enforcement of immigration laws; greater public financial support for access to higher education; reduced immigration, especially of the low skilled and less educated; greater support for progressive taxation; federal financial support to increase the supply of affordable housing; and other matters of importance to a majority of African Americans. African Americans must not only make these serious political demands, but also must be willing to back up those demands by reconsidering their entrenched political loyalties, rather than by refusing to participate.

The challenges of a globalizing world economy require the adaptation of African Americans to a new style of politics adequate to meet the new problems that are emerging as well as those that remain unresolved.

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# **Background**

## **Immigration, Intergroup Conflict, and the Erosion of African American Political Power in the 21st Century**

By Frank Morris and James G. Gimpel

- While social scientists continue to debate the impact of large-scale immigration on low-skilled American natives, these same Americans certainly believe that high levels of immigration threaten their economic well-being. Current research shows that these fears are as much alive among African Americans as Caucasians.
- Conflict between African Americans and Latina/os for group position, status, and political power is increasing as most immigrants of Hispanic ancestry settle in areas proximate to African American populations in the nation's largest cities.

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