

2014-12-17

Adelante Nevada: A Case Study of Latino Political Incorporation in a New Immigrant Destination

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

ADELANTE NEVADA: A CASE STUDY OF LATINO POLITICAL
INCORPORATION IN A NEW IMMIGRANT DESTINATION

By

Emily L. McIlveene

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

December 2014

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Adelante Nevada: A Case Study of Latino Political
Incorporation in a New Immigrant Destination

(December 2014)

Abstract of a thesis at the University of Miami.

Thesis supervised by Professor George A. Yudice.

No. of pages in text. (90)

In recent years, Latinos in Nevada have increasingly become a highly coveted voting bloc by political candidates campaigning in the state. The national media has elevated them into the political spotlight by highlighting their integral contribution to Obama's victories in the last two presidential elections. Latino elected officials are also making history in the Governor's office, numerous city councils, and the state legislature, which boasts more Latino members than ever before. This is a major departure from the state's early political history that was incredibly exclusive of this population. What caused this sudden upward shift in levels of Latino political incorporation in Nevada? Historically, the state's Latino community lacked the necessary political opportunities and organizational strength needed to raise its members' awareness of their oppression to sufficient levels to incite collective action. Using the Political Process Model, this project will analyze the factors that eventually allowed them to do so via the political system. I argue that the elevation of strong Latino community leaders to positions of power, the formation of Pan-Latino grassroots organizations that mobilized the masses, and the proliferation of the Spanish-language media were essential in uniting the rapidly growing population into the political force they are today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank my wonderful parents, Martha and Richard McIlveene, for their constant encouragement without which this project would have never been completed. They have given me the love and support I have needed to gain even a modicum of success in my life, and for that I am forever grateful. I love you both very much.

I would not have been able to successfully evolve this project into a unique work without the perspectives and input of Senator Kihuen and Leslie Mix. Though both of you came into my life as colleagues, you have turned into good friends, and for that I am also forever grateful. Ruben, thank you for your help and for being the best “boss” ever! Leslie, thank you for the hours of conversation and for being a great “Nevada mom.”

I would also like to thank my committee for their patience throughout the years and their willingness to work with me despite the enormous amount of time it has taken to bring this project to its fruition. I would like to extend a special thanks as well to Dr. Torres for her guidance and for working with the Graduate School to make this happen.

Additionally, I would like to extend a special thanks to my nearly life-long best friend, Matthew Thompson, for his willingness to lend an ear and calm me down when my anxiety levels reached code red. Thanks for always being there for me, Mateo.

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Introduction

"I would not be the majority leader in the United States Senate today, but for the Hispanics in Nevada," Harry Reid, 2011

In recent years Nevada's Latino population has been cast into the national spotlight as important actors in the electoral politics of the state. They were the driving force behind President Obama's victory there in 2008, as well as his reelection in 2012. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, who hails from the Silver State, has repeated multiple times that he also would not have pulled out a victory in 2010 without their support. Politicians from both sides of the aisle, Republicans and Democrats alike, are actively courting their vote in the mid-term elections of 2014. They understand that without their votes, the road to victory would be extremely difficult, as they currently comprise 27.3% of the total population of the state, making it the fifth most "Hispanic" state in the nation. In addition to the impact Nevada's Hispanics have made on politics at the federal level, they have also begun to appear as elected officials in rapidly increasing numbers in Carson City, the state's capital which is home to the State Legislature, the Governor's mansion, and all other important state-wide offices. Nevada's three most populous cities, Las Vegas, Reno and North Las Vegas, can each count one Latino councilman among their ranks, and in the case of the latter two for the first time in those cities' history.

To understand why it has taken so long for Latinos to find their political voice in a state whose name is a Spanish word meaning "snow-capped," it is

important to understand the history of Hispanics in Nevada. Chapter One begins by documenting Nevada's history well before it became a part of the United States. Considering that the area that would eventually become Nevada was first explored by the Spanish and later become a part of a Mexican territory, it should come as no surprise that Hispanics have a long history in the state. However, many books on the history of Nevada fail to record the important contributions that they made that were integral to the state's settlement and development, and especially to the two industries that continue to dominate the state's economy: mining and tourism.

This chapter also documents the adversities and discrimination that early Hispanic residents faced as they began to populate the area that would become Nevada. The first three waves of early Hispanic immigration, before and after Nevada officially become a state in 1864, were marked by segregation, prejudice and inequality. As miners, railroad workers, ranchers, and construction workers, they were mistreated and marginalized. During and after World War II, the population of the state grew and more Hispanics settled in Nevada permanently to fill the jobs needed to create the infrastructure required to support the rapidly expanding influx of people.

Chapter Two highlights in what way the era of Civil Rights helped to shape the Hispanic community's early organizations and leadership, as African Americans and other minorities struggled for equality under the law throughout the nation. The latter part of the twentieth century bore witness to Nevada's most prosperous era to date: the casino boom and the development of Las Vegas.

Hispanics again flocked to the state in record numbers in search of work and began to unite to form a number of Hispanic organizations to maintain their cultural identity, share information, and protect their economic and civil interests. During this time the first Spanish-language television station began airing in Nevada, which would become essential to the dissemination of information to the burgeoning Latino populace.

Unsurprisingly, most Latinos struggled to be accepted by the white majority and over time formed community organizations that made attempts to change the policies and laws that limited Latino's upward mobility. However, as M.L. Miranda discusses at length in *A History of Hispanics in Southern Nevada*, the most comprehensive work to date on Hispanics in the state, problems within the community's more powerful organization, and more specifically difficulties establishing clear leaders, limited their political clout and their pleas for fairness were ignored more often than not (200). These organizations also failed to mobilize members of the community from all socioeconomic backgrounds, and their focus on affluent Latinos and the business community severely limited their ability to mobilize Latinos into a political force. Latinos would have practically no political representation in the state government until the 1990s. In their work *Hispanics and the U.S. Political System: Moving into the Mainstream*, F. Chris Garcia and Gabriel Sanchez explain,

Although groups that are relatively weakly organized...can have an impact on the political system, it is also true that greater **organization** can be a major multiplier of individual and group resources. A well-organized, highly disciplined, highly cohesive, and well-led group maximizes its chances for success. **Leadership**

is particularly important because skilled and effective group leaders can not only mold and hold the organization, but they can also be most effective in representing the organizations interest to the outside society and the political system. Thus, effective leadership is an extremely important resource for any group that wants to make its mark on the political system. (149).

This is exemplified in the case of Northern Nevada's Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (NVHCC). While it initially experienced great levels of success and national recognition for its work in the Hispanic community of Reno and the surrounding areas, the NVHCC eventually failed after the Board of Directors began to disagree about the organization's leadership. Chapter Two also highlights that story of an activist who was there to witness the rise and fall of the HVBCC and recalls the issues and events that lead to the demise of a once promising organization.

Chapter Three highlights the enormous political gains that have been made by the Hispanic community since the turn of the century. Latino's exponential population growth due to Nevada's status as a new immigrant destination, the proliferation of the Spanish-language media, and the rise of civic-minded Latino grassroots organizations that have been more successful at mobilizing members of the community from all socioeconomic segments have resulted in the formation of a powerful voting bloc in the state. Nevada's Latino voters now play a large part in determining election results. The number of Latino leaders in the state has multiplied quickly, and they have become important leaders and role models for Nevada's Latino youth, who have also become more politically active than in the past and are using social media to

spread information to their networks. The 2013 State Legislative Session saw the passage of many bills that positively affected the Latino community who came out in large numbers to support the legislation. In the final pages, I comment on popular Mexican-American State Senator Ruben Kihuen's discussions of his experience as an immigrant in Nevada and what led him to run for public office. The conclusion also examines at some of the problems that Nevada Latinos face today.

This research project attempts to answer the question: why, however, did this phenomenon occur when it did after more than a century of stunted development? To structure the chronological narrative outlined above, I will argue that the answer can be found by using the Political Process Model of social movement formation and by discussing Nevada as a case study of the "reactive formation" of a politically active Pan-Latino community in a new immigrant destination.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The Political Process Model (PPM) laid forth by Douglas McAdams in *Political Process and the Development of the Black Insurgency*, posits three distinct factors that were present and essential in explaining the successful insurgency of the black Civil Rights' movement of the latter twentieth century: "the confluence of expanding political opportunities, indigenous organizational strength, and presence of certain shared cognitions within the minority

community that is held to facilitate the movement emergence,” (59). While applied to the case of African-Americans in McAdam’s work, I will argue this model also appropriately represents the basic determinants of the case of Nevada’s Latino population’s own brand of “insurgency” highlighted in this project. While not a formal insurgency consisting of riots and large-scale protests, the “insurgency” of the Nevada Latino population in this work is instead referencing their successful political incorporation through increased participation and representation.

Though an increase in political opportunities can be the result of a number of factors that leave the existing political structure vulnerable to change, in Nevada, the rise of Latinos’ political opportunities is directly related to the rapid growth of the Latino population during the 1980s and 1990s. However, as McAdams suggests, the shift in political opportunities that such drastic demographic change begets is not sufficient to explain the success of any minority social movement. In Nevada, the formation of Latino organizations whose primary goals were to advance the rights of its members were integral to formation of a vocal, and organized network of dissenters determined to change the status quo.

The “raising of awareness” of the Latino communities in Nevada was an element crucial to expediting the increased levels of political incorporation documented in this work. As McAdam notes, neither the expansion of political opportunities nor increased organizational strength is an adequate explanation for an effective insurgency. The minority population must also experience a

“cognitive liberation” if a successful collective action is to occur. “Mediating between opportunity and action are people and the subjective meaning they attach to their situation...challengers experience shifting political conditions on a day-to-day basis as a set of ‘meaningful’ events communicating much about their prospects for collective action,” (48). The proliferation of Spanish-language media outlets, in addition to contributing to Latino’s organizational strength, accelerated the shared cognitions of the Latino community and its leaders by educating them about the shared negative experiences of oppression and prejudice they faced. Combined with an increased and more nuanced national discussion of the role of the Latino in American society and politics, the community was able to examine their role within state politics and realize they had the opportunity to impact the government at the state and local levels.

The national discussion of Latinos was one of a number of factors external to the state that also played an important role in the political integration of the Latino community there. For many, it may come as a surprise that Nevada is classified as a “new immigrant destination” by various scholars, including Jorge Durand, Douglas Massey, and Chiara Capoferro (Durand et al. 14-15). The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), discussed in Chapter Two of this project, marked a significant shift in traditional patterns of Hispanic migration within the United States. The results of IRCA were especially apparent in Nevada, in great part due to its proximity to California, a state that had long been a primary destination of Mexican immigrants. Declining wages due to the California’s recession and high unemployment rates caused a flood of newly

legalized immigrants under IRCA pushed both documented and undocumented immigrants to other states with smaller migrant populations, including Nevada (Durand et al. 12-13). It was also during this time that Hispanic immigrants began to arrive in higher numbers from countries other than Mexico (and Cuba), especially from war-torn Central America.

The diversification of the Hispanic community and the intensification of the hostility they faced from the racial majority proved to be a significant unifying force that helped propel Latinos in Nevada into a prominent role in the political arena in the early 2000s. As previously mentioned, and expanded upon in Chapter Two, the Latino population of Nevada began to show significant growth in the 1980s, with the majority of Latinos coming to the state being first generation immigrants that were born in Latin America and later immigrated to the United States. By the 2000s, many of those immigrants had had children and a large portion of Nevada's Hispanic population were second or third generation immigrants born in the United States. As the following chapters will reveal, Hispanics had failed to make substantial gains in the political sphere throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The community, and its individual organizations' leadership, was often fragmented between groups from various countries of national origin. This would prove to be less of a factor for the second and third generation immigrants that united to form a "Pan-Latino" political bloc and effectively swayed the outcomes of the federal, state, and local elections of the early 2000s.

Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut discussion of the “reactive formation” of ethnicities of first, second and third generation immigrants throughout American history provides an accurate lens through which to view the case of Nevada’s Pan-Latino political renaissance beginning in the early 2000s. In *Immigrant America*, Portes and Rumbaut state, “as Nathan Glazer and others have noted, ethnic resilience is a uniquely American product because it has seldom reflected linear continuity with the immigrants’ culture but rather has emerged in reaction to the situation, views, and discrimination they faced on arrival,” (164). While politically aware first generation immigrants in the U.S. tend to focus on the politics of their native countries with whom they still have a strong attachment, the later generations react by forming alliances that transcend national heritage. Instead they organize under the broader spectrum of perceived ethnicity to attempt to enact change in policy they see as unjust or discriminatory to members of their ethnic community (Portes and Rubaut 173-208). This “collective identification” is partially a result of the American establishment’s tendency to lump all members of a perceived ethnic group together under a singular title such as “Asian” or “Hispanic” instead of by their ancestral nationality (e.g. Colombian, Mexican, Korean, Chinese, etc) (Portes and Rumbaut 205).

Other factors that have contributed to the unification of Hispanic ethnicities and their further incorporation into the political sphere that are apparent in the Nevada case laid forth in this project are language and citizenship. In *Reactive Ethnic Formations and Panethnic Identities: The Creation of Latinos in the United*

States, Ramón Gutiérrez points out that “much of the world’s ethnic politics are language politics,” (15). In his research on the subject throughout late twentieth-century American history, he found that groups that previously never shared a common history, such as “Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, or for that matter any combinations of Latin American groups shared a common language...[and] made it easy for panethnicity to emerge and channeled it into oppositional consciousness,” (15). The Spanish-Language media has contributed to this phenomenon by raising the Latino community’s awareness of the prevalence of discrimination and marginalization against members of all national ancestries and informing them about the nuances of the American political system and how they can work within it to protest and fight such injustices in the most widely used language in Latin America. With this heightened consciousness, members of the Latino community have become better equipped to contribute to the public dialogue and rally for or against public policy that affects them as a result of their shared Pan-Latino ethnicity. The expansion of the Spanish-language media in Nevada was especially important for first and second generation immigrants who, due to the rapid growth of the population in a relatively short period of time, were (and still are) Spanish-language dominant. Without such forms of media in Spanish, many would be left without the proper knowledge needed to become politically cognizant. In *More than 200 years of Latino Media in the United States*, Félix Gutiérrez also discusses the broader functions of political activism and social advocacy that the Spanish-language media serves in the Hispanic community versus the in the

Anglo media (105-106). A 2008 study linking the Spanish-language media's role in increasing naturalization rates, and subsequently voter registration rates, among Latinos highlights the importance of both the Spanish-language media and citizenship in increasing Hispanic political incorporation. Félix, González, and Ramírez find that collaborative efforts by various Spanish-language television and radio stations not only lead to greater mobilization of the Hispanic community to form organized protests against the intense anti-immigrant legislation proposed in California in 2006, but also caused more Hispanics to naturalize as citizens in order to be able to vote after realizing the political implications of the legislation (618-19).

Many of the immigrants who naturalized as a result of such legislation did so not only to participate in the electoral process, but also as a means to protect themselves from the repercussions of anti-immigrant legislation. This process has been dubbed "defensive naturalization" by scholars analyzing the trend (Portes and Rumbaut 186). The impacts of such naturalizations in Nevada are currently unknown, however, the impact of citizenship on immigrant political incorporation are well-documented. Higher rates of citizenship among an immigrant group strengthen the political power of the minority ethnic group, and in turn unite its members, regardless of country of national origin, to support legislation that would benefit the group as a whole (Portes and Rumbaut 191). In Nevada, the naturalization of first generation immigrants proved to be less of a determining factor of successful political incorporation than the citizenship, and therefore the right to vote, granted to their U.S. born children. However, the idea

of the “reactive formation” of a Pan-Latino community built upon common experiences of discrimination and the attempt of the white political majority to enact legislation to curb immigrant rights is an important aspect to consider when studying the rise of Latino political power in the state laid forth in this paper.

Ethnic solidarity has provided the basis for the pursuit of collective goals in the American political system. By mobilizing the ethnic vote and by electing their own to office, immigrants and their children have learned the rules of the democratic game and have absorbed its values in the process. (212)

Latino vs Hispanic

There has been much academic debate on the usage of the term Hispanic versus Latino/a to reference a person, place or thing that is from, or represents, Latin America. In this project, I have taken two approaches to the usage of both terms. First, I have chosen to remain loyal to the terminology used in my primary reference materials when citing a particular source. Therefore, when discussing the early history of Nevada in Chapter One, I almost will exclusively use the term Hispanic, as that was the terminology used in my primary sources. This changes as the chronology of events progresses and the term “Latino” begins to be used by scholars, and by Latinos themselves in the 1970s and 1980s. Second, when analyzing and discussing the “renaissance” of Latinos in Nevada’s recent political history and their increased political incorporation in Nevada, I convert to the term “Latino” or “Latina.” The usage “Latino” has become more commonplace in recent years, to refer to a person that wishes to express solidarity with their ethnic counterparts in the struggle for social justice and at the same time

maintain their identity as an individual with a unique story. The term “Hispanic,” instead, has been used to by the white majority throughout history in an attempt to homogenize a wide range of cultures and nationalities that are as varied as they are numerous. Suzanne Oboler posits in *The Politics of Labeling: Latino/a Cultural Identities of Self and Others*, that due to these reasons, using the term “Latino/a” to refer to oneself is a distinctly *political* statement and implies a connection with social movements associated with the fight for equality under the law (32). Since politics, social justice and language are all central themes of this project, I decided to reflect the evolution of the Hispanic/Latino terminology usage, while staying true to the sources I have cited.

Methodology and Purpose

As previously mentioned, the question this project seeks to answer is, why have Nevada’s Latinos become such a political force *now* after over more than a century of inhibited progress? In order to do so, I reviewed a variety of literature that I will reference. M.L. Miranda’s *A History of Hispanics in Southern Nevada* was an integral part of my research on the history of Latinos in the state as a whole, and not as the title implies, just in Southern Nevada. Along with a variety of other works on the state’s history, I also used many reports detailing the changing demographics of the Latino population to explain the rise of Latinos’ political integration there. In addition to the works that reference Nevada, I also have used the three basic tenants detailed in the *Theoretical Framework and Literature Review* section of this chapter to frame my discussion using the

Political Process Model outlined by McAdams, in addition to various works that catalogue the concept of the reactive formation of ethnicities to discuss the development of a Pan-Latino community in the state. Interviews with Leslie Mix and State Senator Ruben Kihuen also contributed to this work by giving personal and profession perspectives to this account. Therefore, this project is an analytical narrative of secondary sources with targeted interviews to explain the rapid escalation of Nevada's political integration in the state in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 1

An Overview of the Origins of the Hispanic Population in Nevada: 1540 to the 1950s

Early History: Spanish Rule to the Mining Boom

Hispanics played a pivotal role in the development of what would eventually become the state of Nevada in 1864. Long before the state's declaration of statehood, they not only established their own settlements but were instrumental in assisting many Anglo-Americans in their desire to expand the United States westward. One account of the history of the state posits that Spanish explorers possibly traveled through the southernmost region of the modern day state as early as 1540, decades before the first arrival of the Pilgrims on the East Coast (Miranda 6). Even if this version of events is incorrect, several state historians note that the Spanish were, without question, the first non-Native Americans to travel through what is now modern-day Nevada when the majority of the western portion of the United States, at the time called *Nueva España*, was controlled by the Spaniards (Bowers 1; Miranda 9). In 1776, Missionary Francisco Garcés more than likely passed through what would eventually become Clark County in Southern Nevada in order to find a quicker route connecting the coast of modern-day California with what is now Arizona. This path would ultimately become part of the Old Spanish Trail that would expand to New Mexico in order to facilitate trade more quickly and efficiently to the Pacific Ocean. The Spanish, however, did not form any permanent settlements in the

region between the starting point and the destinations. They were primarily concerned with finding deposits of gold and silver to mine and take back to Spain. Since they had already discovered such deposits in California, it appears that they were primarily concerned with exploring that area more than the arid deserts of southern Nevada they travelled through to arrive there. Also, at the time of their early expeditions, they are known to have documented their travels through the southern region of the state, hundreds of miles from the gold and silver mines that would eventually have miners from other parts of the United States and from abroad flocking to northern Nevada.

After Mexico defeated Spain in the War of Mexican Independence and earned its autonomy from the Spanish monarchy, the land that would eventually form Nevada became part of the Mexican province of *Alta California*. As settlements in California began to grow and flourish, a viable market for the trading of basic goods emerged. In 1829, a Mexican merchant named José Antonio Armijo led a group of merchants from a small town near Santa Fe, in *Nuevo México* (which was the name of the Mexican province that included modern day New Mexico) onwards toward California, on a path that would connect with Garcés' route from fifty years earlier to form the Old Spanish Trail. It was on this trip that a young Mexican man by the name of Rafael Rivera became separated from the group. He would become the "first non-Indian to set foot in the Las Vegas Valley" (Rodriguez 20). When he returned to the merchants' camp, he told Armijo what he had seen: several watering holes and a place to cross the Colorado River. This was enough for Rivera to convince

Garcés and the rest of the caravan to follow him. After some trial and error, this new path was determined to be the shortest and most direct route to California, i.e. the Old Spanish Trail (Miranda 19). The contributions of these Mexican explorers were integral to the formation of Southern Nevada, as the area that the city of Las Vegas now occupies became a resting area for travelers on the Old Spanish Trail. The Trail became not only an important trade route, but also provided a path for many families (many of whom were Hispanic) to migrate to what would become California from the region that now forms the borders of modern-day Mexico and other areas of North America.

As the United States continued to grow and pursue the doctrine of Manifest Destiny to expand westward, many of these Hispanic families would play a key role in developing and expanding an industry that to this day remains the number one exporting trade in the state: mining. In 1851, just three years after the Mexican territories of *Alta California* and *Nueva México* were ceded to the United States in 1848, a group of Mormons established a temporary settlement that would ultimately become Nevada's first official permanent settlement at the foot of the Sierra Nevada Mountains (Bowers 6). Genoa, the name officially given to the town which remains a popular tourist destination today, lies south of modern day Reno and Carson City. It was initially a trading station and resting place for the large influx of travelers passing through whose sights were set on California after the recent discovery of gold in 1849. However, after the discovery of the vast quantities of silver in nearby Virginia City in 1856, in what would be referred to as the Comstock Lode, the area received its own

rush of migrants looking to strike it rich. These miners and their families settled in the region, forming many of Nevada's most well-known mining communities.

Hispanic miners of various origins flocked to the region in search of fortune and were essential in both the discovery of and the procurement of silver and gold in Northern Nevada. While the vast majority of Hispanic miners were from Mexico, some came from as far away as Chile. However, it was the Mexican miners from the state of Sonora that had the most influence on the techniques used to mine the Comstock Lode once it was discovered. One famous example is the technique known as "panning," or *batea*, to separate silver and gold ore from other sediment. They freely taught this and other techniques to other groups of miners, both Hispanic and non-Hispanic, and their methods spread quickly across the soon-to-be state as more and more deposits of precious metals were being unearthed. Many of these gold and silver mines were, in fact, discovered and named by Hispanics themselves. It is not difficult to see the influence of these miners when reviewing the names of some of Nevada's first mining communities such as Guadalajara, Candelaria, and Montezuma (Miranda 37-40).

Though Hispanics' contributions to the mining industry are recognized and documented by historians, at the time, many of the advances they made were usurped by Anglo-American miners. The Comstock Lode was actually discovered by a Sonoran miner who recognized that much of the discarded sediment the Canadians (including Henry Comstock himself) were tossing aside was in fact silver. This little known fact is excluded from the vast majority of the

texts used to write this chapter. This type of exclusion perfectly illustrates the plight of many Hispanic immigrants in the region intent on owning and operating their own mines and how, over time, they lost control of many mines (and history) to non-Hispanics. M.L. Miranda demonstrates how this loss of control led to the demotion of these pioneers from chief to servant:

Apache raiders kept the Sonorans from their own mines, so they jumped at the chance to migrate north to the mines of California and Nevada. They came to Nevada after first trying their luck in the California gold fields. The Sonorans offered needed services as prospectors, hired hands, and mule skimmers. Mexican arrieros (mule skimmers) gained a reputation as the most reliable hired hands. They were skillful, had pride in what they did, and could be counted on to get a pack train through the worst snowstorms or over the most treacherous mountain trails. Sonorans gained a reputation in the California gold fields for having a sixth sense for finding gold, and their willingness to endure physical hardship gave them some advantages. Some Sonorans hired themselves out to Yankees, and some worked on their own claims until attacked and run off by other Yankees. Their "luck" at finding gold was conspicuous, and their skills at mining were so notable that unscrupulous and jealous Yankees attacked them for their success. (47)

Unfortunately, this was one example of a pattern that has been repeated a multitude of times throughout United States history, Nevada being no exception. The lack of respect given to Hispanic immigrants is perhaps most apparent when looking at the stark contrast in wages between Anglo and Hispanic miners. Moreover, it would be decades before any laws were put into place to help (somewhat) regulate such irregular practices and mistreatment. This epoch of Nevada's history can truly be seen as the epitome of the wild, wild West.

Table 1.1

Per Diem Wages by Decade

Ethnicity	1860	1870	1880	1890
AngloAmerican ¹	\$1.25	\$1.75	\$2.75	\$3.25
Mexican ²	\$.37	\$1.00	\$1.50	\$1.75
1. Until about 1880, pay usually included board.				
2. Until about 1880, pay included a ration of flour.				

Source: Takaki, Ronald. *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 163.

Statehood to the 1960s

Hispanic miners were certainly not the only type of Hispanic laborers that were exploited in Nevada's early history. In 1864, Nevada became the 38th state in the Union as a result of President Lincoln's desire and need to squelch the political power of the Confederacy during the Civil war by adding much needed electoral and congressional votes for his Republican party (hence Nevada's motto of "Battle Born") (Davies 3). Hispanics would continue to play a pivotal, yet underappreciated role in other important enterprises that were necessary to the formation of the state. As previously noted, it is difficult to determine with accuracy the number of Hispanics that resided in the state in its early years. However, the beginning of the twentieth century marks the well-documented arrival of Hispanics in what has been identified as the first wave of Hispanic immigration in the southern part of the state. In a similar manner to how the mining industry drew immigrants in search of work to the northern part of the state in the late 1800s, the construction of the Union-Pacific railroad in the early 1900s connecting Los Angeles and Salt Lake City and passing through Las Vegas in the south, created the need for affordable labor, which Hispanics were

more than willing to provide (Bowers 37). The vast majority of these immigrants were Mexican, fleeing the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz and the strife of the Mexican Revolution (Skelly et al. 2; Miranda 74). These jobs were notoriously dangerous, difficult, and low-paying. However, much like the Sonoran miners in the north, the Mexican railroad workers of the Las Vegas area earned a reputation for being loyal and hardworking, so much so, that they earned the support of the American Federation of Labor Union (AFL) during World War II. Most of the Mexican railroad workers had avoided losing their jobs and falling prey to the Great Depression of the previous decades due to a combination of their work ethic and the lack of union representation or wage-bartering power of any kind (Miranda 81). Therefore, the acceptance of these workers into the AFL's ranks marks a small yet significant milestone and can be viewed as the one of the initial sparks that would lead Hispanics to become a politically organized force in Nevada.

This breakthrough, however, did not occur in time to provide any relief for the many Hispanics that worked alongside other minorities in order to construct the Hoover Dam (then known as the Boulder Dam) from 1931 to 1935 south of Las Vegas. The federal government-funded massive project's primary goals were aimed at controlling floods, providing a year-round water supply for irrigation and consumption, and producing electrical energy for the notoriously arid American Southwest. The construction of the Hoover Dam was also a large-scale job producer in the area and employed as many as 5,000 employees at one time (Gilbert et al. 38; Bowers 128). Unemployed laborers flocked to the area to work

on the construction of the dam and contributed to the growing economy of the Las Vegas Valley and shielding the region from many of the woes faced by the rest of the nation during the Great Depression. They were also lured by free housing for themselves and their families in Boulder City, the community that arose from the Hoover Dam project. Unfortunately, this only applied to white laborers. The minority workers, the majority of which were Hispanic, African-American and Native American, were excluded from entering the compounds of the city. Once again Hispanics, while gainfully employed, still suffered discrimination and marginalization while performing many of the same tasks as their white counterparts (“Building Boulder City”; Burbank).

The American Association of Public Works still considers the “Hoover Dam...as one of the most successful public work projects and one of the greatest engineering achievements of the modern era” and contributed to rapid expansion of Southern California, Southern Nevada, and Arizona in the years following its construction. In addition to reliable water supply, the federal funds that poured into the region for the project provided the city with paved roads, sewers, and other necessary elements of urban infrastructure needed to support Las Vegas and the surrounding areas growing population (“The Hoover Dam”). This growth coincided with the Nevada Legislature’s decision to lift a ban on gambling that had been passed decades earlier, legalizing the practice in the state. This decision would have a profound impact on the future of the state and set in motion the series of events that led to Reno and Las Vegas becoming prime gambling and tourist destinations for the United States and, later, the world.

In addition to the income from the laborers who were working on the dam and other federally funded projects in the Las Vegas area, tourists began flocking to the casinos and hotels to take advantage of the legal gambling and see the Hoover Dam, which until 1948 was the largest hydraulic plant in the world (“Reclamation”). This would also spur another round of job creation, this time in the burgeoning tourism industry of the Las Vegas Valley. Unfortunately for the Hispanic population (along with other minorities), this would not benefit them as they were barred by law from 1931 to the 1960s from owning or operating any machines or casinos of any kind in Clark County. Similarly in Reno, the situation for all minorities was also bleak. It was considered the gambling capital of Nevada before Las Vegas, but discrimination against Hispanics for the most part kept them away (Harmon). Once again, Hispanics in Nevada found themselves being treated as second class citizens and consigned to unskilled, laborious, and low-paying jobs much like their mining and railroad building predecessors (Miranda 102). By this juncture in the state’s history, a clear pattern of marginalization and segregation was apparent. Hispanics were seen as little more than poorly paid servants that exist for the benefit of the white man. They were expected to construct practically the entire infrastructure of the rapidly expanding cities and towns, yet reap none of the benefits or rewards.

The final wave of Hispanics to come to Nevada during the state’s early history arrived during World War II and the few years that followed. The famous *bracero* program allowed Mexican workers to enter the United States to fill many of the positions abandoned by the men who left for Europe or the Pacific Rim to

fight in the war. Unsurprisingly, the jobs left vacant were also of the low-paying menial variety such as farming and railroad work. Traditionally, agriculture was a small industry in the state compared to mining and tourism due to a lack of access to water and irrigation methods. The arid climate and rugged terrain lacked the rich soil of parts of neighboring California, making farming difficult in most of the state, especially the desert-like regions of the south, until the construction of the Hoover Dam. The majority of the agricultural industry revolved around raising cattle for dairy and meat (Elliot and Rowley 171-173). One notable exception was the Moapa Valley, in the area that lies directly east of Las Vegas close to the Utah border, whose economy had relied on crops since the 1860s. While most of the *bracero* workers who came during the programs were temporary workers who would eventually return to Mexico or settle in other parts of United States, many of the *bracero* workers that came to the Moapa Valley would settle there permanently (Miranda 95). Predictably, these workers, along with their counterparts in the railroad *bracero* program were subjected to poor working and living conditions. Seven-day work weeks were the norm, as were lack of access to heat, running water, suitable housing and education for the migrants' children (Driscoll de Alvarado 113; Miranda 96).

The Bracero Program would eventually end in 1964 due to backlash from labor unions and the increasing anti-immigrant, and especially anti-Mexican, sentiment that was spreading throughout the country at the time. The most repercussion of the increased in Hispanic immigration that occurred during the program was Operation Wetback, an initiative led by Immigration and

Naturalization Service (INS) to seek out and deport undocumented Mexican workers. While the impact on Nevada's Hispanic population was relatively small in relation to other Western states with much larger Mexican immigrant populations, those who were affected there were troubled by the callousness with which the INS targeted undocumented immigrants and separated families through deportation (Miranda 95).

The pattern of mistreatment and the disregard for the welfare of Nevada's early Hispanic population is not unique to the state or even the early era of American history. Racism and suspicion of "brown people" is well documented all over the country, from the nation's beginnings to the modern day. Operation Wetback, however, exemplified these notions at a time when the notion of civil rights for all Americans was entering the nation's consciousness. However, at this juncture in the state's history, Nevada's Latino population was still very small and lacked the even minor resources necessary for increased political opportunity. It would still be decades before the community would experience a similar "cognitive liberation" as the black insurgency occurring simultaneously across the country. "Social insurgency is shaped by broad social processes that...operate over a longer period of time...[and] the processes shaping [it] are expected to be more cumulative [and] less dramatic," (McAdams 41). The discrimination and segregation Hispanics in the state faced in its early years laid the foundation for what would eventually lead to the communities shared realization that these types of conditions were unacceptable. The construction of the Hoover Dam and as a result, the rapid growth of the Las Vegas area,

would set the stage for a population boom that would eventually bring Hispanics to the area in greater numbers and afford them the opportunities needed to enact effective political change.

Chapter 2

The Emergence of Hispanic Organizations in Nevada: 1960s-2000

Types of Community Organizations

Though isolated and generally rejected by most of mainstream (i.e. Anglo) society and relegated to the lower echelons of the economic strata, Nevada's early immigrants and Hispanic settlers found ways to celebrate and maintain their culture. As noted in Chapter One, the vast majority of Latinos were Mexican or of Mexican descent. This is reflected in the customs and events they developed to preserve their cultural identity. As early as 1909, they established businesses that catered to and were owned by Mexicans, such as restaurants and beauty salons. At the turn of the twentieth century in both northern and southern Nevada, Mexican Independence Day celebrations, including parades, were organized and announced in local newspapers. Though seemingly a banal observation, the existence of these events and commercial enterprises allowed Mexican Americans in the state to begin to form social networks that would eventually create an environment that was conducive to support and foster the influx of Hispanics that would come to the state throughout the twentieth century. In the same spirit, the fact that Mexican Americans were treated as second class citizens by the white majority throughout Nevada's early history, would also help guide them toward greater unity.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Hispanics received a great deal of negative attention from the media and bore the brunt of efforts to cast them apart from the rest of society. Hispanics have been portrayed by the mainstream Anglo media throughout the United States's history as "greasy bandidos, fat mamcitas, lazy peons sleeping under somberos [and] short-tempted Mexican spitfires" since the Industrial Revolution (F. éérrez 99). Nevada was not immune from this type of negative typecasting. A number of racist newspaper articles published in the late 1800s and early 1900s throughout the state painted the mostly Mexican community as drunken criminals. These negative stereotypes along with long-entrenched racism led to numerous attempts by the land owning elite of Las Vegas to force not only Hispanics, but all minorities into certain sections of town while limiting their ability to reside in the "white" areas (Miranda 89-94). Even though such attempts were denied, they undoubtedly contributed to the feelings of marginalization in the Hispanic community. Though Hispanics had established businesses and had begun to celebrate their culture with various events, the small population present in the state at the time still lacked the necessary organizational strength and political opportunities to make even minor attempts at political incorporation.

However, this would all change in the second half of the twentieth century. Hispanics' continued isolation from mainstream American society and an exponential increase in the Hispanic population of the state eventually drew the community together. It is during this time that the three tenants of a successful insurgency as posited by McAdams's Political Process Model slowly emerge,

beginning with the formations of groups that would eventually provide the sufficient indigenous organizational strength crucial for successful political integration in Nevada. Hispanics living there after WWII who were unhappy about their lack of economic advancement, rampant widespread discrimination, and societal exclusion would result in the creation a number of organizations that would eventually transform the cultural and political landscape of the state and enable Hispanics to become the political force they are today.

In his discussion of indigenous organizational strength, McAdams identifies four essential resources that existing minority groups provide the organizers of successful social movements' access to that assist them in effectively rallying the minority community towards collective action: *members, an established structure of solidarity incentives, a communication network or networks, and leaders* (44-48). This chapter will identify some of the central organizations that helped to incorporate Nevada Latinos into the state's political sphere, their contributions to the struggle, and analyze their successes and failures in the years leading up to the period of when that goal was realized.

John García discusses how social unification and the development of organizations founded by members of the same or similar cultures applies to the Latino community in recent years in his book *Latino Politics in America*:

Since the 1990s, social scientists have added that a common experience with discrimination and regulation to minority status in most facets of American life have accented a sense of group identification. Measures of socioeconomic and political disparities are often used to enjoin ethnic status with unequal opportunities and rights. (17)

He continues to identify the two distinct types of organizations (what he calls “bases of communality”) that develop when such deep-rooted discrimination and marginalization exist and affect the daily lives of its members.

Communities of common or similar cultures endure when persons are tied together naturally by their involvement in a common system of purpose with accompanying patterns of traditional interactions and behaviors rooted in a common heritage. This common heritage or tradition includes national ancestry, language, religion and religious customs, observance of holidays and festivals, and familial networks. (17)

Garcia notes that these communities of common or similar cultures do not necessarily engage in “community action” or undertake any direct forms of political engagement but can still play an important role in promoting unity among groups that have a shared history, especially a shared nationality (Mexican, Cuban, Spanish, etc.). Examples of these types of communities can include church groups, dance or art clubs modeled around a traditional form of dance or art originating in a particular country, or even family reunions. He identifies the second type of Latino community organization as being distinct from these because:

The idea of a **community of interests** revolves around persons who are united by a common set of economic and political interests. This connection may be due in part to group members’ concentration in certain industries and occupational sectors and in residential enclaves; it may also be due in part to their common experience of political disenfranchisement and differential treatment based on ancestry, phenotype, immigrant status, language, and various other cultural traits and practices. Clearly, there is an intersection of cultural status and interests. The result of perceived and accepted common interests may lead to the development of new or reinforced identity. For example, the “official term” *Hispanic*

may reorient a person to incorporate that label and strategically use that identity to maximize political effect. (17)

These types of organizations have been integral in the formation of a politically active Pan-Latino ethnic community in the Nevada Latino community in reaction to the unjust treatment they have faced due to their ethnic classification as Hispanic. Instead of celebrating a particular nationality or specific culture, they unite as Hispanics facing similar forms of economic or political discrimination. They work with political leaders and bodies such as the state and national legislatures, voters, and the media to work to enact political change for the advancement of the community they represent. Examples of these groups are organizations that support and inform Latino undocumented immigrants, business organizations aimed at advancing the status of Latinos in business, and Latino social justice student groups. They gather together not only to actively pursue a transformation of laws and policy but also to analyze the motives and causes of the particular brand of disenfranchisement they hope to change. To emphasize the key motivation of these communities, García states “a central element within these analytical insights is the role played by discriminatory practices and prejudicial attitudes on the part of and manifested in public policies,” (17-18). Given the history of mistreatment, ostracism, and segregation of Hispanics in Nevada’s early history, as described in the previous chapter, it is not difficult to see the need for communities of interests in the state. The organizations that formed in the post-World War II era arose out of necessity to

not only fight against an entrenched pattern of oppression against Hispanics, but also to understand the reasons behind it.

Though the communities of similar cultures are not necessarily formed with the intention to inducing political change, they provide an emerging social movement with additional members for their ranks. Their communication networks are also key resources for McAdams “insurgents” to tap into. These members can easily become allies in the struggle for equality through contact with other members of the community in their networks who are not interested in becoming directly involved in politics and protest. They can indirectly influence voters and leaders by spreading common messages they deem important to members of their communities.

Both types of Latino communities described by García can produce the four resources McAdam’s claims necessary for sufficient organizational strength to be existent at sufficient levels to produce a successful social movement. Each individual community has members, all of whom have a communication network to some degree, they are capable of producing leaders, and each group is created based on a common thread or established structure of solidarity that brought the group together. In addition to providing organizational strength, both politically oriented groups and culturally oriented groups raise awareness of injustices common to all its members due to their ethnicity. Therefore, the discussion of the Latino organizations that formed in Nevada in the second half of the twentieth century were crucial to realizing a collective “cognitive liberation.”

The 1960s and the Beginning of a Movement

In the 1960s, as African Americans, women, gays and lesbians, and other ostracized members of societies all over the country began to unify and resist the notion that only Anglo-Americans deserved to be treated with dignity, respect, and have basic protection under the law, Hispanics of the nation were also realizing that in order to have their voices heard they would have to organize as well. During this decade, the Hispanic population of Nevada was still quite small, and no major Hispanic organizations would be formed there until the 1970s. Instead, Nevada's Hispanics watched and learned as the efforts of Hispanics in other states and the civil rights movements in the African American community took hold across the nation. During this decade, the number of Hispanic residents of Las Vegas alone would expand fourteen fold, and though they did little to change the political status quo in the state during this time, their growing numbers would afford them the political base they would eventually utilize to enact change at local and state levels.

In other parts of the United States in the 1960s, organizations such as the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), the American G.I. forum (established to protect Mexican-American WWII veterans) and members of the famous Chicano movement were organizing throughout the Southwest and Texas. These organizations had broad goals for Hispanics including economic, social, and political equality. They also placed a strong emphasis on equal access to education for Hispanic children and youths (Miranda 142). Along with African American civil rights leaders, they

fought for the desegregation of schools and watched as riots and protests erupted across the country, including in Las Vegas. The efforts of these groups and others like them were victorious across the country and Nevada's schools were eventually desegregated in the urban areas in 1971. Though the 1960s would only bear witness to the formation of one major Hispanic organization, the Nevada Association of Latin Americans (NALA) in 1969, the power of mobilization and public action were becoming clear to Nevada's Hispanic population (Miranda 147).

As previously discussed, up until the late 1960s, the vast majority of Hispanics in Nevada were of Mexican descent. Though Mexican Americans would dominate the discussion of race and equality in Nevada, the Cuban Revolution and the arrival of a sea of refugees fleeing Fidel Castro's communist regime would play a significant role in the establishment of some of Nevada's major Hispanic organizations over the next two decades and beyond. While much of the dialogue of the migration and settlement of Cubans in America after the Revolution centers on the hubs of New York and Miami, Las Vegas and Reno became natural destinations for Cuban immigrants from Havana looking for work in industries they were already familiar with: tourism and gaming. Nevada's lax prostitution laws were also familiar to the Cuban immigrants. A big draw for many tourists to the both the casinos of Nevada and pre-Castro Havana were the ease of access to prostitutes (Avella and Mills 55). Unlike Mexican Americans who had been left out of the gaming industry by laws directly prohibiting them from taking part or relegating them to very low-level positions in casinos and

hotels such as housekeeping and food service, the Cubans' experience in their country's bustling pre-Castro gaming and tourism industries gave them access to jobs previously unreachable by Hispanics of any type (Miranda 128). This would initially lead to feelings of jealousy and contempt by the well-established Mexican population which was not helped by the (not incorrect) notion that Cubans and Cuban Americans considered themselves to be superior to Mexicans and other Latin American immigrant groups present in the United States at the time. In the 1970s and 1980s, as the Hispanic population continued to diversify and expand exponentially, they would set aside their differences and work together to form a variety of organizations that would highlight the struggles of the Hispanic/Latino population of the state.

Table 2.1 Population of Las Vegas, 1910–1980

Las Vegas	Total	White	Hispanic	Black
1910	947	—	—	—
1920	2,304	—	—	—
1930	5,165	150	—	—
1940	8,124	178	—	—
1950	24,624	21,736	2,275	—
1960	64,405	54,261	236	9,649
1970	125,787	109,923	3,871	14,082
1980	164,674	134,330	12,787	21,054

— means no breakdown provided.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census of Population 1910–1980.

Nevada's Population Boom and the Rise of Hispanic Community

Organizations: 1970s and 1980s

By 1970, tourism had officially surpassed mining to become Nevada's largest industry. By 1975, revenues from gaming alone were more than one billion dollars and fifty percent of the state's entire budget came from taxes produced by gaming related commerce ("History of Gaming"). This further stimulated the "boom" of the state's population that had begun in the 1960s, especially in Clark County in the south, and marked the beginning of a shift of economic power from Reno and the surrounding areas that had previously dominated the state's economy to the Las Vegas Valley. As the city of Las Vegas, and the state (though to a lesser extent in the north), began to expand, tourists traveled to Nevada in large numbers to take advantage of legal gambling and other forms of entertainment that the tourism industry offered. This created a large number of service industry and construction jobs, and Hispanics from neighboring states, Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and other parts Latin America came to the region to fill them.

As the Latino population continued to expand, local Hispanic leaders began to implement the lessons they had learned from African Americans, Chicanos, and other minority groups in the 1960s and began to establish a number of organizations to support and foster the growing Hispanic population. One of the largest groups to form would be the Nevada Spanish Speaking Coalition in 1972. The NSSC brought together some of the local chapters of the larger and older national organizations such as LULAC and the American G.I.

forum, with other local organizations that had just appeared on the Hispanic organization scene in Las Vegas. Its members included:

- A local chapter of the Service, Employment and Redeveloping Agency (SER) that formed in 1971 to provide job training and other skills to help low-income Hispanics obtain and maintain work.
- La Raza-UNLV, a Hispanic student organization that initially formed in 1971 to push the University of Nevada, Las Vegas to establish a Chicano studies program and were successful in their efforts.
- El Círculo Cubano, a Cuban newspaper and community institution.
- A local chapter of the National Spanish Speaking Management Association.

The group was committed to analyzing and discussing a rather large number of issues due to the diversity of its substantial membership, and their intent was to mobilize the community to bring these issues into the political sphere. They included a broad range of concerns that affected the increasing Hispanic community, but among the most pressing were education, employment and housing. These were all areas where Hispanics had had little access before this time and, as Miranda points out, were closely related. “De facto housing segregation was a fact of life in 1972 in Las Vegas because the majority of Hispanics lacked education and job skills and thus were stuck in low-paying jobs, giving them no choice but to live in poor neighborhoods,” (Miranda 153-154).

The NSSC was short lived, disbanding after only three years, and little is known about its outreach and political efforts. It did, however, bring some of these important issues to the forefront of the minds of the budding Hispanic population. By bringing communities of similar cultures and communities of interests together and raising the community's awareness of problems that affecting them, it also set the stage for future groups of Nevada's Hispanics to pressure the local and state government to address the issues important to this growing segment of the population.

The 1970s also gave rise to arguably the most influential local Latino organization in the state to this day, the Latin Chamber of Commerce of Nevada. A small group of Cubans, headed by Arturo Cambeiro, joined together in 1975 and 1976 in Las Vegas to form the small organization, whose main priorities at the time were the economic advancement of Hispanics and the unification of the Hispanic business community (LCC "Our History"). In the early years of the LCC, the founders' emphasis on state and federal level economics limited their membership and focus to the very educated, elite members of the Hispanic community. This is not so surprising given that their leaders were from elite families in Cuba that came to the United States after the Revolution. It should also be noted that Cuban Americans of the time tended to be more politically conservative and had not faced the same types of hardship and discrimination as Nevada's more "traditional" immigrants. They had more socioeconomic and cultural similarities with the white middle and upper class than their fellow Hispanics and, as a result, many had an engrained sense of superiority over

other Hispanic Americans, especially Mexican Americans. (Miranda 148-149). Nonetheless, during the rest of the 1970s, the LCC and its exclusive members continued to flourish, opened an office in Reno in 1978, and made important connections with the banking community and various governmental agencies that would serve the entire Hispanic community of Nevada as well as their agenda, which was changing along with the demographics of Hispanics in the state. This included increasing Hispanic political participation in order to advance the legal rights of Hispanics both locally and nationally. In 1982 the political wing of the LCC was formed and appropriately named Hispanics in Politics (HIP), which became its own entity in 1995 and to this day remains the state's oldest Hispanic political organization (Lapan "Nevada's Hispanics).

Though the LCC continued to promote Nevada's Hispanic economic interests in the 1980s and develop important business relationships throughout the country and abroad, they also began to use their considerable clout to help the state's Hispanic community at large, instead of concentrating solely on the business community. The tourism boom that began in the 1970s exploded in the 1980s, and more and more Hispanics came in search of work. Las Vegas was rapidly expanding to accommodate not only tourists looking to let loose on the world-famous Las Vegas Strip, but also the new residents that were populating the city in record numbers. Service industry and construction jobs were plentiful, so much so that by 1993, Las Vegas was considered America's third best metropolitan market for job growth. In terms of employment and economic stability, it was a relatively prosperous period for Hispanics in the state.

However, this unprecedented time of economic and physical expansion in Nevada correlated with an increase in a disturbing anti-immigrant sentiment that was shaping the political discussion concerning Hispanics in the country at the time. This was especially true in Nevada, a state that until recent years was one of the most politically conservative in the nation.

The 1980s marked the beginning of a surge in undocumented immigrants coming to the United States and Nevada. The economic boom that Nevada was experiencing coincided with an economic depression in neighboring California and many of that state's construction, farm, and service industry workers suddenly found themselves unemployed. The implementation of Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) also exacerbated this trend for both documented and undocumented immigrants as wages fell and unemployment rose, making Nevada a popular immigrant destination as the prospect of finding work there was practically guaranteed. After the implementation of IRCA, many immigrants began abandoning the traditional destination states such as Texas, California, Illinois, New York, and Florida in search of greater opportunities in markets less saturated by large population immigrants, creating "new immigrant destinations," including Nevada, (Hirschman and Massey 2008). In 1970, only three percent of the Mexican migrants arriving from Mexico would settle in Nevada. By 1990, the number doubled to 6.6% (Durand et al. 14). Many arrivals from California who were not unemployed before moving to Las Vegas came to the area as well because the cost of living was much lower and the chance for upward mobility was much higher than in California (Dauber 98). Most of the

undocumented immigrants that arrived to the state from abroad came from Mexico, whose economy was headed towards an eventual crash. However, immigrants also were arriving in higher numbers from several countries in Central America that were experiencing violent civil wars, causing many of its citizens to flee out of concerns for their safety.

As these immigrants' presence increased, so did levels of fear and discrimination towards Hispanics among the general populace. While Nevada was experiencing unprecedented levels of job growth, the rest of America began to feel that Hispanics, and especially undocumented immigrants, would encroach on job opportunities they saw as rightly their's by working for much cheaper wages than the rest of the American populace. They also were worried about the strain undocumented immigrants placed on the nation's welfare, education and health care systems. By 1985, one poll showed that 91% of Americans wanted to end illegal immigration entirely (Miranda 131). Attitudes such as these helped lead to the implementation on IRCA, which while giving amnesty to thousands of undocumented workers who had been living in the country "illegally" and could prove continued residency, also resulted in a crackdown on those who could not and the employers who hired them. In 1988, the LCC in Nevada recognized that this would result in discriminatory practices against Hispanic workers and began to argue against any further legislation targeting undocumented Hispanic immigrants.

Though Nevada was immune from many of the economic concerns of the time, the anti-immigrant sentiment and rhetoric was at such salient levels that it

reached the state legislature. In 1987, a Republican Assemblyman, Virgil Getto, from the rural town of Fallon located east of Reno in Churchill County, was the primary sponsor of Assembly Joint Resolution 11, also known as the English-Only bill. This bill would designate English as the official language of the state, curb voting rights for non-English speakers, and significantly reduce funding for bilingual education programs. The fact that Assemblyman Getto sponsored the bill is of particular note, as he was the son of Italian immigrants and later admitted in a 2008 interview with a member of the Legislative Council Bureau that when he began school he could not speak very much English (Getto 43). The LCC and its political faction, HIP, together with the Latin American Bar Association were rightly appalled by the blatant racism of the resolution and knew that, if it were to become law, much of the progress that had been made towards advancing Hispanic rights, especially in the field of education, would be halted and reversed. These groups, along with others representing the Asian-American population of Nevada, traveled to the legislative building in the state capital of Carson City and successfully lobbied to end the resolution. It was Getto himself who killed his own bill in response to the pressure applied by the LCC and other Hispanic and minority groups. (Miranda 172).

The LCC and other Hispanic groups also had some other notable successes towards advancing the rights of Hispanics in the states in the 1980s, especially in the areas of education, which was a prime concern of all Hispanic organizations and continues to be to this day. The LCC filed a formal complaint against the Clark County School District (CCSD) with the U.S. Department of

Civil Rights in 1987 claiming that the CCSD had not hired enough Hispanic educators to fulfill the quota set forth by its own affirmative action procedures established in 1975. Though the complaint was dismissed by the courts, the CCSD responded by devising a plan to remedy the situation by augmenting the number of Hispanic educators in Clark County to be proportional to the number of Hispanics in the county's population by 1992. The plan was accepted by the LCC and by the 1988-89 school year, the number of Hispanic teachers in the district had doubled and recruitment efforts continued to expand throughout the 1990s.

Table 2.2

Population of Nevada, Clark and Washoe Counties by Decennial Census: 1960 to 1990

	1960	1970	1980	1990
Nevada	285,278	488,738	800,493	1,201,833
Clark County	127,016	273,288	463,087	741,459
Washoe County	84,743	121,068	193,623	254,667

Compiled and edited by Richard L. Forstall, Population Division, US Bureau of the Census.

The Arrival of Spanish-Language Television

The proliferation of Hispanic media would also play a major role in organizing the Latino community and raising their awareness of issues affecting them in both Northern and Southern Nevada. In 1986, the Spanish Independent Network was the first Spanish-language television station to go on the air in Nevada. Surprisingly, it was in Reno, not Las Vegas. Leslie Mix, a Reno-based Latina activist who grew up in Puerto Rico and who has been active in the

Hispanic community for decades, was hired as one of the station's first employees after it was bought out by the well-known Univision network. Her job was to sell advertising slots and, according to her, in the early days, it was an uphill battle in Reno.

There were no numbers to back up what the station represented. It took three years for cable to even carry it. If you wanted to watch Spanish you needed the rabbit ear antennas. Very few people here believed there was a station or that there were people here who would watch it. It was as if the Hispanic community were invisible to the general community. Kitchens, restaurants, casinos, landscaping and building companies hired Latinos at less than minimum wages, ignored their immigration status and did not "see" the busboys and housekeepers they came across. It was certainly a community that did not understand nor wanted to understand its worker base. It did not help that the local newspaper had such a bias that anytime there was an issue with crime and a Hispanic it was blown out of proportion. Many of the stories focused on the ethnicity and language of the individual that allegedly committed the crime and not on the criminality of the act itself. There was no balance on stories focusing on the benefits the Latino people brought to the community. To combat this negative perception of our viewers and people we organized events so that we could showcase the rich beauty of the culture and the benefit the Hispanic people brought to Northern Nevada. The first Hispanic event ever done in a general market venue was at the Nevada State Fair. Year one we almost did not have much of an event because there had been a mix up at the entrance and the band was not allowed in. They had walked the entire perimeter of the fairgrounds until they could find me to get them in. It was humiliating to them. In any case, they were a great success and the tent was packed. In 1990, as Univision we organized the first Cinco de Mayo event and an annual Hispanic Heritage Day Celebrating Art, Heritage and Culture at the University. It was the long beginning of change and education towards positive inclusion of the Hispanic community in Northern Nevada. (Personal Interview with Leslie Mix, Oct 12, 2014)

Mix's story exemplifies that one of Univision's (and similarly other media outlets in the state) greatest early contributions to the community was not so much to proliferate information or offer popular programming, but give a voice to

the Latino community and provide an outlet to congregate together as a singular community instead of through many small groups that were defined by national identity. The creation of Univision in Reno was an important step in the evolution of the formation of a Pan-Latino identity in the state. It was especially helpful for the first and second immigrants that had limited English-language abilities and were arriving in Nevada in record numbers thanks, in part, to IRCA's impact on the California job market and economy. Univision also worked with major corporations to promote and demonstrate the benefits of diversity in the greater, non-Hispanic community at large.

Lack of Leadership among Hispanic Organizations and Community and the Effects on Political Representation in the 1990s

While the LCC and other Hispanic organizations made major strides towards advancing the rights of their community by forging relationships with other community and business organizations and elected officials in Nevada, they were less successful in their efforts to mobilize the Hispanic population into a significant voting bloc or electing Hispanics to higher offices. The Hispanic media was still in its infancy at this time as well, and had not yet become the major source for political information that it eventually would. By the end of the twentieth century, no Hispanic had sat on the Clark County School Board, University Board of Regents, or the Las Vegas City Council, though the LCC and HIP had backed several candidates who were defeated. There was slightly more success in the state legislature. Bob Coffin of Las Vegas served in the Assembly

from 1983 to 1985 and later became the first Hispanic elected to the state Senate in 1987 where he served until 2009. Brian Sandoval, a Republican from Reno, also served in the Assembly from 1995 to 1995. Both of these men identify as Hispanic and have Hispanic heritage, but did not play a major role in the Hispanic community during their early political years in the state legislature. They would both go on to be elected to other offices after the turn of the century where they began to greater emphasize their Hispanic identity as Nevada's Latino population became a larger share of the voting electorate. Dario Herrera, at the time a rising star in the Las Vegas Latino community and the state Democratic Party, who campaigned on a platform of giving Hispanics a voice in Carson City, was elected to the state assembly in 1996 and served one term before going on to win a seat on the Clark County Commission in 1998. He later became the chairman of the CCC before withdrawing to run for U.S. Congress in 2001. He was also chosen to speak at the Democratic National Convention the same year. Unfortunately for Herrera, and the Latino community that ardently supported him, he quickly fell from the community's graces when he was convicted of fraud and sentenced to fifty months in prison for accepting bribes from strip club owners during his time as Commissioner in an FBI sting dubbed "Operation G-String" (Johnson; Packer; "Commissioner Herrera").

One of the issues that prevented the community from having a strong political presence in the 1990s is reflected in the problems that arose among the leadership of some of the major Hispanic organizations in Nevada. Miranda

notes that this was a problem throughout the organizations early history, beginning in the 1970s.

Hispanic organizations such as NALA, MAPA, SER, and LULAC were anything but unified. Members seldom agreed among themselves over how to develop a particular program or with what causes or issues to become politically involved. What was worse, the leaders of each group became self-appointed spokesmen/spokeswomen, giving the false impression that they represented the entire Hispanic community. Hispanics reacted with resentment and distrust. There was constant friction over who actually were the leaders of the community. In a study of the Hispanic population of Clark County, University of Nevada, Las Vegas sociologist James Frey found...that leadership usually fell along ethnic or organizational lines with few crossovers; that is, there were no Cubans designating a Puerto Rican as their "leader" or vice versa. (149)

This decisiveness extended into the greater community over the course of the 1970s and 1980s for a variety of reasons. Hispanics of Mexican, Central American, and Puerto Rican descent were more inclined to vote Democratic, while Cubans who had fled Fidel Castro's Cuba tended to be staunch Republicans. Even within a single nationality or heritage there were great differences, the most notable being age, immigration history, and economic status. Younger Hispanics who were born in the U.S. were long separated from the history of Hispanic immigrants who had come during the civil rights era and bore witness to the "struggle" for equality and intense discrimination against them. They were less interested in participating in the political system on any level, and more concerned with the very real and current struggles they faced in daily life, chiefly among them the ability to support themselves and their families financially (Miranda 149, 155).

. The increasing Hispanic population had improved many of the political opportunities of the community, including the creation of Univision which would eventually become a major factor in increasing Hispanics' political leverage and in raising the consciousness of the oppression and discrimination the community faced. However, at this juncture in the Nevada's history neither of those two tenants of PPM had yet reached the necessary levels for effective Latino political incorporation. The Spanish-language media had not yet become the vital source of information it is today and the political system was still not vulnerable enough for Hispanics to leverage their growing numbers to their advantage. Similarly, the fragmented nature of the state's most active Latino organizations lacked one of the four resources McAdams claimed as crucial for peak organizational strength to occur: strong leadership. "In the context of political opportunity and widespread discontent there still remains a need for the centralized direction and coordination of a recognized leadership," (47). While some levels of community and voter apathy towards politics is inevitable, had the leaders of the Hispanic organizations acted in greater unison, much of it could have been avoided in their early days.

The Rise and Fall of Northern Nevada's Hispanic Business Chamber of Commerce

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the history of Northern Nevada's Hispanic business organizations. As previously mentioned, the LLC opened an office in Reno in 1978 in an effort to unify the business interests of Hispanics

throughout the state. It was a short lived venture, closing in 1981. There is little information available about the activities of the LLC in Reno during this three year period, or addressing the reasons behind its closure. However, if the story of the now defunct Hispanic Business Council (HBC) and Northern Nevada Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (NNHCC) is any indication, it was also a victim of resentment and infighting among members.

Leslie Mix explained that the Hispanic Business Council, of which she was founding President, was formed in Reno in 1989 and would eventually join forces with the Reno/Sparks Chamber of Commerce. There was some disagreement over the merger of the two organizations, and even though the vote was unanimous, one member immediately broke away and started another Hispanic business group he called the Hispanic 500. The existence of two Hispanic business groups confused the relatively small Hispanic community, rendering both organizations less powerful than they would have been had they stayed together. In 1993, Mix left Reno and moved to Las Vegas. In 1994, the organizations joined together to form the Northern Nevada Hispanic Chamber of Commerce due to complaints from the corporate community who were tired of being asked by both groups to donate money and having to choose one over another. The NNHCC kept a low profile and initiated a handful of programs that volunteers put together. Mix says that some of the programs were more successful than others. After returning to Reno in 1999, Mix was contracted on a part-time basis to be the executive of the NNHCC. In her initial conversation with Wells Fargo Bank regarding additional funding for the group,

the representative said, "Ha, like I would give that organization money!" She understood the agent's reservations. She says that in the time she had been absent from Northern Nevada, the group had not only not made any progress, but had seemed to regress, especially in comparison to the LCC in Las Vegas. As Mix states, "I had read the all the minutes and agreed with her. The NNHCC was a floundering group that could not quite get it together."

As President, Mix claims she did two things that changed the course of the organization. After doing her research, Mix decided to visit the nearby Sacramento Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, who she says was regarded as one of the largest and best in the country, to study and understand the reasons behind their success. She also reached out to her contacts in Southern Nevada and was informed she should contact the Regional Chair for the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (USCHCC). She proceeded to do so and started what she called "a galloping relationship with USCHCC." She participated in various meetings with them throughout the country. In one meeting, President George W. Bush called in and interrupted the meeting to appoint Hector Barreto as the Administrator to the U.S. Small Business Administration. Due to the relationships that were formed in these meetings with national Latino organizations and corporations interested in the Hispanic market, the NNHCC thrived. It won the best small Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in the country given by USHCC. Mix was awarded the Minority Business Advocate of the Year in Nevada by the Small Business Association.

Things were going well for the NNHCC, it had taken strong positions impacting the Latino community locally and statewide and was acknowledged as influential in their community by other national Latino organizations. The organization was garnering respect throughout the state and having a positive impact on the entire community in Northern Nevada. It became involved in and fought for a safe and easily walkable community in the Wells Avenue business district, a distinctly Latino neighborhood that continues to house many Latino businesses to this day. Through the NNHCC, Senator Harry Reid awarded a \$750,000 grant for the beautification of Wells Ave in 2005. Mix says the organization and the community were thriving and positive, impactful changes for a diverse and inclusive Northern Nevada were occurring.

Mix claims the problems began when the Board of Directors started fighting internally. In particular, they wanted to change the executive leadership of the organization. She says she never knew what the exact problems were. However, she states, "I will say it is hard for a board of directors to work with a visionary leader when they don't quite understand the long term implications of the vision." In her opinion, it did not matter that the organization was well respected, well-funded and more than met every aspect of its vision and mission statements, the board decided they wanted a change and Mix left the NNHCC. She claims that within the year of her departure, the board had changed direction, hired and fired an executive from Arizona and begun to lose its credibility in the community. This led to a sharp decrease in the organizations ability to fund itself. Board members, not wanting to raise money on their own,

hired an independent contractor from out of state to come in to raise money for NNHCC. They tried it twice at substantial expense to the organization only to have each contractor fail. They were forced to downgrade offices and were eventually on the brink of closing. The board members decided to joined forces with the Sparks Chamber of Commerce, as a sub-committee of that organization. The Sparks Chamber was later become a part of the Reno/Sparks Chamber of Commerce which again consolidated even further to become the Chamber of Commerce in Northern Nevada, now called "The Chamber." Mix complains that for ten years it was only this small sub-committee who addressed the needs of the Hispanic business community, "or not." This lack of funding combined with their disjointed leadership resulted in the collapse of an organization that once received praise from Senator Reid on the Senate floor in Washington, D.C. (Congressional Record V 144).

Even though I had not really thought about it at the time, now I firmly believe that in order for the Latino community to have a voice and be able to represent the needs of the Hispanic community, the Latino organizations must be supported and funded by the Hispanic community first and general market individuals and interests secondly. Very little money (about \$30,000) over an almost 10 year period was allocated to Latino business development by The Chamber. Also, at issue in this community is the ability of a board of directors to set a path for a sustainable Latino organization. Consequently, the organizations are wholly reliant upon one or two leaders' ability to define and implement successful programs and to raise all of the money. Most of the Hispanic leadership would rather be a policy board rather than a working board. This is the way most business board are set up in the general market. In this community it has not worked as there has not been large scale corporations or businesses that have the ability to write a check to the organization. An HCC in Northern Nevada has to be a working board until it can find the individuals that are willing to work as a cohesive unit towards the "give and get" aspects of fundraising. Until then

Hispanic organizations are not sustainable in Northern Nevada. They remain wholly reliant upon the one or two leaders that will take charge. One is left to hope that it is not a profit motive gain off the energy of the organization that drives these leaders. Most individuals will continue to be involved in Hispanic organizations for their own personal vested interest whether it be personal promotion, business development for their own financial gain or using the organization for personal, professional or political gain. This is usually to the detriment of the organization. There is no question that the Latino community in Northern Nevada continues to need leadership and respected representation in areas of education, business and political representation. It is the onus of the Latino leadership as a whole to work together towards inclusion of all aspects of society in Northern Nevada. (Mix)

Leslie Mix's perspective on the tumultuous history of the NNHCC, which weathered many transitions until it merged with the greater Reno/Sparks Chamber, shares some similarities with the difficulties faced by Hispanic organizations in Southern Nevada. Infighting, discord, and a constant need for individuals to assert ownership of ideas and initiatives over the greater good of the community diluted these organizations' ability to maximize political opportunities when they presented themselves and weakened the organizational strength of the emerging Pan-Latino community. While there are successes in the narratives of Hispanic/Latino organizations in both Northern and Southern Nevada, primarily by expanding communication networks, the failure of their leaders to come to an agreement on many issues often overshadowed the needs of the community, resulting in a general lack of Hispanic political representation and incorporation in Nevada until the twenty-first century. Miranda very succinctly illustrates this point in the following excerpt published in 1997:

Unfortunately, the differences among Hispanics have diluted their political clout. The problem, for the most part, has been that

Hispanics have had difficulty developing legitimate leaders accepted by the by all segments of the community. When efforts came to the fore, invariably the question came up: "Who appointed you leader? (200)

Chapter 3

2000 and Beyond: Nevada's Latinos in the Political Spotlight

Table 3.1
Hispanic Population in Clark and Washoe Counties

	1980		1990		2000	
	Hispanic Population	Percent of Total Population	Hispanic Population	Percent of Total Population	Hispanic Population	Percent of Total Population
Clark	35,086	7.58%	82,904	11.18%	302,143	21.96%
Washoe	9,352	4.83%	22,959	9.02%	56,301	16.58%

Source: Census 2000 analyzed by the Social Science Data Analysis Network (SSDAN).

Nevada turns Blue: Increasing Latino Political Participation and the Federal Elections

By the year 2003, Latinos in the United States had overtaken African Americans to become the nation's largest minority population (Clemetson). In the 1990s, as Nevada became an increasingly popular "new immigrant destination" after the implementation of IRCA, the number of Latinos in the state had doubled and accounted for twenty percent of the state's total population. The growth of the Latino voting electorate documented the beginning of an era of the community's unprecedented rise in political incorporation in the state. Moreover, an increasingly younger population of domestic-born second and third generation immigrants began to show an interest in federal and state elections unmatched by their parents. A 2004 study by the Pew Research Center indicated that between the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, the number of Latinos eligible to vote increased by fifty percent and accounted for half of the increase of the total electorate of the Nevada ("The Hispanic Electorate in 2004"). The low

levels of Hispanic political participation and representation in the final decades of the twentieth century would be reversed in the first decade of the new millennium as the population grew and “favorable shifts in political opportunities [were defined] as such by a large enough group of people to facilitate collective protest,” (McAdams 48). Politicians, political strategists, lobbyists and other members of the existing political establishment throughout the state and the nation were coming to the realization that they would have to appeal to this burgeoning population if they were going to win elections at all levels of government. Nevada’s Latinos were finally entering the era where the three necessary factors for a successful social movement were present to challenge the status quo.

The 2004 presidential elections marked a turning point for partisan politics at the federal level in the state. Though George W. Bush won the state’s five electoral votes that year, the implications of the growth of the Latino population and electorate had become evident, much to the Democrats’ delight. The population boom of the 1980s and 1990s had brought thousands of Latinos to the state and transformed Nevada into a new immigrant destination. Unlike Nevada’s early Hispanic population which was much more transient, they had settled and reproduced, making the state their permanent homes. As previously noted, the vast majority of these immigrants, and subsequently their children, were of Mexican and increasingly Central American descent. These populations have historically overwhelmingly backed Democratic candidates. This trend

continued in Nevada, and though John Kerry lost in the state in 2004, he won 60% of the Latino vote compared with 43% of the white vote (Lopez 8).

As the Latino population continued to climb in every area of the state as families expanded and immigration increased, so did the Latino voting population. Moreover, their political participation levels were increasing drastically from the lackadaisical levels of the 1980s and 90s. In the presidential election years of 2004, 2008, and 2012 over 50% of all Latino voters that were eligible to vote were registered, and in 2008, an amazing 91% of registered Latino voters actually voted, pushing Barack Obama to victory in a state once considered an easy win by Republicans. A similar level of Latino turnout occurred again in 2012 when Obama scored another victory in Nevada. The turnout for the midterm elections was lower among Latinos and the rest of the general electorate, as is common during non-Presidential election years. However, in 2010, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid's narrow victory over Sharron Angle is also widely credited to the increase of the Latino voters in the state (Damore et al. 5, 15). In the first decade of the 2000s, the Latino population grew by another 75%, bringing them to 35% of the total population, giving them more political clout than ever in the Silver State. This marked an important shift for a state that Jon Ralston, a popular Nevada political journalist and commentator had called, just a few years earlier, "red, with Democrats yearning for relevancy and Republicans smelling hegemony," in the *Political History of Nevada*, a publication issued by the Nevada Secretary of State in 2006 (Parker et al. 19).

Table 3.2 Latino Population in Nevada, by County

	2000 Census			2010 Census			Growth in Total Pop.	Growth in Latino Pop.
	Total Population	Latino Population	Percent of Population	Total Population	Latino Population	Percent of Population		
Carson	52,457	7,466	14%	55,274	11,777	21%	5%	58%
Churchill	23,982	2,076	9%	24,877	3,009	12%	4%	45%
Clark	1,375,765	302,143	22%	1,951,269	568,644	29%	42%	88%
Douglas	41,259	3,057	7%	46,997	5,103	11%	14%	67%
Elko	45,291	8,935	20%	48,818	11,158	23%	8%	25%
Esmeralda	971	99	10%	783	120	15%	-19%	21%
Eureka	1,651	158	10%	1,987	238	12%	20%	51%
Humboldt	16,106	3,040	19%	16,528	4,038	24%	3%	33%
Lander	5,794	1,073	19%	5,775	1,219	21%	0%	14%
Lincoln	4,165	221	5%	5,345	332	6%	28%	50%
Lyon	34,501	3,784	11%	51,980	7,674	15%	51%	103%
Mineral	5,071	428	8%	4,772	436	9%	-6%	2%
Nye	32,485	2,713	8%	43,946	5,967	14%	35%	120%
Pershing	6,693	1,294	19%	6,753	1,508	22%	1%	17%
Storey	3,399	174	5%	4,010	228	6%	18%	31%
Washoe	339,486	56,301	17%	421,407	93,724	22%	24%	66%
White Pine	9,181	1,008	11%	10,030	1,326	13%	9%	32%
TOTAL	1,998,257	393,970	20%	2,700,551	716,501	27%	35%	82%

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Decennial Census (2000, 2010)

The Rapid Rise of Latino Elected Officials in the State Legislature, City Government, and Statewide Offices

While Latino voters in Nevada were garnering national press for their role in helping to elect and reelect a Democratic President for the first time since President Clinton's reelection bid in 1996, they were also changing the political landscape at home by electing Latinos into office at unprecedented rates at the state and local levels. Several of these Latino elected officials became integral leaders in their respective communities and have contributed to the organizational strength and cognitive liberation of the Latino population. They have directly contributed to the collective action of the Nevada Latino social movement of the twenty-first century by using their positions of political power to propose and enact legislation that benefits their community as well as oppose

legislation that hinders its success. As state and local leaders, they are much more accessible to their constituents than politicians at the federal level and often appear at local events sponsored by a wide variety of Latino organizations and on the local news or radio, usually to discuss an issue of relevance to the Latino community. In this sense, they act as organizers and spokesmen and women for minority collective action, and have extensive networks of friends, families, supporters, journalists, and colleagues to which they can disseminate information quickly to raise awareness of an important issue.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there were only three Hispanic elected officials in the state legislature in the 1980s and 1990s. All three of those officials would continue to play a role in the Nevada political scene, two more successfully than the other. Brian Sandoval is perhaps the most well-known of these leaders. After serving in the Assembly, he became Nevada's Attorney General before being appointed by President George W. Bush as United States District Judge for the District of Nevada in 2005. He has the distinction of being the first Hispanic federal judge in the state's history. He went on to be elected Governor of Nevada in 2010 and is expected to win an easy reelection bid in November 2014. Sandoval is of Mexican-American and has been disparaged by critics who say that he has only become interested in Hispanic issues and voters as their voting power has increased (Huey-Burns; Ralston). Despite his Mexican-American heritage, he does not speak Spanish, and some political pundits have argued this could hurt him and other politicians like him when trying to connect with Spanish-language dominant voters and constituents (Reinhard).

Assemblyman turned State Senator Bob Coffin currently sits on the Las Vegas City Council. He is the first Mexican-American to ever serve on the Council and has a long history of involvement with the Hispanic community and the Latin Chamber of Commerce in Las Vegas, of which he has been a member for 29 years, and served on its Board of Directors for 12 years. He was twice honored by the LCC with its Outstanding Hispanic Citizen Award and its Public Service Award (“Councilman Coffin”). Dario Herrera’s fall from grace was previously documented. He completed his prison sentence in 2009 and recently returned to Las Vegas to pursue other business ventures. It is unknown if he will attempt to return to life in the public eye.

Since 2004, Latinos increasing political opportunities have resulted in greater success in penetrating the State Legislature. That year, Moises “Mo” Denis, a Cuban-American Democrat was elected to the Assembly for the 2007 Session. He was the only Latino in the Assembly until two years later when a young, Mexican immigrant named Ruben Kihuen would join him. Kihuen, a former regional representative to Harry Reid specializing in Latino constituent outreach, ran a modestly-funded grassroots campaign and defeated a popular incumbent to propel him into the State Assembly in Carson City. Kihuen and Denis shared a similar zeal for helping members of the Latino community, and joined to found the Nevada Hispanic Legislative Caucus (NHLC) in 2007 (Kihuen).

Though Denis and Kihuen were the only two members (Coffin was to term out of the Senate the following session and did not join) of the NLHC, they began

to quickly accomplish the two main missions of the group. The first issue they addressed was expanding their ranks in the State Legislature. In order to do so, they decided to recruit, train, and elect Latino candidates and were highly successful in their venture.

When you are only talking about two people in a legislature of 63 your influence is very limited. So we set out a long term plan to move our community forward, not just in pieces of legislation but in representation. So we decided to put a plan together that included recruiting candidates, raise money for them and give them the support and resources that they needed to run for office and that's exactly what we did. So in 2010, after four years for myself in the Assembly and six years for Senator Denis in the Assembly, we decided to run for the Senate. Part of our plan was to recruit two candidates to take over our Assembly seats. At that time we had never had a Latina elected into the Legislature. We are talking about 2010 and we never had a Latina elected. So we both recruited Latinas to run for our seats and on top of that we recruited four other candidates so by the end of the 2010 election we went from having two representatives, Senator Denis and myself, to eight elected Latinos in the Legislature for the 2011 Session. So essentially in election cycle we quadrupled Hispanic representation which was part of the plan that Senator Dennis and I put together early on when we first got elected. (Kihuen)

The second important aspect of their mission and vision for the NHLC was to advocate for the Latino community and address the injustices and discrimination they faced through legislation.

We passed pieces of legislation and also blocked anti-immigrant pieces of legislation. The Legislation is not only about passing bills but also about blocking the bad ones. So we blocked several anti-immigrant, discriminatory pieces of legislation and we passed key pieces of legislation that in my opinion could possibly be the most important pieces of legislation in Nevada's history for Latinos.

For the 2013 Session, Denis was chosen by his colleagues as the first Latino Senate Majority leader in the state's history, and Kihuen was chosen as Majority Whip. For the first time in Nevada's history the state had a Hispanic Governor, Senate Majority leader, and a substantial enough number of Latino/a legislators in office garner enough support to pass major pieces of pro-immigrant (and therefore pro-Latino) legislation through both houses of the legislature. This would have been impossible in previous years given the political establishment's historical anti-immigrant proclivities. Their efforts allowed the members of the NVHC, all of whom were Democrats, to convince their legislative colleagues across both aisles to pass some very important pieces of legislation impacting Hispanics. The following bills benefiting the Latino and immigrant communities were passed through both houses of the legislature and signed by the Republican Governor in 2013:

- AB 74 – Regulated document preparation services businesses to crack down on *notarios* who take advantage of immigrants, especially those with little to no English speaking skills.
- SB 303 – Created drivers' authorization cards allowing undocumented immigrants to drive legally and obtain insurance.
- SB 504 – English Language Learner (ELL) Omnibus bill. Included provisions for free pre-k, full day kindergarten, and created a funding formula that factors in ELL. Dedicated \$50 million of state funding to ELL education.
- AB 222 – Created reading skills development centers to improve early literacy, which are particularly beneficial for ELL students (Combined with SB 504)
- AB 272 – Created an English Mastery Council to set ELL teaching standards (Combined with SB 504)

- SJR 15 – A joint resolution from the Nevada Legislature urging the U.S. Congress to pass Comprehensive Immigration Reform (“Initiatives”)

As these bills passed through the various committees, hundreds of Latinos travelled to the legislative building in Carson City and the Grant Sawyer building in Las Vegas to give testimony and show support for the bills’ sponsors. When Governor Sandoval signed SB 303 into law on May 31, 2013, giving undocumented immigrants driving privileges in the state, the scene was quite emotional as members of the crowd who had also travelled to the Capitol building to watch the signing ceremony chanted “*Sí se puede*,” (Vogel “Sandoval Signs Bill”). Kihuen and other legislators commented that they had never seen such an outpouring of support from their community in their lifetime.

Over the past several years, other Latinos have been elected to government offices that were previous devoid of Hispanic members. Isaac Barron made history and became the first Hispanic Councilman on the North Las Vegas City Council. North Las Vegas has historically been a highly Hispanic area and Barron’s win there was considered a major victory for the Hispanic community. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, its Hispanic population lies at 38.8% of the total, well above Nevada’s average of 26.5% (State and Country Quickfacts- NLV). Barron plans to use his Council seat to diversify other agencies in the city, including the police force, the city staff, and the fire department (Lapan “NLVs First Hispanic Councilman). In Reno, a city where one out of every four residents is Hispanic, Oscar Delgado became the first Hispanic City Councilman in elected in 2012. Along with Bob Coffin, who remains the only

Latino on the City of Las Vegas City Council, Delgado and Barron have dedicated a significant part of their agendas as Councilmen to advancing the rights of Latinos in their respective cities (Lapan “Nevada’s Hispanics”). Latinos also have a presence in state-wide offices for the first time in history with the election of Brian Sandoval is the state’s first Hispanic governor.

Latinas, who have had even less political success than their male counterparts, are finally becoming incorporated into Nevada politics. Catherine Cortez-Masto’s has been Nevada’s Attorney General since 2007 and has helped to set the stage for other Latinas to run for statewide office. Lucy Flores, one of the Assembly candidates successfully recruited by Denis and Kihuen to the state legislature in 2012, was the Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor in 2014. The nomination for a Latina was unprecedented, but this was compounded by the fact that she has been a controversial figure in her short tenure as an Assemblywoman. Flores garnered national attention during her 2013 Assembly Education Committee testimony in support of a bill intended to expand sexual education in the state, AB 230, when she admitted she had an abortion as a teenager (Stuart). Though the bill ultimately died, her story resounded with women, especially Latinas across the state and the nation. Flores’s history, which also includes past gang involvement and a stint in Las Vegas’s juvenile justice system, highlights the changing nature of politicians in Nevada. Though the state legislature has always been a “citizen legislature” comprised of members with a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, only recently has it become more widely acceptable for candidates and elected

officials to speak of their non-elite upbringings and the adversities they have faced in search of a quality life in Nevada.

Flores's case highlights a flaw, though minor, in McAdams's model as applied to the Nevada case of Latino political integration. He asserts that recognized leaders from established organizations are the most likely candidates to assume leadership positions within the aggrieved minority population's ranks as its organizational structure and political position strengthens (45-46). Flores graduated from law school in 2010, just two years before she ran for Assembly. While she had been active in the community as volunteer and was appointed to the Nevada Commission on Minority Affairs in 2008, she was a relative unknown when she commenced her first political campaign ("Meet Lucy"). Kihuen and Denis had similar levels of popular association in the community, as a recruiter and academic advisor at a local community college and a chair of his local Parent-Teacher Association, respectively. The organizations Flores, Kihuen, and Denis were associated with before becoming leaders in the Latino social movement outlined in this project were established organizations, but not that catered specifically to Latinos (the aggrieved population). If McAdams's assertion that leaders of a successful minority's collective actions usually come from these types of established organizations, one would expect a well-known member of the LCC, HIP, or another long-running Latino organization to have played a leadership role the "insurgency." This has not been the case in Nevada. As described in the previous chapter, the members of these organizations were unable to capitalize on the shifting political opportunities, increase of shared

cognitions, and organizational strength of the growing Latino population.

McAdams does not say such leaders *must* come from an established organization, only that common sense dictates that that is the likely scenario.

Therefore, the ascension of less recognized members of the Latino community to important leadership positions in Nevada is not a failure of the model, but instead an interesting departure from the expected outcome compared to other case studies of successful minority social movements. As previously discussed, the failure of the LCC and other “elite” organizations to appoint leaders to manage the organization itself can be traced to a specific weakness within the structures of the establishments’ leaders.

Nevada’s Latino Leaders, Organizations, and the Spanish-Language Media in the New Millennium

Senator Kihuen has not only served the Latino community of Nevada as a popular, well-respected legislator, but has spent his professional career advocating for working families, students, and the underprivileged as a community organizer, college recruiter and academic advisor with a focus on minority, and especially Latino, communities. He is a past member of the Clark County Community Development Advisory Committee and the North Las Vegas Citizen’s Advisory Committee. Prior to being elected to the State Assembly and later the State Senate, he served as student recruiter and academic advisor for the College of Southern Nevada (CSN) where he recruited hundreds of students to pursue higher education and motivated them throughout their college career to graduate and give back to their own communities. While at CSN he also served

as diversity programs manager for CSN. He began his career in the political sphere in campaigns, working as a field organizer for in Nevada, Virginia, Florida and Texas (“Senators”). His personal and professional experiences have given him a unique perspective on the role that Latino organizations have played in expanding Latino political incorporation and participation in Nevada in recent history.

In the early 2000s, while working on a local Congressional race for the Nevada State Democratic Party (NSDP), Kihuen and his team were able to mobilize hundreds of Latino students to turn out to support his candidate. He said the NSDP was “shocked” by the sheer number of young people that came out to volunteer with his campaign; they had never seen anything like it before. He witnessed the significant impact these students, and the organizations they are affiliated with, have had on a variety of political causes over the past several years. It is common practice for political candidates, as well as civic-minded organizations to reach out to the plethora of student groups that have proliferated in Nevada in recent history when searching for volunteers for campaigns. Considering that 48% of the Latino population of the state is 24 years of age or younger, they have a large pool of student organizations from which to draw (Tuman et al. 11).

The Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) reports that six of the state’s institutions of higher education qualify as emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI). Institutions that are granted this status can apply for competitive grants through the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) aimed at

promoting the success of their Hispanic students. NSHE defines HSIs as “a postsecondary institution with a Hispanic student enrollment, full time equivalent, of 25 percent or higher AND evidence that the institution serves a significant needy student population,” (“Nevada’s Emerging HSIs”). The six institutions that qualify for this designation are CSN, Nevada State College (NSC), and UNLV in Las Vegas, and Truckee Meadows Community College and UNR in Reno, and Western Nevada College (WSN) in Carson City. Each one of these universities has at least one Hispanic student organization. CSN’s Latino Alliance is one of the largest. It has a fully functioning board, hosts large events throughout the community, and offers scholarships to Latino students enrolled at CSN. Groups such as the Latino Alliance, UNLV’s *La Voz* Hispanic Law Student Association and UNR’s Latino Student Advisory Board (LASB) have programs connecting community leaders with Latino students. In fact, UNR’s LASB mentions its involvement with political movements in its mission statement (“Latino Research Center”), and has a large presence in the Northern Nevada activist community. Some of its members can often be found roaming the halls of the State Legislature during session, lobbying to legislators in support of or in opposition to bills that affect the Latino community.

High school Latino groups have also grown and become more politically active. Kihuen, a graduate of Rancho High School in Las Vegas, often reaches out to the Rancho Hispanic Student Union, the largest high school organization of its type in the Las Vegas area, for volunteers for canvasses, phone banks, and events for his own election campaigns or those of other candidates he supports.

North Las Vegas City Councilman Isaac Barron, a social studies teacher at Rancho, is the advisor in charge of the group, and its members came out in full force to support him during his campaign. Rancho's Hispanic Student Union hosts a wide variety of political events and forums. In fact, it garnered national attention when in 2010, Harry Reid's opponent, Sharron Angle, made a series of racist remarks about Hispanics looking Asian when speaking to the group (Amira).

In addition to student groups, a number of grassroots Latino organizations have also increased in the state and have played a significant role in recent elections and efforts to pass legislation benefiting Latinos. *Mi Familia Vota* is a national non-profit organization with a large presence in both Northern and Southern Nevada. Its website describes the organization's mission as an entity that "work(s) to unite the Latino community and its allies to promote social and economic justice through increased civic participation," ("About MFV"). They work with other civic organizations and partners to help register new Latino voters, spread information, and lobby elected officials regarding legislation that benefits the immigrant community such as Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR), as well as hold citizenship workshops to educate Latinos and other minority groups about the naturalization process. They were an essential component in Kihuen and Denis's efforts to pass SB 303, the driver's authorization bill, during the 2013 session and bussed hundreds of volunteers to Carson City from Las Vegas and Reno to testify in Committee on the bill's behalf. Other organizations with similar commitments to the Latino political agenda are

the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada (PLAN), North Nevada Latino Alliance (NNLA) and DreamBig Vegas, a small organization founded by local activist Astrid Silva. This organization pushed for the Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals (DACA) moratorium issued by the Secretary of Homeland Security in 2012, which granted a temporary reprieve of deportation for DREAMERS, or children who were brought to the U.S. from abroad by their parents and remain undocumented as a result. Silva became the face of Senator Reid's campaign to pass CIR through the Senate and was present in Washington, D.C. when the bill did indeed pass there in June of 2014. Reid often tells the story of her arrival to Las Vegas in his speeches on the subject. Silva, the winner of the 2014 American Immigration Council's Immigrant Youth Achievement Award, has also become a force in social media, challenging CIR and DACA detractors, and challenging elected officials and political candidates when they appear unsupportive of the Latino immigrant community's struggle for equality (Lapan "Las Vegas Immigration"). She is widely followed on Twitter and Facebook and uses these platforms to connect with other activists, supporters, and even detractors to spread her story or comment on current events and pending legislation. Her efforts have been beneficial not only to the immigrant community, but also led to her father's deportation deferral, thanks in great part to her relationship with Senator Reid (Mascaro).

These Latino student groups, civic organizations, and immigration advocacy groups documented in this section are a prime examples of the recent

rise of Pan-Latino groups that have proliferated across the nation. Ramón Gutiérrez's states:

...that for panethnicity to emerge, one first needs a population that is significantly marginalized and exploited and that comes to see itself as such, in opposition to majority white identities. Once such a reactive ethnicity is in place, demography and geographic isolation has brought together ethnic groups that previously had no common history, (33).

The members of these organizations are not united not by a singular national ancestry, but instead by mutual feelings of exclusion from mainstream America and their common perceived ethnicity. The organizations they join emphasize that membership be based upon both an individual's Latino heritage and a common theme of social isolation. For example, Latino student groups are clearly comprised of members that are students that identify as Latino, but the need for their unification as a formal organization is centered around the notion that these students' academic experience is negatively impacted by their minority status and Latino descent. By identifying as Latinos and not by a singular national identity, the organizations highlighted in this chapter have been able to more effectively impact public policy, legislation, and the community's awareness and understanding of political issues affecting them. These modern "communities of interest" have more successfully contributed to Nevada's Latino political incorporation than the organizations of the late twentieth century precisely because their Pan-Latino composition has resulted in less fragmentation of leadership and greater inclusion of all members from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

As Nevada's Latino population has grown and diversified, so has the number of "communities of similar cultures" that do, in fact, emphasize membership based on the national or regional ethnicity of immigrants country of origin. In recent years, there has been an increase of many groups formed that center around the concept of "state-of-origin" in the Mexican immigrant community. Associations comprised of immigrants from the states of Michoacán, Jalisco, Zacatecas, Oaxaca, Durango and other Mexican states meet regularly in Las Vegas. The arrival of an increased number of Central American immigrants has also resulted in the creation of a variety of organizations representing the different countries of that region. The Guatemalan Unity Committee (COMUGUA) is a well-known association for Guatemalan immigrants in Las Vegas. Similarly, immigrants representing Cuba, Puerto Rico, Brazil, Venezuela, Paraguay, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, the Dominican Republic and other Latin American countries that also reside in Nevada have formed clubs or associations to promote their culture and maintain their own cultural identity. These groups serve two important purposes for their members: 1) They unite the community of their state or region and celebrate their unique culture with events such as parades and festivals; and 2) work with the other organizations and institutions such as the Catholic Church and a variety of Latin American consulates to connect their members to social services that they might not otherwise not be able to locate ("Hispanic/Latino Folklife"; Tuman et al. 11). These established minority organizations, by and large, do not have specific political agendas. However, their members can become an important resource

for individuals and organizations that seek to increase Latino political incorporation and participation through collective action.

Nevada's Latino organizations and their members, regardless of levels of participation in the political process, constitute a wide network of individuals with an expansive communication network through which information about issues affecting the Latino community can be quickly spread to other groups or people. McAdams stresses the importance of this resource in his discussion of minority organizational strength's impact on the formation of a successful social movement by stating that the "failure of a new movement to take hold has been credited to the presence or absence of such a [network], (46). In his analysis of the black insurgency from 1930 to 1970, the ability of insurgents to expand their "communication network" was greatly limited by the technological constraints of the time. Fortunately, Latinos in twenty-first century Nevada have a plethora of options available to them to disseminate the information necessary to their expanding their networks. Social media sites and communication network technology has become an important medium that Latino political activists, politicians, and civic organizations use in Nevada, not only to spread information, but also to garner support for public policy changes affecting their community. Facebook, Twitter, Skype, and Instagram are all platforms that allow people to connect with each other easily and have transformed the way that people can participate in politics. The Nevada State Legislature's website broadcasts committee meetings and floor sessions live and offers a videoconferencing feature that allows constituents to testify in front of the Senate and Assembly

committee meetings from Las Vegas and towns in rural Nevada without having to travel to Carson City. During the course of the 2013 legislative session, over a thousand Latinos used this feature to testify in support of the bills benefiting their community. Many of these people had no previous experience with politics. These technological advancements have helped to increase Latino political incorporation through direct participation and by raising the community's awareness of the legislative process and political events affecting them.

One of the largest contributors to the higher level of social and political consciousness amongst the Latinos in Nevada has undoubtedly been the rapid proliferation of Spanish-language mass media. As recently as of the late 1990s, there were only a handful of Spanish-language television channels in the entire state and they offered their viewers little in terms of programming; by 2014, in Las Vegas alone Latinos had dozens of options with a wide variety of programming available (Kihuen, Mix). *TVAzteca*, *Telemundo*, *MundoFox* and a number of other stations offer daily and nightly newscasts in Spanish. Similar increases occurred in the availability of Spanish-language newspapers and radio stations. Kihuen recalls in the 1990s when the popular Las Vegas newspaper, *El Mundo*, was a small periodical consisting of about four or five pages and could only be found in a few locations throughout the entire Valley and only in establishments that catered to Latinos. The current editions of *El Mundo* range from 30-40 pages and can be found in practically all areas of the city, including local businesses such convenience and grocery stores with customers from all races and ethnicities. Without the ease of accessibility to these forms of media,

many first and second generation Latinos would have little knowledge of the state's political system, current events, and public policy affecting them. Due in part to the fact that a large portion of the Latino population's growth has occurred recently since Nevada became an increasingly popular destination for immigrants, a large portion of the community is comprised of first and second generation immigrants who are still Spanish-language dominant.

Nevada's status as a "new immigrant destination" for Latinos and the resulting population explosion offers only one explanation for the proliferation of Spanish-language media outlets and the ease of accessibility to its products. The rising economic and political power of Latinos and Latino businesses are another important factor. A study from the Selig Center for Economic Studies at the University of Georgia places Nevada's Latinos purchasing power at \$16.3 billion dollars in 2012, an increase of a staggering 1,126% since 1990 ("New Americans in NV" 2). "Businesses and others are starting to see the importance and economic power of Latinos," Kihuen explains, "so now you see a lot of these businesses, political candidates, and causes advertising in Spanish because they are trying to tap into the emerging Latino market." The advertising dollars a business spends in order to attract Latinos can translate into large profits if they are able to attract a significant portion of that market. Similarly, political candidates and campaigns can also reap great rewards from purchasing advertising space from the Spanish-language media. A study on the impact of presidential campaign advertisements on Latinos in Nevada and Arizona during the 2008 election demonstrated that Obama's media spending advantage over

McCain had a positive correlation with an increase in the Latino Obama vote when the money was spent on ads during local newscasts in Spanish (Winneg et al. 244, 257). Results of studies such as these indicating that additional spending on Latino marketing leads to an increased yield of sales, or in this case, votes, combined with the growing purchasing power of the Latino population practically guarantee that the Spanish-language media will continue to be well-funded by advertisers seeking to raise their visibility in that increasingly valuable market.

The increasing economic power of Nevada's Latinos was an essential component in creating a positive shift in political opportunities they needed to challenge, and ultimately affect change in the traditional structures of power outlined by the Political Process Model. "The insurgent potential of excluded groups comes from the "structural power" that their location in various politico-economic structures affords them," (McAdams 37). The acceleration of the community's population growth, the rise of Pan-Latino grassroots organizations united by a common language and history of discrimination, and the proliferation of information thanks to a growing Spanish-language media elevated the community's position of power on that spectrum and provided the necessary organizational strength to complete the process of the "cognitive liberation."

Shifting political conditions supply the necessary "cognitive cues" capable of triggering the process of cognitive liberation while existent organizations afford the insurgents the stable group settings within which that process is likely to occur. (McAdams 51)

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The state's early history is marred by the mistreatment of immigrants who were largely ostracized and used as a source of cheap labor to benefit the white elite. It would take nearly a century for Hispanics to earn even the most basic rights and protections under the law. Despite the implementation of laws during the civil rights movement, institutionalized racism and segregation rampant throughout the state and the nation limited their role in the political sphere significantly throughout the late twentieth century. As Hispanics/Latinos began to establish community organizations in the 1970s, the most visible institutions that were formed during this time were troubled by infighting and disagreement among their elite leadership. Combined with an increasing anti-immigrant sentiment proliferating across the country, these organizations were unable to translate the increase of their community's population into any substantive political opportunities and Hispanics remained detached from the political process.

The implantation of IRCA in 1986 and the construction boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s transformed Nevada into popular destination for immigrants looking to escape or avoid the saturated job markets and high costs of living of traditional migrant destinations. Though Latino's levels of political incorporation would remain extremely low during this time, the immigrants that

arrived during this time would play an important role in the increase of Latino political representation and participation in the new millennium. Many of the immigrants and their families of this era settled in Nevada permanently and were integral in the formation of the social movement that resulted unprecedented levels of Latino incorporation in the state. These immigrants and their children were heavily influenced by the anti-immigrant culture permeating the political dialogue of the nation and the state.

One of the immigrants who arrived in Las Vegas during the construction boom of the prosperous 1990s was Armando Kihuen, the father of current state Senator Ruben Kihuen. He was a professor in Mexico, but in order to support his growing family, he travelled to California in the 1980s to work as a farm worker. When Ronald Regan granted amnesty to migrants already working in the United States, he took advantage of the program, applied and was granted residency. He petitioned to bring his wife and children to join him in 1988. His request was granted, and Ruben along with his mother, two brothers and sister moved from Guadalajara to Southern California that year. The company Armando was working for relocated to Nevada in 1993, and the Kihuen family relocated to Las Vegas. The opportunities for advancement were much greater in Nevada than California, where the cost of living was much higher and the job market had already long been saturated by immigrants causing wages there to be much lower than those in Las Vegas. The story of Ruben's arrival during this time is typical of many immigrants who came to Nevada from neighboring states in search of greater opportunities (Dauber 97-99).

Ruben's experience as a teenager growing up in Las Vegas, witnessing his father's hard work in the fields of California and his mother's countless hours as a housekeeper to support their family, inspired him to become a leader in his community. When asked about facing discrimination in Las Vegas during his youth he describes his experience as being a generally universal one among Latinos:

My personal experience, for the most part, is having an accent and you know looking ethnic, people assume since you have an accent you are going to be working in certain industries, construction, mechanic, cutting lawns so not expecting us to complete college. You know if you complete high school, that is a huge accomplishment, let alone going on to college, let alone going on to be a professional. Somebody that wears a tie to work. So yes, I believe that most Latinos have at some point faced some kind of discrimination.

The discrimination Kihuen and his fellow Latinos experienced due his accent is, unfortunately, a well-documented issue many immigrants in the United States face. Linguist Rosina Lippi-Green has written that accents are often used by the general public, or as she states "nonlinguists," as a "means of exclusion," (165)

The fact is...that when people reject an accent, they also reject the identity of the person speaking: his or her race, ethnic heritage, nation origin, regional affiliation, or economic class. Thus the concept of an accent, so all encompassing in the mind of the public, is a powerful one... (165)

. While the use of Spanish, or any other language, can be a unifying force for a particular minority community, the effects learning English as a second language and having an accent oftentimes bring about embarrassment for the accented

individual when interacting with native English speakers, especially those with little exposure to cultures outside of their own. As Lippi-Green points out, the association made by the discriminating individual is not limited to assumptions about the accented person's English speaking ability, but can also translate to assumptions about their income and as Kihuen illustrates, intelligence.

Despite the discrimination he faced, Kihuen was able to overcome those stereotypes with the support of his parents who valued education and through hard work. He not only graduated high school and college, but eventually became the first Mexican immigrant ever to serve in the Nevada State Legislature. He decided to run for office to counter the effects that political underrepresentation had had on his community. In his words:

It was an opportunity to represent a community that had been underrepresented for many years so I felt an obligation that Latinos have been in this state since the founding of this state yet they have never had proper representation. So the simple fact that I was born in another country, that I actually spoke both languages, gave me the ability to reach the Latino community that was underrepresented and give them more of a voice. So that is why I decided to do it.

Senator Kihuen and his Cuban-American colleague, Senator Denis would form the Nevada Hispanic Legislative Caucus and help numerous other Latinos, including the state's first Latina, reach the state legislature in 2010 and 2012. These legislators represent a variety of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and signify a shift in the typical political dichotomy of the white political establishment. In addition to these Latino legislators, for the first time in the state's history, Nevada has a Hispanic governor, Attorney General, and

representation on the city councils of Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, and Reno. Many laws have been passed in the state as a result of these Latino leaders' efforts, as well as those of the Latino community and its organizations.

In addition to advancing Latino representation throughout the city and state's governing bodies in the past decade, their rising levels of electoral participation continue to contribute to their increased political incorporation. Their vote was integral in President Obama's 2008 and 2012 Presidential campaigns and Senator Harry Reid's 2010 re-election campaign, and will only become more important to any politician who attempts to launch a successful campaign in the state. Organizations that promote civic engagement, such as *Mi Familia Vota*, are educating Latinos on the issues, registering them to vote, and mobilizing them together as a significant voting bloc. Latinos are also becoming involved in politics at a younger age as Latino student organizations proliferate and help candidates like Kihuen, who grew up in their community, to become elected. Social media efforts by these groups and other Latino activists (and others who support Latino causes) have helped disseminate information and promote a public dialogue on the issues. The Spanish-language media in Nevada has grown rapidly and become a major source of information for Latinos to educate themselves about political issues. The media's expansion coincides with a rise in the unprecedented purchasing power of the emerging Latino market, and businesses and political candidates are investing great amounts of time and money to reach this important part of Nevada's population. Traditional Latino organizations like the LCC continue to be a force in the business community and

among its affluent members, but grassroots organizations have taken center stage in mobilizing the Latino community at large.

Moving forward, Latinos in Nevada still have significant room for progress. A recent report by the Guinn Center illustrates that Nevada's Latino population still lags behind Whites and other ethnic groups in a number of ways: In 2012, Latinos were unemployed at a rate of 16% versus 11% for Whites; Latinos per capita income was a dismal \$14,204 compared to Non-Latinos at \$29,500, or slightly less than half; poverty rates for Latino families with children under 18 are a staggering 28% versus 16% for White families. Latinos also struggle in the area of education and are much more likely to drop out of high school. In fact 39% of all Latinos in Nevada have less than a high school education (19-29).

While this news is disheartening, the Latino community of Nevada has more resources than ever before to make their voice heard in in Washington, Carson City, and throughout the state, especially in Las Vegas. Their elected officials, including Senator Kihuen, now have the power and the support to help this community overcome the obstacles it faces. Considering that the Latino electorate is predicted to double by 2030, there is little doubt that their influence will continue to rise (Taylor et al). As the twenty-first century progresses and Nevada's Latino population continues to grow, the Silver State might just become *el Estado de la Plata*.

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