1 The Growing Presence of Latinos in the United States

In early spring 2006, an inspiring and impressive demonstration of Latino political action poured into the streets of American cities to advocate for a comprehensive reform to the existing immigration regime in the United States and against an approach—captured in House of Representatives Bill 4437 (*Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005*)—built on the criminalization of undocumented immigrants and their supporters. Marches occurred in more than 125 cities between March 10 and May 1, and included an estimated three million people. A general strike on May 1 shuttered dozens of food processing plants across the heartland, closed schools and businesses, and shut down countless construction sites in the United States. Collectively, these marches and the strike represented the largest single civil rights action in American history.

As much as these actions were both inspiring and impressive, the adjective most used by social scientists who are students of Latino life in the United States is "surprising." That is, almost nothing we "know" about Latinos from the work of social scientists and humanists would have predicted these events. These actions were surprising in any number of ways. First, they suggested Latino communities to be

far more politicized and mobilizable than current scholarship had suggested. Second, they demonstrated more substantial pan-ethnic solidarity than might otherwise be expected. There appears to have been significant Puerto Rican and Cuban participation, despite the distinct legal arrangements that make immigration a nonissue for these two groups. There appeared to be significant participation and support by native-born citizens of the United States, belying the claim made by some immigration opponents that Latino citizens are not supportive of unauthorized immigrants. Surveys taken by the Latino Policy Coalition and others suggested widespread approval of the actions by Latino citizens and noncitizens alike.

Perhaps most importantly, however, the marches arguably signified critical and interesting predispositions among Latinos. To some degree, the marches simultaneously communicated dissatisfaction with current and proposed policy while also implicitly demonstrating a level of trust in the political system. Clearly, the marchers were unhappy with both the immigration status quo and the proposed legislation. But, by taking to the streets, they also signaled their belief that political action within the U.S. political system *can* yield policy change, a surprisingly efficacious stance. And finally, the marches, the demands, and the trappings of the action (replete with countless American flags) consciously and unconsciously communicated a collective commitment to making a life in the United States. Though clearly undertaken as a political strategy, the marchers' actions and even their very presence served to stake a claim to formal and informal inclusion in the American polity. It was, in the last analysis, a demand for membership.

We might see the marches as the culmination of the political process begun in 1994 with the Latino reaction to California Proposition 187, which prohibited providing most state services to those suspected of being undocumented immigrants. And *some* of the literature on Latino politics, since the late 1990s, had begun to identify some of the small but important changes in Latino political life that may have culminated in the events of 2006 (Fraga and Ramírez 2003; Pantoja, Ramírez, and Segura 2001). But we would be wrong not to recognize that our academic understanding of the Latino community, broadly construed, stands at odds with what was observed that spring. The preponderance of existing work documented a population that was politically disconnected, slow to mobilization and generally inattentive to

politics, fractured along national-origin lines, and more likely to be the targets of political action than the actors themselves. Whatever else the marches of 2006 may have accomplished, they made it clear that our collective knowledge of Latino political orientations was, at best, incomplete and, quite possibly, dated beyond usefulness.

This project, begun well before the marches took place, proceeded largely from that assumption. That is, we began in the spring of 2002 with the creeping suspicion that things had changed, were continuing to change and changing quickly, and that political science may have, to a large extent, missed these changes. The decade of the 1990s witnessed the emergence and proliferation of statewide ballot initiatives, generally or specifically targeted at Latinos. Simultaneously, the immigrant population was exploding while immigrants of a previous wave, whose status had been adjusted by the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), entered the electorate in surprisingly high numbers. Latino communities were emerging in places that had little or no experience with immigration, chasing jobs in Southeastern carpet mills, Southern poultry plants, Midwestern slaughterhouses, and in construction throughout much of the country. Latino politicians sought and won elective office in growing numbers and in a larger array of locations than previously. A Republican candidate for president made outreach to Latinos a signature effort of his campaign; simultaneously, nativist elements of his own party made anti-immigrant politics a popular feature of GOP campaigns and rhetoric—all of which is to say that the political, social, economic, and demographic landscape had changed with results we were beginning to witness.

It is to these developments, and their implications for Latino life in the United States, that this project is addressed.

Demonstrable Changes in Latino Life—Has Political Science Missed the Boat?

Our take on the peculiar features and important aspects of the Latino communities in the United States today is driven in large measure by three important characteristics of social scientists and their impact on what we know and can learn. First and foremost, academic training emphasizes the existing body of knowledge as the baseline from which we begin any new effort at discovery. The "literature," with

its long-held assumptions and well-established findings, serves as the foundation for new investigation. Attempting to move past the literature is difficult, and the logic of the Kuhnian epistemology that dominates contemporary social science suggests that evidence must be particularly strong if "received knowledge" is to be overturned.

The literature on Latino political behavior has evolved substantially in recent years (Fraga et al. 2006b). However, much of what we know about Latino political behavior, the long-held findings and foundational claims, is driven by data collected in the 1989 Latino National Political Survey (LNPS). The population of Latinos in the United States has changed drastically since the collection of those data. In fact, when we consider that the population of Latinos in the 1990 census was 22.4 million persons, some of whom have passed on in the intervening years, compared to 43.2 million in 2006, the universe of potential respondents to the LNPS represent fewer than half of the universe of Latino residents of the United States today. This is not to say that none of the findings of the survey regarding Latino political and social attitudes and experiences applies today. Certainly many things have stayed the same (which is interesting in and of itself, and we have more to say about this in this chapter). But with such a dramatically enlarged and new population, other things may have—indeed, *must* have—changed. Geographic, ethnic, and generational diversity collectively reshape the range of potential experiences—social, economic, and political—that together account for Latino life in the United States. So although some things remain largely as the literature suggests, there is at least the potential for others to have changed drastically.

What exactly has changed and with what effect?

First, the Latino population is much larger and represents a larger share of the national population. The 2006 American Community Survey of the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that Latinos make up 14.8% of the U.S. population while African Americans are 12% (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). Unlike African Americans, however, Latinos are projected to grow as a percentage of the population; African Americans are expected to remain at their current proportion. One projection estimates that by 2050 Latinos will make up almost 25% of the population; Caucasians may be a slim majority at 52% of the nation's population. It is projected that Latinos might make up as much as 33% of the population in 2100 (U.S. Census Bureau 2002).

Second, the national origin of the U.S. Latino population is increasingly diverse. People of Mexican origin have been in the United States in sizable numbers since at least the end of the war between Mexico and the United States in 1848; Puerto Ricans became part of the United States in 1898 as a result of the Spanish-American War. Some people of Cuban origin have lived in the United States since its earliest days, but significant numbers have come to this country since 1960 as a result of the Cuban Revolution. In 1990, people of Mexican descent represented 60.3% of Latinos in the United States; Puerto Ricans made up 12.2%, and Cubans 4.7%. By 2006, those of Mexican descent increased to make up 64.2% of all Latinos; however, substantial immigration from the Latin Caribbean, Central America, and South America reduced the percentage of Puerto Ricans and Cubans to 9.0% and 3.4%, respectively. Dominicans now make up 2.8% of all Latinos; those from countries in Central America comprise 7.6%, those from South America are 5.5%, and those self-described as "Other Hispanic or Latino" comprise 7.7% (U.S. Census Bureau 2006).

Third, Latino population growth is driven by both continued immigration and native birth. IRCA regularized the immigration status of a significant number of people, none of whom were eligible to enter the citizenry, much less the electorate, when the first LNPS was conducted in 1989–1990. Subsequent research documented reluctance on the part of the Mexican American population to naturalize and generally found consistently low levels of political participation among those who did (DeSipio 1996). However, changes in Mexican nationality law and the natural progression of those newly documented to citizenship eligibility resulted in a boom in naturalization beginning in the early to mid-1990s. In California, for example, this boom was accelerated further by the politicization of ethnicity resulting from immigrant-targeted ballot initiatives and by immigrant-unfriendly provisions of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PL 104-193), more commonly known as "welfare reform." However, the largest source of population growth has not been immigration, but native births. For example, although only 44.4% of all Latinos currently residing in the United States are native born, 85.6% of all Latinos under age eighteen years are native born, whereas 39.4% of Latinos over eighteen are native born.

Fourth, the 2000 Census shows that Latinos now have a clear national presence, no longer confined to the Southwestern states, Florida, New York City, and Chicago. In 1990, Latinos were the largest minority group in only 16 of the 50 states, and their share of the population exceeded 5% in only 15 states. In 2000, Latinos outnumbered all other minorities in 23 states, and their population exceeded 5% in 23 states. Table 1-1 lists the states that experienced the largest percentage growth in their Latino populations between 1990 and 2000. Although Latinos still represent relatively small percentages of their respective state populations, the top four states in terms of percentage growth were North Carolina (394%), Arkansas (337%), Georgia (300%), and Tennessee (278%), states without any history of significant Latino presence before the mid-1990s.

The importance of this geographic dispersion should not be underestimated. These population growth rates might appear inflated as a consequence of the very low starting point. But in states like Georgia, Nevada, and North Carolina, the growth is so substantial that the population numbers are sufficient to begin triggering federal Voting Rights Act claims for representation at the state legislative and—soon—congressional level. That is, the actual number of Latinos in these locales is beginning to have significant political implications.

TABLE 1-1 STATES WITH THE LARGEST PERCENTAGE LATINO POPULATION INCREASE, 1990–2000

State	*Percent Change*	*Total Latino Population*
North Carolina	394	378,963
Arkansas	337	86,666
Georgia	300	435,227
Tennessee	278	123,838
Nevada	217	393,970
South Carolina	211	95,067
Alabama	208	75,830
Kentucky	173	59,939
Minnesota	166	143,382
Nebraska	155	94,425
Iowa	153	82,473
Mississippi	148	39,569

Fifth, Latino voters are now the recipients of overtures from both major political parties and from national, state, and local candidates for public office. At least since the 1960s, Latino voters in states such as Texas and California have received targeted campaigning from candidates running in contested elections. This was the case when the Kennedy campaign established their Viva Kennedy Clubs and Richard Nixon pursued his "Hispanic Strategy" in his 1972 reelection campaign. In 2000, however, something unprecedented happened. The Bush campaign chose to make his knowledge of and respect for Latino communities a foundational part of his broader public image to portray him as a "compassionate conservative" to the entire country. Although it can be argued that this approach was more symbolic than substantive, it is hard to deny that the Bush campaign mainstreamed Latinos as potentially important players in American national politics (Fraga and Leal 2004). Moreover, Latino population growth has sometimes translated into electoral growth that has made Latino voters a key segment of electoral victories in important states. Although Latinos make up only a small percentage of the overall national electorate, they are located in states that are of strategic importance to both Republican and Democratic candidates. California is now one of the strongest Democratic states in the country because Latino voters, now estimated at approximately 17% of the statewide electorate, vote Democratic at margins of about 7 to 3, thus being key determinants of Democratic victories when the white vote splits relatively closely. Latino voters in Florida have been very significant components of close Republican and sometimes even Democratic statewide victories in recent elections. The continued growth in the Latino electorate in key states in the Southwest, including Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico, made these states key targets of 2008 presidential candidates. Do Latinos see themselves as key players in contested elections? How does one reconcile this apparent position of Latino voters as important to attaining winning margins of victory with the way that Latino immigrants are often targeted for deportation in much of the current immigration debate?

Sixth, the number of Latino and Latina elected officials has grown consistently over the past twenty years and there is every reason to believe that their number will continue to grow at significant rates.

The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials counted 4,004 Latino elected officials in 1990. By 2006, that number was just over 5,600, a nearly 40% increase. The plurality of these officials serves on school boards and city councils, local levels of government responsible for critical services affecting Latino children and the quality of life of Latino families. Latinos have also increased their presence in state legislatures. In California, for example, Latino members of both the Assembly and the Senate are a critical component of their respective Democratic caucuses. By 2008, California had its third Latino Speaker of the Assembly. In that year, three Latinos served in the U.S. Senate: Ken Salazar (D-CO), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), and Mel Martinez (R-FL). Bill Richardson, a Latino of mixed Caucasian and Mexican heritage who is the current governor of New Mexico, was a declared candidate to be the Democratic nominee for President of the United States in the 2008 presidential primaries. In 2009, Sonia Sotomayor was confirmed as the first Latina justice on the Supreme Court. How does this growth in Latino political representation affect senses of Latino political efficacy? As a result of this increase in descriptive representation, do Latinos feel more a part of American society? Do they see politics as a way to further enhance their chances for upward mobility in the United States?

The dramatic changes we have just recounted—rapid population growth, national origin diversification, geographic dispersion, clear growth in Latino political incorporation as voters and as elected officials—all portend significant variation in the social, economic, and political experiences of America's Latino population. New settlements in the South and rural Midwest expose Latinos to entirely new social contexts with interesting results—some predictable, some less so. Similarly, the growth of second- and third-generation cohorts suggests the emergence of a Latino population whose experiences with American society, grasp of American politics, and sense of power in American politics may differ considerably from earlier cohorts. The mixing of previously distinct (and geographically distant) national-origin communities such as Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans, as well as the arrival of larger numbers of new communities such as Dominicans, Salvadorans, Colombians, and others, raises new questions about panethnic identification, cooperation, and competition, a demographic reality almost unheard of just 15 years ago.

It is, indeed, likely that all of these changes will have some effect on Latino attitudes, views, and social experiences. The first challenge in this project, then, was for us to set aside our long-held expectations, expectations generally fortified by the academic literature, but driven by a social and political reality long-past.

The Presence—and Significance—of Continuity

A second characteristic of social scientists is to regard social change as interesting—more interesting, in fact, than social continuity. Few papers find their way into the pages of the *American Political Science Review* or the *American Sociological Review* whose findings can be summarized as entirely consistent with previous work and with intuitive expectations—no difference, no change, nothing new. For that reason (and others), there is a fetishism of change in the social science community that actually might be inherently misleading in other ways. Specifically, by focusing on change and its legion of potential causes—demographic and otherwise—we overlook the many circumstances of Latino Americans today that look very much like they did a generation ago. This level of continuity should be interesting, however, because it serves as potential evidence of important social forces that we must address.

Specifically, with significant change in the geographic diversity of the Latino population, the presence of more and more varied generations, and the growth of Latino political power, the persistence of one or more social indicators—for example, Latino poverty or high school dropout rates—must, of necessity, suggest the presence of social forces *not* endogenous to the demography. That is, the absence of change on important measures of social well-being, political engagement, or any other dimension highlights an underlying "sameness" in the experiences of Latinos in the United States across time and space.

From where might this similarity of life experiences originate? Some might suggest some form of cultural deficiency; that is, one or more cultural elements common to Latinos across national-origin groups and across generations and cohorts that shape outcomes on key measures. The evidence for these claims has always been suspect and the evidence to the contrary palpable (see Hero 1992).

Alternatively, persistently poor showings on a variety of social indicators may suggest the presence of one or more structural disadvantages, structures that transcend generations and exact a toll on most Latinos—those coming of age in the late 1980s and those today, twenty years later—in a similar manner. Likely candidates may include white flight from school systems, persistently hostile reception among Anglos (non-Hispanic whites) in the United States, and other opportunities foreclosed.

Whatever the cause, it is our contention here that social constancy is as interesting and important as social change. Our second challenge in this project, one as important as the first, was not simply to assume that everything we knew was wrong, outdated, or even eroding significantly. Some of the received knowledge of the earlier generation of work likely still applies.

Confounding Elements of Complexity in Latino America

Examining these elements of continuity and change is made somewhat more difficult by the exceeding complexity of the phenomena at issue. It may seem trite and somewhat obvious to identify complexity as an issue—after all, most social phenomena are complex. We suggest, however, that specific characteristics of Latino populations introduce levels of complexity that complicate and confound our efforts to capture the nature of Latino life in the United States today. Specifically, diversification by generation, national origin, and legal status, as well as widely disparate perceptions of Latino identity and place in American society, make generalization treacherous and conclusions profoundly contingent.

A number of examples illustrate this point, we believe. A significant share of foreign-born Latinos in the United States—and a share of both our focus group subjects and survey respondents—are unauthorized immigrants. When we query subjects about their comfort level in their new communities, their perceptions of government responsiveness, or their willingness to engage non-Latinos in social and political relations, the answers must be contingent on this question of status. An answer detailing significant social alienation or distrust in government

means different things coming from a U.S. citizen of Latino ancestry than it does from an unauthorized immigrant, whose alienation or mistrust might well be justified or, from the standpoint of survival and safety, even advisable.

A second example raises the important issue of nationality differences and how they might interact with immigration and opportunities for transnational communities. Cuban immigrants, as a consequence of U.S. policy, face a very different and more accepting immigration regime than Mexicans on the one hand, but have a much more difficult time maintaining contact and family relations with individuals back in Cuba on the other. Contrast both of these experiences with that of Puerto Ricans, whose status as U.S. citizens affords them the greatest political rights of any group and the freest opportunity for contact, travel, and circular migration, opportunities that are far more difficult for unauthorized Mexican immigrants and essentially impossible for many Cubans. The effect of these differences can cut in surprising and unexpected ways. When we examine questions of community building and civic and political engagement in the United States among those born elsewhere, the opportunity is undoubtedly greatest for Puerto Ricans. But the motivation to build a life and community here—in the absence of meaningful access to circular or reverse migration—may well be greatest for Cubans or unauthorized Mexicans.

Generation and identity with pan-ethnic labels such "Hispanic" and "Latino" vary in important ways as well. Some third-, fourth-, or *n*th-generation Latinos in the United States may have entirely different perceptions of American society and their place in it when compared to newcomers; alternatively, they may have surprising empathy for the circumstances of newcomers if collective memories of the immigration experience—or direct social or familial connection with others of more recent vintage—sensitizes them to these realities. Similarly, identification with pan-ethnic labels varies across individuals and may be driven by the proximity of Latinos to other national-origin groups, levels of political awareness and interest, or even something as simple as familiarity with racial and ethnic terminology in American society. To the extent that collective political action and interests presuppose an awareness of commonalities and a sympathy of interests, variation in generation, empathy for the immigration experience, and sense of

pan-ethnic solidarity will inevitably shape individual Latinos' perceptions of the American experience.

Our point, of course, is that we cannot merely describe "a" Latino experience but, rather, because of clearly identifiable and important social, legal, and political forces, we must identify a variety of modalities of Latino experiences and the forces that shape them. Throughout this effort, we endeavor to illustrate when and where these complexities challenge our received knowledge and circumscribe our conclusions.

Searching for Community

Returning for a moment to the immigration marches in 2006, we noted earlier that one important and symbolic element of the marches was an effort on the part of those participating to stake a claim to membership in American society. Apart from the obvious, including flags and the like, marchers carried signs regarding work, family, and community. Slogans illustrated the specific roles filled by immigrants in American society, the assertion that our current immigration regime was unjust, and perhaps most poignantly, reminders that apart from Native Americans, we are *all* immigrants. Apart from the proximate message calling for significant reform of the immigration process, the intent of the messages was clear: The marches were a call for inclusion.

Building a community in the United States is a theme that appears frequently in the coming chapters. We illustrate in considerable detail how Latino aspirations in U.S. society are remarkably reminiscent of the "American dream." We discuss the progress and difficulties Latinos face in creating pan-ethnic identity and consciousness, a matter of considerable importance in locales where there is considerable diversity in national origin among the Latino population. We are reminded at this juncture of a comment made by an elected official in Miami. He reported considerable angst among Cuban American leaders about the growth of non-Cuban Latino populations in South Florida. He wanted us to tell him how to mobilize and incorporate these new populations into the pre-existing political machine—in short, how to make a Cuban political power base a "Latino" political power base. The salience of this concern was evident on his face. A few moments later,

another group participant, discussing the issue of identity and pan-ethnicity, raised a somewhat different concern. He was Bolivian, his wife Cuban. "What is our daughter?" he wanted to know. Easy—"*Cuban!*" answered the elected official, sporting a big smile (emphasis most definitely in the original).

We also examine the sometimes pleasant and sometimes hostile interactions with non-Hispanic neighbors, co-workers, and even in-laws, and the persistent recognition that language, accent, skin color, and name often continue to conspire to exclude many from the full realization of that American dream. Can Latinos be part of American society if they are unwelcome? Can civic and political incorporation occur if socioeconomic mobility is difficult or, for some, even impossible?

Finding a home in America is shown to be more urgent than we might otherwise realize. Though a large share of Latinos in the United States are foreign born, it is safe to say that, for many, you really can't go home again. Several of our foreign-born subjects, in different ways, communicated a growing unease with the communities and societies they left. Different subjects had different takes. One man expressed a desire to return home to Mexico but lamented that his children would never stand for it. Others reported going to their home country for a visit and then immediately being anxious for the visit to end, either because of physical discomforts and deprivations or merely a sense of not belonging. Still others—especially women—flat out reported feeling that life and opportunities were better for them in the United States.

The lesson drawn from their words and others is that, while Latinos and Latino immigrants are most certainly changing America, America is—in important ways—changing them too. Whether the processes of assimilation and acculturation are chosen or merely passively experienced, Latinos in the United States, even foreign-born Latinos—are *not* Latin Americans. They are something different, having experienced at least a partial metamorphosis in the United States. "Latino" is an inherently American identity. Latino or Hispanic identity, and the lives, views, and preferences of those to whom we refer, cannot be understood outside the context of U.S. society and politics. Exactly how that identity is formed, shaped, and differs from other Americans is something we discuss in detail in the coming pages.

Change, Continuity, Complexity, and Community

With the discussion of community, our thematic structure is complete. In this effort, the six of us set out to illustrate the forces shaping the formation of the Latino community in the United States. That process of community formation is simultaneously a search for self-definition on the part of the almost 50 million Americans of Latin American ancestry and a search for acceptance and inclusion by the remaining 250 million non-Hispanics in the greater economy, society, and polity. In that exploration of community, we take particular note of how aspects of that search and the challenges faced reflect the continuity of nearly identical experiences of Latinos in previous generations, and how—at least on some dimensions and particularly with respect to the sheer magnitude of the Latino population and its impact—those experiences might have changed considerably. In all instances, we try to situate the experiences reported within the unique circumstances and variations that complicate our examination but ultimately, we hope, enrich our understanding.

Our Focus Group Approach

It is because of these multiple challenges that a focus group methodology was our first resort in identifying and mapping the contours of Latino life in America. While survey research was our ultimate goal and a more familiar terrain for most of us, we worried that we did not have enough information about the instances of continuity, change, and complexity or a full understanding of exactly how Latinos were creating lives and communities within the United States. We did not wish to write yet another questionnaire based on erroneous assumptions—in this case, that little had changed, or that everything had.

To that end, we began our project in a straightforward way, by gathering information through simply speaking with a broad and diverse array of ordinary Latinos in America. We hoped to gauge their sentiments and views on life—economic, social, and political—in the United States. Most of the material we discuss in the coming pages comes from these formal focus groups conducted among those everyday folks. Naturally, our impressions are also informed by extensive

interactions with policy advocates, leaders of community-based organizations, elected officials, academics, union officials, immigrant advocates, civil rights attorneys, and others in and around various Latino communities across the United States.[1]

Focus groups are a research technique whereby data is collected through group interactions on topics determined by the researcher (Morgan 1993: 130). These can be conducted in more or less directive interview styles and with more or less structured question formats, depending on the purposes of the particular project.

This methodology is used widely across the social sciences and related fields, including communication studies, education, marketing, and public health (Morgan 1996: 132). While Morgan notes that some form of group interviewing has no doubt existed from the very beginning of the social sciences (Morgan 1996: 129; Bogardus 1926; Merton, Fiske, and Kendall 1956), interest in the use of focus groups in the social sciences has expanded significantly only since the 1990s (Krueger 1994; Knodel, Havanon, and Sittitrai 1990; Stewart and Shamdasani 1990; Vaughn, Shumm, and Sinagub 1996). As a consequence, focus group research is still seen as a relative newcomer in the social sciences.

In part because of their recent adoption and application in the social sciences, focus groups are most often seen used in conjunction with other research methods, particularly surveys, either to help develop the survey instrumentation or to aid in interpreting survey results. They are used to generate hypotheses and to stimulate new ideas, creative concepts, evaluations, and impressions (Bishoping 1999; DeMaio et al. 1993; Forsyth and Lessler 1991; Morgan 1988, 1996; Stewart and Shamdasani 1990). Barbour notes that in addition focus groups are often used to ensure that the questions being asked are appropriate, easily understood by respondents (Barbour 2005: n 7–9), and contextually relevant (Barbour 2005: n 10). Focus groups are also useful in designing culturally sensitive survey methodology (Barbour 2005: n 11–12; Bishoping 1999). In fact, these reasons were part of the original purpose for the inclusion of focus groups as part of the Latino National Survey (LNS) project: Focus groups were included to help develop the study's framework and instrument.

However, focus groups have also increasingly been used on their own as a "self-contained" method (Morgan 1996: 130; Sigel 1996). Group interviews can be seen, in some respects, as an intermediary

method between personal/individual interviews and surveys with a broader range of respondents. Focus groups allow researchers to get reactions "from a relatively wide range of participants in a relatively short time" (Morgan 1996: 134). On the one hand, they provide greater breadth than individual interviews, although individual interviews might allow greater "depth"—that is, more time with each interviewee (Crabtree et al. 1993: 134). On the other hand, while focus groups on the whole do not allow for participation of the numbers of respondents typically included in survey research, in exchange they offer researchers some insight into the subjective experience of individuals, beyond simply a recitation of their opinions, attitudes, and attributes. As one leading researcher noted, "Focus groups are useful when it comes to investigating what participants think, but they excel at uncovering *why* participants think as they do" (Morgan, cited in Barbour 2005: n 38; Morgan 1996: 139; Morgan and Kreuger 1993; see also Fern 1982).

The focus groups conducted by the research team for the project presented here offer precisely this convergence of both breadth and depth. The team used a common protocol to guide discussion in fifteen focus groups—with more than 150 participants in nine cities across eight states—that were designed to include either Spanish- and English-speaking respondents, in different regions of the country, with differing compositions by generation and country of origin. The number and range of the participants in these Latino focus groups are unique in the social science literature. While the focus groups were originally conducted to aid in the development of a larger survey of Latino residents in the United States, it quickly became clear that the transcripts they generated were a significant data source in and of themselves.

Focus groups have other strengths as well. As other researchers have pointed out, focus groups allow access to hard-to-reach groups (Barbour 2005: n 1; Morgan 1996: 133). The LNS, with its focus on Latino residents in the United States, faced a considerable potential obstacle in the number of Latinos in the United States who are undocumented. To our surprise, though never directly asked in the focus group protocols, many of the focus group participants freely volunteered information about their legal status in the United States. Presumably the relative comfort among participants taking part in a group conversation among Latinos facilitated these confidences.

The group dynamics present in this form of research are also one of its strengths: "What makes the discussion in focus groups more than the sum of separate individual interviews is the fact that the participants both query each other and explain themselves to each other" (Morgan 1996: 139). Morgan and Kreuger emphasize that this interaction provides valuable data on the extent of consensus and disagreement among participants (Morgan and Kreuger 1993), an attribute of the data used to full effect in this book project.

Two central concerns about focus groups relate to the generalizability of their findings and their comparability to findings using other methods. Several studies have analyzed these differences (Folch-Lyon et al. 1981; Saint-Germain et al. 1993; Ward et al. 1991). In each case the authors found that focus groups confirmed the findings uncovered using other methods (primarily surveys), differing only in going beyond the survey data by providing more in-depth information and detail on the topic at hand (Delli Carpini and Williams 1994; Morgan 1996: 137). There is, nonetheless, a tradeoff between the two approaches of focus groups and surveys: Focus groups allow for more depth than surveys, allowing open-ended responses to questions and eliciting responses that get at participants' interpretation and meaning that are simply not possible in surveys; however, the limitation is that focus groups can typically cover only a fraction of the topics typically covered by a survey and the findings are not usually suitable for quantitative analysis.

In sum, this book presents the results of a unique data set—the results of fifteen focus groups conducted across the United States with Latino residents, including foreign-born—both legal and undocumented immigrants—and native-born. These data provide more range than allowed by the typical interview-based project and not only give key insights into Latino residents' thoughts about community, language, discrimination, ties to their countries of origin, and the like, but also provide some sense of participants' explanations of their reasoning and motivations, something not achievable through structured survey data alone.

Table 1-2 shows the date and time, language in which the discussion was conducted, targeted ancestry, and location for each of our focus groups; Table 1-3 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants. In retrospect, the choice of cities and locations, the allocation of various acculturation segments for the groups, and

TABLE 1-2 SUMMARY OF LOGISTIC DETAILS OF LNS 2003 FOCUS GROUPS

Group	*Date*	*Time*	*Language*	*Ancestry*	*Location*
A	May 3	11 A.M.–12:30 P.M.	English	Mexican, Central American	Houston
B	May 3	1:30–3 P.M.	Spanish	Mexican, Central American	Houston
C	May 5	6–7:30 P.M.	English	Mexican	Los Angeles
D	May 5	8–9:30 P.M.	Spanish	Mexican, Central American, Other	Los Angeles
E	May 9	6–7:30 P.M.	Spanish	Mexican	Dalton, GA
F	May 10	12–1:30 P.M.	Spanish	Dominican, Puerto Rican, other	New York
G	May 10	2–3:30 P.M.	English	Puerto Rican	New York
H	May 12	6–7:30 P.M.	Spanish	Cuban, South American, other	Miami
I	May 12	8–9:30 P.M.	English	Cuban, other	Miami
J	May 19	2–3:30 P.M.	English	Mexican	Muscatine, IA
K	May 19	7–8:30 P.M.	Spanish	Mexican	West Liberty, IA
L	May 15	6–7:30 P.M.	Spanish	Central American,	Washington, DC
M	May 15	8–9:30 P.M.	English	Central American,	Washington, DC
N	June 19	7–8:30 P.M.	Spanish	Central American	Washington, DC

LNS = Latino National Survey

the diversity of national origin achieved combined to deliver a good set of respondents that is reasonably representative of the U.S. Latino adult population. For example, the gender and age diversity approximate that of the larger Latino population. Also the proportion of participants from each national-origin group reflects the proportional ranking of national-origin groups in the United States. Of particular importance, the participants represent the full spectrum of "generational distance," including second, third, or higher generations of U.S.-born as well as immigrants in the full continuum of exposure to the United States—from "newcomers" who have spent a small fraction of their lives here to "transplants" who have been in the United states much of their lives. However, Latinos with little or no formal education and annual incomes below $15,000 are somewhat under-represented among the group participants whose education and income levels are known.[2]

TABLE 1-3 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Demographic	*Description*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Gender	Male	66	51
	Female	64	49
Age	Less than 30	41	31
	30–39	35	27
	40–54	33	25
	More than 50	18	14
	Not known	3	2
National origin	Mexico	58	44
	Puerto Rico	17	13
	Chile	1	<1
	Cuba	7	5
	Colombia	5	4
	El Salvador	9	7
	Nicaragua	5	4
	Guatemala	8	6
	Dominican Republic	3	2
	Peru	3	2
	Spain	2	1
	Ecuador	1	<1
	Panama	2	1
	Paraguay	2	1
	Bolivia	1	<1
	Uruguay	2	1
	Venezuela	1	<1
	Mixed Latino	4	3
Nativity	U.S.	42	32
	Not U.S.	88	68
Generational distance*	Third or More Generation	23	17
	Second Generation	19	15
	First Generation Transplants	38	29
	First Generation Transitionals	29	22
	First Generation Newcomers	22	17
Education	Less than 9 years	14	11
	9–11 years	14	11
	12 years	29	22
	13–15 years	28	21
	More than 16 years	35	27
	Not known	11	8
Income	Less than $20,000	19	15
	$20,000–$39,999	47	36
	$40,000–$60,000	31	24
	More than $60,0000	23	17
	Not known	11	8

*Definitions: *First Generation Newcomers*: Born in a foreign country; spent <¼ of life in United States. *First Generation Transitionals*: Born in foreign country; spent ¼ to ½ of life in United States. *First Generation Transplants*: Born in a foreign country; spent at least ½ of life in United States. *Second Generation*: Born in United States with at least one immigrant parent. *Third Generation*: Born in United States with both parents born in United States. (Note: These figures do not include a 15th focus group conducted with working-class Latino participants in Washington, DC.)

Obviously, a set of fifteen focus groups in diverse communities cannot adequately fill all the possible sociodemographic cells. Some of the gaps we identify are among the most difficult to recruit for focus groups or for social research in general. However, in Washington, DC, we benefited by inadvertently ending up with valuable input from persons employed in the public sector, who provided opinions not found as commonly in other places. Similarly, in Houston, we benefited from having a group of fairly assimilated Latinos who tried hard to appear "Latino" by participating in the Spanish language groups when clearly English was their dominant language. To some extent, these participants provided us with another view of the complexity and diversity of Latinos and of the potential tendency for some reverse acculturation.

Beyond demographic characteristics, it is worth noting that the groups had wide variation in manner of self-expression; there were highly marginal and vulnerable persons (largely due to their immigration status) who were almost afraid to be interviewed, and there were very vocal and sophisticated persons who were highly engaged in social and political activity. The groups also contained persons whose lives are totally segregated from American society and persons who are totally at ease in the majority culture.

The Latino National Survey

These focus groups were completed to better inform the final development of the questionnaire that was used in our 2006 LNS. The LNS was a forty-minute telephone survey of 8,634 self-identified Latino/Hispanic residents of the United States. It was in the field from November 17, 2005, to August 4, 2006. The questionnaire had approximately 165 items, including questions about policy preferences, political behavior, political attitudes, and a wide set of sociodemographics. Respondents were given the opportunity to speak either English or Spanish at the beginning of the survey. All interviewers were bilingual.

Representative samples of Latino households were drawn from fifteen states and the District of Columbia metropolitan area. The fifteen states were Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Texas, and Washington. This group includes states with historically large concentrations of Latinos and those with Latino pop-

ulations that have arrived more recently. Approximately 87.5% of all Latinos in the United States live in the above described areas. As indicated in Appendix A, some state samples were further stratified by specific substate geographical areas to facilitate within-state comparisons. Each state sample is a valid, stand-alone representation of the respective state's Latino population. A minimum of 400 respondents were drawn from each state. California had a minimum of 1,200 respondents; Florida, Texas, and New York had 800; and Illinois had 600. Each state's sampling error was ±5%. The national margin of error is approximately ±1.05%. All reported data are weighted to be nationally representative.

We use data from the LNS and from other selected national surveys to supplement the narratives that emerge from our focus groups and, when appropriate, to establish a baseline to demonstrate how much continuity and change across selected dimensions of Latino life in the United States are present. Additionally, we are able to use data from the LNS to demonstrate how representative the focus group narratives are of more systematic trends in experiences and views within Latino communities.

Latino Realities in Contemporary Society

The data drawn from the focus groups alone represent thousands of comments, questions, and points of emphasis made by our diverse pool of subjects. They are rich in ways we did not anticipate, and more than once ideas and arguments emerged that were completely unanticipated by the six of us. In short, we learned a lot from the narratives our subjects offered regarding their lives and the lives of their friends and families. While it is tempting to report on everything our subjects offered, we choose instead to identify the distinct themes and topics of emphasis that emerged from these narratives of Latino lives in the contemporary United States. The scope of these areas of examination serves to portray essential elements of the status and experiences of Latinos in a variety of settings, communicating in different languages, and from different backgrounds and national origins.

A note about national-origin differences: As many commentators and researchers have pointed out, differences among Latinos from different national-origin groups can be as significant as those between

Latinos and other ethnic or racial groups. Cuban Americans, for example, have consistently expressed a closer affiliation to the Republican Party and a more conservative bent on some public policy issues than Latinos of Mexican origin. Mexican immigrants, for their part, are considerably more conservative on social issues than either Puerto Ricans or Cuban Americans. In the chapters that follow we point out national-origin differences whenever they appear relevant. Some chapters highlight similarities and differences among Latinos from multiple national-origin groups. Chapter 6, on Latinos' transnational ties, for instance, mentions Puerto Rican respondents' comments about their relationship with both the United States and New York City. But in general national-origin differences were muted in the focus groups, even when the groups drew from several national-origin groups. Sometimes, unfortunately, this was because national origin could not be discerned from the transcripts, which did not always allow us to identify individuals' national origins from what was said. It is also the case, however, that in some groups national-origin differences were entirely absent. For example, Latino residents in the Midwest are overwhelmingly of Mexican descent, so national-origin differences simply never come into play in our discussion of Latinos in rural America (Chapter 5). This is all to say that we were deeply attuned to the differences, as well as to the possible commonalities, among the participants in these focus groups, and the chapters that follow paint a picture that we hope captures the Latino population in the United States with all its nuances and complexities.

In Chapter 2, Trying for the *Americano* Dream: Barriers to Making the United States "Home," we examine the extent to which our focus group participants identify the quintessential "American dream" as their life goal, and their experiences—good and bad—in trying to achieve that outcome. We begin by comparing their opinions with those of other working Americans on what the American dream means and the perceived barriers to its achievement. We then trace how subjects informed us on questions as diverse as how residential segregation, job opportunities, legal status, and education shaped this path to inclusion, social mobility, and the American dream. We move beyond socioeconomic mobility, then, to examine what our subjects had to say about actually "being" American. We again look at a variety of aspects of assimilation and incorporation, including linguistic, marital, cul-

tural, and structural elements. We consider the role that assimilation plays in the pursuit of life goals by looking specifically for indicators of assimilation in the respondents' reported behavior and in their evaluations of other Latinos' success at achieving their dreams.

We turn our attention in Chapter 3 to what is likely the most salient element of both socioeconomic mobility and assimilation: the education system. In Education: Latinos' Great Hope, America's Harsh Reality, we examine the policy arena that continues to most directly affect the chances for Latino upward mobility in the United States. We begin by noting the importance that Latinos give to education, as captured in a number of national surveys; the tremendous growth in Latino presence among public school students across the entire country; and the way that current education reform efforts specifically affect opportunities for Latino educational attainment. We do this to highlight three specific dimensions of assessment of educational systems in the United States revealed by our respondents: (1) the importance Latinos ascribe to education in determining their chances at upward mobility, (2) how schools affect assessments of the quality of neighborhood life overall, and (3) the perceived quality of education in large urban school districts where many Latinos attend public schools. Unlike some previous findings that suggest that elements of many Latinos' cultural values are at odds with academic achievement, our respondents reveal a set of values, experiences, and expectations regarding education and American public schools that is fully consistent with mainstream American values.

Chapter 4 focuses on the other principal impediment both to social mobility and to incorporation, specifically prejudice and discrimination. In Exploring Discrimination and Intergroup and Intragroup Relations among Latinos, we briefly review previous evidence from surveys, then explore our participants' perceptions of intergroup and *intra*group relations, including their personal experiences of discrimination. The focus group discussions demonstrate a wide range of differing views on these issues. We hear signs of despair and continuing frustration regarding both relationships with other Latinos and with other racial and ethnic groups generally. However, we also hear voices asserting positive change and improvement. Immigrants seem to be more optimistic than members of later generations, but overall the focus groups portray a sense of the complexity and great variety of

views on these matters. In addition to illustrating perceptions of discrimination, the comments by participants suggest hypotheses that should be tested in future studies.

In Chapter 5, New Homes in New Communities: Living in Rural America, we explore how Latino settlement in rural and agricultural communities—in the Farm Belt, the South, and the interior Pacific Northwest—clearly illustrates both the continuing problems facing Latinos, but also some of the positive changes stemming from changing patterns of immigrant settlement. On the one hand, white flight from public schools, severe residential segregation, patterns of political exclusion, and a complete lack of political representation echo the experiences of generations past and suggest that long-rehearsed patterns of political contestation between Latinos and other Americans will be reenacted in these new settings. On the other hand, Latino immigration has meant substantial economic and population growth in long-declining areas and noticeably reinvigorated local economies and industries. Coupled with the low crime and quality schools in some of these areas, as well as social engagements with non-Latinos that are often positive or at least more nuanced than in other areas of the country, the day-to-day life of many of these new arrivals is perceptively better than in other, more established locations and in past periods of Latino settlement.

In Chapter 6, Transnationalism and the Language of Belonging, we explore the ties Latinos maintain with their countries of origin. The dramatic increase in Latin American immigration to the United States, the barriers these new Latino residents encounter as they try to achieve the American dream, and the ease of communication and travel to immigrants' countries of origins would all seem to point to the likelihood that immigrants would retain strong ties to their countries of origin. This, we were surprised to learn, is not necessarily so. We find in our focus groups a surprising amount of ambivalence about immigrants' connections with their countries of birth. While Latino immigrants do, indeed, maintain affective ties to their countries of origin, these ties serve to refresh immigrants' memories of the reasons that impelled them to leave in the first place and are a particularly salient indicator of how their lives, beliefs, and expectations have changed. Indirectly, then, transnational ties appear to reinforce Latinos' sense of attachment and belonging in the United States. Transna-

tionalism and assimilation, then, are not only complementary, but may actually be mutually reinforcing.

In Chapter 7, The Evolving Latino Community and Pan-ethnicity: Explorations into the Confluence of Interactions, Networks, and Identity, we examine relations between the various Latino national-origin groups and, in particular, the growing sense of pan-ethnic identification. We begin with a brief discussion of the concept of pan-ethnicity, including how it has been characterized and measured in the past. Then, we turn to the focus group narratives to identify the principal elements of community among Latinos and how those ties are reflected in daily life. If a pan-ethnic community has, in fact, emerged, we want to find out whether it is a consequence of shared values, language, social networks, or something altogether different. We also want to know how national origin and other salient identities may interact with or relate to pan-ethnic consciousness. Similar to the findings of past research, the focus groups reveal that identity and social networking based on country of origin continues to be a prominent feature in the lives of many Latinos. However, we also see that the prominence of national origins has not precluded the development of pan-ethnic and American identities. Moreover, the content and weight of both participants' comments and LNS responses indicates the clear presence of a pan-ethnic (Latino) community that is self-conscious and politically meaningful.

We conclude the book in Chapter 8 by integrating these findings with an eye to the future. In Conclusions: Paradoxes along the Way to Making America Home, we assess the process of contemporary Latino incorporation in the United States, a process that is best understood as a series of paradoxes and tensions. We highlight the numerous contradictions discovered in the beliefs and experiences of Latinos and consider what this means for their future success and acceptance in mainstream America.

The strength of our study, as well as the source of its inspiration, is that we "hear" from ordinary Latinos "in their own words." The analytical questions that we pose serve to underscore the complexities of living as a Latino in 21st century America, and increasingly of living in America for many citizens and residents of the United States. The responses of our participants are filled with insights, frustrations, expectations, and dreams. The questions also serve to organize our

understanding of these important phenomena. Most important, however, are the verbatim responses of the focus group participants.

Together, the extended conversations with Latino focus group participants, in combination with references to selected survey data, provide a window into the continuity, change, and complexity of the growing and diverse population of Latinos in the United States. This book digs beneath the surface of journalistic takes and ten-minute polls to provide an in-depth view of the experiences of Latinos and the way they think and talk about themselves as individuals, their identities, their families, their communities, and the larger nation of which they are such a growing part.

Appendix A: Latino National Survey (LNS) Geographic Sample Strata within States

Jurisdiction	*Geographic Needs*	*County*
Arizona	Complete state	All counties
Arkansas	Complete state	All counties
California	Los Angeles Metro	Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura
	Inland Empire	Riverside County (western part), San Bernardino County (southwestern part)
	San Diego Metro	San Diego County
	Central Valley	Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Tulare
	San Francisco Metro	Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, Sonoma
Colorado	Denver Metro	Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, Jefferson
	other Colorado	Remaining counties in state
District of Columbia	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metropolitan Statistical Area	District of Columbia; Calvert County, Charles County, Frederick County, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, MD; Arlington County, Clarke County, Fairfax County, Fauquier County, Loudoun County, Prince William County, Spotsylvania County, Stafford County, Warren County, VA; Jefferson County, WV; Alexandria city, Fairfax city, Falls Church city, Fredericksburg city, Manassas city, Manassas Park city, VA
Florida	Miami Metro	Broward, Miami-Dade, Palm Beach
	Orlando Metro	Orange, Osceola, Seminole
	Tampa Metro	Hillsborough, Pinellas

Jurisdiction	*Geographic Needs*	*County*
Georgia	Atlanta Metro	Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett
	other Georgia	Remaining counties in state
Illinois	Chicago Metro	Cook, DuPage, Grundy, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, Will
	other Illinois	Remaining counties in state
Iowa	Complete state	All counties
Nevada	Complete state	All counties
New Jersey	Complete state	All counties
New Mexico	Complete state	All counties
New York	Complete state	All counties
North Carolina	complete state	All counties
Texas	Dallas–Fort Worth	Collin, Dallas, Denton, Tarrant
	Houston Metro	Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Montgomery
	San Antonio Metro	Bexar, Comal, Guadalupe
	El Paso Metro	El Paso County
	Rio Grande Valley	Cameron, Dimmit, Hidalgo, Kinney, Maverick, Starr, Val Verde, Webb, Zapata
Washington	Seattle Metro	King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish
	Yakima Valley	Yakima
	other Washington	Remaining counties in state