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The Value of African American and Latino Coalitions to the American South

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African Americans and Latinos have had similar historical experiences living in the United States. Throughout its history, African Americans and Latinos have been subjected to similar forms of racialization, segregation, and discrimination which, in turn, have produced some of the same social, political, and economic issues within each of these communities. Despite the fact that African Americans and Latinos have faced similar issues, historically they have not built coalitions with each other but have chosen to address the issues of their communities separately. Their failure and inability to work together have limited their power and their progress.

With the large increase of the Latino population in the United States over the past 20 years, and more specifically in the South, the demographics of the United States have changed dramatically. One of the primary effects of this change in demographics is its impact on race relations. Historically, the racial discourse in America has been centered on black/white relations (Killian, 2001), which is, by definition, a polar manner of discussing and analyzing race. (See for example, Azoulay, 1997; Hardy & Laszlof, 1994.) This is particularly true in the South, which until recently has not had a significant Latino population (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002). The recent influx of Latinos into the United States and the South has added complexity to the racial discourse. No longer can race relations be seen only in terms of black and white. This fact has disturbed and confused many. (See, for example, Doane, 1997.)

Instead of viewing Latinos as insignificant or as a political and economic threat, or both, community leaders, activists, organizations, and institutions must recognize the enormous potential in establishing coalitions between the African American and Latino communities. The challenge facing this potential coalition lies in the two-fold concept of race—how the two communities race against each other competitively and how they race each other in terms of racial identity and difference. How African Americans and Latinos race each other in terms of competition and identity, therefore, seems to be the primary obstacle that has been and is preventing an African American and Latino coalition. Nevertheless,
a coalition among African Americans and Latinos is timely, necessary, and potentially valuable. A coalition between African Americans and Latinos holds much promise in the South as an effective means to produce social change.

Latino Demographics: New Complexities and Sensitivities in Race Relations

American demographics have changed dramatically over the past 20 years. This change is primarily due to the rise in the Latino population, to which immigrants have contributed significantly. The Latino population has grown tremendously, with immigrants from a variety of Latin American countries arriving in the United States in record numbers. Unlike former migration patterns, however, Latino immigrants are moving beyond the traditional areas of settlement, such as those states in the American Southwest like Texas and California, and are choosing to make their homes in other parts of the country. Latino immigrants are moving into other areas seeking better economic opportunities. One of the areas experiencing a rise in the Latino immigrant population is the American South. In fact, the Latino population increased over 200% between 1980 and 2000 in states like Georgia, Arkansas, Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia, and Kansas (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005, p. 6). Not only are Latino immigrants moving into the South, but Latinos from other parts of the United States are relocating to the South as well. (See Kandel, 2006; Kandel & Cromartie, 2004.)

The immigrants arriving in the American South have numerous national origins. They come from a variety of Latin American countries such as Nicaragua, Venezuela, Cuba, Mexico, Columbia, Panama, the Dominican Republic, and Chile, among others. Although many group all Latinos together, their cultures and ethnic identities are as different as their national origins. It is important to recognize these differences, to acknowledge that the Latino immigrant community is diverse and not monolithic. On the other hand, it is important to be aware of the fact that these diverse communities are grouped together in terms of larger, more general racial identity in America, in which they are classified as Latino and/or Hispanic.

Although Latino immigrants originate from a variety of Latin American countries, the majority of immigrants arriving in the United States are from Mexico. According to the 2000 census, Mexican immigrants made up 29.5% of the overall immigrant population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003, p. 5). In the South, where there is a new and growing community of Latino immigrants, the Mexican population comprises 31.6% of the entire immigrant population, and over 50% of the Latino population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003, p. 7). Realizing that the majority of Latinos in the South are of Mexican descent will assist greatly with understanding the cultural dynamics of the Latino population. (See Passel, 2006.)
The growth of the Latino population and, consequently, the change in American demographics have created some interesting social, economic, and political challenges in regard to American race relations. With the Latino population growing at an enormous rate, there has been a shift in the discourse about race. This shift is particularly evident in the American South where the Latino population is relatively new, increasing significantly over the past 15 years. Prior to 1990, the majority of Latinos lived in the American Southwest, except for the population centers of New York, Chicago, and southern Florida. Now that Latinos are moving into other parts of the country, specifically the South, they have transformed the racial landscape, creating a peculiar predicament for southerners. The challenge is that, historically, race relations in the South have been persistently polarized, with most observers viewing issues of race in terms of black and white. With the large influx of Latinos in the South, racial lines have become more blurred and complicated. The question that perplexes so many is, Where do you put Latinos? Most people agree that Latinos are neither black nor white in the social context of race, but they are unclear about what Latino identity should be. It is clear, however, that many consider Latinos something other than black or white, which, consequently, confuses the racial order of the South.9 With Latinos having a different identity—as defined by themselves and by others, differentiated both from black and white, although to varying degrees, sharing commonalities with both—race relations in the American South have been flustered, making traditional lines of demarcation more complex.10

Race and Racialization

The concept of race is very complicated, especially since there is really no such thing as race.11 Race is not real. Nationality is real. Ethnicity is real. Culture is real. Class is real. Race, however, is not. Race cannot be determined biologically or by phenotype. Race is an idea, a philosophy. Race is a social and political construction used to stratify society and is maintained through coercion and political ideology. Because we live in a society that classifies its citizens by race, race becomes real, and because we live in a system that awards or denies individuals and groups access to privilege based on their race, we have developed a system of racism, which is real. The American society, therefore, makes race a real category of identification and distinction and has turned this concept into a system of racism; consequently, although race is not real, race has become a real form of identity in the American society. A discussion of race, therefore, is necessary in order to better understand the complex dynamics of race relations in America. The concept of race emerged with the founding of the New World. With the enslavement of Africans by Europeans, European colonists developed the concept
of race in order to justify the institution of slavery and solidify their superiority in the new society. Because Africans looked so phenotypically and physiologically different from Europeans, the construction of race among human beings became a way to differentiate the two groups, which sociologically became "white" and "black." Although historically race was determined according to phenotype, due to miscegenation these differences were not so apparent, so the lines of demarcation blurred. As Africans became more "white" physiologically and culturally, legal systems were put in place during the late 17th and early 18th centuries in order to determine who was "white"—had access to white privilege—and who was not. Race, therefore, became a social and political construction that gave access to some and denied it to others (Higginbotham, 2005).

The interrelated concept of race and racism in America has changed and evolved over time. No longer are white and black the paradigm for racial classification. As the presence of Latinos and other ethnic groups grows ever more rapidly in the United States, racial identity and categorization have become more complex. Over the past 40 years the U.S. Census has recognized these differences to include other racial categories. In the U.S. Census, however, Latinos are not classified as a race but as an ethnic group. Some Latinos, consequently, have pushed for a racial classification that would uniquely identify them.

Although Latinos are not recognized as a race by the U.S. Census, sociologically Latinos have been racialized throughout American history. This racialization of Latinos continues today in the American South. No longer is the black-white dichotomy of viewing race relations acceptable or even practical in the South. This new population with this new type of identity has disturbed the social structure of the South, making race relations more complex. Despite their different and distinct identity, however, Latinos do have a lot in common with African Americans. Like African Americans, Latinos have a long history of experiencing discrimination and segregation in the United States; consequently, there are a host of contemporary issues that both communities have in common that need to be addressed.

**Intergroup Commonalities: A Foundation for Collaboration**

In view of the growing Latino population in the South and considering the multiplicity of common issues that the Latino and African American communities face, a political coalition between these two groups to address common concerns would be practical and potentially effective in creating social change. Coalitions, however, should be based not on race but on interests. It is evident that Latinos and African Americans have many common interests, which is a direct result of their similar historical experiences in the United States.
Throughout American history African Americans and Latinos have faced common challenges. They have been racialized—stereotyped with certain characteristics because of their perceived race—and, consequently, marginalized in American society. Both have been economically exploited, socially segregated, educationally deprived, and politically disenfranchised. Due to their common historical experiences, African Americans and Latinos contend with some of the same social, political, and economic challenges within each of their communities. In other words, their similar histories have produced similar outcomes.

Historically, African Americans and Latinos have been racialized in similar ways. Both have been stereotyped as being lazy, shiftless, dirty, criminal, and so on because of their race. Popular culture has played a major role in advancing these images. Movies of the early 20th century such as *Birth of a Nation* and *Birth of Texas* publicized and promoted stereotypes of African Americans and Latinos, and these stereotypical images continue to plague American popular culture. The process of being “raced” through similar negative stereotypes, therefore, is a parallel experience of African Americans and Latinos (Houston, 2000, pp. 6-10).

African Americans and Latinos also have similar histories, being economically exploited throughout American history. During the late 19th century African Americans and Latinos—Mexican Americans specifically—were forced to work as agricultural laborers. As they moved from agricultural to industrial labor during the mid 20th century, African Americans and Mexican Americans both experienced discrimination in the workplace, being confined to low-level and low-paying jobs. Even now, persons within these two communities disproportionately work in the lowest level, lowest paying and most dangerous jobs in industry, lacking adequate benefits and insurance. Due to these facts, a large percentage of the African American and Latino communities make up the working poor, with many of their children living in homes where the income is at or below the poverty level. Because they are confined to the lowest levels in the workplace, African Americans and Latinos are not well represented in executive positions in corporate America. Additionally, unemployment and underemployment plague both communities.

Socially, African Americans and Latinos have experienced various forms of discrimination and segregation. During the late 19th century Jim Crow became the law of the land with African Americans being its primary victims; however, Latinos suffered as well. African Americans and Latinos were confined to segregated neighborhoods and attended substandard segregated schools. They were denied opportunities to pursue higher education in majority institutions. Additionally, African Americans and Latinos were denied access to and/or received unequal treatment in public accommodations. Many restaurants, hotels, department stores, and other types of businesses refused service to African Americans and Latinos or provided them with substandard service.
Segregation and discrimination were most evident in the public school systems. Many African Americans and Latinos were forced to attend segregated schools. In some communities in Texas, for example, there were three schools operating simultaneously in the same public school system. There were an Anglo school, an African American school, and a Mexican school. Although considered “separate but equal,” for the most part these two latter types of schools were unequal to their Anglo counterpart. Schools for African American and Mexican American children were underfunded, overcrowded, and lacked the resources necessary to create a viable learning environment. (For readings on the conditions of segregated public schools for Mexican Americans, see San Miguel, 1987).

African Americans and Latinos also experienced discrimination in higher education. Prior to the Civil Rights Movement (1955–1968), most institutions of higher learning did not admit African Americans or Latinos. Some Latinos, however, were allowed to attend college because of their ability to negotiate their race, but this opportunity was unavailable to most.

Politically, disenfranchisement serves as another common experience of African Americans and Latinos, the latter group having the status of “socially, if not legally, people of colour” (Frederickson, 2003, p. 10). Frederickson (2003) eloquently bridges the historical and current state of affairs experienced by groups falling outside the whiteness norm and within harm’s way in voting and other civic rights:

American identity and citizenship have not been based in any compelling and consistent way on the ethno-cultural character of its population. But, more than the nations of Europe, it has made physical “race,” especially as represented by differences in skin colour, a determinant of civic and social status. (p. 1)

But the current circumstances of blacks and other racialized minorities, such as Mexican Americans, are not merely the cumulative residue of past injustice. The partial dismantling of the welfare state is depriving the poor, who are disproportionately black and brown, of access to the social citizenship adumbrated by the New Deal. Furthermore, active discrimination in access to housing, employment, loans, medical care and education persists. The anti-discrimination laws are either inadequately and inconsistently enforced or fail to cover some of the more subtle ways in which racial bias is expressed. (p. 9)

In the late 19th century following two major events, the Mexican American War in the Southwest and Reconstruction in the South, Mexican Americans and African
Americans, respectively, suffered through the introduction of a myriad of laws and practices—supported by intimidation and violence—that systematically excluded and denied them full citizenship. This process stripped them of their political rights and the right to vote and initiated an era of segregation and discrimination. Unlike the eras preceding the Mexican American War and Reconstruction, during these time periods Mexican Americans and African Americans were denied the opportunity to hold office or participate in the political process. Their inability to exercise their political rights had far-reaching social, economic, and political effects on both the African American and Mexican American communities, limiting their efforts to be fully recognized, embraced, and respected as American citizens.

Considering the common histories of African Americans and Latinos racially, economically, socially, educationally, and politically, it is not difficult to understand why some of the same problems face both of these communities. There are a host of contemporary issues that African Americans and Latinos need to address in education, employment, asset accumulation, health, and law. See appendix A for more detail. These are just some of the many issues that commonly exist within the African American and Latino communities. With similar issues of concern among African Americans and Latinos, it would benefit both of these communities to come together to analyze challenges, plan strategies, and implement solutions.

There is a need for and value in an African American and Latino coalition, particularly in the South. In the South, this type of alliance would be new and could potentially be an example for other communities across the nation. The alliance would be new because, unlike the Southwest, the South has not had a long history of having a significant Latino population; therefore, it does not have a history of coalitions nor the distrust or insecurities that other communities may harbor as a result of having experienced unsuccessful attempts at building coalitions. In fact, until recently there have been few if any opportunities in the South for these two communities to work together and develop alliances. Because the Latino presence in the South is new—new demographically, socially, politically, and economically—an African American and Latino coalition would be a new phenomenon, having the potential to create a new precedent. Working without a long history of failed attempts to build coalitions is encouraging and promising. With little history between the two communities, the concept of building an African American and Latino coalition is fresh and, therefore, potentially brings new ideas, new energy, and new creativity.

There is power in African Americans and Latinos uniting to address common issues of concern. Both groups have different resources to contribute to the alliance, making the union potentially more effective. In the South, for example, African Americans hold an immense amount of power in their institutions and
organizations and as public officials. African American institutions such as the church, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and civic and social organizations are well-established entities within the community, and many of these institutions have long legacies of initiating social change throughout the South and the nation. The resources and networks of these organizations could be very effective in building capacity within an alliance. Additionally, the African American community in the South has a long history of civil rights activism, leaders, and organizations that could bring a wealth of knowledge, abilities, and resources to the efforts of creating social change. In the South, African American elected officials also possess a significant amount of power. In fact, Georgia has more African American elected officials than any state in the country.¹⁶

Latino power in the South is held in its numbers. Although the Latino community in the South does not have a long history of established community institutions, it has the numbers needed to build an effective coalition to effect change. The population is large enough to tilt the scale in many issues. In fact, when you put the numbers together, African Americans and Latinos are the majority in 52 of the 100 largest cities in the United States (Andrade, 2006, p. 53).

A coalition between African Americans and Latinos, therefore, holds much promise in the South. With an African American and Latino alliance, both groups could potentially be more powerful and more effective in their efforts to produce social change than either could be alone. They would have more numbers, more intellectual capital, more resources, and more influence. Sheer numbers and the power of those numbers could possibly influence change. Through an African American and Latino coalition, these two communities would be in a better position to address common concerns as well as safeguard individual, civil, and human rights.

**Coalition Barriers**

If African Americans and Latinos have experienced some of the same racial, economic, social, educational, and political challenges, and if an alliance would be more effective in producing social change, why then have these two groups failed to come together to build coalitions to address common concerns? The answer lies in the understanding of race. The challenge of building and sustaining an African American and Latino coalition boils down to how each group races each other. As the two largest minority groups in America, the African American and Latino communities are constantly racing each other. They race each other in terms of competition, and they race each other in terms of racial difference.

African Americans and Latinos are constantly in competition with each other. As the two largest minority groups in America, they compete on a variety of levels for a variety of rewards. They compete for jobs, financial resources, position,
influence, recognition—and the list goes on. Recently, with the tremendous growth of the Latino population, a new race has emerged: being acknowledged as the largest minority. To be recognized as the largest minority group has its benefits. As the largest minority, a group has more perceived power, which suggests a more prominent role as the power broker. As a consequence of seeing each other as competition instead of as an ally, African American and Latino individuals, leadership, and organizations have a difficult time conceptualizing the need for and the value in forming an alliance with the group they see as their major competitor. The fact that African Americans and Latinos race each other competitively, therefore, has been a major factor in preventing these two groups from working together. Kaufmann (2002, p. 25) has judged this long-term intergroup negative to be “a sense of zero-sum competition between these groups [that] works at cross-purposes with the task of building multiracial unity in the political sphere. It is incumbent upon racial and ethnic minority group leaders to foster more inclusive identities and to work at minimizing the conflict that perpetrates negative stereotypes and out-group resentments.” Morris and Gimpel (2007) echo the need to confront and resolve this intergroup conflict, as it is “increasing as most immigrants of Hispanic ancestry settle in areas proximate to African American populations in the nation’s largest cities.” Elaborating upon this point, Morris and Gimpel (2007, p. 2) write:

Up to very recently, it has been considered politically incorrect, or at least impolite, to suggest that minority groups within American society many not get along well or actually wind up in not-so-friendly competition for scarce resources . . . Recent studies have begun to document, in rising levels of detail, the tension that has emerged between immigrant groups and lower-skilled American natives, a high proportion of whom are African American.

Additionally, African Americans and Latinos race each other in terms of racial difference. An explanation of how race and the racial structure in America function provides some insight into this phenomenon of racing. Historically, the socioeconomic system of America was created on the basis of race. It operated in a way that gave precedent and privilege based on one’s race, with whites being at the top of the socioeconomic structure and blacks at the bottom. This system has continued to operate, though de facto, in much the same way—an informal societal principal that Frederickson (2003, p. 9) summarizes in the following manner: “If a minority is generally disliked or resented, it will be discriminated against in an extra-legal or de facto fashion unless the government acts vigorously
to protect its members." Loury (2004, p. 1) acknowledges the resiliency of the hierarchical divide based on color in U.S. life:

[N]early a century and a half after the destruction of the institution of slavery, and half a century past the dawn of the civil rights movement, social life in the United States continues to be characterized by significant racial stratification.

Kaufmann (2002, p. 5) quotes from the work of Bobo et al. (1994), stating the existence of a "rank order of discrimination" in U.S. cities, which, Kaufmann notes, "places African-Americans at the bottom of the urban social strata." The complication is that Latinos are perceived as neither black nor white; therefore, there is no clear distinction of their place in the racial order. Further complicating the identity of Latinos is the fact that historically Latinos have been legally classified as white. The truth of the matter is that although Latinos have been classified as white, in reality they have been treated socially as the other, experiencing various forms of racial discrimination and segregation. All things considered, Latinos have been placed in the racial order as neither black nor white, but as a group that lies in between and whose position is multilayered. This reality, consequently, speaks to the fact that the racial order in the United States is actually a hierarchy of race in which members of the same perceived racial group can be at different levels of the hierarchy, as in the case of the Latino professional class versus low income Latino immigrants.

Although the majority of Latinos are between whites and blacks in the racial hierarchy, some Latinos are able to climb the racial ladder to become an "honorary white." This privileged status is not available to all Latinos. It is accessible only to those Latinos who obtain a certain social status through phenotype, complexion, education, and/or class position (Loury, 2004). By becoming white, these Latinos have access to white privilege. Most Latinos, however, are unable to achieve this honorary white status, particularly immigrants and those who do not have certain phenotypic features, light complexion, education, or the class position, or any combination of these. Honorary whiteness, therefore, is accessible to some Latinos but not to all.

Most Latino immigrants, however, hold a separate position in the racial hierarchy from other Latinos. Basically, Latino immigrants, specifically the working poor, are ranked at the bottom of the racial order, lower than blacks. There are several factors that contribute to the lower social status of Latino immigrants in the hierarchy of race. They include the language barrier, educational attainment, employment, and cultural difference. By the second or third generation, however, most children of Latino immigrants are able to move up the racial hierarchy to join other Latinos above blacks.
Essentially, the American socioeconomic structure is a type of racial hierarchy. This racial structure influences how each group races each other in terms of racial difference. In other words, the ideas that each group has of each other, which have been primarily formed and developed by the racial hierarchy, dictate how each group will act and react to the other. This leads to the second point of racing and how African Americans and Latinos race each other. African Americans and Latinos race each other as racially different. This idea of racial difference supersedes any common interests and, therefore, prevents the development of coalitions. In other words, instead of seeing their common interests, African Americans and Latinos see their racial differences. This fact presents a number of challenges to those attempting to build coalitions between African Americans and Latinos.

African Americans have raced Latinos primarily into two groups: Latinos who have the potential to become white and Latino immigrants. African Americans have raced—applied different ideas—onto each group. On the one hand, African Americans have a feeling of distrust and resentment toward certain Latinos. On the other, there is the feeling of contempt.

First are the issues of distrust and resentment. African Americans have a certain amount of distrust for Latinos, especially those who are perceived to have obtained or could potentially obtain white status (Kaufmann, 2002, pp. 6-7). In some instances this perception has historical precedence. There have been instances, when addressing similar concerns, that Latinos have distanced themselves from African Americans in order to draw the lines between themselves and blackness. In other words, some Latinos have made a conscious and concerted effort to preserve their separate identity, primarily to maintain their higher status in the racial hierarchy. Trust, therefore, is a major issue for African Americans in building coalitions with Latinos. Additionally, African Americans hold a certain amount of resentment against Latinos. No matter what their phenotype, complexion, education, or income is, unlike Latinos, African American individuals can never become honorary whites or achieve that status as a group. African Americans resent this fact.

On the other hand, African Americans hold feelings of contempt toward Latinos, specifically immigrants. African Americans scorn and degrade Latino immigrants in a myriad of ways, including through hate crimes (Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, 2007). Many African Americans embrace and perpetuate stereotypes of Latino immigrants, exploit immigrant labor, blame immigrants for taking their jobs, and oppose immigration and immigrant rights. Because of these ideas and actions, many African Americans feel that Latino immigrants are beneath them in the hierarchy of race and, therefore, choose not to associate or build allies with this group.
Latinos have raced African Americans as well. Through their racing they project and embrace many of the racial stereotypes that have been created and projected onto African Americans. Many Latinos perceive African Americans to be criminal, ignorant, threatening, and below them in the social hierarchy of race (McClain, 2006, cited in Morris & Gimpel, 2007, p. 8). Because many in the Latino community have reached a certain social status, many times they do not want to associate with African Americans because they feel that African Americans are racially and socially below them. Many Latinos, therefore, do not want to become allies with African Americans because a connection would threaten their identity, social status, and position in the hierarchy of race. In other words, many Latinos feel that their association with African Americans would pull down their social ranking; therefore, many Latinos would rather associate with whiteness than blackness.

In addition to African Americans and Latinos racing each other, there is another factor that has prevented the development of coalitions between the two groups. Both groups feel that everything has to be ideal in their respective communities before they can build coalitions with another group. In other words, all issues and internal conflicts must be resolved before one group should reach out to work with another. The reality is this will never happen. The African American and Latino communities are diverse and not monolithic; therefore, they will never be able to organize everyone, get everyone to agree and solve every problem in their respective communities prior to working with others. That goal is virtually impossible. Each community has a variety of educational, income, and social levels. Members of each community work in all types of jobs and live in all types of neighborhoods. Each has members of different socioeconomic classes and of different political organizations and parties, and each has members who have experienced various degrees of assimilation. In the case of the extended Latino community, some members speak English only, some speak Spanish only, and some are bilingual to varying degrees. The Latino and African American communities have varying religious orientations and practices. They are from different countries with different cultures. Due to the diversity within each community, members of the African American and Latino communities have different interests, goals, and ideas on how to initiate change. Considering all of these factors, at no time will all African Americans and all Latinos think alike or totally agree on any particular idea or issue. There will always be fissures within each community. By realizing that it is improbable and even impossible for one group to be fully organized and address all of its issues before organizing with another group, African Americans and Latinos will free their minds to be open to coalition building.

There are additional challenges facing those attempting to build African American and Latino coalitions, particularly in the South. In the South, the Latino
population is primarily a community of immigrants. Building a coalition between African Americans and Latino immigrants has its own unique challenges. African Americans and Latino immigrants view each other as very different, and for good reason. As cited above, they speak different languages, come from different cultures, practice different religions, have different educational levels, and so forth. Because the African American and Latino immigrant communities are so different, particularly culturally, it is very difficult for them to see their common socioeconomic experiences and embrace each other as allies. In addition to discerning their cultural difference, African Americans view Latino immigrants as a threat to their employment and financial security. Many African Americans feel that Latino immigrants are responsible for the lack of jobs, job displacement, and lower wages. Finally, the language barrier also presents challenges in communication. Cultural difference between African Americans and Latino immigrants, therefore, is a major factor that individuals, leaders, and organizations must address in order to build effective coalitions, particularly in the South.

The fact that African Americans and Latinos race each other—competitively and as racially different—seems to be the major factor that has and is preventing the two groups from working together despite their common interests. Race and racing, therefore, are the dividing wall that separates these two communities. The wall of race, consequently, must be broken down and a bridge of understanding must be built in order for the concept and the reality of a coalition to exist. Issues such as the need to overcome the belief that each community must be fully organized before joining with another group as well as the need for African Americans and Latino immigrants who are culturally different to identify with each other are other areas of contention that must be addressed. Additionally, African Americans need to address their insecurities about viewing Latino immigrants as an economic threat, and both groups need to overcome language barriers in order to foster effective communication. All or most of these challenges must be dealt with and managed for individuals, leaders, and organizations to be successful in building coalitions between African Americans and Latinos in the South.

Conclusion

Building and sustaining an African American and Latino coalition in the South holds much promise in obtaining and safeguarding civil and human rights and producing social change. As African American and Latino communities experience many of the same challenges, an alliance seems promising, necessary, and valuable. Although an African American and Latino coalition has enormous substantive potential, the challenge for activists is to figure out how best to proceed in building one. The answers lie in the following: understanding race
and how each group races each other, fostering a connection between groups that are culturally different, dealing with the internal issues of each community, overcoming the language barrier, and comprehending the dynamics of coalition building. With a comprehensive understanding of these factors, individuals, leaders, and organizations could and would be more successful in building and sustaining an African American and Latino coalition.

The ideas that African Americans and Latinos have subscribed to one another based on race have a lot to do with how each community acts and reacts to the other. Hosting an internal dialogue to discuss, analyze, and understand how one group feels about the other will assist in ironing out the tensions that exist within the group. A group that cannot communicate internally cannot build a coalition. By having this separate internal discussion about race within each community and getting to the root of why each group does not want to associate or work with the other, activists will address some of the issues that have historically kept these two groups from working together.

Additionally, those interested in building coalitions among African Americans and Latinos in the South must understand the dynamics and the plight of Latino immigrants. The issues facing Latino immigrants are different from the issues facing other segments of the Latino population. By bringing the voices and issues of Latino immigrants to the forefront, a coalition can give a face, voice, power, and motivation to the otherwise unseen immigrant community. Including Latino immigrants in coalition efforts will also assist African Americans and the wider Latino community in understanding the complex issues that face Latino immigrants. In most cases, individuals, leaders, and organizations have tended to talk about Latino immigrants and their issues without including them in the dialogue and conversation. Some leaders and organizations omit Latino immigrants altogether. To be successful in the South, individuals and organizations building coalitions between African Americans and Latinos must include the Latino immigrant community in the organization as well as in the conversation. Immigrants are the majority of the Latino population in the South. Not to include and embrace the immigrant community in a coalition would be a grave oversight.

The process of building and developing a coalition also has its challenges. Many times leaders and organizations believe that an umbrella organization is a coalition, and it is not. An umbrella organization has one leader, whether it is an individual or organization, and consists of several organizations, which fall under it. A true coalition is an organization that has members of both groups throughout all levels of the organization. In other words, one organization is not leading the other organizations, but the organization itself is the coalition. The challenge in building a coalition, therefore, is convincing African American and Latino leadership to let go of their egos and be in a space where all can partake in
the leadership and development of the organization. Too often in a coalition, one individual or group wants to be the leader or power broker of the other(s).

Yet another challenge facing coalition building is the failure of the coalition to recognize all of the assets that each group brings to the table. In a coalition some groups have numbers. Some have money. Some have resources. Some have human capital. Some have volunteers. Some have influence. In other words, each entity or organization has its own way of contributing its assets to the larger coalition. The coalition must recognize and value every group’s contribution for the coalition to work effectively. Additionally, one group should not have more value or more input because of the type of resource it brings to the table. So many times members of a coalition value one individual or organization over the other or believe that a specific organization should have more say so in the decision making of the coalition based on the type of resource it brings to the table. This should not be so. To work effectively, the coalition must recognize and value the contribution(s) that each member or member organization brings to the coalition.

Building and sustaining a coalition among diverse groups is very challenging. This article has provided some insight and recommendations on how to proceed with building an effective coalition between African Americans and Latinos, particularly in the South. Both communities have similar histories, both have common issues that need to be addressed, both have a significant population, and both have a tremendous amount of resources to contribute to any organization. An African American and Latino coalition has the potential to effect change beyond what either group could achieve by itself. Many economic, social, educational, and political issues could be addressed with the support of each group working simultaneously on the same agenda toward the same goal(s). Even if African Americans and Latinos only choose a few issues or even one issue to mutually address, the concerted effort by a determined alliance could achieve significant results and produce substantial rewards. Individuals, activists, and leaders of community, civic, and political organizations, therefore, must recognize the potential of and value in building an African American and Latino coalition and actively begin working toward realizing this much needed and desired strategic initiative.

Notes

1. The author chooses to use the term African American to refer to all persons living in the United States who are descendants of persons from Africa. The term Latino refers to all persons living in the United States, whether native or foreign born, who are descendants of persons from Latin America. Because a significant segment of the Latino population in America is immigrants, the author chooses to use the term Latino instead of Latino American. When it is necessary to distinguish between native born and foreign born within the Latino community, the author uses
the terms Latino American and Latino immigrants. The author acknowledges that there are weaknesses in using one term to describe an entire group due to the fact that African Americans and Latinos are nationally, ethnically, and culturally diverse communities.

2. There have been attempts to build coalitions between African Americans and Latinos throughout the United States; however, most of these coalitions have been in name only or have failed to last beyond the issue that they came together to address. In other words, after the issue subsides, so does the coalition. The challenge for activists, therefore, is to build and maintain coalitions that persist beyond momentary issues. For further elaboration see, for example, "CPA Interview" (2002, Spring).

3. According to the U.S. Census Bureau the states that comprise the Southern region are Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. The District of Columbia is also designated as forming part of the South (U.S. Census Bureau Guide, 2002).

4. In 1980, there were 14,608,673 Hispanics in the United States. In 2000, the number of Hispanics rose to 35,305,818, a 141.7% increase (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002, Table 10, p. A34).

5. In 1980, there were 4,473,366 Hispanics in the South. By 2000, the Hispanic population had grown to 11,586,696, a 159% increase (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002).

6. According to the 2000 Census, 16 million foreign-born persons were from Latin America, representing 52% of the total foreign-born population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

7. For the sake of this article the author has decided to group all Latino immigrants together to discuss the Latino experience in America. Although the author recognizes that there is national and cultural diversity within the Latino immigrant community, this article addresses their similar experiences as immigrants from Latin American countries.

8. The terms Latino and Hispanic are used interchangeably. The federal government defines Latino or Hispanic as a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. Accordingly, Hispanics may be any race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

9. Frederickson (2003, p. 13) writes about the phenomenon of shades of whiteness that confused and colored, so to speak, strict adherence to racist notions of whiteness in the United States: "... the ability of immigrants from the Celtic, Latin, and Slavic regions of Europe to claim whiteness, and thereby distinguish themselves from black and Asians, made [the] more exclusive assertions of racial priority ... [by] those of Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, or Nordic ancestry ... unavailing in the long run."

10. The relationship of in-migration by race and ethnic group to out-migration patterns of native whites and blacks, for example, has been reported recently by Ellis and Goodwin-White (2005).

11. The notion of race as a scientific construct was addressed on an international basis in a statement on race by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) during the 1949-1951 period. The statement in effect denied the notion of multiple races of humans, stating that all humans belonged to the single race of homo sapiens (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1951).

12. As previously cited, according to the Census Hispanics may be any race. Others support this nonracial classification of Hispanics: "The Hispanic population is not a racial group, nor does it share a common language or culture. The single overarching trait that all Hispanics share in common is a connection by ancestry to Latin America" (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005, p. 3). Race, therefore, is confusing when classifying Latinos.

13. Latinos are concentrated in relatively low-skill jobs. Latinos account for more than 30% of workers in private household services and about 20% of workers in construction, agriculture, forestry and fishing, nondurable manufacturing, and eating, drinking, and lodging services (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005, p. 10).

14. Within the Latino and African American population, 27.2 % and 32.7% of children, respectively, lived in poverty in 2000 (Lichter, Quian, & Crowley, 2002).

15. In August 2006, the unemployment rate was 8.8 % for African-Americans and 5.3% for

16. The state with the most African American members in its legislature is Georgia, which is followed by Mississippi, Maryland, Alabama, and South Carolina respectively (Bositis, 2001, p. 9).

17. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Latinos are now the largest minority in the United States, making up 12.5% of the population, surpassing African Americans (Greico & Cassidy, 2001).

18. In Texas, for example, Mexican Americans were legally classified as white. For more information on Mexican Americans and their legal racial classification in Texas, see Gross (2003).

19. "Honorary white" is the author's term. The author chooses to use this term to express the privileges associated with whiteness that certain individuals receive once they become "white" in a racial context.

20. Loury (2004, p.15), using 1990 U.S. Census data, demonstrates the perceived differential "racial stigma" between Hispanic women and black women between the ages of 25 and 34: While 39% of Hispanic women had "white Anglo husbands" only 2 percent of black women did.

21. The 2006 HATE Crime Report (Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, 2007) reports that "81% of anti-Latino hate crimes had black suspects," and that 46 "immigrant bashing hate crimes" were reported, 63% of which were violent and "nearly two-thirds of these total crimes were anti-Latino." (pp. 5, 10, 17). More disturbingly, "anti-Latino crimes were the most likely to be violent—72% vs. 53% of anti-black crimes (p. 16).

References


Appendix A

Education
- Poor school systems in African American and Latino communities
- Excessive high school drop-out rates, especially among males
- Lack of postsecondary educational opportunities
- Juvenile delinquency
- Instability of ethnic studies programs at institutions of higher learning

Employment
- Unemployment
- Underemployment
- Job mobility
- Wage and salary discrepancies

Asset accumulation
- Home ownership
- Wealth disparities
- Access to capital

Health
- Access to adequate health care and insurance
- Health disparities
- Teenage pregnancy
- High percentage of HIV and AIDS cases
- Drug and alcohol addiction

Law
- Sentencing discrepancies
- Criminal justice
- Indigent defense
- High percentage of persons connected to penal system
- Recidivism