

THE IMMIGRANT RIGHTS STRUGGLE IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH: A CASE STUDY  
FROM CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

By

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In memory of my grandfather, Albert F. Tibbs, who taught me the importance of hard work,  
dedication and family.

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Over the last two decades, the Latino population in the United States has seen unprecedented growth rates, rising from around 9% of the population in 1990 to 16% by 2010. One particular aspect of the increase in the Latino population is the rising diversity of settlement locations across the country. New immigrant destinations in the United States, such as the American South, are experiencing some of the highest growth rates for the Latino population. As Latino immigrants come into the United States and settle in these non-traditional gateway locations, immigrants and the native-born American population face particular challenges with regard to immigrant incorporation into these communities. As immigrants settle into new destinations, serious questions remain as to whether they will be welcomed into the political discourse or face discrimination and marginalization.

The objective of this thesis is to examine the ability of the immigrant population to develop a political presence in new destinations, many of which have developed negative attitudes towards the incorporation of the immigrant population into the local political discourse. I look at Charlotte, North Carolina, an area with one of the highest Latino population growth rates over the last twenty years to examine the effectiveness of immigrant activism. I find that while

mobilizations seeking to express immigrants' political frustrations and goals were not successful in public policy reform or in creating a lasting immigrant rights social movement, avenues remain open for political advocacy on behalf of the immigrant population.

Secular community organizations and religious institutions have stepped in and continued on in the struggle for immigrant rights, where mobilizations failed. Through such organizations, political advocacy and education are occurring and have brought limited success for immigrant rights in Charlotte. Until such time that the immigrant population itself can re-mobilize, channeling efforts through these organizations presents the best chance for political advocacy and policy reform in Charlotte and much of the American South.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **Background and Objectives**

During the spring of 2006, my last semester as an undergraduate at Davidson College, located just north of Charlotte, North Carolina, the drive for immigration reform was coming to its peak. Various bills were being put forth before Congress, ranging from the draconian Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act (better known as HR 4437) to various proposals that allowed for legalization of unauthorized immigrants, such as the McCain-Kennedy bill. Immigrants and their supporters around the country mobilized to protest against HR 4437 and in support of immigrant rights. Protests and rallies were held in Los Angeles, Washington, Atlanta, and even in Charlotte. When HR 4437 was defeated in the U.S. Senate, immigrant advocates were thrilled and began pushing for more comprehensive legislation like the McCain-Kennedy Bill and the DREAM act, yet success never came. Federal immigration reform has failed to move forward on the political agenda since that time. Every major piece of legislation with regard to immigration reform has failed to become law, including the DREAM Act in late 2010.

As no significant federal immigration reform occurred, immigrants began to feel less and less welcome in many areas of the United States, especially the American South. States and localities began enacting their own laws and regulations to address the perceived “immigration problems,” especially in wake of the failure of any federal reform (Weeks and Weeks, 2010). Southern States, such as Georgia, Alabama and South Carolina have been leading the way, enacting laws that allow police to check the immigration status of anyone suspected of being undocumented, prohibiting landlords from renting housing to immigrants without lawful status, and attach state criminal liability to employers who hire workers who lack proper documentation.

(Winders, 2007; New York Times, 2011).<sup>1</sup> Additionally, Southern counties like Mecklenburg in North Carolina and Cobb in Georgia have led the way with their own local plans for immigration enforcement. The most direct action that has become particularly popular with localities is the actual enforcement of immigration laws by local police via a 287(g) agreement with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the federal agency charged with immigration law enforcement. Under a 287(g) agreement, local or state law enforcement agencies receive authority from ICE to assume some immigration enforcement functions.<sup>2</sup> Since 2002 the program has greatly expanded to include 69 current 287(g) agreements around the country, 40 of which are with localities located in the South (Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2011).

As states and localities have begun to deal with issues of immigration, now more than ever there is a need for the immigrant community to have its voice heard in the ongoing policy debates. This is of particular concern as claims of discrimination surface across the South, not only against immigrants, but Latinos in general, regardless of immigration status have increased in the past ten years. From issues of housing discrimination, to racial profiling by the police, Latinos have faced greater hostility in the South in wake of the rising levels of immigration (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009). As a result, laws intended to target the undocumented immigrant population are beginning to affect the wider Latino population. The previously mentioned state laws giving state and local police authority to stop those suspected of violating immigration law raise even more concerns about racial profiling.

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<sup>1</sup> The most recent bills passed include Alabama's Beason-Hammon Alabama Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act (HB 56), Georgia's Illegal Immigration Reform and Enforcement Act of 2011 (HB 87), South Carolina's immigration bill (SB 20). All of these laws at the time of submission are being challenged in federal court by the Department of Justice.

<sup>2</sup> Localities with 287(g) programs are under one of two models- the Jail Enforcement Model or the Task Force Model. The Jail Enforcement Model allows local law enforcement to identify aliens already in custody who have been charged with or convicted of a separate criminal offense. The Task Force Model allows officers to identify and process aliens in "community settings" or out during their regular law enforcement and patrol work. Under the Task Force Model, 287(g) officers can arrest and hold an alien even if not charged with a criminal offense.

This question of how to deal with the Latino immigrant population is of particular interest in the American South, given the long history of racial tensions in the region. The increase in the Latino population has changed the traditional racial construct of black and white, which has often been a defining feature of the South and its political landscape (Furuseth & Smith, 2006; Pruitt, 2009). Race has in fact been noted as “a salient factor in the political and social fabric of the region” and hence one that works its way into many political considerations (McClain et al., 2006, 572). In addition, Latinos have tended to settle in traditional black neighborhoods, adding to the perception of conflict between black and Latino populations (Mohl, 2003). One study conducted in Durham, North Carolina found that Latinos and blacks did in fact have negative stereotypes of one another, which were intensified for those that lived in mixed neighborhoods (McClain et al., 2006). While conflict is not inevitable, the influx of Latinos into Southern society has seriously altered the traditional notion and classification of race. The traditional black/white racial division is challenged with the addition of “brown” Latinos. What this means for political power and balance in the region, especially for the power and roles traditionally allocated to black as “the” minority in the South, remains to be seen (McClain et al., 2006).

Historically, because of the smaller Latino population and the lack of political clout with regard to electoral power, it made sense for political discussions to go forth without the need for a “Latino voice” of some kind. Now, with Latino’s growing demographic presence across the South, a serious question as to how the Latino population can become politically active and have its concerns heard is an issue that must be addressed. Research on Latino political participation thus far demonstrates a “sizable gap” between the size of the population and the political participation throughout the South (Bullock & Hood, 2006, 1117). Part of this gap can be explained by the status of Latino migrants to the South, as many are not citizens or even legal

residents of the United States. However, Bullock and Hood found that even for those Latinos who are citizens and can participate actively in the political scene, there was a significant gap in participation and political involvement (2006).

Working with the Latino immigrant population in Charlotte, I saw the difficulties that arose for this segment of the population as some native residents and local leaders adopted increasingly hardline positions in the wake of failed efforts at federal immigration reform. Many immigrants who had been living and working in the community for years began to feel less and less welcome. Given that a majority of the immigrant population in Charlotte and the American South as a whole are Latinos, many of whom are not U.S. citizens, I wondered what could be done to help this vulnerable segment of the population (Weeks & Weeks, 2010, 139).

This thesis seeks to address the following set of questions related to immigrant rights in the American South. Why did a wave of mass protests and mobilization starting in 2006, which seemed to have such huge potential, fail to achieve immigration policy reform? What can be done going forward to advocate on behalf of the undocumented population? Who is best suited to do the advocacy given the existing climate of fear?

### **Methodology**

I conducted my primary fieldwork over a six week period during the summer of 2009, with an additional two interviews in May 2011. Building on my previous volunteer experience with the Latin American Coalition, a community organization dedicated to serving the Latino community in the Charlotte area, I made contact with the various community and religious organizations that have become involved with the immigrant community in Charlotte. The list included both religious organizations (the Catholic Diocese, the Charlotte Presbytery) and secular organizations (the Latin American Coalition, and the United National and International Spanish Alliance (UNISAL)). After making contact with each organization, I conducted one

hour semi-structured interviews with leaders of these organizations, as well as interviews with a local political leader (on the Mecklenburg County Commission), with two local academics who research and write on immigrants to Charlotte, and with a local reporter active in the Latino community, for a total of eight interviews . For each interview I asked a set of standard questions (attached as Appendix) and then allowed each interviewee to expand upon my questions as they saw fit. After each interview, answers were coded and categorized so as to allow comparison across interviewees.

In addition to my field research in Charlotte, I reviewed and built off previous research done in Atlanta, Georgia by Dr. Philip Williams, Dr. Manuel Vasquez, and Dr. Timothy Steigenga. Using their research and findings, I was able to find similarities between Charlotte and Atlanta that led to drawing broader conclusions about my research and implications that could apply to the wider region of the American South.

### **Organization and Limitations**

This thesis is organized into five chapters. I conclude this chapter with a brief overview of the Charlotte area and the current geographic and demographic information for the city, to contextualize the research. Chapter 2 examines the existing literature on two primary concepts for the thesis; migration theory and social movement theory.

Chapter 3 applies social movement theory to the immigrant mobilizations that occurred starting in 2006. Using social movement theory as a lens, I examine the rise and fall of the immigrant mobilizations and describe how theory can help us better understand the failure of the immigrant rights movement to sustain the high levels of mobilization achieved during 2006.

Chapter 4 examines how community and religious organizations can step in to fill the need for political advocacy in the absence of immigrants' self organization and mobilization. I also focus on the question of whether community organizations- particularly churches- are the

most appropriate vehicle for moving the fight for immigrant rights forward, especially in the historical context of the civil rights movement in the American South. Finally, Chapter 5 draws conclusions about where the immigrant rights movement is headed, and proposes strategies that may be used by those carrying on the struggle within the American South.

My research, which is based exclusively on interviews with leaders in the Charlotte area does have limitations. As has been noted by previous research, “specific locations provide particular opportunities and constraints for immigrant mobilization” and Charlotte is no different (Steigenga & Williams, 2009, 123). While I argue that there are sufficient similarities to draw broader conclusions from my research, I was unable to perform more extensive and more geographically diverse research to support these conclusions. I rely on information found by other scholars, who examined questions similar, but not identical, to my own. Additionally, my research focused on the leaders of community organizations, not the immigrants themselves, so their view-points are absent in my research and would likely provide a different perspective.

I also did not conduct interviews with any anti-immigrant political leaders or organizations in Charlotte. I was unable to identify any local organization which could be categorized as anti-immigrant. While anti-immigrant sentiment exists, it appears not to have sparked any concerted organizational efforts.<sup>3</sup> I did attempt to contact one county commissioner who has taken a harder line on immigration policy, but my correspondence was never answered. Finally my research focused on urban and suburban, but not rural areas of the South. This choice was intentional due to the fact that the immigrant population growth rate is much more pronounced in urban and suburban areas (Weeks & Weeks, 2010, 142). Therefore the generalizability of some

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<sup>3</sup> Evidence of the anti-immigrant sentiment was present when interviewing a journalist who showed me a file full of hate mail correspondence regarding the moderately positive coverage he gave the immigrant protests. Further sentiment can be seen on the Charlotte Observer’s former blog (it is no longer being updated) related to immigration issues at <http://obsthisland.blogspot.com/>.

of my findings and the particular strategies for mobilization may not be as applicable in rural localities with more geographically separated populations.

### **Charlotte: The Queen City**

The City of Charlotte can be seen as a micro-model for the transformation of the South as a whole. Over the past thirty years, Charlotte grew from a regional city, to one of the major financial hubs of the United States (Smith & Graves, 2003). People from across the United States began moving to Charlotte during the 1990s as Bank of America and Wachovia (now Wells Fargo) established their headquarters in the city and anchored financial services as the backbone of the local economy, making it one of the leading destinations for internal migration in the U.S. (Frey, 1996; Johnson & Kasarda, 2009). The Charlotte metropolitan area has a total population of just over 1.5 million people, and encompasses five counties in North Carolina and one in South Carolina. (US Census, 2011a). The City of Charlotte is the seat and largest municipality within Mecklenburg County, which is the most populous county in the state of North Carolina.

### **Race Relations in Charlotte**

Geographically, the city has changed from one of relative racial heterogeneity, where white and black households were relatively intermixed during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, to more racial segregated by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Being described as a “pie sliced into sectors,” the city became more segregated during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with much of the black population eventually concentrated to the northeast and west of the city (Hanchett, 1998, 3). It was due to this geographic segregation that ultimately led the city and school board to the United States Supreme Court in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*. In this landmark school desegregation case, the Court ordered busing to achieve a more balanced racial integration in response to government-promoted segregation over the years.

While the Charlotte area was mandated to adopt a more rigorous de-segregation policy in, North Carolina has been noted for its relative moderation (compared to the rest of the South) in efforts to push back against forced desegregation (Douglas, 1994). Douglas argues that North Carolina political leaders were committed to the economic development of the state and recognized the need to keep racial strife at a minimum. As a result, disparities in educational spending and voter registration levels between whites and blacks were smaller than any other southern state (Douglas, 1994, 126). This is not to say there were not issues of racial tension and discrimination, as the *Swann* case demonstrates, there was still a pattern of discrimination. However North Carolina and especially Charlotte was able to avoid much of overt political violence that would make progress in the years to come easier.

In the wake of the *Swann* decision, race relations and the balance of racial power made huge strides during the 1970s. During this period, a citizens' initiative started from traditionally black neighborhood groups led a referendum that changed the city council structure, one composed of primarily at-large seats to one based on election from individual districts, giving more weight to the working class white and black neighborhoods that traditionally lacked representation. By the 1980s, with broader representation in city government, officials aimed for diversity in additional urban development (Hanchett, 1998).

### **Latinos in Charlotte**

As mentioned previously, the change of the southern economy from industrial to service based, created a new demand for jobs on the low end labor market that immigrants began to fill. While Latino immigrants, specifically Cubans, came to the area as early as the 1970s, it was not until the 1990s that the immigrant population truly exploded in Charlotte and across North Carolina (Smith & Furuseth, 2006; Griffith, 2005). Between 1990 and 2004, the Hispanic population grew from around 6,000 to 66,000, an increase of 887 percent, the fourth highest

growth rate for a metro area in the country (Deaton, 2008, 1-2). North Carolina as a whole had the largest increase in Latino population from 1990 to 2000, and includes three of the top five highest metropolitan areas in Latino population growth (Deaton, 2008, 1; Furuseth & Smith, 2006, 8).<sup>4</sup> As of 2011, the US census estimated that the Latino population was 13.1% of the Charlotte population, and the foreign born population (of any national background) was 13.6% (US Census, 2011b).

While the majority of the Latino population in Charlotte is of Mexican origin (62%), noticeable populations of El Salvadorians, Hondurans, Colombians and Peruvians exist in the Charlotte area (Deaton, 2008, 3). Additionally the Latino population is young, with 54% of the population between the ages of 15 to 34 years of age (Smith & Furuseth, 2006, 199). Just fewer than 60% of Latinos in 2000 were not U.S. citizens, though the number of undocumented within that group is undetermined. A study of the entire state of North Carolina estimated that the undocumented constituted 45% of the Latino population (Deaton, 2008, 19; Johnson & Kasarda, 2009, 71).

Geographically, three districts have formed that are seen as the Latino settlement areas: the Central Avenue, South Boulevard and North Tyron Corridors. All three corridors are located on the edges of the city lines, in areas once inhabited by lower middle class workers. It is significant that these areas do not have traditional public housing where city officials were accustomed to providing social services (Weeks & Weeks, 2010). However, none of these areas approach a level of fifty percent (or more) of Hispanic residents to classify them as an ethnic enclave as described by Lobo, Flores, and Salvo (2002). The term “barrio” as defined by Borjas<sup>5</sup> (1999)

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<sup>4</sup> The top five were: Raleigh-Durham, Atlanta, Greensboro, Charlotte, and Orlando.

<sup>5</sup> According to Borjas, barrios are “geographic compact community where members of the same ethnic group interact closely and frequently”. (Borjas 1999, 161).

also fails to fit the true nature of the Latino population settlement in the Charlotte area, due to the diversity in nationalities in the area and lack of geographic proximity from one area to another.<sup>6</sup>

Finally while banking and the financial industry have become the hallmark for employment as a whole for the Charlotte area, a more diverse employment picture exists for the Latino population. Top employment sectors for Latinos include: construction (31.5%), Carpentry (18%), janitorial and building upkeep (12.9%), painting and maintenance work (9.8%), and industrial vehicle operation (9.8%), all lower income sectors, traditionally seen as less desirable by much of the American middle class (Deaton 2008, 5). Yet all are based in employment that serves as the vital base in order to run a more service based economy- exactly what Charlotte has strived to become since the 1990s.

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<sup>6</sup> The distance between the three Latino corridors is about ten miles from one another- resulting in a driving time of twenty minutes or more, and even longer via public transportation.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Migration Theory**

Over the years various theories have been proposed by scholars to explain why people take the risk to migrate across borders. Given that such a significant move is costly and time consuming, no matter where you are on the socio-economic scale, the fact that so many immigrants in the United States have come from lower income countries warrants examination.

The traditional and more widely accepted theoretical explanation of migration is referred to as neoclassical economics, which focuses on wage differentials and the supply and demand of labor. The neoclassical model at its base finds that migration is an “individual decision for income maximization” (Massey et al., 1998, 17). Migrants, after analyzing all the costs and benefits of moving, will choose to go to the location where net-returns are expected to be at their highest (Borjas, 1990). However, numerous shortcomings demonstrated the limited applicability of the neoclassical theory to fully explain migratory trends.

According to neoclassical theory, migration is driven by the labor market and wage inequalities, yet not all countries with similar economies and labor markets have similar migratory patterns. Furthermore migration levels have often effectively come to zero, before wage differentials become equal between sending and receiving nations. Scholars began to note that it was more than a cost-benefit analysis that drove decisions to migrate. Researchers found that the decision to migrate is less an individual decision, but one instead made by family units (Massey, Durrand, & Malone, 2002). Additionally the neoclassical model fails to consider how the role of states and various migratory policies can hinder or bolster migratory flows (Zolberg, 1983). Both Japan and the United States are advanced industrialized economies; yet do not see similar migratory levels, demonstrating the incomplete nature of using just the neoclassical

model to explain migratory trends. While decisions to migrate may start with economic choices, these are affected and at times altered by government policies (Haus, 1999).

In response to some of the shortcomings of the neoclassical model, a different economic based theory called the new economics of migration model, emerged. The basis for the new economics of migration theory is that people and especially families decide to migrate not simply for income maximization, but to minimize risks faced due to living in their current location (Stark, 1991). Because many migrants come from poorer countries, whose governments are unable to help their citizens effectively control and manage risks inherent in the markets, those from poorer countries can better manage risk through “diversification” which can include immigrant remittances (Massey, Durrand, & Malone, 2002, 12). This theory in particular takes into consideration the occurrence of cyclical migration, where individuals choose to migrate and work for a set period of time, but ultimately return to rejoin their families and communities back home. However much like the neoclassical model, the new economics model has shortcomings. Governmental policies are similarly left out as a factor under the new economics model. The new economics model also concerns itself solely with the cause of migration within the sending countries, lacking any serious consideration of “pull” factors that may be drawing migration within the receiving countries.

Not all economic models, however, focus on the decisions of the migrants. The segmented labor market theory looks to explain migration based upon the labor market needs of the industrialized countries, especially the need for cheap foreign labor (Piore, 1979). Under this theory, it is not so much the “push” forces as seen in the neoclassical or new economics of migration models that drives migration, but instead a “pull” factor from the industrialized nations. Especially in light of the continued advancement of education and woman’s

employment, the segmented labor market theory concludes that immigrants are the most logical population segment to fill low wage and relatively undesirable jobs at the bottom of the labor market, such as in agriculture, landscaping, construction, and housekeeping.

Macro and structural level theories are also driver behind the world systems theory of migration, which looks to how social and economic structures of the world economy have created more mobile populations prone to migrate. As capitalist firms from more economically developed nations enter less developed nations in search of greater profits, they consume raw materials, land, and change labor markets. As foreign industry helps industrialize these nations, workers in areas such as agriculture and manual labor begin to see their means of economic livelihood disappear, creating a need to migrate- domestically or internationally (Sassen, 1991; Hatton & Williamson, 1998). This same increase in economic development and technology also has made international migration a more realistic and affordable option, as means of communication and ways of remaining connected the one's home country help those adjust to leaving their community. (Sassen, 1991; Basch et al., 1994).

World systems theory and the economic globalization behind it are particularly relevant in explaining migratory patterns between former colonies and their former administrators. Economic expansion drove countries to reach around the world, looking for land and resources. In doing so, they spread common languages and values that allowed migration to the former colonial powers with less of a cultural shock. For example, the migratory patterns of Indians to the United Kingdom, or Algerians to France is in part due to the colonial legacies. Even for countries that were never colonized, the cultural influences that have developed from globalization can be powerful factors in migratory choices (Massey et al., 1998). However the

weakness of world systems theory is that micro-economic factors such as wage rates are not seen as a serious consideration in causing migration.

A significant non-economic approach to migration looks at why migration continues to occur, especially in the wake of economic difficulties. Looking to the idea of social capital, scholars have demonstrated how once initial migrants have arrived to an area, the potential costs for others begin to decrease. Each additional migrant alters the social context of the settling area and creates a context in which migration eventually becomes self-sustaining (Massey, Goldring, & Durand, 1994; Massey & Zentano, 1999). Also known as the “friends and family effect” (Levy & Wadycki, 1973), the social capital theory aligns well with the actual immigration policy of the United States, which has given preference to family member reunification.

As mentioned, over the years new theories have come into existence as older theories are found not to be universally applicable. That said, each theory contributes to the understanding of the migratory process and provides insight into the possible reasons for why a person chooses to leave their country for another. But what can be taken from these theories to help explain the increase in immigration to the American South and other new destinations? Understanding new destinations in particular, involves the application of multiple migration theories to both the international migration context, as well as domestic migration within the United States.

### **New Immigrant Destinations**

Latino immigrants began moving to the American South and other new destinations in noticeable numbers starting in the 1990s. Much of the literature places this demographic shift into a greater context of ongoing immigration legal reform that occurred in the 1980s. In particular, the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) is seen as crucial to the transformation of the South (and other new immigrant destinations) as a location for Hispanic migrants (Frazier & Reisinger, 2006; Haverluk & Trautman, 2008). IRCA, by granting amnesty

to over two million previously undocumented workers,<sup>1</sup> allowed a huge pool of lower skilled labor to gain documentation to move around the country without fear of detention and deportation. IRCA also allowed migrants, who traditionally stayed and worked in cities of first destination (where large networks of other Latinos existed), the freedom to seek work elsewhere where job opportunities were more abundant and smaller pools of competing labor existed (Durrand, Massey, & Charvet, 2000; Winders, 2005). Furthermore with a new expanded pool of legal permanent residents (LPRs), many whom were from Latin America, family reunification became a reality for extended relatives living abroad, as those family members in the US could now petition for lawful entry of relatives in the United States.

IRCA's effect on new immigrant destinations was not solely based on the expanded LPR population and increase in immigrant petitions. Along with amnesty, IRCA and further immigration legislation in the early to mid 1990s increased the presence of border enforcement, especially along the traditional crossing areas in California and around El Paso, Texas.<sup>2</sup> By the mid '90s, in particular with Operation Gatekeeper, the manpower of the border patrol doubled and additional fences and motion sensors were installed- all of which increased the risks and costs of migrating to the United States (Lyll, 2009). For those that were able to make the journey, permanent settlement, not temporary migration became the more common trend (Massey, Durran, & Malone, 2002). Additionally, since the traditional entry areas became so heavily fortified, immigrants began using new points of entry, leading to new arrival destinations

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<sup>1</sup> IRCA provisions allowed for those immigrants who could prove continuous residence since January 1, 1982 and were not otherwise subject to other inadmissibility grounds, such as criminal convictions, were allowed to apply to become Legal Permanent Residences (LPRs).

<sup>2</sup> The most significant of these was Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA). This act increased the number of deportable offenses and mandated minimum re-entry bars of three or ten years for those found to be unlawfully inside the United States depending on the amount of time which an alien was living in the U.S. without status.

as immigrants and smugglers sought to avoid the traditional arrival and settling areas on which border patrol focused.

Other forces at work that have increased the flow of migration into the United States, have been the economic and political upheaval of Mexico and much of Central America. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed in 1994 by the governments of Mexico, Canada, and the United States to help further the economic integration of North America. As markets and trade barriers were eliminated, the Mexican economy in particular was transformed. Opening markets for capitals, goods, and services implicitly created a need for a more mobile labor force (Fernandez-Kelly & Massey, 2007). Additionally the deregulation of agriculture in Mexico in particular, forced many rural Mexican peasants dependent on agriculture to migrate. The inability of Mexican farmers to compete with U.S. agribusiness created an additional migratory population base that began coming to the United States (Andreas, 1998; Fernandez-Kelly & Massey, 2007). The subsequent economic crisis in Mexico in the wake of the peso devaluation exacerbated the crisis and expanded the trend of migration from a few select areas of Mexico, close to the US border, to new sending states , especially those from more agriculturally based southern states (Massey & Espinoza, 1997; Odem & Lacy, 2009) .

Central America, in addition to facing similar economic restructuring, faced additional political difficulties from the lasting effects of civil wars and conflicts that occurred during the 1980s. Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, while all becoming less overtly violent during the '90s, faced enormous economic pressures to provide employment opportunities and economic development in the wake of years of conflict. Economic reforms intended to make economies more sustainable caused high rates of unemployment leading to additional population segments seeking to migrate. As a result, migrants were no longer seeking to escape the political

situation (the reason for migration during the '80s) but instead the dire economic situation as these countries attempted to rebuild (Hamilton & Stoltz Chinchilla, 2001). Additional issues caused by natural disasters such as Hurricane Mitch in 1998 only exacerbated the migratory flow (Wasem & Ester, 2010).

### **Characteristics of New Destinations**

While many areas considered new destinations for immigrants at first glance have very little in common, there are several commonalities between new destination areas that make comparison possible. New destinations are first noted for their fairly homogenous populations and historical lack of newly arriving immigrant populations. Due to this fact, these locations lack any significant resources that are more commonly available to immigrants in traditional gateway cities (Williams et al., 2009).

This lack of resources in new destinations means a lack of support to assist immigrants in integration and adaptation to their new community. More traditional immigrant settling areas with large networks have been showed to be important in providing this support in transitional phases of settlement (Benjamin-Alvarado, 2009; Hagan, 1998). Traditional settling destinations like Miami have strong immigrant networks and resources that have allowed immigrants to develop significant political power that cannot be ignored (Stepick et al., 2003). With these networks missing in new destinations, social capital and a politically active population base from which to call forth for political mobilizations would theoretically be lacking in these locations (Benjamin-Alvarado, 2009).

New destinations, as expected, also tend to lack significant ethnic and racial diversity. This makes making newly arriving immigrants stand out from the native population and not fit into historic racial/ethnic classifications for the area. This feature is particular important in areas where the traditional classification has been black/white- categories that newly arriving Latino

and Asian immigrants do not configure to easily. Consequently scholars have noted and theorized about immigrant/native interaction in new destinations and ethnicity may play a more important role in these locations. In particular the issue of the existence of a black/nonblack division has been examined by scholars (Marrow, 2009; Lee & Bean, 2007). Speculation about low-wage labor market competition between the black community and Latinos, as well as the symbolic challenge of Latinos to black minority status has fueled tension between these two communities (Rich & Miranda, 2005; Ordoñez, 2006). The fact that Latino immigrants often move into areas traditionally populated by blacks adds further possible conflict (Mohl, 2003).

However Latino settlement in New Destinations has not generally lead to a further deterioration of urban neighborhoods. As Latino migrants settle in new locations- stores and services that cater to this growing population begin to establish themselves. Selling ethnic food, money wire services, international phone cards, these stores step in to fill a needed niche. In this process, immigrant stores occupy previously abandoned commercial spaces where few other services exist (Griffith, 2005). The economic activity and revenue by immigrants can sometimes revitalize areas or even whole towns that were previously in decline (Grey & Woodrick, 2005).

### **The Appeal of the American South**

As Mohl and other scholars point out, immigration policy alone cannot account for the continued influx of Latinos into the South. A separate transformation of the Southern economy also occurred that intensified this migratory pattern. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, traditional drivers of the Southern economy, in particular textiles, began to disappear as companies began shifting production overseas to take advantage of lower labor costs. During the same time period the growth and expansion of high-tech research facilities, food processing plants, and the banking sector created the rapid rise of a new service-based economy. With this economic boom came a demand for low-wage labor in the American South (Mohl, 2003; Cobb

& Stueck, 2005). Poultry processing plants, agriculture, and the booming service sector (especially construction) all created a huge demand for lower skilled labor, which could not be met from the existing Southern population (Odem & Lacy, 2009; Haverluk & Trautman, 2008). Firms even began advertising and specifically recruiting workers from Latin America itself to make up for labor shortages in the region (Smith & Furuseth, 2006; Pruitt, 2009). These changes created job opportunities across the board in both cities and smaller communities throughout the South for Latinos moving to the region.

From all this, one can see the combined application of the migratory theories -the neoclassical, segmented labor market, and social capital theories- to the American South. As the region transformed and became a more welcoming location for the American populace as whole with higher paying jobs, the inherent need for unskilled labor (to meet the needs of this growing middle and upper middle class population) created a pull specifically for the immigrant population. Furthermore as first generation migrants who gained legal status with IRCA moved to the area in the early to mid-1990s, family reunification and social capital connections to extended family and friends abroad, spurred further migration to these new destinations. The demographic consequence of all these factors resulted in a swelling of the Latino population throughout the American South between 1990 and 2000, with growth rates in most Southern states over 200%, and as high as 400% in some states (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005; Pruitt, 2009).

### **Social Movement Theory**

The study of social movements and collective action traces back the French Revolution and attempts by scholars to explain the rise of mass movements that began to occur across Europe. Karl Marx's writings in particular were some of the first to deal with the question of when individual engage in collective action (specifically the working class). These early works,

while not defining the parameters of social movements, did help spark an initial interest in the study of collective action. Particularly in relation to grievances that people faced, and the role that grievances had in motivating people to take up collective action.

The earliest attempts at social movement theory viewed such behavior as “irrational crowd behavior” and referred to such forces as dysfunctional and outside the prescribed and accepted norms of society (Tarrow, 1989, 9). Social movements in this paradigm were only believed to come about because of grievances that certain population segments faced. Due to these underlying grievances, it was assumed that social movements would therefore likely result in populations displaying disorderly or mob-like conduct, acting outside established political channels, and resulting in street action that resulted in little meaningful effect on policy formation.

Yet new social movements that came about in the post World War II era, raised serious questions as to the validity of this perspective. Movements began to form on such issues as human rights and the environment, issues on which the classic grievance approach was not as applicable. The movements were formed, not from the marginalized sectors, ignored by society, but from those in the middle and upper classes who saw these issues as important not simply for themselves, but for the greater societal good (Tarrow, 1998). With this ongoing change, scholars began to shift their analysis of social movements and collective action towards the use of a rational choice model. This model aimed to explain why some movements were successful with regards to changing certain areas of public policy. In particular under what would come to be called resource mobilization theory, the focus was on the rational choice of actors and resources available to each movement.

## **Cost Benefit Analysis and Resource Mobilization**

One of the key drivers for a reexamination of scholarship came from economist Mancur Olson, who raised serious questions as to the mere possibility of collective action. In his work, *The Logic of Collective Action*, Olson raised the question of how social movements could sustain prolonged action when dealing with members who are guided by their own self-interest (Olson 1965). As movements become larger, Olson saw a dilemma with others who may have some interest in the movement's cause but who "free-ride" on the efforts of others, because the possible benefits would come to all if achieved. Olson proposed that movements would have to somehow offer "selective incentives" to members in order to be able to build and sustain themselves (Olson, 1965, 51).

While resources mobilization theory was in part to counter Olson's argument and demonstrate why in fact movements do form and succeed given the "free-rider" problem, it borrowed the concept of a cost benefit analysis. Resource availability became a key factor under resource mobilization in explaining if and when social movements would experience success. In particular, under the work of McCarthy and Zald, the issue of free-riders could be minimized via the organization of the social movement, especially with the creation of a social movement organization (1977). With a professionally organized social movement, there could be a professionalization of leadership for social movements, as well as a better access and use of financial resources that would be vital for a social movement's success.

## **Political Processes Approach**

However, resource mobilization theory itself had shortcomings. In particular, it did not address the nature of the political system in which these social movements existed. The political process approach attempted to correct this shortcoming and bring in political analysis to better understand social movements. Specifically, the approach focused on the availability of political

opportunities for social movements, meaning that a successful social movement was one that could identify and take advantage of such opportunities. One of the more useful methods of analysis under this approach is through the use of four key variables articulated by Sidney Tarrow to identify political opportunities: the degree of openness, stability of political alignments, presence of allies, and divisions within the political elite (1989). What is important in the use of the political processes approach is the recognition that social movements do not exist in a political vacuum, and that one must consider factors external to the movement (Tarrow, 1998). Political context matters greatly in the success and growth of social movements. Actions by political elites can help or hinder a movement's visibility and chances for taking concrete forms of action. Successful social movements are aware of this, and take advantage of potential allies or potential political realignments. By understanding when certain external factors have aligned correctly, one can see the political openings that are necessary for social movements to be successful at mobilization and effective at changing public policy at the most opportune moments.

### **Framing**

Another significant development in social movement theory has been on the use of collective action framing, or the efforts by social movements to better define both who they are and what they are seeking to change (Snow & Benford, 1988). Borrowing somewhat from the new social movement theories originating in Europe, the concept explains the source of identity for social movements- both their own internal identity and that given to movements by external actors. William Gamson proposes three main elements with which one can best understand collective framing: injustice, agency, and identity (1992). The injustice component is needed to invoke emotion in the population segment being targeted to spur people into action. Agency deals with the need to empower the participants with the idea that a solution to injustice is

possible by working together in the movement. Finally, identity helps bring the group and potential allies together, as well as create an opposition force that is to be targeted in order to bring about the desired change.

The three theoretical approaches mentioned, resources mobilization, political processes, and collective action framing, are not mutually exclusive and overlap and complement one another to certain degrees. In the chapter that follows, I will use all three approaches to examine the beginnings of a social movement by the immigrant population in the South, specifically in Charlotte.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE IMMIGRANT RIGHTS SOCIAL MOVEMENT?

#### **Mass Mobilizations**

As discussed in Chapter 1, immigration reform came to the forefront of the national political debate during the summer of 2005, when various bills were proposed before Congress to address the country's immigration crisis. With a perceived ever increasing number of undocumented immigrants coming into the United States, coupled with a fear of exploitation of the immigration system by potential terrorists, there existed public pressure for federal immigration reform to find a way to fix the broken system. While some legislation aimed for a comprehensive immigration reform (including greater border security, expansion of the guest worker program, along with a legalization program- specifically the McCain-Kennedy Bill), other proposals focused exclusively on the border and immigration law enforcement aspect, the most infamous being the Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, better known as HR4437.

HR4437 included provisions for: a 700 mile fence along the US-Mexican border, the use of an electronic verification system by employers, a requirement for federal officials to take custody of any undocumented immigrant detained by state or local police, and a mandate making it illegal for any person or organization to assist a person who remained illegally in the United States. At the same time, there was a surge of restrictionist legislation at the state and local levels, as localities began to take action against their perceived immigration problems in the wake of inaction by the federal government. HR4437 was passed by the House of Representatives in December of 2005, and then sent to the Senate for consideration.

In response to HR4437, in early 2006, immigrant rights activists began to form coalitions across the country. The goals of the activists were to protest the various draconian provisions of

HR4437 and call for the Senate to reject the bill in favor of a more comprehensive immigration reform, along the lines of the McCain-Kennedy bill (Navarro, 2009). Beginning in California, a traditional immigrant destination area, and home of larger immigrant rights based organizations, the protests spread across the country to new destinations such as Atlanta and Charlotte by April of 2006. On May 1 2006, instead of traditional May Day demonstrations, organizers promoted “A Day without a Mexican.” Organizers urged immigrants across the country to not to go to work or shopping that day, keep their children home from school, and participate in public protests. At their peak, such efforts brought up to 1 million people out in protest of HR4437 and other anti-immigrant legislation, most of whom were Latino immigrants (Navarro, 2009, 340). In Charlotte, an estimated 10,000 people participated in the 2006 rallies, most of which occurred in Marshall Park, adjacent to the main business and financial district of the city. (Coto & Ordonez, 2006, 1A). While not nearly as large as the protests in cities such as Los Angeles or Chicago, the events in Charlotte were still significant for the city, representing approximately ten percent of the Latino population of the greater Charlotte area.

The immigrant rights protests arguably had many of the features necessary for a successful social movement. First, the minimum level of potential social movement leadership was present and took initial efforts to organize activities. Second, a political window of opportunity opened, with immigration reform on the political agenda and debated across the country. Finally, the attempted framing of the debate by various immigrant rights organizations aimed to create a broad base on which to bring people together on the issue. All of these qualities are elements from the previously mentioned approaches to social movements and are arguably some of the most important for each respective theoretical approach (resource mobilization, political processes, and collective action framing respectively). Numerous scholars

in fact saw such mobilization in the wake of the 2006 rallies as the beginnings of a new Latino social movement (Gonzalez, 2009; Barreto et al., 2009; Garcia & Sanchez, 2008).

### **Successful Features of the Burgeoning Movement**

In this section I will review the mobilizations in light of the three major social movements theories discussed in Chapter 2: resource mobilization, the political process approach, and framing. In the analysis of the mobilizations, one can see the presence of many of the critical factors necessary for a successful social movement. These positive factors in fact made many hopeful that an immigrant rights movement would form and play a major role in future immigrant reform debates.

#### **Resources Mobilization: Leadership and Resources Present**

Under resource mobilization theory, the variability of resources is paramount in explaining the emergence of any social movement. Arguably, this factor was indeed present in the South and across the country by mid 2006. For the first time, particularly in new destinations like the American South, individuals and organizations existed that could provide leadership in this social movement. Good leaders can effectively hold together a large organization as well as effectively manage and bring together resources to make collective action possible (Garcia & Sanchez, 2008). Mobilization and management of both external and internal resources are of the utmost importance to movements in the startup stages of development (Tarrow, 1998). Leaders in particular can be the “most effective in presenting an organization’s interest to the outside society,” especially in the effort to bring together allies and outside resources (Garcia & Sanchez, 2008, 149).

By 2006, a small yet clear set of leaders among the Latino population in Charlotte had emerged, specifically in the form of leaders from various immigrant service organizations. One elected official in fact pointed out that when dealing with the Latino community in Charlotte,

government officials now knew who to contact when there was need for feedback from this segment of the population (interview, August 5, 2009). In addition, because many of the leaders were from community aid agencies, they had knowledge of the local political scene as well as how to get an organization's message out to the general public (previously for fundraising purposes, but applicable for general awareness campaigns as well). The presence of these leaders, who arguably would be best able to skillfully manage and acquire new resources, added huge potential to the immigrant rights movement.

Furthermore the rise of Spanish language media in Charlotte and new destinations provided an outlet for this leadership to emerge and reach out to the community. Over the last ten years, Charlotte, like other new destinations developed a Spanish language media base that the Latino immigrant community turned to rely upon for community information and support (interview, July 27, 2009). With this specific medium now available through which community leaders could reach out to the immigrant population, the resource potential of the immigrants' rights movement grew exponentially as the disparate community became more accessible for recruitment to attend meeting and rallies.

The immigrant community also benefited from additional resources from ally organizations, especially religious groups. Religious leadership in some of the Christian denominations took part in mobilizations and those heading Latino congregations spread the word about rallies and education efforts. While the resources of these groups, especially in 2006-2007, was limited in nature, the symbolic importance of religious involvement as well as the physical space they could provide at times, provided needed resources to the movement. But resource mobilization is not usually sufficient for a mass action to become a social movement; the political climate must be taken into account when considering when might be the best to

move forward with collective action. Only within certain political contexts can change be possible, which is the basis for the political process approach.

## **Political Processes**

### **Immigration on the agenda**

During this time, immigration reform was clearly on the political agenda, both at the federal as well as the state and local levels. In particular in Charlotte, increasing pressure to pass local measures to respond to the immigration problem created an environment in which immigrants' rights had to be addressed; otherwise the local climate was likely to become even more immigrant hostile. Mecklenburg County was already one of the first local government bodies to sign a 287(g) agreement with ICE, and a mayoral immigration task force was also commissioned to provide recommendations for handling the immigration problem (Weeks et al., 2006).

The multiple spheres in which immigration policy was being debated (local, state, federal) were one political context which provided an opportunity for mobilization. There was a political opening in the fact that immigration was already on the agenda and minds of politicians. Resources would not need to be spent on making politicians aware of the issue, therefore allowing the movement to be goal oriented. In addition, the rather restrictive immigration measures being proposed, national and locality, provided a catalyst for community unity and action. The fact that localities were taking actions in an area traditionally seen as a purely federal concern meant that there were issues close to home in which to advocate for or against. While many immigrants may not have had the time to take off work to go to protest in Washington, gathering in the plaza near downtown Charlotte one weekend was something that was possible. Arguably if the debate had been solely based on federal immigration reform and HR4437, it

would have been much harder to convince immigrants in Charlotte that a rally would make a difference.

Yet at the same time, those immigrants who mobilized in Charlotte were part of a broader movement to make people aware that immigrants had a presence in all regions. The 10,000 protestors in Charlotte were just part of the more than three million people gathering across the country. Immigrants in new destinations, like North Carolina, could be assured they were part of a greater community and had some role in national debate over immigration reform (Zepeda-Millán, 2010). The fact that so many rallies occurred simultaneously in so many cities was vital to demonstrate the immigrant rights movement's strength and significance in the national debate on immigration policy (Benjamin-Alvarado et al., 2009). Those in Charlotte and other new destinations were making a difference both locally and nationally- empowering them without taxing their limited resources.

### **Courting the Latino vote**

Another element of political opportunity which came into play during this time period, and one observed by Tarrow, is that of shifting political alignments. Changing coalitions encouraged those non-aligned political groups being sought after to exercise their now important power, especially as elite “compete for support outside the polity” during this time of political change (Tarrow, 1998, 78). Leading up to and during this time period, the Latino vote, a growing segment of the population, was up for grabs and had attracted the attention of both parties. Republicans and Democrats had been attempting to capture this important and growing voting population since the 2000 presidential election (J. Garcia & Sanchez, 2004). During 2006, with mid-term elections on the way, it was the time for the Latino voting population to come forth and make demands on issues of importance to them as both parties attempted to court their political allegiance.

In fact in the wake of the mobilizations, the leaders of the Latino community began a drive to emphasize the power of the ballot and the need for those who could vote to register and ensure their voices were heard on this issue (Coto, 2006). Organizations moved to offer English and civics classes to help those who had LPR status naturalize and become voting citizens. Furthermore, this citizenship effort was a relatively low cost endeavor, and added legitimacy to the immigrants' rights movement because it was more than just groups of undocumented people protesting- but actually voting citizens.

Yet, it is important to point out that political elites were more concerned with the Latino voting population than listening to the immigrant population as a whole (or particularly the undocumented). While many immigrants are in fact of Latino origin, this does not necessarily translate into immigrants' concerns shared by all Latino citizens. Yet the use of collective action framing by the immigrants' rights activists during 2006, were successful in painting this as an issue that applied to beyond the undocumented, to anyone of Latino decent or with immigrants in their family. With the Latino population as whole in support of immigration rights and willing to mobilize, the movement gained serious political clout and recognition.

### **Framing: Immigrant Rights as Latino and Human Rights**

Grievances must be inscribed into "overall frames that identify an injustice, attribute the responsibility to others, and propose solutions to it" in order for mass action to transform into a social movement (Tarrow, 1998, 111). Leaders from social movements ideally adopt frames that reach the widest possible audience to build up a base of support from which to launch significant instances of collective action. In the United States, the idea of "rights" has been a particularly important frame of social movements since the 1960s, and was adopted by the immigrant mobilizations as well (Snow & Benford, 1992). For the South in particular, there was some analogizing the immigrants' rights movement with the civil rights struggles in the '60s and talk

of continuing the fight for equality for the new underclass of American society (however, as will be explained later this strategy backfired to some degree).

More important than the civil rights framing were the successful efforts by the organizers to emphasize a sense of Latino ethnic solidarity, turning the immigrant rights issue into one of greater Latino rights. In particular, a key frame that resonated across Latino nationality lines was the emphasis on families and family unification. Much of the Latino population has some history with immigration to the United States and with family members that are not U.S. citizens. More than half of all undocumented immigrants live in a “mixed-status” family, meaning with a family member that is a U.S. citizen or legal resident. One in five children in the U.S. as whole is born into “mixed-status” families (Thronson, 2008, 397). All of this made family unification a resonating and powerful theme (Martinez, 2008).

An even more powerful rallying point and theme was increase racial profiling in immigration enforcement (Navarro, 2009; Barreto et al., 2009; Okamoto & Ebert, 2010). This was evidenced through documented cases of racial profiling by localities with 287(g) agreements. Roadblocks in Latino neighborhoods and targeting vehicles driven by Latino males, served as a rallying force to expand the fight beyond simply immigrant rights – particularly as it began to affect the lives of U.S. citizen Latinos (Deaton, 2008; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009). The rise of anti-immigration legislation and policy and the spillover effect on the Latino population threatened but also mobilized the community (Zepeda-Millán, 2010; Benjamin-Alvarado et al., 2009). With Latinos as a whole united on this issue of immigration, the immigrants’ rights movement now had even more people for mobilization and a sizable portion of supporters who could exercise their right to vote to express frustration on behalf of their immigrant allies.

The extreme measures of HR4437 also mobilized supporters outside the Latino community who feared the law's broad reach would criminalize daily conduct. Provisions making any person or organization who aided an undocumented alien - in even basic forms - face imprisonment, created push-back from some of the native born population (Zepeda-Millán, 2010). From employers, landlords, and small businesses, to churches and soup kitchens, those whose daily lives involved interaction and business with the undocumented population realized the potential criminal liability they could face in wake of such laws. With such harsh punishments and rather vague boundaries as to what activities could fall under the new laws, a small but significantly important population segment of the native born turned against HR4437 and became allies of the immigrants' rights movement.

Under all three theoretical approaches, resource mobilization, political processes, and framing, there were significant signs of the formation of a new immigrant rights social movement during 2006. Yet despite efforts to maintain the movement, after the defeat of HR4437 in the Senate, most immigrants and Latinos went back to their daily lives. In Charlotte, one Latino community leader found that while many people were still interested in keeping up with the news of immigration reform, getting significant numbers of people out to rally was just not possible after mid 2006 (interview, August 7, 2009). What prevented the social movement from taking off? Why have immigrants who were willing to protest in 2006, now removed themselves from much of the efforts on immigration reform?

### **Failure to Launch**

The immigrant rights mobilizations in the South, and elsewhere in the country, failed to convert themselves into sustainable collective mobilization. While many of the features of successful social movements were present, leadership issues, limited resources, tension with the black community and policy stalemate hindered the immigrant rights struggle in Charlotte.

On a national level, once the movement achieved success with the defeat of HR 4437 and there was a sense that no future bill would contain similar draconian elements, various factions within the immigrant rights movement were co-opted by compromise and moved away from confrontation and protest. Church leadership, labor unions, and moderate Hispanic Americans were drawn into the immigrant rights movement out of concern for HR 4437, but that was as far as common interests aligned. Questions of whether to settle for a compromise like the McCain-Kennedy bill, or to continue to mobilize and push for wider and more liberal reform, split the movement into pieces (Gonzales, 2009). Furthermore the increased localization of immigration policy (such as through 287(g) programs), led to a decline in commonality across the country- as concerns of immigrants focused on local issues that the national movement was not prepared to address (Benjamin-Alvarado, 2009). This localization can be seen in the specific difficulties experienced by the movement in Charlotte.

### **Lack of Willing Leadership**

While quality leadership options were present in the Charlotte community, there was hesitation and tension in the decision as to who would lead mobilization efforts. The number of Latino and immigrant assistance organizations has increased over the years, the Latin American Coalition (the Coalition), is the largest and oldest organization in the area and is still the only organization with enough resources to realistically take on such a role. As two local scholars on immigration geography, Heather Smith and Owen Furuseth, commented, there is a perceived hesitation on the part of other organizations to increase their own advocacy efforts. They commented that the Coalition may be seen as “too effective,” which acted as a disincentive for other organizations with fewer resources to step up (interview, July 12, 2009). Furthermore, the Coalition was the principle organization to deal with the political backlash from the mobilization efforts, a burden others are not likely willing to help share. While leaders of organizations have

recognized this lack of cooperation before, little meaningful progress has been made to address it (Deaton 2008); (interview, August 7, 2009).

At the same time, while the Coalition has taken on leadership responsibility and created a specific program for political advocacy, it is still reluctant to take on advocacy and mobilization full time. The Coalition at times has been almost forced to be the leading organization, especially with regards to logistics. During the April 2006 rallies, people looked to and assumed the Coalition would get the necessary protest permits and handle the sound equipment and other logistical needs. According to Coalition leaders, they were willing to do this because they had the experience and the knowledge to do so, but it was not part of their initial plan to be so overtly involved. And while advocacy efforts by the Coalition have expanded, its long-term goal is to work more to support grassroots efforts of the clients themselves and encourage the community to define the issues on which it wants to see action. For the Coalition, efforts should focus on empowering clients to act for themselves, rather than creating a situation where people must rely on the Coalition for action (interview, August 7, 2009).

### **Limited Resources**

The availability of resources also hampered the ability of some organizations to step up and share the responsibility of leading and organizing protests with the Coalition. Smaller groups like the United National and International Spanish Alliance (UNISAL) and Hondureños Unidos, have been unable to take the lead in any serious fashion with regards to political advocacy. These smaller organizations, while expanding their services over the years, have reported that they do not have the resources to get more seriously involved. Unlike the Coalition, which receives some United Way and county funding for social services, most of the smaller organizations rely solely on donations. UNISAL, for example, commented that it has to pick and choose how and where

to allocate resources, and has focused on more immediate and financially feasible areas to direct its work in the community (interview, May 13, 2011). The organizations focuses on helping its clients with basic immigration petitions, taxes, and the procurement of national identification cards to better meet the immediate needs of the community. Without such support and additional resources, the Coalition remains the only local organization capable of providing any significant resources to mobilization efforts. Furthermore, the immigrant community in Charlotte has been unable to contribute significantly to cover financial costs necessary for protests and advocacy, thus leaving the Coalition to rely on funding from primarily native citizen donors and public funding from the city - sources that are harder to maintain when public reaction turns against the immigrant community.

### **Tension with the Black Community**

In addition to leadership and resource allocation issues, early efforts to draw analogies the immigrant rights struggles to that of the civil right movements backfired to some degree and limited the potential base of supporters. Especially in the South, the civil rights movement took shape in the form of mass protests and collective action (Tarrow, 1988). Arguably some parallels can be seen between efforts of local governments to make immigrants feel unwelcome and akin to second class citizens, and the Jim Crow laws by the southern states that relegated black Americans to second class citizens. Framing the immigrants' rights struggle as one part of the greater civil rights struggle was seen as a way to encourage support from the black community in the South.

However, while Charlotte lacked the overt racial hostility that occurred in other Southern cities, support from black communities was never realized. One local reporter commented that he often heard complaints that immigrant protests were concerned with a different category of rights (interview, July 27, 2009). Black American citizens saw the immigrant rights struggle as

completely different from their own during the civil rights movement (interview, July 12, 2009). Some blacks contrasted their own struggle as one fighting for rights in their own country where they were born, where as immigrants were asking for rights and privileges in a country to which they chose to come, many in violation of the law. Furthermore, the lack of overt violence and struggle that occurred in comparison to the civil rights movement made the analogy less powerful among the black community (Deaton, 2008).

One of the most powerful divisive issue between black and Latino immigrant communities were fears of economic competition between the two groups (Ordonez, 2006; Deaton, 2008). In fact, several black academics and community leaders came out against elements of immigration reform, warning that it would be a “disaster” and one that would “hit black citizens the hardest” (Ordonez, 2006, 1A). At first glance this fear does appear to have some legitimacy - much of the employment that immigrants have taken on has been in areas traditionally filled by black Americans, much of the unskilled labor- such as construction and housekeeping. In particular, as the American economy began to slow down in the late 2000s there was some sense from black leaders that Latinos were undercutting blacks by working for lower wages (Deaton, 2008).

Viewing the situation as a zero-sum game, some segments within the black community hesitate to help the Latino population, for fear of losing out, especially economically. While economic data on the effects of immigration on black employment is somewhat mixed, numerous studies have demonstrated that Latinos have had little if any significant effect on black employment in the American South. In fact, for Mecklenburg County specifically, black employment actually rose between 1990 and 2000, even with increasing numbers of Latino immigrants (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005).

As one reporter commented, “how the movement was portrayed was key” (interview, July 27, 2009). Adopting the language of the civil rights movement without significant pre-existing support from the black community further intensified existing resentment and created a fear of rising competition for blacks’ hard fought gains in economic and especially political power (Ordonez, 2006). With few local leaders from the black community voicing their support for immigrant rights, wider support from the community never materialized.

### **Continuance of 287(g) and Policy Stalemate**

The final element that hurt efforts to create a social movement was the simultaneous failure of HR4437, efforts at federal immigration reform, and efforts to repeal 287(g) in Mecklenburg County. The Senate’s rejection of HR4437 was a significant achievement for the immigrant right demonstrators, yet their more complete goal of comprehensive immigration reform has not been politically feasible. By the end of 2006, it was clear that immigration reform would be off the table until a new presidential administration began. With this, many of the moderate political elites who had come on board to stop HR4437 began to shift their focus to other matters (Gonzalez, 2009).

At the local level, none of the more restrictionist measures proposed by the Mayoral Task Force, were adopted. Yet the 287(g) has continued and most likely will stay in place for the indefinite future, according to one county commissioner (interview, August 5, 2009). While numerous efforts have been made to create a dialogue about the use of 287(g) in the community, its continued presence has not made the immigrant community feel any more welcome in the Charlotte area. On issues that matter in the community such as 287(g), education, and labor rights, the situation has not worsened, but the mobilizations failed to markedly improve the situation- even at the local level.

Specifically the inability to eliminate the 287(g) program<sup>1</sup> continues to create a climate of fear and hampers any meaningful relationship between the immigrant community and law enforcement (interview, July 12, 2009). While numerous community and religious leaders have attempted to create a dialogue between the Sheriff's office and the immigrant community about the reality of the 287(g) program and its (hypothetically) limited scope, mistrust still exists. Mecklenburg's 287(g) agreement is limited to jail enforcement, meaning that officials only screen those brought into the county jail after committing offenses. However, around the country, the number of incidents of immigrants being brought in on minor charges and then placed into removal proceedings has been found to constitute over half the number of immigrants removed via the 287(g) program (Capps et al., 2011, 2). In fact the communities located in the American South,<sup>2</sup> were found to constitute the top localities for issuing detainers<sup>3</sup> on immigrants whose sole criminal offense was a traffic violation (Capps et al., 2011, 23).

The overall lack of meaningful political success has been found to be one factor in particular that can deter immigrant participation and organization (Klandermans et al., 2008; Okamoto & Ebert 2010). While immigrants themselves were not interviewed, one community leader did comment that local policy has been something that arouses less interest and passion, perhaps indicating a presence of cynicism among immigrants that discourage further

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<sup>1</sup> While more recently the Department of Homeland Security has implemented nationwide the Secure Communities Program, which seeks to identify from arrestees, anyone with a deportation order. In Charlotte, the continuance of the 287(g) program is the larger issue due to the fact that with a 287(g) program, local law enforcement can initiate deportation proceedings, while secure communities allows ICE to simply issue a detainer if they wish to deport the alien in question.

<sup>2</sup> This study found of the top ten localities based on number of detainers issued against immigrants, five were located in the South: Cobb County, GA, Gwinnett County GA (which both are part of the Atlanta metro area), Mecklenburg County, NC (Charlotte), Wake County, NC (Raleigh) and Davidson County, TN (Nashville).

<sup>3</sup> A detainer is how a local law enforcement officer under the 287(g) program can begin the deportation process. Once an alien is brought into custody, officers will question the immigrant to ascertain their legal status. If warranted, officers may then issue an immigration detainer. If a detainer is issued, it must be signed by an ICE supervisor. ICE agents can then pick up the alien for transfer to immigration detention within 48 hours. However, it is within the discretion of the ICE supervisor to not sign the detainer, at which point local law enforcement no longer have authority to hold the alien on the basis of immigration violations.

mobilization (interview, August 7, 2009). While HR4437 was never passed, 287(g) remained in Mecklenburg County and, in fact, deportations under the program have increased since the 2006. By 2009, over 62,000 immigrants were identified for removal from 287(g) localities, a tenfold increase from 2006 (Office of the Inspector General, 2010, 6).

Collective action over immigrants' rights failed to transform itself into a social movement, but what does that mean for the future? Could the movement revive itself and make another attempt at mobilization and advocacy to bring up meaningful (and positive) immigration reform?

### **Discussion**

The protest and mobilizations in 2006 had many features of a successful social movement. Given these features scholars and immigrant activists at the time may have believed that a new social movement was being born as the protests grew in number and spread across the country. The defeat of HR4437 was no small accomplishment and demonstrated the power of massive mobilization when there is unity and coordination. Using the three social movement theories, resource mobilization, political processes, and framing, one can see underlying elements necessary for social movement formation. Yet as discussed, the movement ultimately failed to achieve lasting success due to the issues of leadership conflict, limited resources, tension with the black community, and stalemate of 287(g) policy.

These particular challenges faced by the immigrant rights movement in Charlotte, demonstrates the need for the application of multiple theories simultaneously to understand social movement formation and success. The numerous leaders and their inability to unify into a cooperative single effort led to a splintering of resources, at the time when unification and resource consolidation are critical according to the resource mobilization approach. The inability to change aspects of the 287(g) program and its increased popularity with political leaders,

reflect the political processes approach and its emphasis on the underlying political opportunities. Local political leaders felt pressure to deal with the immigrant community in some manner and 287(g) became a simple and popular measure for local leaders to take action, with little economic costs and almost no political fallout. Little political incentive existed for leaders to repeal the program, especially with push back coming from a non-voting population segment. Finally, the attempt to frame the immigrant rights movement as analogous to the civil rights movement, without significant black leadership support backfired against the immigrant community, diminishing potential allies and at the same time increasing political tension. It is only with the application of all these theories that we gain a more complete understanding of the challenges faced by the immigrant rights movement.

One aspect of social movements not touched on is the existence and use of social networks and social capital. The existence and creation of social capital has been noted by scholars as an important variable in social movement success (Putnam, 2000; Williams et al., 2009). In particular the use of “bridging” social capital can help connect groups and create broader bases of support on issues with which one can bring greater pressure on political elites to act. It is with the potential of bridging social capital that the immigrants’ rights movement has a hope to re-energize itself. Gathering allies will greater improve efforts by immigrants to lobby against local anti-immigrant policies, as well as bring people back out to mobilize if necessary. But where is the best place to look to find such allies? The next chapter examines the rise of various community and religious organizations in the immigrant rights movement and how these organizations helped continue the struggle for immigrant rights in Charlotte.

## CHAPTER 4 COMMUNITY AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

As explored in the previous chapter, the immigrant rights social movement failed to launch, not just in the American South, but across the United States. However it was in the South, in the wake of the immigrant rights mobilizations, that the anti-immigrant backlash was the strongest. Localities throughout the region sought ways to become less attractive destinations for unauthorized immigrants. More 287(g) agreements were signed, and in Charlotte, NC Congresswoman Susan Myrick successfully established a new immigration court to speed up the deportation process in North Carolina (Zagaroli, 2008, 1B).

With the undocumented immigrant population unable to achieve significant policy reform, even on the local level, the immigrants' rights struggle had to shift focus. In wake of the backlashes against immigrant mobilizations from the local community, the movement curtailed many of its more visible activities, especially significant public demonstrations. However, that has not meant an end to the immigrant rights struggle in Charlotte or in other new immigrant destinations. Since late 2006, the immigrant rights struggle has shifted focus and become a cause taken up by various community and religious organizations. These organizations have not only taken on an advocacy role on behalf of the undocumented population by lobbying political leaders but also have implemented educational outreach programs in an effort to change the attitudes and stereotypes that have contributed to the negative political climate around the issue of immigration. It is with these organizations that the immigrant rights movement has found a viable method to continue the fight for immigration reform.

### **Secular Community Organizations**

When immigrants are unable to successfully organize and become involved in local political advocacy, Latino community groups are places where the undocumented can go for

assistance. While much of the immigrant population in the Charlotte area are new arrivals, Latinos have had a presence in Charlotte long enough that various Latino community groups exist, some for almost twenty years. Although not every organization is all inclusive in the services that it provides to the immigrant community, many strive to be more than social service organizations. Most secular organizations serve as resources and advocates for the immigrant population, allowing immigrants to gradually become involved in American civil society. For the term civil society, I use Richard Wood's definition, which is organizations "that are not part of political society or government and in which members of a society reflect upon and form values and attitudes..." (2002, 127). With these organizations, the hope is that immigrants can become empowered to build up the skills and connections, or what Robert Putnam calls "social capital", necessary to reinvigorate the immigrant rights movement. As social capital is so important in the formation of social movements, further discussion is warranted.

### **Social Capital**

As Putnam writes, "civic engagement and social capital entail mutual obligation and responsibility for action" (2000, 21). Those seeking to engage and change the political system, benefit from the connections and trust they establish throughout their lifetime. Higher levels of social capital (defined as the connections among individuals, and the value these social networks possess) allow people to call upon friends and allies when in need of political support. One form of social capital, social networks are in fact noted for being a "common source of recruitment into social movements" (Tarrow, 1998, 124). Therefore immigrants seeking to breathe new life into the immigrant rights movement, especially in new destinations like Charlotte, would benefit from established relationships and connections- something these Latino secular organizations seek to provide- at least across the Latino community itself. With such social capital, the immigrant community could be more unified during any future mobilizations.

In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam identifies two forms of social capital, bonding and bridging (2000). Bonding social capital is seen as a more exclusive form of social networking that often works to reinforce identities and make those on the “outside” feel even more excluded. Examples of bonding social capital related to immigrants would be Latino community organizations (because of their ethnic nature), or social groups based on nationality. While these organizations often create very deep personal connections between members, those who do not fit the nationality or ethnicity of the group usually feel excluded. There is deep in-group loyalty with bonding social capital, but it can also create antagonism between the group and everyone else. Bridging social capital, meanwhile, works to link various groups together, often creating broader identities and coalitions between groups who find a common cause or purpose. Bonding social capital is particularly well-suited for those groups in need of additional resources and for those in search of wide information distribution.

Bonding and bridging are not mutually exclusive choices, and many groups in fact do bond and bridge at the same time- including some of the immigrants’ rights groups. As the organizations seek to empower and make connections in the Latino community, many also do some outreach beyond the Latino community, to slowly create bridging social capital that is more useful for broader social movements (Putnam, 2000). The ability of Latino community organizations to create bridging social capital, however, may be limited, as I will discuss later on.

### **Latino Organizations in Charlotte**

As mentioned, Charlotte has a variety of Latino community organizations, the largest and most well-known of which is the Coalition. Other groups include Mi Casa Su Casa; UNISAL; and Hondurenos Unidos. All of these organizations are secular in nature and do not have any direct ties to religious organizations or congregations. All are also social service organizations to

varying extents, providing assistance with housing, wage disputes, and referrals to social services or shelters. Some groups also coordinate with various consulates to help immigrants obtain some form of identification (interview, August 7, 2009; interview, May 13, 2011).

Through their activities, all of these organizations create bonding social capital. Particularly through cultural celebrations and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, the Latino immigrant community in Charlotte is provided with a means of interaction with one another, across ethnic and nationality lines. Cultural celebrations, such as the Latin American Festival and ethnic holiday celebrations, seek to incorporate elements from across the region to demonstrate the diversity of the Latin population in the area to the immigrant and wider native born community. Analogous to what Steigenga and Williams found in their research in new destinations in Florida, cultural celebrations can act “as a unifying force” for the immigrant community (2009, 115). ESL classes also encourage intermingling and unity within the community, as classes often include intermixed levels, allowing people at various stages of English proficiency to assist one another. During ESL classes, members of the immigrant community get together, help one another navigate life in Charlotte, and relate over the difficulties they have faced living in the U.S.

Both cultural celebrations and ESL classes are also avenues these community groups use to create bridging social capital between the immigrant community and the native born population. Cultural celebrations are open to the public and are often advertised across the city. At the Latin American Festival I witnessed significant attendance from the Anglo-American community- especially since that the festival is held in the Southpark Mall area, an upper income neighborhood that is well trafficked location. The Latin American Coalition and Mi Casa Su Casa also use ESL classes to build connections by encouraging native-born Americans learning

Spanish to come to ESL classes for language partners. The local universities- the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, Central Piedmont Community College, and Davidson College- are also targeted for ESL volunteers and language partners- further creating bridging social capital.

### **Advocacy**

While some organizations like UNISAL do not engage in direct advocacy (due to limited resources), for the Coalition and Mi Casa Su Casa (the two larger Latino organizations), advocacy has become a large part of the daily workload (interview, May 13, 2011; interview, July 12, 2009). By working to mediate and resolve housing disputes, wage, and labor issues, as well as contacting law enforcement for families seeking information on detained individuals, both of these organizations often step in for the immigrant community when it is unable or unwilling to do so out of fear.

However, solely advocating on behalf of clients is not the end goal when doing advocacy work. As the Director of the Coalition stated, the organization's long term hope is that they can help "empower" their clients- assisting them along the way as they need it (interview, August 7, 2009). Recognizing that reactive advocacy was not enough, both groups have sought to support grassroots activity by the community. By providing meeting space, education, and technical assistance, the hope is that immigrants can begin to advocate on their own behalf. Because the resources of these community organizations such as these are limited, empowerment would allow them to help as much of the community as possible and become involved only in the more serious issues. This goal of working to self-empower the immigrant community, is in fact directly supported by the Coalition and its linkage with the Reform Immigration for America campaign, one of the largest groups involved in advocating for federal immigration reform. Connecting clients who want to become involved with the campaign, as well as "housing" the

North Carolina advocacy director in their office- demonstrates the assistance the Coalition provides to the immigrants' rights movement (interview, August 7, 2009).

### **Limitations**

While these community organizations have helped create bonding social capital within the Latino Community, there are limitations to their work and the help they can provide. These organizations are inhibited by two principle factors - limited resources and lack of appeal beyond the immigrant community.

As with any group of social service organizations, financial resources are limited and often involve similar groups competing for the same sources of money. While groups do cooperate on some issues, there is a sense of competition between groups at times, especially for financial resources and recognition (interview, August 7, 2011). The Coalition, being the oldest and largest organization, is sometimes seen as "too effective," as described by two local immigration scholars (interview, July 12, 2009). As a result, there in fact may be a disincentive for other organizations to get together or expand their operations. UNISAL's decision to offer only limited services is related to this very fact - any service expansion would compete against the Coalition and lead to the inefficient use of resources (interview, May 13, 2011).

Tension between organizations already exists, due to the rather large presence of the Coalition. During the mobilizations in 2006, when many of these community groups were working together to organize and coordinate the protests and rallies, the news media portrayed the event as organized solely by the Coalition, causing tension between organizations (interview, August 7, 2011). While over the years there have been improvements with groups teaming up and working together more often on issues, underlying personality disagreements remain (interview, July 27, 2009).

Even more limiting than financial and issues however, is the narrow support base that these organizations have been able to build to date. While, as mentioned, these Latino community groups seek to create bridging social capital, the rate of success has been low at this point. Though students and more socially active people from the Charlotte community have begun to work with these organizations, their reach into the wider Charlotte community is limited. Additionally, as these organizations have located themselves within the geographic areas which are more heavily populated by the Latino immigrant communities, their visibility to the native born population is almost non-existent. The limited resources and funding mean that broader outreach to the white and black community is not a possibility with so many other more immediate concerns needing to be addressed. The fact that they are Latino organizations, serving clientele who often do not have proficiency in English, by default limits the interest that native-born may have in the organizations.

With limited resources and limited appeal, the Latino community organizations can only go so far in their assistance. In order for the immigrant rights movement to become revitalized, especially in new destinations like Charlotte, a broader based coalition must be created. In particular there is the need for allies that can speak on the sensitive issue of immigration without being dismissed by politicians and the native born population as groups of illegals. But where can immigrants turn to for such assistance? Here is where religious institutions have played a vital role in the immigrants' rights movement, especially in the American South, as immigrants seek to find a respected ally from which the native born community can be reached.

### **Religious Organizations**

As Robert Putnam writes, "faith communities...are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America" (2000, 66). Churches provide a space and community in which people can build civic skills, create common interests, and become more involved in the

broader community (Putnam, 2000). These faith communities and organizations have become a vital part of the larger concept of civil society. As both Putnam and Wood found in their research, religious and faith-based organizations have come to play an ever increasing role in U.S. civil society.

As Putnam notes, many forms of social capital have declined over the past thirty years in American society (2000). However, faith-based communities remain one of the few reservoirs of social capital. Churches and other places of worship remain key spaces where people may interact and build personal connections with one another. In particular in the American South, the historical importance of the interaction between religion and politics warrant examination into the potential power that religious organizations can have in a social movement.

### **Religious Civic Organization**

With such a repository of social capital, it is not surprising that civil society and social movements have come rely on faith communities for organization and support. As Peggy Levitt notes, “faith communities come equipped with powerful resources and tools that encourage civic activism” (2008, 778). Religious communities in the past have been found vital to the foundation of social movements, like the civil rights movement (Morris, 1984; Putnam, 2000). Yet there is often a hesitancy to overtly intermingle religion and politics in American society. So how can religious organizations work successfully in this social movement context?

### **The moral authority of the Church**

Churches can be excellent resources for social movements and those involved in civic engagement because of the moral authority. They occupy in American culture. Working with issues through a religious framework, allows ideas and proposals coming from these groups to be articulated in an ethical framework, not a political one. Religious organizations often put forth a

moral vision of society, not based on (solely) political beliefs, making it harder to immediately be dismissed by elected officials (Wood, 2002).

The moral authority of the Church in the American South is of particular importance. As Putnam noted, unlike many other areas of the country, religious engagement is still comparatively high in the South (2000). The continued importance of religion in the lives of many Southerners, translates into a continued spillover effect of religion into politics of note in this region. Moral-political issues such as abortion, gay marriage, and separation of church and state play themselves out most heavily in the American South. Church positions on moral-political issues can be an important factor in shaping people's stances on these issues, as people look to church leadership for guidance.

However, it is not only the position that the Church may take, but also that of local religious leaders, that can affect the opinions and ideas of church members on political issues. Pastoral work itself has been noted as a way of "exercising influence" and many pastors recognize the effects they can have over those in their congregation. (Stout, 2010, 199). The leadership of the church not only helps members practice their faith, but also provides moral guidance and authority for people's lives outside of church. Church leaders recognize this role and have begun to acknowledge their role and influence outside the walls of the church. While not becoming expressly political, there is no avoiding the political implications that pastoral work may have.

One of the best historical examples of the role of church leadership and the moral authority religious based organizations can have in social movements, is in the development of the civil rights movement in the American South during the 1950s and '60's. Building from a base of strong and charismatic clergy leadership, the civil rights movement was able to get off

the ground as black clergy convinced their parishioners to become involved in the struggle for civil rights. One of the key initial drivers of the civil rights movement was the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, whose strategy was based on involvement of religious leadership. With religious leaders on board and involved in the civil rights movement, these leaders could take the message to their parishioners and encourage them to join the struggle (Morris, 1984). Once the black community was mobilized, the use of moral discourse and religious based organizational structures arguably gave the movement a political high ground which opponents found harder to attack and dismiss.

While the civil rights movement is an example of the success a social movement can have when joining forces with religious intuitions, it is by no means an easy task to accomplish. Religious civic organizations can face backlash, and resistance from within the church and from external opponents regarding involvement in political issues. However, the moral dimensions that religious organizations bring to issues make immediate dismissal less plausible by politicians, especially those in the American South.

### **Leadership training and networking**

Religious institutions additionally can play important roles in the creation of civil society and social movements because of the leadership training that members can gain from religious participation. Many religious congregations rely on members efforts to create a meaningful faith community. Congregations need volunteers to lead bible study, provide child care, and organize social events just as some examples (Ammerman, 2005). By volunteering for such activities, participants in religious communities take on administrative duties, learn event planning and preparation, and network both inside their congregations and with other external groups as well- all valuable skills for leading civil society and social movements (Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Marquardt et al., 2011). In fact, because of the political clout that religious organizations can

have, active members of religious organizations can easily transition to roles in political discussions and leadership (Levitt, 2008).

Putnam found that those who place a higher importance on religion are more likely to have higher levels of social capital. Higher levels of social capital, whether through service groups, sports clubs, or volunteer organizations, correlate with increased levels of civic engagement. While Putnam cautions not to assume causation between the two factors, the existence of a relationship is still significant (2000). Religious organizations can provide important resources to those seeking to become more involved in their community in any fashion; further explaining why a floundering social movement might turn to religious groups to rebuild and refocus their mission. However it is not just the availability of resources that religious organizations can provide that make them a logical ally in the immigrant rights movement. One must also consider the role that churches themselves play in many immigrants lives.

### **Immigrants and the Role of Religion**

Peggy Levitt states, “God needs no passport” (2007). Religion is an important aspect of an immigrant’s identity that they bring with them when they migrate. While migrants may leave behind their families, jobs, and homes, they usually can bring their faith and religious practices with them. Particularly in wake of globalization and the connections that now exist between communities of faith across the world, an immigrant’s faith can be “a tool for staying connected to a homeland” (Levitt, 2007, 64).

When immigrants arrive in a new country, a connection to a religious institution arguably is the first and easiest connection to make in their community of settlement, especially if they are able to find places of worship under the same parent organization as they had back home . This is

particularly noteworthy in new destinations like Charlotte. In these locations, churches are frequently the only public spaces where immigrants feel welcome (Williams et al., 2009).

### **Religion and Assimilation**

Religious participation, in addition to providing the initial first source of support for immigrants coming to a new country, can also provide methods of acculturation to allow immigrants to become part of the larger American culture. Immigrants who attend inter-ethnic services, or participate in ethnic congregations “hosted” by native-born institutions gain “an intermediary education” from this contact (Levitt, 2007). Native born parishioners and church leaders can provide an important first connection between the immigrant population and broader community where they live- helping them find social services, employment, housing, etc.

As mentioned, religious institutions often provide members with numerous opportunities for civic engagement and leadership training, all of which can help with the assimilation process. In a study done looking at Canadian immigrants, it was found that when immigrants do volunteer, it was more likely due to religious motivations and with religious organizations when compared with the native born Canadian population (Handy & Greenspan, 2009). By volunteering and taking on responsibility, immigrants often acquired not only leadership experience, but also built up contacts with those outside the congregation, creating bridging social capital that can be called upon at a later time if necessary. Many immigrants in the study who volunteered outside their congregation in fact reported that their initial efforts began first with their congregation and expanded over time to non-religious based volunteering, reflecting a growth in social capital (Handy & Greenspan, 2009, 970).

As immigrants settle and assimilate in American society, religious institutions are also important in maintaining a connection to their home country and culture. With ethnic congregations, religious services can be conducted in another language and maintain certain

customs or rituals that are common in an immigrant's home country. Religious practice is one method first generation immigrants can use to pass on tradition and a sense of their original identity to their American born children, allowing them to share in religious beliefs and practices that maintain some sense of connection to the home country for future generations (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Warner, 2007).

### **Religious Organizations in Charlotte**

In Charlotte, the Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) have played the most active roles in addressing the needs of the immigrant community. These are the only two denominations that I found with a dedicated Latino or Hispanic Outreach coordinator with no additional pastoral assignments. For the Catholic Church, in the Charlotte Parish (which encompasses the Charlotte metropolitan area), eight churches offer a Hispanic ministry, with masses in Spanish. The Presbytery of Charlotte meanwhile has three Hispanic "missions" that offer services in Spanish, as well as provides additional services to the Latino community at other churches around the area.

The significant involvement with the immigrant community of these two denominations in Charlotte that have significant involvement mirrors their historical involvement at the national level. The Catholic Church "has taken perhaps the strongest stand on immigration reform measures" including sending a letter to President Bush in 2006 (Knoll, 2009, 315). The fact that Latino immigrants in cities across the U.S. are becoming a larger and larger percentage of the church-going population in the Catholic Church, makes this strong stance rather unsurprising. On the other hand, while the Presbyterian Church lacks a large historic Latino membership, it was one of the first denominations involved with the Sanctuary movement in the 1980s that protected Central American refugees from deportation (Gzesh, 2006). Since that time, the PCUSA national leadership has continued to call for an immigration policy that "work[s] toward

welcoming immigrants into our communities and providing just laws that effect those who live and work in the United States” (PCUSA, 2006).

The Catholic Diocese and the Presbytery of Charlotte connect immigrants to their home country and culture and help them adjust to life in the area. Over the last decade, both denominations have rapidly expanded the amount of Spanish language services offered, both in number and geographic distribution around the Charlotte metropolitan area. Additionally, both have expanded their social service offerings including everything from English classes and food pantries to transportation assistance (interview, July 16, 2009; interview, July 22, 2009). As the undocumented population is legally ineligible for most public assistance programs, churches have become the primary support network immigrants turn to when in need of assistance. Through these programs, religious organizations ease the transition to life in Charlotte, by not only providing immigrants something familiar (religious services they can understand) but also introducing them to the Charlotte community. Additionally, many Latino congregations share church space with native-born congregations and are led by native-born clergy members- allowing immigrants more meaningful contact with the native-born population.

### **Advocacy & outreach**

Beyond service provision, religious institutions in Charlotte also work in two other areas related to the immigrants’ rights struggle- direct political advocacy and outreach. It is in these new areas of activity by churches that the immigrants’ rights struggle has found new life and taken on a particularly unique dimension in the South.

Churches justify their expansion of services to immigrants as part of the biblical mandate to help those in need. When the local political climate became more negative towards the immigrant community, church leadership realized that in order to truly serve this community in need, they needed to provide more than social services (interview, July, 22, 2009). With local

laws and policies having a greater impact on the daily lives of immigrants, to the point where families were afraid to leave the house to attend services, church leadership felt it was time to step in and play a role in unifying the immigrant community.

In order to help bring the immigrant community together, churches began organizing meetings for immigrants to express mass grievances and help Latino community leaders better synthesize demands of the community to bring to political leaders (Deaton, 2008). With churches being one of the few relatively safe and familiar spaces- congregation halls became an easier place to gather the community together without significant fear of immigration checks. Additionally as about 70% of the Latino community in Charlotte is Roman Catholic, reaching out to the community through the Catholic Church arguably was an easy and effective way to get the word out to the community (Deaton, 2008, 16).

Even more significant than organizing the immigrant community however has been the efforts of churches to reach out and lobby to local political leaders on behalf of the immigrant community itself. By sponsoring and hosting forums for political leaders and candidates, as well as the Sheriff's Office, churches aim to be advocates of the immigrant population. Their hope is that through these forums, local leaders can better understand the needs of this growing community (interview, July 22, 2009). As mentioned earlier, the moral authority and power a church brings to a political issue is something political leaders in the South cannot easily ignore. With (some) religious leadership taking a positive stance on immigration policy, political leaders who adopt a more negative and anti-immigrant must confront and explain the moral dimensions of their views. If a church sees immigrants as God's people, why then are they not welcome in this community? This is a tough question for a politician to answer successfully.

As discussed in Chapter 3 mass mobilizations had little significant effect on local political leaders. The 287(g) program gained additional political support and animosity towards the immigrant community grew in the wake of the 2006 protests. With immigrants themselves unable to reach local political leaders, advocacy and outreach by religious institutions has become a more effective method for the immigrant community to express their grievances. In fact political leaders consider clergy as contacts they can turn to when they seek to reach out to the Latino community (interview, August 5, 2009). Churches have become an important ally for the Latino community. But it is not just the local political leadership that churches seek to educate about the Latino community. The native born population is also a focus of religious intuitions, as they seek to educate and change the attitude of the native born population towards the immigrants.

### **Education**

Education of the native-born population (both white and black) has become a third avenue of involvement that churches have taken on in their efforts to become more involved with the immigrant population. The Catholic Diocese, in fact, sees education of the native population as the most important part of its Hispanic ministry (interview, July 16, 2009). It is through educational and awareness programs that church leaders hope they can mediate problems and misunderstandings that arise between the native-born and Latino immigrant populations in the Charlotte area (interview, July 22, 2009). By conducting programs targeted to clergy and parishioners respectively, religious institutions are trying to reach out and change public opinion to make the overall climate less hostile to the immigration population.

According to church officials in both the Catholic Diocese and the Presbytery of Charlotte, there has been no significant backlash or resistance from clergy members or even parishioners to this education effort (interview, July 19, 2009; interview, July 22, 2009). What

has been more common is a lack of enthusiasm or interest from the native population to become significantly involved. Church members may not resist the church's involvement with the Latino community, and parishioners are learning to tolerate the presence of the immigrant community, but the involvement ends there. One official from the Diocese commented that while most native-born parishioners did not want a crackdown against the immigrant community, but they preferred to ignore the issue as whole (interview, July 19, 2009).

While ignorance may not be bliss in this situation, it is an improvement compared to possible backlash against immigrants. As one community leader stated, elected leaders and the native born population may not be ready for the "hard conversations" on immigration, but for now there is a sense of "let's all get along" (interview, August 7, 2009). In addressing immigration, churches like the Catholic Church and PCUSA in Charlotte, avoid directly discussing national immigration policy reform, but frame it as an issue of social justice and human rights (interview, July 19, 2009). This position on immigration policy, which could be considered a success for the immigrants' rights movement, does indicate the importance of the involvement of religious institutions. With major religious institutions involved in education and advocacy, the immigrant rights struggle has an important ally to temper heated discussions and shift the framing of the issue.

In Charlotte, religious institutions do not take a position on how immigration reform should occur, or whether an immigrant stays in this country or not. Instead, churches talk about how people in the community should treat one another, making all feel welcome. I believe, this framing by religious organizations, has altered the tone of the immigration debate and made a difference in preventing any more restrictive immigration policies (beyond the 287(g) program) since 2007. Charlotte has not experienced any additional push for local laws that target

immigrants on issues of housing, or loitering as are becoming prevalent in other communities around the nation. While churches have not had complete success in converting the native born community into dedicated allies of the immigrant community, the rhetoric around the issue of immigration has improved.

### **Discussion**

While the immigrants' rights social movement did not experience as much success as they has hoped, the cause that brought much of the Latino population together and out into the streets is not lost. In Charlotte, community and religious groups have stepped in and taken up many of the causes and goals that the immigrant rights movement held. Better treatment for the immigrant population and a change in the tone of debate about immigration policy are two primary causes that organizations continue to focus on in the Charlotte community. Through these groups, the immigrant rights movement has shifted tactics and found a more viable long term method to achieving its goals.

Secular community organizations continue to work with the immigrant community, providing education and resources to immigrants that can allow them to become better civic participants. By bringing the community together and building social capital, the hope is that immigrants will experience self-empowerment and be capable of taking action on their own when faced with political grievances in the future. However immigrant community unity and empowerment has its limits, especially in a community where deportation remains a real possibility, given the 287(g) program and record numbers of deportations (Capps et al., 2011).

This shortcoming is where religious institutions can and have begun to fill the gap and work with the immigrant community in its fight for social justice. The respected position of churches in the American South makes them powerful allies. Religion, politics and race in the South have an intertwined history, as demonstrated by the civil rights movement; a fact that

immigrant rights advocates have begun using to their advantage (Feldman, 2005). Religious organizations occupy a moral high ground from which to criticize actions of the political elite. They encourage their members to be more accepting of the immigrant community, and become more knowledgeable about why people come to this country, and the contributions immigrants are making to the community.

As discussed “specific locations provide particular opportunities and constraints for immigration mobilization” and Charlotte is no different in this regard (Steigenga & Williams, 2009, 123). As immigrant mobilizations on their own have failed to materialize into a meaningful social movement with political impact, religious organizations and their particular importance in the American South provide an avenue for affective advocacy. These institutions also allow for the creation of greater social capital and networks on which to rely for political advocacy and in future efforts to support the formation of an immigrant rights movement.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

### **Findings**

The immigrant rights movement and struggle had huge potential in 2006. With mass mobilizations occurring across the country, real change on the issue of immigration reform seemed possible. In new destinations across the country, including Charlotte, the immigrant mobilizations marked the first time many immigrants became politically active. Furthermore, the mobilizations in Charlotte made many in the native-born community aware of the size of the immigrant population. Through protests, education, and naturalization efforts, and voter registration campaigns, it seemed that the immigrant rights movement had developed into a successful social movement that would finally unite and empower the Latino community as whole.

However, as discussed in this thesis, the social movement largely failed across the country. In particular, an inability to sustain nationwide action for long periods of time hampered the immigrant rights movement's ability to maintain the strength it needed for policy changes. In Charlotte, specific challenges arose that the immigrant community was unable to overcome. Lack of willing leadership from the immigrant community itself, lack of sufficient resources to allow the community to self-organize, conflict and resistance from the black community, and the continuance of the 287(g) program were obstacles that the movement could not successfully manage. While some of the issues such as lack of willing and competent leadership and lack of resources were applicable to the immigrant rights movement as a whole, conflict with the black community and the 287(g) program were more localized issues. The traditional minority status and power that the black community has in Charlotte (and in many parts of the county- but especially the South) is an aspect that some within the black community believe would be

threatened by Latinos. While currently the Latino population does not have the political clout to threaten black political gains, this could occur in the future as immigrants naturalize and begin to vote. (Ordoñez, 2006, 1A). The underlying tensions between the Latino and black community must be addressed in the years to come if the immigrant rights movement wishes to remobilize.

The 287(g) program also presents particular issues in Charlotte and in other localities with such programs (again many of them being in the South). With 287(g), local police can intimidate the immigrant community in such a way that political engagement becomes risky. Fear of being arrested on a minor criminal issue, like public disorderly conduct, or driving without a license, makes attending public rallies and demonstrations a risk for the undocumented population. Even when local law enforcement do not target the immigrant population (and there are reports of times that they do) the effect of 287(g) is chilling on any mobilization effort in the community. In a community where any police stop could end in deportation, leaving one's house to get involved in a rally becomes a risk not worth taking.

Even with all of these setbacks, though, the immigrant rights movement has not lost all hope. As I found, the struggle for immigration policy reform in Charlotte shifted focus in the wake of these challenges. Community and religious organizations stepped in to take on the cause of immigrant rights. Latino community groups in Charlotte are attempting to reorganize and unify the community. By helping to create a united group that understands the American political system, these organizations' efforts may allow the immigration population to remobilize and make their voices heard- in Charlotte, and across the country.

In the meantime, while the Latino community groups do work in outreach and direct political advocacy, the religious organizations in Charlotte have become a principal ally of the immigrant population. Acting on behalf of the population, religious leaders in Charlotte have

reached out both to elected officials and the native born general population to educate the community on the realities of immigration and stress the need to humanize the discourse on the topic of immigration reform. From a moral high ground and respected position in Southern culture, religious leaders seek to detoxify the local political climate, and act at times as intermediaries between the native born and immigrant community. While the overall climate around immigration is still not a completely positive one, it has become less negative over the last few years. Native born Americans in Charlotte likely would still not rally with the immigrants if they were to protest again, but the calls for more deportations and further restrictionst legislation that would have targeted the immigrant community has dissipated.

### **Public Policy Implications**

While the debate over federal immigration reform is an issue beyond the current research, I believe that several public policy lessons can be gleaned from this work. First is the important role religious institutions can play when they choose to become involved in a political issue. Religious institutions have the ability to frame an issue in a way that is unmatched, especially in the American South. Those seeking to take on larger social causes should look to churches for immediate allies that bring a wealth of experience and power to the table.

Second, and related to the importance of religious institutions, is the need to broaden the base of any social movement, particularly those that that deal directly or indirectly with the issue of race. While the immigrant rights movement did attempt to frame the issue as one of human rights applicable to all U.S. citizens, the fact that many native-born Americans viewed immigration as a Latino issue hampered the ability to acquire allies. Additionally, the conflict between the black community and the Latino community further added a sense of racial divisions. While churches are beginning to address this issue by reaching out to educate the

native born population, more needs to be done. Especially in the American South, the issue of race is an ever present theme that has the ability to break apart political consensus.

Third, is the importance of education on all sides on the immigration debate. Changing native born Americans' misconceptions of the immigration population and why they come to this country is a key component to help detoxify the issue of immigration policy. By better understanding the immigrant community, native born Americans hopefully see immigrants not as a threat to the community, but instead as a group that plays a vital role in the local economy. The immigrant population also must become educated. Locally, immigrants need to be aware that programs like 287(g) are here to stay for the foreseeable future. On the national level, the immigrant community must become educated about the immigration laws of the United States so that specific and concrete proposals can be put forward when immigration reform comes back on the agenda. Only with detailed proposals, can there be hope of convincing the American people there will not be any blanket amnesty, but instead an economical and logical approach that will only ensure American economic stability. Immigrants will need to understand why the current system that favors family-based immigration may change to one focused more on the long term economic needs of the U.S.

### **Social Movement Success**

Measuring success of any social movement is not an easy task, as many movements "leave political by-products that lie outside their programs" (Tilly, 1999, 268). Scholars caution on making sweeping generalizations. As Marco Giugni states, "social movements are complex sets of groups...that may have different goals as well as different strategies for reaching their aims" (1999, xx). Especially with regard to public policy, social movements often fail to directly change policy. However, while social movements cannot always directly influence policy or get the best possible outcome, it does not mean they have no influence at all. Measuring the success

of social movements can and should go beyond looking for direct policy changes, as often times such methods give an incomplete picture of social movements (Guigni, 1999). The lasting effects of social movement are often not immediately apparent in the wake of demonstrations and protests.

In Charlotte, a good example of an indirect outcome of the immigrant rights movement is educational programs that are being instituted by the community and religious organizations. Through education, groups can “influence policy indirectly by convening information to elected officials, changing the public’s preferences, and intensity of its concerns” (Burstein, 1999, 19). The motivation behind these education programs was in part due to the lessons learned from the immigrant rights mobilizations and the difficulties faced by the immigrant community in gathering allies for mobilizations. It was these difficulties that spurred an effort towards education and outreach.

Another arguable success for social movements, is change in the tone and political discourse surrounding the issue(s) a social movement attempts to address. Related to the increased educational efforts ongoing in Charlotte and especially the involvement of religious groups, the lowering of political tension around immigration policy is of importance. Anti-immigrant sentiment has not disappeared in Charlotte and likely never will. At the same time, other than the 287(g) program, no other local policies have come into effect that aim to target the immigrant population. Charlotte has not become like Hazleton, Pennsylvania or Maricopa County, Arizona. Even on a state-wide level, to date, no Arizona style law has been passed by the North Carolina legislature.

Success may even extend outside of political aspects to include features with a cultural dimension (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995). In particular, when social movements include

strong elements of cultural identity, such as the immigrant rights movement, cultural aspects are important to consider when trying to measure success or failure. In the wake of the mobilizations, there has been an effort by community organizations to increase the social capital of the immigrant community, both bonding and bridging social capital. Furthermore within the immigrant community, the protests and subsequent work of the community organizations has created a basic infrastructure and knowledge base within the community which was absent during the initial mobilization efforts in 2006. Where previously, the community relied on groups like the Coalition to assist in organizing, the immigrant community now has individuals with the knowledge and experience to take the lead in the future if re-mobilization occurs. The recent protests in 2010 on the issue of in-state tuition for undocumented students demonstrate the increased capacity of the community to self-organize.

By focusing exclusively on policy outcomes when assessing the immigrant rights struggle, one would miss some of the more lasting effects of the mobilizations on the immigrant community. Policy wise, the immigrant rights mobilizations did help in the defeat of HR 4437, yet comprehensive immigration reform seems out of reach in the current political climate. But a broader understanding of success and methods of measurement does demonstrate numerous additional positive outcomes for the immigrant community, stemming from the 2006 protests. Many of these outcomes may have been unintended, yet still demonstrate the possible wide reaching political consequences of social movements despite the lack of significant policy reform.

### **Comparison with Other New Destinations**

While my research and findings are limited to Charlotte, North Carolina, there are some trends that I believe can be taken from my work to apply to other locations, especially other

Southern urban locations. Research from other scholars who have focused on Latino immigration to Southern urban locations parallels my findings from Charlotte.

Jamie Winders, whose research focused on Nashville, Tennessee, found trends very similar to that of Charlotte (2006). Nashville's change to a service-based economy fueled a boom in the Latino population during the 1990s. By the late '90s, in the wake of public pressure, the city council began considering various local initiatives to target the Latino community and address the problem of unauthorized immigration. In response, Latino community organizations had to transform their work to serve the needs of this growing population that was becoming political targets, similar to trends seen in Charlotte. The remaining question for Winders is how Nashville will come to "know" the Latino population, as this lack of knowledge is the key challenge to future inclusion of the immigration community (Winders, 2006, 1884). This importance of knowledge and education to the future of immigrant rights is comparable to my findings in Charlotte.

Work done in Atlanta, Georgia by Marie Marquardt, Timothy Steigenga, Philip Williams, and Manuel Vásquez also presents direct comparisons, in particular to the important role religious institutions can have in the immigrants' rights struggle. In Atlanta, "churches increasingly have put themselves on the front lines of a broken immigration system" (Marquardt et al., 2011, 158). Using specific examples of the work of Atlanta area congregations like Ray-Thomas Memorial Presbyterian Church and St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church, their research gives insight into how religious institutions can create opportunities to bring together the immigrant and native born communities in a positive way. Churches in Charlotte, especially the Catholic Church and the PCUSA are similarly working to bring together these communities

so that “tension and misunderstanding are replaced with love and interdependence” (Marquardt et al., 2011, 202).

These comparisons strengthen the idea of commonalities across new destinations, especially within the American South. Strategies that are successfully being implemented in Charlotte are similar to strategies being adopted in other Southern urban locations. Immigrant advocates across the South, can employ similar methods in their efforts to change the political discourse on immigration policy on the local and state level. Especially as more states like South Carolina and Alabama adopt state laws relating to immigration enforcement, the need for additional advocacy in the region is only increasing. Change will not happen overnight. Yet with similar methods, advocates in Charlotte, Atlanta, and Nashville have begun to make a difference in regards to immigrant rights.

### **Future Avenues for Research**

Several of the previously mentioned limitations of my study are ripe areas for additional research. A larger comparative study of multiple locations by one scholar would add to the ability to make comparisons and generalizations for the American South as a whole. Additionally, as no current research exists that directly compares urban to rural localities, such research would further our understanding as well as assist those involved in public policy advocacy to adopt more specific strategies for each location. Finally the views of immigrants themselves are missing in my research. Hearing their own perspectives on the immigrant rights struggle in Charlotte and across the South would allow for better conclusions on the needs of the immigrant community and what needs to be done to move forward to better incorporate the community into Southern society.

APPENDIX  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the local environment for the Latino population? And specifically the undocumented?
2. How did your organization come to help the undocumented population?
3. Was the organization founded by immigrants themselves?
4. If not what was the reasoning behind its creation?
5. Does your organization specifically advocate for the undocumented? If not, why not?
6. If so- what methods do you use- rallies? Awareness campaigns? Reaching out to elected leaders?
7. Has your organization been involved with any of the rallies/mobilizations since 2006 on immigration reform?
8. Was there a debate to be involved or not (if they participated)?
9. Why did your organization not participate (if the organization did not)?
10. Have you been involved with efforts at mobilization on local policy reform? Such as the Immigration and Custom Enforcement agreements with police?
11. How successful do you believe your methods have been? What has particularly worked well? What has not worked well? What have you learned from past efforts?
12. Have mobilization or advocacy efforts produced any sort of backlash against your organizations and/or the Latino community as a whole?
13. Have you changed any of your strategies from these successes/failures?
14. Do you believe local political leaders are responsive to the needs of the Latino population?
15. Do you work with other organizations in the area?

16. If so, have collaborative efforts been successful?
17. Which other organizations have you worked with?
18. Have you seen immigrant-run organizations developed out of some of your organizations advocacy and collective action efforts?
19. What are the reasons for the absence of immigrant-run organizations (if applicable)?
20. Do you see implications for the Latino community's lack of grassroots organization and networks? Specifically in the ability of Latinos to be political incorporated and heard by elected officials?
21. What do you see as the specific challenges for the undocumented population in Charlotte?
22. Are there similarities that you perceive between other locations around the South or the U.S. as a whole?

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

William R. Hummel was born in 1984 in Richmond, Virginia. He grew up outside of Richmond and went to high school at the Governor's School for Government and International Studies, graduating in 2002. Afterwards, William went to Davidson College where in 2006 he earned a Bachelor of Arts in political science with a Spanish minor. During his undergraduate studies he studied abroad in Spain and Argentina, where he developed an interest in migration studies. After college, William worked for two years as the Fellow in the Dean Rusk International Studies Program at Davidson. After his fellowship, William enrolled at the University of Florida in the Joint Degree program with law and Latin American studies. His research interests include immigration law and policy and effects of immigration on the American South.