Building Black-Brown Coalitions in the Southeast
Four African American-Latino Collaborations

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Preface from the SRC Board President

The Southern Regional Council's predecessor, the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, emerged during the historic “Red Summer” of 1919 – a high water mark of racial division in the United States. For the ensuing ninety years, we have sought to shed light on those barriers which impede the establishment of a just society in the South, and to illuminate a path toward the eradication of those barriers.

The Commission’s publications – including Charles S. Johnson’s Collapse of Cotton Tenancy and Ira Reid's Sharecroppers All – were instrumental in shaping rural policy for the Roosevelt Administration. The Council’s Ashmore Project resulted in the publication of The Negro in the Schools, which documented the harmful effects of segregation and was cited in the Supreme Court briefing in Brown v. Board of Education. For years, the Council worked to inform the nation’s labor policy through its annual reports on The Climate for Workers in the U.S. The Council’s 1998 report, Seeking an America as Good as its Promise, challenged conventional wisdom about white attitudes towards affirmative action remedies. Our 2008 report on Trends in Voting Policy revealed barriers which continue to impede full electoral participation in the South.

For most of its history, the Council’s work has addressed the paradigm of a South which was made up of two principal communities – one Black and one White. In the waning days of the 20th century, however, the Council began broadening its work to address the impact immigration was beginning to have in our region. The very definition of “minority” in the South had begun to shift, as Latinos and members of other communities of color settled in the region, and the Council was one of the first traditional race relations “think tanks” to address this new reality.

In 1999, the Council launched Partnerships for Racial Unity, a first tentative effort to envision bridges of cooperation and multi-racial understanding. We partnered with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) to co-sponsor a series of “Atlanta Parent Workshops” to increase the involvement of Latino parents in public schools. We collaborated with the University of Memphis Center for Research on Women and the Highlander Center for Research and Education in a community-based research project titled Race and Nation: Building New Communities for the South. This collaboration resulted in a report titled The New Latino South, which exposed the challenges which new immigrants face in finding their way in a social landscape defined in many locations by a contentious divide between Blacks and Whites. We held a series of meetings across the State of Georgia to promote cross-racial progressive coalitions and identify common interests and collaborative opportunities. Notably, our meetings in Dalton and Valdosta, Ga., surfaced important common concerns about the treatment of workers, access to quality health care, and lack of political representation. In one of our statewide gatherings, Latino participants expressed the belief that much could be learned from the experience and struggle of Black Southerners.

Our experience tells us that African Americans and Latinos in the South often face similar challenges as they seek to achieve their full social and economic potential. Instead of joining forces to achieve goals which they have in common, however, they often see themselves as competing in a “zero-sum game” for limited social, economic, and political opportunities. Standing against this trend are examples in which African American and Latino communities have come together to work collaboratively around issues of common concern.

With assistance from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Council has embarked on an effort to explore the prospects for collaboration between African Americans and Latino communities. This effort has been led by Project Director Joel Alvarado and Principal Researcher Charles Jaret, and much of their work has been informed by focus group participants from four very diverse Southern communities. We are deeply grateful to all of the participants for their roles in making this report possible. We believe this effort has produced insights which will be useful in identifying those conditions which best lend themselves to successful collaborations.

Charles S. Johnson, III
President, Southern Regional Council
Acknowledgements

We gratefully thank the Carnegie Corporation of New York for its financial support of this research project. Without this assistance our work and this resulting report would not have been possible. We also thank the Southern Regional Council’s Charles Johnson, III, for the drive he showed in getting this project started and his encouragement and faith in us throughout the months we’ve worked on it. We are also grateful to Charles and to the Rev. Dr. Marvin L. Morgan for valuable comments on a draft version of this report. Donald Reitzes, chair of GSU’s Department of Sociology, has been very supportive of this project and provided sound advice in its early stages. We also appreciate the administrative assistance the SRC’s Deborah Jennings has provided and the manuscript preparation assistance Quanda Miller (GSU Department of Sociology) has given. Three graduate students in GSU’s Department of Sociology made helpful contributions to this research: Pamela Daniels, Jim Baird, and William Holland, and we thank them very much for their efforts. Finally, it is hard to find words that fully express our gratitude to the men and women who participated in the focus group interviews. Each of them took time from their busy lives to spend over three hours discussing their group’s collaborative efforts and answering our many questions. Their dedication, kindness, and positive spirit were fully evident in their comments, and we greatly respect and admire them for the work they are doing. We are grateful for their cooperation and we hope this report accurately reflects and advances their accomplishments.

Authors’ Information

Joel Alvarado is the Policy Director of the Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (G-CAPP). He has extensive experience in research and policy development on issues related to social justice affecting communities of color. Previously, he has worked as Policy Analyst in the Southeast Region for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), and as Assistant Director for the Southern Center for Studies in Public Policy at Clark Atlanta University.

Charles Jaret is a Professor in the Department of Sociology at Georgia State University. He teaches and does research in the areas of urban sociology, race and ethnic relations, and immigration. His research publications include articles on economic inequalities between Blacks and Whites in American metropolitan areas, attitudes towards immigrants, college students’ racial-ethnic identities, and the measurement and impact of suburban sprawl, plus a book titled Contemporary Racial and Ethnic Relations.
Executive Summary

The increasing presence of Latinos living in the Southeast is one of the most obvious demographic changes occurring in this region. Between 2000 and 2007 the Latino population in Georgia and North Carolina grew by over 300,000 and 250,000 people, respectively, while other states in the region, such as Alabama and Kentucky, witnessed more modest but nevertheless substantial increases of 40,000 or more. Much of this population increase consists of people moving in from other regions of the U.S., Mexico, or other parts of Latin America. At the same time, however, the African American population in the Southeast has also been increasing, largely due to more Blacks moving to states like Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee than are moving away to other states.

This has produced a novel situation in many communities in the region – African Americans and Latinos encountering each other in work settings, schools, neighborhoods, and other places. While some interactions have gone smoothly, many have been fraught with misunderstanding, competition, suspicion, hostility, and conflict. Yet observers have noted that many members of both of these groups face some common obstacles: difficulties in finding higher-paying jobs, housing discrimination, inadequate educational opportunities, lack of quality health care, and police harassment. Perceptive individuals within the African American and Latino communities in the Southeast have suggested they have much to gain by collaborating to solve mutual problems, make connections, start dialogues, and act in cooperative ways to transcend the rather deep divisions separating them.

How can this be accomplished? Who is actually working on this? What problems do they encounter, and what successes have they had? What can be learned from their experiences? These are the questions that our research seeks to answer. Towards that goal, we began by identifying groups or organizations in the Southeast working to bridge the gap between African Americans and Latinos in pursuit of mutual goals. After locating several, we focused on four groups that generously allowed us to meet with them and hold focus group interviews. Together, they reflect the wide range of African American and Latino communities in this region: a rural county (Atkinson County, Ga.), a medium-sized city (Greensboro, N. C.), a modern, international city (Miami, Fla.), and a suburban county within a sprawling metropolitan area (Cobb County, Ga.). Of these four groups, the first two were organized by ministers and are based on sacred beliefs, while the latter two are more secular efforts at “Black-brown” cooperation. Chapter 3 of this report describes the groups interviewed and their work in detail, while Chapter 4 provides our conclusions and offers a set of nine elements we think are critically important in creating a successful coalition.
In this summary we want to highlight and emphasize four significant aspects of what we learned from our research:

• **ROADBLOCKS**: Several factors limit the growth prospects of African American-Latino collaborations, but two stand out prominently. The first is that many people within both groups do not see a need for, or a strategic advantage in, pursuing a coalition. In each focus group conducted, a point was made that coalition members often met resistance from African Americans and Latinos due to mistrust, hostility towards one another, or a preference for working within their own community. Ultimately, to grow a strong Black-brown coalition, more African Americans and Latinos must come to believe that although they possess opposing views on some issues, on other important issues they both stand to gain by coalescing. A second roadblock is language – the inability to communicate effectively or comfortably with each other hinders their efforts to collaborate. Some groups have dealt with this rather effectively (by relying on bilingual members, Spanish language students, or faculty from nearby colleges to translate, and by printing signs and fliers in English and Spanish).

• **LEADERSHIP**: The leaders of a Black-brown collaboration must clearly understand the situation and community context, be able to work effectively with others, have the capacity to design and execute plans of action, and possess an ability to attract resources. The most successful of these collaborations have established a leadership development program and also sponsor frequent educational programs that expand member skill sets. Another identifiable leadership trait is that of a “bridge-builder,” an individual who encourages or inspires African Americans and Latinos to cross boundaries by supplanting fear with a sense of possibility. Effective leadership also involves an ability to select issues that can produce “quick wins,” thus allowing coalitions to build enthusiasm and a sense of efficacy.

• **NETWORKS AND RESOURCES**: The more successful African American-Latino collaborations are well-connected with a network of other regional organizations that provide advice, in-kind assistance, and facilitate opportunities to attend events or programs. Their network also includes foundations that serve as funding sources and national organizations that are working on similar issues centered upon Black-brown collaboration (e.g., labor, housing, health care). We found that rural and relatively new coalitions are not as well-connected to these networks and could benefit from such invaluable assistance. These particular groups also need other resources as well, the absence of which places great strain on the groups’ leaders or key activists.

• **TRUST**: Coalition-building is a pragmatic and political endeavor, especially when seeking resources, attempting to mobilize community support, and (as is often necessary) putting pressure on public officials. But it is also an emotional process in which fears are confronted, tentative gestures and acts of kindness may be appreciated, rebuffed, or not even recognized, and trust can be gained or lost. Each of the African American-Latino collaborations we studied has worked hard to cultivate a positive emotional atmosphere and sense of trust, for without these nothing else will move forward. For some, this emotional work is grounded in a religious or spiritual faith that is institutionalized within church activities. For others, it emerges in activities such as multicultural dances or musical programs, the study of each group’s history, or shared “pot-luck” dinners. The essential point is a willingness to cross boundaries, confront fears, and embrace the humanity each community possesses.

Overall, our intention in studying this social phenomenon was not purely “academic.” Ideally, we hope it serves as a valuable resource for local community leaders and activists who are confronting similar challenges. The South, as depicted within the annals of history, has been irreversibly changed into a multicultural, multilingual society where strangers have the opportunity to become allies. This possibility of coalition-building is not idealism run amok, but a necessity if African Americans and Latinos want to further define their reality within the political process. This document offers all who struggle for freedom, justice, and equality a glimpse into what can be. The individuals interviewed were ordinary people who collectively became extraordinary, not for glory or for praise, but to ensure that their families and communities would also partake of the American dream.
CHAPTER ONE

LIBERTY CITY
CHAPTER ONE

The Context of Black-Latino Relations in the Southeast

As the percentage of the United States’ population that is Latino\(^1\) has risen dramatically, from just under 5% in 1970 to 15.4% in 2008, writers, researchers, community members, and activists have grown more interested in the ways African Americans and Latinos are relating to each other. Many recent publications have called for, or evaluated the prospects of, cooperative activities and coalitions to solve problems African Americans and Latinos often face. On October 5-6, 2008, the first National Black Latino Summit meeting was held in Los Angeles. Prominent on this meeting’s agenda were such topics as environmental justice, the criminal justice system, access to health care, and immigration.

A substantial body of essays, articles, and books now exists on “Black-Brown relations” and the prospects of coalition-building between African Americans and Latinos.\(^2\) Many, if not most, of these writings have something in common. They begin by discussing one or more difficulties or hardships African Americans and Latinos face (e.g., housing discrimination, inadequate schools, economic insecurity, profiling by law enforcement officials) then argue that, by uniting and working together, both groups could make progress in overcoming those problems. But ultimately many of these writers conclude by cataloging numerous reasons why effective coalitions between members of these two groups are very difficult or have not succeeded.\(^3\) Only a few published reports highlight instances of successful coalition-building between African Americans and Latinos.\(^4\) Some scholars criticize Black leaders at national or state levels for their collaborations with Latinos; for example Briggs (2003) and Swain (2007) chastise members of the Congressional Black Caucus for allying with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus on certain legislative efforts. Others (e.g., Betancur 2005) suggest coalition-building is more likely to begin in the form of local or grassroots cooperation by African American and Latino neighbors or co-workers who recognize that they have similar interests or problems, rather than from efforts by nationally or regionally prominent African American and Hispanic institutional leaders (who may see Black-Brown relations in a more competitive perspective that involves protecting their own limited resources and powers from being “taken” by the other group). Previous research also shows that cross-cutting socioeconomic class differences within African American and Latino communities is important because the pressures, constraints, or opportunities related to one’s class position make some African Americans and Latinos inclined to collaborate with each other, but make some others disinclined to do so.

This report differs in two respects from other writings on this topic. One is our focus on the Southeast. For the most part, the literature on Black-Brown relations examines the situation in California, Texas, Chicago, the Northeast, and Florida, whereas our sights initially were set on eight Southeastern states: North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas.\(^5\) These Southeastern states have only...
recently seen a large and rapid rise in Hispanic population, so it is not surprising that most writers have looked elsewhere in studying Black-Brown relations. Yet several attempts at building Black-Brown coalitions have been made in the Southeast, particularly in North Carolina. These include, most recently, a Black/Brown Conference in Greensboro (early October 2008) and an African American-Latino Unity Summit conference in Charlotte (late March 2009). Enough collaboration between African Americans and Latinos has occurred to prompt Gordon & Lenhardt (2007: 28) to say that “the South has become something of a laboratory for such efforts.” A few recent reports have described and provided some assessment of this work in this region. We will build on these studies to learn how Black-Brown coalition-building is progressing and see whether the conversations, interactions, and paths towards cooperation taken by Blacks and Latinos in the Southeast are similar to or different from those in other regions.

This report differs from much of the other literature on this topic in a second way. Instead of dwelling at length on the barriers and sources of disunity preventing Black and Latino cooperation, this report seeks, in the spirit of accentuating the positive and learning from what others are doing right, to highlight groups comprising Blacks and Latinos that are working together fairly well to address issues of common concern.

We divide this report into four chapters. The first chapter is an introduction; we begin with some demographic and economic data supplemented by information about social conditions in these Southeastern states to provide background and a context for understanding relations between Latinos and African Americans in the Southeast. Of these two populations, African Americans’ social, economic, and political conditions in this region have been much more extensively researched and are more well-known, so we mainly concentrate on Latinos in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 presents social science ideas and research about effective intergroup cooperation and coalition-building. Chapter 3 begins with a description of our research goals and the methods we used in carrying out this project, and then provides four case studies of organizations in which Blacks and Latinos are engaged in cooperative action. Finally, Chapter 4 contains our conclusions based on this research project.

The Southeastern Demographic Context

Population Growth

Among the most startling statistics produced by the 2000 U.S. Census were the large percentage increases in the Latino population occurring in several Southeastern states. For example, between 1990 and 2000 the Latino population in North Carolina increased by nearly 400%, in Arkansas by over 330%, in Georgia by 300%, and in Tennessee, South Carolina, and Alabama by over 200% (see Table 1). This eye-popping population growth was more surprising to people outside the region than to many Southerners, who during the 1990s had become aware of the increased presence of Spanish-speaking people working, shopping, and attending schools in areas where they previously were scarce in number.

Table 1 also clearly shows the marked contrast between these Southeastern states and Florida (see bottom row of Table 1). Florida’s Latino population was established much earlier than the other states, and by 1990 it had over one and a half million Latino residents (almost 15 times larger than Georgia’s Latino population). Also, to keep the Southeastern states’ “large” 1990 to 2000 Latino population increase in perspective, note that Florida’s Latino increase in that decade (1,108,572) is more than that of all the other states in Table 1 combined (and the same is true for the increase between 2000 and 2007). Moreover, in Florida, about 30% of the Latinos have Cuban ancestry, and many also are from other countries in Central America and the Caribbean, but in other Southeastern states most Latinos have Mexican background.

The Latino population growth trend in the Southeast continued from 2000 through 2007 (and subsequently slowed down due to the economic recession). Of course, the remarkable triple-digit percentage increases of the 1990s are gone (since they were based on very small numbers of Latinos at the start of the time period). In the current decade,
for example, the Latinos population has increased by 68% in North Carolina; by 70% in Georgia and by 78% in South Carolina. However, if one views the absolute size of the Latino population growth in most of the Southern states shown in Table 1, the numerical increase from 2000 to 2007 seems on pace to equal or exceed the numbers seen between 1990 and 2000. For example, in Georgia the Latino population grew by 326,305 from 1990 to 2000, and from 2000 to 2007 it has grown by 305,616; for Alabama the Latino population growth numbers for those same two periods are 51,201 and 48,911, respectively.

To put the Southeastern states’ recent (2000 to 2007) Latino population growth in better perspective, we make the following four key points:

- The numerical increase in Latino residents (and the rate of increase) in Georgia and North Carolina is much higher than most other states. The other Southeastern states listed in Table 1 (excluding Florida) have Latino population increases that are about equal to those of many other states.

- Unlike the nation as a whole (and Florida), where the Latino population is now larger in size than

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>305,616</td>
<td>740,843</td>
<td>435,227</td>
<td>326,305</td>
<td>108,922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70.2%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>299.6%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>259,481</td>
<td>638,444</td>
<td>378,963</td>
<td>302,237</td>
<td>76,726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>68.5%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>393.9%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>91,601</td>
<td>215,439</td>
<td>123,838</td>
<td>91,097</td>
<td>32,741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74.0%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>278.2%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>73,844</td>
<td>168,920</td>
<td>95,076</td>
<td>64,525</td>
<td>30,551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77.7%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>211.2%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>63,404</td>
<td>150,270</td>
<td>86,866</td>
<td>66,990</td>
<td>19,876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73.0%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>337.0%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>48,911</td>
<td>124,741</td>
<td>75,830</td>
<td>51,201</td>
<td>24,629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>207.9%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>34,687</td>
<td>94,626</td>
<td>59,939</td>
<td>37,955</td>
<td>21,984</td>
</tr>
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<td>57.9%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>172.6%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>20,599</td>
<td>60,168</td>
<td>39,569</td>
<td>23,638</td>
<td>15,931</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>148.4%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>1,092,845</td>
<td>3,775,560</td>
<td>2,682,715</td>
<td>1,108,572</td>
<td>1,574,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>70.4%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
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the Black population, in these Southeastern states the Black (and White) population is still much larger than the Latino population.

- Although immigration has played a large role in the South's growing Latino population, the belief that the Southern Latino population is overwhelmingly foreign-born is wrong; instead, as Table 2 shows, a large portion of Latinos (over 40%) are born in the U.S.

- Among immigrant Latinos in the South, a modest but growing percentage (ranging from 10% to 18%) are naturalized U.S. citizens, and in Florida it is dramatically higher – 40% of the foreign-born have become naturalized U.S. citizens (see Table 2).

**Latino Migration to the Southeast: Its Social and Economic Context**

**Reasons for the Recent Migration**

During the 20th century, most immigrants preferred to settle and live in other parts of the United States rather than in the Southeast. In 1940 only 0.3% of North and South Carolina's populations were foreign-born, and only 0.4% of the populations in Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee were foreign-born. In contrast, in 1940 the foreign-born comprised 17.0% of the Northeast's population, 8.4% in the Midwest, and 10.8% in the West (Gibson & Lennon 1999). Prior to 1940 as well, foreign-born people were a much smaller percentage of the Southeast's population than in most other parts of the United States. As a result, until quite recently the Southeast was quite insulated from the on-going struggles of immigrants from Europe, Asia, and Latin American to improve their position in the economic, social, and political arenas. Instead, the Southeast has been a stage on which the bitter struggle of African Americans against racism and second-class citizenship dominated the spotlight.

Today this is no longer the case. The largest numbers of new migrants in the Southeast are Latinos, especially Mexicans. These immigrants started arriving in significant volume during the mid-1980s. For instance, recent Latino settlement in North Carolina has taken place in two phases (McClain 2006). Between 1985 and 1990, most Latinos were born in the U.S. and came to North Carolina after living in states such as California, Texas, Florida, and New York. In the second phase, since 1990, most Latinos came to North Carolina directly from Mexico, especially from areas (e.g., Veracruz, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Puebla) that previously did not send large numbers of migrants to the United States.

In explaining this upsurge in migration to the

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<tr>
<td>% of Latinos who % of Latinos who % of Foreign-born % of all Latinos</td>
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<tr>
<td>are Native-born are Foreign-born Latinos who are Naturalized that are U.S. Citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
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<td>Arkansas</td>
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<td>Alabama</td>
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<td>South Carolina</td>
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<td>Tennessee</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
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<td>Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
</tr>
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<td>Florida</td>
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Data for Mississippi Latinos are not available because the Census Bureau does not make estimates for groups in American Community Survey with populations less than 65,000.
Southeast, experts place most emphasis on economic factors, especially the increased competition, restructuring, and coordination in today’s increasingly interconnected transnational commercial world. In the early 1980s, rising interest rates and declining world market prices for commodities created a debt crisis and economic turmoil in Mexico and other poor countries. This led international financial institutions to pressure those countries to reduce their spending on economic and social subsidies for their own populations and businesses and to restructure their economies by opening them up to international competition. Unfortunately, these changes made it difficult or impossible for many agricultural workers and operators of small and medium-sized businesses to survive in their local areas, so millions of these people have migrated to places they think will offer them better opportunities to earn a living and support their families. Then, in 1994 the U.S. and Mexico entered into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and one of its goals is to stimulate economic development in Mexico so that it could then “export goods and not people” (Massey, Durand & Malone 2002:49). Although it has boosted trade between both countries, NAFTA has also led to declining employment opportunities in Mexico, and immigration to the U.S. rose sharply from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s despite the U.S.’ efforts to tighten border security and prevent illegal entries.

In the past, most immigration from Mexico was directed to California, the Southwest (especially Texas), and a few Midwestern states. What caused this flow of people to broaden into a large movement to the Southeast? Part of the answer lies in Los Angeles, where, according to sociologist Ivan Light (2006), local citizens, businesses, and governments adopted policies that “deflected” (i.e., discouraged or prevented from settling) over one million Latino immigrants, who instead moved to other parts of the United States. These measures in California included changes that made it more costly to hire immigrants and policies that made it harder for immigrants to live together in large households inexpensively.

But why would those “deflected” immigrants, or others, move to the Southeast? The answer is that important economic and political changes transformed several of these states into places where jobs were plentiful. Since 1970, the Southeast has been a site of major investment by the federal government and the private sector, especially in terms of highway construction, military spending, housing and office construction, retailing, and the travel and hospitality industries. In addition, corporate managers seeking lower taxes and labor costs in well-established, highly unionized industries (e.g., car and truck manufacturing; meat packing) closed factories in the Midwest and opened them in the Southeast (where labor unions are fewer and weaker and a more pro-business climate exists). Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina experienced a population boom as large numbers of native-born Americans arrived from the North, from other Southern states, and elsewhere in the U.S. This led to increased consumer demand and a growing need for workers of all types, especially in home and business construction, landscaping, restaurant and food preparation, material moving and warehousing, and janitorial and house cleaning. Even if the pay scale and benefits of these jobs were less than in other parts of the U.S., the cost of living is lower in the Southeast and the sheer number of jobs makes it an attractive destination for immigrants. For many of them, the real comparison was whether a job in the Southeast paid much more than could be earned in their homeland, not whether wages in the Southeast were more than in California or in Chicago. And for many the decision was easy when they learned that working in North Carolina at a Smithfield slaughter-house paid $7.70 an hour compared to $4 per day in Mexico (Leduff 2001:101).

Social and Economic Context of Settlement

Although Emma Lazarus’ famous poem, which warmly and enthusiastically welcomes immigrants to the United States, stands at the base of the Statue of Liberty and is often quoted by American leaders, in our nation’s urban history immigrants have typically not been greeted with unanimous acceptance. Rarely are immigrants’ arrival and presence felt to be an unmixed blessing by the larger community. Instead, immigrants usually encounter misunderstandings, mistrust, and fears. Many face bleak work and economic situations, or confront a grudging acceptance from residents who hope the immigrants will “fit in” okay and not change things too much. That sort of uneasy, sometimes hostile, situation is the context of settlement for many Latinos recently coming to Southeastern states.

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*Sources disagree over whether NAFTA has made Mexico’s unemployment rate higher (Portes 2006) or lower (Bushman 2007), but agree that it has pushed more people into very low-paying, unstable, informal jobs.*
**Labor Market Competition**

An important cause of misgivings about, and antagonism towards, Latinos in the Southeast (and elsewhere, too) has been their impact as competitors for jobs. Simply put, the complaint from many native-born Blacks and Whites alike is that “employers prefer to hire the Mexicans instead of us,” or phrased differently, “the Mexicans are taking jobs from us.” The jobs in question are typically working-class (e.g., in construction, landscaping, food processing, restaurants, hotel service work), not middle- or upper-class occupations. So this competition for jobs produces a situation of conflict, distrust, and accusation among people in the most needy and precarious economic situations. For example, an African American factory worker making about $9 an hour says the easy availability of Mexican workers is “dragging down the pay. It’s pure economics. They say Americans don’t want to do the job. That ain’t exactly true. We don’t want to do it for $8. Pay $15 and we’ll do it” (LeDuff 2001:110). And at that same factory, Mexican workers disparage Black workers as lazy and unreliable.9

Situations like this, in which employers try to replace, or gain wage concessions from, workers of one ethnic group by hiring “cheaper” laborers from another ethnic group, have been long known in sociology as a “split labor market” (Bonacich 1972, 1979). Three very different organized responses to split labor markets can occur. One is that native-born workers try to get protection against job competition from Latinos by calling for and supporting efforts to prevent business managers from hiring or employing immigrants who are not legally authorized to be in the United States (e.g., enforcement of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act [IRCA]; raids on worksites followed by deportation of “illegal aliens”).10 Another response is that a compromise of sorts is developed, whereby the employer gives native-born workers better-paying jobs (often fewer in number) and hires the immigrants to do the very lowest paying jobs. These two responses are the most common outcomes that researchers have seen in split labor market cases. However, an alternative response is possible, and in recent years appears to be on the rise. In this case, labor organizers and activists seek to unify native-born and immigrant workers by having them join together in a labor union. The hope (and the strategy) here is that a labor union that represents and has the loyalty of workers from each ethnic group will be in a much stronger position in negotiating, or if necessary going on strike, to gain improvements in wages, benefits, or work conditions that help all the workers regardless of whether they are native-born or immigrant.12

This latter response is most relevant to the focus of this report — since it involves serious attempts to build trust, cooperation, and coalitions among African Americans and Latinos. In Chapter 3 our case studies provide some information about Black-Brown coalition-building in the labor movement, though more of what we have seen is occurring beyond work issues and involves coalition-building in community settings.

Before shifting the discussion to another aspect of the social and economic context facing Latinos in the Southeast, we need to make two points about the very common perception that Mexican immigrants are much more hard-working than people born in the United States. The first point is simply that this new image of the hard-working Mexican represents a 180 degree change from what the general image of Mexicans was for much of the past two centuries. In the past, when not portrayed as a “bandito,” the popular stereotype of Mexican men depicted them as slow and likely to be relaxing or taking a siesta in the shade. Employers often characterized Mexican workers as lazy, inefficient, needing constant supervision, arriving late, and taking too many holidays (Garcia 1978). Today, the popular stereotype of the Mexican as “super-worker” would have us believe that Mexican workers want or are willing to do anything to please their bosses, expect to be over-worked, and don’t mind doing the most grueling of tasks for little reward.13

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10 For information about how an immigration raid and deportation of undocumented Latino workers at a Crider, Inc. poultry plant in Stillmore, Ga., affected employment of African Americans, see Perez & Dade (2007). Also see the case of an immigration raid and deportations at Howard Industries in Laurel, Miss. (August 2008).

11 This apparently has been the situation in a huge Smithfield pork production factory in North Carolina, where, with a few exceptions, most managerial positions are held by Whites and Lumbee Indians, higher paying pig slaughtering jobs are held by African Americans, and lower paying “cutting up” jobs go to Mexicans (LeDuff 2001).

12 Most notably in the South, the United Food and Commercial Workers Union has taken this approach, as has a North Carolina-based African American labor group, Black-Workers for Justice (see Gordon & Lenhardt 2007).

13 Anyone who doubts how deeply ingrained this new impression of Mexican workers is in certain industries should read Cameron Lippard’s (2008) findings about Black, White, and Latino owners of construction companies in Atlanta and why almost all of them prefer hiring Mexicans rather than Blacks or Whites for the less-skilled jobs.
we make this point is that the existence of this new widely held image of Mexicans as workers may actually encourage people to exploit them under a false belief that their work ethic is so strong that they do not need to be given higher pay or better working conditions.

This brings us to our second point – the reason Mexicans take less desirable jobs when they migrate to the U.S. is not that some cultural transformation has swept through Mexico and dramatically improved the people’s work ethic. Instead, the means of supporting one’s family are so difficult and tenuous in Mexico for these immigrants that they have no realistic alternative to taking the low-paying and dangerous jobs that are offered them once they arrive in the U.S. In Mexico, if they are poor or unemployed, “safety net” assistance such as food stamps, public housing, or medical treatment are almost nonexistent, and without this support, survival itself becomes difficult in their homeland. Thus they feel it imperative to go to the United States, even if it means promising a smuggler a large sum of money to take them in illegally. Once here they are under great pressure, often desperate for earnings, so they can pay their debts and send money to support family back home; therefore they cannot be selective about which jobs to take.

Before moving on to other aspects of the social and economic context of Latino migration to the Southeast, we should note that the issue of labor force competition often fixates on the idea that Latino immigrants “take” jobs that would, allegedly, be held by native-born workers if only the newcomers were not here. This ignores an important side of the situation. Immigrants don’t just “take” jobs, they also “make” jobs, and many of these jobs go to native-born workers. As customers and shoppers, the purchases made by immigrants generate a need for, and the money to pay for, numerous clerks and managers in clothing, grocery, and other retail stores plus their suppliers. Also, employment of immigrants in low-paying manufacturing jobs (e.g., clothing, furniture) enables those businesses to remain competitive with overseas firms, thereby keeping native-born workers employed who would otherwise lose their jobs if the factory closed down and “fled” to another country where labor costs are lower. As for higher paying occupations, Latino immigrants provide business for attorneys specializing in immigration law, and for people in advertising or marketing firms hoping to make products popular in the growing “ethnic” market. In many cities Latino immigrants are heavy users of public transit; without their presence there would be fewer jobs for bus and train operators. Similarly, numerous public school systems in the Southeast report enrollment increases due to the presence of immigrants’ children. What is often emphasized are the burdens and costs that arise in educating the newcomers (and these are not inconsiderable), but we should also recognize that without their presence many schools would face enrollment declines and instead of hiring new teachers, administrators, and staff they would be laying off employees.

These comments about job competition and the jobs immigrants “take” from or “make” for other people lead to an important, but sometimes

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\(^{14}\) For research documenting this, see Adelman, Lippard, Jaret & Reid (2005); Lim (2001); Muller (1993); Rosenfeld & Tienda (1999).

\(^{15}\) In discussing both the success and ultimate bankruptcy of one of the largest car dealership chains in the U.S., the owner of Bill Heard Chevrolet, based in Georgia, noted that Mexican immigrants were a significant part of its customer base. He added that, in the current recession, a large drop in immigrants buying cars seriously hurt profitability and contributed to the company going out of business (Judd 2008).
overlooked, conclusion: African Americans (and other groups in the U.S.) are not affected (i.e., threatened or benefitted) uniformly by immigrants; the impact depends on one’s position in the labor market and on social, economic, political, and demographic features of the community or neighborhood in which one lives. Therefore we should not expect a uniform or monolithic response from African Americans in terms of their willingness to collaborate with Latinos in coalitions.

Finally, to illustrate the relationship between the size of the Latino population in Southeastern communities and the socioeconomic conditions of African Americans in those communities, we provide some correlation data and graphs. These are based on analysis of large and small urban areas of Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, using data on population, unemployment, and earnings from the mid-2000s. If the presence of Latinos has a harmful effect on African Americans, then we should find that in communities in which Latinos comprise a larger percentage of the population African Americans have higher unemployment rates (a positive correlation) or lower earnings (a negative correlation), compared to places with smaller Latino populations.

What we actually found, however, does not support that idea. Instead, the correlations between African Americans’ unemployment rates and the relative size of the Latino population in these Southern urban areas are weak and statistically insignificant (r = -.125 for males and .031 for females). Graph 1 displays this situation, with each circle representing an urban area in Georgia, North Carolina, or Tennessee. Places with high percentages of Latinos do not in general have higher Black unemployment rates than places with low percentages of Latinos. In fact, the place with the highest Latino population (Gainesville, Ga.) has one of the lowest Black male unemployment rates and an average Black female unemployment rate. In addition, instead of a negative correlation between the size of the Latino population and Black earnings, the correlations are insignificant for Black male earnings (r = .146) and significantly positive for Black female earnings (r = .244). Graph 2 clearly shows that African Americans in Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee do not necessarily have lower earnings if they live in cities and towns with larger Latino populations.

Graph 1.
Latino Population Size and Black Males’ and Black Females’ Unemployment Rates in Large and Small Urban Areas in Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. (Mid 2000s Data)

For further discussions of the impact of immigration on African Americans, see Adelman et al. 2005; Bean & Bell-Rose (1999); Hamermesh & Bean (1998); Shulman (2003); and Steinberg (2005) and the responses to Steinberg’s article that were published in New Politics volume 10 issue 4 (Winter 2006).

The data are from the American Community Survey 2005-2007 3-Year Estimates for metropolitan areas, micropolitan areas, and counties; Table C20002B for employment data, Table B20017B for earnings, and Data Profiles for population size.
Legal Status

Whether or not a Latino family or individual is living in the U.S. with valid legal authorization is critically important and shapes their economic and social context in several ways. If they are in violation of U.S. immigration law, then federal law (IRCA), and some recent state laws (e.g., the 2006 Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act), prohibit them from being employed; if caught working illegally they can be arrested, prosecuted, and deported. Even when employed, illegal status makes a worker easily exploited, since an employer can threaten to “turn in” to the authorities any undocumented workers who complain about mistreatment. Beyond that, people residing in the U.S. illegally are not allowed to receive most public benefits and supportive services funded by tax revenues.\(^{18}\)

Some Southeastern states have started to enforce this more strictly and also prohibit issuance of driver’s licenses to undocumented immigrants. A few local jurisdictions have passed laws that prohibit landlords from renting apartments to anyone who is not in a federal data base of persons who are in the U.S. legally (though enforcement awaits judicial review of whether these ordinances are themselves legal).

Beyond these things, the high percentage of Latinos who are in the U.S. in violation of the law (nearly 20%\(^{19}\)) has generated much anger and resentment in the general public. Opinion surveys reveal that sympathy for immigrants is usually lost if they are known as “illegals,” and instead they face resentment, hostility, or distrust. The general public’s attitude tends to be that undocumented immigrants are cheating the system and should not be rewarded for it; they should follow the same rules as everyone else who wants to enter the country and use the formal application process for either immigrant or temporary worker status. Many people are unaware of or do not care how unwieldy or defective that application system is, they just want people to respect it rather than transgress it, even if it means remaining in a desperate situation in another country (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2006; Diop, nd).

Lastly, the issue of legal status complicates and hurts the situation of Latinos who are native-born

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\(^{18}\)The main exceptions are for emergency medical treatment, pre-natal care, and children attending public schools.

\(^{19}\)Estimate based on data for mid-2000s from Pew Hispanic Center and U.S. Census Bureau.

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Graph 2.
Latino Population Size and Black Males’ and Black Females’ Median Annual Earnings in Large and Small Urban Areas in Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. (mid-2000s data)
U.S. citizens or naturalized U.S. citizens. The stigma of “illegal status” is often generalized to all Latinos – anyone who “looks Mexican” or has a Latino-sounding name is often suspected of being “illegal,” which can lead to being unnecessarily stopped (“profiled”) by police, rejected for a job, or disparaged by strangers. Even though, as Table 2 shows, large percentages of Latinos in the Southeast are native-born or naturalized U.S. citizens, this information is not widely known and a large segment of the public views them as “foreigners” or “illegals.” A final complication arises because migrant families often include members who have legal authorization to be in the U.S., while other members do not. When one spouse is “legal” and the other is not, or when some children are U.S. born (hence citizens) but other children or the parents are “undocumented,” how do you equitably determine the rights and privileges that the household should receive?

Social or Cultural Asset or Burden to the Community?

The social and economic context of Latino settlement in the Southeast is also colored, in many places, by a polarized debate over alleged positive and negative consequences of its presence in a community. In this section we focus on three issues that often arise in discussions of costs and benefits associated with an increased Latino presence in the Southeast; these are taxes, language, and neighborhood decline.

Latinos’ harshest critics, who think most Latinos are illegal immigrants, accuse them of contributing little or nothing to the town, county, or state’s tax base while illegitimately taking disproportionately large amounts of publicly funded benefits and social services (e.g., in public health clinics or hospital emergency rooms; in food stamp or other welfare programs; in public schools’ remedial English or bilingual education programs). The idea that Latinos in the Southeast are not paying taxes (allegedly because they work “off the books” and get paid “under the table” in cash) is a myth that is fairly easy to disprove. First, high percentages of Latinos, including those who are here illegally, do work “on the books” and have taxes deducted from their paychecks as legally required.20 A recent study in Virginia (Cassidy & Okos 2008) estimates at least half of the illegal immigrants in that state work “on the books” (i.e., hold jobs in which payroll deductions are made for income, Social Security, and Medicare taxes), and the 2005 Economic Report of the President gives a national estimate of between 50% and 75%. Second, aside from payroll deductions, immigrants (legal and illegal) pay sales taxes, which fund state and local services, on items purchased, just like everyone else. Similarly with property taxes, which fund local public schools and other services, Latino homeowners must pay, and those who pay rent enable their landlords to pay property taxes on the apartment complexes they own (see Immigration Policy Center 2007, 2008). Use of public services among young workers with no children is relatively low, so Latinos in that category are generally contributing in taxes more than the value of services they receive, while those with children or chronic health problems may receive more than they contribute (Bean & Stevens 2003). In either case, however, the point to stress about the context in the Southeast is that Latinos are not simply “free-riders” benefiting at the public’s expense – they are contributing members of the public.

Another feature of the social context of Latino settlement in the Southeast is a series of efforts aimed at stigmatizing and minimizing the public use of languages other than English. Since the days of Benjamin Franklin (who criticized German-speaking immigrants in Pennsylvania), many English-speaking Americans have urged and sometimes coerced immigrants to learn and use English as quickly as possible. The argument is that the presence of people unable to speak the same language as the majority (English) is, inefficient, costly, divisive, and perhaps a sign of disloyalty to America. However, the U.S. Congress has not passed legislation declaring English as the nation’s official language, and federal authorities have in some respects protected the rights of speakers of other languages.

Nevertheless, over 25 states, including every Southeastern state except Louisiana, have declared

20 In fact, the Social Security Administration recently announced that it maintains an account containing billions of dollars that it received from paycheck deductions from workers who provided their employers with false Social Security numbers (Porter 2005).

21 For notable instances see the Nebraska District v. McKelvie (1923) and Lau v. Nichols (1974) Supreme Court decisions, the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, and amendments to the 1965 Voting Rights Act.
English the “official” language of the state, and numerous counties and towns have passed resolutions declaring English as their official language. Most recently, a public referendum was held in Nashville, Tenn., (January 22, 2009) on an “English-only” resolution22 but, after rancorous public debate, it was defeated by a 57% to 43% margin. In several suburban Atlanta counties or towns, Latinos have been affected by various “sign ordinances” that require English words or limit the amount of non-English words on signs that business owners put on their stores. Local government officials say these sign regulations are for public safety (e.g., to enable ambulance or other emergency vehicle drivers to easily find a location) or to help immigrants in their efforts at learning English. However, these sign ordinances have bothered some Latinos who feel that they infringe upon a business owner’s right to advertise as he or she sees fit, or that they indicate the local native-born population is uncomfortable with, or hostile toward, having a large Latino population in their midst and would prefer they live somewhere else. Other language-related controversies that have arisen in the South include whether or not to give drivers license tests in languages other than English and what kinds of instruction the public schools should provide for students who are not fluent in or cannot read English.23

Moreover, inability to speak a common language hinders the growth of coalition-building between Latinos and other community residents. It impedes communication and informal socializing and reinforces misunderstanding or mistrust between groups. And, as we note in our case studies, the language barrier makes meetings slow and tedious and requires extra effort and scarce resources (e.g., translators, bilingual signs) to overcome the language gap.

Housing conditions and neighborhood quality in areas where Latinos have settled are another contentious aspect of the social and economic context in the Southeast. In single family subdivisions, apartment complexes, and trailer parks native-born Whites and Blacks have often noted a decline in upkeep, deterioration of property, and other problems as areas become increasingly Latino. This has caused resentment among native-born Whites and Blacks who seek to preserve the property values, attractiveness, and security of their residential areas (Brooks 2005; King 2005; Whitt 2005).24 It may also be responsible for an increase in housing discrimination against Latinos,25 as well as stricter enforcement of local housing codes, anti-loitering laws, and new ordinances against renting to undocumented immigrants. What is sometimes unrecognized is the fact that the low wages paid to Latinos relegate them to the poorest quality housing, motivates them to “double up” in homes or apartments, and puts them at the mercy of landlords who fail to maintain their residential properties at the level stipulated by housing code or local neighborhood norms (Zlolniski 2006).

In this review we have touched on some of the demographic, economic, and social factors that shape the context in which Latinos are settling in communities throughout the Southeast. In the next chapter we discuss coalitions and the conditions under which coalition-building is most likely to occur.

22 This act would have required metropolitan Nashville’s laws, official documents, and government employees to only use English and stipulated that “no person shall have a right to government services in any other language.”
23 In some communities there is concern over how children of immigrants, especially those with limited English speaking ability, perform on standardized tests, since those test results may affect how a public school ranks on performance criteria used to evaluate schools under the “No Child Left Behind” program.
24 Status as either legal or undocumented (illegal) is important on this issue -- several writers contend that legal immigrants often help rejuvenate run-down neighborhoods (Davis 2003; Kotkin 2000; Muller 1993).
25 For national data on housing discrimination against Hispanics from 1989 and 2000 see Department of Housing and Urban Development’s 2000 Housing Audit (at www.huduser.org/publications/hsgfin/hds_phaseI.html); also see Choi, Ondrich & Yinger, 2008.
CHAPTER TWO

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CHAPTER TWO
Perspectives and Research on Coalitions

Researchers in political science, sociology, and community psychology have shed light on what enables intergroup coalitions to form and succeed. We summarize here many of their insights, theories, and findings, which have guided us in this project. More importantly, these ideas and findings on coalition-building should be of interest and value to people who are actively working to establish more successful coalitions among groups.

Introduction: Intergroup Cooperation and Coalition-Building

We begin this discussion by noting that, in one of the first systematic discussions of African American involvement in coalitions, Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton (1967) were wary of collaborations with other interest groups. They feared that coalitions called for in the 1960s among Blacks, labor unions, liberal Whites, and anti-war activists would be unproductive or misguided, since Carmichael and Hamilton thought they were based on myths instead of political and economic realities. Therefore, Carmichael and Hamilton argued that effective coalitions must be based on certain principles. First, coalition members must not assume that all groups participating in a coalition have identical motives and goals; there must be frank discussion of the various parties’ self-interests and priorities and a means of dealing with conflicts among them. Coalition members must also realize that each party expects to derive some benefit from participating.

More recently Michael Jones-Correa (2001) has added to the discussion of ethnic coalition-building. Beginning by citing three “key ingredients” for successful coalitions that Raphael Sonenshein (1993) identified (i.e., common interests, similar ideologies, and strong personal ties among leaders), Jones-Correa goes on to show that specific features of the local social context (e.g., the groups’ relative size and power, or the local political institutional structure) and the perceived “costs” of engaging in coalition-building are very important.

In the following discussion of effective coalition-building, the previous points are reinforced, but new insights about competition, trust, organizational capacity, and the local social context are added. In the most recent work on progressive coalition-building, David Dobbie (2009) de-emphasizes Carmichael and Hamilton’s concern for the needs and prerogatives of individual coalition partners. Instead, Dobbie (2009:58) urges coalitions in which allied interest groups “become more than the sum of their parts… and expand their identities, interests, and capacity.”

Similar Material Interests and Minimal Competition

A starting point for many discussions is that coalitions form among groups when members recognize they face one (or more) of the same problems or hardships and acknowledge that neither group can overcome the problem(s) by itself. In other words, perceiving that “my group” and “your group” each wants to solve the same problem, but cannot do so alone (or it would be very difficult to do alone), is essential in order for “us” to form a coalition.

For this reason, many African American-Latino coalitions start discussions by pinpointing one or more shared problems faced by both groups. These include issues in employment (inadequate pay, poor working conditions, discrimination in hiring or promotions, abusive supervisors); education (poorly funded schools, low student academic performance, high drop-out rates, unequal disciplinary treatment)
criminal justice (profiling, mistreatment by police, sentencing inequities) housing (discrimination by rental agents or mortgage lenders, displacement by gentrification); health conditions (insufficient hospitals or clinics, exposure to hazardous or toxic waste sites); or politics (exclusion from positions of power, disenfranchisement).

However, research shows that simply facing the same problems and having a desire to overcome them is not sufficient to cause two ethnic groups to form a coalition (Johnson & Oliver 1989; McClain & Tauber 1998; Vaca 2004). One of the most important factors that determine whether or not an inter-ethnic coalition is formed, or how successful a multi-ethnic coalition becomes, is whether the two groups are in (or perceive themselves to be in) a highly competitive situation. In highly competitive cases (often called a “zero-sum” situation), if one group achieving its goal means the other group will gain little or no advantage, then members of each group will see members of the other as rivals or antagonists, not as potential coalition members. For example, suppose the parks and recreational facilities in African American and Latino neighborhoods of a city are very run-down, dirty, and dangerous. If the residents of the African American neighborhoods convince city government to fix up, staff, and patrol the parks in their neighborhoods, the Latino residents may realize that there is little or no money left in the budget to improve the parks in their areas (and vice versa). Both groups, even though they face the same problem, would feel pitted against one another in a situation where a gain for one represents a loss for the other. So it is likely that, rather than being allies, they would each separately and competitively seek to maximize the funds the city devotes to the parks in their own respective neighborhoods. The difficult, but necessary, task for would-be coalition builders is to figure out a “win-win” solution in which both groups achieve a significant gain.

In a real situation involving educational issues, a group of researchers (Meier, McClain, Polinard & Wrinkle 2004) found evidence of both a highly competitive situation and a noncompetitive or complementary (“everyone wins”) situation. Their analysis found that, in Texas school districts, increasing the number of African Americans appointed to the school board led to fewer Latinos serving on the school board and to lower numbers of Latino teachers hired by the schools (and likewise, more Latinos on school boards had a negative effect on African American representation on school boards and the number of teachers hired). However, they also found a win-win pattern with regard to student academic performance: schools that have instituted programs that succeed in having higher test scores among Black students are schools in which Latino test scores are also high (and vice versa). The practical implication here is that a Latino-African American coalition would be much easier to create and maintain if it were organized around the issue of improving student academic performance instead of increasing group representation on school boards.

Sociologists contend that real or perceived competition among ethnic groups gives rise to feelings of threat. Members of a native-born group may feel threatened that the jobs they think are “rightfully ours” are being taken over by immigrants; or that “our neighborhood” is being “invaded” by newcomers and this is hurting our status in the community. Helen Marrow (2008) studied two rural North Carolina counties (each with a negligible African American middle class), to see whether this sense of threat, and other features of community context, affect the quality of relations between African American and Latino residents. She found that in Bedford County, where African Americans are in the numerical majority and greatly outnumber Latinos, African Americans feel a high sense of socioeconomic threat from Latinos, but do not see them as a political threat. She characterizes Black-Brown relations in Bedford as rather hostile, and notes that African American-Latino coalition-building is minimal. In contrast, in Wilcox County, where African Americans and Latinos are both in the numerical minority, the sense of threat is lower, intergroup relations are better, and Black-Brown coalition-building has made some progress. Marrow explains this by arguing that in communities like Wilcox, if African Americans do not feel threatened that Latinos will displace or “leapfrog” over them and usurp their position in the community, then they are more likely to view them as potential allies who can work together to improve their situations. She suggests that the situation in Dalton, Ga., (see Hernandez-Leon & Zuniga 2005) is similar and supports her explanation.

In research done outside the Southeast, Claudine Gay (2006) analyzes Los Angeles Blacks’ attitudes towards Latinos. She finds that Blacks in a social context of competitive threat show unfavorable attitudes towards Latinos. Specifically, Blacks hold the most negative and least cooperative feelings towards Latinos when they live in neighborhoods in which the Latino population is
very large and is better off economically than the Black population. On the other hand, according to Gay the greatest opportunity for successful coalition-building among Blacks and Latinos is in communities where they live in proximity and where the Blacks do not feel economically surpassed or threatened by the Latinos.

A Common Fate or Commonality of Values and Experiences

Another perspective on ethnic group coalitions contends that, regardless of whether or not members face common problems, a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for an effective coalition is a belief among group members that they share an important “commonality.” Karen M. Kaufmann (2003:200) views a sense of commonality as the “symbolic glue” that can bind or unite people together strongly even if they differ in important respects (e.g., socioeconomic level, language, age, sex, political party, religion). This sense of commonality is based on a feeling among group members that they share something fundamental, for example, a shared historical experience, a linked or common fate (Dawson 1994), or membership in the same moral community. When people of different groups perceive one another in these terms, they are more likely to empathize and identify with one another, trust and respect one another, and feel comfortable working together. It is argued that these manifestations of a sense of commonality, and an accompanying lack of negative stereotypes, prejudice, arrogance, and social distance, are necessary for a successful coalition among ethnic groups. With this perspective, Kaufmann found that Latinos who hold a pan-Latino identity (rather than those with strong specific national identities), or who speak English and/or were born in the U.S., and those of Puerto Rican or Dominican background are the most likely to feel the strongest sense of commonality with African Americans. Therefore Kaufmann suggests they would be the most likely to form successful “Black-Brown coalitions for cooperative endeavors.”

An important implication of Kaufmann’s perspective is that in order for the number of African Americans and Latinos working in cooperation to increase, many more people from both groups must become convinced by coalition advocates that African Americans and Latinos have important commonalities — that on things that truly matter they are more similar than different. Given their many cultural, historical, and legal status differences, widely held stereotypes, and hostilities existing between some members of these two groups, this would not be an easy task. In fact, some research suggests that many Latinos feel they have more in common with Whites than with Blacks (Bobo & Massagli 2001; National Conference 1993). But the task of demonstrating the commonalities among African Americans and Latinos is far from impossible; sociological and moral arguments can be made to affirm that large numbers of both groups do have important experiences in common and linked fates. And while Kaufmann (2003) finds that fairly low percentages of Latinos feel they have a lot in common with Blacks (or, for that matter, Whites), high percentages of Blacks feel they have a lot in common with Latinos. Moreover, as the case studies in Chapter 3 will show, activists in Black-Brown coalitions do speak of these commonalities in direct, eloquent, and compelling ways. In addition, there is a method or process that encourages a sense of commonality across ethnic lines and it has often proven effective. This method relies on bringing together members of different groups into equal status, cooperative contact situations and will be described it in the next section.
**Intergroup Contact in Equal Status, Cooperative, Goal-Oriented Activity**

Much sociological and social psychological research on the “contact hypothesis” (Amir 1998; Aronson & Gonzalez 1988; Brewer & Miller 1988; Hewstone & Brown 1986; Jackson 1993; Pettigrew 1971; Pettigrew & Tropp 2006) is consistent with the main ideas of the preceding two sections. The most relevant principle from this research is that it is possible to improve the sentiments and beliefs people from different ethnic groups have toward one another (i.e., to reduce their prejudices and stereotypes) by engaging them in forms of intergroup contact (e.g., activities, programs, work or social events) with the following conditions or characteristics:

- people from both groups in the contact situation should be of roughly equal social status;
- the intergroup contact situation should involve people in cooperative activity aimed at achieving a shared common goal;
- the intergroup contact situation should produce personal interaction and disclosure among members of the different groups so they get to know each other as individuals;
- the intergroup contact situation should be of relatively long duration; and
- the intergroup contact situation should be supported and/or endorsed by relevant authority figures or role models.

The implication of this equal status contact principle is drawn clearly in Gordon & Lenhardt’s (2007:40-42) review of Latino-African American cooperative efforts: in Southern work settings (e.g., hotels, poultry plants, construction sites, warehouses). A sense of commonality and positive feelings developed among Black and Latino workers when their work assignments brought them into cooperative and interdependent routines, but not when they were in isolated or competitive work routines (also see Marrow 2006; Smith 2009; Winders 2008). Intergroup contact research, therefore, recommends that Blacks and Latinos seeking to create coalitions should program events or activities that incorporate the intergroup contact conditions listed above to build the ground on which a successful coalition can stand. Conversely, Marrow (2009) finds that Latinos and Blacks in eastern North Carolina whose contacts with each other are competitive, impersonal, and superficial are becoming more hostile and socially distant towards each other.

**High “Collaborative Capacity”**

Studies by community psychologists have analyzed successful and unsuccessful coalitions. Foster-Fishman et al. (2001) synthesize this research in a model that describes what community coalitions must do to achieve “collaborative capacity,” which refers to conditions and characteristics that “promote effective collaboration and build sustainable community change” by a coalition (Foster-Fishman et al. 2001: 242). In Foster-Fishman et al.’s model, the essential conditions for building collaborative capacity lie in four related areas: (a) “member capacity” (i.e., skills, knowledge, and attitudes of individuals in a coalition); (b) “relational capacity” (i.e., positive internal and external relationships); (c) “organizational capacity” (i.e., a coalition’s leadership and resources); and (d) “programmatic capacity” (i.e., capability to design and implement useful programs). We briefly summarize each of these here.

**Member Capacity**

Successful coalitions need members and leaders with skills, knowledge, and certain key interpersonal aptitudes or personal traits. They must attract or recruit people with these traits or find ways to develop them in their members and leaders. These include:

- being well-informed on and knowledgeable about the issues with which the coalition deals;
- ability to work together collaboratively (e.g., communication and listening skills, team orientation, respectful and trustful of other coalition partners);
- strong sense of personal and group efficacy (i.e., being confident that one’s own actions and the coalition’s actions can make a difference for the better);
- high motivation and commitment to group, belief that benefits of being in the coalition outweigh the costs;
- the ability to actually give one’s time and energy to coalition activities.

**Relational Capacity**

Successful coalitions work at improving both the internal relationships among individuals and groups within the coalition as well as the relationships that the coalition has with outside groups and individuals.
Improving internal relationships includes efforts that: (a) strengthen cohesiveness, trust, empathy, and cooperation among coalition partners, (b) obtain greater shared vision and consensus on coalition goals and values, (c) enhance decision-making processes, and (d) improve how coalition partners deal with and resolve internal disagreements or conflicts.

Improving external relationships includes efforts that: (a) strengthen connections between coalition and other supportive organizations (e.g., potential allies, resource donors, the media, government agencies, policy makers, or community leaders), (b) garner positive visibility or publicity for coalition, (c) make the coalition aware of successful or unsuccessful actions taken by similar groups elsewhere, or “best practices” for ways to address the problems they face.

Organizational Capacity
Successful coalitions operate efficiently and are able to secure the resources needed to sustain them as they pursue their goals. Essential elements needed for organizational capacity are:

- effective leadership, including leadership training, development of new leaders, and effective running of meetings (with regard to interpersonal relations, content, and use of time).
- decision makers or a decision-making system that wisely chooses strategies or tactics that successfully lead toward goal attainment.
- clear identification of staff and members’ roles and responsibilities.
- an effective internal communication system.
- secure source(s) of financial and other needed resources for the coalition’s operations.
- a means of monitoring or reviewing feedback on the coalition’s performance, evaluating its progress, and making improvements or corrections.

Programmatic Capacity
Successful coalitions engage in activities or put on programs that members or their constituencies find beneficial, meaningful, engaging, or inspiring. These can take many forms: an educational program, a fundraising/publicity concert, a discussion forum, a strike, a protest demonstration, a political rally or campaign, a lobbying effort on a legislative proposal, etc. Although the elements listed in the preceding sections are very important for a coalition’s success, it is a coalition’s activities or programs that mainly constitute its “public face,” and these are the things that are pointed to when people ask, “What is the X coalition doing?” So, coalitions are mainly judged, for better or worse, on how well or poorly their activities or programs come off. To gain programmatic capacity coalitions should attend to:

- selecting programs or activities that are really needed by or generate high enthusiasm among a large number of people (i.e., high turnouts for events are important).
- careful planning of programs or activities, including planning for unexpected contingencies.
- for new or young coalitions, programs or activities that generate “quick wins” (tangible benefits) are especially important.
- insuring that programs or events involve input and support from all coalition partners and lead to continued sense of unity and common purpose among them; multi-ethnic coalitions’ activities and programs must be inclusive, culturally competent, appropriate and non-offensive to the groups participating.
- gaining substantial publicity and positive public attention for programs or activities, with effort made, in at least some of these, to gain increased membership, new resources, and/or new allies.

The “collaborative capacity” perspective summarized above highlights many ways in which emerging Latino-African American attempts at cooperation or coalition can improve their chances for success. Conversely, an evaluation of an unsuccessful Los Angeles coalition (the Latino Black Roundtable) by Jeannette Diaz-Veizades and Edward Chang (1996) shows that limited organizational capacity (e.g., lack of staff and financing, membership turnover, power inequalities) and weak programmatic capacity (e.g., too many programs aimed at dialogue, consensus-building, education, and understanding, and no programs of advocacy and action aimed at solving a shared problem) can cause a coalition to fall apart.

Some groups getting started in the Southeast are doing innovative things along these lines. For example, in North Carolina the Black Workers for Justice and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee
were able to reduce tensions and bring unity to African American and Latino workers in poultry processing factories. Together they organized several “Black-Brown Freedom Schools” in which participants shared personal and group histories and struggles, stressing the similarities and things they have in common. For example, they explored similarities between African Americans’ migration from the South to the North and Latinos’ migration from Mexico, Puerto Rico, or Central America to the United States (Center for Research on Women 2006).

Coalitions as Social Movements

The most recent work on coalition-building, by Dobbie (2009), argues that successful large (regional) collaborations among progressive labor, civil rights, and community organizations entails creating “multiracial cultures of solidarity” in which the individual interests and identities of coalition partners are aggregated and transformed so that the coalition becomes “more than the sum of its parts.” Dobbie suggests that initiating this process is largely the responsibility of coalition leaders, who need to be able to play the role of “bridge builders” (i.e., leaders who create connections across social, political, or organizational boundaries and encourage people to reach out and connect with others across those lines).

Beyond that, Dobbie urges organizers attempting to create these sorts of coalitions to “map out” their organizational structures in order to evaluate strengths and weaknesses, particularly in terms of (a) their membership-based groups, (b) their “intermediary” or associated organizations, and (c) the networks that link them together. For its “backbone” Dobbie recommends that a coalition of this sort needs labor unions, religious congregations, and community groups. The latter may represent neighborhoods, racial or ethnic groups, or particular community interests (e.g., fair housing, public transit, immigrant rights, environmental concerns, public school improvement). Valuable intermediary organizations typically are allies that have useful resources or technical capacities they contribute (e.g., independent or university-based groups that help with leadership training, research, or policy development; supportive law firms that provide legal assistance; friendly organizations that donate meeting space or other in-kind assistance). Perhaps the hardest element to attend to in a coalition’s organizational structure is the network (interpersonal and inter-organizational ties) connecting coalition participants. There may be links among religious congregations, or among community groups, or among labor groups, but each tends to be in its own “silo” without strong connection to those outside it. For assistance in strengthening these and other aspects of coalitions, Dobbie recommends two national progressive networks – Building Partnerships USA and Partnership for Working Families. Another useful resource is the National Coalition Building Institute, which offers organizational assessments, workshops, and leadership training to groups seeking to establish coalitions.

Other Considerations for Coalitions

Finally, two other factors affect coalition-building:

- Perceptions about whether or not a group is a valuable partner: This refers to whether members of each group feel the other will be a useful partner in a coalition (e.g., has resources or strengths to contribute, can be trusted, is dedicated and committed enough to stick through a struggle). Closely related is the question of how badly members of each group feel they “need” the others’ help. Jones-Correa (2001) contends that a group that is in, or close to, a dominant position is unlikely to want to collaborate with another group because the more powerful group has more to lose than to gain by aligning with the less powerful group.

- Kinds of leadership and grassroots support: This refers to leaders’ and followers’ status and community positions. For example, do influential members of each group lead (or endorse) the coalition, or are the leaders marginal or stigmatized members of their group? Also, what is the balance in the group between dedicated activists and ordinary members of each group?

Conclusion

We hope this overview of factors that encourage effective intergroup coalitions has brought important issues to light. It should be recognized it is impossible to take a “cookbook” approach and provide a recipe that everyone can follow to create a coalition. What works in one situation will not necessarily work in another. In Chapter 3 we provide case studies of four different groups that are developing African American-Latino coalitions. They are in very different contexts and deal in their own ways with the issues raised in this chapter. Learning about them should be useful for others trying to promote Black-Brown collaboration.
CHAPTER THREE
CHAPTER THREE
Case Studies of Black-Brown Cooperation

Introduction

Our purpose in this project is to identify groups or organizations in the Southeast that are working to bridge the gap between African Americans and Latinos in pursuit of mutual goals (e.g., solving problems they face) and to describe their successes and challenges. We hope this information can assist them and other groups in working together toward mutual trust and cooperation in attaining their goals. In this chapter, we provide a description and analysis of four of these groups or organizations in the form of short case studies, so that others interested in encouraging collaboration between African Americans and Latinos can learn about what they are doing and hopefully profit from their experiences.

We began by searching earlier published and unpublished sources, as well as media reports, on “Black-Brown” coalitions and cooperation. Reports by the University of Memphis’ Center for Research on Women (2006), Jennifer Gordon and Robin A. Lenhardt (2007), and Matthew Wooten (2008) were especially valuable and helped us compile a list of organizations active on “Black-Brown” issues. We were able to contact a few of these, but unfortunately, many of them are defunct, inactive, or were nonresponsive. We continued searching and found additional groups and organizations engaged in bringing together Latinos and African Americans. These vary greatly in form and scope of activity – from a small local informal network centered around two dedicated ministers, to a community organization involved in a complex statewide and regional network of activists and organizers engaged with multiple progressive causes. The settings in which these four case studies are located represent the diversity of communities found in the Southeast: a rural county (Atkinson County, Ga.), a medium-sized city (Greensboro, N.C.), a modern international city (Miami, Fla.), and a suburban county in a sprawling metropolitan area (Cobb County, Ga.).

We then contacted these groups and, after some initial inquiries about their activities, asked if they would be willing to identify several African Americans and Latinos who have been involved in their efforts to participate in focus group discussions with us. These group discussions were typically three to four hours in length and conveyed a great deal of information. We are extremely grateful to all the people who participated in these conversations; we appreciate their time and insights and hope we have accurately and honestly conveyed their perceptions and experiences. The remainder of this chapter consists of our summaries of these case study focus group discussions.

“We are extremely grateful to all the people who participated in these conversations; we appreciate their time and insights and hope we have accurately and honestly conveyed their perceptions and experiences.”
Case Study #1: Atkinson County, GA

BACKGROUND

Our first case study looks at the efforts of two ministers, the Rev. Atanacio (Tony) Gaona and the Rev. Harvey Williams, to encourage mutual understanding, communication, trust, and assistance between Latinos and African Americans in their community. Atkinson County is a small county (containing less than 9,000 people) in south Georgia, and home to the town of Willacoochee. In some respects it is more “old South” than “new South,” as its economy remains heavily agricultural, with some light manufacturing, and it lacks the large malls, sprawling subdivisions, convention centers, hotels, and post-modern office towers containing business, financial, and professional services typical of many rapidly growing Sunbelt metropolitan areas.

Most Latinos in Atkinson County are Mexicans. The Latino population has resided here, and in several nearby counties, since the early 1980s, drawn mainly by the available jobs on farms — planting, tending, and harvesting crops. In 2007, Latinos comprised 22.9% of the county population and African Americans 18.5% (58.3% are non-Hispanic Whites). Although some Latinos work in factories and a few have opened stores, most hold agricultural jobs and live on or near the farms (often in dilapidated shacks or trailers provided by their employers). This means competition between Latinos and Blacks for jobs and housing is not as severe as in some other places, but there is a wide cultural and social gulch between Blacks and Latinos. Where they meet, perhaps more than any other place, is in the public schools.

The work that Rev. Williams and Rev. Gaona have done in alleviating tensions and bringing “Blacks and Browns” together is impressive, and has been featured in a New York Times article and a report on Latino-Black coalition building in the South (Swarns 2006; Wooten 2008). Below we summarize what we learned about their activities based on a three-hour focus group discussion (held in February 2009 in Willacoochee) with Revs. Williams, Gaona, and six other people involved in this effort.

ORIGIN

Unlike many coalitions that begin with the rise of a pressing problem or a recognition of commonality, the relationship formed by Rev. Atanacio Gaona and Rev. Harvey Williams started in the early 1990s with a simple request for a ride home from work. This one mundane occurrence led to nights of dialogue, mutual understanding, and identification of common challenges within Atkinson County. Both pastors were beginning their ministries and believed it important to incorporate the notion of improving African American and Latino relations as a testament to their faith. Their work and friendship resonated not only with congregants, but also with other faith leaders and residents. Based on our discussion, many view Rev. Gaona and Rev. Williams as role models and leaders whose actions — such as celebrating church service together every fifth Sunday — compel individuals to reassess how they relate to others.

This coalition is unique because it mainly revolves around the two ministers. There is no formal organization or ad-hoc structure, but rather an expanding circle of congregants and friends who have been inspired by these two men. Ministers Williams and Gaona have developed a commitment to help one another, and work within their respective
BASIS OF COALITION

Trust, acknowledging the humanity in others, and the desire to build a more tolerant community were all common themes articulated by focus group participants in discussing why Atkinson County residents sought to improve Black-Brown relationships. Each principle is derived from their faith and a basic concern for the well being of others.

On multiple occasions, trust was considered paramount for coalition formation and sustainability. People in both communities expressed a concern for engaging other people whose language, culture, history and societal norms are dissimilar. Many noted that language was a barrier to building a relationship. As a result, Rev. Williams opined that "I have a right to learn Spanish," as opposed to Latinos solely learning English.

Rev. Gaona indicated that trust can emerge when “people keep their word.” Others stated that consistently showing good intentions would lead to the development of trust. Rev. Williams added, “I see (Rev. Gaona) as a human being, as a man.” Another participant offered “we must accept our differences” and “inside we are the same.”

Acknowledging the humanity in others was another key factor leading focus group members towards coalition building. This was particularly important because the group included a law enforcement official, a school board member, and a retired teacher (all three were African American). Each purposely strived to establish trust and acknowledge the humanity in others within his or her profession. The law enforcement official, who serves in a leadership capacity, echoed this point by recounting an experience in which he admonished subordinates who targeted Latino drivers. African Americans and Latinos desire to build a better community for themselves and their families. All participants viewed the existence of Latinos in Atkinson County as permanent, thus increasing the need to identify common ground and support one another.

SUCCESS

The focus group discussion revealed several areas in which the group is succeeding. The first was they sensed an improvement in the degree of mutual respect Latinos and African Americans were showing towards each other. For example, the high school students said Latino students are being treated “all right” and noted that last year the valedictorian was Latino. Adults also indicated that mutual respect is increasing as groups grow in their mutual understanding. Certainly the best example of this was the better understanding Rev. Williams gained about Mexicans when he accompanied Rev. Gaona on a trip to his hometown in Mexico. He said he never really understood the Mexicans in Willacoochee until he saw Pastor Tony’s village and what it was like to be “in their shoes.” Others in the focus group (a teacher, police officer, social service agency director, farm worker) mentioned that, after getting to know the Latinos or Blacks better, they had greater respect for them. Some progress is also being made in group members’ ability to communicate and engage in dialog with each other. Rev. Williams is learning Spanish, and Rev. Gaona has recently started an English class in his church. Several people in the focus group recommended Spanish be taught to English-speakers starting as early as kindergarten. Although the school system has not implemented this recommendation, it nevertheless indicates a desire on the part of local residents for better communication among the respective communities.

drivers in the belief they would be driving without valid drivers’ licenses. Fines for these infractions were as high as $1300, a month’s salary for the average Latino worker. Some within the focus group went so far as to surmise that Latino drivers were targeted for the purpose of providing an enhanced revenue stream for local government.

Another issue identified in the discussion was the treatment Latinos received from landowners who hired them to plant and harvest crops. African American participants observed that Latinos lived in “slum areas” with homes and trailers in dilapidated condition. The law enforcement official thought farmers “only cared about crops” and not about the laborers. The African American participants also noted similarities between the current treatment of Latinos and the historic treatment of African Americans. This conscious recognition of similar struggles serves as a strong motivator for African Americans to support Latino interests.

ISSUES

The first major issue identified in the discussion was racial profiling and the overall treatment of Latinos by Atkinson County and Willacoochee law enforcement officials. Focus group participants thought the police and sheriff departments were purposely constructing roadblocks to target Latino communities towards becoming more accepting and cultivating the idea of brotherhood.
The circle which has formed around these two ministers has also succeeded in gradually garnering support and cooperation from other individuals and groups in the community. Revs. Williams and Gaona have broadened the dialog and now meet every week with several White pastors to talk about issues of concern, and they mentioned Rev. Morrison (a White minister) has “become a strong supporter of Hispanic rights . . . whether they are legal or illegal.” In addition, their “5th Sunday” program brings their respective congregations together for worship, discussion, and socializing. Beyond that, the efforts of the two ministers have also received cooperation and support from a county social service agency, a local food bank, a local business (Harvey’s), and from at least one member of the county sheriff’s office.

As for progress on some of the key issues, there has been very little on the problem of inadequate housing for the Latino farm workers. A focus group member said the farm owners only care about getting their crops planted and harvested and try to house the workers as cheaply as possible. The focus group did indicate that some steps have been taken on the matter of police arrests or fines for unlicensed Latinos driving to work or driving their children to school. Specifically, they mentioned Rev. Gaona’s efforts to inform Mexicans about the need and process to get drivers’ licenses, efforts by both reverends to use vans driven by licensed drivers to transport Mexicans to and from work, the sheriff’s desire to hire a Latino officer, and the deputy sheriff’s efforts to discourage officers from exploiting the unlicensed Latino drivers they stop.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The most serious challenge or limitation mentioned in the Atkinson County focus group is a lack of resources. What they need the most, they emphasize, is more time and more volunteers. Both Rev. Williams and Rev. Gaona are responsible for meeting their congregations’ needs and they have little staff and no pastoral assistants, so they often feel overwhelmed by the demands placed on their time and energy. Rev. Williams indicated that “Pastor Tony and I have to work closer” and that, even though Pastor Tony is very busy, “there are a lot of things he needs to get involved in because he represents his people – he’s the spokesman for Hispanics in this area.” They feel that the community is ready for improved relations among Latinos, Blacks, and Whites, but the two men face a shortage of hours in the day to attend to it, a lack of funds to do things that are needed, and a scarcity of people able to effectively communicate in Spanish and English to engage and bring the groups together.

Both leaders said they had not faced much opposition to their efforts at Black-Brown cooperation. However, they indicated this county is run by a relatively small set of families that own large amounts of land, and creating change without their support is very hard. Rev. Williams also indicated he sometimes hears negative comments by Blacks about Mexicans and acknowledged that after he and Rev. Gaona were featured in a *New York Times* article, someone circulated an email about Latino gangs in California using violence against Blacks – and he viewed this as an attempt to divide the Mexicans and Blacks in Atkinson County.

ASSESSMENT

Several points made in Chapter 2 about conditions conducive to developing intergroup cooperation and coalition-building pertain to Atkinson County’s situation. The first, which enhances prospects for Black-Latino cooperation and fellowship here, is that, according to those in the focus group, in this community the Mexicans and African Americans are not in severe competition over jobs or battling for political control. Thus, they do not see their situation as a zero-sum game (i.e., they don’t view gains for the other group as coming at the expense of their own group).

Second, the emerging positive relations and cooperation among African Americans and Latinos in Atkinson County that this group is building are not based on a factor that stimulates coalition-building in many other situations: recognition that they face the same problems and cannot overcome them by themselves. Although both groups in this county face several similar problems (e.g., high drop out rates from high school, limited access to health care, economic insecurity), focus group members did not cite these as the fundamental reasons why they have come together to promote and improve Black-Brown relations. Instead, several of the points made by Kaufmann (2003) about coalition-building seem applicable and true here. Kaufmann noted that even if people differ in economic status, language, age, or cultural background, they can form a coalition if they perceive that they share some other fundamental commonality, such as sharing a historical experience or being part of the same moral community, which allows them to empathize and identify with each other, and also to respect and trust each other. For example, an African American focus group member feels compelled to stand up for the Mexicans and
try to bring Blacks and Latinos together because “they are getting treated like Black people used to get treated.” Rev. Williams adds that he “sees Pastor Tony not as a Mexican but as a man,” and a central tenet of his faith is the equality of all people, despite their differences, and the need for acceptance and assistance for all. Further, Rev. Williams said that the boundaries humans draw between countries are not boundaries God recognizes, and he feels a sympathy and responsibility for helping neighbors regardless of their race, nationality, or legal status. Several other focus group participants agreed, leading us to conclude that the underlying basis of this coalition springs more from religious and faith-based sentiments than economic, social, or political roots and motives.

In terms of the “collaborative capacity” issues discussed in Chapter 2, this group has remained rather small and is limited by a scarcity of resources and external support in their effort to promote change. Although both Revs. Williams and Gaona have inspired a small circle of associates who are well-informed about the issues and are committed to this cause, they recognize the need for more people to get involved and take on leadership roles. But the source of the resources needed and identifying the most useful activities or programs for encouraging wider participation and social change are questions that hover over this group, waiting for good answers.

**Case Study #2: The Beloved Community (Greensboro, N.C.)**

**BACKGROUND**

The second case study focuses on the work of people affiliated with The Beloved Community Center of Greensboro and a network of associated regional organizations (e.g., the Southern Anti-Racism Network, based in Durham, N.C.) trying to forge more solidarity and cooperation among African Americans and Latinos. The mission of the Beloved Community Center (BCC) of Greensboro is to foster and model the ideals and spirit of community envisioned in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s concept of the “Beloved Community.” In doing this they try to bring about changes in social and economic relations so that the equality, dignity, worth, and potential of every person is realized. The BCC describes itself as advocating on behalf of, standing with, and fighting for “the least, the lost, and the left out” – people who face injustice and oppression as their daily reality.

The BCC is heir to Greensboro’s long, rich history of civil rights and worker empowerment movements, which dates back to the first student sit-ins of the early 1960s. As a social movement organization, the BCC was established in 1991 by three Greensboro ministers: Barbara Dua (Assistant Minister of First Presbyterian Church), Z. Holler (Pastor of Presbyterian Church of the Covenant), and Nelson Johnson (Pastor of Faith Community Church) after they participated in a course at the Servant Leadership School of Greensboro. Since then, the BCC has utilized community organizing, public meetings, protests and other forms of advocacy, as well as training and coalition-building to pursue its goal of an inclusive, egalitarian community.

More specifically, the BCC has assisted workers and labor unions in confrontations with large business corporations (e.g., K-Mart, Smithfield), advocated on behalf of educational reform and against abuses in the criminal justice system, fought against racism and racial discrimination, and has engaged in hospitality and shelter for the homeless.

The central person at the Beloved Community Center is its Executive Director, the Rev. Nelson Johnson. He is also founder and Pastor of Faith Community Church, which physically and spiritually houses and supports the BCC. Rev. Johnson has extensive experience as a dedicated activist for social and racial justice causes and is an officer in several other local and regional organizations devoted to faith-based progressive endeavors. Assisting Rev. Johnson is the BCC’s executive board, comprised of individuals with extensive experience in the civil rights, labor, peace, and environmental movements. Thus the BCC has strong, experienced, committed leadership and as an organization is well-connected with other like-minded groups in North Carolina and the South.
To provide local context, we note that the Greensboro-High Point metropolitan area has a population of about 700,000 people, of which about 250,000 live in the city of Greensboro. Latinos are a small minority, comprising about 10% of the metro area's population and about 7% of the city’s population (within the Latino population, over 70% are Mexican). Whites and Blacks are much more numerous, both in the whole metropolitan area (65.8% non-Hispanic White, 23.7% non-Hispanic Black), and in the city of Greensboro (48.8% non-Hispanic White, 38.9% non-Hispanic Black).

ORIGIN

Although struggle against racism and desire to improve race relations have been central themes of the BCC since its inception, activity aimed specifically at encouraging Latino-Black unity and cooperation is a relatively new agenda item. The BCC’s effort to spark “Black-Brown” collaboration grew out of several shared realities. Some of these are based on African Americans’ and Latinos’ mutual economic interest, and others are based on recognition of commonality based on shared group experiences. Regarding the former, Rev. Johnson mentioned that about four years ago, during the Justice@Smithfield workers’ campaign, “Latinos and Blacks were rather constantly being pitted against each other.” That is, in trying to prevent Smithfield’s workers from opting for a labor union, the company’s managers and supervisors played the African American and Latino workers against each other – doing things to increase their mistrust and resentment of each other, which made it harder for the Justice@Smithfield Campaign to unify the workers. In response, Rev. Johnson and other ministers, along with staff from the United Food and Commercial Workers labor union, wanted to do something to make Black and Latino workers see themselves as allies against a common enemy (Smithfield’s management). To do this they created a “prophetic witness and economic justice school” near the meat-packing factory to help African American and Latino activists and workers gain understanding of each other, overcome their fears and grudges, and commit to working together. Also, to stimulate cooperation among African American and Latino Smithfield workers, for the 2008 Martin Luther King Day celebration in Fayetteville, N.C, the Latino community was invited and special tribute was made to Cesar Chavez as well as to Dr. King. However, while engaged in this campaign, Rev. Johnson and other ministers realized there was “a deep need for an understanding and approach to building Black-Brown unity that far transcended the campaign around Smithfield.” Therefore they decided to hold a conference on building Black-Brown unity throughout the state “where people could figure out how to work together and how to build something that is enduring.”

Somewhat independently, another group based in North Carolina, the Southern Anti-Racism Network, saw the value of bringing African Americans and Latinos closer together. They believed that the immigrant rights movement (which seeks to end the exploitation of undocumented immigrants and supports granting benefits to them to improve their well-being) could be strengthened by increasing African American and Latino unity. To enhance intergroup understanding and empathy, activists pointed to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act (which made it a crime for anyone to harbor or aid a slave who escaped from the South to a free state in the North

28This refers to the labor union organizing drive taking place in the mid- and late-2000s at several North Carolina Smithfield Packing Company plants (pig slaughtering and pork processing factories). In late 2008 workers in Tar Heel, N.C. (the largest of these factories) voted in favor of unionizing (United Food and Commercial Workers), while in April 2009 workers at a Smithfield plant in Wilson, N.C. rejected the option to unionize.

29These included Rev. Dr. Marvin L. Morgan, Rev. Dr. William Barber, and the UFCW’s Libby Manley.
and required police to arrest accused runaway slaves and assist in returning them to their alleged owners) and its apparent similarity to the Sensenbrenner Immigration Control Bill (HR 4437) being debated in Congress in 2005. Thus, a call for Black-Brown unity was framed around the idea of experiences both groups shared—economic exploitation, the threat of physical removal or deportation, and lack of political power.

The BCC’s concern for improving relations between Latinos and African Americans was also related to incidents of violence and other problems involving teenagers and young adults in Greensboro (although plans for the “Black-Brown” unity conference began prior to this situation). Rev. Johnson and several other ministers began meeting with leaders of a street group or gang called the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation (ALKQN), who indicated they wanted to renounce criminal behavior, stop and prevent further violence among gangs, and end hostility between Latino and Black youth. While the ministers became convinced of ALKQN’s sincerity and trustworthiness, other gangs and police officers were suspicious of its motives, and a series of provocations, threats, beatings, shootings, and arrests ensued. In an increasingly tense situation, Rev. Johnson and the BCC attempted to defend the ALKQN, arguing that it could be a positive force in making Greensboro neighborhoods safer, but that ALKQN youths and other Latinos and African Americans are all too often blatantly mistreated by law enforcement personnel. Not surprisingly, this led to disagreement and conflict with Greensboro police officials. No resolution to this dangerous situation was in sight at the time of our focus group interview.

The point here, however, is that to understand the BCC’s interest in and concern for Black-Brown unity we must see it as an organization that (a) is aware of and concerned about the pressure and difficulties that youth and young adults of color face; (b) seeks to reduce violence within and among Latino and Black gangs; and (c) feels that if African Americans and Latinos unite, they can bring greater political and moral pressure on law enforcement officials to improve the way they deal with people of color.

**BASIS OF COALITION**

African American focus group participants began coalescing with Latinos in opposition to federal and local government policies targeting immigrant and Latino communities. They compared current struggles to the African American movement for human rights. The use of the police to target, detain, incarcerate and deport people was especially disturbing. Each group felt compelled, by faith and a belief in human dignity, to articulate its disdain through words and action. Latinos, for their part, sought to align with existing advocacy networks who could offer opportunities to organize effectively and vociferously denounce perceived human right abuses.

Participants agreed that Black-Brown coalitions are needed to further their collective cause of addressing economic challenges experienced within both communities, especially economic exploitation and diminishing employment opportunities. Central to this particular issue was the need to dispel notions of Latinos “taking jobs” from African American workers. In the midst of economic uncertainty, the perception that Latinos were preferred by employers over their African American counterparts was gaining legitimacy in many circles. Focus group participants worked to redefine the discussion by emphasizing how both African American and Latino workers require living wages, improved workplace conditions and the right to organize.

Another basis for coalition-building is establishing trust and solidarity through education. To identify and acknowledge the humanity within one another, it became critical to understand the respective histories, cultures, norms, values and fears harbored by coalescing members. Several focus group members felt that the lack of a purposeful educational component had reinforced stereotypes and fears that led to dissension. A Black participant shared this concern, stating it was “painful to hear other African Americans refer to other human beings as ‘well you know they are illegal’.” Latino participants noted the existence of color prejudice within their culture reinforced by negative perceptions of darker hued Latinos. Through education, the hope is that such animosity can be contextualized, appropriately addressed through dialogue and eventually resolved.

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30 This bill, officially termed the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, was approved in the House of Representatives but did not pass in the Senate. It proposed to make it a felony punishable by a prison term to provide any form of assistance to a person who is in the U.S. illegally and would have made deporting illegal immigrants easier. In 2006, this bill aroused several massive protest demonstrations by and on behalf of undocumented immigrants, including the “day without immigrants.”
ISSUES

All participants indicated their unease about federal policy, most notably 287 (g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, whereby local law enforcement enters into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the United States Homeland Security Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) allowing for the enforcement of civil immigration law at the county and municipal level. According to focus group participants, roughly eight counties in North Carolina have entered into MOUs with ICE. Prior to the emergence of 287 (g) in North Carolina, African Americans attending the focus group became concerned about federal action to address immigration during controversies over the Sensenbrenner Bill (see footnote 30), especially the provision that prohibited assisting undocumented people. Many pro-immigrant advocates surmised the measure was an attempt to deny undocumented persons any form of help (e.g. legal, medical, social, charitable). African American coalition members viewed such policy as akin to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, which also prohibited the aiding and abetting of a particular population because of its status.

To those participating in the focus group, policies like 287 (g) reinforce the belief that “state repression now is based on immigration status.” Latinos resent local law enforcement agencies targeting and oppressing men and women who enter the United States to work and support their families and whose labor contributes to the economy. Tactics such as roadblocks and raids have torn families apart, forced people to become more transitory, put families in a perpetual state of fear, and increased instances of ethnic profiling and scapegoating.

Another issue of great concern was state policy targeting gangs or street groups. The BCC coalition includes several street group members who have been actively working with Rev. Johnson and others to promote Black-Brown unity. These street group members want to become a part of the solution by empowering members of the community, speaking out against injustice, and participating in the political process. The perceptions held by law enforcement officials and legislators is completely different. The state of North Carolina has been aggressively campaigning to suppress “gang activity,” especially with passage of its Street Gang Suppression Act, which went into effect in December 2008. Focus group members have publicly decried the passage of this law and its implementation. African American coalition members were particularly appalled that Black legislators would support it. Those in the focus group felt the law offered local law enforcement greater opportunities to target, harass, arrest and convict Latinos and immigrants. Rev. Johnson wondered aloud why these same legislators did not try to provide Latinos viable jobs with a living wage. He also insisted that African Americans remain vigilant in opposing gang suppression tactics. In his opinion, “if you can slice off one group of the community and mistreat them, then the whole community holds responsibility.”

SUCCESS

For the last several years, the coalition has been extremely successful in developing a network of conscientious people and organizations who desire to improve relationships between African Americans and Latinos. Central to its success was the hosting of a statewide Black-Brown Unity Conference in October 2008. The event, which drew close to 300 people, allowed North Carolinians to engage in an honest dialogue about issues impacting their collective quality of life, raise concerns and fears existent within each community, and enjoy the culture and talents of each group. During the closing ceremony, all in attendance declared in unison “Today, we solemnly pledge to expose the scapegoating and blaming that pervades our state and nation. We pledge to work together to seek more justice, equality and prosperity for all who live in our communities. We pledge to stand together with faith and courage to implement the seven priorities.” Plans are underway to host two more conferences.
The coalition has also continued its effort to educate, engage, and empower African Americans and Latinos about issues of common concern. In March 2009, 300 concerned citizens attended a meeting to discuss Guilford County’s proposed participation in the 287 (g) program. Civil rights, faith, human rights and labor leaders all opposed such action on numerous grounds, including the potential increase in racial profiling and the unwillingness of immigrant victims to seek police assistance. Another meeting was held on April 20, 2009 to further determine how the community will address this issue.

Last, the Beloved Community Center provides excellent information about the work being done to strengthen existing relationships, forge new ones, and reaffirm its commitment to ending the subjugation of African Americans, Latinos and immigrants. To Rev. Johnson, “one of the great imperatives of this hour in the movement is to build new bridges of human relationships, understanding, analysis, and coordination of work between diverse communities. The success of this gathering will be measured to a great degree by how well we strengthen the foundation for collaboration, coordination, and joint work. Indeed, our challenge is to continue to forge a powerful infrastructure for justice.”

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Participants in the focus group at the Beloved Community Center saw their challenges and limitations differently than did the Atkinson County group. For one thing, they did not stress a lack of resources like time, money, or volunteers. In fact, while acknowledging that many of their programs, including the Black-Brown Unity Conference held in October 2008, operate on a “shoe-string” budget, they expressed some pride and satisfaction with the way that different individuals and groups bring different talents and offerings to the BCC and associated organizations. A Latina participant in the focus group mentioned that, in her opinion, a big challenge was to advance African American-Latino cooperation in ways that help empower the communities rather than merely preach to them or provide a service to them. For example, she mentioned an inspiring computer education program (“SPICE”) that brought parents and children together to learn how to use computers and the internet; but what made it special and empowering was that the graduates of the first class then became the teachers in the next year’s class, and subsequently each year’s graduates teach the next year’s class.

Another focus group participant mentioned the need to show more clearly that efforts to bring “Blacks and Browns” together constitute a social movement. She then named five “institutions” involved in these efforts (Southern Anti-Racism Network, Beloved Community Center, the Highlander Center in Tennessee, Project South in Atlanta, and Southern Echo in Mississippi) and said the challenge lies in coordinating the activities of these institutions. She indicated that the Highlander Center was taking the lead in doing this. Later in the discussion, another participant said that lack of coordination—“too much doing our own thing”—is a problem or challenge. She felt that activity wasn’t cumulative and they often felt like they were starting over again when there is a long time between meetings or programs. Another indicated the activity and commitment level from people affiliated with these activist organizations was good, but it would be beneficial to have greater awareness, support, and involvement from the general public.

Rev. Johnson observed that to build a social movement of this type, most fundamentally, you need to grow trust, shared goals, cohesiveness, and cooperation. This, he feels, depends largely on leadership and leadership training, and once these things are in place he believes the financial support will come.

Finally, several focus group members spoke of attitudes and behaviors they encounter in their contacts with other Latinos, African Americans, and Whites who do not agree with the goals they espouse. They often deal with African Americans who feel that top priority should be given to organizing the Black community and see concern for Latinos as a distraction or as a much lower priority, or who are afraid of or hostile toward Latinos because they compete for some of the same jobs. Two Latina focus group members described their frustration with Latinos, including some in positions

“... if you can slice off one group of the community and mistreat them, then the whole community holds responsibility.”
of leadership, who feel superior to and distance themselves from African Americans and darker skinned Latinos. The attitudes of many Whites were also criticized as a challenge group members face, particularly a lack of compassion on immigration issues and misguided notions about the workings of the criminal justice system. This means these advocates for African American-Latino coalitions are aware the political positions and moral stance they advocate are often unpopular with, indeed sometimes diametrically opposed to, those of a large segment of the general public. While this does not diminish their enthusiasm or commitment, they realize it makes their task more difficult.

**ASSESSMENT**

Many strengths are apparent in the efforts at building unity among African Americans and Latinos sponsored by the Beloved Community Center and the network of other North Carolina groups working together. Among these is the large number of experienced, dedicated, competent organizers in this network, their interconnections and ability to work together built over the years. This impressive stock of social capital gives them more than a local Greensboro focus: It gives them a state-wide and regional vision and voice. In the past year they organized a successful Black-Brown Unity Conference, attended by almost 300 people, and they plan additional conferences to further that goal. They also assisted the labor union (UFCW) in bringing Latino and African American workers together in the successful Smithfield pork factory campaign in Tar Heel, N.C. and have spoken out in the debate over 287(g).

Participants in the focus group recognized a need for better coordination and more regular communication and planning among the organizations in this network. They hope the momentum created by their initial Black-Brown Conference does not dissipate. However, because the BBC and associated groups are active on a wide range of social and economic justice issues, energies and resources devoted to Black-Brown relations are bound to fluctuate as other matters of concern take center stage.

Another issue facing the BCC’s efforts to increase Black-Brown solidarity is the basic question of what kind of social movement its participants hope to produce. One option, the current model, is a social movement comprised mainly of activists and organizers in “progressive,” “left-wing,” or “social justice” organizations with a relatively consistent socio-political ideology that focuses on the current oppression of the poor, a desire to put “people ahead of profits,” and the necessity of the less powerful to struggle against large government and corporate institutions. Another option is a larger and broader “mass movement,” which draws in and is supported by a much wider segment of the public. An honest and frank assessment may conclude it would be difficult to shift to the mass movement form. As a few focus group participants noted, their perspectives and the stances they take on several issues are unpopular with many people they encounter.

In addition, among North Carolina conservatives the BCC and the organizations it works with are stigmatized and attacked as dangerous “radicals” and they have received threats and hate-mail from more conservative groups. This is, of course, a problem that many change oriented groups face – they make enemies among the powerful and are tarred in the media with accusations that alienate or scare people in the general public. Whether and how the BCC and associated organizations deal with this issue is likely to affect the kind and extent of impact they have in fostering African American and Latino cooperation.

Having said that, we do not mean to imply that the prospects for greater Black-Brown unity are bleak, even in the current harsh economic situation. The people working in the BCC and related organizations have many of the kinds of “collaborative capacities” described in Chapter 2, and the basis of their coalition-building efforts is grounded in both shared economic interests and common experiences of Latinos and African Americans. This bodes well for their efforts. Moreover, their sincerity, strength, faith, and ethical concerns about treating each other respectfully and equally are most impressive and makes for an approach that is conducive to stimulating Black-Brown understanding and cooperation.

**Case Study #3: Miami Workers Center**

**BACKGROUND**

The third case study deals with the Miami Workers Center (MWC), an organization founded in 1999 by Gihan Perera and Tony Romano, both of whom had extensive experience as labor union organizers. The MWC is based in Miami’s Liberty City neighborhood and assists the residents there and in the nearby neighborhoods of Wynwood, Buena Vista, Allapattah, and Little Haiti. During the 1990s in Miami, as in other parts of the country, social justice activists recognized that working-class people faced serious problems outside of their work
settings and many of those concerns were rooted in neighborhood conditions (e.g., housing, schools, safety), so they established “worker centers” in urban neighborhoods to address community needs. As described on the MWC website, its purpose is to help “working-class people build grassroots organizations and develop their leadership capacity through aggressive community organizing campaigns and education programs.” The WMC “builds coalitions and enters alliances to amplify progressive power and win racial, community, social, and economic justice.” Among the issues the WMC has dealt with are advocating for public housing residents’ rights and access to low-cost housing, protecting voting rights and sponsoring voter registration and education campaigns, and resisting the gentrification of African American and Latino neighborhoods.

We were initially reluctant to include a case study based in Florida (especially Miami), in this study of African American and Latino cooperation in the Southeast for the simple reason that the situation there is so different than the situation in Georgia, North Carolina, and other Southeastern states. As we noted in discussing Tables 1 and 2 (in Chapter 1), the Latino population in Florida is much larger than any other Southeastern state, it has a longer history of residence, and a much higher percentage of foreign-born Latinos are naturalized U.S. citizens in Florida than in any other Southeastern state.

Moreover, by 2000 Florida’s Latino population was larger than its Black population, whereas in all other Southeastern states Blacks greatly outnumber Latinos. In Florida, Cubans comprise the largest portion of the Latino population, with substantial numbers from Central America and Puerto Rico, while in the other Southeastern states the Mexicans are the largest Latino group. In Miami, especially, Cubans have risen in socioeconomic status and political power to the point that they now surpass African Americans and other Latino groups. Miami’s former mayor, Xavier Suarez, proudly said, “The Irish needed fifty or sixty years to get control of Boston, but we took over this city in less than thirty years” (Ungar 1995:197). So it is common for African Americans and other Latinos to refer to Miami’s Cubans as the dominant group in the city. Indeed, a few people we met in our research in Miami felt Cubans were not “real” Latinos due to their higher class position, tendency to identify with Whites, and their lack of solidarity with the Central Americans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Dominicans in Miami. One can point to the popularity of “Yo no soy Latino, soy Cubano” t-shirts and bumper stickers in Miami’s Little Havana as an indication of this social distance between Cubans and people from other parts of Latin America.

Nevertheless, we decided to include the Miami Workers Center as a case study in this project for two reasons. First, in several respects it is exemplary in its organizational form and approach, and therefore other groups may want to consider the MWC as a model. Second, there actually are quite a few towns or cities in the Southeast where Latinos outnumber African Americans, and perhaps they will be more affluent or politically influential, so the approach and strategies used by this organization in Miami may be relevant for other groups.

ORIGIN

Researchers surveying Miami’s recent history have been most struck by the bitter struggles and deep divisions between White, African American, and Cuban communities and the antagonism rather than the cooperation among Blacks and Latinos (Grenier & Castro 2001; Grenier & Stepick 1992; Portes & Stepick 1993). Portes & Stepick (1993) refer to an unsuccessful effort to forge a coalition between Whites and Blacks to oppose the growth of Cuban power in Miami. A 1993 report on Miami notes “the absence of a common agenda between Cubans and African Americans” and states that the “coalitions between African Americans and Latinos, forged in other cities in the U.S., are patently absent in Miami” (American Sociological Association 1993). Another report cites a few instances of African American-Cuban cooperation that produced modest gains, but notes these are rare and suggests that Cuban business and civic leaders in Miami are “more interested in spending their time, money, and energy in catching

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31 Good examples are the cities of Dalton, Ga. and Gainesville Ga. In Dalton, a carpet manufacturing center; in the mid-2000s Latinos were over 45% of the population and Blacks just over 6%. In Gainesville, a chicken processing center; Latinos were 41% of the population and Blacks about 11%.
up to the Anglos and in attempting to overthrow Fidel Castro than in helping African Americans” (Grenier & Castro 2001:154). So it is important to note that to the extent that we speak of African American-Latino coalition-building in Miami, or more specifically, the coalition-building engaged in by MWC, the Latinos involved are mainly from Central America, Mexico, or other Caribbean countries rather than Cuba.

While MWC’s founders hoped their organization would be a means of empowerment for a multi-ethnic population, its initial location and outreach in Liberty City meant the first issues it addressed were those raised by local African American residents. These included assisting impoverished women facing the so-called “welfare-to-work” transition and then organizing the community to protest the destruction of public housing and advocating for the continued provision of affordable housing for those who had been or would be displaced from public housing. In pursuing this housing goal MWC helped create an allied organization: Low Income Families Fighting Together (LIFFT).

After gaining experience in organizing in Liberty City and gaining residents’ support there, in the mid-2000s MWC staff started organizing in adjacent neighborhoods where many Puerto Ricans and Dominicans live. Here the threat of housing loss and displacement due to gentrification was apparent and MWC helped create a grassroots group (Miami en Acción) to fight for the rights of renters and prevent the eviction of poor residents from the neighborhoods.

Cooperation between African Americans and Latinos is encouraged in the MWC’s Circle of Consciousness discussion sessions, which are held for people interested in the grassroots organizations that MWC sponsors. These weekly educational groups focus on topics such as globalization, gentrification, colonialism, homophobia, racism, and working-class struggles. The need for Black-Brown solidarity is a frequent theme in these discussions. To facilitate dialogue and understanding between African Americans and Latinos at these meetings, translators are present to assist those who are not bilingual. MWC participants in our group interview also mentioned the Presidential election campaign in 2008 was very important in initiating many positive contacts between Miami Blacks and Latinos, especially for those who participated in the door-to-door efforts to register and encourage people to vote.

**BASIS OF COALITION**

In speaking with members of the focus group, it became glaringly apparent both African Americans and non-Cuban Latinos share a common resentment for the existing Cuban political power structure. Unmet promises, a shared lack of equity and opportunity, and a perceived sense of Cuban entitlement have forged a relationship with zero-sum consequences. A member of MWC offered some context stating, “due to history and policy [and] a distinctive way the Cubans have been treated . . . has placed them in a particular position here in Miami that is very unique.” An African American focus group participant provided an honest testimonial as to the anger and frustration his community harbored for all Latinos. There was “heavy resentment against Cubans because of the privilege they were given when they came over here that we did not have. Through those resentments we overlooked [the] Latin community because we considered them all one.”

It was not until African Americans and Latinos began dialoguing and working together on MWC’s sponsored projects that reality set in. It became quite evident to both groups that “we Latins and African Americans suffer from the same oppression.” A Latina participant contended that if separate focus groups were conducted within both communities, the issues and concerns which surfaced would be identical. This
revelation was a critical moment in building a viable coalition. An African American participant admitted that “not all Latins are privileged by [the] same policy that Cubans have been privileged by . . . It wasn’t the Latins. . . The Cubans were hiding behind the Latins taking all the opportunities they can to oppress us.” For the coalition members, their struggle was about survival. As one focus group participant indicated, “if we don’t stick together we will be pushed out.”

Projects like LIFFT and Miami en Acción were responses to policies and practices that have compromised the quality of life of both communities. A kinship was formed based on a mutual understanding and appreciation for the suffering each group has endured in isolation. More importantly, the opportunities to interact as friends and co-workers replaced longstanding fears with feelings of optimism and hope. One time adversaries are now united to improve their socioeconomic and political conditions.

ISSUES

In simplest and broadest terms, the issue MWC is most concerned with is how to increase working-class people’s power to improve their lives. As their website states, MWC’s purpose is to build the “collective strength of working-class and poor Black and Latino communities in Miami,” by working to increase the power and self-determination of these communities by initiating and supporting community-led grassroots organizations that confront the critical social issues of our time: poverty and economic exploitation, racism, and gender oppression. If these are the MWC’s overarching key issues, then their strategic issues or goals are to develop a broad-based coalition and to enhance leadership capabilities of the people associated with the grassroots programs they support.

More specifically, Miami en Acción (one of the main grassroots organizations MWC sponsors) is concerned with Roberto Clemente Park in Wynwood, which the city has let decay. They seek to get community control over this park and create a safe and attractive center for the neighborhood. As noted above, gentrification is another key issue for MWC. Its other main grassroots organization, Low-Income Families Fighting Together (LIFFT) works extensively on this and related housing matters. In addition, MWC’s Gihan Perera is a co-founder of Right to the City, which is a national alliance of grassroots organizations in over 30 cities that focuses on legal and policy alternatives to the displacement of poor and working-class communities threatened by gentrification in their neighborhoods. As members of Miami en Acción and LIFFT have found they face similar problems, MWC’s leaders have encouraged their cooperation, and unity and solidarity has been activated in their “Somos Uno” (We Are One) organizing campaign and protest activities. This has been an important means through which African American and Latino cooperation has been advanced at MWC.

Another issue of concern is voting rights (stimulated by the 2000 and 2004 Presidential election vote problems in Florida). MWC’s “Take Back the Vote” campaign addresses the need to make poor peoples’ access to election ballots more secure. On a related note, MWC leaders recognize that after the 2010 U.S. Census reapportionment of federal, state, and local election districts occurs. An undercount in poor and minority neighborhoods reduces the representation minority residents have in legislatures or on county commissions, so, in anticipation of the 2010 Census, MWC has initiated a “Race and Citizenship” campaign to encourage residents in Liberty City and nearby areas to participate in the census and ultimately strengthen their voice in electoral politics.

The MWC is also interested in having the maximum possible amount of public funds benefit Miami’s less advantaged residents. Therefore it joined with other groups in the Coalition Against Marlins Bailout, which objects to using public funds to build a baseball stadium for the Florida Marlins and proposes redirecting the money to things of greater benefit to Miami’s working-class such as health clinics, subsidized housing, or improved schools.

Finally, MWC hopes to broaden its members’ perspectives beyond these local issues so they can understand how they are affected by political and
economic changes playing out at the global level and how they might respond to those distant changes. Towards that end, MWC has held discussions on globalization and NAFTA, and participated in the large protest against the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas) Ministerial meeting in November 2003. Beyond this, the MWC endorses connection to and solidarity with poor people in other parts of the world, and it has encouraged members to participate in boycotts against corporations seen as exploiting people in other countries.

SUCCESS

The MWC has achieved successful outcomes in several campaigns it has supported. LIFFT’s protests against Miami-Dade government and housing authority resulted in an agreement whereby 850 units of low-income housing would be rebuilt and made available to original residents of a public housing project that was demolished in 2003. Other successes include improvements made in Roberto Clemente Park, the registration of several thousand voters in 2008 (for which MWC received recognition from the National Council of La Raza), and an effective leadership training program (called ROC-IT) that trains people to become effective community organizers.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

In the focus group discussion MWC members indicated two challenges or limitations they currently face. The first is obvious and true of all organizations that share MWC’s goals and ideological stance – they face opposition from many powerful segments in the metropolitan area. They refer to the “Miami power structure” as aligned against them and comprised of major real estate developers and large property owners, major corporations, and key government officials. The ethnic mix of this power structure is seen as largely upper- and middle-class Cubans and Whites, along with some advantaged African Americans. The disparity in resources and influence between MWC-sponsored groups and this power structure produces confrontations that resemble “David vs. Goliath” match-ups.

The other challenge MWC members noted is that in the course of their neighborhood organizing efforts they encounter a great deal of mistrust and skepticism. As one focus group participant noted, when they go out organizing in the community they run into “… the fact that a lot of people don’t believe in anyone, they don’t believe in politicians, they don’t believe in politics. They don’t believe in groups like ours; they think everyone is out for themselves.” For example, when MWC organizers invited people to come to a local health fair and receive free health exams and services, some residents didn’t believe them and instead thought the health fair was just a ploy to get undocumented immigrants to come out to be arrested and deported. Another challenge related to distrust is that MWC organizers say they meet many African Americans and Latinos who see each other more as competitors for jobs, housing, and services rather than as potential allies. As a result, MWC organizers feel, “We have to change the way people think, and raise the consciousness” of those who are skeptical or cynical, and try to build trust and community among them.

MWC’s purpose is to build the “collective strength of working-class and poor Black and Latino communities in Miami…”

As is true for many non-profit organizations working for social change, financial stability is a challenge. Since the MWC officer for fundraising was not present in the focus group, little was said about the organization’s current financial status.
Much of its support comes from foundations, and the list of contributors includes many major national foundations (e.g., Ford, Rockefeller, Tides, Hill-Snowden, Marguerite Casey, New World). The current economic crisis has taken a toll on these foundations and it is not clear how well MWC will fare financially.

Language differences among the MWC’s constituents are an obstacle, but probably less so than for the other three groups included as case studies in this report. Several of its staff and members are bilingual; they usually have translators at meetings and write documents in more than one language. They said language is more of a problem for the older people and many, perhaps most, of the younger people who come to MWC activities can speak both English and Spanish.

ASSSESSMENT

The Miami Workers Center is strong on many of the criteria that Dobbie (2009) says successful coalitions need. Its leaders and the MWC as an organization are well integrated in local and national networks of social justice activism, and there are allied groups and individuals providing technical or other support. MWC’s leaders and staff of organizers do seem to be “bridge builders” who are comfortable with and encourage interaction among African Americans and Latinos. Their programs and activities are balanced between those that aim to fight for tangible benefits for poor people and those that increase mutual understanding and respect between African Americans and Latinos. Finally, what we see in Miami supports a conclusion in Gay’s (2006) research that we previously cited – Blacks have more negative feelings towards, and are less likely to form coalitions with, Latinos that have large populations and are economically advantaged (Miami Cubans). Conversely, less affluent African Americans feel more positively towards, and are more likely to collaborate with, Latinos with smaller populations and lower socioeconomic position (Miami’s non-Cuban Latinos).

Case Study #4: Cobb United for Change Coalition

BACKGROUND

The final case study in this report is a recently formed multi-ethnic coalition in Cobb County, a northern suburb in the Atlanta metropolitan area.

In the late 1970s and for most of the 1980s Cobb was one of the fastest growing counties in the U.S. in terms of new housing starts and population increase. Its growth in those years was spurred mainly by two waves of new arrivals: one from other states (including “Yankees” from the North) and another comprised of Whites from the city of Atlanta and DeKalb County, many of whom seemed uncomfortable with the growing numbers of Blacks living there.

In 1980 and in 1990 Cobb County was predominantly White (94% in 1980 and 86% in 1990) and middle-class. However, since 1990, its population has become more diverse. For example, Cobb’s Black population grew from only 4% in 1980 to 23% in 2007; its Latino population increased from 1% in 1980 to 11% in 2007, while its non-Hispanic White population went from 94% to 60% in those years.²²

Several observations about Cobb County provide context for understanding the Cobb United for Change Coalition. Despite Cobb’s changing population composition most of the county’s key political offices are occupied by Whites. In 2009, all four County Commission seats are held by Whites, as are six out of seven positions on the county Board of Education (one is held by an African American). Politically, most Cobb residents and elected political leaders are considerably more conservative than those in the city of Atlanta or DeKalb County, and public discussions of, and decisions about, matters like affirmative action, individual responsibility, school integration, public transit, gay rights, and undocumented immigrants are markedly different in Cobb compared to Atlanta or DeKalb County. For instance, in 1993, when Atlanta was considering granting gay city workers the same domestic benefits given to married couples, Cobb’s County Commission issued a “family friendly” resolution stating that the “gay lifestyle” is “incompatible with the standards to which this community subscribes.” There have been a number of complaints about Cobb police using excessive force against Black residents. In addition, several of the focus group participants mentioned that they know of some African Americans who do not feel comfortable coming to shop or visit friends in Cobb County.

More recently, Cobb County gained notoriety for spearheading action against immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally. Cobb’s State Senator Chip

²² Based on data from the 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census and the 2007 American Community Survey.
Rogers, at the urging of his constituents, was the leading advocate of the Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act, which became law in 2006. Earlier in the decade there was a serious controversy in the city of Marietta (Cobb’s county seat) over Latino day laborers who gathered in certain areas awaiting pick-up for construction jobs. More recently, in July 2007, Cobb County’s Sheriff was one of the first in Georgia to participate in the 287 (g) program, which enables deputies to check the legal status of anyone arrested on any charge (not just for a felony or DUI) and to initiate deportation proceedings on a person here illegally. During its first six months Cobb County’s participation in 287(g) resulted in the start of deportation proceedings against 1,357 people held at the county jail (Mollett 2008).

ORIGIN
The Cobb United for Change Coalition was created in May, 2008 in response to two incidents. The first was the shooting of a Black high school student by a police officer under suspicious circumstances. This generated concern over law enforcement profiling and aggressiveness towards minorities. The second incident occurred during the 2008 Presidential election campaign – the owner of a local restaurant/bar started selling T-shirts on which Barack Obama was made to look like the monkey in the “Curious George” children’s book series. Several organizations and many individuals were angered by the racist imagery and attitudes behind it, so they formed the CUCC and held a public protest and press conference to denounce the t-shirt and its intended message. The CUCC founding organizations were: the Cobb Immigrant Alliance, Family Life Restoration Center, Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials, Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights, Nation of Islam (Cobb chapter), New Order National Human Rights Organization, Southern Christian Leadership Conference (Cobb chapter), Charles Muhammad (Nation of Islam) and Rich Pellegrino (Cobb Immigrant Alliance) have served as the main leaders of CUCC, whose purpose is to promote unity, trust, and understanding across Cobb County’s racial and ethnic groups and to oppose discrimination against racial minorities.

BASIS OF COALITION
As with the previous focus groups, the Cobb County participants sought to address shared concerns through forming a coalition based on mutual respect and trust. The establishment of trust was paramount because of past incidents where Latinos were being targeted and attacked by African Americans. The persistence of the attacks led community leaders to organize a meeting. One of the organizers admitted to using fear as a tactic, telling other stakeholders “if we don’t do something about it, do you want to become South Central Los Angeles or South Chicago with gang proliferation?”

Of importance for coalition members is providing Latino immigrant residents of a local mobile home park with a means to articulate frustrations about their living conditions and treatment from local law enforcement. This notion of empowerment stems from a civil rights and human rights tradition many of the focus group participants embrace. Their past work could be seamlessly incorporated within the framework of advocating for immigrant issues; especially within the context of exploitative practices, policies which target specific populations, and group isolation based on linguistic or cultural differences. African Americans, in particular, saw the current struggle by immigrants and Latinos as a continuation of their movement for freedom, justice, and equality. Focus group members surmised that “the new slave is the Mexican and Latino” or the “Blacks of the ’60s are now the Latinos of 2009.”

Similarly, there was clear recognition that both communities confronted similar challenges from similar sources. Therefore, any cooperation and willingness to collaborate could offer the necessary leverage to uncover these challenges and develop
a strategy capable of being mutually beneficial. An African American focus group participant shared, “I believe that if you look at the Latino community and African American community you see two oppressed people. . . ” Yet, as alluded to earlier, any movement forward would be predicated on building trust and on understanding the reality African Americans and Latinos find themselves in.

ISSUES

African American and Latino coalition members showed their frustration with local law enforcement. Key issues for the CUCC are alleged police violence towards each community, racial profiling, and implementation of 287 (g) by the Cobb County Sheriff’s department. According to focus group participants, African Americans have historically been targeted by Cobb County law enforcement agencies. A coalition member shared that “all the Black men I knew did not want to drive over here because they were targeted and sure enough I was always a witness to that.”

Each group also raised concerns about a mobile home community in which many Latinos and some Whites and Blacks live. They felt management did not treat tenants equitably. African Americans and Whites could rent a home, which meant management paid for any repair costs and permitted greater laxity in making monthly payments. Latinos, on the other hand, were allegedly told that they must own their mobile homes (which required that they would have to pay for any repairs) and they were not given flexibility with regards to late payments. Focus group members recalled how management was quick to call the county Marshall if payment was late, yet African American and White tenants were allegedly allowed to delay payment for months without fear of reprisal.

Another issue is the language barrier. During their preliminary stages of forming a coalition, the mobile home manager (who is Panamanian) translated, but was considered ineffective or insincere. Fortunately, Kennesaw State University foreign language professors and students began to provide expert translation services which allowed for greater discussion and organizational ability. Each focus group member recognized the utility of overcoming separation due to language differences. All coalition members concurred that “language is a barrier when you are trying to build trust.” Therefore, coalition members also sought alternative ways of bringing people together where language was not the sole form of communication. They organized social events such as block parties
and clean-ups where African Americans and Latinos could work together. A focus group participant reflected that the social activities “[were] another catalyst for building trust.”

SUCCESS

The CUCC has become the primary organization building a Black-Brown relationship in Cobb County. Its early protest over the Obama t-shirts were widely publicized and brought a desired outcome. The CUCC continues to advocate for the human and civil rights for all people living in the county. Specifically, it remains active in opposing state anti-immigrant policy and the continued harassment of minorities by local law enforcement.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

As a relatively new organization, the CUCC faces a number of challenges and limitations. Its leaders are in the process of getting to know each other well and are learning what each other’s strongest interests and abilities are. The organization has no real headquarters or staff, and its financial and other material resources are minimal.

As suggested above, the generally conservative attitudes held by Cobb County leaders and, apparently, most of its citizens, especially on matters of race and immigration, make it a challenging and sometimes hostile environment for the CUCC. The CUCC, as an organization, and its leaders have been publicly criticized and verbally attacked at rallies and in the news media by people who disagree with the CUCC’s positions (threats have been made against some CUCC leaders).

Another challenge is that certain people in positions of authority do not want the coalition partners to work together. A coalition member suggested that the management of the mobile home community does not want Latinos, Blacks, and Whites working together. In addition, focus group members said that other influential people in Cobb County do not want the establishment of a Black-Latino coalition. A member of CUCC spoke about this in describing a meeting they had with law enforcement officials:

“The divide and conquer mentality was very strong and not hidden at all. As a matter of fact, the police chiefs and public safety chiefs called us in and told us, ‘We don’t want you working with the Nation of Islam. We don’t want you working with Black and Latino issues together, they’re separate. And we don’t want you going back to the ’60s and ’70s.’ They showed their cards, you know, right on the table.”

Another limitation CUCC members mentioned is since Cobb County is participating in 287 (g), many immigrants are hesitant to involve themselves in any action which might bring unnecessary attention. Simply put, “they do not trust the police anymore” and many undocumented Latinos are afraid to drive to meetings or events. They fear being stopped and arrested for a minor infraction (e.g., lane change without signaling; a headlight or taillight that is out) could have devastating consequences (deportation). African Americans opposed this policy, seeing it as akin to the racial profiling they consistently experience.

ASSESSMENT

The CUCC is a relatively new organization, so assessing its success or effectiveness would be unfair right now. The coalition is moving quickly towards developing an organizational infrastructure and increasing capacity. To its credit, the CUCC possesses charismatic leadership willing to do the necessary work of organizing and mobilizing people.

The incorporation of immigrant and Latino rights within the CUCC mission, via inclusion of the Cobb Immigrant Alliance, is a definite plus which cannot be overlooked. Such action clearly articulates support of African American and Latino (or immigrant) relations and acknowledges a mutual concern which can best be addressed through collaboration.

We also were impressed with CUCC’s desire to innovatively address the language barrier and mitigate any potential dependency on current community leaders. CUCC is designing a program to teach English at the homes of non-English speaking Latinos and immigrants. Throughout the focus groups, it became evident that improving communication will embolden organizational trust, allow for more honest dialogue and lead to better planning. The CUCC intends to provide technical assistance and training to members so they can advocate for themselves (as in the case with the mobile home community). This will allow current CUCC leaders to begin organizing in other parts of the county and build greater public will.

Overall, the focus group participants we interviewed were committed to improving the lives of all Cobb County residents. Issues of racial and ethnic differences have been supplanted by a shared frustration over police profiling and harassment, unfair housing practices, and punitive federal and state policies.
In this chapter we reflect back on what we have read, seen, and heard in the course of doing this research on Black-Brown collaborations. We do not presume we are knowledgeable enough to write a “How to...” handbook on coalition-building. Nor do we think these coalitions are at a stage of development that would allow us to identify and point to numerous “best practices” that could be widely adopted by many other organizations. However, based on what has been learned, especially from the four case studies and focus groups, we think this research provides many useful and instructive principles for people engaged in African American-Latino coalition-building. We divide this chapter into two major sections. The first part connects what we have learned in doing this research to what other researchers (many of whom were discussed in Chapter 2) have said about coalition-building. The second part presents our ideas on pathways or practical steps towards Black-Brown coalition-building in the Southeast.

Comparisons: Similarities and Differences

It was not as easy to find many Black-Brown coalitions in the Southeast as we expected it to be. We think they may be more common in other parts of the U.S. where Latinos have a longer settlement history and where community and/or labor organizing is more strongly established. Some groups on our initial list of Black-Brown collaborations either did not see a reason to meet with us or were too busy, but many showed no current activity. This, coupled with the fact that in all four focus groups one or more people mentioned that most African Americans and Latinos do not see Black-Brown collaboration as a high priority, leads to the conclusion that there is no large groundswell of support in the Southeast for African American-Latino coalitions. The support they do receive comes from those with an insightful and broader perspective than the ordinary person. This reality has several implications, and the first one we address pertains to the roles leaders of Black-Brown coalitions in the Southeast should play.

Leadership

Some view leaders as individuals who sense what people are seeking and then guide them to it, or in John Naisbitt’s words: “Leadership involves finding a parade and getting in front of it.” But what if, in many places in the Southeast, there is little or no “parade” favoring Black-Brown collaboration? The answer may lie in Rosalyn Carter’s distinction between a mere leader and a “great leader” – “A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don’t necessarily want to go, but ought to be.” This implies that advocates of African American-Latino cooperation have a large task that may require “great” leadership. Based on what we’ve seen in this project, we have a few suggestions on what that leadership entails.

As noted earlier, leaders of successful coalitions must understand the situation very well, be able to work effectively with others (e.g., share responsibility and credit), have excellent plans of action, and have an ability to attract resources. In terms of these criteria, we are impressed with the leaders we met in the focus group interviews. For example, the President of the Cobb United for Change Coalition said, with regard to African Americans and Latinos in Cobb County: “We see both communities as disenfranchised, but I believe that’s done purposely. I believe that when you look at the Latino community and the Black community you see two oppressed people. I think there’s an advantage to the establishment when you keep the two communities separated from one another. Instead of talking about the differences, let’s

34 Besides the four organizations featured in our case studies, we also tried to locate and conduct focus groups with four others. Of these, one never responded (probably defunct), one declined to participate in this study, and two wanted to participate but were unable to schedule focus group sessions that met everyone’s time constraints.
accentuate the likeness and the commonalities, and we have a history that actually overlaps one another. I certainly know the Black community as a whole is not aware of that, but much of the Latino community is not aware of that, too, that there is a commonality and overlap of the two communities. Once you build up knowledge of yourself, then there's communication, then there's dialogue, and then there's trust – and from there you move forward.”

In these comments we see an awareness of the separation between African Americans and Latinos and ideas about the reasons behind it, but more important is the emphasis on commonalities between the groups and a commitment to bring them together. In addition, what this leadership could use are some elements that leaders of the Miami Workers Center have put in place. These include a leadership development and community organizing program and a variety of educational and social activities that bring Latinos and African Americans together in situations that have many of the qualities recommended by the research on equal status intergroup contact (reviewed in Chapter 2).

Clearly, the role of leaders as “bridge builders” between communities (Dobbie 2009) is critically important too. Reverends Gaona and Williams, in the Atkinson County, GA case study, epitomize this with their exceptional rapport across group boundaries and how they have inspired others in their congregations to reach out and get to know people outside their own groups. Yet this task of encouraging Blacks and Browns in a coalition to understand and trust each other, to enjoy each others’ company, and feel a sense of solidarity with each other (called an “expressive” leadership role by sociologists) is not enough. Leaders must also discover where and how African Americans and Latinos can assist each other to overcome their problems and attain their goals. With respect to this “instrumental” leadership role, the Miami Workers Center and the Beloved Community Center seem to be doing well. They found issues and mobilized in ways that brought “quick wins” for their communities, which build a sense of efficacy and enthusiasm. As many writers on coalitions have noted, people are in them to gain benefits.

Allies, Intermediary Groups, and Networks

Chapter 2’s discussions of “collaborative capacity” and coalitions as social movements, mention that successful coalitions are usually well integrated in a network of supportive and allied organizations. Of the case studies in this report, the two centers (Beloved Community and Miami Workers) are good examples of this. In the case of MWC, its network includes other activist community and labor oriented groups in Miami, such as the Power U Center; national organizations such as Jobs With Justice, Right to the City and others that work on gentrification issues; and foundations that make grants to progressive causes. The BCC, as noted previously, is well-connected in North Carolina’s large and experienced network of social and economic justice organizations. The Southeast, and North Carolina in particular, is rich in small- and medium-sized organizations of this type, many of which go back to the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1950s-1970s. With some rejuvenation by recent labor union and immigrants rights organizers, and encouraged by Barack Obama’s victory in the 2008 Presidential election, this network seems to be on the upswing. BCC focus group participants indicated at a meeting in August 2007 celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Highlander Center in Tennessee, discussions were held on immigration issues and prospects for Black-Brown coalitions. The Highlander Center may well take the lead in helping to develop strategies for organizations and allies in this network to do more on these matters.

College or university students and faculty often are important allies and intermediaries in coalition networks (e.g., the Civil Rights movement, the Obama presidential campaign). We found this more evident with the BCC and the CUCC. Being based in Greensboro, BCC has several colleges from which to draw support. North Carolina A & T University and Guilford College, in particular, have provided resources and assistance to BCC. For CUCC, faculty and students from Kennesaw State University have provided some help, and CUCC should encourage that support and reach out to other college students and faculty in metropolitan Atlanta to broaden its network.

The CUCC, as noted in Chapter 3, is constituted as a network of organizations of different types. These include an immigrants’ rights group, faith-based organizations (one of which operates a food pantry for the needy), a residential neighborhood group, and a civil rights advocacy group. It also has contact with the Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials. Local chapters of the SCLC and Nation of Islam participate in CUCC. In fact, one of the focus group
participants pointed out that “A person doesn’t readily think of the Nation of Islam working with the SCLC,” and then added that this coalition contains a diversity of faiths, and that “we meet in the middle and take the best each other has to offer and we work together that way.” Nonetheless, the CUCC’s network is limited in resources and numbers of participants, and its location in Atlanta’s northern suburbs provides it with few other local sympathetic allies. CUCC would probably benefit by connecting with regional or national networks and allies, and it might possibly benefit by consulting with the National Coalition Building Institute or organizations like Building Partnerships USA or the Partnership for Working Families.

Of the four case studies in this research project, the coalition is most limited in terms of networks and allies is the one in rural Atkinson County, Georgia. The two ministers are making headway in connecting with sympathetic local leaders from religious congregations, businesses, public schools, and law enforcement, but with no staff, few volunteers, and many demands on their time, progress is likely to be slow. Perhaps seeking connections with faculty or students from a college or university in south Georgia, or contact with the National Coalition Building Institute would be a way to expand their network and allies.

**Intergroup Competition**

As emphasized in Chapter 2, researchers have found that intergroup coalitions flourish or founder depending on people’s perceptions about how much or how little competition there is between groups. When a large segment of one group feels its position or well-being is threatened by another (e.g., that it is being “leap-frogged” over, or that “they” are taking “our” jobs) it is difficult for them to unite with or feel solidarity towards the other group. Researchers have also noted, and our findings agree, perceptions of intergroup competition are affected by several things, including the relative sizes of the African American and Latino communities in an area, their relative socioeconomic positions and political resources, a person’s employment situation or income level, and actions of employers and labor activists.

Ultimately, to grow a strong Black-Brown coalition, more African Americans and Latinos must come to believe that – although their interests may be in opposition on some issues – their respective communities stand to gain a lot more by working together than by going it alone or cooperating with other partners. Currently, it seems easier to see what Latinos stand to gain from the cooperation of African Americans. The critical question for groups in the African American community may be: What can be gained by forming collaborations with Latinos, and who in their groups will benefit most from these collaborations?

Evidence from these case studies points to some tentative answers to this question. The collaborations reviewed in this report suggest that the access African Americans have to affordable housing, protection of voting rights, and treatment they receive from law enforcement can benefit by working with Latinos who share these concerns. Coalition-building also holds the promise of better conditions at work and, for youth and adolescents, better schools and improved parks and recreation areas.

We close this part of the chapter by also acknowledging the importance to coalition-building of what Kaufmann (2003) called a “sense of commonality.” Although the leaders and participants in all these groups may speak different languages, practice different religions, have different upbringings, and differ in an assortment of other ways, nevertheless they feel a common bond of humanity that places them in the same moral community and fosters feelings of responsibility for each other’s well-being.

**A Path Toward Building Black-Brown Coalitions**

Through our research, informal discussions with individuals intimately involved with this issue, and four focus group sessions, we have gained greater clarity about effective coalition-building among African Americans and Latinos.

Times are changing in the Southeast. Latinos have become an integral part of the Southeastern social, economic, and political landscape. Their exponential growth within some states has led to tensions, but it has also brought forth new opportunities in the struggle for freedom, justice, and equality.

During this ten-month journey, we have come to realize that coalition-building is a logical and pragmatic endeavor, especially when trying to stimulate public will to effectuate change. It is also an emotional process in which fears are confronted and sympathetic and empathetic actors are compelled into action. Although each person’s motivation to coalesce with others may differ, the outcomes are dynamic, enlightening, and empowering for all involved in these endeavors.
Based on this research, we have identified nine elements that prove very helpful in establishing and sustaining an African American-Latino coalition. Of course, there is more to it than this, and, as noted above, we do not think a “cookbook” approach to coalition-building is viable. However, these elements seem to have been useful for successful coalitions, and so we offer them as practical advice and as a starting point in working together for a common cause.

1. **Establish Trust Among Coalition Members**
   Each focus group we encountered emphasized the need to establish trust: especially when language, culture, and history serve as barriers. Coalition members have to quell fears, disprove popular stereotypes, and place people in situations where they can feel comfortable. Some of the focus group members have used church and faith as a vehicle to establish trust. Others have organized social events with food, music, and dance. Trust develops over time when people are treated with respect and dignity and the actions of others are genuine and sincere.

2. **Identify the Issues**
   The coalitions we studied were formed as a reaction to a particular social phenomenon occurring within their communities. Whether it is racial profiling, anti-immigrant legislation, exploitation of workers or housing concerns, opportunities for dialogue allowed for the most salient issues to be identified and addressed. Whatever the reason for coalescing, it has to be prioritized and respected. During the first phase of relationship building, the initial cause (or causes) will serve as the motivating factor for African Americans and Latinos to work together.

3. **Develop a Process for Communication**
   Language is a common problem in Black-Brown coalitions since communication is central to every facet of coalition-building. Bilingual members are a vital asset to any Black-Brown coalition. People want to be heard in the language they speak most comfortably. Fortunately, within most of the coalitions we studied, there were always some individuals who could provide translation services. Coalitions can seek translation assistance from local colleges, universities, or service agencies, or perhaps they can establish their own programs to teach English or Spanish. The key is enabling coalition members to speak freely and confidently. This can be accomplished by translators who care about the cause and the statements shared within the coalition.

4. **Find a Safe Place to Meet**
   The location is a symbol of solidarity. Coalitions need to identify a place that is easily recognizable, accessible, and safe. Entering into coalitions is a political act. Parents, children, undocumented immigrants, workers, educators and other concerned residents all fear loss if their actions are uncovered. Churches seem to be the location of choice for most coalitions. Others had established offices where they could meet, strategize, and conduct their business.

5. **Promote Contextual Understanding**
   Although the initial issue(s) is what brings communities together, it is the search for context that sustains the coalition. Community leaders must offer opportunities to understand the struggles, fears, and aspirations of both African Americans and Latinos. Context provides perspective that goes beyond the superficial stereotypes that exist on the surface. Latinos need to understand the history of African Americans in the United States, especially the modern Civil Rights Movement. Equally true, African Americans have to appreciate why Latinos migrated to the Southeast. This process also establishes a sense of humanity and kinship. Coalition members evolve from being seen as stereotypical African Americans or Latinos to becoming individuals who are unique.

6. **Representative Leadership Must Be Predicated on Trust**
   Leadership is another essential element to effective coalition-building. Leaders cannot be self proclaimed, but identified by the community as persons who are trustworthy and capable of addressing the interests of all coalition members. Two groups we studied had faith leaders serving in some leadership capacity. Two others had grassroots organizers or labor leaders. What coalitions want from their leaders is respect, an understanding of the issues, the capacity to mobilize communities, the ability to think strategically, and the audacity to speak truth to power.

7. **Fashion an Agenda Based Upon Current Community Concerns**
   Once a coalition is formed and the leadership is established, there must be a sense of direction and purpose. The agenda is the destination and roadmap towards group success. It contains those issues that
resonate most deeply among African Americans and Latinos and it outlines what should be done and by whom. Therefore, the agenda is also a tool for sustaining enthusiasm and empowering residents to act. It is a document, created through a democratic process, that represents the sacrifice and labor any coalition demands.

8. IDENTIFY GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND TASKS THAT ARE ATTAINABLE

Coalitions exist to change a social phenomenon that is negatively impacting the lives of a certain population. At times a change in leadership or policy might suffice. At other times systemic change might be the only viable recourse available. Allowing the agenda to be achievable is another sustaining mechanism. Change is incremental and purposeful. Coalition leaders should develop a plan whereby members can consistently enjoy victory from their efforts. As well, leaders should recognize the limitations in time, resources, and talent within each community. Trying to accomplish more than is feasible will undermine any momentum attained and lead to group apathy. Remember, success is in the eye of the beholder.

9. TAKE TIME TO ENJOY ONE ANOTHER

The reason for uniting usually stems from negative circumstances. People are angry, frustrated, fearful, and wanting to act. In the midst of building a coalition, there should be time for enjoying the company of others who were once strangers, but are now allies. The focus group participants always found time to organize potlucks, cultural events, or community projects that allowed men, women, and children to bond. Coalitions work well when members enjoy each others’ company and appreciate what everyone brings to the table.
References


