10

L.A.'s Past, America's Future?

The 2006 Immigrant Rights Protests and Their Antecedents

Ruth Milkman

The nation's streets have been relatively quiet since the massive immigrant rights marches of spring 2006, but the aftereffects of that unexpected burst of protest activity are evident on multiple fronts. On the one hand, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) dramatically stepped up its workplace raids and deportations of undocumented immigrants soon after the marches, while intensifying its efforts to police the U.S.-Mexico border. As if orchestrated to maximize media exposure, ICE's displays of force, along with other efforts to intimidate and expel foreign-born residents in some localities, seemed calculated both to strike fear into the hearts of unauthorized immigrants and their families and to placate the xenophobic political constituency within the Republican base. On the other hand, and with much less fanfare, immigrants themselves have been actively pursuing all available opportunities for greater political incorporation. Among those eligible, naturalization applications along with new voter registrations soared in the immediate aftermath of the marches, directly contributing to the expanded and heavily Democratic Latino vote in the 2006 and 2008 elections. Although it has attracted far less media attention than the ICE raids and the scattered grassroots mobilizations of anti-immigrant activists, this political shift among Latino immigrants may prove more significant in the long run. As more and more naturalized citizens become voters and as immigrant birth rates continue to outpace those of the native-born, Latino voters are emerging as a new force on the U.S. political landscape.

Efforts to pass comprehensive immigration reform under the Bush administration were repeatedly stymied by divisions within the Republican Party and may well be postponed further in light of the economic crisis that began in 2008.

Still, it is unlikely that the genie can be put back in the bottle. Not only immigrants and those who advocate on their behalf, but also organized labor and a growing number of employers (strange bedfellows indeed!) strongly support reforms that would create a path to legalization for the nation's twelve million undocumented immigrants. In general, elites are far more positively inclined toward expansive immigration policies, but polling data suggest that legalization for the undocumented also has extensive public support.• If and when immigration reform is achieved, it will further magnify the political influence of the foreign-born population. And insofar as anti-immigrant animus remains strongly associated with the Republican Party, the growing Latino vote will be harvested primarily by Democrats-with vital assistance from organized labor, whose political reach remains far more substantial than its relentlessly declining membership might suggest.

These political dynamics, which helped fuel the spring 2.006 marches and were reinforced jn their wake, were prefigured a decade earlier by events in California. That state not only has the nation's single largest concentration of unauthorized immigrants but also has been on the leading edge of immigrant worker organizing and immigrant rights advocacy for decades. In coalition with organized labor, Latino immigrants have become a formidableJorce in California politics, especially *in tb* years since 1994, when a large majority of the state's voters endorsed the anti-immigrant Proposition 187. That ballot measure would have denied public services (including schooling) to undocumented immigrants had it not been struck down by the courts as unconstitutional.

In a pattern strikingly similar to the impact of the Sensenbrenner bill (H.R. 4437) passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in December 2005, Proposition 187 deeply alarmed both authorized and unauthorized immigrants and sparked large-scale popular protests. In Los Angeles, the anti-187 street demonstrations in 1994 were (at the time) the largest since the Vietnam War. But Proposition 187 had other-albeit unintended-consequences as well, most importantly stimulating a wave of reactive naturalization that greatly increased the proportion of citizens among California's legal immigrants. The newly eligible voters thus created landed overwhelmingly in the Democratic column, thanks to the widely publicized endorsement of Proposition 187 by Republican governor Pete Wilson, who also signed the measure into law. Especially in Los Angeles, the organized labor movement quickly seized this opportmlity to extend its influence into the electoral arena by actively helping *newly* naturalized immigrants register to *vote* and then encouraging them to go to the polls and to vote for labor-friendly candidates.

The parallels between the-grassroots re c;tion to Proposition 187 and that to H.R. 4437 eleven years later suggest the prospect that the political drama that unfolded in California in the mid-1990S might now be reenacted on the more

spacious national stage. As if to signal precisely that outcome, many of the May 1, 2006, demonstrators carried signs declaring, "Hoy marchamos, manana votamos" (Today we march, tomorrow we vote). Shortly afterward, the We Are America Alliance and a host of other organizations-including organized labor-launched naturalization and voter registration drives, which had already begun to yield fruit by the 2006 midterm elections and also contributed to the outcome of the 2008 presidential contest. The trajectory of immigrant organizing and political incorporation in California over the past decade, then, offers a guide to the likely national implications of the 1006 marches-or at least to one possible scenario.

IMMIGRANT UNION ORGANIZING

That trajectory began with the unionization efforts of Latino immigrant workers in Southern California, a development that took nearly everyone by surprise when it first emerged in the late 1980s. Most observers had presumed that the massive stream of undocumented Mexicans and Central Americans who entered California after the passage of the Hart-Celler Act in 1965 would have little or no interest in or impact on the organized labor movement.[2] With union density plunging at the time, both nationally and in California, organized labor's obituary already had been written many times over. Early on, moreover, many union leaders expressed hostility to the new immigrants, who were regarded as a threat to hard-won labor standards.

Yet, by century's end, the labor movement had been unexpectedly revitalized in the nation's most populous state, with union density inching upward there even as it continued to decline relentlessly in the United States as a whole. A wave of Latino immigrant unionization efforts in Southern California starting in the late 1980s was among the key ingredients contributing to this shift.[3] The iconic example is the Justice for Janitors campaign launched by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), an effort that made its first major breakthrough in Los Angeles in 1990 and went on to consolidate its gains thereafter. Foreign-born workers in other industries and occupations-from construction to manufacturing and hospitality to home health care and other service industries-also organized in the 1990s, when many thousands joined union ranks. To be sure, even in the aftermath of these organizing successes, the unionization rate among immigrants remains lower than among U.S.-born workers for a variety of reasons (most importantly, because so few immigrants are employed in the highly unionized public sector).[4] But the potential for recruiting low-wage immigrant workers into unions is widely recognized inside the labor movement today-as was the case well before the spring 2006 marches.

As immigrant unionization gained traction in Los Angeles and elsewhere in California, another kind of organizing among foreign-born workers was also

taking shape. The "worker center" movement began in the 1990s, offering low-wage immigrant workers assistance in pursuing their legal rights, using a community-oriented approach that eschewed conventional unionism and was sometimes in tension with it. The growth of worker centers was a national phenomenon, but from the outset they had a strong presence in California. As Fine (2006) and Gordon (2005) have documented, worker centers are structured differently from conventional membership-based unions; they are community-based organizations that advocate for, provide services to, and also organize low-wage immigrant workers. Worker centers also systematically engage unauthorized immigrants in various forms of civic and political participation, notwithstanding their inability to vote and lack of official citizenship rights.

At first, the emergence of immigrant organizing, both in traditional unions and in worker centers, surprised both labor movement activists and outside observers. The newcomers, especially the undocumented, were seen as vulnerable, docile persons intensely fearful of any confrontation with authority and thus as poor prospects for recruitment into unions or other worker organizations. The dominant view in the early 1980s was, "No, you can never organize those guys. You're beating your head against the concrete," as one union organizer put it (Milkman 2006, 115). Friend and foe alike wondered why the burgeoning population of Latino immigrant workers—most of whom had minimal formal education and few economic resources, and many of whom were undocumented—would dare to take the risks involved in organizing. The majority were sojourners who intended to return home after a short stay in the United States, the conventional wisdom went, and in any case U.S. wages and working conditions compared favorably with the jobs that they had left behind in their home countries. For the undocumented, moreover, organizing might lead to apprehension by the immigration authorities or even deportation.

Such assumptions were by no means limited to the labor movement; indeed, as Delgado (1993) reported in the early 1990s, among academic and other commentators as well, "the unorganizability of undocumented workers because of their legal status has become a 'pseudofact.'" But this once-conventional wisdom was overturned later in the 1990s, as foreign-born Latinos emerged as protagonists in one workplace campaign after the next. Evidence rapidly accumulated to suggest that immigrant workers generally, and Latinos in particular, were actually *more* receptive to organizing than native-born whites. "It's not true that immigrants are hard to organize," a San Francisco hotel union organizer declared. "They are more supportive of unions than native workers" (Wells 2003, 120). An L.A. janitors' union activist was more emphatic: "We Latino workers are a bomb waiting to explode" (Waldinger et al. 1998, 117).

Not only was this the common impression of organizers, but it was confirmed by attitudinal surveys, albeit in a fragmentary way. In the 1994 Worker Representation and Participation Survey (WRPS), for example, 51 percent of Latino respondents nationwide (regardless of nativity) who were not union members indicated that they would vote for a union if a representation election were held in their workplaces, compared to 35 percent of non-Latinos.[5] And in California, 67 percent of Latino respondents to a 2001–2 statewide survey indicated that they would vote for unionization, double the rate for Anglo respondents (33 percent). Only African Americans showed stronger prounion preferences (74 percent). Whereas few previous studies examined such attitudes by nativity, the 2001–2 California survey found far more prounion sentiment among immigrants (most of them Latino) than among natives: 66 percent of noncitizen respondents, regardless of ethnicity, expressed a prounion preference, compared to 54 percent of foreign-born citizens and 42 percent of native-born respondents (Weir 2002, 121).[6]

By century's end, then, the once-dominant view of immigrants as unreceptive to unionization efforts had been largely replaced by its opposite. Several factors underlay immigrants' newly recognized "organizability." One was the strength of social networks among working-class immigrants—networks that are essential to basic survival for foreign-born newcomers and that can help galvanize union drives as well as political mobilization efforts. In Southern California, with its relatively homogenous immigrant population, largely Mexican and Central American, these networks were especially vibrant.

In addition, class-based collective organizations like unions are highly compatible with the past lived experience and worldviews of many Latino immigrants. There is evidence to suggest that, as a group, these immigrants are more inclined to view their fate as bound up with that of the wider community; whereas native-born workers tend to have a more individualistic orientation. And crucially, the shared experience of stigmatization among immigrants, both during the migration process itself and often continuing for many years thereafter, means that when unions or worker centers offer a helping hand it is often welcomed with gusto.

Southern California was the primary laboratory for the workplace organizing efforts that emerged among immigrants in the 1990s. The L.A. metropolitan area is home to the nation's largest concentration of undocumented immigrants (Fortuny, Capps, and Passel 2007) and, as I have argued elsewhere, the region had additional comparative advantages that helped foster union revitalization there in the late twentieth century (Milkman 2006). More recently, immigrant union organizing has begun to spread across the nation, even as the immigrant population itself has become increasingly geographically dispersed. The Houston and Miami Justice for Janitors campaigns are among the many recent examples.[7] Union drives among foreign-born workers have been launched in a wide variety of settings, albeit with uneven success, and the worker center movement is a nationwide phenomenon as well.

The spring 2006 marches finally liquidated any remaining doubts about immigrant "organizability." Few would dispute that a sense of stigmatization, and of being under siege in a hostile environment, rather than generating passivity and fear as many commentators once presumed, instead can foster solidarity and organization among the foreign-born. Like immigrant union organizing, this response to political attacks on immigrant rights was foreshadowed in California. Building on the workplace organizing sketched above, the community response to Proposition 187 became a crucial stimulus to immigrant political mobilization in the late 1990s in the nation's most populous (and immigrant-rich) state.

PROPOSITION 187 AND IMMIGRANT POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

Proposition 187, thanks to the endorsement of then-governor Pete Wilson, instantly linked the anti-immigrant political backlash with California's Republican leadership, an association that remains powerful to this day. As a result, the unprecedented political mobilization among immigrants stimulated by Proposition 187 became a bonanza for the Democratic Party, with which organized labor already had a long-standing relationship. Latino immigrants naturalized and then voted with a strong Democratic tilt in California's supercharged political environment during the 1990s, a pattern that was absent at the time in other states with large Latino populations (Pantoja, Ramírez, and Segura 2001).

The fears that Proposition 187's passage provoked among immigrants in 1994 galvanized the entire Latino community. Households often included a mix of native-born and immigrant members and of documented and undocumented immigrants. Even the previously apolitical Mexican hometown associations, whose local activities had previously revolved around beauty pageants and sporting events, became involved. But above all, the L.A. labor movement, fresh from the success of the Justice for Janitors campaign and similar immigrant organizing efforts in the years just before Proposition 187 came before the voters, seized this extraordinary moment of opportunity. As in workplace organizing, so in politics; Southern California had a comparative advantage. The weakness of traditional political machines in Los Angeles (thanks to a wave of political reform a century ago), as well as the relatively small number of political offices and the high costs of mounting electoral campaigns in the city, had created a vacuum that the newly strengthened L.A. labor movement was destined to fill (Mollenkopf 1999).

Starting in the early 1990s, the L.A. County Federation of Labor was transformed from a junior partner of the local Democratic Party establishment into an independent force with its own capacity for grassroots field mobilization. The County Fed began to devote extensive resources to helping immigrants eligible for naturalization become citizens and then to mobilizing them at the polls.

L.A.-based Latino community organizations and immigrant rights groups had already laid the groundwork for these efforts in the aftermath of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, which provided amnesty for thousands of undocumented immigrants. Building on that effort, and spurred by Proposition 187, the labor movement began to assume a key role. Miguel Contreras, a union organizer who became the political director of the County Fed in 1994 and then rose to its top leadership post in 1996, was the leading architect of the city's labor-Latino alliance, which built on the SEIU's immigrant worker membership as well as that of the hotel workers' union, where Contreras previously had been on staff.

Under his leadership, which emerged alongside and was then reinforced by the Latino community reaction to Proposition 187, the County Fed deployed its massive economic and human resources into direct mail, phone banks, precinct walking, and worksite outreach efforts that targeted union members as well as new immigrant voters. Candidates that the federation supported, mostly Latinos, began to win contest after contest in congressional, legislative, and city council races, rapidly displacing the old-line political insiders.[8] An early example was the 1994 election of union organizer Antonio Villaraigosa to a state assembly seat representing northeast Los Angeles. Two years later, the County Fed helped Democrats regain control of the state assembly. Then in 1999, Villaraigosa became speaker of the assembly, going on to become mayor of the nation's second-largest metropolis in 2005.

The County Fed had not only the capacity to undertake this kind of grassroots political mobilization but also the economic and organizational resources to be politically influential in Los Angeles, and eventually statewide. Given the extraordinarily high cost of California political campaigns, and the limited resources of the Latino immigrant community, virtually no other organized entity representing this constituency could even aspire to play such a critical role. Writing on the eve of the political transition that occurred when the County Fed began to operate as a major player in the mid-1990s, one incisive analyst of L.A. ethnic politics concluded, "Mexicans remain on the sidelines and have yet to position themselves to be part of any new governing coalition" (Skerry 1993, 81; see also Frank and Wong 2004). But that observation was quickly rendered obsolete as the County Fed moved into the electoral arena in the mid-1990s. Labor-sponsored candidates rapidly displaced the small political clique of Mexican Americans who had long aspired to build on their ethnic community's growing demographic weight but who lacked the necessary resources.

The new cadre of labor-backed elected officials went on to win living-wage ordinances and other measures that aimed to benefit L.A. low-wage workers generally and immigrants in particular. Their efforts also fostered union-friendly community development efforts—for example, by making city subsidies for new hotels and other major development projects contingent on "community benefits

agreements" under which employers agreed to pay a living wage and/or to be neutral in union organizing campaigns among the workers who would later be employed on the sites (Gottlieb et al. 2005). Labor's political clout also helped secure the passage of state legislation that directly benefited union organizing efforts. A case in point was a bill sponsored by state assembly member Gil Cedillo, passed in September 2000, prohibiting employers from using state money to promote or deter unionization efforts (Logan 2003). Although it was enjoined and later struck down by the courts, this bill was a telling reflection of labor's enhanced political clout.

More generally, the relationship between labor's growing political influence and its ongoing efforts to unionize unorganized workers took the form of a virtuous circle in these years. In one stunning example, the SEIU added 74,000 L.A. home health-care workers to its ranks in 1999 after engaging in a long political campaign to change state law to create an "employer of record" for this growing occupational group. Although labor's influence was somewhat diminished after the 2003 recall election that thrust Arnold Schwarzenegger into the governorship, the basic political infrastructure built in the late 1990s remains largely intact.

The conditions that fostered Latino immigrant organizing in California in the 1990s emerged from the peculiarities of the state and its largest metropolis, but they gradually began to influence the national landscape as well. For example, unionists in California led the effort to change organized labor's official position on immigration policy, mobilizing at the AFL-CIO's fall 1999 national convention.[9] In February 2000 the same forces successfully promoted the passage of an AFL-CIO Executive Council resolution officially reversing labor's long-standing support for employer sanctions and calling for a new immigrant legalization program. Over the months that followed, the U.S. labor movement, again with leadership from California, mounted a national campaign for immigration reform, an effort that seemed to be on the verge of success prior to September 11, 2001, when it went into the deep freeze.

As the immigrant rights movement began to recover from that setback, California's influence once again helped to position organized labor nationally as a leading advocate of immigration reform. The 2003 Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride, chaired by Maria Elena Durazo (Miguel Contreras's spouse and then-head of the L.A. hotel workers' union who, after Contreras's death in 2005, rose to head the County Fed), deepened the ties between labor and the immigrant rights movement and helped expand those ties beyond California to the national level. As Randy Shaw argues in his chapter in this volume, the Freedom Ride helped lay the groundwork for the 2006 marches.

Today the labor movement again has the potential to play a pivotal role, again pioneered by California unionists but now national in scope, in immigrant political mobilization. Although unauthorized immigrants can participate in street demonstrations and other forms of "noncitizen citizenship," as Gordon (2005, 275–78) calls it, acquiring formal citizenship is the key hurdle they must overcome in a society where the meaning of political participation is largely restricted to voting.[10] A century ago, naturalized citizens were more likely to vote than their native-born counterparts; today the opposite is true. National voting rates among Asians and Latinos (regardless of citizenship status) are lower than those of other ethnic groups (DeSipio 2001). However, thanks in large part to the efforts of California's labor movement (along with Latino and immigrant rights groups) to naturalize those eligible and to increase Latino electoral participation, the gap in voting rates between the state's Latinos and whites virtually disappeared in the post–Proposition 187 years. If one controls for age, citizenship, and socioeconomic status, Latino turnout rates in the state were only one percentage point lower than those of comparable whites from 1994 to 2000; in the 1998 election, when labor mobilized especially energetically against an antiunion proposition on the state ballot, Latino turnout was four percentage points higher (Citrin and Highton 2002, 28–29; see also Ramakrishnan 2005, esp. chap. 6).

Latinos in California not only vote; they mostly vote for Democrats. Some Latinos did cast their ballots for Arnold Schwarzenegger in the 2003 recall election, but when he launched a broad antiunion attack in the form of a series of referenda on the November 2005 ballot, the Latino vote again turned against him, in yet another California election where labor's political mobilization played a critical role. The standard comparison is to Texas, George W. Bush's home state, where at least until recently Republicans still captured much of the Latino vote. That divergence is partly the legacy of former Republican governor Pete Wilson's sponsorship of Proposition 187; organized labor's weakness in Texas is the other key factor (Skerry 1993; Pantoja, Ramírez, and Segura 2001; Meyerson 2004).

In California, then, and especially in Los Angeles, the labor movement has been a potent vehicle of Latino immigrant mobilization, both in the workplace and the voting booth. That helps explain why Los Angeles became the epicenter of the national immigrant rights movement, with a reported 500,000 marchers in the streets on March 25, 2006, and even more on May 1, when protests against H.R. 4437 surged across the nation. The labor-Latino coalition that developed in California after Proposition 187 has continued to flourish over the years since, stacking up huge electoral successes, winning hearts and minds in the immigrant community, and building lasting organizational capacity. The big question now is whether that coalition can expand into a national one.

PROPOSITION 187 REDUX?

Organized labor can claim at best partial credit for organizing the massive spring 2006 marches. The Catholic Church, immigrant hometown associations, a variety

of immigrant rights advocacy groups, student organizations, and perhaps most importantly (and least expected) the ethnic media—all played critical roles. Even some employers quietly supported the effort. Union staff and activists participated actively in planning the protests in many cities around the country, with the SEIU in particular assuming responsibility for providing security—a successful undertaking in that the crowds were extremely peaceful despite the fact that they swelled to a volume far beyond expectations. In Chicago, a committee of local unions helped plan the May 1 marches, and unionists participated in many other cities as well, as part of a wider coalition led by immigrant rights organizations and activists.[11]

Although it was but one force among many in planning the marches, afterward the labor movement was uniquely positioned to become an important player in immigrant political mobilization at the national level. Despite declining union density, organized labor remains a potent force in U.S. politics, with voter mobilization capacity that far outstrips its level of direct influence in the workplace (Dark 1999). The ties between organized labor and the immigrant rights movement were greatly strengthened by their interaction in planning and participating in the marches, so that a national labor-Latino coalition like the one that emerged a decade ago in California is within the realm of possibility.

The vast geographical scope of the demonstrations—which were largest in Los Angeles, Chicago, and other long-standing immigrant gateway cities but also surprisingly substantial in places like Nebraska and North Carolina—reflects the many changes that have taken place in the geographical distribution of immigration over recent years. Not only has the overall size of the nation's undocumented population grown dramatically, but both authorized and unauthorized immigrants have become much more widely dispersed, for reasons Massey, Durand, and Malone (2002) have documented. Once concentrated in Southern California, as well as in other traditional destinations like New York, Texas, Illinois, and Florida, immigrants have increasingly settled in communities throughout the nation. And crucially, immigrant-focused labor organizing—by unions as well as worker centers—has sprung up in many parts of the country where it was once unimaginable.

In this regard the congruence between the geography of the spring 2006 marches and that of the worker centers themselves is especially striking.[12] Nor is it an accident that, in the aftermath of the marches, the worker centers acquired a far higher profile than they had before, and they built new ties to organized labor, which had shown limited interest in worker centers previously. A few months after the marches, for example, the National Day Laborer Organizing Network formalized a relationship with the AFL-CIO and soon after entered into an alliance with the Laborers' union (then a Change to Win affiliate) as well.

Meanwhile, precisely echoing the history of what unfolded after Proposition 187 in the mid-1990s, the Sensenbrenner bill stimulated not only the marches but also a new wave of reactive naturalization among eligible immigrants. In the fiscal year that ended on September 30, 2007, applications for naturalization soared to a level 55 percent higher than in the previous fiscal year, with over 1.1 million "initial receipts" among an estimated total of 8.5 million legal permanent residents who are eligible to become citizens (U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services 2007).[13] The number of naturalization applications exceeded 100,000 in every month from March to July 2007. After that, a substantial fee hike and changes in the citizenship exam led to a brief lull, but by September 2007 the upward trend had resumed. Only in two other years in the past century—not coincidentally, both in the mid-1990s, following Proposition 187—did total naturalization applications exceed 1 million.[14]

Efforts to promote naturalization and voter registration have continued steadily since the spring 2006 marches, led by Spanish-language media organizations and immigrant rights coalitions like the We Are America Alliance.[15] There is evidence that the unprecedented spate of ICE workplace raids and deportations that followed the marches helped to galvanize and accelerate these campaigns, although this was surely not the Bush administration's intent. A mid-2008 survey by the Pew Hispanic Center found that both U.S.-born and foreign-born Latinos overwhelmingly disapproved of the raids and of criminal prosecution of unauthorized immigrants; fully 35 percent of *native-born* Latino respondents indicated that they were worried that a family member or close friend could be deported. The same survey found growing Latino support for Democratic political candidates (Lopez and Minushkin 2008, 4, 6, 11).

As in post-Proposition 187 California in the late 1990s, immigrants across the United States have been voting more than they did in the past, and voting disproportionately for Democrats. According to exit polls, Latinos (not all of them foreign-born) made up a (then) record 8 percent of all voters in the November 2006 midterm elections, held just six months after the marches. Fully 69 percent of Latino voters cast their 2006 ballots for Democratic congressional candidates, compared to only 47 percent of white voters (Ayón 2006). In that very close electoral contest, arguably the Latino immigrant vote was a decisive factor in ending Republican control of the U.S. Congress.

Voter registration and get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts aimed at the 2008 elections began to take shape shortly afterward, led by the We Are America Alliance as well as campaigns like Ya Es Hora (Now Is the Time), sponsored by a coalition of Latino advocacy organizations and Spanish-language media, which have also been engaged in recent efforts to promote naturalization (NALEO 2007). Eleven million Latinos voted in 2008, a 38 percent increase over 2004. Even in

the context of the generally high voter turnout in the presidential contest that led to the election of Barack Obama, Latinos increased their share of the total to 9 percent, a new record. And according to exit polls, 67 percent of all Latinos voted for Obama, compared to 43 percent of whites. The figure was even higher—78 percent—among Latino immigrants, who made up about 40 percent of all Latino voters. Latino votes were crucial in some battleground states that shifted into the Democratic column, including Nevada, Colorado, and New Mexico as well as Florida and Virginia. The success of the mobilization effort is also reflected in the fact that 15 percent of 2008's Latino voters had never voted before, according to postelection surveys. As conservative commentator Richard Nadler (2009) observed shortly afterward, "The fear and the fury engendered in the broader Hispanic community has destroyed conservative prospects in the Southwest, weakened them in the West, and wiped them out in New England" (see also Preston 2008c; *Daily Labor Report* 2008; Lopez 2008; NALEO 2008a).

Obama's campaign actively worked to win support from and mobilize Latino voters, an effort led by Obama's field director Cuauhtémoc Figueroa, a former union official, with assistance from Marshall Ganz, former political director of the United Farm Workers union. Organized labor also devoted significant resources to GOTV efforts in support of Obama and other Democrats in the 2008 campaign, including an estimated $4.5 million specifically targeting Latino voters. The SEIU was the big player here, contributing about $3 million to groups like the We Are America Alliance, Ya Es Hora, and the union's own Mi Familia Vota effort, which focused on battleground states like Colorado and Arizona as well as Texas.[16] However, those figures pale relative to the estimated $450 million that unions and their political action committees spent on the 2008 election, not including the time devoted by union volunteers who made millions of phone calls and home visits (Greenhouse 2008a).

These developments suggest that the labor-Latino coalition that first developed in California in the 1990s is now beginning to be replicated on a national scale. That has several potential ramifications. One is that it could boost renewed efforts to achieve comprehensive immigration reform. In the wake of the political stalemate that developed in the waning years of the Bush administration, it was to the Democrats' advantage to preserve the image of the Republican Party as deeply hostile to immigrant rights—an image that the Sensenbrenner bill had indelibly impressed on the immigrant community. Yet Democrats were wary of openly embracing the cause of immigrant rights during the 2008 election campaign, fearful of alienating their own native-born constituents. Further delay could result from the deep economic crisis that began in 2008, although immigrant advocacy groups have been pressing the Obama administration to launch a new effort.

Apart from immigration reform itself, further developing the embryonic national labor-Latino coalition could benefit both immigrants and the labor movement. Unions nationally could become the midwife of political mobilization and social transformation for today's Latino immigrants, replicating the dynamic that emerged in California after 1994. Organized labor, with its extensive financial resources and political capacity, together with the Latino and immigrant advocacy organizations, is now poised to assume this agentic role. It has done so before, most importantly for the massive wave of working-class immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, when a surge of unionization in the 1930s and 1940s and accompanying political incorporation helped narrow the inequalities between the haves and have-nots and propelled many first- and second-generation immigrants into the middle class—and into the Democratic Party. As Mark Twain reportedly put it, history may not repeat itself, but sometimes it rhymes.

NOTES

1. For a summary of recent polling data, see http://www.pollingreport.com/immigration.htm. These data suggest some volatility in attitudes and that a substantial minority disapproves of legalization. On elites, see Schuck (2007).

2. Asian immigrants have been much less studied, and a smaller proportion of them are low-wage workers. Yet many of the same assumptions were made about them, and they too have actively organized in recent years. This chapter, however, focuses on Latino immigrants, the dominant group within California's low-wage workforce.

3. I analyze these developments in Milkman (2006).

4. In 2008, 20.1 percent of California's U.S.-born workers, and 13.2 percent of the state's foreign-born workers, were union members (Milkman and Kye 2008).

5. African Americans were the only group among whom prounion attitudes were more widespread (see Freeman and Rogers 1999).

6. Although this survey, the 2001–2 California Workplace Survey (CWS), asked a question identical to the one in the WRPS, the results are not strictly comparable. The WRPS asked the question of all nonunion workers except high-level managers, while the CWS asked it only of nonunion nonsupervisory respondents, excluding a much larger group of middle managers. In both surveys the question was, "If an election were held today to decide whether employees like you should be represented by a union, would you vote for the union or against the union?"

7. On Houston, see Greenhouse (2008b, 254–58); on Miami, see Shaw (2008, chap. 4).

8. Redoubtable political commentator Harold Meyerson (2001) noted in mid-2001 that "the Fed has plunged itself into 23 hotly contested congressional, legislative, and city council races around Los Angeles in the past five years and has won 22 of them." See also Shaw (2008, chap. 7).

9. See Shaw (2008, 209–14) and, on the role of Northern California unionists, Hamlin (2008).

10. See also Gordon's recent proposal (2007) for a more expansive, labor-based form of citizenship.

11. See Randy Shaw's chapter in this volume on the SEIU's role in providing security at the marches. On labor's role in the Chicago protests, see Fink (2010). For an account that argues that labor's role in the planning of the protests was relatively marginal, see Narro, Wong, and Shadduck-Hernández (2007).

12. Compare Fine's map (2005) of the worker centers with the geography of the marches shown in Figure 1.1 of the introduction to this volume. As Randy Shaw notes in his chapter in this volume, that geography also echoes the route of the 2003 Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride. Also see Narro, Wong, and Shadduck-Hernández (2007), on the geographical spread of the protests.

13. The 8.5 million figure (for 2005) is from Passel (2007, iv). The 2006–7 naturalization application surge was especially sharp in Southern California, according to Gorman and Delson (2007). See also Preston (2007a).

14. Regarding the large numbers of applications in the mid-1990s, one recent journalistic account notes, "That's when many illegal immigrants who received amnesty in the 1980s became eligible for citizenship, and a political backlash against them motivated many to apply" (Watanabe 2007).

15. See http://www.weareamericaalliance.org.

16. The SEIU spent the most, but other Change to Win affiliates, specifically the United Food and Commercial Workers, the Laborers' union, the Teamsters, and UNITE HERE (which represents garment and hotel workers) also contributed substantially to this effort. The AFL-CIO also contributed a modest amount of funding (Monterroso 2009).