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The Emerging Latino Immigrant Community Of Cincinnati, Southwest Ohio, and Northern Kentucky

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The Latino immigrant community of Cincinnati, Southwest Ohio and Northern Kentucky has only recently begun to emerge. Twenty years ago Cincinnati had a few Proctor and Gamble executives from Latin America and the University of Cincinnati had a few Latino professors. There were few other Latino immigrants. Today tens of thousands of Latino immigrants live and work in Cincinnati and Hamilton County and in the City of Hamilton and throughout Butler County while others can be found clustered around Florence, Kentucky.

The new Latino immigrants in Southwest Ohio and Northern Kentucky should be seen as part of the long history of immigrants who came to the United States in search of opportunity. The current immigration is made up of people coming from Latin America for much the same reason that earlier immigrants came from Ireland, Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia or China. The immigrants, unable to make a living or live safely in their own countries, come here seeking jobs, higher wages, and opportunity for themselves and their families.

The Cincinnati Latino immigrant community is made up of hard-working men and women, family-oriented people who contribute to our local economy and enrich our society. Yet this community, made up mostly of young workers, finds itself facing many difficulties as it attempts to establish itself in our region. In this paper we examine some of the issues facing the Latino immigrant community of Southwest Ohio, and we look at some of the measures necessary to enhance the lives of its families.

The Immigrant Demographics

The Cincinnati Latino immigrant population is dispersed through an area that runs from Butler County, Ohio in the north to Florence, Kentucky in the south, with the greatest centers of population in Cincinnati, Hamilton, Springdale, and West Chester. This greater Cincinnati area has an estimated 60,000 Latino immigrants, most of whom have come here in the last 10 years and many in the last five years. Southwest Ohio has few Latino immigrant farm workers; most farm workers are found in the northwestern part of the state. Some immigrants are employed not only in the factories and retail firms of Northern Kentucky but also in the race track and stables.

Most immigrants come from Mexico or Guatemala, but there are also significant numbers of Central and South Americans. A recent health study found that Mexicans made up 40 percent of the community, Guatemalans 16 percent, Peruvians 13.4 percent, and Colombian 5.9 percent. Three quarters of these immigrants have been here less than five years and 80 percent of them feel more comfortable in a Spanish-speaking and Latino culture. Some of the new immigrants come from indigenous areas and their native tongue may be Mam, Aguateco, or Quiché (if Guatemalan), Mixteco (if from Oaxaca, Mexico) or some other indigenous language. Some immigrants, such as those from the Dominican Republic, are Afro-Latinos.

While some immigrants come with green cards and seek permanent residency, a second group comes with H2A or H2B visas, but these two groups are a minority among Latino immigrants. We estimate that 80 to 90 percent of new immigrants are undocumented. Most

of the new immigrants are young—in their 20s and 30s—and some are very young, crossing the border and coming to Cincinnati without their families as young as 14, 15 or 16 years old. Levels of education for most undocumented immigrants are low, usually between third and twelfth grade. Most work as low-wage, unskilled labor in factories, hotels and restaurants, construction, janitorial work, nurseries and agriculture. Of course there are also smaller numbers of immigrants who come with higher education and with technical and professional training, skills and experience.

Why Do They Come?

Most immigrants to Ohio come for economic reasons. According to the Economic Commission on Latin America (ECLA/CEPAL) “in 2005, 39.8% of the region’s population (209 million people) were poor and 15.4% (81 million) were extremely poor, or indigent.” In Mexico, half of the people live in poverty and 20 percent in conditions of severe poverty and hunger. The statistics are similar for Guatemala: 56 percent in poverty and 16 percent in extreme poverty. Poverty in these countries is greatest among the rural and indigenous people.

Immigrants will tell you that they have come here because in their home towns and native countries there are not enough jobs or they cannot make a living at the wages paid in their countries. The wage differential between Mexico and the United States has for the last 30 years been between about 10:1, that is, for every dollar one can make in Mexico, one can make ten dollars here in comparable usually unskilled labor. Middle class and professional people may find they can make here several times what they would have made in their own country. Mexico’s minimum wage of about \$4.50 per day (varying from region to region) while the average daily wage is about \$7.00 per day. Central American wages are even lower than those in Mexico. The lack of jobs and low wages in their home countries and the much higher wages in the United States are the driving force behind most migration.

While economics—the search for jobs and higher wages—is the dominant motive for most Latino immigrants, some immigrants also come because of political repression, civil war, and political or criminal violence in their countries. Mexico has seen rise in violence attributed to drug dealers that led the U.S. State Department to issue a warning to U.S. citizens in 2006. Some Mexicans migrate to escape the violence and social turmoil in their own country.

U.S. foreign policy and military intervention played a significant role in leading to the deterioration of conditions in Guatemala, for example. After the US CIA coup of 1954, there followed a series of military and authoritarian governments leading to civil war and the death of 200,000 Guatemalans, most of them Indians. The high level of both political and criminal violence in Guatemala over many years and that continues today appears to be a factor in some migration to Ohio. Similarly with Colombia where protracted civil war has led hundreds of thousands of Colombians to emigrate over the last 30 years. Such violence was also present in parts of Peru in the 1980s and 1990s and led some Peruvians to migrate abroad, many to the U.S.

The Latino Immigrant Community

This new Latino immigrant community in our region does not have a geographic center, which both makes more difficult a sense of community and makes the community less visible to the rest of society. Unlike most other Latino immigrant communities in the United States, Cincinnati has had no Latino barrio. While there are a few very small Latino business strips—State Street in Cincinnati, Route 4 in Fairfield, and the Fourth Ward in Hamilton—none of these constitutes a neighborhood where Latino immigrants could expect

to find many Latino-owned businesses, Latino social service organizations, Catholic, Protestant or Evangelical churches and the warm and friendly faces of a community. In fact, with the rise of xenophobia in Butler County, the small Latino shopping strips on Route 4 and in the Fourth Ward have seen customers lost and businesses closed.

More than 70 percent of immigrants are Catholic while many of the rest are Protestants, many of them charismatic Evangelicals or Pentecostals. Some Mayan immigrants who may be nominally Catholic also hold some traditional indigenous beliefs. St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church in Carthage and St. Julie Billiart Catholic Church in Hamilton both have large Hispanic congregations. The Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati has established a Hispanic Ministry and a social service center called Su Casa in Carthage. The Catholic Diocese of Northern Kentucky also has a Hispanic Ministry mostly serving the Cristo Rey congregation in Erlanger. The United Methodist Church has also established the Living Waters social service center in Hamilton which serves a low-income community including many Latinos. More recently the Church of Our Savior Episcopal Church in Cincinnati has established both a ministry and work with Hispanic organizations.

Family, ethnic and national networks are important for immigrants from Latin America as they are for those from other regions. Immigrants form support groups based on common experiences as members of the same family, migrants from the same town, members of the same ethnic or language group, or people from the same country. For example, many Hispanics participate in soccer clubs which they have created, often based on teams from different states or hometowns in Mexico, Guatemala or other countries in Latin America. In the spring, summer, and fall soccer matches represent an important part of Latino social life in the community.

Some Latino business organizations had been established in Cincinnati before the mass migration of Latino immigrants to the area began about 15 years ago, having created the Cincinnati Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Businesses include Latino restaurants and grocery stores, stores specializing in Latino music, tax firms that deal in Spanish with immigrants' particular issues such as taxpayer identification numbers (TIN), as well as other businesses that do not necessarily cater to the Spanish speaking market. Recent raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have hurt businesses dealing with the Spanish speaking market.

There are also Spanish language newspapers such as La Jornada Latina/Spanish Journal and El Pueblo, and several other small Spanish language papers, as well as a Spanish language radio station. Channel 12 offered until recently a Spanish language show El Rincón Latino (The Spanish Corner) but it has been discontinued. La Jornada/Spanish Journal started a Spanish language radio show on WBDZ-AM 1230 in July of 2005. There are also websites such as CincyLatino and MidwestLatino that provide information about Latino organizations and events.

La Jornada Latina/Spanish Journal has taken conservative, pro-business and anti-labor positions that have not always served the Latino majority. It published articles attacking the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) janitor organizing program. An editorial in La Jornada suggested that workers should not join the union organizing effort for higher wages and health benefits and should rather be "grateful" that they were had work, and also opposed immigrant protests in the Spring of 2006 to pressure for immigration reform. El Pueblo, another Latino newspaper took positions more supportive of the Latino organizing efforts and of demonstrations for immigration rights. El Rincón, the Spanish-language television show, attempted to put forward a balanced view of issues important to the Latino community.

At the cultural level, the Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library provides Spanish language books and videos at its main branch and at community branches throughout the area. There exist both commercial and community Latino festivals in Southwest Ohio which give some visibility to the Latino community, most important the Hispanic Festival at Su Casa. Cincinnati Public Schools recently appointed one of its social workers to work with the new Latino immigrant community.

Ohio: The State-Wide Context for Immigrants

While in 2005 Latinos made up 14.4% of the U.S. population they made up only 2.3% of Ohio's, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The Latino population of Ohio has historically come from Texas (Mexican Americans, U.S. Citizens), from Puerto Rico (U.S. citizens), or more recently from Mexico or other parts of Latin America. Latino immigrants who may be in any one of several categories: citizens (such as those from Texas or Puerto Rico), permanent residents, those with temporary visas or the undocumented.

Latino migrants and immigrants have been coming to Ohio since 1918, first to work in the beet fields, then on railroads and in factories. The first Latino communities were established in the early 1920s in Toledo and Lorain, made up of Mexicans and Mexican Americans. During the 1930s the Latino population of Ohio fell as many Latino immigrants were pressured by local authorities to return to Mexico, part of some 500,000 Mexican immigrants driven out of the entire United States during that period. Mexican and Puerto Rican immigration increased in the 1940s in Toledo, Lorain and Cleveland. Mexican American migrants continued to come from Texas to work in Ohio and many settled out into cities or rural towns in the 1960s and 1970s. During the 1980s and 1990s Central American and South American immigrants began to immigrate to Ohio settling in Toledo, Cleveland and Columbus.

Latino immigrants are concentrated in the northern end of the state in Cleveland, Toledo and Lorain, Ohio. Cleveland has for many years had immigrants from Mexico, Puerto Rico and Central and South America. Toledo has many Mexican American immigrants from Texas, Mexican immigrants and some Central Americans. Lorain has had a Mexican and Puerto Rican immigrant community for several decades and more recently has received Latino immigrants from Mexico and other parts of Latin America. Columbus also has a community of Mexican American immigrants mostly from Texas and Mexican immigrants and other Latinos as well. Northwest Ohio remains the center of agriculture employing Latinos in crops such as tomatoes and cucumber pickles though many others work in various industries and services as well. By the 1990s significant numbers of Latinos were beginning to settle in Southwest Ohio.

Within the State of Ohio Latinos receive support from various organizations. Until recently the State of Ohio's Hispanic/Latino Affairs Commission (OCHLA) has been virtually invisible in Southwest Ohio and showed little interest in new immigrants. Perhaps the Commission will improve under the new Democratic Party administration. The Mexican Consulate and the Guatemalan Consulate both provide mobile consulates that visit Southwest Ohio to provide information and documents for their citizens. The Mexican Consulate in particular has been active in attempting to protect its citizens' rights in the United States.

The Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), based in Toledo, Ohio has represented an important Latino led institution interested not only in older settled Latino populations but also supporting new immigrants and fighting for their rights. The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), a group generally made up of middle class and professional Latinos, has recently established a chapter in Cincinnati. The Coalition for Immigrants Rights

and Dignity (CODEDI), an immigrant-led organization of mostly new immigrants, has been active organizing on immigrant issues for four years. CODEDI has established an office and offers classes and some services in Price Hill. In Butler County, the Butler County Community Alliance (BCCA) formed to support immigrants in response to the hostile actions of Sheriff Richard Jones. The Cincinnati Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CCCIR), made up of labor unions, churches, CODEDI more recently LULAC, have all been involved advocating for immigration reform.

Issues Confronting the Latino Community in Southwest Ohio

We turn now to the issues confronting Latino immigrants in Southwest Ohio. Latino immigrants face many problems in dealing with employers, landlords, schools, hospitals, local governments, police authorities, and their fellow residents from other backgrounds.

Labor Issues

Most Latino immigrants are unskilled laborers who work in occupations such as janitors, factory workers, restaurant and hotel work, and construction workers. Many factory workers and janitors work second shift or night shift in factories or work through the night as janitors. Some Latino immigrants hold down two jobs in order to increase their income. Less than 50 percent of workers make \$20,000 a year and almost 75 percent make less than \$30,000 a year. Many workers send a large part of their income to their families back home in Mexico, Guatemala or some other Latin American country, so their actual spendable income here may be less than it appears to be. Most of the companies that employ Latino immigrant workers do not provide health insurance or other benefits.

Latino immigrants, especially those without documents, seek to remain employed at all times since if they are undocumented they do not qualify for unemployment, welfare or other programs for the unemployed, or even if they are documented and do qualify for these programs, they may not know how to go about applying for them. Nevertheless, some Latino immigrants may become unemployed because they work in seasonal industries such as construction; because in the event of a downturn in the economy they were the last hired and will therefore be the first fired; because employers such as restaurants use them on a day-to-day basis; or because of difficulties arising because of the use of false social security numbers.

Latino immigrants face many difficulties on their jobs, especially if they are undocumented. New immigrants often do not know the language, the customs or the laws and therefore can and often are easily taken advantage of by employers. Most Latino immigrant workers do not know their rights under Wages and Hours laws, the National Labor Relations Act, or the Occupational Safety and Health Act. Even if immigrants are aware of their rights, they may be afraid to insist upon them because they are undocumented. Workers also face problems because of government policies regarding immigrants.

While some employers treat Latino immigrants fairly, others take advantage of these workers in the following ways:

- Paying workers wages lower than the legal minimum.
- Failing to pay workers for all time worked, such set-up or clean-up time.
- Forcing workers to work overtime and unreasonably long days.
- Failing to pay workers the overtime pay to which they are entitled by laws.
- Failing to pay workers at all, simply refusing to pay them for work performed, a practice found in the construction industry.
- Denying workers their rest breaks and lunch breaks.

Submitting workers to unhealthy, unsafe and dangerous conditions.
Forcing workers to work at a pace that is unreasonable.
Denying workers sick days and vacation days.
Denying workers the right to organize a labor union.
Threatening, intimidating and firing workers who engage in labor organizing.
Refusing to bargain in faith with existing labor unions.

Government policies often also affect workers negatively, especially those without documents. Many of these problems arise because workers do not have documents and work using false social security numbers.

U.S. Social Security no-match letters lead employers to fire immigrants, even though the law does not require them to do so. New laws to go into effect in 2006 will force employers to verify these numbers and take actions against workers.

Because workers' no-match letters lead to dismissal, workers do not acquire seniority, and therefore do not become entitled to sick-days, holidays, vacations, promotions, raises and other benefits based on accrual of seniority.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has in the last year carried out several raids on workplaces employing immigrants in the local area as well as nationally. The ICE have led to the deportation of workers who have been in the U.S. for years, to the break-up of families, and have caused widespread fear and anxiety in the immigrant community.

Local authorities, particularly the Sheriff of Butler County, have contributed to fear in the immigrant community, sometimes illegally detaining workers on immigration charges. The Butler County Sheriff has also sought authority to enforce Federal immigration law and has arrived at a Memorandum of Understanding with ICE, though the officers have not yet been trained.

The failure of Congress to pass an immigration reform bill in 2006 has been accompanied by increased ICE raids throughout the United States and throughout the region. We have weekly and often daily reports of immigrants in county jails in Ohio and Kentucky being pressed to sign voluntary deportations or being processed for deportation.

Southwest Ohio's labor unions have gradually become more aware of and more supportive of immigrant workers. There are now two Workers Centers in the area, one based in Cincinnati and the other based in Hamilton Ohio; both of them have been involved in Latino organizing efforts. The Cincinnati Workers Center was started a few years ago by churches and labor unions, while the Hamilton Workers Center was created by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union. Workers Centers nationally have been part of an effort to reach workers who might otherwise be neglected by the labor movement. In 2006 the AFL-CIO announced that it had established a national partnership with workers centers.

The Service Employees International Union has carried out a successful campaign to organize janitors who work in office buildings, many of whom are Latino immigrants. UNITE-HERE has been organizing workers in hotels some of whom are also immigrants. The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) represents some Latino workers employed in meat packing plants. The Building Trades Unions have been working to organize Latinos employed in the various construction trades. Several of the unions have participated in local coalitions and in activities aimed to improve the lives of immigrants. Many union workers, aware of their own immigrant heritage have come to the support of immigrants, though some still see immigrants as an enemy to be deported.

Housing Issues

There does not appear to be a housing shortage, though the quality of housing available to immigrant families varies greatly. In suburban areas immigrants often find clean, comfortable, and more or less affordable apartments in large multi-building complexes. Many such apartment complexes exist in the area of I-275 and Route 4 in the area of Fairfield, Springdale and West Chester.

In cities such as Cincinnati and Hamilton immigrants often rent apartments in older apartment buildings or houses that have been subdivided to create apartments. While one can find some modern apartments and older apartments in good condition, older buildings often have electrical or heating code violations, buildings may be dilapidated or poorly maintained. Immigrants are often unaware of their rights as tenants or afraid to defend their rights because they are undocumented.

Young immigrants, like college students, often share apartments and share the rent. For example, four single immigrants might rent a two bed-room apartment. Latino immigrant families may be extended families. It would not be uncommon to find two brothers living together with a cousin and an aunt. Since most immigrant families are young, most of their families are small and children young. In addition to nuclear families some immigrants have extended families that include a grandparent, uncle or cousin, in-law living with the family. While there may be cases of over-crowding, we have not found this to be a common problem in our area.

Few Latino immigrants have yet become homeowners in the Southwest Ohio area, though many aspire to own their own homes. Few assets, low wages, lack of documents form obstacles to home ownership for some.

Some landlords will take advantage of immigrant renters attempting to overcharge them for rents or to keep their deposits.

Organizations that work with the homeless report that they occasionally see Latino immigrants, but that they are so far few in numbers.

Education Issues

Since the immigrant community in Cincinnati is so new and so young there are still relatively few Latino immigrant children in the schools. Local hospitals, however, report a rising Latino birthrate here so immigrant children can be expected to be entering the schools in greater numbers in the coming years.

In 2001 the University of Cincinnati and the University of Cincinnati College of Education and the Hearing Speech & Deaf Center of Greater Cincinnati established a pre-school for Latino/a children which offered bilingual and English as a Second Language Programs for a small number of children.

The Cincinnati Public Schools recently took the initiative to assign one of its social workers to work with the Latino immigrant students. CPS has also created more pre-school and school programs for students who come from families speaking other languages. The number of students who are English-learners has grown from 467 in academic year 2001-2002 to 937 in academic year 2006-2007. The district projects that there will be over 1,000 English learners in the schools by 2007-2008, a 124% increase in less than a decade. In April 2007 the CPS ESL program had 391 students whose home language was Spanish, 62 who spoke Arabic, 61 who spoke Wolof, and 61 who spoke French. The creation of programs

for these students and the establishment of a Latina Spanish-speaking social worker to help the students, families and teachers in making this program a success is laudable.

Nevertheless, the outlook for new Latino immigrants in Southwest Ohio is not good, given the quality of city schools and existing race problems. Those immigrant children enrolled in suburban schools will likely fair better than those in inner-city schools. Most Latino immigrants have low levels of education—three to twelve years of school—and most of the children will come from Spanish-speaking homes and in some cases perhaps from homes that speak an indigenous language. Immigrants are also unfamiliar with U.S. schools and the culture and customs of education here. Spanish language, various Latin American cultures of different countries and ethnic groups, and dark skin color will also make more difficult the immigrants' advancement in this society. In a city like Cincinnati with notorious racial problems and a society that has been divided between whites and blacks, Latino immigrants who do not fit neatly into either category, will have difficulty being accepted and finding a place.

Schools in the cities of Southwest Ohio have high drop-out rates. In Cincinnati only 77% of freshmen and in the city of Hamilton only 75% graduate from high school. "For black males, the city of Cincinnati ranks 57th out of 59 major cities in high school graduation rates, says a national study by the Schott Foundation for Public Education in Cambridge, Mass." If after many decades of African American immigration from the South the Cincinnati Public Schools can do no better than this, then what are the chances for Latino immigrants? Cincinnati Public Schools will have to radically revamp the culture of education for multi-cultural parents and students (not only Latino immigrants but also Africans, etc.). And they will have to create programs of bilingual education of various sorts as well as other programs for the new immigrant children.

Health Issues

Health is one of the few areas where there has been a study of Latino issues. The Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati published "2005 Greater Cincinnati Hispanic/Latino Health Survey" based on a survey of 500 Hispanic/Latino adults out of what was estimated as 58,000 Hispanic/Latino residents. Not surprisingly given the youth of this population, the study found that 96 percent of the immigrants considered themselves to be in good health.

Latinos who do have health issues, however, and face problems in getting the medical attention they need. The majority of Latino immigrants have no health insurance. Fewer than 60 percent had a usual source of health care compared to almost 80 percent for most residents. Many report going to community health centers, clinics or private doctors' offices when they are ill. Their most frequent problems are the high cost of health care and the inability to communicate with health care providers.

Cincinnati has a notoriously high infant mortality rate among some non-Latino residents. Most immigrant women, however, report that they have had prenatal care and most of their children have normal birth weights. Over eighty-percent of Latinas had prenatal care, though almost 20 percent did not.

Not surprisingly given the high stress of living in a new environment and the low levels of social support in many cases, Latinos report slightly higher rates of psychological distress, but lower rates of depression. Latino immigrants smoke less than the regional rate, both Latino immigrants and other residents smoke more than the national rate. Latino immigrants were more prone to binge drinking than the regional rate.

Another issue not discussed in the Health Foundation report is the role of traditional healers

and remedies in the Latino community and their role in Latino health and relationship of U.S. health professionals.

Women's Issues

Women immigrate for the same reasons as men: in search of jobs and higher wages. Women also come from the same countries and regions. A University of Cincinnati study of women migrating from Oaxaca to the Southwest Ohio area drew the conclusion that women migrate because of the decline of agriculture in the state with few new sources of employment. Over all Oaxaca does not provide enough economic opportunity for its citizens and women migrants' hometowns could not offer them a future. Women also migrate, perhaps more than in the past because their educational levels have been rising, though many still only have primary or middle school educations. Some have little formal education at all. Women who migrate, the student found, are more likely to be under thirty years of age, to have few or no children, and to have a male companion or husband in the United States.

Latina immigrants face all the difficulties of other Latinos and some additional ones. Women may face discrimination that arises both within their own culture and within their adopted culture. Most societies in Latin America have been patriarchal, though that has been changing over the last fifty years. Indigenous societies have also usually been patriarchal. The growing Pentecostal churches generally regard men as the heads of households and women as subordinate, views which diminish women's status and opportunities. While Catholic theology does not necessarily subordinate women, sometimes Catholic practice does.

Women face specific social problems. Some Latinas face domestic violence in their homes and some local organizations, such as the Santa Maria Center's Bienestar Hispanic Health Initiative and the YWCA's Alliance for Immigrant Women have programs to deal with this issue. Latina women encounter a segmented labor force that may in some cases relegate them to lower paying jobs than those of men. Latina women often have lower levels of education than men. Indigenous women may have had less exposure to Spanish and not have the same level of Spanish language skills.

Community Relations Issues

The Latino community suffers from a high level of social invisibility. Because there is no Latino district or barrio and because the Latino population is so dispersed, many other residents of Southwest Ohio remain ignorant of the existence of a Latino population here. Or, if they learn of the existence of the Latino population, it may be through sensationalized newspaper, radio or television coverage of some incident involving a crime or a car accident. While a growing number of Catholic, mainline Protestant and Evangelical churches and their congregations offer support to immigrants, still many Southwest Ohioans remain ignorant of the Latinos presence, their number and their problems.

The communities of Southwest Ohio have not responded quickly or well to the arrival of new immigrants. One University of Cincinnati Study of the City of Hamilton, Ohio found, for example, that the city, both public institutions and private businesses, had virtually no bilingual services. Immigrants, the study found, were likely to encounter racist behavior, especially from the police. The public schools had begun to respond to immigrants, and the Jefferson Elementary had established some ESL programs, but the author also noted a pattern of white flight: as Latinos moved into the neighborhood and schools other white or African American residents left. Hospitals and clinics had been quicker to respond to

immigrants' needs than most other institutions, providing translations of documents and interpreters in some cases. The most positive and proactive sector of the community was found to be the religious institutions.

Xenophobic attitudes, ultraconservative politics, and simple racism make parts of the Southwest Ohio region difficult for immigrants. Butler and Warren counties are among the most conservative counties in the country and many white residents of those counties have hostile attitudes towards immigrants, though they may have little knowledge of or experience with the immigrant community. The County Boards in those counties and the Butler County Sheriff have become notorious for their anti-immigrant positions. The City of Cincinnati itself has more tolerant attitudes and in general city officials, the police department, the public library, the Cincinnati Public schools and other institutions have attempted to be supportive of and helpful towards Latino immigrants.

In some areas immigrants have experienced violence at the hands of other residents. Immigrants report that in some communities, for example Lower Price Hill, they have experienced attacks by Appalachian and African American residents. In some cases these are clearly criminal activities such as robberies of immigrants, home invasions, and physical assaults. Local residents have also damaged cars, breaking windows, punching tires, and breaking car mirrors.

Workplace relations between Latinos and other workers are often good, other workers often respect Latinos for their hard work, and many workplace friendships are formed. However some workers perceive the Latino immigrants who are often desperate to get and keep a job as rate busters who work so hard and so fast that they break the established customary production norms and threaten the jobs of other workers. In particular some African American workers report that Latinos work so fast that employers fire black workers and replace them with Latino immigrants. Latino immigrants, unfamiliar with the history of African Americans' struggle for civil rights and respect, sometimes talk of the black workers as lazy rather than as workers who resist employer abuses and stand up for their rights. Where labor unions exist they can moderate these differences by involving both groups of workers in cooperating to establish reasonable production norms.

Public Safety Issues

Latino immigrants face many problems in dealing with public safety issues. Undocumented immigrants cannot get drivers' licenses and so cannot get insurance, yet they must still drive in order to get to work and in general to move about in society. Consequently immigrants frequently face problems when stopped by the police because they cannot produce a valid driver's license. Often the driver will be cited, sometimes arrested and frequently the automobile is impounded. All of this involves lost time, sometimes lost work time and lost income, even lost jobs, court costs, towing and storage costs, sometimes attorneys' fees and so on. Lack of drivers' licenses and the desire to have a legal license represents the most important issue for many Latino immigrants.

When Latinos immigrants are the victims of crime, they may hesitate to call the police. First, police in their own countries, particularly Mexico and Guatemala, are notoriously corrupt and violent. So immigrants may expect that if they call the police here they will be shaken down, robbed, beaten, perhaps raped and jailed even if they are guilty of no crime, as often happens in their own countries. Second, many of the immigrants do not have documents and they hesitate to call the police because they fear that they will be turned over to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and deported. Third, immigrants suppose that in any case they will not be able to explain the situation to the police who probably do not speak Spanish (there are very few Spanish-speak officers in any of the law

enforcement agencies of Southwest Ohio).

Latino immigrants may also hesitate to call 911 for emergencies involving crime, fire, or emergency health issues. First, many do not know the number. Second, many would again be fearful because they do not have papers. And finally most will fear that they will not get a Spanish-speaker on the line. The Cincinnati Police Department has created a program to provide translators to help officers dealing with immigrants reporting or accused of crimes, involved in accidents or other dealings with the CPD.

Immigration Issues

With as much as 80 to 90 percent of the Latino immigrant population in the Southwest Ohio and Northern Kentucky area made up of undocumented immigrants, immigration issues are a major issue, especially since the increase in raids by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). ICE has become much more vigorous in seeking the deportation of immigrants. Immigrants who are stopped for traffic issues and end up in jail now find that ICE officials visit them and question, usually within 48 hours. ICE has also increased raids on homes and businesses in the area. Raids on homes are ostensibly to detain either immigrants who have committed serious crimes or who have missed an immigration hearing date, however, often the agents enter the home and begin to question and arrest other immigrants. Raids on workplaces in the area have taken scores of immigrants at a time. ICE agents have been known to engage in offering legal advice or in pressuring immigrants to sign voluntary deportation orders before they have seen an attorney.

Immigrants detained in this area may be taken to the Boone County Jail in northern Kentucky where the jail administrators have sometimes made it difficult for attorneys and translators who come to help immigrants.

Some legal assistance for immigrants may be obtained through the Cincinnati or Northern Kentucky Legal Aid Societies or through the Volunteer Law Project, though immigrants may find that they have to hire a private attorney to deal with their immigration issues.

Civic Issues

Southwest Ohio's Latino immigrant population has yet to become part of the region's civic life. While many Latinos have joined churches and some participate in soccer leagues and hometown organizations, still other areas of civic participation have yet to be developed. Playing a role in civic life does not necessarily depend on having documents or being a citizen. Civic life has to do with civic participation, such things as attending a PTA or school board meeting, getting involved in a local block club, joining and becoming active in a labor union, or becoming involved in a Latino organization. The character of the Latino immigrant community of Southwest Ohio, that fact that it is so new, young, dispersed, has no barrio(s) have all militated against the establishment of a strong Latino civic life.

Latino Community Makes Some Gains

Despite the difficult situation that Latino immigrants face, they have made some significant gains over the recent period that should be noted.

Founding of Immigrant Rights Group – In January of 2004 immigrants in Cincinnati came together to found the Coalición por los Derechos y la Dignidad de los Inmigrantes (CODEDI), a grassroots immigrant-led and immigrant-based organization. CODEDI has engaged in education and organizing around social and policy issues affecting the Latino community. CODEDI played a leading role in the organization of Latino demonstrations for

immigration reform in Cincinnati and Columbus in 2006. CODEDI has more recently focused on developing an alliance with religious groups and attorneys to defend immigrants and their children.

Victory for Janitors – Janitors, many of the Latinos, won an important victory in July 2007 when the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) won a contract from cleaning companies that clean about two-thirds of the buildings in Cincinnati. The agreement calls for wages to rise to a minimum of \$7.05 by Oct. 1, 2007 and to \$9.80 an hour by Jan. 1, 2012. Before that janitors earned between \$5.85 and \$6.85 an hour. The agreement provides janitors access to employer-subsidized group health insurance starting Jan. 1, 2010 at a cost of \$20 a month for those in a single plan and up to \$198 a month for the most expensive family plan.

Campaign to Organize Hotel Workers – The UNITE-HERE labor union has been engaged in a national campaign to organize several hotels corporations, some of which have hotels here in the Cincinnati area. The UNITE-HERE campaign could also bring unionization and improved wages to Cincinnati

Founding of Workers Centers – The founding of Workers Centers in Cincinnati and Hamilton has the potential to further efforts to organize immigrant communities into labor unions. The workers centers have played an important role in responding to recent raids on the immigrant community.

Churches Become More Involved – While the Catholic Church's Su Casa has a long history of charitable and social work with the Latino community, more recently other churches. For example, Church of Our Savior (Episcopal) in Cincinnati and John Wesley Methodist in Fairfield, have become involved in support of Latino immigrants.

Latino immigrants and their allies, particularly their allies in the churches and labor unions, have been successful in making Cincinnati more hospitable toward Latino immigrants.

Recent Challenges

With the failure of the U.S. Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform legislation and the Bush administration announcing new stepped-up enforcement of existing laws, the immigrant rights movement finds itself on the defensive. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security and its Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have begun to carry out a series of home and workplace raids that have resulted in thousands of arrests and deportations around the country, many of them breaking up families and causing terror in Latino immigrant communities. Some of these raids have occurred in the Cincinnati, Southwest Ohio, and Northern Kentucky areas.

During a raid at Koch Foods in Fairfield, Ohio in August of 2007 ICE detained 160 workers, with an impact on an estimated 1,000 family members. The raid led to criminal charges of the felonies of using false documents and identity theft against about twenty immigrants because they had used a non-existent social security card or the card of someone else in order to obtain work. Other immigrants felt pressured into signing voluntary deportation orders and others faced deportation hearings. Some were released on their own recognizance to care for children or for humanitarian reasons. The impact on the Latino community of the region has been to break up families, to remove men and women breadwinners, and to sow terror among the residents.

All of the existing organizations—immigrant groups, labor unions, churches, and social clubs—reacted swiftly to the Koch Food raids of 2007. They came quickly to the aid of the

immigrants and families affected. Nevertheless, such raids take a devastating toll on productive residents, their families and communities. When such raids occur some immigrants do not go to work or to stores to go shopping; they may keep their children home from school for a day or several days; others fear going to the doctor or to hospitals and may not seek needed medical attention. If such raids continue, they will push immigrants deeper into the underground cash-economy and may lead them to live clandestinely. These results are not good for our communities, for our economy, nor for a democratic society.

Ten Most Important Issues for Latino Immigrants in Southwest Ohio

What could we call the most important issues for the Latino immigrants in Southwest Ohio? Discussions with immigrants, immigrant organizations, and other organizations that serve immigrants suggest that these are the most pressing issues:

A comprehensive immigration reform granting legalization to all immigrants now living and working in the United States and creating a path to citizenship. At the same time no guest worker program of any sort for any industry.

Drivers licenses for immigrants on the basis of secure identifications such as consular identification cards from their own countries. This will also allow immigrants to get auto insurance.

An end to the raids on Latino workplaces and the arrest of hardworking immigrants with no criminal records.

No extension of Federal immigration authority to county sheriffs, police, prison guards or other local officials.

Full protection of the labor rights of all immigrants: wages and hours laws, health and safety laws, and above all the right to organize unions of their own choosing without interference from the employer or any government authority.

The development of initiatives to prepare the schools of Southwest Ohio to incorporate and to educate the coming wave of Latino students.

Employers, government and labor unions must work together to create programs of health insurance for immigrants. The best solution would be a national single-payer health program for all who live and work in the U.S. regardless of citizenship.

Continued improvement in programs to sensitize police to an increasingly diverse and multicultural community, including education for immigrants about 911 emergency.

The development of educational programs to acquaint Cincinnati residents with the new Latino immigrant community. Such programs might be initiated by local government in conjunction with churches, schools, labor unions and most important Latino and other ethnic immigrant organizations.

Work by all public bodies to promote the civic participation of Latino immigrants in everything from the PTA to voter registration and elections.

Migrants and Immigrants Rights

Immigrants in the United States, even the undocumented, do have rights and do have allies.

Immigrants both legal and undocumented enjoy rights protected by the United States and by the United Nations. The United Nations has over the last 60 years issued a series of documents that protect the rights of migrants. Many US Constitutional rights and other rights extend to immigrants, some to legal immigrants and others to undocumented immigrants, though the defense and exercise of those rights requires constant vigilance and intervention on the part of human rights organizations and attorneys. Those migrants or immigrants who seek to exercise their rights usually need to seek the counsel of immigration attorneys.

While conservative radio talk shows promoting xenophobic and racist positions mobilized anti-immigrant voters to pressure U.S. Congressmen against immigration reform, in fact many and perhaps most Americans are sympathetic to immigrants and their families. Many organizations and sectors of society in the United States have taken positions in support of immigrants and in defense of their rights. The Catholic Church in the United States, mainline Protestant churches and Evangelical churches have all issued positions that support immigrants rights. The American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) and the Change-to-Win, the two most important labor federations have also taken pro-immigrant positions. Scores of U.S. cities, including all of the countries very largest cities, have adopted resolutions proclaiming that they are sanctuary cities for immigrants, and in many cities which have not adopted such resolutions, still government officials and police decline to become involved in the enforcement of immigration law. Many and perhaps most Americans would like to see an immigration reform that would regularize the status of immigrants now here and grant them a path to citizenship.

Immigrants and their allies in Cincinnati, Southwest Ohio and Northern Kentucky should be aware of both their legal resources and their important social allies as they undertake to defend the immigrant community from violations of their civil rights and their human rights. We have every reason to believe that we have many more allies than we make think and many more resources than we have yet tapped.

For Further Reading

Best Books on Latino Immigration for the General Reader

Juan González. *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*. New York: Viking, 2000.

This book by journalist Juan González provides in a very engaging and readable an overview of the Latino peoples in America that includes all of the most important national and ethnic groups.

Rubén Martínez. *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail*. New York: Henry Holt. 2001.

Beginning with the death of a group of migrant workers being pursued by the Border Patrol, this book by journalist Rubén Martínez takes us into the experience of a group of immigrant families from the town of Chirán, Michoacán. The book reveals their experience both in their own hometown and in the communities in which they live in the United States.

Jane Gustin and David L. Wilson. *The Politics of Immigration*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2007.

As one reviewer wrote, this book has “identified the hot-button points in the national immigration debate, and ... set out to correct stereotypes, prejudice and misinformation that paralyze rational thought on the subject.”

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I appreciate the help of some friends who read and commented on earlier drafts of this paper: Siusan Durst, a teacher of Spanish language and culture at the University of Cincinnati; Martha Rees, Chair, Anthropology Department at the University of Cincinnati; Mary Jo Montenegro, Cincinnati Public Schools social worker for Spanish-speaking children, families and teachers. Mike Flynn, Sherry Baron, and Sheli DeLaney also commented.

Latino immigration should be seen in the context of the history of immigrants to migrate for work. See: Dan La Botz, "Migration of Workers to the United States in Historical Perspective," at: [HYPERLINK "http://www.floc.com/documents/IRHistory.pdf"](http://www.floc.com/documents/IRHistory.pdf) <http://www.floc.com/documents/IRHistory.pdf>

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World Bank Fact Sheet at: [HYPERLINK "http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/MEXICOEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20233967~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:338397,00.html"](http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/MEXICOEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20233967~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:338397,00.html) <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/MEXICOEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20233967~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:338397,00.html>

World Bank, Poverty in Guatemala, based on data from 2000-01, much of the book is available at: [HYPERLINK "http://books.google.com/books?id=A5rjpvMkKvcC&dq=&pg=PP1&ots=UCXwvzteYb&sig=rqnGzYAP6cSL40zAla4PfPHNWNc&prev=http://www.google.com/search%3Fhl%3Den%26q%3Dpoverty%2Bin%2Bguatemala%26btnG%3DSearch&sa=X&oi=print&ct=title#PPT1,M1"](http://books.google.com/books?id=A5rjpvMkKvcC&dq=&pg=PP1&ots=UCXwvzteYb&sig=rqnGzYAP6cSL40zAla4PfPHNWNc&prev=http://www.google.com/search%3Fhl%3Den%26q%3Dpoverty%2Bin%2Bguatemala%26btnG%3DSearch&sa=X&oi=print&ct=title#PPT1,M1)

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U.S. Ambassador Issues Advisory Message To Americans Regarding Increased Violence In Mexico, at:

[HYPERLINK "http://www.usembassy-mexico.gov/eng/releases/ep060914violence_advisory.html"](http://www.usembassy-mexico.gov/eng/releases/ep060914violence_advisory.html) http://www.usembassy-mexico.gov/eng/releases/ep060914violence_advisory.html

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CincyLatino website at: [HYPERLINK "http://cpanel.wispme.com/~nichola/"](http://cpanel.wispme.com/~nichola/)
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The Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center home page is at: [HYPERLINK "http://www.cworkers.org/"](http://www.cworkers.org/)
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"A National Worker Center – AFL Partnership: at: [HYPERLINK "http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheafclcio/ecouncil/ec08092006j.cfm"](http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheafclcio/ecouncil/ec08092006j.cfm)
<http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheafclcio/ecouncil/ec08092006j.cfm> The significance of workers centers is discussed in: Janice Fine, *Workers Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream* (Ithaca: Cornell University, ILR Press, 2006).
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<http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?ptid=4&mid=1063> ; Episcopal Church, “Executive Council Resolution Opposing Infringement of Immigrants’ and Minorities’ Rights,” at: [HYPERLINK](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/1866_70804_ENG_HTM.htm) "http://www.episcopalchurch.org/1866_70804_ENG_HTM.htm"
http://www.episcopalchurch.org/1866_70804_ENG_HTM.htm and Episcopal Migration Ministries’ “Theological Premises” at: [HYPERLINK](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/3687_32097_ENG_HTM.htm?menu=menu32104)
"http://www.episcopalchurch.org/3687_32097_ENG_HTM.htm?menu=menu32104"
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AFL-CIO documents on immigrants at: [HYPERLINK](http://www.aflcio.org/issues/civilrights/immigration/)
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While local resolutions vary greatly, many cities have pledged to defend immigrants and their rights with so-called “sanctuary” resolutions, among them: Los Angeles and San Francisco, California; Denver, Colorado; New Haven, Connecticut; Chicago, Illinois; Cambridge, Mass.; Portland, Maine; Detroit, Michigan; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Reno, Nevada; Camden, Trenton, Jersey City and Union City, New Jersey; Albuquerque and Santa Fe, New Mexico; New York City, New York; Charlotte, Durham, Raleigh and Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Columbus, Ohio; the State of Oregon; Dallas, Ft. Worth and Houston, Texas; Salt Lake City, Utah; Seattle, Washington; and Madison, Wisconsin. An frequently updated and complete list of sanctuary cities can be found at: [HYPERLINK](http://www.ojjpac.org/sanctuary.asp)
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