

Latin@s and Social Movements in the Obama Years

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ABSTRACT

Although the social movement that crossed race, class, sexuality and gender lines before 2008 was exemplary, there is now another type of social movement that has emerged. This movement, led by conservative right wing groups, has been stirring racial divisions by using the economic crisis to scapegoat immigrants. At the same time, the promises of the Obama Administration have not been kept. Instead, under this administration's immigration policies close to one million deportations have occurred nationally, the implementation of a Secure Communities program has led to arbitrary arrests for minor offenses and violated the due process rights of both citizens and non-citizens, and an existing program of employee immigration-status verification has led to as many as 19,000 people that have been mistakenly identified as being deportable. The ingredients of a social movement are still visible but the strategies have shifted to local organizing efforts that, in California, have resulted in legislation supporting: cities opting out of E-Verify, the right of AB540 students to attend college with financial aid, the right of people without a driver's license to stop the impounding of their cars, and the establishment of a pilot program designed to protect undocumented workers who

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pay state income taxes. This paper focuses on these various trends and the prospects for future systemic change.

Keywords: social movements, politics, Presidential elections, voting, immigration, economy, racism, Coalitions, demographic changes, diversity.

RESUMEN

A pesar de que el movimiento social que tuvo lugar antes del año 2008 y que traspasó los límites de la raza, clase social, sexualidad y género fue ejemplar, en nuestros días ha surgido otro tipo de movimiento social. Este movimiento, dirigido por grupos conservadores de derechas, ha provocado divisiones raciales mediante el uso de inmigrantes como cabezas de turco durante la crisis. Al mismo tiempo, no se han cumplido las promesas de la administración Obama. Por el contrario, bajo la política migratoria de esta administración se han producido cerca de un millón de deportaciones a nivel nacional, se ha puesto en funcionamiento un programa de Comunidades Seguras que ha dado lugar a detenciones arbitrarias por delitos menores y se ha violado el derecho a un juicio justo tanto de inmigrantes con la ciudadanía como de los que no la tienen. Además, el programa existente de verificación del estado de empleo de los inmigrantes ha causado que alrededor de 19.000 personas hayan sido erróneamente identificadas como deportables. Los ingredientes del movimiento social son todavía visibles, pero las estrategias se han transformado en esfuerzos a nivel local que, en California, han dado lugar a una legislación que respalda a las ciudades que optan por no apoyar el E-Verify, el derecho de los estudiantes sujetos a la AB540 a recibir ayudas económicas para ir a la universidad, el derecho de las personas sin carnet de conducir a que no se les incauten sus coches y el establecimiento de un programa piloto diseñado para proteger a los trabajadores indocumentados que pagan impuestos estatales. El presente artículo se centra en estos aspectos y en las expectativas de cambio en el futuro.

Palabras clave: movimientos sociales, política, elecciones presidenciales, votación, inmigración, economía, racismo, coaliciones, cambios demográficos, diversidad.

The significance of the election of Barack Obama in 2008 was in the rising of a social movement of Latinos and broad-based coalitions that advanced a vision for changing the direction of the country and whose interests were served.

The victory by Barack Obama in 2008 represented a transformative social movement that built multi-racial alliances and coalitions, transcended the mythical Black and Brown divide, galvanized new voters, and united hundreds of thousands around a “social change” agenda of issues. In moving large numbers of people around the ideas of equity and full participation in the life and direction of U.S. society, this social movement had the particularity of bringing diverse communities of people together in seeking new answers to their issues and the structural systemic problems being faced by the entire country.

It fit into the ingredients of a social movement where large numbers of ordinary people, disillusioned by the failings of the George Bush Administration, came together around “collective and joint actions” with change-oriented goals to assert their rights and to demand a drastic change in the status quo (Snow, Sule, and Kriesi 1-13).” The particularity of this activity was that it was manifested in the electoral arena through the use of internet technologies, house meetings, and training of organizers. It had the characteristics of “deep pluralism,” as presented by Phil Thomson in his book *Double Trouble*, where large numbers of multi-racial alliances emerge in search of a “deeper democracy” to overcome differences, “to achieve power in competitive struggles with other groups,” and to strive “for a politics of common (cross-racial) good” (Thompson 22-27).

I was part of this social movement. As an academic and community organizer, I was part of a coalition of Latino community leaders and organizations who, very early on in the primary election, developed Viva Obama clubs throughout California (Wall). In the primary election, key pro-immigrant leaders in the Latino community were divided in where they would place their vote. Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and United Farm Worker’s co-founder Dolores Huerta supported Hillary Clinton while Angelica Salas from the Coalition for Human Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA) and Maria Elena Durazo, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, supported Barack Obama. I was part of a coalition of Latino and African American leaders who came together in the Inland Empire region of Southern California and organized widely publicized press conferences, voter registration campaigns, educational community forums, and get-out-the-vote efforts in support of Barack Obama (Wall). Some of our supporters and organizers traveled to the states of Arizona, Nevada, and Colorado to get out the vote.

What drove the unity of our coalition, as similar to other alliances throughout the country, was Obama’s history in identifying with the causes of oppressed communities and his campaign promises to support immigrant rights, to improve the quality

of education, health care, and employment, and to rebuild the type of alliances and partnerships that would be necessary to meet the challenges of a global economy. We were united on the significance of the election as being about the election of a person of color on the one hand, and the possibilities for building a new social movement that would genuinely unite people from diverse backgrounds in advancing a public policy agenda on how the country should be run and whose interests it should serve.

1. OBAMA'S HISTORY WITH OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES

A number of us, who were part of the national coalition to elect Obama, came out of a history as community organizers. Hence, Obama's stories in his two books and in his speeches throughout the country resonated with the trials and tribulations that many of us had faced or were facing.

In particular, his stories about moving from a student to a community organizer appealed to social movement organizers who often cited his memoir *Dreams from My Father* where Obama placed himself in the world of the organizer and the unorganized in seeking solutions to poverty, polluted water, and gang violence. These stories that were often also part of Obama's speeches throughout the country, fit with the experiences of many who came out of the civil rights generation and many others involved in contemporary regional equity movements (Pastor, Benner, Matsuoka 216-218).

It was the issue of "inequity," for example, in our social system that Barack Obama began to question when he was pondering what to do after graduating from college. It was by placing himself in the image of the "other" through his readings, the image of the SNCC workers "convincing a family of sharecroppers to register to vote" or the images of everyday people organizing the Montgomery bus boycott that led to his commitment beyond the individual to listen to the perspectives of others (Obama 2004: 134, 135). It was by placing himself in the world of the organizer and the unorganized that deepened his commitment that empowered him to empower others. In carrying out interviews in the poor communities of Chicago, he reflected "The more interviews I did, the more I began to hear recurring themes. The people I talked to, had some fond memories of that self-contained world, but they also remembered the absence of heat and light and space to breathe – that, and the sight of their parents grinding out life in physical labor" (Obama 2004: 155). As Obama listened to these stories, they reminded him of his family, their migration, their hardships, and the tenacity to build a better life.

When the community organizers he was working with got tired, he looked out the window and asked the organizers to look with him: "What do you suppose is going to happen to those boys out there?" [...] "You say you're tired, the same way most folks

out here are tired. So I'm just trying to figure out what's going to happen to those boys. Who's going to make sure they get a fair shot?" (Obama 2004: 171, 172). In asking these questions and challenging those around him, he was asking the organizers to place themselves in those worlds. In the process, he took the time to listen to others and, in his book *Dreams from My Father*, provided examples of how he came to move "toward the center of people's lives" in his community.

And it was this realization, I think, that finally allowed me to share more of myself with the people I was working with, to break out of the larger isolation that I had carried with me to Chicago... As time passed, I found that these stories, taken together, had helped me bind my world together, that they gave me the sense of place and purpose I'd been looking for. There was always a community there if you dug deep enough. There was poetry as well – a luminous world always present beneath the surface, a world that people might offer up as a gift to me, if I only remembered to ask" (Obama 2004: 190).

It was no accident then that the strategy of "story-telling" and listening to the stories of others on a one-to-one basis became a cornerstone of the campaign. More than the successful use of new technologies, this strategy worked in recruiting thousands of new leaders through door-to-door contact in neighborhoods and training them in using their life histories, and those of the communities they worked with, as a basis to reach out to the voting public.

2. REACHING OUT

This outreach strategy gave rise to an advancement of hundreds of multi-racial collective efforts on a local, regional, and national level comprised of all ethnic/racial groups, hailing mostly from cities and suburbs, largely younger than 30, and among all income classes. With young voters comprising one-quarter of the 44 million eligible voters, the Obama campaign recruited thousands of volunteers between the ages of 18 and 29 (Dreier). The magnitude of this campaign was exemplified by the field operation in Florida that included 19,000 neighborhood teams led by 500 paid organizers (Stirland). Using the "organizing approach," these organizers used personal narratives, a website, and weekend training programs to recruit and train one million volunteers (Burke). This multi-racial coalition that used the internet, cell phones, house meetings, and door-to-door eye contact with the voting public to find and train teams of community leaders was the foundation of the incredible voter registration and voter turn-out statistics in the primary and on Election Day.

Significantly, as part of this movement, there were 2 million more blacks, 2 million more Latinos, and 338,000 more Asian Pacific Americans that cast votes in 2008 than in the 2004 presidential election (Lopez & Taylor).

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LATINO VOTE

In the primary election, there was a question as to whether Obama could build the type of coalition that it would take to win. In terms of the Latino vote, Hillary Clinton got 63% of the Latino vote, including 67% of the vote in Arizona and California (William C. Velasquez Institute). Some journalists attributed this lack of Latino support for Obama in the primary to the Black/Brown divide and to the changing urban landscape where Latino immigrants were moving into inner-city neighborhoods and competing with African Americans for jobs, housing, services, and for positions in local governments. Similar to the research in the edited volume *Neither Enemies Nor Friends: Latinos, Blacks, Afro-Latinos*, others attributed the divide to prejudices shaped in Latin America where darker-skinned indigenous people are looked down upon by those with lighter skin and a Spanish heritage. Earl Hutchison, author of the “Ethnic Presidency: How Race Decides the Race to the White House” proposed before the election that “The tensions between blacks and Latinos and negative perceptions that have marred relations between these groups for so long unfortunately still resonate.” He shared his concern that “there will still be reluctance among many Latinos to vote for an African-American candidate... When you’ve got competing ethnic groups at the bottom level, you’re going to have friction because of the jockeying just to preserve their niche” (Reno).

Although Hillary Clinton was more well-known than Obama in the Latino community, Obama was able to increase the number of Latinos who voted for him by distinguishing himself from Clinton right before the primary in three key areas: “support of drivers’ licenses for undocumented immigrants, a promise to take up immigration reform in his first year in office, and his background as the son of an immigrant (his father was Kenyan) and a community organizer in Chicago (Lochhead).” According to a poll and analysis by the William C. Velasquez Institute, “This shift in campaign strategy seemed to correlate with undecided voters choosing Obama as their candidate of choice in the last week of the primary campaign” (William C. Velasquez Institute).

After the primary, the question was whether Obama would get the Hillary Clinton vote or whether it would be divided and alienated. Obama’s ability to retain an overwhelming majority of Clinton supporters was a key factor in his victory over McCain. Among Democratic voters who wanted Clinton to win the Democratic nomination, 82% supported Obama. The Latino vote sided with Obama and the Black/Brown division, that the media and conservative pundits had advanced as a given, never became a reality. At the same time, the coalition that had supported Clinton, made up of Latinos, union households, low income voters, and white women, was able to be united

on Election Day. Obama won the Latino vote by 66% to 31%, union households by 58% to 40%, and the low income (below 50,000) voters by 60% to 38% (CNN).

With Latinos turning out to vote for Obama, they shattered the myth of a Black/Latino divide. Two thirds of Latinos voted for Obama. More voted Democratic than in any presidential election since 1996 (Lopez). Like voters nationwide, the majority of Latino voters said they had one concern above all others: the economy. This went along with the data that broke down foreclosures by race where Latinos were more than twice as likely as whites to get a high-cost loan, making them particularly vulnerable to foreclosures (Ruggeri).

While the Republicans tried to advance a strategy of using “morality” issues, such as same-sex marriage and abortion, to influence the Latino vote in much the same way that Bush had used these issues in 2004, the use of these “wedge” issues was overshadowed by concerns over the economy, health care, education and immigration.

In contrast to McCain, the Obama campaign was able to motivate and galvanize a broad-based coalition by presenting himself as a symbol of the concerns of a working public that was being affected by a deepening economic crisis. A CNN poll in September 2008, for example, pointed out that McCain exhibited a gap in “connectedness,” and that the voting public by a 62-32 percentage margin, thought that Obama was “more in touch with the needs and problems” of working families (Silver). This connectedness was attributed to a number of key factors including his promises to cut taxes for ninety five percent of working families and his position to withdraw troops from Iraq. Nevertheless, while his position on the war initially placed him ahead in his campaign against McCain, he benefited even more from voter concerns over the crisis in the economy. Although polls showed that half of all voters thought that the economy was in poor condition and were worried about how the economic crisis would hurt them financially, McCain made the serious mistake of minimizing the significance of the economic crisis. While 60% of the voting public said that the economy was the most important problem that the new president would have to focus on, McCain focused on the issue of terrorism, a concern that only 9 percent of the voters saw as their major concern (Ververs). This allowed for Obama to further his argument that the election of McCain would only be a continuance of the policies of the Bush Administration. Although McCain tried, he could not separate himself from the negative feelings that the voting public had toward Bush. About half of all voters came to believe that McCain would continue Bush’s policies and 75 percent said that the country was on the wrong track.

For those of us organizing in Latino communities, the election victory of Barack Obama proved what many of us had been saying all along: that the marches

that many of us had helped lead against the criminalization of immigrants in 2006, and in support for the legalization of the 12 million immigrants in this country, would eventually turn into voting power. Indeed, the theme of the massive marches in 2006, “Today We March - Tomorrow We Vote,” resulted in the galvanizing of immigrants and in their application for citizenship in record numbers. As part of this movement, after 2006, numerous community-based church and community organizations held citizenship and naturalization clinics throughout the country. Hence, the number of individuals naturalized in the U. S. went from 660,477 in 2007 to 1,046,539 in 2008. The Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics not only attributed this increase to organized responses to proposed fee application increases but, most importantly, “to special efforts to encourage eligible applicants to apply for U.S. citizenship (Lee & Rytina).” Not only did this movement advance citizenship drives, but also spurred voter registration efforts that resulted in over 500,000 new citizen voters. The We Are America Alliance, alone, registered over 83,000 new voters in Florida, 35,000 in Pennsylvania, 52,000 in Nevada, and nearly 40,000 in New Mexico. The large number of newly registered voters bypassed the record 64% of eligible voters which last turned out in the 1960 election.

While there was a tendency to say that the immigration issue was placed in the back-burner in the election results, it was on the minds of our Latino communities and played a role in the galvanizing of the Latino vote. In an NDN/Bendixen poll right before the election that asked Latinos “How important is the immigration issue to you and your family?” Between 74% and 86% of Latinos in the states of Florida, Colorado, New Mexico, and Nevada responded that it was very important (America’s Voice). Some Latino voters, who had supported Bush in the last presidential election, were now polled as being disaffected by the Republican stance on immigration. Since 2006, Republicans in Congress had consistently supported immigration bills, such as the Sensenbrenner bill, that criminalized all undocumented immigrants and anyone who would support them. It was no accident that the Obama people understood the impact of such a divisive policy and flooded Latino districts with Spanish-language ads and campaign literature.

4. OBSTACLES IN CONTINUING THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT

After the election, the ingredients of a social movement that helped to elect Barack Obama went by the wayside. While the Obama Administration was forced to

focus on the crisis state of the economy, this was not the only factor that thwarted some of its initiatives. Consequently, a number of the key policy commitments made before the election faced legislative hurdles in an environment where the corporate lobbies, defense contractors, drug companies, and conservative special interest groups staked their ground.

On the economy, Obama's mortgage payment plan promised to help millions of homeowners by creating incentives for lenders to renegotiate the terms of subprime loans. It also promised to help millions of households by paying off their mortgages and by lifting restrictions on financing. Before the election, Obama also promised a 90-day moratorium on foreclosures by banks and companies that receive any kind of government aid. However, while the stimulus package helped various bank and mortgage lenders to survive, there have been no solid guarantees to renegotiate loans or to help anyone who had already lost their home. Meanwhile, some of the companies who were bailed out a year ago, were given bonuses to their executives. Morgan Stanley, for example set aside \$3.9 billion for this purpose while Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc. reported record profits of \$3.4 billion in the second quarter and bonuses "that would yield a record-setting average payout of \$770,000 per employee if sustained the rest of the year (Hamilton, 2009: B1, B2). The Obama Administration's calls to stop the abuse of overseas tax loopholes, to develop a Consumer Financial Protection Agency, and to give more power to the government to regulate Wall Street have been blocked by the banking industry, the Financial Services Roundtable, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (Pazzanghera 2009a: B1, B3; Pazzanghera 2009b: B1, B6).

On the closing of Guantanamo Bay, Obama promised that he would close Guantanamo bay by January 2009, and that his administration would develop a task force to review existing detention policies and the lawful disposition of detainees in the U.S. custody. However, in May of 2009, the Senate by a vote of 90 to 6 voted to block the transfer of detainees to the U.S. and denied the Obama Administration \$81 million that it had requested to close Guantanamo. Presently, Obama has caved in to the contention of legislators in both the House and the Senate that their constituents were afraid of placing detainees on U.S. soil and possibly placing U.S. citizens in danger.

Before the election, Obama had criticized the Bush Administration for not being transparent and keeping the truth from the American public. However, the Obama Administration's position on state secrets doctrines in urging a federal judge to toss out a law suit by former CIA detainees was questioned as being no different than the Bush Administration's position in using state secrets privilege to dismiss entire law suits before there could be any proceedings.

Although Obama has consistently stressed the need for advancing a strategy of bipartisan cooperation between Democrats and Republicans in Congress, his activist governance stance has been horrendously criticized by the likes of such conservative commentators as Glenn Beck, Lou Dobbs, and Rush Limbaugh. The conservatives in the Republican Party, who are now in a position of being the minority party, have thwarted Obama's strategy of bipartisanship. In his book *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama proposed that a genuine bipartisanship strategy would work if there was "an honest process of give-and-take" and if "the quality of the compromises" served "some agreed-upon goal" (Obama 2006: 131).

However, the debate over health care reform revealed the pitfalls in this strategy with conservative groups putting aside what was written in Obama's health care proposals and claiming that his proposals included unlimited coverage for undocumented immigrants, death panels and euthanasia for the elderly, socialized medical rationing, and planned reductions in Medicare benefits. As in some of Obama's other policy initiatives, the promise that universal health care in America would become a reality "by the end of his first term as president" was blocked by the organized force of these right-wing groups, Republican congressional representatives, and the health insurance industry. Obama's support for a more affordable "public option," as an alternative to the status quo proposals of the insurance and pharmaceutical companies, has now been put aside with a requirement that all people buy health insurance with some help from federal subsidies to help those who cannot afford it (Levey 2009b: A-1, A-16).

Rather than the broad multi-racial movement that helped to elect Obama, there is an increase in another type of movement that promotes racism and scapegoats immigrants, underrepresented communities, women, people of color, and working people for the economic problems in this country.

This was especially evident when thousands of conservative protesters, many of them Republican, took to the streets in Washington D.C. questioning Obama's citizenship status and his administration's policies with signs that read: "Is this Russia?" "Traitors Terrorists Run Our Government." "Don't Blame me, I voted for The American" (Barabak A1, A17). The open attacks on the president's character in this demonstration and the outburst by Representative Joe Wilson's (R-S.C.) of "You Lie" in the middle of Obama's address to Congress precipitated such responses as former President Carter's that: "an overwhelming portion of the intensely demonstrated animosity toward President Barack Obama is based on the fact that he is a black man" (Abcarian A1, A16).

At the same time, during the election campaign, Obama proposed that immigration workplace raids were ineffective, and called for an alternative that could

bring the 12 million undocumented immigrants in the country out of the shadows. Until recently, when the Obama Administration has supported prosecutorial discretion and deferred action policies, there has been an implementation of enforcement policies that have resulted in increased immigration raids, audits of employee paperwork at hundreds of businesses, expanded a program to verify worker immigration status that has been widely criticized as flawed, and bolstered a program of cooperation between federal and local law enforcement agencies. With former Arizona Governor Grace Napolitano at the head of the Department of Homeland Security, the Obama Administration, after 2008, moved forward in authorizing as many as sixty-six law enforcement agencies to work with Homeland Security in identifying “illegal immigrants and process them for possible deportation under a program known as 287(g)” (Gorman A1, A9). Under this administration’s immigration policies, deportations reached record levels rising to an annual average of nearly 400,000¹ since 2009, about 30% higher than the annual average during the second term of the Bush Administration and about double the annual average during George W. Bush’s first term. Under this administration, the 287(g) and Secure Communities programs used local law enforcement officers to carry out the screening of people, that should have been the work of federal officers. Under the pretext that these policies were meant to arrest hard core criminals, the policies led to arbitrary arrests for minor offenses and violated the due process rights of both citizens and non-citizens. Since 2008, the Obama Administration also expanded the use of E-Verify, an existing program of employee immigration-status verification that has been criticized for using a database that contains thousands of errors and has led to as many as 19,000 people (of 6.4 million checked) that have been mistakenly identified as being deportable. Up until recently, the Obama Administration called for these programs, especially Secure Communities, to be expanded to every one of the nation’s 3,100 state and local jails by 2013 although these programs have been shown to be fundamentally flawed, incompetently administered, and prone to target, not only immigrants, but Latino citizens.

This focus on enforcement, rather than legalization, was steadily eroding the strong support among Latino organizations that Obama had right before and after the election.

In a national survey of 1,220 Latino adults aged 18 and older (between November 9 and December 7, 2011) the Pew Research Center found that, by a ratio of more than two-to-one (59% versus 27%), Latinos disapproved of the way the Obama Administration was handling deportations of undocumented immigrants. This study found that more than three quarters (77%) of those who were aware of Obama’s

enforcement policies, strongly disagreed with these policies (December 28, 2011, “As Deportations Rise to Record Levels, Most Latinos Oppose Obama’s Policy” by Mark Hugo Lopez, Ana Gonzalez-Barrera & Seth Motel).

Globally, according to a Pew Hispanic Research Center survey, approval of Obama’s policies had “declined significantly since he first took office, while overall confidence in him and attitudes toward the U.S. had slipped modestly as a consequence (Pew Global Attitudes Project).

Hence, it was no accident that the Obama Administration, reading the writing on the wall, approved a policy of “prosecutorial discretion” in August, 2011 directing ICE officials to focus on primarily apprehending hard-core criminals and not on low-priority undocumented immigrants such as those with children who are U.S. citizens, those who came to the country as minors, or those who served in the military. However, the program was deemed a failure when Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University reported that “of the 298,173 cases that were pending at the end of September, 2012 – only 4,585 had been closed under the program by the end of May, 2012.” Hence, a program aimed at reducing nearly 300,000 pending immigration cases, only 1.5% of the backlogged cases were closed.

With the election nearing and with a national campaign by the Dream action network, the Obama Administration, on June 12, 2012, announced a policy to grant “deferred action status” to undocumented persons who fit certain criteria. This policy came at the height of a national campaign by Dream students, where they presented 11,000 signatures calling on President Obama to issue an executive order halting the deportation of Dream-eligible young people. It also came days after Dream students held a series of sit-ins inside of Obama campaign offices across the country.

While this policy does provide a two-year temporary relief to successful immigrant applicants, immigrant advocate organizations are concerned about due process problems that have been a mainstay of the previous prosecutorial discretion policies including that: there will be no impartial adjudicator, no right to meaningful review of faulty decisions, and no formalized way to present and evaluate evidence or legal arguments. Immigrant rights advocates point out that similar discretionary policies have done little to stop the increase of deportations under the Obama Administration and that, since there is no right to appeal, that erroneous decisions may lead to the deportation of qualified applicants. Still, tens of thousands of Dreamers have been standing in lines or attending workshops in recent days to receive help in completing

application forms. With an estimated 1.8 million eligible applicants, the potential of a mass movement has been unleashed and there is no turning back in its mobilization potential.

The conditions are prevalent for rebuilding the type of social movement that was built before the 2008 elections in the electoral arena. However, one of the problems has been the dominance of a strategy that has not relied on the transformative alliances that were harnessed before the last two elections. This follows with a type of disenchantment that Professor Phil Thompson analyzes in his study of African American mayors and their efforts to find solutions to urban decline. In his research, Thompson analyzes how the initial excitement of electing Black mayors was diminished among the electorate when many of these elected officials adopted a traditional “pro-growth” urban policy that ultimately ended up serving the real estate and developer interests. At the same time, as the economies in urban areas moved from manufacturing to service industry employment, these mayors were blamed for the resulting urban problems. When the conditions did not change, it resulted in less political engagement by the black poor and middle class and a strengthening of conservative domination (Thompson 4, 5). Only in a few cases are there examples where Mayors bucked the system and, by relying on the base that elected them, implemented “alternative models of community building and economic development” that addressed urban poverty and made their policies accountable to the public (Thompson 41, 42).

In order for Latino organizations, such as the one that I have worked with, to have the same passion and to build the types of coalitions that existed before, it would take Obama’s continuing support of the type of organizing and advancement of a social movement that took place during the election. Public intellectuals Peter Dreier and Marshall Ganz, in their article *We Have the Hope, Now Where’s the Audacity*, while criticizing the Obama networks for turning to a marketing strategy of “politics as usual,” proposed that the existence of such a mobilization of communities (such as we experienced before 2008) today would take the advancement of a strategy that focuses on movement-building:

The White House and its allies forgot that success requires more than proposing legislation, negotiating with Congress and polite lobbying. It demands movement-building of the kind that propelled Obama’s long-shot candidacy to an almost landslide victory. And it must be rooted in the moral energy that can transform people’s anger, frustrations and hopes into focused public action, creating a sense of urgency equal to the crises facing the country (Dreier & Ganz).

Although Obama has put a progressive and transformative strategy of movement-building to the side, this does not mean that the building of a movement should not be on the agenda of social movements and activists. Rather than allowing for a trend that wants to take the country back before the civil rights movement –that seeks to control the economy for the upper 1%– that thrives on creating fear and divisions among working people and –that uses their genuine concerns to blame immigrants for the economic problems in this country– there is the capacity to build another trend at the grass-roots. This trend is seeking to control the excesses of profit by a few –and build more spaces of equity– examples of democracy –examples of a new economy– with the types of alliances and partnerships that are necessary to meet the challenges of a global economy.

In California, various community-based coalitions have arisen to challenge the federal government’s immigration enforcement policies by organizing and passing legislation allowing undocumented students, not only to go to college, but to receive financial aid. I, and my students, have been part of the Pomona Habla coalition’s efforts in changing the Pomona city council policies that discriminated against undocumented immigrants and were part of a larger movement resulting in the passage of a statewide bill allowing anyone stopped at a checkpoint without a driver’s license to have someone come and pick up their car. This will kill the millions of dollars being made by the tow truck and impoundment companies. The governor, as a result of these movements, also signed a bill that called for “neither California nor any of its cities, counties, or special districts require an employer to use E-Verify as a condition of receiving a government contract, applying for or maintaining a business license, or as a penalty for violating licensing or other similar laws.”

Now, these coalitions are moving forward in organizing to enact a new law that gives qualified undocumented immigrants the right to a driver’s license.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the significance of the election of Barack Obama was not just in the individual but in the rising of a new social movement that united people from diverse backgrounds in advancing a vision for change in the way this country is run and whose interests it serves. While Barack Obama’s exceptional history as a community organizer, lawyer, and state senator placed him in a position of mainstream credibility, it was the social movement of broad-based multi-racial alliances that put him over the top. The movement that developed before the election was one for jobs, health, education, security and equality. It was about the very foundations of local, national, and international

democracy with a vision of ensuring the resource capacity of diverse local and global communities to survive. Unfortunately, the promises of the Obama Administration, that moved so many, have not been kept. The issues are still there after the election but, in spite of their collective impact, the social movements that were built on a common ground of defending the right of all people to be treated with dignity and equality were thwarted by the policies of the Obama Administration that ultimately served the power of the corporate monopolies and monied interests. However, the ingredients of a progressive social movement are still visible but the strategies have shifted to local organizing efforts that, in California, have resulted in legislation supporting: cities opting out of E-Verify, the right of AB540 students to attend college with financial aid, and the right of people without a driver's license to stop the impounding of their cars. These progressive social movements on the local level are based on defending the rights of immigrants, decriminalizing the labor of the undocumented, and challenging the federal government's enforcement policies. At the same time, the local organizing efforts are based on the long-term premise of making the Obama Administration accountable for the policies promised and the policies being implemented.

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