Awakening the Sleeping Giant: 21st Century Latino Political Mobilization

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I. Introduction
Chanting *Si se puede, We are not criminals and Today we march, tomorrow we vote* during the spring of 2006 scores of Latinas/os marched in cities small and large throughout the U.S in protest against pending congressional legislation criminalizing undocumented migrants and those that supported them (Campo-Flores 31-2; Watanabe & Becerra A1; Economist 33). According to the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) estimated that more than 2 million people in over 130 cities participated in the various pro-immigrant marches and rallies that occurred between March and April 2006 (NCLR 1). Importantly, what began as a typical movement to mobilize the Latina/o population against the legislation proposed by Congressman James Sensenbrenner, and approved December 16, 2005 by the House of Representatives in a vote of 239 to 182 (HR 4437), became the most pivotal and stunning example of American political activism thus far in the 21st Century.

Surprising the American political elite and general populace, the pro-immigrant rights marches signified for many ‘the awakening of the sleeping giant’ – the stirring of Latina/o political activism which in due time has the potential to translate into sustained political mobilization and empowerment1. Although Latina/o activism not itself a new phenomenon, the marches were unprecedented in terms of their size and scope. In Los Angeles alone, estimates of those who joined the peaceful *Gran Marcha* of late March 2006 ranged from 500,000 to 750,000, making it the biggest protest in the city’s history. Significantly, this march served as a model of effective community mobilization and helped inspire hundreds of similar marches and walk-outs throughout the nation in the months that followed.

To understand better the significance and implications of these 2006 pro-immigrant rights marches on Latina/o political behaviour, it is imperative to study why this particular example of

1 In this study, I employ John Wilson’s definition of a social movement as “a conscious, collective, organized attempt to bring about or resist large-scale change in the social order by non-institutionalized means (8).” Moreover, I maintain that political mobilization should also be viewed as a process entailing various stages but ultimately concluding with the attainment of some degree of political empowerment. More specifically, in this study, political empowerment refers to possessing the ability to affect political decisions (policy responsiveness) consistent with your interests.
Latin/o mobilization proved to be so effectively organized. Exactly how was the ‘sleeping giant’ awoken? Or more specifically, what methods of political mobilization were chosen by the *Gran Marcha* organizers? Furthermore, how do these strategies differ from those employed in the past, and what are the implications of employing new techniques of political mobilization?

To address these questions, the paper is divided into three distinct sections. After this introduction, I examine both academic hypotheses and recent empirical data of Latina/o use of modern communication technology and its implications on political behaviour. Specifically, the argument that economically minorities are habitually excluded from the political benefits of modern communication technology is evaluated in the context of recent Latina/o activism. Following this section, is a detailed discussion of the causal factors that led to effective organization of the *Gran Marcha* (March 25, 2006) in Los Angeles, California. The evidence suggests that although traditional forms of political mobilization were initially employed, organizers were acutely aware of the benefits of utilizing modern communication technology and the mass media to further publicize and galvanize support for their cause. Three factors in particular proved critical to the success of the movement: the Spanish-language news media, the World Wide Web, and the use of text-messages. The organizational success of the *Gran Marcha* was largely due to the dominant role of Spanish-language radio in providing the community with not only the information needed to make participation possible but also ‘rules of engagement’ and the rationale behind the protest. There is also evidence of a heightened use of modern technology as a resource for political mobilization. Particular attention is placed in this study on those new resources employed to develop a modern, hi-tech organizational strategy that markedly departs from traditional forms of Latina/or political mobilization. The last section of
the study examines the implications of the use of modern technology on Latina/o political behaviour and as an emerging resource to empower the Latina/o community.

II. Examining the changing nature of Latina/o use of modern technology

Most notably, evidence from the Gran Marcha contradicts the image of Latina/os as a political community without access to modern technology and thus at a disadvantage because of a lack of access to information and issue-advocacy networks. The notion that the Latinas/os would not benefit politically from advances in communication technologies is found in work produced by our government as well as in academia. According to a National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) report, there exists a ‘digital divide’ that threatens to undermine the capacity of U.S. minority groups to communicate effectively with peers and access relevant information (NTIA 1-5). Moreover, in 2001, Political Scientist Pippa Norris further argued that the political role of the Internet largely reflects and thereby reinforces, rather than transforms, the structural features of the American political system (Norris 3). Thus the digital divide first described by the NTIA and later expounded upon by Norris primarily benefits the privileged that have easy access to technology. This suggests that economically marginalized groups, such as a sizeable percentage of Latinas/os, would be unlikely to employ the internet as a tool to organize and promote civic engagement. But the events of this past spring indicate that the Latina/o community is crossing the digital divide thereby creating new possibilities for collective action and organizational linkage.

Recent studies support this assertion that the digital divide in the Latina/o community is no longer as wide as initially perceived. Although still lagging behind non-Hispanic white use of the internet, in a 2007 Pew Hispanic Center report it was found that more than one in two

\[\text{In this work, the term ‘Latina/o community’ refers to a social group holding strong ties and a collective identity but not constrained to any particular geographic locale within the U.S.}\]
Latinos (56%) go online (Fox and Livingston 1). Moreover, U.S. born Latinos are much more likely to use the internet (76%) than their foreign-born counterparts (32%). Language and level of educational attainment also influenced internet use within the community (Ibid). According to the study, English-dominant (78%) or bilingual (76%) Latinos were twice more likely to go online compared to Spanish-dominant adults (32%). Additionally, 89% of Latinos who have a college degree and 70% of those completed high school regularly use the internet (Ibid). What these figures indicate is that while the rate of internet use by Latinos is increasing, it is conditioned by nation of birth, language and education. Factors encouraging internet use (nation of birth and language in particular) are more likely found in the younger generation of the Latina/o community. Even for those Latina/os who do not use the internet, they are utilizing other modern communication technologies. According to the study, 59% of Latino adults own a cell phone and of this group 49% regularly send and receive text messages on their phone (Fox and Livingston 1).

Another recent America On-Line Latino study supports this trend of increasing community use of modern communication technologies. In this 2006 AOL cyber-study, 16 million Hispanics (55% of the total Hispanic population) regularly use the internet. While online, 68% use instant messaging, 52% read or post blogs, 43% visit social networking, and 48% prefer websites that focus on news (Business Wire 1). The characteristics of those found to be regular online users include mostly and partially acculturated Hispanics who tend to be born in the U.S. or have resided here for several years, prefer online content in English but still find Spanish content appealing. Although the sample surveyed excluded those under the age of 18 years, its findings can be suggestive (if not under-scoring the trend) of Latina/o youths’ ability to cross the digital divide (Ibid, 2). In sum, the data from both the Pew Center and AOL respective reports indicate that Latina/o usage of the internet as well as text-messaging is growing and
increasingly being utilized as a source of news, communication medium, and arena to network with like-minded individuals.

Accordingly, in this text I argue that the success of the spring 2006 pro-immigrant rights movement marks a critical juncture for the Latina/o community. As Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba first discussed in their seminal work, *The Civic Culture*, political participation is largely conditioned by attitudinal attributes such as political efficacy, trust, and engagement as well as more standard factors such as socio-economic status and level of education (Sanchez 429). Despite current advancements the Latina/o community continues to lag behind other minority groups in terms of education and income measures. For many scholars and community activists this does not portend well for a growth in future levels of political participation or empowerment (Uhlaner, Cain & Kiewiet 195-231). However, I believe that this study appropriately directs our attention to how rising levels of new communication technology use by young Latina/os can become a very significant mechanism to improving rates of political participation and future empowerment.

Importantly, use of the internet and text messaging to communicate and network for political purposes is a highly effective and inexpensive method to transmit the necessary political information that generates not only increased levels of general interest in politics but also may improve levels of trust and personal efficacy. For example, as Political Scientist Gabriel Sanchez documents in his work, establishing a sense of internal efficacy early in life is positively associated with Latina/o voter registration and voting therefore if Latina/o youth learn early that they both have the right as well as opportunity to affect their community this should prove critical to creating a next generation of community activists (436-9). Moreover, political participation is also strongly associated with perceptions of discrimination targeting individuals due to ethnic group membership (Uhlaner et al, 205-7). In 2006, Latina/os reported an increasing
perception of being discriminated against based on their ethnic identity. According to a Pew Hispanic Center 2006 survey, Latina/os are encountering more discrimination and attributing much of it to the pending anti-immigrant legislation (Suro and Escobar, 1). Specifically, 54% see an increase in discrimination as a result of the policy debate and hold the Republican Party responsible for such negative consequences (Ibid). Consistent with Uhlaner et al.’s findings, according to the survey, Latina/os are feeling more politically energized and unified in response to this perceived discrimination – suggesting that future rates of both conventional and non-conventional political participation should increase in the future. Moreover, regardless of nation of origin and citizenship status, the majority of Latinos continue to identify with the undocumented and feel intimately connected to them (qtd. in Campo-Flores 31).

Therefore, Latina/o community solidarity and mobilization is primed to occur in response to continued anti-immigrant policy initiatives emanating from Capitol Hill. Lessons learned from this past spring regarding how to effectively organize political activism via modern technology and the mass media are already beginning to be employed in other arenas of political participation (Mittelstadt A1). To better understand the contemporary nature of Latina/o political mobilization, in the section below I examine the variety of strategies utilized by *La Gran Marcha* organizers and participants to motivate so many to join the March 25th protest.

III. **Explaining how the ‘sleeping giant’ was awoken**

Traditionally, the Latina/o community’s ability to mobilize has been constrained due to the lack of institutional, organizational, and financial resources (Shorris 428; Quiñones 208-14; Estrada, Garcia, Macias and Maldonado 154-63). For example, community ownership of mass communication outlets often was limited in scope and geographic areas. Although Latina/o media ownership grew over time, coverage of political events and employment of the media as a
tool to organize civic activity did not immediately follow (Gómez 225; Meier 256-8). Not until after WWII do we see a surge in terms of Latina/o conventional political participation such as local community organization efforts, local electoral politics, coalitional alliances and church-based community networks (Quiñones 204-20). When local media did actively involve themselves in political debates, minority media’s strong linkages to their community served as an asset to imparting to their audience relevant information regarding policy debates (Grose 117).

But large-scale coordination has always been problematic for the Latina/o community. Despite constituting a significant and growing proportion of the population of many American cities, mobilizing the community to levels commensurate with their population has remained an elusive goal. Some scholars posit that this difficulty arises due to the high number of small Latina/o organizations, each with their own leadership and set of priorities that make larger intra-group coordination problematic (Meier 250). Additionally, money has also played a factor – financial constraints have limited mass publicity campaigns, lobbying efforts, and the ability to transform movements into permanent, professional organizations (Quiñones 208; Shorris 425-8).

However, in 2006 the dynamics of Latina/o political mobilization changed due to the heightened use of modern technology by both community leadership and younger members.

To better understand how this process unfolded to produce a more effective use of community media assets and modern communication technology it is instructive to review the historical genesis of the \textit{Gran Marcha}. Its organization began in late 2005 when approximately ten groups began to meet at Our Lady Queen of Angels Cathedral to organize a protest denouncing pending federal legislation pertaining to undocumented immigrants (Watanabe and Becerra A1-3). Responding to a call by Professor Armando Navarro, on 11 February 2006 approximately 600 Latina/o community activists met and began planning nationwide mobilizations against the HR 4437 (Sarkar 19-20). After this February meeting, in Los Angeles
Relatively new organizers working with existing community organizations such as Jesse Diaz and Javier Rodriguez began planning a number of small-scale events for the upcoming month (such as a news conference, petition drive and targeted protests). For example, the week of March 20-27 was designated as a ‘National Week of Action’ in which a network of organizations (including labour, religious, human rights and migrant associations) would work jointly to demonstrate to Washington D.C. their anger over Congress’ support of HR 4437. However, according to a few of the organizers themselves, they had “more passion than volunteers, in part because they had split with some labor unions that wanted to focus on honoring Cesar Chavez...instead” (Sterngold and Hendricks 2). Additional problems facing the organizers were their lack of money and organization (Watanabe and Becerra A1; Lovato 12). Therefore initially it appeared that this protest movement would take the form of those before it --a grassroots based organization with the cooperation of various churches, immigrant rights groups, and a few unions but subject to splintering and divisions as attempts are made to widen the number of participants (Aizenman A1).

The critical juncture in terms of political mobilization strategies occurred largely due to Diaz and Rodriguez’s call for a massive protest march with intensive Spanish-language media involvement. To start this new campaign, on March 14th the group staged a media breakfast to publicize the issue (Stanley 1; Watanabe and Becerra A1). The evening before the breakfast “Rodriguez received a call from a producer at the morning news program at Univision, the country’s largest Spanish-language television network, who wanted to interview the organizers” early that morning (Watanabe and Becerra A2). To take advantage of this opportunity, organizer Diaz began contacting local Spanish-radio disc jockeys (DJs) who had interviewed him in the

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3 Notably, religious institutions from various denominations supported the creation of a mass march in support of migrant rights. Included at many of the early organizational meetings were representatives from Catholic, Evangelic, Protestant, and Jewish places of worship. These participants later returned to their parishes to inform them of the issue, publicize the institution’s moral position on the pending legislation, and offer instructions to members on how to assist migrants in need. For a good discussion of this see Yuriña Rico’s “Iglesias protegerán a immigrants.”
past and was successful in getting the very popular Spanish language disc jockey Eddie Sotelo (KSCA’s ‘El Piolin’) to also participate. Not only was the event covered by the radio DJ but as an immigrant himself Sotelo’s personal connection to the issue led him to devote the next day’s entire four hour show to the issue and the upcoming mass march (Ibid; Flaccus 1).

Sotelo’s attention to the protest caused a snowball effect throughout the Spanish-language media. The following week, Gran Marcha organizers were inundated with requests for further interviews by many other local Spanish-language radio DJs such as KHJ’s Humberto Luna, KBUE’s Ricardo “El Mandril” Sanchez, and Renan “El Cucuy” Almendarez Coello (Watanabe and Becerra A1 & 3; Flaccus 1). These interviews and frequent on-air discussion of the pending legislation not only further publicized the upcoming mass march (serving as key informational and organizational resource) but it was also instrumental to the organization of a March 20th City Hall promotional event attended by all of the major Los Angeles based Spanish-language DJs. This joint press conference was most surprising because the participating DJs are commercial rivals who were more accustomed competing with one another over market share than joining together in common cause. Specifically, KSCA’s El Piolin (Sotelo) along with KLAX’ Renán Almendárez Coello, KBUE’s Ricardo Sánchez and KHJ’s Humberto Luna announced their support for the Gran Marcha. Affirming “we’re going to march with you, we’re going to get everybody together,” the DJs role in informing, motivating, and shaping the nature of the pro-immigrant movement proved critical to mobilizing many who had previously not participated politically to emerge from their dormant stage to one of highly visible activism (Morales 7). For example, according to a key institutional member of the protest, Mike Garcia from Local 1877, “they (the DJs) were the key to getting so many people out . . . they were just

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4 Although largely known by their Spanish on-air nicknames, due to increasing media attention the DJs are also at times referred to by the English translation of their popular nicknames. Ricardo Sanchez’s Spanish nickname “El Mandril” translates in English to “the Baboon”, Renan “El Cucuy” Almendarez Coello is known in English as “the Boogeyman” and Eddie Sotelo’s nickname “El Piolin” translates to “Tweety Bird”.

5 Local 1877 played a unique role in the March 25th protest. The union took on the responsibility of providing security during the protest. They trained over 500 of their members on appropriate crown control and posted 20-24
pumping, pumping, pumping this up” (Watanabe and Becerra A3). Due to the peculiar nature of
the joint news conference, and the attention it received in Spanish-language television, English-
language media outlets also began to place attention on the issue and the upcoming protest
march. But English-language media coverage remained largely a reaction to events; little
coverage was given to the planning of the upcoming protest march.

Also worthy of note, during this joint news conference the DJ began to issue a series of
‘ground rules of behaviour’ for the march (Ibid; Flaccus 1). Initially discussed at this City Hall
event but later frequently discussed in their individual morning radio programs as well as cited in
other media outlets, the DJs advised protest participants to:

* remain peaceful at all times during the march so the message of the goal would not be
lost to the larger community and to dispel negative stereotypes of Latinos as violent;
* bring along trash bags and clean up after themselves to avoid negative publicity and
demonstrate civic responsibility;
* wear white shirts as a symbol of peace;
* wave the American flag as a signal of loyalty to the U.S. and the desire to become a part
of mainstream American society rather than marginalized, hidden migrants;
* students should march after school.

Drawing on their one personal stories of migration to the U.S., the ‘DJ brigade’ provided their
audience with inspirational testimonies on the importance of fighting for their civic rights and
lobbying their elected leaders. Although the “role of radio personality as advocate” and/or
political activist has occurred in the past, what is significant is that due to the changing nature of
modern media communications, this time the audience of the DJs were in the hundreds of
thousands and were spread geographically across the nation. Rather than simply possessing only

orange shirt wearing, union-security guard on each block of the march. The union also coordinated the over 100
buses that arrived to drop-off participants to the protest. For more information please see the union website as well
as the Watanabe and Becerra article in the Los Angeles Times.
a local audience, Spanish-language radio is now owned by larger minority media outlets who employ modern technology to broadcast syndicated radio shows in various cities at once. Therefore, Sotelo’s long discussions on HR 4437, the development of personal efficacy and the importance of participation were not just heard by Angelenos but by Latina/os throughout the U.S. and even at various times during the day and night.

Neither did the DJs confine themselves to the airwaves. Sotelo made himself available to many television outlets for interviews and even recorded a public service announcement publicizing the protest and its ‘rules of behaviour’ (Del Barco). In sum, Spanish-language radio and the DJ Brigade in particular proved to be one of the most visible and vocal advocates of the Gran Marcha. Not only was their support critical in explaining why people should join the march but they told people where to meet and how to behave – and as such served as political entrepreneurs. Another way the DJ Brigade played a role in the protest was by lending their services on the actual day of the march. Throughout the day, DJs played music and addressed the crowds providing them with words of encouragement at a small stage on the corner of Broadway and Second Street (Stanley, 1).

Also involved in the organization and publicity of the Gran Marcha were Spanish-language television and print media (Duran A1; El Aguila 1).6 Spanish-language cable stations Univision, TV Azteca and Telemundo played their part in mobilizing the crowds by educating their audience of the pending legislation and publicizing the Gran Marcha (Morales 1). TV coverage often provided their audience with reasoned justifications for why participation was a civic duty as well as provided organizational information. For example, in Fresno, the day before the march a reporter on Univision announced what time and where people should meet to drive

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6 For a good discussion of the lack of English-language media attention to the planning of the March 25th protest please see the El Aguila article entitled “Medios de Comunicación Estadounidenses ignoran protestas de inmigrantes.”
down to Los Angeles. The reporter even offered advice about the long drive, reminding viewers to check their cars’ oil and antifreeze before making the trip (Stanley 3).

The Spanish-language print media also played their role in mobilizing participants as well. As journalist Ed Morales notes, the print media “created the background noise that radio and TV pick-up on” referring to the many articles detailing abuses against undocumented migrants and discussing how Washington D.C. activities impact the Latina/o community (Morales 7). In Los Angeles, the local newspaper La Opinión published various articles in the days leading up to the protest explaining the pending legislation and its implications for the Latina/o community. For example, in response to the February 11th meeting of activists, La Opinión covered the event in detail explaining to their readership not only who was involved in the meeting but also discussing the rationale behind the meeting and future protest activities, the goals and marches planned by the activists, tentative dates for these activities and listing the politicians in support of the protests (Cano A1). The day before the march, it published an extensive article with details for those interested in participating. Tellingly, the March 25th headline was “A las Calles!” (To the Streets!) (Stanley 3). Moreover, La Opinión continued to publish articles after the Gran Marcha informing their readers of similar marches that occurred in other Californian cities. Such articles not only served as a mechanism to inform their community of the progress of the movement but it also educated their audience of Washington’s reaction to this display of Latina/o political mobilization (Durán 1-2).

As the previous discussion illustrates, various sectors of Spanish-language media played their role in informing the Latina/o community of the reasons behind the Gran Marcha, provided useful organizational details (time, place, and date) as well as emotional testimonials regarding the importance of protest participation. Additionally, as well documented in Christian Grose’s

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7 La Opinión was not alone in providing extensive coverage of issues relating to undocumented migrants and pending legislation. In Chicago, La Raza devoted many front pages to issue several weeks before the Spring Marches and some of its reporters became key organizers of local protest marchers.
work examining media and minority group coverage, minority media thrive in times of perceived hostility and marginality targeting the minority community (117). This thesis was definitely confirmed in the case of the *Gran Marcha* when Spanish-language media served as one of the primary sources for information on the pending legislation and protest march.\(^8\) Accordingly, the ‘disc jockey brigade’ in particular is considered by many as the critical causal variable for the collection of such large crowds at the protest (Ibid, Stanley A1, Watanabe and Becerra A2). Despite initial expectations that the march would draw fewer than 20,000 participants, LA County police estimated that approximately 500,000 attended. The effectiveness of the ‘disc jockey brigade’ is further demonstrated by the large percentage of attendees conforming to the ‘rules of engagement’ issued by the DJs such as the wearing of white shirts and avoidance of violent confrontations.

Although the role of Spanish-language media cannot be underestimated, I argue that modern communication technology was employed in other new ways that also proved critical to the success of the *Gran Marcha*. Unlike the more traditional mobilization resource of local media participation and grassroots organizing, the World Wide Web and text messaging were increasingly employed as new mobilization resources and as such led to the incorporation of modern communication strategies to facilitate participation and event knowledge. Many of these technology driven strategies were primarily but not exclusively used by Latina/o youth indicating a potential future source of political leadership and modes of participation that cross the ‘digital divide’. This innovative strategy was also not confined to *Gran Marcha* rather throughout the state Latina/o youth employed this strategy to organize local walkouts immediately before and after March 25\(^{th}\). Moreover, the strategy was employed in various cities throughout the nation as well. As Washington Post journalist N.C. Aizenman documents, in the capital of our nation

\(^8\) For example, Spanish-language media’s coverage of the pending legislation began to appear as early as 2005 and has continued to this day. But in the English-language media coverage has been infrequent.
“thousands of Hispanic youths coordinated their actions by text-messaging on cellphones” to organize a series of high school walkouts (A2).

In the March 25th example of Latina/o political mobilization, we see for one of the first times the extensive use of the internet to bolster community activism. A website devoted entirely to the Gran Marcha was created, www.march25coalition.org, to serve as a centralized resource center for the protest. It proved to be a key informational resource for interested parties and pre-existing networks active in the cause of immigrant rights. On the official Gran Marcha website web-fliers advertising the organizational details of the protest were posted, as well as a number of articles detailing the specifics of the pending legislation, the impact it will have for the Latina/o community in particular, and the reasons why participation is critical to not just this issue but for the civil rights of all Latina/os in general. The website also had a sister site in which its content was in Spanish to address a wider audience. In addition to covering the purpose of the march and how to participate, the website also encouraged interested parties to contact elected officials and demand action against HR 4437. Links to affiliated organizations in support of the protest such as the local Catholic Church and the National Council of La Raza were also listed to illustrative the broad coalition participating in the pro-immigrant rights movement. Issue advocacy groups such as the Central American Resource Center, the Pomona Day Labor Center, Resistance, and the Southern California Human Rights Network also posted links on the March 25th Coalition site and utilized their pre-existing web-sites as means to publicize the Gran March (Morales 1). To facilitate conventional forms of political participation as well, the March 25th Coalition site included website information, email addresses, and the telephone numbers of a number of U.S. Senators. The coalition advocated that interested parties contact these officials and demand that they vote against the Senate equivalent to HR 4437. As
the preceding illustrates, protest organizers recognized the utility of employing the web as a resource to political mobilization.

One of the best examples of this is the website of the Los Angeles Catholic Archdiocese which utilized a pre-existing sub-organization (which is figured prominently on its site) to provide their readers with a wide variety of information and access to activists networks (Rico A1). Cardinal Mahoney endorsed the use of the “Justice for Immigrants Campaign” website as a forum to advocate community engagement in the protests of Spring 2006. The Church repeatedly stated that it strongly believed that it was their moral duty to fight against legislation to criminalize the provision of services to illegal immigrants. During Holy Week, Cardinal Mahony urged his priests and parishioners to ignore any future legislation that would make it a crime to assist the undocumented. The Cardinal’s statements and actions was a powerful signal to many Latina/os such as Vilma Martinez who jointed the protest “. . . because he (Mahony) said it was important” (Ordoñez 38). Accordingly, the Los Angeles’ Archdiocese website was employed as an instrument to further publicize the Church’s position on the legislation and organize community political activism against HR 4437.

This website in particular served as a key internet resource regarding not only the details of the legislation (in both English and Spanish) but it helped lay the groundwork for the *Gran Marcha* by placing a letter from the Cardinal on the front page of the website stating his position on the issue as well as a link to join the Immigrant and Justice Action Network – the church’s major organization promoting immigrant rights. With free membership, interested parties could get access to a “Parish Kit” that not only provides a statement of the moral justification for advocacy but also ‘how to guides’ on legislative advocacy, media outreach, establishing a speaker’s bureau, and implementing an advocacy campaign in the Parish. Also available via the site were the complete texts of relevant legislation, a detailed roll call tally with congressional
maps, a guidebook to the legislative process and congressional contact information. The site also included access to two novel web design resources that could be used to further publicize the issue of immigrant rights: web stickers and alert stickers. The web stickers are sample stickers that interested parties can get the HTML for and put on their own webpage. The sticker contains a web-flier detailing the march and the Church’s position on the issue. The alert stickers enable interested parties to put Action Alerts directly onto their respective website. Again it provides users with the necessary HTML/Javascript that is linked to information regarding how to contact elected officials and lobby on the behalf of immigrants. Thus, not only was the website publicizing the upcoming protest but it was acting as a U.S. proxy civics course as well -- all in one well organized, bilingual, easy to navigate, free to access website!

Other modern communication mediums employed to encourage participation and mobilize interested parties were MySpace.com, and text-messaging (Lovato 11; Aizenman A1; Mittelstadt A1). Inspired by both personal motivations and the March 18th HBO airing of the film “Walkout” that chronicled the 1968 Chicano student protests against academic discrimination and inadequate institutional facilities, many Latina/o youth were eager to participate in the upcoming pro-immigrant rights protest (Morales 6). To transform this interest into mobilized political activity, many tapped into the communication technology that they were already accustomed to using the internet and cell-phones for social purposes. Many newly interested parties as well as clearly identified activists used their MySpace pages to voice their concerns and opinions on HR 4437, publicize and encourage others to learn about the issue, and organize participation in various protest marches including _La Gran Marcha_. This dynamic was occurring in other states as well. For example, Texas state representative Rafael Anchia (D-Dallas) commented after viewing how local Latina/o teens who had participated in pro-immigrant rights rallies were re-directed their energies to registering voters, “the kids are
inventing a new paradigm . . . like a micro-grassroots organizing that was not ever foreseen (Mittelstadt, A1)”. This new paradigm for political mobilization is a subject worthy of both more academic attention and use by traditional Latina/o political organizations as an effective and inexpensive way to transform a potential political asset (the large young segment of the Latina/o community) into consistent political participants.

Discussion of HR 4437 took many forms on MySpace.com both before and after the Gran Marcha. There are over 250 public hits for the term the Gran Marcha alone on this extremely popular website. These hits take you to a variety of informational posting, photos, videos, and personal testimonials relating to the pending legislation and the protest marches. Illustrative of what one would find by conducting such a search, an interested party could easily find at ‘latrova’s’ MySpace page a very prominent flyer published by the Coalition of United Students of Southern California publicizing protest marches and providing contact information if interested parties had any additional questions. On 174596439’s and bamn 2006’s respective MySpace pages the necessary information needed to coordinate protest activity is posted as well as information and links to like-minded associations and MySpace members. Notably, what we see is the emergence of a web-based network of largely Latina/o youth pro-immigrant rights activists.

Also available via MySpace.com are over 25 public and private MySpace user groups in support of immigrant rights.9 With names such as ‘Protest Bill HR 4437,’ ‘No Human Being is Illegal,’ ‘Child of an Immigrant,’ ‘National Alliance for Immigrant Rights,’ ‘Jovens Inmigrants por un Futuro Mejor’ and ‘Stop the HR 4437’ these user groups represent a total membership of over 3000 persons. The majority of these user groups provide discussion boards, news links and protest information to their members. Unlike what one could find on official organizational

9 Not all user groups are pro-immigrant rights though. Rather user groups in support of HR 4437 can also be found on MySpace.com such as ‘Stop Illegal Immigration’ with a membership of almost 700 and the smaller ‘Americans Against Illegal Immigration’ (with 300 members).
websites though were the many personal testimonials from Latina/o youth who voiced their fears regarding how HR 4437 would affect their own lives. In this sense, MySpace postings became a way to transform complex and often abstract political debate into a very personal and relevant discussion of the consequences of policy. This process of making the younger generation recognize that what is too frequently perceived as dry and boring discussions on politics does affect their lives in very direct ways can be a critical resource for future community political mobilization and action. Moreover, it provides a forum where teens encourage other teens to learn about the issue in an environment where protest behaviour is socially accepted by their peer group.

Text-messaging was also heavily used in both open and covert ways to publicize the *Gran Marcha*, spread organizational information, coordinate activities, and establish networks of activist support (Khokha 1; Barco 3; Hernandez 1; Gold B1). Such communication strategies were employed to coordinate a number of March 28th and other student walkouts throughout the Spring of 2006 in support of immigrant rights as well. It is largely recognized that via text-messaging and email that activists can potentially reach hundreds of people with a simple click of a mouse. Specifically, MySpace users can send bulletins to everyone listed as a ‘friend’ and this bulletin can be easily forwarded to all of their ‘friends’ friends’ and even their ‘friends’ friends’ friends’ etcetera resulting in potential audience of thousands.

An audience this large would have traditionally required a significant number of (expensive) resources such as printing capabilities, paper, flier distributors, media air time, etc. However with networks already existing in the form of MySpace groups, MySpace and Facebook friends listings, and other targeted web-pages (blogs or formal organizations such as MeCHA groups), sending political information to others can now be done with minimal additional expense (beyond initial internet and/or cell-phone costs). Scott Gold comments in his
article on this subject that Latina/o youth who largely had not been political active but were connected to online networks relied heavily on MySpace to coordinate protest participation “with surprising speed and dexterity” (Gold B1). Student leader Mariela Muniz and two others from Orange County reported to Gold that after learning of the upcoming protest, they posted a bulletin on MySpace announcing protest activities. Response to the initial bulletin was positive with many youths pledging (either via the webpage, phone calls, or instant text messaging) to participate in a next-day walkout in support of the Gran Marcha. By 1:00 pm the next day, over 1,500 students from Garden Grove and Anaheim joined the walkout (Ibid)! Another excellent example of how Latina/o youths utilized MySpace and the internet as a resource for political mobilization can be found in the reporting conducted by NPR journalist Sasha Khoka who interviewed a number of protest participants, teenagers from California’s Central Valley who participated in the Gran Marcha. She found that these students regularly used text messaging and MySpace chat rooms to “coordinate among remote agricultural town” the details of the protest and arrange transportation to Los Angeles (Khoka).

Moreover use of the internet, cell-phones, and text-messaging is a very effective method of organizing political activity in a secretive and often ‘safe’ manner. In many schools, Latina/o youth were told by school officials that they could not coordinate protest activities on school grounds, and were warned that their participation would be subject to punitive actions. Therefore, in this climate of fear, an alternative mobilization strategy was needed that was not as open to verification and surveillance then traditional methods. For example, according to one Gran Marcha high-school participant text messaging became a means to covertly spread information and organize transportation to the march so that interested parties could not be identified by school officials, have their activities stopped and suffer punitive consequences as threatened by the school administration. Wishing to remain anonymous, the student stated that
using text-messaging became an “underground” way to communicate that was not subject to the surveillance of others (Personal interview with the author 5 October 2006). Mariela Muniz, discussed above, commented that by using MySpace she was quickly able to publicize a walkout “without the knowledge or involvement of teachers” who had previously announced their disapproval with such activity and threatening punitive measures against protest participants (Gold B1). Thus, modern communication technology no longer represents a digital divide or wall that communities like Latina/os cannot cross but it has been transformed into a digital underground that mobilizing activists despite living in a climate of fear.

Another illustrative example of text-messaging as a strategy to mobilize young Latina/o activism is documented by *Newsweek* journalist Arian Campo-Flores in a report examining the series of pro-immigrant rights marches and affiliated student walkouts that occurred in late March and early April 2006 throughout the nation. In this report, Campo-Flores spoke with a young Angelino who states that after learning of the pending legislation from Spanish-language television, the youth (Edwin Cervantes, 16 years.) became worried that his entire family would be subject to possible arrest and deportation. In response to this new climate of fear and despite a school lockdown to quell potential Latina/o activism, “Edwin and his friends began text-messaging peers in other classes” and successfully organized a walkout in support of the *Gran Marcha* (Campo-Flores 38). It is this use of modern communication technologies to confront institutional barriers and climates of fear that offer a rich area for future research.10

Although systematic study of the use of new communication technologies by the Latina/o community has yet to emerge, existing evidence indicates that Latina/o youth in particular are increasingly employing modern technology as a resource for political participation.11 The

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10 For example, at present this author is in the process of collecting survey data employing snowball sampling to assess the degree to which text-messaging, the internet, and cell-phones were used to organize protest activities. Unfortunately, to date there is insufficient data to draw conclusions from and therefore results are not available and thus cannot be included at this stage of the study.

11 The organization “Youth Against War and Racism” published a report stating that in late March 2006, over 50,000 students using primarily MySpace.com and text messaging to organize themselves participated in a serious of...
internet and text messaging was used as a medium to quickly distribute key information regarding why one should protest, what exactly they are protesting against, when they should protest, where they should meet to protest, and how they should conduct themselves during the protest to potential protest participants.

Attention should also be given to the increased role that the blog-o-sphere played in publicizing, spreading organizational information, and documenting the events of the *Gran Marcha*. Locally popular blogs such as Latino Blog, BlueLatinos.org, Martini Republic, La Voz de Aztlan, LA.IMC and personal bloggers (such as Eric Richardson, Don Garza, Jim Winstead and Dave Bullock) frequently discussed the rational behind the upcoming protest, the ground rules of participation, and analysis of the issue while also posting visual documentation of the protest to their readership. On the BlueLatinos blog\(^\text{12}\), for example, not only did *La Gran Marcha* organizers contribute short blogs to the site but large web-flyers were prominently displayed on the site. Capitalizing on the various resources available on the web, the blog also provided a link to Google Maps to assist those wishing to join the protest. Bloggers to the site organized meetings, debated the legislation, and provided links to other blogs and/or news reports relating to this debate (such as a report on the rise of crimes against immigrants). Another popular blog, La Voz de Aztlan carried not only pre-march publicity, organizational details and opinion entries on its site but also an extensive collection of photos that appeared throughout the day to further persuade interested parties in joining the ranks of the protesters (Cienfuegos 4). Notably, many of the blogs mentioned above appeal to second and third generation Latina/os who regularly use the web to discuss social issues and network with like-minded individuals. Again, this suggests another new resource for Latina/o political organization and mobilization as well as the creation of a web-based network that is monitors politics and is primed for political activism.

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protest activity against HR 4437. Yet the report fails to identify how their data was collected illustrating the need for academia to explore this issue employing transparency of methods and data.

\(^{12}\) BlueLatinos.org refer to themselves as a national membership based organization for progressive Latinos.
IV. **Implications of the use of modern communication technology and the Spanish-language media to mobilize Gran Marcha participation**

The *Gran Marcha* proved to be extremely impressive not only in terms of size and scope but also in terms of organizational capabilities and participant mobilization. Key to this success was the increased use of new methods based on modern communication technology to improve on the utility of conventional mobilization strategies. While traditional methods such as grassroots organizing and making use of institutional networks continued to be utilized, new mobilization strategies proved critical to making the protest successful. For example, MySpace groups and pro-*La Gran Marcha* websites enabled Latina/o youth to learn about the pending legislation in a medium that is socially accepted by their peer groups while also not subject to the control of adults (especially those monitoring behaviour with the intention of penalizing protest participants). It is important to recognize that this suggests another resource for increased Latina/o political participation. As one Angelino blogger commented “the time has come to organize and politicize our great number of youths (Cienfuegos 3).” I maintain that the newly established communication networks that emerged from the pro-immigrant rights marches reinforce ethnic group consciousness and group mobilization among a sizable segment of the Latina/o community.\(^{13}\) Notably, Political Scientist Atiya Stokes finds in her research, Latinos who demonstrate group identification, express dissatisfaction with traditional access to political resources, and credit this failure to systemic inequity have higher rates of political participation (369). Therefore, if modern communication technologies continue to support both the distribution of political information and maintenance of ethnic networks, it will promote political participation beyond occasional protest activity.\(^{14}\)

\(^{13}\) Presently, more than a third of U.S. Hispanics are younger than 18 years. See the *Economist* (July 2006) and

\(^{14}\) For a good discussion of how rates of Latino political participation compare to other ethnic and/or race based groups please see Uhlaner et al. In this work the author does an excellent job of differentiating between various
As a community we need to further mobilize and expand the ways we participate in politics. La Gran Marcha and other marches of this past spring mark a critical departure from traditional Latina/o political mobilization and as such may mark the beginning of a new, widespread interest in the political process. The lessons learned are already being applied to new arenas of political participation portending a growth of Latino activism and political power. Examples of similar incorporation of modern communication technologies to complement existing mobilization resources can be seen in Dallas, Seattle, San Jose, San Francisco, and New York (Espinosa 1; Murphy 3; Hendricks A4-5; Turnbull A1). Activists throughout the nation recognize that these strategies enable existing networks to expand their audience and provide interested parties with up to date and detailed information in a manner that is much more efficient. Importantly, activist networks established are now being used to promote other issues as well as broader forms of conventional political participation demonstrating the development of critical political skills key to obtaining political power. A good example of a parallel network of mobilization that largely draws from modern communication technologies was recently documented by Elizabeth Martinez in a report on Northern Californian student walkouts. In April 2006, students staged a series of walkouts not only to promote immigrant rights but also affirmative action, school conditions, and bilingual education. Relevant to this study in particular is the fact that students employed the same methods used in the earlier protests – use of a pre-existing organization’s website to educate Latina/o youth on how to contact the media and public officials, organize a protest, and mobilizing their community; and use of cell-phones and beepers to coordinate protest activity (Martinez, 1-6).

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15 Types of political participation, both conventional and non-conventional, indicating that traditionally Latino involvement in protest activities occurs at higher than conventional participation such as voting, lobbying, and financially contributing to a political campaign. Another good resource for information regarding the Hispanic electorate is the Pew Hispanic Center’s Fact Sheet (2004) on this exact topic.

16 For example, in late summer 2006, popular Spanish-language DJ Renán A. Coello who has a national audience of approximately 35 million listeners began a national voter registration drive. His road show stopped at 11 cities and used both his daily show, the city visits, as well as various station websites to publicize the voter registration drive and provide necessary information to interested parties (Hendricks 1-4).
As the preceding discussion illustrates, 2006 marked a critical juncture for the Latina/o community. Mass civic engagement no longer remains an elusive goal. Key to future political mobilization will be the use of modern communication methods – mass media and the internet -- to motivate and organize a diverse and relatively young community to become politically active. As such not only are Latinas/os crossing the ‘digital divide’ but they are incorporating modern technology as a resource to and strategy for political mobilization. The key element is recognizing that politics is an on-going process. Moreover, Latina/o political mobilization must be sustained and expanded for us to reach our full potential for political power. While debate continues regarding the extent to which the sleeping giant has remained awake, I believe that the Gran Marcha and the many other similar protests that occurred throughout 2006 did serve to empower the community. Notwithstanding the difficulty that subsequent marches had in sustaining the high number of participants, policy responsiveness – a key determinant of political empowerment – was largely achieved in 2006. The Latina/o community successfully challenged the existing immigration stance of the Republican Party, influenced the policy position of many of the candidates running for office in November 2006, and blocked continued Senate action on their version of the bill. Therefore, as a community we must continue to employ various methods of mobilization that draw on both traditional and modern technology resources as the process evolves to encounter new challenges.

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