

percent of non-Appropriations legislation was sent to the floor under open rules that permitted amendment; in the DeLay-controlled Congress, only 15 percent had open rules. As *The Hammer* spells out in detail, DeLay subverts the public's business, undermines the rules, perverts ideas of fairness in order to gain even more control of the House, the legislative process, the Republican Party, and national policy. DeLay has not merely maximized the powers of his office; he's not merely the model of the modern martinet; he has eliminated all the customary checks on his power. There are no longer powerful committee chairmen or a group of independent moderates to act as a check; indeed, given the embarrassing redistricting he masterminded in Texas, voters are hardly a check anymore.

As Dubose and Reid explain, DeLay has accumulated all this power not for personal aggrandizement—he lives rather modestly—but to promote his causes, big business, and fundamentalist Christianity. This places DeLay right at the center of two of the most dangerous trends in America today: the rise of corporate society and the fundamentalization of politics. The balance between business and government, between private economic good and the public realm, which produced a standard of living that was the envy of the world, has been radically tilted in favor of business. And, as we have seen, political leaders who are confident in their own righteousness are apt to embark on all kinds of unsound policies. DeLay is not just a tough guy or a cunning guy; DeLay is a power-grabbing radical who wants to undermine the democratic nature of our political institutions and our two-party system. I doubt very much that DeLay will like this book, but as a man who knows something about pest control, I hope events turn out in such a way that he eventually comes to recognize its insecticidal strength.

Jamie Malanowski is a New York writer.

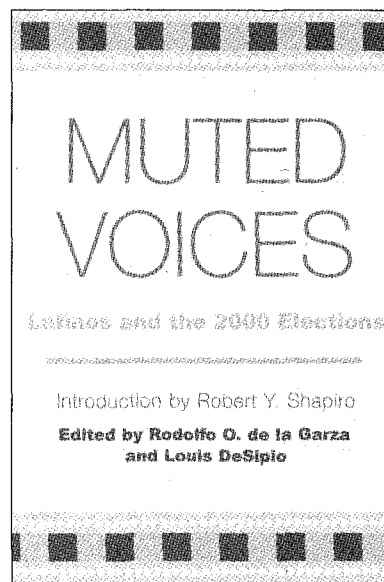
Bloc Patrol

Maybe there's no such thing as the "Latino vote."

By Steve Cieslewicz

It has become an article of faith in this presidential election campaign that the Latino vote is an elusive prize that could catapult to victory the candidate or party that manages to capture it. If you watched either of the political conventions on television this summer, you heard as much Spanish spoken as on a typical hour of "Sesame Street" (though the content of the appeals wasn't much more substantial than "A is for Agua.") At 39 million and growing, Latinos now account for 13 percent of the U.S. population and have all the makings of a formidable electoral constituency. While it leans heavily Democratic, the Latino vote is still in-play, unlike its more established cousin, the Black vote—which consistently gives 90 percent to Democrats. In a close election, many political observers and strategists are convinced that the votes of Latinos alone could determine the outcome.

They just might be right. To listen to Rodolfo O. de la Garza and Louis DeSipio, however, this potential bonanza of votes remains untapped. Since 1988, the two political scientists have tracked the role of Latinos in U.S. politics, and they have released their latest findings, *Muted Voices: Latinos and the 2000 Elections*, just in time for the 2004 election. As the title indicates, the authors—and their 17 collaborators in this collection of essays—argue that Latino interests and concerns are largely neglected by political parties and candidates even as the media focus on them continues to increase.



Muted Voices:
Latinos and the 2000 Elections
By Rodolfo O. de la Garza & Louis DeSipio

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, \$29.95

Muted Voices looks broadly at recent campaign efforts to target Latinos and, in classic academic fashion, uses a series of case studies from high Latino population states such as Arizona, Texas, California, and New York to make predictions about the influence of Latino voters in future elections.

Two dominant arguments are maintained through the essays of *Muted Voices*. The first posits that Latinos cast ballots as a bloc and therefore constitute a singular, identifiable Latino vote. And the second maintains that in order to successfully court this bloc, a political party must both project a "welcoming image" and promote a package of issues

targeted specifically to the community. These academics contend that there is a political philosophy that is unique and comprehensive in its appeal to the Latino electorate—and one that primarily, if not solely, revolves around the concept of being Latino.

Both of these assumptions are deeply flawed. And they are undercut by evidence from the book itself, as well as by opinion polls of Latinos that depict a diverse constituency that looks much more like the broader, diverse American electorate than like a distinct voting bloc.

Although a number of these essays describe examples of Latino outreach efforts at the state level, collectively they fail to elucidate what a “welcoming image” looks like, and fail to identify Latino political interests and concerns that are fundamentally distinct from those of other Americans. Noting that the issues most important to Latinos tend to be the same ones other voters are worried about, the authors admit, “Most Latino leaders interviewed for this study rejected the idea that it was a unique ‘Latino agenda.’ According to the respondents, the issues are similar for Latinos and non-Latinos: health care, quality education, and safe neighborhoods.”


Likewise, while contributor Robert Marbut cites the work of Lionel Sosa, the 2000 Bush campaign point man to Latinos, as an example of successful outreach, Sosa’s strategy was based on emphasizing five traits—optimism, empathy, strength, leadership, and inclusiveness—of which only the last could charitably be interpreted as appealing uniquely to Latinos. In addition, while some of the essays seek to explain George W. Bush’s unique appeal to Latino voters, Ronald Reagan did better in this ethnic group.

The reasons for Bush’s lack of support among Latinos aren’t very different from those responsible for his decline in popularity in general. According to a 2004 poll by the Pew Hispanic Center and the Kaiser Family Foundation, the majority of registered Latino voters disapprove of Bush’s handling of Iraq and do not believe he has a clear plan to succeed there. They are indifferent to his 2001 tax cuts. And finally, the majority of

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Latinos believe that religion should be kept out of political discussions and that abortion should be legal—two views that undercut the cultural affinity Bush was supposed to have with these largely Catholic voters.

This is not to say that the Latino electorate will not lean more Republican in the future. But if it does, that change will likely be due to a shift in demographics and a change in socio-economic status for Latinos, not Republican efforts to appeal to “Latino concerns.” Only 34 percent of registered Latino voters between the ages of 18 and 29 identify themselves as Democratic, compared to 64 percent of those 55 and older, a sign that the Democrats’ current two-to-one advantage at the polls may come to an end within a generation. In

addition, according to the Pew Hispanic Center, Latino Republicans tend “to have higher incomes and are more likely to be foreign-born than Latino Democrats.” As Latinos in the United States continue to assimilate and climb the economic ladder, their voting patterns may change as well.

The admission that Latinos cannot be easily categorized as a unified voting bloc motivated by a list of hot-button political issues might obviate the need for a few panels at American Political Science Association meetings and call into question the existence of the academic specialty of Latino voter scholarship. But it might be a more accurate reflection of the role Latinos play in U.S. elections.

Steve Cieslewicz is a writer in Chicago.

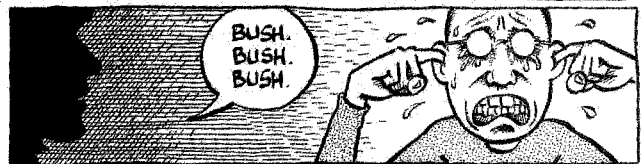
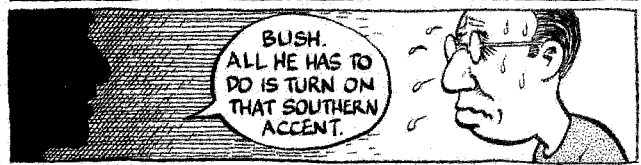
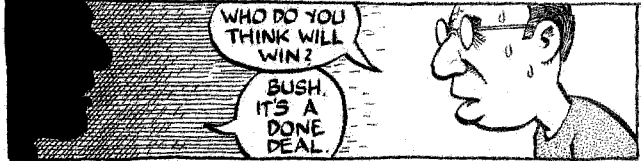
MEANWHILE in AMERICA

Even my own hopelessly small, hardly scientific, highly skewed poll of "definite Kerry voters" (ie, my friends) had been demoralizing.

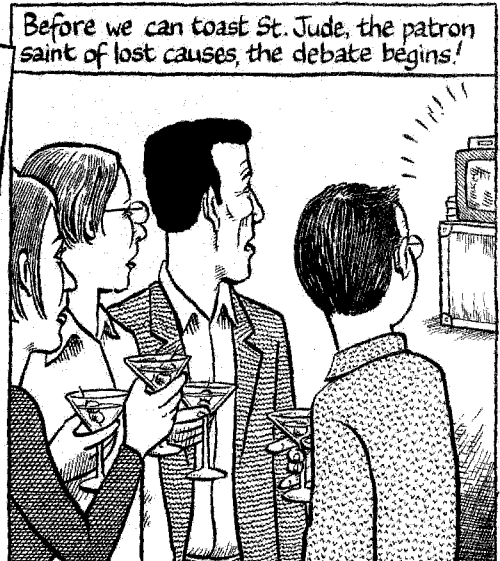


The Pew Research Center! The Harris Interactive! Gallup! Zogby! All through September their hourly polls have crashed on us, bringing ever-worsening news from "likely voters."

by Joe Sacco ©2004



Now, with anxiety bordering on panic, a group of us gathers to witness the campaign's first presidential debate. Lara and Rich bring over a bottle of wine, and so do I, but, fittingly, my girlfriend Amalie serves martinis.



Nervous Sarcasm Phase: Frustrated by Kerry's losing campaign, we vent our anger on the ascendant Bush...



Relief Phase: Increasingly heartened by Kerry's sober performance, we note the blinking and pouting of the "War President."



Premature Celebration Phase: Now toying with the notion that Kerry has half a chance in November after all, we call for another round.

