

## Latino Immigration in the U.S. South: "Carolatinos" and Public Policy in Charlotte, North Carolina

Gregory B. Weeks, John R. Weeks,  
and Amy J. Weeks

For the first two hundred years of its existence, the United States witnessed a clear concentration of settlers from what is known today as Latin America in the southwestern states, especially California and Texas, but also Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. The only notable exceptions to this rule were Cubans in Miami, and Latinos in Chicago or New York, and in migrant farmer communities between Texas and the upper Midwest (Weeks and Spielberg 1979). However, in the past decade it has become increasingly clear that a new pattern has emerged of Latino immigration to the U.S. South. This has sparked considerable analysis in recent years, as it became clear that not only are migrants leaving the western United States in search of jobs and a lower cost of living, but that the South was also becoming a direct destination for Latin American immigrants.

For a region that is not accustomed to receiving international immigrants and for which race relations have traditionally referred to white and black, this new demography of the South has created in its wake an entirely new set of policy issues. We explore these emerging changes using the case study of Charlotte, North Carolina, which has become a new immigrant destination city. We show that Hispanics are growing quickly in Charlotte as a result of family building, not just immigration, and they are suburbanizing quickly and differentiating themselves residentially from African-Americans. Local political leaders are awakening to the enormity of this change and its potential demands on local resources. We conclude with a discussion about the possible public policy outcomes.

### The Emergence of a "Carolatino" Population

Situated on the border with South Carolina, Charlotte, North Carolina, is the core city in Mecklenburg County, which also includes the suburban cities of Cornelius, Davidson, Huntersville, Matthews,

Mint Hill, and Pineville. For convenience, we will use Charlotte and Mecklenburg County interchangeably, unless otherwise specifically noted. According to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, the total population of Mecklenburg County in 2005 was 780,618, of whom 71,904 (9.2 percent) were Latino. Charlotte has been labeled the fourth largest "hypergrowth" Latino destination, because between 1980 and 2000 the Latino population grew by 932 percent (Suro 2002, 6), and most of this growth has occurred since 1990. The top three "hypergrowth" cities (Raleigh, 1180 percent; Atlanta, 995 percent; and Greensboro, 962 percent) are all in the South, and three of the top four are in North Carolina. Between 2000 and 2004, the Latino population in the Charlotte region grew by 49.8 percent, second only to Cape Coral-Fort Myers, Florida at 55.4 percent (Frey 2006, 8). In all of these new Latino destinations, rapid economic growth in finance (in Charlotte's case, banking), business services, and high-tech sectors has sparked rapid growth in the overall population, with a concomitant boom in construction and demand for services of all types. The "Carolatinos" in Charlotte are thus not unique in the South and therefore represent an excellent case study for understanding the new dynamics of Latino immigration to the U.S. South.

The growth of the Latino population in Charlotte is nothing short of remarkable for an area that as recently as 1990 had a total of only 6,693, a mere 1.3 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau). By 2000, that had jumped 670 percent, to 44,871, up to 6.5 percent of the population and then in 2005, as noted above, Mecklenburg County Latinos constituted 9.2 percent of the population. Latinos totaled 7 percent of North Carolina's population in 2005, and accounted for 27.5 percent of the state's population growth between 1990 and 2004 (Kasarda and Johnson 2006, i).

Of particular importance to North Carolina is the fact that a very high percentage of the Latino population is not authorized to be in the U.S. The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey of 2005 showed that there were 533,000 Hispanics in North Carolina and the Department of Homeland Security estimates that in 2005 there were 360,000 unauthorized immigrants living in North Carolina, almost all of whom were probably from Latin America (U.S. Census Bureau 2005; Hoefer, Rytina, and Campbell 2006). This suggests that two out of every three Latinos in North Carolina is an unauthorized immigrant. A study in 2006 suggested that the figure was 45 percent for Charlotte (Kasarda and Johnson 2006, 9). This number is consistent with data from the 2005

American Community Survey for Charlotte showing that 53 percent of Latinos are not U.S. citizens. Since it seems unlikely that all non-citizens are unauthorized, a figure lower than 53 is a reasonable estimate. In all events, the percentage is very high. As we show below, the majority of Latinos who are authorized are likely to be the children of the unauthorized immigrants. This pattern is an important but unintended consequence of U.S. immigration policy.

Furthermore, as Table 1 reveals, in 1990 less than one-third of Hispanics were of Mexican-origin and in 2005, Mexicans still represented scarcely more than half of all Hispanics. The second largest group, accounting for 15,141 people in 2005, was from Central America. Some of these individuals were undoubtedly encouraged to locate in Charlotte through the efforts of local refugee resettlement organizations (Brown et al. 2007).

The data also suggest that Charlotte is not primarily a gateway city for Hispanics. Data from the 2005 American Community Survey show that 18 percent of Hispanics surveyed in 2005 had lived outside of Mecklenburg County in 2004. Of these people, 77 percent moved in from elsewhere in the United States, whereas 23 percent moved in from abroad. These data are not inconsistent with 2000 Census data, which show that 64 percent of the Hispanic population aged five and older

enumerated in 2000 in Charlotte had lived outside of Mecklenburg County in 1995. Of these people, nearly half (46 percent) had moved in from somewhere else in the United States, whereas 54 percent had been living abroad five years earlier. California was highest on the list of states from which Hispanics had moved.

If we use the poverty level as an index of economic well-being, the data from both the 2000 census and the 2005 American Community Survey indicate that Hispanics and blacks are considerably disadvantaged with respect to the non-Hispanic white population. In 2000, the Census data show that 5 percent of the non-Hispanic white population lived at or below the poverty level, whereas the figure for blacks was 16 percent, and for Hispanics it was even higher at 22 percent. The American Community Survey for 2005 show again that 5 percent of the non-Hispanic white population lived at or below the poverty level, and the poverty rates for blacks and Hispanics are 19 and 18 percent, respectively. Given the sampling error inherent in the ACS, we can conclude that there is no significant difference in poverty rates between blacks and Hispanics in Charlotte.

## Public Policy and Immigration: Implications for "Carolatinos"

### Immigrant Family-Building

For years, researchers had reached a near consensus about the dynamics of Latin American immigration to the United States, which were similar to any other group of migrants. In new settlement areas, young men would migrate first (Portes and Rumbaut 1996, 276). After employment was considered steady, social networks were established and enough money had been accumulated to cover travel expenses for a wife and children, then family reunification would take place. The rest of the family would follow the "beaten path" (Castles and Miller 1998, 26). The "men as pioneers" or "trailblazers" became conventional wisdom (Pessar 1999, 54).

Legislation passed over the past two decades, however, requires rethinking the thesis. Ironically, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), passed in 1986, served to increase undocumented immigration even though its essential purpose was to achieve the opposite. The legislation was intended to provide a one time avenue of legalization, while improving enforcement mechanisms as a way to prevent undocu-

**Table 1**  
**Population in Mecklenburg County, 1990 and 2005**

|              |              | 1990   |                  | 2005   |                  | Percent of Hispanics |
|--------------|--------------|--------|------------------|--------|------------------|----------------------|
|              |              | Number | Percent of total | Number | Percent of total |                      |
| <b>TOTAL</b> |              | 518126 |                  | 780618 |                  |                      |
| Non-Hispanic | White        | 360554 | 69.6             | 438597 | 56.2             |                      |
|              | Black        | 133866 | 25.8             | 226179 | 29.0             |                      |
|              | Asian        | 236    | 0.0              | 29307  | 3.8              |                      |
|              | Other        | 2085   | 0.4              | 14631  | 1.9              |                      |
| Hispanic     | <b>TOTAL</b> | 6693   | 1.3              | 71904  | 9.2              |                      |
|              | Mexican      | 2030   |                  | 37152  |                  | 51.7                 |
|              | Puerto Rican | 947    |                  | 3312   |                  | 4.6                  |
|              | Cuban        | 612    |                  | 2812   |                  | 3.9                  |
|              | Other        | 3104   |                  | 28628  |                  | 39.8                 |

Sources: 1990 data are from the decennial Census; 2005 data are from the American Community Survey: <http://www.census.gov>, accessed 2007.

mented immigration in the future. Under pressure from businesses, which resisted being made into federal immigration officials (by being compelled to ascertain the immigration status of all their workers), Congress required employers to make only a "good faith" effort to determine whether their workers had the proper paperwork. The overall effect was to greatly expand the market for fraudulent documents, but not to slow down undocumented immigration (Andreas 2000, 38).

It has also been argued that IRCA served to increase the movement of Latinos out of traditional locations, especially the West (Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2000). Once granted legal status, Latinos had greater freedom to seek employment in new areas requiring labor, as the fear of detection and deportation was eliminated. The backlash against immigrants that occurred in the 1990s also contributed (*ibid.*). In the West, the growth of the immigrant population—particularly undocumented—exacerbated racial and cultural divisions, prompting many to seek new destinations.

Given IRCA's unintended effects, the 1990s saw more congressional efforts to limit immigration generally, but especially by undocumented workers. As the Republican Party incorporated restrictionist policies—California's Proposition 187 was particularly noteworthy—the Clinton administration sought to demonstrate it was not ignoring the issue (Nevins 2002, 92). One of the most prominent examples was Operation Gatekeeper, which went into force in 1994 and involved a large injection of funds into the Border Patrol, with more agents, fencing, and technology. The number of undocumented immigrants did not decrease, but the increased risks associated with crossing the border helped to reinforce the change of attitude that had been taking place among unauthorized immigrants since 1986. This change was that once in the country, immigrants were more likely to stay because it was harder to go back and forth between Mexico and their work in the U.S. Two unanticipated trends have followed from this: (1) males are now more likely to be accompanied by family members, or soon joined by family members, rather than a preponderance of males coming with the intention of returning to Mexico regularly to be with their families; and (2) being freed from the constraint of regular return trips to Mexico and probably also guided by the IRCA-legalized immigrants, migrants have increasingly branched out geographically from the Southwest, focusing especially on the southeastern states.

This pattern was enhanced even further by the U.S. policy response to the attacks of September 11, 2001. Security was an even more central

part of the policy discussion, as the U.S.-Mexico border was perceived to be a potential crossing area for terrorists. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was folded into the newly created Department of Homeland Security (and renamed the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services) in 2003, thus cementing the immigration-security nexus. In 2005, the Bush administration formalized that perception into the "Secure Border Initiative." More federal attention was paid to hiring border patrol agents, building fortified steel fences, funding detention facilities, buying planes and helicopters, sending up observation balloons and drone aircraft, and even—albeit very gradually—raiding businesses. In 2006, President George W. Bush's proposal for immigration reform was shelved, but funding for enforcement reached upwards of \$44 billion (Lochhead 2006). National Guard troops from several states were also deployed to assist the Border Patrol.

Massey et al. (2002, 135) note that in the post-9/11 era, Mexican migration has thus been characterized by a shift from short-term circulation to long-term settlement. In contrast to the past, a greater number of migrants decided to remain in the United States rather than circulate back and forth between the two countries. This decision is based in large part on the renewed political emphasis on border security. As the federal government increased the risks associated with undocumented emigration (e.g. forcing potential emigrants into more dangerous desert areas where security is lighter) fewer Mexicans in the United States chose to make the attempt multiples times. There is also evidence that the inability to migrate back and forth has produced an incentive to reject agricultural work and move to more stable employment in cities (Preston 2006).

It is thus no coincidence that, given the combination of Clinton-era laws and the Bush administration changes after September 11, 2001, the immigrant move to the South has been characterized by more settlement, rather than the more cyclical nature of Latino immigration of the past.

Other public policy decisions, however, have also contributed to the shift toward long-term settlement. Even as the flow of people is a source of controversy, the flow of money between the U.S. and the immigrant's home country has been facilitated by the U.S. and Latin American governments by reducing fees. From an economic standpoint, it becomes rational to make few (or even only one) trips to the United States, knowing that remittances can easily be sent back, and with low fees. Since the cost of human smuggling (that is, the use of "coyotes") increases along

with border security, circulation would mean less money available to send home as remittances.

These same rationales increased the "feminization" of immigration, as more women chose to migrate. In Mexico, for example, it turned out that an unintended consequence of men leaving to work in the U.S. was that more women entered the Mexican workforce as men emigrated (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 12-14). In turn, women became more autonomous and participated more in the decision to migrate. Massey et al. (1992) argue that, given the risks involved in crossing the border with children, the number of children migrating probably did not increase. Less often recognized, however, is that this feminization of immigration meant that there have been more young adult women crossing the border and then ultimately having children in the United States. In North Carolina, 21.6 percent of the Latino population was born in the state as of the early 2000s (Kasarda and Johnson 2006, 2). Data for Mecklenburg County for 2005 from the American Community Survey show that 85 percent of Latinos under the age of 18 were born in the United States, whereas only 16 percent of the adult population was U.S.-born. Furthermore, birth data from Mecklenburg County demonstrate the significant increase of native born southerners of Latin American descent. By 2005, almost one out of every five babies was born to a Latino mother, and that percentage is climbing steeply (see Table 2) Between 2000 and 2004, the percentage of births that were to Latino mothers increased by 9.8 percent each year. A simple linear extrapolation of that figure suggests that by 2015 a majority of births in Mecklenburg County would be Latino.

**Table 2**  
**Latino Births in Mecklenburg County, 2000-2004**

| Year | Number of Latino Births | Percentage of total births |
|------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2000 | 1,513                   | 12.5                       |
| 2001 | 1,771                   | 14.9                       |
| 2002 | 1,894                   | 15.5                       |
| 2003 | 2,017                   | 15.9                       |
| 2004 | 2,310                   | 18.0                       |

Source: Mecklenburg County Department of Health.

Additional evidence of the feminization and family-building among immigrants to Charlotte is found in the age structure. At the young adults ages there are still more men than women, but the number of women is substantial, as can be seen in Table 3. In 1990, when the over-

all Latino population was very small in Mecklenburg County, the ratio of males to females was 1.11 (put another way, 47 percent of the population was female). This small group of "pioneers" seems to have been characterized by families more than unattached males. Between 1990 and 2000, the male population increased more rapidly than the female population, in at least a modified version of the male pioneer migration process. However, by 2005 the female population was catching up again and households were being formed and families were being built, as evidenced by the birth data in Table 2 and the population under age 18 shown in Table 3. Consistent with our view of the impact of changes since 9/11, from 2000 to 2005, the number of women increased 174 percent, compared to 151 percent for men.

In general, the data reveal that between 1990 and 2005, more men were arriving than women, but the number of women of child bearing years was increasing dramatically. In addition, the number of older men and, especially, women also saw large increases, suggesting that grandparents were coming to Mecklenburg County to assist with children while mothers worked. Instead of simply following the male "trailblazer" model, Charlotte experienced a substantial integration of entire families, as young adults migrated, had children, and then brought the grandparents north to help with the children.

It is clear that Charlotte is becoming a destination rather than a way station. The number of children being born here has increased dramatically, while the number of women is also increasing. Like the rest of the South, the time between the arrival of "pioneers" and their families is very short, or even simultaneous. This makes public policy even more relevant, because the people who are arriving will also be staying for the foreseeable future. These are not transients, they are residents, and the younger people, nearly all of whom are U.S. citizens, will be among the voters of the future.

### Immigrant Residential Patterns

Like other low income groups, Latinos traditionally have tended to seek housing in city centers (Singer 2004). Suburbs tend to be more expensive, more difficult to navigate via public transportation, and generally less welcoming. Over time, immigrants might move to suburbs, but tended to do so only after living in the city center. Segregation, or at least self-imposed residential separation, was also prevalent, especially in areas where the Latino population grew significantly relative to other racial and ethnic groups (Massey and Denton 1987). The presence of

social networks and perception of hostility from others fostered the development of enclave communities.

Using data from the 2000 Census, Suro (2002, 7) estimated that 54 percent of all Latinos in the United States live in suburbs, and the number of suburban Latinos had grown by 71 percent since the 1990s. Also using 2000 Census data, Smith and Furuseth (2004) demonstrated that Latino settlement in Charlotte is geographically distinct and cannot be explained by conventional arguments. Unlike the more common model of congregation in the city center, Latinos in Charlotte are more likely to move directly to suburbs. They attributed this phenomenon in large part to the availability of inexpensive housing, especially rental apartments. Additionally, Frey (2006, 14) emphasizes the employment growth in the suburbs, which offers many opportunities for lower skilled labor. Economic growth in Charlotte has been robust, with high demand for positions in industries like construction work (Charlotte Business Journal 2006). Much of that growth is taking place in the suburbs.

As noted above in Table 2, we have recent (2000-2004) birth data from the Mecklenburg County Health Department, which we have been able to geocode based on the addresses of births according to the race/ethnicity of the child as reported by the mother on the birth certificate. These data reveal a residential pattern that confirms the general suburban location of Hispanics in Charlotte. Utilizing birth data provides one of the most detailed snapshots possible of where Latinos live. Its main limitation is that it cannot account for those without children. But given the fact that immigrants whose native language is not English will tend to live more closely together, it is highly likely that women having children reside in an area that includes many others without children. In addition, for reasons of privacy we were unable to ascertain the race of Latina mothers. As we argue, Latinos in Charlotte have not developed enclaves, but neither are they isolated from each other.

In order to display the Mecklenburg County birth data geographically, the recorded street addresses were geocoded against Mecklenburg County's master address table using ESRI's ArcGIS software. The geocoding process matches the birth records with the actual spatial location of the street so they can be viewed on a map. A small number of birth records (2 percent) could not be matched due to invalid street addresses and P.O. boxes. Once the birth data were spatially assigned, the records were aggregated to a larger geographic area for settlement pattern analysis. In our case, the birth data were aggregated to the 2000 Census block group level using ArcGIS's intersect overlay tool, which

Table 3  
 Latino Population in Mecklenburg County, By Age and Sex

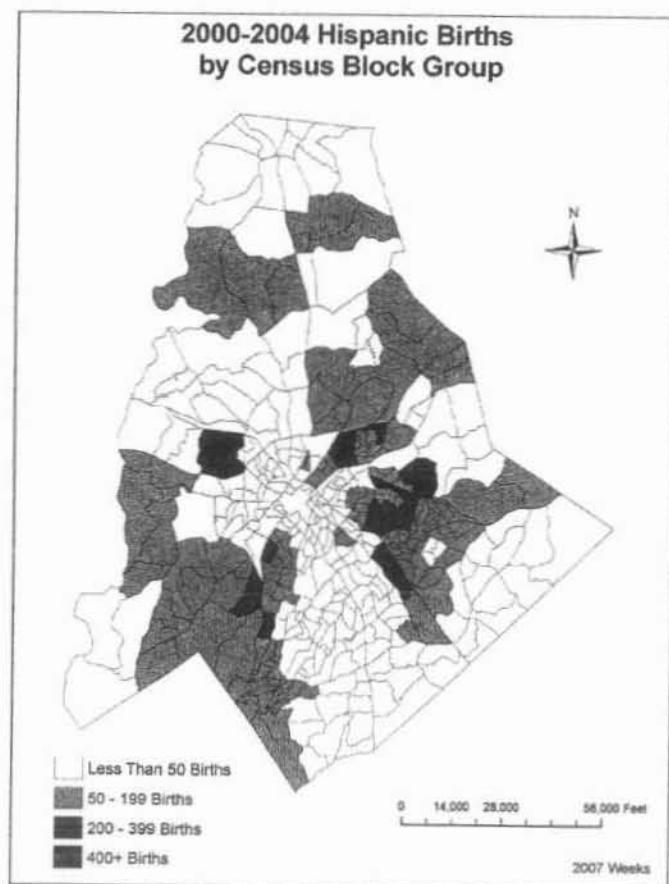
|              | 1990  |         |                 | 2000  |        |                 | 2005   |        |                 | Change: 1990-2005 |        |
|--------------|-------|---------|-----------------|-------|--------|-----------------|--------|--------|-----------------|-------------------|--------|
|              | males | females | sex ratio (m/f) | male  | female | sex ratio (m/f) | Male   | Female | sex ratio (m/f) | Male              | Female |
| TOTAL        | 3636  | 3167    | 1.11            | 27533 | 17338  | 1.59            | 41,685 | 30,219 | 1.38            | 38,759            | 27,082 |
| Under 5      | 307   | 264     | 1.16            | 2416  | 2212   | 1.09            | 4,996  | 4,989  | 1.01            | 4,689             | 4,695  |
| 5 - 9        | 277   | 248     | 1.12            | 1678  | 1581   | 1.06            | 3,089  | 2,785  | 1.11            | 2,812             | 2,947  |
| 10 - 14      | 222   | 211     | 1.05            | 1272  | 1125   | 1.13            | 2,531  | 2,268  | 1.12            | 2,309             | 2,057  |
| 15 - 17      | 136   | 119     | 1.14            | 1194  | 694    | 1.72            | 1,304  | 1,038  | 1.26            | 1,168             | 919    |
| 18 - 19      | 144   | 101     | 1.43            | 1496  | 716    | 2.09            | 972    | 614    | 1.58            | 828               | 513    |
| 20 - 24      | 430   | 341     | 1.26            | 5146  | 2264   | 2.27            | 4,430  | 2,481  | 1.79            | 4,000             | 2,140  |
| 25 - 29      | 632   | 364     | 1.46            | 4753  | 2403   | 1.98            | 7,102  | 3,489  | 2.04            | 8,570             | 3,125  |
| 30 - 34      | 433   | 328     | 1.32            | 3282  | 1813   | 1.81            | 5,986  | 3,119  | 1.92            | 5,553             | 2,791  |
| 35 - 44      | 521   | 508     | 1.03            | 3932  | 2448   | 1.61            | 7,283  | 4,476  | 1.63            | 6,762             | 3,968  |
| 45 - 54      | 277   | 304     | 0.91            | 1509  | 1109   | 1.27            | 3,102  | 2,337  | 1.33            | 2,925             | 2,033  |
| 55 - 64      | 143   | 179     | 0.80            | 571   | 487    | 1.17            | 748    | 2,092  | 0.36            | 605               | 1,913  |
| 65 and older | 104   | 200     | 0.52            | 284   | 386    | 0.72            | 142    | 551    | 0.26            | 38                | 351    |

Source: US Census Bureau, Censuses of 1990, 2000, and 2005 American Community Survey, <http://www.census.gov>, accessed 2006.

assigns each birth record to a Census block group based on its spatial location when overlaid on top of the Census block groups. A count of the number of births in each Census block group was then obtained and rendered on a map.

In 2000, Latino mothers and their families tended to live in the eastern and southwestern parts of Mecklenburg County, with a very small pocket in the west as well. In some areas, such as the north and the south/southeast, there were very few or no births at all. Smith and Furuseth (2004) identify two main "clusters," which is consistent with the birth data.

Figure 1

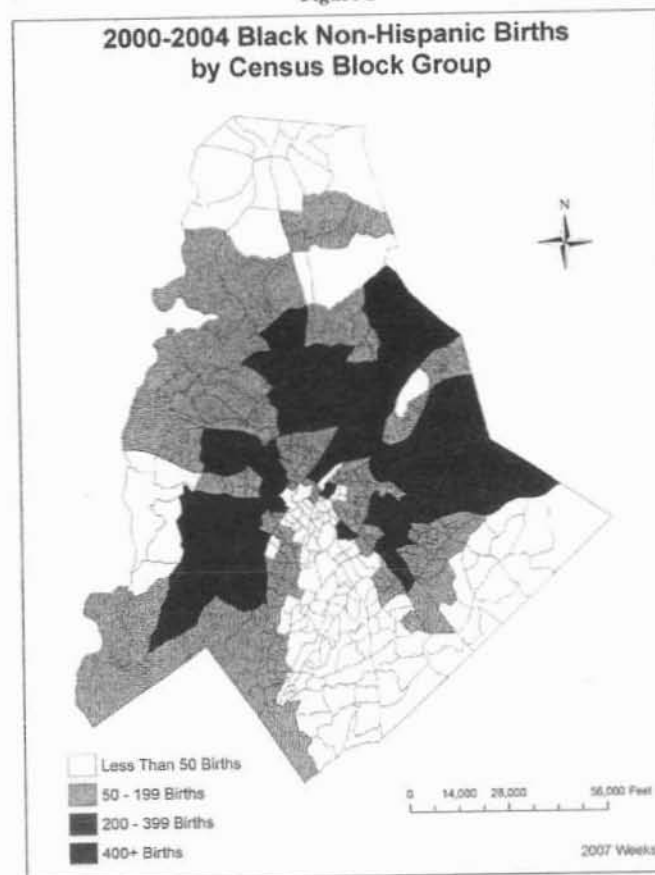


Source: Mecklenburg County Health Department.

The data from 2004 reveal both significant growth and change (see Figure 1). In particular, the Latino suburban sprawl expanded, ringing the entire county, with the exception of the southeast, which has remained predominantly white. The two clusters from 2000 grew, while new ones were created. There continue to be almost no Latino births in the city center. The vast majority of births in Charlotte's city center are to African American mothers (see Figure 2).

Latinos have increasingly moved to the north of the county, which had previously been almost entirely white. The same is true in the western and southwestern parts of Mecklenburg County. Thus, whites live in the outer areas of the county (especially north and southeast), but are

Figure 2



Source: Mecklenburg County Health Department.

gradually being "followed" by Hispanics. Given the combination of new immigration and births, it is likely that within a decade, "clusters" will disappear, as Latinos live in virtually every part of the county.

Also salient is that since Charlotte's population has been growing rapidly, Latino suburbanization has not displaced other racial groups. Areas of strong Latino growth have been accompanied by strong growth of blacks and whites. The southeast of Charlotte, traditionally the choice of residence for the wealthy, politically connected white population, is the only area that has experienced little or no growth in its Latino and black populations. This is consistent with what Frey (2001) has called the "melting pot suburbs," as both the absolute number and percentage of minorities—particularly Latinos and Asians—living in the suburbs grew between 1990 and 2000.

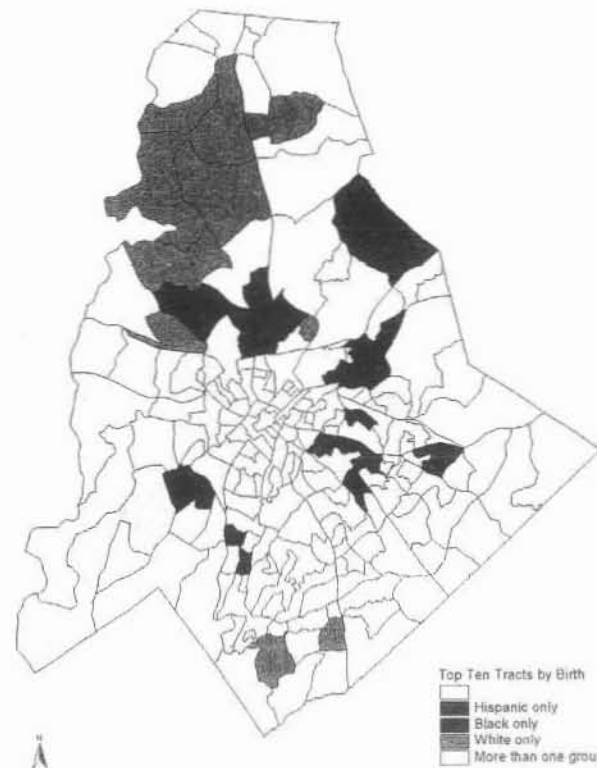
The "melting pot" phenomenon is especially significant because in many other areas of the country, such as New York City, the move to the suburbs was followed quickly by "white flight" (Lobo et al. 2002, 722). The same was true even in cities that were not traditional Latino immigrant gateways, such as Grand Rapids, Michigan, where Latinos moved into predominantly white suburbs adjacent to Latino enclaves, which then prompted the white population to move further out (Ravuri 2005). The exception has been racial, so that white Latinos (who are also more likely to be socio-economically middle or upper class) found it easier to integrate (Lobo et al. 2002, 723; Logan et al. 1996). In Charlotte, this is difficult to measure. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2005 American Community Survey, 67.5 percent of Latinos in Mecklenburg County identified themselves as "white," while another 26.3 percent self-identified as "some other race alone." Given the absence of more familiar terms (such as "mestizo") it is difficult to determine racial categories.

Dispersal also means that as yet there are no clearly identifiable Latino enclaves, which has been common in older settlements for all immigrants. New migrants historically have lived and worked near one another, and later assist others seeking to do the same (Castles and Miller 1998, 220-221). This is accentuated when migrants speak a different language than the country to which they've moved. But given the fact that new jobs in Mecklenburg County are being created in suburban areas across the entire county, there is a strong incentive to find suburban housing close to work, rather than seeking refuge within an ethnic enclave.

However, there are limitations to the "melting pot" phenomenon. Despite dispersal there has also been segregation. Hispanics tend to live

separately from blacks and whites in Charlotte at the Census tract level. The index of dissimilarity—the standard measure of residential segregation—has a theoretical range from zero (no segregation) to 1 (complete segregation). Based on Census 2000 data at the tract level, we find that the index of segregation for Hispanics from blacks is .40 and from whites it is .49. The index of segregation for blacks from whites is .55. Put another way, 40 percent of Hispanics would have to have moved in order to be distributed spatially in the same pattern as are blacks, and 49 percent would have to move in order to have the same residential pattern as whites. We also calculated the segregation indices for births in 2004, with consistent results. The index for Hispanics from blacks was .38, for Hispanics from whites it was .57, and for whites from blacks it was .57.

Figure 3  
Top Ten Census Tracts in Mecklenburg County by Birth, 2004



Source: Mecklenburg County Health Department.



The relative separateness of these three major groups is illustrated in Figure 3. We found the top ten Census tracts in 2004 with respect to the number of births to mothers of each race/ethnic group. Seven of the ten top Hispanic tracts were not in the top ten for either blacks or whites. Five of the top ten black tracts were not in the top ten for either Hispanics or whites, and seven of the top ten white tracts were not in the top ten for either blacks or Hispanics. By this type of index, if the map showed only ten tracts, there would be complete overlap (no evidence of segregation), whereas if there were 30 tracts there would be no overlap (complete separation of all three groups). The map shows 24 tracts, consistent with the general separation of groups.

### Public Policy Consequences

These new demographic patterns of the Carolatinos are both a cause and consequence of public policy and, in turn, they have forced Mecklenburg County's leaders to quickly adapt to a new demographic reality. It has been argued that immigration policy at the federal level has been a major driving force of the more rapid process of family unification. We argue that this had led to greater population growth, because women and families are moving more quickly to the South than they did to older gateway regions. This, in turn, has left local governments in a difficult position as they attempt to absorb the population growth, while exerting no influence on federal policy.

Additionally, the nature of economic growth in Charlotte has created incentives for Latinos to move directly to the suburbs, where jobs are relatively plentiful and housing is inexpensive. This poses important questions about race relations, which in some areas of the country have been conflictive following a period of immigration. But the combination of rapid growth and moving to the suburbs can be positive, since it avoids an "enclave" situation—in which Latinos live in a few concentrated areas—and thereby forces all political actors to deal with the issue.

Thus, a majority of County Commissioners and City Council members are compelled to address immigration, rather than view it as something that is concentrated in only a small number of districts. This does not mean they necessarily view immigration as positive; rather, they are less able to assert it is someone else's "problem." A commonly noted dilemma for Latinos has centered on the fact that, due to living in the inner city, they "contend with the most deteriorated urban environments and they send their children to schools that breed failure" (Suro 1998,

309). In Charlotte, this is less evident. One of the highest profile debates over education has been the funding of urban compared to suburban public schools. This has traditionally been a dispute between African American and white populations, but the Latino population changes the dynamic, as it is generally both lower income and suburban.

Federal immigration policies played a significant role in encouraging Latin American immigration, much of which in recent years has been oriented toward new destinations in the South. But it is local government that is charged with addressing the fiscal impact of an increasing population. For although immigration policy is the exclusive domain of the federal government, there is neither a blueprint nor a set of resources for local governments to utilize. As one Democrat on the Charlotte City Council argued, immigration policy is perceived as "schizophrenic," because at the federal level there was no intention to enforce the law (Interview with the first author, 3/29/06). A Republican labeled federal policy "confused" (Interview with the first author, 2/13/06).

There is a contentious debate over whether immigrants (especially Latino immigrants) constitute a net cost, through the use of schools, social services, hospitals, or by "taking" jobs from native born workers in the U.S. (for contrasting empirical views, see Borjas 1990; Simon 1999; and in North Carolina specifically, Kasarda and Johnson 2006). It is beyond the scope of this article to delve into that debate, but there is no doubt that: a) any rapid population growth, regardless of race or ethnicity, will pose a challenge to local resources, at least in the short term, and this is even more evident when the migrants are predominantly low income; and b) local officials must address issues they have never encountered before, such as the need for translation services in government, and bilingual or English immersion classes in school.

The fiscal impact on schools is the most visible, and has been the significant across the South, where Latinos made up 4 percent of school enrollment in the 2001-2002 academic year, but are estimated to reach 10 percent by 2007-2008, up from 184,000 to 571,000 Latino students (Kochhar et al. 2005, 38). The most critical challenge, of course, is language, as school systems must commit resources to teaching English and overcoming the language barrier with parents.

Aside from the potential economic costs associated with rapid migration, the geography of Latino settlement also has an impact on public policy. Although the phenomenon of Latino immigrants moving directly to the suburbs is very recent, we can point to the likely effects it will have. Since Latinos are not concentrated in one area, their presence is



far more visible, which accelerates the public reaction. Especially in a southern city unaccustomed to hearing Spanish, this can lead to backlash and calls for immigration restriction and local measures to deter more arrivals. For example, in Charlotte one County Commissioner called for limits on the number of people who could live in a single home, and to limit the amount of money that could be wired to other countries (Ordoñez 2006). On the other hand, greater initial visibility also provided the foundation for a vigorous public debate, which is arguably much more tolerant than its western counterparts.

For example, in 2005 Charlotte's mayor created a new Immigration Study Commission, consisting of four different areas (public safety, health care, education, and economic development) and chaired by a well-known immigration lawyer. The purpose of the commission was to gather information, and it released a report in January 2007 to advise the mayor and City Council about the impact of both legal and illegal immigration on Charlotte. An early report given to the County Commissioners elicited praise from both Democrats and Republicans, indicative of how the question of immigration is thus far being handled with some equanimity (Levine 2006).

But in Charlotte dispersal also has problematic effects. A 2006 study revealed that most social services aimed at Latinos were in the city center, despite almost no Latinos living there (UNC Charlotte Urban Institute 2006). With an underdeveloped public transportation system, Latinos in the suburbs (especially in the northern part of the county) have very limited access to necessary services.

Another potential effect of Latino suburbanization is that the city core is likely to be ignored more, since Latinos are on their way to becoming the largest minority, and neither they nor whites live in the city center. This raises the question of what the long-term relationship will be between the black and Latino populations in the South, where race relations have always been binary. On the one hand, there may be resentment at the attention Latinos receive, and the possibility of siphoning off resources that might otherwise be aimed at the African American community, which in other parts of the country has at times been a source of tension (Wood 2006) and an obstacle to the formation of political coalitions between the two (Kaufmann 2003). A city council member noted the perception that Latinos were "stealing the civil rights limelight" (Interview with the first author, 3/28/06).

There are also charges that the arrival of immigrants in the South has flattened wages for African Americans (Mohl 2003, 47). In a study of

Latino labor relations and unionization in Morganton, North Carolina, Fink (2003, 102) notes the perception on the part of African Americans (as well as whites) that Latinos were taking jobs and not paying taxes. There is some evidence that, especially in the northern part of the county, where the Latino population is more impoverished, there is some tension, resulting in some reported cases of physical assault against Latinos (UNC Charlotte Urban Institute 2006).

On the other hand, as an African American County Commissioner argued, many blacks feel sympathy because they know what it's like to be discriminated against (Interview with the first author, 1/11/06). In a study of Alabama, Mohl notes that Latinos have settled in traditionally black neighborhoods, where rents are lower. Combined with high unemployment, there is evidence of some resentment, but overall "African Americans have been accepting of new Latino residents in their communities" (Mohl 2002, 272). A study of Durham, North Carolina, found that the black community had generally favorable impressions of Latinos, though the opposite was not the case: Latinos tended to have relatively more negative views of African Americans (McClain 2006, 579). Thus far, we have mostly anecdotal accounts, without a clear sense of how what one author has termed the "presumed alliance" actually functions (Vaca 2004). This is especially relevant for Charlotte, since most studies have focused on rural areas and smaller towns, so the urban South remains largely unstudied (Winders 2005).

In addition, in Alabama many of the jobs Latinos took had been available to everyone, but were deemed undesirable (both in terms of pay and working conditions). In Mecklenburg County and surrounding areas, the same likely holds true, so the competition for jobs is minimal. Unemployment has remained low (at or under the national rate), so it is less likely that many jobs are being "taken" from U.S. citizens and legal residents. Interviews with local elected officials of both parties revealed almost complete consensus that Latino immigration did not pose a threat in terms of employment. Nonetheless, given strong economic growth, it has not been possible to assess local reaction during a downturn, when jobs are scarcer.

In short, the relationship between African Americans and Latinos in the South requires more study. Studies show evidence of both potential discord and cooperation, but the phenomenon remains too recent to develop longitudinal studies of the local reaction.

## Conclusion

The dynamics of Latino immigration to the South are very different from traditional patterns, which involved initial settlement by males in the city center, followed later by females and children, accompanied by segregation and the development of enclaves. The case of Charlotte demonstrates both these differences and the public policy effects that both create and follow from them. Unlike settlement in western states, women are coming more quickly, which has the effect of increasing the number of families and the number of Latino births.

In addition, Latino immigrants are choosing to live in suburbs rather than the city center. The availability of inexpensive apartment housing, in conjunction with suburban service and construction job opportunities, has precluded the development of enclaves. Instead, the pattern of Latino settlement has been a ring, circling the city center.

Public policy has been a source of these changes, and a consequence. Policy at the federal level contributed greatly to the settlement patterns in the South, which took place after the implementation of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986, and further after the most restrictive laws were put into place in the 1990s. Local political leaders must then attend to the consequences (whether intended or not) of federal policy.

These new patterns have the potential to produce positive public results, even in a region of the country historically beset by racial tension. The existence of a permanent population that lives in many different parts of the county has pushed local policy makers to pursue solutions to the challenges inherent in rapid population growth. Certainly, not all reactions are positive, but thus far in Charlotte the city council and mayor, as well as the county commissioners, have engaged in a healthy debate over the impact of immigration.

A critical question, however, is whether a focus on new suburban residents will come at the expense of the African American community, especially those in the center city. The history of racial conflict and discrimination in Charlotte and other southern cities requires a concerted effort to ensure that tension between the Latino and African American populations remains as conflict-free as possible. If unemployment rises, the potential for tension will increase.

Further research should also examine whether large metropolitan areas (like Mecklenburg County) have different characteristics than rural towns and counties. Geographically, small cities or towns will offer fewer

housing options, which may encourage the development of enclaves. That, in turn, can affect the political response by local elected officials.

In Charlotte, "Carolatinos" are coming to stay. The public and political reaction, though at times antagonistic, has in large part been measured. The Immigration Study Commission's work has been well-received. More research should be conducted on whether constructive public policy remains the norm, and what factors account for it. Despite a history of troubled racial and ethnic relations, the South may provide lessons to the rest of the country.

*University of North Carolina-Charlotte; gwweeks@uncc.edu;*  
*john.weeks@sdsu.edu; Amy.Weeks@MecklenburgCountyNC.gov*

## References

- Andreas, Peter. 2000. *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Borjas, George. 1990. *Friends or Strangers: The Impact of Immigrants on the U.S. Economy*. New York: Basic Books.
- Castles, Stephen and Mark J. Miller. 1998. *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 2nd edition. New York: Guilford Press.
- Charlotte Business Journal*. 2006. "Some Signals Are Mixed But Market Looks Strong." August 18, 5.
- Fink, Leon. 2003. *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Frey William H. 2006. "Diversity Spreads Out: Metropolitan Shifts in Hispanic, Asian, and Black Populations Since 2000." *The Brookings Institution Living Cities Census Series* (March).
- Frey, William H. 2001. "Melting Pot Suburbs: A Census 2000 Study of Suburban Diversity." *The Brookings Institution Census 2000 Series* (June).
- Hernández-León, Rubén and Víctor Zúñiga. 2000. "'Making Carpet by the Mile': The Emergence of a Mexican Immigrant Community in an Industrial Region of the U.S. Historic South." *Social Science Quarterly* 81(1):49-66.
- Hoefler, Michael, Nancy Rytina, and Christopher Campbell. 2006. "Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2005," Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics.
- Hondagneu Sotelo, Pierrette. 1994. *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Kasarda, John D. and James H. Johnson, Jr. 2006. *The Economic Impact of the Hispanic Population on the State of North Carolina*. Chapel Hill, NC: Frank Hawkins Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise (January).
- Kaufmann, Karen M. 2003. "Cracks in the Rainbow: Group Commonality as a Basis for Latino and African-American Political Coalitions." *Political Research Quarterly* 56(2):199-210.
- Kochhar, Rakesh, Roberto Suro, and Sonya Tafuya. 2005. "The New Latino South: The Context and Consequences of Rapid Population Growth." *Pew Hispanic Center Report*, July 26.
- Levin, Carrie. 2006. "Board GOP Opts to Wait on Proposals." *The Charlotte Observer* September 20, 1B.
- Lobo, Arun Peter, Ronald J.O. Flores, and Joseph J. Salvo. 2002. "The Impact of Hispanic Growth on the Racial/Ethnic Composition of New York City Neighborhoods." *Urban Affairs Review* 37(5): 703-727.
- Lochhead, Carolyn. 2006. "Illegal Immigration Tab: \$44 billion Federal Strategy Includes 700-Mile Fence on Border." *San Francisco Chronicle* September 13.
- Logan, John R., Richard D. Alba, and Shu-Yin Leung. 1996. "Minority Access to White Suburbs: A Multiregional Comparison." *Social Forces* 74(3):851-881.
- Massey, Douglas S. and Nancy A. Denton. 1987. "Trends in the Residential Segregation of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians: 1970-1980." *American Sociological Review* 52: 802-825.
- Massey, Douglas, Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone. 2002. *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- McClain, Paula D., Niambi M. Carter, Victoria M. Soto DeFrancesco, Monique L Lyle, Jeffrey D. Grynawski, Shayla C. Nunnally, Thomas J. Scotto, Kendrick, J. Alan Kendrick, Gerald F. Lackey, and Kendra Davenport Cotton. 2006. "Racial Distancing in a Southern City: Latino Immigrants' View of Black Americans." *Journal of Politics* 68(3):571-584.
- Mohl, Raymond. 2003. "Globalization, Latinization, and the Nuevo New South." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 22(4):31-66.
- Mohl, Raymond. 2002. "Latinization in the Heart of Dixie: Hispanics in Late-Twentieth-Century Alabama." *The Alabama Review* 55, 4 (October):243-274.
- Nevins, Joseph. 2002. *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the "Illegal Alien" and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary*. New York: Routledge.
- Ordoñez, Franco. 2006. "Immigrants Issue Gets County Push." *The Charlotte Observer* September 19, 1A.
- Pessar, Patricia R. 1999. "The Role of Gender, Households, and Social Networks in the Migration Process: A Review and Appraisal." In Charles Hirschman, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh DeWind (eds.). *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Portes, Alejandro and Rubén G. Rumbaut. 1996. *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. Second Edition. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Preston, Julia. 2006. "Pickers Are Few, and Growers Blame Congress." *The New York Times*, September 22, 1.
- Ravuri, Evelyn D. 2005. "Changes in the Distribution of the Hispanic Population of Grant Rapids, Michigan, 1990-2000: A Study of the Succession Process." *The Great Lakes Geographer* 12(2):14-26.
- Simon, Julian. 1999. *The Economic Consequences of Immigration*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Singer, Audrey. 2004. "The Rise of New Immigrant Gateways." *The Brookings Institution Living Cities Census Series*, February.
- Smith, Heather Anne and Owen J. Furusest. 2004. "Housing, Hispanics and Transitioning Geographies in Charlotte, North Carolina." *Southeastern Geographer* 44(2): 216-235.
- Suro, Roberto. 2002. "Latino Growth in Metropolitan America: Changing Patterns, New Locations." *The Brookings Institution Survey Series*, July.
- Suro, Roberto. 1998. *Strangers Among Us: How Latino Immigration is Transforming America*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- UNC Charlotte Urban Institute. 2006. *Mecklenburg County Latino Community Needs Assessment*, June.
- United States Census Bureau. 2006. *American Community Survey 2005* <http://www.census.gov> (accessed 2006).
- Vaca, Nicolás C. 2004. *The Presumed Alliance: The Unspoken Conflict Between Latinos and Blacks and What It Means for America*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Weeks, John R. and Joseph Spielberg Benitez. 1979. "The Cultural Demography of Midwestern Chicano Communities," in S.A. and J. Macklin (eds.). *The Chicano Experience*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 229-251.
- Winders, Jamie. 2005. "Changing Politics of Race and Region: Latino Migration to the US South." *Progress in Human Geography* 29(6): 683-699.
- Wood, Daniel B. 2006. "Rising Black-Latino Clash on Jobs." *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 25.
- Wood, Daniel B. 2006. "Rising Black-Latino Clash on Jobs." *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 25, 2006.