# Contested Constituency



## Latino Politics and Pan-ethnic Identity Formation in the 1983 Chicago Mayoral Election of Harold Washington

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## Preface

What was predicted to be a runaway primary election for incumbent Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel in 2015 quickly turned into the first mayoral runoff election in Chicago's history. Cook County Commissioner Jesús "Chuy" García, who won 33.8 percent of the vote to Emanuel's 45.4 percent on February 24, 2015, forced the runoff. To many, this electoral challenge was surprising given the incumbent's credentials as a former chief of staff to both Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. For others, the primary election provided a way to demonstrate their frustration with the city's political status quo and Emanuel's administration. In the month-long campaign preceding the April 7 runoff, the leading issues were school funding, municipal finances, and crime. Though both candidates articulated agendas, the election became so much more than a choice in policy platforms. The possible election of Chicago's first Mexican American mayor sparked a national discussion on Latino politics, in which García's candidacy became a symbol of increasing Latino representation in Chicago politics. Larry Gonzalez, a Democratic strategist in DC and a Chicago native, reflected this

Harold Washington, Jesús García (L.) and César Chávez (R.)

sentiment: "Everything is indicating that it's time. Time for the Latino community to step up and allow its voice to be heard."[1]

The runoff election gained national attention, with Latino leaders from across the United States working to get García elected. Most notable was the endorsement of the Latino Victory Fund, a national political action committee created in 2013 to support Latinos running for elected office across the country. In its endorsement statement, the president of the fund said "we are proud to endorse Jesús 'Chuy' García, whose trailblazing candidacy for mayor of Chicago energized the Latino community, not only in Chicago, but across the country."[2] However, there were obstacles to any effort to build a cohesive Latino political agenda around his candidacy. Oscar Chacón, executive director of the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities, observed that Latino voters, a potential swing vote that was not quite mobilized in the month leading up to the runoff election, were "an untapped great opportunity for both campaigns."[3] Ultimately, Emanuel won, but the resonance of García as a symbol of Latino leadership and political efficacy remained. While some observers saw in García's candidacy the political awakening of Latinos, seasoned followers of mayoral elections noticed parallels to an equally symbolic election thirty-five years before.

In 1983, Chicago elected its first African American mayor, Harold Washington. With the support of a broad though fragile coalition of voters, Washington's election symbolized the aspirations of Black and Latino representation and, in the eyes of many voters, a rejection of corrupt, machine-patronage politics. I believe this moment captures a transformational shift in Latino political engagement within electoral

1. Suzanne Gamboa, "'Chuy' Garcia's Chicago Mayoral Bid Sparks Latino Excitement," *NBC News*, March 14, 2015.

2. Suzanne Gamboa, "Chuy Garcia Picks Up Latino Victory Fund Mayoral Endorsement," *NBC News*, March 23, 2015.

3. Stefano Esposito, "Poll Shows Garcia with Huge Lead among Latinos," *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 23, 2015.



politics. It was in the early 1980s that many Latino neighborhoods came to understand their political potential, with leaders like José "Cha Cha" Jiménez and Rudy Lozano working for Washington to create a Black-Latino coalition and build the racial-political consciousness of Latinos. Lupe Lozano, surviving widow of the deceased Latino organizer, has pointed to the historical significance of García's candidacy: "with Chuy running, it's like a spirit of Rudy that keeps living on."[4] As a close friend of Rudy Lozano, Chuy García got his political start in the progressive, independent political movement of the 1980s. Three decades later, García went on to rekindle the energy, ethos, and rhetoric of the Washington campaign that fostered the birth of Latino electoral engagement in the first place.

America has experienced a dramatic demographic transformation in the past four decades, especially when we consider the expansion and growth of the Latino population in Chicago and around the country. Latinos are frequently described as the next deciding and dominant force in American politics. Yet there is still much to be determined about what constitutes "Latino politics" and Latino identity more generally. Does such a thing as the Latino community exist as a cohesive whole, and if so, how did it come about? Today, political scientists take seriously the idea of a definable, Latino electoral behavior. Ricardo Ramírez and Gary Segura, for example, both argue that pan-ethnic Latino identity is increasingly constitutive and emblematic of cohesive group political behavior among Latinos in the twenty-first century.[5] Yet this was not the case just thirty years ago. The following research project seeks to clarify these contemporary issues by placing them in a larger historical context.

4. Hal Dardick and Bob Secter, "Jesus 'Chuy' Garcia Hopes to Rekindle Harold Washington Torch at City Hall," *Chicago Tribune*, February 11, 2015.

5. See Ricardo Ramírez, *Mobilizing Opportunities: The Evolving Latino Electorate and the Future of American Politics* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013); and Gary M Segura, "Latino Public Opinion & Realigning the American Electorate," *Daedalus* 141, no. 4 (October 2012): 98–113.

Through the story of Harold Washington's 1983 campaign for mayor we can draw several practical lessons. First, we can contextualize and better understand the development of Latino electoral politics in Chicago that made the mayoral candidacy of a Mexican American plausible in 2015. Second, we can explore how campaigns reinforce the use of pan-ethnic labels through the notion of a constituency. Third, we can contribute to the complex and multifaceted debate concerning Latino heterogeneity and the process of Black-Latino coalition building. These three modern-day applications of my narrative demonstrate the value of local history for conceptualizing our contemporary political process. Chicago ultimately serves as the nexus of *Latinidad*[6] and offers a prime case study for understanding Latino politics nationally. This is why the story of the Washington campaign continues to live in our present. Because in Chicago, history is made every day.

## Introduction

Chicago was swept up in a wave of excitement, frustration, anger, and hope as the results of the 1983 mayoral election were revealed. Newspaper presses printed at maximum capacity that day, with front pages boldly announcing Chicago's new mayor after a campaign season like none before. In one of the most racially charged elections in American history, the city appeared to have been split between Black and White, machine and independent, status quo and reform. Despite racial fear mongering and a strong opposition from the Democratic machine, Harold Washington, the Democratic nominee, became the city's first Black mayor. His expressions of commitment were not just for the advancement of African Americans, but all minority groups in the city, making up the famous "rainbow coalition" frequently heralded as the driving force that brought Washington to the mayoralty. His campaign

6. *Latinidad*, Spanish for "Latino group identity," is used in common and academic parlance.



platform was one of racial-ethnic fairness, gender inclusion, and equal opportunity for all. As the champion of the independent reform movement, Washington represented the dreams and aspirations of countless Chicagoans who hoped their voice could be heard in city hall. Given how his election catalyzed the political engagement of several underrepresented groups in the city, including the growing Latino community, it stood as one of the most important elections in the city's history.

Historians and popular memory alike generally understand the 1983 Chicago mayoral election to be the historically significant turning point for Latino political participation in the city. This consensus points to the Black-Latino coalition that formed around Washington as indicative of a cohesive Latino voting bloc that emerged during that moment and stood in racial solidarity with Blacks.[7] This conception of Latinos during the 1983 election is rooted in the assumption that linguistic and cultural similarities between different Latino groups inevitably united them around a common political agenda. Granted, distinct Latino groups had formed successful coalitions in matters such as cultural exchange and nonelectoral community organizing well before the 1980s, but, the pan-ethnic unity expressed in community festivals and worker strikes did not transfer into electoral political action. The actual political behavior of Latinos during the 1983 election does not support the idea that the majority of Latinos belonged to a cohesive, ethnic voting bloc. By analyzing the electoral results from the 1983 primary, I will demonstrate that there was very limited Latino political cohesion and no unanimous Latino support for Washington.

7. By "popular memory," I am referring to the mainstream public's conception or understanding that quickly romanticized the election into some sort of ideal coalition, for example, Ben Joravsky and Tom Brune, "Can Washington's Victory Point the Way Forward for the Next Chicago Mayor?" *Chicago Reporter*, May 10, 1983; reinforcing the image of a Latino coalition were Washington's comments about the Black-Latino coalition and the accounts of the press: David Axelrod, "Washington Elected," *Chicago Tribune*, March 13, 1983.

In order to galvanize support among the contested Latino constituency, Washington's campaign had to confront the challenges of racial-national heterogeneity and subsequent differences in political allegiances among Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and others. This had been expressed in a lack of Latino support for Washington in the Democratic primary, which the campaign sought to overcome by working with college-educated, Latino political elites in the general election. Political divisions among Latinos were especially clear to the political organizers and campaign strategists who needed to mobilize the vote for a Black candidate and saw Latinos as a crucial voter base and a potential swing vote. Seeing the strategic advantage, I argue, Washington's campaign promoted Latino unity as way to fashion a cohesive political unit out of the various Latino neighborhoods in Chicago. Though he was only marginally successful in gaining a majority of Latino voters in the general election against Republican candidate Bernard Epton, the strategies and rhetoric employed by Washington had far greater consequences for Latino identity. This was the case because Washington's campaign strategy intersected with other sociopolitical forces in Chicago, including the legacies of a Black-White racial binary, decreases in public services, and a change in the political establishment that in many ways forced Latino voters to reimagine their engagement in civic life.

In a convergence of local *and* national processes of identity formation, the Washington campaign strategy contributed to the institutionalization of pan-ethnic *Latinidad* that was taking place at the national level. Along with national organizations, like the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and the League of United Latin American Citizens, the campaign to elect Harold Washington worked parallel to and simultaneously with the larger national project of constructing Latino unity and group identity in electoral politics. Thus, Washington at once appealed to a contested constituency and argued for the legitimate existence of Latino pan-ethnicity in the first place. The campaign helped to define a constituency that was just beginning to take shape at a national level. By purposefully appealing to a pan-ethnic "Latino" constituency, bringing



in spokespeople for national pan-ethnic unity, and pushing out a message of Latino unity through the press and literature, Harold Washington's candidacy reinforced the concept of the "Latino vote" in ways that no political campaign had done before. These strategies at the local level were revealing, as they would test the potential of a pan-ethnic Latino constituency in a city with over 420,000 Latinos of diverse national heritages, who were just beginning to engage in elections.

The 1983 campaign period was the beginning of a long process that would discursively form Latinos into a theoretically united political front, regardless of whether they actually were or not. Thus, in the following I argue that the Washington electoral campaign and Latino political elites actually introduced and helped create the *concept* of a legitimate and pan-ethnic Latino electorate for the first time in Chicago. Using organizational records from the Latino Operations Department of the Washington campaign and newspaper accounts of the election period, I will demonstrate that this rhetoric of Latino cohesion was reinforced through an aggressive promotion of pan-ethnic symbolism by the 1983 Washington campaign, Latino political elites, and Latino organizations. In sum, my case study challenges historical assumptions of Latino political homogeneity, analyzes the generation of an externally constructed pan-ethnic constituency, and informs our general understanding of the broader emergence of Latino identity in national politics. But more broadly, this project challenges the focus of American history on a Black-White racial binary that often assigns Latinos to one side of the binary or the other. By reconstructing the story of Latino political engagement outside of a triumphal rainbow-coalition narrative that strips it of its nuance and causation, I urge for a more deliberate approach to Latino political history that is mindful of its difference and integrity, in which Latinos can create and occupy their own political space.

## Literature Review and Archival Sources

The scholarship on Harold Washington focuses mostly on his time as mayor of Chicago and not on the 1983 election leading up to his mayoralty. The narratives that do touch upon the election consistently neglect the role Latinos played. Dempsey Travis's *"Harold," The People's Mayor*, Florence Levinsohn's *Harold Washington: A Political Biography*, and other popular histories make passing mention that Latinos were part of a Black-Latino coalition and acted as a swing vote, but do so anecdotally and without any evidence.[8] Generally reaffirming the image of Latinos as "a small but loyal and decisive group," this historical generalization perpetuates a romanticized vision of overwhelming Latino support for Washington, which did not exist.[9]

Some scholars do discuss Latino political participation in greater depth, such as María de los Angeles Torres in *Harold Washington and the Neighborhoods* and Gary Rivlin in *Fire on the Prairie*.[10] Both Rivlin's and Torres's contributions to our understanding of the 1983 election illustrate the mobilization and excitement of those Latinos who supported

8. Florence Hamlish Levinsohn, *Harold Washington: A Political Biography* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1983); and Dempsey J. Travis, *"Harold," The People's Mayor: An Authorized Biography of Mayor Harold Washington* (Chicago: Urban Research Press, 1989).

9. Dianne M. Pinderhughes, "An Examination of Chicago Politics for Evidence of Political Incorporation and Representation," in *Racial Politics in American Cities*, ed. Rufus P. Browning, Dale Rogers Marshall, and David H. Tabb (London: Longman, 1997), 126.

10. Gary Rivlin, *Fire on the Prairie: Chicago's Harold Washington and the Politics of Race* (New York: Henry Holt, 1992); and María de los Angeles Torres, "The Commission on Latino Affairs: A Case Study of Community Empowerment," in *Harold Washington and the Neighborhoods: Progressive City Government in Chicago, 1983–1987*, eds. Pierre Clavel and Wim Wiewel (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991).



Harold Washington and a progressive Black-Latino coalition. Where I part company from these scholars is in their depiction of a cohesive and monolithic Latino voting constituency—one that I argue is not representative of the actual state of "Latino politics" in the early 1980s. These historical works do not address the initial distrust and lack of Latino support for Harold Washington during the Democratic primary in February of 1983, where he earned only about 15 percent of support from all the precincts that were predominantly Latino.[11] The existence of a tangible, organized, cohesive, and monolithic Latino voting bloc in 1983 is never questioned in any of these accounts of the election. Once we understand that the Latino population was politically heterogeneous, with differing political priorities and allegiances, we can qualify the success of the Black-Latino coalition and better understand how the Washington campaign contributed to the development of pan-ethnic Latino politics in Chicago. Yet to move beyond the image of an organic and grassroots Latino unity, we need a more theoretical and historical approach to Latino politics. To this end, we must look toward a social construction of Latino identity.

Scholars have generally accepted the social construction of race and ethnicity for several decades. Omi and Winant famously discusses the "formation" of racial categories.[12] Similarly, in *Making Hispanics* G. Cristina Mora argues that Latino identity should not be considered a primordial affinity, but as something created and legitimized by several actors and organizations for strategic reasons.[13] Contrary to ideas of a natural or assumed Latino identity based on religion, language, and other sorts of cultural characteristics, Mora demonstrates how *Latinidad* is an

11. David K. Fremon, *Chicago Politics, Ward by Ward* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

12. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986).

13. G. Cristina Mora, *Making Hispanics: How Activists, Bureaucrats, and Media Constructed a New American* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 3.

institutionally constructed identifier. According to Mora, three groups of stakeholders created and normalized the pan-ethnic categorization of "Hispanics" and "Latinos" in the public sphere beginning in the late 1970s: government agencies, social activists, and media outlets. Motivated to pass federal legislation that would recognize Latinos as a minority group positioned to benefit through the Voting Rights Act and affirmative-action policies, stakeholders ushered in a "historical shift toward pan-ethnicity" and the concept of a cohesive Latino interest group.[14]

In the early 1980s, more than ever before, the idea of "Latino politics" was growing alongside an increasing representation of Latinos in government. A *national* project of legitimizing pan-ethnic Latino unity in the public sphere, despite obstacles of regional and ethnic difference, was spearheaded by entities like the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and the Spanish-language television network, Univision, during the 1980s.[15] It was at this moment that the Washington campaign converged with and complemented the external legitimation of a Latino label that Mora discusses. Most political campaigns were still regionally based and specifically targeted Mexican or Puerto Rican voters—not "Latino" voters as a whole. But the Washington campaign was one of the earliest to appeal to a *pan-ethnic* Latino voting bloc. Here, the emerging rhetoric of the "Latino vote" reflected the development of "Hispanic" more generally and the "Hispanic market"[16] more specifically, with Latinos characterized as

14. Felix Padilla's work outlines the ways in which pan-ethnic Latino activism started taking form in the 1960s and 1970s specifically in Chicago with similar Latino coalitions being created in favor of affirmative-action policies and benefits. See, Felix M. Padilla, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985).

15. Maurilio E. Vigil, *Hispanics in Congress: A Historical and Political Survey* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996).

16. The work of Arlene Dávila is similar to the argument put forward by Mora and important for my framework, but it is more focused on the Hispanic market



a convenient category of consumers *and* voters. In this way, Washington's campaign had national significance by reifying the idea of a "Latino vote," legitimizing the authority of national Latino leaders, and pioneering strategies for the mobilization of a pan-ethnic Latino constituency.[17]

These concerns directed my attention to two main archival source pools. First are the Washington Campaign Records at the Harold Washington Library Special Collections in Chicago. Documenting the entirety of Washington's campaign activities from late 1982 to his ultimate victory in April 1983, this collection provides an enormous amount of detail on both the big-picture and everyday operations of the campaign. Of particular importance for my argument are documents from the campaign's Latino citizens committees, the Latino Literature Review Committee and the Latino Operations Department. These records not only feature drafts and copies of flyers targeted towards a broad Latino constituency, but also contain memoranda and minutes from meetings concerning Latino electoral strategy.

Second are the Rudy Lozano Papers at the University of Illinois at Chicago Special Collections. Rudy Lozano was one of the most influential Mexican American political leaders in Chicago during the late 1970s and early 1980s. His papers consist of professional correspondence, institutional records from the Independent Political Organization (IPO) of Little Village, Washington campaign materials, and a wide assortment of newspaper clippings. Of particular value are the Spanish-language news clips within this collection, which are rare and disaggregated when compared to digitized and readily available English-language newspaper sources. Figures like Lozano and his organization were in constant communication with the campaign's leadership and vigorously emphasized

rather than on the political construction and implications; see Arlene Dávila, *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

17. Similar strategies would be pursued in presidential elections in the decades following the 1980s.

pan-ethnic appeals to voters, breaking away from established nationality-based strategies. Additionally, a wide variety of Chicago newspapers demonstrate the spread of pan-ethnic Latino rhetoric. Many articles were skeptical if such a thing even existed, which demonstrates the fragility of a pan-ethnic Latino voting bloc in the early 1980s.

## Terminology

One of the ongoing debates in the academic social sciences asks: what should we call people in the United States with Latin American ancestry? While the 1980 Census categorized these individuals as *Hispanics*, both historical and contemporary norms have pushed me to describe the communities as *Latinos*. Drawing upon the work of Brubaker and Cooper, I will now elaborate on my selection of identity terms in relation to "categories of practice" vs. "categories of analysis."[18] Categories of practice refer to terms used in everyday language, interaction, and self-identification by individuals. In the case of 1980s Chicago, the terminology used to describe Latino Chicagoans included pan-ethnic labels, like "Spanish speaking," "Latin American," "Hispanic," "Latino," "Latin," and "Spanish," in addition to terms specific to national origin, like "Puerto Rican," "Mexican American" or "Chicano," "Cuban American," and so on. In my analysis of newspapers and government records both the media and Latin American–descendent communities themselves used these pan-ethnic labels quite interchangeably.

In contrast, a category of analysis is a term that describes and analyzes a group within the context of academic discourse. While I could alternate throughout the paper between all of the categories of practice mentioned above, I find that a singular and consistent categorization offers clarity. I have chosen *Latino* as my category of analysis for two main reasons. First, the Washington campaign mainly used "Latino" to

18. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper. "Beyond 'identity'," *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 1–47.



encompass the Latin American–descendent communities of Chicago during the 1983 election period. Second, contemporary rhetoric has moved away from "Hispanic" to "Latino" as the primary pan-ethnic category for the Latin American diaspora in the United States. A common critique of "Hispanic" is its negative association with assimilation and whiteness, positioning "Latino" as the more progressive term. "Hispanic" still serves purposes at the national level in the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, in our daily speech, and even within current academic scholarship concerning Latinos in the United States. Yet I hope that by choosing Latino as my category of analysis, this study can show the inextricable link between pan-ethnicity and political identity.

Though there are effective uses for the term, "Latino" can also work to essentialize a heterogeneous group of individuals. Suzanne Oboler raises a very important question regarding the "gap between the self-identification of people of Latin American descent and their definition through a label created and used by others."[19] In discussions of partisanship and group identity through the traditional lens of politics, scholarship concerning Latinos takes into account the impact of *assigned* social categories. Part of the problem with Latino identity is its use as an "ideological construct"[20] in the process of creating imagined communities. For the purposes of this essay, it is imperative to understand the multifaceted and contested nature of *Latinidad* in order to effectively evaluate the state of Latino cohesion in the political landscape of 1980s Chicago.

Defining "politics" can artificially limit how we think of individual actors and entire communities engaging in civic life. For the purposes of this paper, however, we must distinguish between formal and informal politics, given the political shifts of the 1980s. *Formal politics*, as understood in political science, refers to the sphere of electoral politics and the

19. Suzanne Oboler, *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of Representation in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 2.

20. Ibid.,18.

politics of representation. But electoral activity is not the only form of political participation, especially for communities of color traditionally distanced from electoral politics. In the case of Mexican Americans in Los Angeles, Lisa García Bedolla shows how community engagement and nonelectoral activity seem to be more inviting avenues for achieving sociopolitical change in their neighborhoods. Thus *informal politics* refers to forms of community engagement such as neighborhood cleanups and volunteerism, as well as nonelectoral activity that involves protests, marches, and rallies. Though most Latino residents of East Los Angeles "did not see this activity as political,"[21] the political meaning of these kinds of activities is clear. Similarly, Latinos in Chicago were politically engaged well before the election of Harold Washington, but mostly in the domain of informal protest politics.

One of the more controversial terms employed in this paper is the concept of the *Latino political elite.* I do not mean to say that these individuals were separated from their communities and neighborhoods, but rather that they were well out in front of whatever political and pan-ethnic sentiments their communities may have held in the early 1980s. These political elites were raised in the Latino neighborhoods of Chicago and were thoroughly committed to the improvement of the Latino population. However, most of the Latino elites were well established, middle class, and college educated, with broad networks and a progressive envisioning of their own racial-ethnic identity. Leaders like Rudy Lozano, Linda Coronado, and "Cha Cha" Jiménez emphasized pan-ethnic identity and interracial coalition building in working-class communities that were arguably not as receptive to these ideas during times of perceived economic competition. With a strategic framing of identity, the Latino political elites sought to educate their communities and increase representation for their neighborhoods. These individuals framed a broader image of Latino unity and viewed themselves as the well-connected Latino political vanguard.

21. Lisa García Bedolla, *Fluid Borders: Latino Power, Identity, and Politics in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 171.



## Racial and Political Climate

Though American liberal ideology of the 1930s sought to provide equal opportunity and secure the livelihood of middle-class workers, growing inequality between Whites and Blacks demonstrated to progressives the racial divisions in the country. In reaction to the shortcomings of the class-based, New Deal rhetoric of the early twentieth century, the civil-rights movement and other identity-based rights movements emerged in the 1950s and sixties.[22] Latino, Asian, and African Americans organized well into the 1970s and protested the lack of representation and resources allocated to their respective communities. But with the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan, the fortieth president of the United States, a noticeable shift in the racial climate accompanied a new wave of conservatism in American politics. Nationally, the 1980s contrasted sharply in many ways to the radical, racial-protest politics of the 1960s and 1970s. While the rhetoric of parity, economic fairness, and equal opportunity on racial lines continued to emanate from communities of color, the reception and reaction to these claims changed dramatically. As historian Daniel Rodgers notes, in the 1980s "justice was not achieved by attention to history; justice was achieved by transcending the past."[23] Rather than address the systematic and structural manifestations of racial inequality, the dominant conservative rhetoric of the decade de-emphasized economic and race-based systems of oppression, and instead embraced an ideology of "colorblindness."

The political right's fierce debates over affirmative action and other kinds of government assistance programs sparked reaction and a growing sense of unrest in marginalized communities within Chicago. As Chicago scholar William J. Grimshaw notes of the period immediately prior

22. Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010).

23. Daniel T. Rodgers. *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

to the 1983 election under Mayor Jane Byrne, "Reagan's rolling back of the welfare state and Byrne's numerous open assaults on black interests enabled Washington to capitalize on a profoundly bitter sense of loss and disempowerment."[24] However, this sense of disempowerment also stemmed from the exclusion of racial minorities in the governance of their communities at the local ward level. Chicago was truly a city of wards, with each of the fifty wards functioning as a legislative district that elects a representative alderman to the City Council. For the greater part of the twentieth century, the Democratic machine vetted and selected candidates who essentially ran unopposed.[25] By engaging in patron-client style politics, the aldermen and the party maintained control of the wards and elections well into the 1980s. Originally created by Irish political leaders in the nineteenth century, the system came to depend on ethnic White communities for political loyalty in exchange for political resources and city services. In the twentieth century, Italians, Bohemians, Poles, and other ethnic Whites were the base of the system along with some African Americans.[26]

The links between Latino neighborhoods and the Democratic machine were few for most of the twentieth century. Sociologist Felix Padilla notes of the period leading into the late 1970s as a time when, "Mexican

24. William J. Grimshaw, *Bitter Fruit: Black Politics and the Chicago Machine, 1931–1991* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 195.

25. Dominic A. Pacyga, *Chicago: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 405.

26. African Americans were a strong component of the machine's political power, but never full beneficiaries of the city services, infrastructural development, government contracts, and job allocations that Whites enjoyed. By the 1950s and '60s, Black support of the Regular Democratic Organization faded and spurred the independent political movement that brought Washington to the mayoralty. For more on ethnic White voters, see Tomasz Inglot and John P. Pelissero,"Ethnic Political Power in a Machine City: Chicago's Poles at Rainbow's End," *Urban Affairs Review* 28, no. 4 (June 1993): 526–43.



American and Puerto Rican city residents were either outside or only partially linked to the politicization of ethnicity through the political machine."[27] City hall and the City Council at the start of the decade were almost solely comprised of White males affiliated with the Democratic machine. There were no Latino alderman in the City Council before 1983. Thus, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, the two largest Latino subgroups in the city, had to make alliances with the established powers through patronage politics to gain access to city jobs, municipal industrial contracts, and other kinds of city services. As Padilla mentions about Puerto Ricans in the city, "the working class poor [were] granted symbolic participation"[28] through departmental appointments of wealthy business leaders, but their efficacy in representing the interests of the community was questionable, as these leaders were unlikely to go against the interests of the machine leadership that had appointed them. Given the lack of diversity among elected officials in communities of color, the Democratic machine came to be seen by many African Americans and Latinos as an obstacle to the community's self-determination.

## Latino Chicago

Today, Chicago has the third-highest concentration of Latinos in the United States after Los Angeles and New York, with 790,649 people making up roughly 30 percent of the population.[29] In a city historically

27. Padilla, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness*.

28. Felix M. Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 202.

29. "2010 Census," *US Census Bureau*. Accessed January 23, 2017, factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk.

segregated by race and socioeconomic status, Latino ethnic neighborhoods have been based in the Northwest and Southwest sides of Chicago, most notable among them being Little Village, Back of the Yards, South Chicago, Pilsen, and Humboldt Park. Latinos have also been expanding into the suburbs of greater Chicago. Historically, Chicago has experienced several different phases of Latino migration before reaching the numbers and geographic distribution that we see today. One of the earliest periods of growth stretched from the time of the Mexican Revolution in 1921 until the early 1930s, when a small community of Mexican immigrants settled in the South Chicago area. Though small in numbers compared to the hundreds of thousands of African American migrants who came into the city during the Great Migration, these Mexican steel and rail workers established the first Mexican cultural and community organizations. As Michael Innis-Jiménez describes in *Steel Barrio*, these early settlers served as a racial buffer separating Black and White workers. This in-between status occupied by Mexican laborers in the early twentieth century set the precedent for the longer history in which Latinos would be racialized, discriminated against, and never fully accepted by either Whites or Blacks.[30]

With the mass deportations of Mexicans during the Great Depression, many of whom were US citizens being unlawfully deported, the number of Latinos in Chicago remained relatively small until after World War II. By the late 1950s and early sixties, large concentrations of Latinos began to settle in the areas which remain to this day. For instance, Mexican immigrants settled en masse in Pilsen, formerly a Bohemian immigrant community. Other immigrants flocked to Chicago due to economic crises in Latin America, so that by the 1970s and 1980s there was a substantial Latino population comprised of both long-established and bourgeoning neighborhoods with a mix of US citizens,

30. Michael Innis-Jiménez, *Steel Barrio: The Great Mexican Migration to South Chicago, 1915–1940* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 83.



legal permanent residents, and ever-increasing undocumented populations. Between 1960 and 1990, the Mexican population (by far the largest Latino subgroup in Chicago) "increased by more than six times—from 55,600 to 352,560."[31] Mainly working class in character, Mexican neighborhoods were in their highest period of growth by the 1970s and 1980s. After Mexicans, Puerto Ricans formed the second largest contingent of Latinos. Many of them came from New York in the 1930s, and they experienced their largest rates of growth during the 1960s and 1970s.

Although the numbers of other Latino subgroups were small compared to Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, Cubans and Central and South Americans maintained strong cultural traditions, with hundreds of community organizations created to meet the needs of each group. Indeed, Chicago was one of the few cities with a significant presence of more than one Latino group. Whereas cities like Los Angeles and New York had large majorities of either Mexican Americans or Puerto Ricans, Chicago was uniquely positioned as a place that could put notions of Latino identity, consciousness, and cohesion to the test. As the *Chicago Tribune* noted, the "internal heterogeneity"[32] of the Latino community often stood in the way of effective political mobilization and cohesion. This heterogeneity would shape the ways in which the Latino population sought access to resources. Figure one demonstrates that Latinos doubled in size by 1980, but in a city that was over 80 percent White and Black, the question of how Latinos would fit into the racial landscape of the city remained unresolved.

31. Nicholas De Genova and Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, *Latino Crossings: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and the Politics of Race and Citizenship* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

32. "City Latinos Have Almost No Political Power: Study," *Chicago Tribune*, February 21, 1980, 2.

**Figure 1: Racial Composition of Chicago in 1970, 1980, and 1990**

| Groups | 1970 / % | 1980 / % | 1990 / % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Black | 1,102,620 / **30.5** | 1,187,168 / **39.5** | 1,086,389 / **32.8** |
| Asian | 70,970 / **2.4** | 104,141 / **3.1** | |
| Latino | 247,343 / **6.8** | 423,357 / **14.1** | 535,315 / **16.2** |
| White | 2,207,767 / **61.1** | 1,311,808 / **43.6** | 1,265,953 / **38.2** |
| Other | 56,570 / **1.6** | 11,775 / **0.4** | 320,482 / **9.7** |
| Total | 3,614,300 / **100.0** | 3,005,078 / **100.0** | 3,312,280 / **100.0** |

Source: "Illinois," *1970 United States Census*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census, 1970), 15–105 (part 15, sec. 1, ch. B, table 23); "Illinois," *1980 United States Census*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census, 1980), 15–52 (part 15, ch. 1, table 59); "Population and Housing Summary Tape File 3A," *1990 United States Census* (Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census, 1990).

Despite the rapid growth of the Latino population since the 1960s, Chicago's deep-rooted history of racial politics ensured that most issues were framed in a Black-White binary. Latinos who did not identify as Black or White existed in an ambiguous ethno-racial "third space."[33] Culture, language, national origin, and other markers of ethnicity were defining features of Latino-ness as an abstract classification. Defining oneself in terms of race, however, proved a challenging and divisive exercise, which was voiced by a Latino individual interviewed by the *Chicago Tribune* in 1974: "Blacks call us white, whites call us brown, and we have a helluva time deciding what we're going to call ourselves!"[34]

33. David G. Gutiérrez, "Migration, Emergent Ethnicity, and the 'Third Space': The Shifting Politics of Nationalism in Greater Mexico," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 2 (September 1999): 494.

34. "Latino Efforts to Pull Together," *Chicago Tribune*, August 1, 1974.



A 1982 cover story in the *Tribune* discussed the complicated nature of Latino political organizing. Emphasizing the nature of the city as the meeting place of all Latino groups, the author described Chicago as "the one heavily Hispanic city that mirrors the special problem of Hispanics nationally—it does not have a Hispanic spokesman for its entire population. Instead, the various communities have their movers and shakers, who sometimes work together and sometimes fight."[35] Latino Chicagoans did not fit neatly into the city's political and social landscape, which revealed tensions at the national level. These realities left the issues of Latino cohesion, political strategy, and Black-Latino coalitions open for significant exploration in the 1980s.

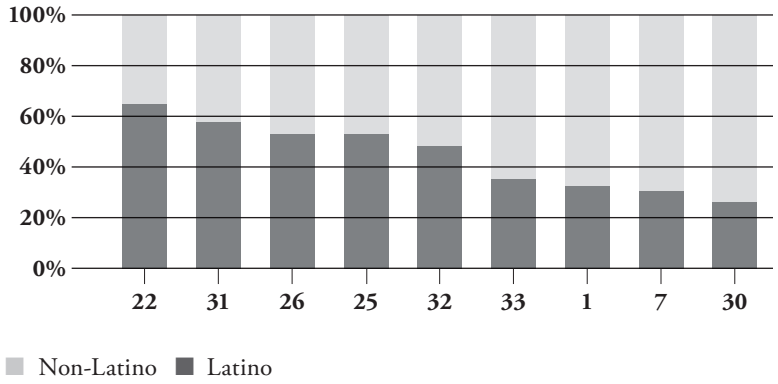
## Rise of Latino Political Organizing

An ambiguous social and political status made it difficult for Latinos to advocate in their local wards. The splitting of Latino neighborhoods between different wards and national origins reinforced this lack of power and limited Latinos' collective political power when dealing with any particular alderman. These institutionalized disadvantages and crippling prejudice for those who challenged the Democratic machine worked to stifle political activism. While many Latinos simply avoided involvement in formal politics, this distance from the electoral process could also be understood as a form of "self-protection" from making powerful enemies in the establishment.[36] Even in wards where Latinos constituted the majority of the population, as seen in figure two, there was still little engagement in formal politics by these communities. By staying secluded from political life, Puerto Rican voters, and Latino voters more generally, were seen as innocuous and were ultimately taken for granted over the course of decades. This gave the machine the security

35. Miguel Galvan, "Who Speaks for Hispanic Americans?" *Chicago Tribune*, June 20, 1982.

36. Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 72.

**Figure 2: Latino Wards by Population Percentage**




Source: Juan Andrade and Connie Ortega, *Hispanics in Chicago: A Political Analysis* (Chicago: Midwest Voter Registration Education Project, Office of Special and International Projects, National Council of La Raza, 1982).

to focus on building support from the Black electorate in the years leading up to 1983. As Torres notes, "while electoral mobilization characterized Latino politics outside of Chicago, the lack of meaningful possibilities for community political empowerment in the electoral arena had caused young Latino political activists in Chicago to adopt other strategies."[37] These strategies included several forms of nonelectoral political organizing, which were some of the earliest manifestations of pan-ethnic Latino solidarity on common issues.

Affirmative action was one of the most important policy issues for Latinos, especially during the civil-rights movement, which catalyzed the formation of many community organizations. Organizations such as the Mexican Community Committee of South Chicago, the Puerto Rican Organization for Political Action, and several others formed during the 1960s, but they were addressed to specific nationalities and not

37. Torres, "The Commission on Latino Affairs," 166.



actively pan-ethnic in scope. Given the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of the Latino population in Chicago, forging a pan-ethnic community would become a strategic necessity to organize on key issues that required larger numbers than the subgroups could mobilize on their own. In response to this reality new organizations aimed to rally the entire Latino diaspora in the city around issues of common concern, and built up confidence in terms of political efficacy. With the creation of the Spanish Coalition for Jobs in June of 1971, the strategy of organizing among different Latino groups in Chicago gained traction. Padilla notes the coalition's significance, which was "considered Chicago's first Latino protest organization, that is, an organization comprised of more than one Spanish-speaking group which employed protest tactics."[38]

The Spanish Coalition for Jobs convened around twenty community organizations from distinct Latino neighborhood organizations to formulate a common agenda for development and to advocate for policy changes in city hall relating to employment. The experience of structural inequality across Latino ethnic subgroups stimulated this politicized behavior during the 1970s and created a front of solidarity for increased job opportunities. Collectively protesting discrimination in hiring practices and working conditions, the coalition focused its campaigns against the Illinois Bell and Jewel Tea companies. While the organization mobilized almost equally among Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, the kind of ethnic mobilization exhibited by the coalition was almost exclusively outside of formal electoral politics. Following on the success of the Spanish Coalition for Jobs, the Latino Institute was established in 1974 as a central advocacy organization that sought to address the development of Latino communities and interests across several issue areas. The institute was a citywide organization with a downtown office that was run by college-educated Latino political elites, "middle-class reformers, more prominent and less alienated from mainstream America than the

38. Padilla, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness,* 90.

members of the Spanish Coalition for Jobs."[39] Financial mismanagement led to the institute's early demise, which by then was only focused on bread-and-butter issues like employment.

In the 1980s, local community organizations in Latino neighborhoods began to engage in an unprecedented level of electoral activity. Spurring this political involvement was the rise of the independent political movement determined to challenge the hegemony of the Democratic machine and create a more racially representative leadership in city hall and in the Illinois legislature. At the fore of this movement was the Independent Political Organization (IPO) of Little Village, founded in 1981, and other IPOs in Chicago, comprised of both Black and Latino members. The IPO was an exclusively political organization with the ultimate goal of counteracting the Regular Democratic Organization. Rising out of the machine's neglect towards communities of color, the independent political movement had great appeal within Black and Latino neighborhoods. In the case of Pilsen, entrenched Alderman Vito Marzullo, an Italian American, symbolized how in the 25th Ward "Mexicans live but do not rule."[40] Similarly in Little Village, the 22nd Ward, the White alderman, Frank Stemberk, didn't even live in the area that he represented.[41] The independent movement's counteractive strategy was to find candidates that would represent the people, not the interests of the party officials, and then campaign on an independent platform in opposition to the machine candidate of that ward.

Around the time of the founding of the IPO in Little Village, a group of Latino and Black community organizers began meeting to build a coalition that would position people of color as viable candidates in the 1982 Illinois legislature race. Candidates endorsed by the Black-Latino

39. Ibid., 130.

40. Hank De Zutter, "Neighborhood News," *Chicago Reader*, March 12, 1982.

41. Robert Davis and James Strong, "Alderman's Residency Investigated, Stemberk," *Chicago Tribune*, May 10, 1985.



Alliance included Jose Salgado, Arthur Turner, Juan Soliz, Arthur McBridge, Jane Flagg, Carmelo Vargas, and Danny Davis. Spokesman Peter Earle stated that alliance's mission was to find "people-oriented candidates who understand our needs, abhor plantation politics and have pledged themselves to work and vote in the best interest of our people."[42] Spanish-language periodicals also took notice of the political partnership. *El Heraldo de Chicago*, a major Spanish-language newspaper, provided a similar depiction of the coalition. Officially forming in January of 1982, the Black-Latino Alliance blasted the party establishment for "giving its support to other ethnic groups at the expense of Blacks and Latinos."[43] Stressing the linked fates of both groups, the article identified Latinos clearly as a non-White group. Ultimately, however, the Black-Latino Alliance was limited in its success. Juan Soliz, the first Latino candidate for the State legislature, lost to the machine-backed candidate in a district that was 70 percent Latino.

What some politically active Latinos considered "an important test of political strength for Latinos in Chicago" turned out to be a disappointment that proved the strength of the machine.[44] Yet this was only the beginning of the independent movement in Chicago. In December of 1982, US District Judge Thomas R. McMillen ruled against the discriminatory ward mapping approved by the City Council in 1981. The decision meant that the boundaries of wards 37, 15, 26, and 32 would be redrawn in order to create two majority Black wards and two

42. Slim Coleman, "Black-Latino Alliance Formed," *All Chicago City News*, February 4–18, 1982.

43. "El cual tradicionalmente ha dado su apoyo a otros grupos étnicos a expensas de los negros y los latinos." Alicia C. Santelices, "Latinos Y Negros: Contra La Maquinaria Democrata," *El Heraldo de Chicago*, February 4, 1982. [All translations from the Spanish are my own.]

44. Bill Campillo, "Soliz Challenges 'the Machine'," *La Opinion Latina*, Winter 1982. The perception of Latino political mobilization during the early 1980s mirrors the rhetoric of the 2015 Chicago election for mayor.

**Figure 3: Registered Voters in Chicago, 1980**

| 1980 | White | Black | Latino | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Voting Population | 53.5% | 37.5% | 7.5% | 1.5% |

Source: Chicago Urban League, *Metro Chicago Political Atlas—1994*, ed. James H. Lewis, D. Garth Taylor, and Paul Kleppner (Springfield, IL: Institute for Public Affairs, 1994).

majority Latino wards. In his ruling, McMillen stated that Latinos were "entitled to better representation in the City Council and have been deprived of that opportunity."[45] This legal victory kept hopes of political change and increased representation alive going into 1983. The court's ruling coincided with the candidacy of Harold Washington in late 1982. Though only a small proportion of the electorate, as seen in figure three, Latino political support would gain unprecedented importance in the 1983 election.

## Primary Campaign and Election: December 1982–February 1983

There were three candidates in the 1983 Democratic primary for mayor of Chicago: the incumbent, Mayor Jane Byrne; Cook County State's Attorney Richard M. Daley; and US Representative for the First Congressional District of Illinois Harold Washington. Byrne was the first woman elected as mayor of Chicago in 1979. Byrne was strong in White working-class neighborhoods but, criticized for her responses to job decline and dilapidated public housing, she struggled in her relationship to impoverished African American neighborhoods on the South Side. As son of the famed Mayor Richard J. Daley, who was in office for twenty-one years, Richard M. Daley posed a significant challenge to the incumbent. Both candidates appealed and held close ties to the Democratic machine,

45. Maurice Possley, "Minorities Get 4 Wards: Judge Boosts Blacks, Hispanics," *Chicago Sun-Times*, December 22, 1982.



posing a problem for the independent voter movement. When movement leaders asked Washington to run on an independent, anti-machine, reform platform, Washington would only consider if Black voter registration went up. This stipulation was made with an astute understanding of the historically low mobilization of Black voters, especially in the election cycles of the 1970s. To Washington's surprise, however, Black community organizers registered voters in the tens of thousands.[46] Black Chicagoans were inspired by the prospect of Chicago's first Black mayor, and at 39.5 percent of the population, their rally ultimately convincing Washington to run.[47]

With the machine's White voters split between Byrne and Daley, as well as Washington's near complete hold of Black voters and appeal to lakefront-liberal White voters, the primary was very close. This split represented the clear-cut voting allegiances within the city. The voting allegiances of the racially, ethnically, and *politically* diverse Latino population were not as clear cut. Contemporaneous newspaper accounts and political analysis speculated broadly on where Latinos positioned themselves during the 1983 primary. The most common distinction was between Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans. Underlying these ethnic divisions were distinct historical patterns of citizenship and migration, wherein Puerto Ricans were citizens as opposed to the citizen-resident-undocumented pattern in Mexican neighborhoods. Rivlin suggests that, unlike Puerto Rican self-identification as non-Whites, "Mexican Americans sought to identify themselves as just another ethnic group like the Italians, the Irish, and the Poles."[48] This idea of assimilation reflected the historical pattern of immigrants distancing and distinguishing themselves from African Americans as a means to assimilate into whiteness. Jaime Dominguez adds further complexity to this

46. Travis, *"Harold," The People's Mayor,* 140

47. "Voter Registration Catches On," *Chicago Tribune*, December 15, 1982.

48. Rivlin, *Fire on the Prairie,* 351.

picture with the observation of citizenship and class-based distinctions between established middle-class Mexicans in South Chicago and more recent descendants of Mexican immigrants in communities like Little Village, who were more prone to vote progressive and to align with the Black-Latino coalition.[49]

Other writers have helped to fill out our understanding of inter-Latino political divisions. Writer Florence Levinsohn states, "interestingly, it is speculated that Latinos are split in their attitudes, with Puerto Ricans more friendly and open to Blacks while Mexicans are more strongly anti-Black."[50] Within the Mexican American community itself, political commentator David K. Fremon observed generational distinctions in the 22nd Ward between "older more established Mexicans, who view themselves as merely another ethnic group" and "younger, more liberal Mexicans, who see themselves as a disadvantaged minority."[51] This divide was representative of a broader shift in the Latino population as older Mexican political leaders slowly gave way to younger politicians from the Chicano movement.[52] In the complex neighborhood-based geography of Chicago politics, Latinos were divided in the ways they identified with the ethnic and racial politics of the primary election.

The *Chicago Tribune* and other news outlets speculated about the difficulty Washington would have with Latino voters, given the historical and racial tensions between Blacks and Latinos and the power of the

49. Jaime Dominguez, "Latinos in Chicago: A Strategy Towards Political Empowerment (1975–2003)" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2007), ProQuest (3294309).

50. Levinsohn, *Harold Washington: A Political Biography*, 271.

51. Fremon, *Chicago Politics, Ward by Ward*, 147.

52. Gregory Rodriguez, *Mongrels, Bastards, Orphans, and Vagabonds: Mexican Immigration and the Future of Race in America* (New York: Vintage, 2008).



Democratic machine. Journalist David Axelrod wrote: "despite a budding independent Hispanic movement, that vote is still largely a Democratic organization reserve."[53] Journalist Phillip Lentz pointed toward an opinion poll according to which approximately 60 percent of Latinos approved of Mayor Byrne before the primary. How the poll was designed and if it was representative was not mentioned, but the article stated that "as with previous waves of immigrants, this optimism [about the mayor's performance] is reflected in support of authority and the political establishment."[54] Yet this approval of Byrne did not come without its challenges. A 250-member coalition of six Latino organizations across the city endorsed Richard M. Daley for mayor in December of 1982, denouncing Byrne on the basis of her ineffective allocation of resources to Latino communities. Furthermore, the spokesperson for the group, Lupe Perez, labeled Washington "a civil rights candidate of the black community and not a political candidate to represent all the citizens of Chicago."[55] This sentiment against Washington reflected the fear of racial preference in resource allocation, a fear of economic and job competition that was considered to be a legitimate logic to vote against Washington.[56]

Racial fear mongering came to the fore during a televised mayoral candidate debate on February 7, 1983, on WBBS-TV Channel 60's *Opinion Publica*. The debate brought in Latino representatives from each of the campaigns to speak on the issues followed by a panel "composed of

53. David Axelrod, "Washington Key Black in Mayor Race," *Chicago Tribune*, July 26, 1982.

54. Phillip Lentz, "Hispanics Hunger for Clout in City Hall," *Chicago Tribune*, January 31, 1983.

55. "Latino Coalition Endorses Daley," *Chicago Tribune,* December 6, 1982.

56. The candidacy of Barack Obama in 2008 spurred an analogous discourse of racial resource competition.

academic and media persons from the Spanish-speaking community."[57] Representing Mayor Byrne was her assistant press secretary for Spanish communication, Fernando Prieto. The sensitive issue of affirmative action in city hiring came up during the question-and-answer period. Prieto, born in Colombia, spoke on the allocation of jobs in the mayor's office: "we can go to the Department of Human Services and we will see how that department is very dark. Can you imagine how it would be with a Black mayor?"[58] The Reverend Jorge Morales of Saint Luke Unity Church of Christ and founder of the Westtown Concerned Citizens Coalition pointed to this incident as representative of the Byrne administration's efforts to divide an independent Black-Latino coalition. Morales demanded that Byrne "apologize to Chicago's Spanish-speaking community for the use of these racist tactics," which in his opinion sought to pit Blacks and Latinos against each other and cast Latinos as a White-ethnic group fearful of Black people.[59]

Washington aimed to leverage a coalition of Blacks and Puerto Ricans in the primary. Though representing more than just the interests of his own community, Morales was also part of the Puerto Rican political elite along with leaders like María Cerda and José "Cha-Cha" Jiménez. Puerto Ricans came out early in support of Washington. Jiménez led this support as founder of the Young Lords Organization, which was modeled after the Black Panthers in the 1970s and saw itself as representative of a radical non-White Puerto Rican population. In his autobiography, Jiménez mentioned that he organized the first Latino rally for Washington with the Puerto Rican Diaspora Coalition in January

57. Marcelino Miyares Sotolongo, president of WBBS-TV, to Washington campaign, 13 January 1983, box 26, folder 10, Harold Washington Archives and Collection: Mayoral Campaign Records, Special Collections and Preservation Division, Chicago Public Library [hereafter HWAC].

58. Jorge Morales, press release statement, 17 February 1983, box 26, folder 12, HWAC.

59. Ibid.



of 1983 at North West Hall where "more than one thousand persons (1000) attended."[60] Although only comprising a sixth of the Latinos in Chicago, Puerto Ricans would support Washington at a proportionally higher rate than any other Latino subgroup by the time of the primary election.

Serving as a crucial link between Washington and Mexican Americans was community activist and labor organizer Rudy Lozano, a Mexican American born in Texas and raised in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago. It was Lozano who, with other Little Village activists, founded the Independent Political Organization of the 22nd Ward. Early in his career, Lozano focused many of his efforts on the very same coalition politics that Harold Washington emphasized. Lozano's work went beyond Little Village and took hold in various alliances throughout the city like the West Side Coalition for Unity and Political Action. A shared appreciation of Black-Latino coalition building shows why Lozano was thought of by many during the 1983 campaign as "Harold Washington's main liaison to the Latino community."[61] With hopes to increase his traction among Latinos, Washington officially endorsed Rudy Lozano for 22nd Ward alderman in the primary. Running as a reform candidate was difficult in a ward with an entrenched machine incumbent, and proved ultimately unsuccessful, but the endorsement symbolized Washington's solidarity with Lozano's goals of political self-determination for Mexican American neighborhoods. Other Mexican American political activists such as Linda Coronado, Juan Soliz, Jesús

60. José Jiménez, "Cha-Cha Jimenez: A Young Lord," ed. Antonio Lopez, Michael Prindle, Hannah Burton, and Jonathan Lewandowski (unpublished manuscript, April 15, 2011), 11. Accessed on January 28, 2017, issuu.com/josejimenez1/docs/cha_cha_pamhlet. The "Puerto Rican Diaspora Coalition" was the political guise of the Young Lords Organization, which was still trying to distance itself from the negative gang connotations of its name.

61. Gary Rivlin, "Who Killed Rudy Lozano?" stapled booklet, circa 1983, Rudy Lozano Papers, Richard J. Daley Library Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

García, and Juan Velázquez worked with Lozano to advance Washington's independent agenda in their neighborhoods and would continue this work after the primary.

Yet, outside of these links to two of the largest Mexican American and Puerto Rican neighborhoods, Washington's efforts to garner Latino support were limited when compared to his mass mobilization and precinct organization in the Black South Side before the primary. One of the more notable publicity events was the endorsement from a national Latino leader brought in to speak at a meeting of Operation PUSH, where "Washington also received the support of Tony Bonilla, president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, the oldest and largest Hispanic organization in the United States."[62] Additionally there were two campaign benefit parties, themed "Blues and Salsa" and featuring groups such as La Confidencia, the Latin Ensemble, and the Latin Jazz Presence III.[63] Aside from these events, the general informational literature distributed by the Washington campaign made some references to Latinos. In the mailer, "A Candidate for ALL of Us—An Agenda for our City," Washington addressed the Chicago's difficult economic situation: "under Jane Byrne, Blacks hold only 18 percent of all full-time city jobs; Latinos hold only 4 percent of city jobs."[64] Nevertheless, the focus of the Washington campaign appeared to be centered on the mobilization of the Black electorate. With most of the campaign's efforts focused on Black voters during the primary, the race was very close come February.

On February 22, 1983, Harold Washington won the Democratic primary with 36.3 percent of the vote, Byrne was second at 33.6 percent,

62. Mitchell Locin, "Byrne Invades 'Enemy' Turf," *Chicago Tribune*, January 30, 1983.

63. "Blues and Salsa Benefit Party," 29 January 1983, and "Benefit Concert Invitation," 19 February 1983, box 11, folder 16, HWAC.

64. "A Candidate for ALL of Us—An Agenda for our City," Committee to Elect Harold Washington mailer, January 1983, box 25, folder 7, HWAC.



and Daley was third at 29.7 percent. Due to the unprecedented turnout of Black voters and the split of the machine vote between Byrne and Daley, Washington had the narrow margin of victory.[65] So what happened to the Latino vote? Perhaps overestimating the power of his racial coalition rhetoric or the early support of elite Latino progressives in Little Village and Humboldt Park, Washington's campaign failed to court votes in Latino areas effectively, as shown in figure four. In his post-primary analysis, David Fremon pointed to some specific areas that demonstrated the leanings of heavily Latino wards. In the 7th Ward, which included the historically Mexican American neighborhood of South Chicago, "Washington carried the Black precincts; the others won the Mexican areas."[66] In the 32nd Ward, approximately half Latino, incumbent Jane Byrne "carried the Hispanic precincts" with the rest of the mainly White vote going to Daley.[67] In the end, Latinos broadly supported either the incumbent or Richard M. Daley. Though the exact breakdown of Latino voting during the primary is not clear, the Midwest Voter Registration Education Project estimated that 51.4 percent of Latinos supported Byrne, 34.5 percent Daley, and 12.7 percent Washington.[68]

In heavily Democratic Chicago, winning the Democratic primary was tantamount to winning the mayoralty given that there were no Democratic runoff elections and the machine usually did not contest or challenge the results. However, since Washington was a Democratic reform candidate whose platform was not favored by the Regular Democratic Party, many leaders decided to endorse a Republican candidate for mayor, Bernard Epton, a Chicago lawyer and state legislator with a

65. "1983 Chicago Mayoral Primary Results," *Chicago Democracy Project*. Accessed in 2015, chicagodemocracy.org/ChooseElection.jsp.

66. Fremon, *Chicago Politics, Ward by Ward*, 61.

67. Ibid., 215.

68. Statistics from the Midwest Voter Education Registration Project published in Torres, "The Commission on Latino Affairs."

fiscally conservative agenda. Edward Vrdolyak, chairman of the Cook County Democratic Committee and president of the City Council, publicly supported Epton during the general election campaign and worked to turn a great majority of White voters over to Epton. Racism also played a genuine role in the turn of many White Democrats to the Republican Party in this election. This shift in party politics was unprecedented in Chicago and pointed to the depth of anxiety about racial change among ethnic White voters and leaders. Washington and Epton would face off in the general election on April 12, 1983. In the span of just forty-nine days, both candidates engaged in a ruthless campaign filled with smear ads, debates, and polarizing racial tension, which made the general

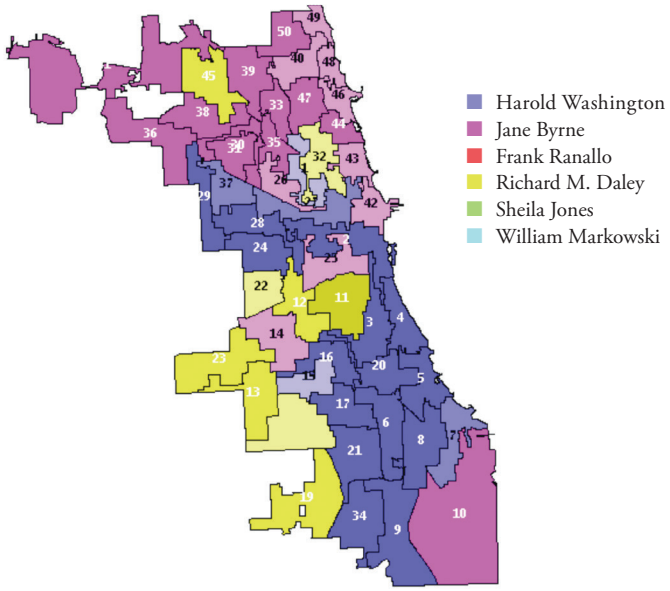



**Figure 4. Election Map by Ward for the 1983 Chicago Democratic Mayoral Primary**

Source: "1983 Chicago Mayoral Primary Election Results," *Chicago Democracy Project*. Accessed in 2015, chicagodemocracy.org/ChooseElection.jsp.



election "one of the dirtiest in history."[69] But one question remained: who would the politically split Latino voters of the primary election support now?

Washington's base was in the Black South and West sides. He did not win any of the four wards (22, 31, 26, and 25) with over 50 percent Latino population, which supported White candidates.

## Contested Constituency: February–April 1983

As the Vrdolyak-led Democratic leadership backed the Republican candidate Bernard Epton, so went the majority of loyal, ethnic White voters in addition to a significant proportion of nonethnic White voters that followed this leadership to the Republican side, if just for one election.[70] Washington had already made inroads with liberal White voters in the primary, particularly with middle-class liberals who lived along Lake Michigan. Moving forward, Washington increased his support in these progressive White neighborhoods.

However, the primary victory was bittersweet for the Washington campaign. While an unprecedented mobilization of African American voters gave Washington the upper hand, the support from Latino neighborhoods, especially Mexican American precincts, was strikingly low. A few days after the primary, the *Chicago Tribune* pointed to the need for Washington to refocus his campaign in order to "greatly improve the

69. Levinsohn, *Harold Washington: A Political Biography*, 232.

70. The Chicago Regular Democratic Organization, or the machine, historically functioned by mobilizing ethnic White immigrant communities such as the Irish, Bohemians, Italians, and Poles. In exchange for political loyalty and turnout, voters received special privileges and city services. Generally, nonethnic White voters were more independent, but more often than not took part in machine political organizing. By and large, people of color were removed from the machine's reward system, especially after the civil-rights movement.

less-than-10 percent he received from white and Hispanic voters."[71] This was both an essential and impossible task. Essential because the political leaning of the approximately 85 percent of Latinos that didn't support Washington in the primary was unclear, and had the potential to become a deciding swing vote.[72] Impossible because of the racial, ethnic, and political cleavages that divided Latinos and kept them from forming a cohesive electoral bloc prior to the primary.

Chicago's Latino voters were a "contested" constituency. Contested in the sense that Latino support was coveted and *fought* for by the Washington campaign. But more importantly, contested in the sense that the Washington campaign *argued* for and crafted an image of Latinos as a pan-ethnic and cohesive voting bloc. In order to galvanize support among such a disjointed constituency, the campaign focused on pushing a pan-ethnic agenda that not only emphasized similarities between disparate Latino groups in the city, but also stressed their shared, non-White identity with Blacks. This project of racial consciousness raising and pan-ethnic identity formation was not a typical responsibility of an electoral campaign in the 1980s, thus making the Washington campaign ground breaking in its methods and ideology. In the forty-nine days leading into the April general election, Latino political elites and the institutions they led took advantage of Washington's political momentum to express their pan-ethnic ideals and unify Latinos around a progressive political agenda.

In addition to the Latinos who had already been in the Washington camp since the primary, other Latino elites from across the city quickly contacted the campaign after the election. The day after the primary, Washington received a congratulatory telegram from Jose F. Pletz, president of the Hispanic Federation of Illinois Chambers of Commerce,

71. David Axelrod, "Washington's New Focus," *Chicago* Tribune, February 27, 1983.

72. Basil Talbott, "Two Key Mayor Battlegrounds," *Sunday Sun-Times*, March 13, 1983.



who asked to discuss issues relating to the "Hispanic business agenda."[73] Similarly, Phil Ayala, executive director of El Centro de la Causa, congratulated Washington "on behalf of the Hispanic community" and added, "you can be assured of our continued support in the general election."[74] It is interesting to note how Ayala seemed to speak for *all* Latinos in Chicago and assures continuing support despite the considerably low turnout for Washington just three days before. Continuing to speak on behalf of the Latino "community" was WOJO 105FM, Radio Ambiente; the station's special events director congratulated Washington and wrote: "As Chicago's Hispanic population, now at 14 percent, continues to grow the need for political leadership is vital. I would like to offer our services to you should information about the Hispanic community be needed."[75] It is not necessarily clear why these individuals offered their help, but perhaps we can infer that they sought to establish themselves as a kind of political vanguard for a population that was quickly growing in both number and political potential.

Washington's campaign manager, Albert Raby, responded with messages like "I welcome your offer of support. Your expertise in the Latino community would be instrumental."[76] These messages of gratitude were not mere formalities, but indicative of the campaign's genuine need to expand support across Latino communities. In fact, March of 1983 would mark the beginning of the Washington campaign's revamped Latino

73. Jose F. Pletz to Harold Washington, telegram, 23 February 1983, box 4, folder 11, HWAC.

74. Phil Ayala to Harold Washington, mailgram, 25 February 1983, box 4, folder 11, HWAC.

75. Claire Hochberg to Harold Washington, letter, 25 February 1983, box 26, folder 6, HWAC.

76. Albert Raby to Homer Alvarado and Rolando Capdevilla, March 1983, box 4, folder 11, HWAC.

strategy. Both the media and the campaign understood Washington's precarious relationship to Latinos after the primary. An aggressive and expanded engagement with Latino voters had to carried out in a month. Beginning on March 1, talk of establishing a "Latino Operations Department" within the Washington campaign had started. Peter Earle, Linda Coronado, Rudy Lozano, Stephen Carter, and Bill Zayas led this initiative. Earle and Coronado outlined the twelve potential functions of the Latino Operations Department, which would have an estimated cost of $32,000 from March through April. The most significant were production of Spanish-language campaign materials, coordination of Spanish-language media, and convening Latino interest groups.[77] These three functions would come to define Harold Washington's campaign in Latino neighborhoods, all aspects of which would emphasize a pan-ethnic political identity.

The Latino Literature Review Committee was the group of staff members and community leaders that focused on the creation, publication, and distribution of campaign literature targeted towards Latinos, most of which was printed in Spanish. Dozens of memoranda point to the extensive planning that took place in the first half of March prior to the launch of a full-fledged media campaign.[78] Stephen Carter, the committee chair, oversaw the rapid expansion of resource allocation toward Latino-specific materials like posters, stickers, and buttons numbering in the hundreds of thousands combined. A committee meeting on March 9 outlined the work in progress, including the creation of a button, a flyer, and press releases. At first, two button designs were considered: fifty thousand with a Puerto Rican theme and fifty thousand with a Mexican American theme. Resisting this idea, several committee members "suggested

77. Peter Earle and Linda Coronado to Campaign Manager Al Raby, memorandum, 1 March 1983, box 4, folder 11, HWAC.

78. Members of the committee included Stephen Carter, Slim Coleman, Mosi Kitwana, Rudy Lozano, Lucia Elias-Olivares, William Lampillo, Alicia C. Santelices, Lauren Marten, Carlos Heredia-Ortiz, Linda Coronado, and others.



consideration be given to one button with design that covers Puerto Rican, Mexican, et al."[79] This is illustrative of the campaign purposefully breaking from traditional campaign tactics that tailored materials to Latino nationality subgroups. Similarly, the discussion of the flyer centered on finding a theme that had "broad Latino appeal" and linked Blacks and Latinos historically.[80]

Many of the drafts for this historical-themed flyer were drawn to be "in line with Harold Washington's policy in developing the Black/Brown ties."[81] The artist commissioned to create the flyers was also very aware of the pan-ethnic consciousness-raising mission that the leadership of the Latino Literature Review Committee desired. In a first draft, a group of Black and Latino people and Harold Washington are seen protesting a sign that reads *"Reagan en el City Hall"* ("Reagan in City Hall"). The image sought to reinforce the idea that the policies of the Reagan administration were harmful to Latinos who, like African Americans, benefitted from government assistance programs. In all the campaign posters, the artist emphasized a strong upright posture and tight-knit groups of individuals to convey themes of solidarity and protest.

The theme of ethnic consciousness figured prominently in a second draft that featured a group of young people looking up with open eyes with a teacher saying, "don't let another person think for you."[82] Here, the language touches on two points. First, it echoes the mission of the independent political movement, which was working to break the hegemony of the machine and to elect Washington. In this way, thinking for

79. Latino Literature Committee, minutes, 9 March 1983, box 21, folder 9, HWAC.

80. Ibid.

81. Stephen Carter on "Finalizing Latino Literature," memorandum, 15 March 1983, box 21, folder 9, HWAC.

82. "No Deje Que Otra Persona Piense por Usted," flyer, March 1983, box 21, folder 9, HWAC.

oneself meant voting on the issues effecting one's community and not according to the mandates of the machine leadership. Second, the uplifted heads and open eyes signaled a kind of racial and ethnic awareness. By recognizing the bonds between all Latino groups and by extension the link between Blacks and Latinos, Latinos could see through the racial fear mongering that kept them from building strong political coalitions.

Many of these illustrated flyers were especially powerful in the courting of Puerto Rican voters. Perhaps the most striking of these published flyers was released under the "Puertorriqueños por Harold Washington" logo that was also distributed in non–Puerto Rican Latino neighborhoods. The "In Unity There Is Strength" flyer (fig. 5) includes a striking image of a chain, with a black link and a white link united in the middle by a gradated link, representing the historical and racial similarities between Latinos and African Americans. Two individuals embrace, demonstrating that a Black-Latino coalition would secure a stronger and brighter future for both groups. It is unclear which groups of Latinos this imagery appealed to most, but it is likely that Puerto Ricans were expected to react the strongest to this appeal. Conversations on Black ancestry and shared struggle were not unheard of in the Puerto Rican community, given the efforts of the Young Lords, among others. For Mexicans, on the other hand, this conversation was not as familiar, which forced the campaign to think in innovative ways.

A booklet, entitled "What are We? Our Historic Ties Unite Us," served as a beginner's guide to shared issues of identity and race within the Latino community (fig. 6).[83] The booklet covered a brief history of Latinos' shared racial colonization and mixed racial heritage: "being 'Latin American' is the product of a syncretism created by three social groups: Spain, the Indigenous race—comprised of Tainos in the Puerto Rican case—

83. "¿Qué Somos? Nuestros Lazos Historicos Nos Unen," booklet, March 1983, box 26, folder 5, HWAC.



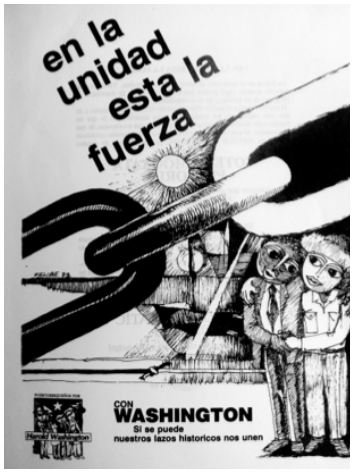



**Figure 5. Washington Campaign Flyer, c. 1983**

Source: "En la Unidad Esta la Fuerza," c. 1983, box 4, folder 40, Rudy Lozano Papers, University of Illinois at Chicago, Richard J. Daley Library Special Collections and University Archives.

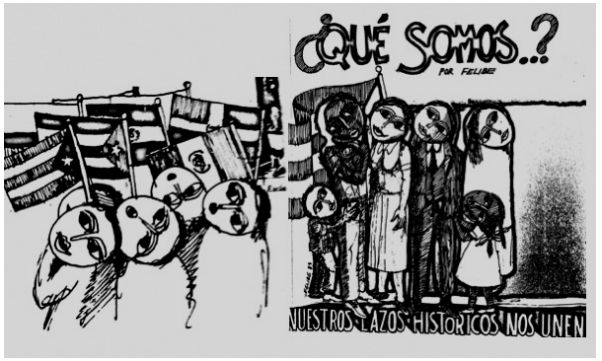



**Figure 6. Washington Campaign Booklet, March 1983**

Source: ¿Qué Somos? Booklet, March 1983, box 26, folder 5, Harold Washington Archives and Collection: Mayoral Campaign Records, Library Special Collections and Preservation Division, Chicago Public Library.

and Africa."[84] The booklet's racially conscious rhetoric continued with an exploration of the historical links between Black and Brown communities through the shared experience of slavery and oppression. Compared to a typical political campaign, the imagery and language employed by Washington's team were bold, pushing Latinos across the city to rethink their racial identities as deeply tied to indigeneity, blackness, and a struggle against oppression. Amplifying this rallying cry to Latino unity were the hundreds of posters with the slogan, "The Sun Comes Out for the Latino with Washington!"[85] Again, speaking to a pan-ethnic constituency.

In less explicitly racial ways, the various press releases of the Latino Literature Committee used specific language that applied to all Latinos, like Washington's concern over the lack of Latino police officers, a push to reject *"Reaganeconomia Republicana,"* the appointment of a Latino deputy mayor, and the establishment of a Latino Affairs Commission if Washington was elected.[86]

The collaboration with Spanish-language media bolstered the campaign's pan-ethnic messaging. Almost three fourths of the approximately $32,700 allocated for Latino media was for radio spots and newspaper ads. Leading the charge on this front was Bill Zayas, a Puerto Rican resident of Humboldt Park and the campaign's Latino media and advertising campaign coordinator. At its March 9 meeting, the Latino Literature Committee discussed the Spanish-language advertising strategy, emphasizing voter registration, Latino issues, and identifying "individuals for photographs with Harold Washington that have the widest Latino appeal."[87] This wide appeal served a practical and economical

84. Ibid. "Ser 'Latinoamericano' es el product de un sincretismo creado port res grupos sociales: España, la raza Indigena—compuesta por los Tainos en el caso de Puerto Rico—y Africa."

85. "El Sol Sale para el Latino con Washington!"

86. "All Latino Community," flyer, March 1983, box 21, folder 9, HWAC.

87. Latino Literature Committee, minutes, 9 March 1983, box 21, folder 9, HWAC.



purpose: the more people you reach with one message the better. But more importantly, these Latino political elites would serve as representatives of pan-ethnic unity.

This rhetorical framing of a pan-Latino vote was clear in the Spanish-language radio spots. Working with Rossi Advertising, a Chicago marketing group owned by Latino entrepreneur Luis H. Rossi, Zayas created extensive lists of Spanish-language media avenues. Options were limited, given that many radio stations operated in Spanish for only part of the day or did not have as strong a signal as the largest Spanish-language station, WOJO. Several drafts of radio scripts from early March focused on bread-and-butter issues like jobs and education, but with a Latino focus. One of these scripts was a conversation between two older Latina women:

**Godmother 1:** Where are you going in such a hurry?

**Godmother 2:** I am a Harold Washington volunteer, the Democratic candidate.

**Godmother 1:** Are you sure he is worth the trouble?

**Godmother 2:** He is the only candidate who can help all the Latinos!

**Godmother 1:** Why?

**Godmother 2:** He was a staunch supporter for the development of the bilingual program. He has always supported social oriented programs such as "Day Care" and he is the first who has promised 14 percent of the city jobs.

**Godmother 1:** Wow! I did not know that!

**Godmother 2:** Not only that, now that we have a Republican in the White House, why have another as Mayor?[88]

88. "Dialogue between Godmothers—Spot #1," WOJO radio script, March 1983, box 26, folder 6, HWAC. The script in the archive is printed in English, but specified that it was read in Spanish on the radio.

The script emulates a typical Latino social scenario while also highlighting Washington's Latino platform around bilingual education and affirmative action in city job allocations. Nearly all Latino-specific media was in Spanish, and the use of Spanish was the most effective way to make clear that the message had been specifically tailored with a Latino audience in mind.

Another half-minute radio script formulated by Zayas and Rossi used language that was more direct: "The Latino vote has been identified as one of the determining factors in this struggle. It is hoped that Latinos recognize that Washington is the only candidate that has incorporated Latino needs in his many political 'platforms' and that they vote accordingly to such a commitment."[89] The "Latino vote" not only appears as a deciding swing vote in this ad, but Latinos are presented as a politically cohesive ethnic group. The February primary results had contradicted this message: Latinos were split both between sub-ethnic groups and *within* their own groups, as was the case with Mexican Americans divided among all three candidates but mostly against Washington. By virtue of pointing solely to *Latino* needs and the *Latino* vote, the general election campaign capitalized on and facilitated the efforts of Latino political elites to overcome these ethnic divides. Full-page ads in Spanish-language newspapers complimented the pan-ethnic messaging on the airwaves. Full issues of *El Independiente* were funded by the campaign to publicize Washington's agenda for the Latino community, and Zayas and the Latino Literature Committee expanded ads from Pilsen, Little

89. "El voto Latino ha sido señalado como uno de los factores determinantes en esta lucha. Se espera que el Latino reconozca que Washington es el unico candidato que ha incorporado las necesidades Latinas en sus 'plataformas' politicas y que ellos correspondan con sus votos a ese gesto." Rossi Advertising for Washington, script, March 1983, box 26, folder 6, HWAC.



Village, and Humboldt Park into West Town, South Chicago, Back of the Yards, and along North Avenue.[90]

These media efforts made Washington's platform visible to the Latino public, but the convening role that the campaign played in gathering Latino interest groups at the same table had perhaps the most lasting impact. Washington's role as a convener manifested itself in two ways: bringing together Chicago's Latino political elites and inviting nationally recognized Latino leaders to Chicago to rally for pan-ethnic unity. Latino political elites like Rudy Lozano, Maria Cerda, "Cha Cha" Jiménez, and others urged their communities and networks to support Washington. Through the month of March, the campaign brought together many more Latino political elites for group strategy meetings with individuals like the Reverend Jorge Morales and Juan Solis, a reception for the twenty-five members of the Hispanic Lawyers Committee for Washington, and larger events like the Hispanic Steering Committee reception for three hundred people, with Washington present.

The "Song of the People" fund-raiser, hosted by Artists for Harold Washington, captured the more unorthodox activities and strategies of the campaign. While most political campaigns typically created affinity groups for key constituencies and demographics, Washington's campaign was exceptional and unparalleled in the ways that it pushed for Latino pan-ethnic unity through a hybrid of politics and culture. The fund-raiser's title referred to only one community, one "*pueblo*," thus promoting the idea of a cohesive *Latinidad*. Held on Easter Sunday of 1983, the event featured over a dozen Latino artists and was carried out under the aegis of the "*voceros de la comunidad*," (spokesmen of the community), Juan Velázquez, "Cha Cha" Jiménez, Rudy Lozano, and Juan Soliz, who evenly representing the Mexican American and Puerto Rican communities. Though already well known and revered in their neighborhoods, their involvement and connection with Washington

90. Some of these papers included *El Mañana*, *La Raza*, *El Heraldo*, *West Side Times*, and *Northwest Extra*, among others.

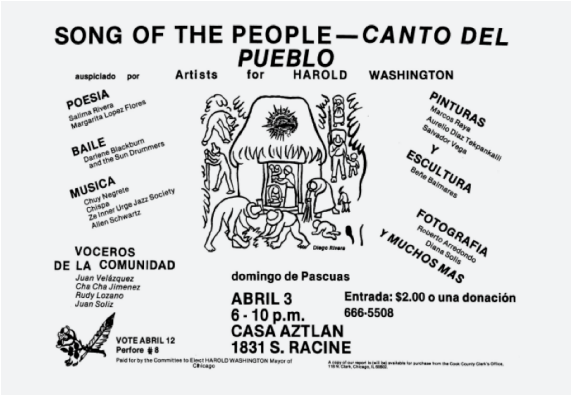



**Figure 7. Washington Campaign Invitation, April 3, 1983**

Source: "Song of the People—Canto del Pueblo," 3 April 1983, box 11, folder 16, Harold Washington Archives and Collection: Mayoral Campaign Records, Library Special Collections and Preservation Division, Chicago Public Library.

positioned these activists as figureheads for the broader, pan-ethnic Latino "community."

Complementing the pan-ethnic messaging of the Chicago spokespersons for *Latinidad* were the nationally recognized Latino leaders that the campaign brought to Chicago. As mentioned earlier, Washington connected first with Tony Bonilla, the president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, who publicly endorsed Washington before the primary election. National engagements and endorsements increased during the general election campaign. Beginning in early March, Bill Zayas recommended that the campaign fly in "members of the [Congressional] Hispanic Caucus" and celebrities like Erik Estrada, Ricardo Montalbán, and Rita Moreno.[91] Though these celebrities never made it to Chicago, many political leaders did. The Congressional Hispanic Caucus

91. "Restructuring for Victory," Bill Zayas to Peter Earle, note, 4 March 1983, box 21, folder 9, HWAC.



was one of the most visible promoters of pan-ethnic political rhetoric seeking to establish Latinos as a cohesive voting bloc in order to increase Latino representation in Congress and beyond. The two-day visit of Grace Montañez Davis, the first Mexican American woman to serve as deputy mayor of Los Angeles and a founding member of the Mexican American Political Association, and Herman Badillo, a New York politician and the first Puerto Rican elected to the US Congress, included radio talks, grassroots campaigning, a dinner with Latino leaders, and a forum at the Latino Institute on "Latino unity."[92] The visit demonstrated that the issues common to all Latinos in Chicago were in fact common to Latinos across the country.

The Hispanic Unity Dinner was the final and most significant Latino event of the campaign. The event drew hundreds of supporters from all Latino neighborhoods *and* national Latino leaders. Toney Anaya, governor of New Mexico was a clear choice as keynote speaker—both his political traction and his national vision for Latino political unity were in line with the aspirations of the Washington campaign and the Latino political elites. In a Spanish-language opinion piece in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Governor Anaya began by saying that "there is great diversity among Latinos…I commit myself to unify the Latinos of this country so that our political presence may be felt," and concluded with an appeal for national pan-ethnic unity: "We Latinos must unite. In unity there is power, in power there is strength, in strength there is hope."[93]

Anaya spoke to reporters and community members at a press conference prior to the the dinner: "As the nation's highest elected Hispanic, I am

92. Herman Badillo and Grace Montañez Davis, itinerary, 19–20 March 1983, box 11, folder 16, HWAC.

93. "Hay mucha diversidad entre los hispanos…Me propongo unificar a los latinos de este pais para que nuestra presencia politica se sienta," "Los Hispanos debemos unirons. En la unidad esta el poder, en el poder esta la fuerza, en la fuerza esta la esperanza." Toney Anaya, "Latinos: Es Hora de Aliarse," *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 11, 1983.

urging all Latinos to unify behind Harold Washington because only through him can we reverse some of the terrible injustices that have been done against Hispanics."[94] Anaya's call to action centered on the point that in order to better their lived conditions, Latinos had to mobilize and cohere politically—a necessary task given their divided political leanings in the February primary. After the press conference, Arturo Velásquez Sr., president of the Mexican-American Democratic Organization of Chicago and cochairman of the event, introduced Harold Washington. Most of Washington's talking points focused on jobs, government contracts, bilingual education, and other benefits particular to Latinos. Many of these issues were national policy issues that brought Latinos together in the 1970s, but now framed within the context of Latino electoral influence and the *national* project of Latino unity. Washington reiterated his intentions to create a mayoral Commission on Latino Affairs and to assign a Latino as deputy mayor. Towards the end of the speech, Washington made clear the broader socio-racial implications of his candidacy. By recognizing their shared histories of racial discrimination and political exclusion, Blacks and Latinos could stand as examples of racial and ethnic unity. In this way, Chicago could serve as a microcosm of racial politics and set a precedent for political empowerment and racial progress across the country.

The significance of the dinner went far beyond the immediate goal to produce electoral support for Washington. Washington's candidacy convened hundreds of Latinos from different national backgrounds and geographic locations in the city, and Anaya's and Washington's rhetoric reified the notion of a Latino voting bloc, a concept that was not self-evident given the results of the primary. The campaign catalyzed a discussion of Latino politics as pan-ethnic rather than regionally or

94. Roy Larson and Lillian Williams, "Washington Makes Pledges to Hispanics," *18th Street Businessmen's Association Bulletin*, April 1983, box 25, folder 5, HWAC.



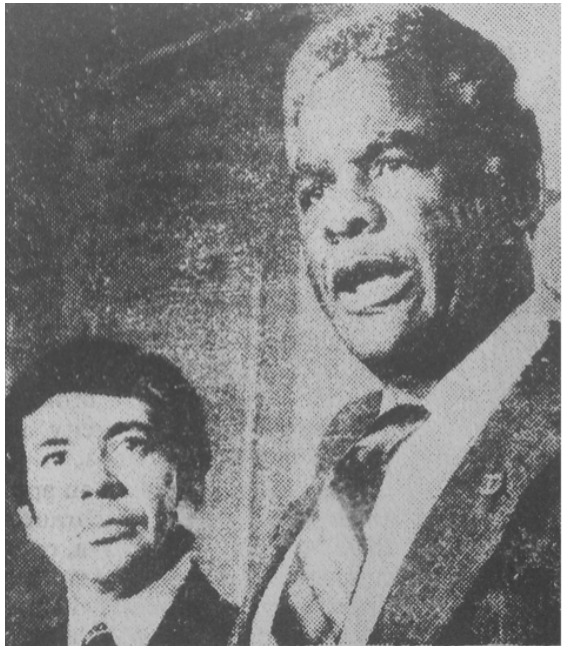


**Figure 8. Governor Anaya and Congressman Washington at the Hispanic Unity Dinner on April 2, 1983**

Source: Unmarked photo clipping, box 25, folder 5, Harold Washington Archives and Collection: Mayoral Campaign Records. Library Special Collections and Preservation Division, Chicago Public Library.

neighborhood specific, which had arguably never been instantiated as it was in March and April of 1983. Taking into consideration the implications of this election, the Hispanic Unity Dinner represented a turning point in the legitimation of Latino pan-ethnicity. Washington made a final ask for support and captured the importance of Latino unity in his concluding comments: "The Latino community turnout on Election Day is absolutely essential. The Latino community has the potential to be a critically important swing vote. The Latino vote is key to winning this election. We have the same goal: one Chicago, on the move for all

its people."[95] The race was close and Washington's prediction of the Latino swing vote would be proven accurate.

## General Election

A common misconception about the 1983 election is that most of the Latino opposition to Washington had been dissolved by April due to his campaign's message and efforts. Admittedly, Washington gained rapid support from dozens of Latino community organizations and increased his Latino base throughout March of 1983 from Democrats who refused to follow machine leaders' endorsement of the Republican candidate. More than any election in Chicago history, however, the issues and racial politics leading up to the general election placed Latinos in a precarious position that deserves a more careful analysis than assuming a Latino tendency to vote for the winner of the primary. While much of the mobilization for Washington was based on an anti-Reagan and anti-Republican narrative to fight against reduced resources for all communities of color, the fears of race-based resource competition between Latinos and Blacks did not disappear with Washington's nomination as the Democratic nominee. How Latinos would vote, if they would vote together, or if they would vote at all were still up for debate until Election Day. One of the earliest signs of instability was a Latino political roundtable convened by Augie Salas, a figurehead of South Chicago's Mexican American community. According to Washington's envoy Peter Earle, these regular Democratic Latinos were closely associated with Vrdolyak and the machine, had supported incumbent Jane Byrne in the primary, and many held the political line "that Latinos should exercise a demonstration of potential political power by boycotting the election."[96]

95. Congressman Harold Washington to Hispanic Unity Dinner, remarks, 2 April 1983, box 11, folder 15, HWAC.

96. Peter Earle at Hispanic Political Roundtable, 7 March 1983, box 4, folder 11, HWAC.



Juan Andrade Jr., director of the Midwest Voter Registration Education Project and an expert on Latino political behavior, said on March 24, 1983, that "the Hispanic vote is still a political wild card."[97] Despite the rapid increase in endorsements from Mexican American and Puerto Rican political organizations, many influential Latino leaders and neighborhoods were hesitant to side with Washington. Raul Villalobos, president of the Chicago Public School Board, who withheld his endorsed in the weeks leading up to the election, said "we are exploring and waiting to see if there is a commitment to Hispanics on the part of either candidate [Washington or Epton]."[98] Together with this strategic and skeptical attitude towards the general election some articles and flyers pointed to serious Latino opposition. Four days before Election Day, the *Daily Calumet* reported that an "open revolt against Democratic mayoral nominee Harold Washington has been called for by Hispanic precinct captains of the 7th Ward" in South Chicago.[99] Though most depictions of Latino political leanings were not as inflammatory, clear opposition remained by the end of Washington's campaign.

On April 12, 1983, the polls opened for one of the largest turnouts in mayoral elections in Chicago history, with a total of 1,291,307 votes cast. At the end of the day, Harold Washington came out on top with a narrow victory of 51.7 percent to Bernard Epton's 48.0 percent of the vote, a difference of 47,549 votes.[100] The vote was almost even divided between Washington's Black and liberal White voters and Epton's blue-

97. Joye Brown, "City Hispanics Hold 'Swing' Vote," *Chicago Tribune*, March 24, 1983.

98. "Washington Promote Trabajos a Hispanos," *Primero y Unico Diario en Español*, March 29, 1983.

99. John Kass, "Hispanics Angry at Washington, Call for Revolt," *Chicago Daily Calumet*, April 8, 1983.

100. "Election Results for 1983 General Election, Mayor, Chicago, IL," *Chicago Democracy Project*. Accessed 2015, chicagodemocracy.org/ElectionResults.jsp?election=crdd_general%2Ccrdd_1983_general_election%2Cil_chi_mayor.

collar, ethnic White supporters. As Washington, Latino political activists, and the media had predicted, Latinos were a decisive swing vote in the general election.[101] The Puerto Rican 31st Ward, with Latinos representing the majority of registered voters, overwhelmingly sided with Washington. On the Near Northwest Side, where the majority of Latinos had supported incumbent Jane Byrne in the primary, many voters sided with Washington in the general election. As sociologist Teresa Córdova argues, of the 47,549-vote difference between Washington and Epton, "27,915 of those were cast by Washington supporters of the four wards where Latinos have the highest populations" (fig. 9).[102]

Latino wards made up the majority of undecided voter areas that ultimately gave Washington the winning margin in the general election. "Other" refers to liberal White voters and Asian American voters who supported Washington.

Washington's aggressive campaigning in Latino neighborhoods was not in vain. Thousands of undecided Latino voters who had not supported Washington in the primary were convinced by his rhetoric surrounding equality, opportunity, and fairness in all aspects of city governance. But Latinos who did not support Washington demonstrate that ethno-political cleavages remained *within* the larger Latino community (fig. 10). Eighty-five percent of registered Puerto Rican voters,

101. The exact ways in which Latinos voted in the election is complicated by contrasting and inconclusive sources of electoral data. Political polls describing Latino voting behavior before the 1990s were scarce and inconsistent within the same city, and most polls did not even count Latinos due to insufficient methods to identify the population. Oftentimes, Latinos were subsumed into the White category due to census records that only began to identify US "Hispanics" as a whole in 1980. The general consensus, though, pointed towards Latinos as the critical swing vote.

102. Teresa Córdova, "Harold Washington and Latino Electoral Politics," in *Chicano Politics and Society in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. David Montejano (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).



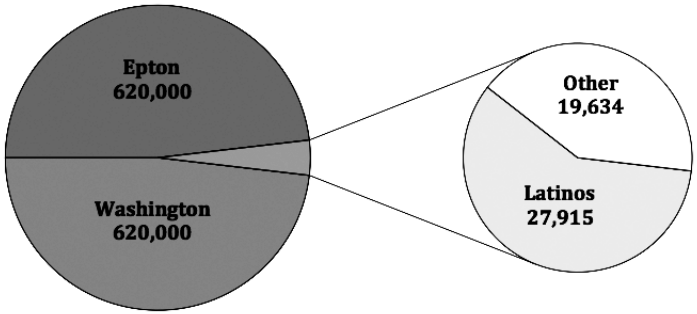



**Figure 9. Swing Vote in 1983 Mayoral Election**

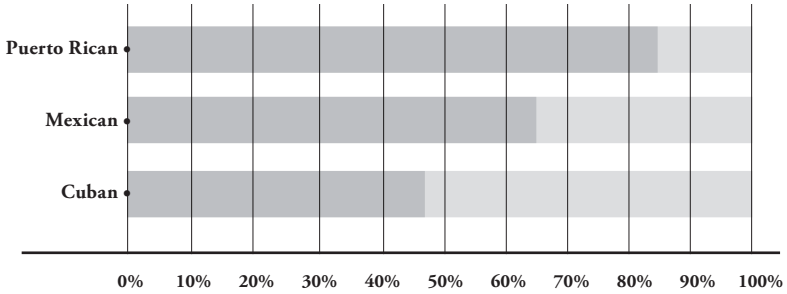
Source: Teresa Córdova, "Harold Washington and Latino Electoral Politics," in *Chicano Politics and Society in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. David Montejano (Austin University of Texas Press, 1999).

65 percent of Mexican American voters, and 48 percent of Cuban voters cast their support behind Harold Washington.[103] As some of the earliest Washington supporters, Puerto Rican voters maintained their strong allegiance to the Black-Latino coalitional rhetoric that was especially salient in a community that embraced the Afro-Latino heritage of Puerto Rico. On the other side of the spectrum, the Cuban American Chamber of Commerce and Cuban American–controlled conservative media, like *El Norte*, opposed Washington. However, the Cuban population in Chicago was in decline by the 1980s and did not have as much impact as the larger numbers of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans voters.

Mexican Americans' 65 percent support for Washington pointing to the political divisions and complicated relationship with the machine

103. Figure ten statistics are the average of several approximations concerning the sub-ethnic breakdown of Latino electoral decisions in the 1983 general election: Torres, "The Commission on Latino Affairs" and notes from the Lozano Collection.

**Figure 10: General Election Support for Washington by National Origin**




Source: Torres, María de los Angeles Torres, "The Commission on Latino Affairs: A Case Study of Community Empowerment," in *Harold Washington and the Neighborhoods: Progressive City Government in Chicago, 1983–1987*, ed. Pierre Clavel and Wim Wiewel (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991) and notes from the Lozano Collection.

in this longstanding Latino community. In his postelection analysis, Fremon noted that the largest Mexican American community of the 22nd Ward "was the only ward won by Washington in which he failed to garner at least 60 percent of the vote."[104] In the end, the unpredictability of Mexican American voters leaned in Washington's favor. The race to win Latino support in the general election wasn't between Washington and Epton, but between Washington and low turnout. Andrade's prediction ("I don't see Hispanics moving a whole lot toward Epton, he has no program that addresses Hispanic issues. Those who can't get themselves to vote for Washington are going to stay home."[105]) was proven on Election Day: 40 percent of Latino voters stayed home, but those that did vote gave Washington the necessary electoral swing to win. By making

104. Fremon, *Chicago Politics, Ward by Ward*, 150.

105. James Martinez, "Mayoral Contenders Aim at Winning Hispanic Voters," *Chicago Sun-Times*, April 7, 1983.



clear his commitment to Latino representation and community uplift, as well as Latino commitment to voting on Democratic lines, Washington convinced tens of thousands more Latinos that he was their best option.

## Conclusion

For those who believed in the Black-Latino coalition, Washington's election was a victory of racial solidarity and proved that moving beyond racial differences was the only way to achieve change in their communities. For others, this election represented more of a crossroads for Latino involvement in formal politics. Milton Rakove, a political scientist at the University of Illinois at Chicago, provided a postelection analysis on the fragility of Washington's coalition. He "warned that the unique black vs. white, independent vs. machine dynamics of the election formed some peculiar, temporary alliances," and that the possibilities for cleavage between Blacks and Latinos, and among Latinos themselves, would probably grow after the racially charged atmosphere of the campaign subsided.[106] Both perspectives on the nature of Latino political unity—one that viewed the election as proof of Latino cohesion, and the other seeing it as a temporary and limited unity—are to some extent true. First and foremost, Washington's campaign effectively reified the political terminology of a pan-ethnic Latino constituency in Chicago. The Mayor's Commission on Latino Affairs continued the campaign's work in promoting the image of a unified Latino interest group into Washington's administration, concretizing the media and public's conception of Latino voters.

The Washington campaign's skillful use of campaign imagery and rhetoric proved that a pan-ethic Latino unity and a Black-Latino unity were possible. However these unities did not become a political reality after the campaign. As seen in the breakdown of Latino support during

106. James Martinez, "Black-Hispanic Alliance's Future Pondered," *Chicago Sun-Times*, April 15, 1983.

the general election, Latinos were still divided in their political priorities. Influenced by a diversity of class, racial, cultural, and geographic differences, Latinos would remain a contested constituency. Hinging heavily on Washington's platform and charisma, Latino unity grew unstable after the election, as Latinos grew frustrated with unmet campaign promises of increased Latino representation and political appointments.[107] The day before Thanksgiving of 1987, some months after winning reelection to a second term, Washington died of a heart attack at his desk. As most histories emphasize, "with Washington's death, the multiethnic coalition began to unravel, but his campaigns and elections had already changed the political power equation in Chicago."[108] That is to say, despite failing to create a cohesive and lasting Latino unity, the Latino political elites and the Washington campaign were able to establish rhetorically the symbolic importance of Latinos in formal politics. Ultimately, they worked parallel to the national project of constructing Latino pan-ethnic identity, but in an ethnic landscape that would require much more time to develop politically.

The contemporary discourse on Latino politics and the "Latino vote" parallels the disputes and challenges that faced the actors in this narrative over thirty years ago. As political scientist Cristina Beltrán argues, "for advocates of pan-ethnicity, the assumption is that Latinos in the United States share not only cultural and linguistic characteristics, but also a political perspective."[109] This misconception contributes to a monolithic

107. Manuel Galvan, "Washington Losing Latino Connection," *Chicago Tribune*, August 28, 1983.

108. "Achieving the Dream: Harold Washington," *WTTW Chicago.* Accessed July 29, 2016, www.wttw.com/main.taf?p=76,4,6,8.

109. Cristina Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 106.



depiction of the diverse Latino population. At the same time, the argument for the existence of a tangible and cohesive Latino electorate can be made now more than ever before. Ricardo Ramírez posits that "the uncertainty about the salience of ethnicity for Latinos has faded as the U.S. political system has consistently engaged Latinos as one ethnic group."[110] In this way, the unique contribution made by Harold Washington's campaign toward the legitimation and construction of pan-ethnic *Latinidad* continues to have a lasting mark on our current understandings of Latino politics. Today, Latinos continue to stand at the nexus of division and unity. The project of constructing pan-ethnic *Latinidad* continues, and as we in America grapple with the complexities of imposed identity and imperfect cohesion, Latinos will continue to be a contested constituency.

110. Ramírez, *Mobilizing Opportunities*, 5.

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