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The Latino Community Creating an Identity in the Nation's Capital

Olivia Cadaval

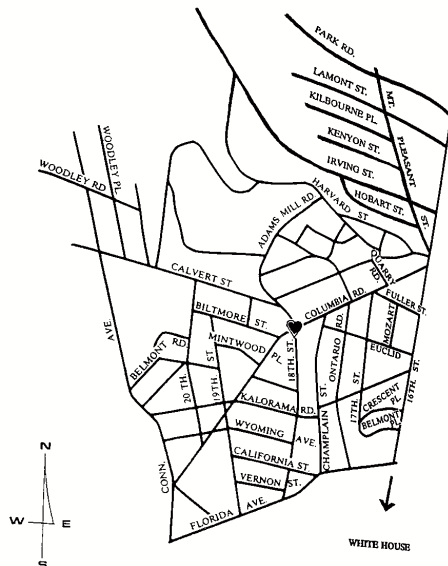
In the late twentieth century immigrants are repopulating the major U.S. cities—including Washington, which during the 1970s and 1980s became a magnet for such ethnic groups as Latin Americans, Caribbeans, Southeast Asians, and Africans. Representing a new wave in Washington's urban odyssey, these immigrants are establishing communities and shaping new cultural landscapes in the nation's capital. Neighborhoods previously populated primarily by migrants from the Carolinas and Virginia, as well as transient federal employees, have become sites for the emergence of multicultural and multinational communities.

Many of these groups have settled in the adjacent neighborhoods of Adams Morgan and Mount Pleasant in northwest Washington, and have transformed this compact geographic area into a growing commercial and cultural hub. A walk along Eighteenth Street from Florida Avenue (the original northern boundary of the city) to Columbia Road, and then east to Mount Pleasant Street (once the end of the trolley line), offers a glimpse of the delicate coexistence of diverse immigrants, who are carving out physical and cultural space while creating new identities for themselves in Washington.

The proliferating restaurants and small stores reflect not only area residents' varying nationalities, but also the regional distinctiveness within national groups: Salvadoran restaurants tend to feature specialties from Oriente, the eastern region of that country, while Ethiopian restaurants prepare foods in Asmaran and Oromo styles.

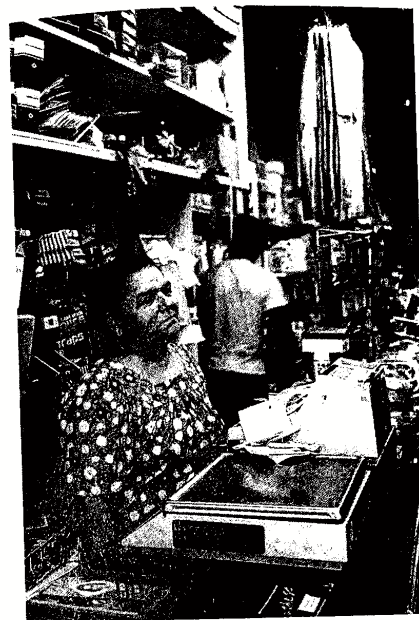
Thirty years ago a handful of Latin American embassy domestic workers discovered an Italian grocery store in Adams Morgan that offered familiar tropical fruits and vegetables. Today mom-and-pop grocery stores, ethnic specialty

The Adams Morgan–Mount Pleasant barrio is one mile directly north of the White House. (Map by and courtesy Olivia Cadaval)



shops, and street-vending stalls, established by earlier immigrants and now run by more recent arrivals, provide a range of goods and services. A Cuban-owned store butchers specialty meats and offers regional products for its Latin American, African, and West Indian clientele. Additionally, social-service centers established to meet newcomers' needs reflect the new communities' vitality and organization.

The Latino presence predominates within the highly textured and complex landscape created by Washington's most recent arrivals.¹ In the 1980s more than 200,000 Latinos celebrated their claim to Adams Morgan–Mount Pleasant as the heart of their community in their annual street festival. The Latino Festival has recently moved to the Mall and Pennsylvania Avenue, and the Latino community itself has geographically spread to other parts of the District and beyond its borders to Maryland and Virginia. The Adams Morgan–Mount Pleasant area, however, remains at the heart of the barrio.² These neighborhoods have experienced both the beginnings of the Latino community and the transformation of the city that resulted from such major national and international events as World War II, the civil rights movement, the riots



Señora Diloné, originally from Puerto Rico, continues to run the grocery store Casa Diloné, which she had started with her Dominican husband in 1962. Like many store owners at that time, the family lived above the store. (Photograph by and reprinted with permission of Luis Salvatierra C.)

following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the Vietnam War, and various Third World political and economic crises combined with emancipation from European colonial rule. The Adams Morgan–Mount Pleasant neighborhood, once a stepping-stone in the city's initial expansion in the late nineteenth century, is now, at the close of the twentieth century, the setting for the development of new cultural identities.

Washington's multiethnic, Spanish-speaking population began to develop after World War II, when Latin American embassies and international organizations became established in the nation's capital. Professional staff members of the Spanish-speaking embassies and international organizations, along with their domestic personnel, took up residence in Adams Morgan, Mount Pleasant, and Dupont Circle, neighborhoods that were convenient to the embassies situated around Sixteenth Street and Massachusetts Avenue.

Many of the domestic workers stayed after their employers' diplomatic tours of duty had ended or their host families had left the city. They settled in

the affordable Adams Morgan–Mount Pleasant area and persuaded family and friends from home to join them. Latin American students in area universities were another significant segment of the growing Spanish-speaking population.

Puerto Rican and Mexican American white-collar workers, seeking the increasing numbers of federal jobs that had become available as a result of the New Deal and World War II, had come to the area in great numbers even earlier than the Latin Americans. For the most part, however, the students and professional Mexican Americans separated themselves from the nascent Latino community.

In the 1960s the Spanish-speaking population began to grow more rapidly. The economic hardships and political turmoil back home, combined with the attraction of an alluring image of the United States as a country “where the streets are paved with gold” spurred a flow of both legal and illegal immigrants. Luis Rumbaut, a Cuban-born lawyer and pioneering community member, described the typical process:

The first person to arrive here from a given village sends his address back home, and he's the first stop when the next person arrives. One shabby apartment building just north of Ontario and Columbia roads is a de facto re-creation of a small village in the Zacapá province of Guatemala.

Another apartment building houses many people from Intipucá, El Salvador. Intipucá has become a prosperous village as a result of the money its emigrants have sent back home.

Cubans and Dominicans, seeking better economic opportunities, began arriving in the 1950s. Cubans came in the greatest numbers in the late 1950s and early 1960s, during and after the Cuban Revolution. This group generally included members of the educated upper or middle class. A later wave, known as the Marielitos, came in 1980 through the Mariel boat lift. In the 1980s a sizable flow of immigrants also arrived from Central America, particularly El Salvador.

In 1970 a group of individuals, mostly from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Puerto Rico, organized a festival that would demonstrate their presence to the District government. They met at the Wilson Center, on Irving Street, NW, which came to play a major role as a Latino cultural center and focal point for social and educational activities. The center, owned by the National Capital Union Presbytery, had once housed a large Presbyterian Church that had counted President Woodrow Wilson among its members. Many of its congregants, however, had begun to leave in the 1950s,

when the neighborhood started to change as a result of white flight. The 1968 riots following King's assassination accelerated this out-migration, and the Wilson Center thus became a gathering place for the newly emerging Latino community. Leaders from this early period agree that the Latino community basically grew around three focal points: an Italian-owned store on Columbia Road; Saturday night dances in individual homes and church basements; and Spanish-language films at the Colony Theater on Georgia Avenue.

Casilda Luna, an early pioneer from the Dominican Republic who had come to the city in 1961, recalls today that there was no recognition of an organized Latino neighborhood at the time she arrived. In the 1960s, most of the Latin Americans were embassy employees, and most were women. Luna began to meet these women in the Italian store on Columbia Road, where they could purchase plantains and other familiar produce. The women were greatly relieved to be able to chat in Spanish, and they would often find that they shared similar problems with language, housing, and employment. According to Luna, “We would get together and speak the same language. We were from different countries but we felt so happy because we could speak Spanish.” Later, they began meeting at the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, where a Spanish-speaking priest helped them with English.

These activities provided the first opportunities for Washington Latinos to interact and, most important, to network in order to solve their problems. The late Carlos Rosario, one of the leaders who had become known as *El Viejo* (the old man, or the godfather), once recalled organizing Spanish-language film programs at the Colony Theater:

In 1962 the first Latino theater was established. I remember that in the monthly theater program I always announced that any person who was looking for a job should call me, and I would help them. I would start calling restaurants and family residences. And there were people who wanted to bring others into the country, but they had to have an assured place here, and I'd help them. And this is how the community began to grow overnight. This has been the fastest-growing community in Washington, and the base for similar communities in Virginia and Maryland.

Foremost among the early leaders were Puerto Ricans and Cubans, who had had several advantages in making their adjustment to Washington. They had immigrated legally, spoke English, and—in the case of many Puerto Ricans—had stable federal jobs. Puerto Ricans were already U.S. citizens, and the Cubans who had immigrated after Fidel Castro's takeover in 1959 had received

avored-immigrant status. Other immigrants, who would form the bulk of the emerging Latino community, most often came from rural or small-town backgrounds, although some had been schoolteachers or were skilled artisans. The majority, whatever their social or economic background, found work in homes, apartment-building maintenance, hotel services, and other work with low pay and few benefits. These jobs, most recently held by African Americans, were also sought by the growing English- and French-speaking Caribbean immigrants.

Rosario worked with other leaders to coalesce the community from within. They resorted to the familiar Latin American *compadrazgo* system, based on ritual kinship among families, which then served as the basis for social and political organization. According to Rosario, this system began to develop in Washington through the dances he organized:

People got to meet each other there. They got married—Ecuadoran girls to Peruvians, Salvadoran girls to Hondurans. And I was godfather to their first child. People from these countries didn't usually speak to each other. Now each group has its own parties.

While individuals from this small Spanish-speaking population assumed leadership roles and began to organize as a community, they also collaborated with African American leaders and other neighborhood activists. Living side by side in a city that, like other major U.S. cities, was undergoing a period of economic and physical decline, residents sought to organize neighborhood-based advisory commissions and service agencies. Ruth Webster, an African American neighborhood activist, recalled that Rosario was an outspoken representative of Latinos during the meetings in which the Advisory Neighborhood Commissions were being formed in the 1960s. President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society poverty programs had created new sources of funds for community social services. Latino leaders initially worked with African American agencies to funnel these funds into programs for the city's Spanish-speaking population.

The 1960s and 1970s civil rights movement set the period's political mood. King's assassination and the ensuing race riots in Newark, Washington, and Chicago were traumatic events in the tense political atmosphere, underlining the nation's social and economic inequities. In Washington civil disturbances razed Fourteenth Street, at the margins of Adams Morgan and Mount Pleasant. Although these events accelerated white out-migration, they also spurred more positive reactions in those residents who remained. A black Panamanian Latino, for example, remembered a feeling of "owning the streets."

The consciousness that spurred African Americans to challenge discrimination inspired other minorities to organize politically. According to Casilda Luna, Latinos in Washington appropriated the objectives of the civil rights movement:

The Cubans shouted for their rights as refugees. The Mexicans can fight because their land has been taken away, but then the Colombians and Dominicans are left without any rights. It was then that the Reverend Welty, a Colombian, organized the 8 A.M. breakfasts at the Wilson Center so people could come with their problems, their values. We had to 'think Latino' since we spoke the same language.

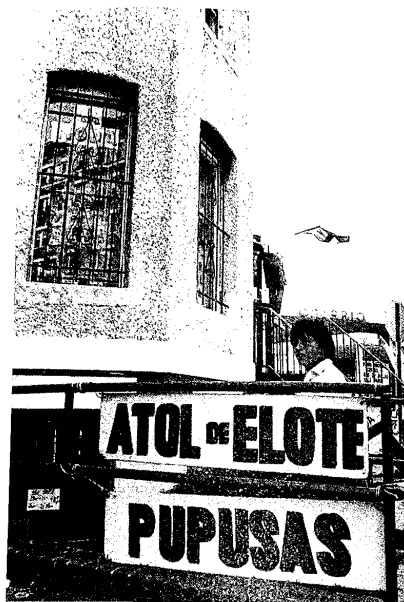
The struggle for civil rights became an intense self-coding process. Among African Americans a new style and political consciousness had developed around the motto "black is beautiful." Similarly, Mexican Americans identified with *La Raza* (the concept of mestizo roots) in homage to their often suppressed or denied Indian heritage. The more recent Latin American immigrants did not necessarily have either a black or Indian consciousness but understood the need to establish a new self-definition in a new land.

Although they came from different nations and experiences, Washington's Spanish-speaking immigrants began to forge a shared identity around a common language, shared cultural values, and similar legal, housing, and employment issues.³ Without losing their individual national identities, they became "Latinos," a term unfamiliar in Latin America. Indeed, the increasing use of the term and the idea of Latino identity indicated that community formation was taking place, with diverse groups coalescing around common experiences and a shared language.

Thus a Latino aesthetic and culture emerged in the Adams Morgan-Mount Pleasant neighborhood, prompting continuing organization through community self-definition. A sense of home began to reshape the neighborhood and to transform it into the barrio. When shopping at Los Primos grocery store in Mount Pleasant, one would often be greeted with, "Hola, prima" ("Hello, cousin"). This Dominican-owned grocery, which had first been opened in the 1970s, has since changed ownership several times, but its employees have always welcomed Spanish-speaking clients with the familial term. This simple gesture, which recognizes a kinship broader than ethnicity or national origin, has become essential to building a new community.

Latino family grocery stores, providing both a hub for social interaction and an economic base for community development, have played a major role in establishing the barrio. Cubans and Dominicans owned the neighborhood's

A small restaurant on Columbia Road boldly advertises familiar Salvadoran fast foods. (Photograph by and reprinted with permission of Luis Salvatierra C.)



earliest Latino stores. Initially, produce was purchased in New York and New Jersey, probably from the same warehouses that supplied the Italian grocer on Columbia Road. Gilberto González, owner of La Americana, would make trips to these suppliers and purchase merchandise for all the stores; he eventually opened his own warehouse in Washington.

In the early days the stores, fulfilling the community's needs and appetites, offered mostly Caribbean produce and some Spanish and South American specialties. In the late 1970s and early 1980s most of them sold *empanadas* (filled pastries similar to turnovers) at the counter. Latino women baked them in their homes and sold them to supplement their meager earnings as housemaids and babysitters, or to sustain themselves during periods of unemployment. *Empanadas* are to Latin Americans and Caribbean islanders what hamburgers are to North Americans. In Washington's Adams Morgan-Mount Pleasant, they became a specialty and an affordable snack. Each national group lauded its par-



A few skilled immigrants have been able to establish small shops. Emberto Rojas, cabinet and music-instrument maker from Bolivia, first opened his shop on Eighteenth Street, NW, where he primarily repaired furniture for embassies. Although he no longer makes musical instruments, he incorporates into his furniture the inlay motifs that he had used to decorate stringed instruments. (Photograph by and reprinted with permission of Luis Salvatierra C.)

ticular version: the fried Dominican *pastelito*, the pleated Bolivian *salteña*, and the flaky Mexican *empanada*. These reflected a shared tradition with as many variants as there were nationalities and regions, and therefore encouraged solidarity among Latinos without homogenizing and leveling differences.

Other businesses followed in the wake of the early grocery stores. A Latino record-shop owner, who had begun selling records from his car trunk, now has outlets in the Maryland and Virginia suburbs and owns a national music production company. Some Latinos who had started out as waiters in non-Latino-owned restaurants opened their own cafes and cantinas. A shoe-repair shop began offering tailoring services, and several barbershops opened. This entrepreneurial sector developed independent of but parallel to the more politicized movement that established and maintained Latino social-service agencies. Washington's Latino leadership has emerged primarily out of these two groups: the business enterprises and the social-service agencies.

By the end of the 1960s, several social-service organizations for Latinos were established, and Latino leaders were ready to claim official recognition from the District government. Rosario described how in 1969 the office of the Spanish Community Advisory Committee was established under the D.C. Department of Human Relations with funds allocated by Congress. Rosario and a group of other residents began to "make noise" to let the city government become aware of the Latino community's needs and frustrations. They had already decided to request the establishment of an Office on Latino Affairs. In 1967 Rosario wrote to newly appointed Mayor Walter Washington to request a meeting. As he recalled, "the only thing that came out of that meeting was that the mayor named me to the board of the Office of Human Rights." The group continued to press the newly appointed city council. A meeting with Senators Robert Kennedy and Joseph Tydings and Maryland Governor Marvin Mandel was pivotal. "Tremendous luck," Rosario said. "They asked us did we want them to write to the mayor!" The mayor then agreed to talk with the city council, and stated, "If that is what you want, you get it." After the Spanish Community Advisory Committee was established, Mayor Washington attempted to move it from the Department of Human Relations to the Office of Human Rights, restricting the office to symbolic rather than actual power. Rosario mobilized his people, who laid down in front of the door to the mayor's office and sang "We Shall Overcome." Rosario was then named director of the committee, and later became the first director of the new Office on Latino Affairs, officially established in 1976.

Demonstration strategies modeled after the civil rights sit-ins and the later Vietnam War protests spurred the creation of the Latino Festival, which had come into being in the wake of the 1968 riots. Marcelo Fernández, a festival founder who had been active in the civil rights movement, argued that the festival was, in effect, a "pressure group" during the early stages of community formation. The 1970 census had counted 17,561 Latinos in Washington, but the leaders in the community knew that the number was much higher. It was critical that more accurate figures be obtained and documented for the allocation of adequate government funds for Latino social-service programs. Since an additional study would have been expensive, Fernández decided, "We will just take to the streets. We'll form a festival."⁴ He knew that the Latino community would be drawn to a street festival, which would then serve as a concrete demonstration of the community's presence, with the media acting as unofficial census takers providing a more accurate count of the area's Latino population.

Factionalism was also an issue when the founders decided to organize the festival. Fernández contended that "to do a festival, the Argentinian has to

come to terms with the Panamanian, or with other groups, to agree upon the order of floats, or upon the members of the festival committee, thus creating a dynamic." Even when alliances are created between two groups to go against a third, a "co-penetration" between groups emerges. Thus, according to Fernández, the festival, which functioned much like Rosario's dances, provided a base for networking rather than for homogenizing.

From the Latinos' perspective, the stores, businesses, social-service agencies, and the festival collectively proclaimed, "We are here." The community dynamic during this formation period is depicted in murals painted in the mid-1970s by members of El Centro de Arte, a Latino cultural organization. El Centro's motto became "Art is culture, is education, is the conscience of a people." This philosophy is apparent in one of its earliest projects, in which community members painted a mural on a neighborhood building's back wall. The mural visually evokes the Latino community and the changes taking place around it. The muralists also had their own motto: "A people without murals is a demoralized people."

The murals highlighted foodways and dance as central motifs, while also emphasizing the importance of the street. The street became the central design element, symbolically dividing and conjoining disparate aspects of the community. The murals themselves also physically delineated the Latino neighborhood, the *barrio*.

Carlos Rosario, the community's revered *El Viejo* throughout the 1960s and 1970s, died in 1987. In accordance with his will, his body was carried in a funeral procession through the neighborhood. The Spanish-language newspaper, *El Pregonero*, wrote:

The funeral of Don Carlos Rosario not only proved his stature as a leader but also served to reaffirm the Hispanic presence in the Washington area. Symbolically, the funeral procession of Don Carlos proceeded on foot, from the Sacred Heart Church to Kalorama Park, on the same streets where the Hispano-American Festival, which he helped to establish seventeen years ago, has been held.

Marcelo Fernández suggested that Rosario's death marked the end of an era in the community. It was certainly the end of an era of charismatic leadership, which had managed to carry Latinos through the rifts and tensions of a rapidly growing heterogeneous community. Even before Rosario's death new groups of immigrants had become part of the community and were beginning to exercise their own leadership styles. A shared language and the migration experience continued to provide a common ground. However, as the community became

more established, succeeding groups of immigrants also made their own claims on it.

Rosario and his followers, the "old guard," had sought primarily to be recognized by and to be integrated into Washington's mainstream social and political leadership. In the late 1970s and early 1980s a new and younger faction began to challenge the old guard's liberal stance and the old "family" style of politics. Some individuals in this group were recent Puerto Rican and younger South American immigrants, who had come to the United States for political reasons.

Particularly threatening to the old guard was a group that formed around El Centro de Arte. This new wave of Latinos included artists who, unlike most of the other immigrants, came from upper- and middle-class families. Primarily from South America, these artists, some of whom had collaborated on the murals, espoused a historical consciousness that saw Washington's Latino community as part of the Third World.

The nation's capital, in fact, was becoming increasingly connected with the strife and the economic crises in the Third World. Although it continued to be the promised land for many Latin Americans, many more were now propelled to the District by political persecution and war—not only economic distress. Immigration from Southeast Asia, Ethiopia and other African countries, and the Caribbean also increased dramatically—often for similar reasons.

The devastating civil war in El Salvador in particular provoked increased Salvadoran migration to the Washington metropolitan area during the 1980s.⁵ These newcomers joined already established activists in organizing agencies to assist the large number of undocumented immigrants and to protest regulations and policies that denied them legal status. The federal Immigration and Naturalization Service routinely raided places of employment to find undocumented workers. By 1983, as community leader Irvin Flores editorialized in a local newspaper, "things were going from bad to worse." He cited the "audacity" of the Advisory Neighborhood Commission's recommendation for the police to "investigate" undocumented immigrants in the streets. He also mentioned reports that a carry-out restaurant franchise had attempted to prohibit the speaking of Spanish by its Latino employees. Moreover, in contrast to Central American immigrants, the Cubans who had arrived with the Mariel boat lift in 1980 were being granted refugee status and given special economic assistance, causing resentment and friction within the Latino community.

The community in general had grown more complex. The dances that had helped establish an interethnic social structure continued to be held in church basements but were now organized by formally constituted soccer

teams, civic and religious associations, social groups, and professional promoters. These groups, formed along ethnic and regional lines, proliferated throughout the community. They have sponsored events ranging from fundraisers for the Salvadoran Intipucá City soccer team and the Casa de Colombia festival float, to the Guatemalan Señor de Esquipulas Patron Day celebration, to concerts and dances featuring international celebrities.

In the early days, dances, soccer games, and the Latino Festival—now community institutions—had been catalysts for the formation of these more specialized groups, which provided the stability and the confidence for the forging of a Latino identity that transcended but did not obliterate regional and ethnic differences. The initial intergroup solidarity created by the dances facilitated a different level of interethnic relationships as distinct groups formed. While each group's core was identifiably Salvadoran, Colombian, or some other ethnicity, non-Latinos could also join. Such interaction not only educated other District communities about the meaning of the Latino identity but also validated it as a concept. This self-ascribed identity remains central to the ongoing process of community formation in a time of rapid social change.

In the more recent stages of the Latino community's expansion and transformation, links between the growth of service-oriented enterprises and the rise of ethnic business ventures also play a major role. Although their occupational status in general has not diversified much, some Latinos have shifted positions within the employment hierarchy. Many former waiters are now restaurateurs, several janitors now manage their own cleaning and maintenance companies, and a few construction workers have become contractors. As such individuals move up the social and economic ladder, they in turn hire the more recent newcomers. For example, the Cuban owner of La Plaza Lauriol, a restaurant on Eighteenth Street, NW, started as a waiter for El Caribe restaurant and now employs mostly Salvadorans.

As the community has grown and become more visible—thus attracting greater scrutiny by regulatory authorities—early economic strategies have faded away. For example, homemade *empanadas* are no longer found on grocery-store counters, and only a few itinerant Salvadoran vendors sell their *pupusas* and *tamales* on street corners or door to door.

Many Latinos, some seeking the "American dream" or pushed out by rent increases and neighborhood gentrification, have moved to the suburbs. New Latino communities, with their own social agencies, stores, restaurants, and festivals, are developing in Maryland and Virginia. Salvadoran bakeries, which have proliferated in the suburbs, now supply Salvadoran bread and pastries to Latino- and Korean-owned grocery stores in Adams Morgan–Mount Pleasant.



Teresa Martínez, known as Mamá Tere, squeezes the whey out of cheese as she had done in her native El Salvador. (Photograph by Jeff Tinsley, courtesy Smithsonian Institution)

As many Latinos move out of the District, many more move in. The newcomers, like those who preceded them, continue to seek the land of opportunity, first setting their bags down in the already overpopulated barrio—although fewer affordable rooming houses and apartments remain. The Salvadoran population continues to grow, and increasing numbers of immigrants have also arrived from Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia, and Mexico.

The Simpson-Rodino Bill, which resulted in the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, imposed civil and criminal sanctions against employers who hired undocumented immigrants and intensified fear and frustration in a community where jobs were already at a premium. Many undocumented immigrants, apprehensive about having to return to their homelands, rushed to purchase suitcases, which were recently added to inventories of Columbia Road stores in large quantities. The majority, however, could not return home and were left to settle for moonlighting jobs and underemployment. Some have joined the growing ranks of the homeless seen on the barrio's commercial streets.

The immigrants' unstable status and immigration officers' activities continue to haunt many. Additionally, immigration policies create and reinforce tensions among Latinos from different backgrounds, as well as between Latinos and African Americans, Caribbeans, East Asians, and other minorities who attend the same schools or compete for the same jobs and neighborhood space. In many ways, however, these groups depend on each other economically. Salvadorans work in Ethiopian restaurant kitchens, or with African Americans and Caribbeans in the new, upscale restaurants on Eighteenth Street and Columbia Road. They seek legal and health services, which the District government is attempting to consolidate, from the same agencies. Over the past few years the Latino Festival, reflecting the community's diversity and complexity, has included an increasing number of food booths and parading troupes from the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, West Africa, and Korea.

In May 1991, after the shooting of a Latino man by a District police officer during an arrest, looters, attracted from neighborhoods throughout the city by television coverage, destroyed businesses and clashed with police in the Mount Pleasant-Adams Morgan neighborhood. The incident was fueled by long-smoldering resentment over the abuses of the police and the insensitivity of the larger society, and the city's unresponsiveness to the Latino community's needs. The civil disturbances not only jostled the city but also spurred old, and some new, Latino leaders to organize a Latino Civil Rights Task Force, a permanent organization with elected officers and a paid staff. The Latino community, now considered anything but invisible, has moved from an intro-

A Dominican grocery store-owner nicknamed "El Gavilán," or hawk, first opened the doors of El Gavilán on Columbia Road in the early 1970s. The store's merchandise has reflected the needs of the area's emergent Latino, African, and Caribbean communities. El Gavilán has since returned to the Dominican Republic. The store is now owned by a Salvadoran family. Besides offering groceries, El Gavilán has a special delivery service to El Salvador, which is mostly used to send money back home. (Photograph by and reprinted with permission of Luis Salvatierra C.)



spective phase of seeking commonalities and support from within (which was focused on survival strategies and transcending of differences) to an outward-looking phase, focused on establishing a Latino presence and place—a "voice"—within the larger polity.

Latinos in the Mount Pleasant-Adams Morgan area have established a social, economic, and political base from which to assert their presence and have built programs that benefit both their own and the larger community. Unexpectedly, their efforts have also stimulated increased gentrification. Latino needs, life-styles, and aesthetics have reshaped the neighborhood and made it increasingly attractive to developers, who are now seeking to reclaim parts of the area and to draw more white professionals back to the city.

Meanwhile, community institutions continue to struggle for scarce funds. Employment remains unstable, and the influx of immigrants eager to work continues. The Latino community's social and economic infrastructure, however,



On weekends the barrio is an especially social place. Juan Pablo Rubio, a Latino photographer, stops to chat with a passerby on Columbia Road. (Photograph by and reprinted with permission of Luis Salvatierra C.)

is firmly established. In the past, Latino pioneers latched on to neighborhood projects initiated by African Americans and used them for their own purposes. Latinos today initiate projects that incorporate African Americans and other minorities. For example, the LatiNegro Theater Youth Project grew out of a concern to address black-Latino tensions in the schools. Skits developed from oral interviews examine the images youths have of themselves and of each other. As the Latino community has matured, it has opened up, beginning to examine itself and its relationship to the larger society. Tensions and challenges remain, but a basis now exists for addressing them.

Although Washington's Latino community has expanded into the suburbs, the Adams Morgan-Mount Pleasant barrio remains its core. When Latinos move out and form other communities, they extend rather than sever the network. In the process, older and newer immigrants nourish an even stronger community, one that still has its heart where it started.

NOTES

I thank my colleague, Luis Salvatierra C., documentary photographer and longtime member of Washington's Latino community, for generously contributing many of the images that complement this chapter.

1. There is little scholarship on or documentation of Washington's Latino community. Its evolution has been recorded and critiqued primarily by its members through anecdotes, oral histories, interviews, and newspaper editorials. This essay is written in the spirit of a history created from within the community. The primary sources are community members' literature and interviews. I have translated direct quotes that were originally in Spanish. All quotations in the text are from interviews in my possession. Articles in the local press (the *City Paper*, *El Barrio*, *El Latino*, *La Prensa*, *Pregonero*, the *Washington Post*, the *Washington Star*, and *Washingtonian Magazine*), particularly Spanish-language newspapers, have been a valuable resource. Interpretations are based on my experience as a participant and observer of the community. Much of the quoted material in this essay also appears in Olivia Cadaval, "The Hispano American Festival and the Latino Community: Creating an Identity in the Nation's Capital" (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1989).

2. Although Adams Morgan and Mount Pleasant are two distinct neighborhoods, District Latinos usually refer to the area as Adams Morgan-Mount Pleasant, without making the distinction. In this essay the two areas are referred to as one. See also Olivia Cadaval, "Adams Morgan and the Latino Community," in *Washington at Home: An Illustrated History of Neighborhoods in the Nation's Capital*, ed. Kathryn Schneider Smith (Northridge, Calif.: Windsor Publications, 1988); idem, "Latinos in Washington, D.C.," in *Cut Across* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Project for the Arts, 1988); and idem, "The Taking of the Renwick: The Celebration of the Day of the Dead and the Latino Community in Washington, D.C.," *Journal of Folklore Research* 22, nos. 2 and 3 (1985): 179-93.

3. New immigrant communities are also growing rapidly in other parts of the nation, including Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York, where new identities are being forged. For recent studies on the growth and movement of U.S. Latino communities, see Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). For the emergence of a Latino identity in Chicago, see Félix M. Padilla, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985).

4. The phrase, "taking the festival to the streets," was also used by the *Washington Post* in 1983. See Cadaval, "Hispano American Festival."

5. Salvadorans' immigration to the area, spurred by intensifying political and economic difficulties at home, started as early as the 1960s. Early Salvadoran immigrants were mainly women who came from the less affluent eastern part of the country. The current Salvadoran immigrant population is dominated by young men.

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