

Cambio de Colores: Latinos in the Heartland

Proceedings of the 11th Annual Conference:
At the Crossroads: ¿Incorporation or Marginalization?
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Preface

*"It was the best of times,
it was the worst of times"*
A Tale of Two Cities, Charles Dickens

The dozen words above refer to London and Paris during revolutionary times, and are often quoted to describe paradoxical moments. But Dickens, a keen observer of the human condition, was referring to 1775, a very specific moment in the inextricably related histories of England and France. He was referring to people's perceptions of what was brewing in the cauldron of history.

Reading more of the book's initial paragraph will help us to better understand the complexity of the human experience:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way— in short, the period was so far like the present period [...]

Like the present period, indeed. The best of times for the immigrant who has a job, a family and a future; the worst of times for the immigrant who is separated from loved ones, or subject to a thousand dangers in a land where language and customs are alien. This is the age of wisdom, where many people, like those attending Cambio de Colores conferences, work hard to understand change and to make life better for all, and the age of foolishness characterized by society's resistance to necessary change. We may have everything before us, but we still often feel as if we have nothing before us. However, this is neither paradox nor contradiction, such is the dialectics of change: confusing, exhilarating, dangerous, intriguing, and, over all, necessary. Latin America's beloved poet Pablo Neruda wrote, in a similar vein: *"Sin duda todo está muy bien / y todo está muy mal, sin duda"* ("No doubt everything's just fine/and everything's very bad, no doubt.")

The eleventh conference's driving theme was "At the Crossroads: ¿Incorporation or Marginalization?" Last year, we were surely facing uncertain and unsettling times because of the high pitch of the electoral rhetoric. We need to take the steps to decide, as a society, if we want incorporation or marginalization of the large numbers of immigrants that are settling here, there, and everywhere. It is, of course, a false option; we want, of

course, to take the road that incorporates the newly arrived families into our society. We know that marginalization is expensive in every social, economic and fiscal respect, and we have no right to impose the task of dealing with those problems on our children. Let us follow the yellow brick road that points to “incorporation” and “integration.” We can go jumping and dancing like Dorothy and her friends, but we will soon find out that there is a deep canyon. To cross to the other side, we need a bridge. We better be brave, smart, and bring a big heart to devise and build the bridge. No wizards are available to help us. Bridges cannot be improvised. We need the human, social, and financial capital, the hearts of the people committed to building the bridge, and people at each side of the chasm who know about the other and want to work together. We need the courage to keep pushing the project, the stamina to resist, and to persuade today’s naysayers that the bridge is for the common good. Finally, no matter how far back in history we go, bridge building has always required brains to carry out careful planning, precise measurements, and to select strong, yet flexible, materials. We need to understand soil, rocks, erosion, the knowledge that may be in the books or developed in the lab, or from measurements in the field.

Solid knowledge is what universities bring to the project. We try to provide facts, not opinions; we try to be persuasive, not confrontational. We are now working in every one of these realms, and the Cambio de Colores conferences are the *akademia* where stakeholders come together to share their hearts, their courage, and their brains. We all can make a fine bridge: beautiful, strong, and durable, so that our children will be proud of our efforts.

Pablo Neruda, again, will help us to remain humble: *“Es tan poco lo que sabemos / y tanto lo que presumimos”*. (We know so little / and we boast so much!)

Domingo Martínez Castilla

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Introduction

"At the Crossroads: Incorporation or Marginalization?" was the central theme that our communities of practice at Cambio de Colores sought to address in 2012. In the 11th year since "Call to Action" in 2002, conference participants came together to Columbia, Missouri, to share their experiences, research findings, and best practices, especially as we look to the future of Latino/as as members of the communities where they have settled. We purposely asked the question, 'Is our path going forward one of integration or separation?', aware of the fact that if marginalized, Latino newcomers to the Midwest would be limited in how they could contribute to the future of our communities and states.

The community of practice that is Cambio de Colores comes together with purpose, seeking to contribute our shared experiences and knowledge to facilitate the integration of Latino/as. The 11th Conference Proceedings includes 18 papers, the largest number to date in a Cambio de Colores proceedings. The five conference themes of Civil Rights, Education, Health, Entrepreneurship and Economic Development and Change and Integration are all represented in the proceedings and capture the breadth and scope of the issue. For example, one paper looks at how Hispanics fared in their efforts to find safe and affordable housing during the economic crisis, 'Is there an affect on incorporation? Does it contribute to marginalization?'. Other papers focus on incorporation in rural areas including the role of social capital in facilitating integration and newcomers in rural Kansas, creating immigrant friendly community and exploring youth perceptions of food in Iowa. There were several perspectives on education including youth, higher and adult education. The role of Latino entrepreneurship and economic development was also explored.

A reason why Cambio de Colores is such a rich learning environment is that it brings together researchers studying the issues of integration together with the people who are working in the communities trying to address the issues. The papers in this proceedings provide both the state of the art in research on the topic of incorporation as well as evaluations of some of the best practices people are employing as they work to address the key issues they are facing in their neighborhoods and communities. We hope you find these papers useful resources to you in your practice, research or both your practice and research.

Sincerely,



Steve Jeanetta



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