

**F. Chris Garcia, ed. *Latinos and the Political System*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) x, 501 pp., \$17.95 paper.**

*Latinos and the Political System*, carefully compiled by F. Chris Garcia, represents a significant contribution to the field of political analysis as well as to the study of the complexities and subtleties of the politics of the Latino community in the United States. While the book's focus is clearly on the emerging place of the Latino community on the American political landscape, Garcia and his collaborators amply demonstrate that as needs and wants are converted into specific policies, the implementation of these will have significant "ramifications for the rest of the system as well as for Latino politics specifically." This collection is as much about American politics as it is about the politics of Latino ethnicity. It is the kind of collection that can be used to illustrate case studies in local, state-wide, regional, and national trends in the rapidly changing face of American politics. It also presents an in-depth analysis of the historical, contemporary, future directions, and political potential of the fastest growing ethnic group in the United State—doubling in the next twenty years, and tripling in the next forty.

Early in his introduction, Garcia suggests that despite the recent increase in scholarly materials on Latino politics, there continues to be "relatively few such materials" readily available for students of politics. This collection helps to fill that gap in a systematic and organized fashion. The structure of the book, based loosely on a "simplified version of the Eastonian political systems model," allows the reader to familiarize himself/herself with (1) the setting: history and demography or contextual factors; (2) input to the political system: participation; (3) the conversion process: representation and decision making; (4) outputs of the political system: policies and issues; and (5) feedback: outcomes and reactions. Each of these sections includes chapters on the three major Latino groups in the United States: Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. At times, however, the book seems to lean heavily in the direction of the Mexican Americans in the Midwestern and Southwestern parts of the United States, with seemingly less focus on Puerto Ricans and Cubans. Nonetheless, the chapters that are heavily focused on Chicanos manage to strengthen their particular arguments by providing comparative data from the Puerto Rican, Cuban and other Latino American communities in those regions. Despite this, there seems to be a structural and representational balance that was thoughtfully considered by Garcia in his construction of each section. Section One, for example, seems to be the most notably balanced in that there are chapters describing each of the three major Latino groups, Hispanics in general, and the final chapter in that section, by Santillan, offers up a particularly interesting and thorough analysis of Latino politics in the Midwest—a harbinger of things to come (coalition politics) for Latino communities throughout the United States.

Garcia provides a comprehensive introduction to each section which lets the reader know exactly what unifying themes to look for in each of the chapters that follow. It should be noted that the book contains a significant

number of reprints as well as several unpublished pieces appearing in this collection for the first time. Garcia calls these articles "classic," in that they stand the test of time." This reviewer's sense is that these reprinted articles, as well as the new ones, constitute significant contributions to the emerging body of literature on Latino politics, and as such, should be considered required reading for anyone interested in this growing and changing community and its potential impact on American politics. These articles, published as chapters, are far more likely to be read by a wider audience than they might have been in their previous journal or report formats.

The complex and often controversial matter of how one would define the "Latino," "Hispanic," or "Spanish-American" community is thoughtfully considered throughout by a number of the book's contributors. Garcia points out that "one cannot speak with complete confidence about a unified Latino political community," and he goes on to recommend that

Basic investigations into fundamental cultural and political orientation are needed before the term "Latino" or "Hispanic" is completely meaningful. At this point, it seems likely that there are bases for cohesion and cooperation which at least allow one to speak generally of Latino politics.

Currently, the terms "Latino" or "Hispanic" continue to offer an opportunity for coalition building that transcends the immediate boundaries of distinct nationality groups. On the other hand, the indiscriminate use of a unifying term for all Latino Americans (Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Central and South Americans, etc.) also has the potential for blurring critical differences that exist between each of these groups. Socio-economic data describing the realities of the Latino community, if presented as combined data, are far more likely to give us an inaccurate picture of the unique political, economic, and social characteristics of each of these distinct groups. The contributors in this book are most sensitive to this statistical dilemma and do everything in their power to highlight these distinguishing characteristics. At the same time that differences of history, national origin, citizenship versus undocumented status, migration and employment patterns, and so on are acknowledged, Garcia also suggests that "a pan-Latino political force nationally would be of great significance in both regional and national politics."

As we enter the 1990s, scholars will continue to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity and diversity of the Latino communities in the United States. This book has made a significant contribution towards that end. Those in ethnic studies, particularly those in Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban and Latino Studies should consider using this text as a primary or supplementary reading resource. Comparative courses in other ethnic studies areas, as well as in sociology and political science, would do well to add this text to the required list of readings.

— Jesse M. Vázquez  
Queens College, City University of New York