

Re-Imagining Political Opposition:  
Contemporary Immigrant Politics in Boston

Victoria Hattam  
Department of Politics  
New School for Social Research  
New York, NY 10003

And

Carlos Yescas  
Department of Politics  
New School for Social Research  
New York, New York 10003

Paper presented at conference in Honor of Suzanne Berger, MIT,  
May 7-8, 2009

In the spring of 2006 immigrant rallies were held across the United States. Some have estimated that more than three million marched in total. Los Angeles and Chicago hosted the largest and most visible rallies on May 1<sup>st</sup>, with estimates of 500,000 and 400,000 marching in each respectively.<sup>1</sup> These rallies, and the political coalitions that organized them, have been seen by many as marking a shift in immigrant politics; from laying low to *coming out of the shadows*. Marching in the streets by the thousands made immigrants visible to friend and foe thereby politicizing US immigration policy and proposed reforms.

Although the rallies appeared as spontaneous uprisings, they were in fact well orchestrated responses to anti-immigrant sentiment of the past half-decade. Lou Dobbs' nightly rants against "illegal aliens" both captured and inflamed anti-immigrant feeling across the country. Between 2005 and 2007, forty local and state governments passed anti-immigrant ordinances and legislation aimed at prohibiting undocumented immigrants from residing or seeking employment in their towns. The Minute Men Project mobilized militia to police the US-Mexico border while many politicians joined calls to secure the US southern border.<sup>2</sup>

Anti-immigrant sentiment came to a head in national politics when Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI) introduced H.R.-4437 into the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress. Sensenbrenner had already established a strong anti-immigration profile by sponsoring the Real ID Act

---

<sup>1</sup> See Xochitl Bada, Jonathan Fox, and Andrew Selee, ed., Invisible No More: Mexican Migrant Civic Participation in the United States (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2006), v. For a useful overview of the Spring of 2006 marches between from February 14 through May 25 with estimated numbers in several cities and towns, see Wikipedia under the heading "2006 United States Immigration Reform Protest."

<sup>2</sup> For powerful accounts of anti-immigrant politics, see Carlos Sandoval and Catherine Tambini documentary Farmingville; David L. Ostendorf, "'Workers, Go Home!' (The Anti-Immigrant Movement, Long Island, New York)," The Christian Century, December 19, 2001; "Illegal Immigrants Clash with Locals on Long Island," USA Today, August 4, 2005; and Richard Cummings, "Flooding Long Island: Aliens Invade the Hamptons," The American Conservative February 28, 2005. For passage of local anti-immigrant ordinances, see Alex Kotlowitz, "Our Town," New York Times Magazine, August 5, 2007. Perhaps two of the most prominent were those passed in Hazleton, Pennsylvania and Carpentersville, Illinois. For two accounts of immigrant days laborers, see Janice Fine, Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2006); and Jennifer Gordon, Suburban Sweatshops: The Fight for Immigrant Rights (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

tying citizenship or legal residency to the ability to apply for a drivers' license.<sup>3</sup> After the Real ID rider passed into law, Sensenbrenner embarked on a more ambitious anti-immigrant campaign via HR-4437---the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act. The bill contained several important provisions including mandating construction of 700 miles of fencing along the US-Mexican border; requiring employer verification of workers' legal status, ending the practice of "catch and release," and newly criminalizing undocumented immigrants and those who assist them. The bill passed the House of Representatives on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005 by a vote of 239 to 182. The impending Senate vote catalyzed immigrant rights protests across the country the following spring.<sup>4</sup>

The immigrant rights rallies of spring 2006 were not the first mobilizations around immigrant concerns---two earlier campaigns paved the way. The in-state tuition and driver's license campaigns had established advocacy networks and forced many local legislators had to define their position towards undocumented immigration in a very public way. The Dream bill aimed at giving illegal immigrants access to college and the armed services was mirrored in many state legislatures and advocates worked with organizers around the country for the approval of both.<sup>5</sup> Local campaigns to grant driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants initially had considerable backing among law enforcement agencies and stood a good chance of being approved. However, after September 11<sup>th</sup>, support evaporated and the bill failed to pass.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> The Real ID Act was eventually signed into law on May 11th, 2005 as a rider on Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Tsunami Relief (H. R. 1268). The Real ID Act started off as H.R. 418 which passed the House and then remain in a stalemate until added as a rider to the Supplemental Appropriations bill. Sensenbrenner was the original author of H. R. 418.

<sup>4</sup> For a full account of H.R.-4437, see <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d109:h.r.04437>. The bill was eventually defeated in the Senate on xxx by a vote of xxx-xxx.

<sup>5</sup>  
<sup>6</sup> The DREAM Act, or the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minorities Act, was introduced in Congress on October 24, 2007. Similar legislative initiatives had been introduced on several occasions

The spring 2006 rallies caught the media attention. Newspapers across the country carried photos of thousands marching in the streets on April 10<sup>th</sup> and May 1<sup>st</sup>. The contested status of immigration policy could not be ignored. We wanted to know more about the institutions and movements that had helped propel the immigrant rallies to national visibility. Who were the organizers? How long had immigrant rights groups been organizing? Who joined the coalitions? Which groups were left out? To answer these questions we began researching immigrant rights organizations in Boston, Massachusetts.

### Why Boston?

Boston is not the most obvious research site for exploring immigrant rights coalitions. After all, the Boston rallies of April 10<sup>th</sup> and May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006 were small; only 2,000 people rallied at the Boston Common on May 1st. To be sure, additional rallies were held in East Boston/Chelsea (5,000) and Somerville (1,000), but even allowing for these dispersed sites the numbers were not large in any terms. More had marched in the previous rallies held on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006, but neither reached the level of LA, Chicago, Houston, or New York.<sup>7</sup>

Why choose a city where the rallies were small? Initially, we selected Boston for two reasons: access and demographics. Carlos Yescas had worked in the Mexican consulate for over four years and had excellent contacts both in Boston and in the New England area more generally. Second, the presence of large numbers of undocumented Irish immigrants---currently estimated at 60,000--- raises questions about the role of white immigrants in contemporary immigrant rights coalitions. Do new Irish immigrants

---

from 2001 on. On October 24, 2007, the bill was brought to a vote and was defeated by a filibuster and was not brought to the floor. The vote was 52 in favor, eight votes short need to beat the filibuster.

<sup>7</sup> Despite the small numbers, over twenty organizations were members of, or endorsed, the Boston May Day Coalition and of the organizations have been active for over a decade. For the Boston May Day Coalition, see [www.bostonmayday.org](http://www.bostonmayday.org).

identify with the undocumented from other countries and join the coalition? If yes, are the undocumented Irish immigrants reconfiguring the longstanding American practice of distinguishing ethnicity from race? Whites from non-whites? Finally, how are white immigrants viewed by other coalition members?

As the research unfolded, we discovered a third reason that made Massachusetts an especially important research site. The presence of the gay marriage movement (Mass Equality) and the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling in Goodridge v. Mass. Department of Public Health on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2003 have made visible connections between immigration and sexuality that we now see as central to any successful progressive coalition.<sup>8</sup> The intersecting mobilizations around sexuality and immigration demand careful consideration if we are to understand the possibilities and limitations of coalition building in the decades ahead. Whether new identifications are being forged; whether discrimination is reimagined, and what groups are included in the coalition will shape the broad contours of immigration and race politics for decades to come.

Before outlining our research, it is worth getting a quick sense of demographics. Demographic change in Boston has been rapid. In 1990, 20% of the city's total population were immigrants; by 2000 the foreign born had had jumped to 26%. In 2000, the top ten countries of origin for Boston's foreign-born population were as follows: Haiti (10%), Dominican Republic (8%), China (7%), Vietnam (6%), El Salvador (4%), Jamaica (4%), Cape Verde (4%), Columbia (3%), Ireland (3%), and Brazil (3%).<sup>9</sup> Change is continuing at a rapid pace. Between 2000 and 2004, 172,054 immigrants came to Massachusetts, 47.3% were from Latin America and the Caribbean and 23.1% from

---

<sup>8</sup> See Mass Equality web site <Massequality.org> and Goodridge V Mass. Department of Public Health 440 Mass. 309, 798 NE2d 941 (November 18, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> These figures are taken from the Office of New Bostonians within the Mayor's office. The Office of New Bostonians was established in 1998 to "meet the needs of the growing and changing immigrant and newcomer communities in Boston." See <http://www.cityofboston.gov/newbostonians/>.

Asia. Brazil is now the largest source of immigrants into Massachusetts. But as is always the case, official immigration statistics undercount the undocumented immigrants. Thus the above figures should be taken as minimal rather than maximal counts.

**Table 1:**

**Total Population, Race, Hispanic or Latino Origin, and Foreign-Born Population in Boston Metro Area, Boston City, and Cambridge City in 2006**  
(absolute number and percentage of total population)

	Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA-NH Metro Area		Boston City, MA		Cambridge City, MA	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total	4,455,217	100.0	575,187	100.0	89,804	100.0
White	3,619,603	81.2	325,474	56.6	58,435	65.1
Black or African American	302,415	6.8	140,819	24.5	12,059	13.4
American Indian and Alaska Native	8,379	0.2	2,013	0.3	424	0.5
Asian	258,046	5.8	45,685	7.9	14,152	15.7
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	1,919	--	382	--	0	--
Hispanic or Latino Origin	334,597	7.5	85,685	14.9	5,795	6.4
Foreign-Born Population	706,422	15.9	156,591	27.2	25,851	28.8

N: absolute number

--: less than 0.1%

Data (absolute number) from: U.S. Census Bureau, "2006 American Community Survey" available online at: < [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)>, 05/17/08. Data are estimate based on a sample. For more information, such as margin of error, sampling error, and so on see "2006 American Community Survey." Percentages estimated by Andrea Carla.

**Table 2:**  
**Total Population, Foreign-Born Population and Place of Birth for the Foreign-Born Population in Boston Metro Area, Boston City, and Cambridge City in 2006**  
**(absolute number and percentage of total population)**

	Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA-NH Metro Area		Boston City, MA		Cambridge City, MA	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total Population	4,455,217	100.0	575,187	100.0	89,804	100.0
Total Foreign-Born Population:	706,422	15.9	156,591	27.2	25,851	28.8
Europe:	162,488	3.6	26,044	4.5	5,798	6.4
Northern Europe:	34,644	0.8	5,725	1.0	1,485	1.6
United Kingdom:	17,633	0.4	1,861	0.3	686	0.8
United Kingdom, excluding England	9,496	0.2	659	0.1	360	0.4
England	8,137	0.2	1,202	0.2	326	0.4
Ireland	13,743	0.3	3,864	0.7	263	0.3
Other Northern Europe	3,268	--	0	--	536	0.6
Western Europe:	19,874	0.4	3,261	0.6	1,121	1.2
France	4,769	0.1	799	0.1	292	0.3
Germany	9,868	0.2	1,792	0.3	384	0.4
Other Western Europe	5,237	0.1	670	0.1	445	0.5
Southern Europe:	53,322	1.2	5,955	1.0	1,444	1.6
Italy	22,586	0.5	3,771	0.6	476	0.5
Portugal	20,181	0.4	177	--	620	0.7
Other Southern Europe	10,555	0.2	2,007	0.3	348	0.4
Eastern Europe:	54,371	1.2	11,103	1.9	1,748	1.9
Poland	7,234	0.2	2,372	0.4	235	0.3
Russia	18,089	0.4	3,507	0.6	290	0.3
Other Eastern Europe	29,048	0.6	5,224	0.9	1,223	1.4
Europe, n.e.c.	277	--	0	--	0	--
Asia:	202,910	4.5	35,992	6.2	10,216	11.3
Eastern Asia:	85,435	1.9	17,273	3.0	5,781	6.4
China:	65,831	1.5	13,679	2.4	3,674	5.0
China,	60,017	1.3	13,225	2.3	2,918	3.2

excluding Taiwan						
Taiwan	5,814	0.1	454	--	756	0.8
Japan	6,444	0.1	1,356	0.2	311	0.3
Korea	12,880	0.3	2,195	0.4	1,796	2.0
Other Eastern Asia	280	--	43	--	0	--
South Central Asia:	45,520	1.0	4,357	0.7	2,750	3.1
India	34,336	0.8	1,870	0.3	1,051	1.2
Iran	5,018	0.1	898	0.1	64	--
Other South Central Asia	6,166	0.1	1,589	0.3	1,635	1.8
South Eastern Asia:	54,467	1.2	11,430	2.0	814	0.9
Philippines	5,995	0.1	683	0.1	66	--
Vietnam	25,111	0.6	8,714	1.5	225	0.2
Other South Eastern Asia	23,361	0.5	2,033	0.3	523	0.6
Western Asia:	17,260	0.4	2,826	0.5	871	1.0
Israel	3,180	--	435	--	402	0.4
Lebanon	4,673	0.1	320	--	0	--
Other Western Asia	9,407	0.2	2,071	0.4	469	0.5
Asia, n.e.c.	228	--	106	--	0	--
Africa:	53,328	1.2	15,975	2.8	3,474	3.9
Eastern Africa	10,769	0.2	2,014	0.3	1,738	1.9
Northern Africa	9,164	0.2	1,584	0.3	1,096	1.2
Western Africa	24,226	0.5	10,247	1.8	341	0.4
Middle and Southern Africa	4,238	--	791	0.1	149	0.2
Africa, n.e.c.	4,931	0.1	1,339	0.2	150	0.2
Oceania:	1,427	--	246	--	168	0.2
Australia and New Zealand Subregion	1,289	--	246	--	168	0.2
Oceania, n.e.c.	138	--	0	--	0	--
Americas:	286,269	6.4	78,334	13.6	6,195	6.9
Latin America:	262,081	5.9	76,372	13.3	5,687	6.3
Caribbean:	111,169	2.5	42,604	7.4	3,239	3.6
Cuba	2,277	--	399	--	134	0.1
Jamaica	10,772	0.2	5,947	1.0	0	--
Other Caribbean	98,120	2.2	36,258	6.3	3,105	3.4
Central America:	59,550	1.3	15,072	2.6	1,351	1.5
Mexico	9,667	0.2	2,515	0.4	174	0.2
El Salvador	20,500	0.5	5,915	1.0	200	0.2
Other Central America	29,383	0.6	6,642	1.1	977	1.1
South America:	91,362	2.0	18,696	3.2	1,097	1.2
Brazil	56,247	1.3	6,990	1.2	39	--

Colombia	18,374	0.4	6,340	1.1	227	0.2
Other South America:	16,741	0.4	5,366	0.9	831	0.9
Northern America:	24,188	0.5	1,962	0.3	508	0.6
Canada	23,845	0.5	1,913	0.3	508	0.6
Other Northern America	343	--	49	--	0	--

N: absolute number  
 --: less than 0.1%

Data from: U.S. Census Bureau, “2006 American Community Survey” available online at: < [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)>, 05/17/08. Data are estimate based on a sample. For more information, such as margin of error, sampling error, and so on see “2006 American Community Survey.” Percentages estimated by Andrea Carla.

### What We Have Done

We wanted to know when, where, and how were enduring alliances established and among which groups? Were connections deep enough to shift extant identifications? How do immigrant rights activists envision their relation to racism and civil rights politics? Are civil rights organizations active within immigrant rights coalitions? Did civil rights groups participate in spring 2006 rallies? And what about white ethnics? Does the participation of the Boston Irish reveal the shifting ethnic and racial identifications in the current moment? How do gay rights organizations align with immigrant groups? Does the inclusion of sexuality alongside issues of immigration and race suggest that dissent is being re-imagined? In short, we want to assess whether and in what ways political identifications are being re-worked?

Our research is based on a mixture of interviews, participant observation, and historical research. We began by exploring two of the most visible and robust organizations in immigrant politics in Boston: the Massachusetts Immigration and Refugee Alliance (MIRA) and the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO).

MIRA has just celebrated its twentieth anniversary and GBIO its ten years of operation.<sup>10</sup>

Both envision and seek to instantiate quite different political coalitions. Understanding each of these organizations, and the dynamics between them, is key to mapping the political terrain of immigrant politics today.

In addition to MIRA and GBIO, we also wanted to document the role of the Mexican Consulate in supporting and shaping immigrant politics in the greater Boston area. Both the popular press and scholarly research has begun to attend to the transnational dimension of immigrant politics. One important piece of this phenomenon is the newly active role that foreign consulates have been playing in the lives of immigrants inside the United States. How should we understand the Consulate's actions as moments? Are they acts of foreign intervention? Or a manifestation of political forces that have not been adequately addressed to date? How extensive and influential have these cross-border consulate activities been?

Finally, in order to get multiple perspectives on Boston's immigrant politics today, we also interviewed activists within single national origin organizations within both the Irish and Brazilian communities as well as other relevant political actors including a past member of the Massachusetts state legislator, a legislative aid, and someone working for a foundation officer responsible for financing immigrant initiatives along with editors of several local newspapers including The Baystate Banner, The Dorchester News, The Boston Irish Reporter, and the Boston Haitian Reporter, and the newly established New England Ethnic News Wire Service (NEWZ).<sup>11</sup>

### Transnationalism: Building Coalitions Across Borders

---

<sup>10</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Tellingly, the Dorchester News, the Boston Irish Reporter and the Boston Haitian Reporter are all edited by one man, Bill Forry. Interestingly, Forry is married to Linda Dorcena Forry, a Haitian-American state legislator. She has been a state representative since 2005.

The boundaries of immigration politics do not stop at the waters' edge; immigrants, and the politics that follow them, necessarily extend beyond the boundaries of single nation states.<sup>12</sup> Immigration politics in Boston are no exception; we have found that the immigrant rights movement draws on extensive transnational networks for money, non-financial resources, strategic advice, political access and policy implementation. The two most dramatic areas of transnational political flows can be seen among the Mexican and Irish immigrants and their respective governments.<sup>13</sup>

In the case of Mexico, the government has launched several initiatives aimed at assisting Mexicans living in the United States. The initiatives have been implemented by the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME as per its name in Spanish) created on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2003 which replaced the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad (PMAC). The mission of the both the IME, and previously of the PMCA, is to establish links between the Mexican immigrant community residing in the USA and the 48 Mexican Consulates in the United States. The Government of Mexico commits resources so that there is a representative of the IME in every consulate with funds at their disposal to conduct outreach to Mexicans immigrants. The IME also plans concerted actions among all its consulates to lobby local and state officials on issues affecting Mexican immigrants. The policy initiatives of the IME have been targeted at four domains: food aid, worker's compensation, housing, and health.<sup>14</sup>

One fascinating thing we have learned from our research is the existence of four formal accords between the U.S. and Mexican governments all of which are aimed at

---

<sup>12</sup> For innovative work exploring the transnational processes in immigration politics, see Riva Kastoryano, xxxxx and Faisal Devji, "Back to the Future: The Cartoons, Liberalism, and Global Islam," Open Democracy April 2006; and Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, Activists Beyond Borders (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Keck and Sikkink have shown that transnational processes are by no means limited to government actions. However, we have found that official government ties have been key for Irish and Mexican immigrant politics in Boston and as such have played an important role in determining the robustness and shape of the immigrant rights' coalition.

<sup>14</sup> Information available in Spanish at the IME's website - <http://www.ime.gob.mx/ime>

delivering public services to Mexican immigrants living in the United States. The four accords were signed on July 21 and 22, 2004. To date, the accords have received little or no attention---non have garnered the usual fanfare given agreements between heads of state. One has to look hard to find the accords in part because they were established at the departmental level and in part because they have not been publicized by the Bush administration. It seems that they would rather these policies fly beneath the political radar. Despite their low profile, the accords document explicit collaboration between several U.S. federal departments and the more than forty Mexican consulates in the United States. Accords have been established in the areas of food aid, Occupational Safety and Health standards, and wages and hours legislation. All four accords are recorded in the World Law Bulletin of August 2004.<sup>15</sup>

The first accord to “Improve Working Conditions for Mexican Workers” was signed on July 21, 2004 by Elaine L. Caho, the U.S. Secretary of Labor, and Luis Ernesto Derbez, the Mexican Secretary for Foreign Affairs. “These agreements,” the accord stated, “will build on this administration’s unprecedented joint outreach program with the Mexican Embassy and its consulates in the United States.”<sup>16</sup> Note that the accord was signed off at the departmental level rather than by heads of state, allowing President Bush to demand that we secure the border, while simultaneously fostering ever closer ties between the Republican administration and Mexican consulates to ensure more effective policy implementation.

Two additional “Letters of Agreement” were signed the same day focusing on occupational safety and health and wages and hours enforcement. Again, signatories to these agreements were departmental officials rather than heads of state. For example, Victoria A. Lipnic, the Assistant Secretary for the Department of Labor’s Employment

---

<sup>15</sup> World Law Bulletin, 8, August 2004, p. 26-7.

<sup>16</sup> See World Law Bulletin, 8, August 2004, p. 27.

Standards Administration signed the Wage and Hour Division Letter of Agreement with the Mexican Embassy serving as the Mexican counterpart. Lipnic, declared that the “Letter of Agreement” builds on going collaboration between the two national bureaucracies “including Houston’s Justice and Equality in the Workplace Program and other similar regional initiatives launched in recent years in Dallas, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles.”<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the fourth accord was signed on the following day. The Food Aid Agreement allowed “Mexican Consulates in the United States to make known the availability of food aid programs to benefit Mexican legal residents in the U.S.” Signatories to this agreement were the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations and the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. Fifteen food aid programs were covered by the agreement.<sup>18</sup>

Jorge Castaneda, the former Foreign Affairs Minister of Mexico, recounts the significance of these transnational political forces when recalling the policies that he pursued utilizing the resources of the IME and the network of consulates.<sup>19</sup> According to Castaneda, all consulates were encouraged to lobby local authorities and elected officials so as to gain recognition of the Mexican Consular ID Card and worked actively to implement the four accords outlined above. Thus, for the past four years the Bush administration, while demanding that we secure the border, also has sought help from Mexican consulates in order to ensure that US policies would be implemented effectively without regard to immigration status.

How, specifically, have Mexican consulates shaped coalition building within the Boston area? While certainly attending to Mexican communities in the greater Boston

---

<sup>17</sup> See World Law Bulletin, 8, August 2004, p. 27. Assistant Secretary for OSHA, John Henshaw, signed the safety and health Letter of Agreement.

<sup>18</sup> See World Law Bulletin, 8, August 2004, p. 26

<sup>19</sup> See Jorge Castaneda EX-MEX: From migrants to immigrants (New York: The New Press, 2007). See also ??? ADD source from POV transcript

area, the consulate also deliberately reached out to other communities as well---seeking to build a more forceful political coalition. Two activities are worth attention. First, there were monthly consular corps meetings in which staff from several different consulates in Boston met to discuss their activities. The Swiss, Irish, Brazilian, Swedish, Peruvian, Canadian, and Mexican consulate staff were regular attendees. These monthly meetings established a network among these different national origin groups---networks that have played an important role in building cross national coalitions. Second, this inter-consulate network enabled connections to be made among otherwise distinct national origin immigrant centers; connections between the Irish and Brazilian centers were especially important as they were institutionally robust and provided much needed infrastructure and political access to an otherwise diffuse immigrant population. The In-State Tuition and Driver's License campaigns drew explicitly on these networks to advance a shared pro-immigrant position through several joint actions. As did the immigrant rights rallies of 2006.<sup>20</sup>

Since the Mexican community was small, the Mexican consulate understood that if they were to have any influence on contemporize political debates, such as In-State Tuition and Drivers License Campaigns, they needed to build links to other national origin groups. Moreover, they were aware that the Irish had a special clout in Massachusetts and made every effort to gain their support. Many on the Mexican consulate staff understood all too well that the Irish could assist them in the mundane, but necessary tasks needed for political mobilizing: gaining demonstration permits, political access to local, state, and national political elites, and on at least one occasion even arranged for a meeting room within the state house for the coalition members to meet. The political capitol of the Irish immigrants past and present, was understood as a vital

---

<sup>20</sup> Interviews, Mexican Community Affairs Co-Coordinator, May 14, 2008, and May 4, 2009.

component of the immigrant rights campaign. Although these actions were not formally approved by the Mexican government, the Consulate did maintain contact with officials in Mexico City, and fellow consulates in Washington and NY City.<sup>21</sup>

What are we to make of the consular actions both in the implementation of the accords and in the inter-consulate coalition building? Clearly, the Mexican government has committed significant resources to citizens abroad; perhaps more resources than those same individuals would have received had they remained at home. Some American commentators have suggested that the Mexican government is meddling in American domestic affairs.<sup>22</sup> The accords suggest that the Mexican government is not simply interfering in political matters on the other side of the border, rather the US government had actively solicited and welcomed assistance from Mexican consulates. As one of our interviewees put it: “the US government is schizophrenic; it wants to keep immigrants out but also wants help implementing its policies on the cheap.”<sup>23</sup> The accords, after all, are formal agreements, recognizing co-operation between the two governments. Actions taken under the accords are not adequately described as foreign intervention---the relationship between the two countries is a more complex and mutually satisfying one.

These processes of transnational policy implementation are not new. If we look back to the 1940s and the creation of Fair Employment Policy Commissions aimed at ending employment discrimination, we see that the US government also sought help from Mexican consulates. Then just as now, the U.S. government has actively solicited assistance from Mexican consulates. Far from meddling in US Affairs, consulates aided the Bush administration when implementing its own policies in several domains.

Matthew Gritter has uncovered fascinating material surrounding the Texas FEPC in

---

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*

<sup>22</sup> See Heather MacDonald, “Mexico’s Undiplomatic Diplomats,” *City Journal*, Autumn 2005, available electronically at <<http://www.city-journal.org/printable.php?id=1880>>.

<sup>23</sup> Hattam/Yescas Interview May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

which its officials approached the Mexican consulates in the hope of encouraging Mexican workers who had been subject to discrimination to file charges with the state FEPC.<sup>24</sup>

Assessing the inter-consulate activities is more complex. Clearly, there was a quite explicit campaign to build a broad coalition aimed at shape political debate and policy on issues affecting immigrant populations within the United States. The boundary between foreign and national actors and politics begins to blur as key stake holders from abroad build extensive networks inside the United States in the hope of improving the daily life of a wide range of immigrants living in the greater Boston area. For the most part, these inter-consular activities have been ignored. During Calderon's visit in xxxx, some media attention was given to Mexican consular activities, but for the most part, they have flown under the political radar.<sup>25</sup>

The Irish experience in Boston is also deeply infused with transnational political relations although the specifics differ from the Mexican case. Financial resources and political access have been more important for the Boston Irish, with the consulate playing a more modest role. The Irish Immigration Center (IIC) in Boston , established in 1993, has been funded in large part by grants from the Irish government for years, thereby making this one of the most robust of the non-profit immigrant advocacy groups.<sup>26</sup> But finances are not the only resource to cross the Atlantic Ocean; the Irish government has also lobbied the US Congress and the Bush administration in an effort to obtain additional visas and a fast track to citizenship for the large numbers of undocumented Irish immigrants living in the United States. Prime Minister Ahern visited the U.S., met

---

<sup>24</sup> See Matthew Gritter, "Shaping Incorporation: People of Mexican Origin and the FEPC 1942-1945," dissertation being completed in the Politics department at the New School for Social Research, chap 2.

<sup>25</sup> See Genaro Lozano, "¿Cinco Dias Inutiles?" *Excelsior*, 2008. See also Hattam NPR ref.

<sup>26</sup> See interview with IIC former organizer, Boston, January 31, 2008. The IIC was founded in 1989 and has received funds directly from the Irish government. Resources from the Irish government with the creation of the Foreign Immigration Affairs Office within xxxx.

with President Bush on April xx, 2008, and even addressed Congress in order to advance the rights of Irish immigrants.<sup>27</sup> Although such efforts suggest that the Irish might have an inside track with special access at the highest political levels; such international lobbying has been a divisive force within the Irish immigrant community and in the immigrant rights coalition more generally. Divided reactions to the Ahern visit were echoed in our interview with a former IIC organizer who trembled when recalling the deep rifts among the organizers over whether to march wearing T-shirts stating, “Legalize the Irish” during the immigrants rights march. The issue was one of intense political debate within the organization over whether to secure their own national origin rights first or to maintain solidarity with a broader pro-immigrant coalition.<sup>28</sup>

#### Competing Coalitions: GBIO and MIRA

When beginning this research, we wanted to assess the development of a black-brown coalition through an exploration of immigrant and racial politics in Boston. To what extent were immigrants and African Americans forming new political alliances and to what ends? Was the long standing race-ethnicity distinction being reworked into new political formations?<sup>29</sup> Our research quickly lead us to reframe our question from the absence or presence of coalition building to the issue of competing coalitions. To be sure, coalition politics abounds in Boston, but it is hardly captured by the notion of a singular black-brown coalition. The more interesting question became: which coalitions were being formed? By whom? To what ends? And how do the multiple coalitions effect each other?

---

<sup>27</sup> See Sarah Garland, “Ahern Will Ask Congress To Act on Irish Immigrants in America,” *The Sun*, April 30, 2008; Sarah Garland, “Immigrants Riled by Irish Push for Special Status,” *the Sun*, May 5, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> See interview with IIC organizer January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2008,

<sup>29</sup> For extended account of the origins and effects of the race-ethnicity distinction, see Hattam, *In the Shadow of Race: Jews, Latinos, and Immigrant Politics in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2007).

Attending to the differences between MIRA and GBIO helps to capture central political fault lines on questions of ethnic and racial difference. MIRA is a Boston based non-profit organization, with one hundred organizations as members and a staff of fifty.<sup>30</sup> Their mission is to “promote rights and opportunities of immigrants and refugees” largely through shaping the public policies that affect their lives. Organizers at MIRA were closely connected to the Immigrant Rights Rallies in 2006, with Marcony Almedia helping to plot the route for the April 10 rally. Much of their work has focused on lobbying the state and federal governments; tellingly the MIRA website provides contact information to local state and federal politicians and encourages members to lobby on behalf of key immigrant rights concerns. If one looks at the website today (May 4th 2009), the two lead items are “Immigrant’s Day at the State House 2009” and “MIRA FY10” in which a list of budgetary amendments is provided and readers are urged to contact their legislators to urge their support. What is more the call provides a web link that allows for easy communication with the relevant legislative offices.<sup>31</sup>

MIRA is one of the most important umbrella organization advocating for immigrants in the Boston area. Even a cursory glance makes clear that MIRA is not an identity or nationality based organization, but an organization that works to forge a political coalition across groups. As their name suggests, one of the important political divisions MIRA seeks to bridge is that between immigrants and refugees. The political status of undocumented and refugee is of considerable consequence and has lead to fissures between immigrant groups. Dominican and Haitians are the principal refugee populations in the greater Boston area and MIRA offers a place that explicitly seeks to forge linkages between refugees and immigrants. Member organizations include the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts,, the Asian Center of Merrimack

---

<sup>30</sup> MIRA head quarters are at 105 Chauncy St, Boston, Massachusetts. MIRA was established in 1988.

<sup>31</sup> See <http://www.miracoalition.org/>.

Valley, the Association of Haitian Women, the Bosnian Community Center for Resource Development, the Boston Center for Refugee Health and Human Rights, the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center, the Brazilian Immigrant Center, the Cambridge Portuguese Credit Union, the Cape Verdean Association of Brocton, Freedom House, the Haitian American Public Health Initiative, the Irish Immigration Center, the Jewish Community Relations Council, and Jobs with Justice. This is no stove pipe institution--- the ambition is to link fates through common political action.

Probing more deeply into the coalition, we wanted to know whether or not, or in what ways, MIRA saw contemporary struggles over immigrant rights as connected to civil rights for African Americans. One of the organizers we interviewed moved easily between the language of civil rights , through immigrant rights to human rights. When pressed on the linkages between race and immigration, it became clear that there was a considerable gulf between claiming the language of civil rights and active bridging of race and immigration. Put simply, the link was there in theory, but seemed less apparent in practice. When pressed on the connection between civil and immigrant rights, the organizer noted that there had been a wonderful speech given by the Reverend Nelson Johnson of the Beloved Community Center in Greensboro, North Carolina at the Low Income Immigrant Rights Conference held on December 6, 2007 at the National Immigration Law Center in Washington DC.<sup>32</sup> While Johnson's speech is indeed powerful and makes the case for bridging immigration and race, we were struck by the fact that the bridging figure was so far from home. No reference was made to similar instances of such linkage within MIRA.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, MIRA has been doing important work bridging immigrants and refugees and different national origin groups, but MIRA has not bridged the race-immigration

---

<sup>32</sup> See [http://www.immigrationadvocates.org/calendar/event.176507-2006\\_LowIncome\\_Immigrant\\_Rights\\_Conference\\_Keynote\\_Address\\_by\\_Rev\\_Nelson\\_Johnson/](http://www.immigrationadvocates.org/calendar/event.176507-2006_LowIncome_Immigrant_Rights_Conference_Keynote_Address_by_Rev_Nelson_Johnson/)

<sup>33</sup> See MIRA interviews, February 1 and May 16, 2008.

division set in place almost a century ago. An impressive coalition has certainly been formed, but it is not the black-brown coalition that many have been waiting for.

Across town, GBIO has been building a rather different coalition.<sup>34</sup> They, too, have created an important umbrella organization bringing together seventy institutions representing approximately 50,000 members---“a diverse mix” they claim “economically, racially, geographically, and otherwise” united in their commitment to faith as a medium for social and political change.<sup>35</sup> GBIO was established in 1996 by forty-five clergy and community leaders who wanted to build a new organization that would transcend Boston’s “historic divides” especially those of race and class.<sup>36</sup> Bridging racial division through faith has remained central throughout. The organization includes a wide range of congregations, including the Roxbury Presbyterian Church, Temple Emmanuel in Newton, Trinity Church, Back bay, and Catholic Sisters Collaborative.

Like MIRA, GBIO directs much of its energy at changing policy at the state level. Matters of housing, health care, elder care, and education have been important areas of concern for several years and have led to important victories including passage of the State of MA \$100 million Housing Trust Fund, won two million dollar increase for Boston Public School textbooks and supplies, supported the Justice for Janitors campaign to win significant pay and benefit increases. Interestingly, at the large Assemblies in April and May 2008, explicit links were made between religious commitment and political change. At the Delegates Assembly held on April 28th, 2008, held at Temple Emanuel in Newton, MA, they invited Secretary of Elder Affairs, Michael Festa, and made him gather together in the front of the synagogue to commit to political change in

---

<sup>34</sup> GBIO is headquartered at 594 Columbia Rd, Dorchester, Massachusetts. It was founded in January of 1996.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted from GBIO website under membership. See <http://www.gbio.org/aboutus.html>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, under the heading “History.”

the eyes of God.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, at the even larger Tenth Anniversary Action held on Tuesday, May 27th, 2008, Duval Patrick was in attendance, with the same intention of having him commit in public to certain political change.<sup>38</sup> The demands in and of themselves were not enormous---the significance of their political work does not lie in policy change---nevertheless, the explicit linkage of faith and politics was stunning. A diverse group of clergy and parishioners coming together for a shared political ends. As with MIRA, it is the smaller scale bridge building that is impressive. Small steps are being taken to reconfigure previously divisive identifications.<sup>39</sup> This remains a long way from the black-brown coalition that many have been calling for, but may provide ground work needed for a larger political transformation.

Racial diversity is front and center. Black and white coming together through faith. The Delegates Assembly of April 28, 2008, for example, was led jointly by Reverend Hurmon Hamilton, of Roxbury Presbyterian Church and Ms Abby Flam of Temple Emanuel in Newton, with duties shared throughout the event. The congregation was equally diverse, about half black-half white. There were also a small number of Muslims present.<sup>40</sup> A particularly interesting GBIO campaign that has brought issues of immigration, race, and faith together is the Haitian Nursing Home Worker Campaign. The Haitian workers had four complaints: disrespect in the work place, low wages, no healthcare, and poor staffing ratios. GBIO began by tackling the issue of disrespect and this then led into broader support for the healthcare initiatives in Massachusetts. GBIO

---

<sup>37</sup> Temple Emanuel is a conservative Synagogue located at 385 Ward St, Newton Centre, MA. The changes agreed to were modest: redesigning of the office of Elder Affairs website, improving the telephone (1-88-AGE-INFO) system, and agreeing to design and implement a public education and marketing campaign so that caregivers and elders will know how to use the website, telephone system, and caregiver program. See "Terms of Understanding" a flyer distributed at the April 8th Assembly (copy of flyer in Hattam possession).

<sup>38</sup> Tenth Anniversary Celebration was called "Promise, Power, Possibilities," and was held in the Case Gymnasium at Boston University 285 Babcock St., Boston, MA. An estimated xxx were in attendance. GBIO made a DVD of the celebration which we have in our possession.

<sup>39</sup> Attended Temple Emanuel Delegates Assembly and 10th Anniversary DVD.

<sup>40</sup> We estimate that there were less than 20 Muslims total.

itself suggest that the Haitian Nursing Home campaign gained broad support “as many GBIO members worried that the maltreatment of workers was also affecting the quality of care elderly parents were receiving in nursing homes.”<sup>41</sup>

To some extent, we want to make a simple but neglected point here. Immigrants are embedded in a wide range of efforts to build broad coalitions. Many believe that the political future lies in moving beyond singular identity formations by building more inclusive organizations that bring together people from more than one national origin racial group. The pressing question is not identity politics versus coalition building, but which coalitions are of the greatest political importance. Which of the competing alliances and umbrella organizations will likely come to dominate the political landscape? Or if no one organization triumphs, how will multiple coalitions operate together? These questions take us beyond the question of whether immigrants and African Americans are forming black-brown coalitions, to ask instead how immigrant and racial identities are being reworked? by whom? And to what ends?

### Queer Migrations<sup>42</sup>

Attending to the co-occurrence of mobilization around both sexuality and immigration in the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century is crucial to any understanding of immigrant rights politics in Massachusetts. The two are complexly inter-connected in ways that both broadens and divides potential coalitions. The movement to legalize same-sex marriages in Massachusetts (MASS Equality) has played a decisive role in the political life of the state. It placed the actions of the legislature at the center of the national debate on the question of gay marriage. Advocates for and

---

<sup>41</sup> Quoted from GBIO website, under Accomplishments.

<sup>42</sup> Shioban Somerville has paved new ground when linking sexuality and immigration.. See her innovative essay, “Sexual Aliens and the Racialized State: A Queer Reading of the 1952 U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act,” in Eithre Luibheid and Lionel Cantu ed., Queer Migrations (2005).

against changing marriage law converged in Boston after the decision by the Massachusetts Supreme Court gave the right to same-sex couples to wed in the landmark case of Goodridge v. Massachusetts.<sup>43</sup> Even after this judicial decision was handed down, the legislature sought to prohibit such unions by introducing a ballot initiative. Pro-gay campaigners anticipated this possibility and used their extensive network and press connections to defeat this rear guard action.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the ultimate gay marriage victory, the political campaign fueled tensions amongst residents of the commonwealth. The debate was not limited to the halls of the State House; but extended into many political arena and had input from many constituencies. Churches, universities, labor unions, and employers had to think about the implications that such unions would have. Immigrants were not exempt from the debate, both because many immigrants were themselves gay and wondered how changing marriage laws might intersect with questions of immigration status, and because many immigrants viewed issues of sexual discrimination broadly and thus considered sexual discrimination as part of a linked fate. Not surprisingly, immigrants like the rest of the population, are divided over the question of gay marriage. Some sought refuge in Catholic and Evangelist churches, and denounced the new law. Others turned a blind eye to the issue and remained within their immigrant communities ostracizing any gay or lesbian members while avoiding political action. Still others welcomed the development as a way to break free from the constraints of conservative groups and families and worked to build a progressive coalition that might address discrimination in many forms.

The Latino gay and lesbian community has been especially visible within the Mass Equality coalition, celebrating Latino LGBT Pride for the last five years, and participating with a float in the Boston LGBT Parade. The most active group is the

---

<sup>43</sup> Goodridge v. Massachusetts 440 Mass. 309, 798 NE2nd 941 (November 18, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> xxxxx

Somos Latinos LGBT organization, with smaller groups of individuals participating in the large LGBT organizations of Massachusetts.<sup>45</sup> However, no established LGBT group has yet fully participated within an immigrant coalition: neither MIRA nor the Ethnic Newswire include LGBT groups within their umbrella organizations. Both the directors of Somos Latinos LGBT and Mr. Marconi Almeida from MIRA mentioned that they had held meetings with Mass Equality to have them join the MIRA coalition, but to this day they have not yet done so.<sup>46</sup>

However, there is a risk of including LGBT groups into broad immigrant rights' coalitions, especially for those working closely with synagogues and churches. Almeida made the dilemma readily apparent when he recounted an episode around his task of mapping the route for the April 10th, 2006 immigrant rallies.

Our rally started in the Boston Common and ended up in the Baptist Church, the very famous one that they have on Tremont Street. So there was the final speech and the end of the rally. And I remember because my name was out there, cause I was kinda the head of the organizers for that rally, I got two phone calls, from two gay activists who said do you know that that church, the past of that church is of Romney's friends, and he is part of the national group to defeat gays, and they say that the gays are the devil, this and that and all of that. I had no clue. But that could be.<sup>47</sup>

For Almeria, the tension between the Baptist Church's progressive position on some issues and its hostility to gay rights was palpable. Ending the rally at the Tremont St church brought divisions between immigrant and gay rights to the fore. Not all saw the Baptist Church in a sympathetic light.

Similarly, Marconi noted that tensions exist between the Evangelical Brazilian churches and the Brazilian ethnic newspapers. Churches provide much needed financial revenue for local newspapers as regular advertisers in the local press, but our interviews

---

<sup>45</sup> Information available at <http://www.somoslatinoslgbt.org>. See interview with Wilfred Labiosa, Board Member of Somos Latinos LGBT on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Refs to both interviews needed

<sup>47</sup> In response to the question about the role of the church in the rallies and the dislike of some congregations towards the LGBT community. Interview with Marconi Almeida.

indicate that the revenue often comes with strings attached. In the case of one local Brazilian newspaper, Marconi commented, one Evangelical church made it clear that it would withhold advertising if the paper runs gay friendly ads and articles.<sup>48</sup> In this instance, the church actively lobbied to keep issues of sexuality and immigration apart. Thus far, the Brazilian newspaper has resisted the pressure, but editors are well aware of the costs their editorial position entails.<sup>49</sup>

Although divisions between gay rights and immigrant groups are real, there is some evidence that the relation between the two might be changing. For example, while there were few rainbow flags at the 2006 rallies, by 2008 they were clearly visible. Most striking is a picture from the march in Chicago on xxxx???, where there was a large contingent carrying two banners reading “Lesbians and Gays support Immigrant Rights!” and “Latino Gay Community.” The shift within the coalition was readily visible in visuals of the 2006 and 2008 marches themselves. Right away one can see the differences in the flags being carried. Few rainbow flags were seen in 2006, by 2008, they cover the screen. While these images are from Chicago rather than Boston, they echo statements made in our Boston interviews.

---

<sup>48</sup> Second interview with Marconi Almeida, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> Ref to interview needed



AP Photo/Charles Rex Arbogast (NYT, May 2, 2006)



Chicago, May 1st, 2006

Compare these images with photos taken in Chicago two years later.



Chicago Immigrant Rights Rally, 2008



Photo by Carlos Yescas

These images suggests that the immigrant rights coalition is changing rapidly and that issues of sexuality and immigration might be being bridged and in so doing contemporary notions of discrimination may well be reconfigured. While a few images can not settle the matter, they should alert us to possible changes underway and at a minimum lead us to look carefully for shifts into current political coalitions and their conception of identification, discrimination, and opposition.

Although divisions between immigrant and gay rights groups persist, our interviews suggest that there may also be a generational differences at work in which older more establish activist for civil rights have ignored LGBT rights as part of their demands, while newer organizations and younger organizers appear to be more open to embracing gay rights within a broad conception of anti-discrimination. In the past, the only sight of LGBT immigrants was as activists; older more establish social movements frequently ignored immigrants who marched alongside their citizen partners during Gay Pride, holding such signs as “Binational-Biracial couple.”<sup>50</sup> These mix-immigrant status couples, were not granted the same privileges as other same sex couples when same-sex marriage became legal in Massachusetts. The reason being that federal immigration law continues to trump state marriage law leaving mix-immigrant same sex couples vulnerable to federal immigration law. Thus illegal immigrant who wish to wed under the same sex marriage law risk being deported under federal immigration. The danger of deportation was conveyed to a group of binational gay couples in xxx, when GLAAD held events to elaborate the consequences of the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling for gay couples.<sup>51</sup> This double jeopardy of immigration and marriage law has gathered little

---

<sup>50</sup> Such signs were signed by one of authors during the marches celebrating Boston Gay Pride in 2004.

<sup>51</sup> As reported by Will Thomson on his radio piece NAFTA Partners, documenting Love, Marriage & International Intigue: A Forum on Immigration Dangers for Same-sex Binational Couples held at Northeastern University school of Law. Need date....

attention in main stream media because as yet few advocacy groups address the complex intersection of sexuality and immigration.

Tensions between gay and immigrants' rights groups notwithstanding, we see the potential for broadening a progressive coalition that links issues of sexuality and immigration. The connections are partly created by the historical overlap of political mobilizations on both front. But the connections do not stop there; there is more than co-incidence at work here. But what exactly is the forces linking sexuality and immigration? We have come to see a connection between sexuality and migration that has long been noted at the level of the national state, but often have been ignored at the level of the globe. Historically, many lesbians and gays were drawn to large urban centers such as San Francisco and New York in the hope of finding safety and community in numbers. We have begun to see that there is an international equivalent to these national population flows in which those with non-conventional sexual orientations are drawn to cities around the globe. These queer migrations are fueled both by a push and a pull as many seek to get out of the confines of home and are drawn to the anonymity, freedom, and community often found in large metropolises. If we are right here, then the emergence of MASS Equality and immigration politics as important forces in the commonwealth are more than historical co-incidence.

But to leave the account of sexuality and migration here is deeply misleading. The problem lies in the implication that US cities are beacons of tolerance and openness on both the national and international level. But this is not so. U.S. immigration policy, replete with its deep heteronormative assumptions, creates important asymmetries between the role of American cities at the level of the nation and globe. Siobhan Somerville's brilliant re-reading of the 1952 Immigration Act in which she traces the sexual politics contained within the family reunification provisions begins to explore

these critical issues. Somerville shows how issues of sexuality infused both the congressional debate and the law. The intersection are not accidental, but rather stem from assumptions about who is family both at home and abroad.<sup>52</sup> We have seen the intersections reappear in current debate as immigrant advocates try to anticipate the complex interplay of changes in gay marriage law and immigration status.

United States immigration law thus both restricts queer migrations. Recognizing the depth of this intersection, however, also raises possibilities of new more wide ranging political mobilizations. The political opportunity before us, as we see it, is to rethink the nature of discrimination and in doing so to foster new political identifications, thereby enabling new coalitions to form. But even this account assumes too linear a process of political change in which we move from rethinking discrimination, to reidentification, to new coalitions. Although we feel strongly that all three elements are necessary if we are to secure enduring political change, in practice the three elements do not move in a linear sequence. Acting in concert can help change extant notions of discrimination, identifying with others helps us to reimagine discrimination. All three elements are crucial, but often take place in a complex inter-play rather than a serial chain.

### Conclusion: Assessing Prospects for a New Politics of Opposition

From our research to date we wish to draw two provisional conclusions. First, we have been impressed by the length and robustness of immigrant rights politics in Boston. Several organizations have been operation for more than a decade, some for two--- evidence of considerable staying power in a world known for the fragility and transience of its organizations. Moreover, we have been struck by the importance of broad coalition

---

<sup>52</sup> See Siobhan B. Somerville, "Sexual Aliens and the Racialized State: A Queer Reading of the 1952 U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act," in Eithre Luibheid and Lionel Cantu ed., Queer Migrations (2005).

building as a central goal of many organizations and activists working in the Boston area. To be sure, the precise contours of the different umbrella organizations vary with each envisioning rather different coalitions: MIRA and GBIO, for example, have both worked hard to bring a wide range of organizations into a progressive coalition. But which groups they tap, and how they envision the frontiers of change are quite different. Thus the pressing issue is not so much of whether to form coalitions; the political arithmetic makes the power of numbers an appealing strategy across the board. But the contentious issue is which coalitions to join and on what terms. Coalitions are clearly forming; the question is on whose term.

Our second observation is somewhat at odds with our first. Many of our interviewees attest to the continued division that persists within their organizations. Time and again we left the interviews stunned by the cleavages that we had not even imagined: Are Brazilians really Latinos? Do Haitians refugees suffer the same degree of discrimination as the undocumented? In what ways might issues of sexuality be linked to the politics of immigrant discrimination? Are white ethnics part of a rainbow coalition?

We thus see a double move in our interview material. On the one hand, many are working to build broad coalitions, on the other, old identity fights persist within these umbrella organizations as member groups struggle to set the terms of political collaboration.

It is simply too early to tell whether deep and enduring identifications have begun to change. It will take both more time and additional research to assess whether immigrant rights coalitions are forming new identifications. But one hopeful sign can be seen in the generational differences evident among interviewees. To be sure the numbers are small, but there does seem to be a difference in aspiration between the sixties activists and a new wave of political organizers, over many of the most divisive issues. The

younger organizers seem more open to rethinking discrimination and in doing so more willing to include a diverse array of participants in their coalitions. When undocumented white ethnics, gay and lesbians, and transnational actors are included in the new political coalitions, the movement for immigration reform seems to be redefining the terms of political opposition. Whether immigration politics will indeed change the broad contours of American identity politics in the next decade remains to be seen. By tracking the complex array of political forces identified above, we hope to assess the developments in years ahead.