Dear Readers,

Thank you in advance for taking the time to read and comment on this paper. This project began during my undergraduate studies at the University of Chicago, and now I am rewriting it into a potential journal article for publication. This work in progress is the story of a controversial and divisive election. In 1983, Chicago elected its first black mayor, Harold Washington, in the most racially charged election the city had ever seen. Historical accounts of this election, as well as the city’s popular memory, have come to perpetuate an idealized narrative of a Black-Latino coalition that brought Washington to victory, with Latinos from all backgrounds coalescing at the polls. However, Latino voters’ support for Washington varied greatly depending on racial identity, differing levels of anti-black racism, generational divides, and national heritage. Panethnic Latino identity did not exist in the realm of Chicago electoral politics and Latinos were still very much politically divided in the 1980s. Instead of assuming preexistent Latino unity in formal politics, I critically examine the efficacy of strategies used to garner the support of this contested constituency.

The paper has two goals. First, I seek to clarify the way in which Latinos voted in both the primary and general election in 1983. In this case, “clarifying” Latino political attitudes and behavior is done by complicating the story, as comes natural to the historian. As I suggest above, there was much more that divided Latinos in Chicago than united them. Second, I hope to demonstrate how despite the mixed electoral results, the Washington campaign’s appeal to “Latino” voters helped legitimize the idea of a monolithic, panethnic category and voting bloc.

The missing piece is the memory aspect, which I am still trying to formulate in the conclusion—a work in progress. This election has been a very important rallying point for Latinos in Chicago today as they imagine their political futures. I wonder if folks have thoughts about how I can write about this historical moment conscious of how it impacts political movements today. I’m also interested in what connections to secondary literature are made. Into what conservations could the paper possibly insert itself?

Best,

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“What are We?”: Latino Politics, Identity, and Memory in the 1983 Chicago Mayoral Election

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Introduction

Chicago was swept up in a wave of excitement, frustration, anger, and hope as the results of the 1983 mayoral election were revealed. Newspapers printed at maximum capacity that day, with front pages boldly announcing Chicago’s new mayor after a campaign season like none before. In one of the most racially charged elections in American history, the city appeared to have been split between Black and White, machine and independent, status quo and reform. Despite racial fear mongering and a strong opposition from the Democratic machine, Harold Washington, the Democratic nominee, became the city’s first Black mayor. As the champion of the independent reform movement, Washington represented the frustration of countless Chicagoans who were neglected by machine politics and hoped that their voices could be heard in city hall. Given how his election catalyzed the political engagement of several underrepresented groups in the city, including the growing Latino community, it stands as one of the most important elections in the city’s history.

Written accounts and public memory frame Washington’s election as the triumphant story of a Black-Latino political coalition, with a cohesive Latino voting bloc that stood in racial solidarity with Blacks.¹ This understanding of Latino politics during the 1983 election is rooted in the assumption that linguistic and cultural similarities between different Latino groups inevitably united them around a common political agenda. Granted, Mexican American and

Puerto Rican neighborhoods coalesced in some non-electoral community organizing on labor issues well before the 1980s, but this panethnic unity did not transfer into formal politics.\textsuperscript{2} The dominant narrative of this election does not address the initial distrust and lack of Latino support for Harold Washington during the Democratic primary in February of 1983, where he earned only about 15 percent of support from all the precincts that were predominantly Latino.\textsuperscript{3} By analyzing the electoral results from the 1983 primary, I will demonstrate the innate heterogeneity of Latino voters and show that there was no unanimous Latino support for Washington.

Nevertheless, the 1983 campaign period was also the beginning of a long process that would discursively form Latinos into a theoretically united political front, regardless of whether they actually were or not. Harold Washington’s campaign and Latino political elites introduced and helped create the concept of a legitimate and panethnic Latino electorate for the first time in Chicago. This rhetoric of Latino cohesion was reinforced through an aggressive promotion of panethnic symbolism by Washington’s team, as evidenced by campaign records. In order to construct a Latino voting bloc, Washington’s campaign had to confront the challenges of racial-national heterogeneity and subsequent differences in political allegiances between Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and others. Beyond the election, the Washington campaign’s rhetoric had lasting consequences for Latino identity. Other sociopolitical forces in Chicago such as the Black-White racial binary, decreases in public services, and new opportunities for political inclusion forced Latinos to reimagine their engagement in civic life as a collective whole.

\textsuperscript{2} \textit{Formal politics} refers to the sphere of electoral politics. But voting is not the only form of political participation, especially for communities of color traditionally distanced from electoral politics. \textit{Informal politics} refers to forms of community engagement such as volunteerism and nonelectoral activity like protests and rallies. Latinos in Chicago were politically engaged well before the election of Harold Washington, but mostly in the domain of informal politics. Similarly, Mexican Americans in Los Angeles found community engagement and nonelectoral activity to be more inviting avenues for political engagement. See: Lisa García Bedolla, \textit{Fluid Borders: Latino Power, Identity, and Politics in Los Angeles} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

In a convergence of local and national processes of identity formation, the Washington campaign strategy contributed to the institutionalization of panethnic *Latinidad* that was taking place at the national level. Along with national organizations, like the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and the League of United Latin American Citizens, the campaign to elect Harold Washington worked parallel to and simultaneously with the larger national project of constructing Latino unity and group identity in electoral politics. The Washington campaign helped define a constituency that was just beginning to take shape at a national level. By purposefully appealing to a panethnic “Latino” constituency, bringing in spokespeople for national panethnic unity, and pushing out a message of Latino unity through the press and literature, Harold Washington’s candidacy reinforced the concept of the “Latino vote” in ways that few political campaigns had done before. These strategies at the local level were revealing for Latino racial formation at the national level, as they would test the potential of a panethnic Latino constituency in a city with over 420,000 Latinos of diverse national heritages, who were just beginning to engage in elections.

In sum, this case study challenges historical assumptions of Latino political homogeneity, examines the creation of a rhetorically constructed panethnic voting bloc, and shows how Chicago informed the development of a Latino constituency in national politics. But this project also challenges the Black-White racial binary of Chicago history, and American political historiography more broadly. By reconstructing the history of Latino political engagement

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outside of a triumphal “rainbow coalition” narrative that strips it of its nuance and causation, I urge for a more deliberate approach to Latino political history that is mindful of its difference and integrity, in which Latinos can create and occupy their own political space.

Today, Chicago has the third-highest concentration of Latinos in the United States after Los Angeles and New York. Historically, Chicago has experienced several phases of migration before reaching the numbers and geographic distribution that we see today. One of the earliest periods of growth stretched from the time of the Mexican Revolution in 1921 until the early 1930s, when a small community of Mexican steel and rail workers established the first Mexican cultural and community organizations in the South Chicago area. These early settlers served as a racial buffer that separated Black and White workers, never fully accepted by either group. Between 1960 and 1990, the Mexican population (by far the largest Latino subgroup in Chicago) “increased by more than six times—from 55,600 to 352,560.” Puerto Ricans were the second largest Latino subgroup, many came from New York in the 1930s, but also experienced their greatest growth during the 1960s and 1970s. Latino Chicago was comprised of both long-established and bourgeoning neighborhoods with a mix of US citizens, legal permanent residents, and ever-increasing undocumented residents. Central and South Americans and Cubans were also present in smaller enclaves. Indeed, Chicago was one of the few cities with a significant presence of more than one Latino group. Whereas cities like Los Angeles and New

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York had large majorities of either Mexican Americans or Puerto Ricans, Chicago was uniquely positioned to put notions of Latino unity and panethnic political consciousness to the test.

Segregation and racial prejudice worked to stifle Latino political involvement in Chicago’s Democratic machine. Secluded from political life, Latino voters were seen as innocuous and ultimately taken for granted over the course of decades. Even in wards where Latinos constituted the majority of the population, there was still little engagement in formal politics. Ignored by the Democratic Party, non-electoral political organizing on issues such as affirmative action fueled the creation of groups like the Mexican Community Committee of South Chicago, the Puerto Rican Organization for Political Action, and several others in the 1960s. But the experience of structural inequality across Latino ethnic subgroups spurred a movement for panethnic solidarity and led to the establishment of the Spanish Coalition for Jobs in 1971, the first organization in Chicago to advocate for more than one Spanish-speaking ethnic group. However, this early panethnic organizing still focused on non-electoral political strategies such as community protests against employment discrimination.

In the 1980s, Latino community organizations began to engage in an unprecedented level of electoral activity. This surge in formal political engagement was part of the nascent independent political movement determined to challenge the hegemony of the entrenched Democratic machine and create a more racially representative leadership in city hall and in the state legislature. The independent political movement had great appeal within Black and Latino neighborhoods. In the case of the largely Mexican Pilsen neighborhood, Italian American Alderman Vito Marzullo had been in office since 1953, a fact that reflected how in the 25th Ward “Mexicans live but do not rule.” Similarly in Little Village, the 22nd Ward, white

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Alderman Frank Stemberk didn’t even live in the district that he represented in city hall.\textsuperscript{10} Organizations like the Independent Political Organization (IPO) of Little Village, founded in 1981, sought to dethrone the Regular Democratic Organization. The IPO’s strategy was to find candidates that would represent the people, not the interests of party officials, and then campaign on an independent platform in opposition to the incumbent.

Around the time of the founding of the IPO in Little Village, a group of Latino and Black community organizers began meeting to build a coalition that would position people of color as “people-oriented candidates” in the 1982 Illinois legislature race.\textsuperscript{11} Officially launched in January 1982, the Black-Latino Alliance endorsed a multiracial slate of candidates including the likes of Jose Salgado, Carmelo Vargas, and Danny Davis. \textit{El Heraldo de Chicago}, a major Spanish-language newspaper, noted that the Alliance aimed to fight against a white-dominated Machine that had “traditionally given its support to other ethnic groups at the expense of Blacks and Latinos.”\textsuperscript{12} Despite its promising beginnings, the Black-Latino Alliance was limited in its success. Alliance-endorsed Juan Soliz, the first Latino ever to run for the Illinois legislature, lost to the white machine-backed candidate in a district that was seventy percent Latino.

What some politically active Latinos considered “an important test of political strength for Latinos in Chicago” turned out to be a disappointment that proved the intransigence of the machine.\textsuperscript{13} Yet this was only the beginning of the independent movement in Chicago. In December of 1982, US District Judge Thomas R. McMillen ruled against the discriminatory ward mapping approved by the City Council in 1981. The decision meant that the boundaries of


wards 37, 15, 26, and 32 would be redrawn in order to create two majority-Black wards and two majority-Latino wards. In his ruling, McMillen stated that Latinos were “entitled to better representation in the City Council and have been deprived of that opportunity."\textsuperscript{14} The court’s decision kept hope for political change alive, and coincided with the beginning of a contentious mayoral election season.

There were three candidates in the 1983 Democratic primary for mayor of Chicago: incumbent Mayor Jane Byrne, Cook County State’s Attorney Richard M. Daley, and Congressman Harold Washington of the Illinois’ First District. In 1979, Jane Byrne was the first woman ever elected to be mayor of Chicago. Byrne was strong in white working-class neighborhoods but, criticized for her responses to job decline and dilapidated public housing, she struggled in her relationship to impoverished African American neighborhoods on the South Side. As son of Mayor Richard J. Daley, who was in office for twenty-one years, Richard M. Daley was the legacy to a cult of personality and posed a significant challenge for Byrne. Both candidates appealed and held close ties to the Regular Democratic Organization – a problem for the independent voter movement.

When movement leaders asked Washington to run on an independent, anti-machine, reform platform, Washington would only consider if Black voter registration went up. This stipulation was made with an astute understanding of the historically low mobilization of Black voters, especially in the election cycles of the 1970s. To Washington’s surprise, however, Black community organizers registered voters in the tens of thousands.\textsuperscript{15} Black Chicagoans were


\textsuperscript{15} Travis, “Harold,” \textit{The People’s Mayor}, 140.
inspired by the prospect of Chicago’s first Black mayor, and at 39.5 percent of the population, their mass mobilization ultimately convinced Washington to run.\textsuperscript{16}

With the machine’s White voters split between Byrne and Daley, as well as Washington’s near complete hold of Black voters and appeal to lakefront-liberal White voters, the primary was very close. This split represented the clear-cut voting allegiances within the city. The voting allegiances of the racially, ethnically, and \textit{politically} diverse Latino population were not as clear cut. Contemporaneous newspaper accounts and political analysis speculated broadly on where Latinos positioned themselves during the 1983 primary. The most common distinction was between Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans. Underlying these ethnic divisions were distinct historical patterns of citizenship and migration, wherein Puerto Ricans were citizens as opposed to the citizen-resident-undocumented pattern in Mexican neighborhoods. Rivlin suggests that, unlike Puerto Rican self-identification as non-Whites, “Mexican Americans sought to identify themselves as just another ethnic group like the Italians, the Irish, and the Poles.”\textsuperscript{17} This idea of assimilation reflected the historical pattern of immigrants distancing and distinguishing themselves from African Americans as a means to assimilate into whiteness. Jaime Dominguez adds further complexity to this picture with the observation of citizenship and class-based distinctions between established middle-class Mexicans in South Chicago and more recent descendants of Mexican immigrants in communities like Little Village, who were more prone to vote progressive and to align with the Black-Latino coalition.\textsuperscript{18}

Other writers have helped to fill out our understanding of inter-Latino political divisions. Writer Florence Levinsohn states, “interestingly, it is speculated that Latinos are split in their

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Rivlin, \textit{Fire on the Prairie}, 351.
\end{itemize}
attitudes, with Puerto Ricans more friendly and open to Blacks while Mexicans are more strongly anti-Black.”19 Within the Mexican American community itself, political commentator David K. Fremon observed generational distinctions in the 22nd Ward between “older more established Mexicans, who view themselves as merely another ethnic group” and “younger, more liberal Mexicans, who see themselves as a disadvantaged minority.”20 This divide was representative of a broader shift in the Latino population as older Mexican political leaders slowly gave way to younger politicians from the Chicano movement.21 In the complex neighborhood-based geography of Chicago politics, Latinos were divided in the ways they identified with the ethnic and racial politics of the primary election.

The Chicago Tribune and other news outlets speculated about the difficulty Washington would have with Latino voters, given the historical and racial tensions between Blacks and Latinos and the power of the Democratic machine. Journalist David Axelrod wrote: “despite a budding independent Hispanic movement, that vote is still largely a Democratic organization reserve.”22 Journalist Phillip Lentz pointed toward an opinion poll according to which approximately 60 percent of Latinos approved of Mayor Byrne before the primary. How the poll was designed and if it was representative was not mentioned, but the article stated that “as with previous waves of immigrants, this optimism [about the mayor’s performance] is reflected in support of authority and the political establishment.”23 Yet this approval of Byrne did not come without its challenges. A 250-member coalition of six Latino organizations across the city endorsed Richard M. Daley for mayor in December of 1982, denouncing Byrne on the basis of

20 Fremon, Chicago Politics, Ward by Ward, 147.
her ineffective allocation of resources to Latino communities. Furthermore, the spokesperson for the group, Lupe Perez, labeled Washington “a civil rights candidate of the black community and not a political candidate to represent all the citizens of Chicago.”24 This sentiment against Washington reflected the fear of racial preference in resource allocation, a fear of economic and job competition that was considered to be a legitimate logic to vote against Washington.

Racial fear mongering came to the fore during a televised mayoral candidate debate on February 7, 1983, on WBBS-TV Channel 60’s Opinion Publica. The debate brought in Latino representatives from each of the campaigns to speak on the issues followed by a panel “composed of academic and media persons from the Spanish-speaking community.”25 Representing Mayor Byrne was her assistant press secretary for Spanish communication, Fernando Prieto. The sensitive issue of affirmative action in city hiring came up during the question-and-answer period. Prieto, born in Colombia, spoke on the allocation of jobs in the mayor’s office: “we can go to the Department of Human Services and we will see how that department is very dark. Can you imagine how it would be with a Black mayor?”26 The Reverend Jorge Morales of Saint Luke Unity Church of Christ and founder of the Westtown Concerned Citizens Coalition pointed to this incident as representative of the Byrne administration’s efforts to divide an independent Black-Latino coalition. Morales demanded that Byrne “apologize to Chicago’s Spanish-speaking community for the use of these racist tactics,” which in his opinion sought to pit Blacks and Latinos against each other and cast Latinos as a White-ethnic group fearful of Black people.27

26 Jorge Morales, press release statement, 17 February 1983, box 26, folder 12, HWAC.
27 Ibid.
Washington aimed to leverage a coalition of Blacks and Puerto Ricans in the primary. Though representing more than just the interests of his own community, Morales was also part of the Puerto Rican political elite along with leaders like María Cerda and José “Cha-Cha” Jiménez. Puerto Ricans came out early in support of Washington. Jiménez led this support as founder of the Young Lords Organization, which was modeled after the Black Panthers in the 1970s and saw itself as representative of a radical non-White Puerto Rican population. In his autobiography, Jiménez mentioned that he organized the first Latino rally for Washington with the Puerto Rican Diaspora Coalition in January of 1983 at North West Hall where “more than one thousand persons (1000) attended.” Although only comprising a sixth of the Latinos in Chicago, Puerto Ricans would support Washington at a proportionally higher rate than any other Latino subgroup by the time of the primary election.

Serving as a crucial link between Washington and Mexican Americans was community activist and labor organizer Rudy Lozano, a Mexican American born in Texas and raised in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago. It was Lozano who, with other Little Village activists, founded the Independent Political Organization of the 22nd Ward. Early in his career, Lozano focused many of his efforts on the very same coalition politics that Harold Washington emphasized. Lozano’s work went beyond Little Village and took hold in various alliances throughout the city like the West Side Coalition for Unity and Political Action. A shared appreciation of Black-Latino coalition building shows why Lozano was thought of by many during the 1983 campaign as “Harold Washington’s main liaison to the Latino community.”

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traction among Latinos, Washington officially endorsed Rudy Lozano for 22nd Ward alderman in the primary. Running as a reform candidate was difficult in a ward with an entrenched machine incumbent, and proved ultimately unsuccessful, but the endorsement symbolized Washington’s solidarity with Lozano’s goals of political self determination for Mexican American neighborhoods. Other Mexican American political activists such as Linda Coronado, Juan Soliz, Jesús García, and Juan Velázquez worked with Lozano to advance Washington’s independent agenda in their neighborhoods and would continue this work after the primary.

Yet, outside of these links to two of the largest Mexican American and Puerto Rican neighborhoods, Washington’s efforts to garner Latino support were limited when compared to his mass mobilization and precinct organization in the Black South Side before the primary. One of the more notable publicity events was the endorsement from a national Latino leader brought in to speak at a meeting of Operation PUSH, where “Washington also received the support of Tony Bonilla, president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, the oldest and largest Hispanic organization in the United States.”

Additionally there were two campaign benefit parties, themed “Blues and Salsa” and featuring groups such as La Confidencia, the Latin Ensemble, and the Latin Jazz Presence III. Aside from these events, the general informational literature distributed by the Washington campaign made some references to Latinos. In the mailer, “A Candidate for ALL of Us—An Agenda for our City,” Washington addressed the Chicago’s difficult economic situation: “under Jane Byrne, Blacks hold only 18 percent of all full-time city jobs; Latinos hold only 4 percent of city jobs.”

Nevertheless, the focus of the Washington campaign appeared to be centered on the mobilization of the Black electorate. With

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32 “A Candidate for ALL of Us—An Agenda for our City,” Committee to Elect Harold Washington mailer, January 1983, box 25, folder 7, HWAC.
most of the campaign’s efforts focused on Black voters during the primary, the race was very close come February.

On February 22, 1983, Harold Washington won the Democratic primary with 36.3 percent of the vote, Byrne was second at 33.6 percent, and Daley was third at 29.7 percent. Due to the unprecedented turnout of Black voters and the split of the machine vote between Byrne and Daley, Washington had the narrow margin of victory.\(^3\) So what happened to the Latino vote? Perhaps overestimating the power of his racial coalition rhetoric or the early support of elite Latino progressives in Little Village and Humboldt Park, Washington’s campaign failed to court votes in Latino areas effectively. In his post-primary analysis, David Fremon pointed to some specific areas that demonstrated the leanings of heavily Latino wards. In the 7th Ward, which included the historically Mexican American neighborhood of South Chicago, “Washington carried the Black precincts; the others won the Mexican areas.”\(^3\) In the 32nd Ward, approximately half Latino, incumbent Jane Byrne “carried the Hispanic precincts” with the rest of the mainly White vote going to Daley.\(^3\) In the end, Latinos broadly supported either the incumbent or Richard M. Daley. Though the exact breakdown of Latino voting during the primary is not clear, the Midwest Voter Registration Education Project estimated that 51.4 percent of Latinos supported Byrne, 34.5 percent Daley, and 12.7 percent Washington.\(^3\)

In heavily Democratic Chicago, winning the Democratic primary was tantamount to winning the mayoralty given that there were no Democratic runoff elections and the machine usually did not contest or challenge the results. However, since Washington was a Democratic

\(^3\) Ibid., 215.
\(^3\) Statistics from the Midwest Voter Education Registration Project published in Torres, “The Commission on Latino Affairs.”
reform candidate whose platform was not favored by the Regular Democratic Party, many leaders decided to endorse a Republican candidate for mayor, Bernard Epton, a Chicago lawyer and state legislator with a fiscally conservative agenda. Edward Vrdolyak, chairman of the Cook County Democratic Committee and president of the City Council, publicly supported Epton during the general election campaign and worked to turn a great majority of White voters over to Epton.

Racism also played a genuine role in the turn of many White Democrats to the Republican Party in this election. This shift in party politics was unprecedented in Chicago and pointed to the depth of anxiety about racial change among ethnic White voters and leaders. Washington and Epton would face off in the general election on April 12, 1983. In the span of just forty-nine days, both candidates engaged in a ruthless campaign filled with smear ads, debates, and polarizing racial tension, which made the general election “one of the dirtiest in history.”37 But one question remained: who would the politically split Latino voters of the primary election support now?

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

As the Vrdolyak-led Democratic leadership backed the Republican candidate Bernard Epton, so went the majority of loyal, ethnic White voters in addition to a significant proportion of nonethnic White voters that followed this leadership to the Republican side, if just for one election.38 Washington had already made inroads with liberal White voters in the primary,

38 The Chicago Regular Democratic Organization, or the machine, historically functioned by mobilizing of ethnic White immigrant communities such as the Irish, Bohemians, Italians, and Poles. In exchange for political loyalty and turnout, voters received special privileges and city services. Generally, nonethnic White voters were more
particularly with middle-class liberals who lived along Lake Michigan. Moving forward, Washington increased his support in these progressive White neighborhoods.

However, the primary victory was bittersweet for the Washington campaign. While an unprecedented mobilization of African American voters gave Washington the upper hand, the support from Latino neighborhoods, especially Mexican American precincts, was strikingly low. A few days after the primary, the Chicago Tribune pointed to the need for Washington to refocus his campaign in order to “greatly improve the less-than-10 percent he received from white and Hispanic voters.”39 This was both an essential and impossible task. Essential because the political leaning of the approximately 85 percent of Latinos that didn’t support Washington in the primary was unclear, and had the potential to be come a deciding swing vote.40 Impossible because of the racial, ethnic, and political cleavages that divided Latinos and kept them from forming a cohesive electoral bloc prior to the primary.

Chicago’s Latino voters were a “contested” constituency. Contested in the sense that Latino support was coveted and fought for by the Washington campaign. But more importantly, contested in the sense that the Washington campaign argued for and crafted an image of Latinos as a panethnic and cohesive voting bloc. In order to galvanize support among such a disjointed constituency, the campaign focused on pushing a panethnic agenda that not only emphasized similarities between disparate Latino groups in the city, but also stressed their shared, non-White identity with Blacks. This project of racial consciousness raising and panethnic identity formation was not a typical responsibility of an electoral campaign in the 1980s, thus making the Washington campaign ground breaking in its methods and ideology. In the forty-nine days

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leading into the April general election, Latino political elites and the institutions they led took advantage of Washington’s political momentum to express their panethnic ideals and unify Latinos around a progressive political agenda.

In addition to the Latinos who had already been in the Washington camp since the primary, other Latino elites from across the city quickly contacted the campaign after the election. The day after the primary, Washington received a congratulatory telegram from Jose F. Pletz, president of the Hispanic Federation of Illinois Chambers of Commerce, who asked to discuss issues relating to the “Hispanic business agenda.” Similarly, Phil Ayala, executive director of El Centro de la Causa, congratulated Washington “on behalf of the Hispanic community” and added, “you can be assured of our continued support in the general election.”

It is interesting to note how Ayala seemed to speak for all Latinos in Chicago and assures continuing support despite the considerably low turnout for Washington just three days before. Continuing to speak on behalf of the Latino “community” was WOJO 105FM, Radio Ambiente; the station’s special events director congratulated Washington and wrote: “As Chicago’s Hispanic population, now at 14 percent, continues to grow the need for political leadership is vital. I would like to offer our services to you should information about the Hispanic community be needed.” It is not necessarily clear why these individuals offered their help, but perhaps we can infer that they sought to establish themselves as a kind of political vanguard for a population that was quickly growing in both number and political potential.

Washington’s campaign manager, Albert Raby, responded with messages like “I welcome your offer of support. Your expertise in the Latino community would be

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41 Jose F. Pletz to Harold Washington, telegram, 23 February 1983, box 4, folder 11, HWAC.
42 Phil Ayala to Harold Washington, mailgram, 25 February 1983, box 4, folder 11, HWAC.
43 Claire Hochberg to Harold Washington, letter, 25 February 1983, box 26, folder 6, HWAC.
instrumental.” These messages of gratitude were not mere formalities, but indicative of the campaign’s genuine need to expand support across Latino communities. In fact, March of 1983 would mark the beginning of the Washington campaign’s revamped Latino strategy. Both the media and the campaign understood Washington’s precarious relationship to Latinos after the primary. An aggressive and expanded engagement with Latino voters had to carried out in a month. Beginning on March 1, talk of establishing a “Latino Operations Department” within the Washington campaign had started. Peter Earle, Linda Coronado, Rudy Lozano, Stephen Carter, and Bill Zayas led this initiative. Earle and Coronado outlined the twelve potential functions of the Latino Operations Department, which would have an estimated cost of $32,000 from March through April. The most significant were production of Spanish-language campaign materials, coordination of Spanish-language media, and convening Latino interest groups. These three functions would come to define Harold Washington’s campaign in Latino neighborhoods, all aspects of which would emphasize a panethnic political identity.

The Latino Literature Review Committee was the group of staff members and community leaders that focused on the creation, publication, and distribution of campaign literature targeted towards Latinos, most of which was printed in Spanish. Dozens of memoranda point to the extensive planning that took place in the first half of March prior to the launch of a full-fledged media campaign. Stephen Carter, the committee chair, oversaw the rapid expansion of resource allocation toward Latino-specific materials like posters, stickers, and buttons numbering in the hundreds of thousands combined. A committee meeting on March 9 outlined the work in progress, including the creation of a button, a flyer, and press releases. At first, two button

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44 Albert Raby to Homer Alvarado and Rolando Capdevilla, March 1983, box 4, folder 11, HWAC.
45 Peter Earle and Linda Coronado to Campaign Manager Al Raby, memorandum, 1 March 1983, box 4, folder 11, HWAC.
46 Members of the committee included Stephen Carter, Slim Coleman, Mosi Kitwana, Rudy Lozano, Lucia Elias-Olivares, William Lampillo, Alicia C. Santelices, Lauren Marten, Carlos Heredia-Ortiz, Linda Coronado, and others.
designs were considered: fifty thousand with a Puerto Rican theme and fifty thousand with a Mexican American theme. Resisting this idea, several committee members “suggested consideration be given to one button with design that covers Puerto Rican, Mexican, et al.”\textsuperscript{47} This is illustrative of the campaign purposefully breaking from traditional campaign tactics that tailored materials to Latino nationality subgroups. Similarly, the discussion of the flyer centered on finding a theme that had “broad Latino appeal” and linked Blacks and Latinos historically.\textsuperscript{48}

Many of the drafts for this historical-themed flyer were drawn to be “in line with Harold Washington’s policy in developing the Black/Brown ties.”\textsuperscript{49} The artist commissioned to create the flyers was also very aware of the panethnic consciousness-raising mission that the leadership of the Latino Literature Review Committee desired. In a first draft, a group of Black and Latino people and Harold Washington are seen protesting a sign that reads “Reagan en el City Hall” (“Reagan in City Hall”). The image sought to reinforce the idea that the policies of the Reagan administration were harmful to Latinos who, like African Americans, benefitted from government assistance programs. In all the campaign posters, the artist emphasized a strong upright posture and tight-knit groups of individuals to convey themes of solidarity and protest.

The theme of ethnic consciousness figured prominently in a second draft that featured a group of young people looking up with open eyes with a teacher saying, “don’t let another person think for you.”\textsuperscript{50} Here, the language touches on two points. First, it echoes the mission of the independent political movement, which was working to break the hegemony of the machine and to elect Washington. In this way, thinking for oneself meant voting on the issues effecting one’s community and not according to the mandates of the machine leadership. Second, the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[47] Latino Literature Committee, minutes, 9 March 1983, box 21, folder 9, HWAC.
\item[48] Ibid.
\item[49] Stephen Carter on “Finalizing Latino Literature,” memorandum, 15 March 1983, box 21, folder 9, HWAC.
\item[50] “No Deje Que Otra Persona Piense por Usted,” flyer, March 1983, box 21, folder 9, HWAC.
\end{footnotes}
uplifted heads and open eyes signaled a kind of racial and ethnic awareness. By recognizing the bonds between all Latino groups and by extension the link between Blacks and Latinos, Latinos could see through the racial fear mongering that kept them from building strong political coalitions.

Many of these illustrated flyers were especially powerful in the courting of Puerto Rican voters. Perhaps the most striking of these published flyers was released under the “Puertorriqueños por Harold Washington” logo that was also distributed in non–Puerto Rican Latino neighborhoods. The “In Unity There Is Strength” flyer (Figure 1) includes a striking image of a chain, with a black link and a white link united in the middle by a gradated link, representing the historical and racial similarities between Latinos and African Americans. Two individuals embrace, demonstrating that a Black-Latino coalition would secure a stronger and brighter future for both groups. It is unclear which groups of Latinos this imagery appealed to most, but it is likely that Puerto Ricans were expected to react the strongest to this appeal. Conversations on Black ancestry and shared struggle were not unheard of in the Puerto Rican community, given the efforts of the Young Lords, among others. For Mexicans, on the other hand, this conversation was not as familiar, which forced the campaign to think in innovative ways.

A booklet, entitled “What are We? Our Historic Ties Unite Us,” served as a beginner’s guide to shared issues of identity and race within the Latino community (Figure 2). The booklet covered a brief history of Latinos’ shared racial colonization and mixed racial heritage: “being ‘Latin American’ is the product of a syncretism created by three social groups: Spain, the

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51 “¿Qué Somos? Nuestros Lazos Historicos Nos Unen,” booklet, March 1983, box 26, folder 5, HWAC.
**Figure 1:** Here, the chains could also point to the Black-White racial binary in Chicago, one that Latinos (the gradient) were often caught between. Source: “En la unidad esta la fuerza.” c.1983, Box 4, Folder 40, Rudy Lozano Papers, University of Illinois at Chicago, Daley Library Special Collections and University Archives.

**Figure 2:** “Qué Somos?” effectively pointed to and outlined the linked fates between different groups of Latinos, whether differing by nationality or by racial diversity. Source: March 1983, Box 26, Folder 5, Pre-Mayoral Records 1980-83, Harold Washington Mayoral Campaign Records, Chicago Public Library Special Collections and Preservation.
Indigenous race—comprised of Tainos in the Puerto Rican case—and Africa.” The booklet’s racially conscious rhetoric continued with an exploration of the historical links between Black and Brown communities through the shared experience of slavery and oppression. Compared to a typical political campaign, the imagery and language employed by Washin-ton’s team was bold, pushing Latinos across the city to rethink their racial identities as deeply tied to indigeneity, blackness, and a struggle against oppression. Amplifying this rallying cry to Latino unity were the hundreds of posters with the slogan, “The Sun Comes Out for the Latino with Washington!” Again, speaking to a panethnic constituency.

In less explicitly racial ways, the various press releases of the Latino Literature Committee used specific language that applied to all Latinos, like Washington’s concern over the lack of Latino police officers, a push to reject “Reagan econo-mia Republicana,” the appointment of a Latino deputy mayor, and the establishment of a Latino Affairs Commission if Washington was elected. The collaboration with Spanish-language media bolstered the campaign’s panethnic messaging. Almost three-fourths of the approximately $32,700 allocated for Latino media was for radio spots and newspaper ads. Leading the charge on this front was Bill Zayas, a Puerto Rican resident of Humboldt Park and the campaign’s Latino media and advertising campaign coordinator. At its March 9 meeting, the Latino Literature Committee discussed the Spanish-language advertising strategy, emphasizing voter registration, Latino issues, and identifying “individuals for photographs with Harold Washington that have the widest Latino appeal.”

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52 Ibid. “Ser ‘Latinoamericano’ es el producto de un sincretismo creado por tres grupos sociales: España, la raza Indigena—compuesta por los Tainos en el caso de Puerto Rico—y Africa.”
53 “El Sol Sale para el Latino con Washington!”
54 “All Latino Community,” flyer, March 1983, box 21, folder 9, HWAC.
55 Latino Literature Committee, minutes, 9 March 1983, box 21, folder 9, HWAC.
reach with one message the better. But more importantly, these Latino political elites would serve as representatives of panethnic unity.

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

**Godmother 1:** Where are you going in such a hurry?
**Godmother 2:** I am a Harold Washington volunteer, the Democratic candidate.
**Godmother 1:** Are you sure he is worth the trouble?
**Godmother 2:** He is the only candidate who can help all the Latinos!
**Godmother 1:** Why?
**Godmother 2:** He was a staunch supporter for the development of the bilingual program. He has always supported social oriented programs such as “Day Care” and he is the first who has promised 14 percent of the city jobs.
**Godmother 1:** Wow! I did not know that!
**Godmother 2:** Not only that, now that we have a Republican in the White House, why have another as Mayor?56

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

Another half-minute radio script formulated by Zayas and Rossi used language that was more direct: “The Latino vote has been identified as one of the determining factors in this

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56 “Dialogue between Godmothers—Spot #1,” WOJO radio script, March 1983, box 26, folder 6, HWAC. The script in the archive is printed in English, but specified that it was read in Spanish on the radio.
struggle. It is hoped that Latinos recognize that Washington is the only candidate that has incorporated Latino needs in his many political ‘platforms’ and that they vote accordingly to such a commitment.” The “Latino vote” not only appears as a deciding swing vote in this ad, but Latinos are presented as a politically cohesive ethnic group. The February primary results had contradicted this message: Latinos were split both between sub-ethnic groups and within their own groups, as was the case with Mexican Americans divided among all three candidates but mostly against Washington. By virtue of pointing solely to Latino needs and the Latino vote, the general election campaign capitalized on and facilitated the efforts of Latino political elites to overcome these ethnic divides. Full-page ads in Spanish-language newspapers complimented the panethnic messaging on the airwaves. Full issues of El Independiente were funded by the campaign to publicize Washington’s agenda for the Latino community, and Zayas and the Latino Literature Committee expanded ads from Pilsen, Little Village, and Humboldt Park into West Town, South Chicago, Back of the Yards, and along North Avenue.58

These media efforts made Washington’s platform visible to the Latino public, but the convening role that the campaign played in gathering Latino interest groups at the same table had perhaps the most lasting impact. Washington’s role as a convener manifested itself in two ways: bringing together Chicago’s Latino political elites and inviting nationally recognized Latino leaders to Chicago to rally for panethnic unity. Latino political elites like Rudy Lozano, Maria Cerda, “Cha Cha” Jiménez, and others urged their communities and networks to support Washington. Through the month of March, the campaign brought together many more Latino

57 “El voto Latino ha sido señalado como uno de los factores determinantes en esta lucha. Se espera que el Latino reconozca que Washington es el único candidato que ha incorporado las necesidades Latinas en sus ‘plataformas’ políticas y que ellos correspondan con sus votos a ese gesto.” Rossi Advertising for Washington, script, March 1983, box 26, folder 6, HWAC.
58 Some of these papers included El Mañana, La Raza, El Heraldo, West Side Times, and Northwest Extra, among others.
political elites for group strategy meetings with individuals like the Reverend Jorge Morales and Juan Solis, a reception for the twenty-five members of the Hispanic Lawyers Committee for Washington, and larger events like the Hispanic Steering Committee reception for three hundred people, with Washington present.

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

Complementing the panethnic messaging of the Chicago spokespersons for Latinidad were the nationally recognized Latino leaders that the campaign brought to Chicago. As mentioned earlier, Washington connected first with Tony Bonilla, the president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, who publicly endorsed Washington before the primary election. National engagements and endorsements increased during the general election campaign. Beginning in early March, Bill Zayas recommended that the campaign fly in “members of the [Congressional] Hispanic Caucus” and celebrities like Erik Estrada, Ricardo Montalbán, and Rita
Though these celebrities never made it to Chicago, many political leaders did. The Congressional Hispanic Caucus was one of the most visible promoters of panethnic political rhetoric seeking to establish Latinos as a cohesive voting bloc in order to increase Latino representation in Congress and beyond. The two-day visit of Grace Montañez Davis, the first Mexican American woman to serve as deputy mayor of Los Angeles and a founding member of the Mexican American Political Association, and Herman Badillo, a New York politician and the first Puerto Rican elected to the US Congress, included radio talks, grassroots campaigning, a dinner with Latino leaders, and a forum at the Latino Institute on “Latino unity.” The visit demonstrated that the issues common to all Latinos in Chicago were in fact common to Latinos across the country.

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

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59 “Restructuring for Victory,” Bill Zayas to Peter Earle, note, 4 March 1983, box 21, folder 9, HWAC.
60 Herman Badillo and Grace Montañez Davis, itinerary, 19–20 March 1983, box 11, folder 16, HWAC.
Anaya spoke to reporters and community members at a press conference prior to the dinner: “As the nation’s highest elected Hispanic, I am urging all Latinos to unify behind Harold Washington because only through him can we reverse some of the terrible injustices that have been done against Hispanics.” Anaya’s call to action centered on the point that in order to better their lived conditions, Latinos had to mobilize and cohere politically—a necessary task given their divided political leanings in the February primary. After the press conference, Arturo Velásquez Sr., president of the Mexican-American Democratic Organization of Chicago and cochairman of the event, introduced Harold Washington. Most of Washington’s talking points focused on jobs, government contracts, bilingual education, and other benefits particular to Latinos. Many of these issues were national policy issues that brought Latinos together in the 1970s, but now framed within the context of Latino electoral influence and the national project of Latino unity. Washington reiterated his intentions to create a mayoral Commission on Latino Affairs and to assign a Latino as deputy mayor. Towards the end of the speech, Washington made clear the broader socio-racial implications of his candidacy. By recognizing their shared histories of racial discrimination and political exclusion, Blacks and Latinos could stand as examples of racial and ethnic unity. In this way, Chicago could serve as a microcosm of racial politics and set a precedent for political empowerment and racial progress across the country.

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

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

The race was close and Washington’s prediction of the Latino swing vote would be proven accurate.

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

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63 Congressman Harold Washington to Hispanic Unity Dinner, remarks, 2 April 1983, box 11, folder 15, HWAC.
Washington’s envoy Peter Earle, these regular Democratic Latinos were closely associated with Vrdolyak and the machine, had supported incumbent Jane Byrne in the primary, and many held the political line “that Latinos should exercise a demonstration of potential political power by boycotting the election.”

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

On April 12, 1983, the polls opened for one of the largest turnouts in mayoral elections in Chicago history, with a total of 1,291,307 votes cast. At the end of the day, Harold Washington came out on top with a narrow victory of 51.7 percent to Bernard Epton’s 48.0 percent of the

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64 Peter Earle at Hispanic Political Roundtable, 7 March 1983, box 4, folder 11, HWAC.
vote, a difference of 47,549 votes. The vote was almost evenly divided between Washington’s Black and liberal White voters and Epton’s blue-collar, ethnic White supporters. As Washington, Latino political activists, and the media had predicted, Latinos were a decisive swing vote in the general election. The Puerto Rican 31st Ward, with Latinos representing the majority of registered voters, overwhelmingly sided with Washington. On the Near Northwest Side, where the majority of Latinos had supported incumbent Jane Byrne in the primary, many voters sided with Washington in the general election. As sociologist Teresa Córdova argues, of the 47,549-vote difference between Washington and Epton, “27,915 of those were cast by Washington supporters of the four wards where Latinos have the highest populations.”

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

Washington’s aggressive campaigning in Latino neighborhoods was not in vain. Thousands of undecided Latino voters who had not supported Washington in the primary were convinced by his rhetoric surrounding equality, opportunity, and fairness in all aspects of city governance. But Latinos who did not support Washington demonstrate that ethno-political cleavages remained within the larger Latino community. Eighty-five percent of registered Puerto Rican voters, 65 percent of Mexican American voters, and 48 percent of Cuban voters cast their

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

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

Mexican Americans’ 65 percent support for Washington pointed to the political divisions and complicated relationship with the machine in this longstanding Latino community. In his postelection analysis, Fremon noted that the largest Mexican American community of the 22nd Ward “was the only ward won by Washington in which he failed to garner at least 60 percent of the vote.” In the end, the unpredictability of Mexican American voters leaned in Washington’s favor. The race to win Latino support in the general election wasn’t between Washington and Epton, but between Washington and low turnout. Andrade’s prediction (“I don’t see Hispanics moving a whole lot toward Epton, he has no program that addresses Hispanic issues. Those who can’t get themselves to vote for Washington are going to stay home.”) was proven on Election Day: 40 percent of Latino voters stayed home, but those that did vote gave Washington the necessary electoral swing to win. By making clear his commitment to Latino representation and community uplift, as well as Latino commitment to voting on Democratic lines, Washington convinced tens of thousands more Latinos that he was their best option.

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


Conclusion

For those who believed in the Black-Latino coalition, Washington’s election was seen as a victory of racial solidarity and proved that moving beyond racial differences was the only way to achieve change in their communities. For others, this election represented more of a crossroads for Latino involvement in formal politics. Milton Rakove, a political scientist at the University of Illinois at Chicago, provided a postelection analysis on the fragility of Washington’s coalition. He “warned that the unique black vs. white, independent vs. machine dynamics of the election formed some peculiar, temporary alliances,” and that the possibilities for cleavage between Blacks and Latinos, and among Latinos themselves, would probably grow after the racially charged atmosphere of the campaign subsided.\(^{74}\) Both perspectives on the nature of Latino political unity — one that viewed the election as proof of Latino cohesion, and the other seeing it as a temporary and limited unity—are to some extent true. First and foremost, Washington’s campaign effectively reified the political terminology of a panethnic Latino constituency in Chicago. The Mayor’s Commission on Latino Affairs continued the campaign’s work in promoting the image of a unified Latino interest group into Washington’s administration, concretizing the media and public’s perception of the Latino vote.

The Washington campaign’s skillful use of imagery and rhetoric proved that a panethnic Latino unity and a Black-Latino unity were possible. However, these coalitions did not become a political reality after the campaign. As seen in the breakdown of support during the general election, Latinos were still divided in their political priorities. Influenced by a diversity of class, racial, cultural, and geographic differences, Latinos would remain a contested constituency. Hinging heavily on Washington’s platform and charisma, Latino unity grew unstable after the election, as Latinos grew frustrated with unmet campaign promises of increased Latino

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representation and political appointments. The day before Thanksgiving 1987, some months after winning reelection to a second term, Washington died of a heart attack at his desk. As many recounting of the Washington and his election emphasize, “with Washington’s death, the multiethnic coalition began to unravel, but his campaigns and elections had already changed the political power equation in Chicago.” That is to say, despite failing to create a cohesive and lasting Latino unity, the Latino political elites and the Washington campaign were able to rhetorically establish the symbolic importance of Latinos in formal politics. In this way, the unique contribution made by Harold Washington’s campaign toward the legitimation and construction of a panethnic Latino political constituency continue to have a lasting influence as Latinos continued to stand at the nexus of division and unity.

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