

Hispanics and blacks in the South seek common ground

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according to the Census Bureau (It counts Hispanics as people of any race whose ethnic background is in Spanish-speaking countries.)

While blacks are still more numerous in the Southeast, except for Florida, a rush of immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries is changing racial interaction across the region. Several Southern states now lead the nation in the growth of Hispanic residents and illegal immigrants.

In places like Houston and Los Angeles, where blacks and Hispanics have long lived side-by-side, the two groups most often fight for jobs, notably low-income jobs that were often held by unskilled black workers.

An April 2006 Pew Research Center poll showed that more blacks than whites said they or a family member had lost a job or never got it because an employer hired an immigrant worker.

"When you get down to the nitty-gritty worker, the antagonism still exists, while politicians talk about common areas and agendas," said Nicolas Vaca, author of "The Presumed Alliance: The Unspoken Conflict Between Latinos and Blacks and What It Means for America."

That animosity endures in the South, where anti-immigrant groups argue that Hispanic newcomers are willing to accept wages that others won't. Many Southern employers, especially farmers, however, say that there simply aren't enough local workers to harvest their peaches and pluck their chickens.

Is the job argument simply a new version of the "racial baiting" behind historic white-on-black discrimination in the South? Yes, said race relations historian John Insoe, it's all too easy to stir up racial or ethnic mistrust in poor people who feel outnumbered in the fight for survival.

Census figures show that across 11 Southern states, foreign-born Hispanics have a substantially lower unemployment rate than blacks—less than 5 percent, compared to more than 9 percent for blacks in 2004—and earn more; their median household income of \$33,765 (euro26,550) in 2005 was nearly 10 percent higher than that of blacks.

Further, research has found blacks feel threatened beyond

the workplace by the influx of Hispanics in the South. Of the three metropolitan areas with booming immigrant populations surveyed in a study related to the April Pew poll, it's only in the Southern one—Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina—that a solid majority of blacks favors cutting back on legal immigration.

But some say it's precisely because of the history of strained race relations in the South, where institutional segregation was painfully dismantled, that the region can help integrate another community into the American mainstream.

"There's a very natural linkage between the African-American and the Hispanic communities," said NAACP President Bruce Gordon. "There's a conscious effort to create animosity between African-Americans and Hispanics that takes our eye off the ball. There's an advantage to coalition, and we should find a way to take advantage of this opportunity."

Angela Arboleda of La Raza agrees, though she notes black leaders have not always

embraced the notion of solidarity among minorities, citing as an example New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin's comment that he feared that city would be "overrun by Mexican workers" during reconstruction after Hurricane Katrina.

In Georgia—home to many black leaders, one of the fastest-growing illegal immigrant populations, and some of the nation's most stringent immigration laws—the growing pains in the developing black-Hispanic relationship have been acute.

"Both sides (blacks and whites) are waiting to see if Latinos will define themselves as black or white," said Dana White, a professor at Emory University who has written about the South. Since skin color is still a defining issue in race relations, and most Hispanics in the U.S. are white, some argue that rather than joining a coalition of minorities, Hispanics will close ranks with white Americans and further marginalize blacks.

In 2001, black Georgia lawmakers fought legislation making Hispanic businesses eligible for a state program

designed to bolster minority enterprises, arguing it would weaken the state's goal of helping black businesses.

However, last April some black leaders spoke of a shared cause against discrimination at a pro-immigration rally in Atlanta that drew 50,000 people, the kind of street demonstration typical of the civil rights movement defined by Atlanta son Martin Luther King Jr.

And it was in a majority-black county just outside Atlanta that Georgia's first bilingual public school, Unidos Dual Language Charter School, opened in

August.

Yolanda Hood, who is black, enrolled her 5-year-old son in the school even though some relatives feared his English could be compromised.

"We're more sensitive to the plight of Hispanics just because we dealt with so many prejudices," she said, explaining that her own educational experience influenced her decision. "I went to a predominantly black school, then a predominantly white college and it was a shock to me—I didn't want my son to have that."

Overcoming mistrust and misunderstandings will take

time, experts say.

After the attacks in Tifton, even though they were not officially termed hate crimes, the U.S. Justice Department sent peacemakers to ease tensions, and police stepped up patrols to quell rumors of blacks terrorizing Hispanic neighborhoods.

"Sometimes I think it was some kind of racism," said Tereso Rodriguez, who was assaulted by a black man shortly before the deadly attacks. "I met a man with his jaw and teeth taken out. If it were only stealing, there'd be no need to hit us so much."

Marrow donor awareness

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another minority blood disease patient and to raise awareness of sickle cell disease.

The Dancing for Life program features liturgical dance ministries and gospel artists who are coming together in support of National Marrow Donor Awareness Month.

Seventy percent of patients are unable to find a donor match within their immediate family and must search the NMDP registry. More diversity is needed to increase the probability of finding a match for minorities.

The groups of individuals identified by the NMDP for focused recruitment are: Blacks, American Indian or Alaska Natives, Asian, Hispanic or Latino, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders. volunteer donors who wish to join the marrow registry must be between the ages of 18 and 60 and in good health. After completing a brief health questionnaire, volunteer donors sign a consent form and give a tissue sample by swabbing their inside cheek. To learn about the potentially life-saving process of marrow donation, visit the NMDP website at www.marrows.org.

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