

The Latino Population Surge & the GOP's Big Problem

Michael Sean Winters | Mar. 28, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

The new census numbers are jaw-dropping. Almost one-quarter of all American children under the age of 17 are Latino. The four states with the largest Hispanic populations are California, Texas, Florida and New York which, together, account for more than half of the electoral votes needed to win the presidency. If no Latinos had voted in the state of North Carolina in 2008, Barack Obama would have lost that state. Instead, he won it narrowly. When Republicans lose North Carolina, they can forget about winning the White House.

In [this morning's Washington Post](#) [1], the always intelligent Chris Cillizza notes that John McCain won seven of the nine states that experienced more than 100 percent growth in their Latino populations: Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, South Carolina, South Dakota and Tennessee. Now, we have to be careful. These states had small Latino populations to begin with, so a 100 percent increase may not be decisive anytime soon. But, the trends are obvious. Latinos who, bless their hearts, seem to abide by the ban on birth control contained in *Humanae Vitae*, are the fastest growing demographic within the electorate and the population growth now is not solely dependent upon immigration. Much of the increase came among those born here in the U.S. If the borders were closed tomorrow, Latinos would still be the fastest growing sector of the electorate.

Between the release of the census figures late last week and this morning's article by Cillizza, there was held in Iowa something called the Conservative Principles Conference. Several GOP presidential hopefuls attended the event, mindful of Iowa's first in the nation caucuses, including Michelle Bachmann, Haley Barbour, Newt Gingrich and John Bolton. In [his report of the event](#) [2], Post reporter Dan Balz weighed the relative enthusiasm of the reception accorded the candidates, concluding the Michelle Bachmann was the clear favorite. That is scary enough.

But, Balz did not write about some of the other speakers at the event, some of whom I caught on C-Span radio heading to the store on Saturday. One speaker was [Jan Mickelson](#) [3], who hosts a daily talk-radio show in Des Moines with 350,000 listeners. This man, whom I had never heard before, gives Rush Limbaugh a run for his money in terms of crass political cant. He trotted out the familiar tropes of conservative politics, such as the claim that the President is a socialist, and he extolled the virtues of free enterprise, smaller government and all the rest. This self-described "Christian libertarian" confuses vile slogans with serious thought, evidently unaware that the freedom extolled by Ayn Rand has nothing in common with the freedom of the children of God of which St. Paul spoke.

But much of Mickelson's focus was on ending so-called "birthright citizenship." He does not think that Latino children born in the U.S. should be granted citizenship, the 14th Amendment notwithstanding, unless their parents are here legally. He was followed by a woman, Rosemary Jenks, of the organization [NumbersUSA](#) [4], which organization is dedicated to both ending illegal immigration and putting more severe limits on legal immigration. She, too, took aim at birthright citizenship. She noted that the preamble to the Constitution states that the purpose of the government is to protect the blessings of liberty "for ourselves and our posterity." She did not add, "our posterity, not theirs" but she did not have to. Her intent was obvious.

This focus on denying, for the first time, the rights of children who are born here was understandable when you

consider that the event was sponsored by Iowa Congressman Steve King, who happens to be the chief sponsor of a bill to end birthright citizenship. I saw King at Mass at St. Joseph's Church a few weeks ago. I suppose he missed the fact that St. Joseph took his family to Egypt to flee persecution and violence, that Jesus and his family were immigrants, dare we point out, undocumented immigrants, a fact of which Archbishop Jose Gomez recently reminded us.

The dynamics of the Republican nominating season will have each of the candidates trying to out-conservative the rest, so you can expect more of this anti-immigrant venom in the months ahead. Bring it on. If the GOP wants to alienate the fastest growing constituency in the country, I say we should let them. But, Democrats cannot take Latino loyalties for granted. I understand that after the bruising battle for health care reform, Congress had little stomach for more controversial legislation. But, the President should consider sending an immigration reform package to Congress even though it has little chance of passing. Let the Republicans vote it down. And, Democrats should run in 2012 on a plank that promises immigration reform at the top of the agenda and not cease trying to pass it until they have succeeded. Latinos are the future and the future, in many states, is already here.

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