

# Nationwide, Latinos feel left out, wonder how they fit in to the conversation on systemic injustice

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing July 6, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts responding to the George Floyd killing 

This *Times* article in the Sunday paper caught my attention. Rough numbers. Bethlehem population 8% African American, 30% Hispanic. Bethlehem has an NAACP chapter and the legendary Esther Lee. Is there a similar and corresponding Hispanic organization? Bethlehem does have Olga Negron. (Odd: the Mayor does have a **Latino Advisory Committee** but not an African American one.) **Black Lives Matters** seemed to be behind Bethlehem demonstrations — were Hispanics involved in co-organizing or as participants? Quantitatively in our town, if there is systemic racism, systemic injustice, you might think it would affect Hispanics more than African Americans here and that we would be hearing more in an organized fashion from that community.

*from Jennifer Medina, “Latinos Back Black Lives Matter Protests. They Want Change for Themselves, Too; Many Latinos are pushing for an acknowledgment of the systemic racism they face, and a conversation about over-policing in their own communities.” New York Times, July 2, 2020. [Printed Morning Call July 5 with headline “Latinos question how they fit in.”]*

Many Latinos are pushing for an acknowledgment of the systemic racism they face, and a conversation about over-policing in their own communities.

“Tu lucha es mi lucha,” several signs declared at a recent Black Lives Matter protest near the Arizona State Capitol. Your struggle is my struggle. . . . There was no doubt in these protesters’ minds: Their fights against racism are bound up together.

“Black and brown” has been a catchphrase in Democratic politics and progressive activist circles for years, envisioning the two minority groups as a coalition with both electoral power and an array of shared concerns about pay equity, criminal justice, access to health care and other issues.

The ongoing protests about police violence and systemic racism encompass both communities as well — but the national focus has chiefly been about the impact on Black Americans and the ways white Americans are responding to it.

Many liberal Latino voters and activists, in turn, are trying to figure out where they fit in the national conversation about racial and ethnic discrimination. They have specific problems and histories that can be obscured by the broad “Black and brown” framework or overshadowed by the injustices facing Black Americans.

And while Latinos want people to understand how systemic racism in education, housing and wealth affects them, they are also grappling with an entrenched assumption that racism is a black-and-white issue, which can make it challenging to gain a foothold in the national conversation.

They often find themselves frustrated and implicitly left out.

For decades, Latinos have chafed over aggressive policing tactics, including at the hands of Latino officers. In the last several years, hundreds of Latinos, mostly men, have been killed by the police in California, Arizona and New Mexico, among other states, though national statistics are hard to come by. Now, activists are pushing for a more explicit conversation about over-policing in Latino communities.

“We’ve always known that police brutality is a Black and brown issue, a poor people’s issue,” said Marisa Franco, the executive director of Mijente, a Latino civil rights group.

“Right now it is imperative for non-Black Latino communities to both empathize with Black people and also recognize that it is in our material interest to fundamentally change policing in this country,” Ms. Franco said.

Immigrant rights activists routinely point to the fact that local police departments often carry out immigration enforcement, leaving many Latinos terrified to call the police out of fear of potential deportation.

The fear and anger has been especially acute in the era of President Trump, who five years ago announced his candidacy by calling Mexicans

rapists and criminals. The suspect in the deadliest anti-Latino attack in modern American history, in El Paso last year, used similar language in his manifesto.

“There’s no doubt that the African-American community has borne the biggest brunt of police brutality, but it’s also clear that Latinos have suffered as well,” Mr. Castro said in an interview. “There’s a kinship of experience as a community.”

Yet illuminating and addressing discrimination faced by Latinos remains a challenge, Mr. Castro said. While many Americans at least learn the basic history of slavery and Jim Crow racism against Black people, there remains a lack of fundamental knowledge about Latino history, which can make it difficult to discuss how social policies have been harmful.

“Many Americans don’t know exactly where you fit in,” Mr. Castro said.

The opposite of a monolith, Latinos include undocumented immigrants and those whose families have been in the United States for centuries.

At a time when Mr. Trump has made his anti-immigrant language and policies a centerpiece of his administration, some Latinos — perhaps especially young ones — see themselves as part of a broader fight for racial equity.

But some activists have privately wondered whether the recent police killings of Latinos have received enough attention, and whether there is broad acknowledgment that they, too, suffer from police brutality and systemic racism.

“This is a huge moment to expand consciousness around our own community, to recognize the contradiction of what kind of power do we and don’t we have in this country, that despite our size, we don’t even have basic needs met,” Mr. Návar said. “This country does not eat without our community, yet the people doing the work can’t keep their own family safe. The lack of power has to make us ask: What kind of respect do we have? How do we organize to have dignity?”

Latinos hardly have the kind of deep political infrastructure that African-Americans have built up over decades, with many organizations working

toward similar goals. Many liberal Latino activists view the Black Lives Matter movement, and the current wave of protests, as a model.

Ysenia Lechuga, 28, who brought a “tu lucha es mi lucha” sign to several recent demonstrations in Phoenix, said she found Black activism “inspiring.”

“I can come here and preach about immigrants and all the issues that we go through,” Ms. Lechuga said of attending the Black Lives Matter protests. “We get racially profiled, we get beat down.”

She thinks the current movement will have a “ripple effect” that will reach her community, too. “Everything is going to start to change,” she said.