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Nuestro Espacia Cyber: The Internet as Expressive Space for Latina/os in the United States

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The Latina/o community is in the midst of a major demographic shift upwards. Along with this population growth, there has been an explosion of Latina/os across the spectrum of popular culture. However, lack of access to mass-media outlets and social constructions in mainstream society pose obstacles to Latina/o freedom of expression. Meanwhile, the internet is evolving into a powerful platform for communication and freedom of speech. By developing a stronger Latina/o presence on-line, it may be possible to channel the power of the internet as a vehicle for empowerment, expression and freedom of speech.

Key Words: Latina/o, Hispanic, Internet Access, Expression, Empowerment, Community

Demographic changes in the United States effect a wide spectrum of social and political issues. While predications for a surge in the growth of the Latina/o community were originally expected to peak closer to 2005, the most recent census data suggest a much more rapid timeframe. With a 60% increase in the Latina/o population in the United States in the last ten years, the size of the community is now on par with the African-American community and likely to outpace the overall size of the African-American community in the next several years (Booth A-04, Branch-Brioso A1, Holmes & Chapman 1A, Kettle 11). As Torres and Katsiaficas explain, the increasing Latina/o population is "closely intertwined with transnational economic forces that are restructuring and reshaping once familiar local, regional, national and international landscapes" (1). Popular culture, more than any other area, has been quick to capitalize on this trend and as a result, mass media outlets are paying greater attention to Latina/os. However, as demographics influence attention and create space for Latina/os in majority culture, little attention has been directed to how Latina/os themselves are capitalizing on new venues of free speech and expression.

While the Constitution offers protection for expression on the part of its citizens, there is no guarantee of free forums to engage in the right to free speech. Attempts to regulate equal and reciprocal access in other mass media outlets, the Federal Communication Commission's Fairness Doctrine for example, have failed to survive constitutional challenge (Neuborne 279). More importantly, as the dimension of public awareness and participation changes at the start of the new millennium, mass media is beginning to evolve past existing structures like community as the conduit for information, social participation, and empowerment. Mass media outlets available for Latina/o expression have been dominated traditionally by a corporate culture that favors a majority-based homogeneity. When attempts have been made to open expressive space for minorities, a dominant, binary racial dichotomy has impeded fruitful discourse from taking root. The dichotomy paints race in the United States as solely defined by two racial groups, Black and White, with other people of color left at the periphery of the

discussion (Perea 361; Delgado 375). Even in geographic areas where there are large Latina/o communities, the opportunities to capitalize on avenues of expressive speech are still far and few between. Amidst this struggle to empower free speech, a technological revolution has occurred in cyberspace that might provide direction and space for Latina/os. Hill and Hughes, surveying the growing body of literature on the internet, explain the information superhighway provides, "the promise of nearly unlimited information delivered to your modem . . . the promise of a better democracy" (2). A significant reason for this development is the provision of space open for free dialogue and discourse. As Drucker and Gumpert suggest, "communication requires location," and "space should be regarded as a medium of communication" (25). The internet is the newest space for free speech and participation in an increasingly, complex, technological world.

This article examines the internet as a vehicle for Latina/o communication, empowerment, and as a space for free expression by Latina/os. The first section examines the binary race paradigm and the effect of language on Latina/os and free expression. The second focuses on the shape of mass media in the United States and the status of openness for Latina/o participation and expression. The role of the internet as a platform for expression and change is then discussed. The last section speculates on how Latina/os can and are using the internet to challenge the binary race dichotomy, language oppression, and mass media monopolization.

Racial Dichotomies and Expression

Race is a challenging subject in contemporary society, especially when it comes to expression and participation. As the United States moves into a new century the concept of identification and the rise of "multiculturalism" are inextricably linked. Expression is a critical tool of identity for minorities not only to strengthen internal, community bonds but also to foster a sustainable niche in the larger community.

Identity and culture have received increased attention in the media and from academics, politicians and social activists. From the Latina/o perspective, these moves are long overdue, especially as a way to overcome society's desire to over-homogenize minority groups into familiar and distinct racial classifications. The diversification of cultures in the United States continues to be hampered by a binary racial dichotomy. If race relations continue to center on a Black/White dichotomy, Perea argues that voice, presence, and history are lost (360). The loss of voice crushes Latina/o power of expression and trivializes the rights of free speech. Rather than shift to a diversified, cultural perspective, the country exists around laws and societal rules geared to account for the differences between black and white. Social praxis as well as laws governing free speech and expression have been codified along these lines. The civil rights movement in particular, with marches and mass rallies helped create powerful expressive space for African Americans. Additionally, the civil rights movement provided another impetus for the rise of strong African American leaders who were able to act as opinion leaders and mobilize the movement. Even when there were tensions across the spectrum of African Americans, these voices were more consistent and able to open space that still has never been possible in the Latina/o community. The energy of the civil rights movement spilled over to Latina/os, especially with the rise of the Chicano Movement (Johnson & Martinez 1147-1148). Unfortunately, recognition and acceptance of the movement was short lived. The voice of African Americans, albeit not always prominent, has anchored one end of the race dichotomy ever since.

When laws also function to serve Latina/o or other minorities' interests, it is a limited series of protections. It is easy to castigate binary race issues as solely theoretical, but questioning the assumptions behind the existing dichotomy is essential to defining a new Latina/o presence.

Espinoza makes an important point that justifies the Latina/o perspective: "Multi-identity is not an accepted concept in dominant discourse. That discourse is about being 'for us or against us . . .'" (p. 17). Understanding and communicating personal identity, however, often requires the expression of multiple and distinct defining categories and the recognition of a unifying concept, in this case the individual person.

The race dialogue that occurs in contemporary society is based upon a dichotomy between black and white. The binary paradigm has great effect on the evolution of race relations in the United States and influences the ability of both critical inquiry and discourse to advance to new levels. The paradigm that currently exists defines issue relevancy. Such a balance controls fact gathering and investigation to the point that research is focused on understanding the facts and circumstances that are relevant to the paradigm. The resulting construction funnels the creation of expressive space that places Latina/os outside of the dominant paradigm and thus marginalizes the entire group. Furthermore, it limits the access to expressive space for self-empowerment and tends to privilege stereotypes and generalizations about Latina/os while limiting the ability to challenge those misrepresentations.

Interestingly, the very use of "Latina/o" offers a positive position to unify many individual, national origin groups. The term comes from Latino Americanos and refers to anyone from the countries in Central and South America, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, indigenous groups, and people from the United States that are either descendents or immigrants from these areas. This umbrella term comes from inside Latina/o communities and not from the government or other authorities. The nature of identity politics means contention is nearly always present in any discussion as Gimenez notes, "... the unique American meaning of the umbrella labels . . . reflect compromises within the US political scene and are incomprehensible to visitors and new arrived immigrants from Latin America and Spain" (168).

The purpose here is not to address the assumptions of every national origin group that falls under the rubric of Latina/o or to gloss over the disparities that exist in their group identification, but rather to justify the use of Latina/o as the identifying term. A multi-dimensional consideration is necessary when discussing Latina/os, especially since Latina/os have many common connections. Focusing on the incorporation of these dimensions moves us past the binary paradigm of existing racial constructions, making it possible to move from essentializing to developing a better, more engaging view of Latina/os. It also provides a mechanism from which to embrace the diversity of Latina/o culture. Empowering free speech embraces a more complex notion of voice potentially interconnecting vast geographic distances. Recognition of the multitude of cultural influences means that the importance of the heritage and cultural development of Latina/os remains at the forefront of the discussion on expressive space. Part of the reason why expressive space is so important is because it represents the ability to share this legacy with others and champion ideals to strengthen the bonds between Latina/o groups, other minorities, and the majority culture. Freedom of speech and voice helps energize this goal and acts as a conduit for voices throughout the Latina/o community.

Another issue of equal importance to the nature of expression and Latina/o participation in American society is the use of language. English is the unofficial language of the United States, however with the spread of multiculturalism many more languages are now being spoken across the country.

Language is the foundation of expression and as the drive for English Only legislation surges, so do limits to minority expression and participation. Silencing language weakens the strength of expression by undercutting the depth and power of ideas. Perea argues that the English Only policies are thinly veiled, racist attacks on minorities, driven by "American nativism in modern form," and a desire to maintain homogeneity (568). Spanish is one of the easiest targets of the

English Only movement. Recent history in California highlights state sponsored attempts to legislate a language into exile, in order to ensure a common future (Navarrette 563). While many Latina/os speak English, there is a substantial portion of the population that still speaks Spanish as the primary language. Additionally many speak both languages and are able to code switch, or move fluently between English and Spanish in the same conversation or in different conversations. These strategies to shift to English as the only language in the United States hardly seem feasible, but more importantly signal a challenge to the legitimacy of Latina/o voice and expression.

Public expression and speech in the United States cannot be limited to only one language, especially if that results in the wholesale exclusion of a growing minority population. Not only does the English Only movement stifle voice in its truest form, but also it reinforces a value hierarchy that says only certain people are worthy of being extended the right to free speech and expression. Moreover mass media also operates in one language making it harder for Spanish speakers to receive information or understand issues. Even with bilingual speakers there are a limited number of outlets that cover both languages in any sort of format. The internet, therefore, is important allowing expressive space for the fusion of languages while allowing for the use of Spanish Only conversations, information channels and even socially active discourse.

Shifting Patterns of Media Participation

The rise of Latina/o culture and the acceptance of its pop icons might not signal a change in the ideology of a country that has consistently created obstacles to minority identity. Vinson alludes to the dilemma that faces this new cultural occurrence, "... being Latino is carrying less racial and ethnic significance than ever before. While the breakthrough has improved the overall position of Latinos in U.S. culture, it also threatens to diminish some of the main factors that have made Latinos so historically important - their cultural complexity and internal differences" (p. G3).

There are two sides to this tale of identity and cultural awareness, the one that Vinson documents and the one represented here. There is much to be said about gaining media attention and focus, especially if it is a way to undo past injustices. The difficulty is that the new media explosion is new only in the United States and really only for those people who do not live in racially diverse areas. As Torres and Katsiaficas explain, the demographic shift favoring Latina/os has been building for some time and reflects change in immunization patterns and development of ethnic enclaves across the United States (1).

The Ricky Martinization of pop music has been in effect for almost twelve years and perhaps signals a greater problem about dominant media control and societal acceptance. That it to say there have been Latina/o artists and performers accomplishing great success in the Spanish-speaking communities, which means they fall outside of the radar of majority households and are generally considered too exotic. Only recently has this process of cultural acceptance started to change. The new attention on Latina/os has not been orchestrated internally as part of a grassroots effort. In fact, it seems like most of the social movements connected to Latina/os have been slow in terms of capturing and harnessing the power behind all of this positive sentiment.

Some might argue the recent wave of pop culture developments suggests a reversal of fortune. These examples are still ensconced in the existing corporate framework and hardly provide a free and expressive base for empowerment. Neuborne notes that in the United States, mass media power has been concentrated into approximately ten integrated companies, a substantial decrease from the thirty-plus companies in 1983 (279). At worst, the empowerment notion is constructed around material and marketing devices thought up by these media corporations.

Escalante explains, "Chicano/Latino-owned media must often struggle and make do with far fewer resources," unlike their counterparts in the mainstream media (135). Latina/o owned mass media outlets cannot effectively transmit the messages that can be important to bind and celebrate a culture. Rather, the focus of these enterprises is limited to self-survival with minimal attention to expansion. Even where there are successful ventures in Latina/o mass media, it is rare for the outlets to be seen across a wide spectrum or outside of Latina/o communities.

Unfortunately, trade-off comes in accepting a new set of stereotypes and generalizations about the cultures that make up the new Latina/o era. The acceptance in society also brings a whole host of problems, as Leland and Chambers explain:

Like other immigrant groups, Latinos in the second and third generations begin to absorb the worst of America: poorer health and diet, higher delinquency and dropout rates, more divorce and domestic abuse . . . The longer families have been in the United States, the better the kids speak English and the higher their self-esteem. But they also do less homework, have lower GPAs and lower aspirations . . . Children's superior English skills may upset the family order. Also, second and third generation Latinos, who grow up with higher expectations than their immigrant parents, may be less resilient when they encounter discrimination. (p. 52)

Rather than celebrate the strength of mixed cultures, many in the Latina/o community have fallen into the trap of majority America; celebrate all of a culture or none of the culture. Not only does this diminish the value of a multicultural experience, but it has negative consequences for expression and acts as resistance to social change. Rather than revel in the power of community and the strength of diversity in Latina/o communities, often times this social capital is lost in the struggle to achieve parity with mainstream America.

The Rise of the Internet Generation

Relative to issues raised earlier in this article, it is imperative to address concerns of general racial inclusion vis-à-vis discussing the "digital divide" as well as to highlight the current direction of Latina/o participation online. Understanding the participation dimension will help clarify the argument for greater promotion of Latina/o expression in cyberspace. The internet is a unique platform for exercising the First Amendment right of free speech. The Supreme Court has made this abundantly clear by striking down the Communication Decency Act in its decision in *Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union*. Siegel explains the rhetoric of Justice Stevens' opinion, "strongly suggests, if not explicitly holds, that cyberspace communication deserves the same undiluted amount of First Amendment protection accorded to print media" (142). Indeed, the procedural protections offered by the Supreme Court are part of the growing recognition that the internet is not only an undeniable fact of life now, but that it is a powerful tool. Hill and Hughes qualify the status of the internet by noting its impact on change: "... the internet will fundamentally alter the political landscape of the United States if not the entire world . . . [the] political and societal change are the effect, and the internet is and will be the cause" (181). The free flow of ideas through free media helps foster democracy and participation.

The gatekeepers and media monopolies described earlier have locked out Latina/o voices. Levinson makes a distinction about the internet relative to mass media that is important to consider given the existing participation and representation of Latina/os: "The problem with the gatekeeper - whether unavoidable in the case of mass media or optional in the case of online publication - is that it cuts off the flow of ideas before the intended recipients, the readers, have a chance to select them." (134)

The development of the internet has opened up a new spectrum of information sharing and technological interconnectedness. Much about the internet's function in society is still unknown, given its unique nature and dynamic nature. Despite the success of email and cyber commerce, debate over internet use and expectations of accomplishment has only just begun. One thing is certain however; the increase of technology is shifting greater control to what Matthews calls "non-state actors" any individual or group entity not directly connected to the government, adding, "... [They] are empowered both in relative terms and absolutely" (64). Valauskas continues by explaining the comments made at an early Web conference in Paris by one of the original internet developers Tim Berners-Lee "the really important work on the internet happens at the scale where small groups interact to solve specific problems, to explore new issues and organize ideas together" (2).

Furthermore, the most important area where defining and expressing voice is political empowerment. Pop culture icons and celebrities may be important, but unless that social capital is translated into political power, it will be impossible to advance minority causes. All too often popular culture is seen as the sole space for expression of minority voice. The internet is a crucial tool by which Latina/os can organize, share information and strive to connect to political organizations. Negroponte argues that the four largest benefits of the internet are that it is, "decentralizing, globalizing, harmonizing, and empowering," factors especially important for the Latina/o community (229). There is space on the internet for individuals to champion ideas that can bring cohesion or a direct attention to a common goal for their group. Expression that is this powerful for an individual has the potential to increase greater participation for larger groups. Evans explains the internet has an effect of "cross-pollination" on thinking and diversity noting that the experience of interacting with, "people from socioeconomic, educational, cultural, national, or generational backgrounds different from our own can provide us with thoughts or manners of expression that interrupt and transform our own" (4).

Branwyn identifies a new internet based media, what he calls "sociomedia," which acts as a tool born of social interaction to breakdown "old relationships between media producers and consumers" (288). Socioresponsive interaction means that groups can use focal points such as identity and culture to define new agendas for expression and participation. Even if that participation is limited to online discourse, it is still revolutionary due to the more open nature of the medium. Slevin affirms this notion of participation:

After all, it offers an opportunity for a more positive and critical approach to finding ways of developing the freedom of individuals to use the internet to participate in engagements which . . . emphasize the responsibility that individuals and groups have for the ideas they hold and the practices in which they engage (47).

Recent developments in politics and social justice suggest the internet is being utilized to reach out more and spread important messages and call for action. Lau notes the new attention politicians are paying to web sites crafted for minority interest, is coming at a time when more minorities are going on-line and focusing a great deal of attention on "building virtual communities" (p. 6). The 2000 presidential election and the Gore and Bush campaigns have respectively targeted their messages to the Spanish-speaking Latina/o population on their web pages and in their campaigns.

Latina/os, Generation N.com, and Internet Empowerment

The internet is not a panacea for minorities seeking redress from social oppression and a space for political expression. The internet is also not the only place that minorities can rally for

empowerment and build greater community cohesion. However, the internet holds promise as a unique platform from which to evolve expressive spaces and gain, "access to the tools of signification" (Colby 125). The value of free expression is trumped if there is no way to capitalize on its power. This final section examines the notion of defining a new community for Latina/os in cyberspace, drawing on the power of individuals in the community, and the search for greater empowerment through the use of web sites and networking on the internet.

Much attention has been paid to the growing gap between those that have access and understand how to navigate the internet and those lacking even the simplest access to cyberspace. The "digital divide" is often described in meta-terms with developed, Western nations identified as the privileged segment of technology users. Developing nations fall on the diminishing side of the balance. The chasm is easily transposed to the domestic front in the United States, where minorities fall on the lower end of the divide.

With greater political attention focused on the status of minorities relative to technological advances, the politicization of the divide has garnered more attention in recent years. A 1999 study by the United States Department of Commerce detailed the divide in terms of ethnicity in the United States and shared statistical data that suggested minorities were "falling through the Net," in terms of computer ownership and participation in cyberspace (Horn and Woodall A-01). The report fueled an already growing sense of disillusion on the part of minorities that the digital divide was far outpacing their ability to actively participate in cyberspace. Certainly, one of the most common arguments made against empowerment and expression vis-à-vis the internet is that technology is insular and there are few opportunities for minorities to gain access.

The best answer to this line of argument is found in more recent studies. The latest research on Latina/o internet participation suggests that not only are Latina/os gaining ground on computer ownership and internet participation, but also they are doing it faster than any other minority group and even faster than white households (Allbritton 7; Hafner G6; Hoffman 11; Varoga 77). This data also suggests that the technology boom in the Latina/o community is anchored with the youth. This is important for several reasons; first, it means that the internet will be part of the heritage of the younger members of the Latina/o community and will inevitably continue as more of the population seeks higher levels of education or specialized work training. Second, because the internet is becoming an important cultural and social phenomenon, it is more likely the younger members of the Latina/o community will be interested in learning more about participating online. Finally, as interest grows with younger Latina/os, there is a better chance their excitement will spark interest on the part of other family members. Bridging the generational gap in the Latina/o community is a job best suited to begin with the youth and move vertically, rather than to expect information to trickle from the older generation downward. Allbritton contends that online participation will increase to eventually encompass two-thirds of Latina/o households by 2005 (7).

Latina/os represent values, languages, cultures, and identities across a global spectrum stretching from South America to the Caribbean through the United States and beyond. The only existing medium that comes close to embracing those distinct flavors is the internet. Some may argue that television has been able to close gaps in social expression and provide for Latina/o representation, but as discussed earlier the nature of mass media and use of one language naturally limit Latina/o expression, representation and participation. It is possible to relish the distinction of being Latina/o online more than ever, because so many qualities can be shared and discussed and focused into sources of empowerment. There is growing potential to ease past the issues that have lead to disenfranchised groups like Latina/os, as Negroponte explains; "The harmonizing effect of being digital is already apparent as previously partitioned disciplines and enterprises find themselves collaborating, not competing. A previously missing common

language emerges, allowing people to understand across boundaries" (230). Slevin continues by articulating the nature of the trust mechanism that the internet helps bring to encourage expression; "On an unprecedented level, the internet is presenting individuals and organizations with new opportunities for responsive action by allowing them to display their integrity and maintain and build up the trust of others in their actions" (47). The internet also helps create space in the "actual" or offline world through the recognition of virtual identity. Evans explains the premise behind this internet effect:

We recognize, in other words, that the online voices have both a virtual and actual dimension. Because the virtual dimension exists always as the "other side" of its manifest content, it cannot exist in separation from this content: its being is to give rise to, to actualize itself as, this content or posting. It is a source that cannot be separated from what it produces, a voice that would disappear without its articulations (6).

The internet offers a base from which to empower ideas and information that does not require as many resources as with other mass media. With proliferating Latina/o use of the internet and rising numbers of Latina/o web sites such as Picosito.com and quepasa.com it is easier than ever to establish web space. Similarly, these web sites have established chat rooms and space online for discussions to take place on issues related to political, economic, and social concerns, that members of the Latina/o community face. These chat rooms are conducted in English and Spanish and help provide comfortable settings for conversations and dialogue to take place. A number of Latina/o social activists, political organizations and think tanks, such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the National Caucus of La Raza (NCLR) and the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI), have established themselves with web pages online. Not only does the presence of these entities legitimize the internet for Latina/o voice, but also they act as evidence that the medium can be commodified for expressive space. The LULAC web site offers a wide range of information including in-depth access to political issues, scholarship and educational opportunities, as well as hyperlinks to other sites of interest to Latina/os. Politico-magazine.com is an excellent site that collects articles and press information relative to Latina/o political and socioeconomic interests as well as commentary and opinion pieces from a wide range of Latina/o journalists.

The monopolization of media and its limitation on expressive space is also challenged through the internet. Latina/o writers and performers are experiencing a renaissance in terms of exposure through web sites and with advance video and audio technology. Creative contributions can be aimed at other Latina/os without relying on the existing corporate structure. Latina/o writers can express themselves through commentary and creative writing at sites such as Elander.com and political satire appears on sites like Pocho.com. Latina/o political cartoons are even starting to proliferate on sites like Cartoonista.com. These web sites are additional examples of the power of the internet. For Latina/o groups there are limited opportunities for cultural expression in printed media and the nature of periodicals limits the breadth of content, so these sites are able to challenge those assumptions and overcome logistical obstacles.

Some contend that commercial interests shatter private space by forecasting a "collision course with free speech interests" online (Samoriski 93). The internet has inevitably faced its share of entrepreneurs, but the risk of commercialization should not appear to deter increased Latina/o participation.

A number of the Latina/o social activist, political organization and think tank web cites in existence now are operated without the intrusion of commercial interests. Even with a commercial presence online, it is hard to argue that individuals cannot move past the allure of hyper-consumerism to engage in the process of expression and empowerment. Perhaps the most

important element of this commercialization process is the chance that Latina/os can find economic opportunities that could help improve their situation. If Latina/o businesses can target a Latina/o consumer base this is also useful to empowering a community. Even if Latina/os just want to communicate with others in a different language or embrace their commonalities, commercialism is a minor hindrance and not an unbreakable obstacle. Kang discusses the importance of this association among like-minded individuals as a stepping-stone to greater possibilities:

Perhaps commonalities underlying cyber-communities could act as a foundation for cooperation. To facilitate communities based on common interests, experiences, and fates, powerful search engines enable individuals to locate others with similar profiles or similar conversational interests. In these communities based on commonalities, people share stories, ask questions, provide answers, and give advice (1171).

The presence of Latina/o enclaves across the United States signifies strong community growth. If Latina/os can extend these communities online they will be able to achieve interconnectivity among multiple communities. Stronger communities make for greater discourse, greater celebration of similarities, and fuel the empowerment necessary for achieving expressive space. There is a concern about the strength of the change brought on by the internet, especially if the change sparks ethnic separatism or reifies cultural boundaries. Selnow offers an optimistic vision of the internet and its effect on change through the spread of information and dialogue:

Quite possibly [the internet] will send audiences in many directions, and by tugging at separate audience threads, fray the cloth of the national agenda. We are particularly vulnerable to such a thing. We are the most pluralistic nation on earth, and while we may look ragtag at times to the rest of the world, we have sustained a sober-minded unity that is in itself remarkable. Can the internet challenge that? Yes, it can, given that information has been the nation's binding agent, particularly through a century of expanding diversity (xxx).

The internet is unlike any other expressive space available to Latina/os today. It offers infinite space to develop a new perspective on identity and a place from which to challenge the existing order of identity politics in the United States. Tapping into resources online removes obstacles that exist in the form of corporate ownership and especially is limitations based on language. The use of multiple languages and even mixed languages can open expressive pathways for Latina/os that may have been culturally constraining previously. Expression is valuable if many individuals can share their perspective and build on each other's ideas and agendas. The internet can focus Latina/o efforts to empower expression by connecting them with powerful organizations, political lobbies, politicians and each other. No longer will activists in different parts of the country be uninformed about each other's activities. With the internet it is possible to report political change that directly effects Latina/os and not rely on mediating factors to alter or diminish the message. In the case of the 2000 presidential election, politicians are even appealing to Latina/os to vote and become active participants in the American political dialogue. Latina/os in the United States are living in remarkable times.

Conclusion

The internet continues to experience growing pains and may never fully evolve to the point that theorists have predicted. However, the nature of communication has forever been altered because of the internet and its wide range of tools and applications. Several issues deserve

greater attention in future research on Latina/o participation on the internet: first, access is growing to favor Latina/o participation; however there needs to be more focus on the empowerment process to stimulate Latina/os seeking access. The information superhighway is only effective if people can find the appropriate on-ramp. Second, while race is an ever present issue in American society attention should not wane from better understanding the binary racial dichotomy that exists and its effect on racial discourse, especially from the Latina/o perspective. As the demographics of the United States change it is imperative to reconstruct the vision of racial relations and find ways to incorporate technology to empower change and fuel discourse that can benefit free expression. Expressive space crafted on the internet by Latina/os can be a powerful way to capture the spirit of expression and free speech that was instrumental for the empowerment and advancement of African-Americans during the Civil Rights movement. Rather than just marching on Washington D.C., an internet-based movement led by Latina/os can spur movements around the country and possibly unify a base of political and social support. Finally, future research can cultivate new researchers and help diversify Latina/o scholarship across academic disciplines. The value of expressive space for academics and social scientists is especially important in a community where there might not be a premium placed on educational opportunities and educational experience. As the technology becomes more accessible there is a challenge to share more information and empower the Latina/o community to participate online and take advantage of the expressive space and their First Amendment right of free speech.

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