2012

Americas and Caribbean Islands Union

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/ruben_barrera_botello_jd/2/
Immigration is a major issue in the United States today. U.S. Latinos often express interest in this issue because of its direct impact on their personal lives, families, schools, jobs, communities and governmental affairs.

Latinos are the largest minority group in the U.S. and in the following states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington and Wyoming (see factfinder2.census.gov). Most Latinos in the U.S. are not immigrants, but most immigrants in the U.S. are from Latin America -- and especially from Mexico -- while most U.S. Latinos are of Mexican descent.

Latino immigrants bring their languages, cultures and traditions with them from their native lands, and this adds to the sense of kinship or affinity many U.S. Latinos have with Latino immigrants. This natural phenomena makes it difficult to separate the two distinct groups of Latinos in the U.S. -- immigrants and non-immigrants -- when discussing the immigration issue even though most U.S. Latinos are not immigrants.

There are an estimated 942 million people in the Americas and Caribbean Islands: 346 million in North America, 200 million in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean Islands, and 396 million in South America (see http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/america.htm). Spanish-speaking Latinos are thus the majority population of the Western Hemisphere (see http://www.state.gov/p/wha/ci/), and the majority of immigrants in North America, while Spanish is their dominant language.

Latinos are not a singular race, color or nationality. Latinos include multilingual people from all the races, colors, nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, religions and creeds in the world. Because most U.S. Latinos are bicultural and bilingual (Spanish/English), they have helped build bridges of understanding and cooperation between the U.S. and the rest of the Western Hemisphere.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are around 52 million Latinos in the U.S. today. About 37 million of these Latinos speak Spanish, and over half of those fluent in Spanish also speak English.

The total population is expected to grow to about 132 million U.S. Latinos by 2050. An estimated 63% of U.S. Latinos are of Mexican ancestry, 9.2% Puerto Rican, 3.5% Cuban, 3.3% Salvadoran, 2.8% Dominican and 18.2% Others. (See http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb12-ff19.html)

and Texas are of Mexican descent, most Latinos in Florida are of Cuban and Puerto Rican descent (see http://www.southbendtribune.com/sns-graphics-latinos-in-florida-gx,0,4916788.graphic).

IMMIGRATION REFORM

The time has come for the U.S. government to go far beyond short-term solutions to immigration problems, especially as they relate to Latino immigrants. Instead of clashing over these problems from election-to-election, all the good citizens of the U.S., and of the rest of the Western Hemisphere, should be able to live, work, study, travel and conduct business and commerce freely throughout this region like European Union (EU) citizens do within their member states.

The Americas and Caribbean Islands need an international union (like EU) to tackle their major problems including human trafficking, drug cartels, community, business, economic, commercial and industrial development, terrorism, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, hunger, homelessness, sickness, disease, natural disasters and unsustainable environments. Regarding immigration, law-abiding citizens in this proposed new union would be able to live, work, study, travel and conduct business and commerce freely throughout the Western Hemisphere, as EU citizens do over there.

THE EUROPEAN UNION

EU has proven multilingual people from diverse cultures and traditions are able to move freely from nation-to-nation, while living and working together to protect, preserve and promote their peaceful, civil and prosperous lifestyles. EU was established to end the frequent wars between neighboring European nations that resulted in World War II. It is now composed of 27 member states: Austria (1995), Belgium (1952), Bulgaria (2007), Cyprus (2004), Czech Republic (2004), Denmark (1973), Estonia (2004), Finland (1995), France (1952), Germany (1952), Greece (1981), Hungary (2004), Ireland (1973), Italy (1952), Latvia (2004), Lithuania (2004), Luxembourg (1952), Malta (2004), Netherlands (1952), Poland (2004), Portugal (1986), Romania (2007), Slovakia (2004), Slovenia (2004), Spain (1986), Sweden (1995) and United Kingdom (1973).

The structure of an Americas and Caribbean Islands Union could be similar to EU, as follows:

* European Parliament
* European Council
* Council of the European Union
* European Commission
* Court of Justice of the European Union
* European Court of Auditors
* European Economic and Social Committee
* Committee of the Regions
* European Central Bank
* European Investment Bank
* European Investment Fund
* European Ombudsman
* European Data Protection Supervisor

Other EU bodies include:

Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER)

Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC)

Community Plant Variety Office (CPVO)

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA)

European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders (FRONTEX)

European Agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems in the area of freedom, security and justice (IT Agency) – currently being set up

European Asylum Support Office (EASO)

European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA)

European Banking Authority (EBA)

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop)

European Chemicals Agency (ECHA)

European Environment Agency (EEA)

European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA)

European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EUROFOUND)

European GNSS Agency (GSA)

European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)

European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA)

European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA)

European Medicines Agency (EMA)

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)
The following agencies operate within the framework of the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy:

European Defence Agency (EDA)
European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)
European Union Satellite Centre (EUSC)

A prime example of how citizens of the Americas and Caribbean Islands can benefit from an international union is reflected in the EU policy that permits EU Nationals to travel in its passport-free Schengen area composed of:

Austria
Belgium
Czech Republic
Denmark
Estonia
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
Hungary
Iceland
Italy
Cross-border workers also have equal rights with native-born workers (see http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/work/cross-border-worker/your-rights/index_en.htm), and EU citizens are entitled to attend school in any EU country under the same conditions as nationals of that country (see http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/education/school/enroll/index_en.htm). EU workers, students and their entire families can also relocate and establish permanent residence in another EU country after living there for five years (see http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/residence/worker-pensioner/rights-conditions/index_en.htm).

Of particular interest is the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (see http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:083:0389:0403:EN:PDF). A similar Charter to protect, preserve and promote the fundamental rights of all the people of the Western Hemisphere would go far toward establishment of genuine liberty, equality and justice for all in this region of the world.

AMERICAS AND CARIBBEAN ISLANDS UNION (ACIU) PROPOSAL

Several Latin American countries are working, as a bloc (CELAC) with EU, today. The Rio Group stands out as the most active and promising international alliance of sovereign states in the Americas and Caribbean Islands that includes: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela.
Also known as the "Community of Latin American and Caribbean States" (CELAC), the Rio Group meets with the European Union every two years on a ministerial level.

CELAC, the U.S. and Canada are not working together well, at this time. CELAC was established as an alternative to the Organization of American States (OAS), the regional body organized largely by Washington DC, in 1948 that has focused primarily on U.S. interests.

The following blocs have worked to integrate much of Latin America for economic and political purposes without an overall union:

- Latin American Integration Association (known as ALADI or, occasionally, by the English acronym LAIA)
- Central American Integration System (Spanish: Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana SICA)
- Mercosur or Mercosul (Spanish: Mercado Común del Sur, Portuguese: Mercado Comum do Sul, Guaraní: Ñemby Ñemuha, English: Common Southern Market)
- Organization of American States (OAS)
- Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (Spanish: Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños, CELAC, Portuguese: Comunidade de Estados Latino-Americanos e Caribenhos, French: Communauté des États Latino-Américains et Caribéens)
- Andean Community (Spanish: Comunidad Andina – CAN)

The Caribbean Community at http://caricom.org/ (CARICOM) brings together 15 states in the Caribbean, including Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Haiti, Jamaica, Grenada, Guyana, Montserrat, St. Lucia, Suriname, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. There is also discussion about a more exclusive North American Union (NAU) between the U.S., Mexico and Canada.

All the above blocs, organizations and initiatives aimed at uniting various states in the Americas and Caribbean Islands lack overall unity, coordination, commonality and cohesion. Some even work against each other, to the detriment of their own citizens. Clearly, a more perfect union is needed to bring all nations of the Western Hemisphere together, as one Union, so they can work out their differences in a stable, peaceful and civil setting, and tackle the major problems they each and together face in strategic, coordinated and effective ways.

U.S. LATINOS SHOULD PROMOTE FORMATION OF THE AMERICAS AND CARIBBEAN ISLANDS UNION (ACIU)

Millions of U.S. Latinos raised the consciousness of America with a resounding vote in support of immigration reform, in the 2012 Presidential Election. This mass pro-immigration movement forced the major political parties, to become more responsive to U.S. Latinos by promising immigration reform during President Barack Obama's final term in office.
To most Americans, immigration reform does not even remotely include establishing an international union where people from all the races, colors, nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, religions and creeds in the Western Hemisphere can live, work, study, travel and conduct business and commerce freely, as do the good citizens of the European Union within their own member states. A major paradigm shift is needed, not only to tackle immigration problems, as we know and understand them today. U.S. Latinos need to promote unification of all the Americas and Caribbean Islands, in order to improve international relations and raise their own living standards along with the almost one billion men, women and children in this region.

In the front lines of the pro-immigration movement that helped defeat the anti-immigrant forces during the 2012 U.S. Election were "DREAMers," young Americans born in the U.S. whose parents were undocumented immigrants when they were born (see http://dreamact.info/). Millions of other U.S. Latinos supported the DREAMers and all immigrants working hard to feed their families because, as mentioned above, U.S. Latinos have a sense of kinship or affinity with Latino immigrants and their families.

Latino students are in a good position, to educate, advocate and work toward an international union like ACIU, in order to help improve the quality of life for all the people of the Americas and Caribbean Islands. This new union could create millions of new jobs, as well, and promote peace and prosperity throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Beyond immigration, several U.S. policies toward Latin America and the Caribbean seem to be in preparation for war and other armed hostilities against Latinos, the type of conflicts Europe was experiencing, as its nations were dragged into World War II over there. An ACIU modelled after EU could bring all the nations, states and territories of the Western Hemisphere under one umbrella, to work out their differences in a peaceful, stable and civil manner, in order to tackle their major problems together instead of resorting to more warfare and other hostilities.

As with immigration reform, U.S. Latinos need to encourage the U.S. government to work with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and with the other blocs mentioned above, to establish an integrated and democratic international union composed of all the nations, states and territories of the Western Hemisphere that choose to join. It may take decades to convince the U.S. government to join the rest of the Western Hemisphere, as a Union, but millions throughout the region would welcome and benefit from this positive change in hemispheric relations.

U.S. Latinos who want to work toward an Americas and Caribbean Islands Union should begin by contacting the President of the United States in support of this innovative proposal (see http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact). They should follow-up by contacting their U.S. senators (see http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm) and congressional representatives (see http://www.house.gov/representatives/).

The National League of Latino Elected Officials should also be contacted (see http://www.naleo.org/) along with prominent Latino organizations like the National Council of La Raza (see http://www.nclr.org/) and the League of United Latin American Citizens (see http://www.lulac.org/). Government officials, agencies and organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean Islands, including those mentioned above, should be contacted and encouraged to work toward such a Union.
Today’s Latino students are the future leaders of our thriving communities, and they must be prepared to help meet the growing demands Latinos are placing on our U.S. society and government in a more diverse, responsive, productive and functional way. Opening doors for Latinos and other Americans, to lawfully experience life, liberty and happiness throughout the Western Hemisphere is a need best met by those who already appreciate all the rich nationalities, cultures and traditions of this diverse region.

All students are encouraged to do extensive research, and to critically analyze and expand on this proposal’s innumerable possibilities in their classrooms, workshops, conferences, mass media and other publications, to educate themselves, their communities and society-at-large about the Americas and Caribbean Islands Union approach to international, hemispheric and world affairs. If European nations can come together, as one Union after all their centuries of conflicts, wars and hostilities, the Americas and Caribbean Islands can, too.

REFERENCE LIST


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruben Barrera Botello has been an ardent Latino activist since 1970. Born and raised in Texas, he moved to California in 1965 and joined the Marines. After Vietnam, he earned an associate degree in journalism, a baccalaureate degree in political science and a doctorate degree in jurisprudence on the GI Bill. The longtime activist has taught Chicano Studies courses, at Ventura College and Humboldt State
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