The Political Awakening of Blacks and Latinos in New York City: Competition or Cooperation?

William W. Sales, Jr., and Rod Bush

Black and Latino cooperation is central to the elaboration of a social bloc capable of forging a democratic and egalitarian future for the people of New York City, and, what is more important, for the larger social formation of which New York City and the United States are a part. Black and Latino competition, on the other hand, reinforces the status quo in which the largest segment of both populations is consigned to the margins of the social economy. At the same time, a subaltern class, a bureaucratic bourgeoisie, has congealed within both populations to represent the interests of the larger system among these populations and to translate their grievances into system-appropriate scenarios. We will argue that for the Black and Latino populations in New York City, the logic of competition is driven by the narrow class needs of the middle class as a class "for itself," while the logic of cooperation is more consistent with, and indeed central to, the needs of the Black and Latino working classes and those committed to working in their interests.

We will review the development of Black and Latino electoral power in New York City since World War II, assess its potential and limitations for meeting the needs of Blacks and Latinos, and document the development of social activism as an alternative to electoral strategies of empowerment. Electoral organizing in the United States is particularly vulnerable to being highjacked by entrepreneurial politicians who forego political principle and instead seek the best opportunity for personal advancement. The most fruitful cooperative approaches to Black-Latino empowerment are thus in the domain of social activism, leading to the creation of new movements for social change. We believe the most promising aspect of the Black-Latino coalition reflects a larger process of class and social group formation that will profoundly affect the struggle for social justice. Part of our task is to

William W. Sales is Chairman of the Department of African American Studies, Seton Hall University, 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079 (e-mail: saleswil@pcrealm.net). His most recent book is From Civil Rights to Black Liberation: Malcolm X and the Organization of Afro-American Unity (South End Press, 1994). Rod Bush is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, St. John’s University, 8000 Utopia Parkway, Jamaica, NY 11439 (e-mail: bushr@stjohns.edu). His recent book, We Are Not What We Seem: Black Nationalism and Class Struggle in the American Century, was just published (January 1999) by New York University Press.
transcend oversimplified paradigms that underestimate the seriousness of the situation of oppressed racialized groups, and thereby, the significance of the opposition they mount. Popular paradigms such as the ethnic secession model are much too localized and do not sufficiently examine the large structures and historical processes with which we need to be concerned.

Post-Industrial Capitalism and the Political Awakening of Latinos and Blacks

Two closely related postwar developments have been particularly salient for the fortunes of Blacks and Latinos in New York City. First, restructuring of the capitalist economy is having a profoundly damaging effect on the standard of living of both groups (Torres, 1995: 61–64). Second, changes in the demographics of the city greatly improved their potential to gain political power and representation in the electoral arena (Falcon, 1988: 171). We will highlight the aspects with particular relevance for this analysis.

The linchpins of the Black-Latino coalition in New York are the African American and Puerto Rican communities. Both groups have been disproportionately consigned to the bottom rungs of the economic ladder. The similarities in their structural positions and social status made for important alliances between their intellectuals and lower strata during the turbulent 1960s and 1970s. Restructuring of the capitalist world economy has profoundly weakened the lower strata in both groups, as well as workers previously in the primary sectors of a highly segmented labor market (Torres, 1995: 61–64). More specifically, it has consolidated a lower stratum of the working class, one disproportionately composed of racial minorities — including immigrants from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia, as well as women (Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein, 1989).

Along with this, the managerial-professional strata of both groups grew significantly in the postwar period, especially among African Americans — in close relationship with government employment (Torres, 1995: 61–64). These new middle class elements, however, were nowhere near parity with their white middle class counterparts as some have suggested. Oliver and Shapiro (1995: 95) found that the white middle class commanded roughly seven times the wealth of the Black middle class. In other words, there has not been a declining significance of race, as authors like Wilson (1978 and 1987) claim.

The significance of race in the distribution of wealth and opportunity may evade those who focus on evidence of overt racial discrimination. The Civil Rights Movement forced explicit forms of racial exclusion to go underground. White racial privilege, however, is deeply ingrained in the structure and practices of our social system, keeping Latinos, Blacks, and other groups systematically at the bottom of U.S. society. This phenomenon is known as institutional racism. Institutional racism, we argue, operates in tandem with other forms of racial discrimination, producing extremely complex forms of inequality that many
prefer to blame on individual qualities — or deficits. By extracting differential performance from the totality of social factors accounting for it, society widens rather than narrows existing inequalities (Wallerstein, 1979). This, in fact, displaces the problem, making it intractable. Not only does it choose to close its eyes to racism, but it also separates it from its class context. Meanwhile, the mechanisms of distribution of wealth and opportunity continue to reproduce advantage and disadvantage by race.

Thus, it is no accident that oppressed lower strata in core countries such as Latinos and Blacks in the USA, Québécois in Canada, and Ocitans in France express their class consciousness in ethnonational terms. The Left is often disturbed by what they perceive as a lack of class consciousness and its replacement with a false consciousness that identifies with the divide-and-conquer schemes of the capitalist class. However, less confusion is caused by the failure of the largely white core working-class movement to represent the interests of the weakest strata of the working class and, thereby, prevent a growing gap, both objective and subjective, between the interests of workers from high ethnic/racial groups and those from low-status groups.

Why is this important? Like most large cities in the core of the world capitalist system, New York is an ethnic/racial hodgepodge. In such cities, the politically dominant ethnic/racial group, whether a numerical majority or not, includes the political and economic elites, a large percentage of the managerial and professional classes, and a large portion of the most skilled workers. The multiple minorities, meanwhile, are divided into higher-status groups recruited into higher-status jobs and lower-status groups recruited into subproletarian positions (unskilled labor and lumpenproletarian, marginal or criminal employment).

The ethnic/racial consciousness of high-status groups tends to be defensive in character — partly to break down remaining barriers to their success and partly to prevent incursions into their privileges by lower-status groups. One form of defense is assimilation into the dominant group. The political meeting grounds of the skilled workers from the dominant ethnic group and the professionals and skilled workers of the higher-status ethnic groups are the institutions of the center-left, such as trade unions, liberal and social democratic parties, and the like. Reform for the lower-status minority groups is not promising because they confront a privileged upper stratum and a privileged middle stratum in control of the center-left institutions. When these subproletarian strata of these low-status ethnic groups reject assimilation, it is the assimilation of these center-left institutions that they have in mind, as we shall see in the struggle for community control of schools.

In the USA, not only have Blacks and Latinos become the lowest status groups, but their attempts at improvement also confront the double barriers of racism and classism. The former have constituted the bulk of the lower working class for nearly 400 years. Their proletarianization has been inextricably tied to a dialectic
between white people as the marker of free labor and Blacks as the marker of slave labor. Initially integrated as colonized peoples by the U.S. takeover of Puerto Rico and half of Mexico, Latinos have been extended the role and position of Blacks in U.S. society. Due to this longstanding position at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, the social movements of Blacks and Latinos have been frequently preoccupied with competition over benefits within the status quo. At the same time, their condition as chronically oppressed and excluded nationalities has made them particularly sensitive to the ideas of a just and egalitarian order, while giving their movements a transcendent or transformative character.

*Ethnicization/racialization* of the working class has complicated the development of class solidarity within the USA and elsewhere. The traditional social democratic and trade union movements, organized around male workers from the high-status ethnic groups, have (weakly) supported liberal measures toward minority rights, but have balked at measures that attack institutional racism. Under conditions of restructuring and the dramatic contraction of opportunities for the working class, elites in this class have pushed to the right to secure their precarious positions against competition from lower-status groups. Meanwhile, the class position and consciousness of Blacks and Latinos, further squeezed by restructuring and the mainstream working-class reaction, potentially place them at the core of a social movement of change.

The second crucial factor for understanding the dynamics of Black and Latino coalitions and struggles in New York, especially in the last three decades, is demographic change. This change, as reflected in augmented electoral power, has given Blacks and Latinos — in that order — a chance to achieve significant electoral power. In the case of Latinos, the chance is still largely potential because many of them are not citizens. This developing potential is all the more noticeable in the face of the explosion of a white backlash fueled by the Reagan/Bush and Koch and Giuliani eras. As the economic prosperity of restructuring leaves behind the Black and Latino masses, these groups turn to the state to redress inequalities (Regalado, 1995: 786). In cities like New York, where neither group is numerous enough to achieve electoral power alone, coalitions are necessary to achieve this development potential.

For this reason, the potential for Black and Latino empowerment is associated with the emergence of *minority cities* — in this case New York — or cities where the majority population comprises nationalities of color. Authors like Regalado and Martinez (1991) see this as an opportunity for political empowerment. For this to happen, nationalities of color need to engage in a process that includes political coalition building, participation, representation, access, and influence inside and outside the formal political institutions and the mechanisms of wealth and power allocation. It is a process through which “a minority group becomes politically organized to such an extent that its concerns, agendas, and demands can no longer be ignored by current power groups” (Regalado and Martinez, 1991: 131). In their
view, this process of empowerment can be institutionalized and reproduced from one election to the next.

**Growing Black-Latino Influence: The Record of Three Decades**

Many observers of the political arena believe that empowerment will allow Blacks and Latinos to effectively confront the mounting problems of their existence in urban America through electoral politics, although this has proved to be no easy task. Nevertheless, there have been some very positive developments in New York City. As early as the 1960s, Latinos and Blacks made it impossible for Democratic politicians to win citywide office without supporting civil rights (The Nation, 1993: 608). In the 1980s, redistricting produced a significant increase in the number of Blacks and Latinos in the city council and the state assembly (Pooley, 1993: 14; Horowitz, 1994: 41). Most important, this increased electoral strength produced the election of David Dinkins as the first nonwhite mayor of New York.

In the 1980s, Latinos showed a propensity to vote conservatively, turning out for both Reagan and Koch. Yet as early as 1984 (and even more forcefully in 1988), Latino voting patterns began to shift significantly toward Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition agenda. Puerto Ricans were a crucial factor in Dinkins’ successful mayoral bid in 1989. He received two-thirds of the Latino vote (Logan, 1993: 51). Nydia Velasquez won election in a newly created congressional district in Brooklyn when Blacks and Latinos combined forces to construct an electoral majority around her candidacy. The Black vote gave her the edge (Leid, 1995). In the 51st Councilmanic District in Brooklyn, Felix Ortiz was elected with support from heavily Latino Sunset Park and Black Red Hook (Wynyard, 1995).

In spite of this, Latinos feel they are treated as second-class citizens, even by Black elected officials who play into “divide and conquer” schemes of more powerful interests. A significant sector of Puerto Ricans belongs to a conservative bloc that opposed School Chancellor Richard Green’s controversial Rainbow Curriculum and supported Giuliani. Nevertheless, the Puerto Rican vote held solidly for Dinkins in the mayoral election of 1993. Furthermore, Giuliani was unable to get more than one-third of the Latino vote in 1993 (Falcon, 1995).

\[\text{Difficulties in Building Black-Latino Coalitions}\]

The formation of majority electoral coalitions of Blacks and Latinos has not been easy. It has run into intra- and inter-ethnic difficulties, as well as into other problems, such as those created by the restructuring of the capitalist political-economy. Unity-building between the two communities is complicated by cultural differences, absence of a steady tradition of cooperation, lack of geographical proximity, and the opportunism of political entrepreneurs (Jennings, 1988: 75–78), among others. Some of these difficulties are explored around the discussion of immigration, electoral potential, racism, and opportunistic leadership.
The Impact of Immigration from Latin America

At the national level, barriers to Black Latino coalitions are considerable. The Black and Latino populations of New York City have experienced increasing differentiation. Immigration from the Caribbean and Latin America has increased dramatically as a result of the 1965 immigration reform and the impact of structural adjustment on the homeland economies of these immigrants. Each of these immigrant groups has different perceptions of nationality, communal allegiances, and citizenship, as well as a differential capacity to participate in electoral politics. This point has been made by Green and Wilson (1989) and de la Garza (1992). The notion of a Black or Latino undifferentiated, culturally and ethnically homogeneous community is erroneous. Hence, in discussing the possibilities for Black-Latino coalitions, we need to disaggregate the Latino population in terms of ethnicity, class, race, nationality, culture, the specific circumstances and histories of their homelands, and the impetus toward immigration.

Morales-Nadal (1995) explains that the extent of mobilization within and between Black and Latino communities is, in part, a function of their different compositions. Many nationalities are included in the designation Latino: Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans, Salvadorans, Mexican Americans, Mexicans, Nicaraguans, Colombians, etc. Black-Latino collaboration in New York City refers largely to African American/Puerto Rican collaboration. However, areas with large Puerto Rican concentrations most often include non-Puerto Rican Latinos as well. They also include significant numbers of non-Latino whites (e.g., Sunset Park, Williamsburg, and South Park Slope). In Brooklyn, the African American designation includes a community that is as much Caribbean as African American. In such cases, "Black" refers to immigrants from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Haiti, and a host of other island nations.

These barriers to coalition hold least with the Puerto Rican-Black relationship and increasingly with the Dominican-Black and Dominican-Puerto Rican relationship. Most Latinos in New York City are either Puerto Rican or Dominican. Despite the rising influence of Dominican immigrants, Latino politics in New York is still dominated by Puerto Ricans. They make up 50% of the city’s Latino population and over 70% of Latino voters (Pooley, 1993). The greatest potential for coalition has traditionally resided in the Black and Puerto Rican communities, for they are closest in most of the variables cited above. For the immediate future, it is crucial that the fastest growing Latino group, Dominicans, also shares with African Americans significant affinities that, in a racist society, will probably strengthen rather than weaken over time. Among Latinos, the Dominican community has the strongest cultural, class, and linguistic affinities with Puerto Ricans. Insofar as there is growing involvement in electoral and protest politics in the Dominican community, the factors fueling this involvement will likely push Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans closer together, rather than farther apart.
One of the most important signifiers potentially binding these groups is color and colorism. Race is an international status symbol within the capitalist world-economy. People of African descent everywhere occupy the bottom rung of the status hierarchy. While the politics of racial identity play differently across the political ghettos of the world-economy, in the United States the rigidity of anti-Black racism consigns those Latino groups with a significant African heritage, such as Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, to a shared status with African Americans.

Problems of Underutilized Electoral Potential

Although both Blacks and Latinos are underrepresented, the former are notably better off in all the above areas. The needs of Latinos have been often subsumed under those of Blacks. When Black demands are met, it is unjustifiably presumed that the Latino condition has been ameliorated. Hence, Latinos strive for visibility as a distinct entity in the political process and for the explicit address of their agenda and needs. Needs such as bilingual education are very specific and often cause tension or separation between the two groups.4

The electoral potential of a Black-Latino coalition in New York City remains only partially exploited. Blacks and Latinos are still underrepresented among registered voters, elected officials, and in the decision-making bureaucracy of the city. Some of this unrealized potential is traceable to the absence of a stable and extensive Black and Latino electoral coalition. To what extent can the latent power of these two communities be galvanized if electoral politics remains the primary arena of focus and contention of the established community leadership?

The Negative Impact of Racism

Racism has had a negative impact on the capacity of Blacks and Latinos to coalesce around issues channeled through the institutional political process. Blacks have tended to think of political coalitions in terms of powerful white groups, such as organized labor or the Jewish community. They have not viewed Latinos as power brokers. Hence, they have usually sought coalition with other groups. To the extent that Latinos have internalized the racist assumptions of their colonial experience, it is difficult for them to accept a Black person as a decision-maker, an elected official, or as a prominent businessperson. With the exception of the Caribbean, almost no Blacks have achieved prominence in any Latin American country in politics, government, or business. Politicians are traditionally visualized only as those whose skin is white (Martel, 1995).

The Roots of Opportunistic Leadership

The restructuring of world capitalism has increased poverty and marginalization in these two traditionally poor communities. It has, in fact, threatened the integrity of these groups as communities. During the administration of Mayor David
Dinkins, New York City lost 350,000 jobs. Simultaneously, nearly one million New Yorkers were on welfare. Bad schools and rampant crime characterized the city. Michael Tomasky (1993a) suggests that although Dinkins could not be faulted for this situation, his administration’s response to it was totally inept. This response alone gave political and economic elites a basis to mobilize against him. The worsening of the economy attendant upon economic restructuring is often blamed on politicians in power. In reality, their ability to stem such economic currents is minimal, regardless of how her or his constituency might be affected. Yet the refusal of mainstream politicians to engage in a serious critique of economic arrangements and of the power of economic elites lessens their credibility.

The voter registration rates of Blacks and Latinos are significantly lower than those of whites. Middle-class political entrepreneurs have monopolized electoral leadership in both communities. Because this elite has conceded that capitalism cannot be fundamentally altered to meet the material needs of all the members of their communities, they approach politics as a zero-sum game. They exploit ethnic allegiances at every turn and engage in traditional clubhouse politics. Angelo Falcon (1995) argues that some of the apparently cooperative behavior of Black and Latino politicians in New York is more a result of the imposition of party discipline than any real impetus to coalesce on the basis of issues shared by the Black and Latino communities. This behavior of the two leaderships as political entrepreneurs reinforces divisiveness and cynicism at the grass roots and thus contributes to their political demobilization.

Black-Latino Coalition: The Record of Political Opportunism

New York City politics has produced notable examples of opportunistic political behavior over the last decades. In 1985, the Black and Puerto Rican leadership split over endorsement of a primary challenger to Democratic incumbent Mayor Ed Koch. Working within the Coalition for a Just New York, the Harlem leadership eschewed coalition with Latinos to settle old scores with Herman Badillo, a Puerto Rican candidate who had a real chance of unseating Koch. Herman Badillo’s political biography reflects that of many Black and Latino political entrepreneurs. In many ways a self-made man, Badillo rose from poverty and the loss of his parents in childhood to work his way through college and law school. He achieved a superior academic record as a magna cum laude graduate of the City College of New York and a cum laude, valedictorian graduate and Law Review member of Brooklyn Law School.

His initial foray into electoral politics was as a liberal and reform-minded Democrat who openly championed the agenda of Blacks and Latinos as it was articulated in the 1960s. Badillo created the John F. Kennedy Democratic Club in East Harlem, a platform that allowed him to challenge the regular organization and its underrepresentation of the viewpoint and needs of Latinos in New York. In response, he was given several prominent positions in the Democratic administra-
tion of Mayor Robert Wagner, including Deputy Real Estate Commissioner and Commissioner in the Department of Relocation, at that time the highest appointive office ever held by a Puerto Rican.

Badillo benefited from the widespread entry of Puerto Ricans into the electoral arena at the end of the 1960s. He made a strong showing in the democratic primary in his first bid for the mayoralty in 1969, running third in a field of five candidates. When a new congressional district, the twenty-first, was carved out of East Harlem and the South Bronx, Badillo was able to take advantage of this new potential for Puerto Rican empowerment, winning election to Congress with 85% of the vote. His tenure as the first Puerto Rican in Congress and the highest officeholder of Puerto Rican extraction was characterized by a progressive legislative agenda on the House Education and Labor Committee that favored the cities, an anti-poverty constituency, a bilingual education agenda, and more federal aid for Puerto Rico.

By the end of the 1970s, Herman Badillo was identified in the popular mind not so much as the exponent of a political agenda favorable to the grass roots, but as one of a small coterie of Black and Puerto Rican politicians who pursued the politics of symbolism as the “first to.” As Badillo failed to garner the support of this group in his aspirations for the mayoralty, he fundamentally altered his approach to the political arena.

In 1985, New York City’s Black leadership abandoned the possibility of coalition with Latinos to back one of its own, Herman “Denny” Farrell, who had no chance of victory. Although the political leadership in Harlem could have been expected to behave in this way, insurgent Black politicians like Assemblyman Al Vann and Congressman Major Owens in Brooklyn were not expected to abandon principle. Yet they, too, supported Farrell. This decision reinforced the suspicions and distrust of the Latino leadership. The Black establishment never forgave Democrat Badillo for undercutting Manhattan’s Black Borough President Percy Sutton’s 1977 mayoral bid. Badillo responded by fundamentally altering his politics and affiliations. He moved away from the direct quest for political power and sought prestige and power as a political insider. As such, Badillo has enjoyed acceptance by the political establishment, especially its more conservative wing. As a public exponent of the neoconservative agenda of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Governor George Pataki, Badillo has attained an importance denied to him by the arena of ethnic politics. He is an important advisor to Giuliani and as vice chairman of the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York, he has led the retrenchment effort in regard to remediation. Removing remediation from CUNY’s senior colleges and recent anti-affirmative action initiatives in California have definite parallels. This attack on remedial work at the City University, which originated with Giuliani and Governor George Pataki, is seen as hitting minorities hard and precipitously curtailing their presence in CUNY’s senior colleges. Badillo has also been in the forefront of the offensive against City College Professor Leonard Jeffries. Although the ostensible issue around Jeffries was the
insensitive and alleged anti-Semitic statements attributed to him, Jeffries was also an avid supporter of the Curriculum of Inclusion. That curriculum emerged from a commission appointed by the State Commissioner of Education that sought to better meet the needs of a racially and culturally diverse student body in New York State's public schools. This suggested curriculum revision enjoyed widespread support in the Black and Latino communities in New York, but was opposed by the educational establishment as represented by Diane Ravitch and Herman Badillo.

As an insider, Badillo has enjoyed prestige, power, and wealth. He belongs to one of the largest law firms in New York City. His firm, Fishbein, Badillo, Wagner, and Harding, has become the major lobbyist at City Hall since the mayoralty of Rudolph Giuliani. Its client-lobbying list has expanded from three to over 60 since the election of Giuliani. Badillo ran with Republican Giuliani on a "fusion" ticket during the 1993 mayoral election. Nevertheless, Latinos stuck with Dinkins. Recently, Badillo formally switched party affiliation and announced that he has become a Republican.

In the 1989 mayoral election, the Black-Latino coalition was critical in making David Dinkins the first Black mayor of America's largest city. Unlike Badillo, David Dinkins was a non-charismatic clubhouse politician who had paid his dues through loyalty to the regular Democratic Party organization. As Borough President of Manhattan, he had given prominent positions on his staff to progressive Puerto Ricans with solid histories of grass-roots activism. Diane Morales had a long history in the movement for community control of schools, having been elected previously to the District Three Local School Board through solid grass-roots support. Victor Quintana, formerly an officer in El Comité, a grass-roots militant organization committed to Latino empowerment and the independence of Puerto Rico, was also brought into Dinkins' office as Borough President. Both Morales and Quintana were well known to Black activists and had worked closely and effectively to bring together Blacks and Latinos on the Upper West Side of Manhattan around mutual grass-roots concerns. Unfortunately, their presence in Dinkins' office did not change the character of his politics. Dinkins committed his Borough Presidency and his subsequent mayoralty to the concept of a "grand mosaic" of ethnic cooperation and good will. In practice, this meant a continuation of clubhouse loyalties and an unwarranted concern for the sensibilities and agendas of powerful white ethnics, while muting the demands of his poor Black and Latino supporters.

Unlike Herman Badillo, Dinkins did not openly capitulate to the conservative forces in the political establishment, yet his mayoral style denied grass-roots forces access to City Hall. Latinos were notably disappointed by the Dinkins administration's lack of concern for the needs of their communities and the dearth of his appointment of Latinos to crucial decision-making positions. Moreover, the Dinkins administration's liaison with the Latino community was shut out from the
decision-making process; funds were cut for high-profile projects in the Bronx. In
1993, Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer sued the Dinkins administration
for the conditions of the highways and streets in the Bronx. Although Dinkins was
able to attract Jose Torres as his deputy campaign manager, Herman Badillo went
with Giuliani (Falcon, 1995).

Despite this, in 1993 the Latino vote remained loyal to Dinkins. The most
accurate reports indicate that he got about 74% of the Latino vote (Ibid.).
Unfortunately, the Black and Latino turnout was slightly down from 1989, while
the white vote for Giuliani increased by seven percent. This difference was enough
to allow the Republican challenger, Rudolph Giuliani, to reverse his defeat of 1989
and make Dinkins a one-term mayor (Pooley, 1993).

Most recently, the political leadership of both communities split over the
construction of a major supermarket in East Harlem. The established political and
religious leadership of Central Harlem broke ranks with East Harlem’s Puerto
Rican leadership to secure approval for the construction of a Pathmark supermar-
ket. Many local Latino businessmen and politicians felt that the supermarket
would adversely effect smaller Latino-owned supermarkets in East Harlem.
Puerto Rican politicians were held in tow. Ironically, the deciding vote was cast
by the first elected Dominican member of the city council, who broke ranks with
Puerto Rican political leaders at the 11th hour (New York Times, 1995: B3). The
redefined empowerment zone in New York City, which now excludes sections of
the Bronx previously included, has also soured relationships between Black
Harlem politicos and their Latino Bronx counterparts.5

Opportunistic bourgeois leadership in both communities, especially in the
electoral arena, is the result of multiple variables. It reflects the nature and extent
of political patronage available for distribution. Consequently, insurgent Black
and Latino candidates garner popular support and achieve election, only to
capitulate later in return for pork barrel projects that scarcely make a difference in
their communities. Israel Ruiz, representing a Bronx district in the city council,
voted for Mayor Giuliani’s budget, while Caribbean-born Una Clarke, called a
nigger in a police riot led by Giuliani,6 is scarcely heard from now, except to
chastise those who question the mayor’s right to lead the West Indian Day Parade.
Not surprisingly, the consensus among a cross-section of knowledgeable journal-
ists, politicians, and scholars is that little significant progress is presently being
made toward Black-Latino coalition in the electoral arena.

The Structural Roots of Political Opportunism: Some Observations

We are not suggesting that the difficulties and the behavior outlined above are
merely the end-product of selfish individuals or a narrow-minded leadership.
Rather, we suggest that the political and economic structures of New York and the
larger society tend to produce and reproduce this kind of counterproductive
behavior in the arena of electoral politics.
The electoral political sphere cannot both respond to the demands of Blacks and Latinos and retrench as the capitalist restructuring process requires. The electoral arena has failed to get municipal government to meet the pressing material needs of these communities; consequently, it cannot be the main arena of their struggle for justice and equality. Political entrepreneurs may at times support or even encourage Black-Latino coalition to get elected or reelected. In this way, they may do it without any lasting commitment to the coalition in the electoral arena. The best examples of Black-Latino cooperation, we suggest, are to be found in the arena of activism and protest. It is upon these building blocks that effective coalitions might be constructed for the future.

**Black-Latino Coalition: The Arena of Activism and Protest**

A Black-Latino coalition has not yet firmly institutionalized itself at the level of electoral leadership. However, it has achieved a solid foundation at the level of political activism and radical organization. Indeed, a grass-roots Black-Latino coalition is one of the important legacies of the 1960s. The coalitional efforts of the newly emergent Black Panthers and the Young Lords parties bequeathed the expression and concept “Rainbow Coalition.” Starting in Chicago in 1968 and spreading in 1969 to New York City, Black, Latino, and militant white youth attempted to place the question of an alliance of the dispossessed on the agenda of societal transformation.

A very important organizational offshoot, keyed to the question of the role of women in the struggle, was the Third World Women’s Alliance (TWWA). TWWA was initiated by Fran Beal in 1969 as a Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) project. It soon outgrew the declining SNCC. TWWA explored the crucial role that women of color played in the major social movements of the 1960s in the USA and in the major liberation movements of the post-World War II era. Its membership was composed primarily of Black and Latina cadres.

TWWA examined the relationship between Black liberation, the anticolonial revolution in the Third World, the women’s liberation movement, and socialist revolution. It represented a center of critical analysis of the practices of existing civil rights and Black power groups on the question of male chauvinism. TWWA also took positions and engaged in actions on all the domestic and international issues coming from the popular struggles of the late 1960s and early 1970s. More than most organizations of the period, it achieved a viable working relationship between different ethnic groups within the overall rubric of the Third World (Beal, 1975).

The stimulus for grass-roots and neighborhood-level Black-Latino coalitions emerged out of commonly shared objective conditions associated with the operation of the metropolitan economy and the functioning of public institutions toward both communities. Although typically living in separate neighborhoods,
Blacks and Latinos have had to use the same schools, hospitals, city bureaucracies, etc. Hence, they have come to share the same conditions and enemies.

An early example of Black-Latino community-level cooperation in New York City was related to the student and community mobilizations around the Open Enrollment Struggle (OES) in the City University of New York (CUNY). Carried out between 1968 and 1970, the OES gave rise to campus-based institutions bringing together Black and Puerto Rican students, faculty, and staff. They pressured for unrestricted entrance of peoples of color and other poor people into the CUNY system. Illustrative of intercampus, multinationality cooperation were the Black and Puerto Rican Student, Faculty, and Counselor Coalition at Queens College and its counterpart at City College in 1969. The model rapidly spread to other CUNY campuses. In addition, the OES in CUNY led to fundamental curriculum reform in racial and ethnic studies and vastly expanded the presence of Black and Latino faculty on CUNY campuses (Torres, 1995: 135).

Stronger today than ever, this tradition of cooperation has continued. One of the most important elements in the CUNY student mobilization has been the role currently played by an immigrant leadership. In the struggle to preserve CUNY, there is the recognition that public higher education in New York City has been one of the most important vehicles for immigrant upward mobility. Moreover, it is a hallmark quality-of-life measure for the city’s working class. That vehicle for advancement is being threatened and, with it, the dreams and aspirations of the most recent generation of immigrants. Within the past decade, the CUNY system has had two major budgetary crises. Each crisis was met by the mobilization of student coalitions grounded in the unity between Black and Latino students. Aided by progressive white and Asian students, this coalition has displayed a militancy, courage, and resourcefulness while engaging in civil disobedience on campuses and in the streets that has not been seen since the 1960s.

Most recently, the CUNY students have mobilized to respond to a Board of Trustees decision to drastically cut back remediation in the senior colleges and deny senior college admission to students in need of more than a summer’s worth of remediation. All the senior college presidents resisted this plan as it could possibly change the ethnic and class mix of CUNY four-year colleges by denying admission to one-third to two-thirds of the poor minority students now able to enter. Ironically, this offensive is orchestrated by Herman Badillo, who as vice chairman of the Board authored CUNY’s resolution ending senior college remediation. Theoretically, the community colleges are to undertake the expanded responsibilities of remediation. Badillo sees this realignment ultimately extending back to the primary and secondary schools. For him, the real issue is restoring “standards” to public education. For the CUNY students, however, his position is indicted as an ideological smokescreen for the exclusion of Blacks and Latinos from the four-year flagship CUNY colleges. Their doubts are reinforced by the fact that the community college budgets have not been adjusted in any way to
provide for this greatly expanded responsibility. When combined with the draconian regime of workfare, students see the specter of being frozen into subproletarian status. These students are willing to resort to a militancy not seen in decades. The response to their movement has become increasingly hostile, with profound departures from democratic and campus traditions in the university’s approach to the demonstrators. City College President Yolanda Moses, a Black woman, has admitted authorizing the installation of spy cameras and eavesdropping devices in the student government offices. In a similar vein, she has nullified the graduate student election that returned to power students active in the CUNY open enrollment struggle.

The CUNY struggle reflects larger processes originating in the evolving political-economy of New York City, which objectively pushes Blacks and Latinos together while setting the elected or bureaucratic leadership in both communities against the interests of the majority. Given the increases in the number of immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, the grass-roots coalition between Black and Latino activists should provide a core of seasoned and experienced leadership who can facilitate the process of bringing these new populations into the political force needed to transform the inegalitarian structures and restrictions that they will share with those who currently occupy the bottom rungs of the economic ladder. At the same time, the increase in the Latino population provides a framework for the growth of a subaltern bureaucratic bourgeoisie within the Latino population who will operate in a pro-systemic manner similar to its African American and Caribbean counterparts. In a situation that these entrepreneurial politicians will view as zero-sum, the pressure for destructive competition between the two groups could increase.

The CUNY struggle also reflects the attempts of higher-status white ethnics to redefine the mission of CUNY, abandoning its traditional mission of providing college education and upward mobility for the children of the working class. Since the parents of many of the current generation of white ethnics were the primary beneficiaries of this tradition, the current group no longer identifies with a working class now made up predominantly of people of color. These recent middle-class entrants into the world of work seek to increase their competitive position by seeking a “quality” education at a more elitist-oriented university at public expense.

**Building Power at the Grass Roots**

Blacks and Latinos make up the largest single bloc among high-school-aged youth in New York City. In the late 1960s, at select high schools like Brandeis on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, African American students became militant participants in the antiwar movement and in the struggle for community control of the schools. Today, this militancy has spread to Latino high school students as well. Thus, in the recent demonstrations against city and state budget cuts to public
education, Black and Latino high school students made common cause in bringing the normal operation of the city to a standstill in the militant demonstrations at City Hall and in front of the entrances to the major East Side tunnels of Manhattan.

Black and Latino youth have coalesced at the level of culture for at least two decades. First appearing in the Bronx, this cultural melding has given us break dancing and rap music. There has been much discussion about the political significance of the rap youth culture, but several positive expressions of it have appeared and reflect the considerable contribution it can make to strengthening political coalitions between Blacks and Latinos. Paralleling the development of the Zulu Nation in the Bronx, in Brooklyn we have seen the emergence of the Latin Kings and El Puente. Luis Gardens Acosta, of El Puente, runs a community peace and justice school in Williamsburg that requires a multiracial board.

Most recently, the Caribbean Cultural Center has organized Azebache, a Black-Latino youth group. Composed of young people representing youth organizations in largely Latino Washington Heights and African American and Caribbean Central Brooklyn, it organized and held a conference on “Steps of Resistance” in June 1995 at Medgar Evers College (CUNY). This was a training conference that brought together young community organizers with veterans from traditional resistance organizations like the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, SNCC, The East, and the trade unions.

Youth in both communities have been the troops in what may be the most successful efforts at coalition building between Blacks and Latinos: the unified work around the issue of police brutality. Ad hoc emergency coalitions in Bushwick, Washington Heights, the Bronx, and East Harlem have continued the trend first seen in the mobilizations around the racist murders of Michael Griffith in Howard Beach and Yusuf Hawkins in Bensonhurst. The City-wide Coalition Against Police Violence and the activities of the Puerto Rican Congress also demonstrate that Latinos are prepared to give leadership in these struggles and are prepared to demand parity in the activist leadership on these shared issues of Black-Latino concern. More recently, the People’s Justice 2000 Coalition, in which Richie Perez (previously a leading figure in the Young Lords and the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights) is a major leader, has moved to the forefront of a movement against police terror and repression. PJ2000 called and led the first major citywide march protesting against the acquittal of the four white cops in the shooting of Amadou Diallo. The PJ2000 coalition includes the Center Against Asian American Violence and the Audre Lorde Project, a center for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and two-spirit people of color.

Support work around the issue of political prisoners has been an important area of Black-Latino cooperation dating back almost two decades. Four busloads of supporters from the largely Dominican neighborhood of Washington Heights attended the massive rally in Philadelphia for Black political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal. Congresswoman Nydia Velasquez also broke ground in this area in the
electoral arena when she issued a statement of support for Mumia’s right to a new trial. This coalition effort around political prisoners grows out of much earlier work concerning the uprising of a largely Black and Latino prison population at Attica State Prison in New York. It also reflects the commitment that brought a contingent of 2,000 Latinos to the Central Park Rally Against Apartheid and to Free Nelson Mandela. The December 12 Movement has joined with Puerto Rican and Native American activists to achieve a breakthrough in getting international recognition of the issue of America’s Black, Latino, and Native American political prisoners. In the area of political prisoners, grass-roots activism has forced some elected politicians to take a position on an issue most would rather avoid. Bronx Borough President Jose Serrano has lent his support to the cause of Puerto Rican political prisoners, as has been the case with the Black and Latino membership of the New York City Council, which has also indicated its support for Black political prisoners.

The benchmark for Black and Latino grass-roots cooperation in Brooklyn occurred in 1968 around the Ocean Hill-Brownsville struggle for community control of the schools. Here, as in most instances of Black and Latino cooperation, the parties were Blacks and Puerto Ricans. According to Luis Fuentes (the first Puerto Rican superintendent of schools on Manhattan’s Lower East Side), the community control movement was a community response to forced integration. The school system wanted to move Black and Latino students to all-white schools to achieve “what they call integration.” Fuentes (1995) says that parents wanted their schools to be as effective as they had been in Puerto Rico or in the South. They wanted schools that were responsive. They wanted community and public accountability of teachers and administrators. Parents called for quality education, not “integration” (in the sense proposed). The racial situation in the northern cities was not the same as that in the Southern United States where the Civil Rights Movement pursued integration of schools as a means of achieving racial equality. The limits of an integrationist strategy became apparent within the Southern Civil Rights Movement in 1965 to 1966, when important segments in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) began to articulate the need for Black Power, or for Black people to control their own communities. The call for Black Power resonated powerfully among the urban working class of the large cities outside the South and was rapidly assimilated by the Latino working classes, who also saw the need to control their own communities. The Black Panther Party, the Young Lords Party, the Brown Berets, the Young Patriots, and others were the organizational manifestations of this new mood in inner cities across the nation.

This new mood reflected both lessons learned from the Civil Rights Movement, and the coming to the fore of actors representing different circumstances. Although liberal trade unionists such as the United Auto Workers and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) were sincere in their support of racial integration of
schools, they did not understand why Black and Latino communities were now rejecting this strategy. The social democratic Left, of which the UFT was a part, considered the Black Power movement to be racially divisive, led by Black middle-class and Olympian hustlers who wanted to take away their positions without doing the necessary hard work. That a teachers’ union should tell the Black and Latino communities that it was inappropriate for them to pursue a path it had itself just recently taken — winning recognition and relative power, not because of their qualifications, but because they organized and fought for them — is, of course, ironic.

According to Fuentes (1995), the UFT offered the strongest opposition to the community control movement and fostered the perception that all teachers were opposed to the movement. However, he observes that many teachers supported the movement and that parents did not wish to run the schools, as the UFT claimed. Instead, they preferred to develop a system of working with teachers that had not existed previously. Moreover, that the parents involved in the community control movement were influenced by the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords Party should not be minimized. They were part of a general mood that demanded an end to poverty and social and political powerlessness. Fuentes credits the Black movement for its social justice and civil rights impetus. “The rest of us,” he adds, “simply followed” (Ibid.: 8).

The fight for community control in Ocean Hill-Brownsville was perhaps the watershed event in this movement and the clearest sign of the times. The activists and teachers who came together in the African-American Teachers Association (ATA) challenged the AFT’s liberal integrationist orthodoxy, rejecting the assumptions behind forced integration and refusing the de facto dismantling of neighborhood schools. They powerfully challenged the belief of white teachers that Black students could not be expected to be high achievers and refused to accept that their children were afflicted with a “culture of poverty.”

Led by activists Leslie Campbell (now Jitu Weusi) and Al Vann (presently a state senator), the ATA argued that white teachers were unable to reach Black children not because of a culture of poverty, but because these white teachers shared “an unwillingness to respect a black lower class that was ‘economically deprived’ but culturally rich” (Podair, 1994: 47). The ATA contended that the teachers’ white, middle-class value base reflected a profound cultural impoverishment, with its emphasis on “making it” in society as it is, its blind pursuit of material gain, and its stress on individualism and competitiveness to the negation of community.

The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) proposed a different narrative, promoting the right of labor to due-process while defending meritocracy, in this case against unqualified Black and Latino extremists who sought to dictate educational policy to professional educators. For Black and Latino parents, this must have had a familiar ring, since it reflected the defensiveness of white middle-
class professionals against any incursions into their prerogatives, although the future of their children and their communities were at stake. This case followed a long tradition of white labor fighting justly for their rights against more powerful employers, but then defending their own privileges from much more powerless Black and Latino working-class communities. Here, the assumption of an intermediate position between the very powerful and the relatively powerless Black and Latino communities is highlighted by the UFT’s alliance with the Council of Supervisory Associations (CSA, of principals, assistant principals, superintendents, etc.) and the central Board of Education, both of which the UFT had traditionally characterized as its antagonists.

According to Gittell (1971), the UFT and the CSA played upon the racial fears and animosities of white middle-class New Yorkers by characterizing the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school activists as Black racists and anti-Semites. UFT president Albert Shanker is reputed to have declared in a meeting of the Education Committee of the Urban Coalition that he would destroy the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Governing Board and Rhody McCoy (Ibid.: 152). Although the UFT claimed that its opposition to the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Governing Board was based on the Board’s denial of due process to 19 teachers who had been transferred from the district, Gittell argues that the more likely reason was the UFT’s belief that the Board (and thereby all the demonstration districts) represented a threat to the union’s authority to set educational policy, won in their 1967 contract. The UFT, he argues, used the levers of fear and intimidation to arouse its own membership and the white middle-class population of the city (Ibid.: 152–153). Furthermore, some of the statements attributed to members of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Governing Board in UFT-CSA leaflets later proved to be false (Ibid.: 153).

The UFT garnered the support of the politically conservative Board of Rabbis, who were put forward somewhat disingenuously as the voice of the Jewish community. In addition, the Central Labor Council fully supported the UFT, even to the point of threatening to call a general strike. Racial epithets voiced on both sides of the picket lines were reported (Ibid.: 153–154).

One UFT-CSA tactic was to aggressively target the Black activists and to attempt to split the Black and Latino coalition. Efforts to break up the Black-Latino unity failed, Jitu Weusi recalls, because of the strong tradition of collaboration established among grass-roots activists in the face of threats to the collective interests of the two communities. Two key actors in forging the coalition in Ocean Hill-Brownsville were Delores Torres, a member of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Governing Board, and Richard Perez, a student at Brooklyn College and a member of the Young Lords Party (now Director of the Puerto Rican Congress). Perez brought Latino students from the college to work in the community control movements at Ocean Hill-Brownsville.

Jitu Weusi related that he learned the value of Black and Latino cooperation from his mother, who had been involved in the militant struggles in New York City
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during the 1930s and 1940s. In the 1950s, Weusi (then Leslie Campbell) lived in the northeast section of Bedford Stuyvesant, an area of Brooklyn that early on developed a Latino (primarily Puerto Rican) population. Weusi's mother, Murdesta Stewart, ran on a ticket with Lannie Hernandez to become district leaders in this area. Their candidacy challenged the white domination of this area of Brooklyn. The whites countered by threatening to reveal Stewart's alleged participation in Communist activities in the 1930s. With McCarthyism at its height in the 1950s, this was a potentially devastating charge. Stewart was forced to withdraw from the slate. Hernandez lost his bid for district leader, but the episode taught young Jitu Weusi the value of Black-Latino collaboration.

The movement for community control of schools was essentially a demand for quality education leading to equal access to jobs, a demand for equality within the work force. Control over education was recognized as the key to defining social reality, social identity, and political destiny. Stemming from the reality of a racialized and ethnicized proletariat, this demand redefined the political landscape of the nation's largest city in its attempt to actualize the notion of giving power to the people. This notion exposed the racial opportunism of liberal trade unionists who opposed overt racial discrimination, but who were unable or unwilling to examine the much deeper and intractable practices of institutional racism.

Ultimately, the power of the predominantly white UFT prevailed over the insurgent Black and Latino parents and school activists. The Ocean Hill-Brownsville Governing Board and the unit administrator were suspended. The UFT had fought victoriously for its right as labor against very powerful adversaries, but ended up defending its privileges as a white professional class against the interests of Black and Latino working-class communities.

Many view the Ocean Hill-Brownsville struggle between the UFT and the Black and Latino parents as a setback for Black-Latino empowerment initiatives and as the decisive episode in circumscribing the possibilities of constructing a rainbow coalition in the city. Although movements cannot grow without ultimately gaining victories in the war of maneuver, in this case the taking of institutional power, the struggle for empowerment cannot succeed without advancing in the war of position (the struggle for hegemony). It is therefore essential that grass-roots activists from the two communities maintained their unity in the face of the establishment's divide-and-conquer tactics, deepened their understanding that the control of education is key to social change, and set forth a model of collaboration and unity that will be called upon in future battles.

In the United States, institutional racism is key to the process of class formation since it produces and reproduces a racialized proletariat and a common sense among the dominant strata that justifies and explains inequality in cultural, racial, and ethnic terms. Social inequality can only be challenged by combating all forms of racism, and particularly institutional racism. Black-Latino collaboration is central to challenging institutional racism because these groups constitute the bulk
of the subproletarian strata in the United States; moreover, all new groups entering into the U.S. social structure have historically been entreated to avoid identification with Blacks at the risk of sharing their pariah status.

Conclusion: The Need for a New Social Movement; Some Theoretical Considerations

The arena of protest and civil disobedience is a more fruitful source of Black-Latino empowerment than is the electoral arena. Without suggesting a rigid dichotomy that pits electoralism versus activism and protest, a strategy of overall political empowerment of urban communities of color should prioritize nonelectoral collective efforts. Our experiences and our reading of the post-World War II history of New York confirm this. They suggest that more progress at coalition-building and empowerment has transpired at the grass-roots level than in the electoral arena. Thus, future coalitional efforts should not limit their activities to or focus them on the electoral arena. Why is this the case? Pohlmann (1992: 132) argues that:

in the United States, both the election process and political party process are inherently biased against fundamental redistributive change. A number of...[practices in the electoral arena] continue to institutionalize race and class inequalities. Registration and campaign finance procedures are prejudiced against working—and lower-class people, and a two-party system guarantees that the major parties will be virtually incapable of educating and leading the public in any direction that would fundamentally challenge the socioeconomic status quo.

We recognize with Pohlmann that electoral mobilization has led to control over some institutional levers of political power that has enabled some Blacks and Latinos to improve their life situations. It has also provided an organizational structure for sustaining the vigilance and pressure needed to perpetuate those gains. The right to vote is certainly a fundamental democratic right worthy of pursuit and essential in developing the consciousness of the people in their struggle for a lasting empowerment. That right is essential in developing popular consciousness and political awareness in the struggle for enduring empowerment. Our conclusions in this study also agree with Pohlmann’s argument that, in the American context, the electoral process alone would not appear to be a sufficient mechanism for achieving self-determination and liberation.

The noted Black political scientist Hanes Walton (1985: 73) has echoed Ralph Bunche’s warning about the limitations of making the vote a fetish. Walton states that mainstream electoral institutions have functioned traditionally to neutralize the Black vote. Low registration or low turnout rates in elections for African Americans are typically explained in terms of apathy or ignorance. Walton (Ibid.:
77) cautions that this might be better explained as the end product of a process of political neutralization that proceeds through legal and extralegal means.

American political institutions are biased against any but incremental evolutionary changes. They tend to be unresponsive to groups that need immediate revolutionary changes in political and social institutions. Some political scientists and sociologists have concluded that established electoral institutions are so structured that in their normal operations they neutralize the potential power of insurgents and facilitate the re-creation of the status quo.

Regalado (1995: 766) posits a two-tiered theory of pluralism that provides for only marginal inclusion of minorities in the political process. The subordinate status of minorities in political life is emphasized, where pluralism exists in form, but not fully, in fact, for some groups. Two-tiered pluralism reflects, for Latinos and African Americans, an institutionally subordinate status in political and economic life. This theory represents an important theoretical and political dilemma for American liberal democracy. In the post-industrial period, the city and its political institutions have almost no latitude to make concessions to the pressing needs of increasingly impoverished urban dwellers through the normal operation of local electoral institutions. In this context, directing the bulk of political activity into the electoral arena diverts pressure away from the real centers of power. It demobilizes communities, as cynicism appears in response to electoral victories that produce no substantive changes or programmatic payoffs.

In critiquing a draft of this article, Abdul Alkalimat (1995) rightly identified the role that the restructuring of capitalism has played in accelerating and consolidating a bureaucratic bourgeoisie within the Black and Latino communities. Interethnic coalitions cannot be assessed without reference to the class forces behind their formation. The New York City example indicates that, in the electoral arena, too frequently the impetus for coalition comes from above, that is, from bourgeois politicians. Thus, such coalitions are tentative, weak, and conditional, reflecting the opportunism of their creators. In contrast, the spontaneous resistance of the working classes and déclassé components of Black and Latino communities is the basis for coalitions primarily rooted outside the electoral arena, in the numerous venues of protest and disruption. These coalitions tend to last as long as the oppression that gives rise to them. In the experience of New York, the impetus to coalition from below is of such long standing that it has given rise to a tradition of joint protest that cannot be easily derailed or abandoned.

True threats to normative political discourse tend to issue from outside the normal channels of political participation. Under these circumstances, groups lacking routine access to institutionalized power have as a major weapon only their ability to disrupt the normal operation of the system (Tilly, 1978: 115–116). The essence of Black-Latino coalition building, we believe, is the enhancement of the ability of both groups through a combination of protest, civil disobedience, and electoral tactics to institutionalize the capabilities of these communities to disrupt
the normal operation of society's political and economic institutions whenever their vital interests are threatened. Such a disruptive potential might mature in New York City out of a long tradition of Black-Latino grass-roots activism and evolve into strategies of transformation, not just of New York City, but of the larger inequalitarian and exploitative world social system of which it is a part. Although this takes us beyond the Black-Latino coalition, this coalition will be a key element in the larger movement that is needed.

NOTES

1. Coined by the Black Power movement in the 1960s, the expression *institutional racism* was adopted by scholars committed to an egalitarian society, but was ignored by many others with solid liberal credentials. William Julius Wilson explicitly denied the value of such an expression and context in his most influential book, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987).

2. Latinos make up 25% of New York's population, but only 15% (or 500,000) of its registered voters (Pooley, 1993).

3. Puerto Ricans and Dominicans who cannot physically "pass" for white may find themselves much more "naturalized" into the African American community than assimilated into white middle-class America. This reality may encourage them to hold onto their ethnic identity for longer than was the case with previous generations of European immigrants.

4. Dr. Morales-Nadal (1995) gives an example of one of the issues of greatest divergence between Blacks and Latinos. Discussing contention between them over bilingual education in School District 17 in Crown Heights, she explains that Blacks think Latinos are receiving special treatment. Bilingual classes are smaller and are seen as a privilege. She has heard some Latino teachers complain about mistreatment of Latino students by Black teachers. Of course, these contentions pale in the face of Black-Jewish conflict, the most visible example of social conflict in Crown Heights. Significantly, Morales-Nadal reports that there was not important Latino participation in the Black-Jewish confrontation over the accidental killing of seven-year-old Gavin Cato (*Ibid.*).

5. The case of Nelson Antonio Denis should also be mentioned here. Denis opposed the East Harlem Democratic machine and ran for the seat of recently deceased boss Angelo Del Toro. The Democratic county machine joined with the established Latino party leadership to topple his candidacy. He was seen as too much of an insurgent, especially given his commitment to a Black-Latino coalition (Leid, 1995).

6. City Council member Una Clarke was called a "nigger" during a rowdy police demonstration (some called it a police riot) on the steps of City Hall. Another member of the crowd referred to Mayor Dinkins as too closely resembling a bathroom attendant.

7. The 1960s movement itself drew from an older tradition and some of its cadres have roots in the mass insurgency of the 1930s.

8. According to an interview with Milga Morales-Nadal of Brooklyn College (August 29, 1995).

9. The name Azebache itself refers to an amulet used by Africans and their descendants to protect small children from harm. It is an African ritual whose practice is also found in Puerto Rico. Interview with Lumumba Bandele (September 5, 1995).

10. Interview with S.E. Anderson, Network of Black Organizers (August 26, 1995).

11. Interview with Esperanza Martel.

12. Interview with Esperanza Martel.

13. Jitu Weusi, a nationally known Black nationalist, founded The East, a cultural center in Brooklyn, and was a leader of the community control movement in Ocean Hill-Brownsville.
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