

By Ruben Martinez

LOS ANGELES

IT'S STRATEGY TIME, AND LATINO—OR "HISPANIC," in establishment politico code—elected officials and activists are gearing up to influence the outcome of November's elections. Experts say that Latino voters may make their strongest showing to date at the polls. And they believe that the Latino bloc could play a pivotal role in determining the election's outcome.

According to the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), the actual Latino vote increased by 29.3 percent between 1982 and 1986. This represents a rise from 2.6 to 3.6 percent of the total national vote. To some, this number might seem like a drop in the electoral bucket. Yet considering that 85 percent of Latinos in the U.S. live in only nine states—California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado—the potential for a Latino "swing" vote is high. These states represent 193 of the 270 electoral college votes (71 percent) needed for a presidential victory in November.

For example, a 3.4 percent shift in the Latino vote in Texas would shift the statewide vote by a full percentage point, and possibly provide the deciding vote in the event of a close election.

Something for everyone: The hallmark of the Latino voting bloc is its heterogeneity. It includes, among others, arch right-wing Cuban Americans, grass-roots, left-wing Chicanos, middle-of-the-road politicians and progressive union leaders. Nevertheless, there have been intense efforts recently to galvanize the Latino vote around common interests. "Hispanic agendas" have proliferated since the presidential campaign kicked off last year.

Such diverse and key Latino groups as the Midwest Voter Registration Project, the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the National Hispanic Agenda '88 Unity Task Force and the National Hispanic Leadership Conference have all produced documents promoting the theme of unity among Latino voters. San Antonio Mayor Henry Cisneros kicked off the agenda campaign last October when he organized the National Unity Task Force, an effort at building an agenda whose stated goal was to underscore the fact that "Hispanic issues are America's issues."

The Unity Task Force conference, held in Washington, D.C., focused on bringing together politicians and those community organizations with a national scope. The document produced by the conference includes discussions of immigration, bilingual education, political empowerment, civil rights, business growth, social services, housing and health-care issues. Yet the document is short on specifics and is rife with watered-down statements. In some cases agenda priorities and the wording of the document were manipulated by the extreme right, leaving many liberals dissatisfied.

The final document calls for increasing Defense Department contracts for Latino businesses and includes a statement on Latin American policy that reads like a State Department press release: "We must be vocal against all dictatorships, whether of the left or right. We support a peace process as an initial step toward a solution of the present crisis in Central America."

Says Roberto Maestas of the Centro de la

Great expectations for Latino poll power

Raza, a Seattle-based community organization, "We got shouted out and out-voted. [Cisneros] tried to find common ground with the more progressive elements, [but] he yielded and gave more concessions to the Cuban, right-wing element."

Adds Andy Hernandez of the Southwest

HISPANICS

Voter Registration Project, "That's not the way you challenge the [Democratic] party. You don't ask them to be apple pie and motherhood—you ask them for specific things."

Cisneros produced an agenda that reflects the views of established Latino politicians rather than those of community organizers. Midwest Voter Registration Project Director Juan Andrade says that his organization's agenda-making methodology was "diametrically opposed" to Cisneros' project. "We had people from 20 states across the country, largely those whose input would otherwise have been excluded," says Andrade.

The Unity Task Force document prompted a number of Latino organizations to develop their own agendas, most of which were well represented at the National Hispanic Leadership Conference (NHLC) held last April in Washington, D.C.

"Unlike the others, we truly brought the community together," says NHLC Chairman Pablo Sedillo of the U.S. Catholic Conference. Generally, the NHLC document supports Sedillo's claim. Highlighted are topics missed by some of the other efforts—such as criminal justice (Latinos are consistently discriminated against within the penal system and have little or no recourse to assis-

tance), culture (more monies for Latino arts) as well as sections on religion (pressure organized religion to pay more attention to Latino needs) and media (underrepresentation of Latinos in media employment and negative stereotyping).

For Harry Pachon, national director of NALEO, the overall agenda-making process signals a "political maturation in the community. Clearly, [the NHLC] is going to want to have an impact at the [party] conventions."

The dividing line: Yet not everyone participated in nor saw the NHLC project as a worthy endeavor. Many community-based organizations opted to concentrate on organizing in Latino barrios throughout the U.S., hoping to insure both voter participation as well as ideological coherency.

Indeed, the clearest division found among Latinos this election year is the rift between the "establishment" politicians and the community-based activists. Although both of these groups grow out of the Chicano/Latino explosion of the '60s, the distance between the two has grown steadily. The majority of Latino establishment politicians lined up early behind Gov. Michael Dukakis rather than swing to the left of the party, which was represented by Jesse Jackson.

A universal theme is political empowerment, increased representation and growing influence on shaping the party platform.

This raised the question of who was leading whom: Was the democratic-majority constituency really behind Dukakis from the beginning? Or was there a "vanguard" effect, in which constituencies were mobilized for Dukakis by their elected representatives? Although Dukakis won a majority of the Latino primary vote, he didn't monopolize it. Jackson won pluralities in key cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia and New York City, according to various exit polls. It's impossible to say whether or not Jackson would have fared better in California, New Mexico or Texas if more Latino politicians had endorsed him.

Some observers claim the Dukakis and Jackson platforms aren't that far apart. But there is no doubt that the civil-rights substance and symbolism of Jackson's campaign, as well as his voter-empowerment legacy—which is essential to both the Latino and black communities—made him the candidate who best reflected Latinos' interests.

So why did so many Latino politicians support Dukakis? The answer is simple, according to Roberto Rodriguez, editor of the Latino national monthly *Americas 2001*. "Activists vote on their principles and the establishment politicians vote pragmatically. Politicians are lining themselves up for [Dukakis administration] cabinet jobs," he says.

Other Latinos, however, downplay the significance of this apparent division and point to the possibility for Latino unity as symbolized by the agenda process.

Bea Molina, president of the Mexican American Political Association, doesn't think that the grass-roots/establishment split will matter much come November. "If Jackson were to have won, there'd be a lot of Latinos supporting him. Now that Dukakis has won, the support will still be there," says Molina.

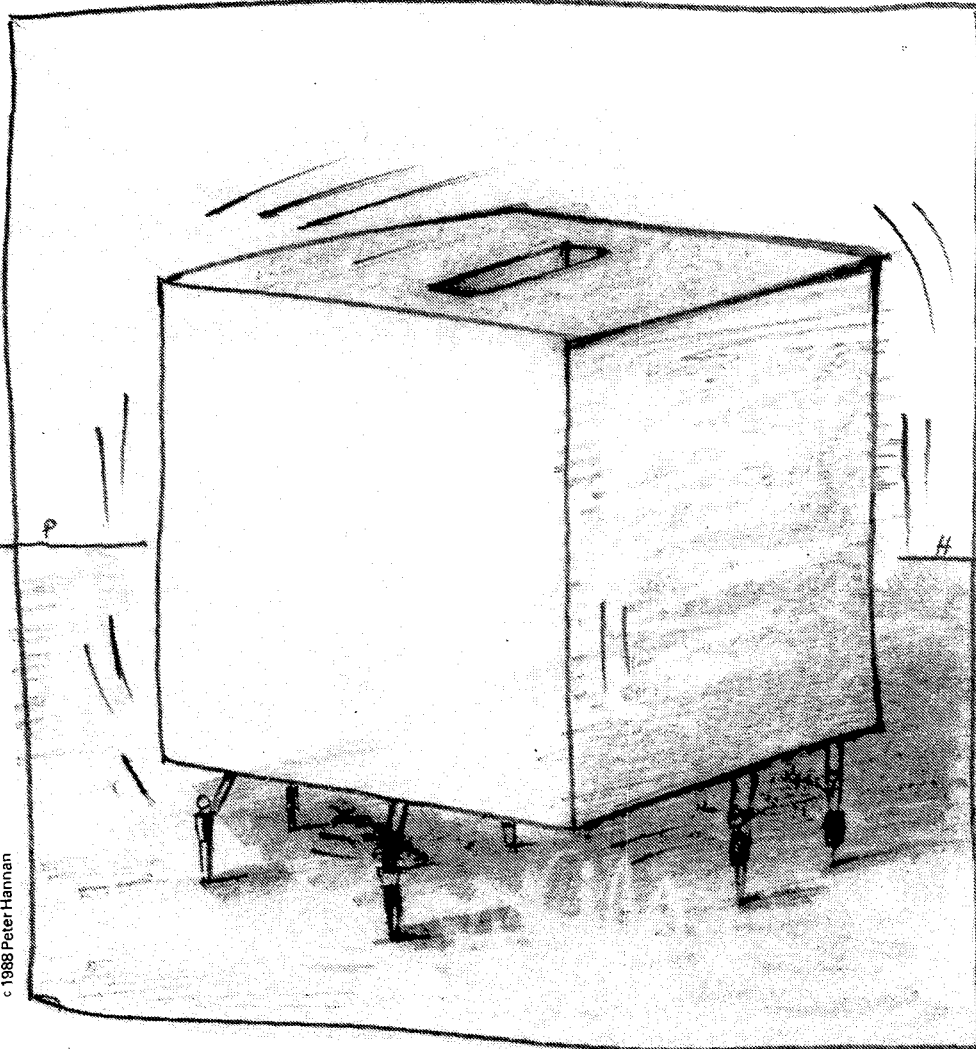
In addition, many Latino vote-watchers say that those Latino Democrats who swung right for Reagan—some of them middle or upper-middle class, but many of them lower-middle class—are returning to the Democratic Party.

Conventional expectations: It's easy to predict what will happen at the Republican convention: the Latino right wing will fall in line with tried and true colors, enthusiastically supporting such positions as increased military spending and renewed contra aid. But things will be more interesting for the Democrats in Atlanta. A universal theme of the recent Latino agendas is political empowerment through voter registration, increased representation on governmental boards and growing influence in shaping the Democratic Party platform. Specifically, many Latino elected officials are pushing for an increased proportion of Latino delegates at the convention.

Yet by late June this goal was far from being attained, while Republican figures weren't available. And, according to the Democratic National Committee, Hispanic delegates totalled only about 5 percent. But Dr. Leo Estrada, an expert in Latino demographics who is tracking convention delegates for the Southwest Voter Registration Project, believes those numbers will probably double by convention time.

"It's not a lot," admits Estrada, "but if we can keep people together behind certain planks, we can make an important contribution."

Ruben Martinez is Latino affairs editor of the *L.A. Weekly*.



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By Salim Muwakkil

TAWANA BRAWLEY'S PERPLEXING TALE OF abduction and rape, and the tactics used by her controversial trio of legal advisers, has stoked the flaring embers of racial tensions in the New York metropolitan area and sharpened divisions among the area's black leadership. More importantly—and amazingly—the issues surrounding the case have attained such national political momentum that the specifics of the black teen-ager's charges of kidnapping and sexual abuse have almost become irrelevant.

Like the Bernhard Goetz and Howard Beach incidents, two other cases that have sharpened racial antagonisms, the Brawley saga treads heavily on the minefield where race and justice intersect. And that's not all they have in common; at least one of Brawley's three advisers also has links to those other cases. In those cases and others, the advisers—attorneys C. Vernon Mason and Alton Maddox Jr. and Rev. Al Sharpton—have attempted to expand the discussion beyond the legal particulars to a broader condemnation of racism in the criminal justice system.

Her story: Tawana Brawley was 15 years old last November when Dutchess County sheriff's deputies in Wappingers Falls, N.Y., found her disoriented and traumatized inside a plastic bag. Her hair was matted and crudely sheared, she was bruised, smeared with dog feces and racial slurs were scrawled on her body. The black teen-ager charged that she was abducted by two white men—one of whom flashed a badge of some kind—and taken to an isolated wooded area where her kidnappers were joined by others, all of whom sexually assaulted her throughout the four days she was allegedly held captive.

Glenda Brawley, the girl's mother, said her daughter initially cooperated with Dutchess County officials. "The first week my daughter answered all the questions for the people here," Brawley said. "But then I saw that everything we said was being distorted and changed around."

Some officials admit they performed sloppy police work during the initial phase of the case and there are solid indications they downplayed the incident. And since the case had received little but local attention, Brawley said she feared being railroaded and isolated by an all-white criminal justice system.

Those fears led her to Maddox and Mason, who are both noted for employing public protest against racism as a legal tactic. Maddox immediately charged Wappingers Falls officials with a lack of diligence in apprehending suspects and hinted that they may be attempting to cover up the involvement of several local white men. He later leveled specific charges against three men he said were identified by the victimized teen-ager.

Howard Beach success: Both Maddox and Mason had gained fame as attorneys in the infamous Howard Beach case, in which 11 white teen-agers were charged with attacking three black men and chasing one onto a highway where he was struck and killed by a car. The two attorneys had argued aggressively that local law enforcement officials were disinclined to aggressively prosecute the white assailants and they advised the surviving Howard Beach victims not to cooperate with those officials until a special prosecutor was named to the case. Meanwhile, Rev. Sharpton, a 31-year-old former

RACE RELATIONS



The tale of Tawana Brawley (second from right): is it a hoax or a classic case of racial injustice?

Who's using whom in Tawana Brawley case?

child evangelist, flamboyant self-promoter and excellent organizer, began staging a series of protest marches in support of the victims.

Their strategy was effective; New York Gov. Mario Cuomo named a special prosecutor, and three of the four white teen-agers facing the most serious charges were convicted of manslaughter. Seven more face trials on lesser charges stemming from the incident. The trio's success silenced critics who had questioned their unorthodox methods.

"After Howard Beach, it appeared that Maddox and Mason had finally hit upon a tactic that could make a change in this racist criminal justice system," says Rev. Herbert Daughtry, former chairman of the National Black United Front and an influential voice among New York's more militant black leadership. "Their triumphs sparked a lot of enthusiasm, and we began to see the awakening of a new, New York-based black movement," he adds, noting that much larger crowds began turning out for various demonstrations protesting the racism within the criminal justice system.

The Brawley case intensified calls for an overhaul of that system, and many angry black New Yorkers travelled to the Dutchess County seat in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., 50 miles north of the city, to participate in a protest march demanding such a change. Several events cast further suspicion on Dutchess County law enforcement officials, including the suicide of one man with a circumstantial relationship to the case. Several celebrities, including Bill Cosby and boxing champion Mike Tyson, pledged \$125,000 to help solve the crime.

Sharpton joined Mason and Maddox as advisers of the Brawley family and, just as in the Howard Beach case, they counselled the victim not to cooperate with local law enforcement officials. In fact, such a tactic seemed even more appropriate in the Braw-

ley case; the teen-ager alleged a police officer was among those who abducted her. When Gov. Cuomo again agreed to appoint a special prosecutor, Maddox, Mason and Sharpton once more were showered with kudos. Cuomo's appointment of State Attorney General Robert Abrams to prosecute the case was originally welcomed but later rejected by the trio as inadequate, and they urged their clients to withhold cooperation.

Kinks in the story: Meanwhile, the teen-ager's story has been greeted with increasing suspicion and skepticism. Several publications have provided exhaustive investigative accounts of the case, most of which cast doubt on many of Brawley's claims. Medical tests found no injuries or evidence of sexual activity and the FBI discovered no evidence

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whatsoever to corroborate her story. That federal agency eventually dropped out of the case.

Roy Innis, the executive director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and a leading black conservative, also contracted an independent investigation into the incident. Innis, who also took a position in opposition to Maddox, Mason and Sharpton in the Bernhard Goetz case—in which Innis championed the white electrician's right to shoot four black youths he thought meant him harm—says his investigator, former New York City police detective Galen Kelly, has concluded that Brawley's account is false. Kelly himself has hinted that he found some evidence linking Brawley to drug use and prostitution.

A power grab? Innis characterizes the

Brawley family's trio of advisers as "the three stooges" and accuses them of committing "civil fraud and wrong parading under civil rights." He says their real intent is "a power grab for the leadership of grass-roots black groups in New York City."

And that assessment is shared by Innis' ideological opposites. In fact, the turmoil surrounding the Brawley case is being credited with dividing the leadership of New York's incipient black movement. "The activist community is deeply divided and disappointed by what's happening in the Brawley case," explains Jitu Weusi, a Brooklyn community leader. Weusi helped organize the "December 12 Coalition," the group that first conducted protest of Brawley's treatment.

"The essence of the dispute is the question of Sharpton's involvement and leadership," Weusi adds. "Ever since it was revealed that he was wearing a wire for the government, a significant portion of the nationalist leadership—me, Sonny Carson, Viola Plummer, Elombe Brath and others—agreed to stop working with him until things were cleared up." Earlier this year, *Newsday* revealed that Sharpton had cooperated with law enforcement agencies seeking information on drug sales by wearing a bugging device to tape conversations with some of his associates.

The defection of these well-respected organizers was particularly damaging to the trio's credibility. While they could accuse black politicians and more mainstream leadership of being pawns of a racist system, or "rent-a-toms," such charges carry little weight when applied to leaders with impeccable movement credentials like Weusi, Plummer, Carson and Brath.

Weusi says they still feel Brawley was a victim of some kind, and that justice for her is the prime objective. "But we don't think the objective of justice can be achieved with Sharpton calling the shots."

A way out: Daughtry, who is executive director of the United African-American Churches, notes that his group had decided to stay with Sharpton, Maddox and Mason, even after Sharpton's wire revelation. "In early March we urged them to cooperate with Abrams," he reveals. "We told them to make a statement that they're doing it at our urging. That way, we figured, they'd have nothing to lose. If the investigation came up blank, they could blame us, a bunch of idealistic clergymen. And if it turned up a high-level conspiracy, they could then get the credit. But they turned it down."

Maddox, Mason and Sharpton are still urging the Brawleys to withhold cooperation. They've provided Glenda Brawley with sanctuary in a Brooklyn church after counselling her to defy a grand jury subpoena to testify in the case. In an unusual public letter of advice to Attorney General Abrams, Gov. Cuomo urged him to arrest the girl's mother. "The process of the court, already outstanding," Cuomo wrote, "should be enforced."

Daughtry says that after suspending judgment for quite a while he, too, is starting to question the motives of the Brawleys' advisers. "I'm beginning to wonder if they have justice for Tawana as their first priority," he says. In recent weeks, two former associates of Sharpton have publicly charged him with perpetrating a hoax.

Not so fast: The media coverage of the case has increased dramatically as the focus has shifted from a possible gang rape of a black teen-ager to a possible hoax by a trio

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