

# **ANOTHER VIEW: African-American lessons can instruct emerging Latinos\_112403**

November 21, 2003

Posted: 11/24/03

## **ANOTHER VIEW: African-American lessons can instruct emerging Latinos**

**By Samuel Atchison**

In his book, "The Other Face of America," Jorge Ramos notes Hispanics comprise the largest minority in the country and are transforming the nation, both economically and culturally.

Yet, he argues, Latinos still face enormous barriers that range from xenophobia to racism. "The real challenge for the Hispanic community, then, is to transform its astonishing growth in numbers, its importance to the economy and its cultural influence into political power."

Thus, the situation in the Hispanic community parallels the black community a generation ago, and it signals permanent change in the nation's racial and political landscape.

African-Americans have served as the poster children for racial inequity in this country, the result of the dual legacies of chattel slavery and legal segregation.

Indeed, the black-white race dynamic has become so ingrained in our psyche that before Sept. 11, 2001, most Americans were only vaguely aware other racial and ethnic groups were emerging.

But they are emerging.

As late as 1998, the President's Initiative on Race estimated in 2050, the population in the United States will be about 53 percent white, 25 percent Hispanic, 14 percent black, 8 percent Asian/Pacific Islander and 1 percent American Indian.

In fact, however, the 2000 Census showed the population is shifting even faster. The Census Bureau found, due largely to immigration, more than 35 million Hispanics-12.5 percent of the overall population-live in this country. By contrast, African-Americans total 34.6 million, or 12.3 percent of the population.

This suggests that while population growth among African-Americans is more or less keeping pace with the overall growth of the nation, Latinos are experiencing a population surge well ahead of the national curve.

Consider as well, Ramos writes, that the Hispanic community is becoming increasingly mobile, with remarkable growth in states like North Carolina, Iowa and Arkansas; Spanish-language media-newspapers, radio and television-are emerging as a major power in a number of American cities; and according to estimates, the purchasing power of Hispanics will reach \$1 trillion by 2010.

The net effect is that even as Latinos wrestle with the myriad problems facing their community-treatment of undocumented workers, racism, poverty in the lower classes, unfavorable American policies toward Latin America-they are poised to address these issues in ways designed to get results.

They possess the cultural, economic and technological means necessary to obtain the political power needed to affect change.

By contrast, the African-American community is in danger of having the world pass it by. Thirty years after the civil rights and black power movements, many blacks still are chanting the same mantra of reparations and set-asides of a generation ago.

Moreover, as Khallid al-Mansour notes in his book, "Betrayal by Any Other Name," some black leaders played a deceptive shell game by enriching themselves and their cronies in the name of the poor. In so doing, they compromised their moral authority, offending those they purported to represent.

Today, as Hispanic leaders give voice to the hopes of a diverse and needy people, they would do well to learn from the failures of some of their black counterparts: Never forget where you came from, and don't forget where you're going.

*Samuel Atchison is a fellow of the George H. Gallup International Institute in Princeton, N.J. His column is distributed by Religion News Service*

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention ( SBC ) and around the world.