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Louis DeSipio. *Counting on the Latino Vote: Latinos as a New Electorate*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996. xii + 221 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-1660-6.

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Professor DeSipio raises a series of challenging questions in this book relating to the political incorporation of the Latino/Latina population in the United States. Why have many Latinos, unlike prior immigrants, not sought naturalization and hence political power? Why have those Latinos and Latinas who have been naturalized not voted in numbers comparable to other ethnic groups in the United States? What is the likelihood of Latinos voting in greater numbers? And, finally, how would their doing so influence the outcome of elections as well as their sense of ethnicity?

Using the data of the National Latino Immigrant Survey and the Latino National Political Survey, DeSipio, a political scientist, concludes that Latinos have not come close to realizing their electoral potential in the United States. If they voted in comparable numbers to other new electorates, however, their impact on the issues discussed by candidates on the local, state, and national level would increase, while the electoral landscape of the United States—i.e., the party choices of different regions—would remain relatively unaffected.

The book is meticulously researched and clearly written, and it offers much insight to political strategists and specialists concerned with American voting behavior. Focused on quantitative survey data, however, its methodology makes it of limited value for historians who attempt to understand political cultures in a very diverse bloc of Americans and permanent residents, let alone questions of mentality.

Chapter One, “New Americans and New Voters,” explores the key concepts of the study. Laudably, DeSipio is careful to disaggregate the diverse Latino group. Apart from the common experience of recent immigration, he notes that Americans of Mexican, Cuban, Central American,

and Puerto Rican origin share few common political concerns and are unevenly integrated in political terms. In his view, voting constitutes the key litmus test of political participation, and is hence the pivotal aspect to consider when gauging the political integration of immigrants and their descendants. The author defines a “new electorate” as a previously disfranchised group that votes in significant numbers, e.g., women, youth, South and East Europeans, African Americans, and Asian Americans. Among these new electorates, women and youth took the longest time to assume a distinct identity in electoral politics. African Americans, however—among the latest to vote in large numbers—immediately thereafter assumed a niche in the U.S. political system.

Where do Latinos fit within this spectrum of new electorates? Chapter Two, “Myths and Realities: Latino Partisanship, Ideology, and Policy Preferences,” discusses the recent scholarly literature on Latino politics. Pundits have long expected Latinos to register a great impact in national elections, predicting that they would come to shape partisan politics in several key states by the end of the 1980s. DeSipio, however, shows why we have yet to see such a great upsurge in Latino influence. While Latinos today greatly shape American culture and society, and while they enjoy a great economic impact, they have yet to develop a strong party allegiance or political agenda. In DeSipio’s view, the different national origins of Latinos constitute only one of the reasons for this failure to impact electoral politics. In addition, the different national groups among the Latinos have not yet developed discernible political ideologies that would help them affect decisions within one or the other party, and they face continued efforts to exclude them politically. Finally, class and gender play important roles in Latino voting behavior, pulling them into different directions.

As one of the few common features that mark them as different from other groups, Latinos express a desire for an expansion of government service in a range of policy areas.

Chapter Three, “The Latino Electorates: Current and Potential,” examines the ways in which current Latino voters and nonvoters affect U.S. politics. While Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans generally vote Democratic—sometimes swinging the vote in states such as California and Texas—Cuban Americans, especially those of the first generation of immigration, vote Republican, affecting politics in Florida. However, current levels of electoral participation has made Latinos play a lesser role than their potential. If Latinos voted in greater numbers, they could decisively influence state and local elections. However, their impact on presidential elections would be much less certain.

Chapter Four, “The Reticents and the Reluctants,” analyzes the reasons why many Latino citizens of the United States do not go to the polls, as well as the possibilities of increasing Latino voter turnout. In particular, Mexican Americans do not vote in large numbers, because many of them form part of those socioeconomic groups least likely to vote regardless of race. In addition, traditional voter registration drives have been targeted at whites and African Americans. In DeSipio’s view, only a “more direct sense of connection to candidates, campaigns, or electoral institutions” would increase both registration or turnout—a sad, but unflinching accurate description of the U.S. political system.

Chapter Five, “Naturalization and New Voters,” addresses the issue of naturalization as a key factor in Latino voting. More than half of the Latinos who did not vote in the 1992 elections could not have voted because they were not citizens. The five-year waiting period imposed on new permanent residents by the Immigration and Naturalization Service constitutes only part of the reason for the large number of non-citizens. Good knowledge of English as well as U.S. civics and history also form barriers for many potential Americans, as do frustrating bureaucratic hindrances imposed by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Finally, U.S. denizens receive almost all benefits of citizens, *sans* the right to vote; therefore, many immigrants feel few incentives to become Americans. Nevertheless, many permanent Latino residents express a strong attachment to the United States, which creates opportunities for future naturalization.

Chapter Six, “Including the Excluded,” examines

strategies for making voters of Latino non-U.S. citizens. In DeSipio’s view, the success in naturalizing many long-term denizens rests on two institutions: the INS—an institution that needs to simplify its naturalization process—and immigrant political groups that have often expressed no interest in the subject of citizenship. The Cuban American community, however, constitutes a notable exception, as widespread opposition to the Castro regime has motivated many former Cubans to seek U.S. citizenship and the right to vote.

In the conclusion, DeSipio offers four potential trajectories for Latino voting behavior. First, they could follow the example of the Eastern Europeans and be sought out actively by a national party (the Democrats in the historical example). Second, national recruitment initiatives could raise overall voting participation without creating new party attachments. Third, following the lead of African Americans, Latinos could tie their voting to a set of political objectives, a move that would likely benefit the Democrats. Fourth, they could continue on their present course and gradually increase political participation without effecting great changes in the American electoral landscape.

One issue DeSipio did not explore in this study is whether U.S. bipartisan politics fits the “needs” of this new electorate more than the party system of other immigrant societies. In other words, would it have been easier for Latinos to assume an electoral identity in France, Britain, or Germany? A brief comparison with European immigrant politics—a subject that has received ample scholarly attention—would have answered this question. As Americans find the two-party system increasingly irrelevant, it would be logical to assume that Latinos would share this sentiment. In France, however, where an anti-immigration party enjoys more and more popular support, immigrants and their descendants have coalesced around those parties of the Left that most vigorously fight Jean Marie Le Pen’s xenophobic movement. Such a trend might well have appeared in the United States if Ross Perot had been elected president in 1992 on an anti-immigrant, anti-NAFTA platform.

I also wonder to what extent political participation can really best be measured by the number of voters. As popular dissatisfaction with the U.S. political system reaches new heights, many U.S. citizens and immigrants have found new forms of political organization—grass-roots organizations and special interest groups, for instance. While I concur with DeSipio’s general approach and conclusions, I consider his claim that his study ex-

amines “how U.S. Latino populations have been incorporated into U.S. society” (p. 2) to be exaggerated.

Overall, I recommend the book to those interested in the current and potential impact of Latinos on U.S. electoral politics. The question of incorporation, political and otherwise, has been better treated by anthropologists and sociologists concerned with culture rather than quantita-

tive analysis.

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