

Cambio de Colores: Latinos in the Heartland

Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Conference:
Latinos and Immigrants in Midwestern Communities
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Introduction

Cambio de Colores conferences started out in response to an urgent need in Missouri—to better understand the demographic changes occurring in Missouri and their impact. Our places were changing and the demographic data showed the large increases in the Latino population. Some communities saw a growth as large as 2,000 percent during the 1990s and early part of this decade. This trend continues as we end the first decade of the new century. Cambio de Colores was launched to provide a forum where we could explore what these changes meant for Missouri communities, the local and state economy, and the social service and health care systems. It sought to encourage research on these topics, share best practices and facilitate new relationships. Cambio de Colores engaged all of us, whether we were conducting research, providing services, developing public policy, enforcing laws or educating our residents about these sweeping demographic changes.

The inaugural Cambio de Colores conference was held in 2002 with subsequent conferences held annually through 2010. The first conference, in Columbia, explored issues affecting the state. It was a call to action. Since then, there has been an explosion of activity in Missouri. For the first conference, it was difficult to find people who could talk about what was happening in Missouri. Now, there are literally dozens of projects underway with researchers and practitioners involved in many impressive collaborative efforts with our communities throughout the state.

These proceedings are a product of the Cambio Center at the University of Missouri. The Center was established in 2004 to enhance our capacity to conduct additional research, and facilitate collaboration among faculty and staff in the development of programs and projects that address issues related to the changes happening in our communities. The Cambio Center serves as the permanent home for the Cambio de Colores conference, coordinates the research and outreach efforts of the MU campus, and provides a vehicle for linking current research to the outreach efforts of the University of Missouri Extension Alianzas project.

The primary focus of the Conference between 2002 through 2008 was Missouri. However, during that time we benefitted from the participation of researchers, practitioners and policy makers from many parts of the country. In 2009, the Cambio de Colores conference broadened its focus to all the Midwest and continued that trend in 2010. It has become clear over the past few years that what is happening is not unique to Missouri but is part of a larger regional and national migration phenomenon. This shift in Cambio de Colores has allowed us to focus on the unique Midwestern characteristics of immigration and what it means for the states and communities of this region. The Cambio Center worked in cooperation with the Latinos and Immigrants in the Midwest research group of the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCERA 216), and the Immigrants in Midwestern Communities Inter University Network to plan Cambio de Colores 2010.

The 2010 conference brought together state-of-the-art research and best practices that informed program participants, decision-makers, and policy makers of the multiple ways in which Heartland stakeholders are addressing this most significant demographic change of the last decades. The conference themes of Change and Integration, Civil Rights and Political Participation, Education, Health and Entrepreneurship and Economic Development provided a framework for exploring the wide variety of experiences that define the migration process in the Midwest. The conference provided a forum for discussing, sharing, learning, and identifying the critical areas where information and promising practices are being developed that will help facilitate the successful transition of Latino newcomers into our communities, as well as to provide all members of these communities the information and practices to make these changes in a way that is beneficial to all.

This book of proceedings includes all the abstracts and selected papers from the 2010 conference. It provides a diverse array of resources for community groups, information for researchers, and connections for those who share similar interests in understanding and affecting the changes happening in our communities. The call for papers and presentations took place in the fall of 2009, and papers and final abstracts included were presented at Cambio de Colores in 2010. As you read through the abstracts, you might think about how your work could contribute to our broader understanding of how demographic changes are affecting communities and consider participating in a future Cambio de Colores conference.

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