Barrio de Langley Park

Yes, Langley Park Day 2006 is just a few days away. This annual event will, for the seventh year, bring to Langley Park music, dance, doctors, dentists, chiropractors, optometrists, nutritionists, family counselors, domestic violence specialists, immigration and employment lawyers, college admission counselors, face painters, clowns, food and craft vendors, a moon bounce, and much much more. Here, we reproduce just a few of the photographs taken at past Langley Park Days: a musician, moon bouncers, and dancers. And remember, the festival goes on in good weather and bad, shining or raining.

The center building of the festival is the Langley Park Community Center at 1500 Merrimac Drive in Langley Park. The postal zip code is 20783. (Telephone: 301 4454508)

The hours of the event are from noon until 4:30 p.m. Participants in the health fair, the folklorico, and other activities are urged to arrive sufficiently early to set up. Parking is in short supply, so that's another reason to arrive early.

Si Se Puede!

Monday, April 10th, marked another forward step in the politicization/activation of those who want the USA to welcome immigrants in order to continue to enrich our culture and enhance our economy. Throughout the country, tens of thousands of immigrants, friends of immigrants, and supporters of justice gathered together to urge congressional decisionmakers to continue the tradition of welcoming immigrants to our country.

The popular view is that the undocumented immigrants are all Latino, especially from Mexico. Most are, but there are significant minorities of people from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. And Canada! The countrywide rallies have drawn participants from all of these sending areas, making the day a manifestation of a broad coalition.

Some reactions: “It was a fantastic day. Congratulations to everyone who worked so hard to pull it off. One of the best moments was marching down the first hill on 16th Street and seeing all the very young children chanting ‘Si, se puede!’ from the park as we went by. It was so exciting to see the next generation - proud and full of possibilities!” (anon)

“April 10th will go on the books as the day that the immigrant community ... changed the wrong direction that this country was heading. Two months ago, anybody would say anything they wanted to about immigrants, two months ago we were thinking of how to defend ourselves from all anti-immigrant attacks, two months ago politicians were afraid to stand up by our side. Today, ... this country started to head in the right direction, a direction that is one of hope, faith, discipline and togetherness, a direction that includes all immigrants as part of the solution. We have new friends and we are no longer on the defense. We are moving to a position that is inclusive, progressive and open to our immigrant community.” (Juan Carlos Ruiz)

“There was a time in the USA when it was ok to openly discriminate against Chinese, Japanese and other Asian immigrants; there was a time when it was ok to display signs that read ‘Negro Enter Here’; and there was a time when employers were comfortable to advertise that ‘Irish or Jews need not apply.’ That was where the minutemen and their racist friends in local, state, and national legislative houses were intending to go this time. Our statements across the nation on April 10th, at least, will let them know there is an invincible force behind a ‘united immigrant people.’” (Chuks Eleonu)
**IN THE NEWS**

**BILL COLLAPSES IN SENATE:** A majority of the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee favored an immigration bill that would have provided undocumented immigrants with possibilities for legal permanent residence plus eventual citizenship. It was not the bill preferred by most immigrants and their friends, but it was vastly better than a House bill that was extremely punitive. However, Senate negotiations eventually collapsed, and with it went the realistic possibility of a good bill – or indeed any bill – being passed by the current Congress. Therefore, advocates must focus on the November elections and the new Congress.

**A RALLY DOWNSIDE:** The outcome of the nationwide rallies on April 9-10 was mostly positive. Voice and unity were displayed. But there were some losers: some people who left work to participate in the rallies. According to a report in the *New York Times* (15 April 2006), hundreds of workers around the country were fired because of absence. What a sad price to pay for exercising voice and manifesting unity.

**BORDER POLICY FAILURE:** Douglas Massey writes in the *New York Times* (4 April 2006): “The only thing we have to show for two decades of border militarization is a larger undocumented population than we would otherwise have, a rising number of Mexicans dying while trying to cross, and a growing burden on taxpayers for enforcement that is counterproductive. We need an immigration policy that seeks to manage the cross-border flows of people that are inevitable in a global economy, not to repress them through unilateral police actions.”

**COST TO REMOVE IMMIGRANTS:** From AP: “As Congress debates immigration reforms, some experts say the most extreme proposal – deporting millions of illegal immigrants – would be a huge legal and logistical morass, and ruinously expensive, too. Officials at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, which would be responsible for deportations, said they have no projections on what it would take to rid the United States of an estimated 12 million people.” In the spirit of the House bill on immigration, another 12 or so million should be rounded up and deported: those who have helped undocumented immigrants. (Fear not: this publication will continue from Mexico or some Central American country.)

**THE LATIN AMERICAN YOUTH CENTER** has received $240,000 from the State of Maryland to create a youth center in Riverdale. Alas, our reporters have been told that equivalent space was not available in the Langley Park area. What a shame that the Mother Teresa Center was not built. What a shame that the administrators in the east wing of the Langley Park Community Center are still occupying space so potentially valuable for activities relevant to the surrounding neighborhood.

**CRIME FREE LANGLEY PARK:** This organization submitted a proposal to obtain “weed and seed” money from the Federal government. Alas, the proposal has not been funded. However, the interest in reducing crime and other undesirable behavior remains. We are sure that CFLP will continue its work, both alone and jointly with such organizations as Action Langley Park.

**POVERTY:** The poverty rate of various sub-groups in the USA population provides additional evidence of the Euro-Asian - Black-Latino gap. The overall poverty rate in the country is 12.7%. The subgroups are: Euro, 8.6%; Asian, 9.8%; Black, 24.7%; and Latino, 21.9%. Presumably, the dramatic undercount of Blacks and Latinos hides even higher rates of poverty for these groups.

The distribution of Latino unemployment (linked to poverty) is dramatic. Naturalized Latino citizens have a very low rate of unemployment, followed by non-citizen Latinos and then US-born Latinos. What’s happening? Perhaps the naturalized foreign-born Latinos may have had time to learn about US culture and the job market, hard work, and planning that are less evident in other categories?

![LATINO UNEMPLOYMENT, 2005](image)

**MEDICATE RULES: HURTFUL.** The *New York Times* (16 April 2006) reports that anti-immigrant legislation passed earlier this year (yes, already passed!) that may have broad negative ramifications for immigrant and others. “More than 50 million Medicaid recipients will soon have to produce birth certificates, passports or other documents to prove that they are United States citizens, and everyone who applies for coverage after June 30 will have to show similar documents under a new federal law. The requirement is meant to stop the ‘theft of Medicaid benefits by illegal aliens,’ in the words of Representative Charlie Norwood, Republican of Georgia, a principal author of the provision, which was signed into law by President Bush on Feb. 8. In enforcing the new requirement, federal and state officials must take account of passions stirred by weeks of national debate over immigration policy. State officials worry that many blacks, American Indians and other poor people will be unable to come up with the documents needed to prove citizenship. In addition, hospital executives said they were concerned that the law could increase their costs, by reducing the number of patients with insurance. The new requirement takes effect on July 1.” Most observers agree that this fear-the-immigrants law will have widespread negative health effects for both citizens and non-citizens.
SENATOR CRAIG SPEAKS

Senator Larry Craig of Idaho, a Republican, gave this speech on the floor of the senate on Thursday, 6 April 2006. Thanks to staffer Iris Amador for providing BLP with the text.

"In this immigration reform discussion, I have stood here to emphasize our imperative duty to guard our borders and strengthen national security. But today I want to talk about another component in the immigration debate. I am concerned about some of the comments being flung around as we address this critical issue. Certainly this is a topic that awakens emotions, but I can't help but reflect on what those comments reveal about us as a nation.

"It is as though America does not want to face the mirror to look at herself. She doesn't want to see what she is and what that means. But for her own good, she has to.

"She is a blend. She is English, German, and Italian. She's Polish, Irish, Asian, African. And she is Hispanic. She is multiracial and multiethnic; diverse since her inception. That's why she's admirable; that's why she has prospered and that's why she's strong.

"What is true in science is true in sociology: Mixing results in advancement and strength. We ought to think about that. We ought to evaluate some of the conceptions we have regarding immigrants and measure them against reality, to see if they hold true.

"Immigration is a challenge, but it's not a threat. Quite honestly, immigrants represent solutions to many of this country's problems, both current and future.

"The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a shortfall of 10 million workers in this country by 2010. The reason is very simple; our workforce is growing older and shrinking. On the other hand, immigrant labor is behind the significant employment growth the country has experienced in different areas in recent years. These are the economics of necessity.

"Can we recognize this? Do we see that foreign nationals are cleaning up New Orleans and binding her wounds? Do we know that the Pentagon was rebuilt with Hispanic muscle?

"Immigrants are sweating it out for this country. They consistently have, for a long time.

"In my home state, Hispanics were digging mines in the 1860s. Mexican cowboys and ranchers were solid members of pioneer communities even before Idaho became a state. Hispanics were mule packers in the 1880s. They were building and maintaining the railroad system of the American West in the 1930s.

"Today they are harvesting apples in Washington, peaches in Georgia and oranges in Florida. They are gathering grapes in California, potatoes in Idaho and corn in Iowa. Their footprints are in fields across the nation.

"Immigrants are hard workers. They work hard because they are grateful people and feel a sense of debt for the opportunities this country has given them. Contrary to what some believe, immigrants -- who have entered legally and illegally, are not here to siphon services, but to produce and contribute.

"Idaho Commerce and Labor reports that between 1990 and 2005, Hispanic buying power in Idaho rose more than twice as fast as total buying power across the state. Nationwide, the purchasing power of Hispanics will reach one trillion dollars in four years.

"Beyond their role in sustaining the country's labor force, immigrants make a net fiscal contribution to the U.S. economy. The President's 2005 Economic Report, which used figures of the most authoritative analysis to date of the economic impact of immigration, says "the average immigrant pays nearly $1800 more in taxes than he or she costs." Undocumented immigrants are believed to contribute billions of dollars to a Social Security system they will not benefit from. According to the President's report, the administration's Earnings Suspense File, made up of taxes paid by workers with invalid or mismatched social security numbers, totaled $463 billion in 2002.

"While other nations of the developed world are aging, America still sees a youthful face reflected in that mirror. Immigration renews the United States and keeps it young. While countries like Japan, Russia and Spain are facing problems because their populations are decreasing, America has the necessary arms to support its pension system. Therefore a comprehensive immigration reform is in America's best self-interest.

"Understanding these realities erases some of the misconceptions bouncing around, misconceptions that sometimes smack of prejudice. Previous immigration waves have experienced it to some extent. But I believe we as a nation are greater than that.

"When every one of us, except Native Americans, belongs to families that came from somewhere else, we should be careful not to erect mental borders, the type that keep people that are different from us at arms length. We are a nation that encourages new thinking and benefits from the growth that results from it. American poet Oliver Wendell Holmes said it best when he said, 'A mind stretched by a new idea never returns to its original shape.' It expands.

"Immigration is a source of new ideas, entrepreneurship and vitality. The meeting of cultures simply does not happen in a one-way street, but in a bridge, where both sides give and receive.

"When America looks at itself in a mirror, it will see that her multicultural character has always been one of her greatest assets."

DEPORTATION

Some statistics on deportation have been made public by a Mexican official, as reported in Proceso/Apro (6 April 2006). "A high-ranking Mexican official has revealed more statistics about the number of Mexicans deported last year from the United States. Speaking at a United Nations sponsored event in Mexico City this week, Lauro Lopez Sanchez, an assistant secretary of the Interior Ministry, said 850,000 Mexicans were deported from the United States in 2005. According to Lopez, 350,000 of the 1,200,000 Mexicans who attempted to illegally cross into the US last year managed to reach their destination. Lopez characterized the migrant flow as a permanent transfer of "labor and talent." Other estimates of the number of undocumented Mexicans who migrate each year to the United States are higher, ranging as high as 600,000 or more. In 2005, Lopez said Mexican immigration authorities deported 250,000 foreign nationals from Mexican territory, most of whom were Central Americans. The Mexican official said another 100,000 Central Americans slipped through his nation's territory without being detained."
LAS VENDEDORAS DE LANGLEY PARK
Mangos! Coconuts! Watermelon! More!

In March 2006, a new association was formed. Called “Las Vendedoras de Langley Park”, it is composed of women (most are of grandmother age) who make a living as sidewalk fruit vendors as well as some van food vendors. They are working together to advance their interests in the face of threats to their livelihoods. Many of the vendors appear to have no alternative means of support, and so their micro-businesses help to keep them from becoming homeless. Here are two quotations from interviews: “I sell because it is necessary to pay for rent and food.” “I sell to survive and sustain my family here and my family back home.” Some of the vendors provide employment for others, as is shown in the above photograph. The van vendors who sell hot food also face a difficult future if two-thirds of them are put out of business.

Many of the residents of Langley Park’s apartments rely upon fruit vendors as well as van vendors for their meals, and often the vendors become centers of socialization – an important contribution in a neighborhood where there are few places informally to socialize. Their presence on the street also helps to deter crime because they serve as guardian “eyes on the street.”

Estimated number of jobs lost if 2/3 of the van food vendors lose their businesses = 65

WHY AM I HERE?
A Personal Editorial

An article in the New York Times (8 April 2006) leads me to wonder why am able to be in the USA. The columnist, John Tiemey, asks, “If America could absorb my grandfather, why keep out today’s immigrants?” His answers to the question have parallels to my own heritage.

My father came from Ireland about ninety years ago. He didn’t have immigration papers, but he was welcomed by the officials at Ellis Island; soon after, he joined our army as a soldier to fight in World War I. (He was injured but survived.) Thanks, USA.

My mother was born in this country, but her parents were recently-arrived refugees from Russia who snuck out of that country hiding under the hay of a horse-pulled cart, stopped in Germany, and eventually made it to the USA. They didn’t have immigration papers, and although they were literate and moderately successful here, they never learned English. Thanks, USA, for the open door that was Ellis Island; it made me possible.

The clerks at Ellis Island did cause one problem. Unable to write my grandparents’ full name, they shortened it. And so in the USA there was a name that could easily be pronounced. I’m reminded of an acquaintance whose name is Luis but is now called Lou. And that reminds me of my ESL students who can’t pronounce “th” so strange alternative sounds are articulated.

The first home of my father and my mother’s parents was New York City. The city had many immigrants, and they brought with them the culture of their home countries. The Lower East Side of Manhattan was filled with peddlers – immigrants who could only sell small items along the sidewalk in order to make enough dollars to pay for their crowded living spaces and barely-adequate food. (See photo.) My father’s occupation mirrors today: he began working in construction. I am thankful that the city’s officials enabled my father and material grandparents to work – to survive – in the new country.

Perhaps my background helps to explain why it is so painful to me to see policies and regulations that marginalize immigrants and even prevent some of them from making a living. Perhaps it explains why I have devoted a good portion of my life over the past eleven years to befriending, helping, and learning from new immigrants, especially those who live in Langley Park. I am acquainted with several hundred new immigrants and of course have had some contact with hundreds more. Some of them are without immigration documents, and some of them don’t have retail permits for their micro-business. I truly love them all.

--Bill Hanna

Barrio de Langley Park is a monthly publication of Action Langley Park in collaboration with the Langley Park Project of the University of Maryland. It is edited by Bill Hanna with associate Janet C. Callejas. To submit articles or article ideas for publication consideration, please send an email to actionlangleypark@yahoo.com.