In the United States, the Spring of 2006 will be distinctly remembered for demonstrations by millions of Latin American immigrants who opposed US immigration policies and for the official attempts to approve reforms leading to criminalization of undocumented migration. In several U.S. cities, immigrants literally took over the streets. The protests were not confined to the largest cities such as New York, Chicago and Los Angeles but also spread to dozens of cities of varied sizes. The peace and quiet of such places as Salt Lake City, Utah and Arlington, Texas was suddenly shattered by the voices of young Latin American people protesting anti-immigrant policies.

While American society recognizes the mobilization and struggle in defense of the human rights of Mexican immigrants and Latin Americans in general (Delgado 2008), the Spring demonstrations of 2006 differed in several ways. On the one hand, these demonstrations were not supported by a strong leadership, but were instead articulated from the bottom-up, based on a complex system of social and communal networks that migrants have been constructing for decades (Zlolniski 2008). The organization of marches and mobilizations were made possible by the strength of social networks that for the first time had acquired a sociopolitical connotation that went beyond the community itself.

On the other hand, the participation of young migrants was notable as was the presence of the children of migrants, people who were born in the United States. This was very revealing since not only does it indicate a high degree of intergenerational solidarity, but also the configuration of a protagonist social subject, the youths, who were claiming their own rights and were no longer relegated to the defense of the labor or migratory rights of their parents. A third and related point was the character of the demonstrations. Even if the catalyst for the protests was the attempt to approve immigration reforms aimed at the criminalization of undocumented migration, there were demands
and claims being made in the heat of the mobilizations that went well beyond the margins or frames that traditionally revolve around migratory policy. The stated demands of the protests were in fact oriented not so much toward the defense of immigrant rights but rather for broad civil and citizen rights. Young people took to the streets to demand their own rights and spaces in a society which has increasingly come to marginalize and exclude them.

“Here we are, here we stay” read one of the numerous protest banners. Perhaps this text best reflected the demands of hundreds of thousands of Latin American youths. Not only did they demand better labor conditions, access to social security, and access to education, but they also demanded a space in society where they could be recognized for what they are, namely, Latino citizens of the United States. They were claiming their social insertion without renouncing their cultural roots. As children of Latin American immigrants, many of them already are American citizens, but have yet to be recognized as such.

For their entire lives, society has demanded that they renounce their cultural, ethnic, and social origin. What the demonstrations brought to light for all to see was not only the injustice of US migratory policy, but also the quantitative importance and, above all, the qualitative importance of a new social subject emerging from American society. This new social subject springs from the social, demographic, cultural and ethnic roots that form part of the social crucible of a changing American society. The demonstrations left no doubt that Latinos or Hispanics are not simply just another migrant group. In short, we have witnessed the appearance of a new vector from the ethnic-cultural matrix of American society. Confronted with the binomial of preserving their marginalized identity and cultural roots or risk being diluted and absorbed by the larger American matrix, the Spring 2006 protests put forth a third opinion: integration without assimilation. The vision was one of becoming integrated into the larger society as an active component, and contributing to it with their own cultural, social and demographic roots that in so doing could enrich and transform that society.

\[\text{1 Several analysts have compared these demonstrations of Spring 2006 with those of the 1960's that developed in the struggle for Black civil rights.}\]