



NCLR *Myth vs. Reality*

For years, myths about the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) have been propagated by opponents of immigration reform as a means of minimizing our voice in the immigration debate. No stranger to political debate, NCLR has always pushed aside such rhetoric in the interest of keeping the focus on solutions to our broken immigration system.

Unfortunately, over the last several years, some of these accusations have become part of a broader effort to build fear and anger among those Americans who perceive immigrant communities as a threat to the United States. As a consequence, the stakes of such rhetoric have become unconscionably high. Hate groups targeting Latinos have risen steadily over the past five years, as have hate crimes against Latinos.

In 2006, just prior to the last debate over immigration, the late Representative Charles Norwood gave voice to many of these myths in an article in the far right publication *Human Events*. Until that point, this fiction was fodder for only for fringe groups and websites—those frequented by vigilantes, hate groups, and White supremacists. Today, however, you can hear some of these myths repeated on cable network television and talk radio despite efforts by NCLR to set the record straight. As many of these absurd claims will undoubtedly resurface in the coming debate over immigration, NCLR has chosen to address them head on in this guide. For a more in-depth discussion, see “The *Truth* About NCLR: NCLR Answers Critics” at www.nclr.org/truth.

MYTH #1

The National Council of La Raza translates as “The National Council of The Race.”

FACT #1

Hispanic and Latino are an ethnicity, not a race. Hispanics can be and are members of any and all races. While one translation of “raza” is indeed “race,” its use in our name refers to the Spanish definition of “la raza,” meaning “the people” or “the community.”

Our name derives from the term “*la raza cósmica*,” meaning the “cosmic people,” which was coined by Mexican scholar José Vasconcelos to reflect the fact that the people of Latin America are a mixture of all of the world’s races, cultures, and religions.

As this point is often brought up by those who oppose our point of view on immigration policy as a way to distract people from our message, we have had a comprehensive description of the origins of our name on our website (www.nclr.org) for years.

Some of this confusion stems from the fact that “la raza” is a commonly used term among a host of organizations, clubs, universities, newspapers, and radio stations. This is why NCLR always refers to itself by its initials or by its full name.

MYTH #2

NCLR advocates *reconquista*, i.e., “taking back” the American Southwest for Mexico.

FACT #2

Conspiracy theories like this one would be silly if they were not so often used to create fear and distrust of all Hispanics. At no time in its more than 40-year history has NCLR endorsed, supported, or condoned such a concept. NCLR is an American institution founded to help Latino American families live the American Dream.

MYTH #3

NCLR is akin to a “Tan Klan.”

FACT #3

NCLR is a civil rights and advocacy organization that has a long history of helping Latino families realize the American Dream. Founded in 1968, NCLR serves all Latino subgroups in 41 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

We are very proud of our record of accomplishment and impact: We have provided housing counseling to nearly 150,000 families and helped more than 25,000 families buy their first home. We support a network of 100 community-based schools that serve 25,000 children a year. We have helped build health clinics and train lay health educators, which provide care and disease prevention assistance to 100,000 people annually.

Nearly half of NCLR’s Affiliates are working every day to integrate immigrants fully into American society by providing English-language and civics classes, and help with naturalization and voter registration. In fact, NCLR, its partners, and its Affiliates helped mobilize more than 200,000 voters in 2008, helping to make the Latino vote one of the key voting blocs in the historic 2008 election.

MYTH #4

NCLR labels everyone who disagrees with it as “racist.”

FACT #4

At NCLR, the term “racist” is very rarely used and only in extreme instances. Over the past several years, we have raised serious concerns over the rise of hate and the role of extremist groups in the immigration debate. Our website “www.WeCanStopTheHate.org,” is designed to draw attention to the mainstreaming of American extremes.

As NCLR does not track or label hate groups, we have relied on research compiled by the Southern Poverty Law Center, which does track and identify hate groups, to assist us in this effort. We have also relied on work done by the Anti-Defamation League to define “code words” used to disguise hate speech that have surfaced in past immigration debates.

Given their histories and missions, both of these organizations are deeply concerned with the rise of hate crimes against Latinos and the spike in hate groups targeting Latinos that has accompanied the immigration debate.

MYTH #5

NCLR believes that free speech should be curtailed.

FACT #5

As a civil rights organization, NCLR is and has always been a fervent advocate of free speech. What NCLR does do, however, is challenge news outlets—particularly cable television and radio networks—to provide better balance to their coverage of the immigration debate and to identify the backgrounds of many of their regular commentators on immigration who have ties to vigilantes, White supremacists, and nativists.

MYTH #6

NCLR’s motto is “Por la Raza todo. Fuera de La Raza nada,” which translates to “For the race, everything. Outside of the race, nothing.”

FACT #6

NCLR does not have a motto. It never has. Our website clearly states our mission: NCLR works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans.

MYTH #7

NCLR charter schools preach violence and sedition.

FACT #7

Such wild claims are often used to instill fear and anger against Latinos. All of our schools are sanctioned by their respective states, undergo rigorous scrutiny by their school districts, and are overseen by the public school authorities in their districts. Like many other schools serving different demographic groups, some of our schools educate their students about their native culture and language or use that language and culture in their curriculum to strengthen and enhance the student's educational experience and achievement.

MYTH #8

NCLR endorses the radical founding document of MEChA, a Latino student organization.

FACT #8

While MEChA's bylaws hardly reflect the current nature of the student organization today, which counts governors, mayors, and state legislators as alumni, they still contain radical language that NCLR has repeatedly denounced as extreme. NCLR's only "funding" of MEChA was a 2003 grant to the Georgetown chapter to pay for a barbeque for students who could not go home for Thanksgiving.

MYTH #9

NCLR believes in "open borders."

FACT #9

NCLR has consistently stated and affirmed its strong belief in American sovereignty and that the American government has every right and obligation to secure our borders. We have long supported strong, effective, and humane border enforcement.