Echoes of Jim Crow: Ultra-Far Right Texas and the Attack on Latino Families

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Texas' present ultra-right and nationalistic political and policy environment is worsening the social, cultural, and economic mobility for many of the more than 12 million Latino Texans and their families. This current environment echoes and has similarities to the Jim Crow era. Today may not be the Jim Crow era of earlier decades: segregation is illegal, and formal civil rights protections exist.

The resiliency and civil rights advocacy of people of color and allies have broken many barriers leading to social, health and economic progress. Despite ongoing advocacy for social justice, disparities and inequities remain, with structural similarities emerging to Jim Crow-era systems that marginalized African Americans, Latinos, and low-income Whites. Additionally, emerging under an undemocratic and repressive nationalistic movement.

The parallels are not incidental; they reflect deliberate strategies by politicians and supporters with values and policy actions adverse to equality while espousing fundamental democratic values – respect for human rights, equality, and the rule of law. They also purport to be color blind as they use political, policy, legal, and media levers to keep control that suppress groups from gaining economic and civic power.

First, let's clarify what most media conflates, the crucial differences illustrated below between a conservatives and ultra-right ideologues whether an elected representative or private individuals. The repeated identifying of ultra far-right individual as conservatives contributes to normalizing and empowering individual and groups aligned with undemocratic and discriminatory values and policies. It provides a direct path to Jim Crow social practices and legal disenfranchisement parallels.

Comparison: Conservatism vs. Ultra / Far-Right Ideologies

Dimension	Conservatism (Mainstream)	Ultra / Far-Right, Discriminatory, Biased
Core Principle	**Preservation of traditions, stability, and gradual change**	**Radical rejection of pluralism; belief in cultural or racial superiority; authoritarian impulses**
Institutions	**Supports long-standing institutions (family, church, courts) as stabilizing forces**	**May idolize institutions selectively, but undermines democratic checks when power conflicts with ideology**
Democracy & Governance	**Accepts democracy, rule of law, and constitutional norms**	**Tends toward authoritarianism; undermines democratic institutions to entrench power**
Social Order	**Maintains social hierarchies as stabilizing but open to gradual adaptation**	**Enforces rigid hierarchies based on race, ethnicity, or religion, hostile to diversity**

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Economics	**Free markets, fiscal restraint, property rights; debate over role of regulation**	**Economics tied to nationalism (e.g., favoring one racial/ethnic group); may scapegoat minorities for economic woes**
Culture, Identity & Diversity	**Patriotism, respect for national heritage, civic nationalism, will work within pluralism**	**Nationalism; defines belonging by race, ethnicity, or religion; exclusionary nativism, hostile to DEI**
Religion & Morality	**Religion seen as moral anchor; promotes traditional values**	**Religion politicized to enforce exclusion; demonizes other faiths or secularism**
Immigration	**May favor controlled and lawful immigration processes**	**Anti-immigrant, xenophobic; calls for exclusion, deportation, or cultural assimilation**
Rhetoric	**Appeals to tradition, order, and responsibility**	**Conspiratorial, fear-based, scapegoating rhetoric (e.g., "replacement theory," "invasion")**
View of Rights	**Supports individual rights, but may balance against order and morality**	**Rights reserved selectively (e.g., only for majority group), suppression of minority rights**

Compare the words, policy actions and messaging of the Governor, and other state elected representatives that show their core values and positions – on democracy and governance, social order, culture and racial identity, diversity, religion, and immigration, and their connection to limited legislative and budget priorities on human capital investments.

Texas stands at a crossroads. Its demographic future is Latino, yet as seen below its policy trajectory echoes structures of the Jim Crow South: disenfranchisement, underfunding, punitive justice, and state control over diverse localities.

Jim Crow–Texas Parallels

Domain	Jim Crow Era	Texas Today	Impact
Voting	**Poll taxes, literacy tests disenfranchised Black (and poor White) voters.**	**Voter ID laws, gerrymandering, cuts to mail-in and early voting.**	**Diluted political influence of Latino/Black voters, reduced access for low-income Whites.**
Education	**Segregated, underfunded schools; censored curriculum.**	**Stagnant basic allotment, inequitable recapture, voucher push; restrictions on curriculum.**	**Latino-majority schools remain underfunded; equity gaps widen. Our very identify, history and contribution are weakened.**
Criminal Justice	**Convict leasing, chain gangs targeted Black communities.**	**High incarceration rates; disproportionate Latino/Black policing; private detention centers.**	**Reinforces racialized poverty, extracts labor and profit from marginalized groups. Inhumane prisons.**
Local Control	**State legislatures curbed Black political power locally.**	**State preemption of majority-minority city initiatives (labor, housing, voting).**	**Diverse communities denied local self-governance.**
Civil Rights	**Systematic denial of equity, legal segregation.**	**DEI bans, reproductive health and abortion restrictions, immigration crackdowns.**	**Modern rollback of civil rights and bodily autonomy.**
Human Capital Support	**System policy and legal practice to limit access and asset ownership to health care, housing, and**	**Failure to address years of crises in health care access. Legal barriers and punitive enforcement health care providers. Blocking local government**	**Millions of Latinos, Black and White Texans are uninsured, the Latino-White pay gap has change little in**

Domain	Jim Crow Era	Texas Today	Impact
	better paying occupations and employment.	**from strengthening and expanding labor benefits and standards; and local housing development equity tools.**	**decades. Home ownership for family asset and generational economic growth is undermined.**

"As Texas goes, so goes the country" is the marketing slogan in promoting the state as the national bellwether for population and economic growth, and 'conservative' values. However, decades have shown its benefits do not trickle down to most Texans, with dipropionate effect on Latinos and Blacks. National ranking reports have extensively document the states' deficient performance in education, income, health, and overall, not the 'best place to live.' Sadly, the state historical foundation and proclivity for discrimination makes it the national bellwether for ultra far-right undemocratic (not conservative) values – aligned perfectly with the Trump administration, and current congress.

Forget for a moment our present immoral, corrupt and xenophobic President Trump, and the innumerable harm he's causing. Since the mid-1990s, Texas state policy has moved from George W. Bush's "compassionate conservative" brand toward a harder-right agenda that emphasizes policing and border enforcement by the state, preemption of local governments, restrictions on voting and curricular content, expansive gun rights, abortion prohibitions, anti-ESG (environmental, social, governance) rules, and limits on LGBTQ+ rights and DEI. This rightward shift accelerated under Gov. Greg Abbott (2015–present)—on several fronts—tests federal-state boundaries and civil-rights guardrails.

Among Latinos, the slogan and Jim Crow parallels are more appropriately framed as a "El mismo gato pero rodando" (same cat but rolled around), i.e., no difference no change. As history has shown, we must create our own change despite the fear, risks, and challenges worsen by those who are harming our families and brothers and sisters, and state.

In summary, improvements in the '*bienestar'* (quality of life) of Latinos would not have occurred without the significant 'strategic' and long-term labor movements of the 1920s, post-World War II Mexican American civic organizing and advocacy of the 40s and 50s, and civil rights/Chicano engagement of the 1960s and 70s. To do anything less than our predecessors is to smile and accept our marginalization.

Where is our Texas Latino platform outlining a clear 5, 10, or 20-year strategy and collaborative actions for meaningful local and statewide change? Can we convene collaborative tables, and leave our target issues aside instead focus on the underline values, political power, and efforts underpinning the structural barriers to all the issues? Do we demonstrate solidarity across the diversity of Latinos - rural and urban, immigrant and non-immigrant, young and old, and those with economic stability and those without? Currently, most advocacy movement is reactive instead of proactive.

Let's get our casa in order and move aggressively to work with our brother and sister of color and White progressive allies to insert our values of democracy, diversity, and equity in our political and policy landscape.

The future of Latino families and our state is at-stake.