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## **Latina/o Studies: The Continuing Need for New Paradigms**

*by Joan Moore*  
*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*

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# Latina/o Studies: The Continuing Need for New Paradigms

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- *Provision of technical expertise and support to Latino communities in an effort to develop policy responses to local problems.*
- *Development of Latino faculty, including support for the development of curriculum and scholarship for Chicano/Latino Studies.*

# Latina/o Studies: The Continuing Need for New Paradigms

As a formally recognized field of study and teaching, Latina/o Studies started in the late 1960's in the Chicano Southwest and in Puerto Rican New York. The origins of the various Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies programs at that time lay less in a slow evolution of scholarly interests than in the urgent demands of angry students and a few faculty who insisted that universities begin to meet the educational needs of undeserved local Latina/os.

But in addition to activist concerns, intellectual issues were of critical importance to sociologists who were among the founding fathers and mothers of these programs. The study of race and ethnicity has been a major specialty within American sociology for the past century, but in the 60's few sociologists who were *not* directly involved with Latina/os knew or cared about them. This should not be too surprising. Almost all sociologists at that time were white, and if they thought at all about racial and ethnic cleavages in American society they thought first about African-Americans, and second about their own ancestors mostly immigrants from Europe. When I moved to California from Chicago as a new faculty member in the early 1960's, I had had absolutely no sociological exposure to Chicanos — and ethnicity was one of my primary specialties. I knew about one population of East Los Angeles — the Molokans, a minuscule Russian Protestant sect — but not about the Chicanos!

The civil rights movement and racial unrest of the late 1960's — both on and off campus — gave sociologists even more cause to think about African-Americans. They were particularly concerned with what had gone wrong with sociological predictions about race. Very few paid any attention to parallel expressions of discontent in Chicano and Puerto Rican communities.

Why? There were two main reasons. First, there was very little research literature on these populations, and what little existed was not widely circulated among sociologists. Looking at the bibliography we compiled for the Mexican-American Study Project in 1966, I count no more than a dozen books by and for sociologists about Mexican-Americans published by mainstream academic presses prior to 1965. What little there was on Mexican-Americans was largely

focused on rural populations.<sup>1</sup> Puerto Ricans, who began to migrate in large numbers between 1946 and 1964, attracted somewhat more sociological attention — probably because they settled in cities (like New York and Chicago) where mainstream sociology flourished. Several prominent sociologists, like C. Wright Mills and Nathan Glazer, undertook the study of these “new” migrants to their city, and they were joined by a few talented, though, less well-known researchers.

However, because Latina/os were so heavily outnumbered in those cities by African-Americans and European ethnics, they tended to be overlooked, which was the second major reason for their neglect in those days. In Chicago, the Young Lords attracted nowhere nearly as much attention as the Black Panthers, for example.

Thus, lack of research literature and the overshadowing by African-Americans were major reasons for sociological ignorance.<sup>2</sup> American sociology was therefore taken by surprise at the very presence of Latina/o sociologists at the tumultuous convention of 1969, let alone at their expressions of discontent with the discipline. Since that time, Latina/o sociologists have become far more visible: the professional association actually has a section devoted solely to Latina/Latino sociology.

The study of Latina/os has changed many sociological specialties. Nowhere, however, have the changes been as great as in the way in which sociologists conceptualize the Latino population itself — and especially the poorer members. Latina/os form such a large proportion of the poor that mainstream sociologists simply must pay attention to them. That is far less true for other specialties. It is a little artificial to limit this discussion to sociologists, since one of the main strengths of Latina/o studies is its interdisciplinary nature. However, the remainder of this chapter will focus on how Latina/o studies has challenged sociological paradigms, both historically and more recently.

## Some Historical Challenges

Sociologists concerned with Latina/os in the United States have rarely been very happy with the sociological models available to them. Historically,

they were faced with a choice between equally inappropriate models that pigeonholed the population with European immigrants on the one hand and those that identified them with African-Americans on the other.

Some of the earliest concerted Latina/o critiques of existing social science paradigms came in the 1970's. Chicano and Puerto Rican scholars vigorously contested the dominant assimilationist paradigm. Research had concentrated on the characteristics of European ethnics which facilitated or retarded their assimilation, acculturation, and upward mobility in the social class system — all taken as indicators of “progress”.<sup>3</sup> People of color — i.e. African-Americans, were seen as belonging to a subordinate caste, with its own separate and unequal class structure. Latina/os were largely ignored in this tradition, though in a rare exception Warner and Srole included them in their 1945 “timetable for assimilation”. Warner and Srole portrayed Latina/os as both phenotypically and culturally “deviant from the dominant American” patterns. They predicted that Latina/os would continue to be “greatly” subordinate, maintain strong ethnic subsystems, and be very slow to assimilate (1945:283-296).<sup>4</sup>

Chicano scholars mounted strong opposition to the assimilationist paradigm. They questioned its basic premise: did Chicanos *want* assimilation; was it really “progress”? They found one principle after another in the paradigm to be deficient (see e.g. Alvarez, 1973; Romano-V, 1968; Vaca, 1970). Warner and Srole's (and others') use of terms like “deviance” to describe the subculture was particularly galling.<sup>5</sup>

When Blauner's “internal colonialism” appeared (1969; 1972), it seemed at first to offer a fruitful alternative not only to the European immigrant model but also to the race/caste model that accompanied it. Internal colonialism distinguished between immigration (the European-American experience) and colonization (the experience of people of color). A new paradigm appeared that seemed to be particularly useful for the study of Latina/os. The title of Acuña's 1972 history of the Mexican-Americans — *Occupied America* — aptly summarizes the appeal of the model. Mexican-Americans were a conquered people, and they were still part of a colonized work force (Barrera, 1979).<sup>6</sup> But the model focused on features that all people of color had in common, while Chi-

cano sociologists were documenting the distinctiveness of the Chicano experience (Almaguer, 1971; Blauner, 1972:175; Flores, 1986; Moore, 1970). The special features of Puerto Rico's status as a colony and of its emigrants led a number of researchers away from the metaphor of internal colonialism. Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans on the mainland needed something more precise (see Bonilla et al., 1986).

## Paradigm Shift in the 1980's: The Underclass

By the 1980's, sociological interest in European immigrants had declined, and when people of color were discussed the primary focus was likely to derive from Wilson's (1987) paradigm-shattering theory of economic restructuring and the development of an “urban underclass”. This is a much more depressing topic — persistent and increasingly degrading poverty affecting people of color.

Wilson's work was based on African-Americans in Chicago, and there are a number of points at which the fit with Latina/os is less than comfortable. But the topic is particularly important, since a recent Census Bureau report showed that Latina/os were more likely than other population groups to experience continuing high levels of poverty (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

So how has the new focus on poverty as an outcome of economic and community restructuring been modified by research on the Latina/o poor? To answer that question, we first must examine the original theory and then ask how well it fit the Latina/o situation.

In his 1987 study, Wilson focused on changes in the historical poverty of urban African-Americans. He argued that in recent history the American economy and American race relations have been transformed, and with them the fate of the African-American poor. In his view, two changes were particularly important.

First, the old assimilation theory was based on the assumption that the expanding manufacturing-based economy, which characterized the U.S. for several decades after World War II, would persist indefinitely. But this economic base declined dramatically. The roots of the new poverty are to be found in the changed economic opportunities available to the urban poor.

Second, the world of state-sponsored *de jure* segregation is no longer with us. This meant that relationships between the classes in African-American communities changed dramatically, as middle-class residents were suddenly able to move (more or less) where they wished. Poor African-Americans were marooned in ghettos that used to hold middle-class as well as poor families. Poverty became concentrated, and this concentration vitiated social controls, undermined community institutions, and isolated the poor both socially and culturally. In short, it made poverty more degrading.

Even though Wilson's theory was grounded in African-American Chicago, it claimed a broader applicability — to the nation as a whole and to Latina/os as well as African-Americans. Some aspects of this claim seem fully justified. It is very apparent that economic restructuring affected all workers in the U.S., not just African-Americans. But “economic restructuring” means different things for Latina/os, and Latina/o studies has expanded the sociological concern with what is meant by the term.

It is equally apparent that the question of relationships between the classes is as important to Latino communities as it is to African-Americans. But the source of change in inter-class relations is not at all the same.

### **Expanding the Concern with Economic Restructuring**

How has the study of Latina/os expanded sociological concern with economic restructuring? First I will discuss the manufacturing and the service sectors, and then turn to immigration, an area where there is no African-American counterpart to what affects Latino communities. I will conclude with a brief reference to the illicit economy.

*The Manufacturing Sector:* For many sociologists, “economic restructuring” is synonymous with “de-industrialization,” but that's not adequate for Latina/os. Indeed, the extreme poverty of Puerto Ricans is probably a result of their concentration in a manufacturing area, and Latina/os in the industrialized parts of the Sunbelt were also deeply affected by Rustbelt-style de-industrialization. However, in many areas of Latino concentration there is almost no manufacturing. Los Angeles did have manufactur-

ing, and suffered a major wave of plant closings that put a number of Latina/os out of work, but what affected Latina/os in San Antonio was the closing of the Kelly Field air base, and in Houston it was the restructuring of the oil industry (Rodriguez, 1993).

Wilson's original theory also ignored re-industrialization, which is particularly important for understanding Latino poverty. Many low-paid manufacturing jobs that depend on immigrant Latina/o labor have been created in the Rustbelt as well as in the Sunbelt (Chinchilla et al., 1993; Fernandez-Kelly and Sassen, 1991; Morales, 1985; McCarthy and Valdez, 1986; Muller and Espenshade, 1986; Soja, et al., 1983). On the surface this pattern may look like simple competition between immigrants and resident minorities that lowers the wages for U.S. Latina/os.<sup>7</sup> On further analysis, it may turn out to involve very complex relationships between immigrant culture and entrepreneurial patterns of exploitation, as in the case of Dominican entrepreneurs and Dominican garment workers (cf Torres and Bonilla, 1993).

Virtually no attention has been paid to the consequences of national economic shifts for the poorest of the Mexican-American population - those who live in the string of cities along the Mexican border. These border cities are particularly salient to questions about how American populations are affected by the globalization of the economy. The well being of those towns is affected by shifts in the Mexican economy as they are by shifts in the American economy, and by the quintessential low-wage industrialization; the *maquilas* of Mexico (Valdez, 1993).

In sum, the study of Latina/os has provided us with a more nuanced view of what economic restructuring means for manufacturing.

*The Service Sector:* The sociological cliché is that economic restructuring means replacement of good manufacturing jobs with “Mac jobs” – poor jobs in the service sector. However, a look at Latina/os and particularly Sassen's look at New York's Latina/os has entirely changed the way in which sociologists look at the service sector. She has shown us that the service jobs held by Latina/os in major cities — the “global cities” — are intimately tied to the emergence of the elite of the global economy (Sassen, 1988; 1991). Many of these Latina/os are immigrants, and do work that caters to the needs

of well-to-do employees of the burgeoning corporate sector. Often these jobs are informal: they may involve pick-up street labor, like Los Angeles' gardeners (see Portes et al., 1989).

Moreover, there are so many immigrants in global cities that their own demand for ethnic-relevant goods and services generates new jobs. These are poorly paid, by and large, but occasionally offer the opportunity for entrepreneurship. As in manufacturing, the interaction between Latina/o entrepreneurs and Latina/o workers often entails a degree of informalization — and exploitation — that is cloaked under the guise of ethnic convenience and solidarity.<sup>8</sup> But “global economy” and “informalization” provide new ways to think about service jobs, and it is Latina/o sociologists who have expanded these sociological horizons.

*Immigration as Economic Force, and the Question of Ethnic Economies:* Immigration plays a very important economic role in most cities with large Latino concentrations, and is almost entirely ignored in Wilson's original African-American centered theory. To begin with, immigration greatly affects manufacturing, by providing an exploitable labor pool that permits work to be easily informalized (Gordon and Sassen, 1992; Soja, et al., 1984; Stepick, 1989). Immigrant labor boosts informalization in other industries, as well, e.g. in construction, hotel, and food services. The most recent immigrants experience a continuing “dialectic between exploitation and redundancy” (Fernandez-Kelly, personal communication, 1994).

In addition, Latino immigrants have contributed greatly to the expansion of the informal sector outside of such industries. “Casual self-employment” (Stepick, 1989:126) includes street vending, front-yard sales, yard work and “handyman” work for homeowners (largely construction), skilled labor (like auto, electronic, and shoe repair) from the home, child and elder care, hair care, occasional curanderismo, street-corner labor pools, and household service. Every city with a large immigrant population reports the proliferation of such activities in recent years.

Many of these casual jobs are confined to Latino communities, and are analyzed as immigrant entrepreneurship. They are part of the Cuban enclave economy in Miami, for example (Stepick, 1989). The enclave economy, of course, includes many for-

mal enterprises, but one of its features is its greater reliance on informality, e.g. family businesses and informal arrangements with workers. Enclave economies have emerged in many Latino communities (see Chinchilla and Hamilton, 1989; Hansen and Cardenas, 1990; Sullivan, 1993).<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Latina/o studies has forced sociologists to recognize that virtually all of the sources of Latino immigration to the U.S. mainland have been tightly tied in one way or another to the American economy and to economic restructuring. Bonilla et al. call Puerto Rico a “regional extension of American capitalism” (1986: 79), and its strains provide the major basis for understanding the *va y ven* (back and forth) pattern of Puerto Rican migration (see also Melendez, 1987, cited in Morales and Bonilla, 1993). The flow between the Dominican Republic and the U.S. is analyzed in similar terms (Sassen, 1988), and the *maquilas* on the Mexican border may play a parallel role in “preparing” Mexicans for migration (cf Chavez, 1992).

*The Illicit Economy:* Sociologists almost totally neglect the illicit economy, both because it is very difficult to study and because many researchers feel that documenting illicit behavior will further stigmatize poor people of color. Unfortunately, the numbers should make us look again. As of 1989, approximately 10% of young Latina/os were under some form of correctional or court supervision (Mauer, 1990), and drug dealing (the most widespread form of illicit economic behavior) is punished with increasing severity. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the drug trade has greatly expanded in recent years. It is a significant feature of many inner-city economies, and is associated with many of the behaviors that make life in those communities difficult. A few researchers have acknowledged the importance of drug trafficking in Latino communities (e.g. Stepick, 1989, in Miami, and Valdez, 1993, in south Texas, Hagedorn, 1994 in Milwaukee, and myself, 1979 in Los Angeles). These researchers make a consistent effort to understand drug dealers in the context of their poor communities and poor families, and this contextualization is beginning to find its way into even the most narrowly oriented textbooks.

I'll turn now to the second topic — relations between the classes.



## Changes in Community Social Structure

For Wilson, two factors concentrated African-American poverty in Chicago: the loss of industrial jobs, and the opening up of non-ghetto housing. This latter factor in part does not really pertain to Latina/os. Wilson suggests that the counterpart for Latino communities has been the recent influx of immigrants.<sup>10</sup>

*Do Immigrants Concentrate Poverty? And With What Effect?* Indeed, there is little doubt that Latino immigrant communities are poorer than native-born Latino communities, and that Latino/a immigrants concentrate poverty (Morales and Ong, 1993:72).<sup>11</sup> However, there is a much more positive side to the story. Sassen documents the development of new jobs in Latino immigrant economies in New York, and Rodriguez (1993) expands on the point for Houston. Immigrant concentration is not *just* a concentration of poverty: social and economic resources are concentrated as well. Rodriguez argues that the social isolation of immigrant communities is “functional and apparently highly positive” (1993:125).<sup>12</sup>

But how do immigrants affect the older, more established Latino communities? For generations, Mexican-American communities have experienced a circulation through the barrios, with immigrants coming in and the upwardly mobile moving out.<sup>13</sup> Rodriguez (1993) calls this process a “continuous reproduction of the communities’ traditional culture,” and the volume of the most recent wave of immigration means that the process has been intensified.

Thus the immigrant presence leads to cultural revitalization — particularly in Mexican communities. The Spanish language and some “old country” norms become part of the cultural scene, reflected most conspicuously in the growth of Spanish language media. Immigrants also seem generally to infuse many of these communities with renewed energy - visible, for example, in home improvements (Moore and Vigil, 1993).

Secondly, immigrants are also important in the forging and restructuring of institutions, and religious institutions have been particularly affected. Immigrants have offered the Catholic Church a number of major and diverse challenges both by virtue of the general “Hispanization” of its flocks and by virtue of the special needs of particular national origin groups (Dolan and Deck, 1994).<sup>14</sup> Salvadorans, for example,

inspired the sanctuary movement and Cubans became Catholicized in large numbers only after their immigration to the United States. Evangelical Protestant parishes have multiplied in Latino immigrant communities, and render an enhanced version of many of the same functions as extended kin groups, providing access to housing, food, jobs, and a sense of belonging for their members (Moore and Vigil, 1993). Religious institutions are seldom studied except by specialists, but they may be almost as important as the family in providing support and social control functions. The vitality of Latino religion stands in sharp contrast to the reputed decline in the traditionally important African-American churches.

In short, it is important to distinguish between the economic and the non-economic roles of immigrants in Latino communities. Poverty becomes more concentrated, but both the causes and the consequences are quite different from the concentration of poverty in the demoralized Chicago housing projects portrayed by Wilson. By and large, immigrants do not seem to contribute to social disorganization.

## Conclusion

What has the study of Latina/os contributed to sociology? There is a dramatic difference between the ways in which sociologists conceptualized Latina/os before and after the rise of Latina/o studies. The earlier paradigms, which emphasized assimilation, were alienating to a number of Latina/os, as the personal documents of several sociologists indicate (Mirandé, 1988; Williams, 1988). Wilson’s new paradigm, by contrast, was subject to almost immediate modification from sociologists emphasizing the varied situations of Latina/os.

They expanded the concept of economic restructuring well beyond its original meaning of de-industrialization, now to include re-industrialization, informalization, shifts in the service sector, the general influence of immigrants, the development of enclave economies and the illicit economy. However, although economic changes are necessary in order to understand the new poverty, they are not sufficient. They have refined Wilson’s concept of concentration of poverty and its effects. A comparison of the literature on Latina/os and African-Americans suggests that if we substitute immigration for middle-class out-migration as a source of poverty concentration, we find that it has very different consequences.

Has all of this work been fully incorporated into the mainstream? Probably not yet — but, as I remarked earlier, the numerical importance of Latino poverty means that full incorporation is inevitable. Has the same been true for other fields within sociology? It depends on the field. In some fields, e.g. the study of the family, stereotypes tend to prevail (Williams, 1990). Yet in each of the subspecialties within sociology there is now enough research that focuses on Latina/os so that Latina/o sociology students do not have to experience the devastating sense of alienation that afflicted earlier generations. There is a base. More importantly, high growth rates, and increasingly dispersed patterns of Latino settlement in the United States means that one sociological specialty

after another simply *must* come to terms with this real-world phenomenon. After all, isn't that what sociology is all about? The base will inevitably expand.

Does this mean that Latina/o studies will become irrelevant as the discipline of sociology absorbs more and more about this population? I think not. As I remarked earlier, one of the great strengths of Latina/o studies is its interdisciplinary nature. This chapter has concentrated on sociological contributions, but it is the interaction of economists, anthropologists, political scientists, and humanists working together with sociologists, on topics of high priority to Latina/o studies, which will continue to break new ground for each of the disciplines.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Bogardus (1934), Burma (1954), Gamio (1930, 1931), Greer (1959), and D'Antonio and Form (1965) were the exceptions.
- 2 Furthermore, the media deliberately suppressed stories of Latino urban unrest, which started after a fairly prolonged period of African-American rioting. Media decided that reports of further unrest — no matter what the ethnicity of the protesters — would make an unsafe city even more dangerous.
- 3 Assimilationism developed from Park's race relations cycle, which argued that contacts between ethnic groups led in an irreversible sequence to competition, accommodation and "eventual assimilation" (1950 [1926]:150). The cycle was intended to illuminate all inter-ethnic contacts throughout history.
- 4 Race was particularly important. For example, it was predicted that darker Puerto Ricans would develop into castes or "semi-castes," while mestizos had a different fate: "If and when the Spanish-Americans and Mexicans lose their cultural identity, those of the more Caucasoid type will become a part of our class order and be capable of rising in our social hierarchy. The darker ones will probably become semi-caste. ...It may be possible that this latter group will merge with the Mongoloid or Negroid groups" (Warner and Srole, 1945:295).
- 5 Two so-called cultural "deterrents to assimilation" were particularly resented by the new scholars as unfairly castigating Chicano populations. The first was the high degree of language loyalty, and the second was the cultural emphasis on family cohesiveness. There was outrage at the idea that either language loyalty or family cohesiveness was the major hindrance to economic progress.
- 6 For the period 1900-1930, Barrera argues that in Southwestern agriculture Mexicans were a colonial labor force because they were repressed, subject to a dual wage system and a low-wage occupationally stratified system; used as a reserve; and used to buffer the impact of economic downturns on Anglo workers (1979:76ff). The colonial model had practical implications, as well: "decolonization," Murguia (1975) argued, implied that upward mobility should be de-emphasized in favor of consciousness-raising about oppression and resistance.
- 7 The question of immigrant vs. African-American competition has been addressed by several researchers, all contradicting the media and popular stereotype that immigrants displace native Blacks. 1980-90 comparisons corroborate the finding. Earlier data indicated that Latino immigrants were lowering the wage levels of native Latinos, but by the late 1980's this was no longer the case (Enchautegui, 1993).
- 8 The extent to which entrepreneurs in ethnic enclaves exploit their fellow ethnics has provoked a lively controversy. See Nee and Sanders, 1987; Portes and Jensen, 1987; Sanders and Nee, 1987; Jensen and Portes, 1992; and Nee et al., 1994).
- 9 The historical question of Latino ethnic enclaves has been begged. It was of great importance in Houston, for example. In the early days, colonia residents depended on Mexican owned enterprises and it was not until recently that Mexican-Americans became American consumers and workers (Rodriguez, 1993).

- 10 Wilson takes a pessimistic view of the effects of immigration on local social structures (1987:35-36). Generalizing from the African-American experience, he argues that it is difficult for immigrants to find occupational niches, and that they are especially vulnerable to economic restructuring. Therefore, he projected, Hispanic immigrants might see more joblessness and social disorganization in the not too distant future.
- 11 Immigrants also strain the resources of state-financed institutions, particularly public health care and school systems, and this in turn makes for difficulties at the local level (see Castellanos, et al., 1989 for school problems in Los Angeles).
- 12 Immigrants find not only a comfortable ambience, but also hometown social networks that provide access to jobs, housing and recreation, even though they are socially isolated from mainstream America, and even though there is crime.
- 13 Obviously, the lower level of housing segregation for Latinos as compared with Blacks — at least since World War II — has facilitated this movement. So has the continuous growth of the population. The Mexican-American concentration east of downtown Los Angeles, for example, has expanded almost continuously, and its eastern borders have always seen a classic process of invasion and succession as formerly Anglo areas become first mixed and finally all-Mexican.
- 14 The issue was taken seriously enough to generate a working group that produced a two-volume study of Hispanics and the Catholic Church, under the editorship of Jay Dolan, to be published by Notre Dame University Press. It is very obvious that not only do immigrant Latinos affect the Church, but that many of its newer theological strands and liturgical innovations are also adapted from Latino models.