

World City/Regional City: Latinos and African-Americans in Chicago and St. Louis

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ABSTRACT

In the mid-1990s, the congressional Republican majority and Gov. Pete Wilson of California placed the blame for a falling standard of living on Latino immigrants, urban African-Americans, and so-called “welfare abuse.” Although a booming economy and low unemployment rates lessened the political pressure to blame immigrants and the working poor for social problems, it remains unlikely that the benefits of economic expansion will accrue to lower-income households. This working paper examines income, education, and household/family organization from 1980 to 1990, with a special focus on Latinos and African-Americans in Chicago and Kansas City. It suggests areas for further research when comparing how ethnic groups fare in “World Cities” such as Chicago in relation to smaller, less “globalized” towns and cities in the Midwest. The paper also provides ample bibliographical references regarding Latinos in the Midwest, an increasingly important research area where much work remains undone about past, present, and future Latino communities and neighborhoods. Once the U.S. Census for 2000 has been completed and published, will we find that a strong economy and “welfare reform” has improved conditions for African-Americans and Latinos? The authors argue that a better understanding of the insertion of each group into its specific urban socioeconomic context is crucial to developing collaborative strategies and policies to unite, rather than divide, the African-American and Latino communities of Midwestern cities.