

Latino Youth: Converting Challenges to Opportunities

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Working Paper No. 50

June 2001

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at understanding Latino youth challenges and concentrates on: 1) an assessment of the demographic transformation which highlights the importance of studying the Latino population in general; 2) an examination of the role of Latino youth in the changing national context; 3) an overview of Latino youth in terms of the official definition of who they are and a discussion of the growing debate over Latino identity and Hispanicity; and 4) an examination of Latino diversity and unity. The authors also discuss the reasons why national policies like immigration and welfare reform heighten awareness of Latinos. They also examine some troubling socioeconomic indicators that challenge Latinos as a whole, such as problems with low income, education, unemployment, deviance, juvenile crime, etc. They found that Latino youth are not achieving the type of education that prepares them for better paying, high skill, professional jobs. They are facing problems of poverty, family dysfunction, and deviant behavior, at least on par with other ethnic groups or even to a greater degree. They also found that despite these concerns, most Latino youth possess the skills ideally suited for a global world, namely the skills of being bilingual, multicultural, and acute awareness of social changes within local communities. The authors argue that Latino youth represent a critical part of this nation's future leaders and workers and are increasingly needed by an aging population in a global world of more trade and international competition. They call for a full-scale blueprint investment in Latino youth and their future.