

Urban Hispanic Poverty in the U.S.: Theory and Context

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ABSTRACT

The following essay presents an overview of various issues concerning the high rate of poverty among urban Hispanics (Latinos) in the United States. The major contemporary theories and hypotheses relating to poverty among ethnic or racial minorities are briefly outlined with a view toward assessing how well they appear to help explain the impoverishment of urban Latinos. None of the explanations covered appears to fully explain the problem by itself, although two or three appear to account well for a substantial part of it. In part, this is likely to result from the fact that the Hispanic population of the United States consists of several subgroups with vastly different experiences in this country. Indeed, the initial and major arguments of the paper consist of emphasizing the importance of separating the Latino subgroups for individual treatment when analyzing their respective economic circumstances. In particular, it is shown that differences in the subgroups' timing and patterns of settlement can affect their relative well-being. The focus of the essay is on the two largest of the Latino subgroups, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, who together are shown to account for over 4 out of 5 of the known Hispanic poor. The author gratefully acknowledges the helpful comments on early drafts of this paper by Julie Quiroz, of the National Council of La Raza, and Dr. Joseph Spielberg Benitez, Julian Samora Research Institute.

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