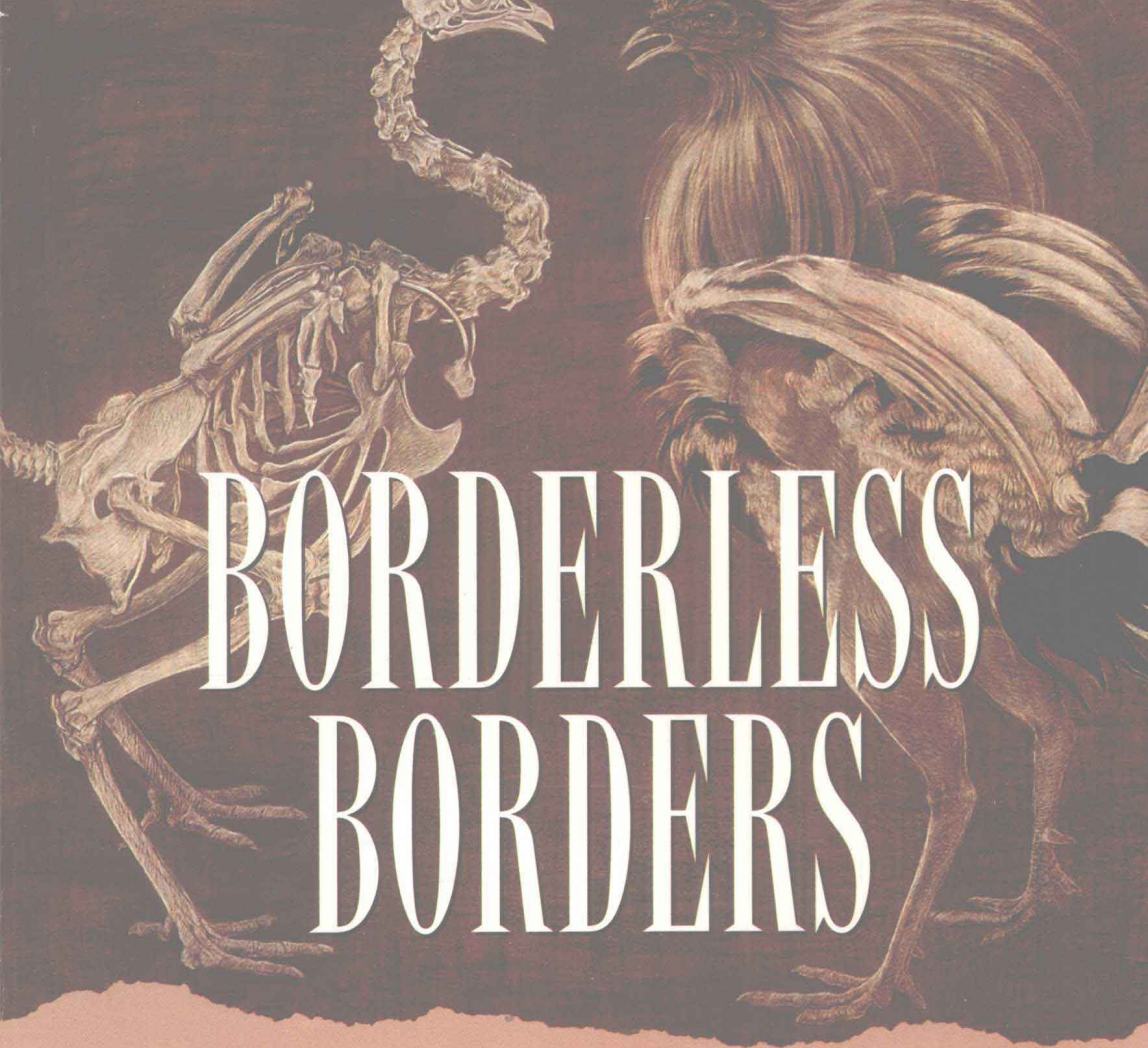

BORDERLESS BORDERS

U.S. Latinos, Latin Americans, and the Paradox of Interdependence

EDITED BY

Frank Bonilla, Edwin Meléndez, Rebecca Morales, and María de los Angeles Torres

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This volume culminates more than a decade of effort by Latinos in a Changing U.S. Economy, a working group operating under the umbrella of the Inter-University Program for Latino Research (IUPLR). Along with others, this team pioneered a now-established mode of collaboration across academic institutions, disciplines, communities, and policy specialties. The Bellagio Conference on which the book is based provided a setting in which to explore the most recent trends in global restructuring. This opportunity, unique perhaps for a Latino-centered enterprise, was generously supported by the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Study and Conference Center, by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and by the Ford Foundation. Key staff persons at these institutions who helped to guide and monitor the project include Susan Garfield, Stephanie Bell-Rose, Mahnaz Isprahani, Antonio Romero, Linda Triangolo, Pasquale Pesce, and Aida Rodriguez. The volume editors coordinated four groups of writers (corresponding to the four sections of this book) who addressed the principal themes of the conference throughout the planning phase and the completion of this book and the associated video, a task stretching over nearly four years. (The video is available from IUPLR, University of Texas at Austin, P.O. Box 8180, Austin, TX 78713-8180.) Details of day-to-day coordination for the conference were efficiently managed by Ana LoBiondo, then part of the IUPLR headquarters staff. Michele Miller Adams helped in the preparation of the manuscript. Bibiana Suárez coordinated the images and text.

Preface

Changing the Americas from Within the United States

Frank Bonilla

Over the past several decades, Latinos in the United States have emerged as strategic actors in major processes of social transformation. This new reality—the Latinization of the United States—is driven by forces that extend well beyond U.S. borders and asserts itself demographically and politically, in the workplace and in daily life. The perception that Latinos are now positioned to bring about change in the Americas from within the United States has taken hold, prompting hemispheric governments to cultivate new forms of relationships with emigrant communities.

In December 1994 the Inter-University Program for Latino Research (IUPLR) convened a conference at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center in northern Italy. Scholars, policy specialists, community advocates, and cultural workers came together to take stock of pertinent research and policy on the present condition and promise of Latino peoples, with a special focus on the transnational dimension. During the past decade, IUPLR has promoted a substantial body of research on the significance of the binational and global processes of the major Latino communities in the United States—Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Central Americans. Four themes were highlighted in sessions extending over three days:

- Emergent forms of global and transnational interdependence
- The negative impact and demographic repercussions within the United States, especially in Latino communities, of economic and political restructuring
- Changing concepts of and social bases for community formation, citizenship, political participation, and human rights as individuals are obliged to construct identities in more than one sociopolitical setting
- Fresh pathways into international relations and issue-oriented social movements and organizations among these highly mobile populations

A primary objective of the conference was the formulation of a long-term research, policy, and organization-building agenda linking the intellectual and political resources generated by Latinos in the United States with counterparts in their countries of origin. The following sketch is meant to convey what was accomplished on each front and some of the common ground between the conference's four main themes and the work presented in this volume.

Global Interdependence. Complex and interlocking forms of interdependence are emerging between the United States and Latin America, involving the movement of capital, modes of industrialization, trade, migration, and growing inequality. As fluid movement across political boundaries interacts with the continued assertion of national, regional, and community controls over economic processes, Latinos throughout the hemisphere are in strategic positions to define and assert new interests, identities, and voices in economic and foreign policy. Two days before the Bellagio meeting, Latin American presidents at the Miami "Summit of the Americas" embraced a broad array of reformist strategies—a show of unanimity that belied the objective indeterminacy of the outcomes of these measures and the potential roles of social actors not represented at the summit. This tension between the premises and projections of those committed to specific neoliberal policies and those wishing to withhold judgment while pursuing further inquiries surfaced repeatedly in the Bellagio deliberations.

The Reconfigured United States. Parallel processes of restructuring within the United States, some tied directly to transnational dynamics, are shaping the incorporation of Latinos into the work force and other institutional domains. National origin weighs heavily in these adaptations via the formation of networks, enclaves, shared social capital, and distinctive forms of social performance. At the same time, inequality is growing, reinforced by institutionalized exclusion, selective incorporation, and heightened hostility against newcomers, all documented among the principal Latino populations and similarly situated communities. Defensive empowering strategies put into place over the past few decades, however, now position Latinos to claim a place in the policy-making apparatus at every level.

Community, Identity, and Civil Rights. Diaspora communities identify themselves according to national origin, while political demands call for or seek to impose an overarching Latino identity. The tensions between community processes and the structures through which people can participate in politics are particularly complicated. Moreover, homeland and host country interact in the lives of most Latinos, who must address events as diverse as the 1994 Chiapas uprising, Central American peace processes, the effects of NAFTA, Proposition 187, changing patterns of

border crossings and their policing, and shifts in refugee and immigration law, in terms of their human and legal dimensions. There are few analytical or practical approaches, and even fewer legal constructs, through which people can understand and act upon these disparate and often conflicting relationships. Conventional models of assimilation deal with only a narrow segment of these problems. The encounters in this session among community organizers, lawyers, human rights advocates, artists, and academics from the humanities and social sciences were encouraging and productive. The successful integration of these perspectives foreshadowed at the conference is a distinctive feature of this volume.

International Dialogue. Participants offered sharply contrasting views of the conditions and prospects for a more inclusive and productive international dialogue that is responsive to human needs and rights. An optimistic vision (stimulated by the recent Miami Summit) emphasized steps toward full democratization of formally elected governments, accompanied by commitments to government reforms, renewed social initiatives, and a revitalized partnership between the United States and Latin America. However, detailed treatment of the political situation in Cuba, as well as "bottom up" perspectives articulated by labor organizers, feminists, environmentalists, and human rights advocates, documented persistent inequalities and limited progress in advancing popular interests in the transnational setting, despite the increasing activity of nongovernmental organizations. In addition, an overview of competing models for regional integration and development (European, Asian, and Western) found them all deficient, especially in their capacity to deal with persistent and growing inequality and popular discontent. These judgments reaffirmed the complexity of the task ahead and its long-term character. Yet participants' experiences on the cutting edge of these issues provided realistic hopes for mapping a Latino path through this maze of contradictions.

Ironically, the perception that Latinos and other minorities in the United States are destined to play an increasingly active role in U.S. foreign and domestic policy crystallized in the 1980s, the very decade that dealt them the most serious material setbacks since the depression of the 1930s.[1] With the national and international policy establishments in disarray, Latinos are claiming enhanced readiness and practical capacity to enter these policy domains in a context of authoritatively declared crises in the social and natural sciences and pervasive disjuncture between social scientific endeavors and technocratic policy management. In 1992 a Gulbenkian Foundation commission called for a comprehensive "restructuring of the social sciences," signaling a widespread concern about the bounds of traditional disciplines and distinctive scientific "cultures." "Scholars," the commission noted, "feel dismayed at the state of the social sciences, but very little is being done collectively to change the situation."[2]

The centrality of Latino and Latin American Studies in this connection and the linking of these intellectual resources to the challenges of analyzing global and hemispheric changes has become a salient theme in these contentious debates.[3]

This is a far cry from the reigning mentality some three decades ago, when Daniel Bell, speaking for the National Commission on the Year 2000, declared confidently that there would be no foreseeable economic or political challenge in what remained of the century that the U.S. economy and political structure could not resolve. More recently, however, Bell has come to see the work of essaying projections into the next century as akin to "lighting a small candle in the middle of a hurricane to see if there is a way out."[4] Uncertainty has penetrated even the natural sciences. Physicist Murray Gell-Mann, a 1969 Nobel prize winner who is currently probing the dilemmas of reconciling the adaptive strategies of human communities with those driven by natural evolution on a planetary scale, echoes Bell's imagery. Immanent contradictions in the adaptive schemata of the biosphere over some four billion years are, in Gell-Mann's view, now poised to converge destructively in a not-too-distant future with cognate processes of human adaptation over some 100 million years. Speaking of Project 2050, recently launched to map paths toward "sustainable" development—that is, a future in which both human communities and the natural environment may prosper—he says, "We are all in a situation that resembles driving a fast vehicle at night over unknown terrain that is rough, full of gullies, with precipices not far off. Some kind of headlight, even a feeble and flickering one, may help to avoid some of the worst disasters."[5]

The Gell-Manns among scientists see poverty-stricken, tropical nations as prime settings for the unfolding of this apocalyptic vision. In this light, they can construe ongoing debt swaps between the United States and Latin American nations that include some provisions for environmental measures as "planetary bargains."[6] However, equally pressing planetary bargains remain to be undertaken within the United States, especially in communities along the U.S.-Mexican border and in major cities across the country where Latino peoples are highly segregated and subject to environmental hazards.[7]

Other, less abstruse forms of U.S.-Latin American interdependence have been widely acknowledged for some time, but their implications in terms of U.S. policy, especially with successive changes in U.S. national administrations, remain obscure. Experts are realizing that there is now no clearly framed U.S. policy toward Latin America and that whatever stances are improvised will depend mainly on how the United States manages its own internal social crisis. Abraham Lowenthal, a seasoned Latin Americanist and executive director of the Inter-American Dialogue,

has stated the matter forthrightly: "The single greatest factor that will define U.S.-Latin American relations in the decade of the 1990s will be whether and how the United States confronts its own economic and political agenda."[8]

Should these insights prove accurate, they add to the conditions under which significant contingents of U.S.-based Latinos will be drawn into social movements across national boundaries. The limited democratization that has been part of more than a decade of neoliberal economic reform in most of Latin America has done little to cushion the impact of deepening absolute poverty and undiminished inequality and even less to muster hopes and popular support for reforms by government decree.[9] The inefficacy of traditional left and labor organizations in the present circumstances seems also to have set in motion a combined movement of ethnic, gender, and regional resistance partly modeled on and readily linked with its counterparts in the United States, as John Brown Childs has observed:

> As ethnic and gender demands come into Latin America's social consciousness, positive outcomes can fortify the future of tridimensional alliances (ethnicity, gender, class) on a basis of equality. . . . From this communal point of reference, and in association with a set of political commonalities, movements can become transnational indeed. It is in this communal space where there are clear bases for creating transcommunal cadres as answers to transnational attacks.
>
> To not develop such transcommunal cadres for the 21st century is to risk a weakened, divided and conflicted marginalized general population confronted by a well-united ruling social bloc that is actually quite demographically diverse but which is separated by class and privilege from the rest of the America[s].[10]

At the Bellagio conference and in this volume we chronicle in a critical spirit the structural processes and active interventions taking place within and outside U.S. Latino communities. These have produced a complex of challenges and opportunities for resistance and constructive action in social policy, some of which are explored in the chapters that follow.

Contents

Chapter 1

Dependence or Interdependence: Issues and Policy Choices Facing Latin Americans and Latinos

Rebecca Morales

Over the last decade, the Western Hemisphere has become progressively integrated economically. This is particularly evident among the industrialized and advanced industrializing countries of North and South America. Here, as elsewhere worldwide, regional blocs are gaining prominence, each shaped by unique developmental paths. The term "interdependence" has been used to convey the way in which the welfare of each country within the region affects that of others. In the Americas, this path has been guided by liberal economic policies, combining economic growth with high rates of poverty and income inequality and a heightened mobility of people and capital. However, interdependence extends well beyond economics. The interpenetration of societies has changed political systems, the nature of social relationships, and forms of cultural expression. In the midst of this transition, the status of Latinos in the United States and of disadvantaged Latin Americans has become more tenuous and at the same time increasingly central to understanding the broader implications of interdependence.

Latinos are now so prominent that they are expected to make up 15 percent of the population by the year 2020, thereby becoming the nation's largest minority. Yet they are for the most part poor and disenfranchised, even though the growth of the U.S. economy has become the envy of other industrialized countries. Latin America has also seen escalating poverty and inequality, despite such growth-stimulating policies as monetary devaluation, fiscal deficit reduction, and increased trade. The lives of U.S. Latinos and Latin Americans are becoming increasingly interlinked through a process of economic, political, and social integration. The purpose of this volume is to examine the nature of the ties that are being forged in order to understand the meaning of interdependence for Latinos and the growing number of disadvantaged Latin Americans.

The four parts of this volume take up the key issues in turn. Part I examines the process of global interdependence. Although the period from the end of the Cold War to the present has seen the rise of free trade and the spread of democratization—two elements associated with the modern state—there has been no corresponding improvement in social

justice. Income inequality and poverty are pervasive throughout the hemisphere. Will interdependence ultimately be accompanied by a decline in disparity, thereby leading to individual economic *independence*? Or will it instead lead to the disenfranchisement of whole segments of society, which will then become even more *dependent* on social intervention? This dilemma has become the center of a major policy debate across the hemisphere, and is critical to the well-being of Latinos and Latin Americans.

The difficulty of determining policy outcomes is exacerbated by the limitations of national sovereignty. Transnational movements of firms, nongovernmental organizations, multilateral institutions, capital, and people are eroding traditional spheres of influence associated with nation-states. Rules governing inclusion and exclusion are under constant challenge—not only issues of citizenship and immigration, but also such far-reaching questions as the role of the state versus that of the firm in the market, and the changing boundaries of the firm. Borders of all kinds, not just those delineating the physical boundaries of a nation-state, are being penetrated and in many instances replaced by new intersections, resulting in what we have termed "borderless borders."

Part II concerns the way interdependence affects the economic well-being of Latinos in the United States. Despite Latinos' long history in this country and their many contributions to its founding and growth, the large wave of recent immigrants, migrants, and refugees makes the overall Latino population relatively young and new. From this complex mosaic of generations and backgrounds come people with vastly different expectations and outcomes. The heterogeneous category "Latinos" comprises political refugees from left- and right-wing dictatorships, the wealthy and the disinherited, fourth-generation citizens and recent immigrants. Despite variations, the largest and fastest-growing groups are those who are falling behind economically; for them, the benefits of economic integration seem particularly remote. These groups are learning new ways of coping and developing their communities. Rather than embracing the questionable image of the United States as a melting pot, they are looking to community networks and the development of social capital as sources of strength. In so doing, they are reopening debates about growth versus development, and how development occurs cross-culturally.

The changing nature of culture and identity during this period is the theme of Part III. As previously noted, "Latinos" are by no means homogeneous. Individuals may identify with different nationalities, such as Puerto Rican, Dominican, or Salvadoran, and be further distinguished by immigrant status, class, language, or color, but they understand the use of "Latino" as a societal identifier. Use of either a more specific self-descriptor or the broad label of "Latino" depends on the circumstances. Although Latinos may appear to enter society through a few avenues, a more nu-

anced examination reveals a number of complex dimensions. Furthermore, despite international ties, transnational connections have failed to emerge uniformly. Rather, the rise of a highly international Latino population, combined with an economy having strong international links, is creating contradictions among Latinos and dividing those who are favored from those who are not. Similar contradictions surface across the generations. The result is a concept of *Latinismo* that is in many ways richer than in the past, but also filled with ambiguity. In this context, civil institutions have generally not come to terms with the demands of the new polity.

Part IV focuses on the need to redefine both frameworks for analyzing trends and methods for collective action to influence policy outcomes. Here, "borderless borders" refers to disciplinary boundaries and traditional approaches for influencing decision-makers. The integration of economy, society, and polity in the Americas is bringing together the previously distinct fields of Latino Studies and Latin American Studies, in spite of deeply ingrained opposing forces. At the same time, it is uniting unexpected allies in the struggle to address problems despite a context in which national efficacy has been seriously eroded and often supplanted by interventions at the local and multistate regional levels. Tensions between global decisions and local consequences are challenging both theory and action as the process of integration deepens. Latinos and Latin Americans are now in the forefront of defining new disciplines and shaping the rise of a new transnational citizens' diplomacy.

Although the process of interdependence has resulted in greater opportunity for some, it has led to persistent and growing social and economic imbalances for others. The imbalances have had a disproportionately negative effect on Latinos in the United States and on the poor in Latin America, resulting in a growing sense of urgency. These groups have only recently entered into sustained discussions of sufficient intensity to alter policy,[1] but the 1997 annual meeting of the National Council of La Raza, which featured Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo, testifies to their emerging strength. The current challenge is to understand how the opportunities created by interdependence can be used to benefit Latinos and disadvantaged Latin Americans. This volume is a contribution to that dialogue. Toward this end, we begin by briefly examining the status of Latinos and Latin Americans.

Growing Poverty and Income Inequality: The U.S. Experience

Latinos in a Changing U.S. Economy: Comparative Perspectives on Growing Inequality, published in 1993, warned of a growing economic, social, and political isolation of Latinos in the United States.[2] Historically, Latinos

enjoyed an economic standing midway between Anglos and African-Americans. Given current indicators, the authors argued, the situation could easily worsen. Change was evident just four years later. In January 1997 the *New York Times* ran a front-page article under the headline "Hispanic Households Struggle as Poorest of the Poor in the U.S." As the article noted:

> While other groups are staying ahead of inflation, Hispanic families, whether American born or newly arrived, are falling behind. . . . Census data show that for the first time the poverty rate among Hispanic people in the United States has surpassed that of blacks. Hispanic residents now constitute nearly 24 percent of the country's poor. . . . Of all Hispanic residents, 30 percent were considered poor in 1995, meaning they earned less than $15,569 for a family of four. That is almost three times the percent of non-Hispanic whites in poverty. Of the poorest of the poor, those with incomes of $7,500 or less for a family of four, 24 percent were Hispanic. . . . Overall, income for Hispanic households has dropped 14 percent since 1989, from about $26,000 to under $22,900, while rising slightly for blacks.[3]

U.S. census statistics further document that the "Hispanic population is experiencing an almost across-the-board impoverishment." According to one commentator, "It is the American nightmare, not the American dream."[4]

What went wrong? Several factors contribute to the problem:

- Structural changes in the economy that have drastically reduced the number of well-paid blue-collar jobs
- Institutional failures, particularly the failure of schools to retain Hispanic students and provide them with a marketable education (Hispanics have the highest high school dropout rate of any group in the nation)
- Discrimination, especially among employers who see Hispanic immigrants and others who are not proficient in English as disposable workers
- Policy shifts resulting in the reduction of social services—during the Reagan and Bush administrations (1980-92), federal aid as a proportion of city budgets fell nearly 64 percent below the 1980 level.[5]

Of these contributing factors, structural changes are the most pervasive.[6] During the 1980s and 1990s, international influences prompted companies to downsize, outsource to low-cost suppliers, and turn to part-time workers, while simultaneously upgrading technologically and seeking out

highly skilled workers. Throughout the period, industries and occupational structures became increasingly bifurcated, resulting in a growing divide between the "haves" (those employed in secure, high-paying jobs) and the "have nots" (the unemployed, working poor, and unskilled workers). Goods-producing industries that had provided high wages for low-skilled workers were supplanted by services and high-technology manufacturing. The new, bifurcated occupational structure comprised high- value-added jobs demanding college graduates and low-wage jobs requiring less-educated workers. Lost were occupational ladders between the two extremes along with those workers who had previously made up the middle class.

When work is redefined as complex problem-solving, the highly educated are generously rewarded, while those with little education are unable to keep pace.[7] In the 1970s, men with some college experience earned an average 20 percent more than those with only a high-school education; by 1980, the gap had grown to between 40 and 50 percent. College-educated men (between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-four) realized a 7 percent increase in their incomes between 1979 and 1989, while those with a high-school diploma suffered an 11 percent decrease, and those without a diploma a 23 percent decrease. The gap widened throughout the 1990s, not because college graduates earned significantly more, but because high school graduates earned so much less.[8]

In contrast to the period from 1947 to 1968, when family income inequality declined by 7.4 percent, the years from 1968 to 1994 saw an actual increase in inequality, amounting to 16.1 percent for the 1968-92 period and 22.4 percent for 1992-94.[9] Between 1973 and 1993, the percentage of those living below the poverty level nationwide grew from 8.8 to 12.3 percent. Among whites, the poverty rate rose from 6.6 to 9.4 percent, while the percentage of blacks living in poverty rose from 28.1 to 31.3 percent. However, the proportional increase was greatest for Latinos, whose poverty rate grew from 19.8 to 27.3 percent.[10] While median incomes (using constant dollars) rose for all households from 1980 to 1993, including those of whites and blacks, Latinos' average income actually dropped.[11] Ironically, the rise in poverty occurred in the midst of an expanding economy. It was not a lack of jobs, but the quality of jobs, that accounted for the deterioration.

From 1980 to 1990, Latinos became more prominent in the economy as their numbers rose from 6.5 percent to 11.4 percent of the nation's population. From 1980 to 1994, the Latino population grew by 44 percent nationwide, with much of this growth coming from immigration. In 1990, over one-third of all Latinos were immigrants. The economic conditions described above intersect with a demographic profile that shows a largely young and immigrant Latino population with a high

dropout rate, a low level of educational attainment, and lack of English proficiency:

- Nearly half of all Latinos over the age of twenty-five are high school dropouts. Only 51 percent of Latinos have completed high school (compared with more than 80 percent of the general population and nearly 67 percent of blacks). Fewer than 10 percent of Latinos have completed four or more years of college (compared with more than 22 percent of the general population and nearly 12 percent of blacks).
- Between 25 and 45 percent of Latinos lack English proficiency.
- Among Latinos, more than 19.0 percent of households are headed by females, compared with 11.4 percent for the nation as a whole. Among Puerto Ricans, the proportion of female-headed households is nearly 34 percent; for Central and South Americans, the figure is 22 percent. In the Americas, this path has been guided by liberal economic policies that combine economic growth with high rates of poverty and income inequality and a heightened mobility of people and capital (the comparable rate for blacks is 47.8 percent).[12]

Despite their circumstances—or perhaps because they have few alternatives—Latinos have shown a strong attachment to work. Most Latino subgroups (with the exception of Puerto Ricans) have higher-than-average labor force participation rates. Trapped in a revolving door of low-wage jobs and frequent unemployment, Latinos exit from and reenter the labor market relatively rapidly, often circulating among poorly paid jobs lacking benefits, security, or full-time employment.[13] For the most part, Latinos constitute the "working poor."

Latinos also fuel the growth of metropolitan economies. Nearly 92 percent of Latinos live in urban areas, compared with about 73 percent of the general population. Furthermore, 90 percent of Latinos are located in six states, with approximately 54 percent situated in fourteen major metropolitan areas. Since many Latinos are poor, the poor are also concentrated in cities. In contrast to the 34 percent of impoverished whites who live in cities, 59 percent of poor Latinos (and 60 percent of poor blacks) are urban residents.

Although the United States has become a major job generator compared with other advanced industrialized countries, the economy is becoming extremely skewed. Inadequate social programs have left the working poor and the unemployed exposed to the harsh forces that flow from economic openness and structural change. According to one 1992 account, "the direct and indirect cost to society of tolerating an underclass of urban poor is at least $230 billion annually and mounting."[14] A careful