

Growth Trends in the US Latinx Workforce Population and Implications for Social Settlement and Schooling of Youths from Immigrant Backgrounds in New Areas of the US

What follows are my initial thoughts and questions on a complex set of interacting topics emanating from the rapid growth of Latinx populations in the Midwest and South, given other trends nationally in the socioeconomic and educational situation of Latinx in the U.S. as a whole. Current political developments in the U.S. associated with the election of our new President, public anti-immigrant sentiments regarding Latinx and other immigrant groups, and economic trends have created very dynamic and unpredictable circumstances that do not permit confidence in predictions about the future of Latinx in these communities, though the following comments point to some such possibilities. A fuller exploration of the issues suggested in this memo would need to be supported by a more thorough documentation of past and current trends based on extant data.

Workforce Growth Trends

It is well-known that trends in migration and immigration to the U.S., have been historically driven in part by employment opportunities available to newcomers in pursuit of a better life for themselves and their families. This certainly has been a highly significant factor in the rise of Latinx immigrants in the Midwest and South during the last 2 decades and in the appearance of Latinx settlements whether in urban, semi-rural, or rural contexts.

By the year 2050 about 30 percent of the US workforce age populations is projected to be of Latinx origin¹. This represents a doubling of the contribution of this population to the workforce since 2010. This growth in the workforce age population of Latinx is driven by the fertility rates of second generation immigrants, and not by first generation Latinx immigrants.

The economic job niches filled by Latinx immigrants in the new communities of settlement in the Midwest and South are primarily in low paying jobs tied to agriculture, or manual/service labor that do not (yet) require educational skill sets beyond secondary school exposure. While these forms of employment are abundant at present, there are likely caps in the availability of such jobs in the future and there is also the likelihood that automation of many of these jobs by machinery and computers will reduce the need for unskilled labor. And there is the likelihood that many of these jobs may become transformed in the future so

¹ Carnevale, A. and Smith, N. (2013). Chapter Three America's Future Workforce. In V. Cárdenas and S. Treuhaft (Eds.) *All-In Nation. An America that Works for All*. Washington DC: Center for American Progress.

that workers will need greater literacy and technology-based skills sets to hold new versions of such jobs—e.g., operators of robotic or computer controlled equipment.

One set of questions that arises then concerns the economic evolution of the economies of new communities of Latinx settlement and how this will affect the continued availability of jobs available to Latinxs given their educational attainment and education-based employment skills sets. A related set of questions is whether the children of current Latinx settlers will find it possible to survive in the economies of communities as these youths attain an education and proceed to move from schools into the workforce with or without college attainment. If these maturing Latinx youths do not find jobs in the current new communities of settlement, where will they go and with what prospects for social and economic development?

Implications for Social Settlements

Thus we need to be concerned for the well-being of Latinx youths as they grow and mature in these new settlements and their ability to prosper socially and attain valued employment skill-sets through advanced schooling. The alternative may otherwise be that Latinx in these new settlements may form an underclass and enter into increasing socially hostile relationships with their more affluent community members either in their current communities or new communities they might migrate to. E.g., consider the tragic disproportionate representation of Latinx in prisons and under social control of the criminal justice system.

The situation is made more complex because of the rapid aging of the white non-Latinx population relative to the younger Latinx population and differences in the needs of these populations. Additionally, there is the presence of other non-White populations and non-Latinx immigrant populations in new communities of Latinx settlement, and the limited availability of jobs overall, and especially of higher paying jobs serving the knowledge economy. The knowledge economy jobs are also characterized by skills sets involving advanced capabilities to manipulate information within complex adaptive industries of the future involving complex forms of teamwork and innovation. They form potential pathways to increased economic and social mobility.

Implications for Education

Increasing the educational attainment of Latinx youths is critical to their employment and social future in the new communities of settlement as these communities evolve and expand, but it is wise to not over simplify what we mean by education. The movement to improve education of Latinx in the U.S. is very much a civil rights struggle connected to culturally responsive social activism with roots in the history of Latin American countries of origin. This history shares many values with the Civil Rights movement serving African Americans and other

oppressed groups, but it also has its own dynamics and complexities that create unique resources for viewing the concept of *educación* and co-ethnic community visions of collaboration and civic engagement. Educación for many Latinx immigrant Latinx entails not just formal educational attainment associated with acquisition of specific content knowledge and skills. It also entails concern for the development of the entire individual as a member of a community with moral and social responsibility dimensions.

There is no question that for Latinx youth to be successful in their new communities of settlement, they will need improved culturally and linguistically responsive access to formal education, and that this will require considerable public investment in the schools they attend. Connections can be made and have been made in learning sciences research between schooled acquisition of high level analytic critical thinking and problem solving skills allied with competence in college and career ready academic standards. There is also evidence that better prepared teachers, ethnic/racially integrated classrooms, and rigorous and engaging academic courses connected to students' out of school experiences and activities connected to employable high-level skill sets are essential in this regard. There is also evidence that at the college level ethnically and racially integrated student bodies contribute to the psychological and cognitive development of students. But despite these promising results more evidence is needed supporting their applicability to new communities of settlement. And in addition, factors affecting Latinx economic, education, social, and political outcomes involving multi-ethnic/racial and socioeconomic integration across community contexts and activities is needed.

The xenophobia against Latinx persons and families present in the new communities of settlement is a reality that needs resolution. Without systematic federal immigration policy change to legalize the status of undocumented Latinxs, it is hard to imagine a substantial resolution of this issue. Nor is it possible to envision solutions that do not take into account the non-Latino white population's concern for the lack of jobs and employment opportunities for them enabling access to middle class attainments such as home ownership, material acquisitions and leisure opportunities, health insurance, and long term retirement resources. These of course, are the same desired ends of Latinx and other populations in the new communities of settlement.

Latinx co-ethnic collaboration and increased civic engagement with concern for all community members regardless of origin may serve as an additional antidote, but it cannot succeed with immigration reform and cannot be a responsibility that just falls on Latinxs. How will non-Latinx, white Northern European origin persons respond? What will make them respond realistically to the inevitable demographic and social realities in the new communities of Latinx settlement? Over the longer term and based on historical precedent Latinx will continue to inter-marry with non-Latinx groups and this will in and of itself create new forms of diversity that will modify the dynamics mentioned in this memo.