

LATINOS IN NEW YORK

Communities in Transition

SECOND EDITION

**EDITED BY SHERRIE BAVER, ANGELO FALCÓN,
AND GABRIEL HASLIP-VIERA**

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Introduction

Angelo Falcón, Sherrie Bayer, and Gabriel Haslip-Viera

Developments in the Latino community of New York City have often served as a harbinger of things to come for this population nationally. As a leading global city, New York is subjected to powerful international forces as well as to the push and pull of local ones at a scale rarely seen elsewhere. Home to what is probably one of the most diverse Latino populations in the world, with the most complex settlement patterns, in many ways the city appears, in light of national trends, to represent the Latino future throughout the country. A close examination of the transitions taking place in New York's Latino community can provide clues about developments in the broader Latino and other similarly situated communities.

Since the first edition of *Latinos in New York* in 1996, the editors have witnessed continuities but also many dramatic changes in this community. In this second edition, we document, for a new generation of students and other interested readers, what has remained the same as well as what has changed. While we attempt a wide review of critical issues confronting the city's Latinos, the research agenda before us remains broader. Issues such as the role of race, culture and identity, health, the criminal justice system, the media, and higher education are but a few that require greater attention from both an academic and a policy perspective.

The impetus for the first volume was that while numerous works existed on Hispanics or Latinos,¹ we were surprised by the absence of a more comprehensive text on New York's Latino community. Studies that started

appearing in the 1960s often focused on particular national-origin subgroups such as Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. They also often did so in specific US localities or regions such as Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, southern Florida, and the Southwest. By the 1980s, several volumes appeared examining the Hispanic or Latino community nationally,² spurred on by the rise in research interest in the issue of persistent poverty and the underclass, followed by the growth of immigration studies. Still, however, little research had been published on the New York Latino experience.

In comparison to the histories of migration between other localities and regions, the history of immigration from Latin America to New York differs in terms of its timing and the mix of its nationality groups. For example, “Spanish,” “Hispanics,” and “Hispanicized Native Americans” were already settled in southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas before those areas were ceded to the United States in 1848, at the end of the Mexican-American War. Small groups of Spaniards and Latinos were also found in Florida when that region was ceded to the United States by Spain in 1819. By contrast, the Hispanic presence in New York and other eastern and midwestern urban areas, such as Philadelphia and Chicago, became significant only in the early part of the twentieth century, although the origins of the migration, especially to New York and its environs, can be traced back earlier.³

Local and regional differences have been apparent in the mix of subgroups as well as in the socioeconomic status of Latino national-origin groups. In terms of the subgroup mix, Mexicans and other immigrants from Central America, for example, have been the predominant Spanish-speaking groups in the Southwest, while balanced but separate communities of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans were the pattern in Chicago. Cubans dominated in southern Florida since the early 1960s, while Puerto Ricans dominated in New York and other communities in the Northeast, most recently along with Dominicans, Cubans, Colombians, Ecuadoreans, Salvadorans, and Peruvians. In recent years, the growing immigration of Latin Americans to the United States and the migration of Latinos throughout the country have made all American urban areas much more diverse.⁴

On the issue of socioeconomic background, many immigrants and migrants in the first part of the twentieth century came from impoverished urban, rural, or mixed rural and urban backgrounds, such as Mexicans in the Southwest or Puerto Ricans and later Dominicans in New York and

other parts of the Northeast. Yet other immigrant groups from South America were predominantly urban and middle class; and the first large wave of Cubans arriving in the early 1960s after the Cuban Revolution and mainly settling in Miami were, typically, well-off and well educated. This picture of the subgroups is now even more mixed, typified by the large migration of Puerto Rican professionals to Central Florida from Puerto Rico.

Aspects of the Latino presence usually overlooked are its scale and its geographic and sociopolitical complexity. In a city of more than 8.5 million residents, Latinos make up close to a third of the population spread over five counties, which are locally called boroughs. Geographically, Latinos live in as many as twenty or so *barrios*, each the size of a small to medium-sized city, with their own histories, national-origin makeup, political cultures, and community issues. Vertically, this community is embedded in a sociopolitical system with global as well as local elites and institutions that include Wall Street, the United Nations, and major media. Along with the national-origin diversity of New York's Latino population, this mix is, in many ways, unique even in comparison with similar cities like Los Angeles and Miami. However, the forces that have shaped this uniqueness are also effecting similar changes elsewhere; and this is where the New York example becomes most interesting to examine.

At present, the literature on Latinos nationally, in specific locales, or regionally is too large to cite adequately. This reflects the growth of this population in the United States, which is now at roughly fifty-four million people (fifty-eight million if one includes the US territory of Puerto Rico), or 17% of the total US population (2013).⁵ In addition to monographs, there are now scholarly journals like *Latino Studies* that chronicle and analyze the US Latino experience generally and for particular subgroups.⁶

Since the first publication of *Latinos in New York*, several studies have appeared on this population and specific national-origin subgroups in New York City, and several authors of such studies have contributed chapters in this volume (e.g., Torres-Saillant and Hernández 1998; Hernández 2002; Morales 2003; Haslip-Viera, Falcón, and Matos Rodríguez 2004; Smith 2006; Torres 2006; Sánchez 2007; Noguera, Hurtado, and Fergus 2011). This also includes such works as Aparicio (2006), Dávila (2004), Dávila and Laó-Montes (2001), Hoffnung-Garskof (2010), Jones-Correa (1998), Remeseira and Delbanco (2010), Ricourt (2002), Thomas (2010), and Upegui-Hernandez (2014). Also since 1996, there has appeared a vast literature on immigrants

and immigration in general that has informed and been informed by the Latino experience.

The significant changes in New York's Latino community since the first edition of this book appeared are in the size, diversity, and relative importance of the national-origin subgroups. At present, Latinos comprise 2.4 million New Yorkers, or 29% of the total city population; furthermore, they represent 23% of eligible city voters. Among Latinos, Puerto Ricans remain the largest subgroup (31%), followed closely by Dominicans (25%) and Mexicans (14%). No longer, however, are Puerto Ricans the majority of New York's Latinos as they were throughout most of the twentieth century. Despite this, given New York's location as major port of entry for the United States, there has always been a diverse Latino presence, with Cubans, Spaniards, and others playing significant roles in the history of this community.

In addition to the top three subgroups, Central and South American immigration has increased especially since the 1980s, making New York City the most diverse Spanish-speaking city in the world. What has not changed is that while great strides have been made in education, disproportionate numbers of Latino residents remain poor. Moreover, significant portions of these residents are undocumented and, therefore, remain without most basic rights, since comprehensive immigration reform, involving a legalization path for the undocumented, has been discussed but not addressed by Congress since the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986.

As noted in the introduction to the first edition of this text, the following chapters highlight, in part, what is unique about the Latino experience in New York, especially its breadth of diversity compared to other US cities. Still, recognizing the uniqueness of New York City as a leading global city, the editors intend that this volume will also have relevance for students, scholars, and policy analysts of the Latino experience throughout the United States. Each contributor, while focusing on the New York context, also understands that each Latino subgroup is transnational and, therefore, sensitive to the home-country context. Yet the contributors are also aware that each subgroup (especially as we move beyond the immigrant generation) is part of the larger Latino presence in the life of the United States. Scholars of the Latino experience will have more than enough work in continuing years to describe and analyze how these dual pressures, transnationalism and notions of *pan-latinidad*, play out for specific national-origin subgroups in different parts of the United States.

THE ESSAYS

The editors have grouped the essays into three broad sections. Part 1 examines the historical and sociocultural context of Latinos in New York. Typically, overviews of Hispanic migration to New York focused on Puerto Ricans in the twentieth century and especially post–World War II. In contrast, historian Gabriel Haslip-Viera’s chapter covers the years 1613 to 2012 on the basis of his many years of tracing the city’s Latino community. Although noting that the community evolved slowly before 1898, and especially during the periods of Dutch and English colonization, his pushing back the start of the immigration story of Spanish-speakers by more than two centuries enriches our understanding of the earliest nonindigenous settlers in Gotham.

In chapter 2, sociologist Clara Rodríguez focuses on Puerto Ricans, who had been the majority of Latino New Yorkers in the last century. While they are no longer the absolute majority, Rodríguez’s point is they remain, in many ways, the predominant Hispanic group in the city. Rodríguez asks the novel question of how earlier ethnic communities in New York, especially Puerto Rican communities, provide a historical base for the more diverse Latino neighborhoods today. She places the Puerto Rican “great migration” of the mid-twentieth century into the larger context of “the long hiatus,” roughly 1930–69, when few European or Asian immigrants were coming to the United States, and Puerto Ricans and Mexicans were arriving to supply America’s low-wage labor. Rodríguez cites other Puerto Rican long-term contributions to newer arrivals to New York and America such as bilingual education, bilingual voting assistance, major contributions to the visual and performing arts, and the presence of Latino studies programs and departments in colleges and universities. She hypothesizes that immigration scholars do not capture the Puerto Rican contributions to US society because of their new focus on transnationalism. She argues, however, that immigration scholars should include the Puerto Rican case because Puerto Ricans are “migrants” as citizens but not “full-fledged US citizens.” Finally, the contribution of Puerto Ricans as leaders in demanding multicultural recognition in New York City and the nation should be noted as demands for multicultural awareness have grown in the main urban centers in Europe and beyond.

Sociologist and historian of religion Ana María Díaz-Stevens focuses on Latino religious practice in New York. While she focuses mainly on the

Catholic Church and the especially Puerto Rican migration experience—which was especially difficult since Puerto Ricans were not accompanied by a native clergy—this is not the entire story. Díaz-Stevens injects diversity into her overview, focusing on newer Spanish-speaking immigrant groups to New York as well as other religious belief systems present in the community. She devotes a good part of her chapter to examining the influence of Afro-Caribbean rituals among Latino Catholics as well as the rise of Protestantism, especially Pentecostalism, among Latinos, and the recent increase in Muslim adherents among Latino New Yorkers.

Part 2 of the volume, titled “Under the Latino National Umbrella,” examines the diversity constituting Latino New York. Although the chapters focus mostly on specific national-origin groups and do not follow a common format, each chapter notes (1) the factors that prompted emigration from the country of origin, (2) the socioeconomic status of the emigrants, (3) the extent of transnational ties with the home country, and (4) the immigrants’ interaction with other Latino groups in New York. This last point should be highlighted since there is little research on how different Spanish-speaking national-origin subgroups interact and what the label “Latino” really means. This is because most people of Hispanic descent still identify in surveys first by national origin (e.g., Puerto Rican) and then secondly as Hispanic and/or Latino.

The beginning chapter in part 2 is presented by economist Andrés Torres and sociologist Gilbert Marzán. Given the decline in Puerto Rican numbers, Torres and Marzán reasonably ask, “Where have all the Puerto Ricans gone?” After an in-depth, quantitative study of the years 1985–90 and 1995–2000, they conclude that for the most part, New York Puerto Ricans have not gone very far. Some have gone to Puerto Rico or Florida, but most who have left New York City have gone to nearby suburbs or states. With the current massive movement of population out of Puerto Rico in the second decade of the new millennium, this issue of Puerto Rican migration patterns assumes greater importance. Therefore, this chapter’s analysis of Puerto Rican population shift away from New York points to its changing role in the broader Puerto Rican migration circuits within the United States and Puerto Rico. The authors suggest that further research should be done on the characteristics of the out-migrants and the implications of these migrations for Puerto Rican identity and socioeconomic status.

Sociologist Ramona Hernández and humanities scholar Silvio Torres-Saillant, present and former directors of the City University of New York’s

Dominican Studies Institute, focus on New York's large and growing Dominican community, projected to soon become the largest Latino group in the city. They note that in recent years, it is not only immigration but also births in the United States that explain the community's population growth. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, almost 50% of Dominican-Americans have been born in the States, which adds to the diversity of the Dominican experience. While most Dominicans initially chose to live in Manhattan, by 2010 more Dominican New Yorkers lived in the Bronx and thousands had moved to other boroughs and states such as Rhode Island, Florida, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania. The authors conclude that while a majority of Dominicans still have a way to go to live the American Dream, they remain optimistic that these resilient immigrants and their children will contribute to this country as well as their Caribbean country of origin.

Political scientist Robert Smith continues his almost three-decade groundbreaking research of New York's dramatically growing Mexican community, the fastest-growing Latino group in the city. He notes that a major change from his 1996 essay for the first edition of *Latinos in New York* is that the community is much more rooted in a large US-born generation. Mexicans, at close to half a million people, are now the third-largest and fastest-growing Latino group in the city. Still, their path to incorporation and social advancement is not smooth because of the high rate of *indocumentados*, who suffer from legal exclusion. Smith then sketches out how specific city institutions, such as the Department of Education, the City University of New York, and the New York Police Department may help those excluded from social citizenship to attain more positive life outcomes than might otherwise be expected.

Veteran journalist Javier Castaño provides one of the first comprehensive overviews of Colombians and Ecuadoreans in New York, focusing on Corona, Queens. Two overarching problems Castaño highlights are (1) Anglo society's inability to distinguish one Spanish-speaking national-origin group from another and (2) the tensions among specific Latino subgroups. Castaño and his narrator in this chapter, Walter Sinche, offer particular details about organizational life in the Corona Latino community, including rivalries and inefficiencies among some groups but also the community's ability to mobilize, when necessary, to protest bias killings and media stereotyping. Furthermore, the chapter offers hope, with Castaño describing a growing number of community activists focusing on improving educational quality, reducing crime, and slowing housing foreclosures.

Finally, Walker Simon and Rosalía Reyes, both journalists, offer the first systematic overview of Central Americans in New York. They begin their essay focusing on US involvement in Central American civil wars of the 1980s, a fact that stimulated large-scale immigration to the United States. Next they concentrate on the specific national-origin groups in metropolitan New York, including Panamanians, Hondurans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Costa Ricans, and Nicaraguans, as well as the Garifuna community, coming primarily from Honduras but from other countries as well. Finally, they document the ongoing transnational ties among all these communities, a seeming commonality among Latino immigrant groups.

Part 3 focuses on politics and policy issues affecting New York's Latinos. In the first piece, political scientist José R. Sánchez addresses the inadequacies he sees in the theoretical approaches used to study local Latino power; more specifically, his concern is what is holding back Latino community power. Sánchez surveys the four most common social science approaches used to study the distribution of power in American society and then provides case studies to highlight the inadequacies of these approaches. One particularly detailed case study focuses on the struggle for public housing in the early 1970s. Sánchez also examines the concept of "identity politics" and tries to explain why "ethnic unity" doesn't always translate into political power for Latinos (or others). His answer is to offer a "social power" approach that is a "riff" on more traditional Marxist political-economy theorizing to examine power in American society. For Sánchez, Latinos' lack of power is now caused more by public sector than private sector institutions, along with activists' inability to draw on old civil rights concepts now in a seemingly "postracial" America.

In the next chapter, veteran civil rights attorney Juan Cartagena provides an overview of the Latino struggle for voting rights in New York City. As president and general counsel of LatinoJustice PRLDEF (formerly the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund), Cartagena has been a leading participant in several of the key cases affecting the Latino community's ability "[to protect] voting rights writ large." His history and deep appreciation of the 1965 Voting Rights Act focuses on how activists successfully eliminated many of the discriminatory effects of both vote denial and dilution that had been used against Latinos and African Americans. This chapter highlights the many challenges in this area as we enter a new era in which the US Supreme Court has weakened voting rights in its June 2013 decision *Shelby County v. Holder*.

Political scientist Sherrie Baver updates her 1996 contribution to *Latinos in New York* by examining changes and continuities in US immigration policy in the last twenty years. The main continuities she finds are (1) that much of the American public remains ambivalent about immigrants, especially unauthorized immigrants—benefiting from their contributions but unhappy about living with them, and (2) that Congress had been unable to pass comprehensive immigration reform, especially since 9/11/2001, when reform efforts became tied to largely unrelated concerns about national security. Even before 9/11, the federal trend was to be less welcoming to immigrants, and in the last few years, deportations of the undocumented have risen dramatically. In the absence of federal policy-making, states and localities have carved divergent ideological paths in their treatment of immigrants, especially the undocumented. Fortunately, New York City (where two-thirds of the population is now made up of the foreign born or their children) has, for the most part, maintained immigrant-friendly policies.

Journalist and author Ed Morales focuses on housing politics in New York's Latino "core communities," as the administration of New York City mayor Bill de Blasio commits itself to the massive development of so-called affordable housing and the rezoning this will require. The main question explored in this chapter is how Latino core communities have been confronting disinvestment, reinvestment, and gentrification. These are forces affecting not only East Harlem / El Barrio but also the Lower East Side, Williamsburg, and Bushwick, among other neighborhoods. Morales notes that the challenges to the Latino presence in various areas intensified after 9/11, when shell-shocked New Yorkers elected Michael Bloomberg as mayor, and the new mayor's key pledge was to rebuild the city rather than reduce social and racial inequities. Morales critiques New York's feeble affordable-housing policies under Bloomberg and details activists' strategies to preserve at least some part of Latino core communities for the residents who have lived there for decades or generations.

Educators Luz Yadira Herrera and Pedro Noguera examine a central issue for Latino New Yorkers, the city's educational policies. In highlighting the challenges facing Mayor Bill de Blasio, the chapter examines the numerous reforms that occurred during the twelve years of the Bloomberg administration and their effects on Latino students, the largest demographic subgroup in the city's public school system. In 2002, Mayor Bloomberg abolished the Board of Education and assumed direct control of the schools to implement his new approach, called "Children First." Key features of his reform package

involved implementing high-stakes testing to ensure teacher accountability, decentralizing the vast education bureaucracy to increase school autonomy, introducing charter schools into the mix of school choices, and closing schools that were seen as failing. Herrera and Noguera conclude that “Children First” has not been particularly helpful to New York’s Hispanic community. The city’s school system remains highly segregated, and “large concentrations of high-needs Latino students continue to be served by low-performing schools.” The authors conclude that sixty years after the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board* decision, New York should be doing a better job for its students.

Next, to provide some historical context to New York City’s new emphasis on sustainability and environmental resilience, Sherrie Bayer examines New York’s environmental justice movement, and the leading role played by Latino, especially Puerto Rican, activists in creating a less toxic, greener city. Environmental justice activists pose two general questions: Why do poor neighborhoods face disproportionate environmental harm from polluted infrastructure, toxic and hazardous waste, and less green space than wealthy neighborhoods? and, How does this reality affect health and well-being in poor neighborhoods? Bayer notes that the Young Lords grappled with these questions almost two decades before the country had an identifiable environmental justice movement, and, not surprisingly, several of the former Lords went on to help establish environmental justice organizations such as The Toxic Avengers in Brooklyn and the South Bronx Clean Air Coalition. Puerto Ricans and other Latinos were greening their New York neighborhoods with *casitas* and community gardens decades before community gardens became “hip.” Even as we acknowledge that most successful environmental justice struggles in the city have been multiethnic coalitions, the Latino contribution cannot be overstated, especially as newer issues such as waterfront parks, green-collar jobs, food justice, environmental resilience, and climate justice are added to the earlier list of concerns.

A longtime “guerrilla researcher” and cofounder of the National Institute for Latino Policy (NiLP), political scientist Angelo Falcón provides the last essay in part 2, speculating on future trends in New York Latino politics. Falcón, the leading analyst of Latino politics in New York, identifies those elements affecting Latino politics in New York City that should be the basis of any analysis of the subject. He notes at least two competing themes in local Latino politics. While the hyperdiversity of New York’s Latino community may impede easy development of a unified political agenda, the fact that Latino politicians need to appeal to more than their national subgroup for

votes may push towards unity. In addition, the intense anti-immigrant and anti-Latino sentiment in the country in recent years has promoted a greater pan-Latino consciousness. Thus a unified political agenda may become a distinct possibility. Falcón ends the chapter with an overview of how these elements were playing themselves out at the beginning of the administration of New York City mayor Bill de Blasio.

Finally, a cultural studies scholar, the late Juan Flores, provides our concluding chapter. Flores focuses on *Nueva York's* uniqueness as the major US city with the most diverse Latino diaspora, and he begins to explore the reality of Latino New York beyond its glossy image in popular culture. He is intrigued by both the awe and foreboding in the wider society about what the Latino "sleeping giant" will mean for "the presumed unity of American culture." Flores is especially interested in two themes: in the relation between Latinos and African-Americans and in Latinos' relations to their countries of origin, since return migration and circular geographical movement are common in the Latino story (as opposed to a one-way, permanent US immigration of earlier immigrant groups). This final "snapshot" of Latino New York nicely sums up several of the themes woven throughout the preceding essays.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, these essays reveal a great deal about the past and present condition of Latinos in metropolitan New York, especially about the transition from a majority Puerto Rican to a much more diverse Latino population in which no Latino subgroup is now in the majority. While Puerto Ricans still constitute the largest Hispanic national-origin subgroup in Gotham, and indeed one of the largest of all national-origin groups in the city, their numbers among Latinos and within the city as a whole have been steadily declining. Current trends indicate that by the end of the decade Dominicans are poised to become the largest Latino (and immigrant) group in New York City, if this has not already become the case.

The editors and authors understand there are differences both within and between the Latino national-origin groups. Race and class differences, for example, exist both within groups and among them. Real behavioral and attitudinal differences exist among the subgroups, and most of the Hispanic population still identifies first by national origin and only secondarily as "Latino" and/or "Hispanic." However, the forces that promote a pan-Latino

consciousness are increasingly strong, both from within and outside of these communities. It is, as a result, still relevant to refer to a Hispanic or Latino community (some would prefer the plural, communities) in ways that connect it nationally and allows comparison with other settings. The Latino experience is complex and defined by the constant interaction between its national-origin and pan-ethnic identities within the context of US racial-ethnic dynamics.

Despite their distinct histories, many Latinos throughout the country share a similar life situation. First, they share a common language. Second, except for Puerto Ricans, large numbers are involved with immigration and citizenship status issues. Third, they are confronted with strong anti-immigrant and anti-Latino discrimination. Fourth, they find themselves racially segregated residentially and in the schools. Fifth, Latinos continue to experience great difficulty in placing their experience firmly in an “American” context, being continually viewed as “foreigners” and “the other,” regardless of their history in the definition of a place called the United States of America. Sixth and finally, partially for bureaucratic expediency and to meet community demands, the federal government created and operationalized the category of “Hispanic” or “Latino” (Mora 2014). This fact has incentivized politicians and activists to embrace the concept, to view the community as united and increasingly vocal, and to work on issues of common concern such as immigration and education. This process is being aided, as well, by the efforts of corporations and their market researchers to create a malleable consumer group and the efforts of political parties and their pollsters to more efficiently create and influence this voting bloc.

Different contributors have asked in different ways if a new pan-Latino identity is emerging among immigrant children and grandchildren born in the United States. Are there several complementary or competing identities for young Latinos? A relevant question to which we do not have an answer is whether there is such a thing as a distinct “Latino vote” either locally or nationally, although it is widely accepted as a factor in general American political discourse.

Our ultimate goal is to pose provocative questions about the Latino experience and future in New York. Our hope is that these essays and the questions they pose stimulate a new generation of researchers. We also hope the essays will pose new thinking for promoting a social justice agenda for the City of New York and the rest of the country, in which Latinos are, at times, reluctantly seen as a part.

NOTES

1. As was the case in 1996, we still choose those terms interchangeably, reflecting everyday usage.
2. The authors provided an illustrative literature review in the first edition of *Latinos in New York* (1996); see nn 1–3, pp xx–xxi.
3. See, for example, chapter 1 by Haslip-Viera and chapter 5 by Hernández and Torres-Saillant in this volume; Sullivan (2010); Iglesias (1984); Falcón (1984).
4. Technically, “immigrants” are newcomers from other countries to the United States, while “migrants” are moving within the United States; hence Puerto Ricans are migrants, not immigrants. Still, in common usage, the terms are increasingly being used interchangeably, and we respect the choice of each author in this volume.
5. See “Data and Resources” from the Pew Hispanic Trends Project at www.pewhispanic.org.
6. *Latino Studies* has been published since 2003. Others include *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, since 1970; *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences (HJB)*, since 1979; *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy*, since 1985; and *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*, since 1987.

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