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From the Guest Editor

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FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

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A national concern among policy makers, academics and social activists has been the integration of Latinos/as in the United States society and economy. The comparatively low achievements of Latinos/as in education and the labor market, as well as their residential segregation, and low levels of civic participation when compared to other groups such as Asian Americans and European Americans, have led researchers to produce a significant amount of scholarship dealing with these problems. However, most of the recent findings have focused for the most part on Latinos/as living in the Southwest or the Northeast of the U.S., in part due to the availability of secondary data that can be analyzed for these purposes. Although significant qualitative research work has been available on the city of Chicago, the need remains for analyses that take into account the large numbers of Latinos/as in the Chicago metropolitan area and the changes in their recent progress.

In order to advance the knowledge of the social and economic situation of the Latino/a population in the Chicago metropolitan area, and offer directions for future research, this issue of *Diálogo* includes several articles that pursue the analysis of the area's Latino/a outcomes, focusing on dimensions of education, labor market, and spatial distribution in the Chicago metropolitan area.

This collection of articles is a result of the combined research effort of a group of University of Notre Dame's Institute for Latino Studies' (ILS) fellows, who are resident faculty at different universities in the Chicago metro area, which was coordinated academically by sociologist John Koval. From John's perspective, it is advantageous to bring scholars from different campuses and social disciplines to work together and advance the analysis of the Latino/a population in the City of Chicago and its suburban areas, given that traditionally scholars tend to work in "silos" within their corresponding disciplines. In this way, the problems that affect Latinos/as in the region receive multidisciplinary attention. Despite the limitations of the data available, new facts and hypotheses will illuminate innovative paths to research and social policy.

These articles, then, represent a new approach, in that each author's work was strengthened by review and comments from scholars within the group that represented different disciplines. As part of this project these scholars produced a series of white papers, published as "Latinos in Chicago: Reflections of an American Landscape", which can be found at: http://latinostudies.nd.edu/pubs/pubs/Latinos_in_Chicago.pdf. These articles are meant to complement the white papers as aides to decisionmakers throughout all levels of society, as they think about the multiple policy responses necessary to balance the challenges posed by rapid growth, while maintaining and augmenting the strengths that this population brings with them.

As a group, the following articles are an exploration of the different dimensions of these opportunities and challenges-but ones firmly rooted in the geography of Chicago and its environs. Thus, they explore issues of education, labor, the urban context, and levels of civic participation with a focus that can be as wide as the metropolitan region, to one that encompasses a suburb or a neighborhood.

We begin with *A Comparison of Latino, Black, and White Educational Achievement Levels in the Chicago Metropolitan Area*, where Sonia Soltero and José Soltero in collaboration with Robert Knight show that, despite the progress made in educational achievement by Latinos/as in the suburbs, their high school dropout rates still top those of all students. Therefore, regardless of the factual relative "upward mobility" of Latinos/as in the suburban areas with respect to the City, the problems of Latino/a education and other dimensions of social stratification still remain.

Samuel Rosenberg, in his article *Latino Income Stagnation in the Chicago Metropolitan Area, 1970-2008*, discusses the elements behind the apparent stagnation of Latino/a wages, despite having the highest levels of participation in the labor market.

This is followed up by Peter A. Creticos' article, *The Spatial*

Characteristics of Latino Employment-Opportunity for Further Inquiry, which examines the spatial distribution of employment for Latinos/as from Little Village and Cicero, two of the most highly Latino/a populated areas in the Chicago area, during the years 2004, 2006, and 2008. His findings show, among other results, that “the appearance of differences in the employment patterns of predominantly Latino communities that share major highway and public transportation services suggests that factors other than the most obvious commuting conveniences are influencing where workers work.”

In his article, *Suburban Chicago: The Latino Capital of the Midwest*, John Koval shows that the majority of immigrants to the Chicago metropolitan area live in the suburbs, including Latino/a immigrants. Although suburban areas have been associated with higher levels of upward mobility, Latinos/as in the suburbs (as well as the City of Chicago), as a group, are still at the bottom of the social stratification system with the exception of African Americans, and despite their higher participation in the labor market by household of all ethnic groups in the suburbs, their median income is the lowest of these groups except African Americans. Nevertheless, suburban Latinos/as’ income level is still higher than their Latino/a counterpart in the City of Chicago.

In their second article in this issue, the connection between educational achievement and other dimensions of social stratification for Latinos/as in the Chicago metropolitan area, such as residence area (urban vis-à-vis suburban), immigration status, weekly earnings, English proficiency, employment status, and occupational category, is investigated by Sonia Soltero and José Soltero in collaboration with Robert Knight in *Educational Achievement and Residential Distribution of Latinos in the Chicago Metropolitan Area*.

Narrowing the focus slightly to look deeper at one city, Costas Spirou’s *Latinos and Aurora’s Downtown Revival*, analyzes how Latinos/as have played a significant role in the revival of Aurora, which is in contrast to many towns in the US that are experiencing demographic and economic decline. Aurora is the second largest city in the state of Illinois, and is also one of the most rapidly growing cities in the Chicago metropolitan area.

Finishing this group of articles are a set that explore a variety of factors that impact civic participation of Latinos/as, in the Latino neighborhood of Pilsen. This begins with an overview by María de los Ángeles Torres and Timothy Ready, *Latino Civic Engagement: What Matters?* This article compares the Pilsen neighborhood in Chicago with Little Havana in Miami, and Garfield in Phoenix. The authors found that, in terms of civic participation, Pilsen had highest levels of membership in social organizations, and was the most civically engaged. The factors that were most likely to explain this phenomenon are discussed in three associated articles.

Thus, Xóchitl Bada, Joanna Schmit, and Ken Fujimoto’s article *Does birth place matter? Determinants of Non-electoral Civic and Political Engagement*, explores the role that being a highly-immigrant community, with relatively circumscribed political expression, has on increasing other forms of civic participation. In *Gender, Education and Civic Engagement*, Amalia Pallares, Vanessa Guridy, Ken Fujimoto discuss the crucial importance of education in assuring the civic participation of women. The third variable important in determining civic participation in Pilsen is investigated in *Does Age Matter?* by María de los Ángeles Torres,

Nawojka Lesinski, and Ken Fujimoto, where the authors make the case that -in contrast with the general finding that age increases participation- in highly immigrant communities relative youth have a special incentive to participate because they are able to be powerbrokers between their immigrant elders and society at large.

In addition, contributions from other regions of the US and Latin America are included in this volume. Daniel Malpica’s article, *Marginalized Workers: The Experiences of Day Laborers in the Informal Economy*, explores the informal sector day laborer phenomenon --mostly Mexican immigrant workers or jornaleros, who congregate at corners (*esquinas*) of cities and towns searching for jobs-- in the state of California, and the action of Day Labor Worker Centers which try to organize these workers.

In her article, *The Signification of Cultural Manifestations in the Discourse of Tourist Books in Mexico*, Sara María de Lourdes Ortiz focuses on the phenomenon of global commodification of tourism and its imprint in the particular case of Mexico by analyzing the discourse elaborated within tourist books. The process of de-historization of cultural goods, its subsequent homogenization, and its “spectacularity” according to the commercial interests of governments and international tourism organizations is the central part of her analysis and conclusions.

David Akbar Gilliam’s article, *Music and Narrative: Portraying Race, Class and Gender on a Canvass of Pre-Revolutionary Cuba in ‘Las Criadas de la Habana’*, leads “the reader to reflect on cultural, racial and class identity on the island; the new cultural identities and relationships, both personal and social, that arise from the Cuban experience in the United States; and the relationship between the Afro-Cuban and U.S. African American cultures and experiences.”

Belizean writer Holly Edgel’s short story, *Heaven or the Deep Blue Sea*, is a vivid account of the social context and motivations that some Cuban rafters (*balseros*) have in order to risk their lives to reach the U.S. She gives the reader a dramatic sense of the emigrant’s perceptions of their receiving country as well as of Cuba. The similarities between the Cuban rafters and those immigrants that have taken similar risks to cross the Arizona desert during the last two decades are blaring.

The front cover image was provided by the Arizona-base *Borderlands Theatre*, which is well known across the U.S. for their representation and activism connected to Latino issues, historical and contemporary, such as their current leadership role in bringing the plight of the undocumented immigrants to the minds and hearts of the national audiences.

We thank all our contributors and hope to motivate future work on similar and related topics that affect our Latino and Latin American communities.

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