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Sonia Soltero
DePaul University

José Soltero
DePaul University

Roger Knight

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Educational Achievement and Residential Distribution of Latinos in the Chicago Metropolitan Area

Cover Page Footnote

This article is from an earlier iteration of *Diálogo* which had the subtitle "A Bilingual Journal." The publication is now titled "Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Studies Journal."

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AND RESIDENTIAL DISTRIBUTION OF LATINOS IN THE CHICAGO METROPOLITAN AREA

Sonia Soltero, José Soltero
DePaul University
and Roger Knight

Recent research shows varying trends among high school dropout rates across metropolitan areas in the United States. Dropout rates are consistently higher in the cities than in the suburbs (Dillon 2009) and in some cases, such as Chicago, a good deal higher. The reasons for this are not altogether clear. High school dropout rates for Latinos are among the highest, if not the highest, in the United States, and the sociological and educational literature abounds with theories that attempt to explain this social phenomenon (Lee and Burkam 2003; Rumberger and Larson 1998; McNeal 1995; Velez 1989).

In this research brief we examine Latino academic achievement in the city of Chicago compared to its suburbs in terms of several selected sociodemographic and economic variables. We make a working distinction between individuals with less than a high school diploma and individuals with an educational level of high school or greater.

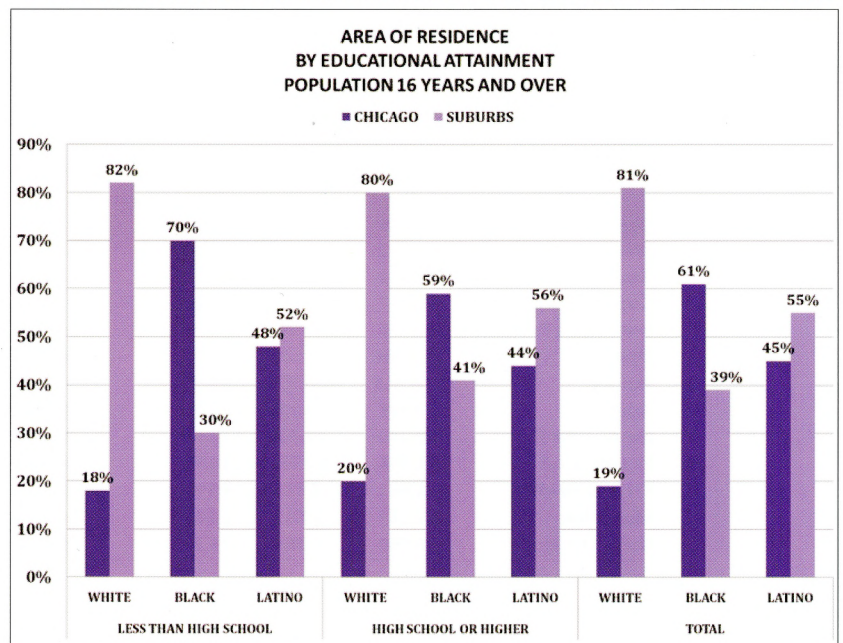
RESIDENCE AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR WHITES, BLACKS, AND LATINOS

Wherever you look in the United States, race and ethnicity typically make a difference. This is true with respect to urban-suburban residential patterns and, as we will see, with education. It is well known that among the population age 16 and over most metropolitan Chicago whites live in the suburbs (81 percent) and most blacks live in the city (61 percent). Although the majority of Latinos now live in the suburbs (55 percent compared to 45 percent), the Latino urban-suburban percentage differences are less pronounced than those of the white or black community. When educational level is added to the race/ethnicity and area of residence mix, the picture that emerges for Latinos is quite complex.

While residential distribution for whites -and to a lesser degree for Latinos- is not influenced by school attainment overall, the percentage of the black population with less than high school education that resides in Chicago is much higher than the black

population with similar educational background in the suburbs (70 percent compared to 30 percent). Furthermore, the percentages of blacks with a high school education or higher varies more significantly than the other two groups (59 percent in the city compared to 41 percent in the suburbs). Thus, among these three groups, Latinos have the least educational variation with respect to urban/suburban residential comparisons-although the percentage of suburban Latinos with a high school or greater educational level exceeds that of urban the Latinos by 12 percent. This Latino percentage is three times the percentage difference of Latinos with less than high school education in the suburbs relative to the Latino population with the same education that lives in the city (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
LATINOS' AREA OF RESIDENCE, EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT & SELECTED SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC VARIABLES



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey

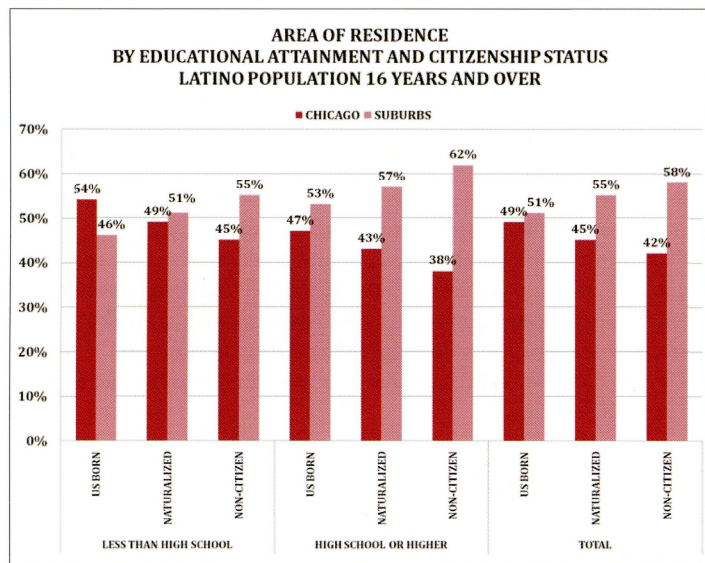
In the rest of this brief we compare urban and suburban Latinos with and without high school diplomas in terms of their

immigration status, weekly earnings, English proficiency, employment status, and occupational category. Note that the data for the analytic groups in the figures that follow are dichotomized into urban and suburban residence. It should be remembered that since 55 percent of Latinos live in the suburbs and 45 percent live in the city, “all other things being equal” would lead us to expect a 55 percent–45 percent urban/suburban measure for each dichotomized group; so, any percentage for suburbanites greater than 55 percent constitutes over-representation and any percentage under 55 percent constitutes under-representation. Similarly any percentage over 45 percent for urbanites constitutes over-representation while any percentage under 45 percent constitutes under-representation.

LATINOS AND IMMIGRATION STATUS

A trend reveals itself among three different metropolitan Chicago Latino groups—US born, naturalized citizens, and non-citizens. The majority of all three live in the suburbs. This is consistent with existing findings. However, there is a percentage progression as we move from one group to the next. The percentage difference between city and suburban US born Latinos is 2 percent; between city and suburban naturalized citizens it is 10 percent; and between city and suburban non-citizens it is 16 percent. Here we add a nuance to earlier findings that report immigrants bypassing the city and landing directly in the suburbs when coming to Chicago.

FIGURE 2



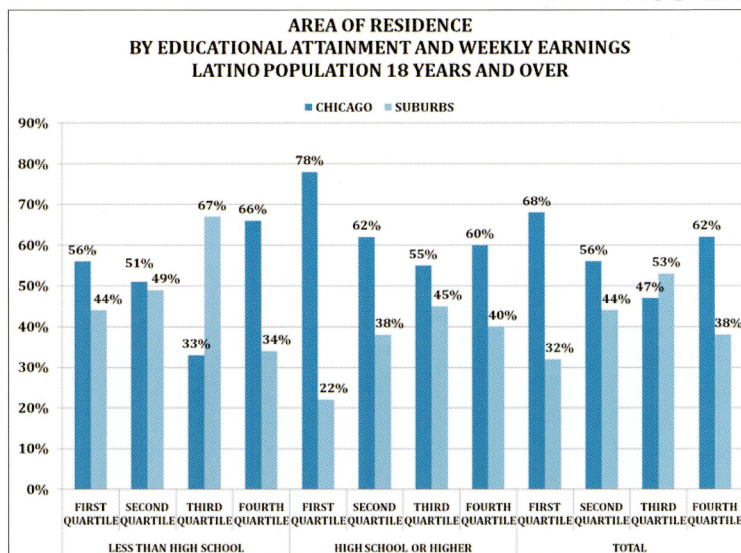
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey

When these immigration groups are analyzed by educational level, US-born urban Latinos with less than high school education are the only Latino group with a majority residing in the city. The majority of the two other groups, naturalized immigrants and non-citizen immigrants, live in the suburbs, regardless of educational level. However, the urban/suburban residential differences are more acute and show more of a linear progression for Latinos with high school education or greater. While the majority of US born with a high school or greater education live in the suburbs (53 percent), an even greater proportion of naturalized immigrants do (57 percent), and nearly two-thirds of non-citizen immigrants do (62 percent).

LATINOS AND WEEKLY EARNINGS

Overall, Latino earnings in the first, second, and fourth weekly earnings quartiles are higher in the city than in the suburbs (see Figure 3)—the quartile cut-points are \$280, \$408, and \$611; however, the proportion of Latinos in the third earnings quartile is greater in the suburbs than in the city.

FIGURE 3



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey

This suggests that Latinos’ jobs and income in the city are bifurcated. On one hand, there are jobs that produce high fourth-quartile earnings; on the other, there are jobs that bring low to medium-low quartile earnings. The suburbs seem to provide more jobs in the medium-high third-quartile weekly earnings. Hence, the bifurcated weekly earnings distribution for urban Latinos, as shown in Figure 3, is consistent with the economic structure of the hour-glass economy that some researchers report emerging in the late 1990s (Koval 2006, 207–8).

LATINOS AND ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

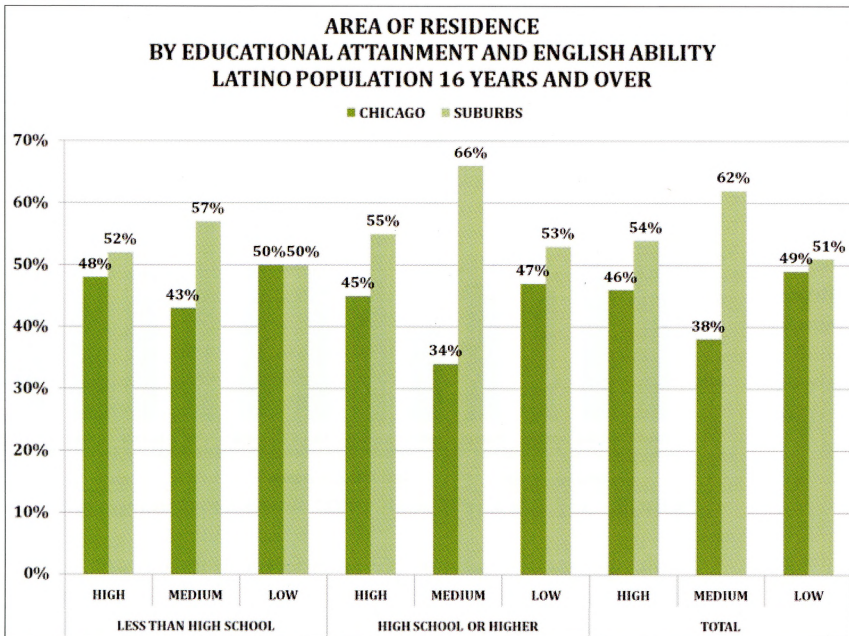
While the majority of Latinos with medium English-speaking ability and an even higher proportion of Latinos with high education and medium English-speaking ability live in the suburbs, two other findings are perhaps more surprising and somewhat perplexing.

It has long been an article of faith that the lack of English-language proficiency has been a kind of communication albatross for immigrants and tied them to ethnic enclaves in the inner city where, presumably, they could comfortably speak in their native tongue with other co-ethnics. Yet we find here that, regardless of educational level, half of low English-language-proficiency Latinos live in the city and half live in the suburbs, rather than the majority living in the city as history would dictate. This suggests—but doesn’t prove—that there are large enough ethnic Latino enclaves in the suburbs to reduce or eliminate the social, cultural, and communication isolation that in the past might have been the case in a majority non-Latino white English-speaking suburb.

It is also surprising that the highest proportion of suburban Latino residents have only medium English-language proficiency. To be sure, the majority of high English-language-proficiency

Latinos do live in the suburbs, but it is only a small majority (52 percent and 53 percent), whereas nearly two-thirds of medium English-language-proficiency Latinos live in the suburbs (57 percent and 66 percent). So far there is no obvious explanation for this, and for now we simply report that a significant majority of Latinos with medium English ability, in both educational categories, live in the suburbs, compared to Latinos of high or low ability.

FIGURE 4

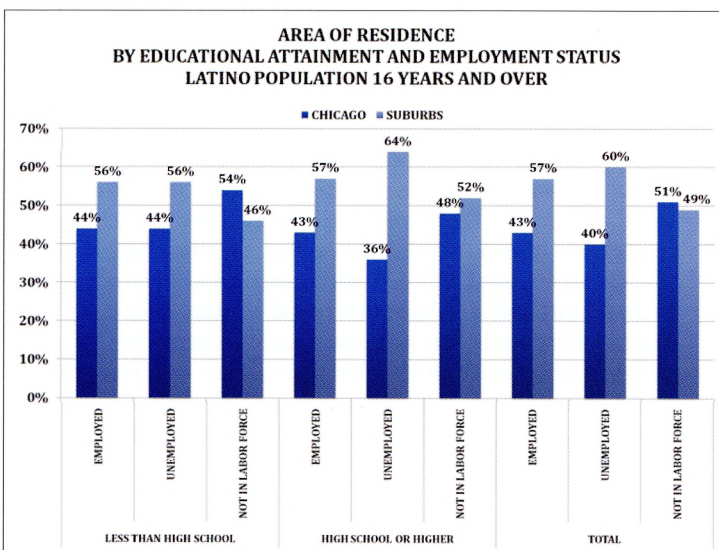


SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey

LATINOS AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS

As Figure 5 shows, for Latinos 16 years old and over the percentages of employed and unemployed individuals in the suburbs exceed the same percentages in the city, but the overall percentage of Latinos not in the labor force in the city is slightly higher (by 2 percent) than that in the suburbs.

FIGURE 5



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey

The most striking difference observed in Figure 5 is that the percentage of Latinos not in the labor force is bigger in the city than in the suburbs for those with less than high school education, while the opposite occurs for Latinos with high school or more education. Furthermore, the percentage difference within the unemployed is more pronounced among those with high school or higher education than among the Latinos with high school or lower education. Hence, education seems to increase participation in the labor market, and more in the suburbs than in the city; however, unemployment seems to be a more pervasive problem for Latinos in the suburbs than in the city.

LATINOS AND OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY

Since there is roughly a 45 percent-55 percent urban/suburban divide among Latinos in metropolitan Chicago, there is pretty much proportional representation of urban/suburban Latinos in the four largest occupational categories in which they are found -with, of course, some exceptions.

For example, low-education urban Latinos are proportionally under-represented in "other" occupation (37 percent) -primarily agriculture and landscaping- while low-education suburban Latinos are proportionally over-represented (63 percent). Similarly, high-education urban Latinos are proportionally under-represented in "other" occupations (36 percent) and "industrial"-primarily entrepreneurial- occupations (38 percent), while

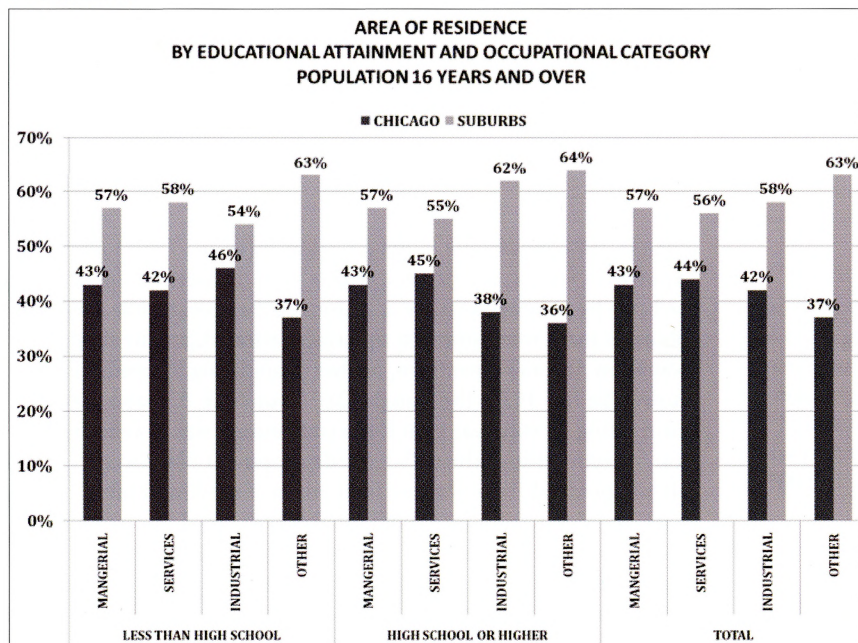
suburban Latino are over-represented in both, 64 percent and 62 percent. Suburban over-representation in agricultural work and landscaping is not surprising, since that's where those jobs are. And one could hypothesize that the over-representation of high-education suburbanites in industrial jobs could also be a function of where the jobs are coupled with the likelihood that high education results in better paying industrial jobs which, in turn, provides the economic resources for suburban living. The reason for the urban/suburban differences for entrepreneurship is not clear. (see FIGURE 6)

CONCLUSIONS

Consistent with other research, the descriptive analyses presented above show that higher proportions of Latinos live in the suburbs rather than in the city of Chicago, independently of their educational level. In addition, the suburbs are proportionally over-represented in two of the four largest Latino occupational groups, entrepreneurship and agriculture/landscaping. A more dynamic labor market in the suburbs is also suggested. More worrisome, the pattern of job distribution for Latinos in the city of Chicago appears to reflect the two-level economic bifurcation hour-glass economy; unlike the suburbs where more middle of the scale paid jobs are available for them, although this is a hypothesis to be tested more rigorously in further labor market participation analyses. Overall, the suburbs seem to offer Latino workers better returns on their investments in human capital, including education, immigration or migration status, occupation, and English proficiency levels, than the city of Chicago and consequently,

the suburbs attract higher percentages of Latinos with high school or higher education, citizenship status, and English proficiency than the city.

FIGURE 6



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey

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Contact SONIA SOLTERO: ssoltero@depaul.edu

Contact JOSE SOLTERO: jsoltero@depaul.edu