



Hispanic Economic Outlook

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About the HEO Committee

The American Society of Hispanic Economists (ASHE)—a member of the Allied Social Science Association—is a professional association of economists and other social scientists who are concerned with the under-representation of Hispanic Americans in the economics profession and with the lack of research generated on Hispanic American economic and policy issues. Our primary goals include:

1. Promoting the vitality of Hispanics in the economics profession through education, service, and excellence;
2. Promoting rigorous research on economic and policy issues affecting U.S. Hispanic communities and the nation as a whole;
and
3. Engaging more Hispanic Americans to effectively participate in the economics profession.

For more information about ASHE, please contact ASHE_mail@att.net or visit our website at www.asheweb.net.

Letter from the ASHE President

Alfonso Flores-Lagunes*

ASHE celebrated its 20th anniversary last year. It was a lively and friendly celebration, albeit through zoom. In January 2023, we will continue the celebration in person at the ASSA meetings. Can you tell we are Hispanic economists? We like to celebrate! And keep celebrating!

But this is also a moment to take stock and reflect on ASHE's journey over the last two decades. I was lucky enough to participate in the founding of ASHE as a young assistant professor. I was not able then to take in entirely what was happening. But over the years, this has become clearer in focus. ASHE is an organization concerned with the under-representation of Hispanics in the economics profession. We know that this under-representation is chronic—which has been documented in previous issues of our publication, the Hispanic Economic Outlook (HEO)—and, by itself, imposes additional barriers to us Hispanic economists. Even more importantly, it also imposes barriers on Hispanics at large through the chronic deficit of consideration to Hispanic issues in all ambits of policy.

Amid this situation, ASHE has been doing its part during the last two decades. I see the current ASHE leadership and members as standing on the shoulders of giants, trailblazers who had the vision and the spirit of service to take ASHE off the ground and make it what it is today. The beginnings of ASHE were not easy. We owe them a great deal of gratitude. Many people come to mind, including Adela de la Torre, Marie Mora, Sue Stockly, Alberto Davila, Joseph Guzman, Mark Lopez, Ron Oaxaca, Francisco Rivera-Batiz, Refugio Rochin, and Charlie Becker. All the past presidents of ASHE (which you can find listed on our webpage, asheweb.org) have also played a key role, including my direct predecessor, Sandra Orozco-Aleman, and Jose Fernandez, who rotates out of the Board of Officers. All those who have served on the different committees of ASHE, and last but not least, all ASHE members who volunteer and participate in our activities.

At the same time that this is an opportunity for celebration and recognition of our young history, it is also a chance to look forward, continue building a solid foundation for the future of ASHE and to dream a vision of what ASHE can become. First, ASHE has grown and has more members, organized activities, and events than ever before (which you can learn about on our website or through our email listserv). However, this process has come with growing pains. The organizational structure of ASHE needs to become more efficient and nimbler, a process towards which the Board has begun to move. One of my priorities is to devise organizational procedures that can help ASHE become even more functional without fundamentally changing its current structure. I see this as an investment in ASHE's future, allowing us to serve our membership better.

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Second, and in tandem with the growth of ASHE, our financial position appears more solid than ever before. This is thanks our increased visibility—which has attracted individual and institutional members—and the entrepreneurship of our past leaders. But there are additional steps that we can take to strengthen the financial position of ASHE. One of these steps is to seek the official IRS denomination for a non-profit, tax-exempt organization. The ability to accept tax-deductible contributions will bolster our finances in the future.

Third, we should dream about what ASHE can be. Today, ASHE offers numerous activities and benefits to our members, including the organization of sessions at the ASSA and regional meetings, mentoring programs, the monthly ASHE research seminar, simulated interviews for job candidates, liaison with the press, facilitator of communications of interest to our members, posting of job ads, etc. We should continue all those activities our members benefit from and begin new ones to satisfy unmet needs. I plan to request your input, elicit needs, and solicit ideas to preserve and enhance the relevance of ASHE to its members.

To close, I want to thank you for your support and involvement in ASHE's activities. I hope to be able to serve you effectively. I am always open to your comments and suggestions. You can reach me at afloresl@syr.edu.

Sincerely yours,

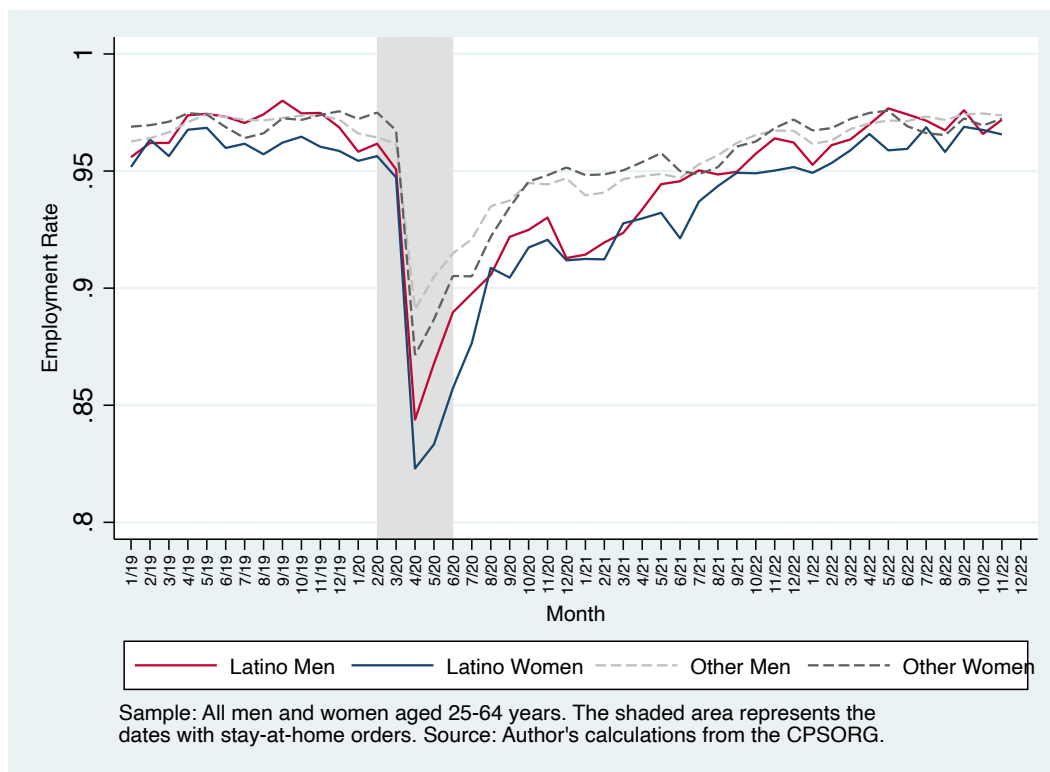
Alfonso Flores-Lagunes

Status of Latinxs in the Labor Market: The Recovery from the COVID Pandemic

Fernando Lozano*

In the summer of 2021, the St. Louis Fed announced that the recession induced by the COVID-19 Pandemic was over. The so-called “v-shaped” recovery was attained, and Gross Domestic Output by the second quarter of 2021 was larger than it had been at the end of 2019. In this report, I explore whether Latinos and Latinas have benefited from the economic recovery at the same rate as other ethnic groups. Research has shown that Latino workers were particularly vulnerable to adverse economic outcomes during the Pandemic, yet we do not know whether these negative consequences continued even after the Pandemic. For example, a report from the Pew Research Center Lopez and Krogstad, 2020) shows that Latinos were more likely to be unemployed or suffer financial hardship during the Pandemic. This result is confirmed by Romero (2020), who shows that Latino employment was particularly vulnerable during the Pandemic. Yet, the costs of the Pandemic went beyond the economic and financial. For example, Grooms, Ortega, and Rubalcaba (2021) show that Black and Latino essential workers were more likely to report symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression during the Pandemic.

Figure 1. Employment Rates



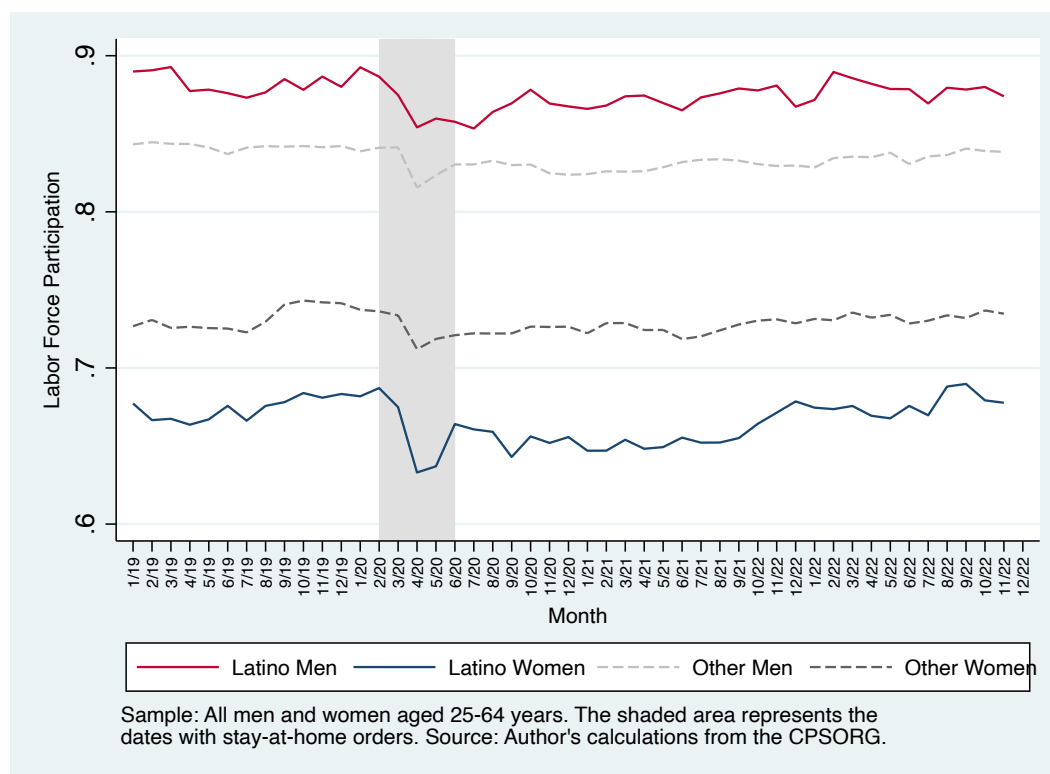
Do the adverse effects from the pandemic spill to a slower recovery from the recession, primarily via lower labor-force participation or employment rates? The data in this report

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shows that while the aggregated data for Hispanics show a recovery in the labor market that is indistinguishable from that of other groups, a closer look at the data suggests that phenotype, education, and nativity play an important role in explaining a slower labor market recovery for specific groups. Notably, male Black-Latinos have lower labor-force participation rates and lower employment rates by the fourth quarter of 2022. This result is well in line with the previous literature showing phenotype's importance on labor market outcomes. For example, Goldsmith et al. (2006) show that darker skin tone is negatively associated with wages. Similarly, Darity et al. (2002) show that Latinos who identify as Black experience a wage penalty.

The analysis in this report uses the 2010-2022 Current Population Survey. Figure 1 shows the aggregate data for employment rates for Latino and non-Latino men and women. Two things are evident from these data: first, the dip in employment due to the COVID pandemic was larger for Latinos workers and even more prominent for Latinas. Second, in the aggregate, all groups evidence a "v-shaped" recovery that seems to have been attained by the summer of 2021. Figure 2 shows the labor force participation rates for the same groups. The data in this figure shows diverging levels of LFP across ethnicity and gender: Latino men are the group most likely to be in the labor force, and Latinas are the least likely group to be in the labor force. The data shows a much smaller dip in LFP during the COVID recession, which is arguably the largest among Latinos and Latinas.

Figure 2. Labor Force Participation Rate



The data from Figure 1 and Figure 2 are quantified in Table 1. The first three columns in Table 1 show the Employment Rate. The first column shows the Employment Rate for 2019, the second column shows the Employment Rate for 2022. The third column shows the difference in employment between both periods. Columns four to six present the Labor Force Participation Rate for the same periods and the difference. The first panel shows both men and women together, first for non-Latino workers, then for Latinos and Latinas whose race is not Black, and third for Latinos and Latinas whose race is Black.

Table 1. Employment rates and Labor Force Participation Rates

	(1)	(2)		(1)	(2)	
	Employment Rates			Labor Force Participation		
	2019	2022	(2)-(1)	2019	2022	(2)-(1)
Non Latinos	0.971	0.970	0.000	0.785	0.783	0.002
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)*
Latinos	0.967	0.966	0.000	0.779	0.780	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Black Latinos	0.963	0.951	0.012	0.771	0.770	0.002
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.005)*	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.009)
Men only						
Non Latinos	0.971	0.970	0.000	0.842	0.836	0.006
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)*
Latinos	0.970	0.969	0.001	0.884	0.882	0.002
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Black Latinos	0.969	0.956	0.013*	0.847	0.827	0.020*
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.012)
Women only						
Non Latinos	0.971	0.970	0.001	0.732	0.733	-0.001
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Latinos	0.961	0.962	-0.001	0.672	0.674	-0.002
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Black Latinos	0.957	0.946	0.011	0.707	0.715	-0.008
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.013)

* Represents statistically significant at the 10% confidence level. Sample: All men and women aged 25 to 65 years old. Source: author's calculations from the Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotations.

The proportion estimates for employment in Table 1 confirm the data from Figures 1 and 2. Employment rates tend to be high. There are minor differences between non-Latino workers and Latino workers. The most significant difference in these estimates is between Black Latino and Latina workers and their non-Latino counterparts. For example, looking at the proportion of men and women combined in 2019, the difference in employment between Black Latinos and non-Latinos was less than a percentage point. In 2022 this difference is almost two percentage points. The differences between Latinos and Non-Latinos in Labor Force

participation are even smaller than for employment rates. For example, in 2019, the difference in LFP between non-Latinos and Black Latinos was 1.4 percentage points. In 2022 this difference increased to 1.8 percentage points. The slight differences in LFP may be due to the hypothesis that Latina women, regardless of race, catch up to their pre-pandemic level of employment. Yet the same is not true for Latino men, particularly Black Latino men.

Table 2 dives deeper into the data and compares employment rates for Black and non-Black Latino men and women across different education and nativity characteristics. The first three columns show data for non-Black Latinos, the second three columns for Black Latinos. The first and fourth column show the proportion employed in 2019, the second and fifth column in 2022, and the third and the sixth column the difference in proportion between both years. The first four categories are educational attainment: high school dropouts, high school graduates, some postsecondary education, and college graduates. The next three rows show nativity characteristics, whether the person was born in the United States and their parents were born in the United States, whether the person was born in the United States, but their parents were born abroad, and whether the person was born abroad. The last two rows divide the sample across age categories: twenty-five to forty-four years of age, and forty-five to sixty-five years of age. Table 3 presents the same data for Labor Force Participation.

Table 2. Proportion Employed and Demographic Characteristics

	(1)	(2)		(1)	(2)	
	Non-Black Latinos			Black Latinos		
	2019	2022	(2)-(1)	2019	2022	(2)-(1)
High School Dropouts	0.957 (0.002)	0.954 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	0.953 (0.009)	0.925 (0.012)	-0.027* (0.015)
High School Graduates	0.968 (0.002)	0.964 (0.002)	-0.004* (0.002)	0.964 (0.009)	0.935 (0.012)	-0.030* (0.015)
Some Postsecondary Education	0.967 (0.002)	0.968 (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)	0.954 (0.009)	0.960 (0.012)	0.006 (0.015)
College Graduates	0.974 (0.002)	0.978 (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)	0.978 (0.009)	0.978 (0.012)	0.000 (0.015)
Born in the US, Parents Born in US	0.965 (0.002)	0.967 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.964 (0.009)	0.946 (0.012)	-0.018 (0.015)
Born in US, Parents Abroad	0.963 (0.002)	0.964 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.955 (0.009)	0.954 (0.012)	0.000 (0.015)
Born Abroad	0.969 (0.002)	0.967 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	0.965 (0.009)	0.954 (0.012)	-0.011 (0.015)
Age 25-44	0.965 (0.001)	0.964 (0.001)	-0.002* (0.001)	0.958 (0.004)	0.947 (0.005)	-0.011* (0.006)
Age 45-65	0.968 (0.001)	0.970 (0.001)	0.002* (0.001)	0.973 (0.004)	0.960 (0.005)	-0.013* (0.006)

* Represents statistically significant at the 10% confidence level. Sample: All men and women aged 25 to 65 years old. Source: author's calculations from the Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotations.

The results from Table 2 suggest that, in general terms, Latino workers have recovered their pre-pandemic employment rates. There is one notable exception though: Black Latinos with little formal education. Black Latinos who did not finish high school are 2.7 percentage points less likely to be employed than before the pandemic. Black Latinos who graduated high school but did not attend any postsecondary institution are 3 percentage points less likely to be employed than before the pandemic. Concerning age, both Black Latinos and non-Black Latinos are less likely to be employed after the pandemic. Still, the magnitude of the estimates is five times larger for Black Latinos. We observe no differences based on nativity.

The results in Table 3 present a puzzle for the evolution of labor market outcomes for Latinos. That is, while labor force participation has changed little across the Latino sample, it is among the Black Latino with little formal education where the changes have been most remarkable. The labor force participation among High School Dropouts increased by 4.6 percentage points, and among high school graduates with no further education decreased by 2.8 percentage points. Notice that in the case of high school graduates, they experience a *decrease* in labor force participation and an *increase* in the unemployment rate. These two effects reinforce each other towards less labor market participation, be it because they are not in the labor force or because they cannot find a job.

Table 3. Proportion in the Labor Force and Demographic Characteristics

	(1)	(2)		(1)	(2)	
	Non-Black Latinos			Black Latinos		
	2019	2022	(2)-(1)	2019	2022	(2)-(1)
High School Dropouts	0.699 (0.003)	0.690 (0.003)	-0.008* (0.004)	0.629 (0.016)	0.675 (0.017)	0.046* (0.023)
High School Graduates	0.776 (0.002)	0.775 (0.003)	0.000 (0.003)	0.773 (0.011)	0.745 (0.012)	-0.028* (0.016)
Some Postsecondary Education	0.816 (0.003)	0.798 (0.003)	-0.018* (0.004)	0.797 (0.012)	0.789 (0.013)	-0.007 (0.018)
College Graduates	0.851 (0.003)	0.862 (0.003)	0.012* (0.004)	0.868 (0.010)	0.855 (0.011)	-0.013 (0.015)
Born in the US, Parents Born in US	0.769 (0.002)	0.765 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.004)	0.774 (0.010)	0.760 (0.011)	-0.014 (0.015)
Born in US, Parents Abroad	0.820 (0.003)	0.826 (0.003)	0.006 (0.004)	0.796 (0.015)	0.819 (0.014)	0.023 (0.021)
Born Abroad	0.770 (0.002)	0.771 (0.002)	0.000 (0.003)	0.760 (0.009)	0.760 (0.010)	-0.001 (0.014)
Age 25-44	0.807 (0.002)	0.807 (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)	0.813 (0.007)	0.817 (0.008)	0.004 (0.010)
Age 45-65	0.739 (0.002)	0.742 (0.002)	0.003 (0.003)	0.700 (0.011)	0.694 (0.012)	-0.006 (0.016)

* Represents statistically significant at the 10% confidence level. Sample: All men and women aged 25 to 65 years old. Source: author's calculations from the Current Population Survey Outgoing Rotations.

Conclusion

This report explores the post-pandemic labor market recovery of Latinos and Latinas in the United States. While the aggregated data shows that by the year 2022, Latinos have the same labor force participation and employment rate as they did before the pandemic in 2019, the disaggregated data also shows that this recovery has been unequal. Latinos, with little formal education, who report their race as Black in the Current Population Survey still experience a gap in their level of employment. There is no clear path regarding labor force participation. Latinos, who report their race as Black, report different trends. High school dropouts report higher labor force participation than pre-pandemic; high school graduates have lower labor force participation; and those who attended college and those who graduated college show no difference to their pre-pandemic level.

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The Long Run Impacts of Mexican-American School Desegregation A Summary for the Hispanic Economic Outlook

Francisca M. Antman

Kalena E. Cortes*

Concerns over segregation in schools has grown markedly over time, as immigration and residential segregation patterns have increasingly isolated students of color. While most of the focus on segregation in schools today stems from *de facto* segregation patterns, policymakers often turn to studies documenting the impacts of desegregating Black/African Americans after the seminal *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954. Less well known is the 1947 *Mendez v. Westminster* court decision which ended *de jure* segregation of Mexican Americans in California, a group who had long been segregated into separate schools and classrooms throughout the southwestern United States.

The justification for segregating Mexicans and Mexican Americans, regardless of citizenship, was often rooted in racial discrimination, but was not always spelled out explicitly, and sometimes used proxies as a means of validating the practice. Nevertheless, the underlying motivation was clear in the larger effort to separate Mexicans and whites in public areas throughout the American Southwest. In this context, Gonzalo Mendez and four other Mexican-American parents sued four Orange County school districts in 1945 on behalf of their children and 5,000 other children of “Mexican and Latin descent,” arguing that segregation violated their constitutional rights. Ultimately, an injunction was issued against Mexican segregation in Federal District court on the grounds that it was in opposition to state law and the ruling was upheld at the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in 1947. Since the school districts declined to appeal, the case never reached the U.S. Supreme Court, however, the case set an important precedent for the *Brown* case in its argument that the doctrine of “separate but equal” violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment.

[Our research](#) (Antman and Cortes, forthcoming) presents the first quantitative analysis of the effects of the 1947 *Mendez v. Westminster* court ruling on long-run educational attainment for Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites in California. One critical distinction between this setting and historical studies of desegregation in the Black/African-American context is that the latter frequently rely on data from the American South, where official documents differentiate between schools for Black and white children. In contrast, segregation policy in California was primarily decided at the local level and official, quantitative documentation of its extent is quite rare in comparison. To get around this data limitation, we leverage historical sources which suggest that segregation was most common in areas with relatively high shares of Hispanic populations. Note that this distinction is consistent with historical evidence on school segregation: Orange County, from which the *Mendez v. Westminster* case originated, is in the

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group of counties classified as likely to have segregated Hispanic students in the pre-*Mendez* period.

To derive quantitative estimates of the impact of desegregation on affected students, we compare counties with a high Hispanic to non-Hispanic population ratio in 1940 to counties with a relatively low ratio, as well as across birth cohorts that started school after *Mendez* relative to birth cohorts that started school before the *Mendez* ruling. Figure 1 graphs the ultimate educational attainment of Hispanic and non-Hispanic white individuals from these counties based on their age at the time of the school *Mendez* decision. Most striking is the steep increase in educational attainment for Hispanic individuals from counties with a high likelihood of segregating prior to *Mendez* and who would either have still been in school at the time of *Mendez* or who started school after *Mendez*—precisely those individuals we would expect to have benefited from desegregation.

The main empirical strategy centers on comparing educational attainment for those who began school after the *Mendez* desegregation decision and were fully exposed to the desegregation treatment to those who had already completed significant schooling, across counties which varied in their propensity to segregate students prior to *Mendez*. The results suggest that the impact of school desegregation in 1947 was quite significant, leading to an increase of almost 0.9 years of schooling for Hispanics in the cohorts who started school after *Mendez* relative to cohorts born 10 years prior. We find even larger effects, on the order of 1.9 years of schooling, if we compare treated cohorts with older birth cohorts who likely would have completed schooling prior to the *Mendez* ruling. This is quite a substantial increase, given that the latter group only attained about 9.2 years of education on average.

This striking change over a relatively short period of time suggests major milestones such as junior high school and high school completion may have also been affected and thus we also trace out the impact of *Mendez* on those outcomes for each birth cohort as well. The main results from our analysis suggest that on average, the birth cohorts who started school after *Mendez* in the counties that had previously been most likely to segregate students were 18.4 percent more likely to graduate from junior high school and 19.4 percent more likely to graduate from high school. In short, Mexican-American school desegregation had a dramatic and positive effect on school attainment for Hispanic students.

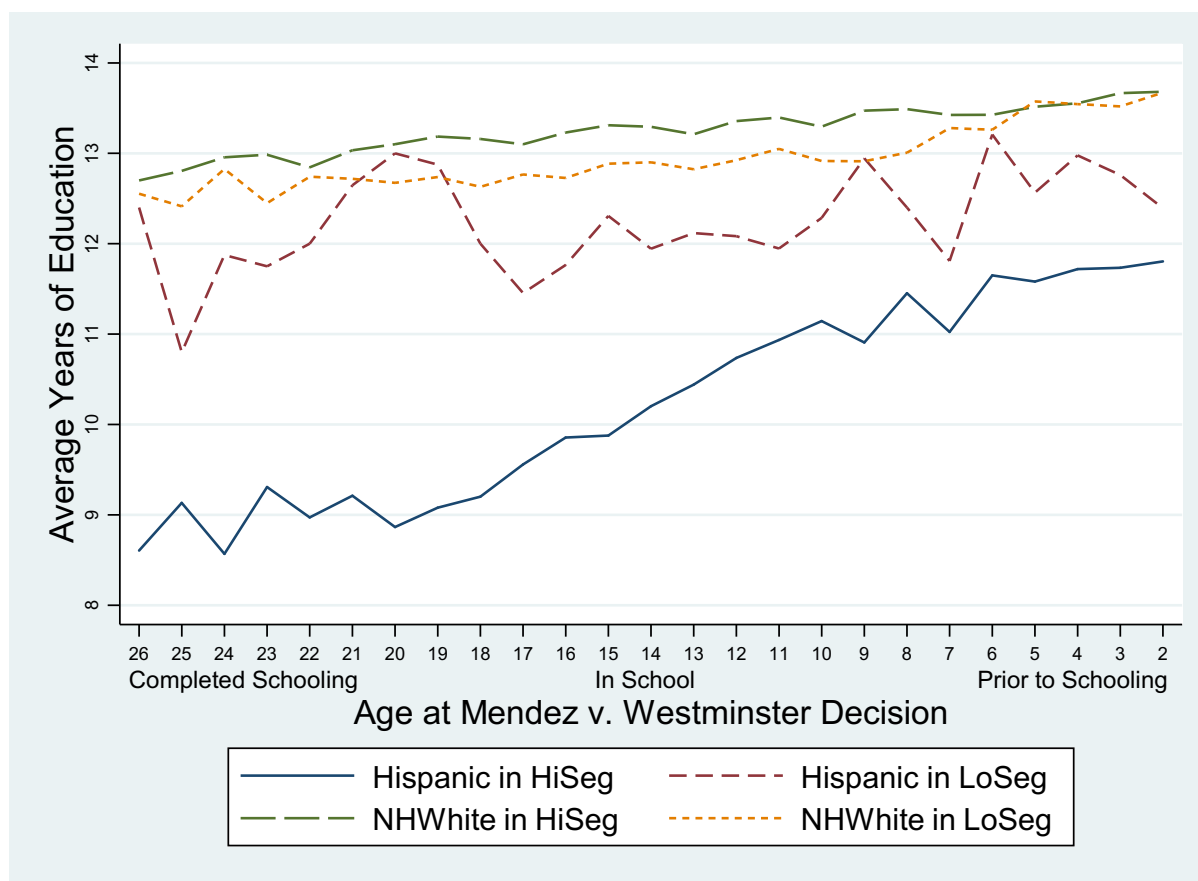
As an extension, we also examine impacts on non-Hispanic whites and find evidence of a slight decline in educational attainment of non-Hispanic whites in birth cohorts that began school after *Mendez* in counties that were more likely to be segregated. This would be consistent with a shift toward a more equitable resource distribution within counties across students from different ethnic groups following the end of *de jure* segregation. Lacking data on school resources linked with explicit information on whether schools and classrooms were classified as “Mexican” or “white,” however, we cannot decisively pin down the mechanism. Nevertheless, our results suggest an important causal link between desegregation and greater equity across students of different backgrounds. More broadly, this study indicates that focusing on desegregating schools

and classrooms in the present day is worthwhile and may be especially beneficial to Latinx students, who are now among the most segregated in the U.S.

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Figure 1: Educational Attainment in Counties with High and Low Likelihood of School Segregation by Age at *Mendez v. Westminster* School Desegregation Decision



Notes: Sample is limited to men and women from 5% samples of 1980, 1990, and 2000 Censuses who were born in California and who reside in a county where the Hispanic to non-Hispanic population ratio was either very high (i.e., above the 75% level for all 1940 counties: high likelihood of segregation, HiSeg), or very low (i.e., below the 25% level for all 1940 counties: low likelihood of segregation, LoSeg).

Reflecting on the CUNY Mexican Studies Institute's First Decade

Alyshia Gálvez*

In February 2022, the CUNY Mexican Studies Institute celebrates the tenth anniversary of its founding. I was honored to be asked to serve as the chairperson of the proposal process that preceded the Institute's approval as a CUNY Institute, and then to be elected as the Institute's founding director by its inaugural advisory board. I stepped down from leading the Institute in Dec. 2016, after a five-year tenure that was simultaneously the most meaningful and the most challenging role I have filled. I am grateful to the current director of the Institute, Professor Juan J. Delacruz for the opportunity to reflect here on the institute's first decade. In this piece, I will reflect both on our goals when we built the institute, as well as the outcome to date. In 2000, a group of faculty, students and administrators founded the CUNY Working Taskforce on Strengthening Educational Opportunities for Mexicans and Mexican Americans in recognition of the growing Mexican-origin population in New York City. This taskforce sought to make the City



University of New York more accessible and welcoming to the growing Mexican population. Statistical data from the US Census and reports by one of the Taskforce's founding members, Professor Laird Bergad of Lehman College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, indicated a rapidly growing Mexican population in New York City, rising 57.7% to 319,126 between 2000 and 2010, and at the time anticipated to surpass other Latin American national origin groups by 2024 ⁽¹⁾. While CUNY saw an increase of enrollment of

Mexican origin students of more than 1800% in the decade prior to the founding of the Institute, efforts to boost enrollment would have to grow much faster if CUNY was to have an equivalent representation of Mexican origin students in its student body to the percentage of the Mexican origin population in New York City, then about 5%. Reports that 51% of adults born in Mexico and living in New York City in 2010 were neither in school nor had a high school diploma were considered an educational emergency by advocates ⁽²⁾. It became clear that for the fulfillment of the expectations for social mobility that caused many people to migrate, public educational institutions would have to do a better job of becoming accessible to this newly arrived immigrant group.

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¹ Bergad, Laird. (2008) "Mexicans in New York City, 2007: An Update," *Latino Data Project*, Report 26, 2008, <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/lastudies/latinodataprojectreports/Mexicans%20in%20New%20York%20City,%202007%20An%20Update.pdf>

² Semple, Kirk, 2011, "Mexicans in New York City Lag in Education," *New York Times*, Nov. 24, 2011.



The taskforce undertook a series of campaigns, including a Memorandum of Understanding between CUNY and the Consulate of Mexico in New York; targeted college fairs in each of the five boroughs; three academic conferences dedicated to exploring diverse topics related to Mexican and Mexican-American Studies, as well as a Spanish-language webpage, *¡Sí, Se Puede!*, designed to offer culturally and linguistically accessible information about how to apply for admission or transfer to CUNY, irrespective of

immigration status. Campus-specific programming, like City Tech's restaurant workers' certification program, and Baruch College's leadership training institute organized by Professor Robert Smith, both sponsored with the Mexican Consulate, also sought to expand the reach and offerings of the university to the Mexican community. Inherent to these efforts was acknowledgement that to be more accessible to the Mexican origin population, which at that time was still largely Mexican-born, the university would have to do a better job of serving immigrant students, especially undocumented immigrant students and their families. While the City University of New York had been an immigrant-serving institution since its foundation in 1847, offering an open-door policy to all learners at a time when many private educational institutions exclusively catered to White Protestant elite men, the needs of immigrant communities at the turn of the 21st century were different. People born in Mexico had long been part of the social fabric of New York City, from the Mayan-speaking Yucatecos who disembarked ships from Mérida in New York harbor as part of the henequen trade early in the 20th century, to the artists and revolutionaries who helped plot the Mexican Revolution from exile in the Big Apple, to the earliest 1980s "pioneros" who came from places like Chinantla de la Sal, Piaxtla, and the areas around Tulcingo and Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla to Brooklyn (³). Nonetheless, the largest wave of Mexican migration occurred in the late 1990s. Many participants in that migratory wave were refugees from the economic instability wrought by the North American Free Trade Agreement, the early 1990's peso devaluation, and a series of droughts that decimated their country, with particular impact on the Mixteca region (overlapping Puebla, Guerrero and Oaxaca states), turning their migrant-receiving states into migrant-sending ones. Because NAFTA failed to account for or authorize the anticipated human mobility triggered by the liberalization of trade in North America, most of these migrants arrived without authorization, carrying with them the burden of undocumented migratory status, and thus excluded from many of the goods and services afforded to other immigrant waves.



³ See Smith, Robert, *Mexican New York*, University of California Press, 2006; Pycior, Julie. "Mexicans in New York City before 1960," Lecture at the Riverdale/Yonkers Ethical Culture Society, October 21, 2012; Gálvez, Alyshia, *Guadalupe in New York*, NYU Press, 2009; Castillo Planas, Melissa, *A Mexican State of Mind: New York City and the New Borderlands of Culture*, Rutgers University Press, 2020.

That wave of migrants worked mightily to secure the rights of citizenship, calling for an immigration amnesty to allow those who were undocumented to embark on a pathway to citizenship ⁽⁴⁾. The activists at the time, at the turn of this century, believed that immigration reform was imminent. It was about 15 years ago that New York, and every other large US city, saw massive protests in favor of immigration reform in 2005 and 2006 ⁽⁵⁾. Many current CUNY students were toddlers who sat on their parents' laps at planning meetings or were pushed in baby carriages at those marches. It is shocking that to this day, immigration reform has receded even further from the horizon now than then, with a rise in virulent anti-immigrant, and specifically anti-Mexican sentiment vilifying and denigrating Mexican nationals and their children and blocking progress toward immigration reform ⁽⁶⁾. Protests to make CUNY more friendly to immigrants began with a hunger strike in 2000 led by then student activist Angelo Cabrera, among others, who sought successfully to ensure that undocumented students could be eligible for in-state tuition. At the time, immigrant students, including undocumented students who had



arrived as children to the United States and only ever studied in public schools in New York City, were charged out-of-state or international student tuition. They also were excluded from state and federal financial aid. Many of the activists and advocates who mobilized to make CUNY more responsive to immigrant students became the core members of the Task Force. One of the key messages of their work was precisely to spread the word about the win on tuition: to ensure that Mexican families knew that CUNY was available to them, irrespective of their

immigration status. While even in-state tuition was a steep price to pay for many families with low incomes but illegible for financial aid and loans, rampant misinformation meant that many people thought undocumented students were still ineligible for admission or charged international student rates. Spanish-language messaging and college fairs sponsored by community leaders and nonprofits were a good way to get the message out.

The foundation of the Mexican Studies Institute at CUNY was inseparable from the struggle for access to education for all immigrant and Latinx students. While the taskforce made substantive strides on meeting its goals, it soon became clear that lasting progress would only come from an institutionalization of the goals of the task force in a CUNY Institute. CUNY is home to over 100 [centers and institutes](#), including several ethnic studies institutes, such as Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, the Dominican Studies Institute, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, the Asian-American and Asian Research Institute, the Institute for Research on the African Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean (IRADAC), and the Haitian Studies Institute. While the

⁴ Gálvez, Alyshia. *Guadalupe in New York: Devotion and the struggle for citizenship rights among Mexican immigrants*. NYU Press, 2010.

⁵ Heredia, Luisa. "5. From Prayer to Protest: The Immigrant Rights Movement and the Catholic Church" In *Rallying for Immigrant Rights: The Fight for Inclusion in 21st Century America* edited by Kim Voss and Irene Bloemraad, 101-122. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520948914-008>

⁶ Gonzales, Phillip B., Renato Rosaldo, and Mary Louise Pratt, eds. *Trumpism, Mexican America, and the Struggle for Latinx Citizenship*. University of New Mexico Press, 2021.

foundation of each ethnic studies institute has a unique story, they have usually emerged as a product of activism, advocacy and support from community stakeholders and elected officials. In some cases, they were the products of demands, protests and lawsuits alleging lack of representation in curriculum and hiring at CUNY. The creation of ethnic studies at CUNY in the first place, in 1968, was a product of nationwide protests demanding equity and representation in admissions and curricula, resulting in Lehman College founding the East Coast's first Black and Puerto Rican Studies Department (now the Departments of Africana and African-American Studies, and Latin American and Latino Studies, where I am a faculty member), as well as California State University's Chicano Studies Program ⁽⁷⁾. There is a historical synergy between demands for civil rights, political representation and enfranchisement, and educational equity and inclusion. Greater political power from grassroots mobilization and eventual political representation amplifies the calls for curriculum and hiring. Better educational opportunities serve to empower new generations of community leaders and elected officials. The cases of Centro and Dominican Studies are examples of the clout and resourcing of institutes being both a result and a driver of greater social, economic and electoral representation in New York City and New York State.

Unfortunately for the Mexican community in New York City, this pattern of consolidation and growth of representation and political capital has not been available. There has been no pathway to legalization for the vast majority of those who migrated from Mexico to the United States in the last four decades. Mexicans who came in the large mid-1990s wave account for about 50% of the unauthorized immigrant population in the United States ([11 million](#)). This is so even though 84% of the foreign-born Mexican population in the United States has been in this country for more than 20 years as of [2017](#). Long term settlement without the option of regularization is a policy of veritable entrapment rather than inclusion. While the Immigrant Reform and Control Act of 1986, popularly known as "Amnesty", offered a pathway to citizenship for some immigrants who had entered the US prior to 1982, since then, all federal legislative action on immigration has been punitive, restricting immigrants' access to regularization of their immigration status. Rather than allow adjustment of status, the vast majority of federal legislation, policy and enforcement has been centered on a militarization of the US-Mexico border, criminalization of Mexican people and a ramping up of detention and deportation.⁸ New York City which only in the past four decades became a numerically significant site of Mexican migration, has an even more pronounced inequality in access to pathways to legalization. While nationwide, only 31% of the total Mexican population is foreign born, in New York City, as of

⁷ Retrieved from <https://latinxstudies.weebly.com/latinx-studies-at-cuny.html>
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/n8qnnzpk5iky023/Totti.EstablishmentPRStudiesCUNY.pdf?dl=0>;
<https://www.npr.org/2020/08/04/899167279/the-long-bloody-strike-for-ethnic-studies> on 12/12/2021

⁸ Gonzales, Phillip B, Renato Rosaldo, and Mary Louise Pratt. 2021. *Trumpism, Mexican America, and the Struggle for Latinx Citizenship*. University of New Mexico Press.

Hernandez, Kelly Lytle. 2010. *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

De Genova, Nicholas. *The deportation regime: Sovereignty, space, and the freedom of movement*. Duke University Press, 2010.

Jones, Reece. 2018. *Open Borders In Defense of Free Movement*. Geographies of Justice and Social Transformation. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press.

[2017](#), it was still the majority at 50.3%, and only 57% of New Yorkers of Mexican descent are citizens, including US born children. This means that a large portion of the adult population is still excluded from formal political participation. This is markedly different from the profile of the other largest Latin American national origin groups in New York City: Puerto Ricans, who are citizens, and Dominicans who went from being largely foreign-born and not citizens to majority US citizens by [1990](#).

Often, while pursuing resources for the Mexican Studies Institute, the members of the proposal committee at its foundation, and then the members of the advisory board of the newly founded institute, were told that they needed to focus on getting electoral representation: that to secure backing and resources from the City Council or the New York State legislature, they would need increased political representation. Indeed, as recently as 2019, the Mexican Studies Institute was allocated only about 10% of the city funding annually granted to the Dominican Studies Institute and Centro. In 2021, under the leadership of acting director José Higuera López, City Council funding was finally increased to \$1 million for fiscal year 2022. Advocacy on the part of Brooklyn City councilmember Carlos Menchaca of District 38 was one of the reasons attributed for the increase in [public funding](#). Councilmember [Menchaca](#) was the first and so far, only Mexican American elected to public office in New York City. When he was term limited from running for reelection in 2020, New York City was again left without any Mexican or Mexican American political representation at all. Any New Yorker could recognize both the moral and demographic obligation of New York City to direct recognition and equitable resources to the Mexican population, given its rapid growth and its socioeconomic and educational precarity. To be sure, some politicians have seen the wisdom in courting and serving the community, in spite of the lagging of its political representation.⁹ Nonetheless, it appears that the assumption that resources given to one group are taken from other “competing” ethnic groups and that ethnic and national origin groups should have to fight for a delimited pie is still dominant. Even the 2021 decision to allow “[non-citizen voting](#)” in municipal elections will do little to correct the imbalance in representation given that it is limited to [legal permanent residents](#) and many Mexican nationals in New York City do not have access to that status. This context reveals a bit of a “chicken and egg” conundrum in which the community is told it needs to have political representation in order to secure equitable educational and social resources, even while educational and social resources are necessary to foster political leadership and runs for public office that could result in political representation. In its first decade, the CUNY Mexican Studies Institute has worked tirelessly to foster civic participation and leadership among CUNY students to ensure that they are poised to run for elected office and shape New York City politics in decades to come. Indeed, with our CUNY Becas program (now renamed The Mexican Studies Scholarship program),



⁹ For example, NY State Governor George Pataki was known to campaign at events organized by the Mexican community at the turn of the twenty-first century. See Gálvez, Alyshia. "La Virgen Meets Eliot Spitzer: Articulating Labor Rights For Mexican Immigrants." *Social Text* 24, no. 3 (2006): 99-130.

scholarship recipients complete internships in many roles that helps build their leadership capacity, including regular placement of interns at City Hall, in city councilmembers' offices (including Menchaca's), and in the [Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs](#). The newly named commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, [Manuel Castro](#), is an alumnus of the Becas program. Students are also encouraged to be binational leaders, with the Institute sponsoring multiple efforts to link Mexico and the United States with educational opportunities, study and service abroad opportunities, research collaboratives and consortiums, and more, in collaboration with Mexican and binational educational institutions, government agencies, and nonprofits. But more could be done with equitable resourcing.

When the Institute was founded, CUNY was considered by many to be a national leader in terms of serving and protecting undocumented immigrant students, in the intervening years, that energy and investment seems to have leveled off. We do not see undocumented student resource centers at all of the campuses as in the Cal State and University of California public university systems.¹⁰ A lot of the university's programming and services for immigrant students are restricted to students who have Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and are unavailable to students who are fully undocumented. A sign of the general lack of resources is that when the Mexican Studies Institute opens applications for its scholarship program, it receives applications from undocumented students from all over the world and has granted full tuition scholarships to 250 students from 13 countries. Many of the students grapple in their applications with not having a particular interest in pursuing Mexican Studies but hoping to receive the scholarship because it is one of the few available to undocumented students. While the Institute has always been proud to serve students irrespective of their national origin, it is unfortunate that the commitment to serving immigrant students has not been more broadly distributed across the nation's largest public metropolitan university. The mass disenfranchisement of the Mexican population in New York City and the resulting inequitable allocation of public education and civic resources will not resolve as long as the federal government fails to offer a pathway to citizenship for all immigrants. Until then, the role of the City University of New York to foster educational opportunity, research, and pathways of empowerment for Mexican New Yorkers remains critically important.



¹⁰ With the exception of John Jay College where a consortium of students, staff and faculty, including former Institute board member, Professor Isabel Martínez, and former Becari@s, who secured funding for the Immigrant Student Success Center now staffed by Denise Vivar, one of the Institute's scholarship recipients and a former staff member. <https://www.ijay.cuny.edu/undocumentedstudents>

Mexican Migration and New York City's Food Systems

Dr. Axel Elías J*

In 2021, I attended a 'Tortilla workshop' organized by a group of young women from Mixteca, an organization with the objective of helping the Latinx community in Brooklyn. The workshop took place at Los Colibríes, a community garden just a short walk from Sunset Park with a great view to the Manhattan skyline. The organizers began the workshop by talking about the historical importance of maize in what is now Mexico and then asked for current experiences about it on our daily lives. After we all shared our stories, the organizers asked us to take a step closer to the bonfire and comal (griddle). Within just a few steps, we felt the heat of the griddle and the potent scent of burning wood. As we commented on our experiences, one of the leaders had been carefully adding water to the nixtamal. Once the dough had the right consistency (similar to



bread, but not as stretchy), she took a palm-sized ball of nixtamal, and placed it in between two sheets of plastic. She then used the tortilla press to evenly flatten the dough and turn it into a disc. She then cautiously removed the thin tortilla from the press and carefully placed the raw tortilla in the griddle. Most people that have witnessed this process will agree that it is mesmerizing to watch a tortilla soufflé once it is placed in a hot griddle. The workshop attendees commented on the famous Mexican saying when tortillas are made from scratch. Women often receive the remark: 'you are now ready to get married.' This comment reflects a commonly held idea that the tortilla making process is an important sign that shows that one

is ready to form a household, despite the fact that most people in urban centers do not make tortillas from scratch. Once the tortilla was placed on the griddle on both sides, the workshop leader added epazote and queso de bola, quesillo or queso Oaxaca, a soft and stringy cheese commonly found in the South-eastern part of Mexico. The melted cheese in combination with the epazote formed a simple, yet very tasty quesadilla. The participants were then invited to prepare their own tortillas or quesadillas with the ingredients at hand. The workshop ended with a tortilla-quesadilla tasting session. This workshop took place a few months upon my arrival to New York City and in comparison, to my experience living outside of Mexico, I was surprised to hear that there were different options to buy tortillas or even maíz nixtamalizado other than Maseca or Minsa. The attendees spoke about shops in the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn where one could find the former ingredients. Even more interesting was that two of the workshop's attendees grew maize, epazote, cilantro macho, chiles, among other produce in their family farm. The young



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women were daughters of Ana, one of the founders of Ángel Farms. A few days after the workshop, I had the opportunity to talk to Ana about their New Jersey based farm. In our conversation, she expressed joy and excitement by having the opportunity to work the land. In Ana's words: 'Thank God we became farmers! We turned New York in our Mexico... We have the best of both worlds (11 May 2021).' Ana spoke about the importance of farming, and thus continuing a family tradition in the United States. Ana described it as a double victory since her family continued to farm while experiencing less violence than in Mexico. As a matter of fact, the latter was the reason why the family migrated. Furthermore, beyond Ana's family history her comment also implicitly addressed food systems in New York, mainly the supply and demand of ingredients necessary for the production and reproduction of what we can label as the Mexican culinary field. An interesting example of the impact of migration on food systems was how proud Ana was for growing 'cilantro macho' (also known as Mexican cilantro). For those that have enjoyed street food tacos in Mexico, you probably realized that this cilantro is more than a simple garnish, since it plays an important part in dish's taste and appearance. Mexicans tend to expect it in their food. For instance, María, who prepared tacos and quesadillas in a food truck in Washington Heights, had two forms of preparing these dishes. When Mexicans came to order, she knew she had to include only onion and cilantro in tacos, while for 'Americans' she served these with 'lettuce, cream, cheese, tomato, onion and cilantro (19 April 2021).' The apparent simplicity of the garnish for the first type of taco requires the taste of the cilantro grown in places such as Angel Farms. Despite cilantro having origins in the Mediterranean, most Mexicans expect 'cilantro macho' in their taco, thus the importance of having the 'right' ingredients. Luisa's life journey sheds more light on migration and its impact in New York City's food systems. Luisa moved from Puebla to New York City in the 1990's and worked at a factory during several years. Nevertheless, after a massive redundancy consequence of the economic crises, Luisa was forced to look for other sources of income. Luisa decided to bake pan de dulce (sweet pastries) and sell them in her neighborhood. Luisa found her spot in the intersections of Amsterdam and 162nd, right outside one of the exits of the Amsterdam and 163rd subway station, a busy intersection for Dominican and Mexican communities that live or work in the area.



In our conversation, Luisa spoke about how Mexicans that stopped by and bought conchas and cuernos, among other pastries, often commented that they tried to replicate their sensorial experiences of back home (20 April 2021). When asked about the ingredients Luisa needed to bake the pastries or cook Mexican food for herself, Luisa claimed that she could find nearly everything that she used in her native Puebla now in New York City. For Anthony, owner of La Oaxaqueña, a Mexican deli located in the same street where Luisa sold her pastries, New York City's food systems allowed him to obtain epazote, pithayas, and hoja santa, among other goods commonly consumed in Mexican cuisine. Nevertheless, Anthony also found that the channels of distribution were scarce at times, resulting in some expensive products (20 April 2021). For Ana, the apparent availability of Mexican produce was recent. In her words: 'When we began farming

sixteen years ago, the Mexican market was a bit more open, but when we first came to this country, it was not, one could not find jalapeños or chile de árbol.’ Juan and his family arrived at New York City in the 1980s when he was a child. Just as with Ana’s recollection of food availability, Juan remembered that finding certain ingredients from back home was complicated and this was especially difficult for tortillas (10 May 2021). The lack of this staple ingredient of the Mexican culinary field had an impact on the family’s diet. Juan contrasted the then and now, claiming that it was now easier to find tortillas in supermarkets and bodegas in New York City. These experiences as well as the tortilla workshop described in the first paragraphs suggest that Mexicans have had an impact on food systems in New York City. The impact goes beyond production, distribution, consumption, we can even talk about the community’s impact on extraction and waste.

Marco and Argelia are two other Mexicans living in New York City that shared the idea that one could find many products needed to cook or consume Mexican dishes in New York City. In their individual interviews they claimed that the Bronx, Queens, or Brooklyn had better distribution channels than other boroughs due to the higher concentration of Mexicans in these boroughs. Other participants living in New Jersey and Staten Island expressed similar ideas. In contrast, those that lived or had lived in Manhattan or upstate New York often had to go to the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn to buy their products and have a taste of Mexico through the sense of taste and smell. Marco, a young professional, stated in our conversation ‘... the more Manhattan, the less Mexican food options you’ll find. The more you go into Brooklyn or Queens, the more Latin people, small shops, bodegas and Latin restaurants you will find (25 May 2021).’ Argelia, artist and performer, shared perspectives with Marco. The former claimed that she needed chile in her everyday diet, but luckily all she had to do was find the right shop in the Bronx or Queens (25 May 2021). Argelia also declared that every now and again she could even find rare herbs and plants such as huazontle. Pamela, a young Mexican academic living in Queens, sustained that she could easily find the produce she needed to cook Mexican in her local supermarket. Pamela contrasted this experience to when she lived in Toronto and had to travel for hours to purchase these goods and recreate the sensorial memories associated with her hometown, Mexico City (1 June 2021).

The supply and availability of produce necessary to cook Mexican food in New York City is complex, but can be attributed to at least two elements, firstly, cultural diversity due to migration, and secondly, food distribution. Regarding cultural diversity, New York City has a diverse population due to continuing waves of migration. According to Baver and the authors of *Latinos in New York* (2018), there has been a constant migration by the Latinx community to New York City, first by Puerto Ricans, followed by Dominicans and most recently, Mexicans. Furthermore, the growing urban speculation in Manhattan has expelled some communities to less expensive boroughs. Mexican migrants, for instance, have formed communities in Sunset Park, Jackson Heights, Little Italy, and Mott Haven, among other neighborhoods. For a visualization of these changes, Lori Flores’s project on cuisine is very relevant. The cultural diversity in these areas has favored an equally diverse food system thanks to supply and demand. Closely related, the rising prices in Manhattan have narrowed cultural practices to fit cosmopolitanism. Paraphrasing Miriam Stock and Antonie Schmiz, cosmopolitanism is a

reproduction of [good] taste that reduces cultural diversity to the preferences of white and higher-class groups. Regarding the importance of food systems, New York City is home to one of the largest food distribution centres in the U.S., the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center. The latter is found in the Southern end of the Bronx, and it is comprised by three markets: the Hunts Point Cooperative Meat Market, the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market, and the New Fulton Fish Market. According to the New York City Food Policy Center, these three spaces sublet to 155 vendors and distributors and cater around 60% of produce to the New York Metropolitan Area. This area is home to more than 20 million making it the most populated metropolitan area in the United States of America. Cultural diversity and food system infrastructure can explain availability of produce to some extent; nevertheless, it is important to highlight that food distribution is not equal.

Gender, race, and class have an impact on food systems and can be seen in testimonies such as Ana's. According to the latter, besides Mexican traders, Ecuadorian and Chinese distributors also valued the corn grown at Angel Farms. From the consumer side, Mexican shoppers such as Pamela try to acquire goods from communities other than the Mexican one. In Pamela's words, 'I miss cacahuazintle [a type of maize that grows with the summer rain season in the central valleys of Mexico]. Sometimes I buy Peruvian choclo, but it is not the same.' Pamela's comment suggests that even though she could find similar ingredients with other national communities,



her desire for cacahuazintle was not completely fulfilled. This lack of diversity in food systems can be due to the clumping of peoples and ingredients, as well as consolidating diasporas. Besides food systems, it is important to acknowledge the demand for produce necessary to cook Mexican dishes is ever changing. For instance, the demand of certain ingredients can be influenced by environmental concerns (as can be seen in avocado or tequila production), as well as cultural interactions and creative expressions. This can happen within or beyond Mexican borders. Enrique Olvera, Daniela Soto Inés, and Ryck Bayless, among others,

are chefs located in the United States of America. Their actions can shape ideas about Mexican cuisine not only because of their celebrity status and their social media reach or publications, but also because of how their work is rendered visible by international media outlets. Olvera, Soto Inés, and Bayless are some of the figures which receive international spotlight by the Michelin Guide, the New York Times, or The Guardian, to mention a few examples. The examples mentioned here highlight that New York City is both subject to changes by the migrant communities, while it also plays an important role in the definition of culture, in the United States of America and beyond. Mexico, Canada, the Americas, and many other countries in the world are subject to these changes. The continuing flows of migration to New York City and the strong cultural industries and networks often feed cosmopolitanism, but this approach does not always favor multiculturalism and diversity. As discussed above, cosmopolitanism takes whiteness and economic development as the aspirational norm. Multiculturalism is often used as a tool for cosmopolitanism in so far as how it can enrich the sense of [good] taste. Nevertheless, this simplification often overlooks originality and diversity. Cooking Mexican, or any other culinary

expression from the world, can be a form of resistance, but it is important that we consider how racialized culinary expressions have been commodified within cities such as New York. It is very useful to reflect upon the complex, diverse, and changing influences of national and regional cuisines over time and how these moves with people and beyond borders. It is most important that we value individual creativity from chefs, cooks, and farmers, among others, while we acknowledge the diverse origins of the culinary expressions and the food systems that allow these to be recreated and challenged. The tortilla workshop described at the beginning of this



piece is one of many examples that recover the mobility of food and the ideas around it. The availability of tortillas in New York City might appear as basic to people that have access to them, but it is important to remember that this was due to an expanding Mexican community that created a demand for them, an extractive and productive network that tailored to that demand, as well as distribution channels to get them across the city. Food systems are complex, but they are most important to understand the everyday that form communities as well as the environmental impacts that these have locally and globally.

A Century of Mexican Migration in the United States: Who are we? What do we do? Where are we going?

Juan J. DelaCruz*

Migration is a world phenomenon of shattering proportions, and their motives are manifold. Socioeconomic migration befalls when people want to increase their earnings or simply to seek a better quality of life. Political migration is caused when people escape from persecution or war. In recent years, environmental grounds are an increasingly common cause for migration. The [United Nations](#) reported that 272 million people (3.5% of the global population) migrated across the world as of June 2019, which represents 51 million people more than in 2010. The world population will be 8.5 billion people by 2030 of which 3.5 billion will be the size of the labor force (working-age population). China and India will comprise 57% of the skilled work (college degree)



whereas India, China, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa will dominate the share of unskilled employment. The industrial countries continue to be the destination points as their labor demand is expected to increase in the next decade. The United States of America, land of opportunities, has captured the best of the human resources on earth during the past centuries. The “American dream” is by far the main motivation to migrate to the US where skilled and unskilled

workers can achieve a higher social and economic positions, relative to their initial status. Evidently, college educated migrant workers are able to close income gaps faster than non-college educated labor. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development ([OECD](#)) reports that Mexico has the one of the lowest shares of population with tertiary education and is placed 71 in educational attainments in the world with only 8.8 years of schooling. Less educated Mexican migrants are in disadvantage in the US labor market compared to other foreign-born workers.

The Journey of Mexican Migrants to the United States

The migration of Mexican nationals to the US has evolved over time. Because these two countries share a common history, economic interests, and a border of more than 2,000 miles, south to north resettlement has become a continuous flow of Mexican workers and lately from people of many other countries, as Central and South Americans as well as migrants from other continents transit throughout Mexico to cross the border. These migration waves have provided cheap labor to agricultural and manual jobs in the US and has been economically advantageous to both sides. Mexican migrants to the US have traditionally come from Central and Western Mexico and are made of young males who are unskilled workers looking for a better way of life in a country that pays higher wages ⁽¹¹⁾. The gender gap leveled off in mid 90s. More women migrated on their

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¹¹ Gutierrez, RA (2019), “Mexican Immigration to the US”,
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.146>

[illegible]

Figure 1: Mexican and Latin American Migration (14)

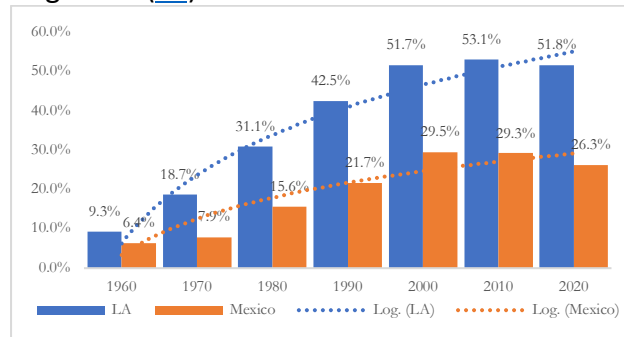


Figure 2: Mexican Migration Destination (2010, INEG)

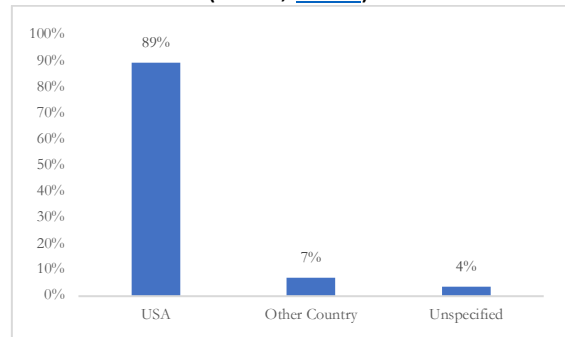


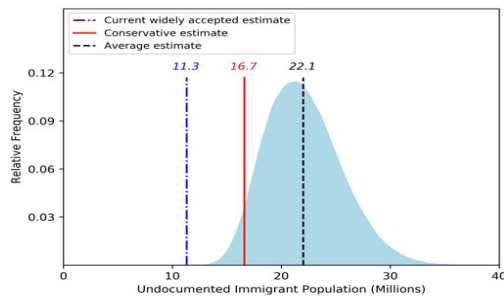
Table 1: Foreign-Born Population in the US (2017)

	Foreign Born	Percent
Total in 2017	43,854	100.0%
Latin America	22,828	52.1%
Asia	13,486	30.8%
Mexico	11,833	27.0%
Other LA	10,995	25.1%
Europe	4,288	9.8%
Rest of the World	3,252	7.4%

The lack of a comprehensive and effective immigration policy has caused a sharp increase in the number of undocumented aliens living in the US. The absence of clarity in policy and unilateral decisions of the executive power have triggered massive surges in migrant entries, then followed by a sizable number of deportations. An example is the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 that added penalties for the undocumented who committed crimes or who stay for statutorily defined periods of time in the US. The number of undocumented immigrants in the US is unknown as experts struggle to quantify its magnitude. Fazel-Zarandi et al (¹⁵) found that the undocumented are twice as many as those estimated by official agencies. Using data from 1990 to 2016 by the means of demographic models, the study projected that 22.1 [95% CI: 16.2-29.5] million undocumented were living in the US without proper documentation compared to current widely accepted estimate of 11.3 million people [Figure below]. The study considers two sources of population inflows such as visa overstay and illegal border crossers, being the latter the largest source of undocumented immigration. Mexicans

¹⁴ Gibson, C & Jung, K (2006), "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the US: 1850 To 2000", US Census Bureau, WP 81 (<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2006/demo/POP-twps0081.pdf>)

¹⁵ Fazel-Zarandi MM, Feinstein JS, Kaplan EH (2018), "The number of undocumented immigrants in the United States: Estimates based on demographic modeling with data from 1990 to 2016", PLoS ONE 13(9): e0201193. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0201193>



have traditionally been the largest population crossing the US-Mexico border, however, the number of family units from Central and South America has increased since 2010 due to more relaxed legislation towards immigration. Immigrant advocates say the border is more dangerous, militarized and inaccessible than ever, but great desperation from organized crime, lack of accountability (unsolved murders), environmental and

economic crisis have driven these larger waves. Also, migrants from all over the world transit across Mexico, not just South and Cent America. The policy implications of these findings are important as the number of crossings (more than 2 million) and foreign-born population (46.2 million) reached record high in 2021; the number of Hispanics represented 61% of the new immigrant population during this year⁽¹⁶⁾. However, the Pew Research Center shows a significant drop in the Mexican immigrant population after 2008. The need to solutions to urgent immigration issues such as the DACA recipients is paramount. A comprehensive approach with the consensus of the executive and legislative powers is the only way to build a friendlier immigration policy.

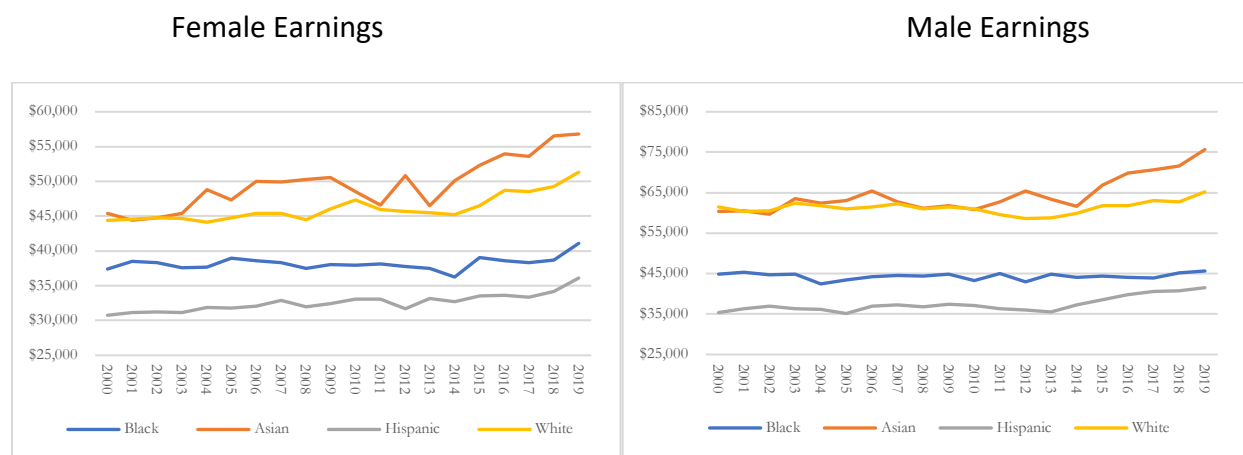
Mexicans and Mexican Americans are at the Bottom of the Societal Ladder

Although Hispanics are the largest ethnic groups in the US, they are historically underrepresented in labor markets and their earnings have been below the median income of any other racial/ethnic group. In the socioeconomic hierarchy, Hispanics are at the bottom of the income pyramid. According to the US Department of Labor, the Hispanic median income is the lowest among all the racial/ethnic groups. Asian and White Americans have the highest earnings whereas Black and Hispanics have the lowest. In 2019, the median Hispanic men earned 61 cents per every dollar of the median income a white men would earn. Hispanic women made 71 cents per every dollar a white women made. Black men earned 73 cents and Black women made 83 cents per every dollar their White counterparts made [Figure 4]. Mexicans and Mexican Americans rank 93 followed by Puerto Ricans when measured median household income by detailed ancestry. Poverty rates are higher for Mexican than for those of Hispanic origin. The Pew Research Center reports that home ownership is 50% among Mexicans and the top states of residence are California (35%), Texas (26%) and Arizona (5%). The Hispanic labor force is made from young people and continues to increase as a share of the total labor force in the US, from 10.7 million in 1990 to an expected 35.9 million by 2030. This growth is the result of continued migration of Mexicans with different levels of skill and the supply of jobs in activities such as farming, fishing, forestry, construction, extraction, transportation, buildings and grounds. Mexican immigrants are more likely to be part of the labor force population (16 to 64 years old) than Mexican Americans or any other foreign-born.

¹⁶ Source: <https://cis.org/Camarota/Immigrant-Population-Hits-Record-462-Million-November-2021> on 12/30/2021.

Migrant labor keeps cost of the US production low, and the earnings of these laborers help sustain their families in Mexico through remittances. The [Migration Policy Institute](#) acknowledged that Mexican migrants sent remittances in the amount of \$38.5 billion dollars to Mexico, which represented a 3% of the entire 2019 Mexican gross domestic product (GDP). [El Pais](#) reported that the minimum wage for workers in Mexico was less than \$3,500 dollars per year in 2017, compared to an average of \$22,200 yearly earning for Mexican workers in the US. This wage gap is wide-ranging, as the average income of Mexican workers falls below the \$23,000 minimum wage in some progressive states and far below the \$47,000 median income at the national level. However, the social and human cost of immigration is high. Mexican migrants are more likely to live in poverty than any other racial/ethnic group in the US due to the existence of barriers to access educational opportunities, health services and other programs.

Figure 4: [Median Income by Race/Ethnicity \(2000-2019\)](#)



There are substantial educational gaps magnifying income-related disparities among Hispanics in general and Mexican Americans in particular. Velez ⁽¹⁷⁾ indicates that only 48.7% of Mexicans have at least a high school diploma, compared to 63.3% of Puerto Ricans and 68.7% of Cubans. These percentages are still low when accounting for the 84% completion rates of high school among Whites. Furthermore, almost one in two Mexican students in New York City drop before completing high school and a disproportionate majority score very low in reading and math, particularly for new immigrant children. The [Pew Research Center](#) shows that the share of Mexicans holding college degrees is 17%, far below when compared to other Hispanic immigrants such as Spaniards (80%), Venezuelans (65%), Argentinians (64%) and Colombians (41%). The educational labor market is an example of the disproportionate representation of faculty of color compared to other demographic groups. As a matter of fact, only 10.2% of the assistant professors, 8.8% of the associate professors and only 5.3% at the full professorial rank in the economic profession were from minority groups nationwide. At the City University of New York, the share of White faculty has been about 6 times higher when compared to Hispanics in full-

¹⁷ Vélez, W (2008) The Educational Experiences of Latinos in the United States. In: Rodríguez H., Sáenz R., Menjívar C. (eds) "Latinas/os in the United States: Changing the Face of América", https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-71943-6_9

time faculty positions between 2014 and 2017. Without specifying country of origin, Hispanics represented less than 10% of the full-time academic employment university wide during the same period. The [Economic Policy Institute](#) shows that 61.4% of the aggregate professional occupations are held by Whites, 12.8% by Black/African-American, 17.4% by Hispanics and on 7.4% by Asian-Americans.

Final Remarks

To maximize their profits in the global environment, multinational corporations (MNC) accelerated their relocation to developing countries to take advantage of wage differential across countries. At the same time, resource factors such as labor has moved from the poor south to the wealthy north worldwide. Mexican migration has been both a significant source of cheap labor in the US and has contributed to asset accumulation of Mexican migrants in the two sides of the border. Needless to say, migration is associated to a high social cost on migrant communities, particularly for women and children. Even though Mexican Americans, the undocumented and indigenous communities of Latin America are the subject of socioeconomic and health disparities in the US, their well-being has relatively improved when compared with their initial status in Mexico. Rampant poverty, corruption, lack of economic opportunities and violence in Mexico have triggered big migration waves to North America in the past decades. Compared to other immigrants, Mexicans in the US have lower levels of education and have limited access to health services, which contributes to a wider gap in inequalities. To achieve upward social and economic mobility, the challenge is to promote better access to high quality education needed to compete for well paid jobs. However, uncertainty regarding their immigration status hinders many from achieving these opportunities. A comprehensive approach to immigration is needed, but often times is misconstrued as polarized political interpretations of the laws range from the humanistic view (one race, one world and open borders) to a restricted immigration method using a merit-based point system to select foreign workers (selective approach).

The road ahead for the Mexican community in the US is long and bumpy. Immigration, education and health status are social-structural issues that can only be induced by policy decisions. The undocumented are the most vulnerable population but education and health become the cornerstone for better quality of life in this land of opportunities. We at the CUNY MSI want to elevate our voices to support our people and to ensure their success, from the undocumented who want to improve their lives through education to the junior faculty of color at CUNY who wants to progress in their academic work.

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