

# SOCIAL WORK WITH LATINOS

*Social, Economic, Political,  
and Cultural Perspectives*

SECOND EDITION

Melvin Delgado



OXFORD

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*This book is dedicated to Denise, Laura, and Barbara.*



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## PREFACE

The writing of a book is probably best conceptualized as the undertaking of a multi-year journey of discovery, and this book is no exception. For me, this journey of discovery goes beyond a focus on scholarship; it also has been a journey of self-discovery. As a Puerto Rican born and raised in New York City, it provided me with an opportunity to revisit how my life has unfolded as a Latino, citizen, and social worker. A process of reflection took hold in a manner that I had not fully anticipated. This reflection often focused on how my identity as a Puerto Rican, social worker, and academic have come together and shaped my worldviews and how I view the profession.

The undertaking of a second edition of a book is a new experience for me. My philosophy had always been that “once was enough.” There are good reasons for violating this rule, as noted in the book, but they bear focusing on here. There have been so many dramatic changes in the United States and the world over the past ten years involving Latinos and Latin America. Looking into the immediate situation and forward into the not too distant future promises to hold many surprises for this community and the nation.

If this country embraces Latinos, it will position itself quite well as the global economy continues unabated in its continued path. If it does not, and the “illegal” immigrant cause is left unresolved, it only means that the potential contribution of millions of Latinos will continue to go unfulfilled, and their needs will go unmet (Grant & Smith, 2015; Jefferies & Dabach, 2015). The quote of “taco trucks on every corner,” which was exposed by a Republican presidential candidate Trump surrogate, addresses the fear of this country being overrun by Latinos.

This book, in all likelihood, will never have a third edition. The emerging cadre of Latino social work scholars will put forth their own vision

of social work with Latinos, further legitimizing this form of scholarship within the social sciences, as the Latino community continues to turn to homegrown scholars rather than relying on outsider allies to further their causes and document their lives. Latinos are arguably in the best position to write counter narratives that undo the harm caused through the perpetuation of deficit/charity scholarly and popular press views of Latinos in the United States (Garcia de Mueller, 2016; Irizarry, 2016; Salinas, Fránquiz & Rodríguez, 2016).

This is not to say that there is no prominent place for allies in our struggles for truth, social justice, and the telling of our narrative for this and future generations (Schroeder-Arce, 2016). It does mean that research and scholarship has evolved to the point where Latinos can be considered experts on Latinos. This represents a significant social-political stage evolution that must be acknowledged, celebrated, and encouraged in the academy.

Increased scholarship brings with it intense debates and that should be welcomed and encouraged. It is a sign that a field is vibrant, significant, and worthy of contested dialogue. This dialogue must not be completely centered on academics but must be broadened to include practitioners and the community itself. This partnership will help ensure that scholarship is focused on what the community and practitioner need rather than what funders, regardless of source, perceive to be important.

This edition has found me sharing more about myself to illustrate key points, and that is unusual in my writing projects. This sharing is not meant to distract the reader. Rather, it is intended to contextualize why a particular example or case illustration has been selected because of its significance in my life, personal and professional. This grounding will help the reader understand the bias that I bring to the subject matter.

Social work is generally about eliciting and sharing other people's stories. This book has provided me with an opportunity to weave my own story throughout in order to reflect on a key point and make it relevant today's situation. It is not autobiographical. The subject of Latinos is not just an intellectual pursuit on my part; it is also a personal pursuit, and *Social Work with Latinos* has provided a canvas upon which to reflect and share.

As this book goes to press, I address the tragedy of the mass shootings in Orlando's Pulse Nightclub, with its reverberations through the Latino community and the nation as a whole. Discussing how Orlando's Latino community has increased dramatically in the past decade takes on added significance for social workers and other helping professions, and brings the lives and narratives of individuals to life in a manner that statistically is simply impossible. This book relies upon an ethnographic approach that places heavy emphasis on documenting the Latino lived experiences, although quantitative data will also be tapped to ground their narratives and experiences.

# Social Work with Latinos



## **Part 1**

### *Setting the Context*



# Chapter 1

## FOUNDATION AND OVERVIEW

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This country's focus on Latinos, and the social work profession's emphasis on better meeting the needs of this growing population group, has generally overlooked key social-economic-political dimensions that are growing in importance and transforming Latinos and the nation in the process, but may ultimately hold important keys to how well this group does in the immediate and distant future (Ayón, 2014; Furman et al., 2009; Furman & Negi, 2010; López et al., 2012; Queiro-Tajalli, 2013). How well this country addresses its immigrants (authorized and unauthorized) has far-reaching implications beyond its borders, setting the moral and social standard for other countries throughout the world (Valentino, Brader, & Jardina, 2013).

It is important to contextualize uprooted populations to appreciate this group in the United States. I subscribe to the principle that context shapes practice, and practice shapes context. That is a dynamic relationship and one that will continue to exist if practice is culturally relevant. Context, as with the case of culture, is ever moving, necessitating a multifaceted point of view to fully appreciate and understand, and social work is well positioned to do so (O'Grady & Rocha, 2016).

The displacement of people from their homelands is a major event worldwide, with an estimated 244 million people who can be classified as international migrants (those individuals who are living in a country or territory that was not the place of their birth). If this population was placed in one geographical area, it would rank as the world's fifth most populated country (Connor, 2016). The United States leads the world as a destination for immigrants with 46.6 million; Germany comes in a distant second with 12 million immigrants.



Social-economic-political factors must play an influential role in the development of any form of Latino social work intervention (micro, mezzo, and macro). and Key cultural factors, identity, socio-economic class, the social environment of the neighborhood (Appleby, Colon, & Hamilton, 2010; Young, Sanchez, & Wilton, 2015), and pressing social justice concerns must all be taken into account (Adams & Zúñiga, 2016; Bell, Goodman & Varghese, 2016; Garcia & Van Soest, 2006).

The interplay of socio-ecological factors will prove challenging in reaching Latinos who are citizens, authorized residents, or unauthorized immigrants, sometimes all within the same family. This interplay of structural and social-political processes shape Latino well-being and their challenges in socially navigating their existence. Differing statuses necessitate outreach strategies that take into account these differences.

The social work profession has a long history of attempting to address the needs and civil rights of this nation's people of color, and this is deeply embedded in the National Association of Social Work's Code of Ethics. Important strides are currently being made to reach out to Latinos, as exemplified in this book for example. Social work scholars, too, have embraced the importance of Latinos, and this has translated into new knowledge that has found its way into the classroom of the nation's social work education programs (Feldman, 2015; Jones et al., 2015; Loya et al., 2016). Unauthorized Latino social work students do exist, and they bring with them their own unique needs and demands to the academy (Loya et al., 2016). Social work can ill-afford to turn its back on Latinos and other groups of color if it is to remain relevant (Reisch, 2013).

The continued and projected demographic increases have had a tremendous impact on the nation's political landscape. At one time in the Republican presidential nomination process there were two Latino candidates (Senators Cruz and Rubio), and a governor (Bush) who is bilingual and married to a Latina. It is no accident that these two senators and governor represented the heavily Latino states of Texas and Florida. Although none of these candidates can be considered "friendly" to the social work profession, there is an understanding of the importance of the Latino vote.

Latino political power gets considerable attention in a presidential year. Other factors, such as social and economic power and how the nation is being transformed in subtle and not so subtle ways, seem to be often overlooked. The Latino community has continued to increase demographically, socially, politically, and economically since the publication of *Social Work Practice with Latinos: A Cultural Assets Paradigm* (Delgado, 2007). The 10-year period since the writing of that book has witnessed a most-welcome increase in scholarship and new developments regarding this population group. This book captures these advances and adds to the existing body of work.

Latino immigration is a “hot” topic, and there is minimal evidence that it will not remain so for the next one or two decades. Montero-Sieburth and Melendez (2007a, p. vii) sum up the debates “border wars”: “The current debates on immigration, immigrants, and the future citizenship of Latinos are among the most contentious of the new century. Immigration and Latinos have become emblematic of radical changes being experienced in the United States.” These changes will increase in significance in the near future, with the potential to politicize immigration to an even greater degree, which is difficult to imagine.

Wood (2013, p. 26) grounds the Latino presence in the United States from an important historical context: “In light of our Anglo-dominated media and political power structure, it is an ironic fact that it was the Spanish who proved the first European colonizers who asserted claims (however tenuous) over much of North America during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As we well know, their colonizing efforts reached to the southernmost tip of South America and north above the Sonoran Desert and well beyond. For more than one hundred years before any rival European power mounted colonial challenge, the Spanish had staked out their territorial ambitions by establishing presidios (military outposts), towns, ranches, and missions.” This historical observation grounds the Latino experience within a much broader period.

This country’s relationship with Mexico is complex and has a lengthy history. Payan (2006) conceptualizes three distinct “border wars” with particular relevance for social work and other helping professions: (1) drugs; (2) immigration; and (3) homeland security. Each of these parameters brings a unique context, but they overlap and bring a political backlash to the post–September 11th aftermath that continues to this day, as was witnessed during the 2016 presidential primaries and election.

The US southern border, as opposed to its northern, more expansive border with Canada, has continued to be controversial because it is the primary point of entry for Latinos, with a long social and historical significance (Coleman & Stuesse, 2014). There is no mistaking that the United States is “browning,” with the immigration of Latinos helping this coloring process, and this development must be grounded within this demographic backdrop.

This browning has implications for certain states and regions of the country with significant communities of color, adding a different color to the gray often used to describe this nation’s aging (Delgado, Goettge, & Gonzales, 2015; O’Brien, 2008). The browning is probably best exemplified by the number of counties that have become majority-minority. Between 2000 and 2013, 78 counties in 19 states became majority-minority, with 6 being majority white in 2000 (Krogstad, 2015c).

## Cultural Community Assets

It is important to first introduce the subject of Latino cultural assets here, which will be addressed again later on, because it sets a context for a major theme in this book. Its prominence in this chapter is no mistake. There is a need for a counter-narrative about Latinos that goes beyond immigration status, gangs, crime, and drug abuse. For example, unauthorized youth who attempt to cross the border are more often prone to be victims of crime rather than perpetrators of crime as often portrayed in the media (Rodriguez & Dawkins, 2016). Blaming immigrants for crime feeds into anti-immigrants sentiments (Juffer, 2013).

Social workers are familiar with these issues, so I am not denying that these challenges exist. Rather, the effort to place cultural assets first is an attempt to broaden the discourse to start with Latino cultural assets and then view issues, needs, and problems within this context. The introduction of language that is affirming and inclusive becomes integral to a counter-narrative of Latino contributions in their communities and in their nation.

It is not an argument that can be considered semantic, such as Is the glass half full or half empty? Rather, the question is “What are Latino assets?” rather than “Are there Latino assets?” How this question is posed reveals our values and worldview. No community consists of just problems, needs, and tensions. Unfortunately, problems get headlines and funding. Funding leads to research, publications, and careers in the academic world, thus influencing how curriculum gets shaped and how practitioners prepare for the world that awaits them upon graduation.

The role and importance of culture has not diminished since the publication of the original edition of *Social Work Practice with Latinos*, and there has been a considerable amount of scholarly and popular literature during this period about how best to take into account culture in the development of services, programs, policies, and even the marketing of goods and services (Delgado, 2011; Marsiglia & Booth, 2015). The importance of an assets paradigm has increased considerably over the past decade, with numerous field examples to draw upon for lessons in conducting assessment and planning interventions (Delgado & Humm-Delgado, 2013). The importance of Latinos has only increased for the profession.

The presence of informal and cultural supports, critical factors in the lives of all Latinos, play a mediating or moderating role among Latino older adults experiencing emotional distress and health inequities (Hansen & Aranda, 2012; Medina & Negroni, 2014). Latino older adults often play the role of cultural and social support within their families and communities (Ruiz, 2007); it is best to view these supports as fostering interdependence (Miyawaki, 2016).

It is estimated that 8 percent of Latino households are multigenerational, which is similar to African Americans/blacks but higher than Asian families (6 percent) and white, non-Latino families (3 percent; US Census Bureau, 2013). A typical household multigenerational composition reinforces key cultural values that are typically handed down generation to generation, thus increasing the cultural, instrumental, and expressive importance of older adults within these families.

National recognition of Latinos has resulted in new or renewed focus on the challenges this community currently faces and is projected to face in the not too distant future, as well as increased consideration of a host of social ecological factors that either facilitate or hinder social work practice in the Latino community and its search for social justice (Chapman & Perreira, 2005; Delgado, 2017a; Williams, 2016). Nowhere is this challenge greater than with this community's children and youth, with practice and research implications across the lifespan.

That Latino youth represent an increasing proportion of the nation's youth population has an impact nationally and equally, if not more, within Latino communities. The presence of unauthorized Latinos has also increased, and this has been the subject of considerable political debate as to how best to address this group—status quo, deportation (criminalization and incarceration), legalization, or path to citizenship. How this nation ultimately responds politically has far-reaching consequences for social workers as well (Escobar, 2015; Escobar, 2016; Golash-Boza, 2015).

The role of cultural assets can be seen throughout all phases of the life-cycle, including death. The funeral industry seems to have been unprepared for the Latino population explosion. In 2012, it was estimated that only 5 percent of the nation's mortuary school graduates were Latino, although this figure was more than three times that in Texas (McClaggan, 2013). The large Latino population in that state (9.5 million; 38 percent of state population) makes the number of Latino mortuary graduates inadequate.

The following approach toward Latino funerals touches upon a number of cultural, social, and economic factors that enter into the process of burying Latinos, and some of these considerations fall outside of the typical norms associated with funerals, with implications for social workers (US Funeral Homes Online, n.d.):

It is not clear just how many Funeral homes specialize in offering Hispanic-themed funerals. One will most certainly find Funeral Homes catering to Hispanics in metropolitan areas where a Hispanic population constitutes a significant proportion of the population. Certainly what we are seeing now is more funeral homes beginning to convert their business to accommodate the Hispanic population. There has been a rise in the number of funeral homes adding 'Se habla español' to their advertising literature, and seeking

to employ Spanish-speaking funeral directors with some knowledge of Latino death customs. Many are now even attempting to offer culturally themed funeral programs by involving mariachis, overnight visitations and family feasts. Much more intimate and in-home funeral services, which are much more culturally akin with Mexican and Latin American tradition, are becoming all the more popular in areas with a high Hispanic population.

Hispanic funerals can involve allowing the family of the deceased to wash, dress, and prepare their loved one. Some even choose to adorn the inside of the casket with photos, jewelry, rosaries, and pictures of the Virgin Mary. An extended period of visitation may be required, and a more visible demonstration of grief as is more traditional in Catholic-Latino custom.

Some funeral companies have managed to cater to the Hispanic population, but a key factor in appealing to this market has also been catering to a low-cost, high-volume model. Most Hispanic families, as immigrants on low wages, have to arrange a funeral within a very limited budget. The Funeral Homes that have become popular with our Hispanic communities are those that can offer affordable funerals and know how to cater to the cultural customs.

There is no denying that Latinos have cultural considerations that are most pronounced, with implications for how burials transpire. Social workers must be prepared to deal with Catholic rituals and beliefs concerning burials, even in cases where the deceased is non-Catholic. Burials often elicit a great deal of emotional reactions that for non-Latinos it may appear as excessive if not pathological (Hanson, 2015).

The subject of a “wall” on the border with Mexico to keep out “illegals,” as popularized by Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump, and his statements concerning Mexicans being rapists and criminals, has sparked considerable national debate and captured the imagination of a significant sector of the nation, raising considerable concern within Latino communities, Republicans and Democrats, and their allies (Preston, 2015; Yin, 2016). Pope Francis weighed in on the need to build bridges rather than walls (Healy, 2016; Viser & Jan, 2016).

Massive deportations are widely considered to be impractical due to the enormous costs and logistics associated with deporting approximately 11 million people, as well as the legality of massive deportations without due process of the law. These deportations, if enacted, would have hemispheric and worldwide implications. Deportations create disruptions throughout the process, including the communities where the deportees lived in while in the country and the communities they are deported to, which is an aspect of the process that generally goes unreported (Price & Breese, 2016).

The emergence of deportation studies in the 2000s, representing an intersection of immigration and security studies, is indicative of the growing importance of this phenomenon, with the potential of increasing in significance in the immediate future (Coutin, 2015). The threat of deportations and raids has long resonated among Latinos (Lopez et al., 2016), although it is not limited to this group, and particularly those with roots in the United States dating back to the Great Depression, when one million Mexicans, including 600,000 with US citizenship, were deported without due process (Malave & Giordani, 2015).

The Eisenhower Administration, too, engaged in deportations of unauthorized Latinos (Wong, 2014). “Operation Wetback” (1954–1955) was responsible for several hundred thousand being deported and many hundreds of thousands fleeing in fear of deportation (Rothman, 2015; Wang, 2015). The emergence of the concept of “deportability” captures the constant threat of deportation and the effect this has on the lived experiences of the undocumented (Allegro & Grant Wood, 2013b).

Massive Latino deportations, as in the case of Chicago’s Mexican community, have occurred during other historical periods, causing tremendous hardships and violations of civil rights (Arredondo & Vaillant, 2005, p. 1):

With the cooperation of the U.S. and Mexican governments, local civic organizations such as the American Legion of East Chicago rounded up hundreds of unemployed workers and their families and placed them on trains bound for the US-Mexico border. Forcible and voluntary repatriation drives focused on workers who ‘looked Mexican’ and often ignored the citizenship of those who had been born in the United States. Others, conscious of their bleak prospects and the hostile social climate, voluntarily accepted the free train trip south. In the decade of the 1930s, the Mexican population in the Chicago area was cut nearly in half. By 1940 an estimated 16,000 Mexicans remained within Chicago.

Discussions of massive deportation of undocumented Latinos during the past two presidential elections, be it “self,” “forced,” or “humanly,” cannot go unchallenged. Will the 2020 presidential campaign address undocumented deportations as well? Chances are very good that it will.

Deportations during the Obama administration reached 400,000 per year, a dramatic increase over that of the Bush Administration, with plans to increase the pace of deportations as this book goes to press (Preston, 2016a). The chant at anti-deportation rallies of “Obama the Deporter in Chief” is in response to this dramatic increase in deportations under this presidential administration (Hamann & Reeves, 2013; Kolken, 2016; Markowitz, 2016). The stigma associated with “failure” in being able to stay in the United States has sociological, psychological, and economic