



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 35
Issue 2 June

Article 16

2008

**Review of *Social Work with Latinos: A Cultural Assets Paradigm*.
Melvin Delgado. Reviewed by Barbara J. Robles.**

Barbara J. Robles
Arizona State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Robles, Barbara J. (2008) "Review of *Social Work with Latinos: A Cultural Assets Paradigm*. Melvin Delgado. Reviewed by Barbara J. Robles.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 35 : Iss. 2 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol35/iss2/16>

This Book Review is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

role of public employment in economic development; third, the consolidation of federalism and finally the problem of pork barrel politics. These chapters make for interesting reading and the author presents a fair and thoughtful analysis of the different points of view that continue to be expressed around these issues today. Leighninger's overall assessment of the impact of the New Deal is largely positive and he concludes that its various programs effectively addressed the most pressing challenges of the Depression era. They also made a significant contribution to the country's economic and social well-being and left a legacy which demonstrates how the resources of government can be used to promote the public good. The book makes a major contribution to current debates about the role of the state in social investment and deserves to be widely read. Hopefully, it will also rekindle interest in the New Deal's forgotten legacy.

James Midgley
University of California, Berkeley

Melvin Delgado. *Social Work with Latinos: A Cultural Assets Paradigm*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. \$35.00 hardcover.

Professor Delgado has provided an essential scholarly achievement that will continue to provide direction and guidance to scholars, advocates, practitioners and policy makers engaged in serving and understanding the Latino community in the United States. The book is a timely and thoughtful volume that provides a different assessment and a calming voice to an increasingly heated and difficult national debate on immigration reform. Given the particular focus of the debate on the rapidly growing and visible Latino population in the U.S., our media has created a singular perspective on immigration that is almost overwhelmingly seen as a Latino issue. Thus, Delgado contributes not only to understanding social policy and social work practice with Latinos but to understanding family cultural assets and community formation and

practices during a time when family well-being and community-friendly government policies are being eroded.

Social Work with Latinos: A Cultural Assets Paradigm is one of those rare multi-discipline books that is both path-breaking and inter- and intra-disciplinary in two major formats: theory and practice. For those working in social sciences such as sociology, psychology, political science, welfare and poverty policy and professional health and public policy, this is a new paradigm and theoretical shift in how the Latino community is investigated and takes us to task with pre-suppositions about a multi-dimensional community under an umbrella label of Latino or Hispanic. The book reminds us that within the Latino community a variety of cultural assets and practices are on display for the discerning scholar who recognizes cultural variety and nuance. For those scholars intent on lumping the entire Latino community into one voice, the book serves as a reminder that history and immigrant experiences are markedly different resulting in different family and community practices. For those in the field of social work, the book has an intra-disciplinary message: theory and practice need to be recast in direct practice areas such as, health and case management as well as in the 'macro' practice community-administrative-policy field.

Each chapter provides a context for this innovative approach to research and practice with Latino communities in the United States. Chapter One introduces the audience to the goals of the subject, who are Latinos in the United States, what is culture and defines the concept of 'cultural assets' as the foundational anchor for the book. Perhaps one of the most compelling issues addressed throughout the book is the deconstruction of the belief that marginalized and left-behind communities are void of strengths and assets. Delgado reminds us that all communities contribute to the general welfare of the country and seeks to map these under-researched and overlooked factors in Latino communities.

Chapter Two presents a current snapshot of the demographic and socio-economic trends present in the Latino community in the United States. The most illuminating portion of this chapter is the recognition that Latinos in the United States remain in contact with extended family abroad over time and

form part of a 'giving' community that has not been recognized by academic researchers. The remittance phenomena (sending dollars to family members abroad out of wages earned in the United States) are a form of 'patient capital' investments and operate as a safety net for extended families residing in the country of origin. This form of connection between communities reminds us that in a global marketplace and in the twenty-first century, distance does not pose the barrier to maintenance of family cohesion and communication that it once did. This particular portrait of Latino families is essential for social workers, academic researchers and policymakers to grasp precisely because it debunks many media images and stereotypes perpetuated by television and print reporters.

Chapter Three offers an overview of pressing health concerns among the Latino population in the United States. The health community has suspected (especially among scholars of color who have raised this issue before) that racism and oppression which are encountered daily create and manifest symptoms that lead to health and mental health concerns. Delgado addresses this, along with other major health issues that appear to remain persistent among the Latino population: cancer, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, obesity, asthma, cardiovascular disease, hepatitis and tuberculosis (the usual suspects in chronic illnesses), as well as substance abuse. What is not addressed in this chapter but appears indirectly in Chapter Six is the belief in and use of alternative healing practices. Belief in and use of alternative healing practices are neither surprising nor unexpected in isolated and underserved communities. Often, healing practices and mental health remedies are tied to cultural folk healing (*curanderismo*, *Santeria* and *spiritualismo*).

Chapters Four and Five are central to the provision of social services, working with Latino families and communities and serve as an important guide for scholars and researchers unfamiliar with Latino families and communities. The Latino (or Hispanic) population in the United States has often been categorized, labeled and defined in a static, unchanging manner. Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 provide evidence and instruction on how to work with 'culturally dynamic' communities where acculturation and navigating mainstream institutions are not a linear, one-stop process. Researchers intent on

understanding communities with large immigrant populations have continued to employ outmoded and outdated assimilation and acculturation models and their corresponding indicators that simply do not reflect the lived reality of communities in the 21st century. Delgado reminds us of the dynamism of the adaptation and adoption process and gives us a firmer understanding of working with Latino communities in Chapter 8 as he focuses on field work experiences, applications and approaches. Ultimately, what Delgado has shared with us in his book is the 'new prototype' of what meaningful research on under-served and under-researched Latino communities in the United States can be and I, for one, am grateful.

Barbara J. Robles
Arizona State University