

Issues of Ethnicity and Immigration and Crime

Introduction to: Martinez, R. (2002). *Latino Homicide*. New York: Routledge.

How crime and criminal justice connect to immigrant groups, groups of different ethnicities, and locations more populated by non-white ethnicities and/or recent immigrants are extremely important areas not only for criminological theorizing, at the individual and ecological levels, and for our understanding of criminal justice, but also for public policies.¹ The current work addresses these questions basically at the community and city levels.

This introduction addresses the following points:

- the changing nature of immigration in the U.S.
- evolving thoughts about connections between race/ethnicity and crime;
- in general what is known in the U.S. about connections between immigration status (being foreign born vs. native born) and criminal involvement;
- some points about popular views about immigration and crime
- current flash points

Changing nature of immigration in the U.S.²

In general terms, in the 20th Century, there were three periods of immigration in the United States: 1900-1930, 1930-1970, and 1970 on. In the first period immigrants came largely from European countries, especially more eastern and southern Europe (not France, England, and Spain). Because of political, economic, and policy changes, immigration rates by comparison were extremely low from 1930-1970. In the third period, significant immigration re-appeared, but with a major change in the countries of origin. In this third period immigrants came largely from Central America, and to a lesser extent, South America. Estimates suggest that from 60 to over 70 percent of immigrants during this period are Latino. The largest numbers come from Mexico.

¹ Lane, R. (1979). *Violent death in the city: Suicide, accident and murder in 19th century Philadelphia*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; Lane, R. (1986). *Roots of violence in black Philadelphia 1860-1900*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Lane, R. (1989). On the Social meaning of homicide trends in America. In T. R. Gurr (Ed.), *Violence in America: The History of Crime* (Vol. 1, pp. 55-79). Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage; Lane, R. (1992). Philadelphia then and now: The "Underclass" of the late 20th century compared with poorer African-Americans of the late 19th century. In G. E. Peterson & A. Harrell (Eds.), *Drugs, Crime and Social Isolation*. Washington: Urban Institute Press; Lane, R. (1997). *Murder in America: A History*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press; Lane, R. (1999). Murder in America: A historian's perspective. In *Crime and Justice: a Review of Research, Vol 25* (Vol. 25, pp. 191-224).

Of the above, the 1997 book and the 1999 C&J article are most highly recommended.

² For some background see: Martinez, R., & Lee, M. R. (2000). On Immigration and Crime. In G. LaFree, R. Bursik, J. F. Short & R. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Crime and Justice 2000 Volume 1: Continuities and Change*. Washington: National Institute of Justice; Massey, D. S. (1995). The New immigration and ethnicity in the United States. *Population and Development Review, 21*, 631-652.

In addition to documented, permitted immigrants, there are estimated to be between six and fifteen million illegal immigrants currently in the country. They are here “illegally” either because they entered without a visa, or because they overstayed their visa.

Current cheap airfares permit many of recent immigrants to return periodically to their country of origin. This is far different from return patterns seen among those who arrived between 1900 and 1930.

Also different are the massive settlements of recent immigrants in small towns with substantial job possibilities. For example, Chicago stockyards have moved out of Chicago and are now spread all about the Midwest, often in very small towns. Large influxes of immigrant (e.g., Asians), can dramatically change the complexion of an entire community, and the criminal justice challenges.³ This has played out closer to home in the recent laws passed in Hazleton City (PA, Luzerne County) barring landlords from renting to undocumented aliens, or employers from hiring undocumented aliens. These laws worked their way up to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court where they were struck down. Our constitution gives rights to aliens.⁴

Evolving thoughts about connections between race/ethnicity and crime

1.

Martinez’ book is part of a broader effort to move beyond thinking about crime, or about immigration, in “black and white” terms. This book and these other works seek to understand more fully not only the differences between major non-white ethnic/racial groups, such as Latinos vs. African-Americans, but also differences **within** major ethnic groups. All Asian immigrant groups, for example, may not be equal, and may have markedly different experiences, not only in cities, but also in suburbs as they move out from initial settlement locations.⁵ When Martinez distinguishes the histories of Cubanos and Mariels in Miami from the Mexican-Americans in El Paso, his distinctions reflect this recent, more differentiated view about ethnicity.

2.

³ Culver, L. (2004). The impact of new immigration patterns on the provision of police services in midwestern communities. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 32(4), 329-344.

⁴ Lozano et al. v. City of Hazleton (PA), July, 2007, No. 3-06cv1586, U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania

⁵ Alba, R., & Logan, J. (1991). Variations on two themes: Racial and ethnic patterns in the attainment of suburban residence. *Demography*, 28, 431-453; Alba, R. D., Denton, N. A., Lwung, S. J., & Logan, J. R. (1993). Neighborhood change under Conditions of Mass Immigration: The New York City region, 1970-1990. *The International Migration Review*, 29, 625-656; Alba, R. D., Logan, J. R., & Bellair, P. E. (1994). Living with Crime - the Implications of Racial Ethnic-Differences in Suburban Location. *Social Forces*, 73(2), 395-434.

Groups composed of different ethnicities are segregated into different locations in cities, suburbs, and even rural areas.⁶ In short this work connects closely with issues of segregation, city structures, and crime.

What leads, over time, to an ethnic community remaining segregated within a broader city or metropolitan region. Is segregation maintained over time because of outside forces impinging on those ethnic communities? Or, instead, is it maintained because of limitations or cultural factors within those communities?⁷

Two broad theoretical perspectives shape this discussion and are indicative of ongoing sociological—indeed, societal—debates regarding the relative importance of race and class in determining social outcomes. **The spatial assimilation model** posits that objective differences in socioeconomic status and acculturation across racial/ethnic groups are primarily responsible for residential segregation, squarely addressing the issue of social mobility in its suggestion that increased education, occupational prestige, and income will lead to greater racial residential integration. This explanation adequately describes the residential mobility of both phenotypically white Hispanics and of Asians. Alternatively, the **place stratification model** emphasizes the persistence of prejudice and discrimination—key aspects of intergroup relations—that act to constrain the residential mobility options of disadvantaged groups, including supraindividual, institutional-level forces. Available evidence suggests that this model better characterizes the inability of those who are phenotypically black (both African Americans and black Hispanics) to escape segregation. At first glance, these perspectives may appear oppositional. Upon closer inspection, however, these seemingly oppositional explanations complement one another. Race still matters; however, its relative importance—and that of socioeconomic status—depends on group membership (Charles 2003: 170; emphasis added).

Stated differently, spatial segregation patterns over time will shift differentially for different ethnic groups depending on who those groups are.

Key to constraining Latinos into segregated communities are language and employment barriers and, Martinez suggests, prejudice.

3.

⁶ Massey, D., & Denton, S. (1993). *American Apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

⁷ Charles, C. Z. (2003). The Dynamics of racial residential segregation. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29, 167-207.

There is a flip side to this process, called enclavization, of being segregated into Latino communities: it creates, within these communities, social capital; that can help with employment opportunities within the communities.⁸

Foreign-born vs. native-born: What is known



The first national commission on crime that relied heavily on social science expertise was the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, headed by George Woodward Wickersham, and commonly called the Wickersham Commission. It issued several reports, including one on the foreign born and crime. Examining the best data available to them at the time they concluded that the relationship between foreign-born status and criminal involvement, at the individual and city levels, was NEGATIVE. This fits with research since.⁹

Foreign-born vs. native-born: Popular attitudes

The Wickersham Commission report on the foreign born also includes an extensive history of views about foreigners and crime. Its conclusion: going back to the 1600s, foreigners have been blamed for crime and crime waves. What has changed over time has been the specific groups that have been blamed.

Current flash points

Work in this area ties in to a number of extremely difficult current issues including:

- “controlling” our borders, and the roles of groups such as the “Minutemen” started by Simcox in Tombstone, AZ
- Immigration reform including the possibilities of returning all immigrants currently residing here illegally; two years ago Congress attempted to pass “comprehensive immigration reform.”
- Questions of economic competition between illegal immigrants and native blue collar workers
- The economic implications for products, services, harvesting, and food production, of available immigrant workers.

Martinez’ work speaks to some of these issues.

⁸ Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its Origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 1-24; Portes, A., & Manning, R. D. (1986). The Immigrant enclave: Theory and empirical examples. In S. Olzak & J. Nagel (Eds.), *Competitive Ethnic Relations* (pp. 47-68). Orlando: Academic Press.

⁹ Sampson, R. J. (March 11, 2006). “Open doors don’t invite criminals.” *New York Times*, p. A16.