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The Process of Assimilation among Latinos in the United States in the 20th Century

ABSTRAKT

Procesy asymilacyjne wśród Latynosów w Stanach Zjednoczonych w XX wieku

Głównym celem artykułu jest przedstawienie złożoności tożsamości wśród Latynosów zamieszkujących Stany Zjednoczone, a także ich walki o to, aby stać się akceptowaną częścią amerykańskiego społeczeństwa, które jest w dużej mierze zdominowane przez potomków europejskich imigrantów. Udowodnię również, że proces stania się Amerykaninem nigdy nie jest taki sam dla imigrantów, a czynniki takie jak bariery językowe, kolor skóry, uprzedzenia, niskie dochody lub brak wykształcenia mogą znacznie zmniejszyć szanse na asymilację, a także mogą skutkować przejściem do niższej klasy społecznej czy też poczuciu wyobcowania ze społeczeństwa. Co więcej, w artykule zwracam uwagę na znaczenie koloru skóry, języka hiszpańskiego, a także teorii pseudonaukowych dotyczących supremacji Amerykanów pochodzenia europejskiego lub koncepcji zinternalizowanej opresji. Analizuję również konsekwencje wpływu dziedzictwa kolonializmu angielskiego na podbite ludy oraz ich negatywne postrzeganie siebie. Podsumowując, istnieją również inne rozwiązania dla Latynosów niż asymilacja, takie jak na przykład akulturacja, selektywna asymilacja lub podejście nacjonalistyczne, które skutkowało domaganiem się równych praw i dumą z własnego dziedzictwa i bogatej historii. Ponadto wyniki nie potwierdzają oczekiwań dotyczących wczesnych teorii asymilacji, które przewidywały asymilację wszystkich imigrantów i dowodzą, że sam proces jest bardzo skomplikowanym zjawiskiem, który może prowadzić do wielu różnych rozwiązań.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Latynosi, Ameryka, tożsamość, asymilacja, rasizm, akulturacja

Methodology

This text concerns the challenges of assimilation is based on studies and analyses carried out by researchers like T. Golash-Boza, J. Gonzales, G. A. Martinez, L. M. Padilla, D. Massey and R. Sanchez Magaly or E. J. R. David. In order to gather

¹ Data złożenia tekstu do Redakcji „MiS”: 13.12.2019 r.; data zatwierdzenia tekstu do druku: 20.12.2019 r.

detailed research data they employed various appropriate quantitative and qualitative methods like surveys, interviews, descriptive statistics, cross tabulations, documentary analyses or photographs taken by the responders. The results of the research methods enabled the authors to explain the idea of identity, assimilation, the importance of the language of origin, the process of Americanization or self-identification and discrimination against Latinos.

I would like to focus on the issues of internalized oppression, colonial mentality, discrimination and racism toward the Latino community in the United States. In order to understand these problems better, we need to look at them in the historical context of Anglo-American colonialism. Moreover, I wish to stress the fact that colonizers justified their actions in God's name and strongly believed that European Americans were better than people of other races. In the later part of this text, I present and explore the beginnings of assimilation processes and their different levels among Latino immigrants. Also, I highlight the importance of native languages and the idea of bilingualism.

Internalized Oppression

Latinos as the largest ethnic minority often encounter prejudice. The practice of treating them in an unfair way, dislike, distrust or unreasonable hatred based on strong and fixed opinions have left their marks on many generations. Such bad experiences entice “Latinos to adopt colonized mentality and internalize negative self-perceptions”². Additionally, as Laura M. Padilla states, internalized oppression is caused by external factors when “dominant players start the chain of oppression through discriminatory behavior, race-based exclusion, stereotyping, together with capitalization on the fears created by those stereotypes”³. To understand the origin of internalized oppression fully, we should start from the history of discrimination against Latinos back to its beginnings in the 19th century, especially after the end of the Mexican-American war in 1848. They experienced prejudice, racism when it was physical and brutal. Many of them were hung without a trial and furthermore lost their land⁴.

Internalized oppression characterizes the marginalized groups who internalize negative beliefs, attitudes or behaviors and finally start to believe that all the negative stereotypes regarding them are true⁵. Frantz Fanon provides further explanation of internalized oppression. His approach is based on “four-phase colonial model” which gives us important insight into the problems associated with

² L. M. Padilla, *Internalized Oppression and Latino/as*, „Diversity Factor” ,2004, Vol. 12, No.3, pp. 61-113.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

⁴ J. Gonzales , *Harvest of Empire: The History of Latinos in America*, Penguin Publishing Group, New York 2000, pp.44-45.

⁵ L. M. Padilla, *Internalized...*, op. cit., pp. 61-63.

this phenomenon⁶. The first stage concerns the situation in which a powerful or rich country rules over a weaker one, and exploits the local population, useful land, minerals to increase its wealth. The next stage denotes the period when the colonizers impose their own ideas, beliefs, way of life, culture on the oppressed and force them to accept these. In the third phase, they start “to civilize the colonized people through a process of tyranny and domination”⁷. They become increasingly repressive in creating a new society in which the native population is subjugated and exploited. As a consequence, it leads to the last stage, in which the primary aim is to create superiority over the conquered people and maintain the status quo. Thus, the colonialists have economic power, controlling and exploiting the natives and this also gives them political power as well.

It is noticeable that many Latinos do not share a common ethnic identity and a feeling of tension and lack of trust between them can lead to further division and make internalized oppression even worse. Moreover, many of them may also have patronizing attitudes towards others because of their skin colour. Padilla clearly states that “a member’s credibility was frequently based on whether they were perceived as either ‘too dark’ or ‘too light’, depending on the issue⁸. Moreover, George A. Martinez explains why so many Latinos consider themselves White. According to the author, “minorities have often sought to ‘pass’ as White...they thought that becoming White insured greater economic, political and social security. Becoming White, they thought, meant gaining access to a whole set of public and private privileges and was away to avoid being the object of others’ domination. Whiteness, therefore, constituted a privilege identity”⁹. Furthermore, they have a rather low opinion of the people of darker complexion and often show it via racist behaviors¹⁰. It is worth mentioning that many dark-skinned Latinos share a common opinion “that lighter skin is more desirable”¹¹.

Prejudice often depends on cultural stereotypes and it clearly shows how persistent popular beliefs are. For example, some women still believe that Latino men are unfaithful and, as a result, do not want to marry them because of the strongly-held opinion that they have a natural tendency to infidelity. Another example concerns the feelings of jealousy of other person’s achievements or successes. This petty jealousy has been long known among Latinos and it is even described in an old story passed down across generations:

⁶ E. J. R. David, *Internalized Oppression, Psychopathology, and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy Among Historically Oppressed Groups*, [http://www.researchgate.net/...David/...Internalized oppression...oppressed.../6](http://www.researchgate.net/...David/...Internalized%20oppression...oppressed.../6). (15.10.2015)

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ G. A. Martinez, *The Legal Construction of Race: Mexican-Americans and Whiteness*, “Harvard Latino Law Review”, 1997, Vol. 2, pp. 321-347.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 328.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 329.

A man stumbles upon a fisherman who is gathering crabs and placing them in a bucket with no lid. When the passerby asks the fisherman whether he is concerned that the crabs might climb out of the bucket and crawl away, the fisherman replies that there is no need to worry. 'You see,' he says, 'these are Mexican crabs. Whenever one of them tries to move up, the others pull him down...'¹².

E. J. R. David examines wider consequences of internalized oppression and states that this process entails very profound implications like "ethnic self-hatred, loss of ethnic identity and feelings of exclusion"¹³. Moreover, people are statistically more likely to develop depression, commit vandalism or be involved in domestic violence. All these aspects are strongly related to suffering from such oppression. The author concludes that "members of historically oppressed groups may eventually internalize the oppression they experience" and also that "the major psychological effect of colonialism is internalized oppression"¹⁴.

Racism and its Victims

Fig. 1. Racist Sign in America



Adopted from: <http://latinopoliticalavenue.com/TMR-media.html> (08.10.2015)

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ E. J. R. David, *Internalized Oppression...*

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

Fig. 2. Racist Sign in America



Adopted from: *Inequality Amongst Americans*, <http://americanhistory6.weebly.com/hispanic-americans1.html> (08.10.2015)

The problem of racism was widespread in both English and Spanish colonies and many settlers believed that the people of their own race were better than others. Historically speaking, the continuing old racial divisions and tensions proved that racist attitudes were deeply ingrained and persistent. Oppressors treated people of other races unfairly and violently. Further more, Anglo settlers were determined to conquer more land in the name of white supremacy. In the 19th century, strong supporters of “Manifest Destiny” were growing rapidly and, according to their religious beliefs, the expansion westwards was fully justified. They firmly believed in the “God-given destiny to conquer the frontier”¹⁵. Phrenologists, like Dr. George Caldwell and Dr. Josiah C. Nott, studied the shape of people’s heads as a way of proving superiority of European Americans over other racial groups. Caldwell states in *Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race* that “to the Caucasian race is the world indebted for all the great and important discoveries, inventions, and improvements that have been made in science and the arts”¹⁶. An extreme example of such opinions are Nott’s views on race: “Wherever in the history of the world the inferior races have been conquered and mixed in with the Caucasian, the latter have sunk into barbarism”¹⁷. Moreover, he strongly suggests putting eugenic law into practice.¹⁸ An American scientist, Samuel George Morton, even claimed that “capacity of the crania of the Mongol, Indian, and Negro, and all dark-skinned races, is smaller than of the pure white man”¹⁹. Such theories had a great influence on many Anglos and significantly changed their perceptions of other races²⁰. However, there was a radically different approach towards mixed race-groups, such as *mestizos* or *mulatos*. For the settlers “a drop of black blood made you black”, hence mixing with natives was something forbidden and banned.

¹⁵ J. Gonzales, *Harvest of Empire...*, op. cit., p. 42.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p.43.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 42-43.

But Spaniards regarded them almost equal and only the richest from the society did not intermarry, so descendants could inherit their wealth²¹.

The Beginning of Assimilation among Latino Immigrants

Many Latinos and Caribbeans found it difficult to become assimilated into the mainstream American society. Some of them decided to get rid of their own culture and language and to immerse in a new way of life to become “authentic Americans”²². Other Latinos came from “the backyard of the U.S. empire to its heartland” with a genuine ambivalence toward America²³. It was mainly due to an egoistic political US involvement in their land. Because of the closeness of Latin America, they could travel more frequently and therefore strengthen their connections with the homeland. However, most of them have not come to the United States to settle down or become integrated into the American mainstream but rather to find a good job²⁴.

The Concept of Bilingualism. The Importance of the Language of Origin

From the very beginning, the US authorities fought with the idea of bilingualism. According to Gonzales, “those language battles”²⁵ created three trends among ethnic minorities. The first one concerned the European and Asian immigrants who arrived with greater or lesser awareness of the new realities. The issue over language was one of the biggest challenges they had to face. They quickly realized that English would be their first language and that their mother tongue had already lost its importance. The second category referred to African slaves who were forbidden to speak in their native tongues and also learned to write and read in English so they could be under control. Finally, the third trend was completely different from the previous ones. Not only did the United States expand its territory but also got control of the people who lived there for generations. They became “American citizens by force”²⁶ and members of the Congress soon claimed sovereignty over the new land but “these annexed Americans could hardly consider themselves foreigners. This turned them into persistent defenders of the right to use their own language”²⁷. Furthermore, Gonzales states that “Anglo historians

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 20-21.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 92.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 191-201.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 205.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 206.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

consistently relegated the languages of these conquered nationalities to the margins of the American experience, dismissing their cultures as either primitive or non-existent”²⁸.

Native language and identity are inextricably bound together and cannot be separated. Gonzales argues that people need a strong feeling of belonging and a sense of racial and cultural identity. He clearly states that mistreated conquered inhabitants do not lose their language and culture over the next decades because they turn them “into weapons of resistance, into the tools with which they demand full equality within the conquering society”²⁹. Furthermore, Edward Said, one of the famous literary theorists, states that “cultural imperialism led to classifications, often antagonistic notions of 'us' and 'them', of superior and inferior societies, thus turning culture into another weapon by which the strong dominate the weak”³⁰. Frantz Fanon, a 20th century Martinican-French philosopher, refers in his work very often to the idea of “the psychology of dependence” and a legacy of European colonialism. He believes that it entailed serious and far-reaching consequences for all oppressed groups and created identity diffusion or psychosocial disintegration:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, destroys it... The effect consciously sought by colonialism is to drive into natives heads the idea that the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality³¹.

Different Levels of Assimilation. Americanization of Latinos and their Self-Identification

Tanya Golash-Boza provides in her paper many facts that show clearly that victims of racial discrimination are less willing to consider themselves as “Americans and more likely to self-identify with pan-ethnic or hyphenated American labels”³². As a result of such experiences, many Latino immigrants regard themselves more as Latinos than Americans. She argues that the relations between different races of people in the United States are based on racial prejudice and this badly affects the pace of immigrant assimilation. Furthermore, such negative stereotypes are often reinforced by their pervasive media representations which portray them as poor, uneducated or criminals³³.

She points out that there is little evidence to support the earlier theory of

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 208.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 200.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 200-214

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 234.

³² T. Golash-Boza „*Dropping the Hyphen...*“, op. cit., p. 27.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

assimilation such as straight-line assimilation. According to this concept, all new immigrants will finally be Americanized and will have the same rights, opportunities as everyone else, whatever their race or religion. Milton M. Gordon, an American sociologist, believes that all newcomers will finally be a part of a larger society, and this process is unstoppable³⁴. However, the famous Cuban-American theorists, Alejandro Portes and Ruben R. Rumbaut, see it from a completely different perspective. They believe that the process of becoming an accepted part of a country or society is never the same for all immigrants. An alternative idea of segmented assimilation is their brainchild. According to it, “processes of assimilation are affected by a number of factors including the human and financial capital of the immigrant parents, the pace of acculturation, family structure, cultural and economic obstacles, the perceived race of immigrants, and the community and family resources available to the immigrants and their children in the United States”³⁵.

They, therefore, conclude that there are three paths to full assimilation. The first one is based on the idea of “high levels of human, social and financial capital”³⁶. This is to mean that wealthy first-generation immigrants are more likely to receive a warm welcome by the host society. The next one is about those newcomers who are poor and gradually become downwardly mobile. Not only do they become poorer but are also unable to find a decent job and a good neighborhood to live in. The last path, described as “selective acculturation”, characterizes those groups who choose what to accept and what to reject from mainstream culture³⁷.

Golash-Boza accurately states that strong supporters of assimilation theory naively believe in the complete disappearance of “ethnic distinctiveness”³⁸. They seem not to see how important the skin colour is and that “many immigrants associate being American with being white”³⁹. She also notices that American sociologists, such as Richard D. Alba and Victor Nee, see the assimilation process only through white and black colours. They do not take into consideration Latinos experiences “since many of these people see themselves as neither white nor black”⁴⁰. Also, it must be acknowledged that there is discrimination in favor of European Americans and ethnic minorities face a widespread racial prejudice. Furthermore, such a treatment has a profound impact on the process of assimilation and causes further marginalization and development of a hyphenated

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

identity⁴¹.

To test these theories, researchers developed surveys regarding Latinos as a minority group. In one of them, 2002 National Survey of Latinos, researchers asked a large number of the responders to describe themselves in terms of their national origin⁴². Then they were asked whether they felt Latino/a. As can be seen in Table 1, the survey shows that only 54% identify of them as American and more than 80% as Latino/a and with a national origin⁴³.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used from 2002 National Survey of Latinos Data.

Variable Name	Percentage	Observations
Dependent Variables		
Self-identifies as American	54.66	1589
Does not self-identify as American	45.34	1318
Self-identifies as Latino or Latina	80.7	52358
Does not self-identifies as Latino or Latina	19.25	562
Self-identifies as national origin	88.24	2537
Does not self-identifies with national origin	11.76	338
American identity is most important	20.27	578
American identity is most important	79.73	2273
Generational Status (Ref: Came to the Us after age 18)		
After age 18	48.12	1292
Before age 10	7.15	192
Between 11 and 17	11.66	313
Second generation	19.59	526
Third and fourth generation	13.48	362
Educational Attainment (Ref: Less than High School)		
Less than high school	31.63	920
High school graduate	31.59	919
Some college	17.88	520
College graduate	18.91	550
Language Use (Ref: Spanish Dominant)		
Spanish dominant	44.68	1309
English dominant	23.45	687
Bilingual	31,86	933
Annual Household Income (Ref: Household Income less than \$30,000)		
Less than \$30,000	50.99	1439
Between \$30,000 and \$49,999	26.29	649
More than \$50,000	22.72	561

Source: T. Golash-Boza ,*Dropping the Hyphen? Becoming Latino(a)-American through Racialized Assimilation*, „Social Forces”,2006,Vol. 85, No.1, p.39.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 38.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

Furthermore, Table 2 indicates that “ethnic identification is highly correlated with generational status”⁴⁴. A further analysis of the data reveals that those people who have spent more time in the United States than in any other country have strong connections to their new homeland and are more likely to identify as American⁴⁵.

Table 2. Cross Tabs from 2002 National Survey of Latinos Data. Row Per centages of Self-identity as American by Generational Status

Row Percentages of Self-identity as American by Generational Status			
<u><i>Self-identifies as American</i></u>			
	Yes	No	Total N
Immigrated age 18 or older	32.00	68.00	1278
Immigrated age 11 to 17	36.54	63.46	312
Immigrated before age 10	61.90	38.10	189
Born in the United States	85.55	14.45	526
R and parents born in the United States	96.95	3.05	361
Total responses	59,60	49,44	2666
Row Percentages of Self-identity as Latino by Generational Status			
<u><i>Self-identifies as Latino</i></u>			
	Yes	No	Total N
Immigrated age 18 or older	84.07	15.93	1287
Immigrated age 11 to 17	85.90	14.10	312
Immigrated before age 10	77.60	22.40	192
Born in the United States	77.14	22.86	525
R and parents born in the United States	67.78	32.22	360
Total responses	80.27	19.73	2676
Row Percentages of Self-identity as National Origin by Generational Status			
<u><i>Self-identifies as National Origin</i></u>			
	Yes	No	Total N
Immigrated age 18 or older	95.42	4.58	1287
Immigrated age 11 to 17	93.87	6.13	310
Immigrated before age 10	92.71	7.29	192
Born in the United States	19.41	80,59	510
R and parents born in the United States	35.10	64.90	339
Total responses	72.59	7.41	2638

Source: T. Golash-Boza, *Dropping the Hyphen? Becoming Latino(a)-American through Racialized Assimilation*, „Social Forces”, 2006, Vol. 85, No. 1, p. 40.

In addition, according to the 1989 Latino National Political Survey, there is a significant correlation between the level of assimilation and self-identification. High educated, English speaking Latinos are more likely to label themselves

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

American. The survey also reveals that women are almost thirty per cent less likely to identify with American society. Researchers argue that it is due to the fact that a lot of women do not work and their contact with the host society is very limited. Furthermore “some Latinas experience gendered discrimination that precludes them from feeling welcome in this country”⁴⁶. Moreover, the findings from the survey on “skin colour and experience of discrimination” is more complex than previous researchers assumed. It is worth noting that such experience and darker skin make the responders victims of racism and significantly slow the process of assimilation and self-identification as American.⁴⁷

Golash-Boza concludes in her article that many Latinos encounter obstacles because of their race, ethnicity, national origin or gender. Discouraged by such treatment and marginalized by white majority, they become second-class citizens. The findings provide support to the predictions that:

Those Latinos/as who appear ‘white’ and do not face discrimination are more likely to assimilate into U.S. society and become unhyphenated Americans. They, like immigrants from Europe, can disappear unnoticed into the melting pot, if they so choose. However, those Latinos/as who face discrimination and who are not perceived to be white are less likely to be viewed by others, and consequently by themselves, as Americans. Yet, even if Latinos/as born in the United States are not Americans, they are also not Mexicans or Cubans, since they are also viewed as foreigners in Mexico or Cuba.⁴⁸

The Idea of Identity among the First and Later Generations of Latino Immigrants

Douglas S. Massey and Magaly Sanchez R. in their paper examine the perception of identity among the first and the second generation of Latino immigrants in the United States. In order to gather the necessary data, they used photographs taken by the responders. Additionally, the respondents were asked to take and submit pictures of what appeared to them typically “American” and “Latino”⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

⁴⁹ D. Massey & R. Sanchez Magaly, *Latino and American...*, op. cit., p. 82.

Table 3. Characteristics of a Sample from the Study of Visual Representations of Latino and American identity.

Characteristics	Photographer'ssample	Total ethnographicsample
Generation		
First	40.0%	69.4%
Second	60.0	30.6
National origin		
Mexican	60.0	34.4
Caribbean	0.0	24.4
Central/South America	40.0	41.3
Gender		
Male	50.0	41.9
Female	50.0	58.1
Place		
New York	20.0	29.4
New Jersey	40.0	36.3
Philadelphia	40.0	34.4
Total number	10	160

Source: D. Massey & R. Sanchez Magaly, *Latino and American Identities as Perceived by Immigrants*, „Qualitative Sociology”, 2007, Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 84.

As Table 4 suggests, the research shows significant differences between the images on the pictures. Among the Latino pictures dominate “Latin American business, places of work, homes and cars, with some references to gang symbols, Latin cultural products, and schools”⁵⁰. However, the responders viewed American images as something different and, occasionally, not familiar. Most of them present “monumental architecture, street scenes, cars, and American icons, with less frequent references to schools, American products, commercial displays, and waste or abandonment”⁵¹.

Additionally, the subjects of photographs are divided into two categories “a person or people versus places and objects”⁵².

Table 4 Components of Latino Identity Extracted from “Latino” Pictures Taken by Ten Respondents of a Larger Survey of 160 First and Second Generation of Latino Migrants in New York, Philadelphia, and New Jersey.

Content categories	Number	Percentage
Primarysubject		
People	83	61,9
Facial close-up	10	7,5
Places or objects	51	38,1

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 85.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

No people at all	41	30,6
Prominent themes		
Interior orLatin business	35	26.1
Places of work	31	23.1
People at work	8	6.0
Latinstore front	19	14.2
Interior of home	10	7.5
Display of gang symbols	8	6,0
Latin products	6	4.5
Contains cars	27	21.1
Taken from cars	5	3.7
School settings	7	5.2
Total number	134	100,0

Source: D. Massey & R. Sanchez Magaly, *Latino and American Identities as Perceived by Immigrants*, "Qualitative Sociology", 2007, Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 84.

The responders formed the idea of Latino identity is based on a very close relationship with people (62 per cent) and less with places (31 per cent). They asked responders to explain why they were so interested in taking pictures of people and faces. One of them explained the reasons behind it:

Respondent: Oh, one could think of many reasons. Perhaps because Hispanics or Latinos are there to see. Wherever you look, there are Hispanics, I would say. In other words, the photo reflects the Latino community a lot. Americans ... are busy in offices, here or there, and the photo very much...

Interviewer: Maybe for Latinos it's just easier to take photographs of each other.

Respondent: Yes, because they [the Americans] I are also going places. whereas Latinos... wherever you go, there they are. Wherever you go to take a photo, there is one, two, or three Latinos... Or wherever you see something written in Spanish,. you always encounter some Latinos. Yes, because, well, Latinos like being where other Latinos are. Photo or no photo... whatever, whenever you see one, you see another... Latinos here are very open. If you say "I want to take your picture," they say, "Okay."

Interviewer: Right away...

Respondent: But Americans ask, "What for?" And they make questions: "What is this?" "Am I going to be in a book?" They ask questions because they watch themselves a lot – their identities – they watch themselves.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: But Hispanics, what do they do? They say, "Okay, taking the photo is fine." Without giving it a thought, because that how Latinos are. They are... they give... they offer, well, whatever they have.

Source: D. Massey & R. Sanchez Magaly, *Latino and American Identities as Perceived by Immigrants*, "Qualitative Sociology", 2007, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 86-87.

The survey also shows that family life and openness toward other people play an important part in their life. Furthermore, 26 per cent of pictures are related to places characterized by the presence of Latin American food products, shops, restaurants or music⁵³. The pictures below show Latinas in places which remind them about their cultural heritage. One of the responders summarizes his views in one short sentence: “Yes, tradition, music, food. All that what makes me identified, so, as Latino”⁵⁴. Figure 4 shows Latinas in an Ecuadorian restaurant indicating their attachment to their culture of origin, traditional Latin American cuisine and the fact that they are very people-oriented. Figure 5 shows Latinas in a store which sells products associated with Latinos culture, such as “the sombreros, cowboy boots, and *piñata*”⁵⁵.

Fig. 4, Fig. 5. Two Images from Latino Photos of Business Oriented Toward Latin American Consumers.



Source: D. Massey & R. Sanchez Magaly, *Latino and American Identities as Perceived by Immigrants*, “Qualitative Sociology”, 2007, Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 88.

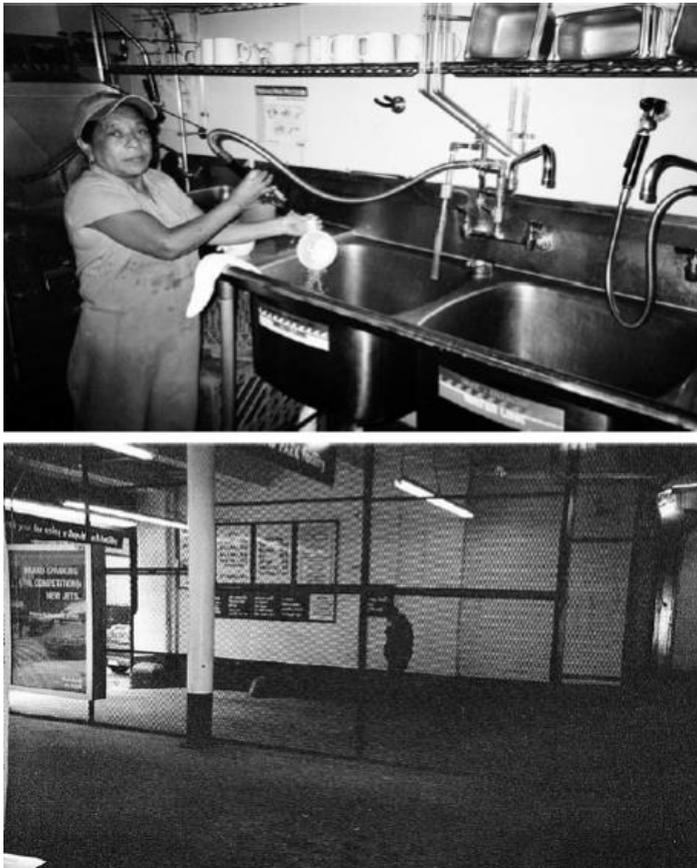
⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

Another main theme of these findings is the importance of work in the Latino community. Almost twenty-six per cent of images show Latinos at work and, in most cases, in low-paid jobs. As mentioned earlier, the responders were asked additional questions about their pictures. They were aware that a lot of Latino immigrants were from a poorer background and hard work was the only way to move up the social ladder. Figures 6 and 7 clearly support these views and indicate that hard work is an important part of Latino identity⁵⁶. The pictures below present hardship of Latinos, who are willing to take underpaid jobs in order to build a better future for themselves.

Fig. 6, Fig. 7. Two Latino Images of Places of Work in the United States.



Source: D. Massey & R. Sanchez Magaly, *Latino and American Identities as Perceived by Immigrants*, "Qualitative Sociology", 2007, Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 89.

⁵⁶*Ibidem*, p. 90.

The Perception of Latino and American Identity

This section discusses further findings on American images and identity. As can be seen in Table 5, more than seventy per cent of responders are not focused on people but mainly on places and objects. On average, the respondents seemed to agree that "...compared to the intimate and rather personalized basis for the construction of Latino identity, immigrants seemingly perceive American identity as rather impersonal and distant. Indeed, almost half of the American images (48%) were bereft of any human being whatsoever, and around 9% consisted of anonymous, empty street scenes"⁵⁷.

Table 5. Components of American Identity Extracted from "American" Pictures Taken by 8 Respondents to a Larger Survey of 160 First and Second Generation of Latino Immigrants in New York, Philadelphia, and New Jersey.

Content categories	Number	Percentage
Primary subject		
People	35	30.4
Facial close-up	0	0.0
Places or objects	80	69.6
No people at all	55	47.8
Prominent themes		
Marriage to American	23	20.0
Monumental architecture	19	16.5
Anonymous street scenes	10	8.7
Contains cars	37	32.2
Taken from car	14	12.2
City or highway traffic	12	10.4
American symbol or icon	14	12.2
Commercial displays	10	8.7
Waste or abandonment	8	7.8
School settings	2	1.7
American products	1	0.9
Total number	115	100,0

Source: D. Massey & R. Sanchez Magaly, *Latino and American Identities as Perceived by Immigrants*, „Qualitative Sociology”, 2007, Vol. 30, No. 1, p 96.

Furthermore, the findings show that there is a vague connection between the Latino community and the American people. It is partly because they live separately in different neighborhoods and their contact is often very limited. Moreover, during the interviews, the participants of the project openly expressed their concern that they encounter many obstacles on their way of becoming American. They

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 95.

mentioned differences in beliefs, way of life or customs that are not shared and accepted by Latinos. Similarly, some of them do not want to lose touch with their native language and culture and often distance themselves from the American society⁵⁸.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the survey is “the impersonal imagery submitted as emblematic of American identity”⁵⁹. What might be deduced from Figure 5 is that there is nobody in these places which makes them very gloomy and unfriendly. This is mainly due to the fact that Americans spend most of the time at work and then at home⁶⁰.

Fig. 8, Fig. 9. Two American Images of Emptiness in Public Space



Source: D. Massey & R. Sanchez Magaly, *Latino and American Identities as Perceived byImmigrants*, “Qualitative Sociology”, 2007, Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 97.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 95-96.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 96.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

These results suggest that there exist completely different perceptions of Latino and American identity. Latinos view Americans as very powerful, money-orientated and very impersonal. Moreover, the respondents view themselves as family-oriented people who value human relationships and their cultural heritage highly⁶¹. Also, the findings of the study suggest that:

In theoretical terms, the content of the photos are, at least on the surface, consistent with the viewpoint of segmented assimilation. Whereas some migrants are clearly constructing a Latino identity on the basis of attachment to work, family, and the immigrant community generally, which suggests a pattern of consonant or selective acculturation that puts them on a path of upward mobility, we also found a distinct subset of youth people whose conceptualization of a Latino identity included gang symbols, rap music, and a "gangsta" lifestyle, which might suggest pattern of dissonant assimilation leading to a path of downward mobility⁶².

Further analysis of the data reveals that not even one interviewee declared to have an American identity. People who answered the questions in the interview identified themselves as Latinos. Moreover, Spanish-speaking immigrants do not come to America to become Americans but mainly to find a well-paid job and to improve their economic mobility. It is hard for them to be accepted as a part of the American society because their everyday life in the United States is marked with discrimination, prejudice and intolerance⁶³.

To conclude, this article shows, first, how the negative effects of the legacy of European colonialism on Latino immigrants are still significant and, second, that European Americans would still like to preserve their status quo in the United States. As a result of their troubled past, many Latinos have been victims of discrimination and racial prejudice which have caused further alienation and marginalization in mainstream society. What is more, the processes of assimilation and integration can be slow and lead to downward mobility and also lower their socioeconomic status. However, many Latino immigrants who are wealthy, light-skinned, rich or educated encounter a warm welcome from white Americans very often. It shows that American society is still divided by many factors, such as race, ethnicity or the wealth gap.

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⁶¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 101-102.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 105.

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The Process of Assimilation among Latinos in the United States in the 20th Century

Summary

The main purpose of this text is to present the complexity of identity among Latinos and their struggle to be accepted as a part of American society which is largely dominated by descendants of European immigrants. I also prove that the processes of becoming an American are never the same for immigrants and factors such as, language barriers, skin colour, prejudice, low income or lack of education can significantly reduce the chances of assimilation and result in downward mobility and a sense of alienation from society. Moreover, this text elaborates on the importance of skin colour, the Spanish language and also pseudo-scientific theories regarding the supremacy of European Americans or the concept of internalized oppression. Furthermore, I analyse the consequences of the legacy of Anglo colonialism and how it has affected the conquered people and also has caused negative effects on their self-perception. To conclude, there are other solutions for Latinos than assimilation, for example, acculturation, “selective assimilation” or a nationalistic approach, which demands equal rights and takes immense pride in their own heritage and rich history. In addition, the results do not support the expectations of the early theories of assimilation which predicted that all immigrants would assimilate and prove that the process itself is a very complicated phenomenon and can lead to many different solutions.

Keywords: Latinos, America, identity, assimilation, racism, acculturation