Cultural Diversity in the United States
A Critical Reader

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Cubans to Miami, fleeing the collectivization and nationalization under way in Castro's Cuba. A later wave of poorer refugees arrived in the 1980 Mariel boatlift (Portes and Stepick 1993; Card 1990; Portes and Manning 1986).

Portes and Bach argue that the success of Miami's Cuban immigrants derives from the successful establishment of an ethnic enclave. Portes' notion of an ethnic enclave dates from his earlier work and focuses on the advantages available to communities of immigrants who utilize human cultural capital (Wilson and Portes 1980; Portes 1981). Portes originally defines the enclave as containing immigrant groups which concentrate in a distinct spatial location and organize a variety of enterprises serving their own ethnic market and/or the general population. Their basic characteristic is that a significant proportion of the immigrant labor force works in enterprises owned by other immigrants (Portes and Bach 1981:291).

In further developing the concept in Latin Journey, Portes and Bach (1985:203) argue that the two most essential and influential characteristics of enclaves are: (1) the presence of immigrants with sufficient capital, either brought from abroad or accumulated in the United States, to create new opportunities for economic growth; and (2) an extensive division of labor.

Portes and Bach suggest that this formulation usually occurs through two successive waves of immigration of the same group. First an entrepreneurial class is successfully transplanted from home to receiving country. This class grows. Its economic activities expand and diversify. When the second wave of immigrants arrives the entrepreneurial class can offer them opportunities virtually unavailable to immigrants entering other labor market sectors.

Most scholars have long accepted the concept of “dual labor markets.” In this formulation the primary labor market operates in the monopolistic industries where workers' jobs are highly paid and secure. The secondary market is lodged largely in small competitive businesses, where jobs are low-paid and insecure. Most immigrants and colored minorities tend to fall into the second option.

Portes and Bach's articulation of the ethnic enclave points to a possible third alternative. The enclave's economic structure, they argue, enables immigrants to achieve upward social mobility. Using culturally based social networks, language, common history, and traditions, immigrants are able to find better-paying jobs, more promotion opportunities, and greater ability to use education and skills in the ethnic enclave than they are in the “dead-end jobs” of the secondary labor market of the dominant economic structures.

Despite low wages in the enclave, workers stay in subordinate jobs in order to take advantage of “paths of mobility unavailable in the outside” (Portes and Bach 1985:204). In Portes and Bach's scenario, as immigrant firms expand, so do openings for co-ethnics at the supervisory and managerial level as well as opportunities for ownership and self-employment. In this model the prosperity of the community is built on close-knit family and kinship networks, where both enclave entrepreneurs and workers are bound by and benefit from ethnic solidarity – mutual obligations, trust, and loyalty – which constitutes a form of social capital absent beyond the enclave boundaries. Portes and Bach portray the Cuban enclave as a favorable alternative to the secondary labor market for new immigrants.

Ethnic Enclave: Defining the Concept

In Latin Journey Portes and Bach record a case study of a new ethnic formation in the Cuban community in Miami, a formation they call an "ethnic enclave." The history of Miami, since the 1950s, is a history of successive waves of immigration and the resulting impact on Miami politics, culture, and economics. The 1959 Cuban Revolution brought entire groups of privileged...
A New Immigrant Narrative

Urban ethnic neighborhoods are not new. European immigrants came to service America's first great industrial expansion after the Civil War. They were recruited to work in large industrial complexes in concentrated urban areas, and they worked alongside native-born Americans. The immigrant ghettos they initially settled were transitional way stations, necessary only until they adjusted to the new society and learned English. The pressures of economic survival invariably forced them to move on – to whatever work was available. Eventually, they found homes outside the ghetto, learned English, and integrated into American society (Sowell 1981).

In presenting the ethnic enclave Portes and Bach are offering a very different immigrant narrative than those of the past. Instead of seeing immigrant concentrations as a place of transition – a place to move away from in order to get better jobs and opportunities – they are suggesting a new and extremely optimistic possibility for the incorporation of new immigrants into the U.S. economy. Cubans in the Miami enclave have jobs in the enclave itself. These jobs, suggest Portes and Bach, are in fact better-paying jobs than those available outside in the secondary labor market. And because they are within the Cuban enclave, lack of English language skills is not a barrier to employment. Moreover, they suggest, within the Cuban enclave there is a shared ethnic spirit of solidarity between workers and employers – a sense of helping each other to help themselves. Cuban employers are able to retain motivated workers who are willing to work hard in order to have the opportunity to learn the trade themselves and advance within the firm as foremen and supervisors. Eventually, they hope to utilize ethnic connections within the enclave to open up their own business and become self-employed. In this narrative Cubans can move from the status of humble immigrants without skills or capital to achieve self-employment and ownership inside the enclave, and accomplish this within one generation.

The notion of the ethnic enclave turns the traditional “human resources” argument upside down. Human resource theory suggests that new immigrants must start from the bottom and move up the ladder of mobility. It takes time to learn English well enough to get a better job. It takes even longer to learn the skills to be a better-paid worker. Immigrants must leave their enclave to find work because within immigrant communities there are few businesses well-enough to provide immigrants with jobs. This narrative was prevalent among earlier European immigrants. An Italian immigrant stayed in New York’s Little Italy neighborhood just long enough to learn a few words of English in order to get a job in a Brooklyn factory. For a better job he would have to improve his English and acquire additional skills to go elsewhere to work, perhaps in Detroit’s automobile industry. This Italian immigrant’s mobility would most likely be limited to moving from unskilled to highly skilled union jobs. Dreams of ownership and self-employment would most likely be deferred and realized through the ambition of his offspring. The ethnic enclave as described by Portes and Bach suggests the possibility of an entirely new narrative for today’s new immigrants and provides a framework for reconceptualizing notions of class, mobility, and assimilation within immigrant communities. Today’s immigrants can find jobs within the enclave. They can learn skills and receive on-the-job training in the enclave. They may even be able to move up the ladder to self-employment without ever leaving the enclave. If true, this is indeed a new trajectory (see also Bailey and Waldinger 1991).

Applications of the Ethnic Enclave Model

The concept of the ethnic enclave is hard to generalize, as even Portes and Bach (1985:38) admit. In describing the Cuban enclave, they lay out several defining characteristics. The ethnic enclave is not an ethnic neighborhood. It is primarily focused on ethnic economic activity. The enclave has an entrepreneurial class possessing the capital necessary for the establishment of ethnic businesses. It also has a diversity of employment arising from the growth of ethnic businesses, which in turn offers opportunities for upward mobility both to supervisory and management positions and even to ownership and self-employment.

These are very difficult conditions to fulfill. First, immigrants with professional and entrepreneurial skills, especially those with individual capital, have a larger degree of mobility in the mainstream American economy. They are often not willing to be stranded in an immigrant enclave to work and perhaps live alongside the poor and unskilled. Second, to maintain the diversity of job opportunities that will allow participants in the ethnic enclave to achieve ownership and self-employment, firms cannot grow too large. In small communities, monopolies in any particular sector would severely inhibit options for ownership and self-employment. Yet this scenario – in which immigrants with capital and entrepreneurial skills start businesses large enough to hire workers but not too large to monopolize the enclave – seems extremely rare.

Perhaps there are very few immigrant communities which would satisfy the criteria. In Latin Journey, Portes and Bach detail only two other examples, the Japanese and Jewish immigrant communities arriving in the United States during the 1890–1914 period. Both were noted for their tightly knit communities that were not exclusively residential.

They were instead economic enclaves, areas where a substantial proportion of immigrants were engaged in business activities and where a still larger proportion worked in firms owned by other immigrants. For the entrepreneurially inclined, networks based on ethnic solidarity had clear economic potential. The community was (1) a source of labor, which could be made to work at lower wages; (2) a controlled market; and (3) a source of capital, through rotating credit associations and similar institutions (Portes and Bach 1985:38).

Using these parameters, can the ethnic enclave model detailed by Portes and Bach in the Cuban community in Miami be generalized to other immigrant communities? A number of scholars have tested the applicability of the ethnic enclave formulation. Their studies have produced mixed results.

Gibertson and Gurak (1993) apply the concept of the ethnic enclave to the labor market experiences of Dominican and Colombian men in New York City utilizing data from a survey conducted in 1981. They do not find the positive returns suggested by Portes and Bach. Concerned that previous research on the
enclave has focused too narrowly on wages, Gilbertson and Gurak expand their study to compare primary, secondary, and enclave workers not only on wages but also on opportunities for skill acquisition and access to non-monetary fringe benefits. Unlike the findings in Miami, Gilbertson and Gurak’s analysis reveals no significant differences in opportunities for skill acquisition or earnings return between enclave and secondary market workers. In fact they argue that in receipt of health insurance and retirement benefits, increasingly expensive items in today’s economy, Dominican and Colombian men in the enclave are disadvantaged compared with secondary sector workers. “Our findings are not harmonious with the hypothesis that the enclave economy is a protected sector of the U.S. economy” (Gilbertson and Gurak 1993:218).

In a separate analysis of the same data, Gilbertson (1993) examines Dominican and Colombian women’s enclave labor in New York City. Her analysis shows that women working in Hispanic-owned firms do not receive advantages in earnings returns to human capital when compared to women in other labor market sectors. She concludes that ethnic ties do not produce positive advantages for women workers and that ethnic enclave employment, in fact, is highly exploitative of women. Finally Gilbertson suggests that the successes of certain sectors within the ethnic enclave rely heavily upon the marginal position of immigrant women.

In attempting to apply Portes and Bach’s concept of the ethnic enclave to the Dominican and Colombian experience in New York City, Gilbertson and Gurak encounter a problem of definition and methodology. They cite Portes and Bach’s definition of an enclave as “firms of any size which are owned and managed by members of an identifiable cultural or national minority.” As a result their study encompasses firms in a large decentralized area including much of upper Manhattan and all of Queens. Is this really an ethnic enclave? Furthermore, their survey study encompasses respondents for any Hispanic, whereas an enclave is ideally defined in terms of working for someone of the same country of origin. Respondents may have been working in a business with a Hispanic manager but with a non-Hispanic owner. These complications in definition and methodology exemplify the difficulty in applying the ethnic enclave model beyond the Cuban experience in Miami.

Min Zhou and John Logan (1989), later expanded in Zhou (1992), attempt to apply the ethnic enclave concept to New York’s Chinatown. They define and analyze the enclave in three ways, examining place of residence, place of work, and industrial classification. They conduct a separate analysis of the labor market situation of immigrant women. Yet even in a study conducted in New York’s Chinatown with its many similarities to Miami and conducted by a student of Portes, the findings produce mixed results. Zhou and Logan suggest that for Chinese immigrant men, labor market experience, education, and English language ability, or human capital, do have positive effects on wage earnings within the enclave. However, they find that “human capital returns for men are not greater within the enclave than outside” (1989:819).

Zhou and Logan’s analysis of women’s experiences within the enclave further weakens the ethnic enclave hypothesis. Despite the increased importance of women in the Chinatown enclave economy, both as consumers and workers (primarily in the garment industry), Zhou and Logan found that the key predictors of women’s earnings were hours logged and occupation, not human capital. They found a total absence of human capital effects and no measurable earnings returns on previous human capital. Why? Zhou and Logan identify certain status-based obstacles for women working within the enclave, including occupational segregation by gender, women forced to play triple roles as mother, wife, and worker, and jobs requiring higher education consistently reserved for men. They conclude that Chinese cultural notions of male supremacy reinforce gender discrimination in the enclave. The authors suggest that further research must be conducted to determine “to what degree the positive functions of the enclave for men are derived from the subordinate position of women” (Zhou and Logan 1989:818).

Though the quantitative findings for the success of the Chinese ethnic enclave are mixed in the 1989 study, in her book Chinatown: The Socioeconomic Potential of an Urban Enclave (1992) Min Zhou relies heavily on cultural explanations to make the case for the positive returns of participating in the enclave economy. Following Portes and Bach’s notion of ethnic solidarity, Zhou (1992:14) argues that in Chinatown the “economic behavior of enclave participants is not purely self interested, nor is it based on strict calculation in dollars.” The enclave benefits entrepreneurs who receive profits in large part from the low-wage labor, but in return also incur obligations to the workers. The enclave benefits the workers, who while “willingly exploited” are given opportunities for training in occupational skills which may improve future employment. Chinese immigrant laborers are willing to work for substandard wages, a fact Zhou attributes directly to three factors: a Chinese cultural work ethic, a positive comparison to poorer wages in China, and a willingness to make sacrifices in the short term in order to derive benefits in the future. In the case of Chinese women in the enclave, Zhou argues “their behavior must be understood in the context of Chinese culture which gives priority not to individual achievement but to the welfare of the family and the community as a whole.” Zhou concludes that what women lose for themselves becomes a significant contribution to the family. Unfortunately her argument is weakened by the mixed results of her own research, noted earlier.

Other studies of U.S. Chinatowns have challenged Portes and Bach’s view of the ethnic enclave as a protected sector for immigrant workers with ethnic solidarity enabling positive wage returns on human capital and opportunities for upward mobility. Sanders and Nee (1987), examining census data for San Francisco’s Chinatown and Miami’s Cuban enclave, have compared the wage levels of those working in the enclaves with those in the secondary labor market and concluded that in fact employment in the ethnic enclaves pays immigrant workers less than employment in the non-ethnic labor market. While acknowledging that the ethnic enclave confers certain advantages upon ethnic entrepreneurs Sanders and Nee assign these advantages to ethnic entrepreneurs’ ability within the enclave to exploit workers, and to draw on ethnic solidarity and notions of mutual obligation to enforce and maintain sweatshop conditions, including low wages and closure to union organizing. Sanders and Nee question the empirical evidence for the claims of ethnic solidarity at work in the
Martin note, lacks investment capital and an exploitable labor force. Most black labor is exported to white businesses and many highly trained blacks—potential entrepreneurs—prefer working with government agencies. Wilson and Martin conclude that the conditions for the success of the Cuban enclave are unique and are not present in the black community.

We believe that comparing the Cuban and the black enclaves is an extremely problematic and potentially dangerous application. In so doing Wilson and Martin take a framework designed for understanding immigrant experience in the United States and apply it to an established U.S. ethnic community. Blacks are not new immigrants. And as Wilson and Martin state, none of the pre-requisites Portes and Bach establish for a successful ethnic enclave exist in the black community in Miami. Perhaps most importantly, blacks do not play the same role in the deindustrialized and restructured U.S. economy that new immigrants play. Seeking increased profits, American businesses have decentralized industrial production and relocated production sites to areas with the lowest government regulation, the lowest labor costs, the weakest labor organizations, and the most vulnerable workers. In many cases this has meant shifting production offshore to the Caribbean, Central America, and the Pacific Rim. In other cases it has meant locating production sites in U.S. immigrant communities. New immigrants fill this labor market, not poor blacks or poor whites. The danger of this application, which Wilson and Martin avoid, is in establishing a comparison between two ethnic communities which on the surface may have many similarities yet differ significantly in historical and social context.

It is our opinion that in evaluating the scholarly debates on the issue, the validity of Portes and Bach’s claims proves to be elusive. In part this has to do with the problem of defining the parameters of ethnic enclaves and the difficulties in establishing a fixed list of quantitative data to use for comparative purposes. In part, we conclude, this stems from the fact that much of their observed reality involved political factors which they have underrated and which are impossible to verify relying purely on quantitative economic data. While we agree that the ethnic enclave phenomenon exists in some immigrant communities, we seriously disagree with many of the positive attributes assigned to it, particularly claims of increased upward mobility and ethnic solidarity.

New York Chinatown: A Case Study

The experience of the Miami Cuban immigrant enclave appears to be an extremely rare occurrence. In examining New York’s Chinatown in light of the ethnic enclave concept, however, we believe we have found a solid case for comparison. A number of key similarities will allow comparison and evaluation of Portes and Bach’s claims. First, Chinatown too is an intensely concentrated ethnic phenomenon with a multi-class composition of largely non-English-speaking new immigrants. And while Chinatown has existed for nearly a century, in the early 1970s it took on many of the ethnic enclave attributes, as Asian “refugee capitalists” immigrating to New York to avoid political instability were later joined by thousands of working-class refugees affected by China’s Cultural Revolution coming through Hong Kong. Thus Portes and
Bach's two fundamental characteristics of an enclave, namely an entrepreneurial business class with capital to invest and diversity in the labor market, were achieved in Chinatown during the course of the 1970s and continued to build in the 1980s and 1990s as additional capital came from Hong Kong and new workers came from mainland China, particularly undocumented workers from Fujian Province (Kwong 1997). But do Portes and Bach's claims of ethnic solidarity leading to greater return on human capital and increased upward mobility within the enclave hold up in the Chinatown case?

Our research in New York's Chinatown, drawing upon many years of extensive participatory observation and hundreds of in-depth interviews, suggests a very different conclusion from Portes and Bach's claims about ethnic enclaves. In particular, our study documents that within the Chinese immigrant community, while ethnic support and mutual assistance exist, those who have wealth, education, and who immigrated earlier have accelerated their capital accumulation and established a dominant position in the community by exploiting less fortunate co-ethnic newcomers. This process has reached a new extreme with the recent influx of illegal immigrants from mainland China. Our analysis suggests that the economic dynamics of the ethnic enclave give rise to a particular strategy for accumulation, not a cultural proclivity for mutual aid. Furthermore, we argue that "ethnic solidarity" has increasingly been manufactured by the economic elite within the Chinese community to gain better control over their co-ethnic employees.

As stated earlier, urban ethnic neighborhoods are not new in the United States. At the turn of the 20th century they served as transitional orientation points where newly arrived European immigrants adjusted to their new environment before moving into mainstream American society (Sowell 1981). From the beginning, however, Chinatowns were different. The Chinese Labor Exclusion Act of 1882 barred immigration of Chinese workers into the United States. Anti-Chinese violence, blatant discrimination, and legislated housing restrictions forced those Chinese already in America into segregated neighborhoods. The exclusion of Chinese workers from jobs in the mainstream American labor market for almost a century further maintained the segregation (Kwong 1979).

With the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Chinatowns and other newer ethnic immigrant neighborhoods across the nation no longer owed their existence to legally sanctioned racial exclusion. One could therefore expect that they would finally play the role of transitional neighborhoods, like the old European ghettos. Instead, many of these new districts, like the Cuban community in Miami and New York's Chinatown, have developed viable economic structures providing new immigrants with jobs right in the midst of their own ethnic immigrant communities.

Until 1965, most U.S. Chinatowns were largely bachelor societies whose residents engaged in low paying self-employed trades. Families and wives of residents, taking advantage of liberalized immigration policies, began to arrive under the "family unification" provision of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. This influx added a substantial number of women to the labor force, which the garment industry quickly incorporated by subcontracting work to Chinatown garment factory operators. For the garment industry

the Chinese situation was ideal. Not only did it solve its labor force problem but garment manufacturers could leave factory management to Chinese contractors, who handled the language problem, worked out wage scales, and even dealt with the union. By the early 1980s, there were already 400 garment factories in New York's Chinatown, employing 20,000 workers.

The rise of the garment industry in the immigrant Chinese community stimulated the growth of Chinese restaurants and other service trades, leading to a local economic boom and providing new job opportunities. These in turn attracted more Chinese immigrant workers and more Hong Kong investment. With additional labor and capital, Chinatown's economy expanded both vertically and horizontally, adding more restaurants and service businesses while diversifying into wholesale food distribution, restaurant equipment, and the construction trades. This rapid growth also spawned new satellite Chinese communities in New York City's other boroughs. By the early 1980s Chinese ethnic enclaves had become thriving, predominantly working-class economic entities inhabited by non-English-speaking immigrants (Kwong 1987).

The Fuzhounese

Since the 1980s New York’s Chinatown has received a large and persistent influx of illegal immigrants from mainland China (Kwong 1996; Kwong 1997a). Most of them are from the rural outskirts of the city of Fuzhou in the southeastern province of Fujian. In comparison to estimates of all illegal immigrants currently in the United States (conservatively 3 million: and over 60 percent are Mexicans and Central Americans), the number of Fuzhounese is comparatively small, approximately 200,000. But the Fuzhounese situation is unique. Many of them are victims of a large-scale and sophisticated international human smuggling network. After arrival, they may work for years under what amounts to indentured servitude to pay off large "transportation" debts, now more than $50,000 per person. Smugglers, called "snakeheads," enforce compliance in both work and repayment with constant threats of torture, rape, and kidnapping. Employers brutally exploit these vulnerable undocumented workers while brazenly violating American labor laws.

The original Chinatown in Lower Manhattan and the newer enclave in Sunset Park in Brooklyn (established since the late 1980s) are very attractive to the arriving immigrants. There they are able to locate jobs quickly after landing in the United States without ever having to learn English. Chinese employers can count on the service of this cheap labor supply, because these immigrant workers (without English and professional skills) have problems finding jobs in the open, but competitive, low-wage secondary labor markets outside of Chinatown.

While it is easy for a new immigrant to settle within the Chinese enclave initially, our study calls into question the long-term benefits. Regarding language acquisition, for example, once settled there, immigrants are not likely to learn English, since it is unnecessary in the daily activities and social interactions in the enclave. This is not to say that the immigrants lack desire to learn the language. Several different versions of English Made Easy audio cassette tapes are available in Chinese bookstores, as are bilingual microcomputers. Thousands of Chinese
immigrants attend English language classes offered weekly by dozens of non-profit groups including unions, churches, and social service organizations in the community. But spending two hours in a language class on Sunday, without a chance to converse and practice until a week later, produces meager results. It is common to meet Chinatown residents who, having lived in the United States for more than 25 years, are not able to communicate in simple English. This language barrier, combined with a shortage of jobs outside the enclave, limits the possibilities for Chinese immigrants to escape the ethnic immigrant community. They remain trapped and vulnerable to the power of Chinese employers.

Furthermore, our study suggests that the very existence of ethnic enclaves like Chinatown inhibits new immigrants from seeking other options. The possibilities available to undocumented workers recently arrived from Fuzhou are the most limited. This can be extremely advantageous to Chinese employers. Ethnic workers with little or no access to the primary or secondary labor markets, especially undocumented workers, are more vulnerable to labor exploitation. In this context it may be in the employers' interest to promote an ideology of ethnic solidarity to reinforce Chinese dependency on the ethnic enclaves.

We are all Chinese: manufacturing ethnic solidarity

From the moment Chinese immigrants arrive, they rely on ethnic networks to survive. The newcomers rely on their relatives or friends to get them housing and jobs. They need them also for the very practical purpose of learning how to do the work. With many working 12 hours a day, often for well below minimum wage, no one except a close friend or a relative would take time to teach a newcomer how to sew, how to set tables, or how to drive nails.

The owners in our study prefer not to get involved in the recruitment and training process. Instead, they allow long-time employees to recruit workers through ethnic and kinship networks. From the employer's perspective this helps screen out undesirable candidates. It also immediately places newcomers into a system of social obligations. The friend performs a ren-qing (personal favor) by means of guanxi (connections) to get the newcomer a job. The newcomer owes a ren-qing not only to the friend but more importantly, to the employer. The job could have gone to any one of many applicants. But the employer has shown his good-heartedness by helping a fellow Chinese, often a fellow villager, and perhaps even taking the risk of hiring an illegal. The newcomer is expected to return these favors when he or she is in a position to do so. This begins by being a compliant, hard worker. Respectful and loyal behavior, in return, ensures special consideration in individual job assignment, work load, wages, and benefits. Thus Chinese cultural notions of ren-qing transform a typical labor/capital class relationship into an association based on personal favor and obligation.

Employers effectively manipulate ideas of ethnic solidarity to inspire worker loyalty. For instance, they may attempt to create work environments that are culturally familiar by disregarding fundamental American rules. Mothers are allowed to leave work at four in the afternoon to pick up their children at school and bring them back to the factory. If the family is in financial distress, which all debt-paying illegals are, the owners may "help out" by hiring their children to work in the factory or allowing them to bring consignments home, even though such practices violate U.S. labor laws. Lonely old ladies with little to do are allowed to work as thread cutters on completed garments. Older men wash dishes for a few dollars so they can feel useful and have others to talk with during the day. Our analysis reveals that employers' generosity toward employees and solidarity with their co-ethnics in effect mask a system of co-ethnic exploitation (Kwong 1997b).

Employers' political power

In addition to their economic control over the enclave, Kwong's earlier studies (1987, 1997a) indicate that Chinatown employers also dominate all social organizations within the Chinese community through a system which has evolved over more than a century. When Chinese in the United States were forced into segregated communities in the 1880s the political structure that emerged as the self-policing force of these communities was transplanted from the rural regions of China. In fact, it closely followed the pattern of local, unofficial civic organization that sprang up during the Qing dynasty. Since Chinese communities in America remained in relative isolation until the 1960s, the imported structure had a long time to develop and solidify. It is still operative today, despite the profound changes of recent years.

Early Chinese immigrants, the vast majority of whom were male, tended to live communally, sharing apartments to save money. This arrangement evolved into a formal collective called a fong, which literally means a "room." Members of a fong developed a close relationship and great loyalty to one another.

Several fongs made up of people from the same village formed a village association; several fongs composed of people of the same surname formed family or surname associations. A village association might raise funds for famine relief or for the building of schools and hospitals in their particular home village. But the associations also carried out joint functions and lent support to each other. Successful collective action led to the creation of even larger organizations. Huiguan (meeting halls) were composed of several family and village association groups together. While the huiguan continued to carry out mutual aid and charity functions, they were more commercially oriented than the fongs or associations. They arbitrated disputes among members and served as credit and employment agencies. They also ensured their members' obligations in business transactions with others.

The associations were originally formed to defend their members against a hostile American society and to provide order within the community. But an internal hierarchy soon developed. Association members who owned shops and restaurants commanded the respect of other members, who depended on them for jobs. Those who received jobs and favors became obligated, forming patron/client relationships. The patrons thus became association leaders in addition to owning businesses. The resulting hierarchy that developed within the Chinese community was based entirely on wealth. And wealthy Chinatown shopowners and merchants were able to use the associations to maintain social and political control of the community (Kuo 1977).

Our most recent research suggests that Chinatown's class-based political structure remains fundamentally unchanged. Local power continues to be con-
centred in the hands of factory owners, merchants, and landlords, who utilize their official positions in the associations to achieve personal political goals. When association leaders gather, they effectively make up an informal government, though one solely representing the interests of the Chinatown elite. Kinship, village ties, trade, and fraternities may cut vertically across the Chinatown community, superseding class lines. The political structure, however, does not. Political power is concentrated exclusively in the hands of the wealthy.

An examination of political relationships with outside government and non-government entities reveals the way the nearly hegemonic control of power in Chinatown is reinforced. The merchant elite are recognized as the “community leaders” by those beyond the enclave who have no idea how to penetrate this isolated community, and often little interest in trying. In recent cases, whenever the mayor’s office, a federal government official, or law enforcement authorities seek to reach out to the Chinese community, they do so through the Chinatown elite. Control over access to political networks beyond Chinatown completes the elite’s monopoly of the political, economic, and social structure of Chinatown.

Aspects of a successful enclave?

In some instances positive aspects which Portes and Bach identify in the Miami enclave have been experienced in New York’s Chinatown. At least in the 1970s at the beginning of the mass Chinese migration, entrepreneurs found substantial opportunities in the restaurant and garment trades. At that formative stage, workers had some potential for moving into management and ownership positions. Our study points out, however, that this “wild-west frontier” environment disappeared quickly as more and more immigrants poured in from Hong Kong and mainland China. Employers took advantage of the surplus labor by offering increasingly lower rewards to their co-ethnic employees. Workers who could not learn enough English remained constrained within the enclave, unable to exit into the mainstream American labor markets. Standards continued to deteriorate as the waves of undocumented Fuzhouhuese immigrants entered the competition for jobs in the 1980s and 1990s. The potential for upward mobility within the enclave economy reported by Portes and Bach in Little Havana, quickly ended in New York’s Chinatown.

Conclusion

Portes and Bach are correct in identifying the importance of the ethnic enclave phenomenon, especially in situations in which new immigrants, mostly from Asia and Latin America, tend not to disperse but reside and work in ethnically concentrated locations. Unlike the ghettos of earlier European immigrant communities, today ethnic enclaves exist which are not transitional. They have capital flowing in to employ new immigrants and they have a multi-class character. Though we disagree with many of the implications of Portes and Bach’s study, we believe their introduction of the concept of “ethnic enclave” has made an important contribution by intensifying the debate regarding new forms of immigrant incorporation and related socioeconomic, political, and racial issues.

The concept of the ethnic enclave, however, is not easily generalizable. The specific phenomenon of “Little Havana” in Miami described by Portes and Bach involves an ethnically concentrated, multi-class, and more or less self-sufficient community. This is highly unusual. In most instances of immigrant enclaves today, immigrant workers still reside in ghettos as a transitional place until they locate better jobs in the secondary or primary economy. Entrepreneurs and professionals tend to seek mobility in mainstream society, not in the enclave. For the different classes of Cuban immigrants – elites, small entrepreneurs, middle-class professionals, and working people – to remain together in one enclave in Miami is rare. Given their particular political and immigration history it may even be unique. If so, the characteristics and attributes Portes and Bach ascribe to the ethnic enclave concept may also be unique to Miami. This possibility must be considered.

Our Chinatown study certainly does not support their positive claims for the role of the enclave in the immigrant incorporation process, despite examining a phenomenon perhaps closest to Portes and Bach’s Cuban ethnic enclave. Nor do other studies we have reviewed. Claims that workers in the enclaves receive higher pay than those in the secondary labor market and claims of greater opportunity for upward mobility to “self-ownership” are particularly difficult to corroborate.

Key problems exist in Portes and Bach’s research data itself, as noted earlier (Grenier 1992). Further problems emerge from their methodology. Their conception of the ethnic enclave – a complex group of people moving and changing in different roles over time – is too broadly conceived. To confirm their observations quantitatively requires an agreement on specific parameters of the study. Whose incomes are to be counted? Must all those considered in the study reside in the enclave? How do you correctly account for mobility over time? How do you compare the conditions inside the enclave to those in the general labor markets? Which part of the general labor market should be used in the comparison? It seems that part of the difficulty of confirming Portes and Bach’s claims is that we are comparing apples and oranges. This problem confronts all studies inspired by their ethnic enclave conception.

Ultimately, we believe that Portes and Bach’s analysis significantly overestimates the strength of ethnic solidarity and underestimates the existence of co-ethnic exploitation. Furthermore, Portes and Bach consistently underestimate the political power relationships within the enclaves. Ethnic employers do use their political power inside these isolated ethnic communities to their advantage. Our fieldwork in the Chinese community presents a clear example of this. Despite significant scholarly debate on the issue and numerous attempts to apply the concept of the ethnic enclave beyond the Miami case study, the evidence in support of the general applicability of the ethnic enclave model remains inconclusive.

The ethnic enclave and cultural diversity

Reservations and criticisms of their optimistic claims notwithstanding, Portes and Bach’s theory of ethnic enclaves is extremely popular. Why? In the final analysis,
we suggest the popularity of their study may have more to do with the political climate of our time than the applicability of their research findings. Their claims of ethnic solidarity and ethnic self-reliance are appealing to those new immigrant groups attempting to carve a niche for themselves in the American landscape and who want to distance themselves from what they see as the failures of the traditionally colored minorities. In this new narrative, immigrants can count on ethnic solidarity and mutual assistance to succeed without help from the mainstream society. They can develop their own systems of upward mobility in the American economy. And they can accomplish this without “forced assimilation” – without sacrificing their language, culture, and ethnic community.

Claims of ethnic solidarity and ethnic self-reliance have also captured the imagination of those who are frustrated by the lack of economic progress in the ghettos of American communities. If new immigrants can achieve economic success in this manner, why not the African American community? If the ethnic enclave model works, it provides an alternative for evaluating the status of traditional U.S. minorities, especially the African American community, and the lack of progress by the civil rights movement in achieving economic parity. By implication, the success of the immigrant ethnic enclave suggests that African Americans lack a sense of “ethnic solidarity” and “work ethic” as compared to new immigrants. Moreover, if the virtues of the ethnic enclave prove true, and colored immigrants can achieve upward mobility, then African American charges of racism leveled against the U.S. economic system would be undermined.

Here we must be wary of how ideas of ethnic solidarity, designed to further the analysis of immigrant groups in America, may play into other ideological discourses and political agendas. Do the successes of some ethnic groups based on patterns of ethnic solidarity suggest a cultural superiority over other ethnic groups? We argue that the answer must be no. Instead, there are other historical, political, and economic dynamics at work, as suggested in the work of Wilson and Martin (1982). It is important to remember that by and large new immigrants are likely to be better off economically than the most depressed parts of the American population. Today’s immigrants, like immigrants of previous generations, tend to be the more personally restless and ambitious elements from their homeland. Additionally, as a result of U.S. immigration preferences, today’s immigrants tend to have much stronger family ties, an advantage they have over both blacks and whites in our society. And finally, immigrants from Asia and Latin America, while facing discrimination in the United States as colored minorities, have not suffered the consequences of the intense hostility built up and enacted between blacks and whites through the history of slavery and segregation.

How does the notion of ethnic enclaves engage the discourse about cultural diversity in U.S. society? Portes and Bach attempt to provide insights into a new form of immigrant incorporation into the U.S. economy at a time when immigration is becoming increasingly prominent in academic, policy, and popular discourse. Yet the purported successes and potential of the ethnic enclave may actually provide a misleading framework for exploring and understanding issues of diversity in U.S. society, especially as they play out between traditional racial/ethnic groups and new immigrant communities. Furthermore, the notion of ethnic solidarity may also obscure the complexities, conflicts, diversity, and contradictions within individual immigrant communities.

REFERENCES CITED


Perspectives on U.S. Kinship

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Kinship and marriage have been central to anthropology since the days of Lewis Henry Morgan (1790-1877), whose work on Iroquois social organization set the parameters of study. Kinship and marriage patterns foster cooperation and group loyalty, and are deemed fundamental to human social organization (Spradley and McCurdy 1994:197). Over the years anthropologists developed a complex categorization system of kinship terminology that classified principles of mating and birth. These principles involved how to reproduce members of the next generation (marriage), where they should live (residence rules), how to establish links between generations (descent), and how to pass on positions in society (succession) or material goods (inheritance) (Shultz and Lavender 1987:180). Following the dictates of the discipline, most of the research on kinship and marriage carried out by U.S. anthropologists took place among “tribes.” Kinship in anthropological discourse resided with those whose life experiences were deemed as strange or alien; the traditional simple society centered around face-to-face, interpersonal interactions.

Most studies of U.S. kinship, usually carried out by sociologists, dwelled on the simplicity of the general rules of descent or on the local aberrant behavioral systems that appear among the “exotic within,” such as Native Americans, and those deemed a problem, such as African Americans, and immigrant groups. All of those exceptions to the “American” (Euro-Protestant) middle-class nuclear family system were designated as abnormal. At best, other “exotic” U.S. systems were viewed as unassimilated kinship patterns retarded by their unique histories and in-group approved modes of behavior. Patricia Zavella’s (1987:12) review of Chicano family studies notes that “values conducive to success in American society – achievement, independence and deferred gratification – [were] supposedly absent in the Mexican-American family.” Further, changes toward acquiring American “egalitarian” values and norms would come only with acculturation. There were anthropologists working in the urban United States whose research countered the dominant nuclear family/assimilation model in their studies with “problem” people (e.g. Stack 1972; Valentine 1978; Gwatney 1981; Susser 1982). Each of these ethnographic accounts focused on kin-based systems of cooperation, obligation, loyalty, reciprocity, marriage, residence rules, descent, succession, and inheritance.