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Research Article

## “Asian Latinos” and the U.S. Census

Robert Chao Romero and Kevin Escudero

### Abstract

Numbering more than 300,000, “Asian Latinos” are a large but overlooked segment of the Asian American and Latino populations of the United States. Drawing from data generated from the 5 percent Public Use Microdata Samples of the 2000 U.S. Census, this article provides a preliminary quantitative analysis of the Asian Latino community. In particular, it examines the demographic characteristics of population size, geographic distribution, national origin, gender, age, citizenship, and educational attainment. In addition, it examines several policy implications related to Asian Latino coalition building and undocumented immigrant advocacy.

### Introduction

Gloria Chan immigrated to Monterey Park, California, from Santa Marta, Colombia, in January 2001. Following graduation from Mark Keppel High School and East Los Angeles College, Gloria enrolled at UCLA, where she completed a bachelor of arts degree in international development studies. Although of pure Chinese racial ancestry, she identifies most closely with Colombian culture and most of her friends are Latino:

Most of my friends were, and are, Latinos[as] because I felt more connected to them since we shared the same language, culture, and music. In addition, I identify more with them because my mother was born in Colombia, and she was raised by her Chinese parents as a Colombiana, and that was the same way how she raised my brother and me; as Colombians eating Sancocho and Arepas, listening to music in Spanish and watching novellas. (Chan, 2006)

Kevin Escudero was born in Woodland Hills, California, to a Bolivian father and a Vietnamese mother. After graduating from high school he attended UCLA. At UCLA he obtained a bachelor

of arts degree in Chicana/o studies and a master's degree in Latin American studies. Of "mixed" Asian and Latino ancestry, Kevin felt out of place in monoracial settings but ultimately chose to identify more with his Latino, rather than Asian, cultural heritage:

I felt like if I spent two days with Latinos I was not leading a balanced life and needed to go home to a family function on my Asian side. Also, because of the large numbers of Asian students at UCLA I found it easier to associate more with Latinos because of the close, tightly knit Latino community that has been created on campus where everyone knows each other because we have smaller numbers.

Gloria and Kevin are among the more than three hundred thousand Asian Latinos currently residing in the United States. Asian Latinos fall into four categories. The first category consists of Asian immigrants from Latin America like Gloria who consider themselves Latino. Similar to Kevin, the second major group of Asian Latinos is comprised of persons born in the United States of cross-cultural Asian Latino parentage. A third, smaller category of Asian Latinos includes Filipinos who blend into Latino communities by capitalizing upon their Spanish surnames and familiarity with the Spanish language (Lai and Arguelles, 2003). The majority of this third group is older Filipino Americans who emigrated from the Philippines and settled in Latino neighborhoods in the United States or others whom found employment alongside Latinos in the agricultural fields and the cannery industry. A fourth category of Asian Latinos is made up of the descendants of Puerto Rican immigrant laborers who went to Hawaii during the late nineteenth century and intermarried with Native Hawaiians. This unique "Latino Islander" population today resides in Hawaii and in cities of the mainland with large Hawaiian expatriate populations such as those in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, and Las Vegas (Lai and Arguelles, 2003).

This article provides a preliminary quantitative analysis of the Asian Latino population of the United States. In particular, it examines the demographic characteristics of population size, geographic distribution, national origin, gender, age, citizenship, and educational attainment. In addition, it examines policy implications related to Asian Latino coalition building and undocumented immigrant advocacy.

This article makes a unique methodological contribution to the historiography of multiracial studies in so far as it examines a multiracial/cross-cultural population that has largely slipped through the statistical cracks of traditional census data.

According to a 2000 census brief by Jones and Smith, 6,826,228 people, or 2.4 percent of the total U.S. population, self-identifies as being of two or more races (Jones and Smith, 2001). Those who self-identified as multiracial on the 2000 census, however, were constrained to choose from six limited census race categories: white, black/African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, and "some other race." Because Hispanic/Latino is considered an ethnic, but not a racial category, moreover, Hispanics/Latinos were allowed to select from any of the six census race categories.

It is important to note that census administrators created no separate race category for Asian Latinos. As a result, existing census categories fail to capture the full complexity of Asian Latino social identity. Although census data is available for Asians of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, there are not many additional data sets available overall for Asian Latinos, especially for those of the mixed-race category.

This article addresses the Asian Latino statistical "black hole" through the analysis of data generated from the 5 percent Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) of the 2000 U.S. Census. This data set has never before been utilized in prior studies of Asian Latinos. PUMS is drawn from U.S. Census records and provides socioeconomic data related to the inhabitants of individual housing units. PUMS data files represent a one in one thousand, 1 percent, or 5 percent sampling of all the housing units in the country. The 1 percent sample files have approximately one record for every one hundred persons/households in an area, while the 5 percent files have approximately one out of twenty. The universe from which the PUMS records are drawn is restricted to household/persons who received the long-form questionnaire. The smallest unit of geography on the 1 percent PUMS files is called a Super-Public Use Microdata Area (Super-PUMA); these geographic entities have a minimum population of four hundred thousand. The 5 percent PUMS file records contain a different set of PUMA geographic areas, each of which has a minimum population of one hundred thousand.

Despite the wealth of data provided by the PUMS data set, it is limited because it provides socioeconomic data for only one category of Asian Latinos Asian immigrants from Latin America. Although some census data has been generated for Asian Latinos of cross-cultural parentage, not many data sets are available. Because of these methodological limitations, this article's analysis of national origin, gender, age, citizenship, and educational attainment reports only upon Asian Latino immigrants from Latin America. Therefore, the policy findings of this article pertain most directly to Asian Latino secondary migrants from Latin America.

The PUMS data set is further limited in so far as it only includes distinct data sets for Asian Latinos from three countries: Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. These countries represent the homelands of the largest numbers of Asian Latinos. Data for Asian Latinos from all other countries in Latin America are lumped by the census into a separate category of "other." As a result, discrete data about Asian Latinos from countries other than Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba is unavailable. This lack of data further limits the scope and specificity of the findings of this study.

### Literature Review

Despite their relatively large numbers, Asian Latinos have been largely overlooked by scholars of Asian American, Chicana/o and/Latina/o studies compared to significant and burgeoning literature that has developed in recent years around the topic of Asian immigration and settlement in Latin America. This study provides a unique substantive and methodological contribution to this nascent literature on Asian Latino Americans.

Notable exceptions include the scholarship of Evelyn Hu-DeHart, Kyeyoung Park, Steven Masami Ropp, Rudy Guevarra, Jonathan Okamura, and Grace Peña Delgado. In her encyclopedia article, "Asian Latinos," which appears in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Latinos and Latinas in the United States*, Hu-DeHart gives voice to the diverse experiences of Asian Latino Cubans, Peruvians, Dominicans, Indians, and Brazilians, and provides an historical overview of the Asian Latino experience (Hu-DeHart, 2006). In addition, she asserts that Asian Latinas and Latinos are an overlooked cultural group and that their voices and experiences have not been examined within the fields of Asian American studies or Latina/o studies:

The multiple and diverse voices of Asian Latinas and Latinos in the United States have been muted, inaudible, ignored, discounted, or simply silenced for the simple reason that the category of Asian Latinas and Latinos is not a widely recognized and acknowledged cultural or social category in the United States. . . . Asian Latinas and Latinos are practically absent from the discourses of Asian American Studies and Latina and Latino Studies. (Hu-DeHart, 2006)

Park's article, "I'm Floating in the Air': Creation of a Korean Transnational Space among Korean-Latino-American Remigrants," represents the earliest study of Asian Latinos in the United States (1999). In this pathbreaking essay, Park examines the processes of social identity formation and cultural adaptation among Korean-Latino-Americans who "remigrate" to the United States from Latin America.

Ropp's article, "Secondary Migration and the Politics of Identity for Asian Latinos in Los Angeles," is also an early scholarly treatment of the topic of Asian Latinos (2000). Drawing from ethnohistorical data, narrative analysis, and political economy theory, Ropp examines patterns of Asian Latino immigration to Los Angeles and the varied cultural social identifications of these Asian "secondary migrants" from Latin America. He argues that many Asian Latino immigrants have used Latin America as a migration stepping-stone by first settling in countries like Mexico and Brazil and then eventually immigrating to the United States. According to Ropp, economic and political crises in Latin America since the late 1970s have also served to encourage Asian immigrants to push their way farther north into the United States.

Guevarra's dissertation, "Mexipino: A History of Multiethnic Identity and the Formation of the Mexican and Filipino Communities of San Diego, 1900–1965" (2007), and essay, "Burritos and Ba-goong: Mexipinos and Multiethnic Identity in San Diego, California" (2003), provide a unique historical and sociological glimpse into the large Mexican Filipino interracial community of San Diego. Based upon interviews with Mexipinos and his own personal experience, Guevarra asserts that Mexipinos share three common aspects of identity: "the best of both worlds" ideal, "ambiguous identity," and "multiple passing."

A fascinating literature has also begun to develop around the topic of "Latino Islander" identity formations. Unbeknownst

to many, Puerto Ricans immigrated to Hawaii in large numbers during the early twentieth century. They intermarried with Asian and other mixed-race “locals” in Hawaii because they shared a common plantation history. In his recent publication, *Ethnicity and Inequality in Hawai'i*, Okamura examines Latino Islanders within the context of a broader discussion of Hawaiian multiraciality, ethnicity, and inequality (2008). Okamura argues that ethnicity is the dominant organizing principle of social relations in Hawaii and that it structures inequality among ethnic groups within the spheres of education and the economy. According to Okamura, Latinos, together with Native Hawaiians, Filipino Americans, and other Pacific Islanders, form part of the social underclass of Hawaiian society. As members of this subordinate group, Latino Islanders suffer from socioeconomic disadvantage in the realms of education and the economy.

Historian Delgado offers a pioneering examination of the Chinese immigrant community of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands (2000, 2004). As a Chicana/o studies scholar, Delgado argues that the American experience and the Chicano/a experience have overlooked the significant effects that Chinese exclusion laws had upon the lives of Chinese immigrants who lived in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Examining American and Mexican nativism, international immigration patterns, and borderlands economic development, Delgado demonstrates how Chinese exclusion laws engendered the creation of a distinct Chinese-Mexican ethnic identity in the borderlands of Sonora and Arizona.

### Brief Historical Background: Asians in Latin America

Although Asian immigration and settlement in Latin America is often thought of as a contemporary phenomenon, this trend actually has long historical roots tracing back to the sixteenth century. Between 1565 and 1815, it is estimated that as many as one hundred thousand immigrants from China, the Philippines, Japan, and India settled in Mexico as part of the Spanish Manila Galleon trade (Slack, 2009, 35–38). As part of the Manila Galleon Trade, Spanish merchants purchased luxury items like porcelain and silk from Chinese merchants in the Philippines and transported these goods on large galleons to the port of Veracruz, Mexico. Thousands of Asian immigrants made their way to Mexico aboard these

ships as sailors, servants, and slaves during the two and a half centuries of the Manila Galleon Trade. These numbers included large numbers of Indian slaves who were transported by the Portuguese from trading ports in India to the Philippines and Mexico (Slack, 2009, 41).

Subsequently, Asians settled in Latin America on a wide scale beginning in the 1800s. Between 1847 and 1874, Cuban planters and merchants imported more than 125,000 Chinese indentured laborers as part of "*la trata amarilla*," or the "yellow trade." Most of these contract laborers, or coolies, were recruited as laborers for sugar, tobacco, and coffee plantations. These Chinese laborers supplemented the African slave labor supply following the abolition of the African slave trade and facilitated Cuba's transition from a plantation economy dependent on slave labor to a capitalist and industrial economy based on wage labor (Hu-DeHart, 1994, 38, 48). During these same years, close to one hundred thousand Chinese coolies were also imported as contract laborers for the sugar plantations and guano pits of Peru (Hu-DeHart, 1989, 92).

Chinese immigrated to Mexico in large numbers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between 1882 and 1940, an estimated sixty thousand Chinese entered Mexico, constituting Mexico's second-largest immigrant community (Romero, 2010). Chinese immigrants went to Mexico for two main reasons: first, in hopes of crossing illegally into the United States in circumvention of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; and second, in order to find jobs in the developing Mexican economy as shopkeepers, merchants, and laborers in Mexican haciendas, ranches, and mines (Romero, 2010, 3). By 1926, at a size of 24,218, the Chinese represented the second-largest foreign ethnic-minority group in all of Mexico and were to be found in almost every state and territory of the country (Romero, 2010, 1).

The Japanese also have had an important historical presence in Latin America. In the early twentieth century, Japanese immigrants settled in twelve Latin American countries, including Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Colombia, and Panama (Master-son, 2004). More than 180,000 Japanese immigrated to Brazil between the years of 1908 and 1941, more than 2,400 Japanese lived in Mexico in 1910, and close to thirty thousand Japanese immigrated to Peru during these years. Like their Chinese counterparts,



Japanese immigrants made their way to Latin America during the early twentieth century in search of economic opportunity, in hopes of eventual entry to the United States, and in response to difficult socioeconomic conditions in their homeland. Today, at an estimated size of 1.5 million, the Japanese community of Brazil is the largest outside of Japan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2011).

### Asian Latinos and the U.S. Census

According to the U.S. Census (2000a) there are 319,334 Asian Latinos in the United States. Although they can be found throughout the country, they are geographically concentrated in states and communities with large Latino and Asian immigrant populations (see Table 1). The largest Asian Latino populations are to be found in the states of New York, Texas, and California. The cities with the largest Asian Latino populations include Los Angeles, Honolulu, New York, San Francisco, and San Diego (Lai and Arguelles, 2003). Significant numbers of Asian Latinos are growing in smaller states with traditionally small Latino populations such as South Carolina, Tennessee, and Michigan.

Table 1. Geographical Distribution of Asian-Latinos by State

<b>States:</b>	
South Carolina	1,252
Tennessee	1,407
Michigan	3,005
New York	21,102
Texas	21,401
California	125,660
San Diego, CA	15,262
San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose, CA	37,364
New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-CT-PA	38,272
Honolulu, HI	45,599
Los Angeles-Riverside-Orange County, CA	68,403

Source: "Chino Latinos? APAs of the Hispanic variety," in *The New Face of Asian Pacific America: Numbers, Diversity & Change in the 21st Century*, eds., Eric Lai, Dennis Arguelles (San Francisco: Asian Week, UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 2003), 12, 13.

The following analysis of national origin, gender, age, citizenship, and educational attainment includes only Asian Latino immigrants from Latin America.

### National Origin

The largest proportion of Asian Latino immigrants from Latin America identify with Mexico as their country of origin (see Table 2). A surprisingly large number, nearly twenty thousand, identified themselves with Puerto Rico, and a small number claimed Cuba as their country of origin. By far, the second-largest percentage of Asian Latinos come from countries other than Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. Unfortunately, disaggregated data on Asian Latinos from Latin American countries other than Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba are not available as part of the PUMS data set. This absence of data severely limits the scope of the findings of this study.

Ethnically, Asian Latinos come from Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian and Pacific Islander heritages.

### Gender

In contradistinction to the male-dominated Asian immigrant communities of Latin America and the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Asian Latinos of the United States are almost equally balanced between men and women (Romero, 2010, 24, 66) (see Table 3). Males comprise 49 percent

Table 2. National Origins and Ethnic Backgrounds of Asian-Latino Secondary Migrants Living in the United States

<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Chinese</b>	<b>Japanese</b>	<b>Other Asian Pacific Islanders</b>	<b>Total</b>
Mexico	4,791	5,344	47,608	57,743
Puerto Rico	1,620	739	17,465	19,824
Cuba	1,801	176	1,567	3,544
Asian-Latinos from other Latin American Countries				56,154

Source: 2000 United States Census, 5% Public Use Microdata Samples

(67,794) of the Asian Latino population, and females 51 percent (69,471). This male-to-female gender ratio of Asian Latinos is exactly the same as that of non-Hispanic whites (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a). This gender balance is largely consistent, moreover, across Asian Latino categories of national origin.

This near equal ratio of male to females would tend to imply that most Asian Latinos have immigrated to the United States with their nuclear families in tact or have succeeded in carrying

Table 3. Gender and Citizenship Status of Asian Latino Secondary Migrants Living in the United States

	Mexico	Puerto Rico	Cuba	Other Latin American Countries
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	4,634	389		
Female	5,501	350		
<b>Citizenship Status</b>				
Naturalized	4,396		745	11,734
Other	8,753		515	13,489
Decline to State	43,674		2,143	29,748
<b>Age</b>				
0–12 years	18,346			
13–20 years	8,888			
21–30 years	10,944			
31–40 years	10,393			
41–55 years	6,555			
56–70 years	1,997			
71–85 years	708			
<b>Educational Attainment</b>				
Elementary	17,900			13,477
Jr. High	3,465			2,808
High School Diploma/GED	8,661			8,985
1 yr of college+	5,774			5,615
Associate of Arts Degree	2,310			2,246
4-year Degree	2,887			5,615
Graduate/Professional Degree	1,155			2,246

Source: 2000 U.S. Census; 5 percent Public Use Microdata Samples

out family reunification. Such gender balance stands in direct contrast to demographic patterns of earlier waves of Asian migration to the United States which, owing to discriminatory immigration restrictions, tended to be comprised mostly of single or married men who left wives and children behind in their countries of origin (Park, 2004, 101).

### Age

Consistent with the hypothesis that many Asian Latinos have immigrated in nuclear families to the United States, census data indicate that Asian Latinos are a relatively young community (see Table 3). The Asian Latino population is considerably younger than its non-Hispanic white counterpart (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a). Nearly half of Asian Latinos are less than twenty years old. This contrasts with less than one-quarter of non-Hispanic whites who are less than eighteen years old. The size of the Asian Mexican and Asian Latino population begins to drop noticeably after age fifty-five and continues to decline increasingly into the senior citizen years.

Based upon these population patterns, Asian Latinos represent a young community that is poised for continued numerical growth in the decades to come.

### Citizenship

Although a majority of Asian Latino immigrants are not U.S. citizens and did not report their official citizenship status, census data indicates that large numbers of Asian Latino immigrants have gone through the process of becoming naturalized U.S. citizens (see Table 3). Among Asian Latinos from countries of Latin America other than Mexico, Puerto Rico, or Cuba, 21 percent identified themselves as naturalized U.S. citizens as compared to 8 percent of Asian Mexicans. Asian Cubans reported much higher relative levels of naturalized citizenship than did Asian Mexicans and most other Asian Latinos. These high numbers might reflect the fact that many Asian Cubans fled Cuba as political and economic refugees following the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Chinese immigration to Cuba came to a sudden halt after 1959, and Chinese-owned businesses in Cuba were nationalized during the following years. As a result, large numbers of Chinese Cubans followed the larger exodus of Cubans to U.S. cities such as Miami and New York

City (Lopez, 2005, 281). As refugees without a national homeland, Asian Cubans may have had more incentive to integrate themselves within the political community of the United States. As middle-class migrants, furthermore, they may have also brought with them social and financial capital, which facilitated the process of political integration.

Notably, large numbers of Asian Latinos appear to be residing in the United States without legal documentation. Similar to many Chinese immigrants who were smuggled into the United States from Mexico and Cuba during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in evasion of the Chinese Exclusion Laws, many Asian Latinos appear to be currently living in the United States without legal documentation (Lee, 2003; Romero, 2010). This can be deduced from the fact that the overwhelming majority of Asian Latinos, 69 percent, did not report their citizenship status (see Table 3). Specifically, 76 percent of Asian Mexicans and 60 percent of Asian Cubans elected not to reveal their citizenship status. Among Asian Latinos from countries other than Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico the same trend was true. Although 44 percent chose to report their citizenship status, 53 percent—a clear majority—did not.

Although some Asian Latinos may have not indicated their citizenship status out of confusion over the census questionnaire categories or due to limited English proficiency, it is possible that many respondents declined to do so as a means of protecting their undocumented identities. Though it is impossible to say for certain, this reluctance to claim national citizenship status on the part of so many Asian Latinos may indicate that many are currently residing in the United States without documentation.

The converse question might also be asked, why did some Asian Latinos choose to claim Latin American, as opposed to Asian, national citizenship when questioned for the U.S. census? One potential reason is that they felt a strong social identification with Latin America based upon a significant period of residence in the region. Another explanation relates to their official status under U.S. immigration law. As secondary migrants from Latin America, many Asian Latinos gained permanent residency in the United States based upon their status as citizens or permanent residents of a specific Latin American country. As a result, they are legally and technically viewed as Latin American by the U.S.

government based upon the information contained in their applications for permanent residency. The claiming of Latin American nationality on the part of many Asian Latinos would therefore be a precise legal response to census queries pertaining to citizenship.

### Educational Attainment

On the whole, Asian Latinos are a moderately educated population (see Table 3). Although the largest numbers of Asian Latinos reported having completed no more than an elementary school education, significant numbers are high school graduates and a relatively small percentage are college or university graduates.

In contrast with non-Hispanic whites, however, Asian Latinos report low levels of educational attainment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b). For example, whereas 15 percent of Asian Mexicans earned a high school diploma or General Educational Development test (GED), 88 percent of non-Hispanic whites are high school graduates. Moreover, 28 percent of non-Hispanic whites report completing a four-year degree in sharp contrast to only 5 percent of Asian Mexicans.

### Conclusion and Policy Implications

Based upon their large numbers, Asian Latinos are an important but overlooked segment of the Asian American and Latino populations of the United States. Although Asian Latinos like Gloria and Kevin number in the hundreds of thousands and are present in many states throughout the country, little is written or known about them. This unique community is comprised of Asian secondary migrants who have immigrated to the United States from Latin America and of the offspring of Asian Latino marital unions. Although Asian immigration to the Americas has long and deep historical roots, not much is known about Asian immigration to Latin America and even less is known about the growing Asian Latino community of the United States. This study helps fill the gap in research pertaining to Asian Latinos, a void resulting from the lack of available data and the limitations of census categories that fail to capture the full complexity of Asian Latino social identity.

Several other factors also account for the paucity of scholarship on Asian Latinos. The first is that Asian Latino secondary

migrants blend phenotypically into the larger Asian American community. As a result, they have gone largely unnoticed by the general public and scholars of multiraciality. This problem is further compounded by the fact that many researchers are unaware of the large historical presence of Asians in Latin America. As a logical consequence, and notwithstanding notable limited exceptions, the topic of Asian secondary migration to the United States is not on their academic radar.

Mixed-race Asian Latinos have been similarly overlooked by the field of multiracial studies. This is largely because wide-scale Asian Latino intermarriage is a relatively recent historical phenomenon in the United States. Although Asian Latino cultural interactions in Latin America span more than four centuries, as previously discussed, and intermarriage between Asians and Latinos has important historical precedent in places like Mexico, Peru, Cuba, and Hawaii, the occurrence of Asian Latino intermarriage in large numbers (and the subsequent rise in the population of mixed-race Asian Latino children) is a relatively recent phenomenon. As a result, few are aware of the nascent but steadily growing Asian Latino population of the United States. Fortunately, as evidenced by the literature review that opened this article, academic research on the Asian Latino population is slowly gaining momentum and legitimacy as a viable topic of study.

Several significant policy implications arise from these findings. The first relates to the increased potential for Asian and Latino coalition building. Asian Latinos, including Asians from Latin America and mixed-race individuals of Asian and Latino ancestry, have the potential to serve as unique cultural and political liaisons between the fast-growing Asian American and Latino populations of California and the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2008 Asians and Latinos comprised nearly half the population of the state of California. At a size of 4.5 million, Asian-descent individuals represent 12.4 percent of Californians; with a total population of 13.5 million, Latinos constitute 36.6 percent of the state's inhabitants (American Immigration Council, 2010). On a national level, Asian Americans currently comprise 5 percent of the total population, and by 2050 this number is projected to increase to 9 percent. Latinos represent 15 percent of the current U.S. population, and according to government projections, this number will grow to 30 percent by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau,

2008). Because of their large numbers, Asian Americans and Latinos will play critical roles for many years to come in the state and national economies, and they comprise a powerful potential voting bloc that could significantly sway the future direction of electoral politics. Based upon their strong cross-cultural connections and community ties, Asian Latinos can serve as effective economic and political intermediaries between the rising Asian American and Latino populations of the United States.

Asian Latinos are also in a unique position to organize the Asian American and Latino populations around advocacy for undocumented immigrants. Although unauthorized immigration is usually thought of as an issue affecting primarily Latinos, Asians represent 1.5 million, or nearly 10 percent, of the estimated 10.8 million undocumented immigrants currently residing in the United States (Lin, 2010; Watanabe, 2010), and as examined in this article, large numbers of Asian Latinos may live in this country without proper legal documentation. Once again, based upon their special cross-cultural and community ties, and also their personal familiarity with the topic of unauthorized immigration, Asian Latinos are in a strategic position to unite both communities around the issue of advocacy for undocumented immigrants.

Asian Latinos are also uniquely situated to rally Asian Americans and Latinos in support of undocumented college and university students in California. It is estimated that sixty-five thousand undocumented students graduate from high school each year throughout the United States, with a majority of such students matriculating from California high schools (Oliveres et al., 2006). It is further estimated that 3,500 to 5,000 unauthorized students, mostly of Asian and Latino ancestry, are currently enrolled in California colleges and universities (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2009). Many undocumented Asian American students immigrated to the United States with their families on valid visas that eventually expired, and it is a common experience for such students not to learn of their unauthorized status until they apply for college (Mandel, 2009). Nearly half of all undocumented students in the University of California system are Asian Americans (Mandel, 2009). Many Asian Latinos are also undocumented.

Assembly Bill 540 (AB-540), which was passed into law in 2001, has made public college and university education accessible to Asian American and Latino undocumented students in



California. Prior to the passage of AB-540, a college education was out of the reach of most undocumented students because they were forced to pay high international student tuition fees according to state law. Since 2001, undocumented students have been allowed to pay more affordable in-state registration fees at California public colleges and universities if they meet several criteria, including a three-year high school residency requirement (Oliverrez et al., 2006). Although eligible for in-state tuition, AB-540 students are not, however, entitled to receive any public scholarships, loans, or other forms of government financial aid to help them pay for their education. As a result, they often work thirty to forty hours a week, commute long distances on public transportation, and go without basic necessities in order to meet their educational expenses (Madera, 2008).

Even for those undocumented students who do manage to graduate from college, their educational and professional options upon graduation are severely limited. Tragically, many outstanding students are unable to continue their education at the graduate level because they do not qualify for residency-based scholarships and financial aid. Also, because they lack legal residency, most undocumented college graduates do not qualify for work visas that would allow them to stay in the country and find gainful employment. As a result, many are forced to seek low-paying jobs in the informal work sector or to start commercial enterprises that do not require them to provide documentation of their legal status.

In an attempt to address the many social injustices experienced by undocumented students, in December 2010, federal legislators put before Congress the Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act. More commonly referred to as the Dream Act, this legislation would have provided a path to citizenship for undocumented youth who were brought to the United States before the age of sixteen and who attended college or served in the military. Although the Dream Act passed the House of Representatives, it failed by a vote of 55-41 in the Senate (Mascaro and Oliphant, 2010). The recent failure of the Dream Act has reinforced the need for continued political advocacy on behalf of the undocumented population of the United States.

In summary, this article has sought to draw scholarly attention to the large but overlooked Asian Latino community, examine some of its salient demographic characteristics, and provide policy recommendations based upon these findings. One central policy

recommendation relates to the unique potential for Asian Latinos to serve as cultural and political liaisons between the fast-growing Asian American and Latino populations of the United States. Based upon their dual cultural and community ties, they can serve as effective economic and political intermediaries between the rising Asian and Latino populations. Drawing from their familiarity with the struggles of being undocumented, Asian Latinos are also in a strategic position to rally the Asian American and Latino populations in support of continued advocacy on behalf of undocumented immigrants in the United States.

This article makes a unique methodological contribution to the academic literature on mixed-race communities in so far as it analyzes a multiracial population that has largely slipped through the cracks of traditional census data. It addresses the Asian Latino statistical “black hole” by analyzing data generated from the 5 percent PUMS of the 2000 census—a data set that has not previously been used by scholars in the study of Asian Latinos. As a quantitative study based upon the PUMS data files, however, this study has several limitations. First, because it is based upon 2000 census data, its findings need to be compared with new data from the recent 2010 census. It is the authors’ hope that the methodology used in this study may inspire future demographic studies of Asian Latinos based upon the 2010 census. As an explicitly quantitative study, moreover, this article is limited by a lack of qualitative data. More qualitative data is necessary in order to understand with greater certainty some of sociological questions posed by this study. For example, the claim that large numbers of Asian Latinos appear to be residing in the United States without legal documentation, although logically borne out of the statistical evidence, must be verified through further qualitative analysis. Finally, this study has also been limited by a lack of available census data. Asian Latinos have remained largely under the academic radar because the census does not maintain mixed-race aggregated data. As a consequence, there exists a dearth of available data on Asian Latinos and other mixed-race communities. As a further policy recommendation, the census should begin to maintain mixed-race aggregated data, as well as improve census efforts at collecting data on mixed-race people in general. Despite these methodological limitations, this article provides a meaningful preliminary glimpse into the important but overlooked Asian Latino population of the United States.

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