
Theoretical Overview Of Mexican And Puerto Rican Migration To The United States

Immigration is what has made America what it is today. In reality, there would be no America if not for immigration because absolutely everyone within the United States is an immigrant themselves or has descended from one. Each wave of immigration brings new thoughts, cultures, and beliefs with it. Two groups specific that have migrated to the United States include Puerto Rican and Mexican people. This all began back in the mid-1800s when the Mexican-American War took place leading to the annexation of close to half of Mexico's territory. Then, in the late-1800s the Spanish-American War took place which led to the annexation of Puerto Rico as well. Both of these events brought many immigrants to the United States and while this country is often known as "the land of the free and the home of the brave", it was not always easy for immigrants to adapt and fit into their new lifestyles in America. Minorities throughout history have often been discriminated against by white people who feel that their power and privilege are being threatened by immigrants migrating to America. All people, regardless of their race or where they come from, deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Mexican and Puerto Rican people whether they came to America by force or by choice have so many things to offer. When immigrants in America are treated unfairly, it only holds our country back from benefitting to the fullest from the talent and power of our people. When looking at the migration of Latin people to the United States, it is important to look at sociological models on migration and how they have been applied to the immigration patterns of both Mexican and Puerto Rican people. Through this, it will be much easier to see how and why things happened and why current day society is how it is. The three theories that will be used to talk about Puerto Rican and Mexican migration are rational choice theory, world-systems theory, and social network theory.

The first theory that is important to talk about when speaking of the migration of Latin people to the United States is the rational choice theory. The rational choice theory states that people rely on rational decisions to be successful and achieve their goals and personal objectives. People want to make the best out of what they are given and will do whatever is in the best interest of themselves and their families. In the 1920s and 1930s both Mexico and Puerto Rico were in trouble economically. Both countries promised little and life was very difficult. Jobs were almost unheard of and when people could find jobs, they paid very poorly. Many people had little education, with children often taking care of family members and the house rather than going to school. People were ultimately living in poverty and the hole they were in was a hard one to dig out of. According to *Better Lives for Mexicans Cut Allure of Going North*, "Comparatively, the United States looked like a dreamland of technology and riches: it was found that the wages paid by the railroads, where most early migrants found legal work, were five times what could be earned on farms in Arandas, the municipality that includes Agua Negra" (Cave, 2011). America was a big shiny object that looked very appealing to people in countries like Mexico and Puerto Rico who were struggling to find work and to support themselves and their families. Migration behavior that is seen in the Latino population is considered to be a rationally thought out action and choice because the people who migrate to America are doing so because they are trying to maximize their personal gains and profits. The unfortunate part about the migration of Latino people to America is that not all that glitters is gold. While some of the Mexican and Puerto Rican people came to America to better themselves and find work and money to support their

families, they often came up short. In some cases, people did not choose to come to America at all but because of land being taken over, they were placed there. In the case of the Mexican people, they were settled on land in Texas that was the territory of Mexico until America annexed it in 1845, in which they were then on land owned by the United States. Even though the United States is who fought for the land, they didn't necessarily want competition from the Mexican people for farmland and resources, leading to conflict between Anglo and Mexican people. Throughout history, even still today that tension can be seen and felt between not only white and Mexican people but also white people and all minorities. Many times, Mexican and Puerto Rican people are discriminated against because of their culture, customs, and the color of their skin. Another point to consider is that Puerto Rican people are born U.S. citizens and are free to come to the United States as they please, yet they are still discriminated against as though they are doing something wrong. Many people also believe and treat Mexican people in the United States as though they are all illegal immigrants when in fact they are definitely not. According to *Discrimination in America: Experiences and Views of Latinos*, "Overall, 78% of Latinos believe that there is discrimination against Latinos in America today. Among those who believe such discrimination exists, nearly half (47%) say that discrimination based on the prejudice of individual people is the bigger problem, compared to 37% of Latinos who say discrimination based on laws and government policies is the bigger problem. Another 14% say both are equally problematic" (*"Discrimination in America"*, 2019). These statistics account for both Mexican and Puerto Rican people and they show how over time nothing has changed. Though it is often claimed that America is moving in a direction of change and inclusivity, these statistics show differently. Migration has been happening for a very long time and even today, in 2019, 78% of Latino people have felt as though they have been discriminated against in America.

The next theory to look at about the migration of Mexican and Puerto Rican people to the United States is the world-systems theory. The world-systems theory focuses on the evolution and growth of the composition of the world market. According to *Latinos in the United States: Diversity and change*, "According to this perspective, the penetration of capitalists from developed countries and multinational corporations into the economic markets of developing countries set the emergence of international migration from developing countries to developed countries" (Sáenz & Morales, 2015, pg 28). When capitalists like the United States enter developing countries, like Puerto Rico or Mexico at the time shortly after the Mexican-American War and the Spanish-American War, they disrupt the economy and the labor force in that country. This then leads to migration for people coming from the affected developing countries to already developed countries in hopes of finding work. This can lead to tension between immigrants and people native to the land where they migrate to because when more people are present in a certain area, fewer resources and jobs available. According to *A New Framework For Understanding Puerto Ricans' Migration Patterns and Incorporation*, "In Puerto Rico's case, American corporations decided initially to privilege the production of sugar, buying off larger and larger plots of land from the local small and medium farmers. These actions led to the eventual demise of the coffee haciendas, the dislocation of the peasants that worked for them, and the misery of many small farmers" (Velez, 2017, pg 10). World-systems theory goes against the idea that migration is the outcome of the choices made by individuals who are trying to maximize returns to their capital and past employment, like rational choice theory. Rather, it focuses on the invasions of wealthy and established nations into the terrains of immature nations such as Mexico and Puerto Rico. Not only were people from these lesser countries being pushed off of their land and out of their jobs but once they arrived in America they were treated poorly and discriminated against on top of it. There were not great jobs readily waiting

for immigrants in America, so they were faced with some choices. They could work very low-paying jobs for the American people who now owned the land and businesses in their home countries, or come to America and work farming jobs in the hopes that they could work their way up and establish opportunities for themselves and their families.

The final theory to bring into the discussion of the migration of Mexican and Puerto Rican people to the United States is the social network theory. The social network theory is a study of people and their social networks and how they communicate within them. Through these networks, people can gain social support, resources, and social influence through person-to-person contact. Initial migrants from places such as Mexico or Puerto Rico came to the United States and had lots of questions and unknowns to deal with. They then became connected to the States where better employment and the thought of a better overall life was present. According to *The Differential Role of Social Networks: Assistance in Brazilian Migration to Portugal and the Netherlands*, "Given the desirability of the destination and the access gained through social networks with previous migrants, the flow continues beyond the 'pioneers', as previous migrants mediate the migration of friends and family. Migrant networks facilitate the moves of newcomers by providing information about the new society and assistance, for example with housing and employment" (Meeteren & Pereira, 2016, pg 4). What this is showing us that the initial immigrants that come to a country get themselves acclimated, find employment, housing, and become social with others, and then they help people back home understand the process so that they too can migrate to that country to try and better their life. It is always better to travel or move somewhere that you know things about so that you feel more comfortable. It would be very hard to make the move somewhere you know nothing about, without knowing anyone there, and not knowing how to get yourself acclimated. Latino people, both Mexican and Puerto Rican, attempt to gather information from members of their community and networks before making the move to migrate. According to *Latinos in the United States: Diversity and change*, "Potential migrants draw on the stock of knowledge accumulated by members of the community, including relatives and friends, to gain important information as they seek to immigrate and subsequently look for employment in the place of destination. Once the potential migrant, himself or herself, engages in migration and settles in the place of destination, he or she becomes another potential link to other potential migrants contemplating an international move" (Saenz & Morales, 2015, pg 29). The outcome of this is that the more people that immigrate to a specific area, the less costly, risky, and overall difficult it is for those who follow them. This is because people obtain information necessary for a smooth and successful transition that they then share with other potential immigrants. Through the social network theory, it is easy to see how transnationalism plays into immigration and how immigrants feel ties to both their homeland and the new land they are a part of. This allows them to have a unique and very special identity. Both Mexican and Puerto Rican people have lived in the United States for a very long time. They have built lives, families, friends, jobs, and social networks here, so of course, they feel tied to this land. People make decisions, take actions, feel deeply connected, and develop identities through social networks that connect them to more than one society. Many people have family and friends in the United States as well as back in their homeland. That is why the social networks that people have are so important because it allows them to communicate with their loved ones and helps them understand the lifestyle in America so that if they so choose to migrate themselves, they will have the tools that they need to do so knowledgeably and successfully.

Without immigration, and the wide array of people that it brings to the United States, America would look nothing like how it does today. When the people of Mexico and Puerto Rico migrate

to the United States, they bring with them new cultures, thoughts, beliefs, and ideas that can benefit us all. As seen throughout this paper, life is not always easy for immigrants that come to America, they face many hardships and they are often discriminated against for the way they speak, look, and dress. Especially in an era like the one we are in now where it feels as though there is so much hate and separation, we should all work to come together, not tear each other down. With the United States being as divided as it is right now, has it become terrifying for those who wish to migrate here? Only time will give us the answer to that question. Currently speaking, immigration is still embedded and remains a part of American history and our society. Immigration provides a second chance for many people who are attempting to migrate to a new land and begin a brand new life. The United States has often been compared to a melting pot, where people of all different backgrounds and walks of life blend as one. The U.S. has also been compared to salad, in which each part resembles its own flavor and texture while contributing to the greater good. Possibly former President and Nobel peace prize winner Jimmy Carter said it best, "We become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams" (Hills, 2017). It is important for people to not only see the differences amongst each other but to embrace them for what they are and realize that those differences are what make America truly unique and wonderful. No one group of people whether that be a race, a gender, or a religion, can make this country great alone. The mobility of immigrants and a diverse population are here to stay and it is going to take all of us, born here or not, to work together to achieve greatness.