

# Circles of Influence and Chains of Command: The Social Processes Whereby Ethnic Communities Influence Host Societies

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## Abstract

*Research into immigration has for many years focused most of its attention on the issue of how immigrants adapt to host societies. This tendency is especially true in the work of sociologists. Yet if we acknowledge the growing ethnic diversity today in the United States and elsewhere, the most interesting questions arise as to how immigrants influence the host society – not how they adapt to it. This paper proposes a sociological theory to account for such influence. For evidence it draws on a variety of empirical examples from research on ethnic communities in the United States.*

## Introduction

During the past four decades, millions of new immigrants have entered the United States. As of 2002, more than 32 million new residents, or approximately 11 percent of the total U.S. population, have been added in this manner. (U.S. Census, February 2003). This stream of new immigrants has come to America from places very different than in the past. As the result of a major overhaul of immigration policy – evident in the 1965 Hart-Celler Immigration Act – the long-time preference for settlement given to immigrants from Western Europe was dropped; in its place new criteria shifted the basic flow of immigrants to Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The large majority of these newcomers today, about 50 percent, arrive from countries in Latin America (U.S. Census, February 2003), mostly Mexico. In 2000, 9.2 million immigrants, or roughly 30 percent of the total foreign-born U.S. residents were from Mexico (U.S. Census, December 2003). The newcomers also are concentrated regionally and in major metropolitan areas. The foreign-born tend to favor the West and Northeast, and are least likely to live in the Midwest (U.S. Census, December 2003). For example, fully 26 percent of the population of California is foreign-born. In 2000, four major metropolitan counties were home to 22 percent of the total U.S. immigrant population (U.S. Census, December 2003). The counties were: Los Angeles, California; Miami-Dade, Florida; Cook County, Illinois; and Queens County, New York.

As the numbers have multiplied in recent years, it has become abundantly clear that this new generation of immigrants has begun to exercise a dramatic impact on the character of this nation. There are many diverse indications of the nature of the impact. Among them is the growth of a number of new ethnic businesses outside of the local enclaves, especially new ethnic restaurants. In addition, one can find a more prevalent use of non-English languages

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in the conduct both of private and public business. Many ATM outlets in major metropolitan areas such as Chicago, for instance, now allow users to conduct their business in English or Spanish. In other parts of the country, such as Boston, ATM users are given a choice of seven languages. On the West Coast, Wells Fargo recently added Spanish with audio capacity to 2,700 of its ATM machines (ATM Marketplace.com 2004, 2003, 2001). For several years, the state of Illinois has provided driver's examination booklets in three languages – English, Polish and Spanish. There are an increasing number of bilingual education programs in public schools – even as the debate rages about the appropriateness of such education programs. There also are a greater number of newspapers, radio stations and television outlets in different languages – among them, Chinese, Russian, Polish and, of course, Spanish. In brief, there are a host of signs heralding the growth of ethnic and linguistic diversity throughout American society.

The growth of this ethnic diversity, especially in major metropolitan areas, appears to go beyond the development of diverse ethnic neighborhoods. There is, it would seem, a more pervasive influence, one that affects the language of everyday life, the discourse of business, the variety of menus available in restaurants, and the like. America has become enriched by a cornucopia of different languages, symbols and cultural paraphernalia. Cultural diversity, in other words, once simply an ideal promoted by liberal political groups, has gradually become a fact of life for millions of Americans.

Why has this happened? But, even more to the point, how can we as social scientists provide a compelling theoretical explanation for this growing cultural and ethnic diversity – now as well as in the future? One could simply describe the changes, as the brilliant observer of urban life, Mike Davis, has done in a recent book on the influence of Latinos in America (Davis and de la Campa 2000). Indeed, it is most tempting to simply go around any of the major metropolitan areas in America and count up the number of different ethnic restaurants and stores on major public thoroughfares or in major malls.<sup>1</sup> But such a strategy, however interesting, sidesteps the more important analytical issue – how can we explain these changes in a meaningful and useful framework?

Unfortunately, our basic theories in the social sciences do not deal with how immigrants might influence the host society, but rather with how immigrants adapt to the host society. Furthermore, even if one searches in other literatures, such as the vast literature on social movements, one will not find a model that can be easily crafted to fit the question of how immigrants and/or ethnic groups might work their magic on American institutions.<sup>2</sup> In short, if we want to explain how immigrants or ethnic groups might influence the institutions of the host society, we must invent a model to explain these events and to guide our empirical research into their details.

This article proposes one such theory. It furnishes a variety of empirical examples in support of the theory and provides some suggestions for testing and refining this model through further empirical research.

## **Conceptions of Immigrants and Host Societies**

At the outset it is important to acknowledge that the usual theories employed by immigration researchers do not admit to the possibility that immigrants can change or alter institutions of the host society. All such models are premised on the fundamental assumption that immigrants, if they are to remain in the United States (or any host society for that matter), will be compelled to adapt to its institutions. Failing to do so, the assumption appears to be that the foreigners will simply exit or remain marginal and thus problematic. In other words, the current models of the social sciences do not permit immigrants, as groups, to exercise any

form of agency over the institutions of the new societies they confront.<sup>3</sup> They are, at best, contentious players, engaged occasionally in conflict with the host institutions, but never permitted, in any serious theoretical fashion, either to challenge or to change them.

This failure in current models to grant immigrants the capacity to influence and to change host institutions may be understood largely as a response to currents and issues that shaped the creation of these models in the past. In a country such as the United States, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it simply made more sense to think that immigrants who entered America came here with the intent of becoming American, adopting American ways and beliefs. The new immigrants from overseas were simply part of that large mass of people who disembarked on American shores seeking greater opportunity in this “land of milk and honey,” and they were anxious to become a part of the system that created and produced such opportunity (Gerstle 1997).

Everyone who thought about immigration – from the rabid patriots who pressed immigrants to Americanize in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the early sociologists who sought to understand the experience of the new immigrants – were necessarily influenced by the ideological concerns of the day (Higham 1955). Models that are employed today still retain some of the flavor of a worldview that almost a century ago assumed that immigrants simply wished to divest themselves, not only of their culture but also of their power and purpose. In particular, the key concepts of assimilation and accommodation were first developed by sociologists who were accustomed to thinking about immigrants in the host society in the same way as ecologists thought about plants and environments: immigrants, in effect, were the new plants, forced to deal with an environment or host society that was pretty much fixed in its basic terms and form (Park 1925).

Even the masterful reconstruction of the notions of assimilation and acculturation some years later by Milton Gordon (1964) does not concede to immigrants, *as a group*, any authentic capacity to change or to alter American institutions. Having granted that acculturation rather than structural assimilation has taken place in America, Gordon has this to say about the influence of immigrants and immigrant groups on American society:

*Was acculturation entirely a one-way process? Was the core culture unaffected by the presence of the immigrants and the colored minorities? In suggesting the answer to this question, I must once again point to the distinction between the impact of the members of minority groups as individuals making their various contributions... and the specific impact on the American culture of the minority cultures themselves. The impact of individuals has been so considerable that it is impossible to conceive of what American society or American life would have been like without it. The impact of minority group culture has been of modest dimensions... in most areas, and significantly extensive in only one – the area of institutional religion.... For the rest, there have been minor modifications in cuisine, recreational patterns, place names, speech, residential architecture, sources of artistic inspiration, and perhaps a few other areas – all of which add flavor and piquancy to the totality of the American culture configuration but have scarcely obscured its essential English outlines and content. (109-110)*

Now perhaps it was true at the time that Gordon made his observations that immigrants collectively had little obvious effect in changing American institutions – though even this must at times be questioned – but that claim is not so nearly so self-evident today.

None of this is to insist that today's notions of assimilation remain cut from the same whole cloth as those employed either by Park or by Gordon. Social historians, for example, challenged the idea almost 20 years ago (Zunz 1985). Since then, a number of them, including some discussed below, have employed a far more flexible and creative approach to understanding the changing circumstances and wherewithal of immigrants once they reach American shores (see, e.g. Conzen et al. 1992). Leading sociologists, however, have been more reluctant to abandon the idea of assimilation. Some have modified it to fit contemporary circumstances, as in the case of the popular notion of segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou 1993). Others, such as Alba and Nee (2003), rework the process of assimilation in such a way that institutions, such as the federal government, and a constantly evolving cultural mainstream provide the central dynamic by which most immigrants will continue to become assimilated (Brubaker 2001).

There are, however, a number of significant developments that give a new twist to our world today, ones that are likely to affect the capacity of immigrants and ethnics to reshape American institutions. The ability of people to move from one nation to another has increased immeasurably (Castles and Miller 1998). Moreover, the capacity of such people to retain both their cultural heritage as well as their general sense of purpose, most observers agree, is much greater today than it was in the past. Part and parcel of these changes are new developments, such as the emergence of transnational communities of migrants, people that move easily back and forth among nations while maintaining a separate transnational community (Glick Schiller 1999). The net effect has been to enable large numbers of immigrants to retain a great degree of autonomy and power in the conduct of their daily lives. It is only natural, therefore, for us to expect that today's immigrants might be able to change and refashion American institutions or those of any host society in ways perhaps inconceivable in the past. Indeed, once we acknowledge this possibility, it not only gives a new perspective on the relationship between immigrants and host institutions today, but also provides a fresh look at the past as well.

## **A Model of the Ethnic Community and Its Avenues of Influence**

How, then, shall we think about the impact of immigrants today on the United States, in particular, on American social and spatial institutions? I offer below a relatively compact theory that can help us account for changes in a host society, such as the United States, and for tracing those changes back to the immigrant populations. I shall do so, in part, by postulating a model of power and influence. It is that kind of model, I would argue, that can help answer the question of how immigrants alter and change institutions in the United States. (Also see the recent discussion in a somewhat parallel vein in Stepick et al. 2003; the earlier important writings of Glazer and Moynihan 1971; and in a slightly different tack, Yancey et al. 1976.) Moreover, as the exposition unfolds, it will become clear that while this model is constructed on the basis of the American experience, the same model could be used to help explain the impact of immigrants and ethnic communities in other nations as well.

### ***The Ethnic Community***

Let me begin first with the concept of an *ethnic community*.<sup>4</sup> I shall use this concept in two different but equally important ways. First, it can refer to a very specific and concrete community that is located in space – in a particular metropolis or even village. It can also refer to a broader community, one that can be found in different quarters and places across a

metropolitan area or even a nation, and is not confined to a specific geographical area. In addition, we may think of the ethnic community as a collective actor in much the same way that other theorists think of status groups as actors (Weber in Gerth and Mills 1958). The ethnic community, in other words, possesses a life all its own. Accordingly it is capable of collective and concerted action designed to attain specific ends and goals.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Constitutive Elements***

My concept of ethnic community is composed of a number of key elements. There exist a variety of definitions of community, of course. I have identified those elements that seem to constitute the most comprehensive definition of the ethnic community.<sup>6</sup> They are: (1) a group of people who define themselves as members of a common ethnic community or who share a common ethnic identity (Gordon 1964); (2) organizations that are unique to the ethnic community in terms of the products and services they offer, such as stores that sell ethnic goods, but also clubs and political agencies that promote the cause of the ethnic group; (3) an ongoing conscious and deliberate effort to ensure the survival of the community through activities that create a legacy and celebrate a common heritage, all actively pursued by institutions such as the family, school and church (or mosque or temple); and (4) spatial and/or social boundaries that distinguish between the ethnic community and the larger society, such as physical demarcations such as streets, but also social markers including membership and/or activity in the organizations and institutions of the ethnic community.

There also can be considerable variation among ethnic communities in the degree of their vitality and robustness. This distinction has been partly captured in the work of students of ethnicity in Canada, many of who rely on the concept of *institutional completeness* (Breton 1964; Pfeifer 1999; Stebbins 2000).<sup>7</sup> In their terms, some ethnic communities are considerably more complete – in their institutional features and thus vitality – than other communities. Conzen et al. (1992) have captured the broader dimensions of the distinction. In commenting on why the Jewish community in the United States has been so effective, they note that “(l)eadership, degree of institutional completeness, cultural particularity, and the power of the idea of peoplehood, all (have) played a role. Jewish immigrants have been on occasion mistakenly thought of as a homogenous population; in fact they were sharply divided by religious, linguistic, cultural and political differences. Yet well endowed with the aforementioned qualities and mobilized, first by widespread anti-Semitism in the United States and Europe, more recently by the issue of Israel, the American Jews have created an influential, integrated and united community.” (p. 4) For ease of my presentation here, I shall employ a dichotomous distinction between *robust* and *weak* ethnic communities; nevertheless, I recognize that the attribute, in fact, is likely to vary throughout communities.

### ***Boundaries***

The boundaries that lie between ethnic communities and the larger society, I believe, are of crucial importance to understanding the nature of the ethnic community (Barth 1969; for an excellent recent analysis, see Sanders 2002). They are significant in two respects. First, they define what lies inside and outside the ethnic community. If this distinction does not exist or if it cannot be drawn, then one could not speak of the effect or influence of the ethnic community on the larger society. It is thus of conceptual significance in examining and understanding the nature of the ethnic community and its impact.

Second, boundaries are also important in terms of understanding the variations among ethnic communities, differences that will manifest themselves in the likely effect of ethnic communities on the larger society. In particular, the permeability of these boundaries varies widely among ethnic communities. Some ethnic communities are highly bounded, thus impermeable in the sense that they are cut-off and isolated from influences outside themselves. This may be the result either of a voluntary decision on the part of the ethnic community or, alternatively, because of actions taken by powerful institutions of the larger society, specifically the state or its equivalent. Other ethnic communities, by contrast, seem highly permeable and thus much more subject both to influencing and being influenced by the larger society.

Two illustrations may help to make this point more clear. On the one hand, there is the case of the Frankfurt Jewish ghetto of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Though dense and complete in the manner suggested above, it also was deliberately isolated by the political authorities from the larger society. In contrast, there are less bounded or more permeable ethnic communities, communities in which the social interaction between the members and the larger society occurs with relative ease. An illustration may be found in some of the Mexican and Mexican-American communities in America today. They represent communities in which there is a regular and lively intercourse between themselves and the institutions of the larger society (Sanchez 1993).

### ***Power and Influence***

Following Max Weber, I shall use the concept of *influence* to describe actions that result in changes of policy and/or practice taken by organizations, groups and/or individuals outside the ethnic community that advance the activities and interests of the ethnic community (Weber, in Gerth and Mills (1958), p. 194). Influence, furthermore, may assume one of two forms: (1) *direct influence*, which is the actual and successful action by an ethnic community that results in the projected changes of policy and/or practice by non-ethnic parties; and (2) *indirect influence*, which is a change in policy and/or practice taken by non-ethnic parties that, even in the absence of any direct action by the ethnic community, both acknowledges and advances the ethnic community's interests (Dahl, 1963). An example of the exercise of direct influence by an ethnic community would be the election of a representative of an ethnic community to a political office in local government, in which the majority of the ethnic community votes for that representative. An example of the exercise of indirect influence would be the increased use of an ethnic community's language, for example Polish, by local businesses outside the Polish community even in the absence of any direct action taken by the Polish community to produce that result.

### ***Circles of Influence and Chains of Command***

I propose, then, that there are two principal social structures through which an ethnic community is able to exercise its influence over the institutions of the larger, or host, society. One is what I shall term the *circle of influence*. By this concept I mean all those organizations, businesses, clubs and individuals that lie outside the boundaries of the ethnic community and through which the ethnic community is able to make its influence felt. Circles of influence can be conceived in two forms, parallel to the nature of an ethnic community, itself. First, they can be the circles of groups and individuals that surround a spatially-defined ethnic community. The wider the circle of influence by an ethnic group, the greater the number of organizations,

businesses, clubs and individuals spatially adjacent to the ethnic community that have taken steps to acknowledge and advance the interests of the ethnic community. The circle of influence can also be conceived in non-spatial and territorial terms as the array of groups, organizations and individuals lying outside the broad ethnic community that have taken steps to acknowledge and to advance the interests of the ethnic community.

An example of the first circle of influence would be the use of bilingual education, say Spanish and English, in public schools that lie within the immediate vicinity of a Spanish-speaking ethnic community. In contrast, an illustration of the second broad form of a circle of influence would be the proportion of members of a local city council who represent and advance the interests of the local Chinese community in a city. Another example would be the growth of Latino music in the United States, especially the recent introduction of the Latino Grammy Awards, an effort spearheaded by Latino artists including Gloria Estevan.

The second social structure through which the ethnic community manages to exercise its influence is what I shall call the *chain of command*. By this concept I mean the chain of command – or line of authority – within an institutional or organizational sector of a given area (a metropolis or even a society). It can refer to any institutional sector, thus to the church, public schools and even to the legal system. Just as the circle of influence is designed to point our attention to the broad lateral array of parties through which an ethnic community may exercise its influence, the chain of command is designed to point our attention to the hierarchical dimension through which authority is exercised. This can be an exceptionally important element to the exercise of influence, generally, and to its exercise by ethnic communities, specifically.

For example, when the Rev. Jesse Jackson seeks to get a nationwide corporation to take actions that will acknowledge and/or advance the interests of African-Americans, he seeks to persuade not all the principal officers of local outlets but rather the chief officers, those who stand at the top of the chain of command. If Jackson is successful, then he has taken a particularly effective route to exercise influence for change in policy and/or practice. Initiated at the top of the organization, these actions will generally be binding on all those officials and businesses lower in the hierarchy. Similarly, if a specific ethnic community wishes to get certain policies adopted by public schools, it is a far more effective strategy to seek to persuade the top school officials rather than simply local school officials.

## Basic Theoretical Propositions and Evidence

Let me now advance my central theoretical propositions about the links among ethnic communities, circles of influence and chains of command. I furnish below illustrations and examples to support each of the main propositions. This evidence is, I must emphasize, illustrative and intended to showcase the manner in which ethnic communities have in fact influenced the institutions of host societies in the past. I also have made a conscious effort to select a variety of examples from different places as well as different historical eras. My intent in so doing is to suggest the broad relevance of the concepts as well as the different forms that both circles of influence and chains of command may assume.

As with any theoretical effort, this one is exploratory and thus intended to open up avenues for new inquiry rather than to test a set of specific statements. I demonstrate the ways in which circles of influence and/or chains of command have come under the power of different ethnic communities – both in spatial and in non-spatial terms. There is much more to be discovered about the exact nature and unfolding of this process, but my central analytical point is that the ethnic community exercises its influence through social structures that lie within its reach. Further research, I hope, will help to clarify how the social connections and

further negotiations are made between ethnic and host institutions and personnel; among other things, it is entirely possible that host institutions that change in ways that reflect the influence of ethnic communities do so not only because they are socially proximate, but also to satisfy specific demands or counter the specific vulnerabilities of those particular institutions.

I turn, then, to the major proposition:

*Ethnic communities are able to influence or to otherwise shape the actions of non-ethnic parties in the larger society through two social mechanisms: circles of influence and chains of command.*

There are three illustrations that I shall use to support this proposition. The first is the classic historical case of Tammany Hall in New York City. It furnishes a clear example of how an ethnic community can use the chain of command in an organization to wield influence over the larger metropolis. Tammany Hall is one of the great political machines in the history of American politics. With origins as a patriotic and fraternal organization in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was captured by Irish immigrants in the 1830s and, over the next half century or so, became a vehicle whereby the Irish were able to exercise considerable power in New York City. The machine established its roots by providing a variety of benefits to new immigrants, among them jobs and shelter. Those at the top of the chain of command, especially during the heyday of William "Boss" Tweed, exercised their power and influence almost recklessly; indeed, Tweed eventually was toppled by charges of corruption. At the lower levels of the organization, the workings of influence provided a model that other machines and politicians would come to emulate over the years. The extraordinary story of all of this is told in the famous recollections of George Washington Plunkitt, that estimable machine politician who claimed, "I seen my opportunities and I took 'em." Plunkitt was an exemplary influence-peddler, using the resources of the machine to wield influence over local residents and thereby spread the influence of the machine, and the Irish immigrants who composed it, across the city (Riordan 1995; Allen 1993).<sup>8</sup>

A variety of illustrations for the ways in which ethnic communities can widen their circles of influence to embrace spatially proximate organizations and groups comes from Cohen's study (1991) of the development of the working class and unions in Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s. Cohen explored the making of three different ethnic communities in Chicago in the 1920s – Poles, Jews and Italians. Each group developed its own particular organizations and clubs, and each established a variety of ways in which to celebrate their ethnic heritage. For each group, moreover, its religious organization came to play an essential role. Indeed, among the Poles, the parish became the center of the ethnic community around which there grew additional clubs and organizations (Erdmanns 1998). Moreover, the Poles and the Jews established local schools for their children, thus providing a means of passing on their heritage.

Beyond the core social and religious arrangements, however, there were other organizations and groups that came to fall under the influence of each community. In effect, each of the three different communities extended its influence outward, taking in public spaces and organizations and using them for their own purposes. For example, each of the ethnic communities found its own pubs and taverns in which to gather, and these places came to be known as the Polish pub or the Italian tavern. More importantly, however, the community's influence came to include new forms of entertainment that, by their very nature, had nothing to do with the essential character of the ethnic

community, itself. For example, motion pictures were just emerging as a popular form of entertainment, and local entrepreneurs began to build motion picture theatres in different parts of Chicago. Soon, in each community, the movie theatre ran only motion pictures that were in the language of and appealed to the local residents be they Jews, Poles or Italians. In fact, as Cohen beautifully illustrates, the motion pictures became the place where a contest developed between the special interests of the ethnic community and the growing use of a mass culture. Eventually the mass culture won out, but not before the motion picture theatres had become sites where each of the different ethnic groups could gather and, through celebrations on the screen, create and recreate their own sense of ethnic heritage in Chicago.

My third illustration comes from research on how some ethnic communities dominate specific occupational sectors of the labor market. This is an instance where the influence of ethnic communities extends into the economy and thereby can eventually become very widespread. Some of the most interesting work on this topic comes from Waldinger (1996); see also Light and Gold 2000. In his study of ethnicity and labor markets in New York City, Waldinger makes a variety of discoveries that show how specific ethnic communities, both long ago and at present, come to extend their circle of influence by gaining dominance in particular occupations. In the past, for example, the Jewish community in New York City was especially concentrated in the garment industry, whereas now it has gained niches in legal services, accounting and education. More recently, African-Americans have gained an especially strong foothold in the public sector, while Dominicans and West Indians have gained strong footholds in the hotel industry. Occupational niches such as these provide a means for exercising considerable influence because the ethnic communities become, in effect, gatekeepers, determining who can and cannot enter particular local job markets (Light and Gold, 2000).

The full picture of an ethnic community's control of an occupational sector becomes even clearer in the recent work of Poros (2001). Her research reveals how a particular caste of the Gujarati Indian community in the United States, the Patidars, has come in recent years to dominate the operation of hotels in the United States. At present, in fact, many of these Asian Indians self-consciously regard themselves as the defining force in the industry: one independent hotelier noted that "we are the establishment." (Varadarajan 1999)

These three examples, then, reveal how different ethnic communities can come to exercise their power via circles of influence and chains of command – and how it can happen both in spatial and non-spatial forms. Though the Tammany Hall example is relatively straightforward, revealing how an organization can fall under the influence of an ethnic community and become a vehicle for extending that influence to quarters far beyond the community, the development of the ethnic communities in Chicago reveals how subtle the extension of influence can be and how difficult it can be to draw the line between the ethnic community and the larger society. Clearly in each of the three ethnic communities in Chicago, there was a center or core to the community, largely based on the religious institutions and local businesses. But as the communities grew, their influence expanded to capture organizations, such as movie theatres, that had absolutely nothing to do with their heritage. Yet such groups eventually became very powerful vehicles for portraying and disseminating a sense of the ethnic heritage and an important means of retaining and celebrating that heritage. Finally, the case of ethnic niches demonstrates that ethnic communities, by virtue of their dominance of positions in particular labor markets, can extend their circle of influence very broadly, so much so that they become, in effect, the chain of command.

*Robust ethnic communities will be likely to possess a wide circle of influence.*

This proposition means simply that robust communities possess the institutional and organizational resources necessary to extend their influence outward over the institutions of the host society. It can be taken in a comparative sense, that more robust ethnic communities will also have wider circles of influence than sparse ethnic communities, or simply as a singular statement about robust communities. Lacking any clear systematic example here, I shall simply illustrate the proposition by using a recent empirical example from Philadelphia.

A notable study of the development of the Korean community in Philadelphia nicely illustrates the manner in which a robust ethnic community can establish a circle of influence (Goode and Schneider, 1993). Koreans began to migrate to Philadelphia in the early 1970s. Eventually they developed fairly sizeable and flourishing communities in a number of sites. Each community was notable for its businesses and stores. Moreover, each was controlled and developed by a relatively small number of figures that exercised a decisive influence over the internal organization of the community. These leaders eventually came to represent the face of the Korean community to the larger metropolis, especially to the key leaders and political figures in Philadelphia. As Goode and Schneider note, "(o)nce the networks of city influentials came to know these individuals, they became universal referrals for anyone who wanted to approach 'the community.' As we (the authors) sat on the boards of programs for the arts, museums, and human-rights networks, it became apparent that this was the way things worked." (p. 85)

The authors discovered, moreover, that there was not widespread participation by Korean immigrants in the larger Philadelphia metropolis. The leading figures that exercised their authority within the Korean community provided the single point of contact, and thus wielded a great deal of power on behalf of the community. "The Korean citywide organizations," Goode and Schneider write, "participate in the life of Philadelphia through formal channels. They hold many ceremonial events at which guests recognized as important city figures receive awards. One group, the Korean American Friendship Society, has been created to improve relations (with others in the city)." (p. 87)

This particular case perfectly illustrates how the leaders of an ethnic community can develop a circle of influence and how both the ethnic community and the leadership of the larger metropolis may embrace one another as representatives of their respective groups. Moreover, it is clear that this circle of influence, through the formal channels, is a major, if not the major, path by which Koreans are able to exercise their influence in Philadelphia.

*Robust ethnic communities will be likely to exercise their influence high up the chain of command of a particular organizational or institutional sector.*

This proposition, like the one above, may be taken in a comparative sense. It can be taken to mean that one specific ethnic group is able to elect its representatives to high levels of political office, say, the U.S. Congress. Equally, it can be taken as a statement about a single robust ethnic community.

One of the best illustrations of this proposition today can be found in the Cuban community of Miami (Portes and Stepick 1993). This community, of course, has often been singled out as unusual, even unique. But in terms of the framework I advocate here, Miami's Cuban community simply provides a prototype of how a robust ethnic community can exercise influence over both local and national circumstances. Stepick and his

colleagues (2003) give us a rich description of the many ways in which the Cubans have become dominant in Miami, not only in local institutions but also in their relations with other groups. Assessing the overall local influence of the community, they note:

*In 1983, Latinos captured a majority in Hialeah, the county's second largest city. The Miami City Commission turned majority Cuban American in 1985 and has had a Cuban American mayor almost continually since then. In 1996, Alex Penelas became the county's first Cuban American mayor. In addition, the County Commission achieved a Cuban American majority. The City Commission of Miami Beach, the county's third largest city, became majority Cuban American in the fall of 1999. Two Miami Cubans are in the U.S. House of Representatives, and the Miami-Dade County state legislative delegation along with the Miami-Dade County School Board are dominated by foreign-born Latinos, especially Cubans. (21)*

While this community has been unusually effective in exercising its influence in local quarters, Stepick and his colleagues observe that after Janet Reno, Attorney General of the Democratic Clinton Administration, forced the return of the young boy, Elian Gonzalez, to his father in Cuba, the Cubans of Miami turned out in record numbers to vote for Republican George W. Bush in 2000 – thereby punctuating their influence and demonstrating it even in the national arena.

The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) provides yet another illustration of the manner in which a robust ethnic community can develop specific political organizations that work in various ways to extend the community's influence into the workings of American institutions and specifically the legal system.<sup>9</sup> MALDEF was founded in San Antonio, Texas in 1968 by a group of Mexican-American activists. Initially it worked to promote and extend the civil rights of Mexican-Americans. Yet, over the years it has evolved into a more powerful organization, working to lobby Congressmen and to promote specific pieces of legislation intended to help both Mexican-Americans and the broader Latino population in the United States. There are four major regional offices in Chicago, Atlanta, San Antonio and Washington, D.C. Each of these offices pursues work in three areas: litigation, advocacy and political access.

MALDEF has worked to increase the political influence of Latinos in various areas. During the past year, the Chicago regional office has worked hard to increase the representation of Latinos in the Illinois House and Senate. It proved successful, increasing the number of Latino representatives in the House from four to eight, and those in the Senate from two to four. In addition, MALDEF has worked both in Illinois and in Michigan on cases to promote the rights of immigrants and illegal aliens. In just the past year, MALDEF, along with representatives from a number of other organizations that sought to protect the rights of immigrants, was able to prevent the Michigan Senate from adopting a measure that would have required all licensed drivers to be legal immigrants.

*To the degree that an ethnic community is divided by competing interests among its leading parties and representatives, its ability to use either circles of influence or chains of command will be sharply attenuated.*

The plausibility of this proposition is suggested above in the observations of Conzen and her colleagues (1992) about the Jewish community in America. But there is direct support

as well. In her fine study of the Polish community, Polonia in Chicago, Erdmanns (1998) furnishes a vivid illustration of how differences and divisions within an ethnic community can vitiate its potential influence over a host society. Erdmanns' project involved a study of immigrants and the development of the Polish community over many years, dating back to the latter part of the 19th century when Poles first came to Chicago. She discovered that there were several different generations of Polish immigrants – the first generation, who were peasants and came largely from rural circumstances; the second generation whocame during and after World War II as refugees; and the third and most recent generation, who came as the collapse of Communism took place.

Now one might think that all three generations would come to embrace Polonia, the large diaspora of Polish nationals who sought refuge in other countries like the United States. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, a major division occurred between those emigrants who came before Poland was taken over by the Communists and those who came after. Though the earlier generation, through its organizations, was able to help the most recent generation settle in Chicago, great differences in education and attitudes emerged between the two groups. The earlier generation worked through such organizations as the Polish American Congress, whereas the newer generation established its own organizations, many of which identified strongly with the Solidarity movement in Poland that led to the collapse of the Communism.

The rifts and divisions within the community proved considerable. The new generation, for example, disparaged the lack of education and a broad cosmopolitan attitude on the part of the older leadership. Instead of seeking to work with the older generation, the new immigrants simply complained about their lack of intelligence and their lack of success. They pointed to the absence of any Polish intellectual or political leaders of substance in America. "These types of comments from the new immigrants," Erdmanns writes, "particularly galled the Polish Americans. They had fought for decades against mainstream America's portrayal of them as 'dumb Polaks.' Now here was a group of 'their own' deriding them with the same stereotype. These attacks undercut the authority of the (Polish American Congress) and, not surprisingly, created tensions within the community." (192; 190 ff)

*Impermeable ethnic communities, by definition, will be less likely both to influence and to be influenced by non-ethnic parties, regardless of the robustness of their institutional resources.*

This is a very important proposition, and it is meant to draw a distinction between the internal nature of an ethnic community and its capacity to influence or be influenced by non-ethnic parties. Thus, there can be very robust ethnic communities, but unless those communities possess boundaries that are permeable they will be unable to exercise any influence over the institutions of the larger society. One example of this is the case of the Bronzeville area of Chicago. In the 1930s and 1940s, Drake and Cayton (1945) could describe this area as one rich with a local social and civic life. Storefront churches were everywhere. There were a variety of voluntary associations among residents and a very lively political life. Its robust character notwithstanding, however, it was a community unable to influence Chicago for one simple but powerful reason: it was a segregated community, actively enclosed and cut off from the rest of the metropolis by the political organization and officials in metropolitan Chicago.

In order to further clarify this point, Table 1 below identifies several known ethnic communities in terms of the degree of their institutional density and the permeability of their boundaries. The Korean example above indicates that even though robust, the Korean community may be described as semi-permeable.

**Table 1: A Typology of Ethnic Communities Further Discussion and Elaboration**

	<b>Institutional Resources</b>	<b>Community Boundaries</b>
	<b>Permeable</b>	<b>Impermeable</b>
<b>Weak</b>	Post-1965 Polish Immigrants in Chicago	Native Americans on reservations
<b>Robust</b>	Pilsen in Chicago Cubans in Miami	Frankfurt Jewish Ghetto Hasidic Jews in Williamsburg, New York Amish

### ***The General Concept of Ethnic Community***

At present there is a great deal of enthusiasm, but also controversy, about the concept of *social capital*. Indeed, the concept has become so popular – largely, it would seem, because it lends itself to easy empirical application – that many observers seem to think that social capital and community are one and the same thing (Putnam 2000). In fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

As I have suggested above, an ethnic community is a rich and complex phenomenon whose elements range from a sense of common identity to the existence of boundaries between itself and the larger society. My conception emphasizes especially the institutional components of such communities precisely because institutions, I believe, represent the very foundations of ethnic communities. While such communities also entail complex social networks among people, what really sustains them over time is the presence of vigorous and credible institutions, such as the church or the family, that work to retain and to advance the unique cultural heritage and legacies of the ethnic group. In the absence of such institutions, I would argue, the ethnic community simply will disappear. Indeed, I would further speculate that when such basic institutions as the church (or synagogue or mosque) or school diminish in strength, then ultimately the fate of the ethnic community is sealed and it will become extinguished.

### ***The Spatial Concentration of the Ethnic Community***

One of the most observable traits of an ethnic community lies in its concentration in a specific spatial area. One can easily argue that where an ethnic community is most spatially concentrated – in terms of its institutions and members – it would be most likely to exercise an influence over the host institutions in its immediate vicinity (assuming its boundaries are permeable). Yet how this influence makes itself manifest will depend, in large part, on the specific nature of the host institutions. Political institutions, in particular, can often gerrymander the quarters occupied by an ethnic community, and, therefore, limit the political influence of that community. Such a strategy, however, only works when the local political system is constructed on the basis of district – not at-large – voting.

## ***Spheres of Influence and the Relative Strength of Ethnic Communities and Host Societies***

One of the most important matters to consider is the institutional sector within which an ethnic community can exercise its influence. In particular, are there certain kinds of institutions wherein an ethnic community can make its influence felt more easily, even more substantially, than other kinds of institutions? We might phrase this theoretical concern in a slightly different, but equally compelling, manner: are there spheres, or institutions, wherein the host society holds a decided advantage over the resources of the ethnic community, and can thereby limit its influence? My selection of the examples above was partly guided by an interest in showing not only a diversity of contexts and eras, but also a wide range of domains across which ethnic communities have been influential. Thus, they comprised: politics, including parties, legislation and voting; social clubs and organizations; small businesses, such as restaurants and shops, but also particular kinds of occupations; and even cultural organizations, such as movie theaters.

In keeping with my effort at conceptual parsimony, I want to suggest that, *in general, where an ethnic community enjoys an ease of social access to a group or institution then it will be more likely to extend its circle of influence and/or ascend the chain of command in that sphere than in a sphere where it does not enjoy such access.* Let us consider several illustrations of such access. Spatial proximity provides such access, and it can be used to explain why an ethnic community first expands its circle of influence among those businesses, people and groups immediately spatially adjacent to it. These are the parties that lie within the easiest social reach of the community, and therefore they are the ones likely to be most susceptible to changing in ways that will advance the community's interest. Ease of access can also explain why it is that public institutions, such as schools and the police force, show evidence of the influence by an ethnic community in programs such as bilingual education rather than in private organizations such as large corporate businesses. Public institutions are most directly subject to federal and local mandates that require them to provide opportunities for education and employment to all groups regardless of origin. Entry into such public institutions, in other words, is much easier than it is into private ones. Finally, ease of access would also help to explain why specific ethnic communities are able to gain control over certain occupational sectors. The presence of co-ethnics in a particular labor market, say hotels, provides an initial social foothold or point of entry. And once that foothold is established, access is made much easier for others of the same ethnic origin and easier than for job seekers of different ethnic origins (Waldinger 1996).

### ***The Cumulative Nature of Ethnic Influence***

It is important to acknowledge that the nature of the perspective I have proposed must be thought of as cumulative and dynamic over time. By that I mean that as an ethnic community is able to widen its circle of influence and to extend the reach of its influence ever higher up the chain or chains of command, it will grow even stronger, exercising influence over many organizations, positions and people. Thus, as its institutional connections and resources expand, it should be in a position to further extend and expand its influence over the host society's institutions, and even perhaps to diminish the comparative influence of other groups. If successful and when extended over a long period of time, the effects could be dramatic, leading to a broad and substantial transformation of the institutions of the host society. In this case I would describe the influence of the ethnic community as *hegemonic*.

### ***Empirical Applications and Examinations: Suggested Directions***

I believe that the three concepts – ethnic communities, circles of influence and chains of command – lend themselves to a variety of empirical applications. The elements that constitute the ethnic community, for example, those of ethnic identity, organizations, groups, even institutions such as the church and school, can be objectively identified through various and different means, including simple observation, counting and the like. The sense of identity may either be inferred, as from ethnic organizations that promote such identity, or observed and recorded through personal interviews and sample surveys.

Both circles of influence and chains of command lend themselves to relatively straightforward identification, though the compilation of data may be time-consuming. If, for example, one wishes to identify those organizations, groups and people in the immediate vicinity of spatial ethnic communities, it is a matter of meticulously identifying the potential number of groups and organizations, along with people such as key political or other official figures, and then determining the relative proportions of that collection of parties that, through their policies and/or practices, work to advance the interests of the local ethnic group. Assessments would then naturally follow with other groups, using the same procedures and seeking to compare, for example, complete and partial ethnic groups with one another, or robust and weak communities among the complete ethnic groups.

The most important part of the process for carrying out empirical studies of the model I have proposed is the careful and meticulous examination of the process whereby influence itself is used to advance the interests of specific ethnic groups. Too little is known now about the process.

Finally, I believe that the theory also can lend itself both to synchronic and diachronic analyses. In particular, I would suggest that one might historically examine a single ethnic group in an effort to discover how its resources have developed over time, and then seek also to determine whether, it has become more dense in its institutional resources. Does it have more churches or stores relative to the size of its population as – its circle of influence widens and its reach up the chains of command advances.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has offered a way to conceptualize the manner in which the new immigrants, and the ethnic communities they have established in the United States leave their imprint on American institutions. I have offered some historical illustrations to support the general theoretical propositions, but these propositions can only be affirmed through much more extensive research into the nature of ethnic communities and their ties to various circles of influence and chains of command.

Of course, one must always remind oneself that the patterns observed in the past as well as the present may be evanescent and impermanent. Among other things, it is clear that if immigration to America had continued well beyond 1928 when the 1924 laws went into effect, the history of ethnicity in the United States would also have been far different than it is today. There seem to be indications of a growing diversity in America, but only the future will tell us whether they shall remain. As Gerstle (1997) and Higham (1955) remind us, the history of America and its experience with ethnicity and immigration is one that wavers between periods of “constraint” and those of “liberty.” We seem to live today in a period of somewhat less freedom than in the past, but unexpected events such as war and terrorism can always intervene to force the state to exercise even greater constraint on those entering a country and what happens to them upon entry. Whether the changes we observe today will remain

tomorrow or whether the ethnic communities will be as vibrant depends ultimately on historical events over which we have very little control.

Nevertheless, I offer a means both of explaining and of beginning to answer the question of how immigrants today have had an impact on American institutions. One of the matters that remains to be explored in greater depth is the nature of the changes, themselves. I sense that there are many such changes, ranging from the greater use of languages, such as Spanish, in quarters well beyond the Latino enclaves, to the greater diversity of restaurants and general cultural paraphernalia brought in by the new immigrants. But future research obviously will have to carefully spell out the specific empirical accounts of these changes. What I have attempted to clarify is the critical nature of the difference between the ethnic community and non-ethnic parties. Boundaries are essential to thinking about these matters. Indeed, it is at the boundaries, as history has shown, that contests over the rights of the ethnics and the power of the state often are fought. Such issues, I hope, also will be explored by future research.

I hope, moreover, to have provided a firmer sociological foundation to understanding the process whereby such changes might happen; for both circles of influence and chains of command lie at the very foundations of that which is sociological. In addition, I encourage further exploration, especially how it is that today's diversity can happen even when there is an apparent absence in many places of organized and concerted political action. As I suggest, changes may occur as a result of indirect influence and thus even in the absence of direct political action by ethnic communities. But perhaps the deeper and more satisfying change, from the point of view of ethnic communities, is that which results from the work of organizations such as MALDEF that, using the courts, seeks to influence the chain of command in the legal system, and ultimately those laws that influence our everyday lives.

## Notes

1. For some earlier work that touched on how Latinos are changing American cities, see Suro (1998) and Muller (1993), especially Chapter 4.
2. The exception might be the work of Olzak and Nagel (1986) on social movements. However, my careful assessment of the various writings of these two scholars suggests that their approach is fundamentally different than mine. Among other things, they are interested in a different set of questions.
3. One of the few exceptions to this general tendency among sociologists can be found in Rodriguez (1998). Historians, at least since the seminal article of Conzen et al. (1991), have granted to immigrants and the ethnic groups they form a considerable degree of agency, particularly through what some call "the invention of ethnicity."
4. I draw a distinction here between immigrants and ethnics, and immigrant groups and ethnic groups. Immigrants are those foreigners who have migrated to a host society, presumably with the intention of remaining there, though that is not necessarily the case. Ethnics, by contrast, are those people who have developed and created an ethnic tradition for themselves, including organizations and institutions. Immigrants may become ethnics in a particular society through joining and participating in the ethnic events and activities. Immigrants, as a group, may influence the host society but only in an indirect fashion, whereas ethnics, I would argue, possess clearly more power to do so for reasons I lay out in the following paragraphs. In my depiction here, as will become evident from some

examples, I also include African-Americans as an ethnic community. One might refer to the more general category as a racial-ethnic community. I will use the shorter term because it is simpler, but readers should understand I am including a racial community such as African-Americans as well as white ethnic communities such as the Irish. More recent literature gets into matters of race and “whiteness” (Roediger 1992) and, while those matters are very interesting, they are not my primary concern here.

5. Actually Weber draws a distinction between status groups, which in his eyes are types of communities, and political parties, which “live in a house of power.” (194) Here I am merging the two concepts together precisely because I believe that ethnic communities often do “live in a house of power,” and act accordingly through their various political organizations and representatives. See Max Weber, “Class, Status and Party,” in Gerth and Mills (1958), p. 194 et passim.
6. Among the various definitions and writings on community, see any of the following: Castles and Miller (1998), Chapter 2; Cohen (1985); and Putnam (2000). My thanks to my former undergraduate research assistant, Nancy Rios, for having assembled these definitions.
7. More recent information about the concept of institutional completeness is available at the Canadian website for *Metropolis*. It includes a number of interesting and useful references, especially to the document, “A Preliminary Stock Taking on Immigration Research in Canada.”
8. While Tammany Hall provides the major illustration whereby the Irish were able to exercise power over New York City, the efforts by Richard J. Daley and his band of Irish friends from Bridgeport provides yet another example of how the Irish were able to use politics as a means of ascending in America and exercising influence over its institutions (Cohen and Taylor 2000; Royko 1971).
9. I am particularly grateful to a former undergraduate student, Olga Gutierrez, who worked for MALDEF and provided me with a paper about and important insight into the workings of this organization.

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