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ABSTRACT

The similar structure of present-day North American cities makes it impossible to study urban poverty as anything other than a concomitant of the possession of certain demographic characteristics the penalty for which is imposed on a society-wide level. By shifting our focus, however, to incorporate both Latin American cities and North American cities in previous stages of their history it should be possible to increase our understanding of the distribution and nature of poverty as it depends on urban structure. The research reported here is based on 1953 and 1963 data on Puerto Rican households collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Certain tentative conclusions were reached: (1) As compared with the U.S., Puerto Rican poverty is less closely linked to stigmatized demographic status. This may be due to the absence of blacks. (2) As is the case in the U.S., Puerto Rican urban residence serves to somewhat ameliorate poverty. This seems to be due both to higher wages and to public assistance. (3) Family size and sex of head are the principal determinants of income among the poor. Sources of income vary slightly by area in the magnitude of their contribution. (4) The urban poor spend relatively more on housing and less on clothing than rural residents. There was no evidence for an urban "mass consumption" effect. (Author/JM)

W3-31 THE DEMOGRAPHY OF URBAN POVERTY:
NORTH AND LATIN AMERICA*

by

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A working paper of the Center
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"For a while I thought that some insight into the future course of income distribution (in North America) might be garnered by speculating on forecastable differences in urban industrial structure. But, industrial earnings differentials excluding agriculture are not likely to grow large enough ever to explain more than a small part of variations in income...New York City poverty..(is)... totally unrelated to any special aspects of city life. Rather, the New York City distribution is the outcome of the proportion of family heads non-white, poorly educated, aged, and female."

Smolensky (1961)

The similar structure of present-day North American cities makes it impossible to study urban poverty as anything other than a concomitant of the possession of certain demographic characteristics the penalty for which is imposed on a society-wide level. By shifting our focus, however, to incorporate both Latin American cities and North American cities in previous stages of their history it should be possible to increase our understanding of the distribution and nature of poverty as it depends on urban structure. The purpose here is to set out some facts and conjectures with which to begin such a study. Ultimately the aim is to provide a statistical enlargement of the picture provided by such impressionistic accounts as those of Liebow (1967), Lewis (1965), Leeds (1967,1969), Dietz (1969) and Peattie (1968).

WHAT IS POVERTY?

Most simply, poverty is the lack of sufficient money. But the issue is far from simple. Sufficient for whom? Sufficient for what?

Our unit of analysis will be the individual family since it is here that most decisions of demographic consequence are taken. In their 1964 report

which marked the beginning of the War on Poverty the Council of Economic Advisers (U.S.A.) defined poverty as being a family income of \$3000/yr. or less. Subsequently the Social Security Administration developed a sliding scale which takes into account family size, composition, residence, and proportions of income required to purchase a minimum adequate diet.¹ Clearly these conditions have varied at different times and places and their proper adjustment is no small problem. Later in this paper we will employ just such a simple "poverty line" definition for its aid in calculation.² This definition is typically based on the requirements of subsistence and has the virtue of an apparent concreteness. Yet fundamentally we agree with Miller and Roby (1970) that with economic development subsistence issues are replaced by issues of inequality - full participation for the bottom segment of society and an adequate life chance for their children. As described by Miller and Roby inequality is a question of

"....(1) incomes, (2) assets, and (3) basic services, but also of (4) self-respect and (5) opportunities for education and social mobility and (6) participation in many forms of decision-making." (p.12)

This paper is organized around the essentially economic aspects of poverty: income and expenditures. Yet along the way we hope to shed some light on more general life-cycle aspects of urban family poverty.

URBAN STRUCTURE

By urban structure I mean the whole range of city attributes which help to explain the nature of poverty. These include occupational and industrial

composition, relative wages and prices and the demography of the labor force, as well as available housing, consumer durables, public services, etc.

It is hopeless to attempt to begin with a unified theory (applicable across time and space) of the relationship of these variables to one another and to the distribution of poverty. Rather we will proceed by highlighting certain aspects of the problem.

Certainly occupational structure is a key factor in the distribution of income. In this regard the statement by Smolensky with which we began assumes not only that the occupational distribution of wages is the same in different cities, but also that selected demographic characteristics (being female, for example) either over ride the effect of occupation on income (as when men are paid a higher wage for the same work as women) or lead to the same occupational distribution regardless of labor market conditions (as when women are restricted to certain occupations regardless of labor scarcity in others³). There is, of course, much evidence to support these generalizations, yet questions still remain.

(1) Which demographic statuses have been penalized in different places at different times and what is the effect of changes in their composition? Thus it seems reasonable that low education is an important determinant of poverty only after extensive economic development. If, as Leibenstein (1971: 178) believes, it is increased efficiency (associated with bureaucratization and the division of labor) which is the principal cause of

growth, then we must look for the interaction of such a regime with negative demographic statuses in order to chart the future of poverty.⁴

(2) How do the occupational structure and the available means of support alter the very nature of poverty? Thus Mayhew reports (Yeo and Thompson, 1971: 22-8) that in London in 1850 the most numerous occupation was that of domestic servant, constituting 26 per cent of the labor force. Surely such a situation raises in kind payment to a position of prominence in the life of the poor. What effect does this have on the distribution of poverty? What is the effect of the existence of welfare and other forms of government subsidy?

(3) How does an oversupply (or undersupply) of demographically stigmatized workers effect the distribution of poverty? By comparison with North America, Latin American cities exhibit a high percentage of females (Bogue, 1969:468) and of young workers. Do these people simply occupy the positions at the bottom of society reserved for black males and older workers in the United States? Or is a different occupational structure built around their presence? Is there a sort of succession as when (in the mid-nineteenth century) Irish immigrants replaced the female labor force which had originally been pulled off the farm to work in New England textiles.

(4) How is poverty in the city effected by the surrounding regional labor market? Thernstrom (1964, 1971) shows that in nineteenth century New England

there was a great deal of geographical mobility on the part of (apparently unsuccessful) laborers. Those who stayed in the city were reasonably successful in acquiring some property. Much of the cityward migration in Latin America today apparently occurs as steps between urban places (Browning, 1971). How can this process be similar to the one Thernstrom describes when most Latin American countries are dominated by a single large city? Rather, we expect a greater percentage of low skilled workers to be "trapped" in Latin American cities. How do they survive? How does their presence alter the nature of poverty (getting, spending, and the life cycle).

Of course these questions can be multiplied by considering also the industrial mix, relations with agriculture, seasonal unemployment and their relationship (and the ensuing feedback) to the structure of demand. Rather, let us go on to examine some micro aspects of urban poverty.

THE FAMILY AS ECONOMIC UNIT

Survey data on the nature and source of family income and expenditure will enable us to provide reliable answers to a host of questions proposed by first hand observers of urban poverty. Typical of these is Leeds' (1967:131) discussion of the complexity surrounding the purchase of modern consumption goods by poor families in the favelas of Rio.

"...good upper-middle-class people like you and me tend to say, 'Oh, you know those poor people, how bad it is for them to buy refrigerators. They should be spending it on more basic things! However, if one looks closely, one finds, for example, that refrigerators are used to make ice cream or little ices which are sold around the favela. These pay off the refrigerator,

which also contributes to higher standards of living and comfort, and ultimately contributes further capital to the family. There are a series of devices like this, enormously inventive, that contribute to the family as an enterprise which is constantly making investments increasing its general capitalization. I would suggest that analyzing the family in terms of capital structure would shed a fantastic amount of light on what is actually going on in the slums, or at least in favelas."

Similar sentiments are expressed by Oscar Lewis (1965:xxii):

".....the study of the material possessions of the poor may give us another important dimension for the definition of poverty. It can tell us about their buying and spending habits, their definition of luxury items, the relationship between income and material wealth, the proportion of goods bought in stores, markets, street stands, or from hawkers; the extent of trade or exchange of goods within slum settlements or neighborhoods, and the social consequences and concomitants thereof...the range and variation in the distribution of 'wealth' among families who seem desperately poor... the values of the people as reflected in the relative amount of their income spent on various types of objects."

Thus we are interested in all aspects of the income and consumption of the poor. Ideally we would also like to know how these affect the inheritance of poverty. Under what circumstances is it necessary (as was the case for nineteenth century Irish laborers, see Thernstrom, 1964) to mortgage the childrens future by sending them out to work at an early age? What happens when (as described by Peattie, 1968, for Ciudad Guayana in Venezuela) opportunities for such child labor aren't available? What determines how much education a child will get (in Puerto Rico it is his fathers occupation more than his fathers' education says Kendrick, 1970).

The basic question we ask involves a given family's ability to escape from poverty, the strategies open to it in terms of income and consumption

and how these compare with actual behavior. Of greatest interest is the relationship between this economic behavior and the demographic characteristics already mentioned.

It is beyond dispute that the ability of those at the bottom of society to accumulate liquid savings and property has varied according to the city of residence. Thernstrom (1964:chapter five) shows that whereas such events were not common in nineteenth century England they were quite common in New England in the same period. Yet the provision of an income permitting the possibility of some saving is often accompanied by the advent of a whole new class of consumption goods.⁶ As the Leeds quote demonstrates, a proper interpretation of household choice may require great care and imagination.

Ideally we wish to deal with these questions both for the poor in different cities and for different groups among the poor. Let us see what answers a preliminary study can provide.

SOME RESULTS FOR PUERTO RICO

This section is based on 1953 and 1963 data on Puerto Rican households collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.⁷ We will begin with an overview and then proceed to examine income and consumption separately.

The poverty line we will employ consists of a family income of less than \$1000. (We define extreme poverty as less than \$500.) This is essentially an arbitrary choice yet it does have the virtue of agreeing with the usage of

the Bureau of Labor Statistics as well as placing our poor well within the range of income observed by Oscar Lewis in the San Juan slum of LaEsmeralda.⁸ It is also not far from a relative poverty line discussed by Miller and Roby: one-half of the median national income.⁹

We will employ these data to examine poverty both in San Juan and in other Puerto Rican urban places.¹⁰ Where relevant comparisons with North America will be undertaken.

We begin by commenting on the Puerto Rican society-wide distribution of poverty. Note that although we employ a different poverty line (absolute value of family income) than is the case for the United States, this should not greatly affect our results. This is because we are solely interested in who is at the bottom of society and how they get along. For Puerto Rico in 1963 17 per cent of all families had incomes of less than \$1000. while in the United States in that year 18 per cent had incomes less than \$3000 (Miller and Roby, 1970:36). We thus see that our own different poverty lines permit us to compare the same bottom segments of society. In each case the share of total income received by this bottom segment is about 3 per cent.

Although there are few blacks in Puerto Rico, in other respects Smolensky's description of the demographic correlates of poverty is perfectly applicable here. Thus we find that in Puerto Rico 41 percent of all female headed families are poor (48 percent in the U.S.A.¹¹). Similarly 22 percent of Puerto Rican families with heads under 25 years of age are poor while 32 percent of those

TABLE ONE

SOCIETY WIDE POVERTY INCIDENCE, U.S.A. (1961), AND
PUERTO RICO (1963) (% of families in poverty)

Family Head	U.S.A.	Puerto Rico
female	48	41
< 25 yrs. of age	31	22
≥ 65 yrs. of age	47	32
low education	37	29
nonwhite	44	

at least 65 years of age are. For the United States the comparable figures are 31 and 47 percent, respectively. As for education, equivalent bottom segments of each population are defined by noting that in 1960 40 percent of the U.S.A. population had less than 8 years of schooling while 36 percent of the Puerto Rican population had less than 4 years¹². Of the U.S.A. and Puerto Rican families whose heads' educational attainment fell into these categories, 37 and 29 percent, respectively, were poor.

Summarized in table one, these results show that while demographic characteristics are also related to poverty in Puerto Rico, the relationship is stronger in the U.S. This is no doubt due to the presence of nonwhites (more than one stigmatizing characteristic is particularly causative of poverty) as well as a more developed economy. With these society-wide similarities in mind, let us turn to an examination of poverty in urban Puerto Rico.

Our method is to look successively at the entire society, those residing in urban places (at least 2500 inhabitants), and those living in San Juan. Since these are nested subsets, simple calculations on the data presented here would permit explicit comparison of rural-urban and San Juan - urban non San Juan. Much of the ensuing discussion will be in these terms, for we view Puerto Rico as a metropolitanizing society (in the period 1953-1963 the family population of San Juan increased by 60 percent while that of Puerto Rico as a whole only increased by 10 percent and urban areas 8 percent - revealing a

TABLE TWO

PUERTO RICAN POVERTY INCIDENCE, 1963
 (% families in poverty, by area and demographic characteristics)

	<u>PUERTO RICO</u>	<u>URBAN</u>	<u>SAN JUAN</u>
Number of families	461,000	224,000	139,000
Total %	16.7	10.2	4.9
<u>Family Head</u>			
< 25 years of age	22.4	5.2	0.0
≥ 65 years of age	31.6	25.0	13.4
female	40.8	32.9	19.6
education = none	37.8	39.6	25.6
education = 1-3 years	22.9	17.5	9.2
no one in family worked	51.5	37.3	11.7
no one in family worked regularly	39.5	31.7	18.9
head works in -- industry:			
agriculture	26.0	9.8	-
construction	6.9	4.0	2.3
manufacturing	5.2	3.1	0.0
trade	8.1	5.7	5.7
finance	0.0	0.0	0.0
transportation	3.1	3.2	0.0
services	15.6	14.5	8.0
public administration	4.7	3.2	0.7
unemployed or not in labor force	36.1	27.4	14.8

TABLE TWO (continued)

PUERTO RICAN POVERTY INCIDENCE, 1963
(% families in poverty, by area and demographic characteristics)

occupation of head:

farmers & farm managers	21.4	-	-
proprietors, managers & officials, nonfarm	4.0	2.2	1.7
clerical, sales	5.5	4.5	3.2
craftsmen, foremen	5.4	4.3	1.9
operatives	5.5	4.3	-
service, except household	13.9	16.0	5.5
farm laborers and foremen	29.6	-	-
laborers except farm	11.4	4.0	3.6

Class of head

private and government	9.2	3.2	2.2
private	10.6	3.2	2.9
government	4.6	3.0	0.5
self employed	17.6	15.5	6.4

loss of family population in non San Juan urban areas). These categories should permit an appreciation of the effect of urbanization on poverty.

As we see in table two, Puerto Rico resembles the U.S.A. in having a higher incidence of poverty in rural areas, and it also agrees with Ornati's (1968:55) U.S.A. finding that the percentage in poverty decreases as city size increases. A further generalization from this table is that "demographic stigmatization" is somewhat alleviated by a more completely urban location. Of interest here is that residence must actually be in San Juan for the effect to be felt by those with no education at all.

Examining the industrial and occupational breakdowns of table two we see not only a tendency for higher wages in urban settings (particularly for service workers and non farm laborers) but also the significant rural-urban-metropolitan differences produced by public assistance (observe the incidence of poverty for non-working families). This latter point is corroborated by the high percentage of poor family income provided by such assistance in San Juan (table three). It seems to be the case that not only is public assistance a benefit of urban residence, but also that the private and public sectors pay higher wages in cities ("class of head" in table two). Moreover, the self employed also do appreciably better when in San Juan. The higher wage levels appear to carry everyone along. (Of course these gains may be wiped out by associated prices, yet the small distances involved make this somewhat unlikely for commodities other than housing. Even here

there are no large differences: average monthly rents paid by the poor in the whole country, urban areas, and San Juan were, respectively, \$9.30, \$8.13, \$10.70). It is time we examined family income more closely.

Income

In an attempt to assess the relative effects of head of household demographic characteristics on the income (including in kind) of poor families we estimated the following equation for a national sample of 242 poor (income < \$1000) Puerto Rican families. (Standard errors are in parentheses).

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Income} = & 790.6 - 4.9 (\text{AGE OF HEAD}) + .03 (\text{AGE OF HEAD})^2 \\ & (3.8) \qquad \qquad \qquad (.03) \\ & -2.3(\text{EDUCATION OF HEAD}) + 84.5 (\text{SEX OF HEAD}) + 21.2 (\text{NO. OF PERSONS}) \\ & (1.1) \qquad \qquad \qquad (27.4) \qquad \qquad \qquad (7.2) \end{aligned}$$

$$R^2 = .154, \quad \text{SEE} = 206.1$$

We observe that age of head is not significant, while family size and sex of the head have the greatest influence on income. Among the poor, with their generally low level of education and either unemployment or unskilled jobs, the marginal return to an extra year of education is quite low. Indeed, having more children seems to be the most effective way of increasing income (ignoring added costs, that is).

TABLE THREE

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SOURCES OF THE FAMILY
MONEY INCOME OF THE POOR (Income < \$1000),
1963, BY AREA

	<u>PUERTO RICO</u>	<u>URBAN</u>	<u>SAN JUAN</u>
Wages and salaries	40.7	29.8	34.0
Self-employment			
profession & trades	5.2	7.1	5.5
unincorporated business or farm	6.2	8.0	4.4
Rental	0.1	0.5	0.4
Boarders	0.3	0.4	0.9
Sale of Food	1.9	0.6	1.6
Military service	1.4	2.7	-
Cash from family outside home	10.4	13.8	8.1
Unemployment insurance	1.8	0.7	1.3
Soc.sec., old age benefits etc.	12.7	11.2	13.4
Other government pension	0.6	1.8	5.4
Public assistance & private charity	11.2	12.8	17.9
Alimony	3.4	5.7	3.4
Miscellaneous	4.2	4.9	3.8
	100.0	100.0	100.0

What are the actual sources of funds, and how do they vary by area? As shown in table three, city dwellers depend less on wages and more on government assistance with those residing in San Juan more dependent on charity, government pensions, social security, and old age benefits. By comparison the extent to which urban non-San Juan residents depend on self employment and cash from those outside the home is striking. Of course the latter may constitute "transfer payments" from the urban economy: wages earned by family members now living in San Juan. As for income received in kind (which doesn't amount to more than a few hundred dollars) it is distributed by commodity as might be expected: rural dwellers receive a higher proportion in food, urban dwellers in clothing. (The similar percentage received from housing is a bit of a surprise).

Expenditures

In this society most people are in debt, whether their income be below the poverty line or not. As shown below, indebtedness increases with urban residence.

NET CHANGES IN ASSETS AND LIABILITIES (DOLLARS), 1963

<u>PUERTO RICO</u>		<u>URBAN</u>		<u>SAN JUAN</u>	
<u>Total</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Poor</u>
-109.	-89	-123.	-101.	-137.	-102

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE AVERAGE FAMILY EXPENDITURES
TOTAL POPULATION AND THE POOR, BY AREA, 1963

	<u>PUERTO RICO</u>	<u>THE POOR</u>		
		<u>PUERTO RICO</u>	<u>URBAN</u>	<u>SAN JUAN</u>
food	49.3	49.3	47.3	48.2
clothing	11.2	11.2	10.2	7.5
housing	13.0	13.0	19.4	18.2
housefurnishings	6.0	6.0	4.8	5.4
transportation	4.3	4.3	3.4	4.3
alcohol and tobacco	3.2	3.2	3.0	4.7
medical care	2.2	2.2	2.2	1.5
personal care	4.6	4.6	4.9	4.5
recreation, reading, education	2.3	2.3	1.7	1.8
other consumption	2.2	2.2	1.6	2.4
personal insurance	1.3	1.3	1.1	1.0
gifts and donations	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.7
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The expenses creating this indebtedness are identified for the poor in table four. Food is a constant percentage of the budget across areas, but city residents spend a greater percentage on housing and less on clothing and housefurnishings. There is no evidence to support the assertion that the poor living in San Juan are "hooked into" modern consumption habits and spend disproportionately on clothing and housefurnishings. There is, however, some evidence of increased use of alcohol and tobacco. As a variety of regressions confirmed, family income is the best predictor of amounts expended per capita on the major items of table four. Once income is known most demographic characteristics show little effect (the only significant one is age of head - a life cycle measure).

CONCLUSION

Clearly this study is not definitive, yet we are able to reach certain tentative conclusions.

- (1) As compared with the United States, Puerto Rican poverty is less closely linked to stigmatized demographic status. This may be due to the absence of blacks.
- (2) As is the case in the United States, Puerto Rican urban residence serves to somewhat ameliorate poverty. This seems to be due both to higher wages and to public assistance.

(3) Family size and sex of head are the principal determinants of income among the poor. Sources of income vary slightly by area in the magnitude of their contribution, with public assistance being somewhat traded off for wages in urban areas. The sort of family entrepreneurship described by Leeds for urban areas either escaped our interviewers or contributes a negligible portion of total income.

(4) The urban poor spent relatively more on housing and less on clothing than rural residents. There was no evidence for an urban "mass consumption" effect.

Footnotes

1. Urban family income is adjusted by dividing by the appropriate factor in the table below. This adjusted income will buy a comparable level of living to that of the unadjusted income of a four person family with its head 35 to 54 years of age. The urban poor are then defined as those families whose adjusted income is less than \$3000/yr.

ADJUSTMENT FACTORS FOR URBAN FAMILY INCOME (U.S.A.)

Size of Family	Age of Head (years)			
	<u>35</u>	<u>35-54</u>	<u>55-64</u>	<u>65</u>
2	0.59	0.62	0.63	0.56
3	0.68	0.85	0.87	0.78
4	0.82	1.00	1.08	0.97
5	1.02	1.15	1.25	1.11
6	1.18	1.31	1.40	1.20

Source: Bogue (1969: 417)

2. With some luck the nature of the calculations will cause them to be relatively independent of the particular definition chosen.
3. Even in this event disproportionate growth of the "female sector" may lead to changes in the distribution of poverty. Oppenheimer (1973) documents how since 1900 the increased United States demand for nurses, teachers, secretaries and other clerical occupations has increased the labor force participation rates of women. Another recent event of interest is the decline (apparently due in part to non-economic causes) in domestic household work by black women.
4. It seems reasonable to expect bureaucratization to accompany certification in restricting the opportunity for demographically stigmatized groups to escape poverty.
5. For the purposes of this exposition we omit a discussion of purely demographic behavior (fertility, death chances). Of course in human capital terms even fertility is given an economic interpretation.

Footnotes (continued)

6. See Sam Bass Warner (1968:66) for an interesting description of the supply of consumption goods in mid-nineteenth century Philadelphia. As Peattie (1968:39) describes an urban slum in Venezuela:

"LaLaja has definitely thrown in its lot with the city and the cash economy, 'Los pobres' in La Laja may raise a few chickens, but they cannot really make a living that way. They are, in fact, making a living on the others, on the persons in the barrio who have found themselves niches in the modern sector of the economy. Their cognitive orientation is toward the modern world of mass-produced consumption goods, and toward the world of personal relations giving them access to it. Because they do not have the skills, they cannot be full participants in that world, but they are hangers-on."

7. Puerto Rico (1963).

8. LaEsmeralda was one of four San Juan slums sampled by Lewis. In 1964 the mean annual income of the one hundred sample families from the four slums was \$1400.

9. Miller and Roby (1970:36) show that this measure gives similar results to the more usual poverty line.

10. As discussed below an urban place is one with population at least 2500.

11. The Puerto Rican figures cited here are from the source cited in note 7. The United States results are to be found in the Economic Report of the President (1964:62-69).

12. For the U.S. figure see Bogue (1969).

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