INTRODUCTION

Housing has numerous impacts on the daily lives of individuals and families. For example, the cost of shelter influences what can be spent on other items such as education, transportation, or entertainment. Inferior-quality housing can lead to accidents and poor health. Housing conditions such as overcrowding influence whether household members have privacy and space to engage in various activities such as homework. Critical housing issues include the affordability of housing, the extent to which families are “cost-burdened” due to the high cost of housing, housing quality, the value and equity of owned-housing, and the stability of households, among others.¹ These matters have important consequences for children, families, communities, and the nation as a whole. Further, common practices such as redlining, a widespread banking policy after World War II through the 1970s that excluded racial and ethnic minorities from obtaining mortgage loans, real estate agents steering minorities to particular neighbourhoods, and other housing practices have had differential impacts on Americans by race and ethnicity (Squires, 1992) and have been particularly devastating for minorities, including Latinos (Diaz, 2005). Given this context, it is especially important to evaluate how housing outcomes continue to differ across racial and ethnic lines.

Housing issues matter for the substantial Latino population in the United States, their physical and mental health, and their ability to save and to accumulate wealth. Latinos are a significant
and fast-growing component of the housing market, because of international migration, fertility rates, and their relative youth. Indeed, between 1995 and 2005, Latino-headed households increased at a faster rate than non-Latino households, accounting for more than 27% of the total increase in U.S. households (JCHS, 2006). In the decade after 1995, Latino households grew by at least 50% in nearly every state in the country, accounting for all of the household growth in central cities, 26% in suburban households, and offset non-Latino declines in rural households (Ready, 2006).

Latinos have economic impacts in housing. They spent $61 billion on shelter in 2000, about 20% of their total spending, their second highest expenditure after transportation (Humphreys, 2002). Latino buying power in housing is very concentrated, given that many Latino groups reside in just a few cities, especially Los Angeles (Mexicans, Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and Costa Ricans) and New York City (Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Colombians) (Lewis Mumford Center, 2002). The overall buying power of Latinos is increasing faster than any other group, more than tripling between 1990 and 2000 (Humphreys, 2002), and they represent an increasingly attractive market for mortgage lenders and the financial market overall (Gallagher, 2005; Grow et al., 2005). Reports indicate that even unauthorized Latino immigrants potentially could take out $44 billion in home mortgages if given the opportunity (Paral & Associates, 2004). Banks, credit unions, and mortgage companies have tapped into this market by translating applications into Spanish, changing criteria for assessing credit, accepting alternative documents to driver’s licenses and social security numbers, and marketing specifically to Latinos (Gallagher, 2005; Grow et al., 2005).

This chapter has two primary objectives. This first is to summarize the experiences of Latinos in housing, including the characteristics of their residences and neighborhoods, the costs of shelter, differences in rental versus owned-housing, homeownership rates, and the value and equity of Latino-owned homes. Where data are available, I identify variation within Latinos by country and by nativity and contextualize these patterns via comparisons with non-Hispanic Whites, Blacks, and Asians. Moreover, the chapter includes information about both the housing situation nationally and in cities with large Latino populations, including Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City, and Miami. Thus, the chapter highlights the extensive heterogeneity of Latinos in housing by nativity, group, and U.S. location.

The second objective is to describe the state of current housing research vis-à-vis Latinos. Despite the importance of housing for the social and economic well-being of this rapidly growing population, housing scholarship focusing on Latinos is at a relatively nascent stage, compared with research about non-Hispanic Whites and African Americans. The earliest Latino-focused work generally explored the history and development of Latinos in Southwestern cities or the experiences of Latino households and Latino neighborhoods known as barrios (e.g., Acuña, 1972; Barrera, 1979; reviewed in Diaz, 2005). Contemporary housing scholarship increasingly includes Latinos rather than examining only White-Black gaps in housing outcomes. I provide a brief overview of this literature, with a particular focus on the most developed of this research – homeownership and housing equity. The chapter concludes with new housing challenges and directions for future research.

Readers will note that housing information about this population is typically presented for all Latinos or for one or more of the three largest Latino groups (Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and/or Cubans). Even research reports describing the state of housing in America generally (JCHS, 2006) or particularly about Latinos (McConnell, 2005; Ready, 2006; Vargas-Ramos, 2005) take this approach. This is partly due to the small sample sizes of Latinos in many national surveys, preventing analyses that are disaggregated by group. Additionally, important data sources, such as the American Housing Survey, do not collect information about detailed Latino groups, noting