

**HISPANICS IN THE UNITED STATES AT THE DAWN OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: A GROWING, YET UNDERDEVELOPED FORCE**

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(Resumen)

Al despuntar el nuevo siglo, la población hispana en los Estados Unidos se ha convertido en el grupo étnico más numeroso de esa nación. Su crecimiento es vigoroso, debido tanto a su alta tasa de natalidad como a la sostenida inmigración latinoamericana de las últimas tres décadas, que parece extenderse hacia el futuro próximo. Sin embargo, la situación socioeconómica de esta población adolece de serios problemas estructurales que reflejan una elevada tasa de desempleo, una estructura ocupacional adversa, ingresos bajos, altos índices de pobreza, educación formal deficiente e insuficiente a todos los niveles, poco dominio del idioma inglés e inferiores niveles de participación política en comparación con los otros grupos étnicos. El gran enigma que confrontan analizadores y dirigentes políticos por igual se relaciona a la capacidad de incorporación eventual del segmento hispano al resto de la población. El asunto es sumamente complejo, pues los hispanos no presentan una estructura monolítica; antes bien, existen profundas diferencias culturales e históricas que incluyen no solamente lugar de origen y concentración en diferentes regiones del país, sino también gran heterogeneidad dentro de cada grupo.

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Recent trends pointing to an increasingly global economy, the internationalization of capital, and mass migration into the United States have forced American scholars and policymakers to focus on issues of interdependence and multiculturalism. Understanding people's diverse cultural frames of reference (*i.e.*, the elements that condition various groups to perceive the world and interpret its stimuli in different ways, and influence their behavior accordingly) has become a major challenge in the search for cultural pluralism and the tolerance, acceptance, and cooperation presumably ingrained in it (Chandler et al; Frey; Morales-Jones). The cultural-pluralism model of social interaction, far more plausible for explaining human relations in the U.S. than the melting-pot concept of assimilation, is predicated on continuity of cultural diversity within national unity rather than a homogeneous blend of minority groups' traits and preferences.

Of all cultural and demographic segments in the United States, Hispanics have been the most dynamic throughout the 1990s. Their accelerated expansion is one of the dominant forces shaping economic life today (Brischetto). According to the latest census, the Hispanic population rose by 57.9 percent, from 22.4 million in 1990 to 35.3 million in 2000, compared with increases, during the same period, of 5.9 percent for Non-Hispanic Whites, 21.5 percent for African Americans, and 48.3 percent for Asian Americans. In 2002 Hispanics surpassed African

Americans, thus becoming the nation's largest single minority group, and current reproduction and immigration patterns suggest that they will continue to expand more rapidly than any other major segment. By the year 2050, one out of every four persons in the U.S. is likely to be Hispanic (Etzioni; Jeria).

In spite of their growing economic, social, and political importance, Hispanics rarely are the object of meaningful academic analysis (Amaro and Zambrana; Gibson), and some of the relatively few studies available point to gross under representation in areas crucial to public policy (Erlach; Villarruel *et al*). Outside the realm of academia, the situation is just as bleak; "reality" often is portrayed by a mainstream media where Hispanic images are virtually nonexistent and Hispanic culture often is depicted in a negative light or using crude stereotypes.

The purpose of this article is to present a profile of Hispanics in the United States based on data from the 2000 Population Census, the March 2000 Current Population Survey, and other sources;<sup>1</sup> compare their most salient socioeconomic indicators with those of non-Hispanic segments; and analyze variations in these indicators among the major Hispanic subgroups. Four areas comprise this profile. First, similarities and differences are established among subgroups. Second, a review of general population characteristics such as growth, concentration, age, household composition, marital status, and number of children takes place. This review is followed by an analysis of economic characteristics which encompass labor force participation, unemployment, occupational structure, household income, income distribution, poverty, and consumption patterns. Finally, there is a discussion of social characteristics, including formal schooling, ability to speak English, incidence of foreign born, naturalization, dwelling ownership, health insurance coverage, and receipt of means-tested assistance. For comparison purposes this layout is similar to the one presented by Carvajal (1997) a few years ago.

## 1. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES WITHIN HISPANICS

The term Hispanic does not denote ethnicity.<sup>2</sup> Its use is primarily political, but it serves often to identify people with a common cultural background and, over the years, has developed multiple meanings that include a distinct social identity marked heavily by economic features. The most salient characteristic of these people is that they share their origin in regions where language, religion, law, and customs have been influenced by Spanish rule (Gratton *et al*). To be sure, many

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1. The U.S. Population Census is taken every ten years. The Current Population Survey is taken annually by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Its universe consists of the civilian, non-institutional population of the United States and members of the Armed Forces in the United States living off post or with their families on post, but excludes all other members of the Armed Forces. Data from the 2000 Current Population Survey are used here to complement and conform to census data.

2. The U.S. Census Bureau defines an Hispanic as "a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race." In data collection and presentation, federal agencies are required to use a minimum of two ethnicities: "Hispanic or Latino" and "not Hispanic or Latino."

of them may employ or even prefer other terms to identify themselves (*i.e.*, Latinos, Chicanos, etc.), and most individuals from some regions formerly under Spanish rule (*i.e.*, the Philippines, Morocco, and the low countries) do not consider themselves Hispanic. Yet, in spite of these caveats, it is the term of choice by the U.S. Census Bureau and other federal agencies.

The 1970 census was the first to include a separate question on Hispanic origin. This information, however, was not requested from the entire population, only from a 5 percent sample of households. Prior to 1970, Hispanic origin was determined indirectly. For example, the 1960 and 1950 census published data for “persons of Spanish surname” in five southwestern states, and in 1940 the census enumerated individuals who reported Spanish as their “mother tongue” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

In the 2000 census, questions on race and Hispanic origin were asked of the entire population. (The federal government considers race and Hispanic origin two distinctly different concepts.) Responses were based solely on self-identification. Persons who identified themselves as “Spanish/Hispanic/Latino” were asked further to specify their origin as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino.<sup>3</sup> Respondents choosing the last category had additional space to name country of origin. Notwithstanding the 20 or so separate nationalities with which they can identify, which encompass radically different political systems, profound racial diversity, and variations in socioeconomic strata, Hispanics share attitudes, beliefs, aspirations, expectations, frustrations, and behavioral patterns that bind them into a *bona fide* cultural group (Paulin).

According to the 2000 census, one out of every eight persons is Hispanic. More than half (58.5 percent) are Mexican. Puerto Ricans, the second largest subgroup, constitute 9.6 percent, while Cubans, a small but economically powerful group, account for 3.5 percent. Dominicans compose 2.2 percent, Central Americans represent 4.8 percent, South Americans form 3.8 percent, and Spaniards make up 0.3 percent. The remaining 17.3 percent are classified as “all other Hispanic or Latino” because they do not report a country of origin. Of special importance in the Central and South American categories are individuals who identify their country of origin as El Salvador (655,165), Colombia (470,684), Guatemala (372,487), Ecuador (260,559), Peru (233,926), and Honduras (217,596).

## 2. GENERAL POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

The 57.9 percent population increase recorded for Hispanics throughout the 1990s is not uniformly distributed among subgroups. Mexicans increased by 52.9 percent, Puerto Ricans by 24.9 percent, and Cubans by 18.9 percent. The greatest expansion (96.9 percent) has occurred for Hispanics who report other origins.

Three factors are responsible for the recent growth of the Hispanic population. One is the highest birth rate of all ethnic groups in the United States—23.6 per 1,000 population, *vis-à-vis* 13.9 per 1,000 population for Non-Hispanic Whites, 17.4 per 1,000 population for African Americans, and 16.7 per 1,000 population for Asian Americans. Within Hispanics, Mexicans exhibit the highest birth rate (23.6 per 1,000 population), Cubans have the lowest (10.5 per 1,000 population),

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3. The term “Latino” appeared on the census form for the first time in 2000.

and, in between, lie Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics, with 16.7 per 1,000 population and 15.3 per 1,000 population, respectively (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002). After increasing from 23.2 per 1,000 population in 1980, 26.0 per 1,000 population in 1990, and 27.0 per 1,000 population in 1992, the Hispanic birth rate declined in 2000.

The Hispanic population explosion also can be partly attributed to a very high international immigration rate, most immigrants originating in Mexico and Central and South American countries experiencing economic hardship or political turmoil (Brischetto). Nearly half (45.2 percent) of the foreign-born population of the U.S. are Hispanic, and the proportion increases to 53.8 percent among non-citizens. Overall high birth rates and increased legal immigration are expected to account for 90 percent of the Hispanic population growth between now and the year 2050 (Mas et al).

Improved enumeration procedures such as cleaner questionnaires, better population coverage, and effective public-relations campaigns also have contributed to the increased visibility of Hispanics. Especially forcible in this respect have been efforts by the Spanish-language media, private as well as public organizations, and community groups in raising awareness of the importance of being counted. In spite of these efforts, however, numerous illegal immigrants, primarily Mexicans and Central Americans, remain uncounted.

U.S. minority groups tend to concentrate heavily in selected clusters, and Hispanics are no exception. This pattern often leads to the formation of mini melting-pots, each with its own dynamics, politics, and consumer preferences, in contrast with the rest of the country, which is much less diverse (Frey). Almost half (44.8 percent) of Hispanics concentrate in the West and another third (33.2 percent) live in the South, with only 14.1 percent in the Northeast and 7.9 percent in the Midwest. This compares with heavy concentrations of African Americans (54.4 percent) in the South and Asian Americans (53.6 percent) in the West, while Non-Hispanic Whites are more evenly divided (32.8 percent in the South, 27.1 percent in the Midwest, 20.3 percent in the Northeast, and 19.8 percent in the West). According to Frey, only 381 of the 3,141 counties in the U.S. have a greater than national representation of Hispanics, as do 697 counties for African Americans and 117 counties for Asian Americans.

Different concentration patterns appear for the Hispanic subgroups. Mexicans are grouped predominantly in the West (56.8 percent) and the South (32.6 percent), while Puerto Ricans congregate in the Northeast (63.9 percent) and Cubans are clustered in the South (80.1 percent). The rest of Hispanics are spread evenly in three regions—Central and South Americans 34.6 percent in the South, 32.3 percent in the Northeast, and 28.2 percent in the West, and “other” Hispanics 36.0 percent in the West, 33.7 percent in the Northeast, and 25.1 percent in the South.

Hispanics tend to assemble in cities, especially in places where a large number of Hispanics already live. They like to contract with Hispanic vendors, deal with Hispanic managers and clerks, and be surrounded by persons who share and value Hispanic culture (Menard). About 91.5 percent of Hispanics live in urban areas, compared with 79.5 percent non-Hispanic urban dwellers. Nearly half (46.4 percent) live in central cities, a much greater fraction than non-Hispanics (27.0 percent). Cubans, Central and South Americans, and Puerto Ricans register the greatest incidence of urban residence (98.4 percent, 97.4 percent, and 96.2 percent, respectively), although Puerto Ricans are gathered in central cities (61.2 percent) to a much greater extent than do

Central and South Americans (45.8 percent) or Cubans (22.4 percent). Mexicans (89.4 percent urban, 44.9 percent in central cities) and “other” Hispanics (89.3 percent urban, 56.5 percent in central cities) follow. Thirty cities with at least 250,000 people register 15 percent or more Hispanic population. These cities and their percentages are listed in Appendix.

Hispanics have the youngest median age (25.8 years) of all major ethnic groups. The median age is 37.7 years for Non-Hispanic Whites, 30.2 years for African Americans, and 32.7 years for Asian Americans (Jeria). Two out of every five Hispanics (39.4 percent) are younger than 20 years, substantially more than the incidence of Non-Hispanic Whites (26.3 percent), African Americans (35.8 percent), or Asian Americans (31.6 percent). Conversely, the presence of persons 65 years and older is greater for Non-Hispanic Whites (14.0 percent), African Americans (7.7 percent), and Asian Americans (7.3 percent) than for Hispanics (5.3 percent). Major intra-Hispanic variations are detected, however, as the age distribution of Cubans (21.1 percent younger than 20 years and 21.0 percent 65 years and older) is much older than the distribution of Mexicans (42.1 percent and 4.3 percent, respectively), Puerto Ricans (38.1 percent and 6.0 percent), Central and South Americans (32.9 percent and 4.7 percent), and “other” Hispanics (37.6 percent and 6.8 percent).

The 35.3 million Americans of Hispanic origin enumerated in the 2000 census form 9.2 million households, an average of 3.62 persons per household. This is much greater than the average of 2.48 persons per household recorded for Non-Hispanic Whites, the 2.74 persons per household of African Americans, or the 3.11 persons per household of Asian Americans. These averages vary by subgroup. Mexicans show the largest average household size (3.92 persons), followed by “other” Hispanics (3.48 persons), Puerto Ricans (3.00 persons), and Cubans (2.77 persons).

Hispanic households are more likely to be family households (81.1 percent) than are Non-Hispanic White (67.3 percent), African American (67.4 percent), or Asian American (75.1 percent) households. Two out of three (67.9 percent) Hispanic families are headed by married couples, which is less than the incidence of Non-Hispanic Whites (82.7 percent) and Asian Americans (79.6 percent), but more than the incidence of African Americans (47.8 percent). Almost one-fourth (23.4 percent) of Hispanic families are maintained by a female with no husband present, compared with 12.7 percent for Non-Hispanic Whites, 44.1 percent for African Americans, and 13.2 percent for Asian Americans. As with other indicators, substantial variations exist among Hispanic subgroups. Cubans exhibit relatively high levels of family stability, with 76.9 percent of families maintained by married couples and 18.2 percent maintained by female heads, followed by Mexicans (69.9 percent and 21.1 percent, respectively), Central and South Americans (65.0 percent and 24.6 percent), and Puerto Ricans (56.8 percent and 35.7 percent).

One-third (33.2 percent) of Hispanics 15 years and older report never having been married, which is about the same as for Asian Americans (33.1 percent), higher than for Non-Hispanic Whites (24.5 percent) and lower than for African Americans (43.5 percent). About half (52.1 percent) of Hispanics report being married, compared to 57.7 percent for Non-Hispanic Whites, 34.1 percent for African Americans, and 57.0 percent for Asian Americans. The incidence of the rest of the population 15 years and older—separated, divorced, and widowed—is almost identical for Hispanics (10.8 percent) and Non-Hispanic Whites (11.0 percent), higher for African



Americans (15.8 percent), and lower for Asian Americans (5.9 percent). Montgomery (1994) points out that Hispanics tend to marry overwhelmingly within ethnic subgroups, and when they marry outside their specific subgroup, they are more likely to marry a non-Hispanic than a member of any other Hispanic subgroup. Mexicans and Cubans tend to marry within their subgroup to a much greater extent than do Puerto Ricans and "other" Hispanics.

Hispanic families are more likely to have children under 18 years of age (64.4 percent) than are Non-Hispanic White (45.2 percent), African American (56.2 percent), or Asian American (53.8 percent) families. The same holds true for families with children under 6 years of age—15.8 percent for Hispanic families *vis-à-vis* 10.5 percent for Non-Hispanic White families, 11.7 percent for African American families, and 14.0 percent for Asian American families. These characteristics are crucial in the determination of Hispanic households' income distribution and poverty profile.

### 3. ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Labor force participation is perhaps the most fundamental economic indicator for it affects all others—employment, occupational structure, earnings, income distribution, and poverty. Overall, Hispanics' labor force participation rate (68.4 percent) is approximately the same as the rate of Non-Hispanic Whites (67.4 percent), African Americans (65.8 percent), and Asian Americans (66.4 percent); but variations exist among subgroups—from a high of 71.8 percent for Central and South Americans to a low of 61.3 percent for Cubans, with Mexicans (68.7 percent), Puerto Ricans (64.2 percent), and "other" Hispanics (68.3 percent) in between.

Participation in the labor force varies by gender. African Americans report the highest rates of female labor force participation (63.9 percent), followed by Non-Hispanic Whites (60.8 percent) and Asian Americans (59.3 percent). Hispanics show the lowest rate (56.6 percent), although it is expected to increase more rapidly in the future (Mas et al). Within Hispanics, Cubans have the lowest female labor force participation rate (49.5 percent), while the rates of Puerto Ricans (59.3 percent), Central and South Americans (61.0 percent), and "other" Hispanics (62.3 percent) are the highest and the rate of Mexicans (54.9 percent) is in the middle.

At the time of the 2000 census, Hispanics experienced a much higher civilian unemployment rate (6.8 percent) than did Non-Hispanic Whites (3.4 percent) or Asian Americans (3.9 percent), although not as high as the rate of African Americans (7.7 percent). Hispanic men are less likely to be unemployed (6.2 percent) than are their women counterparts (7.7 percent), which is the opposite relationship found with the other major groups—3.6 percent and 3.3 percent for Non-Hispanic White men and women, respectively; 8.1 percent and 7.4 percent for African Americans; and 4.1 percent and 3.6 percent for Asian Americans.

With 8.1 percent unemployment (8.0 percent for men, 8.3 percent for women), Puerto Ricans' rates are the highest within Hispanics, followed closely by Hispanics classified as "other" (7.9 percent overall, 8.9 percent for men, and 6.5 percent for women) and Mexicans (7.0 percent overall, 6.1 percent for men, and 8.5 percent for women). The lowest rates are recorded by Central and South Americans (5.1 percent overall, 4.5 percent for men, and 5.9 percent for women) and Cubans (5.8 percent overall, 6.7 percent for men, and 4.6 percent for women). Central and South Americans' highest rate of labor force participation and lowest unemployment rate lend credence to

the contention that this group consists substantially of highly skilled workers who have entered the United States under occupational preferences of immigration laws (Rumbaut). Also of interest is the fact that while Cubans have the lowest female labor force participation rate, they also report the lowest female unemployment rate of all Hispanic subgroups.

One of the reasons why Hispanics experience such a high unemployment rate is their adverse occupational structure (Padilla and Jordan). They are over represented in low-status, blue-collar occupations and underrepresented in white-collar occupations, and are more likely to be employed by small firms (fewer than 25 employees) than other groups (Mas et al; Rousemaniere). In many instances they work in the informal sector of the economy, in seasonal or migrant agricultural activities, or in service areas such as hotels and restaurants characterized by non-unionization and part-time employment, that is, jobs with little stability and few possibilities of climbing the merit ladder (Jeria).

Only one out of every seven Hispanics (14.0 percent) 16 years or older is classified as a manager or possessing a professional specialty, a much lower incidence than those of Non-Hispanic Whites (33.2 percent), African Americans (21.7 percent), or Asian Americans (39.4 percent). Cubans show the highest proportion of managers and professionals (23.5 percent) within the Hispanic group, followed by "other" Hispanics (22.0 percent), Puerto Ricans (17.1 percent), Central and South Americans (14.8 percent), and Mexicans (11.9 percent).

The second tier occupational category, technical, sales, and administrative support, also shows proportionately fewer Hispanics (24.6 percent) than do Non-Hispanic Whites (30.3 percent), African Americans (29.0 percent), or Asian Americans (28.1 percent). Here Puerto Ricans (34.9 percent) and Cubans (34.0 percent) show the highest levels, while Mexicans (22.4 percent) and Central and South Americans (23.4 percent) report the lowest levels and "other" Hispanics (29.7 percent) rank in between.

At the other end of the occupational spectrum, one out of every five Hispanics (19.4 percent) reports his/her occupation to be in the service sector, a little below the level reported by African Americans (22.6 percent) but substantially above the fractions corresponding to Non-Hispanic Whites (11.8 percent) and Asian Americans (14.9 percent). The incidence of work in the service sector is consistently high for all Hispanics (23.2 percent for Central and South Americans, 19.5 percent for "other" Hispanics, 18.9 percent for Mexicans, and 18.2 percent for Puerto Ricans) except Cubans (13.5 percent).

Hispanics also are over represented among operators and handlers (22.0 percent). This fraction is higher than for any other ethnic group—11.5 percent for Non-Hispanic Whites, 18.1 percent for African Americans, and 11.3 percent for Asian Americans. All Hispanic subgroups report high percentages of their labor force working as operators and handlers—22.9 percent for Mexicans, 22.7 percent for Central and South Americans, 19.1 percent for Puerto Ricans, 18.3 percent for "other" Hispanics, and 17.3 percent for Cubans.

The median annual income of Hispanic households (\$30,735) is greater than the income of African American households (\$29,423), but considerably lower than the income of Non-Hispanic White (\$44,366) and Asian American (\$51,908) households. Hispanic households report 26.7 percent less income than all non-Hispanic households combined, and 30.8 percent less income than Non-Hispanic White households. This amounts to a steady deterioration of the income of Hispanic



households relative to the income of Non-Hispanic White households, from 29.4 percent less in 1992 and 27.9 percent less in 1989 (Carvajal). Within Hispanics, Central and South Americans exhibit the highest annual median household income (\$33,129), followed by "other" Hispanics (\$31,573), Mexicans (\$30,400), Cubans (\$30,084), and Puerto Ricans (\$28,233).

An even more adverse picture emerges for Hispanics when one compares the median annual income of family households. The income of Hispanic families is \$33,077, slightly lower than for African Americans (\$33,255) and much lower than the family income levels of Non-Hispanic Whites (\$54,906) and Asian Americans (\$59,324). The median annual income of Hispanic family households is 36.3 percent less than the income of all non-Hispanic family households combined and 39.8 percent less than the income of Non-Hispanic White families. Cubans have the highest median income (\$39,432) of all Hispanic families, followed by "other" Hispanics (\$36,164), Central and South Americans (\$34,806), Mexicans (\$32,345), and Puerto Ricans (\$31,312).

Hispanics also fare poorly in terms of relative household income shares. One-fifth (21.5 percent) of Hispanic households earn under \$15,000 per year, and another fifth (18.9 percent) earn between \$15,000 and \$25,000. For Non-Hispanic White households these percentages are lower (14.1 percent and 13.3 percent, respectively), and for Asian Americans they are even lower (13.7 percent and 9.8 percent, respectively). African American households, however, are even more concentrated than are their Hispanic counterparts at the lower end of the income distribution: 28.5 percent under \$15,000 and 16.4 percent between \$15,000 and \$25,000. At the other extreme, only 12.0 percent of Hispanic households report earning an annual income of \$75,000 or more, compared to 25.0 percent of Non-Hispanic White households, 12.7 percent of African American households, and 32.7 percent of Asian American households.

Interesting patterns emerge when one analyzes relative household income shares within Hispanics. Puerto Ricans exhibit the highest incidence of households earning under \$25,000 (45.6 percent), followed by Cubans (42.3 percent), Mexicans (40.8 percent), "other" Hispanics (39.2 percent), and Central and South Americans (35.0 percent). One out of every five Cuban households (19.1 percent) earns at least \$75,000, but this indicator is substantially smaller for the other Hispanic subgroups: 14.9 percent for Central and South Americans, 14.7 percent for "other" Hispanics, 10.9 percent for Puerto Ricans, and 10.5 percent for Mexicans.

The incidence of Hispanic families living below the poverty level (20.2 percent) has declined over time, from 27.2 percent in 1982 and 23.4 percent in 1989 (Carvajal). Slightly below the African American family poverty incidence (21.9 percent), it nonetheless doubles the poverty incidence of Asian American families (10.3 percent) and almost quadruples the poverty incidence of Non-Hispanic White families (5.5 percent). Puerto Ricans are the subgroup with the highest incidence (23.0 percent), followed by Mexicans (21.2 percent), "other" Hispanics (18.1 percent), Central and South Americans (16.3 percent), and Cubans (10.3 percent).

Hispanic poverty is aggravated by several structural factors which threaten to reverse the downward trend of the poverty incidence over the last two decades. One is workers' concentration in lower-status occupations, which impedes economic and social mobility (Enchaustegui). Another factor is the ubiquitous presence of children. Hispanic children are more likely than Non-Hispanic White, African American, or Asian American children to be poor, and they are more likely to live



in very poor neighborhoods, which offer less social support to families raising children (Mogull; Moore). And third is the substantially greater poverty indices registered for all ethnic groups by households maintained by a female head with no husband present—38.8 percent for Hispanics *vis-à-vis* 18.6 percent for Non-Hispanic Whites, 39.3 percent for African Americans, and 23.1 percent for Asian Americans—coupled with the relatively frequent occurrence of this phenomenon in Hispanic families (Harris and Firestone; Villarruel et al.).

In spite of these low-income and poverty constraints, Hispanics' purchasing power is considerable (Brischetto; Gibson; Nuiry; Perez). It was estimated at \$225 billion in 1997 and projected to reach \$400 billion in 2000 (Morton; Radice). Their top five markets are Los Angeles, New York City, Miami, Chicago, and San Francisco. Understanding the underlying behavioral patterns of this segment is crucial to both producers and retailers not only because of its current capacity and prospective growth, but also because Hispanics respond differently to verbal and written marketing messages than do Non-Hispanic Whites, African Americans, and Asian Americans. Several studies show, for example, that although price is a primary reason for store/product selection among Hispanics, they are more likely than any other ethnic group to develop store/product loyalty, especially with respect to nationally advertised brands; be attracted by product quality; prefer smaller, familiar, ethnic establishments; dislike impersonal stores; and respond to convenience. They also are less likely to buy new products, use credit cards or store coupons, read newspapers and magazines, or listen to the radio (Eckman, Kotsiopulos, and Bickle; Radice). Above all, in spite of differences in country of origin, they maintain a strong ethnic identity because of frequent contact with their homeland and widespread availability of Spanish media.

#### 4. SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

One of the most common concomitants of poverty and low levels of income everywhere is insufficient or deficient formal schooling (Carvajal, Morris, and Davenport). Hispanics in the United States are no exception (Padilla and Jordan). Hispanics' median annual earnings of full-time workers 25-64 years old increase steadily with formal schooling: \$17,299 for workers who never completed ninth grade, \$19,796 for those with some high school education but no diploma, \$24,588 for high school graduates, \$29,546 for those with some college education but no degree, \$30,841 for two-year (associate degree) college graduates, \$39,357 for four-year (baccalaureate degree) college graduates, and \$46,912 for persons with a master's degree. At each educational level, Hispanic women earn less than do Hispanic men, and the female-male earnings ratio remains approximately the same (74.8 for ninth grade dropouts, 76.0 for high school graduates, and 74.5 for holders of baccalaureate degrees) except for workers who hold a master's degree; in this category the gap is reduced to 89.4 percent. Thus, Hispanic women do not seem to get any lower return to their investment in education relative to Hispanic men.

Despite some recent progress, Hispanics continue to lag behind in schooling. Of the major ethnic groups, they seem to profit the least from the American educational system (Erlach; Jeria). Hispanic students' reading performance is worse than the mainstream, and they are plagued by higher failure and dropout rates (Gibson; Perna). More than a quarter (27.3 percent) of Hispanics

25 years and older have never completed ninth grade. This is several times greater than the ninth grade dropout incidence of Non-Hispanic Whites (4.2 percent), African Americans (7.1 percent), or Asian Americans (8.5 percent). Within Hispanics, Mexicans exhibit the highest proportion of workers who never completed ninth grade (32.3 percent), followed by Central and South Americans (22.3 percent), Cubans (18.1 percent), Puerto Ricans (17.5 percent), and “other” Hispanics (15.0 percent).

The high school student dropout rate also is higher for Hispanics than for the other ethnic groups (Collison; Gibson), and an inter-generational effect may be partly responsible. Often with little formal education of their own, many Hispanic parents neither understand the nature or scope of a high school education nor fully realize the extent of its impact in shaping their children’s socioeconomic opportunities (Laden). Only 57.0 percent of Hispanics have attained a high school diploma, indeed much lower than the rates of Non-Hispanic Whites (88.5 percent), African Americans (78.5 percent), or Asian Americans (85.6 percent). Although variations do exist, the rate of high school diploma attainment for every Hispanic subgroup is lower than the rate of any of the other major ethnic groups: 73.0 percent for Cubans, 71.6 percent for “other” Hispanics, 64.4 percent for Puerto Ricans, 64.3 percent for Central and South Americans, and 51.0 percent for Mexicans.

The problem is replicated in higher education. Hispanic students’ college enrollment often is limited by pessimistic messages received from culturally insensitive high school teachers and counselors, namely, that, because of low academic achievement and limited financial resources, college is not a realistic option and vocational programs may be more appropriate (Villarruel et al, “Bridges and Barriers”). Rigid institutional policies, unresponsive to the needs of working and other nontraditional students, as well as an absence of faculty, mentors, and administrators that share the same cultural background and serve as role models, make matters worse (Bowen and Bok). Consequently, Hispanics fail to go to college in proportion to their numbers in the United States, and most of the relatively few who venture to post-secondary education end up in junior/community colleges, whose students tend to experience high attrition and low transfer rates to four-year institutions (Erlach; Laden). According to Gibson (2002), approximately 55 percent of Hispanics enrolled in post-secondary institutions attend two-year colleges, and only 9 percent of them continue on to a baccalaureate degree granting school.

On average, only one in ten Hispanics (10.6 percent) 25 years and older holds a four-year college degree, a much lower portion than those reported by Non-Hispanic Whites (28.1 percent), African Americans (16.5 percent), or Asian Americans (43.9 percent). People of Mexican descent, who comprise almost three-fifths of the country’s Hispanic population, are the least likely subgroup (6.9 percent) to be college educated, followed by Puerto Ricans (13.0 percent), “other” Hispanics (14.5 percent), Central and South Americans (20.4 percent), and Cubans (23.0 percent).

Educational attainment is largely hindered by the inability to speak English. Harrop (2001) claims that 49 percent of Hispanics in the United States are not fluent in English, and, according to the 2000 census, nearly a quarter (23.7 percent) of Hispanics 5 years and older either do not speak English at all or do not speak it well. This proportion increases with age—10.4 percent for persons 5-17 years old, 27.8 percent for persons 18-64 years old, and 38.4 percent for persons 65 years and older. (For comparison purposes, individuals who do not speak English at all, or do

not speak it well, account for 0.8 percent of the 5 years and older Non-Hispanic White population, 1.1 percent of the African American population, and 17.0 percent of the Asian American population.) In addition to the obvious constraints associated with less educational attainment, individuals with weak or no command of the English language tend to bear heavy labor market costs that limit their income growth, job search efforts, and on-the-job productivity gains. Being less able to speak English fluently is tantamount to being less useful in the labor market and more vulnerable to unemployment and underemployment regarding other skills (Jeria).

More than three-quarters (78.6 percent) of Hispanics speak another language, and Spanish is by far the most common. The ability to speak another language increases with age: 69.9 percent for persons 5-17 years old, 81.5 percent for persons 18-64 years old, and 85.8 percent for persons 65 years and older. Preferences are important, too. While Hispanics under 20 years of age are likely to be bilingual, but generally prefer to speak English, Hispanics 20-39 years old, also bilingual and likely to speak English, mostly at work, probably prefer Spanish-language media (Ceniceros). The ability to speak another language, as well as the preference for it, are associated with international immigration, especially recent immigration. A greater portion (43.0 percent) of Hispanic foreign born arrived in the United States in the 1990s than of any other major group—Non-Hispanic White (31.9 percent), African American (38.5 percent), or Asian American (41.4 percent) foreign born.

Yet, in spite of Hispanics' numerical superiority, in absolute terms there are more Non-Hispanic White than, and almost as many Asian American as, Hispanic persons born outside the United States who have become naturalized citizens.<sup>4</sup> The rate of naturalization among Hispanics (25.7 percent) is by far the lowest of all major groups (50.3 percent for Non-Hispanic Whites, 38.7 percent for Blacks, and 45.8 percent for Asian Americans), which accords with their observed low levels of voter registration and political participation (Gibson; Kim and McKenry; Segura et al). Along these lines Chavez (2000) claims, for example, that even after 20 years of U.S. residence, fewer than one in five Mexican Americans choose to acquire U.S. citizenship.

Housing tenure is another characteristic often examined by social scientists. Relatively few (45.5 percent) Hispanic households own the dwelling in which they live compared to the other major groups (73.6 percent of Non-Hispanic White households, 47.1 percent of African American households, and 52.9 percent of Asian American households). The same applies more specifically to family households (49.2 percent of Hispanic families own their dwelling *vis-à-vis* 82.3 percent of Non-Hispanic White families, 52.6 percent of African American families, and 59.8 percent of Asian American families). Within Hispanics, Cubans show the highest incidence of dwelling ownership (58.7 percent of all households and 65.7 percent of families), Puerto Ricans (35.0 percent of all households and 39.6 percent of families) and Central and South Americans (37.5 percent and 40.5 percent, respectively) show the lowest ownership incidence, and Mexicans (47.8 percent of all households and 51.1 percent of families) and "other" Hispanics (48.0 percent and 52.7 percent, respectively) rank in between.

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4. Puerto Ricans are born U.S. citizens. Thus, they are not included with the rest of Hispanics when the rate of naturalization is computed.

In general, Hispanics are less likely than other major groups to be covered by health insurance. Only two-thirds (66.6 percent) are insured, compared to 89.1 percent of Non-Hispanic Whites and 78.9 percent of African Americans. Of those insured, 70.7 percent of Hispanics are covered by private policies, a much lower fraction than reported by Non-Hispanic Whites (88.2 percent) and approximately the same as the fraction of African Americans (70.9 percent). Within Hispanics, Cubans are over represented, and Central and South Americans are underrepresented, in terms of health insurance expenditures (Paulin).

People below poverty level tend to have less health insurance coverage than the rest of the population. This is true for the Hispanic (56.3 percent) and Non-Hispanic White (72.3 percent) poor, but not for the African American (71.9 percent) poor. Other Hispanic pockets that experience relatively low levels of health insurance coverage are persons 18-34 years of age (54.0 percent), people living with unrelated individuals (57.2 percent), 16-64 year-old males who did not work full time year-round (46.6 percent), and persons of both genders 16-64 years of age who did not work at all (56.2 percent).

Almost half (47.2 percent) of U.S. Hispanics live in households that receive means-tested assistance.<sup>5</sup> This is substantially higher than the figure reported by Non-Hispanic Whites (15.0 percent) but only slightly higher than the incidence of African Americans (45.2 percent). Yet, in each of the major means-tested assistance categories, a lower proportion of Hispanics than African Americans benefit. This applies to the percentage of individuals living in households that receive means-tested cash assistance (12.1 percent of Hispanics, 17.0 percent of African Americans, and 4.7 percent of Non-Hispanic Whites), in households that receive food stamps (13.3 percent of Hispanics, 17.8 percent of African Americans, and 3.7 percent of Non-Hispanic Whites), in households in which at least one person is covered by Medicaid (29.5 percent of Hispanics, 30.8 percent of African Americans, and 10.8 percent of Non-Hispanic Whites), and living in public or subsidized housing (6.7 percent of Hispanics, 12.2 percent of African Americans, and 1.9 percent of Non-Hispanic Whites).

While the incidence of Hispanics receiving means-tested assistance is very high, it has declined somewhat over the last few years (Carvajal), which lends credence to the contention that means-tested assistance programs are designed primarily to sustain the poor, not to pull them out of poverty (Bracey). Hispanic pockets over represented in receiving means-tested assistance include individuals living in households with children under 18 years of age (60.2 percent), in families headed by a woman with no spouse present (67.1 percent), and, as one might expect, persons living below poverty level (78.9 percent).

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5. Means-tested assistance includes cash benefits received from aid to families with dependent children, general assistance, supplemental security income, and means-tested veterans compensation of pensions. It also includes Medicaid benefits, food stamps, subsidies from free or reduced-price school lunches, and rent subsidies.

## 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Hispanics already have become the largest single minority group in the United States and will continue to expand rapidly in the foreseeable future because of high birth rates and immigration, benefiting considerably from a 1965 change in immigration law that gives priority to relatives of persons living in the U.S. The chronic economic and political instability which has characterized most of Latin America and the Caribbean in the last few years, as the Administration seems increasingly preoccupied with the Middle East and Asia at the expense of the Western Hemisphere, are likely to accelerate the immigration flow.

Hispanics' socioeconomic indicators put them at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the rest of the population. At the turn of the century, Hispanics generally show higher unemployment rates, an adverse occupational structure, less household income, a higher poverty incidence, insufficient and deficient formal schooling at all levels, less fluency in English, less propensity to own the dwelling in which they live, less likelihood of being covered by health insurance, and a greater index of receiving means-tested assistance compared to Non-Hispanic Whites and Asian Americans, and levels comparable to those of African Americans. The key question which confronts academicians and policymakers is: Can the United States absorb adequately this large and growing segment or are Hispanics destined to become a permanently disfranchised, aggrieved, and volatile minority?

Any attempt to answer this question is complicated by the fact that Hispanics hardly exhibit a monolithic structure. Not only are there substantial cultural and historical differences among subgroups and nationalities which concentrate in different parts of the country, but, within each subgroup, one finds families who have lived in the U.S. for generations and families who have just arrived; individuals who struggle to read and write, in any language, as well as college graduates; workers who hold professional and managerial positions and those who hold blue-collar or service jobs, or no job at all; high-income earners and welfare recipients alike. There is a profusion of variations (Moore). In spite of some evidence which points to third-generation Hispanics performing less favorably in relation to first- and second-generation (Padilla and Jordan), the experience of the Hispanic population can be characterized as a revolving door leading to an escalating platform. As new immigrants' level of acculturation—not necessarily assimilation—increases and they acquire essential skills to cope with, and prosper, in their new place of residence, their economic and social position is likely to improve; that is, they move upwards (Shaull and Gramann). This process, however, may be slow and painful. For example, Brischetto points to a striking contrast in the educational background of U.S. born and immigrants: Two-thirds of Mexican immigrants are not high school graduates, whereas almost three out of four Mexican Americans born in the United States have high school diplomas. Thus, even if upward mobility is the rule rather than the exception, and this assumption seems, in the best of the cases, blurry (Erlach), the steady Hispanic immigration flow which is projected over the next few decades will exert a continuously depressing effect on the major socioeconomic indicators of this ethnic group.

The consequences of this process transcend the material well-being measured by the socioeconomic indicators, as they touch on the relationship that apparently exists between ethnic identity and the psychological functioning of individuals. When young Hispanics internalize the negative societal stereotypes of their ethnic group portrayed by the media and supported by

statistics, they experience low levels of self-esteem and self-confidence, and they may encounter difficulty not only escalating the socioeconomic ladder, but also finding meaning in their lives (Dukes and Martinez). The scarcity of role models in positions of power and authority—in school, at work, in politics, and so on—may contribute further to the formation of a feeling of collective frustration. Ultimately, fatalism and apathy may eclipse individual drive and the influence of social capital, making progress even harder to attain.

Is there light at the end of the tunnel? The challenges faced by Hispanics are increasingly viewed by non-Hispanics as a collective problem, a predicament which affects everybody. This perception is likely to brew prejudice, conflict, and community polarization. In fact, there seems to be a significant relationship in certain states between opinions and attitudes of Non-Hispanic Whites and the proportion of Hispanics residing in their county (Hood and Morris). Along these lines Stein et al point out that Non-Hispanic Whites living in California, a state with substantial concentration of Hispanics, exhibit significantly more negative attitudes toward Hispanics than residents of other states. If this is the prevalent trend of the future, solving “the Hispanic problem” is not only an elusive goal in the interest of an ethnic group, but an essential condition for the perpetuity of society.

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### APPENDIX

#### POPULATION IN U.S. CITIES WITH 250,000 OR MORE INHABITANTS AND AT LEAST 15 PERCENT HISPANIC POPULATION AND COMPOSITION BY HISPANIC SUBGROUP

City and State	Population (thousand)	Hispanic Composition (percent)				
		All Hispanics	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Other
Albuquerque, NM	448.6	39.9	15.2	0.4	0.4	23.9
Anaheim, CA	328.0	46.8	38.4	0.4	0.3	7.7
Arlington, TX	333.0	18.3	14.1	0.6	0.1	3.5
Aurora, CO	276.4	19.8	13.8	0.6	0.1	5.3
Austin, TX	656.6	30.5	23.4	0.4	0.2	6.5
Chicago, IL	2,896.0	26.0	18.3	3.9	0.3	3.5
Corpus Christi, TX	277.5	54.3	35.3	0.3	0.1	18.6
Dallas, TX	1,188.6	35.6	29.5	0.2	0.2	5.7
Denver, CO	554.6	31.7	21.8	0.3	0.1	9.5
El Paso, TX	563.7	76.6	63.8	0.6	0.1	12.1
Fort Worth, TX	534.7	29.8	24.8	0.4	0.1	4.5
Fresno, CA	427.7	39.9	33.8	0.3	0.1	5.7
Houston, TX	1,953.6	37.4	27.0	0.3	0.3	9.8
Las Vegas, NV	478.4	23.6	17.5	0.6	0.7	4.8
Long Beach, CA	461.5	35.8	27.6	0.5	0.2	7.5
Los Angeles, CA	3,694.8	46.5	29.5	0.4	0.3	16.3
Mesa, AZ	396.4	19.7	16.0	0.4	0.1	3.2
Miami, FL	362.5	65.8	1.0	2.8	34.2	27.8
New York, NY	8,008.3	27.0	2.3	9.9	0.5	14.3
Newark, NJ	273.5	29.5	0.8	14.5	1.1	13.1
Oakland, CA	399.5	21.9	16.3	0.6	0.1	4.9
Phoenix, AZ	1,321.0	34.1	28.4	0.4	0.2	5.1
Riverside, CA	255.2	38.1	31.0	0.6	0.2	6.3
Sacramento, CA	407.0	21.6	17.4	0.5	0.1	3.6

San Antonio, TX	1,144.6	58.7	41.4	0.7	0.1	16.5
San Diego, CA	1,223.4	25.4	21.2	0.5	0.1	3.6
San Jose, CA	894.9	30.2	24.7	0.5	0.1	4.9
Santa Ana, CA	338.0	76.1	65.9	0.2	0.2	9.8
Tampa, FL	303.4	19.3	2.1	5.8	4.8	6.6
Tucson, AZ	486.7	35.7	29.9	0.4	0.1	5.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *2000 Census of Population and Housing, Profiles of General Demographic Characteristics*