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## U.S. Demographics: The Hispanic Boom

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**United States Program**

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Protesters march by the U.S. Capitol during a rally in support of overhauling immigration laws, March 2010.

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## Ce qu'il faut retenir

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Le recensement de 2010 a confirmé que les Latinos formaient désormais la minorité ethnique la plus importante et la plus dynamique des Etats-Unis. Ce groupe est en réalité hétérogène, comme le suggère l'existence de plusieurs appellations concurrentes: « Hispaniques », « Latinos », voire « Chicanos ».

Plusieurs indicateurs laissent à penser que cette minorité commence à se transformer, passant du statut de minorité exploitée à celui de groupe reconnu et influent.

Les Latinos restent globalement sous-représentés, à la fois en nombre d'électeurs et en nombre d'élus. Les politiques les considèrent pourtant de plus en plus comme un groupe capable de faire basculer les élections. Les Latinos ont une forte préférence pour les démocrates (65 % en 2010) et partagent les priorités du reste des Américains : emploi, assurance santé et éducation. Les choses évoluent pourtant : il existe déjà des poches républicaines dans cette minorité, qu'il s'agisse des Cubains de Floride ou des catholiques conservateurs.

Souffrant de pauvreté et de chômage dans des proportions supérieures à la moyenne, les Hispaniques sont souvent dénués d'assurance-santé et de formation supérieure. Ces facteurs accroissent la criminalité dans les quartiers hispaniques et limitent l'ascension sociale. Cependant, l'entrepreneuriat hispanique est en forte hausse et le pouvoir d'achat du groupe dans son ensemble est considérable.

Enfin, bien que la communauté latino fasse toujours l'objet de stéréotypes négatifs dans les médias, sa culture est de plus en plus reconnue aux États-Unis, comme le démontre le succès des nombreux chanteurs et acteurs d'origine latino. Aujourd'hui, les immigrants de deuxième et troisième génération s'intègrent sans problème.

## Executive Summary

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The 2010 census confirmed that the Hispanic population of the United States has become the largest and fastest growing minority group in the country. It is also the most diverse one, as the debate over the labels “Hispanic”, “Latino” or even “Chicano” suggests.

A number of findings may indicate that this group is slowly morphing from a poor and down-trodden minority into one of the nation’s most dynamic groups:

Latinos continue to be underrepresented both as voters and as candidates, but politicians are increasingly paying heed to their potential to sway elections. Latinos tend to prefer the Democrats (65% in 2010) and they share the same priorities as most other Americans, i.e. jobs, healthcare, and education. Allegiances may be changing, however, and some sub-groups, such as Florida-based Cubans or Catholic-inspired conservatives, already vote for the Republicans.

Hispanics suffer from disproportionately high rates of poverty and joblessness, with many also lacking healthcare and failing to complete a high school education. These problems increase the incidence of crime within Hispanic communities and limit upward social mobility. Nevertheless, they are also rising to prominence in entrepreneurship and as a reliable consumer base.

Finally, in spite of enduring negative stereotyping by the media, Latinos are engaging in cultural exchange in various regions of the United States and gaining visibility in mainstream society. Latino celebrities display this most prominently, but second and third generation residents are also integrating effectively.

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# Who Are the Hispanics?

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## *The 2010 Census*

Since 2003, Hispanics or Latinos have been estimated to be the fastest growing and largest minority group in the United States by the U.S. Census Bureau<sup>1</sup>. The recently released 2010 Census data confirms this: Hispanics accounted for more than 50% of population growth in the United States from 2000 to 2010, and now represent over 16% of the total population with 50.5 million people<sup>2</sup>. The most recent population projections indicate that by 2050, the Latino population will total roughly 132.8 million people, or 30% of the total U.S. population<sup>3</sup>.

The United States Census is a nationwide survey mandated by the U.S. Constitution to enumerate the population every 10 years and accordingly allocate congressional seats, electoral votes, and government program funding. Three major trends have been identified in the 2010 Census: the United States population is 1) aging, 2) growing, and 3) becoming more diverse<sup>4</sup>. Hispanics largely account for the latter two of these three. As they rise to prominence, so too does the need to understand who they are and how they fit into the tapestry of the U.S. demographics.

Indeed, Latinos hold a unique place in the American landscape as a population both unified and heterogeneous: present in many regions of the United States, they consist of immigrants and natives, business owners and the impoverished, politicians and the disenfranchised, members of many races and religions, celebrities and criminals. Analysis must accompany the continuous growth of the Latino population in the United States.

## ***“Hispanic” or “Latino”?***

The term “Hispanic” first appeared officially in the 1970 Census, and the word “Latino” developed after as a grassroots, progressive

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<sup>1</sup> El Nasser, Haya. 39 Million make Hispanics largest U.S. minority group (USA Today 2003) 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ennis, Sharon R., Merarys Ríos-Vargas, and Nora G. Albert. The Hispanic Population: 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011) 2.

<sup>3</sup> 20 FAQs about Hispanics (National Council of La Raza, 2010) 1.

<sup>4</sup> Heisler, Elayne J., and Laura B. Shrestha. The Changing Demographic Profile of the United States (Congressional Research Service, 2011) 2.

alternative<sup>5</sup>. Historically, “Latino” has seen more use in the Western United States and “Hispanic” in the Eastern United States, and neither is common outside of it. The term “Latino” refers to “Latin” or “Latin America”, a term coined in 19<sup>th</sup> century France to designate Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries in the Americas as well as Napoleon III’s Second Mexican Empire -but not French-speaking territories to the North: Québec and Louisiana were never part of “Amérique latine”. Today, the “Latino” concept may be more relevant in the United States than in Latin America. NYU Professor Marcelo Suárez-Orozco and Boston College Professor Mariela Páez write,

*The very term Latino has meaning only in reference to the U.S. experience, Outside of the United States, we don’t speak of Latinos; we speak of Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and so forth. Latinos are made in the USA<sup>6</sup>.*

Even within the United States, the merits of both terms continue to be debated extensively. Both phrases refer to an ethnicity rather than a race, a significant but often misunderstood distinction. Race defines geographic origin of ancestry and genetic similarity, while ethnicity refers to common cultural heritage. The term Hispanic was created to describe one such common heritage based on a language: Spanish. However, who falls under the “Hispanic” umbrella is also a matter of debate.

The Census Bureau’s “person of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin” is defined in the 2010 Census as “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.”<sup>7</sup> To make use of the Census data, “Hispanic” and “Latino” will be used synonymously hereafter in accordance with the Census definition. Nevertheless, it is important to qualify that this definition is not necessarily prevailing or popular.

In particular, it includes people some Latino scholars would prefer to exclude due to language or geography. Brazilians, for example, who speak Portuguese and not Spanish, qualify as Hispanic on the Census because of their South American origin. Paradoxically, Spaniards also qualify as Latino on the Census for the opposite reason—despite being European they speak Spanish. This contradiction is troubling even without looking into more complicated cases such as Filipinos.

The danger of both terms, “Hispanic” and “Latino”, is that they may homogenize the varied experiences of their elements, members of different classes, races, languages, national origins, genders, and religions. Professor Emerita of the University of Colorado Martha Giménez describes this challenge well when she writes,

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5 Oboler, Suzanne. *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States* (University of Minnesota, 1995) vii-viii.

<sup>6</sup> Suárez-Orozco, Marcelo M., and Mariela Páez. *Latinos: Remaking America*. (University of California, 2009) 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ennis, *et al. Op. cit.*, 2.

*The problem facing social scientists and public health specialists in trying to make sense of the data collected by federal, state, and other agencies is a problem not only of comparability but of meaning... The heterogeneity of national origin groups, in turn, undermines generalizations about the entire group*<sup>8</sup>.

In a prescriptive policy context, this can be especially problematic. As Cafferty and McCready expounded in *Hispanics in the United States* in 1985, “policies are created for Hispanics which help some and harm others because there are, in one sense, no generic Hispanics.”<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, across the map, enclaves of Latinos of different national origins thrive: Mexican and Central Americans in the Southwest, Cuban Americans in Florida, and Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in New York, among other groups<sup>10</sup>. For many individuals within these groups, their identity is shaped by their national origin or some other factor; it is possible that they rarely call themselves “Latino” or “Hispanic”. But there are, in turn, those who do describe themselves as such—and the binary yes-or-no choice of Hispanic origin on the Census reinforces this.

In fact, one challenge to tabulation of Hispanics by the Census Bureau has been misinterpretation of “Hispanic” as a race rather than an ethnicity by the Hispanics themselves. In the 2000 Census, 42% of those describing themselves as ethnic Hispanics in a first set of questions then reported “Some other race” when asked for their race, most often writing “Hispanic” or “Latino” in that box<sup>11</sup>. The presumption by some Latinos was that their race was not white or black or Asian, but was itself Hispanic or Latino.

To curtail this in 2010, the questionnaire form clearly states that Hispanic origins are not races. In the 2010 Census, 53% of Hispanics chose white as their race and fewer (36.7%) were “Some other race”<sup>12</sup>. But the results of the 2000 Census are revealing about how Latinos self-identify in terms of ethnicity and race and may also speak to historical conceptions of race and ethnicity in the United States. They suggest the Latino ethnicity has adopted racial characteristics, a process which may be in part internally motivated and more generally externally imposed.

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<sup>8</sup> Oboler. *Op. cit.*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ennis, *et al. Op. cit.*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> The choice of races offered by the 2000 and 2010 census was: white, black, American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander and “Some Other Race”. Cassidy, Rachel C., and Elizabeth M. Grieco. Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001) 10.

<sup>12</sup> Ennis, *et al. Op. cit.*, 14.

## Historical overview

There is, in a way, a great public amnesia about the history of Hispanics in the Americas and in the United States. Texts in U.S. schools are only starting to recount the tales of Spanish conquistadors and explorers in the South, like Hernán Cortes who toppled the Aztec Empire and pushed into California, or Cabeza de Vaca, who met numerous indigenous tribes after being shipwrecked in the Gulf of Mexico. Much like the Native Americans, early Hispanic settlers were largely ignored or mistreated by later pioneers of Anglo-Saxon descent. Only now—with rapid Latino population growth—is the reality setting in that a continuous Hispanic presence has existed in the modern territories of the United States since its creation.

The racial and ethnic diversity of the United States has been a social issue since before its independence. Racism, discrimination, and ethnocentrism persisted legally well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and remain in unsanctioned forms. Social constructs like the “one drop rule” show how skin color was one, but not the only factor in this prejudice. Latinos have in instances been labeled “brown”, and made subject to the same biases as other “colored people” of the United States. But even those Latinos who are racially white have faced harassment over characteristics as petty as Spanish surnames. Although divisive for America on the whole, such instances may have fostered a unifying Latino experience.

Cultural reforms spawned as responses to negative treatment. The 1960s civil rights movements in the United States are good examples of this, and Hispanics participated in their own “Chicano Movement” during this period (“Chicano” refers to all things Mexican, but the movement included all Latinos). Equality and Latino empowerment were core issues: improving worker’s rights, eliminating poll taxes, and addressing the struggle of the urban youth through better education. It was in this movement that Latino leaders like Mexican-American César Chávez emerged, famously spoke the words “Sí, se puede” (literally: “yes, it can be done”), and participated in La Raza Unida political party. The use of *la raza*, which translates to the race or the people, is perhaps most telling about the positive effect of these movements on Hispanic unity.

## Population Overview

For these historical reasons, the existence of an ethnic Latino identity, imposed or otherwise, is just as real as Latino diversity. On top of this, government and media portrayals have reinforced this ethnic union by rapidly promulgating the terms Hispanic and Latino. This is especially significant in the case of government, where policy can be formed with ethnic parameters; for example, the use of Census data on ethnicity in shaping access to better housing, political power, socioeconomic and educational resources is widely acknowledged.

Therefore, with consideration of the Latino population's vast diversity all the while, broader characterizations and facts can be used to chronicle the emergence (or resurgence) of the ethnicity over the past decade and forecast consequences for the United States. The 2010 Census Hispanic population report provides a valuable starting point for this:

The surge of Hispanic Americans dominates in geographic pockets of the Southwest where they are often in the majority, but is evident throughout the entire United States. As a result, over 70% of Latinos now live in the South or West of the United States and more than 50% live in just three states: California, Texas, and Florida<sup>13</sup>. This concentration of growth regionally has developed local hybrid cultures, influenced regional economies, and will shape political redistricting and representation both at the state and the federal levels.

Additionally, the most recent population growth is composed of mostly American-born Hispanics, not immigrants, with new Latinos much younger on average than their non-Hispanic white and black counterparts<sup>14</sup>. This means many Hispanics have yet to enter the labor force or become voters, and that schools and universities will be catering to new, sometimes bilingual students. It also raises the possibility of a rift developing between second and first generation Latinos as the American-born seize chances for social mobility through education and employment.

Finally, the United States may not actually house exactly 16% Hispanics. Although the Census wants to estimate the real population and does not check for legality, many illegal immigrants of Hispanic origin do not report for fear of deportation, meaning the total number of Hispanics may be higher than reported. A corollary is that legal Hispanics may account for less than 16% of the population, because some illegal immigrants do choose to report. The dynamic between illegal immigrant Hispanics and legal Hispanic residents deserves close observation as the number of American-born Hispanics increases. However, the perception that Hispanic voters are preoccupied with immigration policy is skewed; the biggest issues for them -who already are by definition U.S. citizens- are actually education, jobs, and healthcare<sup>15</sup>.

These concerns are largely shared by other Americans, but Latinos seem to face them with disproportionate political, economic, and social hardships. While presenting these demographic realities, this paper will review emerging evidence that provides hope for progress.

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<sup>13</sup> Ennis, *et al. Op. cit.*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Gandel, Stephen. What Does the 2010 Census say about America? (Time Magazine, 2011) 1.

<sup>15</sup> Lopez, Mark Hugo. Latinos and the 2010 Elections: Strong Support for Democrats; Weak Voter Motivation (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010) 2.

# Political Behavior and Influence of the Latinos

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## *Party Preferences and Reapportionment*

According to a Pew Hispanic Center study, a sizeable majority of registered Hispanic voters—65%—prefer the Democratic Party<sup>16</sup>. It would seem natural that the Hispanic population is a boon for Democratic candidates for election, but the analysis is not quite this simple.

It is true that different states pursue different policies, so regional growth of the Hispanic population does influence policy directly at local scales. But federally, Hispanic population gains that service Democratic candidates are offset in part by reapportionment of House seats following the 2010 Census—a reapportionment driven mostly by Hispanic growth. After every Census, the 435 seats in the House of Representatives are redistributed among the states proportionally by population. Following the 2010 Census, Texas will gain 4 House seats, Florida will gain 2, and Arizona, Nevada, South Carolina, Utah, Washington, and Georgia will each gain 1. This comes at the cost of 2 seats each in Ohio and New York, and 1 each in Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. After reapportionment comes redistricting.

The redistricting process, in which state governments break up their state into new congressional districts according to their allocated number of representatives, is vulnerable to political bias from state leaders. Gerrymandering, or creating partisan, incumbent-protected districts by manipulating geographic boundaries, can marginalize growing voting blocs by *packing* them into areas they already control or *cracking* their influence across many districts. In the short term, Hispanics may join a growing minority of Democratic voters in largely Republican dominated states, effectively minimizing the full impact of their ballots. On the other hand, potential exists for the gerrymandering of majority-minority or plurality-minority districts, which can usually lead to the election of an official with minority interests and increase the diversity of Congress.

Along with reapportionment of House seats comes reapportionment of the Electoral College, the people who actually vote for President—a body equal in size to number of House and Senate members of a particular state. In all states, voters indirectly elect the President with their popular vote used to determine the composition

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<sup>16</sup> Lopez. *Op. cit.*, 1.

of the Electoral College. A winner-take-all system is employed in 48 states, meaning whichever candidate wins a state wins votes equal to the size of the Electoral College there.

Because of the indirect election of the President and the winner-take-all system, Hispanic population growth may actually favor the Republican candidate in the 2012 presidential election despite Hispanic voter's preference for the Democratic Party. Although some of the reapportioned states tend to fluctuate, Hispanics will have a difficult time advancing a Democratic platform in Republican strongholds like Texas and Utah, and the Democratic strongholds like New York and Massachusetts will now offer fewer electoral votes. Swing states like Ohio, Nevada, and Florida—which have gone to each major party twice in the past four presidential elections—are where Hispanic influence could matter most.

President Barack Obama effectively engaged the Latino population in 2008, and Hispanic voters will be even more pivotal in 2012. In 2008 he won the battleground states of Ohio, Nevada, Virginia, North Carolina, and Indiana, and the Hispanic population has increased by at least 60% in each of these states<sup>17</sup>. One of his top strategists, David Axelrod, identifies the minority vote as a key to the coming election<sup>18</sup>, yet the exact influence the Latino population cannot be known until after, and even then the role of Hispanic population growth and reapportionment will be delicate to assess.

Overall, the evolution of the political landscape alongside the Hispanic population is quite complex and at times may appear paradoxical. It seems Hispanic voters favor Democrats and will be vital in swing states, but may nevertheless help Republicans in the short term due to reapportionment. At the same time, the group is heterogeneous and these are only overarching generalizations.

In 2010, there were factions of Republican Hispanic voters, particularly among those who had thought about the election a lot (31%) or were “English-dominant”, i.e. speaking primarily English at home (30%). Additionally, support for Democrats in 2010 was higher among immigrant Hispanic voters (73%) than native ones (61%)<sup>19</sup>. This leaves open a distinct possibility that the increasingly American-born, English-dominant Hispanic population could shift its support to Republican candidates not far in the future, despite its Democratic lean today.

In fact, Republican Hispanics are emerging as elected leaders such as governors and senators in several states. In 2010, three Republican Hispanic candidates won top statewide offices: Republican Susana Martinez became governor of New Mexico, Republican

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<sup>17</sup> Curry, Tom. Latino population boom will have 2012 election echoes (MSNBC, 2011) 1.

<sup>18</sup> Obama adviser pledges outreach to minority voters (Associated Press, 2011) 1.

<sup>19</sup> Lopez. *Op. cit.*, 1.

Brian Sandoval became governor of Nevada, and Republican Marco Rubio won a Senate seat in Florida. No data on the Latino vote is available for New Mexico where exit polls were not held, and Sandoval lost the Hispanic vote in Nevada with only 33%, but at least one of these candidates drew strong Hispanic support—Rubio, who captured 55% of the Latino vote in Florida<sup>20</sup>. There are several ways to explain this.

The first is that Rubio's win among Hispanics was simply a manifestation of the trends described above (wherein increasingly native, English-dominant candidates vote Republican). The second is that the specifics of the election, a three-way-bid between the incumbent Republican governor running as an independent, the Democratic candidate, and Republican nominee Rubio led to his overall victory and victory among Hispanics. The third is that Rubio was the best qualified or most articulate candidate or that voters liked him for some other reason. These may all have been factors. However, a fourth explanation, and perhaps the most pertinent, is that he won amongst a primarily Cuban population.

The Cuban American community has long fostered anti-communist, pro-capitalist sentiments due to their unique history of fleeing the communist regime of Fidel Castro. They have supported primarily the Republican Party since the Bay of Pigs crisis and after outreach by Ronald Reagan, only offering Obama 35% of their vote in 2008<sup>21</sup>. Thus, as with any large and diverse group, caution is important in suggesting uniform voting behavior for Hispanics.

## ***Identity Politics***

The type of identity politics prominent in discussion of American minority voters is ambiguous when it comes to Hispanics because of their heterogeneous nature. Even so, ethnic and racial interest groups have played a significant role for the Latino population. They often echo the causes and rhetoric of the Chicano Movement of the 1960s, and some groups formed during this period still operate. Strong lobbies and advocacy groups exist both for the larger Latino community and for subgroups to influence domestic and foreign policy<sup>22</sup>.

Well-known examples include the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the Southwest Voter Registration

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<sup>20</sup> Lopez, Mark Hugo. The Latino Vote in the 2010 Elections (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010) i.

<sup>21</sup> Miller, Carlos. Why Cuban Americans Vote Republican (Hispanic News, 2010) 1-2.

<sup>22</sup> Haney, Patrick J. and Walt Vanderbush. The Role of Ethnic Interest Groups in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Case of the Cuban American National Foundation (International Studies Quarterly, 1999) 346-350.

Education Project (SVREP), and the National Council of La Raza (NCLR). All four serve a variety of functions, but share the common goals of fighting discrimination, ensuring civil rights, and promoting opportunities for Latinos. Strategists and politicians certainly deal with and pander to these and similar groups hoping to rally support. However, Latino concerns are not so different from other Americans in similar socioeconomic groups; playing the ethnicity card can only get office seekers so far.

Furthermore, the trend towards the umbrella terms Hispanic and Latino appears to be dissipating among younger members of the ethnicity, reinforcing their heterogeneity. Asked which term they generally use to *first* describe themselves, young Latinos show a strong preference for their family's country of origin (52%), then American (24%), and finally Hispanic or Latino (20%)<sup>23</sup>.

However, it seems likely that as the Hispanic population increases, those depending on their votes—elected politicians—will increasingly pay heed to their needs and the Hispanic political voice will in part be formed as a natural response to their rising voting power. However, the persons chosen by presidential appointment, like Chairman of the Federal Reserve or Supreme Court Justice, will obviously be selected with increased scrutiny over their ability to both serve in their appointed capacity and act as a leader for all Americans.

The prolonged confirmation process of President Barack Obama's Supreme Court appointee Sonia Sotomayor demonstrated this and highlights that support will not necessarily fall along ethnic lines. A poll before her confirmation showed Sotomayor's approval rating at 55% among all Americans, 66% among Jewish Americans, 85% among African Americans, and 58% among Hispanic Americans<sup>24</sup>. Not only was her approval rating only 3 percentage points higher among Latinos than all Americans, 25% of Latinos also said that she was more liberal than they would like; in the same survey, Hispanics were more prone than any other group—whites, blacks, Evangelicals, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Women, Men, even John McCain presidential supporters—to say that they approved of the way Republicans in Congress were handling their jobs<sup>25</sup>.

Nevertheless, Sotomayor was confirmed and is now the first Hispanic Supreme Court Justice of the United States. Her appointment by President Obama has been read as a federal acknowledgment of growing Latino presence.

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<sup>23</sup> Between Two Worlds: How Young Latinos Come of Age in America (Pew Hispanic Center: 2009) 7.

<sup>24</sup> Stein, Sam. Sotomayor Choice Widely Popular, But A Quarter of Hispanics Disapprove (Huffington Post: 2009) 1.

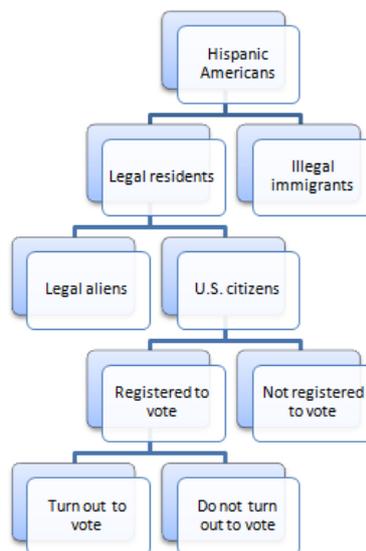
<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

## Immigration, Representation, and Turnout

In the legislative branch of government, Latinos account for a proportion of lawmakers much smaller than their 16% of the population. Only 24 out of 435 voting members of the House of Representatives are Hispanic, or 5.5%. Only 2 out of 100 Senators are Hispanic. Both of these are far lower than the percent of the population that is Hispanic, but somewhat comparable to the percent of Hispanic voters in the 2010 Midterms, 6.9%<sup>26</sup>. Around 60% of these members of Congress were elected in plurality or majority Hispanic districts. The number of Hispanic representatives can be expected to increase somewhat as the overall Hispanic population increases and qualified candidates emerge, but increasing the voter motivation of Hispanics given their diversity will be a greater challenge.

Not all Hispanics present in the United States vote there, for a number of different reasons. As shown in the diagram below, the minority group first divides between illegal immigrants (who do not show up on any official registration list in the country) and legal residents. Amongst the later are legal aliens and U.S. citizens. Legal aliens are foreigners who have a residence permit in the U.S. and may in rare areas participate in local ballots (around six communities within Maryland and school board elections in Illinois are the most prominent examples). U.S. citizens can vote, as long as they are registered to vote and actually turn up for the ballot. Those two last conditions are unfortunately met in limited degrees by Hispanics.

### “Which Hispanics actually vote in the U.S.?”



<sup>26</sup> Lopez, Mark Hugo. The Latino Electorate in 2010 : More Voters, More Non-Voters (Pew Hispanic Center: 2011) 4.

A Pew Hispanic Center study details the lack of motivation among Hispanic voters. Only 51% of Latinos surveyed were registered to vote in the elections of November 2010 and only 32% said they had given the election a lot of thought<sup>27</sup>. This did set a new record for Latinos: 6.6 million voted in the 2010 midterms, comprising a larger share of the electorate than in any previous midterm election<sup>28</sup>. But still, turnout is low compared to their proportion of the population and lags behind other groups.

There are indeed two separate issues—one of enfranchisement, the other of turnout of voters—and Latinos seem to be limited by both. There are two major demographic reasons keeping the whole Latino minority from the ballots in terms of enfranchisement: much of the Hispanic population is unable to vote because of youth or non-citizenship.

More than 1 in 3 Latinos are under age 18 (34.9%) and more than 1 in 5 are of voting age but lack U.S. citizenship (22.4%)<sup>29</sup>. As a result, only 42.7% of the American Latino population is registered to vote, compared to 77.7% of whites, 67.2% of blacks, and 52.8% of Asians<sup>30</sup>. This number will begin to change as young Hispanics age, but will only influence political outcomes if new voters actually vote. When non-voters were polled about not voting, the most common reason given by any racial or ethnic group was lack of time, but for Hispanics forgetting to vote was more than double the rate for any other group<sup>31</sup>. This likely reflects limited voter motivation among Hispanics, but an interesting counter exists—the rates of early voting were higher among Latinos (26.2%) than among whites (25.5%) or blacks (17.4%)<sup>32</sup>. Once again, the results appear to be ambiguous.

It is especially uncertain whether the 22.4% of adult Hispanics that are unable to vote due to nationality will decrease in number. This figure includes immigrants legal and illegal, permanent residents, and others lacking citizenship. The potential surge of voters among this population is one reason for the heavy politicization of immigration and amnesty policy. Despite being the fourth most important issue for Hispanic citizens, immigration may very well be the first issue for disenfranchised Hispanics, and the policy outcomes of immigration reform have the potential to restructure the base of Latino voters.

Comprehensive immigration reform has been introduced to the United States Congress in several forms, but has always failed to

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<sup>27</sup> Lopez, Mark Hugo. Latinos and the 2010 Elections: Strong Support for Democrats; Weak Voter Motivation (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010) 3-4.

<sup>28</sup> Lopez, Mark Hugo. The Latino Electorate in 2010 : More Voters, More Non-Voters (Pew Hispanic Center: 2011) 4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 4-5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

pass, either due to lack of cloture or votes. Progress has been stagnant in part due to partisan divides. In 2006, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid's Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act did not make it past the conference committee. In 2007, Senators John McCain and Ted Kennedy's Secure Borders, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Reform Act was never voted on because it failed to obtain cloture: those opposed to the act had the power to indefinitely filibuster, or extend debate on the issue, and those in favor of the act lacked the three-fifths majority necessary to close discussion.

The economic downturn of 2007-2010 has only helped to divert federal attention from immigration policy. Most recently, state governments in Arizona, Indiana, Utah, Alabama, and Georgia have gained notoriety for new immigration policy—typically designed to profile and crack down on illegal immigrants. Such policy has been attempted before at the federal level. Another bill, the Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, would classify illegal immigrants and all those who helped them enter or remain as U.S. felons. Not only did this fail to pass in the Senate, it also resulted in large demonstrations in Spring 2006: marches were held in Chicago, Los Angeles, Dallas, and over 100 smaller cities, with the largest including 100,000 to 500,000 protesters.

A famous bill that has been promoted since 2001 but never passed is the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. The proposal would provide conditional permanent residency to certain illegal alien students who graduate from U.S. high schools, are of good moral character, arrived in the U.S. illegally as minors, and have been in the country for at least five years prior to the bill's enactment. In 2010, the bill passed in the House of Representatives but failed to advance to the Senate floor. In 2011, it has lacked the support of key Republicans who voted for it in the past. Road blockades, student walkouts, and protests of all types have also surrounded this bill over the past decade.

A recent UCLA study estimates that between 825,000 and 2.1 million young people could benefit from the legislation and become legalized. Legalized permanent residents who went on to obtain citizenship could vote at the national level. Many of the DREAM Act beneficiaries would come from the 22.4% of Latinos who are currently disenfranchised due to lack of citizenship. Many others would be part of the 34.9% of the Latino population that is still under age 18.

In the context of a Hispanic population boom, it appears that both among voters and within the government, underrepresentation of Hispanics persists. The young Latino population will continue to unlock the power of the Latino base of voters as they age, but without immigration reform more than 1 in 5 Hispanics will still be disenfranchised at the national level. With no democratic avenue to voice their needs, the economic outcomes of these Latinos may be significantly limited.

# Hispanics in America's Economy

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## *Poverty and Finance*

Latino Americans are disproportionately poor compared to non-Hispanic white Americans. In 2009, the median Hispanic household income was \$38,039 compared to \$54,461 for non-Hispanic white households and more than 12.4 million Latinos lived in poverty (25.3%)<sup>33</sup>.

These numbers are revealing about American society and demonstrate how poverty can affect even wealthy nations. Moreover, they are not unprecedented or unrivaled: African Americans remain the only racial or ethnic group with lower median household income and higher poverty rates than Hispanics in the United States<sup>34</sup>. In 2009, the median income for African American households was \$32,584 and 25.8% of African Americans lived in poverty<sup>35</sup>.

U.S. poverty is especially dangerous because it falls along racial and ethnic lines, sensitive subjects in the United States. The poverty rates for white and Asian Americans are relatively low, 9.4% and 12.5%, respectively<sup>36</sup>. Although 18.5 million non-Hispanic whites lived in poverty in 2009—higher than the number in poverty in any other racial or ethnic group—they accounted for 42.5% of people in poverty while whites made up 64.9% of the total population<sup>37</sup>.

Moral arguments aside, poverty is an economic problem for the United States because it can contribute to considerable infrastructure costs. Within the U.S., partisan and philosophical divides exist on the nature of poverty and the best methods for reduction. Liberal thinkers often prefer public programs which require government funding, believing spending on poverty reduction or job creation can potentially pay for itself through social and economic benefits. Conservative thinkers, in contrast, often find government options unattractive because they doubt the theoretical benefits but feel certain of the drain on the government budget or taxpayers<sup>38</sup>. Ultimately, the Latino and African American poor may be left to languish while policy debates are held, particularly during periods of divided government, where policy is difficult to move forward for either party.

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<sup>33</sup> DeNavas-Walt, Carmen, Bernadette D. Proctor and Jessica C. Smith. Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) 8, 16.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Gilens, Martin. *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (University of Chicago: 1999) 60.

Another crippling statistic exists when it comes to the Hispanic community: almost 1 in 3 Latinos lacked health coverage in 2009 (32.4%)<sup>39</sup>. This number is the highest for any ethnic or racial group in the United States. Combined with poverty, lack of health care severely limits upward social mobility among the poor. Impoverished Hispanics suffer what development economists have famously coined the *triple whammy* of poverty: low income, unpredictable and irregular income streams, and lack of suitable financial instruments<sup>40</sup>. Without healthcare, irregular and unpredictable expenditures make saving to escape poverty especially difficult.

It is equally difficult to invest without suitable financial instruments or loans. In the early 1900s, a process known as *redlining* restricted access to loans for neighborhoods considered especially risky. In practice, this meant limiting options to Latino and African-American communities, who were stereotyped as inherently risky regardless of their qualifications. These practices continued well into the 1970s and lowered the average asset value of minority households by depreciating homes in redlined neighborhoods.

Today, microfinance institutions do facilitate borrowing by the poor of the United States, but sometimes engage in predatory lending. Pawn shops, check-cashing, or cash-advance stores exist in poor Latino neighborhoods, but charge higher interest rates than formal and semi-formal financing options. More than any other American ethnic group, Hispanics prefer to work with lenders who speak their own language, and may feel uncomfortable handling business transactions in English. Because of this, many Spanish-dominant Latinos have paid a premium to deal in Spanish with microfinance rather than trying to navigate formal and bureaucratic all-English channels which they find complex and intimidating. Microfinance has successfully reduced poverty in developing countries like Bangladesh, but it is no panacea. It remains difficult to borrow enough through microfinance in the U.S. to pay for long term investments such as homes.

If home ownership is seen as the gateway to the middle class in the United States, it is particularly challenging for impoverished Latinos to make it there due to limited knowledge of the lending process, low income, poor credit history, and language or cultural barriers. The types of loans obtainable by many poor Latinos often involve high risk of default or foreclosure and high interest rates. According to the National Council of La Raza, Latinos are twice as likely as non-Hispanic whites to be financed into substantial subprime mortgages.

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<sup>39</sup> DeNavas-Walt, *et al.* *Op. cit.*, 25.

<sup>40</sup> The « Triple Whammy » of Poverty (Portfolios of the Poor: 2010) 1.

## **Education, Labor, and Welfare**

Even for the majority of Hispanics (who do not live in poverty), another obstacle exists to upward mobility from within the middle class. Higher education is the gateway to the upper class, but often Hispanics are just not getting there. The Latino workforce consists of mostly unskilled and uneducated labor in large part because many Hispanics are not completing high school or higher education<sup>41</sup>. The high cost of university in the United States makes it a non-option for many Hispanic families, where children are pressured to work to help support the family. But before university, many Hispanics do not even finish high school. Some 41% of Hispanics over age 20 in the United States do not have a high school diploma, compared to 23% of similarly aged blacks and 14% of whites<sup>42</sup>. Part of this is a byproduct of immigrant Hispanics who do not finish their education after moving to the United States. The dropout rate among foreign-born Hispanics is 47% versus 20% for the U.S.-born Hispanics<sup>43</sup>. But part of this also stems from the failure of the educational system to accommodate students of diverse backgrounds and foreign-language-dominance.

Many other compounding factors exist that may cause or exacerbate these high dropout rates. A study by the Pew Hispanic Center provides details about the outlook of America's Latino youth. Despite satisfaction with life, optimism about the future, and high value placed upon education, career success, and hard work, Latino youth are more likely than other Americans to live in poverty, drop out of school, become teenage parents, or be involved with gangs<sup>44</sup>. In 2009, 26% of Hispanic females were mothers by age 19, and about 31% of Latino youth knew a friend or relative involved with a gang<sup>45</sup>. These are huge obstacles to educational attainment and resign many young Hispanics to minimum wage or unemployment.

About 26%, 16%, and 20% of workers earning exactly, less than, and slightly above the minimum wage in 2007 were Hispanic, numbers relatively high considering that in that year they represented 15% of the population<sup>46</sup>. These figures portray the reality of low income among the Hispanic community, but also suggest that policy influencing the minimum wage has a strong impact on Hispanics. Additionally, 11.9% of Hispanics were unemployed as of June 2011, and it is well known that the simplest way to create disparity in a country is to have many people with zero income<sup>47</sup>. Thus, job creation

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<sup>41</sup> Fry, Richard. Hispanics, High School Dropouts, and the GED (Pew Hispanic Center: 2010) 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Between Two Worlds. Op. cit.*, 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Orrenius, Pia M. and Madeline Zavodny. The Minimum Wage and Latino Workers (Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas: 2007) 7.

<sup>47</sup> Employment Situation Summary (Bureau of Labor Statistics: 2011) 1.

is also a critical avenue to promoting the Hispanic community and reducing both inequality and poverty in the United States.

Joblessness is sometimes associated with ill-perceived social care in the United States, where unemployment is historically tied to moral failure—the inability to support one’s family and provide. Although data is uncertain for legal versus illegal immigrants, Hispanics do draw more in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) than other groups relative to their percent of the population; in 2008, 28% of families drawing welfare were Hispanic, 31.5% were white, and 34.2% were African American. Meanwhile, Hispanics accounted for less than 16% of the total population but 25% of the total poor in the U.S.<sup>48</sup>. Medicaid is another service from which Hispanics gain with numbers disproportionate to their percent of the total population but roughly equal to their share of the poor—in 2009 27% of Medicaid recipients were Hispanic compared to only 11% of recipients who were white<sup>49</sup>.

Hispanics’ poor records of employment, use of social welfare, and lack of education have fostered negative stereotypes for their ethnicity. However, the Hispanic population also provides substantial benefits to the United States, the first of which is consumption.

## **Consumer-base and Entrepreneurship**

According to an annual study conducted by the Selig Center for Economic Growth, Hispanic buying power has grown faster than the buying power of the overall population and faster than any other group over the past 20 years, for a total increase of over 300%<sup>50</sup>. In 2010, Hispanics were estimated to exercise a total of over 1 trillion in buying power, a number expected to grow to 1.5 trillion by 2015 given favorable demographics and population momentum<sup>51</sup>. By 2007, the Hispanic consumer market in the United States was as big as or bigger than the GDP of Canada and Mexico<sup>52</sup>. Advertisers spent more than \$3.3 billion in the United States to market products to Hispanics in 2005, a nearly 7 percent increase from 2004, according to Hispanicbusiness.com<sup>53</sup>.

One of the negative assumptions about Latino illegal immigrants is that they take jobs but do not pay taxes, and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) does not have an estimate of how

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<sup>48</sup> Percent Distribution of TANF by Ethnicity/Race (Office of Family Assistance: 2008) 1.

<sup>49</sup> Medicaid’s Role for Hispanic Americans (The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation: 2011) 1.

<sup>50</sup> Humphreys, Jeffrey M. The Multicultural Economy 2009 (Selig Center for Economic Growth: 2010) 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>52</sup> King, Kate. Hispanic entrepreneurship, buying power on the rise (CNN: 2007) 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

many illegal immigrants pay income tax. But from state to state, sales taxes on consumption are paid by both legal and illegal Hispanic residents. Although figures are not available for incidence of tax by ethnicity, for legal Hispanic residents with no way to escape the IRS, it seems safe to assume a tax contribution proportional to income levels and population size. Thus, both the contributions by illegal and legal Hispanics help maintain the solvency of U.S. entitlement programs like Social Security, programs from which illegal immigrants will never be able to collect<sup>54</sup>.

Additionally, the Hispanic population of the United States is not just consuming and paying taxes—they are working as well. In 2006, a report issued by the U.S. Census Bureau calculated the growth of Hispanic-owned businesses from 1997-2002 at 31%, three times the national average for that period<sup>55</sup>. The bureau identified nearly 1.6 million Hispanic-owned businesses, producing nearly \$222 billion in revenue in 2002<sup>56</sup>. Other groups expanded on this work by demonstrating another impressive figure: the percent of those Hispanic business owners that were female approached 40%, higher than among all business owners<sup>57</sup>. From 2002-2007, Hispanic business ownership grew by another 44%, compared to 15% growth among non-Hispanic firms, and generated revenue of \$345.2 billion, up 55.5% from 2002<sup>58</sup>. This spirit of entrepreneurship aligns well with American values and the idea that hard work reaps dividends enabling success.

And even those Hispanics who cannot start their own business are working hard in other industries as well. In 2010, 19% of Latinos worked in management or professional occupations, 26% worked in service occupations, 21% worked in sales and office jobs, 16% worked in natural resources, construction, and maintenance jobs, and 17% worked in production, transportation, and material-moving occupations<sup>59</sup>. Among these, concentrations of Latinos are heaviest in hospitality and construction, feeding into popular (but apparently not entirely unfounded) portrayals of Latino construction workers and domestic servants<sup>60</sup>. In 2010, 65% of Hispanic adults were working or actively searching for a job, a percentage approximately equal to the participation rate for the total U.S. population<sup>61</sup>.

Thus, the portrait of Latinos in the economy of the United States is mixed. While they make significant contributions consuming, paying taxes, pioneering new businesses and working when they can, they also include disproportionate numbers of poor and jobless, who

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<sup>54</sup> Loller, Travis. Many illegal immigrants pay up at tax time (USA Today: 2008) 1.

<sup>55</sup> King, *Op. cit.*, 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>58</sup> 20 FAQs about Hispanics *Op. cit.*, 3.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>60</sup> Humphreys, *Op. cit.*, 3.

<sup>61</sup> 20 FAQs about Hispanics *Op. cit.*, 3.

utilize welfare services and have low rates of educational attainment. Improving financial instruments, creating stable jobs and setting up programs to keep students in high-school or college could potentially mitigate some of these economic problems facing the Latino community and dispel harmful social misconceptions about Hispanics.

# Social Conflict, Cultural Values

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## *Stereotypes and Violence*

Negative stereotypes of Hispanics have been perpetuated in part by the reality of their socioeconomic situations, but also by the biases of media coverage. In 2003, Latino-related stories accounted for less than 1% of all network newscasts, even though Latinos made up 13% of the population, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists reported<sup>62</sup>.

But lack of coverage is not the only problem, the same study shows: so is negative coverage. Crime, terrorism, poverty, and welfare accounted for 66% of all Latino network stories in 2001<sup>63</sup>. The arrest of suspected terrorist José Padilla, a Muslim convert involved with Al-Qaeda, occupied a central role in the coverage of Latinos in 2002, with 21 network stories or 18% of all stories that aired on Latinos<sup>64</sup>. The number of Latino-related crime and youth gang stories in 2002 was grossly excessive when compared to statistics on crimes involving Latinos. Last but not least, illegal immigration continues to be an important focus of network news coverage of Latinos<sup>65</sup>.

Contributing to this negative lens, the dangers of racial and ethnic conflict are frequently declared alongside fears of inadequate social cohesion. Minority groups are often pit against one another, especially as jobs become increasingly scarce. The success of Hispanics is often masqueraded as the failure of African Americans by single-issue pundits focused on racial and ethnic identity. The persistence of these social critics raises skepticism and this creates the illusion that different groups are incompatible, competing for precious jobs, benefits, educational resources, and welfare. But the general truth is that Hispanics and African Americans get along. A study shows that 70% of blacks believe blacks and Hispanics get along pretty well or better and 57% of Hispanics feel the same way<sup>66</sup>. The significant discrepancy emerges from the white respondents, of whom only 39% believed blacks and Hispanics got along pretty well or better<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> Alverio, Diane and Serafín Méndez-Méndez. Network Brownout 2003: The Portrayal of Latinos in Network Television News, 2002 (National Association of Hispanic Journalists: 2003). 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Morin, Richard. Do Blacks and Hispanics Get Along? (Pew Research Center: 2008) 1.

<sup>67</sup> Morin, Richard. Do Blacks and Hispanics Get Along? (Pew Research Center: 2008) 1.

Interethnic or interracial conflicts are certainly not unheard of in American society. Today, the national dialogue of the United States is far removed from events like the Los Angeles riots of 1992 following the police beating of black motorist Rodney King. But if another similar event happened now, the response might be the same as in 1992. Gang violence continues among youth and gangs tend to be racially or ethnically homogeneous. These gangs are traps for young Latinos searching for belonging that often lead to lives of crime and lend support to negative stereotypes of the ethnicity.

How to prevent minorities from turning to gangs, crime, and other harmful outlets is a highly polarized sociological issue in the United States. Analysts frequently debate the validity of positive discrimination/affirmative action, and likewise argue over what constitutes prejudice and whether Americans live in a post-racial society. With the election of President Barack Obama in particular, a new wave of commentary emerged on multiculturalism within America, and whether social equality has truly been achieved with the advent of its first African American, multiracial president.

When surveyed about discrimination in four areas (applying for a job, buying a house or renting an apartment, applying to college, and shopping or dining out) Hispanics and whites were significantly less likely than blacks to notice discrimination in one or more areas; 81% of African Americans believed they faced discrimination in at least one area compared to 55% of Hispanics and 36% of whites<sup>68</sup>.

Furthermore, Hispanics do not share in the history of slavery and oppression of many of their African American counterparts. In actuality, the resurgence of the American Latino population is mostly a product of the past 30 years, and new perceptions of the Latino community were formed in that (slightly) more progressive time period. Because of this, there are positive views of Latinos as well—as sources of cultural enrichment—even if those views are not necessarily shared by mainstream media.

## **Culture and Entertainment**

One of the most evident ways in which the Hispanic population of the United States has left its mark is through language. For many years, Spanish has been the most studied language in the United States (after English)<sup>69</sup>. The United States has no official language at the federal level and many states in the Southwest publish government information in both Spanish and English. On television and radio, Spanish language programming is readily available in any part of the

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>69</sup> Furman, Nelly, David Goldberg and Natalia Lusin. Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education (Modern Language Association: 2010) 1.

United States. In September 2010, Univision, the nation's largest Spanish-language network, beat out NBC, ABC, CBS, and Fox in the first week of ratings in the most desirable demographic (ages 18-49)<sup>70</sup>. That season, 40% of new U.S. TV homes were projected to be Hispanic households<sup>71</sup>. In areas like Southern California, Univision is already the most watched network. Although much of its programming caters to Hispanic audiences, it is nevertheless accessible to others—including Spanish learners—acting as a foil to the linguistic insularity of the United States.

Singers and musicians are enjoyed by audiences of all languages, and the Latin Grammy Awards are given out annually in a television event broadcast in Spanish on the English-language station CBS. Some of the most famous winners, Colombian singers Juanes and Shakira, are not U.S. Latinos but have paved the way for the success of Spanish-language pop and rock music worldwide. Others, like Daddy Yankee and Don Omar, have popularized new musical movements like *reggaeton*, which blends reggae, hip hop, and Latin styles. There are many other Hispanic American musicians that have achieved international fame, such as Jennifer Lopez, Joan Baez, Linda Ronstadt, Zack de la Rocha, Fergie, Gloria Estefan, Kat DeLuna, Selena, Ricky Martin, Marc Anthony, Carlos Santana, Christina Aguilera, Enrique Iglesias, Los Lonely Boys, Frankie J, Jerry Garcia, Robert Trujillo, and Tom Araya.

Latino actors and actresses, comedians, sports stars, newscasters, and celebrities of all types are among the Hispanic people most Americans are exposed to on a daily basis. Antonio Banderas, Cameron Diaz, Salma Hayek, Penélope Cruz, George Lopez, and Charlie Sheen are some of the most visible Hispanic figures in American films and television. It is interesting to note that some of them keep a Latino-sounding name—thus portraying the similarities and differences Latino Americans have with their compatriots—while others, probably for the sake of a less constrained career, choose a more mainstream Anglo-Saxon stage name. In a different medium, literature, Hispanic American authors such as Sandra Cisneros and Rudolfo Anaya also try to chronicle what makes the Latino American experience unique and challenging. Even in popular fiction Hispanics are making gains in visibility—the hugely successful children's show *Dora the Explorer* stars a bilingual, animated protagonist who speaks to the viewers in Spanish and English<sup>72</sup>.

Beyond language and arts, Hispanics lend an array of cultural elements to the United States and increase variety and choice, a

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<sup>70</sup> Burton, Nsenga. Univision Beats Out the Top 4 Major Networks in Ratings (The Root: 2010) 1.

<sup>71</sup> 40% of New U.S. TV Homes this Season will be Hispanic Households (Nielsen Wire: 2010) 1.

<sup>72</sup> El Nasser, *Op. cit.*, 2.

nontrivial boon for consumers. Cuisine is one of the most easily visible changes brought about by Hispanics, and is evident in regional variants like Tex-Mex. But values can also be appropriated—including the strong sense of family among Latinos, and the commitment to work ethic. Among Latino youth, 84% believed “most people who want to get ahead can make it if they are willing to work hard” and likewise 84% agreed that “relatives are more important than friends”<sup>73</sup>. The former certainly seems to mesh with the canonical idea of the American self-made individual, while the latter may underlie the social conservatism in the Hispanic population.

## Values and Integration

On a number of social issues, Hispanics take the conservative stance. Only 34% of Latinos age 16 and older favor gay marriage compared to 39% of the total adult population<sup>74</sup>. More than 50% of Hispanics backed California’s Proposition 8 to ban gay marriage<sup>75</sup>. A full 56% of Latinos age 16 and older think that abortion should be banned compared to 45% of the U.S. adult population<sup>76</sup>. Another 56% of Latinos feel that unmarried women having children is bad for society—a view that seems (along with their thoughts on abortion) to fuel early marriages for the teenage mothers<sup>77</sup>.

Values transfer is a two-way process for Hispanics and other Americans in the United States. It seems in part that residential interactions would enable the transference of values, but enthusiasm for greater social integration is not exactly resounding. Hispanics are particularly less enthusiastic than blacks about residential integration. 60% of blacks compared to 50% of all Hispanics say they would like to see the country become more integrated in terms of minorities and whites living in the same neighborhoods<sup>78</sup>. Among whites, 41% say they want more integration while 44% say current levels of integration are “about right,” a view shared by 38% of Hispanics and 28% of blacks<sup>79</sup>.

The term *melting pot* has been used to describe how residents of different cultures have melted into and helped form American society. Whether assimilatory policies are valuable in this process is an open question. Integrating immigrants has been historically rough for the United States, particularly when significant differences existed between the new and old population. The Native Americans were

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<sup>73</sup> Between Two Worlds, *Op. cit.*, 59-62.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 66.

<sup>75</sup> Blacks, Hispanics nixed gay marriage (Washington Times: 2010) 1.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 65.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 67.

<sup>78</sup> Morin, *Op. cit.*, 3.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

disregarded, Africans were treated as inferior and slaves, Asians were discriminated against heavily and subject to intensive scrutiny and disenfranchisement, and even the Irish and Italians weathered difficulty due to their Catholic heritage<sup>80</sup>.

It has been said that Hispanics may have a challenging time integrating into American society because they not only have a predominantly Catholic background, but many are also dominant in a different language, Spanish. The Catholic background surely accounts for some of the more conservative views among Latinos. But analysis of language requires a consideration of the history of the Latinos in the United States and the knowledge that the majority of them are native-born, not foreign-born. By the second generation, the majority of Latino youth demonstrate proficiency in English, even with parents encouraging Spanish<sup>81</sup>.

A study of Latino youth breaks down language usage by first, second, and third generation American Hispanics: by third generation and higher only 38% of Latino youth could speak Spanish, and only 26% could read it<sup>82</sup>. In contrast 98% of the third generation Latino youth could read English and 97% could speak it<sup>83</sup>. Another Pew Hispanic Center study provides a complete overview of language dominance by generation:

*In the first generation, only 7% of youths are classified as English dominant, while 40% are bilingual and 53% are Spanish dominant. By the second generation, English dominance spreads rapidly to 44% of the population, while 54% are bilingual and only 2% are Spanish dominant. In the third generation, some 80% have English as their primary language, while 15% are bilingual and again, a small share—5%—remains Spanish dominant<sup>84</sup>.*

The same study provides data about media consumption by language as well. It seems that Latinos enjoy both Spanish and English language entertainment into the third generation, particularly with music<sup>85</sup>. In each generation of immigrants, over 25% of Latinos consume Spanish and English music equally, however by the third generation 91% of Latinos watch television primarily in English<sup>86</sup>.

Perhaps more socially significant is the role of language in education. Indeed Spanish may speak to some of the educational difficulties facing the Hispanic community. Even though 88% of Latinos believe a college education is important to getting ahead in society, 74% stated they have not continued their education because

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<sup>80</sup> Hing, Bill Ong. To be an American: Cultural Pluralism and the Rhetoric of Assimilation (NYU: 1997) 13-31.

<sup>81</sup> Between Two Worlds, *Op. cit.*, 32.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 32.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 32.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* 33.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* 33.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 34.

they needed to support the family and 49% because they felt their English was not good enough<sup>87</sup>. When asked why Latinos in general do not perform as well as others in school, two reasons garnered more than 50% support: 57% of Latinos said most Hispanic parents do not play an active role in their child's education and 54% said Hispanic students know less English<sup>88</sup>.

If the majority of the Hispanic community is correct in assuming education is important to getting ahead in society, then both parental involvement and English learning will be necessary. Indeed, parental involvement in particular may be critical for addressing other social problems among Latino youth, like gangs and teenage pregnancy, which underlie economic challenges to the Hispanic community as well.

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* 52.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 53.

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