WE-2R

We the American...

Hispanics

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BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Acknowledgments

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We, the American Hispanics

Introduction

We, the American Hispanics trace our origin or descent to Spain or to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and many other Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America. Our ancestors were among the early explorers and settlers of the New World. In 1609, 11 years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, our Mestizo (Indian and Spanish) ancestors settled in what is now Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Several historical events also shaped our presence in America: the Louisiana Purchase, admission of Florida and Texas into the Union, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which ended the Mexican-American War, the Spanish-American War, the Mexican Revolution, labor shortages during World War I and World War II, the Cuban Revolution, and political instability in Central and South America in the recent past. Although our common ancestry and language bind us, we are quite diverse.

We have not always appeared in the census as a separate ethnic group. In 1930, "Mexicans" were counted and in 1940, "persons of Spanish mother tongue" were reported. In 1950 and 1960, "persons of Spanish surname" were reported. The 1970 census asked persons about their "origin," and respondents could choose among several Hispanic origins listed on the questionnaire. In 1980 and 1990, persons of "Spanish/Hispanic" origin reported as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or "other Hispanic." The 1990 census tabulated information for about 30 additional Hispanic-origin groups.

Because of our increasing diversity, the Census Bureau presents social and economic characteristics for specific Hispanic-origin groups such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban. This report represents a fraction of the wealth of information available from the Bureau of the Census on Hispanic Americans.

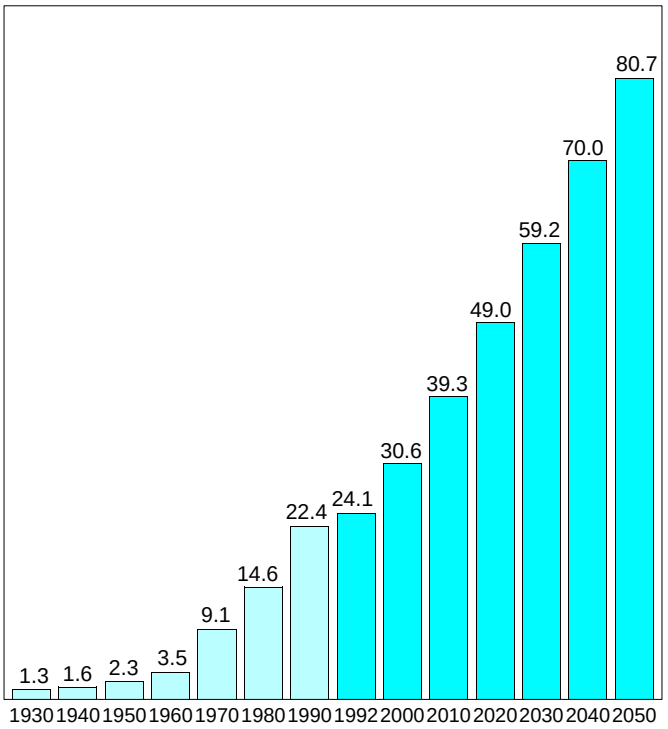
We are a large, fast growing segment of the Nation's population.

Since 1930, some segments of the Hispanic population have been counted in the census. In 1930, 1.3 million "Mexicans" were reported. In 1950, 2.3 million "persons of Spanish surname" were reported, and in 1970, 9.1 million persons of "Spanish" origin were reported.

In 1990, there were 22.4 million Hispanics in the United States, almost 9 percent of the Nation's nearly 250 million people. The Hispanic population in 1990 was slightly less than the entire U.S. population in 1850.

The Census Bureau's 1992 middle series projections suggest rapid growth may continue into the 20th century. The population could rise from 24 million in 1992 to 31 million by the year 2000, 59 million by 2030, and 81 million by 2050.

Figure 1.
Hispanic Population: 1930 to 2050
(Millions. Middle series projections)



Note: Data for 1930 include only "Mexicans," data for 1940 include persons of "Spanish mother tongue," and data for 1950 and 1960 include persons of "Spanish surname."

Our population grew over 7 times as fast as the rest of the Nation between 1980 and 1990.

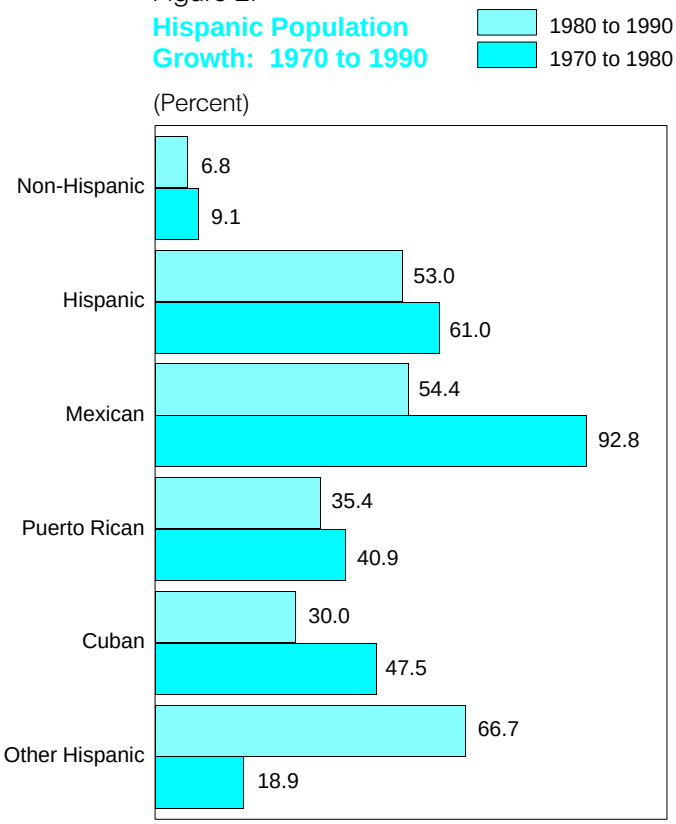
The Hispanic population grew by 53 percent between 1980 and 1990 and by 61 percent between 1970 and 1980. Several factors contributed to the tremendous increase in the Hispanic population since 1970. Among them are a higher birth rate than the rest of the population and substantial immigration from Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America.

The Mexican population nearly doubled between 1970 and 1980, and nearly doubled again by 1990.

Both the Cuban and Puerto Rican populations grew at a rate at least four times as fast as the rest of the Nation.

Other Hispanic populations grew dramatically between 1980 and 1990, partly as a result of the large influx of Central and South American immigrants during this time period.

Figure 2.
Hispanic Population Growth: 1970 to 1990
(Percent)



We are concentrated in a small number of States, mostly in the South and West.

In 1990, nearly 9 of every 10 Hispanics lived in just 10 States. The four States with the largest proportion of Hispanics were California, Texas, New York, and Florida.

The remaining States with significant proportions of Hispanics were Illinois, New Jersey, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Massachusetts.

Most Hispanics lived in the Southwestern States of the Nation: New Mexico, California, Texas, and Arizona.

Nearly 40 percent of New Mexican residents were Hispanic, and about 26 percent of California and Texas residents were Hispanic. Nearly 20 percent of Arizona residents were Hispanic.

More than 10 percent of the residents of Colorado, New York, Florida, and Nevada were Hispanic.

Figure 3.
Hispanic Population for Selected States: 1990

(Percent distribution)

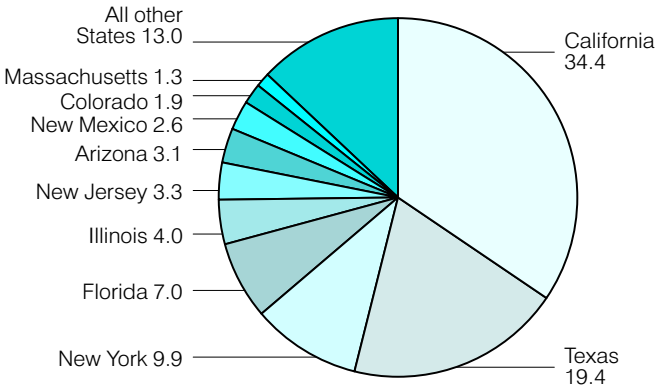
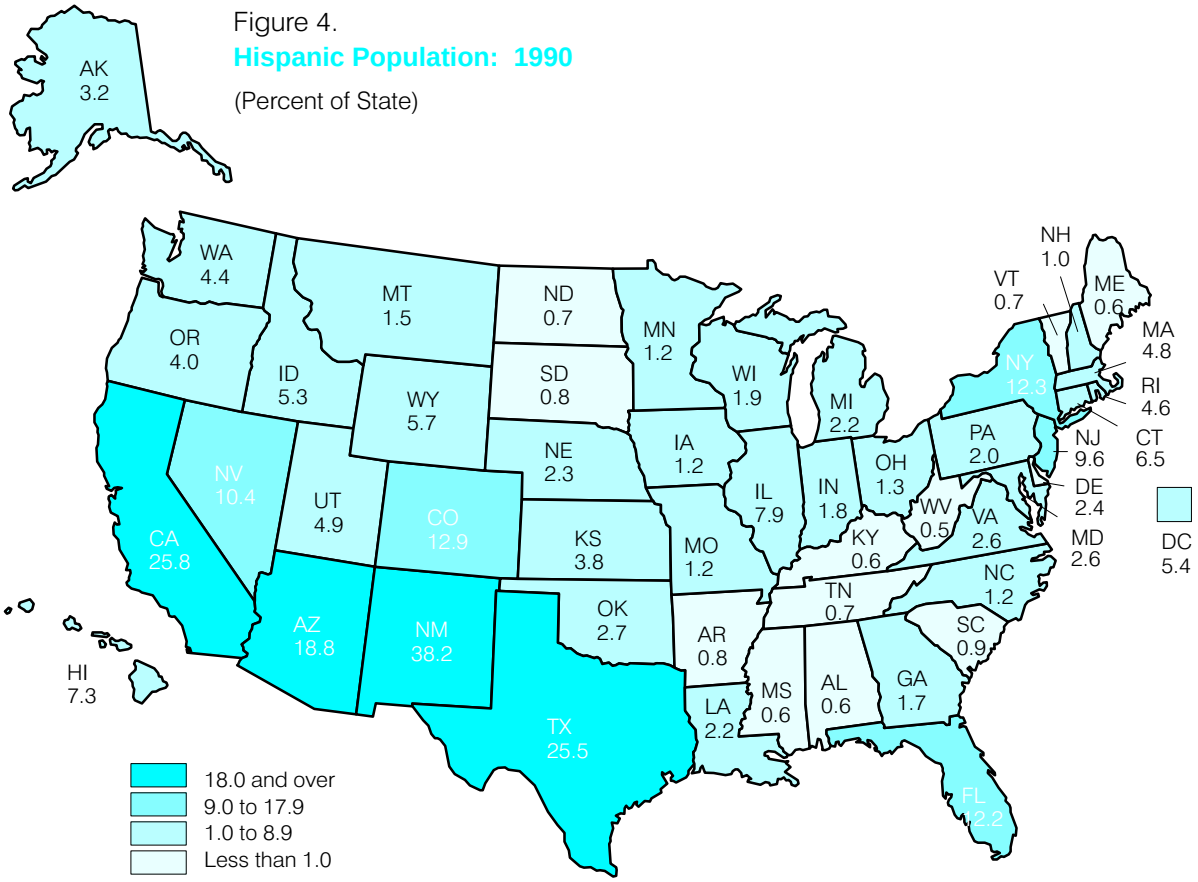


Figure 4.
Hispanic Population: 1990

(Percent of State)



We come from many different origins.

In 1990, Mexicans were the largest Hispanic group, representing about 61 percent of the 22.3 million Hispanics.

Puerto Ricans were the second largest group, about 12 percent; and Cubans were about 5 percent of the Hispanic population.

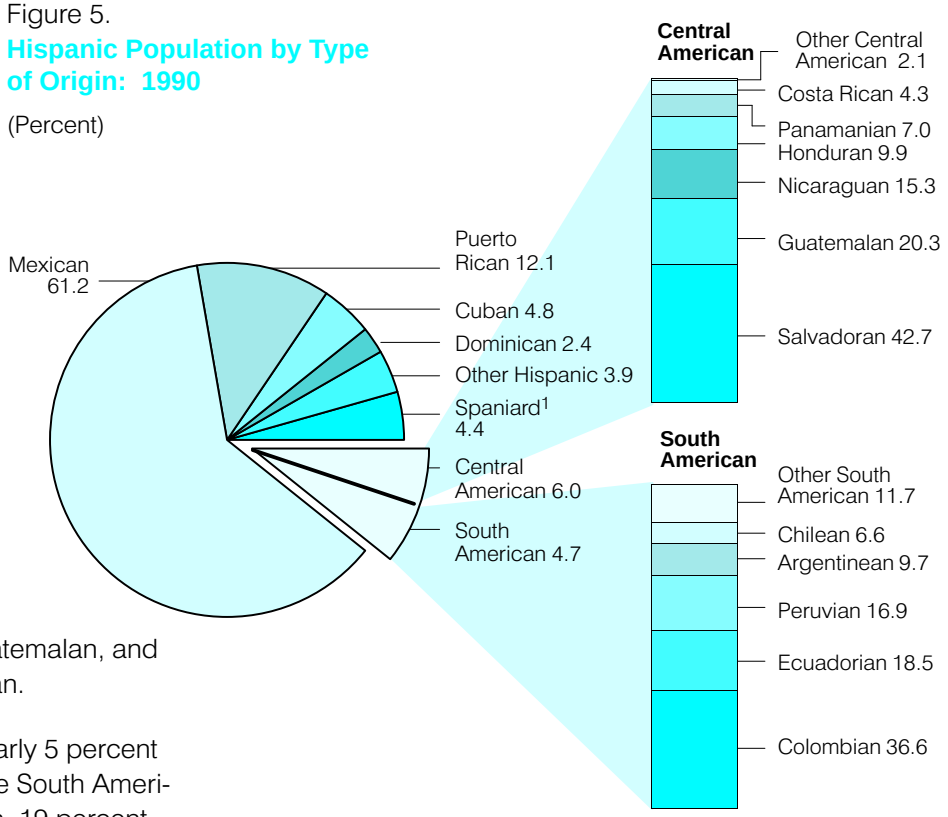
Central Americans represented about 6 percent of the total Hispanic population. However, of the Central Americans, about 43 percent were Salvadoran, 20 percent were Guatemalan, and about 15 percent were Nicaraguan.

South Americans represented nearly 5 percent of the Hispanic population. Of the South Americans, 37 percent were Colombian, 19 percent were Ecuadorian, and 17 percent were Peruvian.

Dominicans, Spaniards, and other Hispanics each were over 2 percent of the Hispanic population.

Figure 5.
Hispanic Population by Type of Origin: 1990

(Percent)



[1]Includes those who reported "Spanish."

Our population has a higher proportion of young adults and children and fewer elderly than the non-Hispanic population.

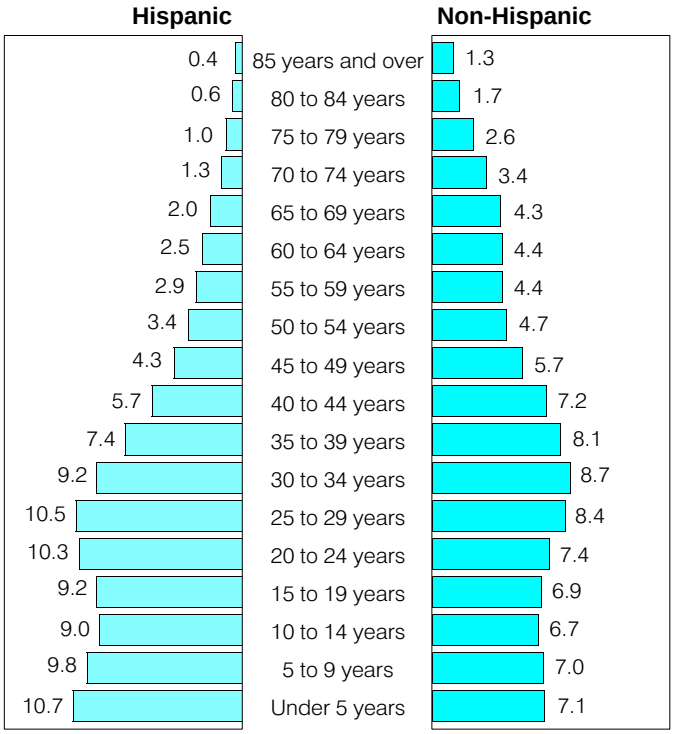
In 1990, nearly 7 out of every 10 Hispanics were younger than 35 years old compared with just over 5 out of every 10 non-Hispanics.

Among the elderly, about 5 percent of Hispanics were 65 years old and over compared with 13 percent of non-Hispanics.

Nearly 40 percent of the Hispanic population was under 20 years old, compared with 28 percent of the non-Hispanic population. This reflects a relatively high fertility rate among Hispanics who have recently immigrated.

Figure 6.
Age of the Population: 1990

(Percent)



We made great strides in educational attainment since 1970.

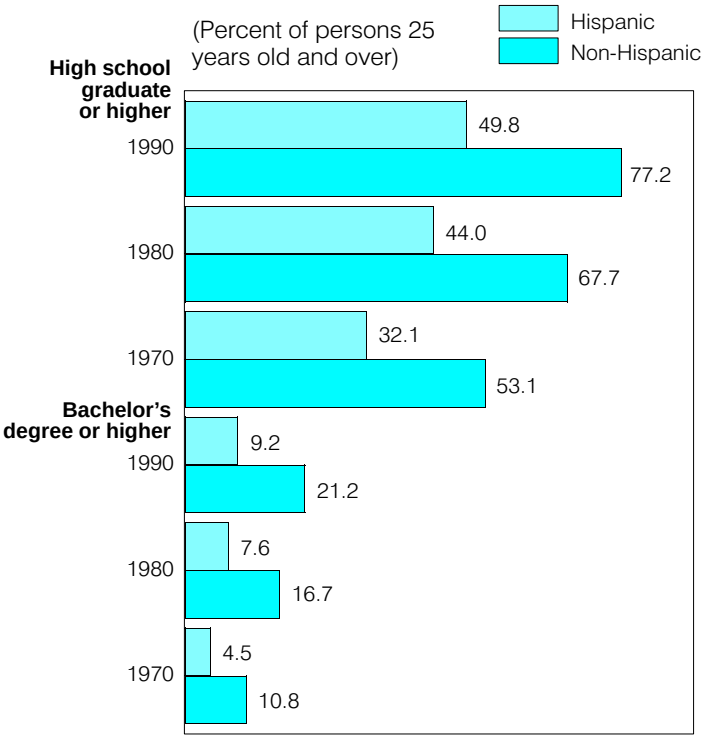
In 1990, about half of the Hispanic population had at least a high school diploma and 1 in 11 earned a bachelor's degree or higher. However, Hispanic adults were less likely than non-Hispanic adults to complete high school or college.

In 1980, about 4 of 10 Hispanics completed 4 years or more of high school and 1 of every 13 completed 4 years or more of college.

In 1970, only 3 of 10 Hispanics 25 years old and over completed at least 4 years of high school. Less than 1 in 20 completed 4 years or more of college.

Figure 7.
Educational Attainment: 1970 to 1990

(Percent of persons 25 years old and over)



Our educational attainment varies among different Hispanic groups.

Although about half of the Hispanic population received a high school diploma or higher in 1990, individual Hispanic groups varied from a high of 77 percent for Spaniards to a low of 43 percent for Dominicans.

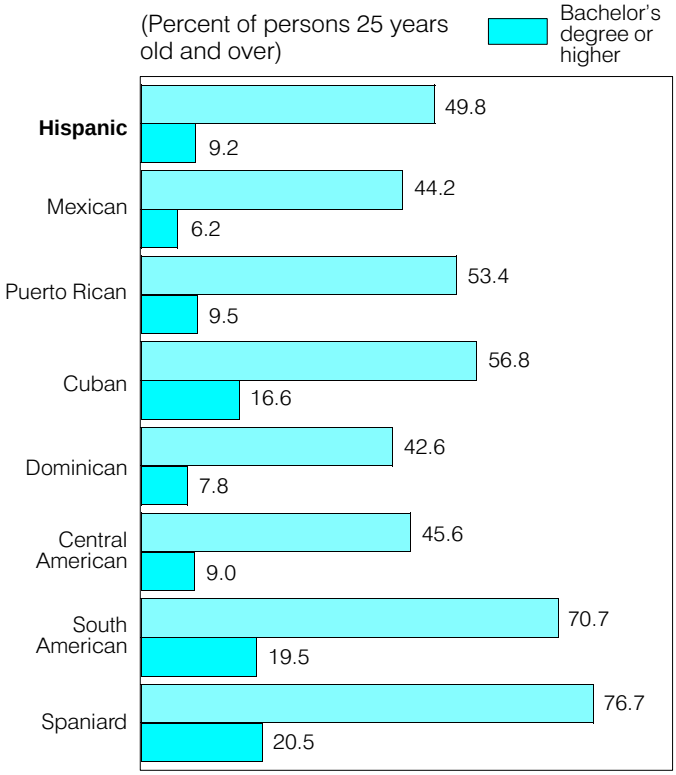
About 44 percent of Mexicans, 53 percent of Puerto Ricans, and 57 percent of Cubans had a high school diploma or higher.

About 46 percent of Central Americans and 71 percent of South Americans received a high school diploma or higher in 1990.

Nearly 10 percent of the Hispanic population received a bachelor's degree or higher in 1990. However, about 20 percent of Spaniards and South Americans received a bachelor's degree or higher compared with only 6 percent of Mexicans.

Figure 8.
Educational Attainment for Selected Hispanic Origin Groups: 1990

(Percent of persons 25 years old and over)



Although many of us were foreign born, about 64 percent of us were born in the United States.

In 1990, over 7.8 million Hispanics were foreign born. Hispanic foreign born from Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America represented about 43 percent of all foreign-born persons in the United States.

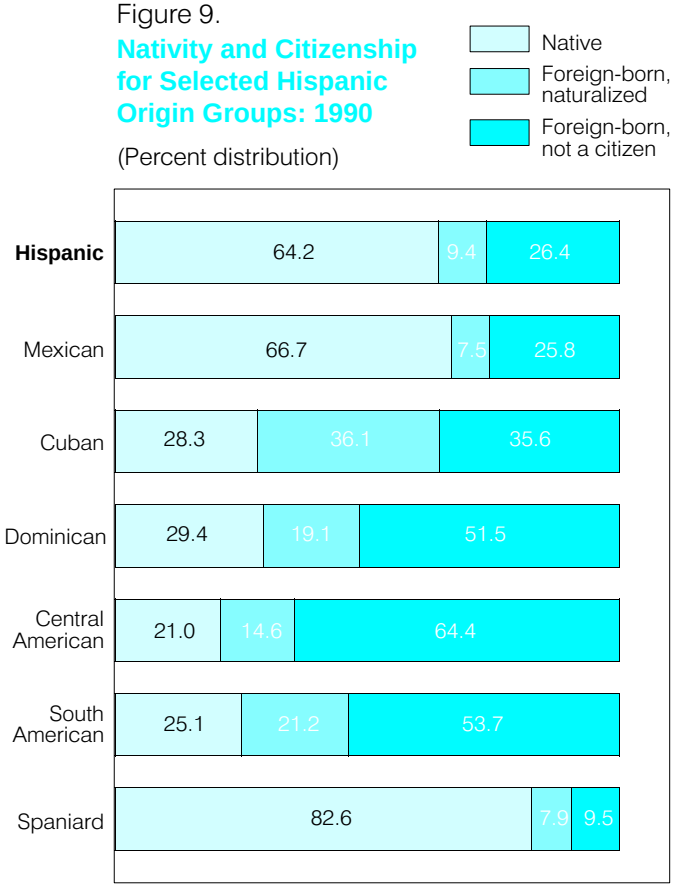
Nearly three-quarters of the Hispanic population were native-born and naturalized citizens compared with about 97 percent of the non-Hispanic population.

About 83 percent of Spaniards and about 67 percent of Mexicans were born in the United States. About 21 percent of Central Americans and 25 percent of South Americans were born here.

Among foreign-born Hispanics, the proportion who were not citizens in 1990 varied from less than 10 percent for Spaniards to nearly 65 percent for Central Americans. Many Central Americans are relatively recent immigrants to America and have not had time to go through the naturalization process.

Note: All persons born in Puerto Rico are American citizens.

Figure 9.
Nativity and Citizenship for Selected Hispanic Origin Groups: 1990
(Percent distribution)



About half of us who were foreign born came to the United States between 1980 and 1990.

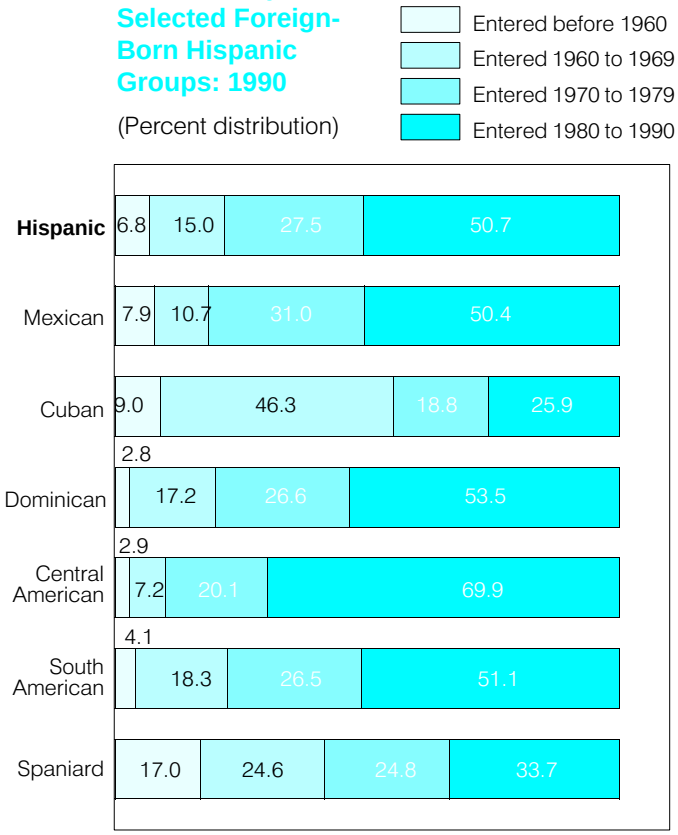
Whether pulled by the need to be reunited with families or pushed by political events in the country of birth, many Hispanics moved to the United States between 1980 and 1990.

Just over half of the Hispanic foreign born arrived in America since 1980. About 28 percent arrived between 1970 and 1979, 15 percent between 1960 and 1969, and about 7 percent before 1960.

About 20 percent of the Central American foreign born arrived between 1970 and 1979, and about 70 percent arrived between 1980 and 1990. Central Americans represented the largest proportion of newly arrived Hispanic immigrants during the 1980's.

About 46 percent of the Cuban foreign born arrived between 1960 and 1969. Many Cuban refugees arrived in the United States following the Cuban Missile Crisis in the early part of that decade.

Figure 10.
Year of Entry for Selected Foreign-Born Hispanic Groups: 1990
(Percent distribution)



Nearly 3 million of us are legal immigrants who arrived between 1980 and 1990.

Prior to 1950, the vast majority of legal immigrants arrived from Europe. From 1950 to 1990, a new wave (nearly 20 million) of legal immigrants arrived, many from Latin America. Between 1951 and 1960, over 2.5 million people entered the country legally. Of those, 1 in 5 came from Latin America.

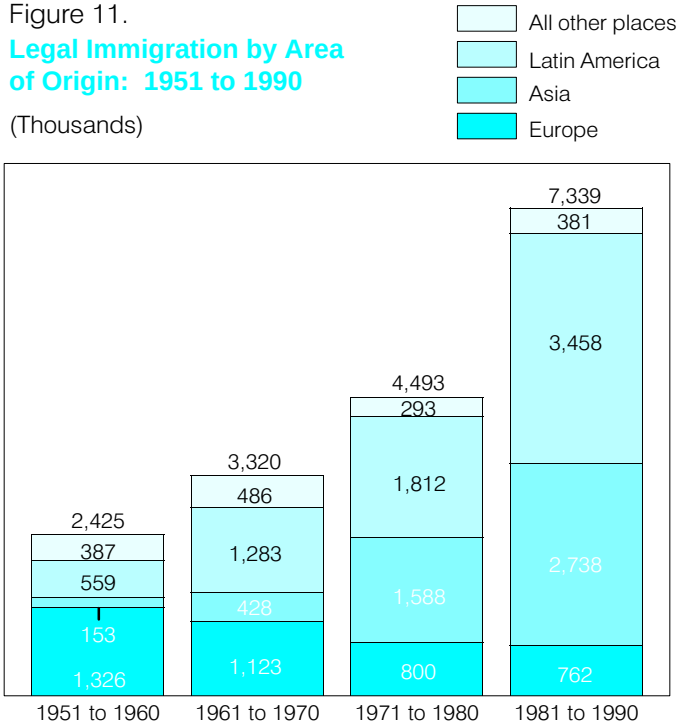
Between 1961 and 1970, 3.3 million immigrants entered the United States, with 1 in 3 coming from Latin America. During the 1970's, there were nearly 4.5 million immigrants, with about 40 percent coming from Latin America.

By the 1980's, 47 percent of immigrants were from Latin America.

Figure 11.

Legal Immigration by Area of Origin: 1951 to 1990

(Thousands)



Note: Information for this graph came from the 1991 Statistical Yearbook of Immigration and Naturalization Service, M-367. Latin America includes Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America.

The Spanish language is a tie that binds us together.

In 1990, about 14 percent of the Nation's population 5 years old and over spoke a language other than English at home. Spanish was spoken by about one-half of all non-English speakers in the United States.

Also in 1990, about 78 percent of Hispanics spoke a language other than English at home. Spanish was spoken by nearly all of the Hispanic non-English speakers.

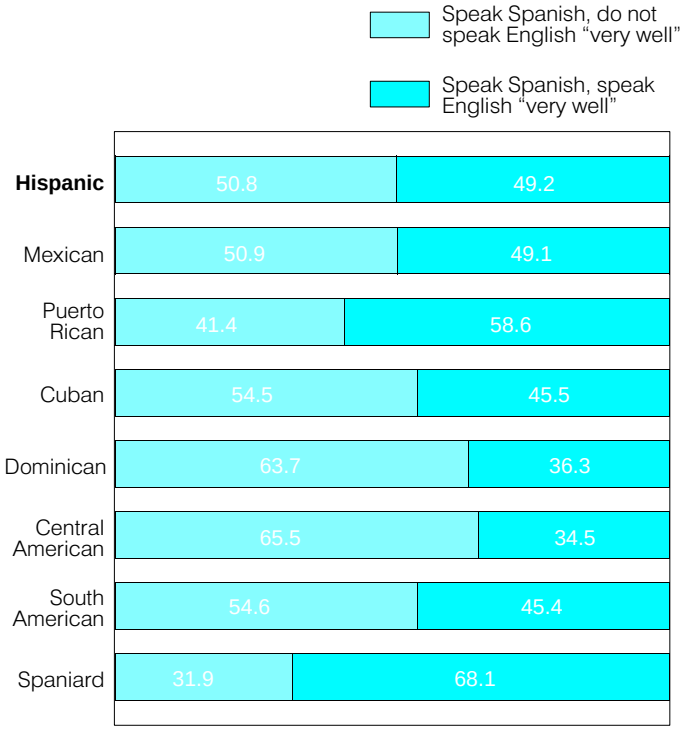
Of the Hispanics who spoke Spanish at home, about one-half spoke English "very well" and about half did not speak English "very well."

A greater proportion of Dominicans and Central Americans than Puerto Ricans and Spaniards who spoke Spanish at home did not speak English "very well."

Figure 12.

Language Spoken at Home and Ability to Speak English for Selected Hispanic Groups: 1990

(Percent of persons 5 years old and over who speak Spanish at home)



Fewer of us held jobs as managers or professionals than non-Hispanics.

In 1990, about 28 percent of Hispanic males 16 years old and over worked as operators, fabricators, and laborers compared with about 19 percent of non-Hispanic males.

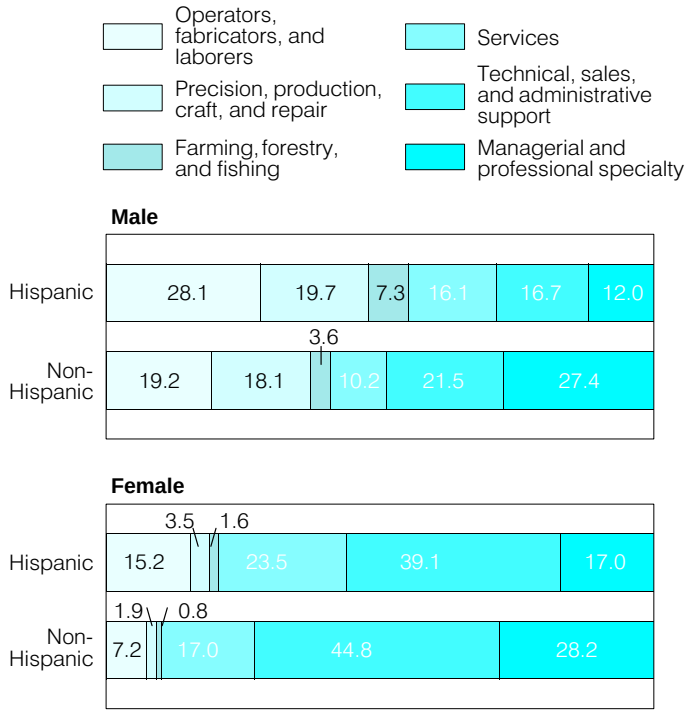
Technical, sales, and administrative support positions provided employment for the largest share (about 39 percent) of Hispanic females compared with about 45 percent for non-Hispanic females.

Only about 12 percent of Hispanic males held managerial and professional specialty positions compared with about 27 percent of non-Hispanic males.

Service occupations provided employment for about 17 percent of non-Hispanic females compared with about 24 percent of Hispanic females.

Figure 13.
Occupation by Sex: 1990

(Percent 16 years old and over in civilian labor force)



In 1990, most of us lived in family households.

About 70 percent of Hispanic families were maintained by married couples, about 9 percent by a male with no wife present, and 22 percent by a female with no husband present.

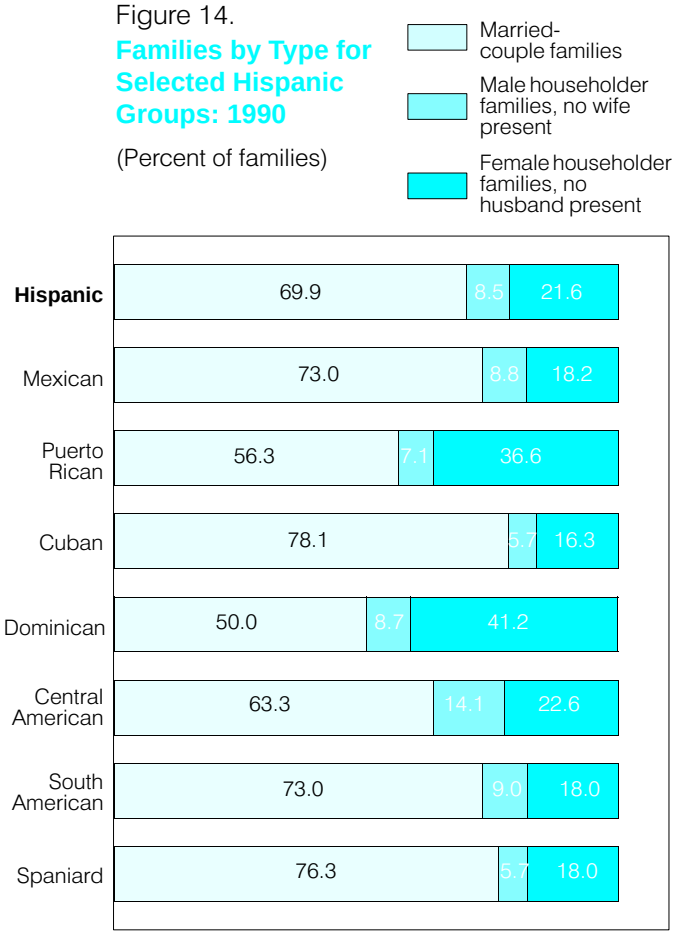
The distribution of families by type varied among Hispanic groups. Over three-quarters of Cuban and Spaniard families were maintained by married couples.

Families maintained by a female with no husband present were found primarily among Puerto Rican and Dominican families.

About 14 percent of Central American families were families maintained by a male with no wife present.

Figure 14.
Families by Type for Selected Hispanic Groups: 1990

(Percent of families)



Our median family income was lower than that for all Americans.

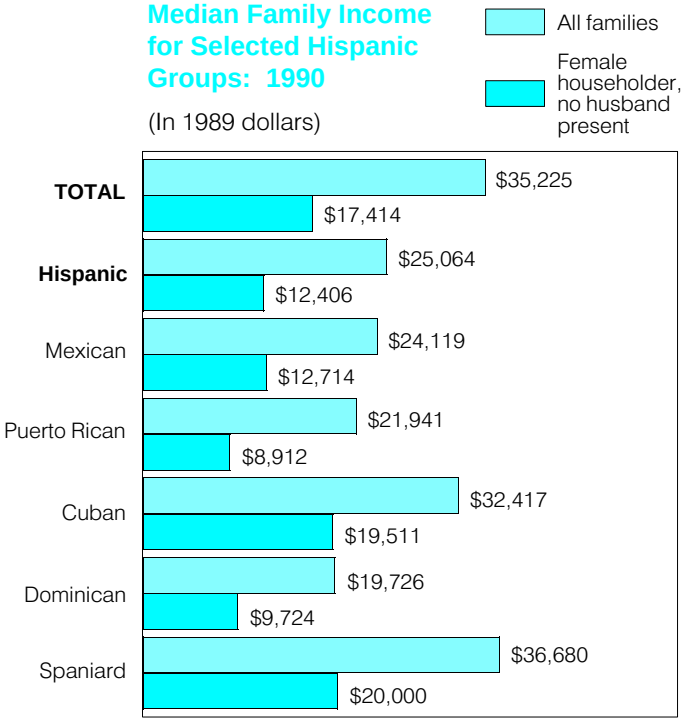
In 1990, the median family income for Hispanics was $25,064, lower than the median family income of $35,225 for all Americans.

Hispanic female householders with no husband present had lower median incomes than all female householders with no husband present, $12,406 and $17,414, respectively.

Of the Hispanic groups shown, Dominicans had the lowest median family income ($19,726), and Spaniards had the highest median family income ($36,680).

Puerto Rican female householders with no husband present had the lowest income, $8,912, while Cuban and Spaniard female householders with no husband present had the highest incomes, $19,511 and $20,000, respectively.

Figure 15.
Median Family Income for Selected Hispanic Groups: 1990
(In 1989 dollars)



Over 1 million of our families lived in poverty in 1990.

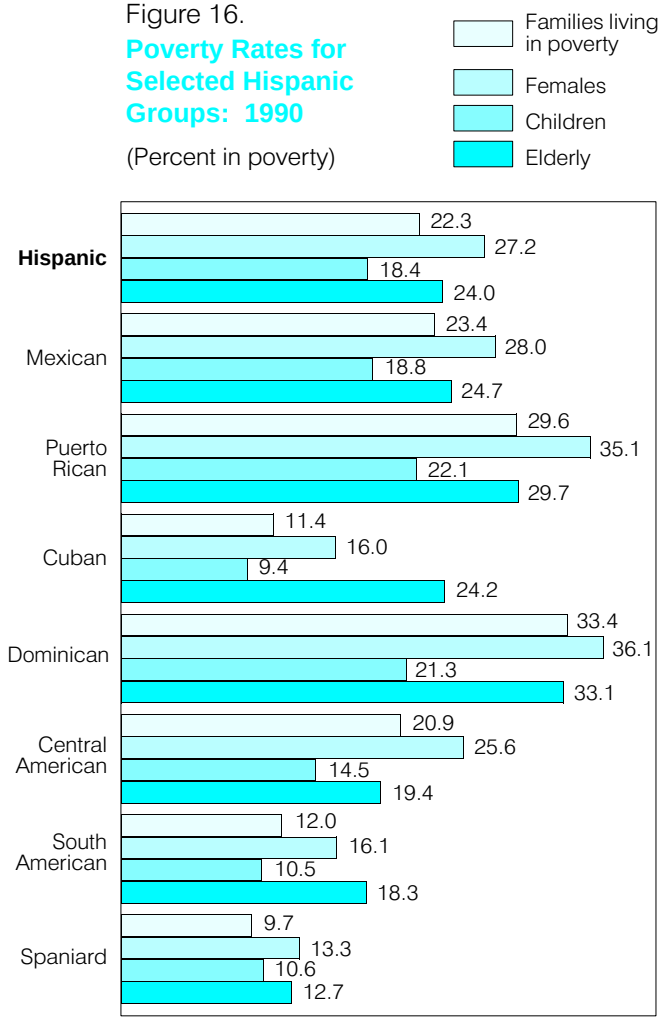
Just over 2 of every 10 Hispanic families were living in poverty in 1990 compared with less than 1 of every 10 non-Hispanic families.

About 30 percent of Puerto Rican families, 33 percent of Dominican families, about 10 percent of Spaniard families, 11 percent of Cuban families, 23 percent of Mexican families, and 21 percent of Central American families were below the poverty level in 1990.

Hispanic females, children, and elderly also had higher proportions living in poverty than their non-Hispanic counterparts. About 27 percent of Hispanic females lived in poverty compared with 13 percent of non-Hispanic females.

About 18 percent of Hispanic children under 18 years old lived in poverty compared with 17 percent of non-Hispanic children. Twice as many elderly Hispanics 65 years old and over lived in poverty than non-Hispanic elderly, 24 percent and 12 percent, respectively.

Figure 16.
Poverty Rates for Selected Hispanic Groups: 1990
(Percent in poverty)



Information in this report is based on the 1990 Census of Population and Housing. Estimated population and housing unit totals based on tabulations from only the sample counts may differ from the official 100-percent counts. Such differences result, in part, from a sample of households rather than all households. Differences also can occur because of the interview situation and the processing rules differing between the 100-percent and sample tabulations. These types of differences are referred to as nonsampling errors.

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