

# Latinos in the United States in 2000

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*This population study, based on the 2000 decennial census in the United States, characterizes the Latino population in terms of those sociodemographic variables that have been identified as integral to researchers and practitioners working with diverse populations. A number of dimensions of the Latino experience in the United States are presented, including family and household information, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, health, and disability descriptors. Perhaps the most interesting of the variables examined is the dramatic growth rate of Latinos in the United States, who now represent 13% of the total population. Moreover, Latinos increasingly can be found in states where there have been little or no Latinos in the past, presenting both challenges and opportunities to service delivery systems and to policy makers.*

**Keywords:** *Latinos; demographics; population trends; census data*

The United States is currently experiencing unprecedented changes in its population (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 2001). A growing need to understand both similarities and differences among and within ethnic minority groups and, especially, linguistically diverse people rises along with increasing pluralism. Latinos constitute the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the United States, with varying estimates by demographers as to the year in which Latinos will become the largest minority group in terms of number of individuals in the U.S. census. To inform policy makers, health services, educational, and other entities, every 10 years, the U.S. Census Bureau provides a snapshot of characteristics of the U.S. population. The latest census, conducted in the year 2000, is significant in that it is the first one of the 21st century and therefore potentially will shape the policies and practices of the new

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millennium. The purpose of this article is to describe from the decennial census those characteristics of Latinos that are most salient to researchers, practitioners, and policy makers. This article builds on a previous characterization of Latinos in the United States (Garcia & Marotta, 1997) and, where possible, will compare 1990 census data from our earlier research with 2000 data. The article begins with a discussion on definitions of key variables used in the census and some definitional dilemmas identified by population researchers and ethnic minority researchers from various disciplines. This discussion will be followed by tabular descriptions of key demographic variables related to the Latino experience in the United States. The article concludes with implications of the identified demographic changes for both practitioners and researchers.

### **Census Definitions and Identity Development of Latinos**

The operative word for the definitions used by the U.S. Census is *pragmatism*. In most cases, census forms instruct individuals to identify for themselves the demographic terms with which they most closely identify. We see this pragmatic approach as empowering to diverse groups such as Latinos. When a woman ascribes herself as belonging to a racial group while filling out the census form or when a man checks a category on a form asking about Hispanic heritage, census researchers assume these actions mean respondents are including themselves as members of the designated group. We have argued elsewhere (Garcia & Marotta, 1997) that the context in which the question is asked (e.g., in country of origin or adopted country) and the purpose for the questions (e.g., for academic research or for setting government policy) can determine the response and that definitions must be clarified by questionnaire designers and by respondents if applications within the social sciences are to be useful. Others have argued that census definitions are political (Comas-Diaz, 2001) or that researchers use terms such as *race*, *ethnicity*, or *culture* so interchangeably that it leads to confusion (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). In this article, to correspond with our earlier work, we prefer the term *Latino*, which will be used interchangeably with the census-created term *Hispanic*. Where a definition deviates from the census limit of self-reported identification, we provide the definition. This is the case for such terms as *household unit* or *employment status*, among many terms used in the following research results. We also agree with Betancourt and Lopez (1993) that it is not necessary for researchers to agree on every definition. Definitions used need to be stated at the beginning to promote clarity of understanding of research results and subsequent applications of research findings by practi-

tioners. Recognizing that Latinos are a richly variable mix of individual and group differences, we provide, where it is available, information about different Latino groups such as Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, or Central Americans as well as comparisons to the total U.S. population and to White groups of various ethnicities.

### **Method**

The major sources of data for this article were public documents from the U.S. Census Bureau and from the annual population surveys conducted by the bureau. Where other entities such as the U.S. Department of Labor, the Centers for Disease Control, or research literature were accessed for data, we provide the appropriate citation. Data from the decennial census are released in stages over several years immediately following the data collection year. As data became available, we analyzed raw data and summary tables to create categories and groupings that warrant attention. In reading the results of our research, readers are cautioned that Latinos are a subset of the total U.S. population, so categorical comparisons made in this article are not orthogonal. Moreover, the census makes use of an “other” category that conflates very diverse groups of Latinos such as those of South American and Caribbean identifications. When the “other” category is used, we provide descriptions of the included subgroups. We do not include descriptions of other ethnic minorities except as comparison points to Latinos where necessary; omission should not be correlated to unimportance. Finally, the reader is reminded that Latinos can be of any race and that the census defines race as a social construct and not a scientific phenomenon.

### **Results**

The variables reported later include growth rates of Latinos in the United States as a whole and within various Latino groups. Geographic distribution of Latinos across the United States was explored because in the past 10 years, there have been major changes in where Latinos reside. The 48 contiguous states are divided into four regions. Alaska and Hawaii are grouped in the Pacific region. Gender, marital status, age, language spoken, and household size seem to be correlated with differential research and practice outcomes (e.g., Mehan, 1997; Sabogal, Perez-Stable, Otero-Sabogal, & Hiatt, 1995). Socioeconomic status is expressed as a function of several variables— income, poverty level, occupation and employment, and education. These variables are all correlated with access to resources and with the ability of

**Table 1. Population Growth From 1990 to 2000 (in millions)**

Description	1990	2000	Increase (%)
U.S. total	249	281	13
Latino total	22.4	35.3	58

Latinos to integrate into the larger society. Finally, health status is discussed, including death rates, insurance coverage, and Latinos with disabilities.

#### *Growth Rates*

The 2000 Census revealed significant changes in the composition of the U.S. population, perhaps none more dramatic than the rate of increase of the Latino population. As illustrated in Table 1, this group experienced a 58% growth in the past decade compared with a 13% growth for the total population in the United States during the same period. In 1990, the census reported 10% of the population was of Latino heritage compared with approximately 13% of the total U.S. population in 2000. Latinos represent 12.5% of the population, whereas African Americans represent 12.3%. This makes Latinos and African Americans the two largest minority groups in the United States, although some Latinos can identify with both categories. The increase of the Latino population in the previous decade (1980 to 1990) was a modest 10% compared with the 58% increase for the period from 1990 to 2000. It is important to note that the 10-year growth rate predicted for Latinos in 1991 was only 20% (Schick & Schick, 1991). Schick and Schick (1991) projected that Latinos would represent 15% of the total U.S. population by the year 2020; however, this projection was underestimated, with Latinos reaching nearly 13% by the year 2000.

#### *Latino Groups*

Compared with 1990, the composition of Latinos within group remained largely the same in the year 2000, with Mexicans representing the largest group (58%) among Latinos. However, a new trend may be emerging, suggested by the fact that the Latino population comprising the "other" category doubled its representation from 2% to 4% of the total population of this country in the past decade. This "other" category includes individuals from Central and South America and represents the second largest Latino group (see Tables 2 and 3). At the same time, the proportion of people in the "other" cate-

**Table 2. Latino Groups as a Percentage of the Total Population and the Total Latino Population**

Latino Group	<i>n</i>	Total Population (%)	Latino Population (%)
Mexican	20,640,711	7.3	58
Puerto Rican	3,406,178	1.2	10
Cuban	1,241,685	0.4	4
Other	10,017,244	3.6	28

**Table 3. Comparison of Percentage Increases Across Latino Groups**

Latino Groups	1990 (%)	2000 (%)
Total Latinos	10	13
Mexican	5	7
Puerto Rican	1	1
Cuban	0.5	0.4
Other	2	4

gory within the Latino group increased from 23% to 28%. Central Americans are mostly from El Salvador, and South Americans are mostly Colombian.

### *Geographic Distribution*

Most Latinos reside in the western (43%) and southern (33%) United States. The total U.S population is concentrated in the West (36%) but is more evenly distributed across the other regions (see Table 4). In the West, Latinos represent as much as 18% of the total population, whereas in the South, they represent about 12% of the population (see Table 5).

The 10 states with the largest Latino population are listed in Table 6. These data show that about 50% of all Latinos in the United States are concentrated in California and Texas. However, the average growth in the top 10 states (33%) was outpaced by the growth of Latinos in states that were not traditionally preferred Latino sites of residence. Table 7 shows growth rates that quadrupled in the past decade in North Carolina, Arkansas, Georgia, and Tennessee, whereas this rate tripled in states such as South Carolina, Alabama, and Kentucky. Other states that evidenced a large growth of Latinos include Nevada, Nebraska, and Minnesota, an indication that Latinos can be increasingly found in areas that differ from their previous geographic preferences and consequently are transforming geographic areas previously not

**Table 4. Comparison of Total Population and Latino Population by Region**

Geographic Region	Total U.S. Population <sup>a</sup> (%)	Total Latino Population <sup>b</sup> (%)
South	36	33
Midwest	23	9
West	22	43
Northeast	19	15

NOTE: South = Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Washington, D.C.; Midwest = North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio; West = Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico; Northeast = Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York.

a. 281,421,906.

b. 35,305,818.

**Table 5. Percentage of Latinos Living in Each U.S. Region**

Geographic Region	Latinos (%)
South	11.6
Midwest	4.9
West	18.1
Northeast	9.8

**Table 6. States With the Largest Latino Population**

State	1990	2000
California	7,687,938	10,966,556
Texas	4,339,905	6,669,666
New York	2,214,026	2,867,583
Florida	1,574,143	2,682,715
New Jersey	739,861	1,117,191
Arizona	688,338	1,295,617
New Mexico	579,224	765,386
Colorado	424,302	735,601
Washington	214,570	441,509
Illinois	904,446	1,530,262

**Table 7. Top 10 States by Hispanic Rates of Increase**

State	<i>n</i> 1990	<i>n</i> 2000	Rate of Increase
North Carolina	76,726	378,963	Quadruple
Arkansas	19,876	86,866	Quadruple
Georgia	108,922	435,227	Quadruple
Tennessee	32,741	123,838	Quadruple
Nevada	124,419	393,970	Triple
South Carolina	30,551	95,076	Triple
Alabama	24,629	75,830	Triple
Kentucky	21,984	59,939	Triple
Minnesota	53,884	143,382	About triple
Nebraska	36,969	94,425	About triple

**Table 8. Urban and Rural Distribution**

Latinos	Number	Percentage
Urban	32,173,942	91
Rural	3,131,876	9

having a significant Latino presence. Moreover, Latinos represent the largest minority group in 7 of the 10 states with the largest concentration of Latinos. African Americans remain the largest minority group only in New York, New Jersey, and Illinois.

The regional preferences of Latino groups in 2000 indicate that most Cubans live in the South (74%), the majority of Puerto Ricans live in the Northeast (61%), and most Mexicans live in the West (55%). Of Latinos, 91% live predominantly in urban areas (see Table 8), and the proportion residing in urban versus rural areas is unchanged since 1990.

### *Age and Gender*

As can be observed in Table 9, the projections of growth across age groups were found to be quite different from actual growth rates. In general, the projections were larger for the "45-and-older" age groups and smaller for the age groups younger than 45.

Latinos are younger than the total U.S. population for those younger than age 44 (see Table 10). The average age for Latinos is younger than that of the total U.S. population for men and women (see Table 11). However, for the total U.S. population, the median age is the highest in the nation's history.

**Table 9. Comparison of Actual to Projected Latino Population by Age Group**

Age (in years)	2000 Survey	2000 Projected	Difference
0 to 17	11,695,000	11,441,000	-254,000
18 to 44	14,593,000	14,236,000	-357,000
45 to 64	4,764,000	4,864,000	100,000
65 and older	1,752,000	1,938,000	186,000
Total	32,804,000	32,479,000	

**Table 10. Percentage Distribution of Latinos by Age**

Age (in years)	Total U.S. Population (%)	Latino Population (%)
Younger than 19	29	39
20 to 44	37	43
44 to 64	22	14
65 and older	12	5

**Table 11. Median Ages of U.S. Population and Latino Population by Gender**

Groups	U.S. Population	Latino Population
Women	36	27
Men	34	26
Total	35	26

The distribution of Latinos by gender remains the same as in 1990, with 50% men and 50% women. This is similar to the gender distribution for the total U.S. population (51% and 49%, respectively). Similarly, the distribution of Latinos by age categories remained the same. About 80% fall in the 24-and-younger age category (see Table 12).

Latinos as a group tend to be married (52% in 2000). Latinos who have never married form the next largest group at 33%. These rates are fairly consistent across the past 10 years (see Table 13).

In addition to marital status, another way to capture living conditions for Latinos is through analysis of household size. Households are defined as all individuals who live in a housing unit. A family household is defined as a householder and any individuals living in the same household who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption. Unrelated people in the household are not

**Table 12. Comparison of Latinos by Age, 1990 and 2000 Survey Data**

Age Group	1990 (%)	2000 (%)
0 to 17	36	35
18 to 24	44	44
45 to 64	14	15
65 and older	6	6

**Table 13. Marital Status of Latinos in 1990 and 2000**

Description	Latinos 1990 (%)	Latinos 2000 (%)
Never married	33	33
Married	56	52
Widowed	4	4
Divorced or separated	7	11

**Table 14. Household Size (family and nonfamily)**

Number in Household	Latinos as Percentage of Total
Fewer than 2	34
3 to 5	51
More than 6	15

included in the count. The U.S. Census provides data for people who live in families as well as for those who do not. Latinos comprise 12% of households in the United States. Table 14 shows that 51% of Latinos live in households composed of 3 to 5 people. For the total U.S. population, 11% live in households that include nonrelatives compared with 18% of Latinos.

### *Language*

The change in the percentage of people speaking Spanish at home in the past decade is quite dramatic. The percentage of the total population speaking Spanish at home has increased consistently at the national and state levels. Nationally, it increased from about 7.5% to 10.7%. At the state level, it increased significantly as well. Table 15 shows a 1990 to 2000 comparison of the percentage of people speaking Spanish at home in the 10 states with the

**Table 15. Percentage of Population Speaking Spanish at Home in 1990 and 2000**

	1990 (%)	2000 (%)
Total U.S. population	7.5	10.7
California population	20.0	25.0
Washington population	3.2	5.8
Illinois population	6.9	10.9
New York population	11.0	13.6
New Jersey population	8.6	12.3
Florida population	12.0	16.5
New Mexico population	27.9	28.7
Texas population	22.1	27.0
Colorado population	6.7	10.9
Arizona population	14.2	19.5

**Table 16. Percentage Spanish Speaking at Home in States With Largest Latino Growth**

State	1990 (%)	2000 (%)
North Carolina	1.7	5.0
South Carolina	1.4	2.9
Georgia	2.0	5.6
Alabama	1.1	2.2
Nevada	7.7	16.2
Nebraska	1.7	4.9
Tennessee	1.1	2.5
Kentucky	0.9	1.9
Minnesota	1.0	2.9
Arkansas	1.3	3.3

largest Latino population. Table 16 shows the same comparison across the 10 states with the largest Latino growth in the past decade.

### *Socioeconomic Status*

Socioeconomic status can be defined in various ways as a function of variables such as education, occupation, and income. In addition, the U.S. Census measures poverty levels, an indicator of potential barriers to improving socioeconomic status. The U.S. Census Bureau sets a poverty threshold, defined as a function of the family size. Because Latinos tend to have larger

**Table 17. Distribution by Income Category (in thousands)**

Income	Total U.S. Population		Latino Population	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Less than \$10,000	4,144	6	757	10
\$10,000 to \$24,999	12,163	17	2,163	29
\$25,000 to \$49,999	20,412	28	2,466	33
\$50,000 or more	35,313	49	2,178	29

family sizes than does the total U.S. population, different thresholds must be used to make comparisons. For example, for the total U.S. population with an average family size of 2.5, the poverty level is \$12,486, whereas for Latinos with a household size of 3.5, the poverty level is \$15,669. The socioeconomic status of Latinos is presented in the following tables.

#### *Income*

Table 17 shows that only 29% of Latinos earn an annual income of \$50,000 or more compared with 49% for the total U.S. population. The percentage of Latinos with an income of less than \$10,000 is also larger than that for the total population. The median household income for the United States is \$67,721, whereas for Latinos, it is \$45,338. When income is measured by number of family members, the average for the United States is \$26,641, whereas for Latinos, it is \$15,415. Raw averages independent of family size are \$82,000 for the United States and \$53,251 for Latinos; raw averages are typically not good indicators when there are extreme differences in income levels, which is true for income in all these groups.

#### *Poverty*

The percentage of Latinos below the poverty level (27%) in 2000 remained about the same (29%) compared with 1990. This figure is larger than that for the U.S. Population (19%), but the gap seems to be decreasing, apparently due to an increase in the number of individuals living below the poverty level among the total U.S. population (see Table 18). The decreasing gap may also be confounded by a formula that relies heavily on food costs, whereas housing costs have remained the same in the current formula.

**Table 18. Percentage Below Poverty Level in 1990 and 2000**

Year	U.S. Population (%)	Latino Population (%)
1990	14	29
2000	19	27

**Table 19. Work Experience (in thousands)**

Work	U.S. Population		Latino Population	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Work experience	161,050	59	18,153	56
Full-time	113,724	71	12,385	68
Part-time	19,734	12	1,778	10
None	27,592	17	4,000	22

### *Occupation and Unemployment*

Occupation describes the kind of work a person does. Employment means having done any work at all during the period specified in the data collection form as a paid employee, as self-employed, or as having worked at least 15 hours for a family business or a farm. Unemployment means individuals had no employment during the week that the survey or census was taken, they were available for work at that time, and they were looking for employment in the previous month. Work experience is another descriptor used and is defined as anyone who had a job or business any time, even briefly, in the year 2000. It is measured by age, with different ages being used by survey or census. In the U.S. population, 59% of all people ages 20 to 64 have some form of work experience. For the Latino population, 56% of all people ages 18 to 64 have work experience. These rates are comparable, although there are age differences in the categories used. Table 19 shows that similarities in work experience hold when work experience is divided by full-time or part-time categories.

Self-employment rates for the total U.S. population and for Latinos are slightly dissimilar. For example, 4% of Latinos are self-employed as compared with 7% for the total White population.

Latinos and the total U.S. population are employed at similar rates (63%) and have slightly similar unadjusted unemployment rates (6% for total U.S. population versus 8% for Latino population). Gender also does not appear to differentiate unemployment rates (7% men to 6% women). Among Latino

**Table 20. Percentage of Unemployment by Education Level**

Description	U.S. Total (%)	Latinos (%)
Total unemployed	3.7	5.3
Total high school graduates	4.2	4.4
Some college but no degree	3.5	3.8
Associate's degree	2.9	3.7
College graduates	2.3	3.6

groups, unemployment is distributed unequally. Puerto Ricans have the highest unemployment rates among Latinos (7.8%), whereas Cubans and Mexicans have similar unemployment rates (6.5% and 6.7%, respectively).

#### *Relationship of Unemployment Rates and Education*

A more precise measure of unemployment emerges when it is correlated to educational attainment. Regardless of educational level, Latinos have higher unemployment rates than those of the total U.S. population, although the unemployment rate diminishes with a higher level of education for Latinos. However, when compared with the U.S. general population, at least at the college graduate level, the unemployment rate for the total U.S. population is 2.3%, whereas for Latinos the rate is 3.6% (see Table 20).

#### *Occupation Type*

Another indicator of socioeconomic status is the type of occupation that various population groups attain. The U.S. population as a whole is primarily employed in managerial and technical, sales, and/or administrative jobs (60%), whereas Latinos cluster in service, industrial and agricultural jobs (61%). (See Table 21.) Within Latino groups, there are differences as well. Table 22 shows that Mexicans have much lower employment in professional and/or managerial, technical, sales, and administrative support jobs than do other groups such as Puerto Ricans and Cubans, although they have higher employment in labor and farm occupations.

Although women and men are distributed about equally (50%) in both the total U.S. population and the Latino population, there are still significant gaps in employment rates when comparing their respective employment patterns. These gaps have closed somewhat in the past three decades. In 1970, there was a 30% gap in men's and women's employment rates, with more men being employed than women; by 1998, the gap was only 6% (Coley, 2001). Thus, there are considerably more women in the workforce today.

**Table 21. Comparison of Occupation Types**

Description	U.S. Total (%)	Latinos (%)
Managerial	31	15
Technical, sales, or administration	29	24
Service	14	20
Precision production, craft, or repair	11	15
Operators, fabricators, or laborers	13	21
Farming, forestry, or fishing	2	5

### *Education*

The most current information about educational attainment among Latinos shows a mixed picture (U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey, 1998). For the total U.S. population, high school graduation rates have grown from 75% of the population in 1990 to 82% in 2000. The number of general educational development credentials rose from 331,000 in 1977 to 501,000 in 2000. Similarly, people with bachelor's degrees represented 20% of the population in 1990 and 25% in 2000. Latinos with a high school education (53%) or with a bachelor's degree (9%) maintained their attainment levels during the decade of the 1990s. At the lowest educational levels, however, Hispanics are still disproportionately represented, with the proportion of Hispanics with a fifth-grade education being 17 times larger than that of non-Hispanic Whites, who are found at 0.6% in that educational category. Among Hispanic groups, people with Mexican heritage were the least likely to have high school diplomas or higher educational attainment.

### *Education and Gender*

Overall, when looking at educational attainment by gender, the pattern favors women. Of women, 66% between the ages of 25 and 29 have high school diplomas compared with 60% of men. In terms of college-level education, 10% of Latinos have completed 4 years of college or more and the men's advantage has virtually disappeared. Latina women have an advantage of 2 percentage points over Latino men as of 1998, the latest year with available data (Coley, 2001). This is true for other groups such as Whites and Blacks in which women outpace men in college educational attainment (U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey, 1998). Although women are completing high school and college at higher rates than are men, there continues to be differences in earnings and employment that favor men (Coley, 2001). However, these differences are decreasing. The male-female earnings ratio for college

**Table 22. Occupation Type Across Latino Groups**

Description	Mexicans (%)	Puerto Ricans (%)	Cubans (%)
Professional or managerial	12	21	23
Technical, sales, or administration support	22	33	31
Service	20	19	15
Precision production, crafts, or repair	16	11	13
Operators, fabricators, or laborers	23	16	17
Farmers, forestry, or fishing	6	1	2

graduates was 2 to 1 in the 1970s, whereas in 1998, this ratio was calculated as 1.3 to 1. At the high school level, differences continue, but the gap is narrower (1.8 to 1.4). Although the gap has decreased, it remains a problem to consider in terms of the overall benefits of educational attainment.

### *Education Dropouts*

Dropouts have been defined variously in the social sciences, and definitional problems have contributed to differences in reported results across studies. Moreover, the National Center for Education Statistics (2002) uses distinct generational definitions from those generally accepted in the social science literature. For purposes of this article, generational differences based on birth location are defined according to National Center for Education Statistics definitions and dropouts are defined by status rates, which include those individuals who have not completed high school and are not enrolled at a time point. Status rates tend to be higher than either event rates (individuals who leave school in a year) or cohort rates (a group of students followed over time) (Mehan, 1997). The drop-out rate is significantly higher for Latinos born outside the United States. For example, in 1997, the status drop-out rate for this group was 39% compared with 15% for those individuals born in the United States but whose parents were born outside the United States and 18% for later generation Latinos ages 16 to 24. These percentages are consistently higher than those for total non-Hispanics born outside the United States, those born in the United States but with at least one parent born outside the United States, and later generations, where the drop-out rates are 8%, 5%, and 9%, respectively. Across Latino groups, people of Mexican origin are disproportionately represented among dropouts. For Mexicans between 16 and 24 years of age who are born outside the United States, 44% drop out

**Table 23. Average (and standard deviations) of GRE and SAT Scores Across Population and Language Groups**

Description	GRE Verbal	GRE Quantitative	SAT Verbal	SAT Math
Non-Hispanic White				
EBL ( <i>n</i> = 55,386)	523 (106)	580 (121)	524 (101)	558 (106)
NEBL ( <i>n</i> = 496)	461 (105)	568 (125)	437 (108)	538 (113)
Mexican American				
EBL ( <i>n</i> = 569)	464 (104)	507 (126)	459 (105)	486 (106)
NEBL ( <i>n</i> = 23)	351 (86)	443 (115)	366 (97)	425 (126)
Puerto Rican				
EBL ( <i>n</i> = 244)	470 (109)	497 (137)	469 (113)	483 (113)
NEBL ( <i>n</i> = 264)	398 (89)	465 (115)	363 (91)	443 (92)
Other Latino				
EBL ( <i>n</i> = 582)	491 (104)	534 (137)	486 (104)	512 (110)
NEBL ( <i>n</i> = 107)	454 (101)	534 (116)	418 (104)	490 (100)

NOTE: EBL = English best language; NEBL = non-English best language; other Latino = unspecified; GRE = Graduate Record Examination.

compared with 29% of other Latinos. The same holds for first and later generations where there is a difference of 17% to 8% between Mexicans and other Latinos, respectively (Mehan, 1997).

#### *Educational Testing and Field of Study*

Two measures of educational achievement are SAT and Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores, the two most commonly used standardized tests for college and graduate school admissions (Pennock-Roman, 1999). Table 23 presents a longitudinal analysis of raw scale scores of Latino groups on the GRE and the SAT over an approximately 6-year period. Overall, when compared with non-Hispanic Whites, GRE verbal and quantitative raw scale scores for Latinos are lower, with Puerto Ricans scoring slightly higher than Mexican Americans. The “other” category of Latinos as a group shows higher scores than do both Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans. An interesting comparison is apparent when categorizing students on the basis of their own language preferences. For Puerto Ricans and other Latinos, there is more improvement in verbal and quantitative scores from the SAT to the GRE, a period that corresponds to the undergraduate years, in those for whom English is not their primary preference as compared with those who self-report English as their stronger language. In other words, those who preferred a language other than English at the time they took the SAT had bigger gains on the GRE than did those who were stronger in English. A corollary to this

**Table 24. Selected Fields of Study by Total and Latino Populations**

Description	Total U.S. Population (%)	Latinos (%)
Business	20	19
Education	17	19
Engineering	7	4
Liberal Arts	5	6
Other fields of study	13	12

point is that a test given in a nonnative language reflects a point-in-time measure that can be expected to show substantial improvement with continued exposure to the language of the test. Given the small number of Mexican Americans who identified as non-English best language, this comparison cannot be made with any degree of confidence for that Latino group. Understandably, there are clear within-group differences in favor of those who are bilingual over those who are not, and this holds for both tests across all Latino groups.

It is interesting to note the fields of study chosen by Latinos. Once Latinos enter the college level, they choose bachelor majors that are similar to those of the general U.S. population (see Table 24), with the major differences being in engineering degrees. The differences in occupation of Latinos or in attainment of college degrees previously noted bear further investigation given these similarities.

### *Health*

Some of the common indicators of the health status of Latinos in the United States are death rates, causes of death, health insurance coverage rates, and disability status. Data are provided as follows for each of these measures, with the source being the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2000). Table 25 shows that Latinos have the second lowest death rates when compared with other race ethnic groups. Asian groups have the lowest death rate.

Table 26 shows that the leading cause of death for the total U.S. population is heart disease, which is true for Latinos as well. Among the top 10 causes of death, Latinos show clear differences from the U.S. total population as well as from non-Hispanic Whites. These differences are in accident rates, liver diseases, homicides, and perinatal conditions. Accidents rank third for Latinos and fifth for the total U.S. population and for non-Hispanic Whites. Notably, homicides, liver disease, and perinatal conditions do not appear on the Top 10 lists for the total U.S. population or for non-Hispanic Whites. Some of

**Table 25. Death Rates by Population Group**

Description of Group	Number per 100,000
Total U.S. population	825
African American	691
American Indian	710
Latino	601
Asian American	519

**Table 26. Top 10 Causes of Death by Group**

U.S. Total Population	Non-Hispanic Whites	Latinos
Heart disease		Heart disease
Malignant neoplasms		Malignant neoplasms
Cerebrovascular disease		Accidents
Chronic lower respiratory disease		Cerebrovascular disease
Accidents		Diabetes
Diabetes	Influenza	Liver disease or cirrhosis
Pneumonia and influenza	Diabetes	Homicide
Alzheimer's disease		Chronic lower respiratory
Nephritis		Pneumonia and influenza
Septicemia	Suicide	Perinatal conditions

NOTE: Empty cells indicate same as U.S. total.

these differences may be attributable to differences in numbers of people at younger and older life stages among Latinos when compared with the total U.S. population. For example, accidents for Latinos and Alzheimer's disease for the total U.S. population may be related to age categories, with Latinos as a younger population being more susceptible to injury, whereas an aging total U.S. population may be more susceptible to Alzheimer's disease. For African Americans, HIV appears on the Top 10 lists, whereas for American Indians, suicide is on the Top 10. The National Center for Health Statistics (1998) reported that Latinos have low rates of chronic diseases, especially lung and colorectal cancer, and strokes. For diabetes and liver diseases, Latinos are rated in the middle of all the race/ethnic categories. Geographic differences also affect death rates, with up to 10% lower deaths per 100,000 in the North-east when compared with the South.

**Table 27. Medicaid Coverage for Children by Ethnic Groups**

All children covered by Medicaid	20%
Whites	17%
Blacks	36%
Asians	17%
Latinos	31%

### *Health Insurance Coverage*

The U.S. Census defines health insurance coverage globally, and this definition may affect differences reported across agencies. Coverage means that people participated in private plans or in government programs such as Medicaid or Supplemental Security Income. The Census Bureau warns that some respondents may not know whether they are covered. The different types of coverage are not mutually exclusive, meaning that people may have several types. People can be fully insured or only partially insured or covered by Medicaid or by military health care entities. Using the Census Bureau definition of coverage, data on health insurance coverage show that in 1999, 66% of Latinos were covered, compared with 89% of Whites, 79% of African Americans, and 79% of Asians/Pacific Americans. Alaskan Natives are not included in this description because of changes made to the survey categories for that group. On the other hand, uninsured rates for Latinos declined from 35% in 1998 to 33% in 1999. For Whites, the drop was from 12% to 11%. Blacks also declined 1% from 22% to 21%. These data show that although there has been a slight improvement in overall health insurance coverage for all groups, Latinos still lag well behind in current coverage. As a group, 1998 census data show that the foreign-born population in the United States is more likely to be without health insurance (32.5% versus 13.6%, respectively). In addition, if a group migrates to the United States and is below the poverty level, more than 50% of that group will have no health insurance.

Employment-based insurance is still the norm, and the poor are less likely to be employed in occupations with health insurance. Insurance coverage is also related to income. For those whose income is under \$25,000, the rate of coverage is 76% for all groups; coverage rises to 92% for those with incomes of \$75,000 or more.

Regarding types of insurance, Tables 27 and 28 indicate that Latino children are far more likely to be covered under government insurance, and private insurance coverage for Latinos as a whole is far less prevalent than it is for Whites.

**Table 28. Private and Government Insurance Coverage by Selected Groups (1999)**

Insurance Coverage	Total (%)	Whites (%)	Latinos (%)
Private	71	73	47
Government	24	23	24

### *Latinos With Disabilities*

The Census Bureau defines disability status according to the definitions in the Americans With Disabilities Act (McNeil, 2001). The long form questionnaire includes two items relating to disability. The first item asks about sensory and physical conditions that limit individuals and are long lasting. The second item asks about mental disabilities such as learning or concentrating, self-care disabilities, whether the individuals can shop or go to doctor appointments alone (going outside the home), and employment disabilities (ability to work). There are six categories derived from the two items: sensory disability, physical disability, mental disability, self-care disability, going-outside-the-home disability, and employment disability. Questionnaire items apply to all individuals older than 5 for sensory, physical, mental, or self-care impairments or to all those older than 16 for going outside the home or employment-related impairments. Approximately 20% of the total U.S. population has one of these impairments. About 50% of those impairments are considered severe. Latinos have statistically similar rates of severe disability when compared with the White, non-Hispanic population: 12% and 11%, respectively. Individuals with severe disabilities are more likely to live in poverty and to be covered by government insurance programs. The presence of a disability among individuals ages 25 to 64 triples the risk of also being in poverty (McNeil, 2001). Unemployment rates for Latinos with disabilities remain disproportionately high when compared with the total unemployment rates of persons without disabilities (52% compared with 18%).

### **Discussion**

We offer this research solely as a description of Latinos to be used as a baseline for other investigators and practitioners in their work with linguistically and culturally diverse populations. To that end, we limit the discussion of the findings to a few selected highlights that have implications for further research. The most dramatic demographic change is in the growth rate of Latinos, who now represent 13% of the total U.S. population. If that growth

rate continues, Latinos will represent 20% of the total U.S. population by 2010. Importantly, Latinos have begun to settle in areas of the country that historically have been more homogeneous. Careful planning for an infusion of culturally and linguistically diverse individuals will be required among health providers, educators, and government agencies in those states that have seen the biggest change. Across-the-board increases in the number of individuals whose home language is Spanish (11% of the population) are noted. This finding probably correlates to the unprecedented migration rates previously noted, which means that more Latinos will be requesting English instruction, particularly at ages younger than 25. The preference for Spanish at home by people newly arrived may also be related to the high proportions of Latinos who remain at the lowest educational levels.

As a group, Latinos do better economically with increasing levels of educational attainment. However, people of Mexican ethnicity, the largest ethnic minority in the United States, are poorly represented in higher socioeconomic categories while being disproportionately overrepresented in low educational attainment and drop-out status. Educational institutions from K through 16 apparently have not yet developed programs to attract and retain this Latino group. Slight educational gains made by Latinos in the past decade may be cancelled out if the economy continues to slow, particularly if Latino women with college degrees continue to be paid at levels below those of men.

The relationship between poverty and health status among Latinos should be a focus of researchers across disciplines. On all of the variables previously described, people in the bottom fifth income group continue to do poorly. Latinos cannot “bootstrap” to better standings in health and education without adequate resources to buy boots in the first place. As a young and growing group, Latinos are responsible for helping the United States to avoid the stagnant growth conditions currently experienced by other Western countries. As such, they are both hope and challenge.

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