

# Hispanics

## A Statistical Portrait

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# Major Findings

## Income and Wealth

- Per capita income of Hispanics is one half that of non-Hispanic whites, and household net worth is less than one tenth.
- Fifty percent of Hispanic households use some form of welfare, the highest rate of any major population group.

## Crime

- Hispanics are 3.3 times more likely to be in prison than whites; they are 4.2 times more likely to be in prison for murder, and 5.8 times more likely to be in prison for felony drug crimes.
- Young Hispanics are 19 times more likely than young whites (and slightly more likely than young blacks) to be in youth gangs.

## Education

- Hispanics drop out of high school at three times the white rate and twice the black rate.
- Even third-generation Hispanics drop out of school at a higher rate than blacks and are less likely to be college graduates.
- From 1992 to 2003, Hispanic illiteracy in English rose from 35 percent to 44 percent.
- The average Hispanic 12th-grader reads and does math at the level of the average white 8th-grader.

## Families and Health

- At 43 percent, the Hispanic illegitimacy rate is twice the white rate, and Hispanic women have abortions at 2.7 times the white rate.
- Hispanics are three times more likely than whites not to have medical insurance, and die from AIDS and tuberculosis at three times the white rate.
- In California, the cost of free medical care for illegal aliens forced 60 hospitals to close between 1993 and 2003.

## Attitudes

- Only 33 percent of citizens of Hispanic origin consider themselves “Americans” first. The rest consider themselves either “Hispanic/Latino” or their former nationality first.

# Hispanics: A Statistical Portrait

Hispanics are the fastest-growing major population group in the United States, and have outstripped blacks as the largest minority. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's medium or most likely projection, they will account for one in four of the American population by 2050. Large majorities of both legal and illegal immigrants are Hispanic, and would be the major beneficiaries of any program to offer undocumented residents a path to legal status. In May, 2006, for example, the Senate passed S. 2611, which would amnesty 10 million illegal immigrants and triple legal immigration from one million to three million people every year.<sup>1</sup>

Decisions on amnesty, guest-worker programs, or any other immigration-related measures will therefore determine whether the United States retains its current demographic characteristics or becomes increasingly Hispanic. These decisions should not be made without regard to the impact Hispanics have already had on the United States.

## The Population

In 2005, there were 42.7 million Hispanics in the United States, and they were 14.4 percent of a popu-

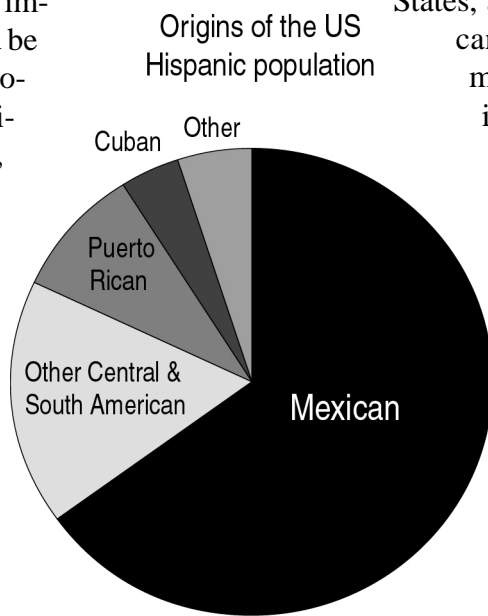
lation that was 66.9 percent white, 12.3 percent black, 4.2 percent Asian, 1.4 percent Pacific Islander, and 0.8 percent American Indian.<sup>2</sup>

The great majority of Hispanics—66 percent—are of Mexican origin. No less than ten percent of the population of Mexico now lives in the United

States, and one out of every seven Mexican workers migrates here.<sup>3</sup> Many more would like to come: According to a recent survey, almost half of all Mexicans said that they would move to the United States if they had the chance.<sup>4</sup>

The 33 percent of Hispanics who are not from Mexico have mainly the following heritages: 17 percent Latin American, nine percent Puerto Rican, and four percent Cuban (see figure to the left).<sup>5</sup> The characteristics of these populations are often quite different, with Cuban immigrants generally more economically successful than those from Mexico, Central America, or Puerto Rico.

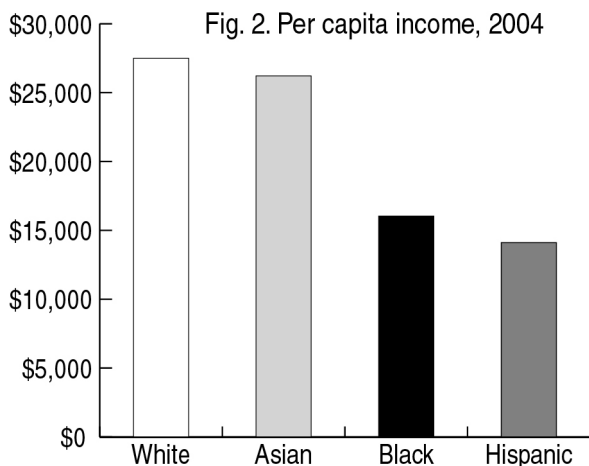
Between 2000 and 2005, the Hispanic population increased at a rate of 3.7 percent a year, no less than 14 times the growth rate for whites and more than three times the black rate.<sup>6</sup> This increase was due both to high birthrates and to immigration of about 800,000 Hispanics every year.<sup>7</sup> Much of this



immigration was illegal. The best estimates are that Hispanics account for 78 percent—and Mexicans for 56 percent—of the roughly 11 million illegal immigrants in this country.<sup>8</sup> What are some of the characteristics of this group?

### Income and Wealth

In 2004, the median per capita income of Hispanics was about half that of whites— \$14,100 as opposed to \$27,500 (Figure 2). Because of their large

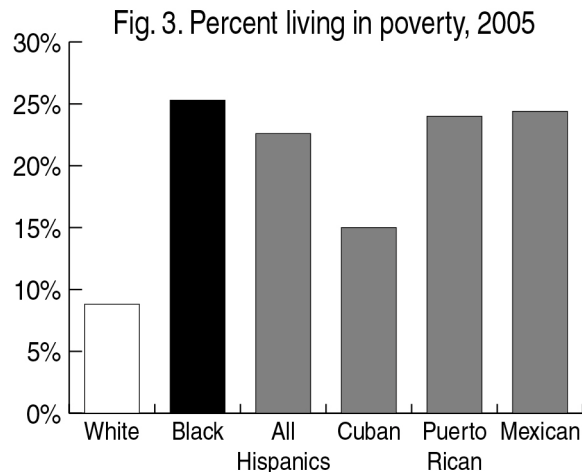


households, Hispanics had a higher median household income than blacks, but on a per capita basis they were behind the black figure of \$16,000.<sup>9</sup> Since 1972, the gap between white and Hispanic household incomes has increased while the gap between whites and blacks decreased. In 1972, whites earned 34 percent more than Hispanics, but in 2004 they earned 43 percent more.<sup>10</sup>

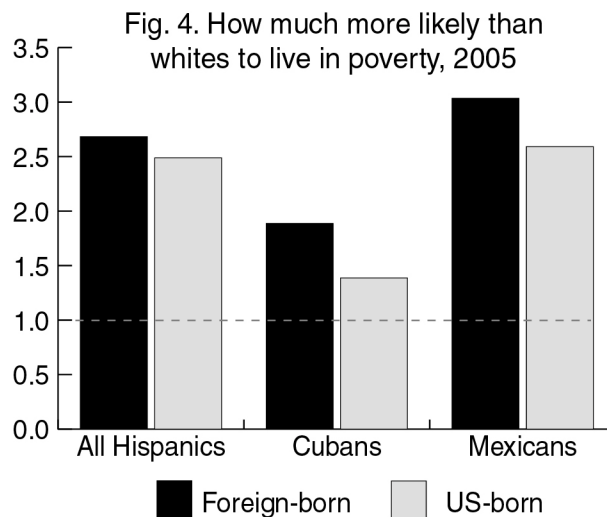
Part of the difficulty Hispanics face is their adjustment to a new culture. Their incomes rise as they become better assimilated, but the white/Hispanic gap stops narrowing after the second generation. A California study found that first-generation Hispanic immigrants who arrived before 1980 were making only 56 percent of the average white income even after they had been living in the United States for 20 years or more. Second-generation Hispanics saw the percentage rise to 79 percent, but this closing of the gap then stalled, with third-generation immigrants earning 81 percent of the wages of California whites. By contrast, by the third generation, Asian immigrants earned 12 percent more than whites.<sup>11</sup>

In 2005, nearly a quarter of Hispanic families—

23 percent—were living in poverty, a rate close to that of blacks, and 2.6 times the white rate. As can be seen in Figure 3, however, Cubans were consid-

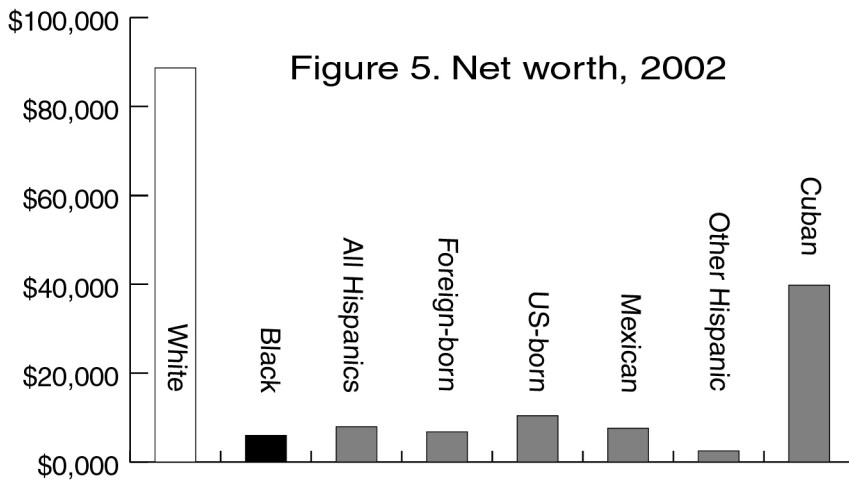


erably less likely than other Hispanics to be poor. Greater familiarity with the United States should result in better earnings, but US-born Hispanics are still more than twice as likely as whites to be living in poverty (Figure 4—the dotted line is at 1.0 for



whites).<sup>12</sup> According to economist Robert J. Samuelson, the growth in the number of poor Hispanics is the main reason poverty is growing in the United States despite decades of efforts to fight it.<sup>13</sup>

The median net worth of Hispanic households in 2002 was \$7,932, or nine percent of the median white net worth of \$88,651.<sup>14</sup> At \$10,425, the net worth of US-born Hispanics is not much higher than that of all Hispanics.<sup>15</sup> Again, as Figure 5 makes clear, there are sharp differences by area of origin.<sup>16</sup> The white/Hispanic gap is not shrinking over time: In 1996, Hispanic net worth was about 9 percent of



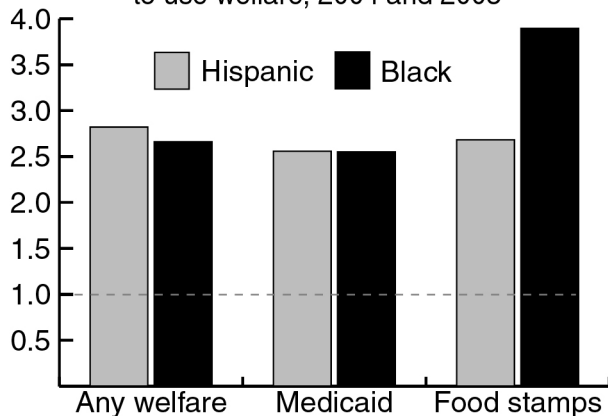
that of whites, just as it is today.<sup>17</sup>

Part of the problem is unemployment. Although Hispanics have the reputation of accepting work others will not take, with an unemployment rate of 7.6 percent in 2004, Hispanics were about 50 percent more likely to be unemployed than whites.<sup>18</sup>

Casual day labor is some of the most difficult, badly-compensated work in the United States, and is done overwhelmingly by Hispanics. Of the estimated 118,000 day laborers in the country working on a given day, 59 percent are of Mexican and 28 percent are of Central American origin. Day laborers can earn about \$15,000 if they work all year.<sup>19</sup>

Because of their low incomes, Hispanics are the major population group most likely to use welfare: In 2004, 50 percent of Hispanic households used at least one form of welfare, compared to 47 percent of blacks and 18 percent of whites (see Figure 6).<sup>20</sup>

Fig. 6. How much more likely than whites to use welfare, 2004 and 2005



In 2005, 13 percent of Hispanic households used food stamps, as opposed to five percent of white households. Puerto Rican households were more

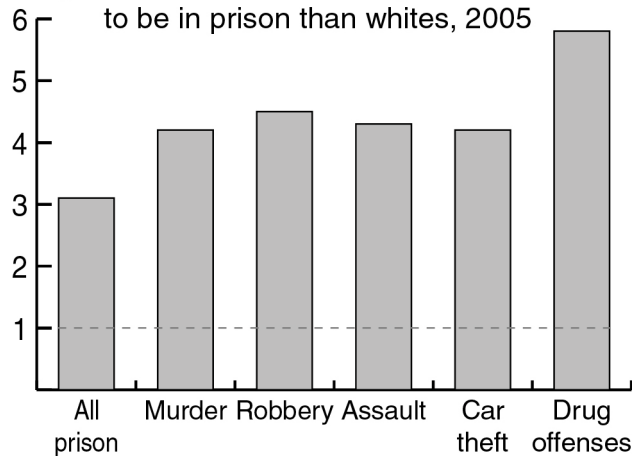
than four times more likely than whites to use food stamps and Mexicans almost three times more likely.<sup>21</sup> Non-citizens are generally ineligible for many forms of welfare; if many Hispanics were to gain citizenship, Hispanic welfare use would rise.

### Crime

Hispanics were 3.3 times more likely to be in prison than whites, and twice as likely to be in jail.<sup>22</sup> There were 267,000 criminal aliens in all prisons and jails in 2003, about three quarters of whom were Hispanic.<sup>23</sup> Three point nine percent of Hispanic men aged 25-29 are in prison or jail, vs. 1.7 percent of whites (11.9 percent of black men of this age are incarcerated).<sup>24</sup>

As shown in Figure 7, Hispanic incarceration

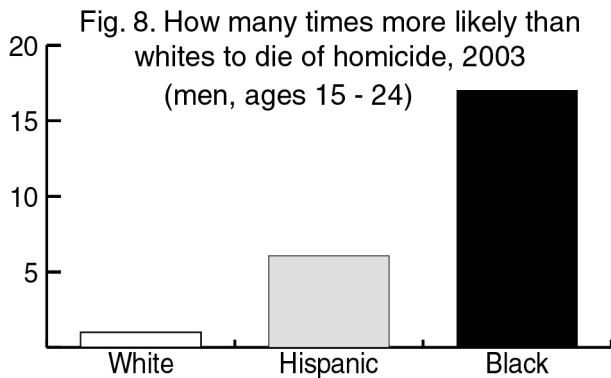
Fig. 7. How much more likely Hispanics are to be in prison than whites, 2005



rates are especially high for violent crimes, motor vehicle theft, and drug offenses.<sup>25</sup> High drug offense rates reflect Mexico's role as an important source of drugs: 92 percent of the cocaine sold in the United States comes through Mexico, and it is our largest supplier of marijuana and second largest supplier of heroin.<sup>26</sup>

Hispanics are 2.9 times more likely to die from homicide than whites (blacks are eight times more likely), and are 3.4 times more likely than whites to die from gunshot wounds (blacks are 11 times more likely). (These figures are age-adjusted to take into consideration the younger average age of Hispan-

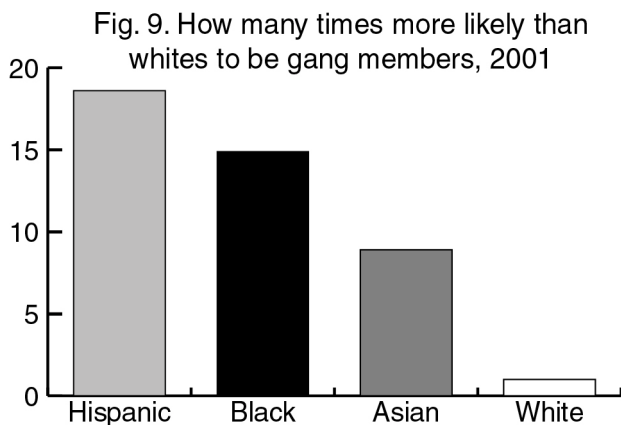
ics—young people are more likely to be murdered than older people.)<sup>27</sup> As shown in Figure 8, a 15-



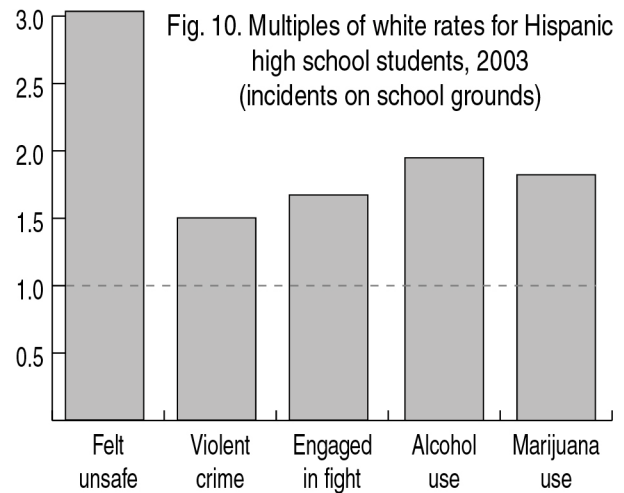
24-year-old Hispanic man is more than six times more likely than a white of the same age to die from homicide (a black is 17 times more likely).<sup>28</sup> Murder rarely crosses racial boundaries; almost all murder victims are killed by people of the same race.

In Los Angeles in 2004, 95 percent of the 1,200 to 1,500 outstanding warrants for homicide were issued against illegal aliens, almost all of whom were Hispanic. Up to two-thirds of the city's 17,000 fugitive felony warrants were for illegal immigrants.<sup>29</sup>

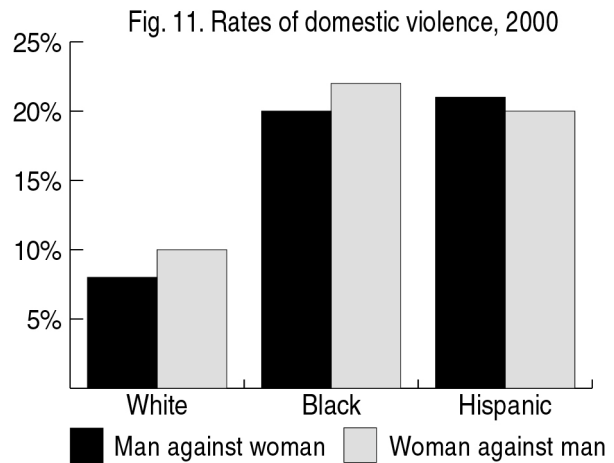
In a disturbing sign for the future, Figure 9 shows



that young Hispanics are no less than 19 times more likely than whites of the same ages to be members of youth gangs (blacks are 15 times more likely).<sup>30</sup> Perhaps this explains why Hispanic high school students are three times more likely than whites to feel unsafe at school or on the way to and from school (Figure 10). This is a higher rate than for blacks, who feel unsafe at 2.7 times the white rate.<sup>31</sup> MS-13, the largest and most notorious Hispanic gang has an estimated 10,000 members and recruits heavily among young men.<sup>32</sup>



There are no nation-wide ethnic breakdowns of domestic violence, but according to one study, Hispanic men are more than two and a half times more likely than whites to batter wives or girlfriends, and Hispanic women are twice as likely as whites to commit domestic violence. White and black women are slightly more likely than men of the same race to commit domestic violence, but this is not true of Hispanics, for whom the man is more likely to be violent (Figure 11).<sup>33</sup> A different study found His-



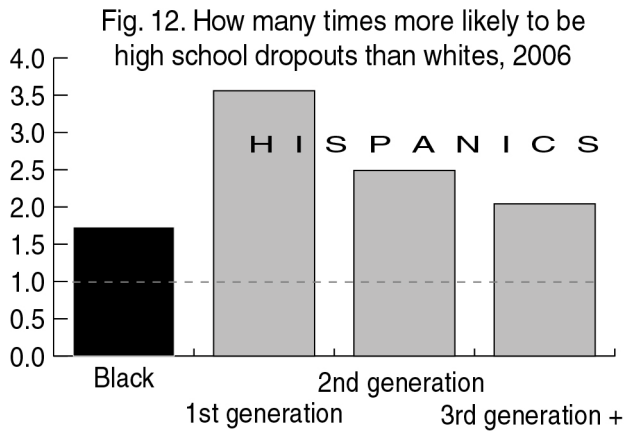
panic women nine times more likely than white women to report domestic violence.<sup>34</sup>

For some crimes there are no reliable national statistics, but state figures may give an indication. In California, Hispanics were 42 percent more likely than whites to be arrested for drunk driving in 2004.<sup>35</sup>

## Education

Poverty and crime are invariably more common

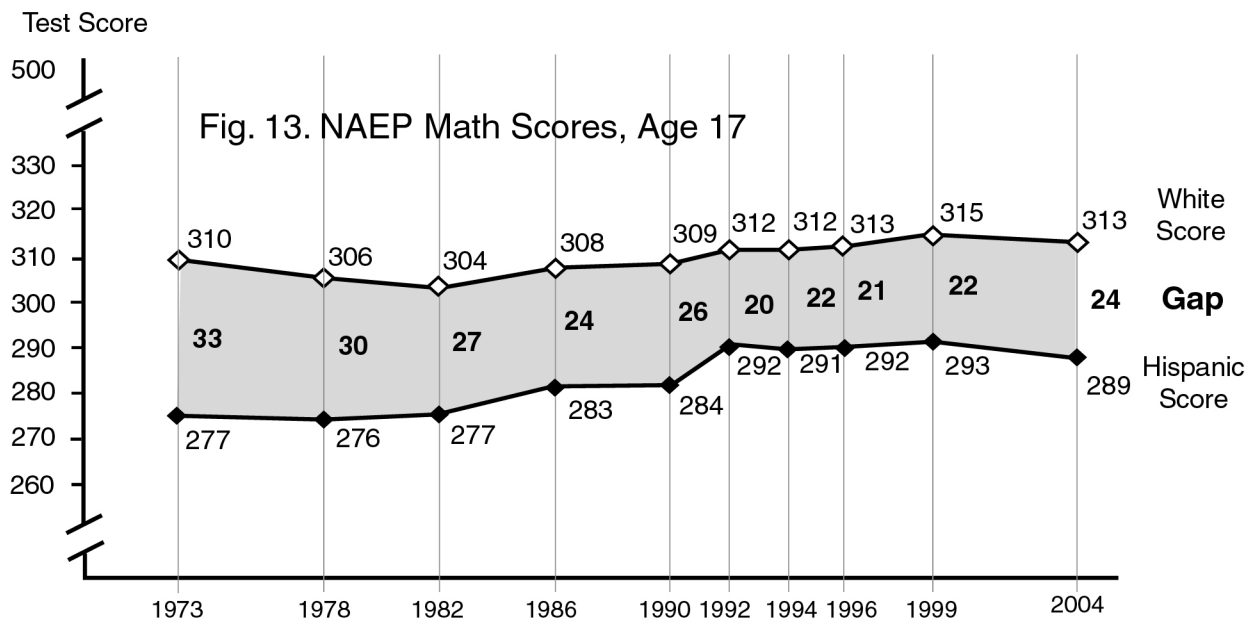
among Americans who do not finish high school, and most studies suggest Hispanics are more likely to drop out than any other group.



Because students move and change schools, it is not easy to calculate precise dropout rates, but for 2002, Jay P. Greene of the Manhattan Institute found a national graduation rate of only 52 percent for Hispanics, as opposed to 57 percent for blacks and 78 percent for whites.<sup>36</sup> The Civil Rights Project at

reflect the language and cultural barriers faced by immigrants. US-born Hispanics do better than the foreign-born, but according to a government survey of adults, even Hispanics who have been in the United States for more than three generations (third generation+ on Figure 12 to the left) are twice as likely as whites and slightly more likely than blacks to report not having a high school diploma.<sup>39</sup> Hispanics who remain in school have lower test scores than whites. In 2004, their reading scores were the same as blacks. In a disturbing indication of future levels of productivity, on average, black and Hispanic 12th-graders read worse than white 8th-graders, and there is a similar pattern in math scores. Despite considerable efforts, the achievement gaps have grown wider since the 1990s (Figure 13).<sup>40</sup>

Hispanics are the least likely of the major population groups to attend college. In 2003, 28 percent of Hispanics aged 18 to 24 were enrolled in college, compared to 38 percent of blacks and 52 percent of whites. As shown in Figure 14, most groups have



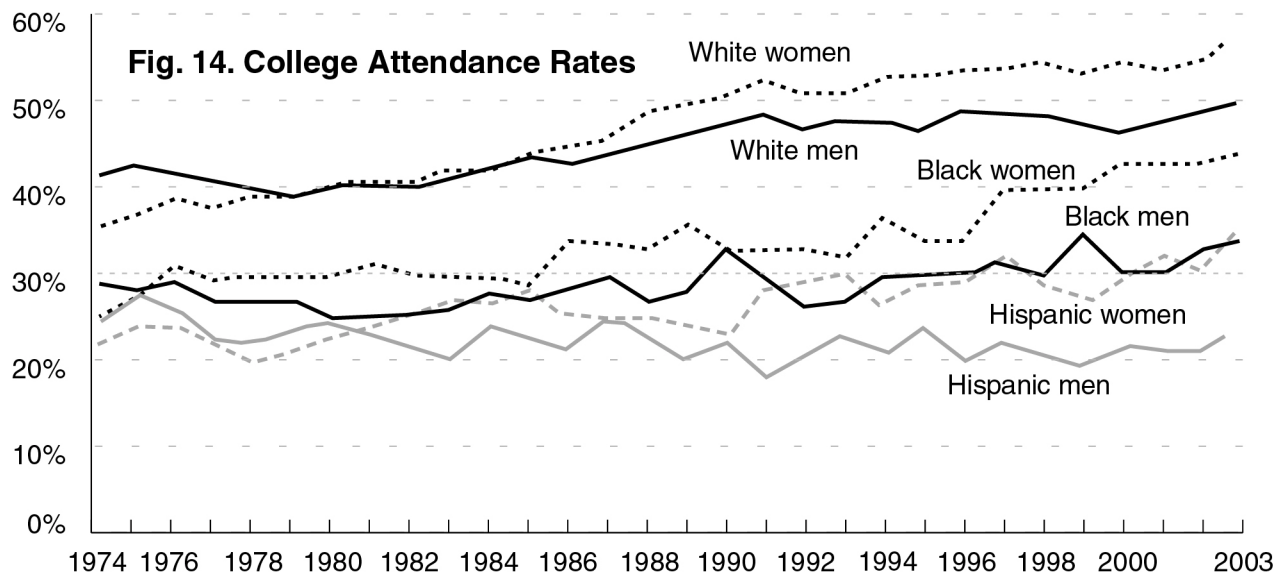
Harvard reported similar results in a 2005 study: graduation rates of 50 percent for blacks, 53 percent for Hispanics, and 75 percent for whites.<sup>37</sup> According to a different measure that does not take into account prisoners or transients—many of whom are dropouts—57 percent of Hispanics had graduated from high school, versus 74 percent of blacks and 85 percent of whites.<sup>38</sup>

To some extent, Hispanics' low graduation rates

increased college attendance rates, but between 1974 and 2003, rates for Hispanic men declined.<sup>41</sup>

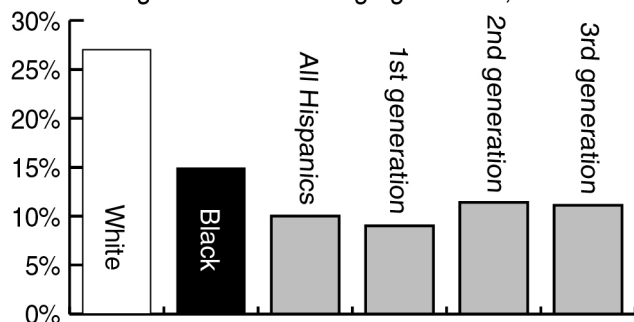
Enrolling in college does not ensure graduation. A study by the National Center for Education Statistics found that 62 percent of whites who started four-year colleges in 1995 had graduated six years later, but only 44 percent of Hispanics and an equal percentage of blacks.<sup>42</sup>

College graduation rates are only slightly better



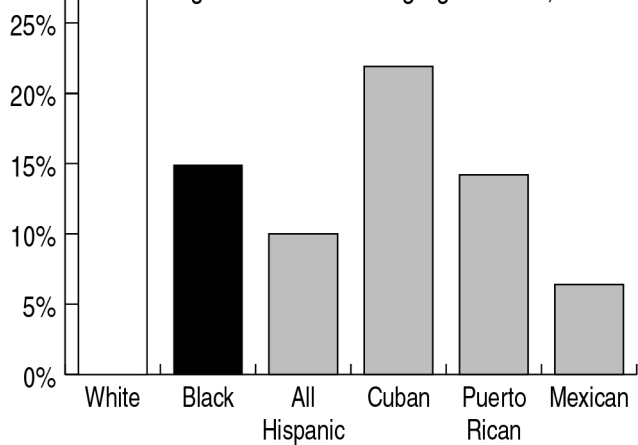
among US-born Hispanics than the foreign-born—11 percent versus 9 percent—and the rate stalls at 11 percent for both second and third generation US-born Hispanics. As Figure 15 indicates, Hispanics

Fig. 15. Percent college graduates, 2006



who have been in the country for three generations or more are still less likely than blacks to graduate from college. Once again, country of origin has a significant effect, as shown in Figure 16.<sup>43</sup> Hispan-

Fig. 16. Percent college graduates, 2006

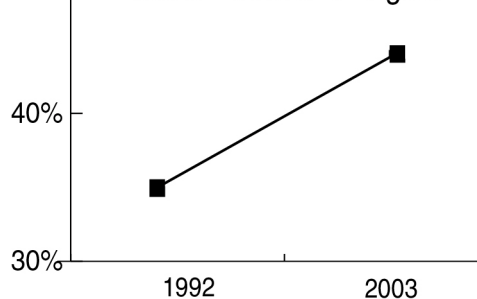


ics who do receive degrees have excellent opportunities, and receive slightly higher wages than whites when matched for education and occupation.<sup>44</sup>

Low Hispanic education levels and the low incomes that follow have broader implications. If the Hispanic population increases as projected and Hispanics do not improve their graduation record, the average per capita income in California is estimated to drop by 11 percent by 2020. The average for the entire country would drop by two percent.<sup>45</sup>

One difficulty Hispanics face is that Spanish is so firmly entrenched in some areas that many immigrants may feel no pressure to learn English. In 2003, 44 percent of Hispanics did not speak and read English well enough to perform routine tasks, while in 1992 the percentage was 35 percent. This means the illiteracy rate for Hispanic adults rose during the decade (Figure 17), whereas it declined for every

Fig. 17. Percentage of Hispanic adults illiterate in English



other major population group.<sup>46</sup> Fifty-three percent of working age residents in Los Angeles County have



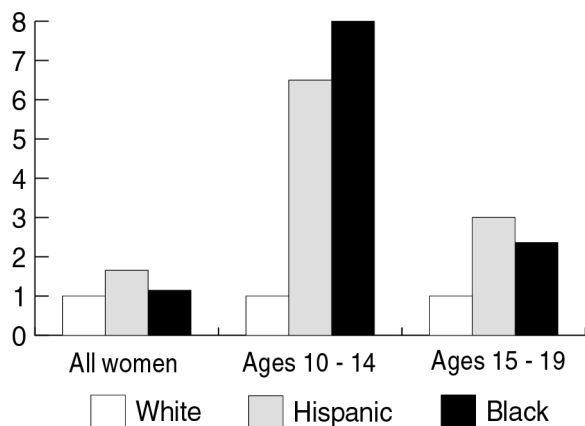
trouble reading street signs and filling out job applications in English.<sup>47</sup> In the nation as a whole, nine percent of fourth-grade students are classified as “English Language Learners,” but this number rises to 54 percent in heavily-Hispanic Los Angeles.<sup>48</sup>

Limited English can impose burdens on others. In 2002, the Office of Management and Budget estimated the costs of implementing Executive Order 13166, which required agencies receiving federal funds to serve people who do not speak English. OMB had not yet gathered the data to calculate a total figure, but it estimated the annual cost would be \$268 million for hospitals and \$8.5 million for state departments of motor vehicles. The annual cost of language services to food stamp recipients was expected to be \$25.2 million.<sup>49</sup>

### Fertility, Marriage, and Health

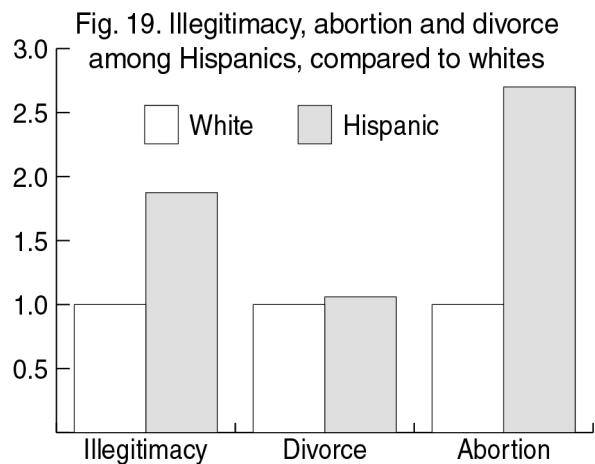
Hispanics have the highest fertility of any major population group, and their teenage birthrates are especially high (Figure 18).<sup>50</sup> Hispanic fertility stayed about even from 1980 to 2003, while that of

Fig. 18. Multiples of white fertility rates for Hispanics and blacks, 2003



whites dropped by six percent, and that of blacks by 26 percent.<sup>51</sup> Fifty-three percent of Hispanic women who gave birth in 2003 had a high school education, vs. 89 percent of white women.<sup>52</sup>

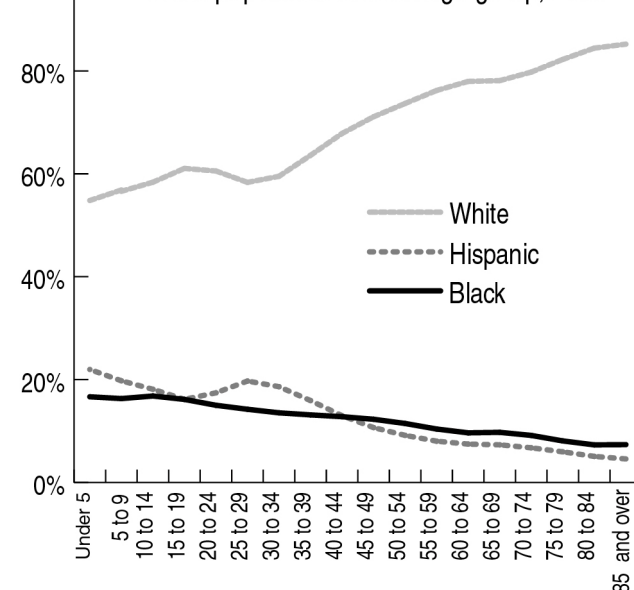
In 2003, the illegitimacy rate for children born to Hispanic mothers was 45 percent, nearly double the white rate (Figure 19). Between 1980 and 2003, the illegitimacy rate for Hispanics increased by 91 percent.<sup>53</sup> Hispanic women accounted for 20 percent



of abortions in America in 2002, and were 2.7 times more likely than whites to end a pregnancy in this manner.<sup>54</sup> White and Hispanic divorce rates are about the same: According to a 2001 study based on older data, 34 percent of Hispanic women’s first marriages ended in divorce within ten years; the figure for white women was 32 percent.<sup>55</sup>

One reason for high fertility among Hispanics is the large number of young people. In 2005, their median age was 27.2, whereas the median age for whites was 40.3.<sup>56</sup> Although Hispanics are 14.4 percent of the total population, they are 22 percent of all Americans under age five. Figure 20 shows the percentage of whites, blacks, and Hispanics of vari-

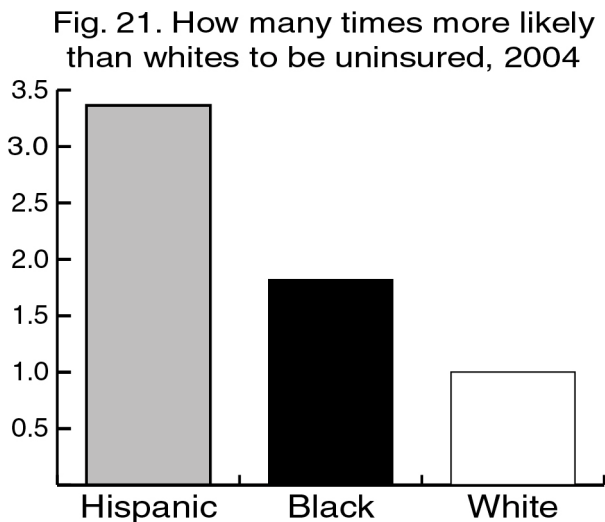
Figure 20. White, black and Hispanic share of the population in each age group, 2005



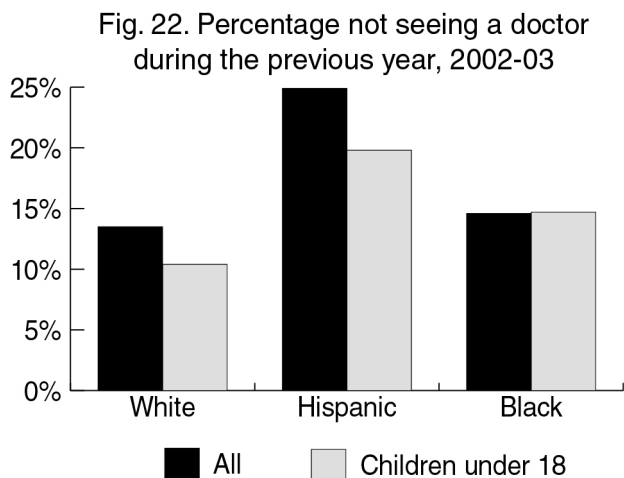
ous age groups. Whites, for example, account for 55 percent of Americans under age five years, but

85 percent of those 85 and older.<sup>57</sup>

Despite their youth, Hispanics are in relatively poor health and tend to receive infrequent medical attention. This is partly because they are the group least likely to have health insurance. Thirty-three percent of Hispanics are uninsured, vs. 11 percent of whites and 20 percent of blacks (Figure 21).<sup>58</sup>

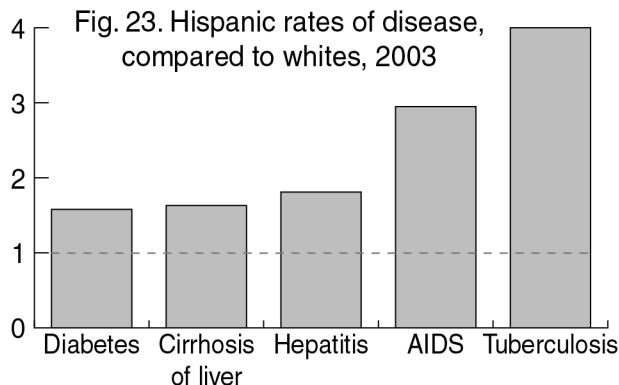


The majority of immigrants from Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala are without health insurance, which means they must be treated at public expense, and are likely to put off doctor visits until their conditions are relatively serious.<sup>59</sup> Hispanics were nearly twice as likely as whites to report not going to a doctor over the previous year, and children under 18 were about twice as likely as white children not to have visited a doctor during the previous year (Figure 22).<sup>60</sup>



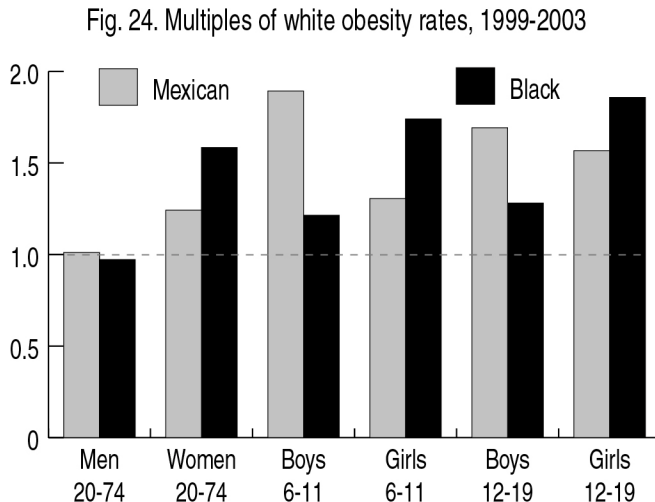
Hispanics are three times more likely than whites

to die of AIDS, and four times more likely to die of tuberculosis (these figures are age-adjusted to take account of the low average age of Hispanics). They have higher rates of other diseases as well (Figure 23); a high rate of death from cirrhosis of the liver



is an indicator of alcohol problems.<sup>61</sup> Mexican adults ages 18-64 are 90 percent more likely than whites to have untreated cavities.<sup>62</sup>

Mexican and white men are about equally likely to be obese, but Mexican women are 24 percent more likely than white women to be obese. Children show a more disturbing trend. As shown in Figure 24, boys



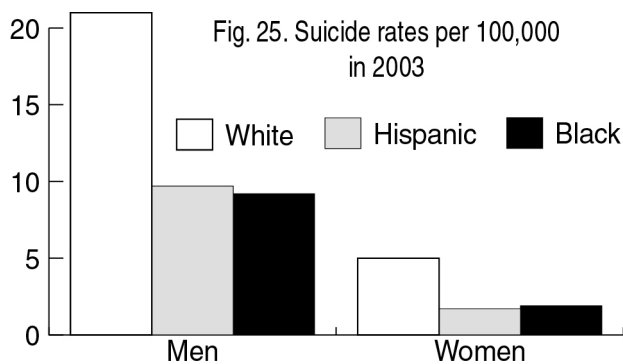
ages 6-11 of Mexican origin are 89 percent more likely to be obese than white boys, and Mexican girls in the same age group are 31 percent more likely to be obese than white girls. There are similar differences among 12- to 19-year-olds.<sup>63</sup> Hispanics are 32 percent less likely than whites to exercise regularly, and even Hispanics with incomes three times the poverty threshold or greater are 19 percent less likely to exercise than similar whites.<sup>64</sup>

Illegal immigrants enter the country without

health screening, and some bring diseases not normally found in the United States. Polio, typhoid, tuberculosis, plague, leprosy, and dysentery are still rare but are increasing. Outbreaks are almost always traced to immigrants, many of them Hispanic.<sup>65</sup>

Because Hispanics are poor and often do not have drivers licenses, they walk more than other Americans, and immigrants from rural areas may not be accustomed to heavy American traffic. As a result, in 2001-2002 Hispanics were 77 percent more likely than whites to be hit and killed by cars.<sup>66</sup>

The health picture for Hispanics is not uniformly grim. They are less than half as likely as whites to smoke.<sup>67</sup> Also, health officials have found that despite infrequent doctor visits and a disproportionate number of teenage birth, Hispanics do not suffer from high rates of infant mortality. Although blacks, at a rate of 13.5 per 1,000 live births, are more than twice as likely as whites to die as infants, the mortality rate for Hispanic infants, at 5.5 per 1,000 live births, is lower than the white rate of 5.7.<sup>68</sup>



Adjusted for age, whites are also more than twice as likely to commit suicide as Hispanics. Every year, 21 white males per 100,000 commit suicide, as compared to 9.7 Hispanic males, and five white females vs. 1.7 Hispanic females. White men between the ages of 25 and 44 are about 3.5 times more likely than Hispanics of the same age to commit suicide (Figure 25).<sup>69</sup>

### Costs

Low-income groups use more in government services than they pay in taxes. It is difficult to make precise calculations by population group because tax receipts and distribution of services are rarely bro-

ken down this way. However, the Center for Immigration Studies, using estimates developed by the National Academy of Sciences, calculates that over a lifetime, the average adult Mexican immigrant will collect \$55,200 more in government services than he or she will pay in taxes.<sup>70</sup> A North Carolina study found that Hispanics as a group represented an annual net cost of \$61 million, or \$102 per Hispanic. This estimate considered only education, medicine, and corrections.<sup>71</sup>

There is more research on the costs of illegal immigration. The Federation for American Immigration Reform estimates Hispanic illegal immigrants are a net cost to the country as a whole of \$45 billion.<sup>72</sup> FAIR estimates that the net cost to state and local governments for the education, incarceration, and emergency medical care of illegal aliens is \$36 billion. The net cost to California is \$8.8 billion, or \$1,183 per native household, and for Texas it is \$3.73 billion, or \$725 per household.<sup>73</sup> The state of Mississippi, hardly an area know to attract large numbers of Hispanics, estimates that illegal immigrants are a net cost of \$25 million.<sup>74</sup>

Children of illegal immigrants cost public schools \$28.6 billion annually,<sup>75</sup> and 70 percent of the increase in enrollment in public schools from 1991 to 2001 is due to immigration.<sup>76</sup>

Whether they have immigrated legally or not, Hispanic students often cost more to educate because of language difficulties. In Arizona, for example, it costs \$1,200 more each year to teach a student with limited English.<sup>77</sup> For the 2005-06 school year, Texas appropriated more than a billion dollars for language education, which constituted 3.5 percent of its total budget.<sup>78</sup> For fiscal year 2006, the federal government, which pays only a small fraction of local school expenses, spent \$669 million on English teaching.<sup>79</sup>

These numbers reflect only language-related programs. For the 2006 fiscal year, the federal government allocated \$13 billion for Title I schools, which have low achievement records and serve poor students.<sup>80</sup> Hispanics frequently attend schools that qualify for Title I aid.

The cost of imprisoning criminal aliens is considerable. From 2001 to 2004, the federal government spent \$1.5 billion each year both for its own

criminal alien prisoners and on reimbursements to state and local governments. Reimbursements do not cover all local costs. Every year, the states of Arizona, California, Florida, and New York spend a total of about \$600 million more on criminal aliens than they receive from the federal government. Four local jail systems with large criminal alien populations spend a combined \$160 million a year over their reimbursements.<sup>81</sup>

Federal law requires hospitals to treat all comers, whether they are legally in the country or not. In California alone, the heavy cost of free medicine for illegal aliens—the overwhelming majority of whom are Hispanic—forced 60 hospitals to shut down between 1993 and 2003; many more are on the verge of collapse.<sup>82</sup>

Hispanics are a relatively disadvantaged population that can be expected to require social services. However, their need for services is not independent of their own financial decisions. In 2004, Mexicans sent \$20 billion in remittances to their home country, and other Latin American immigrants sent another \$10 billion, sums that could have paid for a considerable amount of medical insurance.<sup>83</sup>

### Political Attitudes

As noted earlier, two thirds of the Hispanics in the United States are of Mexican origin. For historical and geographic reasons, this is a potential cause for concern. Mexico is the only nation in the world that, at least in the popular mind, has a historical claim on portions of the United States. Mexicans are still bitter over the loss of territory that followed the Mexican-American War, and many believe the United States does not have the moral right to control its own borders.

No fewer than 58 percent of Mexicans agree with the statement, “the territory of the United States’ Southwest rightfully belongs to Mexico.” Only 28 percent disagree. Likewise, 57 percent agree that “Mexicans should have the right to enter the U.S. without U.S. permission,” while 35 percent disagree.<sup>84</sup>

Perhaps historic resentment helps explain why only 36 percent of Mexicans say they hold a positive view of Americans whereas 84 percent of

Americans say they hold a positive view of Mexicans. Seventy-three percent of Mexicans say Americans are racist, and only 16 percent say Americans are honest.<sup>85</sup>

After they come to the United States, Mexicans retain longer and stronger attachments to their country of origin than do immigrants who have come greater distances. Only 34 percent of Mexicans eligible for US citizenship actually become Americans, the lowest figure for any national group.<sup>86</sup>

When they become citizens, Hispanics remain emotionally attached to their countries of origin. In a poll taken by the Pew Hispanic Center, only 33 percent of American citizens of Hispanic origin considered themselves first or only American. Forty-four percent still described themselves as their original, pre-immigration nationality (Mexican, Salvadoran, etc.), and another 22 percent considered themselves first or only “Latino or Hispanic.” Surrounded by compatriots, and with their country of origin just across the border, it is likely that U.S. citizens of Mexican origin identify even less strongly than other Hispanics with the United States. When citizens and non-citizens of Mexican origin are taken together, 55 percent consider themselves Mexican, 25 percent Latino or Hispanic, and only 18 percent American.<sup>87</sup>

It is legitimate to wonder whether it is wise for the United States to welcome large numbers of a potentially irredentist population within its borders, especially when that population is concentrated in those parts of the United States to which Mexicans have an emotional claim. An organization known as MEChA (the Spanish acronym for “Chicano Student Movement of Aztlan”) actively promotes the view that the southern border of the United States is illegitimate, and even flirts with the idea of expelling non-Hispanics from the territories lost by Mexico and establishing an all-Hispanic nation to be known as Aztlan. It has an estimated 400 chapters in universities and high schools, mainly in the American West.<sup>88</sup>

One would hope this project appeals only to a youthful minority, but the political interests of Hispanic citizens remain anchored in ethnic loyalties. A poll by *Investor’s Business Daily* found that amnesty for illegal immigrants and easing of restric-

tions are so important for 70 percent of Hispanic-Americans that their vote hinges on this question alone.<sup>89</sup> Should there ever be a sharp conflict between the United States and Mexico or any other Hispanic country, it is not difficult to predict on which side of the controversy many Hispanics—citizens or non-citizens—would fall.


### Good Americans?

Many Hispanics are loyal, productive Americans, and there is a definite trend towards assimilation and economic success as Hispanics put down roots. At the same time, it is disturbing to note that assimilation flattens out so that even after three generations, Hispanics are still at a considerable disadvantage compared to the majority population. This is in sharp contrast to Asian immigrants, many of whom surpass white achievement levels after several generations.

At the same time, most Americans believe a citizen's first identification should be as an American, not as a "Honduran" or a "Latino." It is not

reassuring for non-Hispanics to learn that only one third of Hispanic citizens think of themselves as Americans first. Mexico changed its laws in 1998 to permit dual nationality, which encourages Mexicans to take American citizenship while maintaining Mexican loyalty.<sup>90</sup>

Even staunch advocates for Hispanics recognize that large-scale immigration brings potentially serious problems. Roberto Suro of the Pew Hispanic Center has written that "Latino immigration could become a powerful demographic engine of social fragmentation, discord, and even violence," adding that Hispanics could "replace blacks as the face of intergenerational poverty."<sup>91</sup> High Hispanic dropout rates and young-gang affiliation are ominous indicators of this possibility.

For the past 50 years, the United States has poured tremendous efforts into fighting poverty, disease, crime, and school failure. We should think very carefully about policies that encourage demographic changes that may lead to setbacks in these efforts and that could burden future generations with increasingly difficult problems. 

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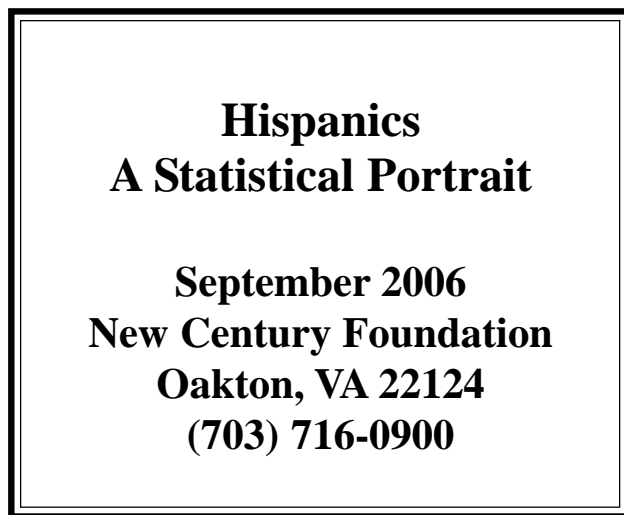
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