

HISPANICS IN FLORIDA

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This paper examines the impact of Florida's rapidly growing and unevenly distributed Hispanic population. The central theme is that the unusually heavy concentration of Hispanics in the Miami area has and will continue to exacerbate various social problems, including housing, jobs, politics, and racial attitudes, not only in southeastern Florida, but throughout the state and beyond.

It is not my intention to suggest or imply that Hispanics make poor immigrants or citizens. Similar negative impacts would be expected from any immigrants who come in similar numbers from the same origin in the same short period of time and concentrate in a relatively small area. Hispanics came under circumstances similar to earlier immigrants and had to work hard and fight their way up the economic ladder. They have performed admirably in education, arts and science, professions, skilled and unskilled trades, and various entrepreneurial endeavors, and have become outstanding citizens. This paper does not in any way intend to minimize the positive contributions of Hispanics to this nation. Both Florida and the nation have benefited enormously from Hispanics, who have enriched our architecture, music, dress, food preferences, linguistic diversity, and values and attitudes. Hispanics are a growing positive influence in American society. At least nine Hispanics serve in Congress, one is a governor of a state, and three major U.S. cities (San Antonio, Denver, and Miami) have elected Hispanic mayors. Only 30 percent of Hispanics of voting age cast ballots in the 1980 presidential election (compared to the national figure of 58 percent), but voter registration drives should significantly increase future Hispanic political influence (Davis, Haub, and Willette 1983, 40). At least thirteen television stations and 118 radio stations broadcast in Spanish

full time, and perhaps another 100 or more broadcast ten or more hours a week in Spanish. Several supermarket chains stock Hispanic food specialties and Mattel markets an Hispanic Barbie doll. Thus, Hispanics are a growing influence, politically and economically.

Various attempts to classify Hispanics by Spanish origin, surname, language, heritage, birth, or parentage have floundered for a variety of reasons. Therefore, this paper uses the term Hispanic based on the subjective method used by the United States Census Bureau in both 1970 and 1980, namely asking people if they are Hispanic, i.e. people of Spanish origin who trace their heritage to Spanish-speaking countries (Haub 1981, 9). Using this method in 1980, the United States Census identified 14.6 mil-

TABLE 1

U.S. HISPANIC POPULATION

Year	Millions	Percentage of Total U.S. Population
1950...	4.0	2.7
1960...	6.9	3.9
1970...	10.5	5.2
1980...	14.6	6.4

Source: Compiled from various census reports.

lion Hispanics in the United States, representing 6.4 percent of the total population (Table 1). This number includes an estimated 2 million illegal immigrants (Davis, Haub, and Willette 1983, 27). In 1950 nearly all Hispanics in the United States were of Mexican-American origin and lived in the Southwest. In recent years changes in United States immigration laws have made it easier for large numbers of Hispanics to enter from other Spanish-speaking nations. The overall impact has been especially significant for several states, including Florida. Hispanics, the fastest growing minority in the United States, are now second largest after blacks. They could replace blacks as our largest minority.

Hispanics are widely distributed throughout the United States, but most are clustered in a few states and metropolitan areas. Nearly 70 percent live in California, Texas, New York, and Florida (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1982). In 1980 Florida ranked fourth among all states in total number and seventh in percentage of Hispanic people. Hispanics have a strong preference for urban location. In 1980 approximately 80 percent of all Hispanics were living in metropolitan areas. Nearly one-third lived in five metropolitan areas, Los Angeles, New York City, Miami, Chicago, and San Antonio (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1981).

Since World War II Florida has experienced an unusually rapid population increase. Although most of this increase has resulted from large-scale migration from the "Snow-Belt" states, approximately 400,000 of the 3 million people moving to Florida during the 1970s were Hispanics. Florida's Hispanic population nearly doubled from 450,000 in 1970 to 858,000 in 1980 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1980, Table 16, pp. 11--26). Since 1950, Cuban-Americans have made up an ever-increasing percentage of immigrants to the United States (Table 2). Between

TABLE 2

CUBAN-AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS TO THE U.S.

Year	Number of U.S. Immigrants	Percentage of U.S. Immigrants
1950-1959....	71,000	7.4
1960-1969....	249,000	19.2
1970-1979....	278,000	20.0

Source: Davis, Haub, and Willette 1983, p. 22.

1960 and 1980 a total of 527,000 Cubans entered legally into the United States, according to the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, and an additional 100,000 or more were admitted as political refugees or other categories of special entrants (Davis, Haub, and Willette 1983, 22). Most of these Cubans settled in southeastern Florida.

In addition to this large number of Cuban-Americans, Florida also has significant numbers of various other Hispanic groups including Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and "other Hispanic" (Table 3). It is the large Cuban-American population, however, that

TABLE 3

HISPANICS IN FLORIDA (1980)

Hispanic Group	Number of Hispanics	% of Total Hispanics	Percentage Urban
Cubans.....	470,250	55	99.1
Puerto Ricans....	94,775	11	93.4
Mexicans.....	79,392	9	69.4
Other Hispanics...	213,741	25	95.0
Total.....	858,158	100	94.7

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census 1980, 11--26.

TABLE 4

DISTRIBUTION OF FLORIDA HISPANICS BY SMSA (1980)
 (Percentage of Total Hispanics by Groups Who Live in SMSA Indicated)

Hispanic Group	SMSA				
	Miami	Tampa- St. Pete	Ft. Lauder- dale	West Palm Beach	Orlando
Cubans.....	87	4	3	2	1
Puerto Ricans.....	47	12	10	6	10
Mexicans.....	17	12	4	10	6
Other Hispanics...	54	18	7	3	3
All Hispanics.....	68	9	5	3	3

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census 1980, 11--26.

Gives Florida its special Hispanic identity. According to the 1980 census, 55 percent of the 858,000 Hispanics in Florida were Cuban-Americans. Prior to 1959 only about 50,000 Cubans had entered the United States (Population Reference Bureau 1983). From 1959 to 1962 an additional 260,000 entered before the Cuban Missile Crisis temporarily ended migration to the United States. In 1965 Cubans were once again allowed to leave Cuba, and 344,000 came to the United States before Castro terminated emigration in 1973. Shortly after the official 1980 U.S. Census was taken in the spring of 1980, Castro permitted an estimated 125,000 additional Cubans to migrate to the United States. Most of these settled in the Miami area. Thus, as of the spring of 1985, somewhat more than 925,000 Cubans were known to be in the United States, and 590,000 (64 percent) of these were living in Florida. (In 1980 the figure was 59 percent.)

The uneven distribution of Hispanics in Florida, with an unusually heavy concentration in the Miami area, is perhaps a greater problem than the total number of Hispanics in the state. This adds considerably to social tensions and problems of assimilation. Hispanics in Florida, as elsewhere, display a strong urban preference (Table 4). Approximately 95 percent of Florida's Hispanics live in urban areas. Eighty-eight percent live in five of Florida's eighteen Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs). Three contiguous SMSAs in southeastern Florida (Miami, Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood, and West Palm Beach) are home for 77 percent of Florida's Hispanics, and Dade County (the Miami SMSA) contains 68 percent.

Four of the five cities in Florida with the largest number of Hispanics are located in Dade County. The city of Miami, with 194,000, had the most Hispanics, 56 percent of Miami's total population. This was 26 percent of all Hispanics in Florida in 1980 (Table 5). Nearby Hialeah was nearly 75 percent Hispanic. Miami Beach and Coral Gables also have significant numbers of Hispanics with 22 and 30 percent respectively.

The only other major Florida city with a large Hispanic population was Tampa with 36,000, or 13 percent of that city's total population. Tampa has had a sizable Hispanic population since cigar workers began relocating there in the 1880s.

In addition to the large number and uneven distribution of Hispanics in Florida, other factors may add to social tensions: variations in national, racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Hispanics include Caucasians, Indians,

blacks, and Asians (Filipinos). Furthermore, a considerable range exists among Hispanics in education, income, and levels of acculturation and assimilation.

Hispanic immigrants have experienced problems typical of most immigrant groups to the United States including various degrees of hostility and prejudice in housing, jobs, and education. And as with earlier immigrants, the large number of Hispanics has raised fears about American

values being undermined. Early in this century immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe came in large numbers and were perceived to be inferior by many Americans who predicted a deterioration in the vitality of American society. Clearly such was not the case. However, Hispanics are somewhat unique as immigrants in that they share a common language and, aided by governmental action, are holding on to their native languages more rigidly than earlier ethnic or linguistic groups. Many of the problems faced by Hispanics in Florida are in part related to pre-existing racial-ethnic attitudes and tensions and have been made worse by a persisting language barrier. By clinging to a common language, Hispanics have benefited by development of a strong group consciousness which has led to increased political leverage in demands for special attention in education, the political process, and job opportunities. But this has in turn led to a negative response from some non-Hispanic Americans who fear a drift toward bilingualism could slow the rate of assimilation. Debate concerning bilingual education has become involved in political processes, as should be the case in a democratic society, but the result has been increased social tension. Voters in Dade County in 1980 overturned a county-wide bilingualism policy that had been adopted in 1973. As Hispanic political influence increases, it is likely that bilingualism will repeatedly emerge as a political issue.

Other causes of social tension include worries that large numbers of Hispanics, especially illegal immigrants, might take jobs from people already in the country and may work for lower wages. Some people fear that large numbers of newly arrived immigrants will make excessive use of public services such as welfare, education, and medical care. Such fears are often exaggerated and manipulated by politicians and others, despite evidence that illegal immigrants probably pay more in federal, state, and local taxes than they receive in benefits (Davis, Haub, and Willette 1983, 28). The cost of providing certain services clearly falls most heavily on local jurisdictions with large numbers of immigrants. Such has been the experience of southeastern Florida where large numbers of recent Cuban immigrants have created serious problems and added to the burden of local and state taxes. Although the federal government has agreed to underwrite part of the cost of housing, feeding, educating, and providing medical care for the 125,000 Cuban refugees who came in 1980, the total dollar amount is still disputed.

The problem of soaring crime rates is national, but is especially critical in the Miami area. A two-year study completed in 1984, headed by Robert

TABLE 5

FLORIDA CITIES WITH LARGE HISPANIC POPULATIONS (1980)

City	Total Population	Total Hispanic	Percentage Hispanic
Miami	346,865	194,037	55.9
Hialeah	145,254	107,908	74.3
Tampa	271,523	35,982	13.3
Miami Beach	96,928	21,408	22.2
Coral Gables	43,241	12,794	29.6

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1980, Table 16, pp. 11--27-33.

Stephenson for the Dade-Miami Criminal Justice Council, indicated that the crime rate among the Marielitos who came to the Miami area in 1980 is overall five times greater than for Cubans living in the Miami area prior to 1980 (Study: Crime rate rising... 1984). These Marielitos accounted for only 5 percent of Dade County's population but were responsible for 9 percent of the felony arrests and 23 percent of misdemeanor arrests. Miami Herald Publisher Dick Capen has written that "no one is safe in South Florida anymore" (Miami "paradise" tarnished... 1985). Two weeks earlier the headline in the Miami Herald read "Dade County Murder Rate Leads the Nation." Dade County is not only the murder capital of the United States, but also has the second highest overall crime rate in the nation. There seems to be no single cause of increased crime rates, but a clear association with the large influx of Marielitos seems obvious. Drugs are related to 40 percent of Dade County's murders, and nearly 70 percent of all United States cocaine seizure takes place in South Florida (Miami "paradise" tarnished... 1985). Many of the Marielitos were known criminals involved with traffic in drugs. Since Castro has agreed to accept the return of approximately 2,700 known criminals and mental problems among the Marielitos, crime rates and related problems may ease a bit. Still, the tension remains.

Florida and the nation have an opportunity to learn from problems related in part to governmental programs which encourage migration while doing little to relieve pressures resulting from the heavy concentration of immigrants in a few areas. Existing political institutions and American values would not permit, nor is it recommended, that newly arrived immigrants be forced to locate in areas not of their own choosing, but surely financial incentives for jobs, housing, education, and free or cheap land might help encourage a greater dispersal of immigrants. Such action, especially at the national level, would certainly help mitigate some of the social unrest and political alienation that has occurred in recent years and affected policy makers at all levels of government.

TABLE 6

POPULATION PROJECTIONS, HISPANICS IN THE U.S. IN THE YEAR 2020

Estimate	Population in Millions	Percentage of Total
High.....	32	11
Low.....	47	15

Source: Davis, Haub, and Willette 1983, 38-39.

Projections for future Hispanic population growth in the United States are compiled by the Population Reference Bureau (Table 6). The low projection suggests that an annual net migration of 500,000 Hispanics to the United States would result in a total Hispanic population of 32 million by 2020. This would make the Hispanics 11 percent of the total population of the United States. The high projection assumes 500,000 legal and an equal number of illegal Hispanic immigrants, which would result in a total Hispanic population of 47 million by 2020, or 15 percent of the national population.

Future prospects are not encouraging unless governments at all levels

coordinate efforts to accommodate problems that are likely to arise. Most of the 120,000 Marielitos who settled in southeastern Florida in 1980 are or soon will become eligible to apply for residency status which will permit the bringing of spouses and unmarried children. Eventually, full citizenship can permit the bringing of parents, siblings, married children, and their families. An estimated 300,000 or more additional Cubans may seek to enter the United States in the next few years. If history repeats, most of these new migrants will settle in the Dade County area. This would likely have a tremendous impact on

local politics and the cultural landscape of southeastern Florida for many years to come.

In summary, Florida's large and rapidly growing Hispanic population has significant social, economic, and political implications for the state. Because of the unusually large concentration of Hispanics in southeastern Florida, social tensions have increased and are likely to remain high. Evidence of these tensions may be seen in rising crime rates; political squabbling at local, state, and federal levels over financial responsibility for political refugees from Cuba; over-crowded facilities such as schools, jails and hospitals; and debate over the issue of bilingualism. Reluctance on the part of most Hispanics to relocate outside of southeastern Florida could create increasing social and political problems. It seems highly probable that the future impact of the growing Hispanic population will depend largely on the degree of assimilation into the American "melting pot." Like earlier immigrant ethnic groups Hispanics have changed and will continue to change the cultural landscape of America, especially southeastern Florida. The problems are by no means beyond solution, but proper recognition of potential problems and the responsibility of various levels of government accompanied by proper planning can play a major role in alleviating the pressures and aiding eventual assimilation of recent immigrants.

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Editor's Note.

The previous article by John Stafford was reviewed by four individuals who have knowledge of ethnic studies and Miami's Cuban population. All expressed reservations about the tone of the article, and based on their comments, Dr. Stafford revised an earlier version of this paper. Of major significance is the added material of the second paragraph, in which he points to accomplishments of America's Hispanic population. Still, the paper views Hispanics as the source of problems, a polemical position to which some might object. As editor, I suggested that the reviewers submit their views to be published as comments on the article. Only one chose to do so, Dr. Arthur S. Evans, Department of Sociology, Florida Atlantic University. The following are his thoughts about Dr. Stafford's article:

The impact of the Hispanic population on Florida is an important topic that needs to be addressed by social scientists. However, I am concerned about certain points in this article. In the first paragraph, the author suggests that the heavy concentration of Hispanics in the Miami area has and will continue to exacerbate various social problems. From there he discusses problems that are associated with the Hispanic community. From the author's perspective it seems that population growth among Hispanics is the key to understanding their social problems. While this explanation for the exacerbation of social problems of Hispanics has received overwhelming support among conservatives, it is nothing more than a theory which seeks to place the blame for the Hispanic's minority situation on the Hispanics themselves. Behind all the fancy words is the bottom line: Hispanics are flawed characters. I do not concur with this view of blaming the individual group to the exclusion of structural factors working externally. Could it not be that the Hispanic's social problems are related to discrimination or acculturation and adjustment to a new way of life? How would a Marxist explain the problems associated with Miami's Hispanics? Instead of examining competing schools of thought, the author instead accepts the idea of blaming the growth of the Hispanic problems on the growth of Hispanic population.

Dr. Stafford's reply to Dr. Evans follows:

It puzzles me why Dr. Evans interprets the manuscript as a somewhat devious ploy to denigrate Hispanic character. Perhaps he does not think in terms of regions the way geographers do. His main concern seems to confuse the use of a theory which suggests (to him) that the paper is attempting to derogate Hispanics through innuendo or "fancy words." I deny that this was the intention of the paper, and thus his criticism has no validity whatsoever. Or perhaps I failed to make the case clearly enough that a central problem I was addressing was one of distributions in a relatively small region, and that rapid population growth rates, among other issues, exacerbates problems. The fact that Hispanics are involved, although important, is peripheral to the main contention I am trying to make, namely that population distributions can and often do create problems or add to their severity. Dr. Evans challenged my interpretation rather than my facts. I think this is healthy and an important aspect of research -- to get scholars talking and thinking. I appreciate his taking the time to comment about the paper.