

Issue Brief: Latino/ Discrimination

Description:

This brief provides an overview of discrimination against Latinos in the United States. Both the sources of discrimination, as well as attempts made to combat it, will be addressed.

Key Words:

Hispanic, Latino, Discrimination, Immigration, Employment, Education

Key Points-

- Latinos make up roughly 12.5% of the U.S. population. The highest concentrations of Latinos are in the Southwest, West Coast, or Florida.
- Latinos are one of the fastest growing minorities and are projected to make up 24% of the population by 2050.
- Only 12.1% of employed Latinos hold managerial/professional positions compared to 38.1% of Caucasian Americans
- According to the FBI, hate crimes against Hispanics increased for the fourth consecutive year, increasing nearly 40% from 2003 to 2008.

Brief:

Like many other ethnic minorities in the United States, Latinos, or Hispanic Americans, have experienced significant discrimination in a variety of ways. It is easy to see this as a contemporary issue, but anti-Latino discrimination has roots early in our nation's history. The earliest forms of anti-Hispanic discrimination were exhibited in the 1840's during the U.S. acquisition of Mexican territory. Laws were passed to inhibit Mexican voter participation and unfairly tax Spanish-speaking workers a "foreign miners' tax", despite their U.S. citizenship.¹

Latino discrimination has grown more complicated since the 1840's due to the increasing size and diversity of the Latino population. Labor discrimination continues to affect Latinos to this day. Despite the efforts of important leaders like Cesar Chavez, Hispanics continue to hold many of the least desirable jobs and often subject to illegal and unsafe working conditions if they are undocumented workers. Hispanic workers hold fewer managerial/professional positions than Caucasians and are paid less.

Discrimination is not limited to the workplace; other areas such as voting, education, housing, and healthcare demonstrate disparate treatment for Latinos. Discriminatory treatment in these areas often stems from Latinos' perceived, or actual, immigration status. Latinos are often portrayed as foreigners trying to find their way into the U.S. and establish themselves at the cost of tax-paying citizens. For this reason, Latinos are criticized for taking jobs from American citizens and draining tax dollars for social service programs, despite the fact that many are tax-paying citizens. FBI statistics show an increase in anti-Hispanic hate crimes as the population continues to grow.² According to the 2000 Census, Hispanics or Latinos of any race made up 12.5% of the total population. Mexicans made up 58.5% of the Latino population. The Latino population is the fastest growing ethnic minority in the country, which increases the anti-immigrant anxieties of many Americans.

The fast-pace of Latino immigration has created issues related to cultural assimilation and language barriers. Many Hispanic immigrants live in closely-knit communities that preserve cultural identity while preventing assimilation to American culture. This often causes friction

¹ Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Back Bay Books, New York. p165

² <http://www.hg.org/article.asp?id=6051>

between Latinos and the rest of the U.S. population. It is important to note that this segregation is not always a matter of personal choice. Latinos tend to live in similar areas because they are the only affordable housing options, or because discriminatory housing practices have kept them from moving into other neighborhoods. This segregation supports further misunderstandings about Latinos that leads to discrimination. They are often characterized as illegal immigrants who cannot speak English, despite the fact that many have been in the U.S. for generations and were born citizens. Certain statistics demonstrate the slow pace of assimilation for Hispanic citizens. For instance, Hispanics have a much lower intermarriage rates than Asian Americans, for example. Many Latino advocacy groups are also fighting for bilingualism in the classroom and other public spaces, which can be viewed both as a hindrance to assimilation, or building respect and acceptance of different cultures.

Language barriers and immigrant status have caused discrimination in education as well. ESL programs in public schools are often underfunded or they promote segregation between Hispanic and non-Hispanic students. Children of immigrants are often citizens yet lack the English language skills necessary for schooling and jobs. The lack of support for English learners creates disparities in school performance, which affects the kinds of jobs available to the Latino community. Standardized testing has revealed a significant achievement gap between Latino and Caucasian students. In 2003, for example, 42% of white fourth graders scored at the proficient level or above on the Math exam compared with just 15% of Latino students.³

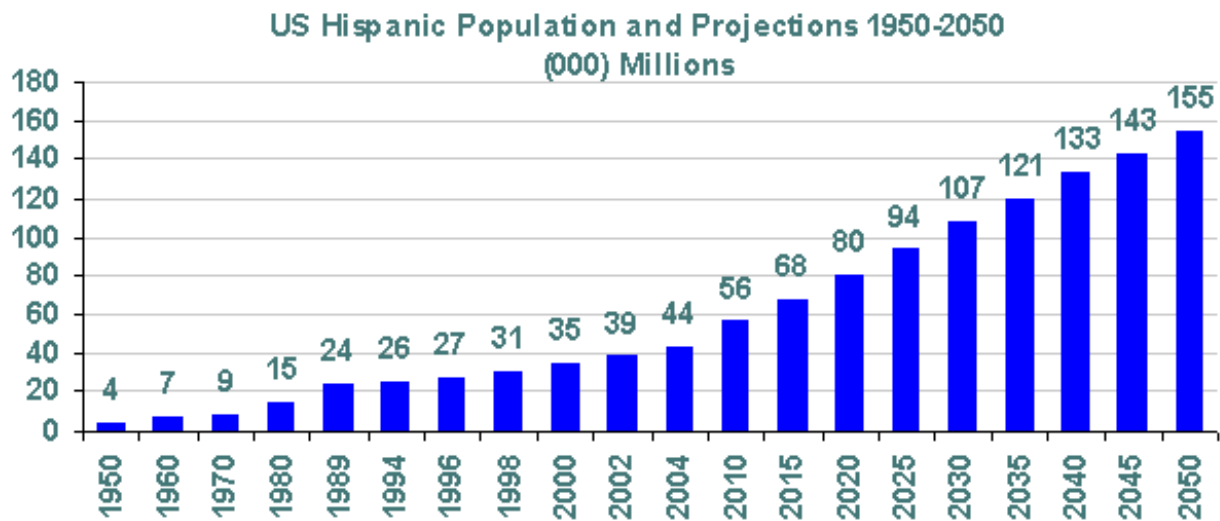
Special interest groups have been formed to combat discrimination. Two of the most prominent groups are LULAC (The League of United Latin American Citizens) and NCLR (National Council of La Raza). These groups provide Hispanic-Americans with legal advice and political organization so issues pertaining to Hispanic-Americans will be addressed by the government. Another group, MALDEF (The Mexican-American Legal Defense Fund), despite its ties to Mexican's specifically, has fought many important cases in the American court system to combat discrimination related to immigration, employment and labor that affect all Latinos.

³ U.S. Department of Education, 2003



<http://thecurvature.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/border-fence.jpg>

The US/Mexico border fence is a physical reminder of the many hurdles Latinos face within the country. It serves as a stark reminder of the anti-immigrant mindset that leads to discrimination against Latinos in the U.S.



Source: Synovate, U.S. Census Bureau

References:

Overview of Hispanic Discrimination from Red, Brown and Blue.com -

<http://redbrownandblue.com/?p=1463>

Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Back Bay Books. New York, 2008.

U.S. Census Bureau - www.census.gov

Huntington, Samuel. "The Hispanic Challenge". *Foreign Policy*. No. 141 (Mar-Apr, 2004), pp. 30-45 <<jstor.org>>

Websites:

MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense Fund)

www.maldef.org

LULAC (The League of United Latin American Citizens)

www.lulac.org

NCLR (National Council of La Raza)

www.nclr.org