

## **Opportunity and Freedom: Latino Immigration to the United States**

### **Key Words**

Immigration Acts, Cultural Identity, Independence, Deportations, Immigration Reform

### **Description**

This brief will include a summary timeline of Latino immigration into the United States. It will also examine the future of immigration reform and Obama's deportations.

### **Key Points**

- America now consists of many different Latino peoples.
- The majority of the Latino immigration occurred throughout the past 100 years.
- Many immigration laws prevented Latino populations from entering into the United States.
- The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 eliminated many problems for immigrants.
- 16% of the U.S. population is made up Latinos.
- Latinos are now pursuing for a new immigration reform.
- Many deportations have caused innocent Latinos to leave the United States.

### **Issue Brief**

#### **History**

Much of America's population is now composed of Latinos. Throughout American history there has been much immigration that has led to the prominence of Latino people in American culture. This is a brief timeline of the Latino immigration movement in America over the past two centuries.

What is today the state of Florida belonged to Spain for a long time and was settled by Spanish-speaking people. At the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo gave the United States possession of Spanish-speaking territories such as California. This was a key event because the California Gold Rush quickly followed towards the end of the 1800's. This marked perhaps the true beginning of sustained Latino immigration into America when many Mexicans quickly saw their opportunity with the gold rush. Approximately 25,000 Mexicans immigrated into America during the gold rush (Gutiérrez). However, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were immigration laws that prevented many prospective Latino immigrants from entering for extended periods of time.

Everything changed with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. This act overruled and abolished the Emergency Quota Act that had prevented many Hispanic peoples from immigrating to the United States. This marked a major spark for the Latino immigration movement. Now, immigrants were not analyzed and characterized by their skin color and ethnic background. Many more visas were given out so that more individuals could come into America.

In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of the Latino populations were in a time of poverty. The opportunity to come to America gave them a chance to change their lives for the better. This is why many Latino people saw coming to America as a way to chase their dreams. The US Government also helped these immigrants find new homes in America. An example is when Fidel Castro was the head of Cuba during the 1960's and 1970's. Castro would not let any Cubans leave the country although many of them wanted to flee. The United States arranged to accept

political refugees from Cuba, accommodating and facilitating their settlement in the US. While things started out rough for Latino immigrants, the United States now actively helps these immigrants enter the country.

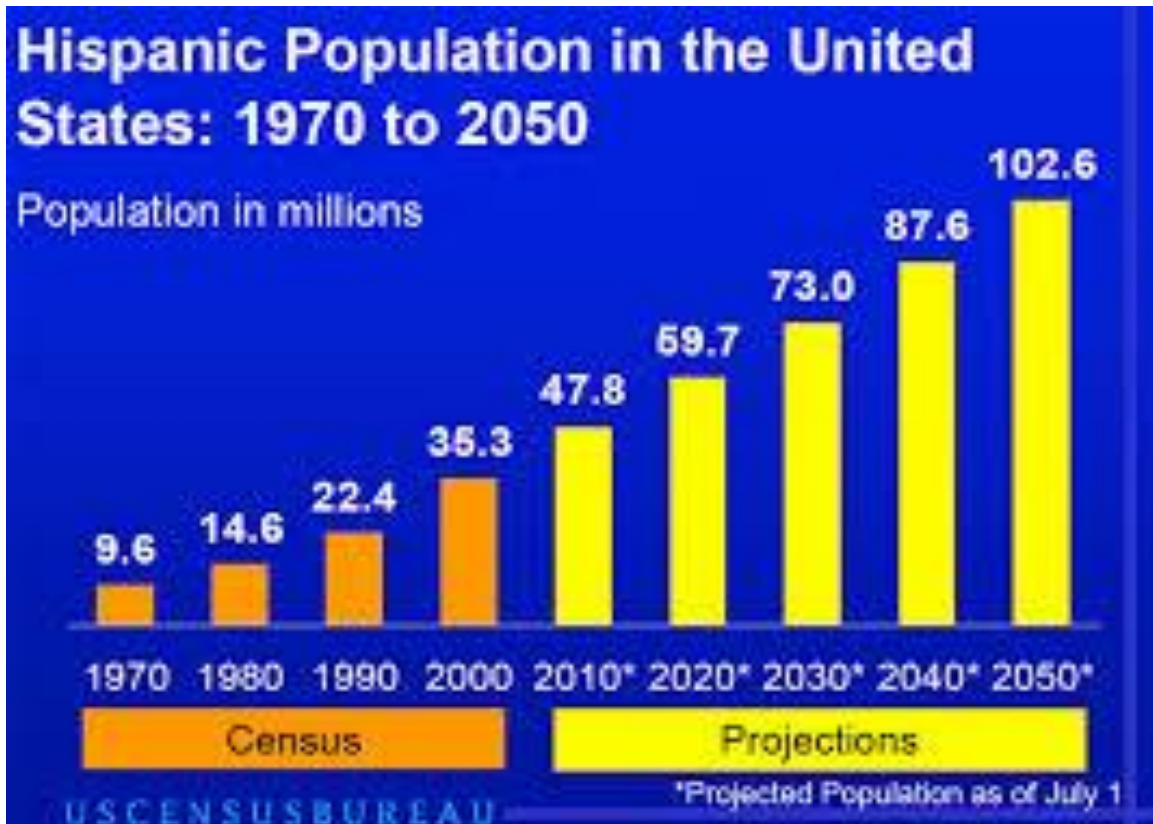
### Today

Currently, America has “a now widely dispersed population of well more than 50 million (or 16 percent of the nation’s population) Latinos” (Gutiérrez). Along with many other cultures, the Latino population has taken advantage of the immigration movement into the United States.

Within Obama’s Presidency, there has been much talk of an immigration reform to occur within the United States. However, President Obama has put off the reform and it still has yet to be dealt with. A major problem that the Latino community is dealing with now is deportations. Although Obama has said that he would help create a system of citizenship for illegal immigrants, “his administration deported a record 1.5 million of them in his first term” (Dade). In fact, Obama has deported more illegal immigrants than any other United States President.

The major problem with these deportations is that there are many Latino people being deported who shouldn’t be. The deportations have eliminated many criminals from US society, but there are also many innocent Latinos being deported. The Latino community has taken a stand against these deportations. Latino Politian Luis Guitierrez commented on the deportations, ““This is nothing to be proud of... We must also realize that among these [deported] are parents and breadwinners...that are assets to American communities and have committed no crimes”” (Dade). It has been difficult to separate the innocent from the guilty within the deportations.

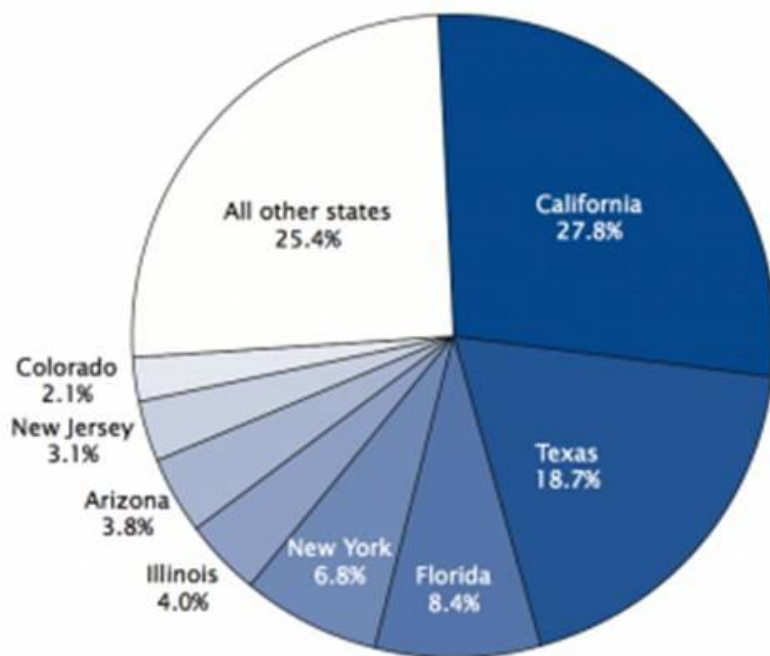
It appears that the Latino population must keep waiting until an immigration reform occurs. However, this reform has been pushed off for many years. Hopefully a reform happens within the next year to help legitimize the status of the Latino immigrants.



**Figure 1**

This figure shows the steadily increasing population of Latino (Hispanic) people into the United States. Currently, there are approximately 50 million in the United States. It appears that this number is only rising.

## Percent Distribution of the Hispanic Population by State: 2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *2010 Census Summary File 1*.

### **Figure 2**

The Hispanic population is broken down by state in this figure. California, with over a quarter of the total, has the largest single Hispanic population out of all the United States. Texas is second with 18.7%,

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Figure 1:

<http://www.markettolatinos.com/wpcontent/uploads/2011/02/graphicHispanicPopulation.gif>

Figure 2:

[http://ahaa.org/img/Census\\_chart2.jpg](http://ahaa.org/img/Census_chart2.jpg)