

DRAFT — DO NOT CITE OR CIRCULATE

The Hispanic Question and the 2020 Census

Debating the Alternatives

**Edited by
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Some Critical Thoughts on the Census Bureau's Proposals to Change the Race and Hispanic Questions

By Nancy Lopez (January 10, 2013)

As a sociologist of racial, ethnic and gender stratification, I applaud the Census Bureau's ongoing efforts to examine how we can collect race and ethnicity data that address our increasingly complex and changing demographics for generations to come. Among the key recommendations of their 2010 Alternative Questionnaire Experiment (AQE) Report is a call for further testing of the combined race and Hispanic origin question format.

Accordingly, the Census will continue testing questionnaire formats that include Hispanic as a racial category (the first and only time that a specific Hispanic origin group was included in the U.S. Census was in 1930 when "Mexican" was included as a racial group). Including Hispanic as a racial category is a significant departure from current Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidelines that require that Hispanic Origin (ethnicity) is asked as a separate question from Race (racial status). It is important to note that since 2000, individuals may mark one or more race (but only one Hispanic ethnicity).

While the Census engages in further testing and refinement of questionnaire formats for race and ethnicity data collection, it is important that we consider why we collect and analyze race and ethnicity data in the first place: the focus is to assess our progress in Civil Rights enforcement. Data collection on race and ethnicity is used by federal, state and local agencies to monitor discrimination and segregation in housing (Fair Housing Act), labor market participation (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission), political participation (Voting Rights Act, Redistricting), educational attainment (Department of Education), health (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), and criminal Justice (Department of Justice), among oth-

er policy areas.

If we agree that the key purpose of data collection on race and ethnicity is for monitoring our progress in creating a more perfect union for all, then we should consider several questions:

- To what extent is one's ethnicity, cultural background, national origin, generational status, and ancestry conceptually interchangeable with one's race or racial status as a social position in society?
- What is the value-added of a given questionnaire format?
- What is lost or improved by keeping or changing the current two-question format?
- Do these data allow us to monitor patterns of inequality among entire categories of people by race and ethnicity?

The "gold standard" for all racial and ethnic data collection should be meaningful use for interrogating inequalities across a variety of social outcomes.

As a native Spanish-speaker who was born and raised in New York City's public housing projects, I am viscerally aware of the distinction between race and ethnicity. Although I share the same ethnic background of my immigrants from the Dominican Republic, my father, who is light skinned and not of discernible African phenotype, occupies a different racial status than my mother and I who share a common racial status as Black women.

The distinction between race and ethnicity is not trivial. A growing number of scholars have found that distinguishing race from ethnicity is extremely important for monitoring and ameliorating inequalities in housing segregation (Massey and Denton; Logan); health (LaVeist-Ramos *et al.*); education (Murguia and Telles); criminal justice (Steffensmeier and Demuth); and employment (Rodriguez *et al.*), etc.. If we collapse race and ethnicity as interchangeable concepts, we may miss the opportunity to examine whether there are unique experiences among co-ethnics that may occupy very different racial statuses.

While it is true that the combined questionnaire formats being tested by the Census instruct individuals to mark one or more race and write in an ethnic designation if they desire, it will be challenging to capture the two concepts with one question. Indeed, the AQE report found that while the total number of Hispanics was not reduced by the combined questionnaire formats, the detailed information on national origin groups did decrease.

In other words, one of the potential shortcomings of the combined format is that, although it will not necessarily reduce the number of Hispanics that are counted, we will have less information about their racial status and national origin.

In the end, if we depart from the premise that race and ethnicity are two analytically distinct concepts then we will require two different questions. Currently, only the American Community Survey (ACS) includes a question about ancestry. The value added by the extra "real estate" of a having two separate questions on race and ethnicity, not only for Hispanics but also for other demographic groups, surely outweighs the costs of having poor data that will hinder our ability to assess distinct pathways of inequality.

Another value-added question that the Census could pilot is bringing back the parental place of birth question. Given our changing demographics and diverse immigration streams, the collection of these data would allow us to examine patterns of inequality related to national origin and immigrant status (e.g., first generation-immigrants who came as adults vs. second generation-U.S.-born children of immigrants). The last time that this value-added question was included in the Census was in 1980. These data would allow us to map whether there are unique inequalities faced by foreign-born individuals and their children by national origin.

Again, I applaud the Census for proceeding with caution before recommending any major changes in national data collection systems that will shape how we assess Civil Rights enforcement for generations to come. While I have focused on the experiences of Latinos, the analytical distinction between race and ethnicity is also important for other groups that have experienced historic and ongoing discrimination, including Native Americans, Blacks, Asians and Middle Eastern communities, etc..

It is my hope that the Census also pursues further testing of what is lost and/or gained in terms of interrogating inequalities by keeping Hispanic ethnicity and race or racial status as separate questions. In particular, I am optimistic about the strategic partnerships between the Census, OMB and diverse Civil Rights organizations, scholars, researchers and communities working towards creating a more perfect union for all.

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Census Racial Categories and the Latino "Culture" of Black Invisibility

By Tanya K. Hernández
[SALTLAW Blog](#) (October 25, 2012)

On October 25-26, 2012, the newly constituted U.S. Census Bureau National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic and Other Populations will be holding its first meeting in its role of assisting the Census Bureau in producing more accurate statistics about our diverse nation. This meeting is open to the public at the U.S. Census Bureau headquarters in Suitland, Maryland, and will begin to discuss the Census Bureau's proposal to add "Latino" and "Hispanic" to the list of government-defined races on its decennial population survey questionnaire, amongst other issues. This proposal has the potential to significantly hinder the demographic count of Latinos of African ancestry and should be rejected.

In the last census Hispanic was part of a separate ethnicity question rather than being listed as an option in the "what race are you" question. Such a two-part formulation in 2010 enabled Latinos to indicate their ethnic origin as "Hispanics" and simultaneously indicate their racial identity as white, black, Asian or Native American. Given the racial diversity of Latinos in the U.S., the pre-existing census form seems quite logical and should be retained. For instance, with the current questionnaire structure the count of Afro-Latinos is not subsumed and made invisible within a simple count of persons of Hispanic origin. In contrast, the proposed census reform will hinder an ability to collect the statistical data that concretely demonstrates the subordinated status of Afro-Latinos that is distinctive from broader Hispanic ethnic groups. Because census racial data is principally used to enforce the civil rights mandates against discrimination in employment, in the sale and rental of homes and in the allocation of mortgages, it would be a disservice to this country's pursuit of racial equality to institute a census change that would mask the civil rights harms pe-

trated against Latinos with visible African ancestry.

Why then is the Census Bureau considering the reformulation of Hispanic ancestry into a racial category? The proposed reform arises from the fact that in the 2010 census like many prior census years, an average of 36% of Latinos chose the "Some Other Race" racial option, despite the ability to select a specific racial category after indicating their Hispanic ethnic origin. Because non-Latinos only select the "Some Other Race" option at approximately a 3% rate, it is presumed that unique "Latino" perspectives about racial identity cause the difference. To be precise, the frequent explanation for the 36% Latino rate of selecting "Some Other Race" is considered to be the Latino cultural inability to view race in binary black and white terms and a Latino preference for expressing racial mixture. What this presumed explanation obscures is the greater extent to which Latinos actually do choose specific racial categories and how.

For instance, if cultural identities rooted in racial mixture were the primary driving force for the "Some Other Race" Latino selection phenomenon, then one would expect to see more Latinos exercising the census questionnaire option to "mark one or more boxes." Instead, only six percent of Latinos on the 2010 census chose to select "two or more races." Indeed, the racial category of choice for Latinos on the 2010 census and census forms from prior decades has been the white racial category at a rate of 53 percent. Such a pattern suggests that Latino census responses are not primarily a consequence of a particular Latino identification with racial mixture.

When survey instruments such as the 2003 New Immigrant Survey omit a "Some Other Race" option, Latino immigrants overwhelmingly select the white racial category at a rate of 79% regardless of what their actual skin color is. And it is this preference for whiteness that is a more accurate reflection of any presumed "Latino" cultural expression on the census form. Indeed, census data from Latin American countries show the same proclivity for the white racial category regardless of actual skin color in response to the Latin American disdain for African and indigenous ancestry. Once Latin American immigrants become "Americanized" in the United States along with their U.S. born descendants, the shift to the ambiguity of a "Some Other Race" option may very well reflect not only the sense of exclusion from a U.S. category of whiteness that stigmatizes Latino ancestry, but also a preference for distancing oneself from U.S. blackness. For instance, the New Immigrant Study also found that Latinos who were most integrated into U.S. society were more likely than recent immigrants to completely opt out of a specific racial category despite the ability to select multiple racial categories to express racial mixture. In short, while inter-

preting Latino census responses may be a complex matter, the complexity will not necessarily be appropriately resolved with the proposed census reform of making "Hispanic" a racial category.

Thus far, the empirical data demonstrates that Latinos do have racial identities separate and apart from their national origin and pan-ethnic Latino identities, and that the "Some Other Race" phenomenon is not a consequence of incomprehension of the racial categories or a preference for the expression of racial mixture. Latin American census experiences suggest that the "Some Other Race" selection may instead be an outgrowth of the preference for whiteness and its companion disdain for indigeneity and blackness. U.S. Census Bureau officials should reject the proposed reform lest the Hispanic racial category change become another mechanism for refusing to officially acknowledge indigenous and African ancestry within the Latino community. It would be a shame to facilitate the invisibility of indigenous and Afro-Latinos in the United States, at the very moment that indigenous and Afro-Latino communities in Latin America itself are gaining recognition and demanding social inclusion.

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How We Measure Race in America

By John R. Logan (November 19, 2012)

Since 1980 the Census Bureau has acknowledged the growing size of the country's Hispanic population by asking people to identify as Hispanic or non-Hispanic in a separate question from the traditional one on race. These two questions provide the only full enumeration of Americans by race/ethnicity. Other questions (such as ancestry, country of birth, and parents' country of birth) have always been asked only from a sample of people.

The Bureau now is considering a recommendation to combine the race and Hispanic origins items into a single question. One rationale is that the current questions lead to high "item nonresponse." Between 0.6% and 1.2% of persons do not respond to a combined question. Nonresponse to the two-question format is higher at 4-5% because people often answer only one of the two questions, though only around 1% of people fail to answer at least one of them. Is this a problem?

The Bureau corrects for nonresponse by "borrowing" information from "similar" people in the household or neighborhood. This was done in the 2011 American Community Survey for 8% of respondents on occupation, 5-8% on health insurance coverage, and 16% on wage income. In comparison to these variables, nonresponse on race/Hispanic origin is a minor concern. I suspect that statisticians focus on nonresponse because it is among the few things they can measure. But just because we can measure it does not mean that it is important. I am much more worried that we have to make guesses about so many Americans' jobs, incomes, and health insurance.

Another rationale is that a large share of Hispanics selects "some other race" rather than white, black, or another race category. For example, they may write in "Mexican" on the race question. The Bureau thinks of this as misreporting because "some other race" is not a race category as defined

by the Office of Management and Budget. It was included in the expectation of being a very small residual category.

My view is that the Census stumbled onto a very important phenomenon. Now we know that many Hispanic Americans do not think of themselves in terms of black and white. We have also discovered that a majority do select a race category, most white, few black. Racial identification also varies widely across Hispanic groups - quite low shares of Cubans report as black, for example, compared to quite high shares of Dominicans. The pattern would not be so clear if Hispanics did not think of themselves in terms of race.

We live in a country with many disparities and boundaries organized by social categories that are hard to define but are nonetheless very real in people's lives. We acknowledge the stakes when we define some people as members of protected classes and when we take racial and ethnic composition into account in organizing political representation at the Congressional, state, and local level. The Census Bureau's most critical function is to provide information about American society and how it is changing. We rely on data about race and Hispanic origin to inform us about progress toward equal opportunity or about potentially disparate racial/ethnic impacts of policy decisions.

It does not make sense to base decisions on how we collect these data on small variations in response rates or on how policy makers at OMB would like us to understand race. The key criterion must be how well the data inform us about the patterns and complexities and changes over time in the nature of America's color lines.

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The 2020 Census Race and Hispanic Questions: *Don't collapse them! Analyze them*

By Carlos Vargas-Ramo (November 19, 2012)

The US Census Bureau collects data on race and ethnicity (i.e., Hispanic origin) for a variety of reasons, but primarily to provide the federal government with the information to monitor and enforce civil rights laws in areas such as education, employment, housing and mortgage lending, health care, voting rights, and the administration of justice. These requirements resulted from decades of struggles against racial and ethnic discrimination, and culminated in protections and guarantees enshrined in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Conditions for the protagonists of these struggles, largely African Americans, but also Latinos and American Indians, among others, have improved significantly over the past half a century. Yet, conditions of discrimination either persist or continue to arise in this day and age. Therefore, the patent need remains for continuing the monitoring and enforcement of civil rights laws. So does the need remain to identify accurately the groups that are still subjects of discriminatory treatment? However, the identification of these population groups is not as easy as it may seem.

The Census Bureau is proposing changes to the race and ethnicity questions it uses in its census and survey questionnaires. In a major departure from previous practices, the Census Bureau is pondering whether to collapse the race and ethnicity questions into one. The reason for this proposed change is sensible: to increase the likelihood that people will respond accurately to the question asked. However, this change is a mistake.

Collapsing two questions into one will provide less information about Hispanics, not more. Yes, in very many instances, the concept of Latino or Hispanic has been racialized so that when these terms (or their national-origin equivalents) are used they are associated with particular physical

types that are neither Asian, black, Native American, Pacific Islander or white, or may rather be a combination of all or some of these "racial" groups. Moreover, there is evidence that when racial categories are limited, Latinos tend to identify as white when otherwise they would not. There is already a strong tendency to treat social groups as monolithic, where there is in fact a lot of diversity within them. Hispanics can be of any race, and Afro-Latinos do not experience the same treatment as white Hispanics.

I encourage the Census Bureau to continue its research on ways to improve non-response. Why do Latinos disproportionately choose "some other race" when answering the race question? Why do we tend to eschew racial identification? This cannot be easily established with an experiment in which people are presented different questionnaires. Rather, it requires qualitative research involving ethnography, in-depth interviews and focus groups. Answers to these questions will result in greater response rates.

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Beyond the Absolute Numbers: The Future Census, Racial Inequalities and Immigrant Integration

By Kenneth Prewitt (August 10, 2012)

Angelo Falcón, fierce defender of Latino interests in the Census, is quoted on the recently released results of the Census Bureau's ambitious, unprecedented experiment testing alternative Race & Ethnic question formats that can provide more accurate data to the country. His concern, understandably but far too narrowly, is with absolute numbers (at least in the quotation cited by the AP). There is much more at stake -- how well will the race/ethnic/origin data inform the country in ways that will make for better policy. Here I have in mind two large policy issues: racial inequalities and injustices; and, the intelligent integration of our immigrant population, being added to at about 1.1m annually, and, especially, information about their children.

These issues, put differently, are the color line and the nativity line. Allow me to paraphrase DuBois -- "the problem of the 21st century is the problem of the color line as it intersects the nativity line," the latter being the line separating the native born from the foreign born and their children. Who among the children of immigrants will be "racialized" (it is happening to some) and who will be "whitened" (it is happening to others), and what will be the consequences?

Angelo, my friend, ask yourself: will the country, including its vibrant, growing Latino population, be better off with a census that finds an extra quarter-percent of Latinos; or, a census that can tell us what is happening to millions and millions of second generation Americans today, over the next several decades and, perhaps, decades and decades to come? And not just second-generation Latinos, though they will be the majority, but second-generation Ethiopians, Iranians, Russians, Vietnamese.

You can of course have both, but as best I can tell, your eye is fixed on the former -- that extra quarter-percent -- and hasn't noticed that the

census has failed to ask "parental place of birth" since 1970, just as the country began to need those statistics. History will not judge the NiLP Latino Census Network favorably if it doesn't energize its formidable political clout around this question: why does the Census Bureau continue to ask an ancestry question (that produces data of dubious quality primarily for genealogical hobbyists) yet fails to ask parental place of birth, which would immediately be taken up by hundreds of serious scholars eager to investigate the huge issues of immigrant integration that are at the core of the kind of America we will at the end of the 21st century.

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Pigments of Our Imagination: The Racialization of the Hispanic-Latino Category

by [Rubén G. Rumbaut](#)
[Immigration Daily](#) (April 2011)

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Race is a pigment of our imagination. It is a social status, not a biological one; a product of history, not of nature; a contextual variable, not a given. The concept of race is a historically contingent, relational, subjective phenomenon, yet it is typically misbegotten as a natural, fixed trait of phenotypic difference inherent in human bodies, independent of human will or intention.

Racial categories (and the supposed differences that they connote) are infused with stereotypical moral meaning. What is called "race" today is chiefly an outcome of intergroup struggles, marking the boundaries, and thus the identities, of "us" and "them" along with attendant ideas of social worth or stigma. As such, "race" is an ideological construct that links supposedly innate traits of individuals to their place in the social order.

The dominant "racial frame" that evolved in the United States - during the long colonial and national era of slavery and after it - was that of white supremacy. But how do persons classified as Latinos or Hispanics fit into the country's racial frame today?

Are Hispanics a "race" or, more precisely, a racialized category? In fact, are they even a "they"? Is there a Latino or Hispanic ethnic group, cohesive and self-conscious, sharing a sense of peoplehood in the same way that there is an African American people in the United States? Or is it mainly administrative shorthand devised for statistical purposes; a one-size-fits-all label that subsumes diverse peoples and identities?

This article considers these questions, focusing primarily on official or state definitions and on the malleable way the categories of Hispanic and Latino are incorporated into the psyches of those so classified.

The Hispanic-Latino Population Today

The groups included under the label "Hispanic" or "Latino" - Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Salvadorans, Colombians, and the many other nationalities from Latin America and even Spain itself - were not "Hispanics" or "Latinos" in their countries of origin; rather, they only became so once they arrived in the United States. As such, the labels of Hispanic and Latino have a particular meaning only in the US context in which it was constructed and is applied, and where its meaning continues to evolve.

The Hispanic population of the United States reached 50.5 million in 2010, comprising 16.3 percent of the US population. (This total excludes the population on the island of Puerto Rico, who are US citizens by birthright but not US residents.)

Hispanics surpassed African Americans in 2003 to become the largest pan-ethnic minority in the country. According to the latest estimates of the US Census Bureau, by 2050 the Hispanic population is projected to grow to more than 130 million people, or 30 percent of the national population. By comparison, the non-Hispanic black population in 2050 is projected to comprise about 13 percent of the national total, and the Asian population 8 percent.

Hispanics or Latinos are a diverse group, made up both of recently arrived newcomers and of old timers with deep ancestral roots in what is now the United States. But it is also a population that has emerged seemingly suddenly, its growth driven both by accelerating immigration from the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America - above all from Mexico - and by high rates of natural increase. Indeed, over 40 percent of Hispanics in the United States today are foreign born, while about one-third consists of a second generation of native-born children of immigrant parents.

Creating a "Hispanic or Latino" Category in Official Statistics

Although certain methods of identifying and counting people of Mexican ancestry in the United States were in place as early as 1850, efforts to distinguish and enumerate the "Hispanic" population as a whole using subjective indicators of Spanish origin or descent date back to the

late 1960s.

At that time - in the context of surging civil-rights activism, new federal legislation that required accurate statistical documentation of minority groups' disadvantages, and growing concerns over differential census undercounts - Mexican-American organizations, in particular, pressed for better data about their group.

The White House ordered the addition of a Spanish-origin self-identifier on the 1970 census "long-form" questionnaire and, to test it, the question was added to the November 1969 Current Population Survey (CPS) - the first time that a subjective item such as this was used in the collection of government statistics.

Later analyses comparing the results nationally of the (subjective) Hispanic self-identification in the CPS against the (objective) use of Spanish surnames in the identification of Hispanic households found significant differences between the two measures, raising questions of validity and reliability.

For example, in the Southwest, only 74 percent of those who identified themselves as Hispanic had Spanish surnames, while 81 percent of those with Spanish surnames identified themselves as Hispanic. In the rest of the country, 61 percent of those who self-identified as Hispanic had Spanish surnames, and a mere 46 percent of those with Spanish surnames self-identified as Hispanic.

Then, in 1976, Congress passed a remarkable bill "relating to the publication of economic and social statistics for Americans of Spanish origin or descent" - the first and only law in US history that defines a specific ethnic group and mandates the collection, analysis, and publication of data for that group.

The law asserted that there was a need to identify the "urgent and special needs" of the 12 million Americans who identified themselves as being of Spanish-speaking origins in the 1970 census, a large number of whom "suffer from racial, social, economic, and political discrimination and are denied the basic opportunities that they deserve as American citizens"

In 1977, as required by Congress, the Office of Management and Budget issued *Directive 15: Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting* to standardize the collection and report-

ing of racial and ethnic statistics and to include data on persons of "Hispanic origin."

Directive 15 specified a minimal classification of four races ("American Indian or Alaskan Native," "Asian or Pacific Islander," "Black," and "White") and two "ethnic" backgrounds ("of Hispanic origin" and "not of Hispanic origin"), and allowed the collection of more detailed information as long as it could be aggregated within those categories.

Since that time, in keeping with the logic of this classification, census data on Hispanics have been officially reported with a footnote indicating that "Hispanics may be of any race."

Later criticism of the ethnic and racial categories led to a formal review of Directive 15, beginning in 1993 with congressional hearings and culminating in revised standards which were adopted in 1997. The changes stipulated five minimum categories for data on "race" ("American Indian or Alaska Native," "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander," "Asian," "Black or African American," and "White"); offered respondents the option of selecting one or more racial designations (an option used for the first time in the 2000 census); and reworded the two "ethnic" categories into "Hispanic or Latino" and "not Hispanic or Latino."

The notice in the Federal Register of these revisions to Directive 15 pointedly added that "The categories in this classification are social-political constructs and should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature... The standards have been developed to provide a common language for uniformity and comparability in the collection and use of data on race and ethnicity by Federal agencies."

Nonetheless, Directive 15's definitions of racial and ethnic populations are used not only by federal agencies, but also by researchers, schools, hospitals, businesses, and state and local governments - and are conflated, abridged, and diffused through the mass media, entering into the popular culture and shaping the national self-image.

Nation, Race, and Place in the 2000 Census

Much has been made in the media and even in academic discourse about "the browning of America," a misnomer based on stereotypes of an appearance presumed to characterize people of Spanish-speaking origin.

But does the Hispanic population differ significantly from non-Hispanics by race, as it does by place, socioeconomic status, and national origins?

The American system of racial classification, employed variously since the first census of 1790, has been the epitome of externally imposed, state-sanctioned measures of group difference, primarily distinguishing the majority-white population from black and American Indian minority groups, and later from Asian-origin populations.

Yet Hispanics were incorporated in official statistics as an ethnic category, and considered as being of any race. Moreover, prior to 1970 Mexicans were almost always coded as white for census purposes, and were deemed white by law (if not by custom) since the 19th century.

How then are racial categories internalized by Hispanics? Are there intergroup and intragroup differences in their patterns of racial self-identification? Since 1980, the census has asked separate questions for Hispanic or Latino origin and for race, permitting an examination of how Hispanics or Latinos self-report by race and country of origin.

Intergroup Differences in Racial Identification

Despite increasing immigration from a wider range of Latin American countries over the past few decades, persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban origin comprised 77 percent of the 35.2 million Hispanics counted by the 2000 census, with Mexicans alone accounting for 63 percent. (This trend is sure to continue when the detailed data from the 2010 census on the specific countries of ethnicity within the Hispanic/Latino category are released. The proportion of persons of Mexican descent almost certainly increased to account for two-thirds of the 50.5 million Hispanics counted in 2010.)

Much of the remainder of the Hispanic population in 2000 was made up of six groups of relatively recent immigrant origin: Dominicans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans comprised 7 percent of the total while Colombians, Peruvians, and Ecuadorians made up nearly 4 percent.

Hence, nine nationality groups accounted for nine out of ten (88 percent) Hispanics in the United States in 2000. Persons who trace their identities to the ten other Spanish-speaking countries of Central and South America, plus Spain, comprised only 4 percent of the Hispanic total. And only 8 percent self-reported as "other Spanish, Hispanic or

Latino" in the 2000 census, without indicating a specific national origin.

Overall, only half of the 35.2 million Hispanics counted by the 2000 census reported their race as white (48 percent), black (1.8 percent), or Asian (0.3 percent). In contrast, 97 percent of the 246.2 million non-Hispanics counted reported their race either as white (79 percent), black (14 percent), or Asian (4 percent).

Most notably, there was a huge difference in the proportion of these two populations that chose "other race." While scarcely any non-Hispanics (0.2 percent) reported being of some other race, among Hispanics that figure was 43 percent - a reflection of more than four centuries of mixed European and Native American heritage in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as differing histories and conceptions of what race means.

In addition, Hispanics in the 2000 census were more than three times as likely to report a mixture of "two or more races" - 6.4 percent of Hispanics compared with only 2 percent of non-Hispanics - although among Hispanics who listed this option, the overwhelming majority (85 percent) specified "white" plus another race.

Still, the main divide among Hispanics was between the 48 percent who self-identified racially as "white" in 2000 and the 43 percent who rejected all the official categories and reported "other race" instead. (The corresponding aggregated figures have widened to 53 percent and 38 percent in the 2010 census, but the main patterns analyzed below continue to apply a decade later.)

Table 1. Hispanic/Latino Ethnic Identity by Self-reported "Race," 2000 Census Ranked by Proportion Identifying as "Other Race"

Examining the results for each of the main Hispanic nationality groups, the proportions who identified racially as "white" ranged from a low of 22 percent among Dominicans to a high of 84 percent among Cubans.

More than half of Dominicans (59 percent) and Salvadorans and Guatemalans (55 percent) reported "another race," as did 46 percent of Mexicans, 42 percent of Peruvians and Ecuadorians, 38 percent of Puerto Ricans, 28 percent of Colombians, and less than 8 percent of Cubans. The most likely to identify as "black" were Dominicans (8.2 percent),

while the "other Spanish, Hispanic or Latino" were the most likely to identify as multiracial (10.7 percent).

Intragroup Differences in Race and Place

Self-reported race varies not only between origin groups, but also within them - and over time and place as well.

An examination of 2000 census data on self-reported "race" for the largest Hispanic groups broken down by the largest states - California and Texas in the Southwest (where Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans are most concentrated), and New York-New Jersey and Florida along the East Coast (where the Caribbean groups are concentrated) - is quite revealing.

In California, 40 percent of the Mexican-origin population reported as "white" and 53 percent reported as "other race," compared with 60 percent who reported as "white" and 36 percent who reported as "other race" in Texas. Similar, if less pronounced, patterns were observed for Salvadorans and Guatemalans in those two states: they were significantly more likely to be "white" in Texas and "other" in California.

Table 2. "Race" Self-reported by Largest Hispanic Groups in Selected States, 2000 Census

Even more striking is the degree of difference in the geography of race among Caribbean groups: all were far more likely to be "white" in Florida than in New York-New Jersey. For example, 67 percent of the Puerto Ricans in Florida reported that they were "white," compared with only 45 percent in New York-New Jersey; the respective percentages for Cubans were 92 and 73 percent; for Dominicans, 46 and 20 percent; for Colombians, 78 and 46 percent.

If race were a biological and permanent trait of individuals, no such variability would exist. Instead, these data exemplify how race is constructed socially, historically, and spatially. Lingering historical prejudices in the former slave states of the American South and the relatively more-open social dynamics of the Northeast and West coasts may invite varying degrees of willingness to self-identify in different ways.

Such contextual differences are supported by other relevant data. A census conducted by the United States when it occupied Puerto Rico in 1899 found that 62 percent of the inhabitants were "white," as were 65

percent of those counted in the 1910 island census. That proportion grew to 73 percent in 1920, and 80 percent by 1950 - an increase that could not be accounted for by demographic processes, institutional biases, or other explanations, and has been attributed to changes in the social definition of whiteness and the influence of "whitening" ideology on the island.

The 2000 census conducted in Puerto Rico found that 81 percent of the population on the island self-reported as "white" - notably higher than the 67 percent of Puerto Ricans who self-reported as "white" in Florida and the 45 percent who did so in the New York region.

The Malleable Meaning of "Race"

While the Census Bureau has established "Hispanic" and "Latino" as ethnic categories and not racial ones, the meaning of "race" to individuals seems to vary depending not only on social and historical contexts, but also on the way in which questions are asked and the response format provided in conventional surveys.

In a survey of more than 400 Dominican immigrants in New York City and Providence, Rhode Island, the adult respondents were asked a series of three questions about their racial self-identification.

First they were asked in an open-ended format how they defined themselves racially. Next they were given a close-ended question, asking if they were white, black, or other (and if other, to specify). Finally they were asked how they thought that "mainstream Americans" classified them racially. All three questions were basically getting at the same thing: the respondent's racial identity.

In response to the first open-ended question, 28 percent gave "Hispanic" as their race, another 4 percent said "Latino," and still others offered a variety of mixed "Hispanic" or "Latino" answers; 13 percent said "Indio," and another 13 percent gave their Dominican nationality as their race. Of all respondents, only 6.6 percent chose "black" and 3.8 percent "white." The rest of the responses showed the extraordinary range of racial categories and labels common in the Spanish Caribbean.

[Table 3. Dominican Immigrants' Answers to Three Racial Self-identification Questions Survey of Dominican immigrants in New York City and Providence*](#)

When asked to choose their race in the close-ended format of the second question, the largest response remained "Hispanic" (written in by 21 percent of the sample, in addition to 3 percent who chose "Latino"), though the categories "black" and "white" now more than doubled to 16.8 and 11.6 percent, respectively.

And when asked how they thought others classified them racially, the category "black" dramatically increased to 37 percent and "white" decreased to 6.4 percent. "Hispanic" was still selected by almost one-third of the sample (30.4 percent) as the racial category that they perceived others used to classify them. Indeed, "Hispanic" was the label most consistently given by the respondents to characterize their own racial identity, whether self-asserted or imposed upon them by others.

The "Race" of Immigrant Parents and their Children

Another study found that, in addition to significant change in their ethnic self-identities over time and generation in the United States (as measured by open-ended questions), the offspring of Latin American immigrants were by far the most likely to define their racial identities differently than their own parents.

During the 1990s in South Florida and Southern California, the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) surveyed a sample of more than 5,200 second-generation youths representing 77 different nationalities, including all of the main Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America, and their immigrant parents. In one survey, the youths (aged 17 and 18) were asked to answer a semi-structured question about their race, and were given the option to check one of five categories: "white," "black," "Asian," "multiracial," or "other." If the latter was checked, they had to specify the other race.

Among the Latin American-origin youths, less than a fourth of the total sample checked the conventional categories of white, black, or Asian; 12 percent reported being multiracial; and over 65 percent checked "other." When those "other" self-reports were coded, it turned out that 41 percent of the sample wrote down "Hispanic" or "Latino" as their race, and another 19.6 percent gave their nationality as their race.

The explicit racialization of the Hispanic-Latino category, as well as the substantial proportion of youths who conceived of their nationality of origin as a racial category, are noteworthy both for their potential long-term implications in hardening minority-group boundaries and for their

illustration of the arbitrariness of racial constructions. It is indicative of the ease with which an ethnic category developed for administrative purposes becomes externalized, diffused, accepted, and finally internalized as a marker of social difference.

The latter point is made particularly salient by directly comparing the youths' notions of their race with that reported by their own parents. The closest match in racial self-perceptions between parents and children were observed among Haitians, Jamaicans, and other West Indians (most of whom self-reported as black), among Europeans and Canadians (most of whom labeled themselves white), and among most of the Asian-origin groups (except for Filipinos).

The widest mismatches by far (and hence the most ambiguity in self-definitions of race) occurred among all of the Latin American-origin groups without exception: about three-fifths of Latin parents defined themselves as white, compared with only one-fifth of their own children.

Table 4. Self-reported "Race" of Children of Immigrants and their Parents, by National Origin Groups

The results of this survey point to the force of the acculturation process and its impact on children's self-identities in the United States, providing another striking instance of the malleability of racial constructions. More fully exposed than their parents to American culture and its ingrained racial notions, and being incessantly categorized and treated as Hispanic or Latino, the children of immigrants seemingly learn to see themselves in these terms - as members of a racial minority - and even to racialize their national origins.

If these intergenerational differences between Latin American immigrants and their US-raised children can be projected to the third generation, the process of racialization could become more entrenched still.

Conclusion

Although a single label implies otherwise, "Hispanics" or "Latinos" are not a homogeneous entity. Many families classified as such can trace their roots in the United States back many generations, and even the newcomers differ notably in national and social-class origins, legal statuses, cultural backgrounds, and phenotypes (many mixing indigenous pre-Columbian ancestries with European, African, and Asian roots).

And, as the data show, there are vast differences in the way in which these various groups see themselves racially and ethnically, and in the way in which they are perceived by others. Divisions are evident between regions and groups, within groups, and even within families.

Nonetheless, despite sometimes profound group and generational differences among them, the tens of millions of persons classified as Hispanic do share a common label that symbolizes minority-group status in the United States. This is a label developed and legitimized by the state, diffused in daily and institutional practice, and finally internalized - and racialized - as a prominent part of the American mosaic.

That this outcome is, at least in part, a self-fulfilling prophecy, does not make it any less real. But the reliance on "Hispanic" or "Latino" as a catch-all category is misleading, concealing the multiple origins and the uncertain destinies of the peoples so labeled.

About The Author

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The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the opinion of ILW.COM.

US Census Bureau Definitions

Ethnicity is a distinct and separate classification from race in the census. All respondents are asked to categorize themselves as a member of one of two ethnicities: "Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin" or "Not Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin."

People of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin are defined as "those who trace their origin or descent to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Spanish-speaking countries of Central or South America, and other Spanish cultures."

Once a respondent claims "Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin," they are asked to further designate which country or countries to which they trace their origin.

Origin can be the "heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of

birth of the person or the person's parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States."

"Hispanics or Latinos" may be of any race.

Race is not defined biologically, anthropologically, or genetically by the US Census Bureau. Racial categories in the 2010 Census were:

- "White"
- "Black, African American, or Negro"
- "American Indian or Alaska Native"
- "Asian Indian"
- "Chinese"
- "Filipino"
- "Japanese"
- "Korean"
- "Vietnamese"
- "Other Asian"
- "Native Hawaiian"
- "Guatemalan or Chamorro"
- "Samoan"
- "Other Pacific Islander"
- "Some Other Race"

More than one race can be chosen, and space is provided to write in an unlisted race.



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