

The Hispanic Population in the USA - 1990

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Despite the Census Bureau's extensive efforts to enumerate the Hispanic population in 1990, there will probably be little more agreement on the accuracy of the numbers than there was in 1980. At that time the Bureau estimated they missed the mark on people of Hispanic descent by 7.4 percent according to the research editor of *American Demographics* (Exter 1985:29). This would adjust the 1980 total Hispanic population from 14.6 to 15.8 million, which provides us with a reasonable starting point to estimate the size of the 1990 Hispanic population in the USA.

Because both the March 1985 and 1987 Census Bureau updates (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census; *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20: No. 403, 1985; No. 416, 1987) start with a basic number of 14.6 million for 1980, these estimates should be adjusted from 18.1 million to 18.6 million, and from 18.8 million to 20.3 million respectively. This also takes into account the estimated Hispanic birth rates and the legal immigration, 100,000 yearly, as well as the estimated illegal immigration, 200,000 yearly (Exter 1985: P20). Extrapolating these figures to 1990 would give us a figure of 21.2 million Hispanics in the USA in 1990.

When compared to the Census Bureau projections of the Hispanic population (Spencer 1986: P25) this figure compares with a point approximately midway between their middle (19.9) and highest (22.1) series considering fertility, mortality, and immigration. What this figure does not take into account is Hispanic transients: migratory workers, day laborers in border regions, extended visitors, students and tourists who reside with relatives and friends, etc. Because of the fluidity of migration back and forth across the southern border, this figure is most difficult to even estimate, and that accounts for much of the disparity in total Hispanic population estimates. In 1980 it was estimated that three million undocumented aliens resided in the USA (Allen & Turner 1988:3). The Slater article showed that about 50% of the aliens were from Mexico; Passel and Woodrow showed about 55% (1984). Through the later part of the 1980's the number of apprehensions by the immigration authorities approached or exceeded a million people per year.

With the assumption that there are 1.5 million illegal Hispanic residents here and most of those are in fact not counted; that there is one transient Hispanic in the USA for every one apprehended each year; and that there are approximately one million legal transients: migrant workers, border area workers, "tourists" and students; we can conservatively place the number of transient Hispanics at 3.5 million in any given year.

Therefore, the total number of Hispanics in the USA in 1990 is approximately 24.7 million people. Higher estimates simply cannot be documented. The 1990 preliminary census data on the total USA population seems to be coming out very close to the "middle range" projections of 250.4 million (Spencer 1989: P25) which lends credibility to the estimates on Hispanics that we have used here.

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Sources

1. Exter, Thomas; "Focus on Hispanics" in *American Demographics*, Aug 1985, Vol. 7, No 8, p 29.
2. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census; *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20: No. 403, 1985; No. 416, 1987.
3. Exter, Thomas; "Focus on Hispanics" in *American Demographics*, August 1985, Vol. 7, No.8, p 30.
4. Spencer, Gregory. *Projections of the Hispanic Population: 1983 to 2080*; Current Population Reports; Population Estimates and Projections; Series P-25, No. 995, 1986.
5. Allen & Turner. *We The People*. NY, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988.
6. Passel and Woodrow. "Geographic Distribution of Undocumented Immigrants," a paper presented at the Population Association of America (PAA) annual meeting, May 1984.
7. Spencer, Gregory. *Projections of the Population of the United States by Age, Sex, and Race: 1988 to 2080*. Current Population Reports; Population Estimates and Projections, Series P-25; No.1018, 1989.