

**Immigrants from Latin America and  
the Caribbean: A Socioeconomic Profile**

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### Related Reading by the Author

- Rumbaut, Rubén G. and Wayne A. Cornelius, eds. *California's Immigrant Children: Theory, Research, and Implications for Educational Policy*. (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1995)
- Rumbaut, Rubén G. "Origins and Destinies: Immigration to the United States Since World War II." *Sociological Forum*, 9,4 (December 1994), 583-621.
- Rumbaut, Rubén G. "The Crucible Within: Ethnic Identity, Self-Esteem, and Segmented Assimilation Among Children of Immigrants." *International Migration Review*, 28,4 "Winter 1994", 748-794.
- Rumbaut, Rubén G. "The Americans: Latin American and Caribbean Peoples in the United States." In Alfred Stepan, ed., *Americans: New Interpretive Essays*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 275-307.
- Rumbaut, Rubén G. "Passages to America: Perspectives on the New Immigration." In Alan Wolfe, ed., *America at Century's End*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 208-244, 518-526.
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# Immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean: A Socioeconomic Profile

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## **Immigrants From Latin America and the Caribbean: A Socioeconomic Profile**

Contemporary immigration to the United States and the formation of new ethnic groups are the complex and unintended social consequences of the expansion of the nation to its post-World War II position of global hegemony. Immigrant communities in the United States today are related to a history of American military, political, economic, and cultural involvement and intervention in the sending countries, especially in Asia and the Caribbean Basin, and to the linkages that are formed in the process that open a variety of legal and illegal migration pathways. The 19.8 million foreign-born persons counted in the 1990 U.S. census formed the largest immigrant population in the world, though in relative terms, only 7.9% of the U.S. population was foreign-born, a lower proportion than earlier in this century. Today's immigrants are extraordinarily diverse, a reflection of polar-opposite types of migrations embedded in very different historical and structural contexts. Also, unlike the expanding economy that absorbed earlier flows from Europe, since the 1970's new immigrants have entered an "hourglass" economy with reduced opportunities for social mobility, particularly among the less educated, and new waves of refugees have entered a welfare state with expanded opportunities for public assistance. (Rubén G. Rumbaut, 1994)

This CIFRAS seeks to make sense of the new diversity, with a focus on immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean. Some key facts and figures about contemporary immigrants are presented, looking at their patterns of settlement and comparing their distinctive social and economic characteristics to major U.S. racial-ethnic groups. Their different modes of incorporation in - and consequences for - American society are the subject matter of more extensive articles by the author, as noted in the references.

The information of this CIFRAS is conveyed in four data tables, drawn from the 1990 U.S. Census of Population. Each table is designed to address separate but interrelated issues of today's Latino population. In order, the tables cover:

- \* Patterns of Settlement of the U.S. Hispanic Population;
- \* A Socioeconomic Portrait of Major U.S. Ethnic Groups;
- \* Latin American and Caribbean Immigrants in the U.S. Today;
- \* A Socioeconomic Portrait of Principal Immigrant Groups.

In addition, several Figures are presented to highlight certain parts of the tables.

## Population and Settlement

Of the 249 million people counted by the 1990 U.S. Census, Hispanics accounted for 22.4 million, or 9% of the total population; up 53% from the 14.6 million counted in 1980. The sharp increase in the Hispanic population has been largely due to recent and rapidly growing immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean, making Latinos the largest immigrant population in the country. Only Mexico, Argentina, and Colombia have larger Spanish-origin populations. If current trends continue, and there's every reason to believe that they will, Hispanics as a whole will surpass African-Americans in population size sometime in the next decade.

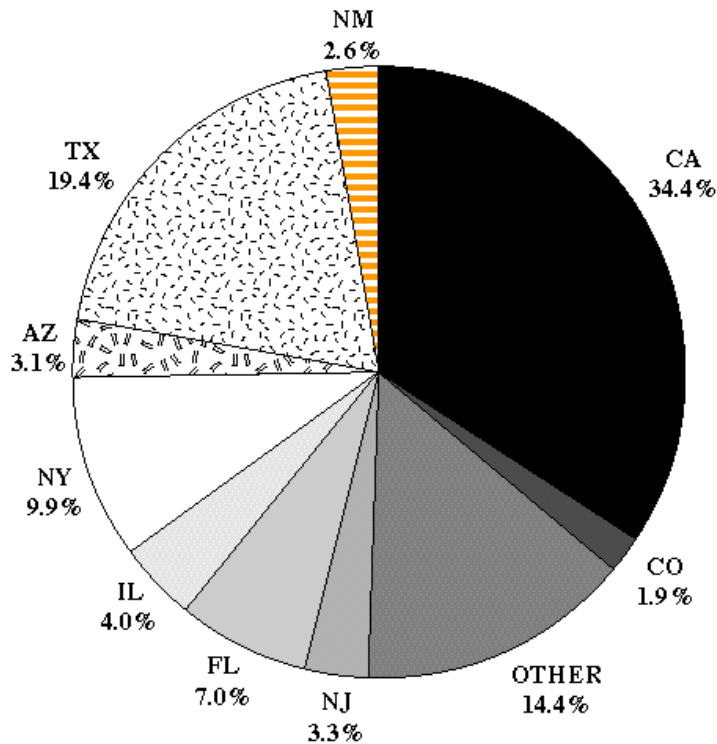
As detailed in Table 1 and Figure 1, nearly three out of four Hispanics in the United States reside in just four states: California (with over a third of the total), Texas (nearly one-fifth), New York, and Florida (combining for one-sixth). By contrast, less than one-third of the total U.S. population resides in those states. Indeed, Hispanics now account for more than 25% of the populations of California and Texas.

**Table 1. States and Counties of Principal Hispanic Settlement in the United States, 1990**

State or County <i>N in 1,000s</i>	Total 1990 Hispanic Population	% Hispanic Pop. Growth, 1980-1990	% Hispanic of State or County Population	% of U.S. Hispanic Population	PERCENT OF EACH GROUP'S POPULATION			
					Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Other Hispanic
<b>U.S. TOTALS (%)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>53.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>60.4</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>22.8</b>
<i>States:</i>								
California	7,687,938	69.2	25.8	34.4	45.3	4.6	6.9	26.9
Texas	4,339,905	45.4	25.5	19.4	28.8	1.6	1.7	7.6
New York	2,214,026	33.4	12.3	9.9	0.7	39.8	7.1	18.9
Florida	1,574,143	83.4	12.2	7.0	1.2	9.1	64.6	9.7
Illinois	904,446	42.3	7.9	4.0	4.6	5.4	1.7	2.3
New Jersey	739,861	50.4	9.6	3.3	0.2	11.7	8.2	6.0
Arizona	688,338	56.2	18.8	3.1	4.6	0.3	0.2	1.2
New Mexico	579,224	21.4	38.2	2.6	2.4	0.1	0.1	4.9
Colorado	424,302	24.9	12.9	1.9	2.1	0.3	0.2	2.6
<i>Counties:</i>								
Los Angeles, CA	3,351,242	62.2	37.8	15.0	18.7	1.5	4.4	14.5
Dade (Miami), FL	953,407	64.1	49.2	4.3	0.2	2.7	54.0	5.8
Cook (Chicago), IL	694,194	39.0	13.6	3.1	3.4	4.7	1.4	1.7
Harris (Houston), TX	644,935	74.7	22.9	2.9	3.8	0.3	0.7	2.2
Bexar (San Antonio), TX	589,180	27.8	49.7	2.6	4.0	0.2	0.1	0.8
Orange (Santa Ana), CA	564,828	97.3	23.4	2.5	3.5	0.3	0.6	1.5
The Bronx, NY	523,111	32.0	43.5	2.3	0.1	12.8	0.9	3.0
San Diego, CA	510,781	85.6	20.4	2.3	3.3	0.4	0.3	1.1
Kings (Brooklyn), NY	462,411	17.9	20.1	2.1	0.2	10.1	0.9	3.1
El Paso, TX	411,619	38.6	69.6	1.8	2.9	0.1	0.0	0.3
New York (Manhattan)	386,630	15.0	26.0	1.7	0.1	5.7	1.7	4.0
Queens, NY	381,120	45.2	19.5	1.7	0.1	3.7	1.8	4.9
San Bernardino, CA	378,582	128.2	26.7	1.7	2.4	0.3	0.3	0.9

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Persons of Hispanic Origin for the United States and States: 1990," and "Hispanic Origin Population by County: 1990 and 1980," *1990 Census of Population* (1991); and 1990 Census State Summary Tape Files STF-3 (1993).

**Figure 1. Percent of U.S. Hispanic Population by State, 1990**



Source: Table 1.

Patterns of concentration are even more pronounced for specific groups: three-fourths of all Mexican-Americans are in California and Texas alone, half of the Puerto Ricans are in the New York-New Jersey area, and two-thirds of the Cubans are in Florida. Significant numbers of Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans are also in Illinois, overwhelmingly in Chicago. The category “Other Hispanic” used by the census includes both long-established groups who trace their roots to the region prior to the annexation of the Southwest after the U.S.-Mexico War (notably in New Mexico, where Hispanics still account for more than 38% of the state’s population despite comparatively little recent immigration), and also recent immigrants from Central/South America and the Spanish Caribbean (with a quarter in California, another quarter in New York-New Jersey, and a tenth in Florida).

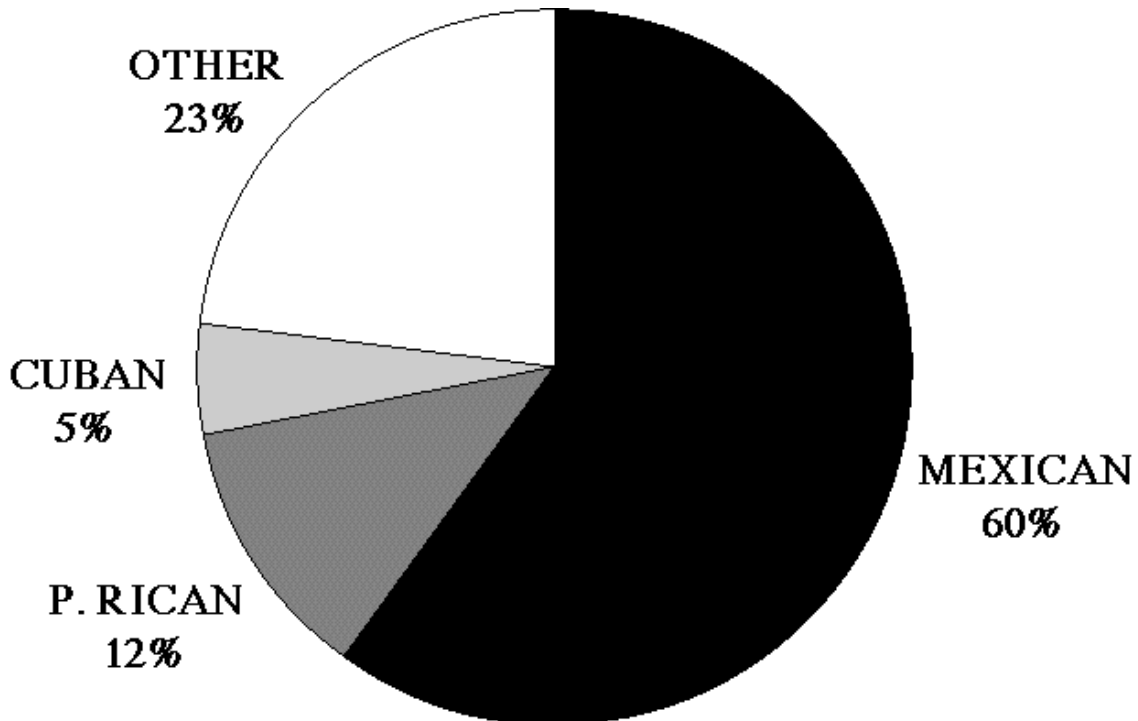
These patterns of concentration are more pronounced still in metropolitan areas within states, and in particular communities within metropolitan areas. The bottom panel of Table 1 lists the 13 largest counties in the U.S. of Hispanic concentration (the “baker’s dozen” out of more than 1,200 counties in the U.S.) In 1990, there were 3.4 million in Los Angeles County alone, 15% of the national Hispanic population and 38% of the total population of Los Angeles. Three other adjacent areas in Southern California — Orange, San Diego, and San Bernardino Counties — reflected the highest rates of Hispanic population growth over the past decade and combine with Los Angeles to account for 22% of the U.S. total. Nearly 8% of the total Hispanic population resides in four boroughs of New York City: the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens. Half of the populations of Dade County (Miami) and Bexar County (San Antonio) are Hispanic — principally of Cuban and Mexican origin, respectively — as are over two-thirds of the population of El Paso (on the Mexican border) and nearly a quarter of Houston’s.

Today, the Mexican-origin population of Los Angeles is exceeded only by Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey; Havana is the only city in Cuba larger than Cuban Miami; San Salvador and Santo Domingo are slightly larger than Salvadoran Los Angeles and Dominican New York; and there are twice as many Puerto Ricans in New York City than in the capital of Puerto Rico, San Juan.

## Socioeconomic Characteristics of U.S. Hispanics and Non-Hispanics

About 60% of all U.S. Hispanics are of Mexican origin (13.5 million) and 12% are Puerto Ricans (2.7 million on the mainland, excluding the 3.5 million in Puerto Rico), making them the nation's second and third largest ethnic minorities after African-Americans (29 million). By comparison, only four other groups had populations in 1990 above 1 million: American-Indians; the Chinese (the nation's oldest and most diversified Asian-origin minority, originally recruited as laborers to California in the mid-19th Century until their exclusion in 1882); Filipinos (colonized by the U.S. for the first half of this century and also recruited to work in plantations in Hawaii and California until the 1930's); and Cubans (who account for 5% of all Hispanics and whose immigration is also tied closely to the history of U.S.-Cuban relations). The original incorporation of all of these sizable groups, except the oldest (American-Indians) and the newest (Cubans), was characterized by processes of labor importation. What is more, while the histories of each took complex and diverse forms, the four largest ethnic minorities in the country — African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and American-Indians — are peoples whose incorporation originated largely involuntarily through conquest, occupation, and exploitation (followed, in the case of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, by mass immigration during the 20th Century, much of it initiated by active labor recruitment by U.S. companies), setting the foundation for subsequent patterns of social and economic inequality. These are reflected in the socioeconomic profiles presented in Table 2 for all the major U.S. racial-ethnic groups. Note that the next three largest groups — the Chinese, Filipinos, and Cubans — are today largely composed of immigrants who have come to the U.S. since the 1960's, but building on structural linkages established much earlier.

**Figure 2. Hispanic Settlement in the United States, 1990**  
*PERCENT OF EACH GROUP'S U.S. POPULATION*



Source: Table 1.

**Table 2. Size, Nativity, and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Principal Racial-Ethnic Groups in the United States, 1990**

Racial-Ethnic Groups		NATIVITY	EDUCATION <sup>1</sup>	OCCUPATION <sup>2</sup>		INCOME <sup>3</sup>			TYPE <sup>4</sup>
		Foreign Born <sup>5</sup>	College Grads (%)	UpperWhite Collar(%)	LowerBlue Collar(%)	Poverty Rate (%)	% Public Assistance	Per Capita (\$)	% Female Households
Hispanics <sup>5</sup>	22,354,059	35.8	9.2	14.1	22.9	25.3	14.3	8,400	21.6
Mexican	13,495,938	33.3	6.3	11.6	24.9	26.3	12.5	7,447	18.2
Puerto Rican <sup>6</sup>	2,727,754	1.2	9.5	17.2	21.0	31.7	26.9	8,403	36.6
Cuban	1,043,932	71.7	16.5	23.2	16.5	14.6	15.2	13,786	16.3
Salvadoran	565,081	81.2	5.0	6.3	26.4	24.8	7.1	7,201	21.2
Dominican	520,151	70.6	7.8	11.1	29.4	33.0	27.1	7,381	41.2
Non-Hispanic									
White	188,128,296	3.3	22.0	28.5	13.4	9.2	5.3	16,074	11.8
Black	29,216,293	4.9	11.4	18.1	20.8	29.5	19.7	8,859	43.2
Asian & Pacific									
Islanders	6,968,359	63.1	36.6	30.6	12.1	14.1	9.9	13,638	11.3
Chinese	1,645,472	69.3	40.7	35.8	10.6	14.0	8.3	14,877	9.4
Filipino	1,406,770	64.4	39.3	26.6	11.0	6.4	10.0	13,616	15.1
Japanese	847,562	32.4	34.5	37.0	6.9	7.0	2.9	19,373	11.9
Asian Indian	815,447	75.4	58.1	43.6	9.4	9.7	4.6	17,777	4.5
Korean	798,849	72.7	34.5	25.5	12.8	13.7	7.8	11,178	11.3
Vietnamese	593,213	79.9	17.4	17.6	20.9	25.7	24.5	9,033	15.9
Pacific									
Islanders <sup>6</sup>	365,024	12.9	10.8	18.1	16.3	17.1	11.8	10,342	18.4
Am. Indian, Eskimo, & Aleut									
	1,793,773	2.3	9.3	18.3	19.4	30.9	18.6	8,367	26.2
<b>Total Pop.</b>	<b>248,709,873</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>20.3</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>14,649</b>	<b>16.0</b>

1 Education of persons aged 25 years or older.

2 Employed persons age 16 or older;

“Upper White Collar” = professionals, executives, and managers; “Lower Blue Collar” = operators, fabricators, and laborers.

3 Persons below the Federal poverty line, and households receiving public assistance income.

4 Female Head-of-Household with no husband present.

5 Hispanics may be of any “race,” as classified by the census.

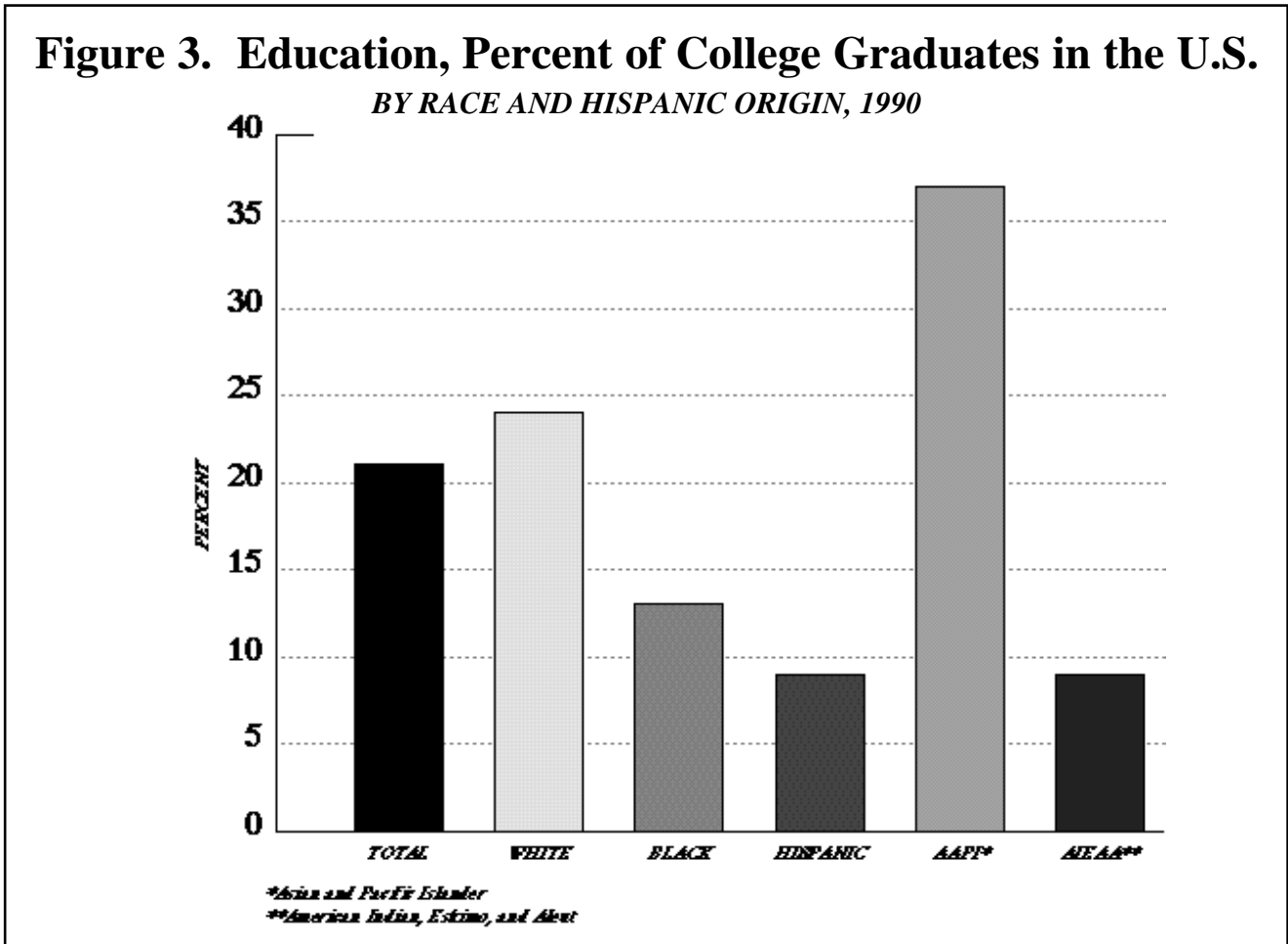
6 Puerto Ricans and Pacific Islanders residing in the 50 states.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1990 Census of Population; Social and Economic Characteristics*, 1990 CP-2-1, Nov. 1993; and *1990 Census of Population: Persons of Hispanic Origin in the United States*, 1990 CP-3-3, Aug. 1993.



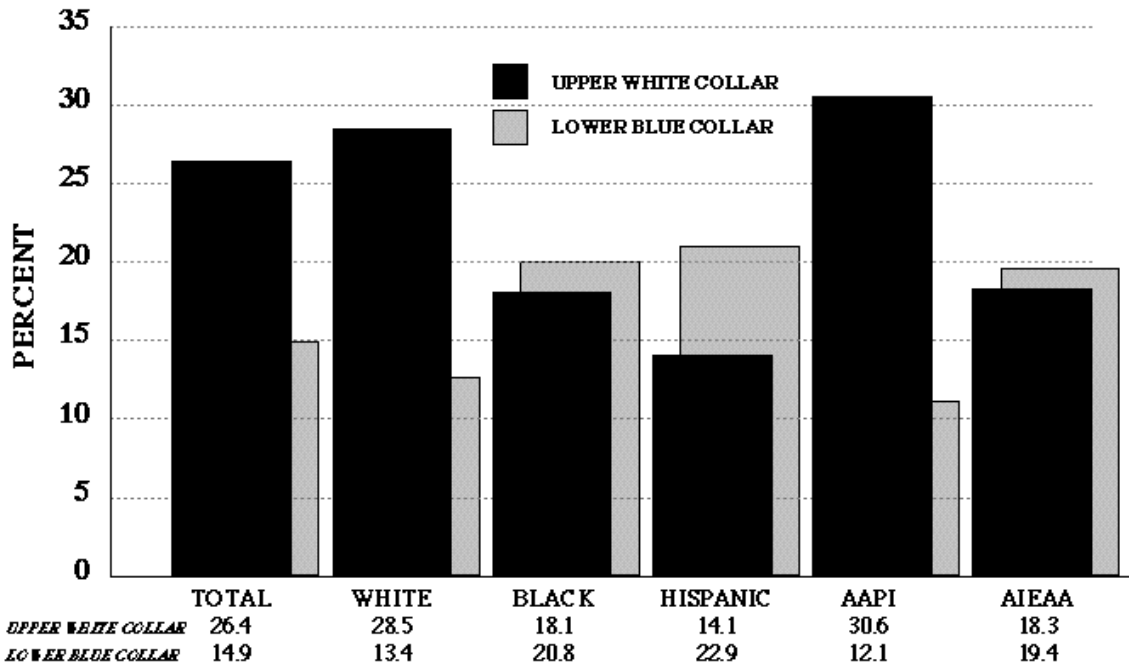
While today's immigrants come from over 100 different countries, the majority come from two small sets of developing countries located either in the Caribbean Basin or in Asia, all variously characterized by significant historical ties to the U.S. The former include Mexico (still by far the largest source of both legal and illegal immigration), Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Haiti, with El Salvador and Guatemala emerging prominently as source countries for the first time during the 1980's; the latter include the Philippines, South Korea, Vietnam, China (including Taiwan), and India. In each set, their historical relationships with the U.S. have variously given rise to particular social networks of family and friends that over time serve as bridges of passage to the United States, linking places of origin with places of destination, opening "chain migration" channels, and giving the process of immigration its cumulative and seemingly spontaneous character. To be sure, there are many factors — economic, political, cultural, geographic, demographic — that help explain contemporary immigration to and socioeconomic incorporation in the United States, but none can do so adequately outside of its historical context.

Table 2 compares the major Hispanic and non-Hispanic racial-ethnic groups in the U.S., including both the foreign-born and the native-born. Hispanics differ sharply not only from non-Hispanics, but also among themselves, in terms of education, occupation, poverty, public assistance, per capita income, and family type. See Table 2 for details. In addition, these major differences are highlighted in Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. Note that the information in Table 2 does not break down such differences by nativity within each ethnic group. For example, of the 13.5 million persons of Mexican origin in the U.S., two-thirds are U.S.-born, while only one-third are immigrants (despite the enormous flow of recent Mexican immigration). The remaining sections of this report will focus solely on the characteristics of the foreign-born.



### Figure 4. Type of Occupation in the U.S.

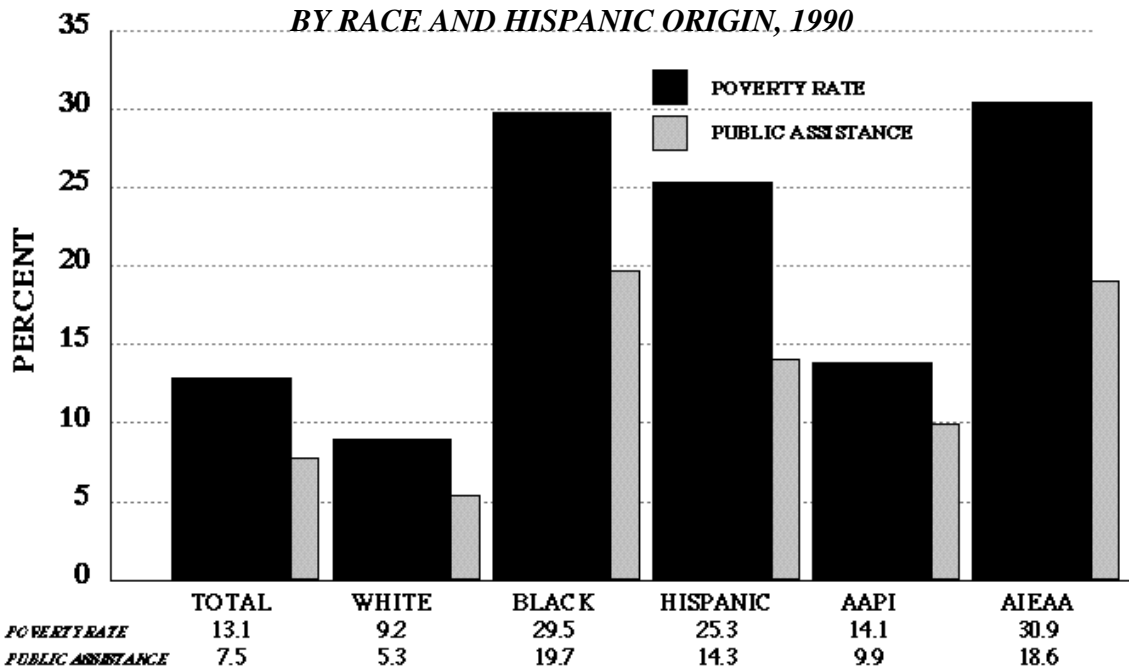
BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN, 1990



AAPI = Asian and Pacific Islanders AIEAA = American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut  
Source: Table 1

### Figure 5. Percent of Population Below Poverty Level and Receiving Public Assistance

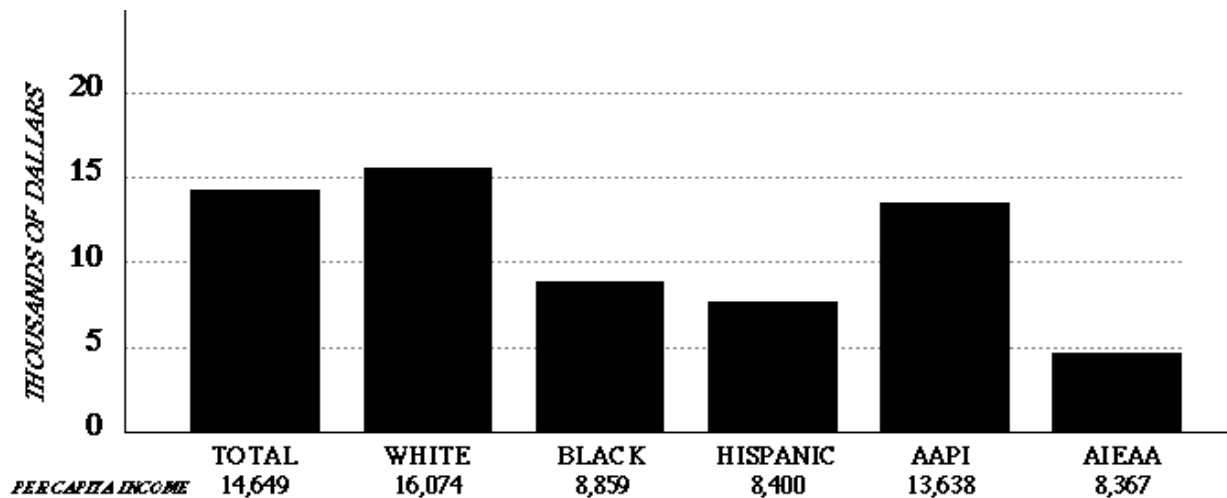
BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN, 1990



AAPI = Asian and Pacific Islanders AIEAA = American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut  
Source: Table 1

## Figure 6. Per Capita Income in the U.S.

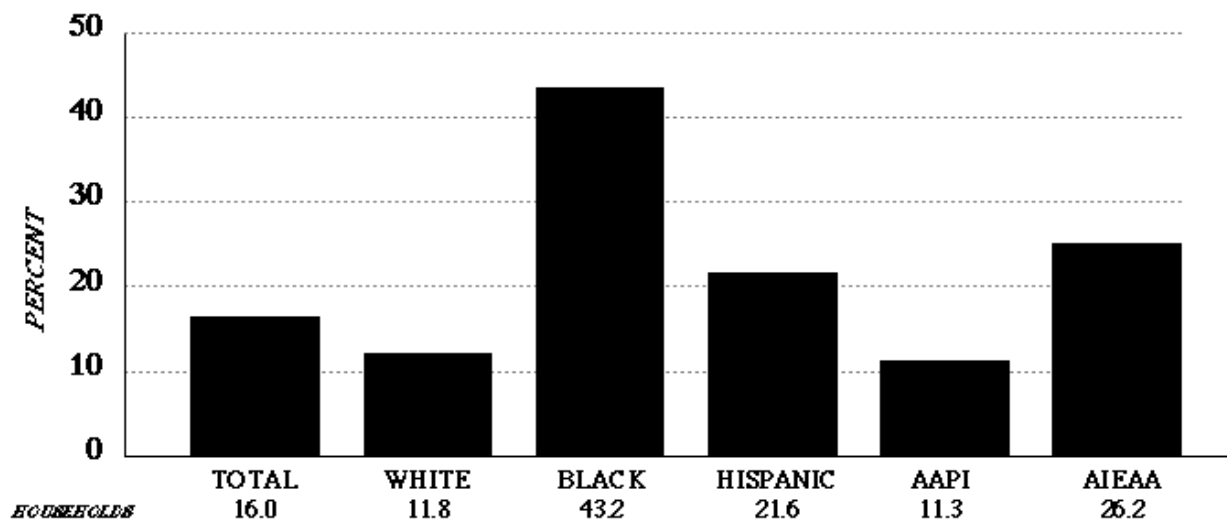
BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN, 1990



AAPI = Asian and Pacific Islanders AIEAA = American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut  
Source: Table 1

## Figure 7. Family Type, Percentage of Female-Headed Households in the U.S.

BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN, 1990



AAPI = Asian and Pacific Islanders AIEAA = American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut  
Source: Table 1

## Immigrants in the United States Today

Table 3 provides a comparative portrait of the foreign-born population of the U.S. — at 19.8 million persons, the largest immigrant population in the world, although constituting only 8% of the total U.S. population, much lower than its proportion at the turn of the century.

Region/Country of Birth	Foreign-Born Persons (N)	YEAR OF IMMIGRATION TO THE U.S.				NATURALIZED U.S. CITIZEN		STATE OF PRINCIPAL SETTLEMENT		
		1980's (%)	1970's (%)	1960's (%)	Pre-1960 (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Calif. (%)	NY/NJ (%)	Fla. (%)
<i>REGION:</i>										
Latin America/Caribbean	8,416,924	50.0	28.0	15.0	7.0	27.0	73.0	38.7	17.9	12.8
Asia	4,979,037	57.0	29.0	9.0	5.0	41.0	59.0	40.2	15.7	2.3
Europe and USSR	4,350,403	20.0	13.0	19.0	48.0	64.0	36.0	15.4	27.2	6.9
Canada	744,830	17.0	12.0	20.0	51.0	54.0	46.0	21.0	9.6	10.4
Africa	363,819	61.0	28.0	7.0	4.0	34.0	66.0	18.1	22.2	4.1
<i>LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN:</i>										
<i>Spanish-Speaking Countries:</i>										
Mexico	4,298,014	50.0	31.0	11.0	8.0	23.0	77.0	57.6	1.3	1.3
Cuba	736,971	26.0	19.0	46.0	9.0	51.0	49.0	6.7	15.6	67.5
El Salvador	485,433	76.0	19.0	4.0	1.0	15.0	85.0	60.3	10.5	2.1
Dominican Republic	347,858	53.0	27.0	17.0	3.0	28.0	72.0	1.0	79.9	6.7
Colombia	286,124	52.0	27.0	18.0	3.0	29.0	71.0	10.7	43.0	23.3
Guatemala	225,739	69.0	22.0	7.0	2.0	17.0	83.0	60.2	10.7	5.1
Nicaragua	168,659	75.0	16.0	5.0	4.0	15.0	85.0	34.6	7.1	42.7
Perú	144,199	60.0	22.0	13.0	5.0	27.0	73.0	26.1	23.2	16.9
Ecuador	143,314	40.0	33.0	22.0	5.0	26.0	74.0	13.6	63.1	7.7
Honduras	108,923	64.0	19.0	12.0	5.0	26.0	74.0	24.0	25.2	19.1
Argentina	92,563	39.0	24.0	28.0	9.0	44.0	56.0	29.1	27.6	14.2
Panama	85,737	35.0	22.0	23.0	20.0	51.0	49.0	15.0	35.9	13.4
Chile	55,681	37.0	39.0	16.0	8.0	33.0	67.0	26.1	23.2	16.9
Costa Rica	43,530	44.0	26.0	21.0	9.0	33.0	67.0	30.0	26.6	15.7
Venezuela	42,119	67.0	15.0	12.0	6.0	23.0	77.0	11.3	19.5	33.2
Bolivia	31,303	50.0	23.0	18.0	10.0	30.0	70.0	22.5	16.6	9.7
Uruguay	20,766	38.0	38.0	19.0	5.0	38.0	62.0	13.2	46.7	13.0
Paraguay	6,057	41.0	40.0	14.0	5.0	33.0	67.0	15.4	37.9	5.6
<i>English-Speaking Countries:</i>										
Jamaica	334,140	47.0	33.0	15.0	5.0	38.0	62.0	3.4	50.2	22.1
Guyana	120,698	63.0	27.0	8.0	2.0	40.0	60.0	3.5	75.6	6.5
Trinidad and Tobago	115,710	38.0	37.0	22.0	3.0	32.0	68.0	4.9	59.6	10.5
Barbados	43,015	34.0	37.0	19.0	10.0	46.0	54.0	2.9	68.1	5.9
Belize	29,957	32.0	33.0	31.0	4.0	35.0	65.0	44.8	25.2	5.7
Bahamas	21,633	39.0	32.0	8.0	21.0	33.0	67.0	2.1	12.5	66.6
<i>Other-Language Countries:</i>										
Haiti	225,393	61.0	26.0	11.0	2.0	27.0	73.0	1.2	45.7	36.9
Brazil	82,489	56.0	15.0	18.0	11.0	24.0	76.0	15.8	27.9	11.3
<b>Total Foreign-Born:</b>	<b>19,767,316</b>	<b>44.0</b>	<b>25.0</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>41.0</b>	<b>59.0</b>	<b>32.7</b>	<b>19.3</b>	<b>8.4</b>
<b>Total Native-Born:</b>	<b>228,942,557</b>	—	—	—	—	—	—	<b>10.2</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>4.9</b>

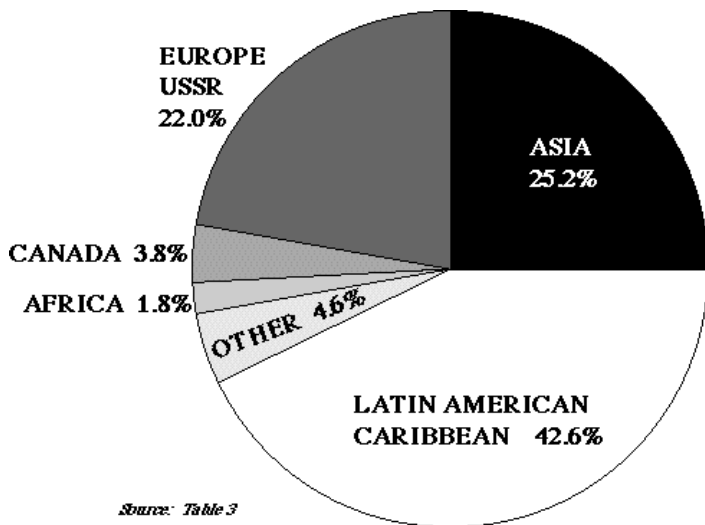
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Ethnic Profiles for States, CPH-L-136, 1993; The Foreign Born Population in the United States, 1990 CP-3-1, July 1993, Tables 1, 3; and The Foreign Born Population in the United States: 1990, CPH-L-98, 1993, Table 13. Data on year of immigration are drawn from a 5% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) of the 1990 Census, and subject to sample variability; decimals are rounded off.

Table 3 also presents information on the recency of immigration, the proportion of naturalized U.S. citizens, and the states of principal settlement, broken down by world region and for all of the major sending countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, in rank order by the size of the different national-origin groups.

As highlighted in Figure 8, Latin America and the Caribbean alone accounted for nearly 43%, 8.4 million of foreign-born persons in the U.S. in 1990, fully half of them coming just during the 1980's. This meant that by 1990, for the first time in U.S. history, Latin American and Caribbean peoples comprised the largest immigrant population in the country.

**Figure 8. Foreign Born Persons in the United States**

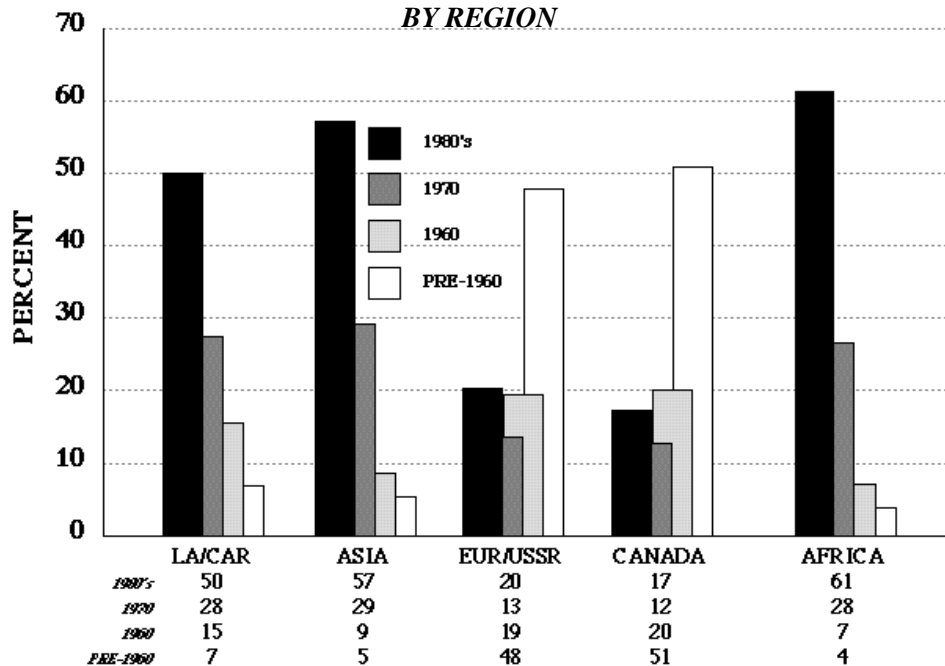
*BY REGION, 1990*



Source: Table 3

**Figure 9. Year of Immigration to the United States**

*BY REGION*

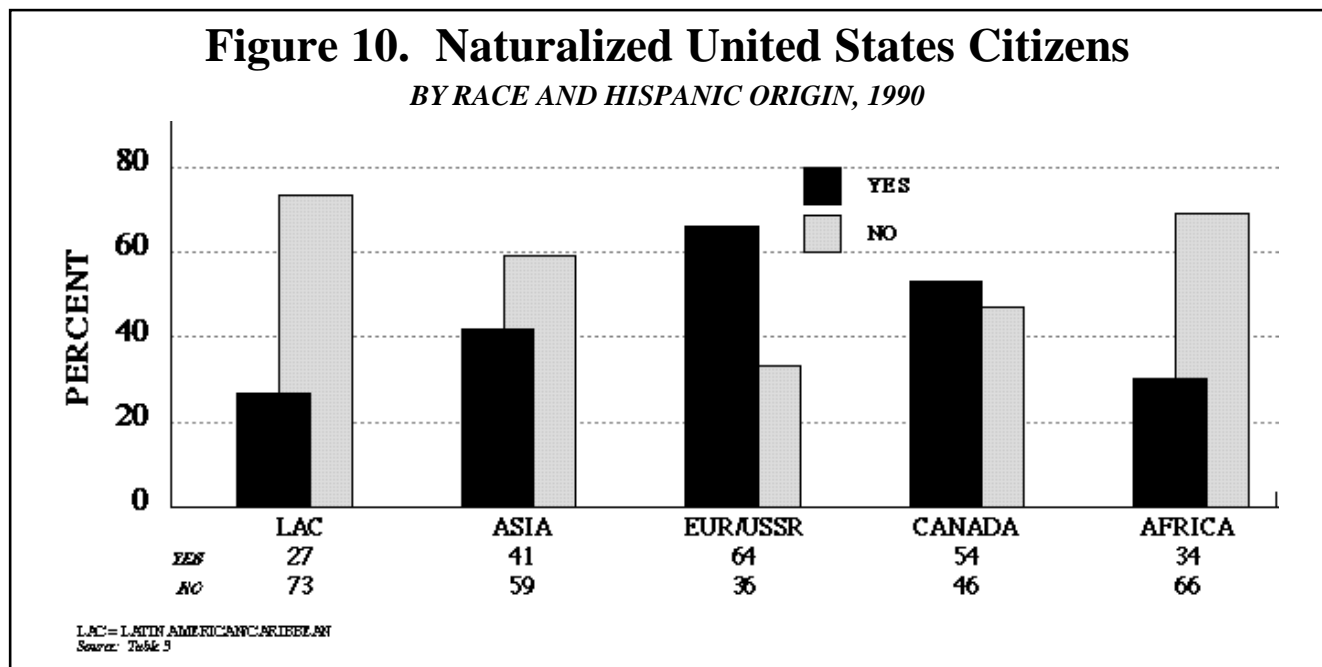


LACAR = LATIN AMERICAN & CARIBBEAN  
Source: Table 3

As shown in Figure 9, there were also more residents of the U.S. in 1990 who were born in Asia than in Europe, and huge proportions of both Latinos and Asians had settled especially in California. The number of Asian and African immigrants more than doubled during the last decade. In fact, over four-fifths of their 1990 populations had arrived only since 1970, reflecting the fact that Asian and African immigration has largely taken place since the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, which abolished racist national-origins quotas which had largely excluded non-Europeans from the Eastern Hemisphere. In sharp contrast, the Europeans and Canadians counted in the 1990 census consisted largely of aged and aging populations who had immigrated well before 1960, and their immigration patterns reflect a declining trend over the past three decades.

Mexico's 1990 immigrant population in the U.S. (4.3 million, of whom over 2 million were formerly undocumented immigrants whose status was legalized under the amnesty provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986) accounted for half of all immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, and indeed for nearly a quarter of the entire foreign-born population of the U.S. The Cuban-born population in 1990 (737,000) was by far the next largest immigrant group, and the only one who arrived preponderantly during the 1960's. However, the number of Cubans arriving during the 1980's (including the 125,000 who came in the 1980 Mariel boatlift) was surpassed by that of Salvadorans, Dominicans, Jamaicans, and Guatemalans, with Haitians, Colombians, and Nicaraguans not far behind. (Among these many entered illegally during the decade, most after the 1981 date required to qualify for the amnesty provisions of IRCA.) From South America the largest flow remains that from Colombia, although significant numbers of Ecuadorans and Peruvians came during the 1980's. The biggest increase was registered by the Guyanese, making them, surprisingly, the fastest-growing immigrant group from South America in recent years. Indeed, the Guyanese share a common pattern with other English-speaking groups in the Commonwealth Caribbean (such as Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, and Belize); the percentage of immigrants from these countries relative to their 1990 homeland populations is very high, most reaching double-digits.

Figure 10 provides data on the percentage of each group who had been naturalized as U.S. citizens as of 1990. As would be expected, those immigrant groups who had resided longer in the U.S. (Europeans and Canadians, most of whom came before the 1960's) had a higher proportion of naturalized citizens; recent arrivals (Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans, most of whom had come only in the 1980's), who are just beginning to make their way in the U.S., were much less likely to have initiated the process of citizenship acquisition. However, Latin American immigrants as a whole had the lowest proportion of naturalized citizens (27%), despite the fact that Asians and Africans were the most recently arrived groups. Clearly, time in the U.S. alone does not explain why different groups become U.S. citizens at different rates, but this is an important question since, along with higher numbers

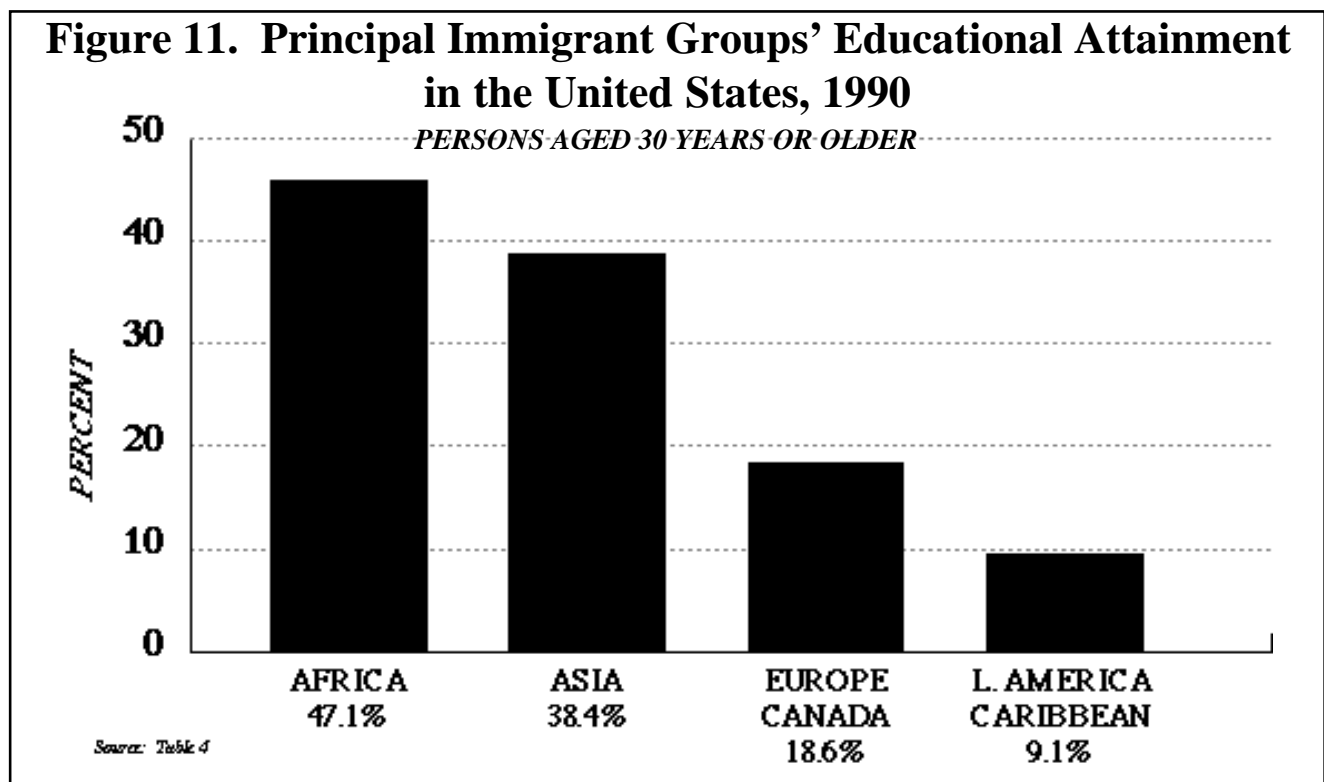


and greater concentration, citizenship acquisition, and effective political participation go to the heart of ethnic politics and to the ability of these groups to make themselves heard in the larger society. Among legal immigrants, the research literature (see references at the end of the report) has shown that the motivation and propensity to naturalize is higher among upwardly-mobile younger persons with higher levels of education, occupational status, English proficiency, income and property, whose spouses or children are U.S. citizens. In fact, the combination of three variables alone — educational level, geographical proximity, and political origin of migration — largely explain differences in citizenship acquisition among immigrant groups. Undocumented immigrants, by definition, are ineligible for citizenship and remain permanently disenfranchised.

### A Socioeconomic Portrait of Principal Immigrant Groups

Table 4 extends this general picture with detailed 1990 census information on social and economic characteristics for all of these immigrant groups, ranked in order of their proportion of college graduates (which, as noted, may serve as a proxy for their social class origins). These data, which are compared against the norms for the total U.S.-born population, reveal the extraordinary socioeconomic diversity of immigrants to the U.S., in general, and of those from the Americas, in particular.

A first point that stands out in Table 4, and highlighted in Figure 11, is the extremely high degree of educational attainment among immigrants from Asia and Africa: some 40% to 50% are college graduates, compared to 20% for the total U.S. population, and they are well above average in their proportion of professionals. For some countries such as India (not shown in the table), their proportions are much higher than the continental average shown; for example, over 90% of Indian immigrants to the U.S. in the late 1960's and early 1970's had professional and managerial occupations in India prior to immigration, as did four-fifths in the late 1970's and two-thirds during the 1980's, despite the fact that over time most of these immigrants have been admitted under family reunification preferences. By the mid-1970's there were already more Filipino and Indian foreign medical graduates in the U.S. than American black physicians; by the mid-1980's one-fifth of all engineering doctorates awarded by U.S. universities went to foreign-born students from Taiwan, India, and South Korea alone; and by 1990 the U.S. Census showed that the most highly educated groups in the U.S. were immigrants from India, Taiwan, and Nigeria.



**Table 4. English Proficiency and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Principal Immigrant Groups in the U.S. in 1990 in Rank Order of College Grad, By Region and Selected Latin American/Caribbean Countries of Birth**

Region/Country of Birth	Persons (N)	SPEAKS ENGLISH		EDUCATION	LABOR FORCE AND OCCUPATION			INCOME	AGE
		English Only (%)	Not Well or Not At All (%)	College Grads (%)	In Labor Force (%)	Upper-White Collar(%)	Lower-Blue Collar(%)	Poverty (%)	60 Years+ (%)
<b>REGION</b>									
Africa	363,819	25.0	5.0	47.1	75.1	37.0	12.0	15.7	6.0
Asia	4,979,037	8	22.0	38.4	66.4	32.0	13.0	16.2	11.0
Europe and Canada	5,095,233	45.0	9.0	18.6	52.2	32.0	12.0	9.3	40.0
Latin America/Caribbean	8,416,924	13.0	40.0	9.1	70.7	12.0	26.0	24.3	10.0
<b>LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN</b>									
<i>Spanish-Speaking Countries</i>									
Venezuela	42,119	9.0	12.0	37.2	68.2	34.0	11.0	21.1	5.0
Argentina	92,563	8.0	15.0	27.7	74.0	33.0	11.0	11.0	13.0
Bolivia	31,303	5.0	16.0	26.1	76.3	22.0	12.0	13.8	7.0
Chile	55,681	7.0	20.0	23.5	74.0	27.0	14.0	11.0	10.0
Panama	85,737	26.0	7.0	20.5	69.3	24.0	10.0	15.7	13.0
Perú	144,199	4.0	30.0	20.5	75.9	18.0	19.0	14.8	8.0
Paraguay	6,057	5.0	28.0	18.9	75.2	18.0	16.0	13.7	5.0
Uruguay	20,766	4.0	30.0	15.5	76.2	19.0	22.0	10.7	9.0
Cuba	736,971	5.0	40.0	15.4	63.8	23.0	18.0	14.9	30.0
Colombia	286,124	5.0	34.0	15.1	73.7	17.0	22.0	15.4	8.0
Nicaragua	168,659	4.0	41.0	14.5	73.3	11.0	24.0	24.4	7.0
Costa Rica	43,530	7.0	22.0	14.0	69.5	18.0	16.0	16.2	10.0
Ecuador	143,314	4.0	39.0	11.4	73.9	14.0	27.0	15.3	9.0
Honduras	108,923	6.0	37.0	8.1	71.0	9.0	24.0	28.4	6.0
Dominican Republic	347,858	4.0	45.0	7.3	63.6	10.0	31.0	30.5	8.0
Guatemala	225,739	3.0	45.0	5.8	75.9	7.0	28.0	26.0	4.0
El Salvador	485,433	3.0	49.0	4.6	76.2	6.0	27.0	25.1	4.0
Mexico	4,298,014	4.0	49.0	3.5	69.7	6.0	32.0	29.8	7.0
<i>English-Speaking Countries</i>									
Bahamas	21,633	80.0	1.0	18.0	54.8	13.0	10.0	23.6	19.0
Guyana	120,698	94.0	1.0	15.8	74.2	19.0	12.0	11.9	9.0
Trinidad and Tobago	115,710	94.0	0.0	15.6	77.2	20.0	10.0	14.9	9.0
Jamaica	334,140	94.0	0.0	14.9	77.4	22.0	11.0	12.1	12.0
Barbados	43,015	98.0	0.0	8.6	76.7	11.0	8.0	9.4	16.0
Belize	29,957	88.0	0.0	8.0	77.0	17.0	9.0	15.5	8.0
<i>Other-Language Countries</i>									
Brazil	82,489	16.0	23.0	34.2	71.6	20.0	12.0	10.8	11.0
Haiti	225,393	6.0	23.0	11.8	77.7	14.0	21.0	21.7	7.0
<b>Total Foreign-Born</b>	<b>19,767,316</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>64.3</b>	<b>22.0</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>18.2</b>	<b>18.0</b>
<b>Total Native-Born</b>	<b>228,942,557</b>	<b>92.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>20.3</b>	<b>65.4</b>	<b>27.0</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>17.0</b>

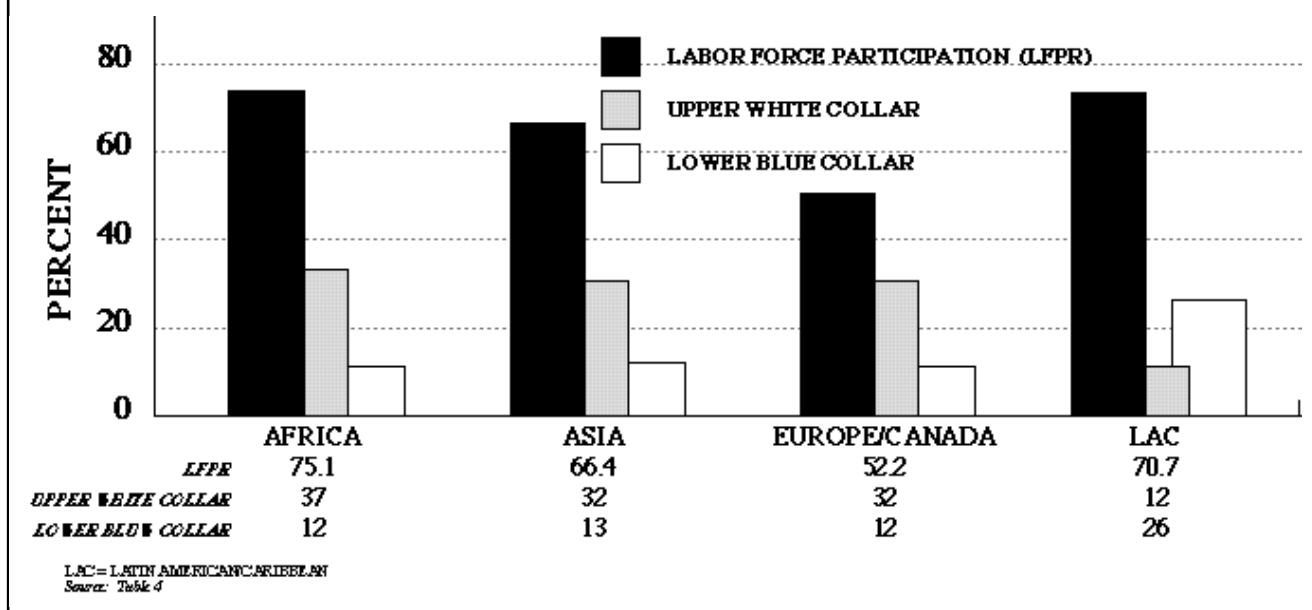
- 1 English proficiency of persons aged 5 years or older.
- 2 Educational attainment for persons aged 25 years or older.
- 3 Labor force participation and occupation for employed persons 16 years or older; "upper white-collar" = professionals, executives, and managers; "lower blue-collar" = operators, fabricators, and laborers.
- 4 Percent of persons below the federal poverty line.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Foreign Born Population in the United States*, CP-3-1, July 1993, Tables 1-5; *Persons of Hispanic Origin in the United States*, CP-3-3, August 1993, Tables 1-5; and data drawn from a 5% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) of the 1990 U.S. Census, subject to sample variability.



## Figure 12. Labor Force Participation and Occupation of Principal Immigrant Groups

IN THE UNITED STATES IN 1990

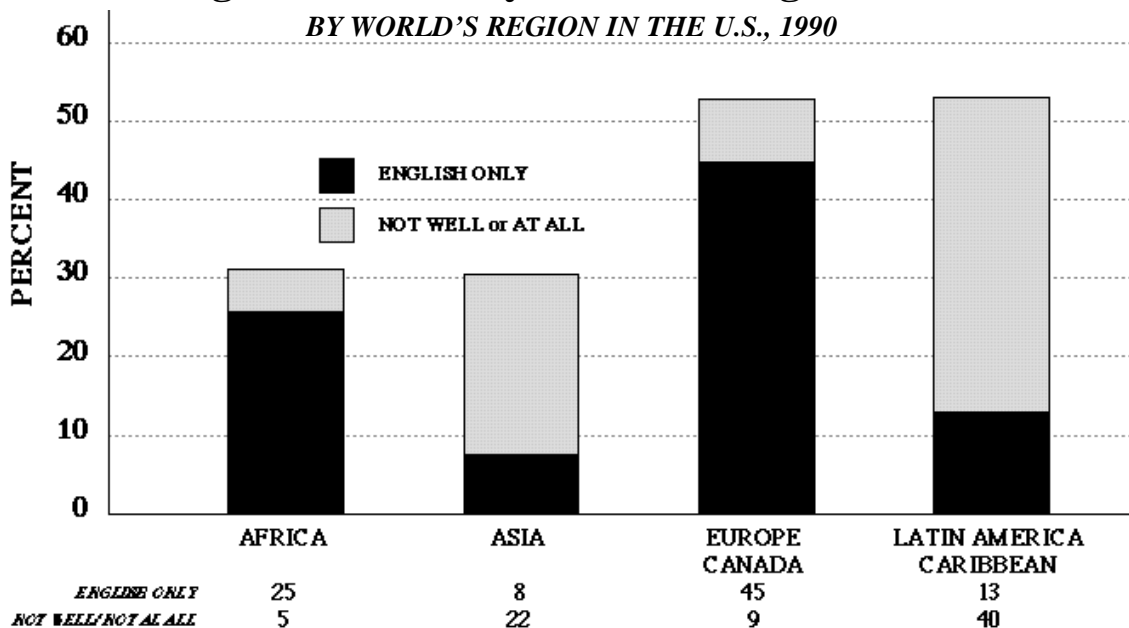


These data document a classic pattern of “brain drain” immigration; indeed, although they come from developing countries, these immigrants as a group are perhaps the most skilled ever to come to the United States, a fact that helps explain the class origins of the recent popularization of Asians as a “model minority” and to debunk nativist calls for restricting immigrants to those perceived to be more “assimilable” on the basis of language and culture. Canadians and Europeans, though they are much older resident groups (as reflected in their low rates of labor force participation and high naturalization rates), show levels of education slightly below the U.S. average, an occupational profile slightly above it, and lower poverty rates. (See Figure 12.) Latin Americans as a whole, by contrast, have high rates of labor force participation but well below-average levels of educational attainment, are concentrated in lower blue-collar employment (operators, fabricators, and laborers), and exhibit higher poverty rates.

However, as shown in the bottom panel of Table 4, a different picture emerges when broken down by national origin, underscoring the fact that these populations cannot sensibly be subsumed under the supranational rubric of “Hispanic” or “Latino” except as a catch-all category. Among Latin Americans, the highest “socioeconomic status” (SES) is reflected by Venezuelans, Argentineans, Bolivians, and Chileans (who are also among the smallest of the immigrant groups) — suggesting that these groups consist substantially of highly skilled persons who have entered under the occupational preferences of U.S. immigration law. Brazilians also recently emerged in this latter category. The lowest SES is found among Mexicans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Dominicans (who were also the largest groups of immigrants entering both legally and illegally in the 1980’s). Their socioeconomic characteristics approximate those of Puerto Ricans on the mainland (as seen earlier in Table 2), except that the poverty rate for the latter is much higher than that of any Latin American or Caribbean immigrant group (only Dominicans similarly exhibited poverty rates above 30%). Hondurans, Ecuadorans, and Nicaraguans also reflected a much higher ratio of lower-blue-collar to upper-white collar employment, as did to a lesser extent Haitians and Colombians. Panamanians, Peruvians, Paraguayans, Uruguayans, and Cubans reflected levels of educational attainment near the U.S. norm, and their occupational and income characteristics put them closer to the national average. Occupying an intermediate position were groups from the English-speaking Caribbean (Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, Guyana), with SES patterns quite similar to each other and somewhat below U.S. norms.

**Figure 13. English Proficiency of Persons Aged 5 Years and Older**

*BY WORLD'S REGION IN THE U.S., 1990*

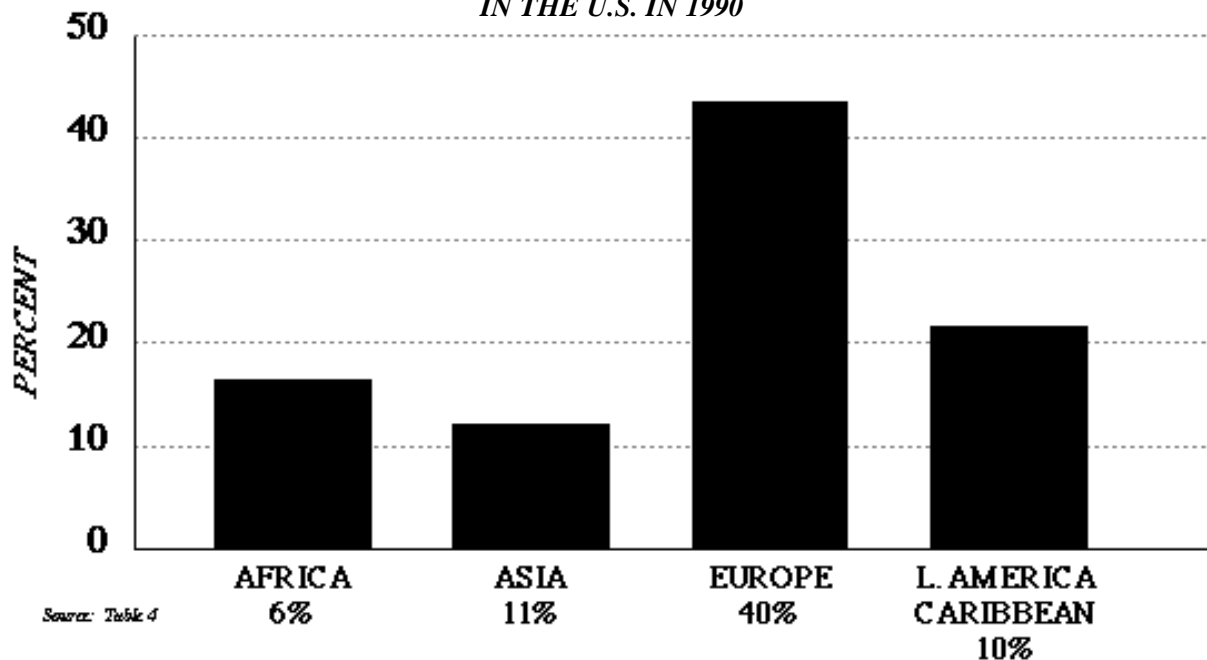


Source: Table 4

Table 4 and Figure 13 also focus on the level of English language proficiency of the U.S. foreign-born population, by region and for all of the largest Latin American and Caribbean immigrant groups. The latter as a whole exhibit a much lower degree of English proficiency than Asians, Africans, and Europeans, reflecting previously noted differences in socioeconomic status and time in the U.S. But again, even among “Hispanic” groups, there is as much diversity in their patterns of language competency as we saw with respect to other socioeconomic char-

**Figure 14. Persons 60 Years or Older of the Principal Immigrant Groups**

*IN THE U.S. IN 1990*



Source: Table 4

acteristics. Quite obviously, nearly all immigrants from the Commonwealth Caribbean are English monolinguals (a much higher proportion than Canadians, in fact). Among all other Latinos, Panamanians (the oldest resident immigrant group from Latin America, 20% of whom had arrived in the U.S. prior to 1960, as shown earlier in Table 3) were the most English proficient (in fact, over a quarter were already English monolinguals), followed by immigrants from Venezuela, Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile (the highest-SES groups from Latin America). The least proficient, with approximately half reporting being unable to speak English well or at all, were immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic — who, as seen earlier, were also the largest immigrant cohorts entering in the 1980’s as well as the lowest-SES groups from Latin America.

In addition to education and time in the U.S., age is also a key to the ability to develop proficiency in the English language, as is residence within dense ethnic enclaves. (See Figure 14.) Cuban refugees, whose median age is the oldest by far of any immigrant group from the Americas (about a third are over 60 years old), provide the best example: 40% reported speaking English not well or at all, and on closer inspection these tend to be older or elderly persons residing in areas of high ethnic concentration such as Miami. Still, the data in Table 4 are remarkable in showing that even among the most recently arrived groups, large proportions already report being able to speak English well or very well, and indeed that non-negligible proportions of the foreign-born speak English only. That fact notwithstanding, English language competency particularly among Hispanic immigrants in the U.S. — and their alleged Spanish “retentiveness” and “unwillingness” to assimilate — has become a highly charged sociopolitical issue, with nativist organizations warning about cultural “Balkanization” and Quebec-like linguistic separatism in region of high Hispanic concentration. Those fears are wholly misplaced. English fluency not only increases over time in the U.S. for all immigrant groups, but English also becomes by far the preferred language of use by the second generation. For children of immigrants, it is their mother tongue that atrophies over time, and quickly: the third generation typically has grown up speaking English only. This historical pattern explains why the United States has been called a “language graveyard.”