

Latinos in the Heartland: The Browning of the Midwest

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ABSTRACT

This report provides a Latino-focused assessment of the changing demographic and economic landscape of the Midwest between 1980 and 1990. Drawing on data from the 1990 Census, the authors found that Latinos (Hispanics) captured the bulk of population growth over the decade, while sustaining a major loss in real income and experiencing significant increases in poverty. Specifically, the authors found that over 56 percent of total population increase was accounted for by Latinos, especially Mexicans. On indicators of well-being, an increasing gap separates Whites from Latinos and Blacks. Whites, Blacks and Latinos all sustained significant real income declines over the period, although Whites maintained and even expanded the gap between themselves and the other groups. Nearly a third of Blacks were in poverty, and over one in five Latinos were poor, while less than 1 in 10 Whites were impoverished. Puerto Ricans' rates of poverty are at least as high as those of Blacks. Hispanic educational attainment is the least favorable indicator of all. Latinos trail the others, including Blacks, by wide margins. Latino labor force participation exceeds that of Whites and Blacks. The per capita income of Blacks is slightly better than that of Hispanics. The research implications of this study are to determine what macroeconomic factors accounted for a downturn in income and why Latinos and Blacks have been hit so hard in the process.