

HISPANIC AMERICANS:

A Comparative &

Critical Analysis of Leading Reference Sources

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Hispanic American, also known as *Latino*, is a generic name given to millions of immigrants and their descendents originating from 20 countries—Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The word *Hispanic*, derived from Hispania—once Spain's official name—describes the close connection between Spain and the 19 above-mentioned countries of North, Central, and South America. Three elements unite all these countries: a common language of Spanish (hence the exclusion of Portuguese-speaking Brazil); a common history and culture formed by more than four centuries of Spanish colonial rule; and a common religion, Catholicism, imposed by the Spanish *conquistadores* in the name of the Spanish Motherland.

There has been significant debate over the use of the term Hispanic Americans as opposed to Latinos. Strictly speaking, Hispanic or Hispanic American refers to those who trace their language and heritage to Spain. The term Latino, encompassing languages rooted in Latin, includes not only Brazil but also may be construed to include persons from the Francophone countries of the Caribbean and South America such as Haiti and French Guyana. In distinguishing between the terms Hispanic and Latino, other commentators, such as Cuban-born literary critic William Luis, have argued that

Hispanics are those individuals born or raised and educated in a Spanish-speaking country who

are dominant in Spanish and identify with the culture of their parents. Latinos are those born or raised and educated in the United States, who speak Spanish but feel more comfortable expressing themselves in English and are receptive to U.S. culture and society. (Figueredo, 2000, 34)

Nonetheless, the United States Census Bureau has chosen the term Hispanic American to denote this population as it seeks to measure demographic characteristics rather than cultural identification.

According to the latest data released by the Census Bureau, the Hispanic-American population is one of the fastest-growing segments of the country's multiethnic mosaic. During the last decade of the twentieth century, this population grew from 22,354,059 in 1990 to 35,305,818 in 2000, a surge of 13 million people compared to an increase of 11,774,556 in the white non-Hispanic population.

Fueled by both immigration and natural increase, the demographic progress of the Hispanic population promises to continue in at least the same proportion in the coming years. Furthermore, Hispanic Americans have made multiple contributions in virtually all fields of our country's endeavors, ranging from education, media, and the military to arts, sports, science, business, medicine, and many others. This article, therefore, seeks to focus on 11 leading reference sources to examine how Hispanic Americans and their achievements are covered and to determine what publishers of reference titles can do in the future in order to serve the research community with more

accurate and comprehensive tools.

The following is a list of examined works, after the Census arranged chronologically by date of publication. Tables on pages 44 and 45 compare the works with respect to the information they provide on specific Hispanic-American groups.

- U. S. *Census of Population and Housing, 2000*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001.

(USC)

- Brown, Francis and Roucek, Joseph, eds. *One America: The History, Contributions, and Present Problems of Our Racial and National Minorities* (3rd ed.). New York: Prentice Hall, 1952. (OAH)

- Thernstrom, Stephan, ed. *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980. (HEAEG)

- Kanellos, Nicolás and Fabregat, Claudio-Esteva. *Handbook of Hispanic Cultures in the United States*. Madrid/Houston, Tex.: Agencia Española de Cooperación, Arte Público Press, and Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana, 1994. 4 vols. (HHC)

- Jackson, Kenneth D., ed. *The Encyclopedia of New York City*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press/The New York Historical Society, 1995.

(ENYC)

- Tardiff, Joseph, et al., eds. *Dictionary of Hispanic Biography*. Detroit: Gale, 1996. (DHB)

- Levinson, David, ed. *American Immigrant Cultures: Builders of a Nation*. New York: Simon & Schuster/Macmillan, 1997. (AIC)

- Kanellos, Nicolás, ed. *Hispanic*

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ETHNIC GROUP	USC2000 (1990)	OAH	HEAEG	HHC	ENYC	DHB
Argentiniens	100,864 (63,176)	—	—	—	—	essay (4) bib., photo
Bolivians	42,068 (33,738)	—	—	—	—	essay (1) bib., photo
Chileans	68,849 (61,465)	—	—	—	—	—
Colombians	470,684 (351,717)	—	—	—	—	essay (1) bib., photo
Costa Ricans	68,688 (51,771)	—	—	—	—	—
Cubans	1,241,685 (859,739)	—	essay (5 p.) bib., map	extensive coverage, bib., map	short essay	essay (14) bib., photo
Dominicans	764,945 (505,690)	—	essay (2 p.) bib., map	some coverage, bib.	essay (2 columns),bib.	essay (2) bib., photo
Ecuadorians	260,559 (197,374)	—	—	—	short essay bib., photo	essay (1)
Guatemalans	372,487 (241,559)	—	—	—	—	—
Hondurans	217,569 (116,635)	—	—	—	short essay	—
Mexicans	20,640,711 (11,586,988)	essay (5 p.) bib.	essay (22 p.) bib., map	extensive coverage, bib. photo	short essay	essay (77) bib. photo
Nicaraguans	177,684 (177,077)	—	—	—	—	—
Panamanians	91,723 (88,649)	—	—	—	essay (2 columns)	—
Paraguayans	8,769 (5,415)	—	—	—	—	—
Peruvians	233,926 (161,866)	—	—	—	short essay	essay (1)
Puerto Ricans	3,406,178 (1,955,323)	essay (6 p.) bib.	essay (9 p.) bib., map	extensive coverage, bib., photo	essay (2 p.)	essay (13)
Salvadorans	655,165 (499,153)	—	—	—	short essay	—
Spanish	included in Other Hispanic (360,935)	—	essay (5 p.) bib., map	colonial period covered, bib., photo	short essay on Spanish language press	essay (12) bib., photo
Uruguayans	18,804 (14,641)	—	—	—	—	—
Venezuelans	91,507 (40,331)	—	—	—	—	—
Other C. Am.	103,721	—	—	—	—	—
Other S. Am.	57,532	—	—	—	—	—
Other Hispanic (no land of origin) (1,113,259)	6,211,800 (in- cludes Spanish)	essay (8 p.) bib.	essay (8 p.) bib., map	extensive coverage, bib.	essay on His- panic Society of America	essay (60) bib., photo

AIC	HAA	GEMA	EOA	SPD
essay (5 p.) bib., map	—	essay (8 p.) bib., photo	1	—
map (general, of region)	—	essay (10 p.) bib., photo	—	—
essay (2 p.) bib., map	—	essay (12 p.) bib., photo	1	—
essay (5 p.) bib., map	—	essay (12 p.) bib., photo	3	—
map (general, of region)	—	essay (8 p.) bib.	1	—
essay (8 p.) bib., map, photo	extensive coverage, bib., photo	essay (12 p.) bib., photo	17	2
essay (6 p.) bib., map	—	essay (9 p.) bib., photo	4	—
essay (6 p.) bib., map	—	essay (14 p.) bib.	5	—
essay (2 p.) bib., map, photo	—	essay (19 p.) bib., photo	15	—
essay (6 p.) bib., map	—	essay (9 p.) bib.	10	—
essay (8 p.) bib., map, photo	extensive coverage, bib., photo	essay (32 p.) bib., photo	35	3
essay (6 p.) bib., map, photo	—	essay (17 p.) bib., photo	18	—
essay (6 p.) bib., map	—	essay (10 p.) bib.	—	—
map (general, of region)	—	essay (8 p.) bib.	—	—
essay (5 p.) bib., map, photo	—	essay (14 p.) bib., photo	6	—
essay (8 p.) bib., map, photo	extensive coverage, bib., photo	essay (15 p.) bib., photo	38	3
essay (6 p.) bib., map, photo	—	essay (13 p.) bib., photo	—	—
essay (7 p.) bib., map, photo	extensive coverage, bib., photo	essay (10 p.) bib. photo	40	2
map (general of region)	—	essay (7 p.) bib.	—	—
map (general of region)	—	essay (8 p.) bib.	3	—
—	extensive coverage, bib., photo	—	55 (various general Hispanic)	51 (various general Hispanic)

American Almanac: A Reference Work on Hispanics in the United States.

Detroit: Gale, 1997. (HAA)

- Lehman, Jeffrey, ed. *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America* (2nd ed.). Detroit: Gale, 2000. 3 vols. (GEMA)
- Ballard, Patricia Tsune, ed. *Encyclopedia of Associations*. Detroit: Gale, 2001. 3 vols. (EOA)
- Striplin, Deborah, ed. *Standard Periodical Directory*. New York: Oxbridge Communications, 2001. (SPD)

Comments

The **USC 2000**, the latest official count of the U.S. population, recorded 281,421,906 people, out of which 35,305,818 are Hispanic Americans, compared with 36,419,434 African Americans, 11,898,828 Asian Americans, and 4,119,301 American Indians and Alaska Natives. However, millions of undocumented immigrants, many of whom have lived and worked in the United States for years, were not counted. Recently, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service estimated that in the last years of the 1990s, there were about 6.5 to 7 million undocumented, or in their terms, "illegal," immigrants living in the United States. These included about 4 million Hispanics: 2.7 million Mexicans, 335,000 Salvadorans, 165,000 Guatemalans, 90,000 Hondurans, 75,000 Dominicans, 70,000 Nicaraguans, 65,000 Colombians, 55,000 Ecuadorians, and 30,000 Peruvians, as well as others (*New York Times*, 2001). The U.S. Congress is considering new legislation to grant legal status to undocumented Hispanic immigrants, beginning with those of Mexican origin. If this takes place in the next several years, the official number of Hispanic Americans will reach 40 million, representing 16 percent of the country's total population.

OAH, a pioneer book devoted to over 50 ethnic American groups, estimated that in 1940 there were 4 million Hispanic Americans. In addition to a general essay on all Hispanic Americans, there is a five-page essay on Mexican Americans and a six-page

essay on Puerto Rican Americans. These essays cover immigration and settlement and include statistics, bibliographies, and other relevant information. The essays examine immigration from the 1850s onward, and Hispanic Americans are called "Latin Americans." The book is still useful for comparative and research purposes.

HEAEG is a solid and prestigious scholarly publication, but because it was published in 1980 and uses 1970 U.S. Census data, it is obviously not current enough to be of extensive use. Nevertheless, like *OAH*, *HEAEG* will still assist those seeking historical research and comparative information. It covers Hispanic Americans, including Central and South American immigrants, in a generic article eight pages long. Spanish and Cuban Americans merit an essay of five pages each, Puerto Ricans are described in nine pages, and the most extensive essay, 22 pages, is devoted to Mexican Americans. Dominican Americans are treated in an essay only two pages long. All essays are accompanied by maps of lands of origin and generally deal with historical background, early immigration, settlement patterns, economic life, culture, religion, ethnic organizations, press, politics, and group maintenance. Relevant bibliographies are included.

HHC is a very well written, researched, and documented four-volume set dealing with Hispanic-American history, anthropology, sociology, literature, and art. Extensive essays, accompanied by rich and relevant illustrations and bibliographies, offer splendid material to interested researchers, especially on an academic level. However, the study focuses mainly on indigenous Americans, Spanish conquistadores, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans, and Dominican Americans. Had the authors devoted another volume to the rest of Hispanic Americans from Central and South America, users of the set could have had a much more complete picture and a needed source of information on the subject. Let's hope that the author and publishers of the above title will produce an additional volume in the near future.

ENYC's information is far from satisfactory. Short entries on Cubans, Ecuadorians, Hondurans, Mexicans, Panamanians, Peruvians, Puerto Ricans, and Salvadorans offer meager data and lack bibliographies and pictures. Dominican Americans receive two columns with a bibliography but no pictures. The longest entry, just two pages, goes to Puerto Ricans, the largest Hispanic-American group in New York City. For the Spanish, there is an entry on the Spanish-language press and on the Hispanic Society of America. In reality, New York is the home, *par excellence*, for all Hispanic-American groups, along with dozens of other ethnic communities. It is regrettable that *ENYC* did not collect materials and focus on all Hispanic groups, who can easily be seen in parades in their colorful festive clothing, with descriptions of the typical music of each land of origin and other ethnic characteristics. All Hispanic-American communities in New York have their own cultural societies, churches, restaurants, nightclubs, and political organizations. The inclusion of all these groups, with pictures and bibliographies in a future edition of *ENYC*, is a must.

DHB is a collective biography of about 500 men and women representing all Hispanic nationalities, but only a third of them are Hispanic Americans. These include 60 biographies listed under the generic name "Hispanic Americans," even though from the context readers can determine the subject's land of origin or heritage. Other biographies expressly refer to Mexican Americans (77 in all), Puerto Rican Americans (13), Cuban Americans (14), Spanish Americans (12), Argentinian Americans (4), and Dominican Americans (2). There is one biography each of a Bolivian American, a Colombian American, an Ecuadorian American, and a Peruvian American. All other specific Hispanic nationalities are missing. A future edition of this book should remedy these shortcomings, since *GEMA*, also published by Gale, has more examples of noted people representing all Hispanic-American groups. The biographical sketches are evenhanded in length and sufficiently detailed, two to three columns each, with bibliographi-

cal sources and good photos.

AIC provides extensive essays—5 to 10 pages in length, with bibliographies and maps—on 15 Hispanic-American groups (Argentinians, Chileans, Colombians, Cubans, Dominicans, Ecuadorians, Guatemalans, Hondurans, Mexicans, Nicaraguans, Panamanians, Peruvians, Salvadorans, Spanish). However, five groups (Bolivians, Costa Ricans, Paraguayans, Uruguayans, and Venezuelans) are represented only through U.S. Census statistics from 1990 indicating numerical presence in the United States and population by state, plus maps of the land of origin. The majority of entries lack pictures. For the 15 groups covered, the essays include descriptions of the land of origin, immigration history, cultural features, language, religion, community life, social structure, assimilation, and heritage preservation. Unfortunately, there is no coverage of important organizations, noted people, and media.

HAA is a comprehensive reference volume with numerous photos and fine coverage of Hispanic history, language, family, religion, women, education, art, theater, film, music, media, sports, and organizations, principally in the United States but also in the countries of origin. However, the focus is mainly on Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans, Spanish Americans, and Puerto Ricans. Inclusion of the rest of the Hispanic-American nationalities is strongly recommended in a future edition.

The three-volume **GEMA** is the only reference work that covers all Hispanic-American groups in essays ranging from 7 to 19 pages, with the exception of Mexican Americans, described in 32 pages. Essays include information on the lands of origin (but no maps), waves of immigration, settlement patterns, acculturation and assimilation, language, popular expressions, greetings, family and community dynamics, religion, employment and economic conditions, politics and government, noted people, individual and group contributions to the United States, media, organizations, museums, and research centers. Contact persons for all organizations and institutions are provided. Bibliographies are less exten-

sive than in **AIC**, and pictures are missing from essays on Costa Ricans, Ecuadorians, Hondurans, Panamanians, Paraguayans, Uruguayans, and Venezuelans. Despite the omission of maps and some photos, **GEMA** is the most useful, comprehensive reference source on Hispanic Americans for a broad spectrum of readers and researchers.

EOA lists over 200 Hispanic-American organizations, of which 55 figure under the general name of Hispanic. The rest mention the specific Hispanic-American group. However, Bolivians, Panamanians, Paraguayans, Salvadorans, and Uruguayans have no listings of organizations, even though **GEMA**, put out by the same publisher, has information on organizations that represent these five groups. All entries of **EOA** contain addresses, a description of the organization's main activities and purpose, membership data, publications, conventions, telephone and fax numbers, and contact persons. The volume is updated regularly.

SPD claims to be "the largest informative guide to United States and Canadian periodicals," but regrettably, it covers American ethnic groups very poorly in general and Hispanic-American groups in particular. Only 51 Hispanic-American periodicals are listed under their generic name, while individual Hispanic groups are mentioned with very few items. **SPD** cites two Cuban-American publications, three Mexican-American publications, three Puerto Rican publications on the mainland, and two Spanish-American publications. **GEMA** offers this information along with many additional items for each Hispanic-American group, and the editors of **SPD** need to be aware of this shortcoming in their supposedly specialized resource.

Conclusions

Only one reference source, **GEMA**, covers all 20 Hispanic-American groups, as shown in the table summary. Even this outstanding source is not perfect, as it lacks maps of the country of origin, some groups lack pictures, and some bibliographies are incomplete. All of the other sources supplement

each other but leave much room for improvement and, of course, updating in light of the 2000 U.S. Census figures.

Essays must be written by competent scholars who are thoroughly familiar with the subject and not by ad-hoc authors. These essays must present an objective picture of the specific Hispanic-American group they describe, not a picture that is superficial or biased. In keeping with scholarly standards, essays should contain full bibliographies for readers to explore groups and topics in more depth. Geared to academic researchers, **HHC** is especially strong in this area, even though its coverage is limited. **HEAEG** and **HAA** are also models of scholarly research and documentation, though the former is quite outdated, and the latter presents only four groups in depth.

Many of the sources lacked photo illustrations, or the photos were of low quality. Compilers of these resources should be aware of the importance of photos in illustrating aspects of family and community life. Photos should reflect typical aspects of the Hispanic-American group described and not just generic aspects that can be attributed to any other group. None of the examined sources offered photos for Costa Ricans, Hondurans, Paraguayans, Uruguayans, or Venezuelans.

In examining the religious life of Hispanic Americans, most of the essays focused mainly on Catholicism, the official religion of the lands of origin. However, various Protestant denominations have made inroads among Hispanics living in the United States. These denominations should be described.

In each of the essays, more attention should be given to bilingual education, Spanish in colleges and universities, collections in libraries of Hispanic-American literature and Hispanic Americana in general, and Hispanic Americans in the military, labor unions, and government and politics. There should also be more coverage of topics related to genealogical research, an area of great interest for many group members. For the most part, the essays in existing sources offered little

information on the relations of Hispanic-American groups among themselves and between Hispanic Americans and other ethnic and racial groups in the United States. These are important topics that bear addressing in future editions.

Finally, the dispersal of reference information on Hispanic Americans in so many yet-incomplete sources during the twentieth century leads me to the belief that we need to take a qualitative step in publishing in the new century. I have in mind the publication of a multifaceted, well illustrated, and well documented Hispanic American Encyclopedia, devoted to all 20 Hispanic-American groups, based on a common methodology for presenting all groups, and thorough coverage of all aspects of Hispanic-American history and life today. Such an encyclopedia, which would eventually occupy a set of volumes, could be produced by a select group of competent scholars, and accompanied by yearly updating volumes. The set would contain ample indexes. The encyclopedia could also be published in condensed form at a reduced price, thus enabling purchase by libraries that cannot afford the full edition. A publisher might also want to produce a bilingual (Spanish-English) edition to facilitate access to the encyclopedia in all Spanish-speaking countries as well as among Spanish-dominant Hispanics in the United States.

References

Figueredo, D. H. (2000). Of Salsa and sonnets, stories and soul: A conversation with Cuban-American literary critic William Luis. *MultiCultural Review* 9(4): 34-37, 56-58.

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