

CHAPTER**10****Reading****Racial and Ethnic Relations****The Influx of Hispanics to America**

In Census 2000, 281.4 million residents were counted in the United States, of which 35.3 (12.5 percent) million were Hispanic. Coming mostly from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, this diverse group brings with it many customs, including behavioral patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and thoughts. In his book, Atlas of Hispanic-American History, George Ochoa offers a detailed overview of the experiences and important events surrounding Americans of Hispanic descent. The following excerpt from Ochoa's book provides a brief look at Hispanic Americans today.

In a 1999 interview with *Newsweek* magazine, Christy Haubegger, the editor of *Latina*, a bilingual magazine for young Hispanic women, said this about the growing influence and rising population of Hispanic America: "The [African American] civil rights slogan was 'We shall overcome.' Ours is going to be 'We shall overwhelm.'"

Haubegger may have been using a fair bit of hyperbole, but she had a valid point. Hispanic Americans in 2001 represented nearly 13 percent of the population of the United States, and their numbers were rising rapidly. While Americans of all ethnic backgrounds are dancing to the sounds of Latin musical artists like Ricky Martin, Gloria Estefan, and Christina Aguilera, politicians on local, state, and federal levels are eagerly courting Hispanic voters, even though Hispanic Americans do not typically vote as a monolithic bloc. Although Hispanic Americans are underrepresented at the highest levels of power and many Latinos still live in poverty, business leaders also increasingly understand the economic clout of the Hispanic-American community, and Hispanic-American-owned businesses are a growing sector of the economy.

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF HISPANIC AMERICA

One of the keys to understanding the governing interest in and influence of Hispanic Americans is an understanding of current demographic trends. Hispanic Americans are one of the fastest growing population groups in the United States. Between 1990 and 1997 alone, the Hispanic population of the United States grew 37 percent, while the population of the country as a whole grew just 9 percent in the same period. Numbering about 35.3 million as of 2000, or 12.5 percent of the general population, they were in rough parity with African Americans as the country's largest minority group in 2000 and were soon expected to surpass it. By mid-century they are expected to account for one-quarter of the U.S. population. Because most Hispanic Americans are young, the population is likely to continue growing rapidly throughout most of the 21st century as many people come of age and begin building their own families.

Chapter 10, Reading, continued

As the Hispanic-American population grows, it is expected to remain centered in the Southwest, the Northeast, Florida, and Illinois. The Hispanic-American population in California grew over 90 percent from 1995 to 2000; in Florida during the same period, the Hispanic population more than doubled.

As of 2000, a high percentage of the U.S. Hispanic population were urban dwellers. In fact, about 37 percent of all Hispanic Americans lived in one of three major cities—Los Angeles, New York City, and Miami. If San Francisco, San Jose, and Chicago are added to the list, the homes of 43 percent of all Hispanic Americans are accounted for.

One of the main reasons for the rapid growth of the Hispanic-American population is a high rate of immigration. All told, as of 1997, just 61.6 percent of all Mexican Americans and 30.9 percent of all South and Central Americans were born in the United States. At the same time, only 57.9 percent of Puerto Ricans were born on the U.S. mainland. Just 27.3 percent of Cuban Americans were born in the United States as of 1997; however, that figure is misleading as a sign of immigration since immigration is strictly limited by the Cuban government.

From "The Demographics of Hispanic America" from *Atlas of Hispanic-American History* by George Ochoa. Copyright © 2001 by Media Projects Inc. Reprinted by permission of Facts On File, Inc.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU READ After you have finished reading the selection, answer the following questions in the space below.

1. How did the growth rate of the Hispanic population of the United States between 1990 and 1997 compare to that of the United States population in general?

2. Why will the Hispanic American community continue to grow rapidly throughout the 21st century?

ACTIVITY Write a paragraph describing how you think the growing Hispanic population will influence American culture. Think about the kinds of things that contribute to culture like religion, food, and music. Go to the library or search the Internet for information about Hispanic Americans and their lives before immigrating to the United States.