The diversity of Hispanics in the U.S. work force

Hispanics have immigrated from different countries at different times, for different reasons, and have settled in various parts of the United States; this diversity is reflected in their labor force characteristics

Peter Cattan

Persons of Hispanic origin make up one of the fastest growing worker groups in the United States. Their number—10.1 million in 1992—has increased 65 percent since 1980, a rate of growth 4 times that for the non-Hispanic work force. A heterogeneous population, Hispanics represent many nationalities and ethnicities, including Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, persons from 15 Central and South American countries, Spain, and the Dominican Republic. (See box, p. 4.) The histories and labor force characteristics of these Hispanic-origin groups are markedly different.[1]

Labor force growth

Trends in labor force growth differ widely among the major Hispanic ethnic groups. (See chart 1.) Over the past 6 years, the number of Central and South American workers in the United States grew 61 percent—far outstripping the other Hispanic groups. The number of Mexican workers also grew rapidly—28 percent. These increases were almost entirely the result of rapid population growth, which was attributable, in turn, to large waves of immigration. By contrast, the number of Cuban workers in the United States actually has been decreasing, as population growth slowed to a trickle (mainly because of the Cuban Government's restrictions on immigration) and as large numbers of the earlier arrivals reached retirement age.

Overall, Hispanics accounted for approximately 1 of every 3 legal immigrants to the United States during the 1980's. In addition, there were many others who entered illegally. The number of undocumented Hispanics who entered between 1980 and 1986 has been estimated at approximately 1.3 million.[2]

Mexican Americans are, by far, the largest single Hispanic group, accounting for 63 percent of all Hispanics in the U.S. labor force in 1992. As chart 2 shows, Central and South Americans represented another 16 percent, followed by Puerto Ricans (9 percent), Cubans (5 percent), and other persons of Hispanic origin or descent (7 percent).

Roots of diversity

Many cultural similarities transcend these categories to define a collective Hispanic or Latino identity. There is, in fact, a longstanding sentiment of community among many Latin Americans. Recognizing the potential benefits of unity—that there is "strength in numbers," for example—Hispanic political, humanitarian, and cultural organizations in the United States often mobilize these feelings to draw support from across the Hispanic ethnic

Peter Cattan is an economist in the Office of Employment and Unemployment Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

groups. At the same time, there are important differences among Hispanics which history and geography have imposed.

Even today, when given a choice, most members of groups designated as Hispanic classify themselves according to specific ethnic or national categories. This was illustrated recently by the Latino National Political Survey, a study of Mexicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans. When asked to indicate which ethnic self-labels they preferred, 75 percent of the respondents chose to identify themselves as Mexicans, Cubans, or Puerto Ricans. Only 18 percent chose a pan-ethnic label like Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish American, while 7 percent identified themselves as Americans.[3]

Throughout the history of the United States, Hispanics have immigrated from different countries, at different times, for different reasons, and have settled in different parts of the country. Their histories, and therefore their identities, are diverse.[4]

Mexicans. In contrast to the other Hispanic-origin groups, most of the earliest Mexican Americans were actually *not* immigrants. They were Mexicans who lived on land which had been part of northern Mexico until the end of the Mexican War in 1848, when it was forcibly annexed by the United States. As Gregory DeFreitas writes:

> A series of armed expeditions, often encouraged by Washington, led to the secession of Texas from Mexico as a pretext to start a full-scale war. The Mexican War ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (known to generations of Mexican historians as "the amputation of 1848"), which stripped the country of nearly one-half of its national territory: the area that would become Arizona, California, New Mexico, and large parts of Colorado, Nevada, and Utah. . . . [Approximately] 80,000 to 100,000 Mexicans . . . stayed on in the region.[5]

Under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, Mexicans were decreed to be U.S. citizens.

Decades later, thousands of Mexicans fled the poverty and bloodshed of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917), crossing the border into the Southwestern United States to work on farms, railroad crews, and in the mines. At the same time, a

A note on CPS estimates of the Hispanic labor force

The data presented in this article are based on estimates from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly sample survey of persons in some 60,000 households representing the U.S. population. To derive estimates of the size of the Nation's working-age population, CPS sample results are routinely weighted to independent estimates of the civilian noninstitutional population. These estimates (or "population controls," as they are technically called) are derived from decennial census population figures, which are then carried forward with adjustments for births, deaths, and net immigration. The most recent CPS estimates—as of the publication of this study—are based on weights derived from the 1980 census. For additional information on the CPS sample, see "Labor Force, Employment, and Unemployment from the Current Population Survey," *BLS Handbook of Methods*, September 1992, pp. 3–13.

Results from the 1990 census showed that the actual size of the Hispanic population and labor force was somewhat greater than the estimates used in the CPS at the time. For example, as indicated below, the census count of Hispanics in the civilian noninstitutional population 16 years and older was 828,000 higher than the estimate used in the CPS at the time. The discrepancy between the CPS and census estimates of the Hispanic civilian labor force was 487,000. The 1992 CPS data for Hispanics, which are discussed in this paper, are probably similarly understated:

	Civilian noninstitutional population (thousands)	*Civilian labor force (thousands)*
1990 census	15,026	10,022
April 1990 CPS	14,198	9,535
Difference	828	487

Beginning in January 1994, when a host of other changes will also be introduced to the CPS, the population estimates underlying the data from the survey are to be "re-weighted" to bring them into line with the findings from the 1990 census. This procedure will boost the CPS estimates of Hispanics, showing that there was even greater growth for this group over the past decade than is indicated in this article.

smaller number of Mexican professionals, particularly from the northern state of Sonora, also crossed into the United States to escape the uprisings. With older Mexican American families, they became part of business elites in southwestern towns like Tucson.[6] Responding to worker shortages induced by World War I, other Mexican immigrants increasingly entered manufacturing.

The flow of workers from Mexico continued throughout the years and was interrupted only by the Great Depression. When agricultural labor became scarce during World War II, the U.S. Government instituted the *bracero* program, which allowed hundreds of thousands of migrant Mexicans to temporarily work on U.S. farms.[7] Migrants continued to find low-wage jobs across the border even after the program was discontinued in 1964.

In the 1980's, migration surged as Mexico experienced its worst economic downturn since the 1930's.[8] Although the Mexican economic situation has improved in very recent years, wages remain much lower there than in the United States and many Mexicans continue to look for work across the border.

Mexican Americans tend to be concentrated in the West and the South. The 1990 census indicated that almost half lived in California and more than a quarter in Texas.

Puerto Ricans. A Spanish colony for 4 centuries, the island of Puerto Rico became a U.S. possession following the Spanish-American War in 1898. Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship in 1917, and, after a series of political reforms, the island became a Commonwealth (or "Free Associated State") in 1952. This unique political status combines U.S. citizenship with self-rule. Puerto Ricans elect their own governor and local officials, for example, while retaining complete freedom to move back and forth to the U.S. mainland.[9]

Puerto Ricans had been migrating to the mainland long before Commonwealth status, however. In the 1890's, some were employed in cigar-making shops in Florida and New York, and on the eve of World War I, there was a small Puerto Rican community in New York City where many worked in munitions factories and shipyards, as has been compellingly described in the *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega,* one of these early immigrants.[10]

Once a major producer of sugar, the island's economy was transformed after World War II, as factories began to replace plantations. The economic transformation gained momentum during the early 1950's, attributable largely to a system of tax breaks for U.S. firms on the island. At first, as DeFreitas notes, most of the new industries—like textiles and apparel—were labor intensive, but they could not absorb all of the agricultural workers who had been displaced. Later, in the 1960's, the industries which were attracted to the island—including petrochemicals and pharmaceuticals—were increasingly capital-intensive. Although social services and rising wages increased the standard of living, thousands of Puerto Ricans continued to be displaced.

Relatively cheap air fares enabled large numbers to leave the island in the 1950's. Many sought jobs in several large central cities, primarily in the textile, garment, and leather factories of the Northeast, especially New York and the steel mills of Illinois and Ohio—typical destinations for earlier, European immigrants.[11] Double-digit unemployment rates on the island and relatively low salaries continue to push many Puerto Rican workers to the U.S. mainland. Of these, 60 percent are concentrated in a few mid-Atlantic States; New York alone accounts for 40 percent of all Puerto Ricans on the mainland.

Cubans. Unlike other groups of Hispanics, Cuban immigrants were primarily political refugees. The vast majority left their island in various waves after Fidel Castro's assumption of power in 1959. By 1980, there were more than 800,000 Cuban Americans in the United States, representing a greater than 10-fold increase over a 20-year period. After the famous Mariel boatlift of 1980, which brought in another 125,000 Cubans, immigration dropped off sharply due to restrictions imposed by the Cuban government. Nevertheless, thousands since then have attempted to cross the perilous 90 miles of ocean separating them from the Florida Keys. The 1990 census enumerated approximately 1 million Cuban Americans; 2 of 3 lived in Florida.

A recent sharp increase in the number of Cubans who have made the journey to the United States suggests that conditions on the island have worsened. Using small boats and rafts, more than 2,000 Cubans successfully completed the voyage to Florida in 1992—the highest level of Cuban immigration since Mariel.[12]

Many Cuban refugees began their careers here in lower skilled jobs and in positions far less prestigious than those they had back home. Over the years, however, a remarkably large proportion of Cuban Americans rose up the occupational hierarchy. Some, particularly those in the earlier waves of immigration, arrived in the United States with solid business or professional experience and relatively high levels of educational attainment, which helped them get ahead. In addition, many received job training and placement as part of a large Cuban-assistance program financed by the U.S. Government. Early on, they formed strong and cohesive com-

Chart 1. **Rates of population and labor force growth of Hispanics and non-Hispanics, 1986–92**

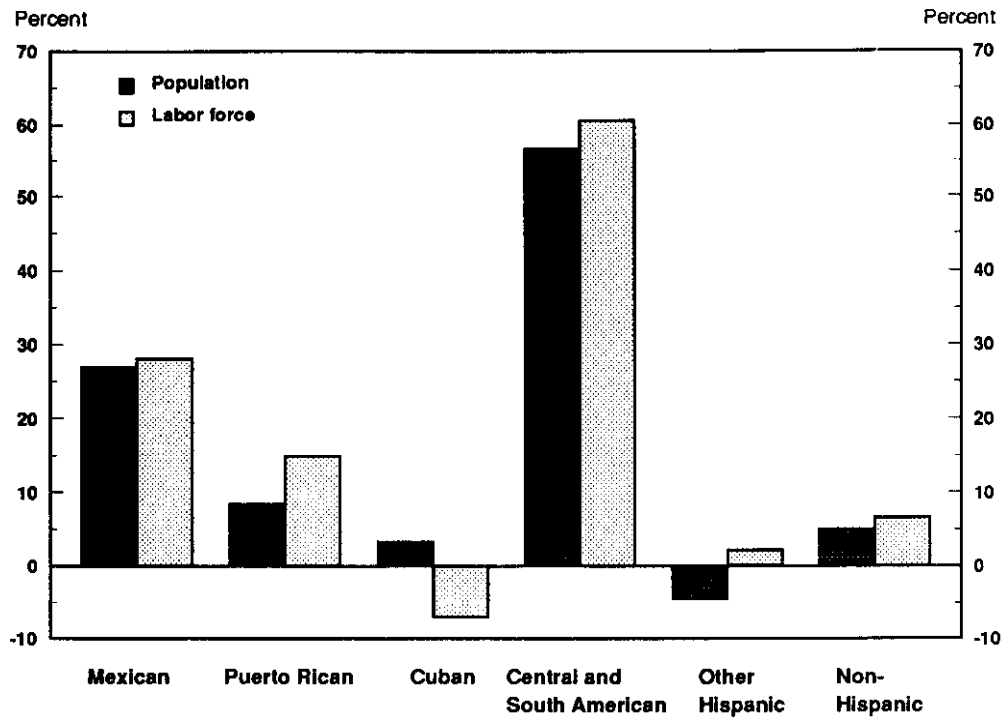
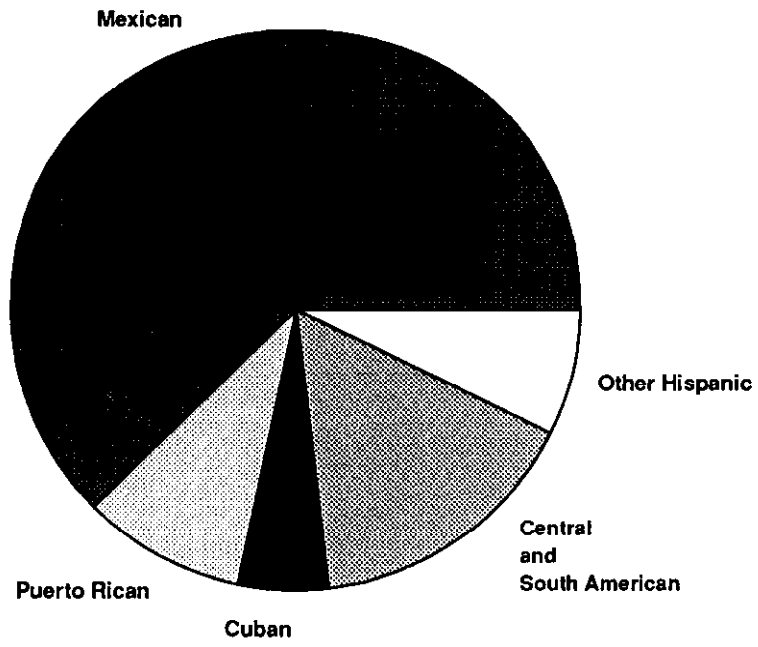


Chart 2. **Percent distribution of the Hispanic civilian labor force, 16 years and older by type of origin, 1992 annual averages**



munities, developing business ties among extended families and friends and systems of mutual support and financial assistance. Today, of the major Hispanic groups, the occupational distribution for Cubans most closely approximates that for non-Hispanics, although there are still noticeable differences, as will become clear in later sections of this article.

Central and South Americans. With origins in 15 different countries covering a vast geographical area, Central and South Americans make up a very heterogeneous group. This is also a group with a very high proportion of recent immigrants, most having arrived over the past decade. Central America has been especially affected by political and economic problems over that period. As thousands escaped wars in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala in the 1970's and 1980's, Central American communities grew rapidly in many parts of the United States.

Like Central Americans, South Americans have only recently begun to arrive in large numbers. The biggest group has come from Colombia, which accounts for more than 1 of every 4 South Americans who legally immigrated during the 1980's.[13] Some of the earliest Colombian migrants—dating back to the 1960's—were fleeing political violence. Falling standards of living for persons in the middle class prompted many to emigrate in the 1970's. Colombian immigrants were disproportionately white-collar workers back home, with middle-class backgrounds and relatively high levels of education. Economic and political problems have also prompted considerable emigration from Peru, Ecuador, Argentina, and Chile.

The Central and South American labor force is about equally distributed across our northern, southern, and western regions. A disproportionate share of both Central and South Americans live in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area.

Other Hispanics. This group is made up of Hispanics who prefer to identify themselves according to a broad rubric, such as Latino or Hispanic, as well as persons from the Dominican Republic and Spain. Except for Dominicans, most in this category were born in the United States and are fluent in English. The Dominican Republic has accounted for an extraordinarily large number of immigrants over the past decade (almost 270,000).[14]

Age and education profiles

Despite many differences, there are two important socio-demographic characteristics which several Hispanic groups share. Compared to the makeup of the total U.S. working-age population (16 years and older), Hispanics are generally younger and also much less likely to have completed a high school education or better.

Mexicans, Central and South Americans, and Puerto Ricans, who together make up almost 9 of 10 Hispanics in the United States, are the youngest of the Hispanic groups. As the tabulation below shows, the median age for the working-age population 16 years and older was the lowest for Mexicans—approximately 33 years in 1992, nearly 8 years younger than that for non-Hispanics.

	Median age
All Hispanics	34.7
Mexicans	33.4
Puerto Ricans	36.0
Cubans	46.5
Central and South Americans	34.5
Other Hispanics	38.4
Non-Hispanics	41.1

In contrast, the median age for Other Hispanics (38 years) was most like that for non-Hispanics. Cubans had an exceptionally high median age—47 years—mostly because the largest share of the immigrants arrived many years ago and are well into their adult years. Also, the recent restrictions on immigration have severely limited the inflow of younger persons from the island.

Hispanics have, on average, a relatively low level of educational attainment. There are many reasons for this. Adult immigrants have tended to be poorly educated; many arrived with less than an eighth grade education. For some, schooling was interrupted by war or the need to work. In addition, many of the Hispanic youths fail to complete high school in the United States. In 1992, 39 percent of Hispanics 20 to 24 years of age were not enrolled in school and had not completed high school—a rate almost 4 times that for non-Hispanics.

While 4 of 5 non-Hispanics 25 years and older had completed at least high school, this was true for a little more than 2 of 5 Mexicans. The proportion for each of the other major groups—Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Central and South Americans—was approximately 3 of 5. With the exception of Cubans, all were markedly less likely than non-Hispanics to complete college. The following tabulation shows the percentage of the population 25 years of age and older in 1992 by educational attainment:

	Had at least a high school diploma	*College graduates*
All Hispanics	52.5	9.4
Mexicans	45.6	6.1
Puerto Ricans	59.0	9.0
Cubans	61.7	19.2
Central and South Americans	62.7	15.5
Other Hispanics	68.2	14.6
Non-Hispanics	82.0	22.6

Unemployment differentials

Hispanics tend to experience greater labor market problems than non-Hispanics. In 1992, for example, an average of 11.5 percent of the Hispanic labor force was unemployed, approximately 1–1/2 times the proportion for non-Hispanics. This differential has held remarkably constant throughout the past decade. There are certainly many reasons for this, reflecting such things as a low average level of educational attainment, a high proportion of youth in the Hispanic labor force, language problems, discrimination, and the concentration of Hispanic employment in occupations which tend to have high unemployment rates.

Average unemployment rates for all of the Hispanic ethnic groups in 1992 were higher than that for non-Hispanic workers. (See table 1.)[15] At 14.0 percent, the incidence of joblessness among Puerto Ricans was the highest. As table 2 shows, Puerto Rican youth had a particularly high rate—more than 1 of 5 was unemployed.

With the onset of the recession in mid-1990, the unemployment rate for Hispanics rose from 8.0 percent in the third quarter of 1990 (the onset of the recession) to 12.2 in the first quarter of 1993. This was somewhat sharper than the rise for non-Hispanics (from 5.2 to 7.2 percent over the same time period).

The impact of the recent cyclical downturn on the major Hispanic groups varied somewhat. For example, the unemployment rate for Mexicans (12.0 percent in the first quarter of 1993) was up by 4 percentage points over the period, while the rate for Cubans (8.1 percent) rose by only 0.2 point. Puerto Ricans continued to be the most af-

Table 1. **Employment status of the Hispanic and non-Hispanic civilian noninstitutional population 16 years and older by sex, 1992 annual averages**

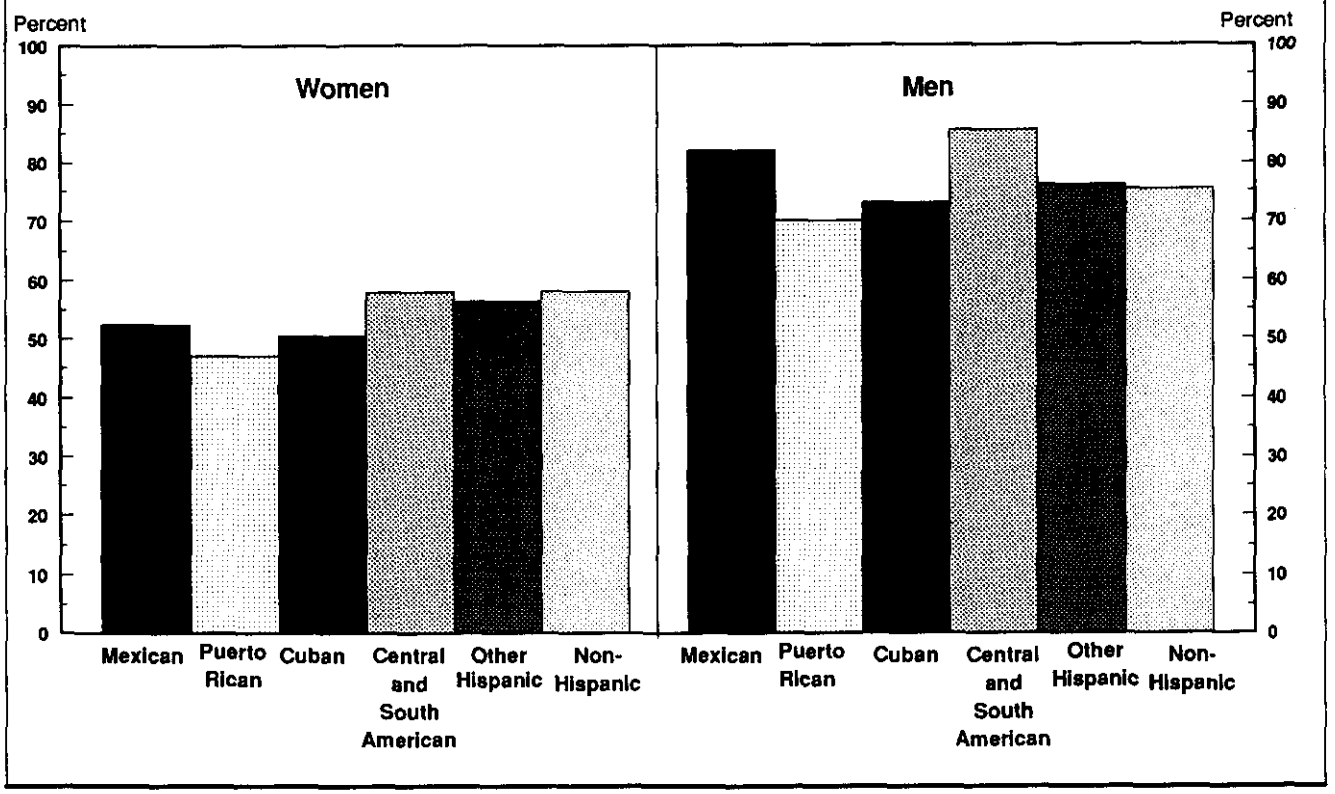
[Numbers in thousands]

Employment status and sex	Hispanic origin						Non-Hispanic
	Total	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Central and South American	Other Hispanic	
TOTAL							
Civilian noninstitutional population	15,244	9,374	1,625	866	2,245	1,134	176,332
Civilian labor force	10,147	6,338	932	528	1,604	744	116,890
Percent of population	66.6	67.6	57.3	61.0	71.5	65.6	66.3
Employment	8,981	5,595	801	487	1,421	677	108,647
Employment-population ratio	58.9	59.7	49.3	56.2	63.3	59.7	61.6
Unemployment	1,166	743	130	42	184	67	8,243
Unemployment rate	11.5	11.7	14.0	7.9	11.4	9.0	7.1
Men							
Civilian noninstitutional population	7,569	4,808	728	406	1,093	534	83,971
Civilian labor force	6,093	3,946	509	296	935	406	63,119
Percent of population	80.5	82.1	70.0	73.0	85.6	76.0	75.2
Employment	5,391	3,486	431	276	829	369	58,424
Employment-population ratio	71.2	72.5	59.2	67.9	75.8	69.2	69.6
Unemployment	702	460	78	21	106	37	4,695
Unemployment rate	11.5	11.7	15.4	7.0	11.4	9.0	7.4
Women							
Civilian noninstitutional population	7,674	4,566	897	460	1,152	600	92,361
Civilian labor force	4,053	2,392	422	232	669	338	53,770
Percent of population	52.8	52.4	47.1	50.5	58.1	56.4	58.2
Employment	3,589	2,109	370	211	592	308	50,222
Employment-population ratio	46.8	46.2	41.3	45.9	51.4	51.3	54.4
Unemployment	464	283	52	21	77	30	3,548
Unemployment rate	11.5	11.8	12.3	9.1	11.5	9.0	6.6

Table 2. **Unemployment rates for Hispanics and non-Hispanics by age, 1992 annual averages**

Age	Hispanic origin						Non-Hispanic
	Total	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Central and South American	Other Hispanic	
Total, 16 years and older	11.5	11.7	14.0	7.9	11.4	9.0	7.1
16 to 24 years	17.8	17.7	23.1	11.5	17.7	15.0	13.9
25 to 54 years	9.9	10.0	12.6	7.8	9.6	8.1	6.0
55 years and older	8.7	8.3	5.8	6.2	15.1	6.8	4.5

Chart 3. **Labor force participation rates of Hispanics 16 years and older by sex, 1992 annual averages**



fected; their jobless rate rose by 7 points to 15.7 percent in the first quarter of 1993, the highest among the Hispanic ethnic groups. Puerto Ricans have been at an unusually severe disadvantage during the 1990–91 recession because of their concentration in the Northeast, particularly in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, three States which, over the last 3 years, suffered some of the biggest employment declines in the Nation.

Labor force participation rates

At 66.6 percent in 1992, the overall proportion of Hispanics who were in the labor force was approximately the same as that for non-Hispanics (66.3 percent). This apparent parity, however, masks substantial differences by sex, ethnicity, age, and education.

Sex. Differences in labor force participation between Hispanic and non-Hispanic women tended to offset those between Hispanic and non-Hispanic men. The proportion of Hispanic women in the labor force—at 52.8 percent—was approximately 5 percentage points below that for other women, while the participation rate for Hispanic men—at 80.5 percent—was about 5 points higher than that for their non-Hispanic counterparts.

Data for 1992 show that there are some differences in the extent to which the major Hispanic groups participated in the labor force. (See chart 3 and table 1.) As one would expect, the overall rate of participation for both Hispanic women and men is greatly influenced by the situation of Mexicans, the largest component group.

With but one exception, Hispanic women were less likely to be in the work force than non-Hispanic women. The exception was Central and South American women, who were about as likely to participate as non-Hispanic women. With a rate of 47.1 percent, Puerto Rican women had the lowest proportion in the labor force.

Among men, the most likely to be in the work force were the Central and South Americans and the Mexicans. Cuban and other Hispanic men participated at rates similar to the average for non-Hispanics, while the participation rate for Puerto Ricans was 5 points below that for non-Hispanic men. The proportions of Puerto Rican men and women in the labor force—once among the highest of the Hispanic ethnic groups—dropped precipitously in the 1960's. The downward trend coincided with the sharp contraction of manufacturing industries in the Eastern Seaboard cities where Puerto Ricans have been disproportionately employed.[16]

Age. Differences between the proportions of Hispanics and non-Hispanics in the labor force varied considerably by age. As can be seen in table 3, there was a much greater gap between Hispanic and non-Hispanic women in age groups under 55 than the overall participation rates indicate. For example, the percentage of Hispanic women 25 to 54 years of age who were in the labor force was approximately 13 points below that for their non-Hispanic counterparts. The reason the overall difference in labor force participation rates between Hispanic and non-Hispanic women was much smaller is that a greater proportion of the Hispanic population was between the ages of 25 and 54, ages at which persons are more likely to be in the labor force.

Table 3 also shows that the proportions of Puerto Rican women in the labor force were markedly lower than those for other Hispanic women across most age categories. For example, only 55 percent of Puerto Rican women who were 25 to 54 years of age participated in the labor force, compared with more than 60 percent for other Hispanic women and 76 percent for non-Hispanics.

On average, almost 9 of 10 Hispanic men 20 to 24 years of age were in the labor force, a notably higher proportion than for non-Hispanics. As a general rule, differences between the proportions of Hispanic and non-Hispanic men who participated in the labor force were not pronounced among men who were 25 to 54 years of age. In contrast, however, Puerto Rican men—like their women compatriots—were much less likely to participate than other Hispanics and non-Hispanics in each age category under 55. (See table 3.)

Educational attainment. Persons with higher levels of educational attainment have traditionally been more likely to participate in the labor force, and this is particularly evident among Hispanic women. (See table 4.) For those 25 to 54 years of age who had attained a high school diploma, the percentage in the labor force was, on average, only about 5 points below that for non-Hispanics in the same educational category (73 percent versus 79 percent). Furthermore, as table 4 also shows, college-educated Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Other Hispanic women were actually *more* likely to participate than their non-Hispanic counterparts. Among Central and South American women,

Table 3. **Labor force participation rates of Hispanics and non-Hispanics by sex and age, 1992 annual averages**

Sex and age	Hispanic origin						Non-Hispanic
	Total	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Central and South American	Other Hispanic	
Men, 16 years and older	80.5	82.1	70.0	73.0	85.6	76.0	75.2
16 to 19 years	51.7	56.5	34.7	(1)	49.5	40.5	53.9
20 to 24 years	87.5	89.8	77.0	(1)	84.6	83.6	82.8
25 to 54 years	91.5	92.2	82.9	91.5	93.3	93.3	93.2
55 years and older	44.4	42.9	39.0	45.8	62.8	39.5	38.1
Women, 16 years and older	52.8	52.4	47.1	50.5	58.1	56.4	58.2
16 to 19 years	39.2	40.5	30.0	(1)	39.9	41.6	50.6
20 to 24 years	59.7	59.5	57.6	(1)	57.1	62.4	72.7
25 to 54 years	62.5	61.4	55.5	69.3	66.1	70.2	75.9
55 years and older	22.6	20.3	18.0	25.1	31.4	25.0	23.0

[1] Data not shown where base is less than 35,000

Table 4. **Labor force participation rates of Hispanics and non-Hispanics 25 to 54 years of age by sex and educational attainment, 1992 annual averages**

Sex and educational attainment	Hispanic origin						Non-Hispanic
	Total	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Central and South American	Other Hispanic	
Men, 25 to 54 years of age	91.5	92.2	82.9	91.5	93.3	93.3	93.2
Less than a high school diploma	88.4	89.9	67.6	85.6	92.3	87.5	80.7
High school graduates or beyond	93.9	94.5	90.3	93.6	93.9	94.9	94.7
College graduates	95.4	96.4	96.2	94.3	94.6	94.5	96.8
Women, 25 to 54 years of age	62.5	61.4	55.5	69.3	66.1	70.2	75.9
Less than a high school diploma	47.5	47.9	28.9	48.2	61.4	44.4	53.0
High school graduates or beyond	73.4	74.5	71.1	75.8	68.6	78.5	78.6
College graduates	81.2	80.2	89.0	89.2	70.9	88.7	84.5

Table 5. **Total employment and median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary Hispanic and non-Hispanic workers by occupation and sex, 1992 annual averages**

Occupation and sex	Hispanic		Non-Hispanic		Ratio of Hispanic to non-Hispanic earnings
	Employed (percent)	Median weekly earnings	Employed (percent)	Median weekly earnings	
Total, 16 years and older	100.0	$331	100.0	$457	72.4
Managerial and professional specialty	13.5	574	27.6	662	86.7
Technical, sales, and administrative support	24.8	358	31.8	411	87.1
Service occupations	20.2	249	13.1	286	87.1
Precision production, craft, and repair	13.4	384	11.0	502	76.5
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	22.3	286	13.7	366	78.1
Farming, forestry, and fishing	5.9	222	2.7	279	79.6
Men, 16 years and older	100.0	345	100.0	516	66.9
Managerial and professional specialty	11.5	640	27.1	799	80.1
Technical, sales, and administrative support	15.3	411	21.3	531	77.4
Service occupations	16.8	270	9.6	345	78.3
Precision production, craft, and repair	20.2	405	18.7	510	79.4
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	27.5	320	19.2	407	78.6
Farming, forestry, and fishing	8.7	231	4.2	285	81.1
Women, 16 years and older	100.0	299	100.0	393	76.1
Managerial and professional specialty	16.3	503	28.2	564	89.2
Technical, sales, and administrative support	39.0	336	44.0	364	92.3
Service occupations	25.2	219	17.3	249	88.0
Precision production, craft, and repair	3.2	282	2.0	348	81.0
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	14.6	232	7.4	286	81.1
Farming, forestry, and fishing	1.7	196	1.0	231	84.8

however, those without a high school diploma participated at a higher rate than that of their non-Hispanic counterparts. (See table 4.)

At least 9 of 10 Mexican and Central and South American men participated in the labor force, regardless of educational attainment. The high participation rates for these groups may be partly attributable to the large numbers of recent immigrants among them. As Frank Bean and Marta Tienda observed, many moved here with the intention of improving their employment situation, which, of course, meant they *had* to participate in the labor force.[17] Some, like those Central Americans who fled economies wrecked by war, arrived with only meager savings and thus lacked the resources to be out of the labor force even for a short time.

Table 4 also shows that the markedly low *average* participation rate for Puerto Rican men 25 to 54 years of age is in large measure reflective of those who had not completed high school. In fact, the rates for Puerto Rican men with higher levels of educational attainment were rather similar to those of their Hispanic peers. The work of Gregory DeFreitas and others suggests that a sharp contraction in the number of entry-level jobs in New York and other Northeastern cities has exacerbated the labor market problems of Puerto Ricans with low levels of schooling.[18]

Employment and earnings

In 1992, there were almost 9 million employed Hispanic Americans in the United States, making up 7.6 percent of all workers. With close to 60 percent of their working-age population employed, Hispanics were about as likely to have a job as were non-Hispanics. Hispanic women, however, were less likely to be employed than non-Hispanic women. The proportions employed differed by age and educational attainment in ways similar to those for participation rates.

As is evident from table 5, there were substantial differences in the occupational distributions for Hispanic and non-Hispanic workers in 1992. The most notable is that Hispanics were much less likely than non-Hispanics to be managers and professionals. While approximately 28 percent of non-Hispanics were employed in this category, this was true for approximately 14 percent of Hispanics. Two factors behind this disparity are the younger age distributions of Hispanics and their lower average level of educational attainment. For example, the disparity in managerial and professional employment is reduced somewhat among college graduates who were 25 to 44 years of age. For this narrowly defined subset, 65 percent of non-Hispanics were employed as managers and professionals, versus 60 percent of Hispanics.

Table 6. **Employment distribution and median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary Hispanic and non-Hispanic workers by occupation, sex, and origin, 1992 annual averages**

Sex, occupation, and earnings	Hispanic origin						Non-Hispanic
	Total	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Central and South American	Other Hispanic	
Occupation							
Men, 16 years and older	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Managerial and professional specialty	11.5	8.9	14.9	23.6	14.0	18.3	27.1
Technical, sales, and administrative support	15.3	13.2	19.8	22.4	15.9	23.3	21.3
Service occupations	16.8	15.6	21.4	10.2	21.6	17.2	9.6
Precision production, craft, and repair	20.2	20.6	18.5	21.1	19.3	19.7	18.7
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	27.5	29.8	23.2	19.5	26.1	19.2	19.2
Farming, forestry, and fishing	8.7	11.9	2.1	3.1	3.2	2.4	4.2
Women, 16 years and older	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Managerial and professional specialty	16.3	14.0	21.8	26.4	13.8	24.1	28.2
Technical, sales, and administrative support	39.0	39.5	45.2	45.5	30.1	40.4	44.0
Service occupations	25.2	24.6	18.5	14.8	36.6	23.0	17.3
Precision production, craft, and repair	3.2	3.6	2.4	2.5	2.7	2.6	2.0
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	14.6	15.7	12.1	10.6	16.4	9.3	7.4
Farming, forestry, and fishing	1.7	2.7	.0	.3	.4	.6	1.0
Median weekly earnings							
Men, 16 years and older	$345	$325	$421	$441	$352	$451	$516
Women, 16 years and older	299	285	353	363	281	350	393

The high level of recent Hispanic immigration has also tended to hold down the proportion employed in managerial and professional occupations. Immigrants born in Latin America have been generally less likely than native-born Hispanics to be employed in managerial and professional positions.[19] This may be, in part, because recent immigrants have tended to be young, to be less fluent in English than other workers, and to lack professional and business contacts.

Whereas Hispanic men and women were markedly underrepresented in management and professional positions, both were overrepresented in the lower paying occupations. Hispanic *men* were highly concentrated in operator, fabricator, and laborer positions—lower paid factory, construction, and other blue-collar work. In contrast, non-Hispanic men were much more likely to be working in better paying jobs—managerial and professional and technical, sales, and administrative support. Partly because of their concentration in lower paid occupations, median weekly earnings for Hispanic men who worked full time were approximately one-third lower than those for non-Hispanics. (See table 5.)

As table 6 shows, there were noteworthy variations in occupational mix for men by country of origin. Puerto Ricans, Central and South Americans, and especially Mexicans were the least likely to be employed as managers and professionals. In contrast, the occupational mixes for Cubans and non-Hispanics were rather similar.

Although much lower than those for non-Hispanics, at more than $400, median weekly earnings were relatively high for Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Other Hispanic men who were employed full time. This finding for Puerto Rican workers may be attributable, in part, to their concentration in Northeastern cities, which tend to have relatively higher wages and a high cost of living.

The earnings of Hispanic *women* at each occupational category were closer to those of non-Hispanics than was the case for men, as the final column of table 5 shows. For example, the median weekly earnings for Hispanic women employed as managers and professionals were 89 percent those of their non-Hispanic peers. The gap among men in the same occupational category was somewhat larger. Nevertheless, Hispanic women were also overrepresented in the poorly paid categories—particularly in the service and operator, fabricator, and laborer positions.

As with other labor market indicators, the occupational distribution of Hispanic women varied by area of origin. (See table 6.) Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Other Hispanics had the highest proportions employed in the managerial and professional category, though all were below that for non-Hispanics. The median weekly earnings for women who worked full time tended to reflect their occupational distributions: Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Other Hispanics had the highest earnings, while Mexicans and Central and South Americans tended to earn considerably less.

On the whole, the profiles of Puerto Rican men and women who worked full time are generally more favorable than those for Mexicans and Central and South Americans. Puerto Ricans were somewhat more likely to work in higher skilled occupations, and this may be one important factor behind the higher median earnings for those who worked full time. On the other hand, as was noted earlier, an unusually large proportion of the Puerto Rican working age population was not in the labor force. As a result, many Puerto Rican households had no earners. This is a major reason why their median household income in 1990 was the lowest of all Hispanic groups and their poverty rate the highest, as the following tabulation shows:[20]

	Median household income	*Percent of persons 15 years and over below poverty level*
All Hispanics	$22,330	28.1
Mexicans	22,439	28.1
Puerto Ricans	16,169	40.6
Cubans	25,900	16.9
Central and South American	23,568	25.4
Other Hispanics	25,635	21.5
Non-Hispanics	30,513	12.1

Continued diversity

In sum, Hispanics are a composite of ethnic and national origin groups that have very different histories and labor force profiles. In 1992, Central and South Americans were more likely than the others, including non-Hispanics, to participate in the labor force. Like Mexicans, Central and South Americans tended to be employed in the lower skilled occupations and to be paid low wages and salaries. In contrast, Cubans and Other Hispanics were about as likely as non-Hispanics to participate in the labor force. They also had a fairly high proportion of managers and professionals and relatively high median earnings. Puerto Ricans were the least likely to participate in the labor force and the most likely to be jobless, but those who worked full time had an occupational distribution and median earnings similar to those of Cubans and Other Hispanics.

But even this assessment oversimplifies Hispanic diversity. Each group is, itself, a composite of more detailed subgroups made up of persons who have markedly different labor force and employment characteristics. Because the demogra-phic and economic characteristics of Hispanics are so diverse, many analysts have questioned the wisdom of aggregating statistics under the "Hispanic" label. Yet, as Peter Skerry has observed, the common label has meaning to many Hispanics themselves. Individuals from across Hispanic ethnic groups do meet, in a variety of settings, to celebrate cultural heritage and to work on common concerns; in political arenas, the Hispanic label serves as a common banner under which diverse groups rally, giving each a stronger voice.[21] Sometimes the appeal of unity is precarious, overshadowed by tensions between divergent interests. Such tensions will probably persist for a long time.

THE NUMBER OF HISPANIC workers will continue to increase at a rapid pace well into the next century. BLS projections indicate that the proportion of the U.S. labor force accounted for by white non-Hispanics will have declined almost 6 percentage points from 1990 to 2005, while the proportion accounted for by Hispanics will have expanded by an additional three points, reaching 11 percent of the total labor force by 2005.[22] The proportions for blacks and Asians and Pacific Islanders are also projected to increase somewhat, all of which signals an expanding ethnic and racial diversification in the U.S. work force. An equally important trend which will probably continue is that, as Hispanics immigrate from many parts of Latin America, the composition of their own labor force will continue to diversify as well. □

Footnotes

[1]Estimates of labor force characteristics come from data obtained in the Current Population Survey. Identification of persons of Hispanic origin is obtained from responses to the survey question, "What is the origin or descent of each person in this household?" Respondents are shown a "flashcard," reproduced below, and those who indicate categories 10–17 are identified as being of Hispanic origin. Thus, Hispanics are defined as persons who themselves, or whose ancestors, are from Spanish-speaking countries.

What is the origin or descent of each person in this household?

01 German	12 Mexican
02 Italian	14 Puerto Rican
03 Irish	15 Cuban
04 French	16 Central or South American (Spanish Countries)
05 Polish	17 Other Spanish
06 Russian	20 Afro-American (Black, Negro)
07 English	26 Dutch
08 Scottish	27 Swedish
10 Mexican-American	28 Hungarian
11 Chicano	

OR

30 Another group not listed

Persons who report themselves as Mexican-American, Chicano, or Mexican are consolidated into one origin. As shown above, Central and South Americans are all identified according to a single category.

[2] See table 2.6 of Karen A. Woodrow and Jeffrey S. Passel, "Post-IRCA undocumented immigration to the United States: an assessment based on the June 1988 CPS," p. 53, in Frank D. Bean, Barry Edmonston, and Jeffrey S. Passel, *Undocumented Migration to the U.S.* (Washington, The RAND Cor-

poration and The Urban Institute, 1990), and Immigration and Naturalization Service, *1990 Statistical Yearbook* (Immigration and Naturalization Service, U.S. Department of Justice, December 1991), pp. 52–53. Much of the apparent increase in numbers of recent legal immigrants is an artifact of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, which legalized many who were already residing in the United States. The act provided an amnesty period during which more than 3 million Mexican workers applied for permanent residence, accounting for, by far, the majority of all amnesty applicants.

[3] Central and South Americans were not included in this survey. The results reported here are based on tabulations for U.S. citizens as well as noncitizens in the Latino National Political Survey available from Rodolfo de la Garza, Department of Government, University of Texas at Austin. Findings from this survey are summarized in Rodolfo de la Garza and others, *Latino Voices: Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban Perspectives in U.S. Politics* (San Francisco, Westview Press, 1992).

[4] Except where otherwise noted, the histories recounted below have been compiled from Frank Bean and Marta Tienda, *The Hispanic Population of the United States* (New York, Russel Sage Foundation, 1987), pp. 7–35; and Gregory DeFreitas, *Inequality at Work: Hispanics in the U.S. Labor Force* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 10–52.

[5] DeFreitas, *Inequality at Work*, pp. 11–13.

[6] David L. Torres, "Dynamics behind the formation of a business class: Tucson's Hispanic business elite," *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, February 1990, pp. 25–49; and David L. Torres and Melissa Amado, "The quest for power: Hispanic collective action in frontier Arizona," in Juan R. García, ed., *Mexican American Studies*, vol. 3, 1992.

[7] The "emergency wartime program of importing labor [signed in August, 1942 by President Franklin Roosevelt] . . . was known as the *bracero* program (from the Spanish for 'working hand')"; DeFreitas, *Inequality at Work*, p. 17. Under pressure from businesses, primarily in the southwestern States, the program was continued for more than two decades.

[8] DeFreitas, *Inequality at Work*, p. 255.

[9] There are important restrictions on citizenship rights for Puerto Ricans who live on the island. For example, they are not allowed to vote for the U.S. president, they have a nonvoting resident commissioner in the U.S. Congress, and they are not represented in the U.S. Senate. Islanders receive many U.S. social services and are exempt from U.S. taxes.

[10] César Andreu Iglesias, ed., *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega: A Contribution to the History of the Puerto Rican Community in New York* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1984).

[11] National Puerto Rican Coalition, Inc., *A Blueprint for Change: A Puerto Rican Agenda for the 1990's* (Washington, National Puerto Rican Coalition, Inc., 1991).

[12] *The Washington Post*, Nov. 1, 1992, p. A8.

[13] Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Statistical Yearbook*, pp. 52-53.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Because of different weighting and estimation procedures, the estimates presented in this article differ slightly from those published elsewhere by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

[16] Census figures show that the proportions of Puerto Rican, men and women in the labor force in 1960—85 percent for Puerto Rican men and 40 percent for Puerto Rican women—were at least equal to those of non-Hispanics. The subsequent decline of labor force participation among Puerto Ricans appears to have halted in the mid-1970's. The proportion of Puerto Rican women in the labor force actually rose from 32 percent in 1976 to 46 percent in 1991; that for Puerto Rican men hovered around 72 percent throughout the period.

For recent analyses of the employment situation for Puerto Ricans, see: Vilma Ortiz, "Latinos and industrial change in New York and Los Angeles," pp. 119–31, in Edwin Meléndez, Clara Rodríguez, and Janis Barry Figueroa, *Hispanics in the Labor Force: Issues and Policies* (New York, Plenum Press, 1992); Luis Falcón and Charles Hirschman, "Trends in labor market positions for Puerto Ricans on the mainland: 1970–1987," in *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, February 1992, pp. 16–51; María Enchautegui, "Migration out of New York and the labor force participation of Puerto Rican and non-Hispanic women," Discussion Paper 962–91(University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty, December 1991); DeFreitas, *Inequality at Work;* Bean and Tienda, *The Hispanic Population;* and Clara E. Rodríguez, *Puerto Ricans: Born in the U.S.A.* (Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1991).

[17] Bean and Tienda, *The Hispanic Population*, pp. 295–300. In general, foreign-born persons in the United States have high participation rates regardless of educational attainment, as shown in Joseph R. Meisenheimer II, "How do immigrants fare in the U.S. labor market?" *Monthly Labor Review*, December 1992, pp. 3–19.

Bean and Tienda have also suggested that many Mexicans and Central and South Americans live in areas with expanding labor markets, particularly for entry-level positions and that, as a result, the low-skill workers among them generally face relatively favorable job opportunities. See Bean and Tienda, *The Hispanic Population*, pp. 56–103. The Washington, DC, metropolitan area—home to the largest number of Central and South Americans in the United States—may be a prime example, as it has had an extraordinarily rapid employment growth over the past decade. Among the fastest-growing jobs were janitors, cooks, and construction laborers; Hispanics accounted for over 20 percent of the employment in each of these in 1990, several times above their representation in the total Washington population (5.7 percent in 1990). See a recent *Washington Post* article highlighting data from the decennial censuses, "Work force disparity seen narrowing," *The Washington Post*, Nov. 5, 1992, pp. C1 and C3. A similar situation may exist for Mexican-Americans in California and Texas. A tabulation by John Kasarda suggests that the number of entry-level jobs in Houston may have been expanding in recent years. See a table and discussion of Kasarda's perspective in DeFreitas, *Inequality at Work*, p. 143. For an overview of debates concerning the relationship between Hispanic labor force participation rates and aggregate changes in demand for low-skill workers, see Ortiz, "Latinos and industrial change"; Enchautegui, "Migration out of New York"; and Roger Waldinger, "Changing ladders and musical chairs: ethnicity and opportunity in post-industrial New York," *Politics and Society*, vol. 15, 1986, pp. 369–401.

[18] As shown in tabulations by John Kasarda, the number of jobs held by persons who had not attended college declined by approximately 605,000 in the New York central city between 1970 and 1980; the number held by persons with higher levels of education increased by 505,000 over the same period. See table 3 of Kasarda's "Urban industrial transition and the underclass," pp. 26–47, in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, January 1989. See DeFreitas, *Inequality at Work*, pp. 140–44 for a similar discussion.

[19] Data are available for 1960, 1970, and 1980 in Bean and Tienda, *The Hispanic Population*, pp. 328–35. Note from Bean and Tienda's tabulations that there was some variation by ethnicity. Puerto Ricans born on the island or the mainland had similar likelihoods of being employed as managers in 1980, for example, and foreign-born Cubans were actually somewhat more likely to be employed as managers than their

native-born counterparts. Also see Marta Tienda, "The Puerto Rican worker: current labor market status and future prospects," *Journal of Hispanic Politics*, Vol. 1, pp. 27–51, for a similar finding.

[20] *The Hispanic population in the United States: March 1991, Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, No. 455 (Bureau of the Census, 1991).

[21] Peter Skerry, "E pluribus Hispanic?" *Wilson Quarterly*, Summer 1992, pp. 62–73. Skerry is director of University of California at Los Angeles, Center for American Politics and Public Policy in Washington, DC.

[22] See table 5 of Howard N Fullerton, Jr., "Labor force projections: the baby boom moves on," *Monthly Labor Review*, November 1991, p. 41.

That's progress

Thanks to the historical progress made as a result of the heterogeneity of the wage- and salary-earning classes, the prevailing acceptance of the objective needs of the capitalist economy and the full social and intellectual 'citizenship' attained by employers and managers, the labour movement exerts less attraction than it once did. It is more prosaic, more pragmatic, less enveloped in an emotional aura, frequently not raising dramatic questions. Young workers themselves, except for an activist, politicized minority, make requests of the unions that are less strongly associated than in the past with social and political ideals and militancy and with analogous support for the parties of the left.

—Guido Baglioni

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Baglioni, Guido and Colin Crouch, eds.
(London, Sage Publications, 1992), p. 36.