

# THE HISPANIC POPULATION IN MISSISSIPPI

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**T**here has been considerable interest in the Hispanic population in recent years, both in Mississippi and nationwide. Hispanic origin was self-reported by respondents in Census 2000, as was race. People of Hispanic origin may be of any race, although most are white. The count of Hispanics in census data is undoubtedly too low because many are in the country illegally and are fearful of discovery and deportation. Although, by law, the census assures confidentiality to all respondents, and aims to count everyone living here, regardless of immigration status, persons here illegally have historically been difficult to enumerate.

This report provides information about the size, characteristics, and projected growth of this group of people in the state. Detailed data, both published and unpublished, on the demographic, social, economic, and health characteristics of Hispanics are available from Census 2000. The limited information on the characteristics of illegal immigrants -- most of whom are Hispanics -- is also described.

## Demographic Characteristics

Census 2000 counted 39,569 people of Hispanic origin living in Mississippi, comprising only 1.4 percent of the state's total population, far smaller than the 12.5 percent in the nation as a whole. The relative size of Mississippi's Hispanic population also stands in sharp contrast to the proportion Hispanic in some of the nation's larger cities, such as Los Angeles with 46.5 percent, New York with 27.0 percent, or El Paso with 76.6 percent.

The majority of Hispanics counted in the state in 2000 (72.5 percent) were U.S. citizens, most by birth and a smaller fraction by naturalization. About one in four (27.5 percent) were not American citizens; although some of these people undoubtedly were here illegally, others were here legally as students, guest workers, or immigrants who had begun, but not completed, the process of becoming a U.S. citizen.

Despite their small numbers, Hispanics in Mississippi comprised a very diversified group in terms of national origin. It is commonly believed that most are Mexican and, indeed, more than half of the total (54.6



percent) came here from Mexico. The next largest group was Puerto Ricans (7.3 percent), followed by Cubans at 3.8 percent. Smaller fractions arrived from Central America, South America, and elsewhere. About one in four did not provide a specific country of origin in the census data.

Their wide variety of national origins suggests that Hispanics differ from one another as much or more as from non-Hispanics, making generalizations risky. We know from national data, for example, that there are substantial disparities among Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and other Hispanic subgroups in such areas as educational attainment, labor force participation, and median family income.<sup>1</sup> The Hispanic group in Mississippi, however, is too small to distinguish characteristics by specific national origins.

Nearly three in five Mississippi Hispanics (57.8 percent) were male, compared to only 48.1 percent male among non-Hispanics. The median age among those reporting Hispanic origin (both sexes combined) was significantly younger than for the non-Hispanic majority -- 26.2 years versus 34.0 years. Both the high proportion of males and the relatively young age of the Hispanic population are consistent with immigration trends in which young single males predominate among newcomers seeking work.

The relative youth of the Hispanic population, their higher birth rates, and the cultural norms they bring with them from the home country help explain a median family size (3.53 people) and median household size

(3.22 people) substantially higher than the figures among non-Hispanics (3.14 and 2.62, respectively).

According to Census 2000, Hispanics lived in every county in the state, as Table 1 indicates. But in only eleven widely scattered

counties (Calhoun, Chickasaw, DeSoto, Harrison, Jackson, Jones, Leake, Scott, Tippah, Tunica, and Yazoo) did they constitute 2.0 percent or more of the county's total population. Only one county (Scott) had more than five percent. Yazoo County's 4.4

Table 1. HISPANIC AND TOTAL POPULATION BY COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI, 2000

County	Total Population	Hispanic or Latino	Percent Hispanic	County	Total Population	Hispanic or Latino	Percent Hispanic
Adams	34,340	273	0.8%	Lincoln	33,166	229	0.7%
Alcorn	34,558	443	1.3%	Lowndes	61,586	684	1.1%
Amite	13,599	113	0.8%	Madison	74,674	742	1.0%
Bolivar	40,633	477	1.2%	Monroe	38,014	261	0.7%
Calhoun	15,069	318	2.1%	Montgomery	12,189	103	0.8%
Carroll	10,769	79	0.7%	Neshoba	28,684	332	1.2%
Chickasaw	19,440	445	2.3%	Newton	21,838	198	0.9%
Choctaw	9,758	79	0.8%	Noxubee	12,548	141	1.1%
Claiborne	11,831	94	0.8%	Oktibbeha	42,902	461	1.1%
Clarke	17,955	120	0.7%	Panola	34,274	384	1.1%
Clay	21,979	190	0.9%	Pearl River	48,621	686	1.4%
Coahoma	30,622	276	0.9%	Perry	12,138	122	1.0%
Copiah	28,757	332	1.2%	Pike	38,940	284	0.7%
Covington	19,407	155	0.8%	Pontotoc	26,726	481	1.8%
DeSoto	107,199	2,516	2.3%	Prentiss	25,556	176	0.7%
Forrest	72,604	912	1.3%	Quitman	10,117	55	0.5%
Franklin	8,448	45	0.5%	Rankin	115,327	1,520	1.3%
George	19,144	307	1.6%	Scott	28,423	1,660	5.8%
Greene	13,299	106	0.8%	Sharkey	6,580	86	1.3%
Grenada	23,263	145	0.6%	Simpson	27,639	318	1.2%
Hancock	42,967	775	1.8%	Smith	16,182	96	0.6%
Harrison	189,601	4,910	2.6%	Stone	13,622	170	1.2%
Hinds	250,800	1,978	0.8%	Sunflower	34,369	448	1.3%
Holmes	21,609	194	0.9%	Tallahatchie	14,903	137	0.9%
Humphreys	11,206	168	1.5%	Tate	25,370	223	0.9%
Issaquena	2,274	10	0.4%	Tippah	20,826	434	2.1%
Itawamba	22,770	226	1.0%	Tishomingo	19,163	343	1.8%
Jackson	131,420	2,807	2.1%	Tunica	9,227	233	2.5%
Jasper	18,149	117	0.6%	Union	25,362	413	1.6%
Jefferson	9,740	64	0.7%	Walthall	15,156	201	1.3%
Jeff Davis	13,962	107	0.8%	Warren	49,644	514	1.0%
Jones	64,958	1,271	2.0%	Washington	62,977	531	0.8%
Kemper	10,453	76	0.7%	Wayne	21,216	134	0.6%
Lafayette	38,744	427	1.1%	Webster	10,294	174	1.7%
Lamar	39,070	426	1.1%	Wilkinson	10,312	45	0.4%
Lauderdale	78,161	888	1.1%	Winston	20,160	243	1.2%
Lawrence	13,258	89	0.7%	Yalobusha	13,051	127	1.0%
Leake	20,940	440	2.1%	Yazoo	28,149	1,233	4.4%
Lee	75,755	882	1.2%				
Leflore	37,947	720	1.9%	<b>Mississippi</b>	<b>2,844,658</b>	<b>39,569</b>	<b>1.4%</b>

SOURCE: U. S. Census Bureau, *Census 2000*.

Table 2. **SELECTED SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HISPANICS AND NON-HISPANICS: MISSISSIPPI, 2000**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Hispanic (%)</b>	<b>Non-Hispanic (%)</b>
<b>Marital status<sup>1</sup></b>		
Married, spouse present	38.2	48.6
Married, spouse absent	9.4	2.6
Widowed	3.7	8.1
Divorced	9.4	10.0
Separated	3.3	2.9
Never married	36.0	27.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Education</b>		
High school graduate	59.1	73.1
B.A. or higher degree	12.1	17.0
<b>English Language Ability</b>		
Speak English poorly or not at all	20.5	0.4
<b>Disability<sup>2</sup></b>		
Sensory	3.3	5.2
Physical	7.1	11.8
Mental	5.6	7.0
Self-care	2.5	4.4
Going outside	13.2	11.8
Employment	18.0	16.6

<sup>1</sup>Ages 15 and over.

<sup>2</sup>Ages 5 and over for first four measures; ages 16 and over for last two measures.

SOURCE: U. S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Public Use Microdata Sample (5%), Mississippi

percent -- the second highest fraction among the counties -- consisted mostly of men housed in the federal prison for the state, which is located there.

### Social Characteristics

Selected social characteristics of Mississippi Hispanics are shown in Table 2. As of Census 2000, Hispanics here exhibited a higher proportion in the "currently married, spouse absent" category, a finding that is consistent with the tendency of many younger immigrants to come here alone in search of work, then return to their point of origin either temporarily or permanently. The never married group was also proportionately largely among Hispanics, reflecting their relative

youth. The proportion widowed, in contrast, was higher among non-Hispanics, consistent with their older age structure. Proportions divorced and separated were very similar for the two groups.

When it comes to educational attainment, the Hispanic population is comparatively disadvantaged, with lower proportions of both high school graduates and persons with a Bachelor's or higher degree. In a state already educationally disadvantaged relative to the nation, the state's Hispanic minority is even more disadvantaged. Part of the explanation for educational deficiencies lies in language issues: of Hispanics aged 5 and over, one in five speak English poorly or not at all.



Finally, Census 2000 contains a variety of information on health and disability, as shown in Table 2. The first four measures refer to the population aged five and over, whereas the last two refer to the population aged 16 and above. People living in institutions such as nursing homes were excluded, as were members of the armed forces. Since many people residing in institutions are highly disabled, the figures shown in Table 2 would be somewhat higher for both groups if they were included.

All of the disability measures refer to conditions that are long-lasting -- six months or more. The first measure, sensory disability, asked whether the respondent was blind, deaf, or suffered from a severe vision or hearing impairment. Physical disability refers to limitations on basic physical activities such as walking and climbing stairs. Mental disability queries the existence of problems with learning, remembering, or concentrating. Self-care problems encompass difficulties carrying out such daily home-based activities

Table 3. **SELECTED ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF HISPANICS AND NON-HISPANICS: MISSISSIPPI, 2000**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>Non-Hispanic</b>
<b><u>Labor force status<sup>1</sup></u></b>		
Employed (%)	64.3	70.4
Unemployed (%)	2.7	3.7
Not in labor force (%)	33.0	25.9
<b>TOTAL (%)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b><u>Full-time, year-round<sup>1</sup></u></b>		
Yes (%)	46.0	55.1
No (%)	54.0	44.9
<b><u>Occupation<sup>1</sup></u></b>		
Management, professional, and related (%)	16.6	28.0
Service (%)	18.8	14.1
Sales and office (%)	14.4	23.0
Farming, fishing, and forestry (%)	3.4	1.3
Construction, extraction, and maintenance (%)	15.7	11.7
Production, transportation, and material moving (%)	30.8	21.6
Military (%)	0.4	0.2
<b>TOTAL (%)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Median earnings of full-time, year-round workers<sup>1</sup></b>	\$22,000	\$27,000
<b>Median household income</b>	\$30,856	\$35,000
<b>Median family income</b>	\$31,989	\$31,200
<b>Per capita income</b>	\$12,549	\$15,900
<b>Below poverty (%)</b>	26.2	22.5
<b>No vehicle in household</b>	12.0	7.3
<b>No telephone in household</b>	14.6	6.2

<sup>1</sup>Ages 25 to 59.

SOURCE: U. S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Public Use Microdata File (5%), Mississippi.

as dressing and bathing, whereas disabilities related to going outside the home alone refer to such activities as shopping and visiting a doctor's office. The last measure, work disability, asked whether respondents had health problems that made it difficult to work at a



job or business. The prevalence of sensory, physical, mental, and self-care disability was higher among non-Hispanics than Hispanics, a fact that may be largely attributable to the higher average age among non-Hispanics, since disability prevalence rises with age. Yet, despite the relative youth of the Hispanic group, they show a somewhat higher prevalence of disabilities that prevent going out of the home alone and working at a job.

Disability rates are higher among poor people and the less educated, factors that help explain the higher rates among Hispanics in the last two measures listed. It is worth noting that Mississippi ranks among the highest states on both overall disability prevalence and on each of the individual measures.<sup>2</sup> Also worth noting is the fact that the census disability measures were not mutually exclusive -- respondents could answer "yes" to several disability items. Among Hispanics, 10.2 percent had one type of disability, whereas 11.0 percent reported two or more. For non-Hispanics, nearly the same percentage reported one disability (10.4 percent) as for Hispanics, but 12.6 percent had more than one.

### Economic Characteristics

When it comes to measures of labor force activity, earnings, income, and other indicators of economic well-being, Mississippi typically ranks at or near the bottom. Data on Hispanics residing in the state in 2000 show them to be an economically disadvantaged minority relative to the non-Hispanic majority, as is the case in the nation as a whole.

As Table 3 shows, Hispanics in 2000 were less likely to be employed and had a higher proportion out of the labor force compared to



non-Hispanics. These data refer to the population in the prime working ages of 25 to 59, thus excluding children, most young adults still in school, and the aged. Hispanic workers were also less likely to work full-time year-round than their non-Hispanic counterparts -- only 46.0 percent among the former compared to 55.1 percent for the latter.

Among prime working age adults, Hispanics were more concentrated in low-paying jobs in the service sector, construction, and the production/transportation/material moving category. Given the different occupational structures, it is not surprising that the median earnings of full-time, year-round workers were substantially lower for Hispanics than for non-Hispanics -- \$22,000 versus \$27,000.

Most other income measures confirm that Hispanics in the state were relatively disadvantaged -- lower median household income, lower per capita income, and a higher percentage in poverty. An



exception was median family income, which was about the same for the two groups; this fact can be largely explained by the larger average size of Hispanic families, which may translate into more workers per family.

Higher proportions of Hispanic households lacked access to private transportation (no vehicle), while proportionally more Hispanic than non-Hispanic households had no telephone. In a largely rural state like Mississippi, where public transportation is very limited, would-be workers without a car or telephone presumably face greater than average difficulties in finding and keeping a job.

### Illegal Immigrants

The number of illegal immigrants residing in Mississippi is impossible to state with any accuracy; recent estimates range from a low of 8,000 to a high of 90,000 to 100,000.<sup>3</sup> It is very likely, however, that these numbers have been growing over time and that the characteristics of illegal immigrants are such as to constitute social and financial problems for the state. Limited, but suggestive, information is available on the characteristics

of illegal immigrants from a government survey of those who were granted amnesty under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. This study, published in 1992, revealed that only 15.0 percent of amnestied illegal immigrants spoke English, 80.0 percent used public health services, and 49.0 percent had no health insurance. They averaged only seven years of formal education and an annual income of \$8,982.<sup>4</sup> The Federation for American Immigration Reform points out that many of the illegal aliens in the survey were well established in this country, having lived here more than ten years. Thus "they represented the most successful people in the illegal alien population" and "a profile of the overall illegal alien population could be expected to be much worse."<sup>5</sup>

Concerns about the social and economic impact of the illegal population on our society include the cost of providing bilingual education to Spanish-speaking children, increased healthcare costs, the risk of the spread of serious communicable diseases, the possible loss of jobs to legal residents, the costs of incarcerating those convicted of



crimes, the loss of state income tax revenue due to the failure to file tax returns, and the loss of sales taxes that occurs when remittances are sent back to relatives in the home country. "Most State agencies, schools, and other governmental entities do not currently document the actual numbers of illegal immigrants or their use of services."<sup>6</sup> Due to the lack of data, it is not possible to estimate precisely what these costs are. Nor is it possible to estimate the extent to which the costs may be offset by the benefits of illegal immigration, such as the reduced costs to consumers and the savings to employers when illegal workers -- poorly paid and with few or no benefits -- pick produce, work in restaurants and hotels, or labor on construction sites.



### Summary and Conclusion

We have seen that in many respects the social and economic characteristics of

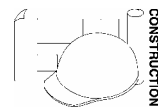
Hispanics counted in the most recent decennial census show them to be relatively disadvantaged compared to non-Hispanics in the state. Based on evidence cited above from the federal government's survey of illegal immigrants granted amnesty in the late 1980s, Hispanics not counted in Census 2000 were probably worse off than those who were counted.

Recent national data indicate "the blazing pace of immigration seen throughout the 1990's has continued into the first half of this decade."<sup>7</sup> Official population estimates show a substantial increase in Mississippi's Hispanic population from 39,569 in 2000 to 50,879 in 2005 (Table 4). Although Hispanics comprised only 1.7 percent of the state's total population in the latter year, their numbers rose by 28.6 percent since Census 2000.



Eighteen counties had a Hispanic proportion of 2.0 percent or more, with Scott County the highest at 6.9 percent, followed by Yazoo County with 5.2 percent and Jones with 3.6 percent. Table 4 also shows the percentage growth for each county between 2000 and 2005. The growth rates should be interpreted very cautiously, since they are calculated from a very small base population.

The prospects for the continued growth of the Hispanic subgroup in Mississippi are very good.



First, the need for construction laborers in the wake of the extensive hurricane damages in the coastal counties is great, at least in the short term. Numerous low-skill, low-wage jobs also exist in agriculture, poultry processing, and the service sector. Hopes of employment will entice Hispanic workers to come to Mississippi both from other U.S. states and from abroad. Some will come only to work seasonally or temporarily; others will stay and bring their families. Second, poverty, unemployment, overpopulation, and poor living conditions in many of the countries of origin of Hispanic immigrants will continue to provide strong motivation for crossing the border, legally or illegally, in hopes of a better life. Third, the high fertility norms among

Table 4. HISPANIC POPULATION IN 2005 AND PERCENTAGE GROWTH 2000 TO 2005: MISSISSIPPI COUNTIES

County	Total 2005	Hispanic 2005	Percent Hispanic	Change 2000-2005	County	Total 2005	Hispanic 2005	Percent Hispanic	Change 2000-2005
Adams	32,099	273	0.9%	0.0	Lincoln	33,906	254	0.7%	10.9
Alcorn	35,306	649	1.8%	46.5	Lowndes	59,895	691	1.2%	1.0
Amite	13,435	206	1.5%	82.3	Madison	84,286	1,086	1.3%	46.4
Attala	19,552	321	1.6%	14.6	Marion	25,235	187	0.7%	18.4
Benton	7,852	93	1.2%	10.7	Marshall	35,659	552	1.5%	29.9
Bolivar	38,641	482	1.2%	1.0	Monroe	37,704	332	0.9%	27.2
Calhoun	14,652	516	3.5%	62.3	Montgomery	11,829	110	0.9%	6.8
Carroll	10,397	101	1.0%	27.8	Neshoba	29,905	457	1.5%	37.7
Chickasaw	19,184	556	2.9%	24.9	Newton	22,366	268	1.2%	35.4
Choctaw	9,572	89	0.9%	12.7	Noxubee	12,202	172	1.4%	22.0
Claiborne	11,492	105	0.9%	11.7	Oktibbeha	41,247	457	1.1%	-0.9
Clarke	17,670	131	0.7%	9.2	Panola	35,331	483	1.7%	25.8
Clay	21,223	217	1.0%	14.2	Pearl River	52,659	858	1.6%	25.1
Coahoma	29,002	343	1.2%	24.3	Perry	12,160	142	1.2%	16.4
Copiah	29,164	395	1.4%	19.0	Pike	39,426	288	0.7%	1.4
Covington	20,273	211	1.0%	36.1	Pontotoc	28,208	798	2.8%	65.9
DeSoto	137,004	4,628	3.4%	83.9	Prentiss	25,593	169	0.7%	-4.0
Forrest	75,095	1,062	1.4%	16.4	Quitman	9,512	58	0.6%	5.5
Franklin	8,411	49	0.6%	8.9	Rankin	131,841	2,211	1.7%	45.5
George	21,259	536	2.5%	74.6	Scott	28,739	1,978	6.9%	19.2
Greene	13,183	105	0.8%	-0.9	Sharkey	5,967	92	1.5%	7.0
Grenada	22,861	157	0.7%	8.3	Simpson	27,944	425	1.5%	33.6
Hancock	46,711	1,063	2.3%	37.2	Smith	16,058	133	0.8%	38.5
Harrison	193,810	5,210	2.7%	6.1	Stone	14,862	239	1.6%	40.6
Hinds	249,345	2,278	0.9%	15.2	Sunflower	32,311	558	1.7%	24.6
Holmes	21,099	188	0.9%	-3.1	Tallahatchie	14,191	145	1.0%	5.8
Humphreys	10,527	222	2.1%	32.1	Tate	26,548	345	1.3%	54.7
Issaquena	1,909	9	0.5%	-10.0	Tippah	21,212	699	3.3%	61.1
Itawamba	23,359	251	1.1%	11.1	Tishomingo	19,202	490	2.6%	42.9
Jackson	135,940	3,402	2.5%	21.2	Tunica	10,321	284	2.8%	21.9
Jasper	18,162	138	0.8%	17.9	Union	26,784	702	2.6%	70.0
Jefferson	9,432	65	0.7%	1.6	Walthall	15,460	194	1.3%	-3.5
Jeff Davis	13,158	128	1.0%	19.6	Warren	49,131	610	1.2%	18.7
Jones	66,160	2,357	3.6%	85.4	Washington	59,220	657	1.1%	23.7
Kemper	10,246	99	1.0%	30.3	Wayne	21,291	143	0.7%	6.7
Lafayette	40,842	546	1.3%	27.9	Webster	10,092	196	1.9%	12.6
Lamar	44,616	684	1.5%	60.6	Wilkinson	10,269	46	0.4%	2.2
Lauderdale	77,217	958	1.2%	7.9	Winston	19,870	319	1.6%	31.3
Lawrence	13,502	117	0.9%	31.5	Yalobusha	13,417	134	1.0%	5.5
Leake	22,453	676	3.0%	53.6	Yazoo	28,195	1,467	5.2%	19.0
Lee	78,793	1,039	1.3%	17.8					
Leflore	36,431	795	2.2%	10.4	<b>Mississippi</b>	<b>2,921,087</b>	<b>50,979</b>	<b>1.7%</b>	<b>28.6</b>

SOURCE: U. S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, 2006.

Hispanics already residing in Mississippi and the relative youth of the immigrant population ensure the continuance of higher birth rates among them compared to non-Hispanics. The state is already seeing some of the costs associated with immigration, along with its substantial benefits. The continuing challenge will be to maximize the benefits while controlling the costs. As a first step, accurate estimates of the numbers, characteristics, and legal status of all immigrants are essential.

Notes

1. U.S. Census Bureau, *We the People: Hispanics in the United States*, Census 2000 Special Reports, December 2004, pp. 11-16.
2. U.S. Census Bureau, *Disability Status: 2000*, Census 2000 Brief, March 2003, p. 6.
3. Phil Bryant, "The Impact of Illegal Immigration on Mississippi: Costs and Population Trends," Report from the Performance Audit Division, No. 102, February 2006, p. ii.
4. Federation for American Immigration Reform, "Distribution of the Illegal Alien Population," March 2006, p. 3. [www.fairus.org](http://www.fairus.org).
5. Ibid.
6. Bryant, op. cit., p. 18.
7. Rick Lyman, "Census Shows Growth of Immigrants," *New York Times*, August 15, 2006.