

Who are the Latinos?

The Latinos, also known as Hispanics, are the fastest growing minority in the United States. Perhaps no other ethnic group in the United States is as diverse in its culture, physical appearance, and traditions as the Hispanic.

The Hispanic background encompasses no fewer than 21 separate republics, each with its own distinct culture and history, including indigenous languages, religion foods, and individual philosophies. In Latin America, the homeland of most of the people known in the United States as Hispanic, no one defines himself or herself as Hispanic. The Mexicans call themselves Mejicanos, the Puerto Ricans - Puertorriquenos, the Cubans - Cubanos, the Colombian - Colombianos, the Dominicans - Dominicanos, and so on.

For Latin Americans, who like North Americans fought hard to win their independence from European rule, identity is derived from their native lands and from heterogeneous cultures that thrive within their borders. Each Latin American country views itself as the curator of multiethnic, diverse cultures that cannot be totally embraced by the term "Hispanic."

With growth in numbers has come political and economic clout. During the 1992 presidential election, individual Latinos and Hispanic organizations made roughly 30,000 political contributions, totaling more than \$20 million. In recent years, the number of Latino-owned businesses in the United States has tripled. (Submitted by Hispanic Heritage Committee.)



Local events

Saturday -- Car wash at Shopette, 9 a.m.-2 p.m.

Sunday -- "How to make a Piñata" at the base library

Oct. 9 -- Piñata Party at Youth Center

Oct. 16 -- Dinner-Dance at Charleston Club

For more information, call 963-2601 or 963-2536.

Did You Know:

■ By the year 2040, Latinos will comprise 51 per cent of the population of California.

■ In 1993, there were over 650,000 Latino-owned business in the United States.

■ The Inca were the first people in the world to grow potatoes.

■ Thirty-seven Hispanic-Americans are among the more than 3,400 Medal of Honor recipients. They are: Lucian Adams, David M. Gonzales, Manuel Perez, Jr., John P. Baca, Ambrosio Guillen, Louis Rocco, Jr., David P. Barkeley, Rodolfo P. Hernandez, Cleto Rodriguez, Philip Bazaar, Silvestre S. Herrera, Joseph C. Rodriguez, Roy P. Benavidez, Euripides Rubio, Emilio A. De La Garza, Jr., Jose Francisco Jimenez, Alejandro R. Renteria Ruiz, Ralph E. Dias, Miguel Keith, Hector Santiago-Colon, Daniel Fernandez, Baldomero Lopez, Fernando Luis Garcia, Jose M. Lopez, France Silva, Marcario Garcia, Carlos James Lozada, Jose F. Valdez, Edward Gomez, Benito Martinez, M. Sando Vargas, Jr., Harold Gonsalves, Joe P. Martinez, Maximo Yabes, Alfredo Gonzales and Eugene Obregon.

Read about them at <http://www.defenselink.mil/specials/hispanic/recipients1.html>

DoD working to attract Hispanic-American recruits

By Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — Some time in the next 10 years, Hispanic Americans will become the nation's largest ethnic group.

DoD understands this demographic certainty and is working to attract Hispanic Americans to the military and retain them once they're in.

"We are doing all right this year," said Vice Adm. Patricia Tracey, deputy assistant secretary of defense for military personnel policy. "About 12 percent of the recruits entering the armed services this year were Hispanic Americans, and that's right around the percentage of Hispanic Americans in the population."

But, she said, this is the first year this has happened.

While 11.5 percent of all Americans are Hispanic Americans, they comprise only 7.3 percent of the Army, 8.6 percent of the Navy, 4.7 percent of the Air Force and 11.9 percent of the Marine Corps. The overall total for Hispanic Americans in DoD is 7.5 percent.

Hispanic Americans' representation in the commissioned ranks is far lower than in the general population. Hispanic-American officers make up just 3.5 percent of all officers in DoD, with service breakdowns of Army, 3.6 percent; Navy, 4.7 percent; Air Force, 2.1 percent; and Marine Corps, 4.8 percent.

Ironically, DoD's own Youth Attitude Tracking Survey shows Hispanic Americans have a greater propensity than most other ethnic groups to enlist in the armed forces.

Why is there a problem? A lack of diplomas, DoD officials said. Hispanic-American youths have a higher school dropout rate than other Americans, and that makes many of them ineligible to enlist. "I suspect there are many more Hispanic Americans who would like to join the military than we are willing to take right

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now, not because of their ethnicity, but because of no high school diploma," Tracey said.

"[One of] DoD's quality goals for nonprior-service accessions is 90 percent should have a high school diploma," said Army Lt. Col. Catherine Abbott, a Pentagon spokeswoman. Another standard, which is not a recruiting problem according to Tracey, is that at least 60 percent of all recruits should score in the top half of the Armed Forces Qualification Test.

"We insist on maintaining those standards for quality because years of research and experience show that recruits meeting those educational standards and aptitude standards perform better, have less attrition and fewer disciplinary problems than recruits who do not meet them," Abbott said.

"If that portion of the population continues to complete high school at lower rates than the rest of the population, they will continue to be a difficult segment for us to recruit from," Tracey said.

The services will continue to examine ways to identify those high quality individuals who were unable to complete high school but who can succeed in the military. In the meantime, the push in the military is to encourage more Hispanic American youths to finish high school. The Army, in particular, has a program called simply "Graduate ... You Can Do It." It is modeled after a successful program aimed at African-American youth.

In the program, recruiters go into high schools with heavy Hispanic-American populations and present a video about

graduating from high school. They also pass out pamphlets in English and Spanish reinforcing the point. Recruiters speak of the opportunities the military offers to all Americans, but stress the need for recruits to have high school diplomas. "Take charge! You can do it!" is how the presentation ends.

The services have differences and some of those differences have a cultural appeal to Hispanic Americans. "I think the Marines are successful [in recruiting Hispanic Americans] because of the Marine Corps emphasis on being a close-knit corps," Tracey said.

"The special emphasis they place on being a member of the Marine family has resonance in the Hispanic-American community," Tracey added.

Other services are looking for ways to reach Hispanic Americans. "The Army recently doubled its advertising on Spanish-language stations," Tracey said.

Recruiting Hispanic-American officers is even tougher. "We need to adapt the programs that worked for African Americans to Hispanic Americans," said Bill Leftwich, deputy assistant secretary of defense for equal opportunity. For instance, he said, DoD is taking its successful ROTC programs at historically black colleges and universities and creating a template adapted to colleges with high percentages of Hispanic-American undergraduates.

But both enlisted and officer recruiting run into the same problem — too few Hispanic-American role models in the military.

Tracey noted that more Hispanic-

American recruiters might help. Potential recruits are more apt to join the military if they can identify with it — and recruiters are the military to some enlistees, she stressed. If potential recruits see someone who looks and speaks like them and they see what the military has done for the recruiter, they may be more apt to join, she said.

But this can't be the only answer.

Finding ways to showcase the accomplishments of Hispanic-American men and women serving as officers and enlisted members may be a more effective way to encourage young people to consider joining the military.

Tracey said many recruits still join the military for the opportunity to learn skills and earn money for college. The desire to go to college registers very high in surveys of the Hispanic-American population, she said. "I think there's the opportunity for some synergy between the educational benefits we offer and what is important to the Hispanic community," she said.

Also, Tracey continued, the Hispanic-American population is "less identifiable" than other ethnic groups.

"We need to focus more," she said. "The Hispanic population is not homogeneous, although we talk about it as if it were. You have different groups with different attitudes — Cubans, Puerto Ricans, South Americans and Central Americans. Each group has its own values and aspirations and motivations. We need to be sensitive to each group."

Tracey and Leftwich said they were optimistic about recruiting Hispanic Americans. They said Hispanic leaders are enthusiastic about working with DoD, in part because they see the military as a means of upward mobility.

Tracey said recruiting Hispanic Americans is not a "one-shot" effort that will go away if recruiting picks up. America is becoming a more diverse nation and her military will also, she said.