

History of Latinos in the Northwest

- History of Latinos in the Northwest
- Latinos in Washington State Today

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The history and movement of Latinos into the Pacific Northwest and specifically Washington is long and varied. This history is intertwined with the Spanish explorations of the sixteenth century, continuing through the colonial period, followed by the migration of Mexicans in the nineteenth century and the settling out patterns of a larger Latino community in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.¹

¹To be inclusive of all those who consider themselves Latino, this term is used throughout this essay. However, as is noted in the brief historical overview, individuals of Mexican origin continue to be the largest Latino group in the nation and state. Until the late twentieth century Latinos in Washington was primarily a Mexican affair.



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Colonial Pioneers: 1550s-1800s

Although many historians point to Juan Perez's voyage of 1774 as the first by a Spaniard to reach the Northwest coastline, new revelations indicate that Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo explored the region as early as 1542-1543. To further illustrate the Latino presence during this period many of those early Spanish explorers were Mexican-born Spanish subjects. However, a more sustained exploration of Washington did not begin until the late eighteenth century with Spanish Captain Juan Perez who anchored off Vancouver Island in the early 1770s. Shortly afterwards Bruno Heceta and Juan de la Bodega explored the Olympic Peninsula. In the end the Spanish/Latino crew made four expeditions to Washington State during the 1700s. In the process, two settlements were established in the 1790s at Neah Bay (Nuñez Goana) and Vancouver Island. Nuñez Goana (est. 1792) was the first non-Native settlement in the state of Washington.

Two Mexicans in particular contributed greatly to early knowledge of Washington State. José Mariano Moziño participated in the 1792 expedition, known as the Malaspian

Expedition. He produced an ecological catalog of 200 species of plants, animals, and birds. He documented his research in *Noticias de Nuka: An Account of Nootka Sound* in 1792. Also a member of the Malaspian Expedition, Anastasio Echeverría was considered the best artist in Mexico at the time. Echeverría sketched one of the first detailed landscape profiles of the area. The Spanish expeditions to Washington State made many discoveries, but by the late eighteenth century, conflicts in Europe and Latin America forced Spain to abandon its claim to the region. In 1819, the United States and Spain signed the Adams-Onís Treaty in which Spain gave up its claim to the Pacific Northwest and sold Florida to the U.S. Washington became part of Oregon Territory in 1848, became Washington Territory in 1853, and became a state in 1889. Through it all, the Latino legacy remained.

Latino Presence and Contributions: Nineteenth Century

The second half of the nineteenth century marks important developments in Washington. The era represents the increase of a U.S. military presence, the removal of the indigenous population from their ancestral homelands, the expansion of European American settlement, and eventual statehood for Washington. This period also represents a continued Latino presence and experience in the region due to the expansion in cattle ranching, trade transportation, mining, and other economic activities associated with the settlement and formation of the Northwest territories.

Before statehood, Latinos contributed to the early economic development of the region. After 1819 two economies developed in Washington State: fur trapping and mining. Latinos were not instrumental to the fur trapping business, but they created the backbone of the transportation system for the mining economy of the late nineteenth century.

The Mexican mule-pack system was in regular use in the mining economy of California during the mid-eighteenth century.

The discovery of gold in British Columbia and Idaho during the late 1850s prompted many miners to go through the future Washington State and stop there to purchase provisions.

Before the 1870s the lack of commercial overland transportation hindered development of Washington Territory. Walla Walla was center of mining activity and by 1870 had a large Mexican population, which developed the region's first dependable means of commercial transportation. However, the formation of significant and permanent Latino communities did not emerge in Washington until the twentieth century.



Latinos and El Norte: Early Twentieth Century Settlement Patterns

The emergence of Latino communities in Washington was the result of several factors. First, the development of Mexico's northern region and the American southwest in the early twentieth century, which pushed thousands of Mexicans towards the north and eventually into the United States. Simultaneously, Mexico experienced political turmoil with its revolution. Between 1910 and 1920 nearly 500,000 Mexicans had fled to the U.S. The expansion of the U.S agriculture industry and the Mexican Revolution resulted in a large increase in the Mexican population along the U.S.-Mexican border, which in turn created competition for work where supply surpassed demand. The over supply of labor created the movement of large numbers of Mexicans to regions outside of the Southwest and into places like the Northwest, which created the first Latino migratory routes into Washington.

A number of historians have documented the arrival of Latinos into the state as early as 1907. Although the Mexican Revolution caused much of this movement, it should be noted that labor recruitment played a crucial role in bringing Mexicans into Washington to work in the salmon canneries of Seattle. Immigration policy of the early twentieth century also played a role in establishing a Latino presence in Washington. Due to labor shortages in the agriculture industry the head tax and literacy tests of the 1917 Immigration Act were waived for Mexicans employed by the Utah and Idaho Sugar Company. As agricultural production exploded in Washington so did the presence of Latinos. Other industries such as timber, railroad, and construction companies recruited Latino labor to the state during the 1920s.

The 1930 Census provided the first and only time the label Mexican was used as a racial category with limited results. Many Latinos during this era refused to identify as Mexicans, thus an accurate count remained elusive. Nevertheless, the 1930 census counted 1.3 million individuals of Mexican ancestry in the country. Washington State had a Latino population of approximately one thousand individuals. However, with the economic downturn and depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s Latino immigration to the state, like elsewhere, significantly dropped. Indeed, communities with large Mexican populations instigated deportation drives of Mexican labor with the worst occurring in places such as California, Michigan, and Indiana. Washington was not immune to these deportations even though the state had a relatively small Mexican population. For example, the city of



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Spokane rounded up what few Mexicans could be found and had them deported. Another source indicates that officials interested in lowering incarceration costs agreed to commute the jail sentences of Mexican prisoners if they consented to deportation. As a result, ninety Mexican prisoners at McNeil Federal Penitentiary were returned to Mexico in 1932. Overall, there is no reliable way to estimate how many Latinos arrived or were recruited to Washington during the 1930s. However, newspaper accounts, images, diaries, and interviews indicate that the Great Depression did not stop growers from recruiting Latino migratory workers to the region.

Prior to the outbreak of U.S. involvement in World War II, the U.S. had an overall Latino population of 1.6 million. Washington State had a Latino population of approximately 2,500 individuals. With U.S. involvement in the war dramatic changes occurred throughout the nation and the state. The mobilization for the war effort created critical shortages of labor throughout the country. For the state of Washington a critical labor shortage occurred in agriculture and as a result state and federal officials organized a two-prong approach to alleviate the shortage. First, it increased labor recruitment of primarily Mexican Americans from Texas, California, Colorado, and Wyoming. Second, the U.S. government entered into a bilateral agreement with Mexico for the importation of Mexican nationals (males) to work in agriculture and the railroad industry. This bilateral agreement became known as the Bracero Program ². By 1945 Washington State comprised six percent of the total number of Braceros imported to the United States. For Washington State the use of Braceros lasted from 1943-1947 with 16,182 Braceros employed throughout Washington. Unlike those in the Southwest, Northwest braceros endured colder winters and received little protection from U.S. and Mexican government officials. A series of Bracero strikes and high transportation costs convinced Washington farmers to stop importing Braceros in 1947 and shift to Mexican migrant families from Texas and other Southwest states.

Simultaneously during the war years other Latinos were arriving in Washington as service members of the U.S. Armed Forces who were stationed at Ft. Lewis and Ft. Lawton near Tacoma and Seattle, Fairchild Airbase in Spokane, and Larsen Airfield in Moses Lake, and Ephrata Air Terminal. Documentation shows that many of the Latino military personnel stationed in Washington during World War II remained after the war rather than return to the Southwest. Overall during the 1940s a large number of Latinos from various occupational backgrounds came to Washington due to the war effort and participated either as Braceros, farm laborers, or as U.S. military personnel. This movement resulted in a large increase in the Latino population and the creation of vibrant communities throughout Washington. For the state and Latinos, World War II was a watershed moment.

Latino Migration and Community Formation: 1950s

The majority of the Latino population of Washington can trace its roots to the post-World War II era. Several major developments occurred during the 1950s that changed the make-up of the Latino population. First, Latinos became more diverse and urban. Although many Latinos continued to gravitate to rural communities for agricultural work, thousands more traveled to urban centers such as Seattle, Spokane, Yakima, and the I-5 corridor, working in non-agricultural industries or establishing their own businesses. Thus, the post-World War II era illustrates the urbanization of Latinos and their entrepreneurial spirit in Washington. In fact, Latino owned businesses emerged in Seattle and Spokane as early as 1954 and 1960, respectively. In the urban areas the population of Latinos became more diverse, but remained heavily of Mexican origin.

² The term Bracero comes from the Spanish word brazo or arm. Thus, the nickname “bracero” generally refers to those who use their arms for labor.

Second, as water became available to regions such as the Columbia Basin in North Central Washington, additional opportunities and year-round work emerged that created a new wave of migrants to Eastern and North Central Washington. These migrants were primarily from south Texas. Others migrated to other regions of Eastern Washington from the Yakima Valley. Communities such as Quincy, Moses Lake, Royal City, Warden, and Pasco saw their Latino populations increase significantly during the 1950s.



Third, during the early 1950s the U.S. became involved in the Korean Conflict that instigated another wave of Latinos to Washington. Like World War Two, the Korean War created the need for additional labor and Latinos heeded the call for help as farm laborers, and military personnel. This period also showed early signs of a Latino professional class as some Latinos came to Washington with advanced degrees.

Lastly, as the Latino population in Washington matured and the Latino generation returning from World War Two and the Korean Conflict had empowered themselves, Washington became a place where change was needed. The relatively small Latino population organized in a variety of ways during the 1950s in order to exert not only their place in society, but demand the same rights that many had fought and died for in the European and Pacific theatres of war. Latin American Clubs, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) organizations, and the Mexican American Federation sprang up in many communities such as Seattle, Quincy, Yakima, Othello, Moses Lake, and Olympia. These early signs of community mobilization prepared the Latino community for the explosive and challenging 1960s.



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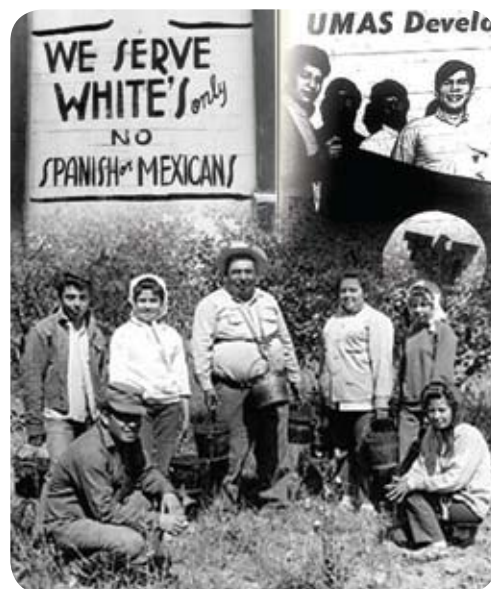


Latin American Refugees and El Movimiento in Washington: 1960s and 1970s

Nationally, by the end of the 1960s there were approximately 9.6 million Latinos in the United States. Latinos in Washington represented roughly 2.1 percent of the overall state population of 3.1 million or about 65,000 Latinos. Through the 1960s and 1970s the Latino population remained mostly of Mexican origin, however, an increasing diversity of the Latino population continued due to U.S. foreign policy in Latin America that was driven by the Cold War. First, a regime change on the island of Cuba in 1959 challenged U.S. hegemony in the region. As animosity developed with the emerging socialist state in Cuba the U.S. subsequently placed an economic embargo on the Castro administration. The result was a large movement of Cubans to the U.S., including a small number

that came to Washington State. The 1960s and 1970s also represent a period when left wing movements in Central and South America began to challenge U.S. supported dictatorships in places such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Chile. As revolutions and political turmoil gripped these regions, large numbers of refugees, especially from Central America migrated to the U.S. For example, starting in 1979 Salvadoran rebels fought the U.S. backed national army that resulted in over 75,000 deaths and nearly one million Salvadoran refugees immigrated to the U.S. Guatemala and Nicaragua also exploded into civil wars during the 1970s. Prior to the 1960s Latinos, other than Mexicans, were almost statistically non-existent. U.S. involvement in Latin America during the twentieth century has substantially contributed to the making of the Latino population in the U.S. Likewise, U.S. economic and cultural hegemony have contributed to uprooting Latinos from throughout Latin America and the Caribbean leading to their resettlement in the United States. As the twentieth century came to a close economic and political turmoil in Central and South America resulted in changes in the overall Latino population in Washington State.

There was also a large change in the migrant circuit as more and more Latinos of Mexican origin opted to settle in Washington. Although Latinos' work was welcomed in Washington State, they faced discrimination. As in the Southwest, this led to confrontation during the late 1960s and 1970s. Latinos in Washington State joined the civil rights fight and established a distinct movement of their own. Similar to the Southwest, the civil rights movement for Latinos in Washington began incrementally. As communities throughout Washington came of age they established important community organizations such as Latin American Associations of the early and mid-1960s, which evolved into more politicized entities such as the Progressive League of United Mexican Americans or PLUMA, established in 1967. PLUMA was active in the Columbia Basin during the late 1960s. PLUMA in turn instigated the need for a statewide organization initially known as the Mexican American Federation (MAF),



which was established in 1968 and had active chapters in both Eastern and Western Washington. In fact, MAF is the predecessor to the current Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs.

One of the most important civil rights organizations to emerge from Washington is the United Farm Workers Co-op in Toppenish in 1967. This organization was instrumental with mobilizing the community in regards to farm workers rights, providing low cost food from their co-op, creating a farm workers clinic, and is the precursor to the United Farm Workers of Washington State, that eventually joined Cesar Chavez's national farm workers union, the United Farm Workers of America.



The Latino student population of Washington was crucial in addressing the needs of Chicano and Latino Students in the K-12 system as well as higher education. Students at the University of Washington formed the United Mexican American Students (UMAS) in 1968. This organization evolved into the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA) or the Chicano Student Movement of Aztlan in 1969. Both of these groups mobilized students to demand equality throughout the educational system. Students at the University of Washington formed a chapter of the Brown Berets in 1968 and Chicano activists in the Yakima Valley formed another in 1969. The Brown Berets were often portrayed as a radical, para-military, and nationalistic organization that demanded an end to the occupation of Mexico's northern territory conquered by the United States in 1848. However, in Washington the Brown Berets participated in food drives, raised funds for legal defense, and tutored young students in the Yakima Valley and Seattle area.

In the urban sector El Centro de La Raza was established in 1972 in Seattle, Washington by a group of activists who occupied a vacant school building and refused to leave until the local school district agreed to lease the building for one dollar per year. El Centro is a multi-service community organization. It operates a preschool, provides meals to the needy, offers ESL classes, stages cultural events, and hosts other progressive community initiatives. The early 1970s also represents the establishment of Chicano Studies at the University of Washington, Washington State University, and Eastern Washington University. And in 1979 Radio KDNA was established as Washington's first Spanish language public radio station from Granger, Washington.

The 1960s and 1970s provided numerous challenges to the Latino population in Washington. Because a large contingent of Latinos came as migrant laborers, opportunities were limited due to a lack of upward mobility. However, as the national war on poverty developed agencies began to look for ways to alleviate the causes. Many of the barriers created during this period were also the result of lingering animosity towards Latinos, discrimination, and unequal access to education. Vital to the changes that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s were the Chicano and Latino organizations that emerged and challenged unfair practices of discrimination at all levels of society. Finally, as Latinos began to settle permanently in Washington, the subsequent generations gained and earned opportunities not afforded to their parents.





Growth and Change: 1980s-1990s

The 1980 Census indicated that the Latino population in Washington had grown to 3 percent of the state's total population or approximately 123,000, a significant increase from 1970. As the decade of the 1980s progressed important developments in the economy and immigration policy became national debates as the country plunged into a recession that put immigrant labor within the cross hairs of the immigration question. The result of this debate was the passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), and as the name implies, the policy became an additional layer for the control and use of labor. However, these mechanisms of national control of labor did not deter growers and employers from utilizing undocumented Latino labor. The increase in undocumented workers entering the country and working in industries, that had become reliant on immigrant labor, such as the agricultural, service, and construction industries was a symptom of larger forces that included a co-dependency in which workers and growers were reliant on each other, but also an immigration policy that for decades had encouraged the clandestine movement of Latino labor to the United States. Embedded within this new immigration policy was a program allowing undocumented workers to become "legal" residents by meeting certain conditions. Over 32,000 Mexicans in Washington came forward to apply for legal residency and permanently changed the ethnic and demographic make-up of the state. Indeed, the 1980s were a precursor of what was to come in regards to the Latino population in Washington and by the end of the decade the Latino population had nearly doubled to 214,570 persons.

Examining the dramatic change in the Latino population of Washington can easily be illustrated with North Central Washington (NCW) between 1960 and 2000. Between this forty-year span the Latino population grew an astounding 2,257% from 7,596 people to 201,820. During this same period, the white population grew only 21% from 360,702 to 438,135. From 1990-2000 NCW recorded a 140 percent increase in its Latino population, mostly of Mexican origin. Based on the 2000 Census, Mexicans represent large percentages in communities throughout NCW. For example, they represent over 21 percent of Wenatchee's population; 65 percent of Quincy's population; over 25 percent of Moses Lake's population; 60 percent of Brewster's population; 90 percent of Mattawa's population; 65 percent of Bridgeport's population; and 78 percent of Royal City's population. Immigration, coupled with Latinos as the youngest ethnic group in the nation, as well as high fertility rates explain part of the demographic shift that has been occurring.

Latinos, Immigration, and Demographic Shifts: 2000-Present

Latinos today represent the largest minority group in the nation. While the origins of Latinos can be traced worldwide from Central and South America to the Caribbean and Spain, the largest group, Mexicans, have long established migratory routes into the United States.

The 2000 U.S. Census revealed a substantial Latino population growth reaching beyond the traditional zone of the American Southwest. For example, Washington State recorded a Latino population of 441,509. Nationally, between 1990 and 2000 Latinos grew an astonishing 54 percent. The 2006 U.S. Census update revealed continued growth with an overall Latino population approaching 45 million.



While Mexicans in Washington remain the largest Latino segment, other Latinos have also grown significantly. The 2007 American Community Survey showed an increasing diversity among Latino sub-groups in Washington, with different immigration and migration patterns into and within the United States. At the state level Mexican/Mexican Americans remain dominant at 80.1 percent; Puerto Ricans represent 3.7 percent; Central Americans are 4.5 percent; South Americans 2.2 percent; and other Latino 8.8 percent.

As of 2008, there were over 47 million Latinos residing in the United States representing 15.4 percent of the nation's population. With a Latino population of approximately 668,288 or 9.8 percent of the total state population, Washington State has seen a significant increase in its Latino population in the past ten to fifteen years. Indeed, Washington is ranked thirteenth in the nation with its total Latino population. Yet, as has been discussed Latinos are not newcomers to Washington State.

The overall reaction to the demographic shifts of the past two decades has been mixed. While some openly oppose the invitation to immigrants strictly on prejudicial grounds, others are concerned that an unchecked and unplanned growth based on immigration will create more problems than it will solve. Ultimately, the momentum that began decades earlier continues unabated. In the early twenty-first century Latinos remain the fastest growing population segment nationally and in the state of Washington.

More importantly, a critical mass of Latinos has not translated into a political voice, with few Latino elected officials in the entire state, especially at its highest levels. To date there has not been a single U.S. Senator or Congressman of Latino ancestry elected to office, a most troubling fact considering the high concentration of Latinos in certain regions, counties and cities in Washington. Thus, while Latinos are increasing their numbers and contributing to the growth and development of Washington, they remain a politically marginalized group. As this population continues to grow important questions need to be addressed regarding their position and the important role Latinos will have in Washington's future.

About the Author

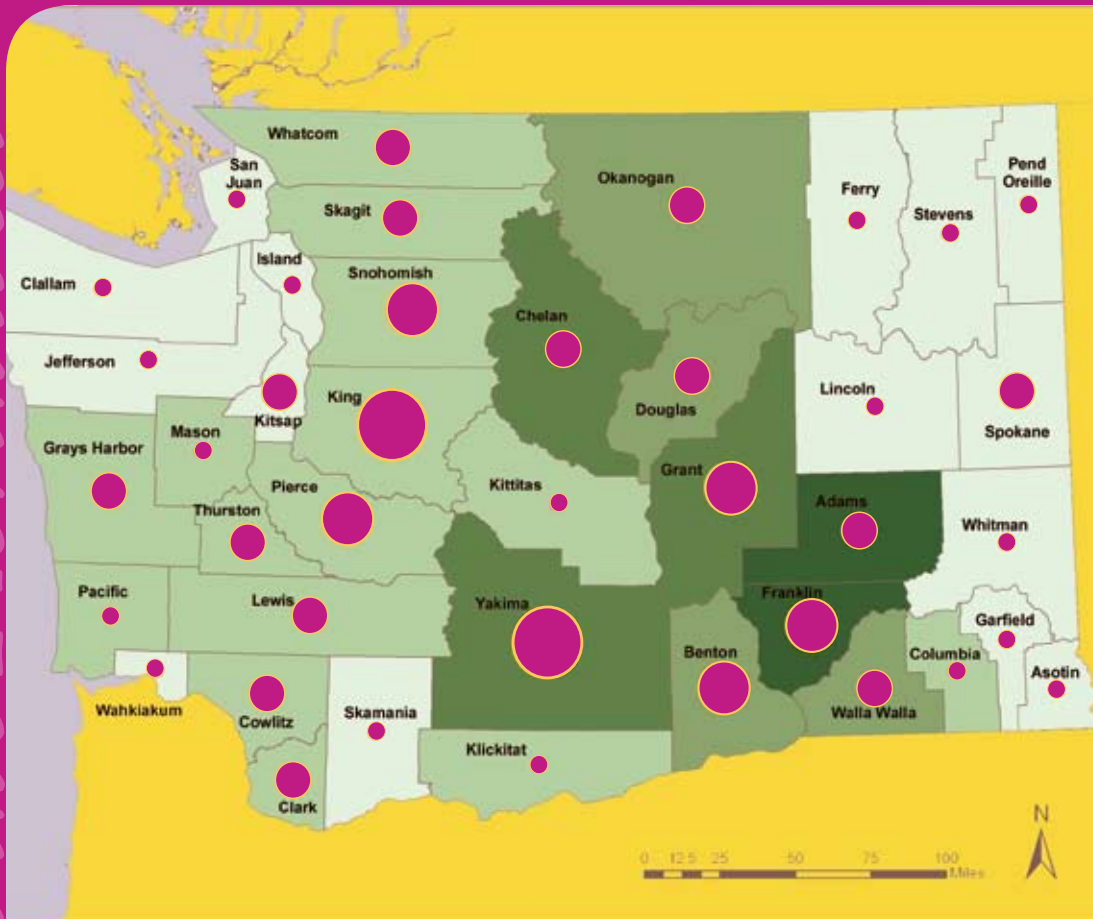
Jerry Garcia was born and raised in Quincy, Washington, the heart of the Columbia Basin. Upon graduation from high school, he served three years in Japan with the U.S. Army where he was commissioned a Second Lieutenant. Following his military service he attended Eastern Washington University and received his B.A. in 1987. After three years as a Community Corrections Officer he returned to Eastern Washington University and received his M.A. in History in 1993. Garcia entered the PhD program in History at Washington State University and completed it in 1999 with a dissertation titled "Japanese Immigration and Community Formation in Mexico, 1897-1940."

Dr. Garcia's first academic appointment was with Iowa State University, History Department and Latino/a Studies Program from 1999-2004. From 2004 through Fall 2009 Dr. Garcia was an Assistant Professor with the History Department and the Chicano/Latino Studies Department at Michigan State University. Beginning January 2010 Dr. Garcia begins a new appointment as Director of the Chicano Education Program at Eastern Washington University.

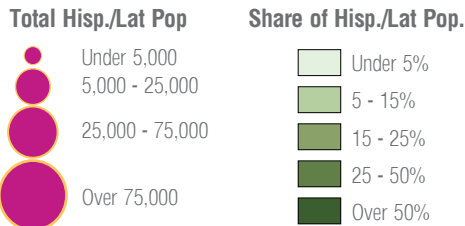
A widely published author, Dr. Garcia's upcoming publications include, *Paradox of Whiteness: Myth, Popular Culture, and the Racialization of Mexicans in the United States*; *Japanese Immigration and Community Formation in Mexico, 1897-1945*; *Mexicanos in Greater Aztlan: From the Pacific Northwest to the New South*.

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County Name	Total Population	Hisp./Lat. Population	Percent Share
Adams	17,800	9,629	54.1
Asotin	21,400	491	2.3
Benton	165,500	26,869	16.2
Chelan	72,100	18,073	25.1
Clallam	69,200	3,218	4.7
Clark	424,200	24,914	5.9
Columbia	4,100	314	7.7
Cowlitz	99,000	6,048	6.1
Douglas	37,000	9,030	24.4
Ferry	7,700	228	3.0
Franklin	70,200	41,628	59.3
Garfield	2,300	65	2.8
Grant	84,600	30,951	36.6
Grays Harbor	70,900	5,352	7.5
Island	79,300	3,840	4.8
Jefferson	28,800	780	2.7
King	1,884,200	127,933	6.8
Kitsap	246,800	12,143	4.9
Kittitas	39,400	2,589	6.6
Klickitat	20,100	1,953	9.7
Lewis	74,700	5,443	7.3
Lincoln	10,400	248	2.4
Mason	56,300	3,519	6.3
Okanogan	40,100	7,164	17.9
Pacific	21,800	1,457	6.7
Pend Oreille	12,800	267	2.1
Pierce	805,400	54,952	6.8
San Juan	16,100	423	2.6
Skagit	117,500	17,562	14.9
Skamania	10,700	510	4.8
Snohomish	696,600	41,281	5.9
Spokane	459,000	15,287	3.3
Stevens	43,700	928	2.1
Thurston	245,300	13,149	5.4
Wahkiakum	4,100	115	2.8
Walla Walla	58,600	11,542	19.7
Whatcom	191,000	12,230	6.4
Whitman	43,000	1,455	3.4
Yakima	235,900	100,348	42.5
Washington	6,587,600	613,929	9.3



HISPANIC LATINO APRIL 1, 2008 POPULATION ESTIMATE BY RACE BY COUNTY

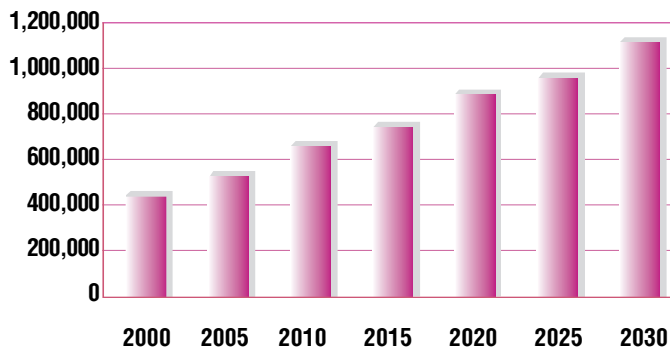
Washington State
Office of Financial Management



Forecasting Division
Kyle Reese-Cassal
October, 2008

Note: Hispanic is an ethnic category, Hispanics can be of any race

WASHINGTON STATE HISPANIC/LATIN POPULATION
2000-2030



Data sources: 2008 county race estimate and projections. Produced by Washington State Office of Financial Management Forecasting

COUNTIES IN WASHINGTON STATE WITH THE HIGHEST
PERCENTAGE HISPANIC/LATINO POPULATION - 2008

County	Rank	%	Hispanic/Latino	Overall
Franklin	1	59.3	9,629	17,800
Adams	2	54.1	41,628	70,200
Yakima	3	42.5	100,348	235,900
Grant	4	36.6	30,951	84,600
Chelan	5	25.1	18,073	72,100
Douglas	6	24.4	9,030	37,000

Data sources: 2008 county race estimate and projections. Produced by Washington State Office of Financial Management Forecasting