

Spanish...and English Spoken

The Hispanic Media in the United States

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Simon Cipriano, a popular Hispanic radio host in the United States.

More than 350 million people speak Spanish as a mother tongue in Spain and the Americas alone. If we add the 70 million who speak it as a second language, it becomes the third-largest language group in the world. In addition to being the official language in 21 countries, a large part of the U.S. population also speaks Spanish as its first language: about 15 million Latino U.S. residents were born abroad, and official figures show that of the 28.1 million Spanish speakers living in the United States, a little over 14 million state that they also speak English “very well.”¹

In all, the Hispanic community, which in 2000 became the largest ethnic minority in the country, has purchasing power of about US\$798 billion a year.² In addition, their participation in society is growing in practically all spheres,

from the workplace to politics. While many have not severed ties to their communities of origin, most have become almost completely integrated into their new surroundings.

This article is a summary of information from the book *Los medios de comunicación en español en Estados Unidos* (The Spanish-language Media in the United States), with a broad overview of Hispanic media, as well as some important information about the print media and specialized radio in the U.S.³

BILINGUAL AND SPANISH-LANGUAGE MEDIA

Given the rapid growth of Spanish-language and bilingual media and heterogeneous selection criteria for data bases, it has been very difficult to define a truly standardized universe, particularly regarding print media and radio. On the one hand,

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data bases normally include only those who purchase advertising space, and many lists include radio stations from northern Mexico and Puerto Rico, covering the southwestern United States. Selection criteria also vary. For example, some directories classify simple ad sheets as weeklies; others include radio stations that broadcast full time in Spanish, while yet others include in that same category stations that broadcast more than 10 or 20 hours in Spanish. Thus, statistically speaking, it has not been possible to have an official figure.

We have been able to identify 1,436 publications and broadcasters that we divide into four categories: print media, radio, television and internet. We used the following criteria: we excluded official publications of organizations or associations, including religious ones; only media sources with offices in the United States were incorporated and, in the case of the print media, those who published there. With regard to internet media, we included only one of all the electronic addresses available for each organization, company and media outlet, to avoid duplication. And we ruled out personal web sites or blogs.

Table 1 shows the results. Based on its information, we can see that of all the specialized media in the Hispanic community that we identified, around 47 percent are print media; a little over 35 percent are radio stations; the 230 television stations represent 16 percent; and only 2 percent are internet web sites. We can also note that the dominant format is Spanish-language, followed by bilingual (Spanish and English, even if not in a 50-50 ratio), and lastly, English only. The category marked "Other" includes Portuguese and trilingual (Spanish-English-Portuguese) publications.

Naturally, these media sources are geographically distributed according to the concentration and distribution of

the Hispanic-origin population in the United States. We found specialized media in 38 states and the District of Columbia, as Table 2 shows. The states with the greatest number of media outlets, in descending order, are California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois and Arizona, concentrating a little over 70 percent, or 1,014 outlets. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the states with the fewest specialized media outlets are Louisiana, Wisconsin and Hawaii, which has a single Spanish-language television station and one web site. In Alaska, Vermont, North Dakota and New Hampshire, we found no evidence whatsoever of Hispanic media, while in Iowa, Kentucky, Montana, Mississippi, South Dakota, West Virginia and Wyoming, the media we found did not cover the selection criteria used in this research project. It should be pointed out that most of the states in the table (21, including the District of Columbia) made for less than one percent of the total number of outlets. Most of these states are in the Midwest, where the concentration of Hispanics is less than nine percent of the population.⁴ New migratory flows herald a change, given that since 2000, the states with a low Latino population, like Tennessee, Maryland, Alabama and Rhode Island, have seen an increase in the number of their inhabitants born outside the U.S., mainly in Mexico.⁵

PRINT MEDIA

As pointed out above, we identified 676 specialized print media outlets serving Hispanic communities in 242 cities in 38 states. These publications can be divided into three categories: directories, newspapers and magazines. Almost 65 percent are newspapers; almost one-third, magazines; and

LANGUAGE	FORMAT				TOTAL BY FORMAT	%
	PRINT MEDIA	RADIO	TELEVISION	INTERNET		
Bilingual	166	25	5	6	202	14.1
Spanish	405	473	223	10	1,111	77.4
English	99	9	2	7	117	8.1
Other	6	—	—	—	6	0.4
Total	676	507	230	23	1,436	100

Source: *Los medios de comunicación en español en Estados Unidos*, p. 26. See footnote 3.

TABLE 2
 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF MEDIA OUTLETS

STATE	FORMAT				TOTAL BY STATE	%
	PRINT MEDIA	RADIO	TELEVISION	INTERNET		
Alabama	3	1	—	—	4	0.3
Arizona	10	25	9	1	45	3.1
Arkansas	2	6	3	—	11	0.8
California	180	142	58	8	388	27.0
Colorado	9	14	7	1	31	2.2
Connecticut	6	7	3	—	16	1.1
Delaware	2	1	—	1	4	0.3
District of Columbia	4	—	—	—	4	0.3
Florida	118	39	20	6	183	12.7
Georgia	17	10	4	—	31	2.2
Hawaii	—	—	1	1	2	0.1
Idaho	1	6	1	—	8	0.6
Illinois	35	16	4	—	55	3.8
Indiana	2	1	2	—	5	0.3
Kansas	1	3	1	—	5	0.3
Louisiana	1	2	—	—	3	0.2
Maryland	1	5	1	—	7	0.5
Massachusetts	5	9	6	—	20	1.4
Michigan	7	4	—	—	11	0.8
Minnesota	6	1	—	—	7	0.5
Missouri	6	—	—	—	6	0.4
Nebraska	3	2	—	—	5	0.3
Nevada	6	7	9	—	22	1.5
New Jersey	21	1	1	—	23	1.6
New Mexico	7	31	7	—	45	3.1
New York	57	8	5	4	74	5.2
North Carolina	8	7	1	—	16	1.1
Ohio	6	3	1	—	10	0.7
Oklahoma	5	5	2	—	12	0.8
Oregon	6	5	8	—	19	1.3
Pennsylvania	11	4	2	—	17	1.2
Rhode Island	1	2	1	—	4	0.3
South Carolina	3	1	2	—	6	0.4
Tennessee	5	5	—	—	10	0.7
Texas	90	117	61	1	269	18.7
Utah	4	3	5	—	12	0.8
Virginia	14	—	1	—	15	1.0
Washington	10	14	4	—	28	1.9
Wisconsin	3	—	—	—	3	0.2
Total	676	507	230	23	1,436	100

Source: *Los medios de comunicación en español en Estados Unidos*, p. 30. See footnote 3.

Because of their feeling of socio-cultural belonging, historically Hispanics have created media that deal with what is happening both inside and outside their community. This began three centuries ago and has never stopped growing.

the rest, 5.1 percent, are directories. Six out of every ten publications are completely Spanish-language; one-fourth, bilingual, and the rest, 14 percent, are published exclusively in English. Most of the Hispanic publications (44 percent) are weeklies; one-fourth are monthlies; and the rest come out every two weeks (9 percent), quarterly (7 percent) or annually (6 percent). Seventy-four percent of them have a circulation of fewer than 50,000 copies.

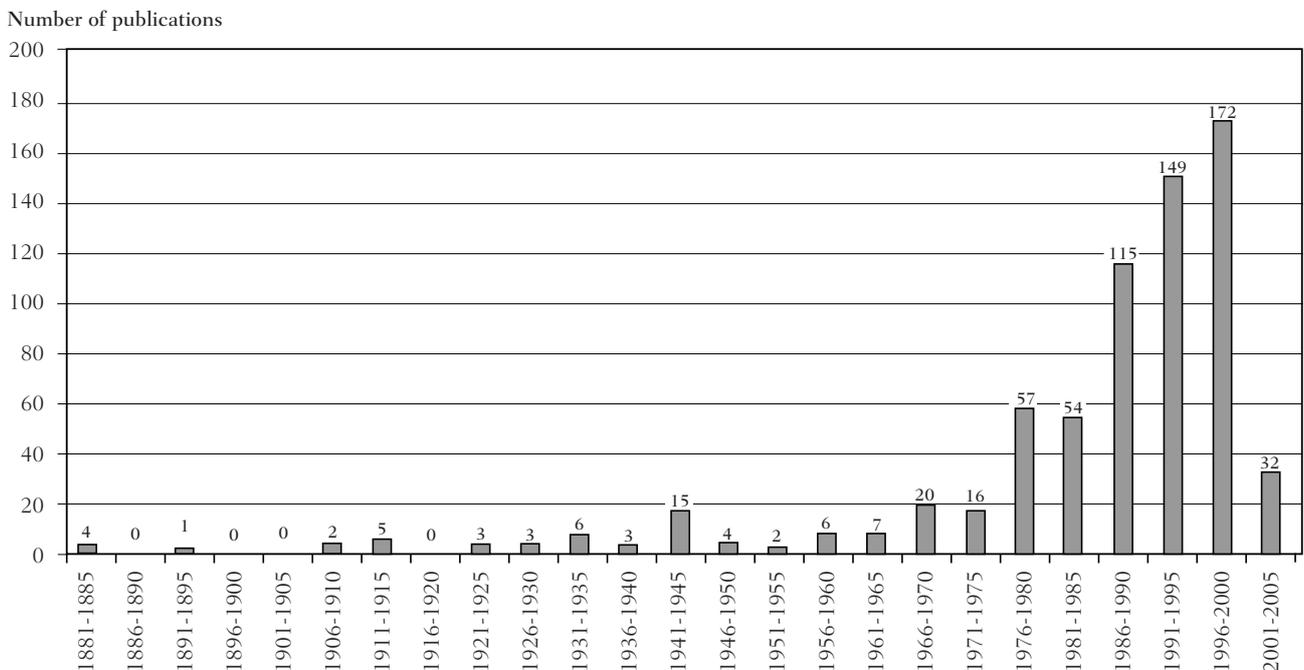
Graph 1 traces the years when the publications were founded. This information gives us a general idea of the historic evolution of the print media from the beginning of the twentieth century until the first five years of the twenty-first century. The data shows that in the early part of the last century, Latinos had access to only five specialized publications.⁶ By 1925, that figure had doubled, and by mid-century, there

were 46 publications with different formats. It was during World War II that more Spanish-language publications were founded to inform the communities about events in Europe. In the following years, they grew steadily, but between 1976 and 1985, growth skyrocketed 114 percent. By the second half of the 1980s and the early 1990s, we see a growth of 127 percent, which slowed down then to 43 percent.

RADIO

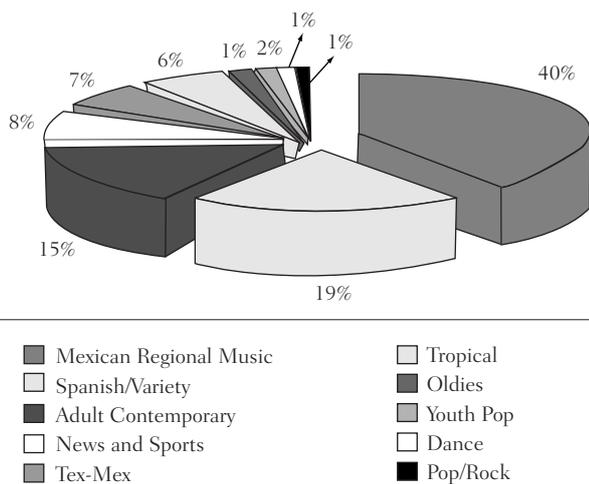
Two hundred fourteen U.S. cities have radio stations targeting the Hispanic community (507 in all in 34 states). Whether in Spanish, English or bilingually, eight out of every 10 broadcast 24 hours a day, delivering very varied programming to their listeners, mostly people over 18.⁷ Graph 2 shows the diversity of contents and the proportion in which the radio stations use them. For example, two out of every five stations broadcast Mexican regional music, including *banda*, *ranchera*, *mariachi*, *norteña*, *huapangos*, etc. Nineteen percent broadcast Spanish-language hits, including everything from salsa to pop music. The romantic music, ballads and international pop hits preferred by today's adults are broadcast by 15

GRAPH 1
YEARS PRINT MEDIA WERE FOUNDED



Source: *Los medios de comunicación en español en Estados Unidos*, p. 34.

GRAPH 2
PROGRAMMING ON HISPANIC RADIO STATIONS



Source: *Los medios de comunicación en español en Estados Unidos*, p. 34. See footnote 3.

percent of the stations. News and sports stations make up eight percent of the sample, while *tejano* or Tex-Mex and “tropical” music (salsa, cumbia and merengue) make up 7 percent and 6 percent respectively. The rest of the stations play oldies, youth pop, dance and pop/rock music.

CONCLUSIONS

Because of their feeling of socio-cultural belonging, throughout their history, Hispanics have created media dealing with what is happening both inside and outside their community. This began three centuries ago with print media and it has never stopped growing. Its profile has changed as the Hispanic community has evolved and, above all, as technology has facilitated its dissemination. Understanding the characteristics of media specialized in the U.S. Hispanic community allows us to identify the areas that strengthen trade, educational and cultural relations with that community, as well as to improve our communication with them, supporting dialogue and optimizing efforts to get better results.

The media have a dual function as both display windows and promoters of the cultural identity of the communities they serve: they offer spaces for communication and understanding among their audiences and readers; they service cultural needs; and they help people who are far away from their places of origin feel a little more at home. They also

help define the profiles of those communities and facilitate their interaction with the rest of society, mainly through the use of Spanish and bilingual formats. Despite the fact that their origins are Hispanic, many of the media outlets targeting that community are being bought up by Anglos, who have noted the big economic potential of this sector of consumers.

With time, the figures will rise and, thanks to external stimuli, like the coming U.S. presidential elections, it is very probable that the Hispanic media will incorporate new elements, mainly low-investment electronic media that become highly visible by crossing borders. However, the challenge that these media outlets face today, mainly the ones in Spanish, is increasing the participation of Latinos in the different facets of their industry. This is especially due to the Hispanic media’s success story and how they have attracted the Anglo business community, which little by little has bought up printing houses, radio stations, television stations and web sites that originally belonged to Latinos. In addition, it will also be important to increase original programming, which will undoubtedly be closer to the day-to-day lives of the Hispanic community than programming imported from Spanish-speaking countries abroad. **MM**

NOTES

- ¹ The 15 million Latinos born abroad represent about 40 percent of the Hispanic population identified by the 2002 census carried out by the U.S. Census Bureau.
- ² Jeffrey M. Humphreys, “The Multicultural Economy 2006,” Table 3, *Georgia Business and Economic Conditions GBEC*, vol. 66, no. 3 (Athens, Georgia), published by the Selig Center for Economic Growth/The University of Georgia.
- ³ Graciela Orozco and Celina Bárcenas, *Los medios de comunicación en español en Estados Unidos* (Mexico City: Fundación Solidaridad Mexicano Americana, A.C./ILCE, 2005). For more information, see www.fsma.org.mx
- ⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, *Profiles of General Demographic Characteristics 2000*, Table D-P1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, May 2001).
- ⁵ Fundación Solidaridad Mexicano Americana, *Análisis de la población mexicana en Estados Unidos*, Table 2, internal document (August 2002).
- ⁶ Since the eighteenth century, dozens of small publications began to be published to inform Spaniards about events in Spain, and later, about the independence of New Spain. In 1808, *El Misisipi de Nuevo Orleans* was first published, and a year later, *El mensajero de Louisiana*, considered the first Hispanic newspapers in the U.S. F. Subervi-Vélez, “Mass Communication and Hispanics,” F. Padilla, ed., *Handbook of Hispanic Cultures in the U.S.* (Houston, Texas: Arte Público Press, 1994).
- ⁷ Most stations identify their target audiences using different age group intervals. For practical purposes, the study used the following age groups: under 12; from 12 to 17; from 18 to 24; from 25 to 34; and over 35, in the main.