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The rise of Hispanics

by Sarah A. Klein March 31, 2008



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Of all the demographic changes in Chicago over the past 30 years, one stands out: the increase in the city's Hispanic population.

The shift has transformed the racial and ethnic makeup of Chicago, altering its image as a town once dominated by European ethnic groups and blacks. It's also transformed the city's economy, created new consumer markets and business models and changed the political landscape.

The numbers tell the story. Hispanic residents, who numbered 420,710, or 14% of the city's population, in 1980, totaled 774,042 in 2006, nearly a third of

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Discrimination appears to be a factor, says Mary Gonzalez-Koenig, CEO of the Spanish Coalition for Jobs. "How many Latinos are there in corporate boardrooms?" she says.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS

Despite those imbalances, businesses have recognized Hispanics' economic importance. A study by the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia found that Hispanic buying power nationwide reached \$860 billion last year, surpassing all other minority groups. By comparison, blacks spent \$845 billion.

Auto companies such as Ford Motor Co. and consumer giants like Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and Home Depot Inc. are tapping into that growing buying power and have created more culturally specific, bilingual advertisements for the Hispanic market.

The city's economy also has benefited from Hispanic entrepreneurs who not only know how to target their product to a particular market but who also reach out to customers in Spanish. Real Latino Images LLC, a Chicago-based stock-photo business, and San Jose Group, an advertising agency that targets the Hispanic market, are two examples of the trend.

Looking ahead, the most significant result of this demographic upheaval may be political. Indeed, Chicago has already benefited from it. Had Hispanics not offset an otherwise declining population, the area would have lost a congressional seat. "I would hate to see what Chicago would look like if not for that community," says U.S. Rep. Luis Gutierrez, D-Chicago.

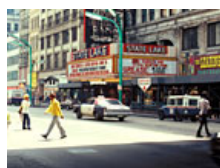
Rising population results in increased political power, and Hispanic politicians in Chicago are clearly ascendant. Anita Alvarez, a career prosecutor and the daughter of a Mexican immigrant father and Hungarian mother, won the Democratic nomination for Cook County state's attorney in February. If she beats her Republican opponent, Cook County Commissioner Tony Peraica, in the November election, she will be the first Hispanic to head the office.

Can a Hispanic mayor of Chicago be far behind?



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There's been no shortage of drama in Chicago business, politics, the economy and, of course, sports over the past 30 years. Here's a quick look at some of the key events that helped shape our city and the world since Crain's Chicago Business came to town.



30 years on State Street



State Street 360



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George L. San Jose President and Chief Creative Officer of The San Jose Group a multicultural advertising agency.

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(Note: Your first name and last initial will appear with your remarks.)

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