

1980s NOT A BANNER DECADE - Hispanics have - Dallas Morning News, The (TX) - January 8, 1989 - page 30A
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For many Hispanics, not only was 1988 troubling, but the entire decade was as well, and many are relieved to see the 1980s -- and the Reagan administration -- roaring to a close.

This decade has seen the number of Hispanics in poverty grow to the highest on record. About 1.2 million Hispanic families -- 26 percent of the total -- were living below the poverty level in 1987, compared with 10 percent of non-Hispanic families.

By 1987, Hispanics had seen their median incomes drop to \$20,300, compared with more than \$21,000 in 1979.

Hispanic students had the highest dropout rate in the country -- from 55 percent to 80 percent, depending on the region of the country.

Hispanics have the nation's highest incidence of AIDS and diabetes, and one of the highest unemployment rates -- more than 30 percent in some South Texas counties.

Hispanic leaders point to cuts in social service programs, health benefits, education programs and housing assistance as having exacerbated Hispanics' woes.

In the civil rights arena, "it's been a travesty," says Antonia Hernandez, president and general counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund. Most of Reagan's judicial appointments have been "conservative, white, young, male ideologues," she said. "Civil rights laws have been eroded because of them. You either lose cases or they are watered down."

But Hispanics can boast of at least a couple of pluses. Their high fertility rate has boosted their numbers in key states and has attracted the attention of politicians and advertisers.

Hispanics now represent 9.4 percent of the U.S. population when Puerto Rico is included. There were 19.4 million Hispanics last March -- 34 percent more than in the 1980 census. California, with 6.6 million, has the largest number of Hispanics, followed by Texas with 4.1 million and New York with 2.1 million.

For the first time in history, 51 percent of Hispanics 25 and older had completed four years of high

school or more in 1987 and 1988. And although only 10 percent of Hispanics 25 and older had completed college, that was still a record.

Hispanics now may be looking to the 1990s with some optimism.

President-elect George Bush has appointed not just one but two Hispanics to his Cabinet -- a first for an American president -- and more are expected to hold visible positions.

The 1990 census will eventually result in new congressional districts in states with high Hispanic concentrations. More Hispanic elected officials also could conceivably be a byproduct of redistricting.

Last, the 1992 quincentenary observance of Columbus' voyage will rightly focus on historical events and historical contributions involving Hispanics.

What was heralded as 'The Decade of the Hispanic' has lived up to that name in one respect -- the 1980s set unexpected records and will not soon be forgotten. NOTAS: KERA-TV Channel 13 will air the final report of Dallas Together at 7 p.m. Thursday. The 'town hall' report will focus on the city's racial problems and recommendations in five areas of concern: the 'underclass,' political participation, education, business development and economic opportunity and development. . . .

Free classes on English as a Second Language and GED accreditation are now available at the West Dallas Multipurpose Center, **2828 Fish Trap Road**. Classes will be from 6 to 8 p.m. on Monday and Wednesday. For more information, contact the center at 670-6359.

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