



## Physical Anthropology Section – 2009

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### H105 Hispanic Affiliation: Definitions, Assumptions, and Biological Reality

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The goal of this presentation is to present the forensic anthropological community with the inconsistencies in the usage of the term Hispanic and to review the current methods used when attempting to identify individuals considered Hispanic.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by discussing the importance of consistency, use, and meaning of the term Hispanic within the forensic science community in general and the forensic anthropological community in particular. The learning objectives are to present the forensic anthropological community with the inconsistencies in the usage of the term Hispanic and to review the current methods used when attempting to identify individuals considered Hispanic.

Hispanic individuals make up the fastest growing population within the United States and are now the largest minority group therein. The term Hispanic is officially considered an ethnicity by the U.S. Census Bureau and the Office of Management and Budget directive No. 15. On the U.S. Census, an individual must specify a race of Black or White and then indicate whether or not they are Hispanic or non-Hispanic. Further, the term Hispanic is based on a linguistic classification of the Spanish language and encompasses many different countries separated by major geographic and cultural boundaries. Moreover, many individuals that would be considered Hispanic in the U.S., indigenous Mayans for example, are not Spanish-speaking peoples.

In spite of widespread utilization, no accurate or accepted use of the term Hispanic exists within the forensic anthropological community. This paper will review the use of the term Hispanic by the forensic anthropological community and will review the current methods used when attempting to recognize and identify Hispanic individuals. Based on an evaluation of the forensic anthropological literature, there is no agreement on the meaning or usage of the term Hispanic. In the *Journal of Forensic Sciences* and in the *American Academy of Forensic Sciences Proceedings*, the term Hispanic has been previously described by forensic anthropologists as a race, an ethnicity, an ancestry, a biological category, and as biologically meaningless. More specific terminology has been used to describe this biological heterogeneous group including Southwest Hispanic, Mexican-American, migrant workers, or border crossers, while still others use terms relating to national origin.

How can forensic anthropologists tell the difference between a Southwest Hispanic, Mexican-American, a migrant worker, or a national origin group considered to be Hispanic when working with unknown skeletal remains? Hefner et al. (2007) presented results from a blind study that suggest forensic anthropologists have a difficult time recognizing and ascribing a racial or ancestry category to an individual self-described as Hispanic. Thus, the problem may not only lie with inconsistent and confusing terminology, but also with methods of identification.

Sledzik et al. (2007) suggested that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century forensic anthropologists will abandon racial classifications in lieu of geographic origins or population groups. This goal is certainly realized in research articles working with known populations, which are described by their geographic or national origins. However, when faced with an unknown set of skeletal remains, using a geographic origin in lieu of a generic term seems unlikely, especially for individuals considered Hispanic simply because the data is not available. Until more data become available that describe the range of variability that is inherent within the group currently known as Hispanic, applying a geographic label to an unknown set of skeletal remains will continue to be difficult. Differentiating southwest Hispanics from southeast Hispanics is currently possible in some situations due to contextual inferences, although further national and geographic separation is currently problematic.

#### Hispanic, Biological Affiliation, Biological Profile