

Hispanics traditional food habits

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The paper "Hispanics Traditional Food Habits" is a good example of a culture essay. Although Hispanics are still considered a minority group in the United States, they represent one of the fastest growing sectors of the population (Kaiser, 2006). Conservative figures demonstrate that 50.5 million Hispanics or Latinos were residents of the United States as of April 1, 2010, implying that they formed a sixth of the United States total population of 308.7 million people (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). Scholars and practitioners have noted that the traditional food habits of any group of the population are deeply rooted in its local environment as well as culture, though the food habits persistently change as the group becomes acculturated into the mainstream culture (Sanjur, n. d.). Yet, Hispanics have been able to maintain their traditional food habits for the many years they have been in the United States and readily identify with their traditional delicacies. This serves as the main justification as to why this minority group deserves special attention. Although traditional food patterns vary widely across, and even within, countries located in South America, most staple foods consumed by Hispanics comprise the use of beans, rice, hearty stews or soups, vegetables, meat, plantains, yucca root, and arepa (Kaiser, 2006). The arepa, according to this author, is a corn-based staple which contains "corn flour or fresh corn, cheese, eggs, legumes, and starchy vegetables" (p. 2). Food is mainly prepared by boiling and steaming, hence members of the population are able to stay healthy by taking a low-fat diet (Frenn et al., 2005). Chili and salt are major sources of seasoning used in the preparation of food. Meal composition is mainly comprised of local fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy products and protein sources, though most traditional diets today are rich in a multiplicity of foods and dishes that symbolize a blend of

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pre-Columbian, indigenous Indian, Spanish, French, and more recently, American culture (Frenn et al., 2005). Hispanics believe that if they consume 12 grapes in a meal they will guarantee food availability for the family all year long. Other Hispanics dislike pig meat as having bad or evil spirits. Available literature demonstrates that “ the health status of Hispanic populations living in the United States is below that of non-Hispanic Whites” (Tafur, Crowe, & Torres, 2009, p. 82). Although there is no mention of any particular types of food, these authors posit that Hispanics “ are encouraged to eat foods that are hot or cold in essence, not in temperature, in order to maintain equilibrium in the body and regulate the amount of heat or cold” (p. 84). Foods for traditional celebrations include specially prepared vegetables, refried beans, beef, and soup. Lastly, dietary practices associated with religion include fasting, praying, and consulting religious objects before eating. It is common knowledge that “ the traditional diet of Latin America is vastly different from the westernized versions of food we have come to know” (Palmer, 2010, p. 2). Although acculturation is increasingly playing an important role in defining the dietary habits of Hispanic immigrants, it is yet to wipe away the much revered traditional food patterns of this group of the population. Most Hispanics are still cooking in their homes rather than visiting fast food hotels, and that the less acculturated Hispanics still demonstrate a higher consumption of fruits and vegetables and lower consumption of fat when compared to their more acculturated peers mostly in urban areas with busy work schedules (Duecy, 2006). Compared to other minority groups such as African Americans and American Indians, it can be argued that Hispanics have been more resilient in maintaining and preserving their culture as well as traditional dietary patterns. This, however,

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does not mean that the minority group is resistant to acculturation into the American way of life. On the contrary, many employed Hispanics residing in busy urban areas are increasingly finding themselves being acculturated at a faster rate due to their busy schedules and subsequent lack of time to prepare traditional foods in their homes. Owing to the fact that Hispanics have strong traditional and cultural beliefs that seem to direct their everyday activities, it is my considered submission that their traditional dietary habits will never eventually assimilate into the United States mainstream culture. Dietary habits are closely aligned with the culture of a population, implying that such habits may never get assimilated if the cultural orientation of a particular group remains strong (Frenn et al., 2005). The cultural orientation of Hispanics directs their everyday activities, including religion, traditional celebrations, feeding habits, health, and lifestyle, as well as superstitions. This being said, it, therefore, becomes increasingly difficult to assimilate the traditional dietary habits of such a minority group into that of the mainstream United States Culture. However, it may be possible for Hispanics living in urban areas and with busy schedules to assimilate their lifestyles and dietary habits into that of the mainstream United States culture (Gray, Cossman, & Dodson, 2005). The catchphrase here is that it is not possible for all Hispanics in America to get assimilated. Diseases that may be associated with the culture's food intake include obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. However, available literature demonstrates that these diseases are not a direct consequence of traditional Latin foods; rather, they arise due to the consumption of soft drinks, fast food, and packaged foods as Latinos gravitate towards foods that are cheap, fast and easy to find in the neighborhoods (Palmer, 2010). Such an orientation is

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more a problem of acculturation than of assimilation. The first advantage is that the diet is high in fiber, implying that it is healthy to consume. The second advantage is that the diet is low in fat (Frenn et al., 2005). The third advantage is that it is cooked in home environments, thus availing consumers the opportunity to include all the ingredients that can make a balanced diet. The first disadvantage is that such foods consume a lot of time to prepare, hence making it impossible for people with busy schedules to benefit from them. The second disadvantage is that it may be impossible to get all the ingredients to prepare a meal in the United States due to market factors. Lastly, the ingredients may not be as fresh as originally intended since they are sourced from far-flung areas. Lack of freshness may compromise on the value of nutrients. Some viable alternatives that can be passed for consideration include legumes, oats, wheat, maize, bananas, oranges, mangoes, chicken meat, goat's milk, camel milk, grains, papaya, potatoes, cabbage, carrots, cheese, seafood/fish, pumpkin, and sesame seeds (Kaiser, 2006). These foods, in my view, have the same nutritional value as the ones mentioned in the first section of this paper. This paper has elaborated on the traditional dietary habits of the Hispanics in the United States and on elements of acculturation and assimilation. It is evident that much of the diet of the minority group is made of vegetables, fruits, and soup, and that different types of foods are used to mark religious and traditional celebrations. Overall, it is clear that the traditional food patterns of Hispanics can never be assimilated into the United States mainstream culture.