



Physical Anthropology Section – 2004

H48 Metric Description of Hispanic Skeletons: A Preliminary Analysis

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After attending this presentation, attendees will appreciate the importance of obtaining a better understanding of the skeletal features of this rapidly growing component of the American population.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by demonstrating that it should emphasize the importance of understanding the skeletal biology of this important component of the American population.

Mexican Americans have been a large component of the population in the Southwest for a long time, but in recent decades they have been expanding into areas of the U.S. where their numbers have traditionally been small. The 2000 census reveals increases of 150-200 percent in some states such as North Carolina and Tennessee. Yet compared to Blacks and Whites, the formal knowledge base of Hispanic skeletons is low. Since forensic anthropologists in any part of the country are now likely to encounter Mexican American skeletons in their caseloads, it is obviously important to understand metric variation and to develop identification criteria specific to them.

The Forensic Anthropology Data Base now has information about 130 remains that may be termed Hispanic. These include various ethnicities, e.g., Puerto Rican, Cuban, Guatemalan, but the majority is of Mexican origin. This paper will deal with those of Mexican origin. Mexican skeletal remains are often found in circumstances that make positive identification difficult or impossible. Consequently, about 1/3 are not positively identified. Cranial remains are more frequent than postcranial. Sample sizes are too small to develop a definitive characterization of Mexican Americans, but it is useful to present a preliminary picture to illustrate the importance of a more complete picture of their skeletal variation.

Compared to American Blacks and Whites, Mexican American crania are somewhat smaller overall, with shorter vaults, narrower faces and orbits. Cranial morphology places Mexican Americans in an intermediate position in relation to Whites, Blacks and Amerindians, reflecting their hybrid status. However, crania are sufficiently distinctive to distinguish them from other groups. Postcranially, long bones are shorter and femur heads are smaller. The femur midshafts are rounder and more robust, and the subtrochanteric region is mildly platymeric. Sexing criteria derived from American Whites, whether cranial or postcranial, over classify Mexican American males as females, because of their smaller size. There are only 17 individuals in the database with some sort of stature, an inadequate number on which to base stature estimation.

Hispanics, Cranial Variation, Postcranial Variation