

HISPANIC LAST NAMES

The majority of Hispanics have two last names. One is the last name of the mother; the other the last name of their father. Sometimes they are hyphenated and sometimes they are not. The names are generally written in this order: *first name, father's family name, mother's family name*. For example, Roberto Sánchez Colón would be first name of Roberto, father's family name of Sánchez, and mother's family name of Colón.

When a woman marries she generally stops using her mother's family name and adds her spouse's family name with "de" in front of it. For example, Rosaura Herrero Bilbao marries Juan Cruz Echeverría Bencoa and changes her name to Rosaura Herrero de Echeverría.

Some women prefer not to use the "de" and just add the spouse's name, which she may or may not hyphenate—e.g., Rosaura Herrero Echeverría or Rosaura Herrero-Echeverría.

Some women also prefer not to add their spouse's name at all.

In a telephone directory or other formal alphabetical listing, such as you might find with a criminal or civil index, the names are listed this way: the father's last name, and then the mother's last name: e.g., Sánchez Colón, R.

In researching a Hispanic subject with two last names you should, as a rule, check both last names on the index, regardless of whether the client has ordered separate searches for each last name.

Often U.S. agencies get the last names mixed up and the Hispanic person just agrees to use the names as they are printed on some pay stub or some other document, just to avoid having to explain it all again and again. For conversational purposes, they usually use only their first name and the father's family name, as in José Avila when the full name is José Avila-Ramirez. For formal documents though both last names would be used. Of course if José Avila-Ramirez is hiding something it could be very convenient for him to say his name is José Ramirez.