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Census Won't Add Up for Dominicans 200,000 missed in undercount

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Last year's census miscounted as many as 200,000 New Yorkers claiming Dominican heritage, an error that Latino leaders fear will unfairly diminish the emerging group's influence.

"It means we will be shortchanged dramatically," said Assemblyman Adriano Espaillat (D-Manhattan), who is Dominican. "We will get resources that will be reflective of that count, not the real number of Dominicans."

Census figures made public yesterday show that last year's tally found 406,806 Dominicans in the city, an increase of 22% since 1990.

But city demographers had estimated, based in part on immigration figures, the Dominican number to be as high as 600,000.

That would have made Dominican community nearly as large in number as Puerto Ricans, historically the city's largest Hispanic group - a distinction that Dominican leaders say would have earned them stronger bargaining positions for social services, school resources and political redistricting.



Bedford for NEWS

Many in Washington Heights fear being shortchanged by undercount.

"This comes as a shock to me and, I'd say, to the community as well," said Guillermo Linares, who in 1991 became the the first Dominican-American elected to the City Council. "When we are undercounted, everything that is already limited for us to begin with gets diminished even more."

Two other Hispanic groups also appear to have been miscounted. Ecuadorans and Colombians were expected by the city to total 260,000, but the census counted 178,159.

The city Planning Department and Latino advocates blamed a changed census form.

Census questionnaires in 2000 and 1990 contained check boxes for Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans. Other Latinos were asked to write a group name in another box.

But the 1990 form included examples for the write-in groups - including Argentinian, Colombian and Dominican - whereas the 2000 questionnaire made no suggestions.

"We're leaning toward an interpretation that the lack of examples in the question may have prompted people to answer with a generic response," said Joseph Salvo, director of the city Planning Department's population division.

"People were confused with the form," said Moises Perez, director of Alianza Dominicana, an advocacy group that worked to increase the response rate in Washington Heights. "The Census Bureau did very little to ensure that this process was clear to people."

But bureau officials insisted it wasn't a mistake. "It's not an error by any means," said Roberto Ramirez, a statistician with the bureau's Ethnic and Hispanic Statistics Branch. "The total numbers are there. It's just that there's a lot of noise in the details of the Hispanic groups."

Ramirez suggested that some Latinos no longer choose to identify themselves as being from a specific group, perhaps because their families have been in the United States for generations.

Whatever the explanation, the new census failed to show which groups drove the 24% growth in the city's Hispanic population since 1990.

Instead, the biggest growth group was "Other Hispanic," a generic category that swelled from 70,792 to 356,743.

Hispanic advocacy groups and the city Planning Department asked the Census Bureau yesterday to consider adjusting the numbers.

"The problem is, those numbers are now with us for 10 years," said Angelo Falcon, senior policy executive for the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Beyond that problem, the latest figures show emerging Hispanic enclaves across the city.

Dominicans increasingly dominate Washington Heights in Manhattan and are growing in number throughout the Bronx.

Colombians are concentrated in Jackson Heights, Queens, near Northern Blvd. and 82nd St.

In other parts of Jackson Heights and in Elmhurst, Queens, neighborhoods of Ecuadorans and Mexicans have sprung up.

Mexican immigrants also are concentrated in East Harlem in Manhattan, Sunset Park in Brooklyn and Port Richmond, S.I.

Census SNAFU?

The city Planning Department and Hispanic leaders think that a change in the Census Bureau questionnaire caused more than 200,000 of Dominicans, Colombians and Ecuadorans to be miscounted as "Other Hispanic" during the 2000 census.

	Census Counts		Estimates by the City Planning Department
	1990	2000	2000
Dominican	332,713	406,806	550,000-600,000
Ecuadoran	78,444	101,005	140,000
Colombian	84,454	77,154	120,000
All Other	70,792	356,743	71,000

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