



# Puerto Ricans in the New York Metro Area

## QUICK FACTS:

### Place of Origin:

Puerto Rico (primarily San Juan)

### Location in Metro New York:

Bronx (almost everywhere, including Mott Haven, Morrisania, West Farms, Unionport, Parkchester, Co-op City, Kingsbridge Heights); Manhattan (El Barrio, Lower East Side, Cathedral); New Jersey (Newark, Passaic, Paterson, Jersey City); Nassau (Brentwood, Pine Aire); Connecticut (Bridgeport)

### Population in Metro New York:

1,412,906 (ACS 2010 Specific Origin Puerto Rico)

### Population in New York City:

723,069 (ACS 2010 Specific Origin Puerto Rico)

### Primary Religion:

Christianity (Roman Catholic, evangelical)

### Status of Christian Witness:

Greater than or equal to 10% evangelical.

### Primary Language:

Spanish

### Secondary Language:

English

### Registry of Peoples Codes:

108160, 210550

### Significant Note:

There are more Puerto Ricans in the five boroughs of New York City than in San Juan proper, making New York City the largest Puerto Rican city in the world. (The San Juan Metro area, however, has twice as many Puerto Ricans as the New York Metro area).

ALL PEOPLES INITIATIVE

LAST UPDATED: 8 / 2008

Numbering 723,069 in New York City and 1,412,906 in the Metro area (ACS 2010), Puerto Ricans have long been the largest Hispanic group in Metro New York. However, there are signs that their preponderance is waning. In 1990, Puerto Ricans made up 8.4 percent of the Metro New York population and 46.4 percent of Metro's Hispanic population. By 2008, these numbers had dwindled to 6.2 percent of the Metro New York population and only 30.4 percent of Metro's Hispanic population (ACS 2008). With the massive influx of South Americans, Central Americans, Mexicans, and Dominicans into the city, some researchers suggest that Puerto Ricans' majority influence over the Hispanic population in New York could come to an end in the next decade or two.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, as the ubiquitous Puerto Rican flag outside New York City apartment windows suggests, Puerto Rican pride is here to stay.

## When Did They Come to New York?

As Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States, Puerto Ricans receive United States citizenship status at birth. This arrangement was established in 1917, and Puerto Ricans have been making their way to New York ever since. However, a large-scale immigration of Puerto Ricans to the city did not take place until 1947. In the ten years following, a great number came to the city due to Puerto Rico's booming population growth, lack of work opportunities, and poor standard of living. The abundant job availabilities in New York City's garment district and other service jobs served as a magnet for new Puerto Rican immigrants.

While emigration from Puerto Rico slowed in the 1960s, a recession-induced wave of new Puerto Ricans came in the late 1970s, and the 1980s witnessed a steady stream of new immigrants due to increased violence, overcrowding, and unemployment on the island.<sup>2</sup> Many Puerto Ricans retire in Puerto Rico, while second- and third-generation Puerto Ricans steadily move out of the city into the surrounding counties, warmer climates such as Florida, or elsewhere in the Northeast, where living conditions are better and cheaper.

## Where Do They Live?

East Harlem, commonly known as *el barrio*, or Spanish Harlem, received its name from the strong presence of Puerto Ricans in the neighborhood. The Puerto Rican flavor of East 116th Street and the surrounding area, however, is less pronounced these days, as Mexican taco stands and luxury condos in real estate-marketed "SpaHa" (Spanish Harlem) reflect competing entities for neighborhood identity. The Lower East Side has historically been an important Puerto Rican neighborhood, with such landmarks as the Nuyorican Poets Café, but their population there is steadily declining. Almost all of the Bronx has a strong Puerto Rican contingent, and successful Puerto Ricans continue to move to New Jersey, Long Island, and Connecticut.

## What Do They Believe?

Almost twenty percent lower than the total Hispanic count, around forty-nine percent of Puerto Ricans in America are Catholics, and around twenty-seven percent of Puerto Ricans are evangelical Christians, a number twelve percent more than Hispanics in general. The rest are mainline Protestants (nine percent), "other Christian" (four percent), or secular (nine percent).<sup>3</sup> In addition, some Puerto Rican Catholics and others practice varying levels of Santería, which is based on the traditional religious beliefs of the Yoruba from West Africa.

## What Are Their Lives Like?

Puerto Ricans love to celebrate. At such events as the Three Kings Day and Puerto Rican Parade—one of the largest ethnic parades in New York City—their festive spirit is on full display. While Puerto Rican professionals abound, social problems such as crime, gangs, unemployment, and an alarmingly high divorce rate plague their urban community.

## How Can I Pray?

∞ Pray that Puerto Rican Christians will actively make a difference in their community and that Christ would be victorious over the social ills that trouble many of their people.

∞ Pray that the vibrant evangelical churches led by Puerto Ricans throughout the city will effectively share the gospel with new immigrants from Central and South America.



Photo by Joanna Johnson

1. Dominicans and Mexicans are the major candidates for surpassing Puerto Ricans' population numbers. See Ramona Hernandez and Francisco L. Rivera-Batiz, *Dominicans in the United States: A Socioeconomic Profile, 2000* (CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, 2003), [http://www.earth.columbia.edu/cgsd/advising/documents/rivera\\_batiz.pdf](http://www.earth.columbia.edu/cgsd/advising/documents/rivera_batiz.pdf) (accessed August 15, 2008) and Eric Pape, "So Far From God, So Close to Ground Zero," *The Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 2003, <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/aug/03/magazine/tm-nymex31> (accessed August 15, 2008).

2. Derek Green, "Puerto Rican Americans," *Countries and Their Cultures*, <http://everyculture.com/multi/Pa-Sp/Puerto-Rican-Americans.html> (accessed August 18, 2008).

3. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion," *Pew Hispanic Center*, April 25, 2007, <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=75> (accessed August 18, 2008).