



Quichua in the New York Metro Area

ALL PEOPLES INITIATIVE LAST UPDATED: 02/2010

QUICK FACTS:

Place of Origin:

Andes Mountains
(Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia)

Significant Subgroups:

Cañari Quichua (large majority); Otavalo (small minority); other Quichua groups (small minority)

Location in Metro New York:

Queens (Jackson Heights, Corona, Ridgewood); Rockland (Spring Valley); New Jersey (Newark); Bronx (Morrisania); Westchester (Sleepy Hollow)

Population in Metro New York:

10,000 (Community Estimate)

Primary Religion:

Christianity (Catholicism syncretized with Inca traditional beliefs and rituals)

Secondary Religion:

Christianity (evangelical)

Status of Christian Witness:

Greater than or equal to 10% evangelical.

Primary Languages:

Spanish, Quichua

Registry of Peoples Codes:

107703, 101871

Significant Notes:

Due to racism that Quichua experienced in their home countries, many Quichua hide their identity in the US.

Most of the Quichua evangelical churches in Metro New York are made up of people from Cañar, but there is at least one Chimborazo-Quichua church.

In Ecuador, the word "Quichua" is used to describe this ethnic group, while in countries like Peru and Bolivia, the word "Quechua" is used.

Many Quichua in Metro New York do not have proper documentation to be in the country.

Sharing Times Square street space with the likes of the "The Naked Cowboy" and "subway musician" space with the likes of musical saw players, Quichua musicians have established themselves as part of New York's tourist trade with their popular Andean folk music. The Quichua, or Quechua, Indians from the Andes Mountains in South America are the largest remaining American Indian group in the world. Hailing from mountain ranges throughout Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia, the Quechuan language and identity spread due to the influence of the Quechua-speaking Inca Empire. It was the Incas who brought Peruvian populations into Ecuador to consolidate their territory, making Quechua the language of government and trade. Although Quechua is still spoken throughout the Andes, some dialects are no longer mutually comprehensible, such as the one spoken in Ecuador—where "Quichua" is the preferred spelling—and the one spoken in Peru.¹ In Metro New York, most Quichua are from either the Otavalo or Cañari highlands of Ecuador. Community leaders estimate that there are ten thousand Quichua in Metro New York, with most of these Cañari.² Anthropologist Jason Pribilsky, who wrote an ethnography on Andean Ecuadorian immigration to New York, estimates that there are 1,500 Quichua in Rockland County alone.³

When Did They Come to New York?

Quichua from Otavalo started making their way to New York in the late 1970s and early '80s due to economic problems in their homeland. Initially, they primarily sold textiles their people had made in Ecuador and were involved in other small commercial activities between the two countries. The population has grown steadily until today, when most Otavalo Quichua immigrate and specialize in a particular construction industry, such as siding, roofing, or cement. Shortly after the Otavalo Quichua carved a niche for themselves in the New York economy, Quichua from the Ecuadorian provinces of Cañar and Chimborazo immigrated and followed suit in the construction business.



Photo by Joanna Johnson

Where Do They Live?

The main concentration of the Quichua is in the Jackson Heights, Corona, and Ridgewood areas of Queens. With little free time apart from work, however, new Quichua communities have developed throughout the Metro area as they settle close to their work sites. They can be found along Westchester Avenue in the Morrisania area of the Bronx, Newark, New Jersey, and north of New York City in Rockland County—particularly in Spring Valley.

What Do They Believe?

Quichua people almost exclusively identify themselves as Christians. Most of these, however, are Catholics who have syncretized traditional Inca beliefs and rituals with Catholicism. Many Quichua have a strong sense of the reality of the supernatural world and believe that what occurs in that dimension explains what happens in the natural world. At least eight evangelical Quichua churches exist in Metro New York. These churches are often extensions of existing churches in Ecuador, whose members have immigrated in large numbers.

What Are Their Lives Like?

Apart from the obvious economic reasons, many Quichua and other Ecuadorians immigrate to New York for what it represents. Using their own colloquialism, they seek to adopt the *iony* way. *Iony*, derived from the ubiquitous phrase, "I ♥ NY," has come to represent a way that is more modern, progressive, and developed.⁴ The *iony* way can be used to describe anything from fashion to evolved attitudes on gender equality, and many Quichua begin to adopt the *iony* lifestyle. With male immigrants often leaving their families behind in their home countries, the acute changes that take place in both locations at the hands of *iony* have had both positive and negative effects. While both sides are often excited about the "progress" their family is making because of *iony*, the same force is usually responsible for tearing apart marriages, customs, and traditional values.

How Can I Pray?

∞ There are several Quichua evangelical churches in Metro New York. Pray that God would use them to prevent their people from falling prey to the negatives aspects of the *iony* way.

∞ The Quichua are often looked down upon by Hispanics from Central and South America. Pray that the Quichua would love these people with a Christ-like love, persuading them to investigate the Source of such humility.

1. Jeremy Mumford, "Ecuadorian Americans," in Robert Dassanowsky and Jeffrey Lehman, eds., *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, vol. 1 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group, 2000), 560.
2. Estimate comes from personal interviews with Quichuan pastors.
3. Jason Pribilsky, as quoted in Leah Rae, "Indigenous South American Tongues a Challenge," *The Journal News*, November 29, 2005, <http://www.alipac.us/topicp-60969.html> (accessed February 12, 2010).
4. Pribilsky, *La Chulla Vida: Gender, Migration, and the Family in Andean Ecuador and New York City* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2007), 11-12.