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## Washington Heights/Inwood Demographic, Economic, and Social Transformations 1990 – 2005 with a Special Focus on the Dominican Population

Laird Bergad

*Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies*

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The Center established and helps administer an interdisciplinary specialization in Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies in the Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies program.

The Latino Data Project was developed with the goal of making information available on the dynamically growing Latino population of the United States and especially New York City through the analysis of extant data available from a variety of sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the National Institute for Health, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and state and local-level data sources.

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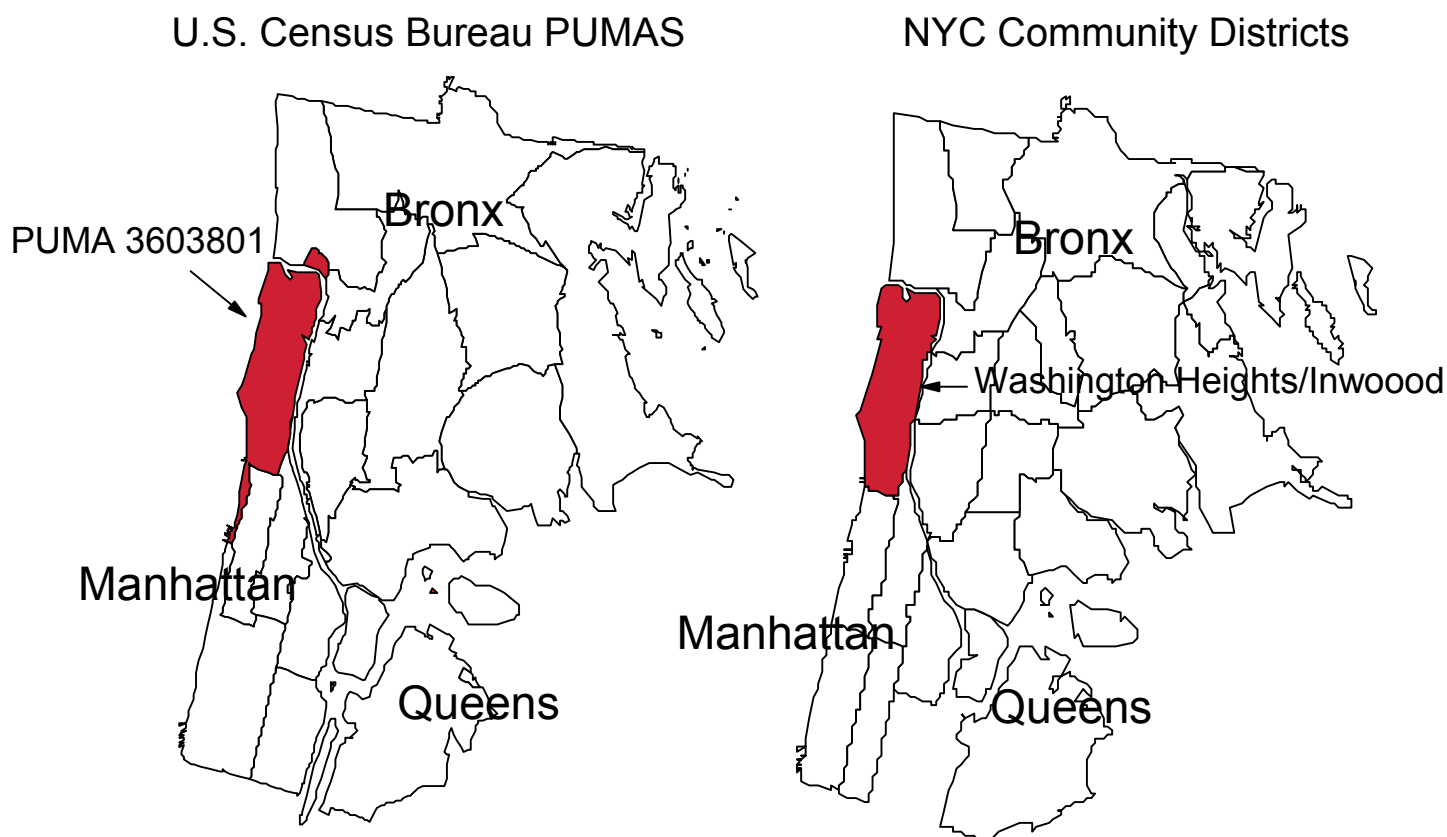
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Figure 1

Map Depicting Geographical Differences between U.S. Census Bureau Designations and NYC Community Districts



Notes:

Source for all data: IPUMS (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series) data for 1990, 2000, and 2005 for PUMA 3603801 derived from the U.S. Census Bureau and prepared as Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 3.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2004, available at <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>

The data presented in this report are estimates with an undetermined, but small margin of error. This is because the Census Bureau data for PUMA 3603801 do not correspond precisely to the geographical contours of the NYC-designated community district of Washington Heights/Inwood as designated in Figure 1 above.

These Census Bureau data are the only data available with the precision needed to generate the comparative data presented in this report for 1990, 2000, and 2005.

Since the 1980s the upper Manhattan neighborhood of Washington Heights/Inwood (hereafter WH/IN) has been transformed by the immigration of a large Latino population of whom Dominicans have been the most prominent national group. Latinos made up 67% of WH/IN population in 1990; 74% in 2000; and 73% in 2005. Dominicans moved into the neighborhood in large numbers during the 1980s and 1990s and after 2000 accounted for more than 50% of the neighborhood's total population and more than 70% of all Latinos in the district. (See figures 2, 3, and 4).

Figure 2  
Percentage of Total Population in Washington Heights/Inwood by  
Race/Ethnic Group, 1990 - 2005

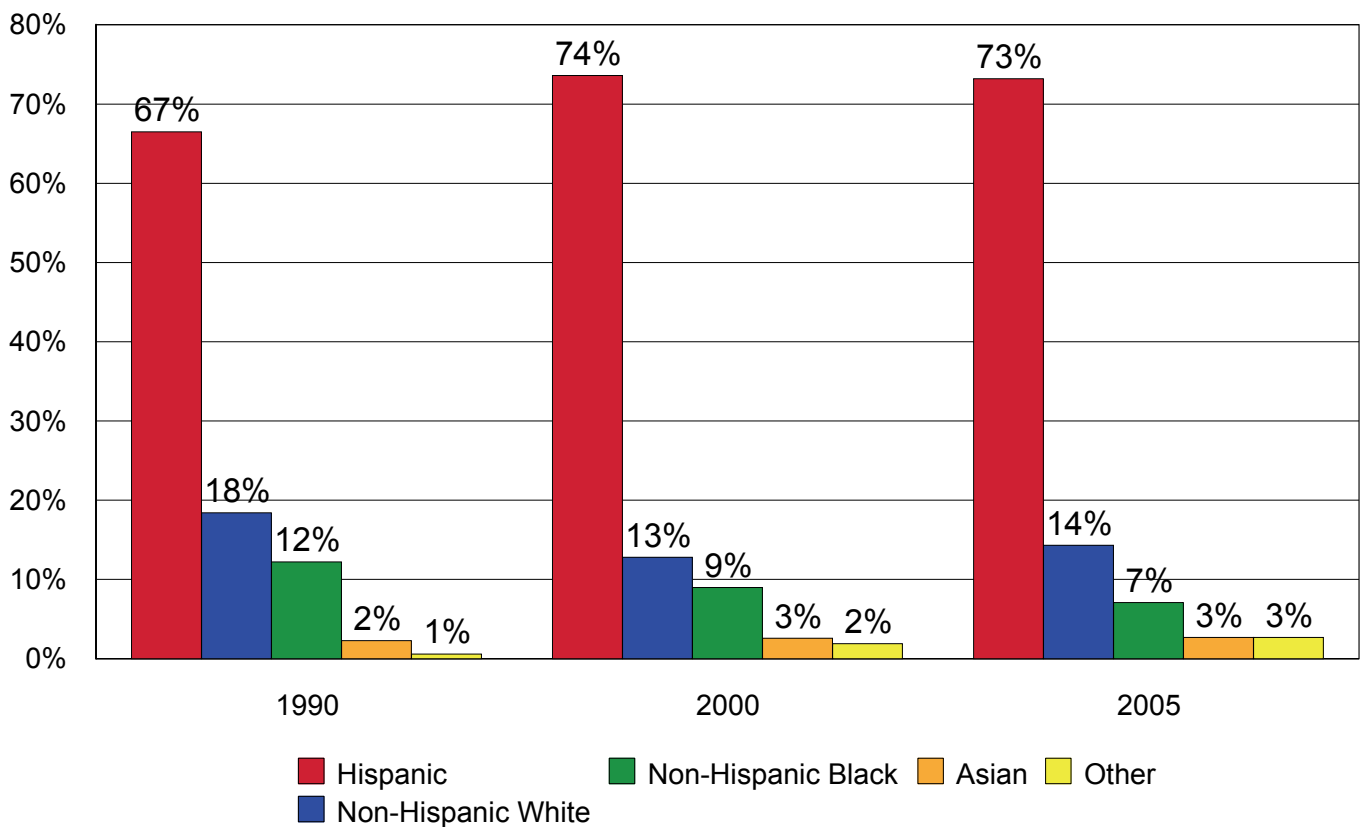


Figure 3  
 Latino Nationalities Washington Heights/Inwood  
 as Percentage of Total Latino Population, 1990 - 2005

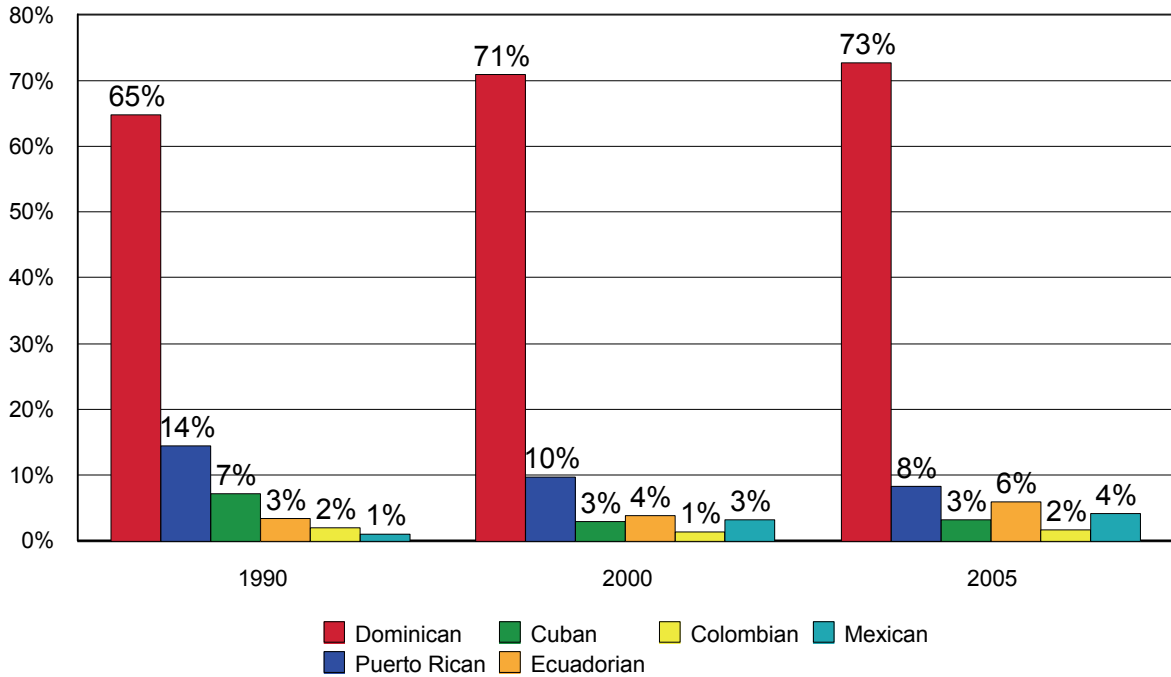
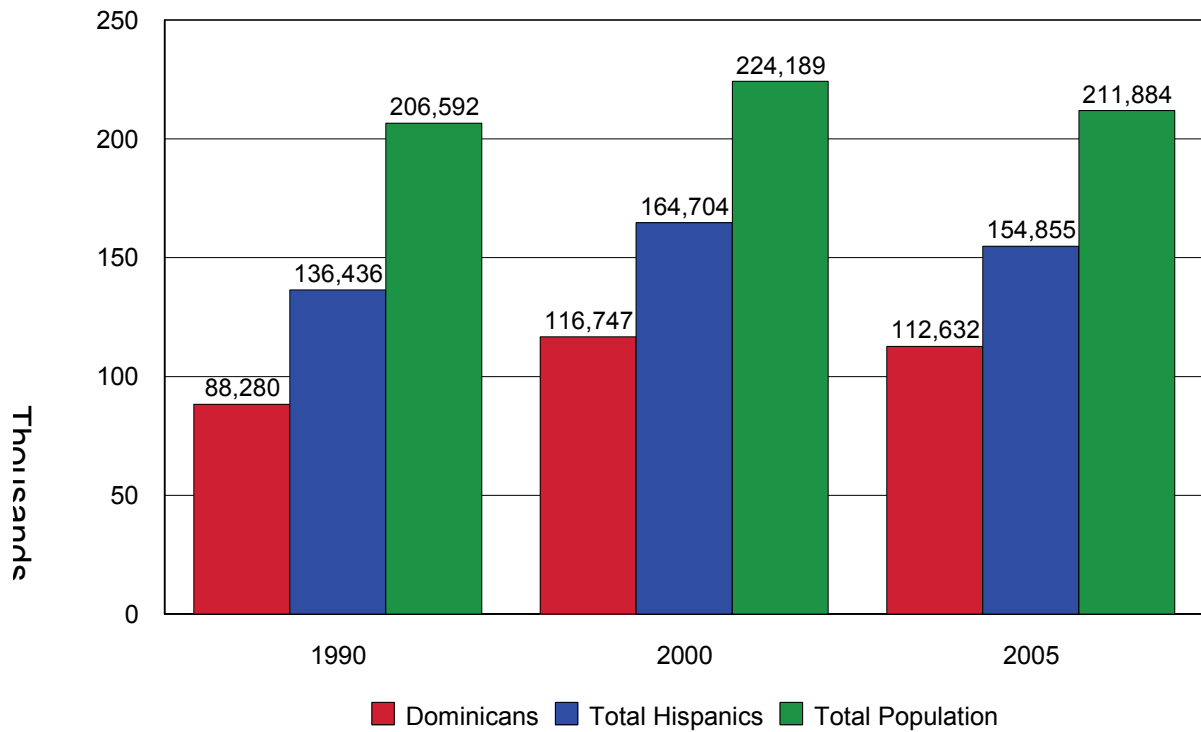


Figure 4  
 Dominican Population, Hispanic, and Total Populations of  
 Washington Heights/Inwood, 1990 - 2005



During this same time period the meteoric rise in real estate values throughout Manhattan and elsewhere in the City resulted in the gradual penetration of the city's poorer neighborhoods by people of all racial and ethnic groups seeking reasonably priced housing as well as speculative opportunities in New York City real estate markets. Widely referred to as 'gentrification' this process accelerated after 2000 and previously impoverished Manhattan neighborhoods such as East , Central, and West Harlem, the Lower East Side, Hells Kitchen and others have been transformed or are in the process of transformation. This study will examine the impact of these city-wide processes on WH/IN, and especially on the Latino population which makes up nearly three-quarters of all residents.<sup>1</sup>

There has been much recent debate about whether 'gentrification' and rising housing costs displaces poorer extant residents or creates conditions for an amelioration of their lives because of better security, diminishing crime rates, enhanced job opportunities, and other improvements in the quality of life in 'gentrified' neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> It is too early in the process of transformation of WH/IN to arrive at any definitive conclusions on the impact of the social, economic, and demographic changes now underway. It is also not clear that a process of 'gentrification' is in fact occurring and if so how it is impacting the people of the community. However, data from the decennial census reports of 1990 and 2000, and the American Community Survey of 2005 issued by the U.S. Census Bureau permit insights into some of the changes taking place in the community over this 15 year period.<sup>3</sup> This article will examine indicators of transformation in the neighborhood occurring between 1990 and 2005 focusing upon changing household income structures, employment patterns, and educational attainment levels among different sectors of the WH/IN population.

<sup>1</sup> The term 'gentrification' was first popularized by the sociologist Ruth Glass in her 1964 study of London poor neighborhoods which were being settled and transformed by more affluent Londoners. See Ruth Glass, editor, London;: Aspects of Change (University College, London. Centre for Urban Studies. London, MacGibbon & Kee, 1964). The popular notion of 'gentrification' is that wealthier people move into communities and poorer residents are forced to move because of ensuing higher housing costs.

<sup>2</sup> See Lance Freeman, There Goes the 'Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> The Institute for Children and Poverty released a report in March 2006 titled "The Cost of Good Intentions: Gentrification and Homelessness in Upper Manhattan" which examined five NYC communities: Park Slope, Central Harlem, East Harlem, West Harlem, and Washington Heights between 1990 and 2000. The authors apparently did not have access to the 2005 data. While noting changes in WH/IN the report concluded that the process of 'gentrification' was only beginning by 2000.

## Household Income

The annual median household income of all WH/IN residents has increased considerably from 1990 to 2005.<sup>4</sup> In 1990 it was \$25,271; \$34,800 in 2000; and \$39,422 in 2005. These data indicate a major acceleration in the yearly rate of median household income growth after 2000. Between 1990 and 2000 the yearly rate of increase was 1.5% while between 2000 and 2005 it was 4.4% annually. Although it is nearly impossible to estimate the number of people moving in or out of the community, these data suggest that either the extant population was earning higher incomes; that people with higher incomes have moved into the district after 2000; or that there has been a combination of both processes which is the likely conclusion.<sup>5</sup>

When median household income data are examined by racial/ethnic groups there were great comparative disparities, especially after 2000. Non-Hispanic Whites (14% of the total WH/IN population in 2005) and Asians (3% of the total population in 2005) had the highest median household incomes between 1990 and 2005. (See Figure 5). However, the real story lies in the comparative rates of median household income growth found among these major racial/ethnic groups **AFTER 2000** and these are indicated in Table 1.

Although Non-Hispanic Whites and Asians clearly had higher median household incomes in each year, between 1990 and 2000 rates of yearly household income increase were about the same for each of the four major race/ethnic groups in the community at between 1.4% and 1.6% yearly. It is only after 2000 that fairly significant differences in the rates of income growth are found among the major race/ethnic groups in the community. The most notable differentiation in was the acceleration of median household income growth rates among Non-Hispanic Whites to 4.9% yearly between 2000 and 2005 and an even more impressive rate of growth among Asian households at 6.0% annually. Among Non-Hispanic Blacks median household income declined markedly, while among Hispanics there was a yearly increase of 3.6%. This rate of growth is significantly higher for Hispanics than experienced in the period between 1990 and 2000, but still lags behind Non-Hispanic Whites and Asians. These data suggest that the real 'losers' in WH/IN seem to be Non-Hispanic Blacks in that their median household incomes declined after 2000.

<sup>4</sup> The Census Bureau defines household income as follows: "Household income is the sum of money income received in the calendar year by all household members 15 years old and over, including household members not related to the householder, people living alone, and other non-family household members. Included in the total are amounts reported separately for wage or salary income; net self-employment income; interest, dividends, or net rental or royalty income or income from estates and trusts; Social Security or Railroad Retirement income; Supplemental Security Income (SSI); public assistance or welfare payments; retirement, survivor, or disability pensions; and all other income." Median income is calculated in the following way: "Median Income - The median divides the income distribution into two equal parts: one-half of the cases falling below the median income and one-half above the median. For households and families, the median income is based on the distribution of the total number of households and families including those with no income. The median income for individuals is based on individuals 15 years old and over with income."

<sup>5</sup> This does not necessarily mean that an all-encompassing process of so-called 'gentrification' has begun. If 'gentrification' is interpreted as meaning that more affluent people are living in the community, then this process has been underway in WH/IN after 2000. However, this emphatically does not mean that poorer people are being pushed out of this particular NYC neighborhood as will be demonstrated later in this article. This suggests that the notion of 'gentrification' may have to be recast.



Figure 5  
Median Household Income in Washington Heights/Inwood by Race/Ethnic Group, 1990 - 2005

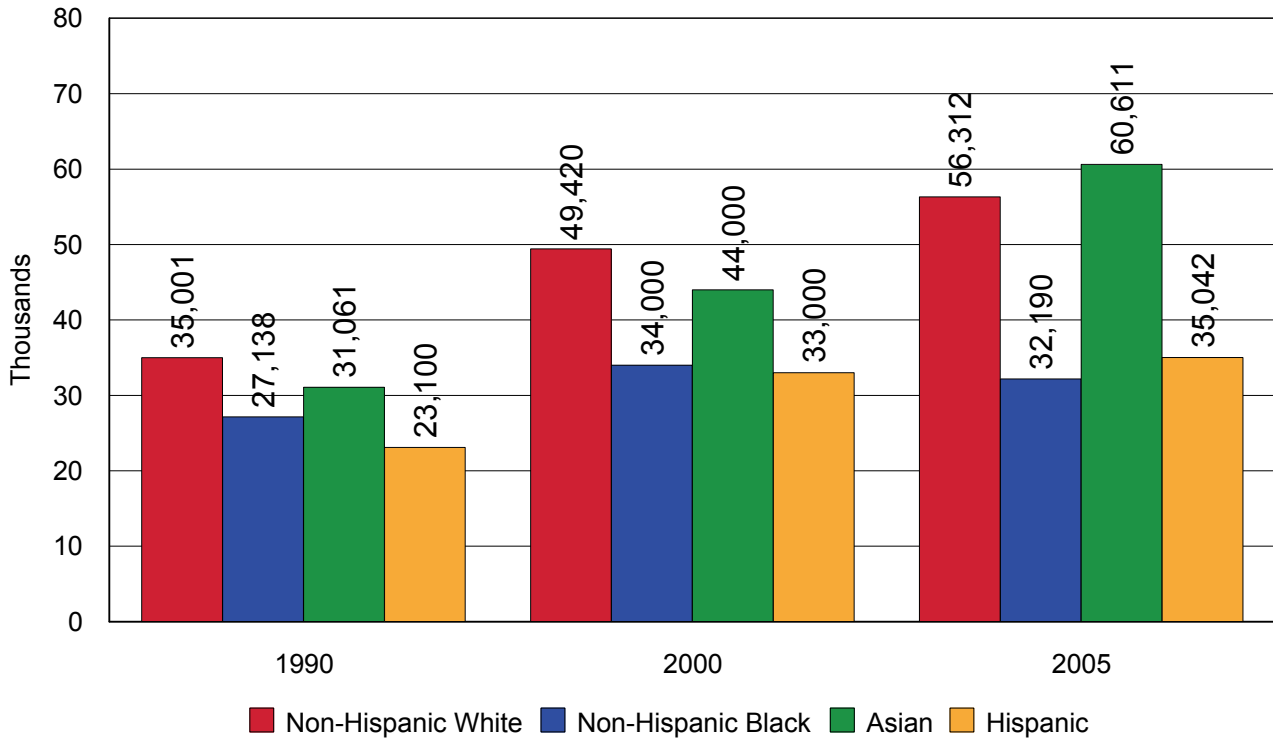


Table 1  
Median Household Income and Yearly Rates of Median Household Income Growth by Race/Ethnicity Washington Heights/Inwood 1990 - 2005 (in dollars)

Year	Non-Hispanic Whites	% Yearly Rate of Growth from Previous Census Year	Non-Hispanic Blacks	% Yearly Rate of Growth from Previous Census Year	Asians	% Yearly Rate of Growth from Previous Census Year	Hispanics	% Yearly Rate of Growth from Previous Census Year
1990	35,001		27,138		31,061		23,100	
2000	49,420	1.6	34,000	1.4	44,000	1.6	33,000	1.5
2005	56,312	4.9	32,190	-3.5	60,611	6.0	35,042	3.6

These rates of median household income growth add more evidence supporting the concept of a community undergoing change, although this does not mean that more affluent 'migrants' who may have moved into the district are replacing the community's poorer inhabitants. The sharp yearly increase in household incomes among Non-Hispanic Whites, Asians, and to a lesser extent among Latinos suggests that families among these race/ethnic groups with higher incomes may indeed be moving into the district. At the same time the decline in the Non-Hispanic Black population seems to indicate that African-Americans have emphatically not been drawn to WH/IN and are in fact leaving the community.

Yet, even if there has been an influx of wealthier families into the community this process has NOT altered the basic WH/IN racial/ethnic configurations between 1990 and 2005 in any significant way. Despite higher median household incomes, Non-Hispanic Whites DECLINED as a percentage of the total WH/IN population from 18% in 1990 to 13% in 2000 and maintained relative stability through 2005 at 14% of all residents. These data suggest that the stereotypical images of 'gentrification' which usually assert that more affluent whites take over communities in transition has not occurred in WH/IN, at least by 2005. (See Figure 3). Among Asians there was little change. They were 2% of all inhabitants in 1990 and 3% in 2000 and 2005. Latinos increased from 67% to 74% of all residents between 1990 and 2000 and maintained near stability at 73% in 2005 indicating that there was no displacement whatsoever by other race/ethnic groups. The significant finding is that Non-Hispanic Blacks were clearly leaving the community. They declined from 12% of all people in 1990 to 7% in 2005, and were the one race/ethnic group which has apparently been adversely affected by the changes occurring in the neighborhood.

There is even more compelling economic evidence that lower income households are not leaving the community even if wealthier families are moving in. Table 2 indicates the percentage of households in the lower and higher income ranges by race/ethnicity in WH/IN. The first observation to be made about these data is that between 1990 and 2000 there was an overall decline in the number of households earning less than \$20,000 and an increase in the number of households earning more than \$50,000 among each race/ethnic group. Between 2000 and 2005 there was near stability in these higher and lower income categories, with the exception of Asians (only 3% of WH/IN residents) who experienced a fairly significant increase in upper-income earning households to 63% of their total in 2005.

The second observation is that if the process of 'gentrification' was accelerating after 2000 there was not only no significant decline in the overall numbers of Latinos in the community, who continued to make up over 70% of all residents in 2005, but there is no evidence that poorer families among Hispanics were leaving WH/IN. The percentage of households among Latinos with median incomes below \$20,000 annually declined significantly between 1990 and 2000 from 43% to 32%, and then remained nearly stable to 2005 at 31%. At the same time upper-earning households increased between 1990 and 2000 among Hispanics, from 14% to 29%, and then slightly to 32% in 2005. Thus, Latinos have not left in any significant numbers. And those at the bottom of the income earning hierarchy have not diminished in their relative percentage of all households from 2000 through 2005.

There were clear disparities in income distribution patterns by race and ethnicity highlighted by significantly greater percentages of Non-Hispanic White and Asian households earning more than \$50,000 annually. However, these households represented just 17% of the WH/IN population in 2005 and their presence did not diminish either the overwhelming relative number of Latinos in the community, nor is there any evidence that poorer Hispanic families moved out of the district because of the presence of these wealthier Non-Hispanic Whites or Asians.

Table 2  
Higher End and Lower End Household Income Earners by Race/Ethnicity  
Washington Heights/Inwood, 1990 - 2005

Non Hispanic Whites	1990	2000	2005
Percentage Households Earning Less than \$20,000 Annually	29%	18%	17%
Percentage Households Earning More than \$50,000 Annually	34%	50%	53%
Non Hispanic Blacks	1990	2000	2005
Percentage Households Earning Less than \$20,000 Annually	37%	31%	31%
Percentage Households Earning More than \$50,000 Annually	23%	34%	31%
Asians	1990	2000	2005
Percentage Households Earning Less than \$20,000 Annually	24%	20%	25%
Percentage Households Earning More than \$50,000 Annually	36%	42%	63%
Hispanics	1990	2000	2005
Percentage Households Earning Less than \$20,000 Annually	43%	32%	31%
Percentage Households Earning More than \$50,000 Annually	14%	29%	32%

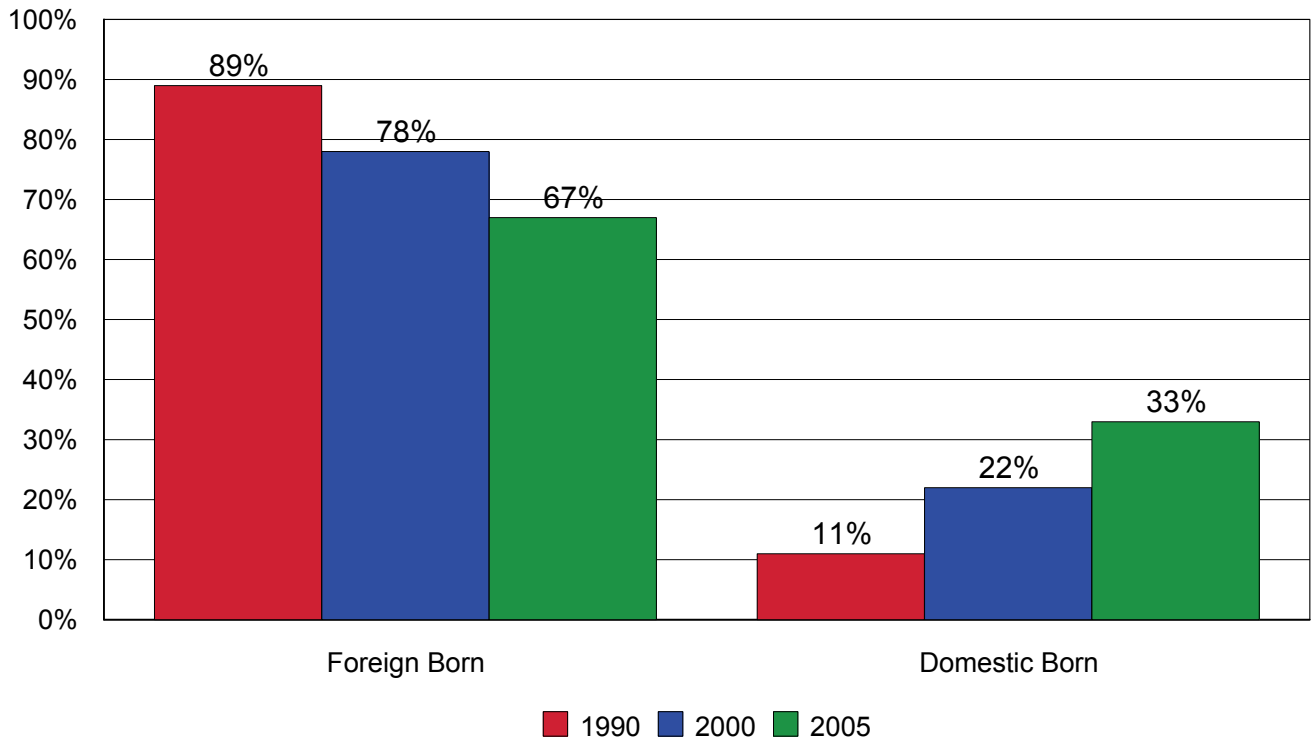
It is now appropriate to focus upon the Dominican population of WH/IN. They constituted over 43% of the total population in 1990; 52% in 2000, and 53% in 2005. By 2005 Dominicans were 73% of all Hispanics in the community and some 20% of the total NYC Dominican population lived in WH/IN. Although there was a relative shift in the percentage of the NYC Dominican population toward the Bronx between 2000 and 2005 as indicated in Figure 6, this was largely because of population growth rather than displacement in older areas of Dominican settlement such as WH/IN. There is little evidence of major Dominican 'out-migration' from the community after 2000. (See Figure 4 above).<sup>6</sup>

What clearly occurred among Dominicans after 2000 was a slowdown in migration from the Dominican Republic to WH/IN. This is revealed by examining the percentage of the Dominican population which was foreign and domestic-born. The percentage of foreign-born Dominicans remained stable between 1990 and 2000 and then fell significantly by 2005. Further evidence of a drop in migration is indicated by examining the age structure of the Dominican population. In 1990

<sup>6</sup> The decline in the number of Dominicans from 116,747 to 112,632 (-3.5%) between 2000 and 2005 was mirrored in every other racial/ethnic category. This suggests an overall population decline not specific to any group, or some subtle shift in the way the census bureau enumerated people between 2000 and 2005. It must be kept in mind that these data are derived from population samples taken by the Census Bureau.

89% of Dominicans in the 15-44 year old age category were foreign-born. This fell to 78% in 2000; and 67% in 2005. (See Figure 7). This broad age category is usually where most migrants are found. These data strongly suggest that fewer migrants from the DR were settling in the district.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 7  
Percentage of Foreign and Domestic Born Dominicans in  
Washington Heights/Inwood Ages 15 - 44, 1990 - 2005



Not only did the overall number of Dominicans in WH/IN NOT change significantly after 2000 but there is no evidence that poorer Dominican families were being forced out of the neighborhood by the social and economic transformations which were clearly underway. The median household income among Dominicans increased from \$21,036 in 1990 to \$32,000 in 2000 and then rose marginally to \$32,801 in 2005. The percentage of Dominican households earning under \$20,000 yearly dropped sharply between 1990 and 2000 from 47% to 31% and then increased to 37% in 2005. At the higher end of the household income earning hierarchy some 12% of Dominican households earned over \$50,000 annually in 1990. This increased to 28% in 2000 and remained stable in 2005 at 28%. (See Table 3). If poorer families were being displaced by newcomers there would not have been an increase in their share of all Dominican households after 2000.

<sup>7</sup> There is also compelling evidence that the migration of Dominicans from the DR to NYC in general slowed considerably after 2000. Within the 15-44 age group, where most migrants are found, there was a decline of the portion of foreign-born Dominicans in NYC from 86% to 80% between 1990 and 2000; and then a major decrease to 69% in 2005. In the Bronx, which in 2005 had the largest Dominican population, there was also a decline in the percentage of foreign born 15-44 year old Dominicans from 88% in 1990; to 85% in 2000; and then 74% in 2005.

Table 3  
Dominican Higher End and Lower End Household  
Income Earners Washington Heights/Inwood , 1990 - 2005

Dominicans	1990	2000	2005
Percentage Households Earning Less than \$20,000 Annually	47%	31%	37%
Percentage Households Earning More than \$50,000 Annually	12%	28%	28%

### Employment Patterns

Employment data for WH/IN indicate substantial shifts in the work force between 1990 and 2005 among the population between 16 and 60 years of age. These data must be used and interpreted carefully since there are three broad categories of persons enumerated by the Census Bureau: employed; unemployed; and those not in the labor force. No particular reasons are listed for those 'not in the labor force' and the reasons for not working range from the extremes of severe mental and physical disabilities to those who simply are not looking for work for whatever reason. To understand the transformations taking place in WH/IN the most important data to consider are changes in the number of employed persons. Unemployment indicators are not reliable gauges of employment because they do not include persons who are not looking for work even though these people may be healthy and able to hold a job. However, as more people enter the work force by actively seeking jobs, the employment rate rises and this is a more reliable indicator of change than the unemployment rate.

Employment data for the major race/ethnic groups in Washington Heights/Inwood are indicated in Table 4. Between 1990 and 2000 there was complete stability in the percentages of 16 - 60 year olds employed for Non-Hispanic Whites (70%) and Non-Hispanic Blacks (61%); while Asians experienced a decline from 68% to 54% and Hispanics with jobs fell from 53% of 16 - 60 year olds in 1990 to 49% in 2000. However, between 2000 and 2005 significantly increasing employment rates were found among all racial/ethnic categories and these are noted in Table 4 and indicated graphically in Figure 8. Although the Hispanic population had lower employment rates than the other racial/ethnic groups, the increase in the percentage employed among 16 - 60 year old Latinos from 49% to 64% between 2000 and 2005 was significant. There was also an important rise in the percentage of Non Hispanic Blacks employed over the same period from 61% to 69%. Non-Hispanic Whites (79%) and Asians (72%) had the highest rates of employment rates among 16 - 60 year olds in 2005 in WH/IN.

Figure 8  
Percentage of Population Employed in Washington Heights/Inwood  
Ages 16 - 60 by Race/Ethnicity 1990 - 2005

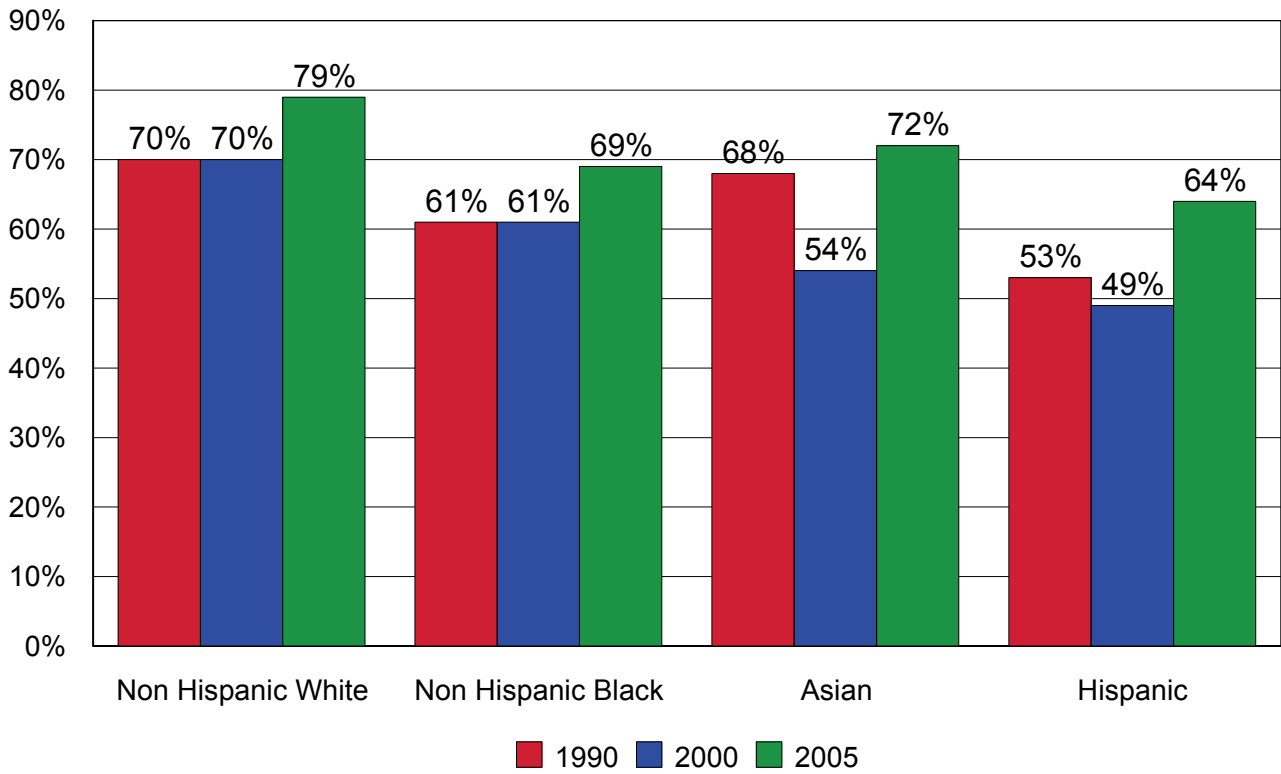


Table 4  
Employment and Unemployment in Washington Heights/Inwood by Race/Ethnic Group  
1990 - 2005, Population 16 - 60 Years of Age

Non-Hispanic Whites						
	1990	%	2000	%	2005	%
Employed	14,812	70%	13,277	70%	16,657	79%
Unemployed	987	5%	1,539	8%	914	4%
Not in labor force	5,237	25%	4,094	22%	3,542	17%
Total	21,036	100%	18,910	100%	21,113	100%

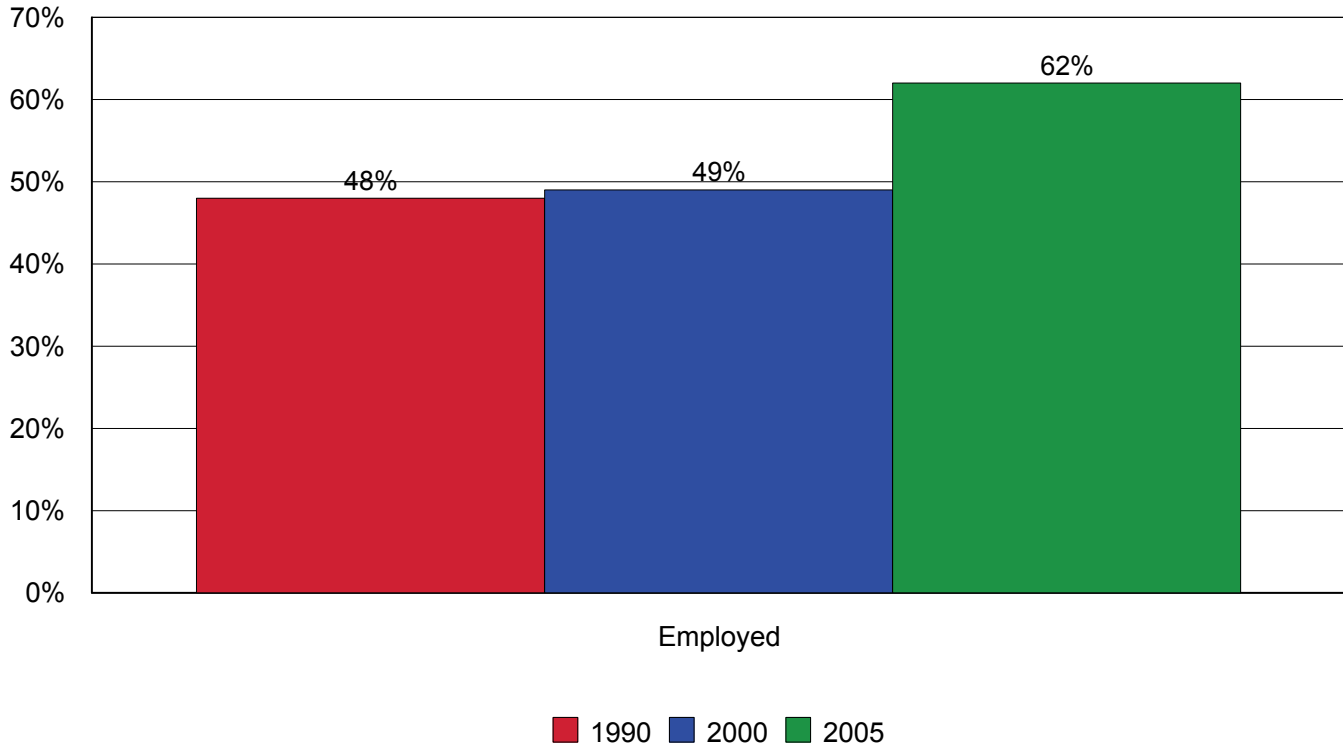
Non-Hispanic Blacks						
	1990	%	2000	%	2005	%
Employed	9,535	61%	7,279	61%	7,008	69%
Unemployed	1,646	11%	1,128	9%	482	5%
Not in labor force	4,353	28%	3,603	30%	2,704	27%
Total	15,534	100%	12,010	100%	10,194	100%

Asians						
	1990	%	2000	%	2005	%
Employed	2,231	68%	2,404	54%	3,385	72%
Unemployed	86	3%	408	9%	na	na
Not in labor force	965	29%	1,676	37%	1,304	28%
Total	3,282	100%	4,488	100%	4,689	100%

Hispanics						
	1990	%	2000	%	2005	%
Employed	47,274	53%	52,785	49%	63,744	64%
Unemployed	9,544	11%	9,921	9%	9,220	9%
Not in labor force	32,391	36%	44,136	41%	26,741	27%
Total	89,209	100%	106,842	100%	99,705	100%

How did the Dominican population fare with respect to employment? Since Dominicans comprised over 70% of the Latino population of WH/IN it is not surprising to find that their employment record parallels that of Hispanics in general. In 1990 48% of all Dominicans ages 16 - 60 were employed and this changed marginally to 49% in 2000. However, in 2005 62% of all WH/IN Dominicans in this age category were employed as indicated in Figure 9.

Figure 9  
Employment Among Dominican Population of Washington Heights/Inwood  
Population Ages 16 - 60, 1990 - 2005



These employment data for WH/IN do not address occupational categories of the employed or their income levels. There is no way to know if jobs were low paying entry-level positions in the service sector, higher-paying skilled jobs, or where in NYC these jobs were located. However, it is significant that between 2000 and 2005 there was a generalized increase in the percentage of the working-age population employed among all racial/ethnic groups. This constitutes evidence of the fact that major transformations are underway in WH/IN. It is unknown whether the rise in employment was the result of people with jobs of all racial/ethnic groups moving into the community or whether people already living in the district were acquiring jobs. The maintenance of high percentages of Latinos within the general population from 2000 to 2005, and high percentages of Dominicans within the Latino population, suggests that the extant population experienced increased opportunities and improved conditions with respect to employment. This may have been connected to significant improvements in educational attainment levels after 2000.



### Educational Attainment

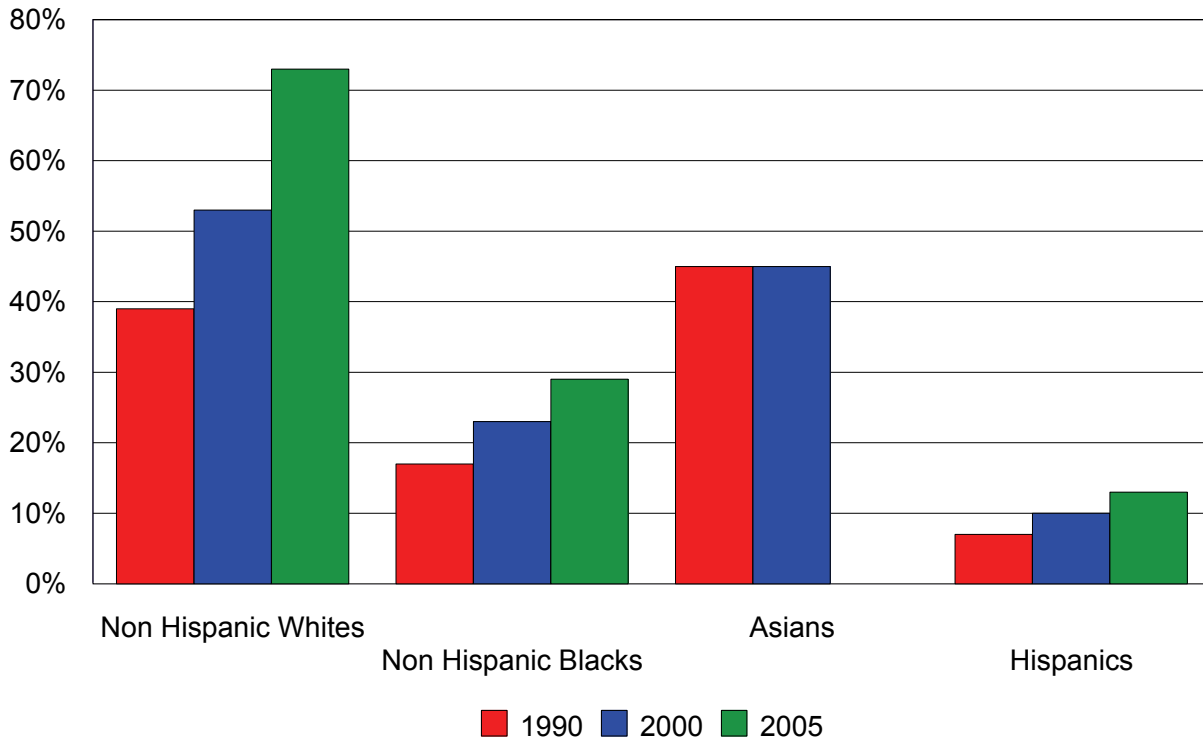
The population of Washington Heights over 25 years of age experienced positive changes in educational attainment levels between 1990 and 2005, although it is unknown whether this was because more educated people moved into the community or the extant population became better educated. There were major differences between the major race/ethnic groups. Evidence suggests that among Non-Hispanic Whites more educated people moved into the community, although this must be seen in perspective. It should be stressed once again that Non-Hispanic Whites did NOT increase in significant numbers over this time period, nor did Latinos diminish. If more educated Non-Hispanic Whites moved into WH/IN they did NOT displace existing population groups. Nevertheless the data are impressive and support the notion of a community in the process of transformation. In 1990 39% of Non-Hispanic Whites 25 years of age and over had achieved a BA degree or higher educational attainment. This increased to 53% in 2000, and an extraordinary 73% in 2005.

By way of contrast, among Latinos these same rates paled in comparison, even through there were significant improvements in Hispanic educational attainment levels. Still, only 7% of all Latinos over 25 years of age had attained a BA degree or higher in 1990 in WH/IN. This increased to 10% in 2000 and 13% in 2005. These were improvements to be sure, and they were significant. However, the differentiation between Latinos and Non-Hispanic Whites in educational attainment was dramatic.

Among WH/IN Non-Hispanic Blacks 25 years of age and older those with educational attainment levels of a BA or above, rose from 17% in 1990; to 23% in 2000; and to 29% in 2005. These are all percentages which were far above those found among Latinos. It must be reiterated that the Non-Hispanic Black population of WH/IN diminished considerably between 1990 and 2005 in both absolute numbers and as a percentage of all inhabitants. Those remaining, or perhaps those moving into the community, were clearly better educated than those who left according to these data.

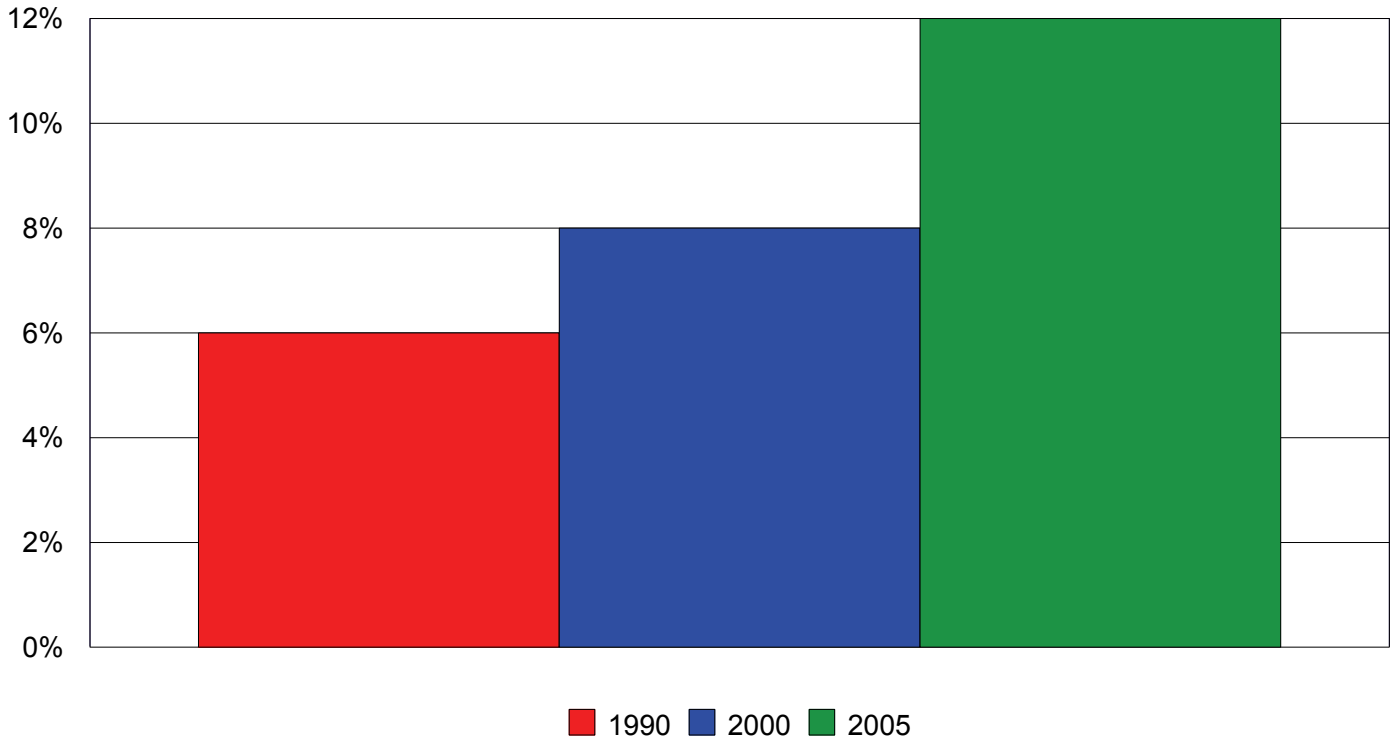
Among Asians 45% of those over 25 years of age had acquired a BA degree or higher in both 1990 and 2000. It is unfortunate that the data for 2005 are not complete or reliable. (See Figure 10).

Figure 10  
 Percentage of Washington Heights/Inwood Population 25 Years of Age and Over  
 with Educational Attainment Levels at BA or Above Level by Racial/Ethnic Group, 1990 - 2005



Among Dominicans there was also a clear improvement in educational attainment levels between 1990 and 2005 with a steadily increasing share of the 25 years of age and over population acquiring educations of BA degrees or higher. Only 6% fell into this category in 1990; although this increased to 8% in 2000, and 12% in 2005. (See Figure 11). These data strongly suggest that the extant Dominican population of WH/IN was attending college and achieving degrees.

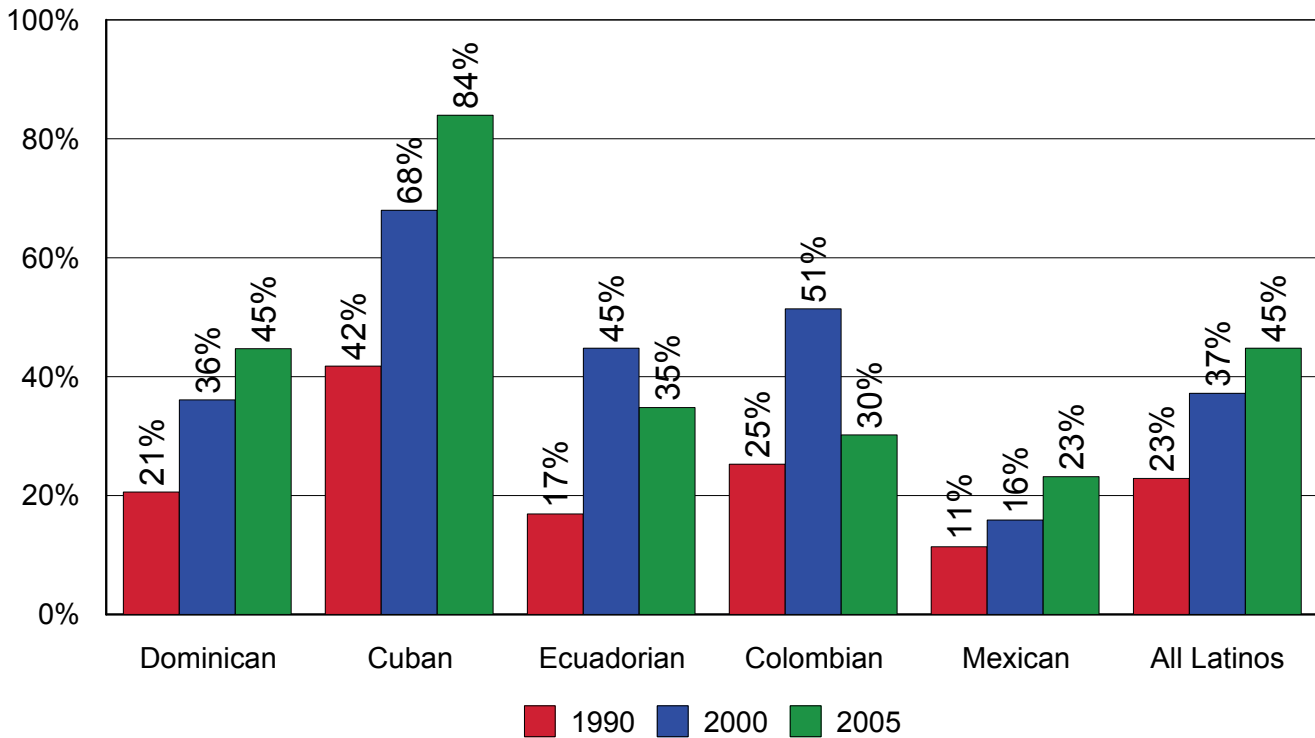
Figure 11  
Percentage of Washington Heights/Inwood Dominican Population 25 Years of Age and Over  
with Educational Attainment Levels of BA or Above, 1990 - 2005



### Citizenship

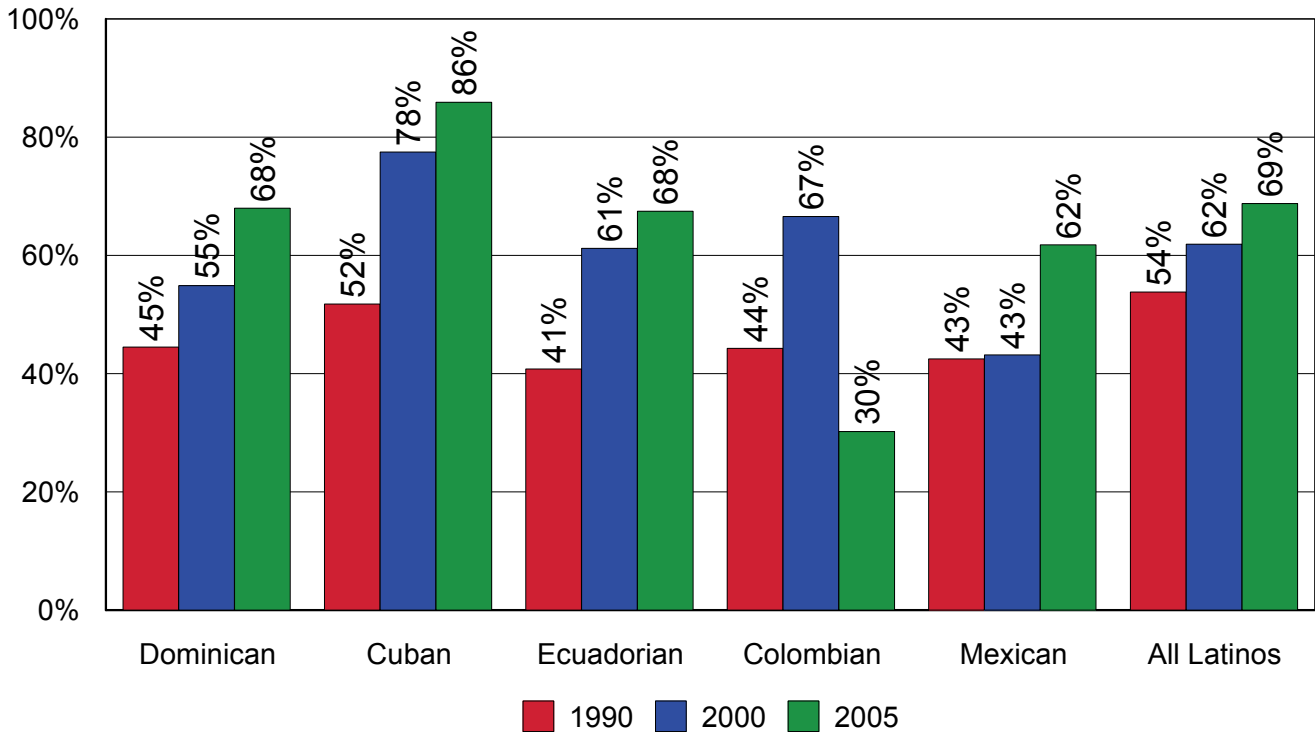
An increasing percentage of foreign-born Latinos living in Washington Heights/Inwood became naturalized citizens between 1990 and 2005 as indicated in Figure 12. Among all foreign-born Latinos only 23% were naturalized citizens in 1990. This rose to 37% in 2000, and then 45% in 2005. Cubans had the highest rates of naturalization with 84% of all foreign-born Cubans having acquired citizenship by 2005. Among Dominicans there was a very sharp upward trend toward greater rates of naturalization with 21% of all foreign-born Dominicans having become citizens by 1990 and 45% by 2005.

Figure 12  
Percentage of Largest Foreign-Born Latino Nationalities who are Naturalized Citizens  
Washington Heights/Inwood, 1990 - 2005



If we examine all citizens among Latino national groups, naturalized and domestic born, it is clear that greater percentages of WH/IN Latinos were citizens between 1990 and 2005. This paralleled the clear increase in the numbers of domestic-born Dominicans and other national groups as well as rising rates of naturalization. In 1990 54% of all Latinos residing in WH/IN were citizens and this increased steadily to 2005 when 69% were either naturalized or domestic-born citizens. Among Dominicans 45% were citizens in 1990 and this had risen sharply to 68% by 2005. These data are indicated in Figure 13.

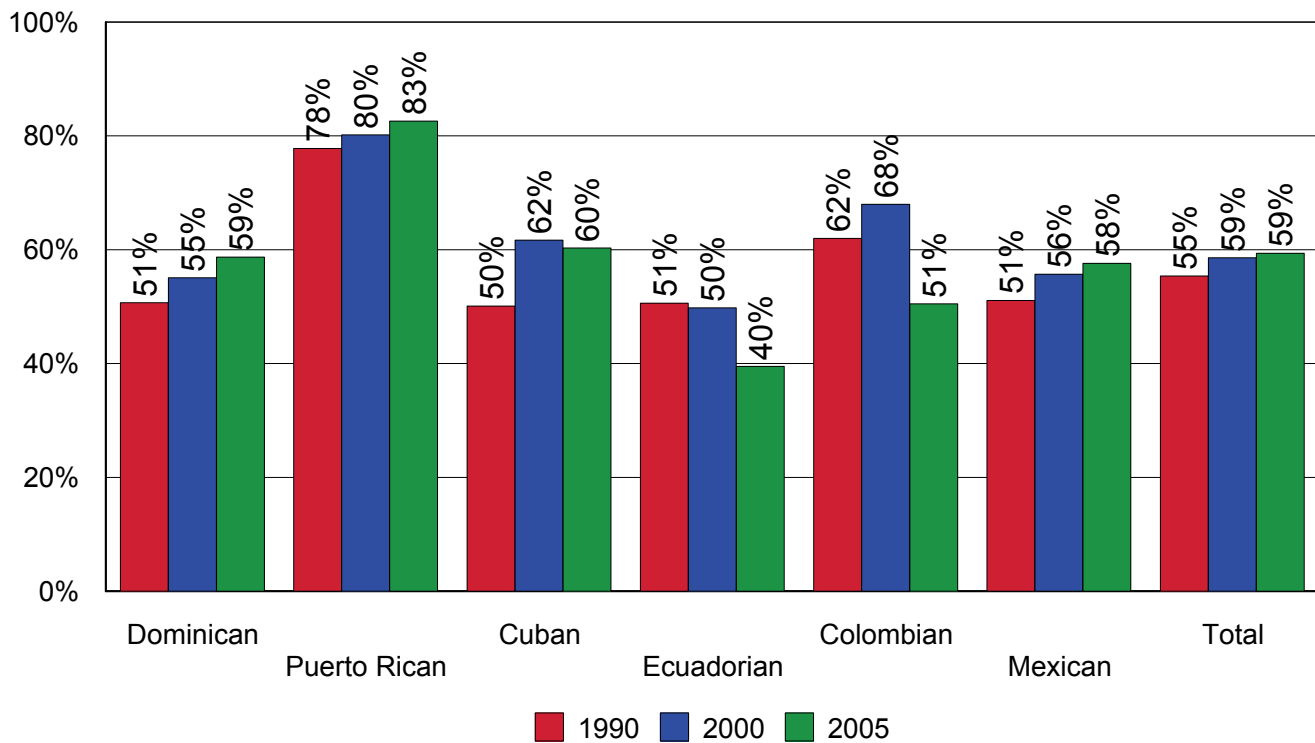
Figure 13  
 Percentage of Largest Latino Nationalities who are Citizens, Naturalized and Domestic Born Washington Heights/Inwood, 1990 - 2005



### Linguistic Ability

Despite the fact that increasing percentages of Latinos were becoming citizens there was no dramatic rise in English language skills among WH/IN Latino national groups. In 1990 55% of all Latinos reported speaking English exclusively, very well, or well. This increased marginally to 59% in 2005. Among Dominicans about 51% reported these English-language skills in 1990 and this rose to 59% in 2005. These data are indicated in Figure 14. It is difficult to ascertain the precise reasons why English language abilities increased so slowly in WH/IN. However, it is certain that as migration flows from the Dominican Republic slow, and increased numbers of WH/IN Dominicans are born in the U.S., English language abilities will experience major improvements.

Figure 14  
Percentage of Largest Latino Nationalities who Speak English Exclusively, Well, or Very Well  
Washington Heights/Inwood, 1990 - 2005



### Conclusions

Washington Heights/Inwood is clearly a neighborhood in which significant changes have begun to occur, especially after 2000. However, within the context of transformation there has been a degree of stability in the community and this is brought into sharp focus by examining the racial/ethnic configurations of the population between 1990 and 2005. Among Latinos in the community there is an image of more 'white people' moving in and indeed there may have been an influx of better educated and higher income earning Non-Hispanic Whites who have a very visible presence in the commercial areas of the neighborhood where new businesses have opened in the past five years. But the census data do not support the popular notion of whites moving in and Latinos or other groups being pushed out. In fact the percentage of whites in relation to the overall population declined from 18% to 13% between 1990 and 2000 and then only rose marginally to 14% in 2005. The high visibility of whites in the business districts of the neighborhood may have created a distorted image as to the degree of their presence which in reality has not changed significantly throughout WH/IN.

However, it is clear that while Non-Hispanic Whites are more educated and earn more money than the other race/ethnic groups, they have not affected the fundamental demographic configurations of the community in which Latinos and Dominicans are the overwhelming majority of the population. Latinos continued to be the dominant population group constituting 74% of all residents in 2000 and 73% in 2005 during this period of change; and Dominicans have increased slightly as a percentage of all Hispanics over the same time frame from 71% to 73%. The one group which is on

the decline is Non-Hispanic Blacks who have decreased from 12% to 7% of the total population between 1990 and 2005.

Among Latino groups Puerto Ricans have declined as a percentage of all Hispanics from 14% to 8% between 1990 and 2005. Other Hispanic nationalities have moved into the neighborhood especially Mexicans, whose numbers have increased throughout NYC, and Ecuadorians. Yet, Dominicans continue to be the dominant group and their position has remained stable demographically despite the changes underway in the community.

With the exception of Non-Hispanic Blacks, the other race/ethnic groups have experienced rising median household incomes after 2000, including Latinos. Non-Hispanic Whites and Asians remain at the top of the income-earning hierarchy to be sure. While poverty clearly persists in the neighborhood among Latinos and Dominicans, the poor have not yet begun to exit the community in significant numbers. In fact the number of Latino and Dominican households earning under \$20,000 yearly has increased between 2000 and 2005.

There is no question that some, maybe many, Latino and Dominican families have moved out of the community for lower rent neighborhoods in the Bronx or elsewhere between 2000 and 2005, and this probably occurred during the 1990s as well. One would be hard pressed to find Latinos in the area who do not have a story about this person or that family who has left for lower cost-of-living neighborhoods. But individual stories, even if they are generalized, do not reflect the realities revealed by hard data. Families have left to be sure, but overall there has been absolutely no systematic movement of people, poor or otherwise, out of WH/IN since 1990, although it is impossible to predict what the future will bring.

The majority Latino population has experienced enduring poverty without question. However, there have been major improvements which must be not ignored. The employment rate has soared since 2000, and while we don't know if Latinos are employed in low-earning jobs, it is clearly better to be working than not looking for work or unemployed. The data on median household income suggests there have been significant improvements in earning capacity among Latinos and Dominicans but that they clearly lag well behind Non-Hispanic Whites and Asians.

Additionally, there can be no questioning of the increased educational attainment levels experienced by the majority Latino population including Dominicans. More WH/IN Latinos are going to and graduating from college and this is a major predictor of better economic performance in the future.

Is Washington Heights/Inwood being 'gentrified'? The word itself has a negative connotation to most people because an intrinsic assumption is that if more affluent people move into a given neighborhood the extant population, especially the poor, will eventually be displaced. According to the data presented in this report there are clearly important changes taking place in WH/IN, but to date there has been absolutely no large-scale immigration or out migration of people from the community and the poor as a group have remained entrenched in the neighborhood with the possible exception of Non-Hispanic Blacks. The data presented here offer convincing evidence of these conclusions but they may not be used to project future changes. The U.S. Census of 2010 will offer a more nuanced understanding of the transformations occurring in WH/IN during the first decade of the 21st century, but we will have to be patient, and not jump to conclusions as to the impact of transformation in this northern Manhattan community district. Convenient stereotypical labels such as 'gentrification', with all of their implicit assumptions, do not really tell us very much about complex social and economic transformations which are experienced repeatedly in the world's major urban centers, and are underway in WH/IN.