ETHNOGRAPHIC FOLLOW-UP OF A PREDOMINANTLY AFRICAN AMERICAN POPULATION IN A SAMPLE AREA IN CENTRAL HARLEM, NEW YORK CITY: BEHAVIORAL CAUSES OF THE UNDERCOUNT OF THE 1990 CENSUS

by

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RESULTS IN BRIEF

The 1990 Decennial Census of the south side of one block in Central Harlem in this predominantly African-American, low-income community in New York City, reported 80 housing units and 72 New Yorkers. My Alternative Enumeration (AE) of the same side of the block (the sample area) identified 132 housing units and 143 individuals. The undercount was therefore about 50 per cent.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC SITE

Central Harlem is located in Northern Manhattan, from 110th Street to 155th Street between Amsterdam Avenue to the west and Fifth Avenue to the east. Hedged in on the east and west by Hispanic populations, Central Harlem remains predominantly African American, although significant numbers of Caribbean African and African migrants have been settling in since the late 1960's. By the early 1900's, Harlem was a solid working class African American community, boasting fine, well maintained brownstones and apartment buildings interspersed by enclaves of splendid family mansions. Yet, today it has become a landscape in which blocks of abandoned buildings or empty, rubble-strewn lots predominate. A fractured commercial life persists along the major avenues, while the majority of the community's residents occupy dilapidated housing on the side streets.

The sample area fully represents the history and diversity I have sketched. In the ethnographic site lived "old time" Harlemites, newer African American migrants born in the South or in the Caribbean and Africans from Ethiopia. Residents of the ethnographic site lived in dilapidated brownstones and apartment buildings, ruined family homes, abandoned buildings and a few well kept town houses. A couple of churches and a parochial school within the site served as reminders of Harlem's "golden past".

FIELDWORK METHODS

I do not think it would have been possible for me to perform the Alternative Enumeration (AE) of the sample area had I not previously acquired an extensive knowledge of it and of Central Harlemites. I began working formally in the sample area in 1984 for an influential local community agency as a researcher and social worker specialized in the then new "crack" epidemic. In this position, I gained a thorough knowledge of Central Harlem neighborhoods, including the sample area, which comprised the agency's catchment area. My knowledge included the locations of drug using and distributing locales and the persons who frequented them. Some of the latter were in the sample area.

After beginning to write in the academic and professional literature about crack, I received continuous funding since 1986 to expand my research on drug distribution, drug use and misuse, and on treatment for drug misuse. In the course of several projects, therefore, I had already gained the trust of some persons who would later be included in the Alternative Enumeration. I had spent many months accompanying them on their daily round of activities, had noted down observations of them in a variety of settings, and had tape-recorded formal interviews with them. The time spent with them had made the sample area and its residents familiar to me, and me to them.

I selected the sample area because I had identified about 20 male and female crack users who were "squatters" in an abandoned building there. I felt sure that these citizens would not be included in the census and that their cases would illustrate the impact of drugs and homelessness on censusing. Background studies had predicted and hypothesized these effects on censusing (Bourgois 1989; McCall 1990). By the time the Alternative Enumeration began, however, a series of incidents had caused the building to be emptied and sealed. Below, the last days of squatting in the abandoned building are described through the eyes of local residents. I followed the dispersal of the former squatters into other buildings in and near by the sample area. Several were included in the Alternative Enumeration as members of unusual households called "freak houses."

In conducting an Alternative Enumeration, my strategy was to begin with the crack misusers and distributors I knew, and to obtain through them information about housing units and occupants in their buildings. Thus, I received immediately detailed dispositions of three brownstones, in which my informants had assigned persons to housing units. Next, I observed the persons so identified on different occasions during the day: during the morning exodus of workers from the neighborhood, or during their return at 5 pm; at the corner stores during the day or in the evening; or sitting on the stoops of buildings. Residents of two of the brownstones attended a late night outing to the swimming pool in Central Park and were introduced to me by the crack distributor who had invited me. I met two older women who attended the nearby churches on Sundays and some residents who "made meetings" of Alcoholics Anonymous that were held within the sample area. Eventually, I was introduced to, or found and had the opportunity to become acquainted with each individual (or most of them) and brought up the question of an interview or a home visit in connection with the AE.

It should be noted that crack distributors and users gained me an entree into three buildings in the sample area which are usually avoided by neighbors because of the fearful reputations they have acquired. Flagrant drug use was evident, and fights broke out among users and distributors on the sidewalks. The police responded frequently with screeching tires, blaring sirens and flashing lights. Respectable citizens in the sample area resented the excitement.

In moving to other buildings in which there was neither crack use nor distribution, I was greatly aided by the fact that my own behavior in interaction with crack users and distributors was being observed by the respectable citizenry. As I had moved in as a resident in a building close-by, my professional affiliation at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and my research on drugs was well known. My engagement of two Harlemites, students at John Jay, as research assistants in this project was appreciated. I had been very fortunate in the choice of one of them. He had attended the parochial school in the sample area as a boy, lived nearby in the projects and was familiar with most of the study population although he frequently lacked precise details of their living arrangements. I was able to secure the assistance of the clergy in the sample area, who shared their knowledge of the areal residents and the parishioners with me. Two householders, both senior level public officials, also functioned as "key community consultants": persons whose knowledge could be trusted. Keen property owners, they were experts on property values, the fates of the buildings in the sample area, and the fortunes of the persons who lived in them. They introduced me to some of their neighbors who felt that the census had pestered them enough, and that they could not make more time for me. Their commentary was combined with the observations I was making and with the self reports of the residents themselves to make a plausible AE of the sample area.

While on the street I wrote minimal notes on a small pad but once at home and seated at my computer, I wrote up my observations and recollection of interviews while they remained fresh. I and my assistants kept several records of our observations and encounters with the sample population and, on my computer, I maintained field logs in which the time and place and circumstances of every contact was recorded. Field notes covered the latter more extensively while diaries and positions papers probed the meaning and significance of incoming data. For many residents, I have note from multiple interviews spanning months before and after the time of the Alternative Enumeration in June and July 1990. The research assistants helped me complete an initial list of housing units, though I made changes as I learned more about occupants. I set up a data base which was continuously and systematically updated for each housing unit, recording names and information such as age, date of birth, marital status on each residents as I learned these particulars.

In August 1990, I submitted the Alternative Enumeration and observations for each housing unit and households and for the neighborhood as a whole. I received the match to Census and guidelines for the resolution in December 1990. I discussed matches and resolutions extensively with the Census Bureau technical representative. My previous notes proved to be a good source for sorting out issues about matching to the census and where the people who moved often really lived on Census Day.

REASONS FOR THE UNDERCOUNT

I see three main reasons why the undercount was so severe at this site in Harlem: (1) missed housing units, (2) unusual households and (3) enumerator fear. I will discuss each of these reasons in detail below.

(1) Missed Housing Units
The principal reason for the undercount is that housing units were completely missed. In several cases, a single questionnaire was mailed to an address in the belief that there was only one housing unit there. An enumerator would go out into the neighborhood expecting to find one person or one family and would utterly believe that he had found that: a brownstone on a reasonably quiet block, or at least with little activity in the middle of the day (at hours when I had observed census enumerators at work). Especially if no one admitted him into the brownstone, he would take away that impression of a single family house, rather than of a house broken into two or up to ten housing units.

Housing units 002 to 011 were in such a brownstone. I am sure that there are records to show that once upon a time, this was a modest brownstone housing a snug nuclear family of husband, wife and young children. This view of the building remains unchanged in the 1990 Census. One questionnaire was mailed out to the address, and an enumerator, walking past it (he could not have gone in!) listed it as one housing unit, containing three individuals. The reality, of course, is quite different. In 1984, a minister of a nearby Baptist church bought the property "to respond to the problem of homelessness." He divided the brownstone into ten housing units, and rented each apartment at $350-$375 a month. Since few repairs have been made to the heavy wear-and-tear on public spaces like stairways and shared bathrooms, the aspect inside the building is grimly Victorian. Twenty one individuals live in the building today, including two children under 10. Figure 1 illustrates the situation and the census outcome.

Figure 1

Actual situation	Census outcome
Converted Brownstone # 1 Housing units A 17 002 to 011	
21 people in 10 housing units	Family of 3 in 1 housing unit (single family house)
Totals	
Census Day residents: 21	Censused population: 3

The heterogeneity of the housing in this sample area (and in similar blocks in Harlem and throughout the city) apparently confuses the census. Six brownstones [A17:076 to A17:081], [A17: 088], [A17: 089], [A17: 095], [A17: 103], [A17: 105 to [A17: 107], handsome well-kept homes, do indeed house single, nuclear families, or three generations of a single family, or non-related persons [A17: 088-04, -05] [A17: 103-05, -06] who are so familiar that they might be regarded as "fictive" kin. A seventh [A17: 090] (correctly shown as vacant and "unconverted" on Census Day), has been sold to a single family.

The eighth [A17: 062 to A17: 063] and ninth [A17: 108 to A17: 110] family homes have let out two floors to three foreign students [A17: 063-01,-02,-03] and two teachers [A17: 109-01, A17: 110-01] respectively. It appears that these tenants were screened carefully, to maintain the aura of respectability and "family home." A tenth [A17: 064 to A17: 069] has sheltered the same home-owner, her son, and three tenants since the 1920’s.

Five other brownstones, however, [A17: 002 to A17: 011], [A17: 028 to A17: 035], [A17: 045 to A17: 051], [A17: 082 to A17: 087], [A17: 096 to A17: 102] are like the converted brownstone I already described in that they now have multiple units.

Figure 2 compares the actual situation within these five converted brownstones to how the census represented them.

Figure 2

Five More Converted Brownstones

Actual Situation	**Census outcome**
Converted Brownstone # 2: HUs A17 002 to 011 = B17 563]	
22 people living in	1 person living in
11 housing units	1 housing unit

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Converted Brownstone # 3: HUs A17 028 to 035 = B17 571]	
4 people living in	1 person living in
4 housing units plus	1 housing unit
4 other vacant apartments	

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Converted Brownstone # 4: HUs A17 045 to 051 = B17 639 et al]	
19 people living in	5 people living in
7 housing units	5 apartments plus
	3 other vacant apartments

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Converted Brownstone # 5 : HUs A17 082 to 087 = B17 886	
6 people living in	1 person living in
6 housing units plus	1 housing unit
1 vacant apartment	

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Converted Brownstone # 6 : HUs A17 096 to 102 = B17 017 et al	
19 people living in	4 people living in
7 housing units	3 housing units plus
	6 vacant apartments

Totals

Census Day Residents: 70	Censused population: 12

Recently, a young female attorney bought a brownstone which has nine market-ready housing units. She and a single tenant have occupied only two, as she is reconverting the brownstone into a single family home. However, a total of seven persons in three different housing units were censused because the conscientious and civic-minded young woman and her tenant had mailed in three questionnaires that had arrived at the address. The complicated situation is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Reconverted Brownstone

Actual situation	Census outcome
Owner occupies the 8 units; Tenant occupies 1 additional separate apartment [A 17 036-044]	3 separate units listed at building address apt 1 lists owner and tenant apt 2 lists owner and tenant apt 3 list owner, tenant and an occasional weekend guest of the owner
Totals	
Actual population: 2	Censused population: 7 (2 correct, 4 duplicate, 1 erroneous enumeration)

(Alternative Enumeration Data References: Owner A17: 037-01; tenant A17: 036-01;housing units A17: 036 to A17: 044)

Three more brownstones [including housing units A17 032 to 035, 082 to A 087, and 076 to A 081] are being refashioned currently either to increase or to reduce the number of housing units within each building.

Missed housing units mean missed people, and their demographics in this sample area ensure that they will be missed. In the brownstone owned by the Baptist minister (shown in Figure 1), persons who would otherwise be homeless were attracted by the low rents. Many have reasons for concealment, including violations of parole or illegal drug activity. And at any rate, they all felt that the Census was a waste of time, unlikely to make any improvements in their abject living conditions, and were therefore hostile towards it.

Some housing units were missed through sloppiness. This site contains a rectory [A17 001] where four priests live. The reverend father who gave me their names, ages, ethnic group and details of living arrangements for the Alternative Enumeration, assured me that they had mailed in a census questionnaire. Thereafter, he greeted me whenever he saw me working, and took the trouble to congratulate me on the importance of the project. The rectory was the only building in the site which distributed census advertisements and information. Their address does not appear on census records for this block. They were not censused.

Nor was the owner [A17: 089-01] of one of the stable family homes [A17: 089] in the site, whom I had reported as a "sure return." When I had visited, a relative was also visiting who serves the Census Bureau at a very high level. She goodnaturedly rebuked the homeowner for not mailing the questionnaire, which was lying, already completed, on top of the refrigerator. Two days later, she assured me as she hurried to work that she had mailed it after all.

Were the claims of these people that they had received and mailed back a census form correct? Were their returns lost in the mail? Or were they wrongly geo-coded by the Census Bureau (so that they are being counted in Hawaii or Alaska)? Or maybe the forms have been inadvertently lost or destroyed after being received by the Census Bureau? The Census Bureau technical representative could not find these addresses on the census lists for the block or anywhere nearby. It should be noted that a few housing units, with censused persons in them, were mis-geocoded to this research block and thus were "imported" into the study sample from addresses several miles away. These had to be struck out, and were identified on the resolution coding sheet as errors: addresses and people without any possibility of a match in Harlem!

2) Unusual Household Arrangements

Squatters

In my original proposal to the Census Bureau, my interest in the Census Bureau's AE project centered in an abandoned building. The building corresponds to housing units numbered as A17 111 to 130. In this building, I had reported a number of crack-abusing squatters lived. The situation changed, however, over the year between submission of the proposal in May 1989 and June 1990 when the Alternative Enumeration began. Several incidents ---a murder, a shootout between crack distributors and the police which left one of the former dead, the discovery of a breed of attack dogs being reared in a top-floor apartment--- encouraged the police and the City to attempt sealing off entrance to it.

Each attempt was foiled by the squatters. Finally a fire which burned off the roof, the demolition of the interior by responding fire fighters, and the placement of a solid metal sheet where the street door had been, discouraged them. On Census Day, therefore, only two distributors of "pfunk" [heroin mixed with cocaine, for intranasal use or smoking] occupied the first floor of the building. Had the fire not occurred, up to twenty persons would have been residents, and would have been additional "Predicted Misses." Although this abandoned building resisted occupation by squatters in the end, there are very many more like it in Harlem which do not.

Some of the refugees from the abandoned building joined very peculiar households which defied both classification and enumeration, but were nevertheless enumerated in the AE (See Stanley's Freak house [A17-045], below). Some are called "freak houses."

The Formation of "Freak Houses"

"Freak houses" had been in the making for at least a year, or since the beginning of 1990. When male and female crack abusers lost their apartments or their "berths" in relatives' homes, they worked out a residential strategy which included squatting in abandoned buildings, sleeping in hallways and basements, and staying briefly in the several types of city shelters for the homeless. Prisons, hospitals and rehabilitation centers also provided a roof. But increasingly, they were attracted to the homes of single, elderly male users (Hamid 1992 and forthcoming).

Government policy over the past three decades had contributed greatly to this attraction. While in the 1960's the poverty risk for the elderly had been one in three, today only one in eight has an income below the poverty line. Persons over 65 have prospered from an expanded social security program, which offers increased benefits indexed to newer, higher levels of inflation; from an expanded medicare program; and from housing programs and other services (eg. discounts or reduced fees) designed exclusively for them (Weir et al. 1988). In the same period of time, however, the eligibility requirements for mothers applying for welfare assistance grew more restrictive, payments were not indexed to changes in the cost of living, and few housing programs were developed to compensate for their inability to compete for housing units in an inflated real estate market (Peterson and Rom 1988; Rossi 1989).

Of course, younger men and childless women had never received an outright "dole" from the state: and now find themselves served by fewer educational or job-training opportunities (Wilson 1987; Gibbs 1988; McAdoo 1988). After crack-abusing males and females had surrendered their children to grandmothers, these reluctant caretakers, senior citizens again, (New York Times: 1989) discovered that, under the provisions of the City's kinship Program, they would be paid up to $1500 per month per child. Thus, by mid-1990, when "freak houses" had differentiated themselves, the estate of the elderly had seemed blessed and assured in comparison to that of the next descending generations in inner city minority neighborhoods. More significantly, the elderly had homes.

Single, elderly men and female crack abusers must have realized for some time that they had a common ground to negotiate. One early accommodation has been widely reported in the press. An elderly European-American gentleman, a former dancing star who had performed with Fred Astaire, was helped one day with his groceries by two sisters in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn. The sisters, both in their mid-twenties and from the nearby Bushwick section, were crack abusers who may have intended to rob the elderly man, but then decided to accompany him home. There they saw even better opportunities. When the relationship was reported by neighbors a few months later, the police found a very hostile man who resisted their attempt to arrest his companions.

Although the sisters had emptied his bank account of over $50,000, their company had been more welcome than the blank stare of walls he had grown used to. "They sang and danced," he complained to the policemen bitterly, "the walls do not." (Daily News: 1990).

In the less affluent neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Harlem, variations of the same relationship were reached, especially where the single elderly men had already become users. While female crack abusers needed a place to store their few clothes and official papers, and to sleep, cook and attend to personal hygiene, single, elderly crack using males wanted not only companionship and sexual favors, but crack too. That desire emboldened them to create households in which they could oversee several women while they sought crack and returned to consume it.

As a result, a single, elderly man would "smoke lovely," as the current street expression goes: a "harem" of women would settle in and supplied him daily with crack, domestic services and sex. He would spend less money than he had done normally, and enjoy besides an undreamed-of fund of extra income and excitement.

One of the first of these unusual households was established in mid-1989 in Central Harlem. The household I'll describe for "Pops" is located just across the street from the sample area. The household I'll describe for "Stanley" is within the sample area. Some of the same people were involved in both households at different times between the Census Day and the AE.

Pops' Freak House

Pops is a firm, wiry, 66-year old African American male who had migrated from the Carolinas with his mother, two brothers and a sister to New York City in the 1950's. They had settled in this Harlem neighborhood, and all had found jobs. Pops became a welder and remained in that occupation until his retirement in 1979. He shared an apartment with his mother until her death in 1975. He never married, and his social life had been centered around his mother's church.

After his mother's death, Pops moved to his present home on the top floor of a brownstone near the Avenue. The owner of the brownstone was an elderly woman who had been among his mother's closest friends at church, and he had moved in to help her with the maintenance of the building, which housed five other tenants.

When the owner died, it was inherited by her four children, and is managed today by a son who lives in New Jersey. The son acknowledges Pops' special relation to the brownstone, and leaves him in effective day-to-day control of it.

In the years since his mother's death, and especially since his retirement, Pops has made a few close friendships with other men his age in the neighborhood. Eddie, Louie and Rich are his closest buddies. Although the four never go out of the neighborhood for amusement, they meet every night at Pops' to drink a pint of Bacardi's and to play cards. The friends are moderate drinkers who restrict themselves to the one pint. When they aren't visiting, Pops likes to spend his time at the window in his bedroom, which overlooks the street and its quiet eddy of New York life.

In 1987, the view from Pops' window revealed a rapidly quickening scene. Pops' brownstone stood directly opposite one of only two apartment buildings in the sample area. There were twenty apartments in this one, but in the last year or two, many new faces were seen going through the street door. A lot of these new faces belonged to women, whom Pops could see busily strolling the street at all hours. Then, overnight it seemed, a clump of three young men in their late teens, took root on the pavement before the street door of the apartment building. Another band settled in obliquely opposite, on the western pavement on the Avenue; and there was a third crew directly opposite them. Members of the three groups monopolized the public telephones closeby, and other young men, dressed in expensive jump suits and sneakers and behind the wheels of rented New Yorker sedans, drove up frequently to confer with them. The female newcomers now made these young men the centers of their non-stop peregrinations. Of course, Pops knew they were crack abusers "on a mission," and that the young men were crack distributors.

The appearance of the apartment building deteriorated before Pops' eyes. First, the glass pane in the street door was smashed, then the door itself was kicked off its hinges. Broken windows multiplied around the building: and behind them sheets made of cloth or plastic had been installed. The boiler broke down and was not repaired. The backyard filled up with discarded furniture and uncollected garbage.

The building was formally abandoned in late 1988. In vacant apartments, window frames were scavenged by scrappers, leaving huge, gaping holes in the facades of the building; the apartments themselves were stripped and gutted. The stairway indoors collapsed between the second and third floors and subsequently, more sections fell off. Visitors got upstairs by negotiating sharp-edged ruins of concrete by the light of a dim naked bulb, and passed by landings where psychiatric homeless men would rear up suddenly from beneath shelters made of cardboard boxes, muttering curses and offering fierce gestures.

Nevertheless eight apartments remained occupied. Residents continued to have electricity, but fetched water from the fire hydrant at the curb. They were principally women, as many as six to each apartment, which they maintained as a locale for using crack. Many workingmen were seen entering the building, apparently undeterred by the hazards of the stairway.

One woman, whom he had observed frequently from his window, looked very appealing to Pops, and he was glad when she approached him one day in the street and asked for some money to buy food. Up close, he noticed that she possessed, in addition to the shapely body, a very pretty face and a soft-spoken diminutive manner. He joked with her a bit, saying that he was sure that she would take the money and head immediately for the crack distributors at the curb. It would be better for her, he opined, to share the lunch of neck bones and rice, collard greens and macaroni pie which he was going in to prepare.

"Evelyn", as the young woman is called, recalls the offer and the meal well. Twenty four years of age, she had recently moved into this neighborhood from the South Bronx, where she had grown up. Her mother had quarreled with her regularly for the past four years, following her initiation into crack use. Eventually, after repeated thefts of money and valuables from the home, her mother applied to the Family Court for an Order of Protection against her, and petitioned formally for custody of her two daughters.

Evelyn meanwhile got to know Annie, who was squatting in the apartment building here, and moved in with her. But she couldn't store her clothes safely at Annie's, there wasn't a working bathroom, and there wasn't any place to prepare a meal. Moreover, Annie's apartment swarmed with men eager to smoke crack and to exchange some for sex: they often enjoyed the latter and then refused to produce the former. Some of them grew quarrelsome and violent as they "beamed up" and drank alcohol.

Evelyn was very grateful, therefore, for Pops' offer and valued it more highly than the few dollars she had begged. While Pops prepared lunch, Evelyn was allowed to fetch some fresh clothes from Annie's, to draw a long, hot bath, and to wash out her dirty clothes. She must have been radiantly transformed when she and Pops sat down to eat. As for Pops, it must have been one of the few occasions in his life which he had spent together with an attractive young woman.

As the relation between Evelyn and Pops was prolonged, conditions at the apartment building opposite [A17 111 to A17:130] worsened. A shootout between the police and the crack distributors had brought notoriety to it. Friends of a distributor who had been killed in the shootout had tied a wreath in his memory to the street lamp post nearby, and there had been a struggle with the police to keep it there. The feud was reported in a local newspaper, under a picture showing the street corner, the lamp post and the wreath. Neighborhood youths trashed and burned the Arab-owned grocery store on the street floor two months after it opened. The responding fire company gutted it entirely.

Then the police were called to remove a dead body indoors, and discovered that two raving pitbulls were being raised in an apartment on the top floor. A special police unit had to be summoned to remove them. When the police completed this job, they had the street door barred with a padlocked, folding metal gate. Annie had used a bolt cutter to remove the padlock and had replaced it with her own; but entry and exit had been made more difficult.

Pops did not object as Evelyn began introducing her crack-abusing female neighbors to his apartment. He had been encouraged by Evelyn to try crack as a sexual aid, and had become a careful, if totally committed, crack smoker. He insisted that Evelyn and her girlfriends should bring him gifts of crack, and provide him with different women upon request. When, following a fire which had burned out the top floor, the apartment building opposite was sealed by a solid sheet of metal fitted across the street door, Evelyn and three of her friends, Lorry, Genny and Sonya, moved into Pops' apartment. (Lorry [A17-045-06] and Genny [A17-045-07] lived in Stanley's freak house at the time of the Alternative Enumeration.)

Pops is a controlled user of crack. When asked about his crack use, he praises it, but his lovingly constructed home-made crack pipe sits undisturbed in its cradle on his nightstand for most of the day. He plays cards and sips Bacardi's in his bedroom with his three buddies while the four women and their friends come and go with the men who are buying them crack. Sometimes they come into the bedroom to sit and smoke, and to leave portions of the drug for Pops. Sometimes they look in to ask permission for use of the spare room in back of the apartment, and then they leave cash as well as crack. Past midnight or early in the morning, after his buddies have left, Pops will call his bedmates for that night into his bedroom and lock the street door to the brownstone. His pipe, fashioned from a 2-oz. Chivas Regal bottle and a clean stem, is uncradled then.

A strong man, hard-working for most of his life, Pops is abroad in the neighborhood by 10 am everyday of the week. He buys the Daily News and Newsday from the corner deli and groceries from the neighborhood C-Town. He cooks for the women who share his apartment, and encourages them to keep it clean and to do the laundry regularly. They are also strictly forbidden from molesting the five elderly tenants who occupy the remaining three floors of the brownstone.

Pops' household responded to his need for crack, sex and companionship at minimal cost, and to the desire of the females for a measure of permanence in a highly mobile lifestyle. Several other men and women needed their affiliation to it for smoking crack and for sex-crack exchanges. Once the household form for meeting these various needs and for combining many persons was achieved, however, it spread rapidly. Its special strengths --providing income and facilitating sex-- were developed continuously.

Stanley's Freak House [A17-045]

Stanley's apartment is in the sample area and was enumerated in my AE. On the same street as Pops, it became a freak house around March, 1990 when Stanley moved into it. Stanley's is a freak house in ways in which Pops' is not. Unlike Pops, Stanley [A17-045-01] has been a drug user and hustler for much of his life. As a hustler, he has even run scams at places where he was legitimately employed. For example, he worked for a number of years at a hospital as the clerk who goes from bed to bed, signing up patients for TV service. A lot of that money ended up in his pocket. In another job as a shipping clerk in a used clothing company, he diverted merchandise to street peddlers regularly. He must have appreciated at once the unique opportunities a household like Pops' afforded.

Stanley is 45 years old. He has been a crack user for the past five years, but in the late

1960's and early 70's he had injected and distributed heroin. He served prison time for grand larceny and drug distribution in this phase of his life. He had joined a methadone program at a well-known hospital in 1975, and had remained in it for ten years, although he continued to smoke marijuana, to drink beer and to sniff cocaine. In 1985, he moved from East Harlem to Central Harlem. His wife, also a former heroin injector, had contracted AIDS, and needed constant supervision.

The care of their four children fell entirely to him too. When he discovered that, despite her condition and her denial of sex to him, his wife had been admitting a lover into their home, Stanley went out with one of the many crack-abusing females who milled about the new neighborhood, and learned to smoke crack. Eventually he lost his job at the hospital, surrendered the four children into their grandparents' care; and after his wife died, moved to a cheaper basement apartment in a brownstone managed by New York City's Housing, Preservation and Development (HPD) Department on Pops' block.

Stanley arrived in the sample area in time to witness the fire at the apartment building opposite Pops' brownstone. When the solid sheet of metal was inserted into the street door, he was on hand to offer shelter to the many women who had lost theirs. Annie [A17-045-02] Althea [A17-045-3], Eileen, [A17-045-4] and Lisa [A17-045-05] accepted the call. The two sisters, Lorry [A17-045-06] and Genny [A17-045-07] joined them later.

From the outset, Stanley took pains to lay down a number of ground rules for the use of his apartment. Any crack abusing female was welcome to stay as long as she pleased, if she followed the rules. Stanley was to select the males who patronized the apartment; he would negotiate and receive cash fees for the use of the various spaces in it; and he was the only one permitted to leave the premises (for a fee) to make purchases -of crack, cigarettes, "Bic" lighters, beer or liquor- unless he delegated that task to someone else. In return, Stanley promised that the women and himself would "smoke lovely" off the crack male visitors bought.

Stanley has kept his promise by assiduously attracting a choice clientele of big spenders who love to smoke crack and to "freak" [see below]. Very wealthy Harlemites, who make their money in both legal and illegal businesses or professions, have spent whole weekends at Stanley's. An upper crust of workers can be observed there also, especially on paydays for city and state employees.

Stanley has two main spaces in his apartment. In the living room, men buy crack, and share it with himself and females present. Females will take off their clothes in this room if requested. The price of the bedroom is on a sliding scale which reaches $100 an hour: into this room, a man may take as many females as he pleases for his private enjoyment. Stanley will quit the living room too, if two paying customers wanted privacy at the same time. On those occasions, he sits on the stoop outside, waiting to run errands and receiving crack and fees.

Stanley does not tolerate distribution in his freak house, and has made no effort to enter it himself. He has a very friendly relationship with a neighbor who lives in the same brownstone as he does. The neighbor has a fledgling freak house upstairs, but primarily distributes "dimes" [$10 vials of crack] from the stoop. Stanley also buys crack from young men who sell at the corner of the Avenue, and buys cocaine powder a little further off on the street.

The income Stanley derives from his freak house pays his monthly rent of $375, buys clothes and enables Stanley to provide crack for the household during the day, when visitors are scarcer.

By May 1990, freak houses had arrived as the premier places in low-income minority neighborhoods where crack was consumed. The salient characteristic of these households was contained in the "freak" part of the word: they appealed to male crack users who wanted to "freak," or to enjoy the sexual services of many women in an ensemble. Crack using women flocked to them to receive cash or crack, and their proprietors received crack and cash for mediating the exchange.

Figure 4

Stanley's Freak House

Actual situation		Censused outcome
Census Day residents: 8 Stanley, one other male and 6 women aged 20-30		Censused population: 1 (a woman enumerated in June of unknown Census Day status)
	Totals	
Actual population: 8		Censused population: 1 (uncertain)

Other unusual households in the sample area

Another unusual household [A17: 098] was maintained by a young woman [A17: 098-02] and her transvestite brother [A17: 098-01]. Co-resident with them were four other male transvestites [A17: 098-04, -05, -06, -07] and a young former crack dealer [A17: 098-3] escaping surveillance by probation officers. The five transvestite males work every night at a nearby "strip" [street location where prostitutes meet clients], and return with their earnings to the household to consume crack.

Although resident in the respective units on Census Day, these households are very frangible, and are vulnerable to internal fissions as well as pressures from the police, landlords, and fellow non-drug-using residents (Bourgois: 1990). As of this writing (3/20/91), both Pops' and Stanley's "freak houses" have disbanded. Stanley and several of the women now live in an apartment on the south side (Pops' side) of the street- a new "freak house" combining participants from the former two.

(3) Enumerator Fear

A third reason for the undercount is probably "enumerator fear." The foregoing accounts have sketched several violent or frightening incidents: the shooting by the police of a young crack distributor; a week-long feud between the police and friends of the deceased; several fires; the discovery of a murder victim; the removal by the police of attack dogs; the looting and burning two months after it was opened of an Arab-owned grocery store; and the presence of psychiatrically disturbed or potentially violent homeless persons. These incidents are associated with the one building only, and are but a few of those recorded for the sample area as a whole.

Because of the high incidence of such events in these neighborhoods, which have been reported both in the media and in police complaint and arrest statistics, Central Harlem is considered a "high crime risk" area, and an enumerator is not encouraged to knock too many times on a door or window. For example, several drug using locales have been identified in the foregoing descriptions. These were places where an enumerator would be wise to be cautious.

I received my share of cold responses during the AE, because people were afraid. One brownstone [A17: 053 to A17: 061], reserved for several senior citizens by the City's Housing, Preservation and Development Department, remains impenetrable by me. My information about it comes exclusively from names on mailboxes, a hurried interview with an old woman [A17: 053-01], and several skirmishes with elderly men. One of the latter, an inebriated septuagenarian, even shook his fist at me and clenched his jaw as he declared his deep disapproval of the Census Bureau. It turned out, however, that they had mailed in their questionnaires and my account of the building and its occupants fairly concurred with the Census reports.

I observed on several occasions the futile efforts of census enumerators as they knocked on doors during the day. Then, the people in this ethnographic sample area had either traveled to jobs outside of the neighborhood, or had settled down to sleep; others, such as "freak house" residents, guarded their privacy. Very many of my own observations and interviews during the AE were completed in the evenings and late at night, or on Sundays, when neighbors strolled to church, visited, sat on deck chairs and stoops late into the evening, or carried on "partying" and "binge" from Saturday night. It was also to my advantage that I have been working intensively with some segments of the ethnographic sample for two years before the AE, and that I was myself censused in the community, as a Harlem resident of seven years.

CONCLUSION

For these and perhaps other, unidentified reasons, literally half of the population in the ethnographic sample was not counted by the Census. The few erroneous enumerations, such as the double duplication of the lady lawyer discussed above, by no means compensate for the many missing units and missing people.

While the brownstones described in this report as stable, single family or quasi-single family homes were dutifully censused, often by both questionnaire and census enumerator, our review indicates that it is the half which more urgently needs more political representation, more jobs, more money for better schools, more and improved drug treatment programs and expenditures for many more infrastructure repairs, which has remained faceless, nameless and numberless.

Since much of Harlem looks like this sample area, as do low-income, minority neighborhoods throughout the city (for example, Bushwick, East New York, Brownsville, Williamsburg, Flatbush, Crown Heights -to name only the Brooklyn communities where I have worked), the census for large sections of New York City should be doubled, as should allotments for political representation and funding.

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DISCLAIMER

(1998) This paper reports the results of research and analysis undertaken by Ansley Hamid and the John Jay College of the City University of New York. Research results and conclusions expressed are those of the authors and have not been endorsed by the Census Bureau. This report is released to inform interested parties of the research and to encourage discussion.

(1990) This is the final report for one of the 29 independent Joint Statistical Agreement projects which conducted an ethnographic evaluation of the behavioral causes of undercount. All 29 studies followed common methodological guidelines. This report is based on an analysis of the results of a match between the author(s)' Alternative Enumeration to data from the 1990 Decennial Census forms for the same site. Each ethnographic site contained about 100 housing units. Information was compiled from census forms that were recovered through October 10, 1990. The data on which this report is based should be considered preliminary for several reasons: Between October 10, 1990 and December 31, 1990, additional census forms MAY have been added to or deleted from the official enumeration of the site as a result of coverage improvement operations, local review, or other late census operations. Differences between October 10, 1990 and final census results as reported on the Unedited Detail File were incorporated in later analyses of data from this site. The consistency of the authors' coding of data has not been fully verified. Hypothesis tests and other analyses are original to the author. Therefore, the quantitative results contained in this final JSA report may differ from later reports issued by Census Bureau Staff referring to the same site.

NOTES

To request copies of this report, contact Statistical Research Division, Room 3133-4, Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C. 20033.

The exact location of the study area and the names of persons and addresses enumerated by the independent researchers and in the 1990 Decennial Census are Census confidential and cannot be revealed until the year 2062. The researchers who participated in this study were Special Sworn Employees (SSE) or staff of the Census Bureau.

The sample area discussed in this report was one of four where an independent Alternative Enumeration, the 1990 Census Enumeration, and 1990 Post Enumeration Survey (at zero weight) were conducted and compared through a triple-match. Discrepancies across the three enumerations were resolved. See Hamid and Brownrigg (1993) "Accurate Address Listings to Improve Housing and Population Counts: A Comparison of Address Listings and Enumerations of Four Sample Areas by the 1990 Decennial Census, the Post-Enumeration Survey (PES) and the Alternative Enumeration (AE)" also available on the SRD www server.