

Introduction

Ever since the arrival of the first Hispanic community in New York City in the late 1800s, its population and needs have been increasing progressively. As a result, several bookstores were opened during the 20th century in order to satisfy the growing demand.

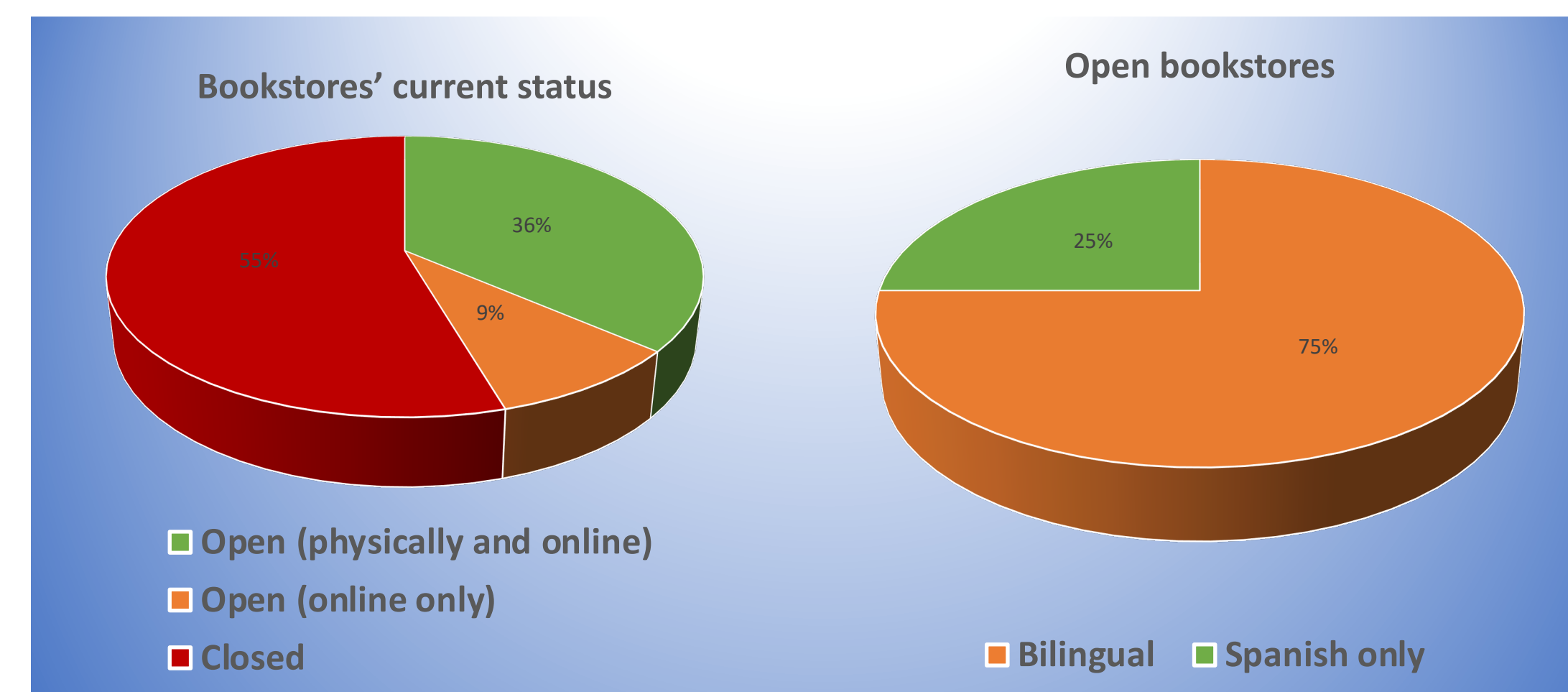
Despite their historical significance, no research has been done in order to fully understand the Hispanic bookstore tradition in NYC. Its study helps us to document the presence of the Hispanic community in the city and recognize its cultural contribution.

This work intends to document the status of these bookstores throughout the decades, discover if they have played a role as cultural meeting centers for the Hispanic community, and determine if their catalogues have influenced the literature studied in the departments of Modern Languages and Hispanic Studies of local colleges and universities.

Methods

- Studied the Hispanic historical context in NYC from the 19th century.
- Compiled and analyzed literary, advertising and journalistic publications from ten different bookstores operating in the city during the previous and current century.
- Navigated through currently working bookstores' websites and analyzed their catalogues, availability, and accessibility.
- Chronologically compared the relationships between bookstores and college departments of Hispanic studies, and activities offered by bookstores related to the cultural development for the Hispanic community.

Results



- All the bookstores that have closed did so because of rising rents.
- Every open bookstore offers its titles online as well.
- Only one bookstore that closed its doors still operates online as a bilingual bookstore.
- Every Spanish only bookstore in Manhattan has closed.
- In all of NYC, only one exclusively Spanish bookstore remains open in Queens.
- Every Hispanic bookstore studied in Manhattan has collaborated with the departments of Modern Languages and Hispanic Studies of local colleges and universities, locating specific titles requested by their faculties.
- All of these bookstores have offered both Latin American and Spanish literature.
- All of these bookstores have offered their communities one or more of the following: book clubs, lectures, gatherings, poetry readings, book fairs, Spanish classes, and other cultural activities.



Librería Barco de Papel is the last Spanish only bookstore in NYC.

Conclusions

- The Hispanic bookstores, as most of the bookstores in NYC, have been adapting to new technologies in order to stay afloat. Because to this, all of the bookstores that remain open offer the option of having their merchandise purchased and delivered online.
- Despite the increase of the Hispanic population in Manhattan during the last decade (West and Alfaro par. 8), the borough does not provide enough demand for a Spanish only bookstore to justify the exorbitant rents. Today, Manhattan only offers Spanish titles in bilingual bookstores.
- Despite offering their own catalogues, these bookstores have not been able to directly influence the literature chosen by the Hispanic faculties. Instead, their role has been to meet the faculty's requests and to locate and import titles when necessary.
- Bookstores have played an important role as cultural meeting centers for the Hispanic community from the very beginning, and they continue to offer up their establishments and digital services for the literary development of New Yorkers.

The Hispanic bookstore tradition in NYC has shown a clear pattern of decline. The rising rents and the competition with online sales have led them to struggle to keep their doors open. Luckily for now, we can still enjoy a few enduring shops that proudly offer New Yorkers their cultural treasures, particularly rewarding for those seeking to connect with their roots.

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References:

West, Melanie, and Mariana Alfaro. "NYC's Hispanic Population is Growing." *The Wall Street Journal*, 22 June 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/nycs-hispanic-population-is-growing-1498104060#:~:text=In%20all%2C%20Hispanics%20make%20up,to%20the%20new%202016%20data>. Accessed 25 April 2021.