

Spanish Surnames Among the 2,000 Most Common United States Surnames

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ELSDON C. SMITH'S LIST of 2,000 "Most Common Surnames in the United States"¹ is a valuable source for statistical onomatology. I have compared the 100 most common Spanish surnames on Mr. Smith's list with the 100 most common Spanish Surnames in California.² The comparisons illuminate some of the regularities, and some of the meaningful irregularities, of the distribution of this special subclass of all surnames.

Of the 2,000 American surnames given by Mr. Smith, almost exactly 100 are Spanish. Why almost? The original list prepared by Social Security and used by Mr. Smith contained only six characters. Thus, MONTANEZ, MONTANES and MONTANO are all MONTAN. I have re-collapsed to GONZAL the GONZALes and GONZALez given by Mr. Smith. For DOMING, I prefer DOMINGuez to DOMINGo. But these are mere matters of taste. Mr. Smith has done a yeoman job of reconstituting from abbreviated forms.

I can estimate from my earlier work that 100 names will cover about 52.5 per cent of the Spanish-surnamed population. The 2,000 surnames given by Smith cover slightly over 70 per cent of the 152, 757, 455 names on the Social Security rolls. Expanding both percents shows only 75 per cent of the expected number of Spanish surnamed persons on the Social Security rolls. This statistic is commensurate with the findings on California union member lists. Spanish-surnamed persons, when not in subsistence agriculture, have been largely farm laborers not covered by Social Security.

In order to prepare the following analysis, the Spanish surnames on Mr. Smith's list were re-ranked among themselves, from RODRIGUEZ (Smith's #44) ranked 1, to FUENTES (Smith's # 1975) ranked 101.

The ranking of these 101 names is within shouting range of the ranks computed for California. Thus, the ranks of the first ten in the United States are

¹ Elsdon C. Smith, *American Surnames* (Philadelphia, 1969), pp. 301-326.

² R. W. Buechley, "A Reproducible Method of Counting Persons of Spanish Surname," *J. Amer. Statistical Assoc.*, 56 (March 1961), 88-97.

United States		California
1	RODRIGUEZ	6
2	GARCIA	1
3	GONZALEZ ^S _Z	3
4	LOPEZ	4
5	RIVERA	27
6	MARTINEZ	2
7	HERNANDEZ	5
8	PEREZ	8
9	SANCHEZ	7
10	TORRES	11

The regularities and irregularities already appear. Eight of the first ten for the United States are the same as for California, somewhat rearranged. Two surnames, Rivera and Torres are new, and, of necessity, the ninth and tenth California Surnames, Ramirez and Flores, are below tenth in the United States.

Rivera has come from deep in the pack to fifth position. Why so? A brief check shows it to be a member of the Puerto Rico name set.³ A check of the other Puerto Rican names shows that they, as a class, have far higher ranks in the United States list than in the California list. Obviously, not only the migrants to the states but those remaining in the Commonwealth are covered by the Social Security system.

Of the Puerto Rican names on Smith's United States list *all* have far higher ranks than they did on my California list. They are

<i>Name</i>	<i>U. S. rank</i>	<i>California rank</i>	<i>Gain or Loss</i>
ACEVEDO	87	201	114
ARROYO	94	216	122
DAVILA	99	284	185
FIGUEROA	31	101	70
MALDONADO	34	99	65
MELENDEZ	55	199	144
MIRANDA	57	71	76
RIVERA	5	27	22
SANTIAGO	20	295	275

Not only this, but names I know to be Puerto Rican from a baseball player and a patriotic singer, PAGAN and FELICIANO, appear in the first 100 in Mr. Smith's United States list, not at all on my 300-name

³ R. W. Buechley, "Characteristic Name Sets of Spanish Population," *Names*, 15:1 (March, 1967), 53-69.

California list. RODRIGUEZ is rather more common in Puerto Rico than elsewhere. Thus, Puerto Ricans, and their names, are far more common and important in the United States than I had found them to be on California material.

What Puerto Rican surnames have gained in ranks, New Mexican surnames have lost. Thus:

<i>Name</i>	<i>U. S. rank</i>	<i>California rank</i>	<i>Gain or Loss</i>
BACA	missing	85	**
CHAVEZ	28	12	-16
DURAN	71	49	-22.
GALLEGO	76	63	-13
HERRERA	39	26	-13
LUCERO	97	74	-23
MONTOYA	79	65	-14
ORTIZ	11	24	+13
PACHECO	65	72	+7
PADILLA	55	37	-18
ROMERO	25	19	-6
SALAZAR	49	42	-7
SANDOVAL	69	34	-35
TRUJILLO	67	51	-16
VALDES	47	43	-4

MARTINEZ, which dropped from second to sixth, is more common in New Mexico than elsewhere, but see Smith's discussion.⁴

Some of the small set of names characteristic of South Texas show much higher ranks, but some do not.

<i>Name</i>	<i>U. S. rank</i>	<i>California rank</i>	<i>Gain or Loss</i>
CANTU	101	224	123
CORTEZ	88	69	-19
GARZA	26	116	90
SALINAS	91	191	100
VILLARREAL	70	125	55
GALVAN	**	95	- ?
JUAREZ	**	60	- ?
SOLIS	**	97	- ?

⁴ Elsdon C. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 299-300.

Of the other delineated Spanish surname sets, only the Costa Rica and Nicaragua set has any considerable number of the first 100 names, and these show lower U. S. rank than California.

<i>Name</i>	<i>U. S. rank</i>	<i>California rank</i>	<i>Gain or Loss</i>
ALVARADO	68	54	-14
CASTRO	30	21	-9
DUARTE	missing	88	- ?
JIMENEZ	36	29	-7
MORA	missing	91	- ?
ROCHA	missing	96	- ?
VARGAS	40	48	+8

OROZCO, from the Old Mexico name set, does not appear on the United States list.

The previously delineated name sets from Puerto Rico and from New Mexico show very characteristic rank differences. The Puerto Rican names are consistently and strongly higher ranked, the New Mexico names almost as consistently and strongly lower ranked. This result, as reasonable as it was simple to derive, shows that the names in the sets have other characteristics in common as well as telephone book frequency. Thus, name set analysis has the virtue of giving consistent results, and Mr. Smith's book has the virtue of a source book for statistical onomatology.

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