

9-23-1992

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Recommended Citation

Rivera, Ralph (1992) "Latinos in Massachusetts: Growth and Geographical Distribution," *New England Journal of Public Policy*. Vol. 8: Iss. 2, Article 5.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umb.edu/nejpp/vol8/iss2/5>

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Latinos in Massachusetts

Growth and Geographical Distribution

Ralph Rivera, Ph.D.

Massachusetts has undergone radical changes in its racial/ethnic composition in the last ten years. The Latino population, owing to its extraordinary growth rate during the last two decades, is the largest racial/ethnic minority group in the state. Yet relatively little is known about this population because of the "information gap." Based on 1990 census data, this article focuses on the growth and geographical distribution of Latinos in Massachusetts. It considers the undercount of Latinos, the growth of Latinos in the commonwealth from a national perspective, and assesses the increase of Latinos in the New England states. It explores the growth in numbers of Massachusetts Latinos within the context of changes in the racial/ethnic composition of the state's population and examines their growth and geographic distribution in the commonwealth's cities and towns with the largest concentrations of Latinos. General policy implications are discussed.

Mirroring the population shifts that occurred throughout the United States in the past decade,¹ the population of racial/ethnic minorities in Massachusetts increased at a significantly faster rate than that of whites.² The Latino³ population, due to its extraordinary growth rate during the last two decades, is the group most responsible for making the commonwealth significant in the national trend toward greater ethnic diversity. Moreover, Latinos are now the largest racial/ethnic minority group in the state.⁴

The size and phenomenal growth of the Latino population has increasingly been the subject of discussions in the media and the business community throughout the United States. But recognition of Latinos as a significant population that warrants such attention in Massachusetts has come slowly. Unlike blacks, who are concentrated in Boston (50 percent of all blacks in Massachusetts live in Boston, compared with 21.5 percent of all Latinos), Latinos are dispersed geographically throughout the state.⁵ Their geographic distribution, combined with their limited

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economic and political power, have made Latinos victims of indifference and neglect in the commonwealth.

This treatment has been fueled by the "information gap" in Latinos in Massachusetts.⁶ The information gap is the lack of basic information and analysis of the problems and needs of this population. Data readily available for whites and blacks are often nonexistent for Latinos. This gap "extends from basic vital health statistics such as death rates and causes of death, to the participation and outcomes for Latinos in public programs, such as employment and educational programs, and to the understanding of the complex dynamics of Latino communities in the State."⁷ Furthermore, even when adequate data are available, they are often not analyzed fully and comprehensively.

This article seeks to contribute to the existing knowledge base used in forming policies and programs that affect Latinos. With this objective in mind, I focus on the growth and geographical distribution of Latinos in Massachusetts as documented by the 1990 census data released in March 1991 under requirements of Public Law 94-171.

The Latino Undercount

The U.S. Census Bureau has acknowledged that the differential undercount⁸ of Latinos was a problem in 1970 and 1980.⁹ Reasons given for the undercount include:¹⁰

- Resistance from some Latinos to government inquiry into their lives
- Prevalence of Spanish-language usage among Latinos
- Paucity of Latino census enumerators
- Low educational levels and illiteracy
- Presence of a significant number of undocumented Latinos who were reluctant to complete a census form

In spite of Census Bureau efforts to improve the counting of Latinos in 1990, there is evidence that a substantial differential undercounting of Latinos again took place nationally as well as in many urban centers in Massachusetts.¹¹ According to a postenumeration survey conducted by the Census Bureau to determine the accuracy of the original count, the 1990 census may have missed up to 1.7 million Latinos nationwide, which represents a 7.3 percent undercount for this group compared with 6.2 percent for blacks and a 2.5 percent overall undercount.¹² Furthermore, the Census Bureau acknowledges a minimum Latino undercount of 4.2 percent or 973,000.¹³ For Massachusetts, undercount estimates of 4.2 to 7.3 percent represent between 12,077 and 20,991 Latinos.

The 1990 census undercount of Massachusetts Latinos seems particularly severe for Chelsea and Boston, reporting only 9,018 Latinos in Chelsea, or 31.4 percent of the city population. Estimates of the Latino community produced by other sources, however, suggest a significantly larger community. Figures developed by the Center

for Community Planning at the University of Massachusetts at Boston show 11,800 to 12,700 Latinos in Chelsea, or 44 percent of the total population.¹⁴

Additional evidence that suggests a serious undercount of Latinos in Chelsea is found in data on the percentage of Latino students enrolled in Chelsea public schools. In 1989, 54.6 percent of the student body was Latino. Part of the variation between the 1990 census figures on the percentage of Latinos in the total population and the percentage of Latino students can be attributed to larger families among Latinos. The sizable twenty-three-point differential, however, suggests that an undercount is responsible for a part of this discrepancy.

In Boston, municipal officials have expressed serious concerns over the general undercount in the city in 1990. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Black Legislative Caucus also have voiced their distress over the undercount nationally within communities of color.¹⁵

Boston city officials have quarreled with the Census Bureau over the mailing list used for the census. They argued that it did not account for between 12,000 and 20,000 housing units.¹⁶ According to city of Boston administration officials, this resulted in an undercount of between 42,350 and 50,000 Boston residents.¹⁷ Given that Latinos represent 11 percent of the Boston population, their share of the undercount attributed to the missing housing units would be between 4,659 and 5,500. It is important to note, however, that although Boston city officials have expressed concerns that go beyond the undercounting of housing units, they apparently did not seek remedies to address these other problems in their discussions with the Census Bureau.¹⁸ Seemingly, the fact that undercounts have been historically greatest in low-income inner-city minority neighborhoods has been neglected by Boston city officials.

According to the 1990 census, there are 61,955 Latinos in Boston. This number represents a growth rate of 70.1 percent between 1980 and 1990 for the Boston Latino population, an extremely modest rate compared with Latinos in other cities and towns across the state.¹⁹ However, as early as 1981, the Hispanic Office of Planning and Evaluation, using data from the Center for Survey Research at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, had already estimated Boston's Latino population at over 55,000, that is, 53 percent higher than the official 1980 census count of 36,068.²⁰ Moreover, the Massachusetts Commission on Hispanic Affairs had also estimated the Boston Latino population at 55,000 in 1985.²¹ Given that number of Latinos in Boston by 1981 or 1985, it is safe to assume that by 1990 it would have grown to significantly more than the 61,955 counted by the census.

In July 1991, U.S. Commerce Secretary Robert A. Mosbacher announced that the 1990 census figures would not be statistically adjusted to compensate for the undercount.²² The debate is not yet over, since five cities²³ and several groups (including the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund) will reopen a lawsuit seeking a new count in a New York federal court. Past experiences with census undercounts suggest, however, that it is highly unlikely that an adjustment will be made. The Census Bureau has never adjusted to compensate for an undercount.²⁴ It is important, nonetheless, for policymakers to understand that while the official 1990 census data document the dramatic growth of the Latino population, these figures are highly conservative estimates of its actual size.

National Perspective

The United States continued to experience a dramatic growth in its populations of people of color during the 1980s. A significant amount of that surge occurred among Latinos, who increased by 7.7 million people, or 53 percent, during that decade. The Latino population has been, and is expected to continue, increasing significantly faster than the non-Latino population. Moreover, its growth is so rapid that Latinos are projected to become the largest ethnic group in the country by the year 2010.²⁵

While they reside in every state in the nation, they are geographically concentrated in five states: California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois contain almost three quarters of all Latinos in the United States. Furthermore, the first three states account for 64 percent of the Latino population in the country.

A salient characteristic of the Massachusetts Latino community in the national context is its rapid rate of growth. As shown in Table 1, the Massachusetts Latino population grew at a faster rate between 1970 and 1980 (113.2%) and again between 1980 and 1990 (103.9%) than did its counterparts in any of the other fourteen states with the highest concentration of Latinos in 1990. The 103.9 percent rate in the last decade is almost twice the growth rate of Latinos nationwide (53%). With 287,549 Latinos, Massachusetts has the tenth-largest Latino population in the United States; however, it constitutes only 1.3 percent of the national Latino population.

Table 1

Latino Population Growth in the Fifteen States with Highest Concentration of Latinos, 1970, 1980, and 1990^a

State	1970	1980	1990	Growth 1970-1980 (%)	Growth 1980-1990 (%)
California	2,368,748	4,544,331	7,687,938	91.8	69.2
Texas	1,840,862	22,985,824	4,339,905	62.2	45.4
New York	1,352,302	1,659,300	2,214,046	22.7	33.4
Florida	405,037	858,158	1,574,143	111.9	83.4
Illinois	393,347	635,602	904,446	61.6	42.3
New Jersey	288,488	491,883	739,861	70.5	50.4
Arizona	265,006	440,701	688,338	66.3	56.2
New Mexico	308,340	477,222	579,224	54.8	1.4
Colorado	225,506	339,717	424,302	50.6	24.9
Massachusetts	66,146	141,043	287,549	113.2	103.9
Pennsylvania	108,893	153,961	232,262	41.4	50.9
Washington	57,358	120,016	214,570	109.2	78.8
Connecticut	65,468	124,499	213,116	90.2	71.2
Michigan	151,070	162,440	201,596	7.5	24.1
Virginia	40,222	79,868	160,288	98.6	100.7

Sources: Hispanic Policy Development Project, 1984; U.S. Census Bureau, 1983; and U.S. Census Bureau, 1991.

^aStates are ranked by the size of their Latino population in 1990.

New England

While New England continues to be one of the least diverse regions of the United States, the growth of people of color in this area of the country during the 1980s was

dramatic. As a result of interstate migration and the fact that many new immigrants are choosing to settle in different states and smaller cities than their predecessors, the New England states experienced among the highest rates of growth of Latinos, blacks, and Asians of any area in the United States. Three of the five fastest-growing state Latino populations in the nation are in New England — Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire (see Table 2).

Three of the five fastest-growing black populations were also in New England. New Hampshire had the highest growth rate for blacks (80.4%) of all states, while Vermont ranked third (71.9%), and Maine fifth (64.3%). The two fastest-growing Asian populations were in Rhode Island (245.6%) and New Hampshire (219.0%), whereas Massachusetts ranked sixth (189.7%).

Table 2

States with the Fastest-Growing Latino Population, 1980 and 1990

State	1980	1990	% of Growth 1980-1990
Rhode Island	19,707	45,752	132.2
Nevada	53,879	124,419	130.9
Massachusetts	141,043	287,549	103.9
New Hampshire	5,587	11,333	102.8
Virginia	79,868	160,288	100.7

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 1982, and U.S. Census Bureau, 1991.

Table 3

**Growth of the Latino Population in the New England States,
1970-1980 and 1980-1990**

State	1970	1980	1990	Growth 1970-1980 %	Growth 1980-1990 %
Connecticut	65,468	124,499	213,116	90.2	71.2
Maine	2,433	5,005	6,829	105.7	36.4
Massachusetts	66,146	141,043	287,549	113.2	103.9
New Hampshire	2,281	5,587	11,333	144.9	102.8
Rhode Island	7,596	19,707	45,752	159.4	132.2
Vermont	1,611	3,304	3,661	105.1	10.8

Sources: Hispanic Policy Development Project, 1984; U.S. Census Bureau, 1983; and U.S. Census Bureau, 1991.

A look at the increase of Latinos in the New England states between 1970 to 1980 and 1980 to 1990 (see Table 3) shows spectacular growth for almost all states during both periods. The exceptions are Maine and Vermont during 1980-1990, when Latinos grew by only 36.4 percent and 10.8 percent, respectively, after each had grown by 105 percent in the previous ten-year period.

The Latino population, however, continued to swell at a rate significantly higher than the national rate of 53 percent between 1980 and 1990 in the other four New

England states. The Rhode Island Latino population, the fastest growing in the country, increased by 132.2 percent between 1980 and 1990, while the number of Massachusetts Latinos grew by 103.9 percent. Although the New Hampshire Latino population is still quite small (11,333), it increased by an impressive 102.8 percent during the last decade. The Connecticut Latino population expanded by 71.2 percent.

It is important to note that the high growth rates for Rhode Island and New Hampshire are a function of the relatively small number of Latinos in each state in 1980. Conversely, Massachusetts had the fastest-growing Latino population in the country when compared with states of more than 100,000 Latinos in 1980.

Massachusetts

Diversity

During the past twenty years Massachusetts has gone from one of the least ethnically and racially diverse states in the United States to one of medium diversity.²⁶ While racial and ethnic minority groups represented only slightly more than 4 percent in 1970, they grew to over 12 percent in 1990 (see Table 4). In 1980, racial and ethnic minority groups represented 7.5 percent of the total state population, of which 3.7 percent were blacks, 2.5 percent were Latinos, and 0.9 percent were Asians. In 1990 this population expanded to 12.2 percent of the total population. Blacks increased to 4.6 percent, Latinos to 4.8 percent, and Asians to 2.4 percent of the population.

As stated previously, the number of Latinos in the commonwealth doubled in size from 1970 to 1980 and again between 1980 and 1990, and they are now the largest

Table 4

Massachusetts Population Changes by Racial/Ethnic Group and Total Population, 1970, 1980, and 1990

Racial/Ethnic Group	1970 Population (%)	1980 Population (%)	1990 Population (%)	1970 - 1980 Change (%)	1980 - 1990 Change (%)
Non-Hispanic white	5,477,624 (95.8)	5,305,963 (92.5)	5,280,292 (87.8)	-171,661 (-3.1)	-25,671 (-0.5)
Non-Hispanic black	175,817 (3.1)	212,608 (3.7)	274,464 (4.6)	+36,791 (+20.9)	+61,856 (+29.1)
Hispanic origin	66,146 (1.2)	141,043 (2.5)	287,549 (4.8)	+74,897 (+113.2)	+146,506 (+103.9)
Non-Hispanic Asian	20,766 (0.4)	49,501 (0.9)	143,392 ^a (2.4)	+28,735 (+183.4)	+93,891 (+189.7)
Total population	5,719,587	5,737,037 ^b	6,016,425 ^c	+17,450 (+0.3)	+279,388 (+4.9)

Sources: Commission on Hispanic Affairs, 1986; U.S. Census Bureau, 1982; and U.S. Census Bureau, 1991.

^aThe 1990 census data on non-Hispanic Asians are not yet available; therefore, this count includes Hispanics who are Asians. In 1980, 892 Latinos (0.6% of all Latinos) in Massachusetts identified their race as Asian.

^bThe 1980 total population includes 27,922 persons who are of other races and not of Hispanic origin.

^cThe 1990 total population includes 30,728 persons who are of other races and not of Hispanic origin.

minority group in the state. During these same periods, the non-Hispanic white population of the commonwealth decreased by 3.1 percent and 0.5 percent, respectively, and the non-Hispanic black population increased by 20.9 percent and 29.1 percent. Clearly, the modest growth in the Massachusetts total population (4.9%) is due to the increase of Latinos and blacks, as well as to the Asian population that increased by a remarkable 189.7 percent in the last ten years.

Table 5

Population Changes for Racial / Ethnic Group and Total Population by Selected Cities, 1980 and 1990

City	Year	Total ^a	Non-Hispanic White(%)	Non-Hispanic Black (%)	Hispanic Origin (%)	Non-Hispanic Asian(%)
Boston	1990	574,283	338,734 (59.0)	136,887 (23.8)	61,955 (10.8)	30,388 ^b (5.3)
	1980	562,994	384,451 (68.3)	122,102 (21.7)	36,068 (6.5)	16,073 (2.9)
Chelsea	1990	28,710	16,930 (59.0)	1,140 (4.0)	9,018 (31.4)	1,435 (5.0)
	1980	25,431	21,100 (83.0)	517 (2.0)	3,551 (14.2)	175 (0.7)
Holyoke	1990	43,704	28,519 (65.3)	1,145 (2.6)	13,573 (31.1)	356 (0.8)
	1980	44,678	37,227 (83.3)	1,088 (2.4)	6,156 (13.7)	146 (0.3)
Lawrence	1990	70,207	38,401 (54.7)	1,195 (1.7)	29,237 (41.6)	1,358 (1.9)
	1980	63,175	51,712 (81.9)	694 (1.1)	10,296 (16.3)	278 (0.4)
Lowell	1990	103,439	79,165 (76.5)	2,093 (2.0)	10,499 (10.1)	11,493 (11.1)
	1980	92,418	86,105 (93.2)	1,089 (1.2)	4,585 (4.9)	478 (0.5)
Lynn	1990	81,245	65,166 (80.2)	5,423 (6.7)	7,432 (9.1)	3,003 (3.7)
	1980	78,471	73,105 (93.2)	2,776 (3.5)	1,998 (2.7)	190 (0.2)
Springfield	1990	156,983	99,869 (63.6)	28,484 (18.1)	26,528 (16.9)	1,636 (1.0)
	1980	152,319	112,608 (73.9)	24,531 (16.1)	13,804 (9.1)	796 (0.5)
Worcester	1990	169,759	141,416 (83.3)	6,746 (4.0)	16,258 (9.6)	4,770 (2.8)
	1980	161,799	149,540 (92.4)	4,498 (2.8)	6,877 (4.0)	786 (0.5)

Sources: U.S. Census, Bureau, 1982, and U.S. Census Bureau, 1991.

^aThe total population includes persons who are of "other races" and not of Hispanic origin. The sum of all groups may not equal the total population of each city or town because the "other race" category is not included in the table. The sum of the percentages of each group by city or town may not equal 100 percent for the same reason.

^bThe 1990 census data on non-Hispanic Asians are not yet available, therefore this count includes Hispanics who are Asians.

Table 6

**Massachusetts Population
by Racial/Ethnic Group, by Counties, 1990**

County	Total Population	Non-Hispanic White (%)	Non-Hispanic Black (%)	Hispanic Origin (%)	Other Races (%)
Barnstable	186,605	177,956 (95.4)	2,727 (1.5)	2,287 (1.2)	3,635 (1.9)
Berkshire	139,352	134,177 (96.3)	2,454 (1.8)	1,407 (1.0)	1,314 (0.9)
Bristol	506,325	474,032 (93.6)	7,203 (1.4)	13,578 (2.7)	11,512 (2.3)
Dukes	11,639	10,896 (93.6)	323 (2.8)	121 (1.0)	299 (2.6)
Essex	670,080	600,518 (89.6)	10,242 (1.5)	48,440 (7.3)	10,880 (1.6)
Franklin	70,092	68,074 (97.1)	457 (0.7)	842 (1.2)	719 (1.0)
Hampden	456,310	373,426 (81.8)	32,105 (7.0)	45,785 (10.0)	4,994 (1.1)
Hampshire	146,568	135,451 (92.4)	2,428 (1.7)	3,887 (2.7)	4,802 (3.3)
Middlesex	1,398,468	1,258,602 (90.0)	37,677 (2.7)	47,383 (3.4)	54,806 (3.9)
Nantucket	6,012	5,759 (95.8)	140 (2.3)	50 (0.8)	63 (1.0)
Norfolk	616,087	577,079 (93.7)	11,532 (1.9)	8,414 (1.4)	19,062 (3.1)
Plymouth	435,276	401,847 (92.3)	15,003 (3.4)	9,571 (2.2)	8,855 (2.0)
Suffolk	663,906	412,210 (62.1)	138,695 (20.9)	72,844 (11.0)	40,157 (6.0)
Worcester	709,705	650,265 (91.6)	13,478 (1.9)	32,940 (4.6)	13,022 (1.8)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1991.

While most cities and towns throughout Massachusetts remain primarily white, the dramatic growth of the black, Latino, and Asian populations in the state's larger cities, coupled with a decrease in the white population, has resulted in a significantly more diverse population in these urban centers. A comparison of the racial/ethnic group composition in the state's largest cities in 1980 and 1990 shows a notable increase of people of color as a percentage of their total population (see Table 5).

In 1980, people of color represented less than 20 percent of the population in the cities of Lawrence, Chelsea, and Holyoke. By 1990, 45.3 percent of the Lawrence population, 41 percent of the Chelsea population, and 34.7 percent of the Holyoke population were people of color. Furthermore, people of color constitute 41 percent of the Boston population, 36.4 percent in Springfield, 23.5 percent in Lowell, 19.8 percent in Lynn, and 16.7 percent in Worcester.

A look at the racial/ethnic group composition of the Massachusetts counties, however, shows extremely low rates of diversity (see Table 6). Only two counties, Suffolk and Hampden, have populations of color that significantly exceed 10 percent. Suffolk County is the most diverse in the commonwealth and, according to Allen and

Turner, ranks seventeenth among the thirty most ethnically diverse counties in the United States,²⁷ with nearly 38 percent of its population comprised of people of color. Almost 19 percent of the Hampden County population consists of racial/ethnic minority people. Conversely, the least diverse counties in the state are Franklin (97.1% white) and Berkshire (96.3% white).

Table 7

**Growth of Massachusetts Latino Population
by Selected Cities and Towns, 1970, 1980, and 1990**

Cities/Towns	1970	1980	1990	1980-1990 Change (%)	% Latino of Total
Amherst	298	767	1,669	117.6	4.7
Attleboro	324	788	1,130	43.4	2.9
Boston	17,984	36,068	61,955	71.8	10.8
Brockton	936	2,142	5,860	173.6	6.3
Brookline	637	1,162	1,596	37.3	2.9
Cambridge	1,954	4,536	6,506	43.4	6.8
Chelsea	1,098	3,551	9,018	154.0	31.4
Chicopee	899	629	2,050	225.9	3.6
Clinton	252	695	1,032	48.5	7.8
Everett	476	469	1,371	192.3	3.8
Fall River	220	2,187	1,577	-27.9	1.7
Fitchburg	335	1,095	3,957	261.4	9.6
Framingham	1,237	2,186	5,291	142.0	8.1
Haverhill	278	931	2,714	191.5	5.3
Holyoke	1,870	6,165	13,573	120.2	31.1
Lawrence	2,327	10,296	29,237	184.0	41.6
Leominster	634	1,347	3,161	134.7	8.3
Lowell	1,079	4,585	10,499	129.0	10.1
Lynn	953	1,998	7,432	272.0	9.1
Malden	302	529	1,417	167.9	2.6
Marlborough	214	361	1,338	270.6	4.2
Medford	437	411	990	140.9	1.7
Methuen	305	637	2,070	225.0	5.2
Milford	227	586	1,022	74.4	4.0
New Bedford	1,144	4,497	6,653	47.9	6.7
Newton	1,333	1,147	1,638	42.8	2.0
Northampton	180	557	1,201	115.6	4.1
Peabody	537	614	1,346	119.2	2.9
Quincy	564	524	1,197	128.4	1.4
Revere	313	339	1,631	381.1	3.8
Salem	265	894	2,548	185.0	6.7
Somerville	701	1,530	4,784	212.7	6.3
Southbridge	305	1,033	2,278	120.5	12.8
Springfield	5,456	13,804	26,528	92.2	16.9
Taunton	502	1,292	2,362	82.8	4.7
Waltham	527	1,417	3,239	128.6	5.6
Westfield	819	1,026	1,564	52.4	4.1
Woburn	316	568	834	46.8	2.3
Worcester	1,674	6,877	16,258	136.4	9.6

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 1973; U.S. Census Bureau, 1982; and U.S. Census Bureau, 1991.

Growth

The Massachusetts Latino population registered growth rates in all cities and towns where they resided between 1980 and 1990 (see Table 7), with the sole exception of Fall River. The fast growth of the Latino population is a result of a young population (36 percent are under eighteen compared with 21 percent of whites, 30 percent of blacks, and 28 percent of Asians), high birth rates, and immigration, both legal and undocumented. According to a 1989 report by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 6.5 percent of the total births in the state were to Latino mothers during a period when it was estimated that Latinos represented only 3.8 percent of the total population.²⁸

While the census data by Latino subgroup are not yet available, other evidence suggests that the immigration of Latinos to Massachusetts, primarily from Central America and the Dominican Republic, and migration from Puerto Rico continued at an accelerated rate throughout the 1980s.²⁹ Furthermore, a significant number of Latinos migrated from other states to Massachusetts, particularly during the economic boom.

While the Latino population in some cities and towns represents a somewhat smaller percentage of the total population, it increased at an extraordinary rate during the last decade, as may be seen in Table 7. The most dramatic Latino growth occurred in Revere (381%), Lynn (272%), Marlborough (271%), and Fitchburg (261%). In addition, Latinos in the following cities and towns expanded by more than 200 percent, that is, at more than twice the state Latino growth rate: Chicopee (226%), Methuen (225%), and Somerville (213%). Other cities and towns whose Latino population also increased substantially include Everett (192%), Haverhill (192%), Salem (185%), Lawrence (184%), Brockton (174%), Malden (168%), and Chelsea (154%).

It is important to note that the explosive growth rates for most of these cities and towns is a function of the relatively small numbers of Latinos in each area in 1980. These rates clearly indicate, however, that this population is increasing rapidly in areas where it had not previously grown.

Geographical Distribution

The Massachusetts Latino population also evidenced notable changes in its geographic distribution in the past ten years. Latinos reside in every city and town of the state, and although they are concentrated significantly in the larger cities, they concentrate in many towns as well.

In 1980 there were only four cities where Latinos represented more than 8 percent of the total city population — Lawrence (16.3%), Chelsea (14.0%), Holyoke (13.8%), and Springfield (9.1%). According to the 1990 census, there are now twelve cities and towns where the Latino population represents more than 8 percent of the total population. While these municipalities contain almost two thirds of all Latinos in Massachusetts, they are scattered throughout the commonwealth (see Table 8). The highest concentration of Latinos is in Lawrence, where four out of every ten residents are Latino, and in Chelsea and Holyoke, where one of every three residents is Latino.

Table 8

**Growth of Massachusetts Latino Population
by Cities and Towns with Highest Concentration
of Latinos, 1970, 1980, and 1990**

City/Town	1970	1980	1990	Growth 1980-1990 (%)	% of 1990 Population	% of Total Latino Population
Lawrence	2,327	10,296	29,237	184.0	41.6	10.2
Chelsea	1,098	3,551	9,018	154.0	31.4	3.1
Holyoke	1,870	6,165	13,573	120.2	31.1	4.7
Springfield	5,456	13,804	26,528	92.2	16.9	9.2
Southbridge	305	1,033	2,278	120.5	12.8	0.8
Boston	17,984	36,068	61,955	71.8	10.8	21.5
Lowell	1,079	4,585	10,499	129.0	10.1	3.6
Worcester	1,674	6,877	16,258	136.4	9.6	5.6
Fitchburg	335	1,095	3,957	261.4	9.6	1.4
Lynn	953	1,998	7,432	272.0	9.1	2.6
Leominster	634	1,347	3,161	134.7	8.3	1.1
Framingham	1,237	2,186	5,291	142.0	8.1	1.8

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 1973; U.S. Census Bureau, 1982; and U.S. Census Bureau, 1991.

While the state's largest Latino community is still in Boston, the 1990 census reveals that between 1980 and 1990, the proportion of all Massachusetts Latinos living in Boston decreased from 25.8 to 21.5 percent. On the other hand, Lawrence experienced the largest increase in proportionate share of the Massachusetts Latino population during the same period (7.3% to 10.2%).

Policy Implications

The accelerated growth of the Latino population in Massachusetts and New England poses many challenges for policymakers. Their growth, combined with that of blacks and Asians, introduces racial/ethnic diversity to this state and region of the country as has never existed previously and has concomitantly raised concerns over how to integrate these immigrants and migrants into local communities and their economies effectively.

The new diversity has rekindled the historic tension between assimilation and pluralism as seen by the various English-only legislative initiatives. However, instead of seeking the mythical "melting pot," the general public policy thrust should focus on facilitating acculturation and integration in a way that preserves ethnic identity, language, and cultural expressions. In addition, the growth of Latinos has critical policy implications for at least four other major areas: education, economic participation, political participation, and statistical policy.

Education

The growing Latino population should be seen as a resource, and the policy emphasis should be to invest in developing this resource. Therefore, the public educational system must respond to the needs of the Latino community. This is particularly critical in inner-city schools where Latinos constitute a large percentage of the student

population and in some cases make up the majority of students (for example, Lawrence, Holyoke, and Chelsea). Yet, because of the declining enrollment of white children in the public schools, fewer resources are being allocated to education; subsequently, cities tend to have limited resources to support essential programs. Consequently, the education policy thrust should be to target additional financial resources to support and expand existing programs such as preschool and transitional bilingual education programs, as well as to provide additional English-language and skills training programs for Latino youths and adults.

Economic Participation

Over the next decade, Latinos will constitute a growing segment of the state's labor force, and they will make up an increasing proportion of the taxpayers supporting Social Security, Medicare, and other transfer payments required to sustain an aging society. Consequently, public policies that seek to improve the economic status of Latinos and foster their full economic participation in all segments of the economy should be supported. The policy direction should include programs that seek to eliminate barriers to employment which are the result of limited English-language proficiency and inadequate educational credentials and programs that provide employment and training opportunities that will assist Latino workers in developing occupational skills which are more compatible with the current and future needs of Massachusetts's industries.

Political Participation

The growth of the Latino population will lead to more active participation in the political system and to increased political visibility and empowerment for this group, particularly for Puerto Ricans, who comprise more than half the state's Latino population and are U.S. citizens by birth. To facilitate their fullest participation in the electoral process, policy initiatives designed to eliminate barriers to voter registration should be considered. The availability of mail-in and Election Day registration could increase Latino voter registration and voter turnout rates. Voter registration information should be distributed by state, county, and municipal agencies, as well as by community-based organizations. Moreover, community-based organizations should be allowed to register voters.

Statistical Policy

The formulation of sound public policy requires a solid information and research base. Given the size and continued growth of the Latino population, state and local statistical policy should seek to eliminate the previously noted information gap. Reliable and objective information on Latinos is needed to inform public debate and policymaking. State and municipal departments should begin systematically to gather more information on this population by adding, where appropriate, a Latino identifier in population-specific data sets. In addition, a Latino identifier should allow for the classification of the major Latino subgroups in Massachusetts — Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Central Americans, South Americans, Mexicans, and Cubans.

One of the primary characteristics of the Latino population in Massachusetts is its rapid growth. We move into the 1990s and the twenty-first century with the knowl-

edge that the Latino population, the largest racial/ethnic group in Massachusetts, has doubled in size each of the last two decades, and it is expected to continue to grow at a significantly faster rate than the white and black populations throughout the next decade. The explosive growth and geographic dispersion of the Massachusetts Latino population justifies immediate attention by policymakers in the public as well as private sectors.

Indeed, the Latino population poses formidable challenges to these policymakers. Latinos, the most disadvantaged ethnic minority group in the state, have the highest poverty rate — “47 percent —” of all state Latino populations.³⁰ The benefits of the Massachusetts miracle that accrued to whites, and to some extent blacks, were not shared with the Latino community.³¹ Clearly, the Latino population will require expanded attention by state and local policymakers during the 1990s to enable this community to gain full participation in the commonwealth’s social, economic, political, and educational life.

While the issues and needs of the Latino population in Massachusetts are not new, what is new is the large numbers of Latinos affected by such issues. The implications of their accelerated growth and geographic dispersion are numerous. In the years ahead Latinos are virtually guaranteed to have an increasing impact on the economic, political, and social structures of many cities and towns throughout the commonwealth.

Like previous immigrants to Massachusetts, Latinos come here seeking, among other things, economic opportunity for themselves and their families. Like earlier immigrants, they seek peace and a better life for their children, and they are willing to work hard to achieve this quality of life. Expanded economic opportunities, however, are essential for the rapidly increasing Latino labor force to contribute to the present and future viability and competitiveness of the Massachusetts economy.

It will be extremely difficult for Massachusetts to have an economically competitive economy without an economically competitive Latino work force. Consequently, policymakers must seek ways to assure full participation in the state’s economy for this population. Clearly, the success of the Latino population is not only a selfish community concern, but also a matter of self-interest for the commonwealth as a whole. ❧

Notes

1. F. Barringer, “Census Shows Profound Change in Racial Makeup of Nation, *New York Times*, March 11, 1991, 1, 8.
2. White, black, and Asian are used throughout this article to refer to non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic blacks, and non-Hispanic Asians, unless otherwise noted.
3. Latino is used throughout this article to refer to U.S. residents of Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, or Mexican ancestry, as well as Spanish-speaking people from Central or South American countries. However, the terms “Hispanic origin” and “non-Hispanic” are used in the tables to maintain consistency with the U.S. Census Bureau’s terminology.
4. The growing population diversity in the United States and in Massachusetts makes it more important than ever to understand the meaning of the terms “race” and “ethnicity.” While these terms are often used interchangeably, they are not synonymous. According to the

Census Bureau, there are only four racial groups — white, black, Asian and Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans. There are, however, hundreds of ethnic — religious, cultural, or national — groups. The term “Hispanic,” an ethnic category, not a racial group, refers to Latino heritage. Latinos may be of any race.

Recent reports of the 1990 census data give figures for whites, blacks, Asians, and Native Americans (all of which include Latinos) and contrast these with figures of people of Hispanic origin. The appropriate comparison and presentation should be of mutually exclusive groups. This is achieved by disaggregating Latinos from the racial groups to produce the “non-Hispanic” white population, “non-Hispanic” black population, “non-Hispanic” Asian population, and so forth. This comparison shows that Latinos are the largest ethnic group in Massachusetts.

5. U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population and Housing, 1990: P.L. 94-171 Data File* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991).
6. For more information on this topic, see M. Uriarte, *Latinos, Data and Public Policy: The Latino Information Gap in Massachusetts* (Boston: University of Massachusetts, Mauricio Gastón Institute, 1990); D. Hayes-Bautista and J. Hernandez, *Improving Data: A Research Strategy for New Immigrants* (New York: Russell Sage, 1985); Ford Foundation, *Public Policy Research and the Hispanic Community: Recommendations from Five Task Forces* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1984).
7. Uriarte, *Latinos, Data and Public Policy*, 3.
8. An undercount is the portion of the “real total population” that a census fails to count. A differential undercount is produced when a census misses more of one group in the population than of another. Historically, undercounts have been greatest in low-income inner-city neighborhoods.
9. W. Alonso and P. Starr, *The Politics of Numbers* (New York: Russell Sage, 1986).
10. See H. M. Choldin, “Statistics and Politics: The ‘Hispanic Issue’ in the 1980 Census,” *Demography* 23, no. 3 (1986): 403–418, and “Hispanic Policy Development Project,” *The Hispanic Almanac*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C., 1990).
11. T. Puente, “Latino Population Grows 53%, to 22.4 Million: 1980–90,” *Hispanic Link Weekly Report*, March 18, 1991, 2.
12. “Census Tally May Be Short 1.7 Million,” *Hispanic Link Weekly Report*, April 29, 1991, 1.
13. *Ibid.*
14. The Latino percentage of the total Chelsea population range is generated by computations utilizing the estimated total Latino population range and the final 1990 census figures for the total Chelsea population.
15. “Census Missed 6M, US Says,” *Boston Globe*, May 19, 1991, 1.
16. See T. Coakley, “City Says Census May Be Under by 50,000,” *Boston Globe*, September 4, 1990, 25; S. Marantz, “Census May Undercount Hub by 42,000, Official Says,” *Boston Globe*, May 2, 1990, 25, 32; and M. Rezendes, “US Census Bureau Denies City of Boston’s Charge of Undercount,” *Boston Globe*, May 6, 1990, 86.
17. According to Marantz, “Census May Undercut Hub,” these figures are based on a city estimate of 2.5 persons per dwelling unit.
18. Coakley, “City Says Census May Be Under,” 25.
19. It is also important to note that the accuracy of the 1980 census in enumerating Latinos in Boston has been questioned. The estimated Latino undercount in Boston in 1980 was 10 percent, according to the Hispanic Policy Development Project, *Hispanic Almanac*.
20. Hispanic Office of Planning and Evaluation, *Boston’s Hispanics and the 1980 Census: Where We Live* (Boston, 1981).
21. Massachusetts Commission on Hispanic Affairs, *Hispanics in Massachusetts: A Demo-*

- graphic Analysis* (Boston: Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Commission on Hispanic Affairs, 1986).
22. F. Perez, "Census Decision Promises More Uncertainty," *Hispanic Link Weekly Report*, July 22, 1991, 1, 2.
 23. The five cities are Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, and New York.
 24. U.S. General Accounting Office, *1990 Census Adjustment: Estimating Census Accuracy — "A Complex Task. Report to the Chairman, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, House of Representatives, GAO/GGD-91-42* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991).
 25. "Hispanic Americans: An Emerging Group," *Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Statistical Bulletin 2*, October–December 1988.
 26. J. P. Allen and E. Turner, "Where Diversity Reigns," *American Demographics*, August 1990, 34–38.
 27. *Ibid.*, 38.
 28. Massachusetts Commission on Hispanic Affairs, *Hispanics in Massachusetts*, 21.
 29. See *ibid.*; Massachusetts Department of Public Health, *Hispanic Births in Massachusetts Volume 1: Facts and Figures* (Boston: Bureau of Health Statistics, Research and Evaluation, 1989); Center for Community Planning and the Collaborative for Community Service and Development, *The Hispanics of Chelsea: Who Are They?* (Boston: University of Massachusetts, College of Public and Community Service, 1990); and Center for Community Planning and the Collaborative for Community Service and Development, *Hispanics in Chelsea: Undocumented Hispanic Immigrants in Chelsea* (Boston: University of Massachusetts, College of Public and Community Service, 1990).
 30. J. D. Haveman, J. Danzinger, and R. D. Plotnick, "State Poverty Rates for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics in the Late 1980s," *Focus 13*, no.1 (Madison: University of Wisconsin–Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty, 1991). According to this article, the national Latino poverty rate was 27.2 percent, and the Latino poverty rates for the other state Latino populations reported were Texas, 35.4 percent, New York, 35.0 percent, Idaho, 31.8 percent, Michigan, 30.5 percent, Colorado, 29.0 percent, New Mexico, 27.6 percent, Arizona, 26.6 percent, New Jersey, 26.6 percent, Illinois, 24.0 percent, California, 22.0 percent, and Florida, 19.0 percent.
 31. Boston Foundation, *In the Midst of Plenty* (Boston: Boston Foundation Persistent Poverty Project, 1989).