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### Latinos in Massachusetts: Cubans

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# **Latinos in Massachusetts: Cubans**

By Phillip Granberry, PH.D., and Krizia Valentino

July 2020

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THE MAURICIO GASTÓN INSTITUTE  
FOR LATINO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
AND PUBLIC POLICY

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## Foreword

The Mauricio Gastón Institute’s description of the Cuban population of Massachusetts mirrors that of other states where Cubans have settled – from its large concentrations in Florida and New Jersey to those, like Massachusetts, where their concentration is much smaller. Cubans tend to be older and to show better educational outcomes and higher incomes than other Latin@s, sometimes bettering the outcomes of the native white population. Some observe these outcomes and conclude “exceptionality” ... and they would be right, although the exceptionality resides not in the individual characteristics of the immigrants but rather in the privileged ways in which their migration has been treated by the United States.

A bit of history may be helpful here. Although a small number of Cubans have lived in Massachusetts, since the late 1800’s –Boston was one of the centers of support for the Cuban and Puerto Rican Wars of Independence- most of the Cubans who have come to Massachusetts have done so as a result of the Cuban Revolution of 1959. The social and economic transformation initiated in the island drove its upper classes and its technical and professional sectors to leave the island in political opposition to the revolution’s measures. The political exiles who made up this first phase of the Cuban exodus settled in Miami, “greeted with open arms”<sup>1</sup> as a result of their particular role in the Cold War politics which counted every single Cuban refugee as a “win” in the war against the socialist revolution evolving in the island.

The Cubans that settled initially in Massachusetts came primarily from the middle- and working-class migration that fled Cuba in the “Freedom Flights” between 1963 and 1968.<sup>2</sup> Many in this group were political exiles fiercely opposed to the Cuban Revolution, but this group included also a growing number of economic migrants.<sup>3</sup> By 1970, the U.S. Census reported that 17.3% of the Latin@ population of Boston (2,888 persons) were of Cuban origin: Cubans were the second largest Latin@ national group in Massachusetts, second only to Puerto Ricans.

These Cubans arrived in Boston as part of the resettlement efforts of the 1961 Cuban Refugee Program, with the Catholic Church being the largest sponsor in Massachusetts. This program sought to support state and local agencies across the U.S. with the cost of resettlement of the refugees, including the provision of cash subsidies for the refugees, of medical benefits, of support in seeking employment and professional training, of small business loans and of loans for college education<sup>4</sup> (From 1967 to 1971, I was the fortunate recipient of what was then called “the Cuban Loan”, a part of the National

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<sup>1</sup> Massud-Piloto, Felix. (1988) With Open Arms: Cuban Migration to the United States. Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc.

<sup>2</sup> Uriarte, Miren. Against All Odds, Latinos Build Community in Boston. In M Uriarte, P Osterman and E Melendez, Latinos in Boston: Confronting Poverty, Building Community. Background Monograph for Beyond Poverty: Building Community Through New Perspectives. The Boston Foundation, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Pedraza-Bailey, Silvia. Political and Economic Migrants in America. University of Texas Press, 1985 p. 26

<sup>4</sup> Pedraza-Bailey, 1985 p. 41-42

Defense Educational Loans of the time). Over 70% of Cuban exiles arriving in the 1960's and 1970's participated in some aspect of the Cuban Refugee Program.

**The comprehensive federal support afforded the early Cuban refugees upon their arrival has no precedent in and bears no similarity to the experience of any other Latin American group as they enter the U.S.**

The support provided the initial Cuban refugees also bears little similarity to that provided Cubans who arrived later. In 1980, the Mariel boatlift brought tens of thousands of refugees to Florida beaches and about 1,500 were re-settled in Massachusetts.<sup>5</sup> The Mariel refugees were notably poorer, with less education and racially mixed compared to the primarily professional, educated and overwhelmingly white refugees of the 60's and 70's. Nevertheless, the support offered the Mariel refugees was broader than the negligible one offered other immigrants from Latin America.<sup>6</sup> Since then, Cubans have continued to arrive in the U.S. as a result of various immigration agreements between the two countries. The newcomers, many of whom are economic migrants seeking family reunification, have been protected by the Cuban Adjustment Act and the Special Cuban Migration Program which have provided exceptions for Cubans seeking entry to the U.S. and expedited residency processes for those admitted. This exceptional treatment, which has protected Cubans from unauthorized immigration and its consequences, was ended in 2016 as part of the agreement between the Obama Administration and Cuba.

As is true of other refugees, who eventually resettle in areas of high concentration of the group, many of the Cubans who were initially resettled in Massachusetts in time returned to South Florida. But even though the proportion of Cubans in the Latin@ population in Massachusetts has decreased considerably since the 1980's, the Gaston Institute's report shows that the number of Cubans in the state has actually increased in the last decade.

Today, 80% of the Cuban population of the state are U.S. born, that is, second and third generation U.S.-born Cubans who have moved to Massachusetts, most likely, to attend college or to work in the health, higher education and financial sectors. It is their positive education and economic outcomes – those of the children and grandchildren of the refugees benefitted by supportive measures upon their arrival- that are most reflected in the Institute's report. In the end, this is precisely the most consequential lesson of this research: the persistence across subsequent generations of the positive effects of supportive measures offered to the original immigrants in their first years in the U.S.

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<sup>5</sup> Rivera, Ralph. Social Service Networks Available to Cuban Refugees. Massachusetts Department of Health and Human Services, 1980.

<sup>6</sup> For a glimpse at the differences in support across groups review the support provided to Haitian refugees arriving in Florida shores at the same time as the Mariel boatlift.

The U.S. government knows the types of policies that need to be implemented to facilitate and support the integration of immigrants. Cubans are a case study of what happens when the U.S. government chooses to implement supportive integration strategies. And without a doubt, present policy towards Latin American immigrants, including recent immigrants from Cuba, and the outcomes these policies produce, are examples of what happens when the U.S. chooses not to do so.

*Miren Uriarte, PhD*

Founding Director of the Gastón Institute and Professor Emeritus of Human Services,  
University of Massachusetts Boston

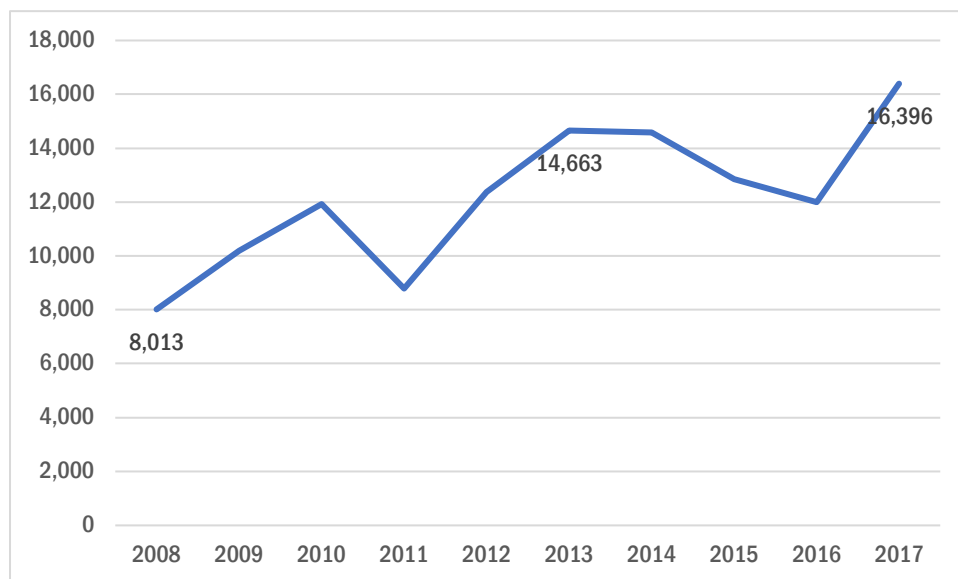
## Latinos in Massachusetts: Cubans

The Gastón Institute’s 2020 Latinos in Massachusetts series focuses on the ten largest Latino populations located throughout the state.<sup>7</sup> In order of size, these Latino populations are Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Brazilians,<sup>8</sup> Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Mexicans, Colombians, Cubans, Hondurans, and Ecuadorans. This report analyzes Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data from the 2017 American Community Survey (ACS) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. Our descriptive analysis uses both household- and individual-level data to estimate population size and percentages and to compare Cubans to Other Latinos and Non-Latinos in the state.

### Cubans in the Massachusetts Population

Massachusetts was home in 2017 to 918,565 Latinos, of whom 16,396, or 2%, were Cuban. Massachusetts has the 13th largest Cuban population in the United States. Appendix A maps the Cubans in the United States, while Appendix B maps the Cubans by cities and towns in Massachusetts. Boston has the largest Cuban population followed by Lowell, Lawrence, Worcester, and Cambridge. (These five cities between them have 31% of the Cubans in the state.) Figure 1 shows that the population grew by 105% from 2008 to 2017. In the same time period, the state’s overall Latino population grew by 44%. By comparison, the state’s total population grew by 5.6% from 2008 to 2017.

**Figure 1: Cuban Population from 2008 to 2017**



Source: 2008-2017 American Community Survey

<sup>7</sup> These reports will not identify Latinos in specific cities and towns, as previous years’ reports have done. Instead, the focus is on the most prevalent Latino ethnic groups statewide.

<sup>8</sup> We use Latino origin and ancestry, based on migration from Latin America, to identify these populations. Thus, Brazilians are included in the category “Latino” although most Brazilians self-report using a racial category – white or black – rather than identifying with the term “Latino.”

Foreign-born Cubans in Massachusetts, who on average arrived in the United States in 1985, composed only 20% of Cubans in Massachusetts as of 2017. With 80% of their population native born, over 95% of Cubans in 2017 were U.S. citizens. By comparison, 36% of Other Latinos in 2017 were foreign born, and 78% of their population were citizens. The Non-Latino population was 14% foreign-born, and 94% were citizens.

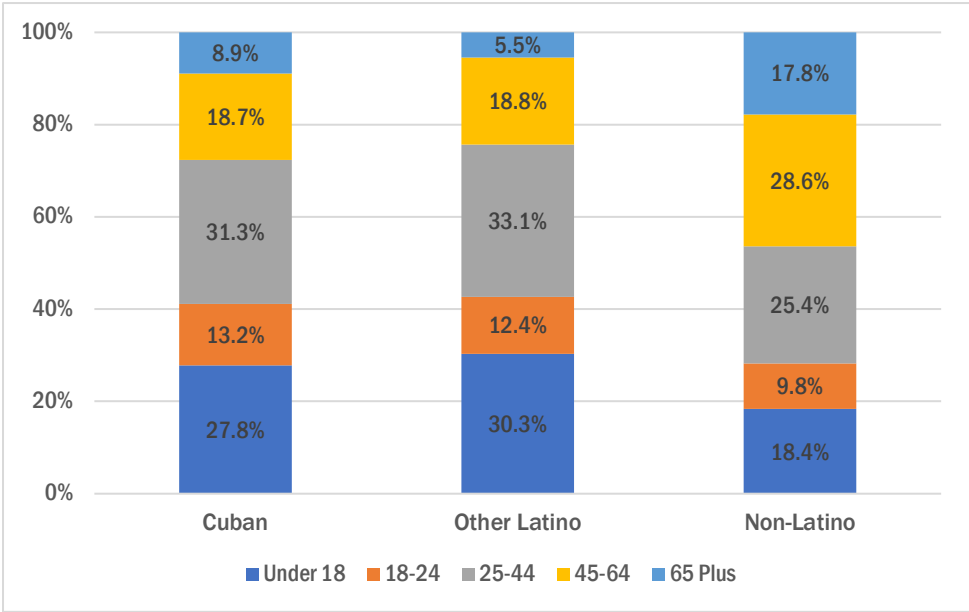
With 80% of the Cubans native born, only 9% of Cuban children in 2017 had at least one foreign-born parent compared to 48% of Other Latinos and 24% of Non-Latinos.

**Age Distribution and Marital Status**

The Cuban population in Massachusetts had a median age of 31 years, older than Other Latinos (29 years) though much younger than Non-Latinos (41 years). Figure 2 shows that 41% of Cubans are under age 25 compared to 43% of Other Latinos and 28% of Non-Latinos.

At the same time, the prime working-age years of 25-44 and 45-64 together accounted for a slightly lower proportion of Cubans (50%) than of Other Latinos (52%) and Non-Latinos (54%). Non-Latinos had a much higher share of the population 65 and older while Cubans and Other Latinos had similar smaller shares.

**Figure 2: Age Categories**



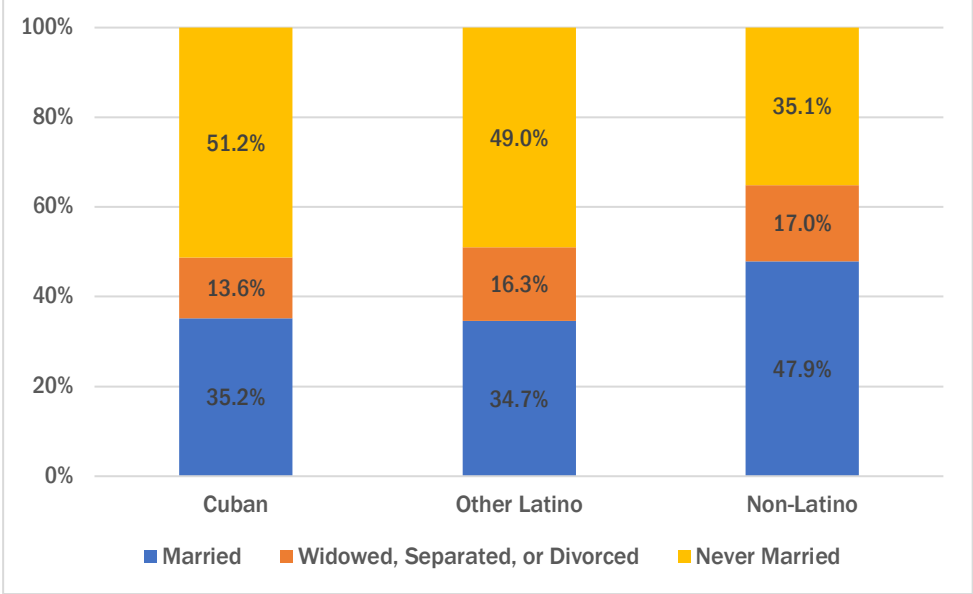
Source: 2017 American Community Survey

**Marital Status**

Even though the Cuban population was slightly older than that of Other Latinos, they had similar marriage rates. Figure 3, covering all ages 15 and older, shows that the

Cuban and Other Latino marriage rates (35%) in 2017 were lower than for Non-Latinos (48%).

**Figure 3: Marriage Rates of the Population 15 Years and Older**



Source: 2017 American Community Survey

**Education**

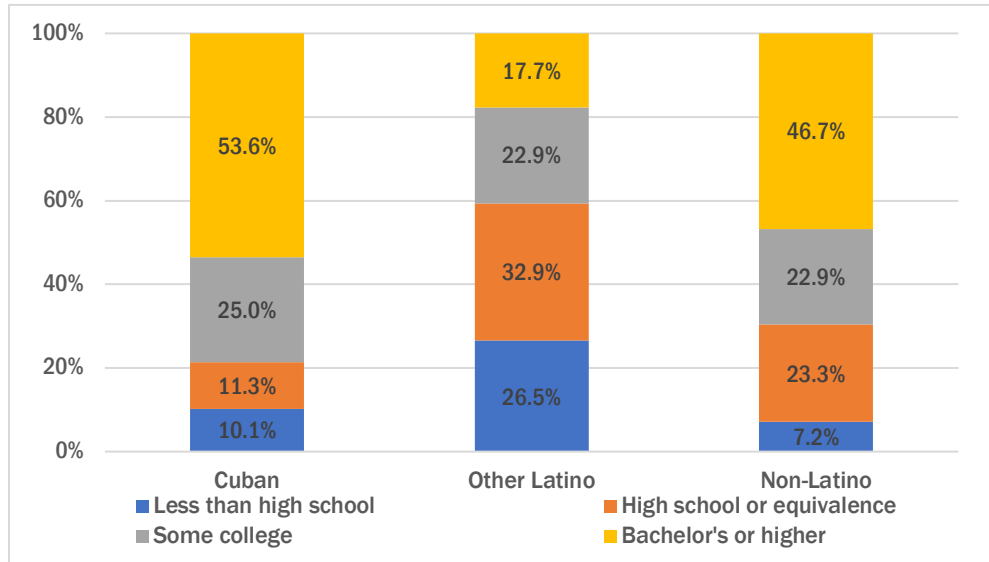
Latinos in Massachusetts overall have relatively low levels of educational attainment, but this is not the case for Cubans. Figure 4 shows that Cubans had an especially high share of their 25-and-older population with a Bachelor’s degree: 54%, compared to 18% for Other Latinos and 47% for Non-Latinos. Correspondingly, Cubans had a lower share of their population with less than a high school education (10%), more similar to Non-Latinos (7%) than to Other Latinos (27%).

The ages of 18 through 24 are important for obtaining higher education, and 55% of Cubans in this age group who had not already earned a Bachelor’s degree were enrolled in college, compared to 38% for Other Latinos and 61% for Non-Latinos.

English language difficulty is often referenced as a reason for Latinos lower educational attainment. Of the population 5 and older, 90% of Cubans in 2017 either spoke only English or spoke it very well. This put Cubans much closer to Non-Latinos (94%) than to Other Latinos (65%).



**Figure 4: Educational Attainment of the Population 25 Years and Older**

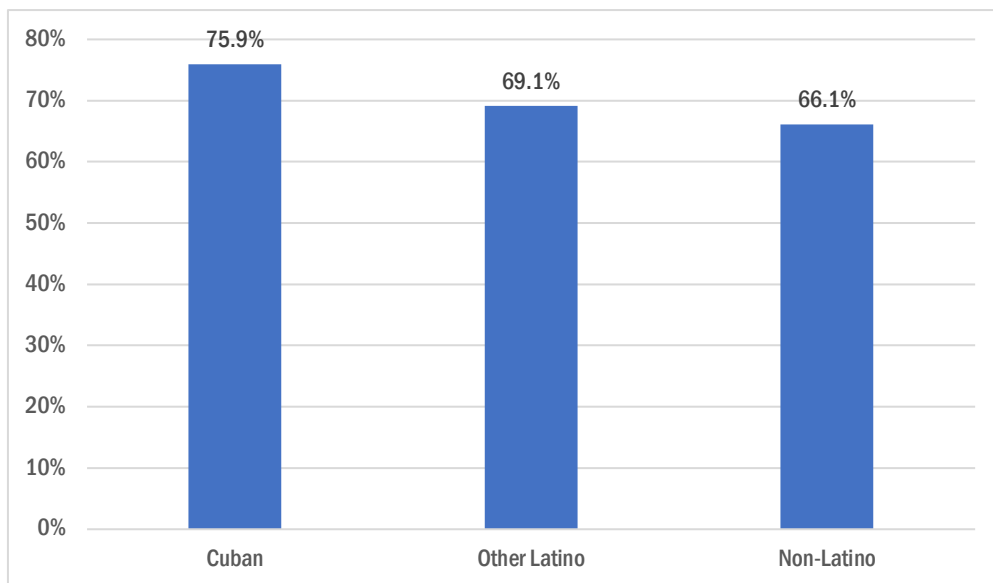


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

### Labor Force Participation

Cubans had higher labor force participation (76%) than did Other Latinos (69%) and Non-Latinos (66%). Among Cubans, men had a slightly higher labor force participation (78%) than women (75%). Younger Cubans had higher labor force participation, which was 86% for those ages 25-44. This was similar to Non-Latinos (86%) but higher than for Other Latinos (80%) in the age group.

**Figure 5: Labor Force Participation of the Population 16 and Older**

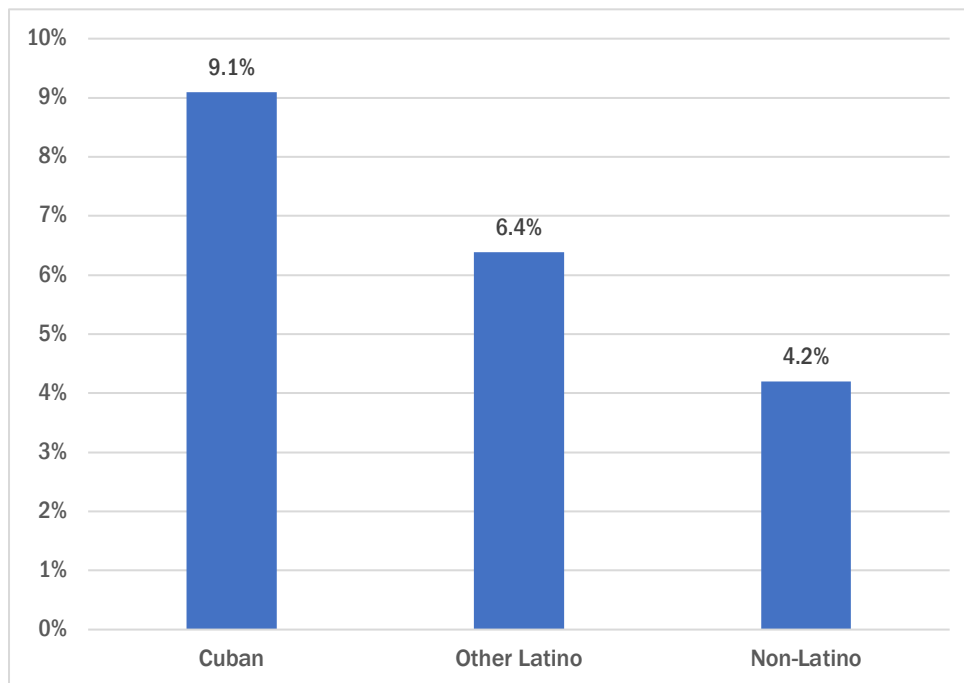


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

## ***Unemployment***

In 2017, the ACS estimated Massachusetts unemployment at 4.5% overall, but 9.1% for Cubans. This unemployment rate was higher than for both Other Latinos (6.4%) and Non-Latinos (4.2%).

**Figure 6: Unemployment**

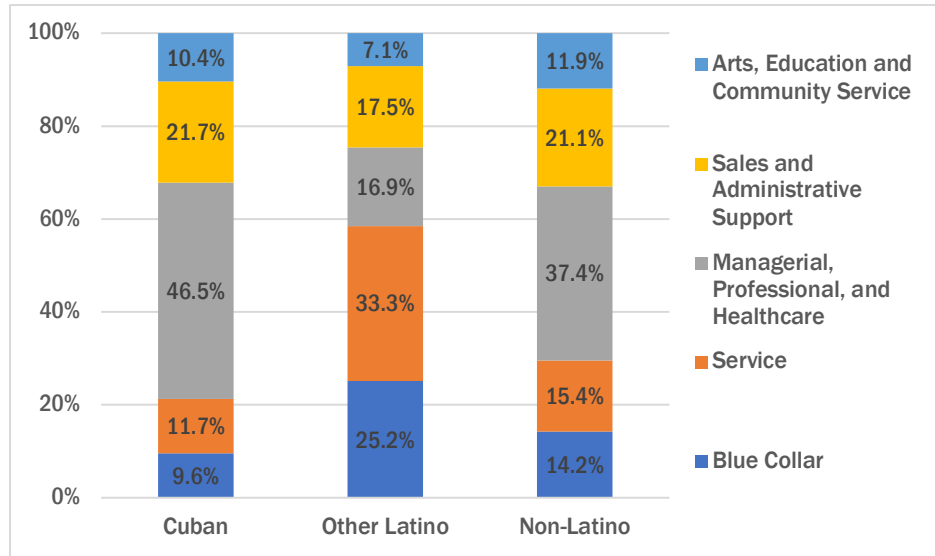


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

## ***Occupations***

Nearly 47% of employed Cubans worked in managerial, professional, and health care occupations compared to Other Latinos (17%) and Non-Latinos (37%). In contrast, only 21% of Cubans work in blue collar and service occupations compared to 59% for Other Latinos and 30% for Non-Latinos. This distribution suggests that Cubans with higher levels of educational attainment fill segments of the labor market that are somewhat more similar to Non-Latinos than to Other Latinos.

**Figure 7: Occupational Distribution of Employed Workers**



Source: 2017 American Community Survey

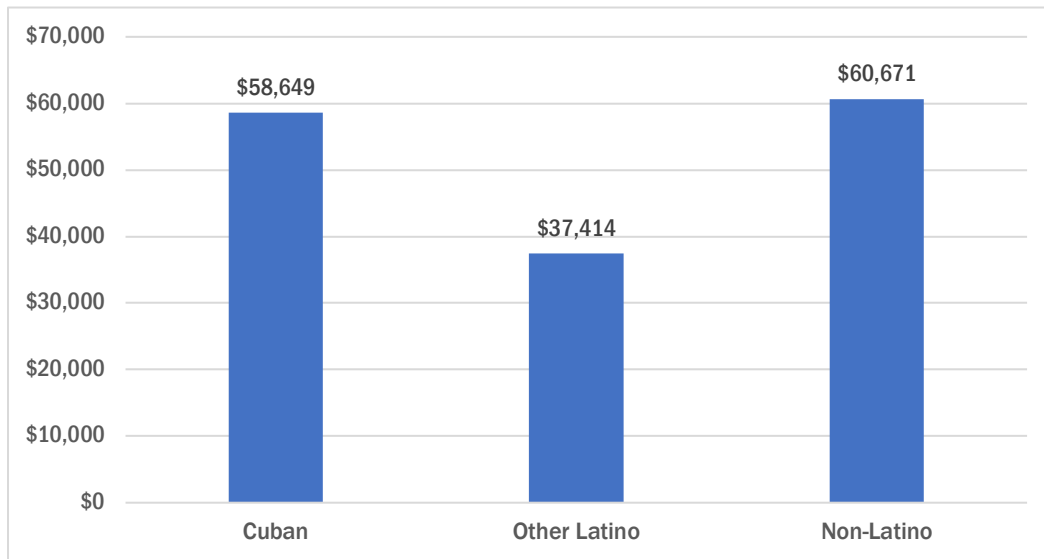
### ***Wages***

Given the previous occupational information in Figure 7, it is not surprising that Cubans earned relatively high wages in 2017. Full-time Cuban workers in 2017 had a median wage income of \$58,649, which was approximately \$21,000 more than for Other Latinos and only \$2,000 less than for Non-Latinos.

### ***Poverty***

With their better labor market outcomes, only 12% of Cubans in 2017 were below the poverty threshold. This is much lower than for Other Latinos (23%) and not much higher than for Non-Latinos (8%). Slightly over 17% of Cuban children lived below the poverty threshold compared to 31% for Other Latinos and 9% for Non-Latinos.

**Figure 8: Median Wage Income of Full-Time Workers**



Source: 2017 American Community Survey

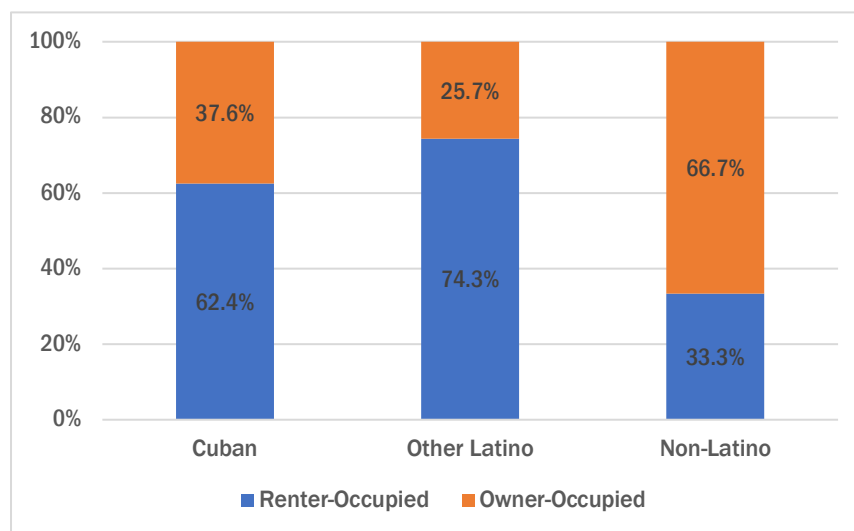
### ***Standard of Living***

The final measures of Cubans' participation in Massachusetts are projected to identify how they are rewarded for their economic, social, and political participation. We look at homeownership, household income, housing costs, and medical insurance.

### ***Homeownership***

Cubans in 2017 had a higher homeownership rate (38%) than Other Latinos (26%) but much lower than for Non-Latinos (67%). The Cuban rate of 38% means that 62% of Cubans were renters.

**Figure 9: Homeownership**

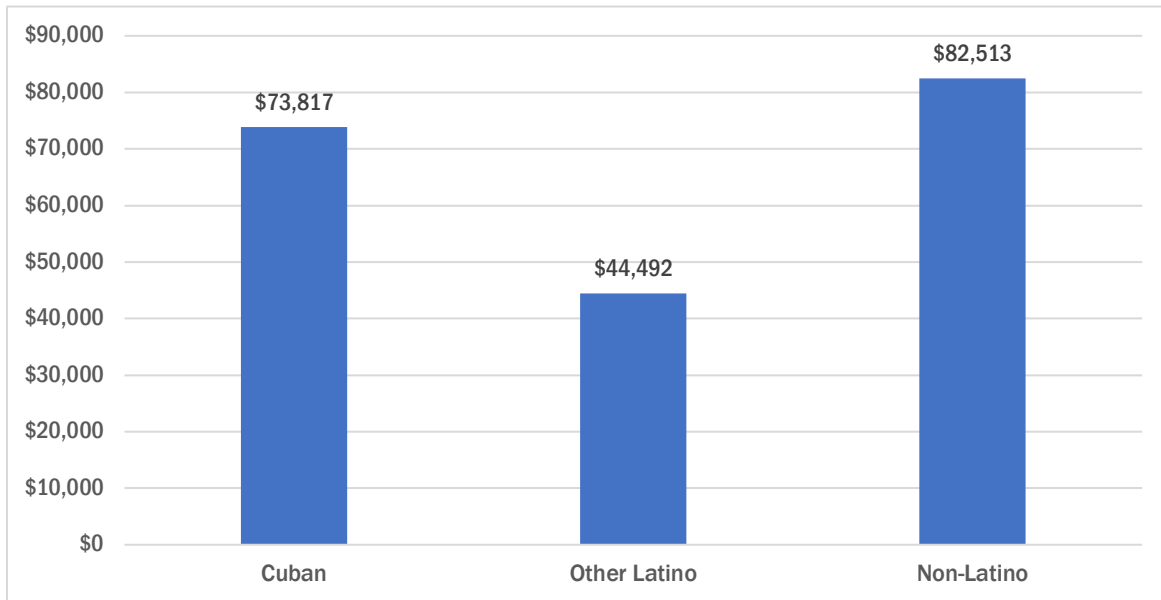


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

## ***Household Income***

Household income is another aid in assessing a population’s standard of living. It accounts for the incomes of all people ages 15 years or older occupying the same housing unit, regardless of relation. Cubans’ median household income was \$73,817. This was much higher than for Other Latino households (\$44,492) though lower than for Non-Latinos (\$82,513).

**Figure 10: Median Household Income**

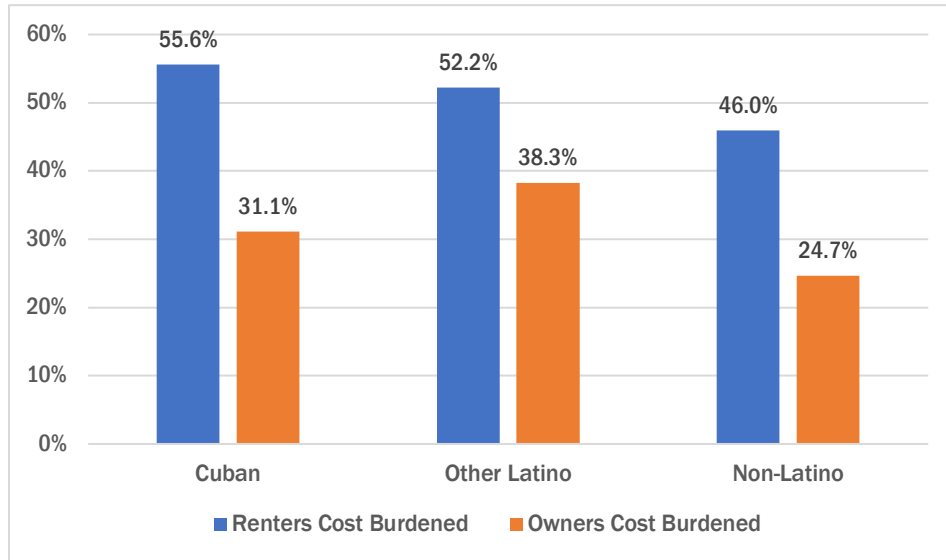


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

## ***Housing Cost Burden***

A housing cost burdened household spends more than 30% of its monthly income on either rent or a mortgage payment. In Massachusetts, noted for its high housing costs, 47% of all renting households were cost burdened. This figure was 56% for Cuban households, 52% for Other Latino households, and 46% for Non-Latino households. Among homeowners, 31% of Cuban households were housing cost burdened. This was lower than for Other Latinos (38%) but higher than for Non-Latinos (25%).

**Figure 11: Housing Cost Burden**

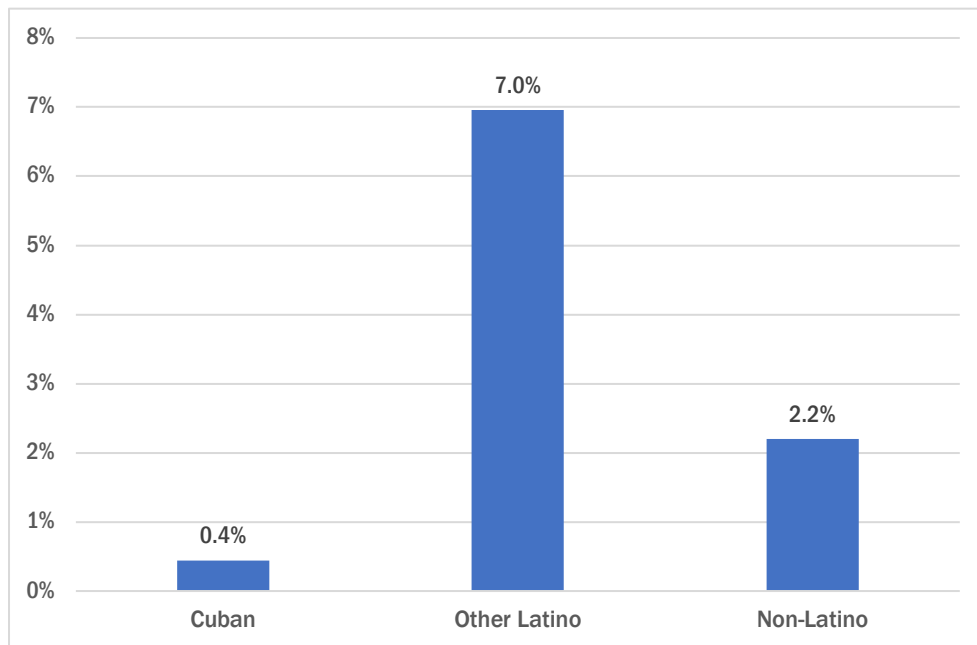


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

### ***Medical Insurance***

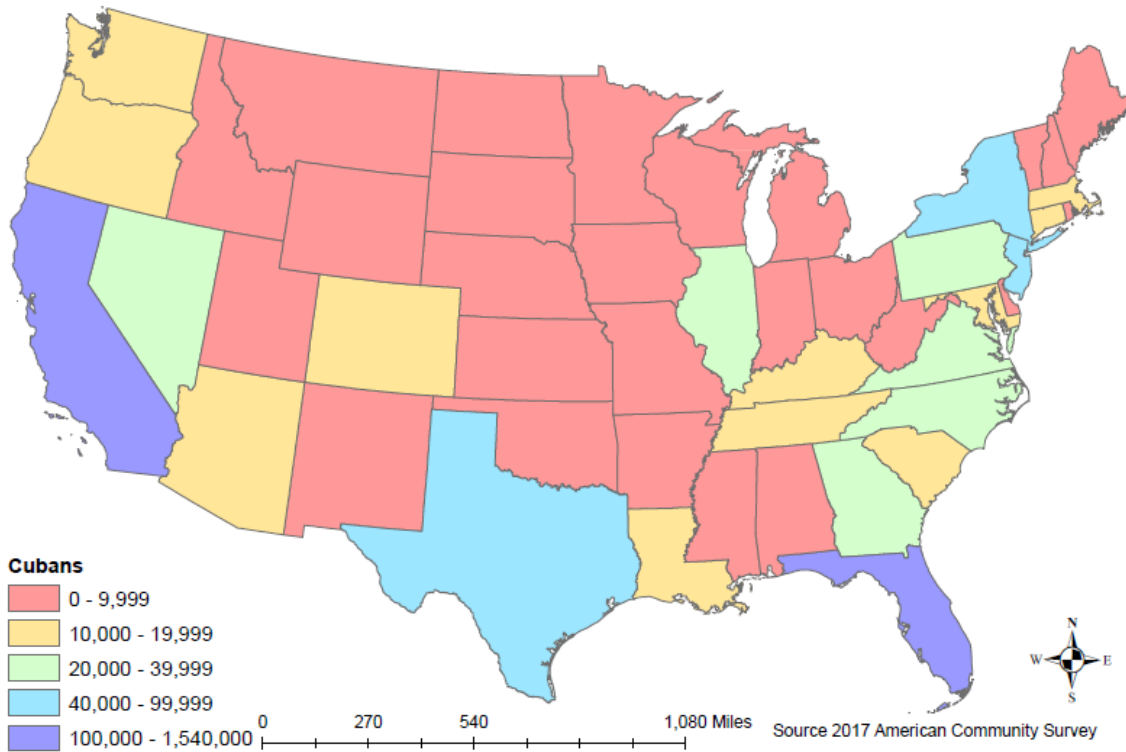
Cubans had low rates of medical uninsurance in 2017. Less than 1% of all Cubans lacked medical insurance. This was lower than for Other Latinos (7%) and Non-Latinos (2%).

**Figure 12: Medical Uninsurance**

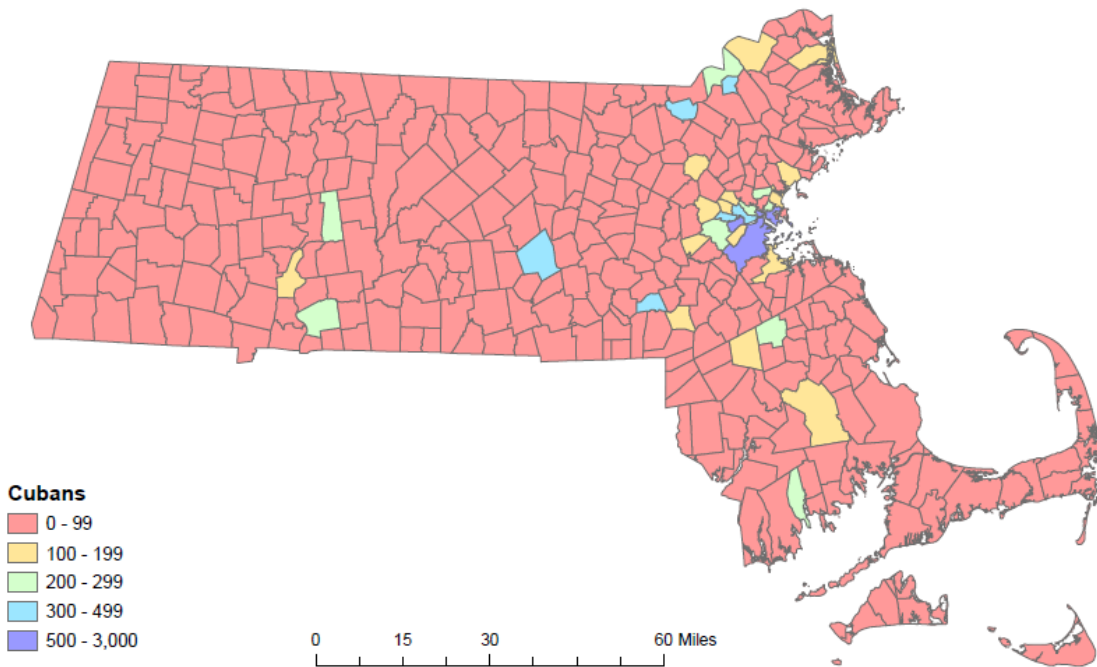


Source: 2017 American Community Survey

## Appendix A: Cubans in the United States



## Appendix B: Cubans in Massachusetts



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 - 2017 American Community Survey, American Factfinder Table: B03001

## Latinos in Massachusetts: Cubans

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July, 2020

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## About the Gastón Institute

Established in 1989, the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy was created by the Massachusetts Legislature in response to a need for improved understanding about the Latino experience in the commonwealth. Now in its 30th year, the Gastón Institute continues its mission of informing the public and policymakers about issues vital to the state's growing Latino community and providing information and analysis necessary for effective Latino participation in public policy development. To learn more about the Gastón Institute, visit [www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute](http://www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute).

One of the goals of the Gastón Institute is to be responsive to the needs of the Latino and policy communities through the research we undertake. Please feel free to contact us with suggestions or requests for specific information.

## About the Authors

Phillip Granberry is a social demographer. He worked with various community-based organizations assisting recently arrived U.S. immigrants before earning a Ph.D. in Public Policy from the University of Massachusetts Boston. He has published several articles on the accumulation and use of social capital among Latinos and the sexual health communication of Puerto Rican mothers with their children. In addition to his research and teaching in the Gastón Institute and Economics Department at UMass Boston, he is Senior Researcher in demography for the Boston Planning and Development Agency.

Krizia Valentino is a graduate student in the Applied Economics program at UMass Boston, expected to graduate May 2020. She has supported data collection and analysis for a wide range of projects at the Gastón Institute, including a Survey Report for English for New Bostonians and the Latino Non-Profit Mapping Project with Amplify Latinx. In addition to her time at Gastón Institute, she is also a teaching assistant in the UMass Boston Economics department.



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