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Latinos in Massachusetts: Brockton

by Phillip Granberry, PH.D., and Vishakha Agarwal

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**THE MAURICIO GASTON INSTITUTE
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Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Brockton

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Prologue

Commonly referred to by the moniker “Champion city,” Brockton, Massachusetts has a rich, yet little known history among the cities and towns of the Commonwealth. It has sometimes had a poor reputation, which is beginning to change along with shifting demographics. In reports from October 2020, based on the most recent census, Brockton achieved a unique demographic milestone in the state. It is the only city in Massachusetts with a majority Black population (with 50,000 residents of African descent). Brockton’s Black and Latinx populations continue to grow and impact the city in powerful ways, most notably in the cultural sector and in the Brockton Public Schools, which have been led to respond to these population changes.

Brockton’s beginnings can be traced back to a 1645 “land grab”—the practical theft of a plantation (about 7 miles in each direction consisting of present-day Brockton, Bridgewater, and East and West Bridgewater) that was added to then Duxbury, MA.¹ Local historian Willie Wilson, Jr. often notes that this was the earliest purchase of land by settler colonists, who hitherto had stolen Indigenous lands as they pleased. The deal was made at Sachem Rock (still standing in East Bridgewater, MA). Three men—Myles Standish, Samuel Nash and Constant Southworth—“bought” the land (nearly 18 thousand acres) from the Massasoit for 7 coats, 9 hatchets, 8 hoes, 20 knives, 4 moose skins, and 10.5 yards of cotton.² From the first few dozen settlers who made their way there in 1650, the community grew through the start of the 18th century when the first significant numbers of whiteresidents made their homes. In 1874, “North Bridgewater” was officially named Brockton, and the city was incorporated in 1881.

By the mid 1850’s, it was beginning to emerge as a popular commercial center. Indeed, oral histories boast of the fact that Thomas Edison used Brockton to experiment with several technologies that would become “firsts.” Thus, Brockton was champion of electric power in a sense: it was the first city in the world with an underground electric system and could boast of the first electric-powered theater and the first fire station with electricity.³ Brockton had been a champion of other 19th century things besides electricity and business (and 20th century sports figures, which is the most popular association). The Liberty Tree downtown was a popular site for the Abolitionist movement, where activists were known to gather and

¹ James E. Benson, *Brockton* (Images of America Series) Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2010.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. See also Brockton Historical Society resources and recordings.

protest enslavement. Frederick Douglass is the best-known figure to have appeared there.

Brockton’s early immigrant communities included the Irish, Greeks, Lithuanians, Italians, French, and Swedish. They were part of the waves of European migrants that flooded the US at the turn of the twentieth century. Each was associated with a particular local neighborhood in the city, such as the Lithuanian Village on the North Side. The immigrants provided the necessary labor force for the many factories in “shoe city”—a name earned due to the success of the shoe industry there and the many original patents held by Brocktonians for innovations in shoe manufacturing. These neighborhood demographics eventually changed as the shoe business died down post World War II, leading to some European immigrant families leaving to look for work elsewhere in the state and region. Eventually African American migrants from the US South as well as diverse immigrants from the African Diaspora (especially Cabo-Verdeans) moved in during the mid to late 1960’s. Later on came Haitians and small numbers of Spanish- and English-speaking Caribbean migrants—for instance Barbadians and Puerto Ricans. The 1990’s brought one of the largest waves of Cabo Verdean migrants to the city, giving it the additional nickname of “the 11th island” (Cabo Verde is a 10-island archipelago). In the new millennium, a growing population of South and Central Americans has emerged in the city. This report will shed light on these Latino populations in Champion city and the implications that their presence suggests for the present and future.

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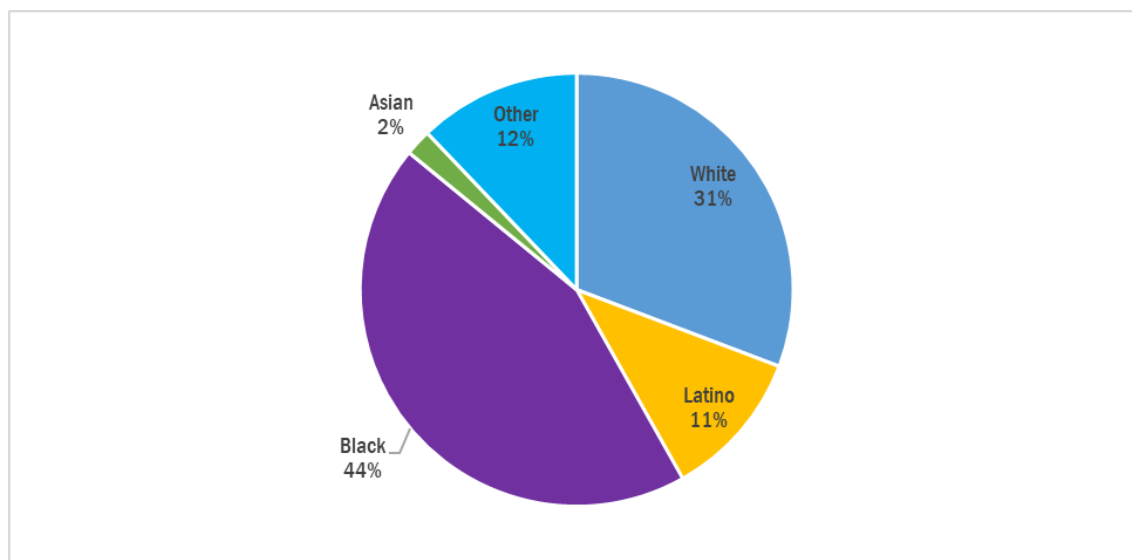
College of Liberal Arts

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Brockton Overview: The Latino Population

The city of Brockton, Massachusetts has a population of 95,594 residents, of whom 10,601 or 11% are Latino, according to the 2015-2019 American Community Survey. Black residents constitute the largest share (44%), followed by Whites (31%). The Latino share in Brockton is almost exactly the same as Latinos' statewide share, which is 11%. Brockton has a large “other” population, which makes up 12% of the city’s population (Figure 1). This group is largely made up of Cabo Verdeans. With only 2% of the population, the Asian group will be omitted from the individual characteristics of the report. This is because such a small sample will lead to especially large margins of error.

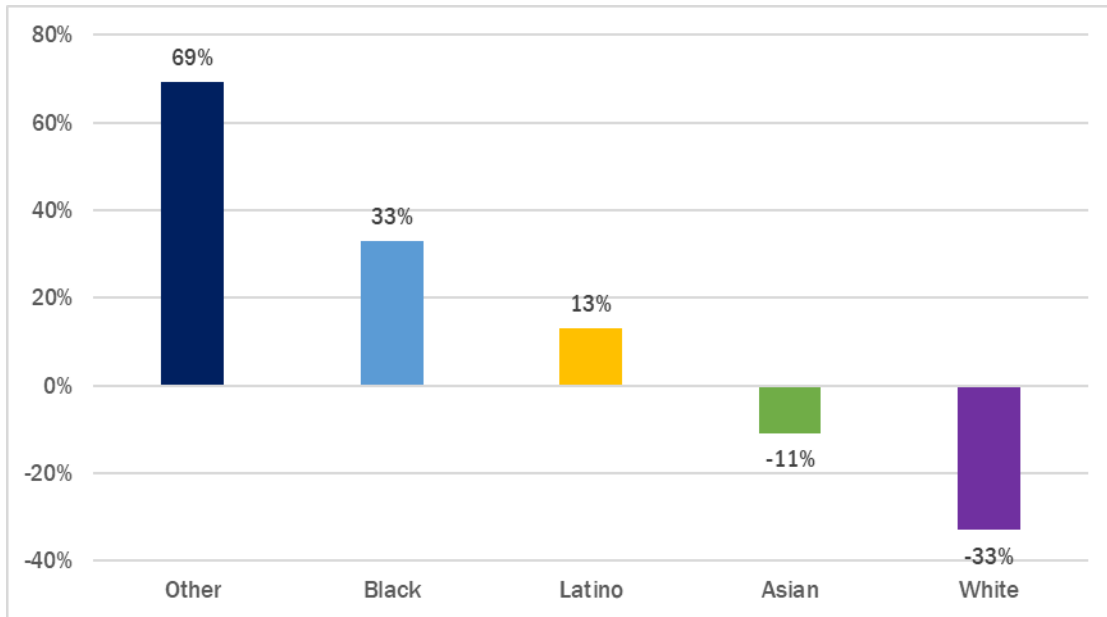
Figure 1: Population Percentages by Ethno-Racial Group in Brockton



Source: 2015-2019, American Community Survey - B03002

Between 2010 and 2019, Brockton’s population increased by only 2% but the Latino population grew significantly, from 9,382 to 10,601. This represents a 13% increase in the Latino population. (However, the Latino population increased by 38% statewide during this same period.) Meanwhile, the Black population of Brockton grew by 33%, and the city’s White population declined substantially (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Population Change by Ethno-Racial Group from 2010 to 2019

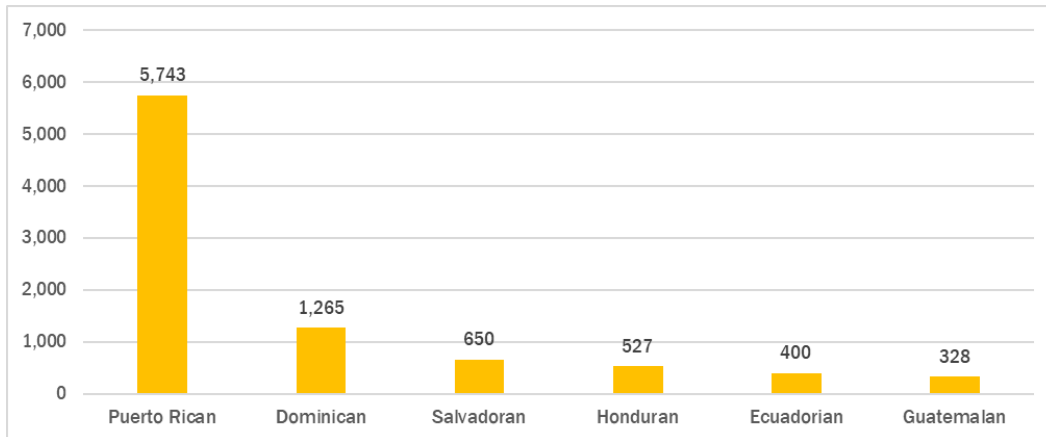


Source: 2015-2019 & 2006-2010, 5-Year American Community Survey – B03002

The foreign-born share of the overall population in Brockton is notably higher than in the state of Massachusetts. Brockton’s population is 31% foreign-born, while Massachusetts’ population overall is only 16.8% foreign-born. Brockton does not have a larger Latino foreign-born population, as only 22% of Latinos in Brockton are foreign-born compared to 32% statewide. Its largest foreign-born populations are from Cabo Verde (11,177), Haiti (8,988), Brazil (836), and Jamaica (808).

Figure 3, which breaks down the Latino population into national-origin subgroups, however, includes both native-born and foreign-born Latino residents of Brockton. Puerto Ricans (who are U.S. citizens at birth) make up more than half of the city’s Latino population with 5,743 residents. Dominicans, Salvadorans, Hondurans, Ecuadorans, and Guatemalans are the next largest Latino populations, though each number fewer than 1,300. Statewide, the largest Latino populations in descending order are Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Salvadorans, Mexicans, and Guatemalans.

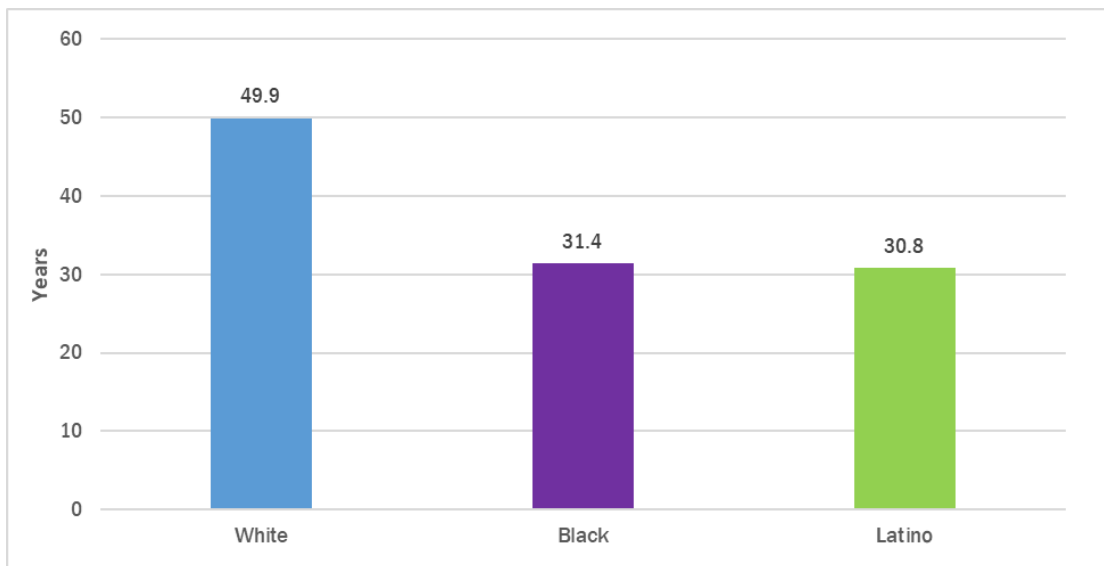
Figure 3: Origin of the Top Latino Populations



Source: 2015-2019, American Community Survey– B03001

Median Age and Marital Status

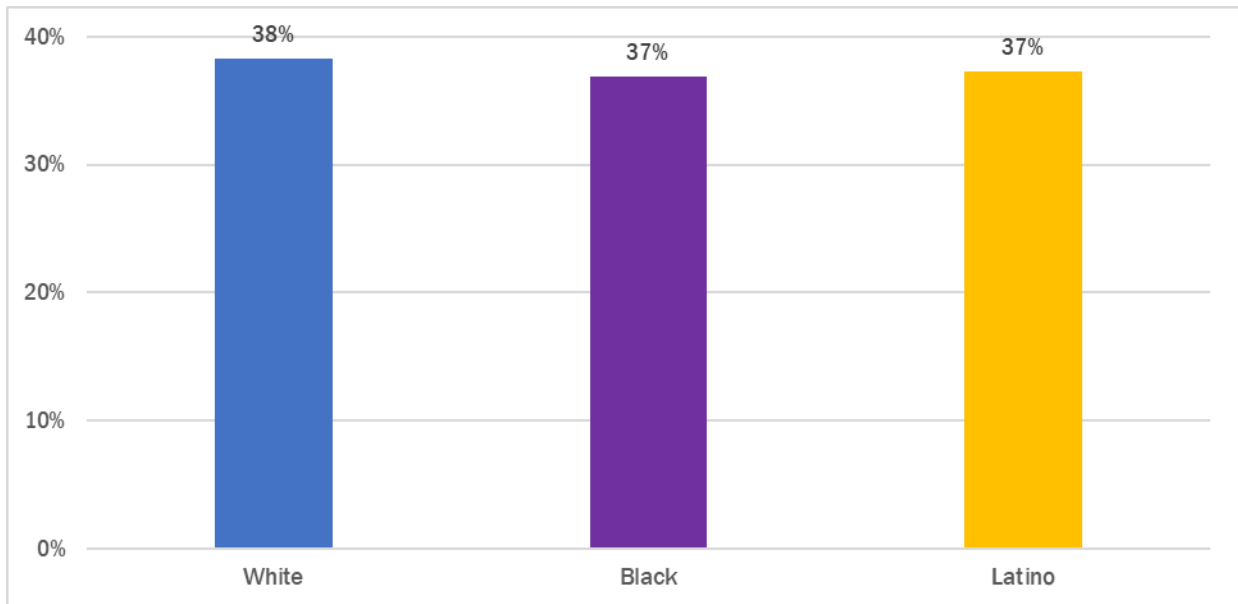
Figure 4: Median Age by Ethno-Racial Group



Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – B01002

The median age in Brockton is 35.7 years, but it varies significantly across ethno-racial groups. Whites are the oldest group both statewide and in Brockton. The median age for White residents in Brockton is 49.9 years, while that of Latinos, the youngest group, is 30.8 years. The median age for Black residents is 31.4 years. Across the state, the median age for Latinos is slightly younger than in Brockton, at 28.1 years (Figure 4).

Figure 5: Marriage Rates by Ethno-Racial Group (Ages 15 and older)



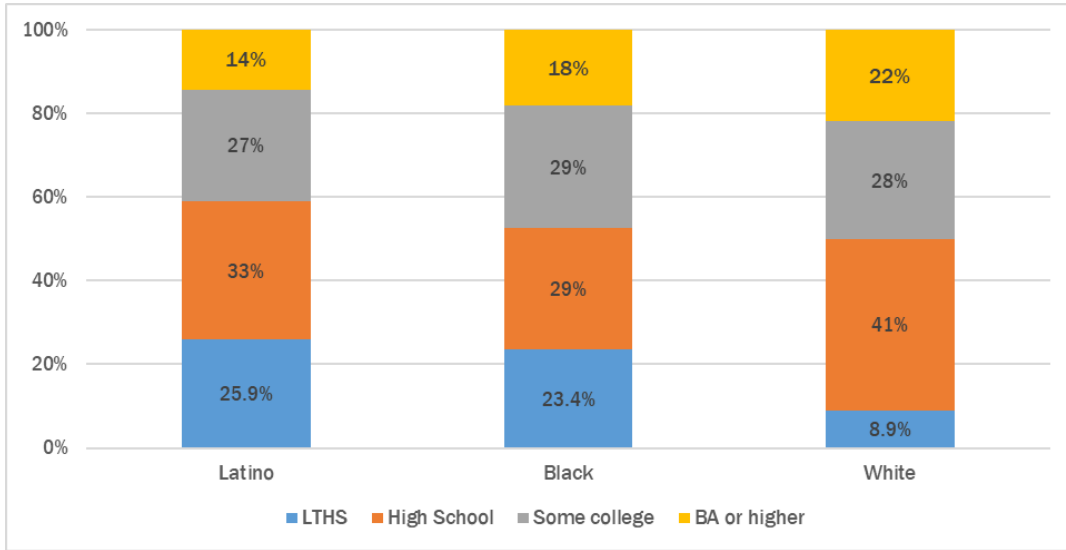
Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – B12002

Marriage rates are low in Brockton. Whites have the highest marriage rate of 38%, which is lower than the marriage rate of 48% for the Massachusetts population overall (Figure 5). The marriage rate for Latinos is 37%, but is higher than their statewide marriage rate of 33%.

Education

In Brockton, Latinos have the largest share of residents who did not complete high school (26%). Whites have the lowest less-than-high-school (LTHS) rate at 9%. Degree holders, on the opposite end of the spectrum, are most heavily concentrated in the White (22%) and Black (18%) populations. Latinos with a bachelor's degree or higher account for only 14% of Latinos 25 years and older in Brockton and 21% of Latinos across the state.

Figure 6: Educational Attainment by Ethno-Racial Group (Adults 25 years and older)

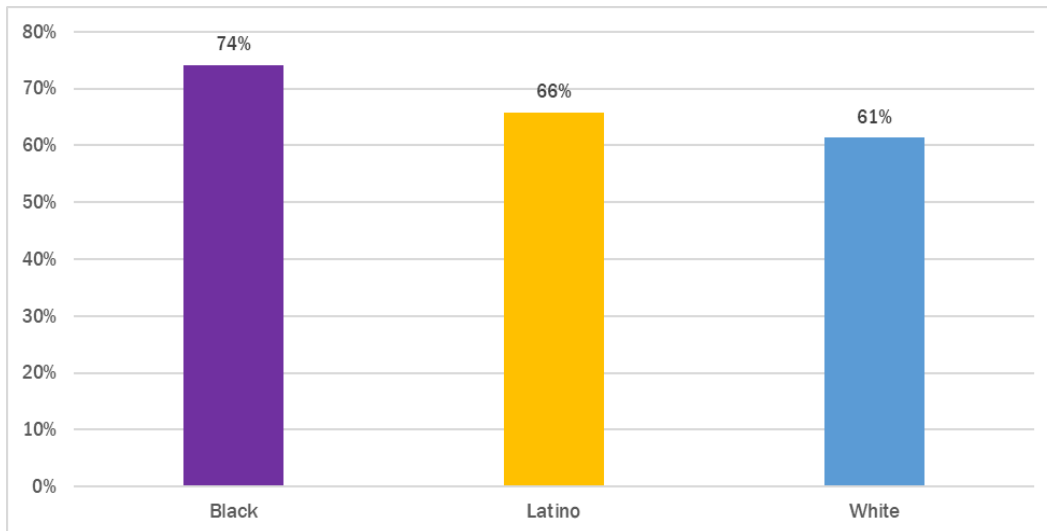


Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey – C15002

Labor Force Participation

Labor force participation in Brockton (69%) matches the statewide participation rate (68%). In the city, labor force participation is highest among Black residents (74%) and lowest among White residents (61%). Latino labor force participation in Brockton (66%) is slightly lower than the Latino labor force participation rate at the state level (70%).

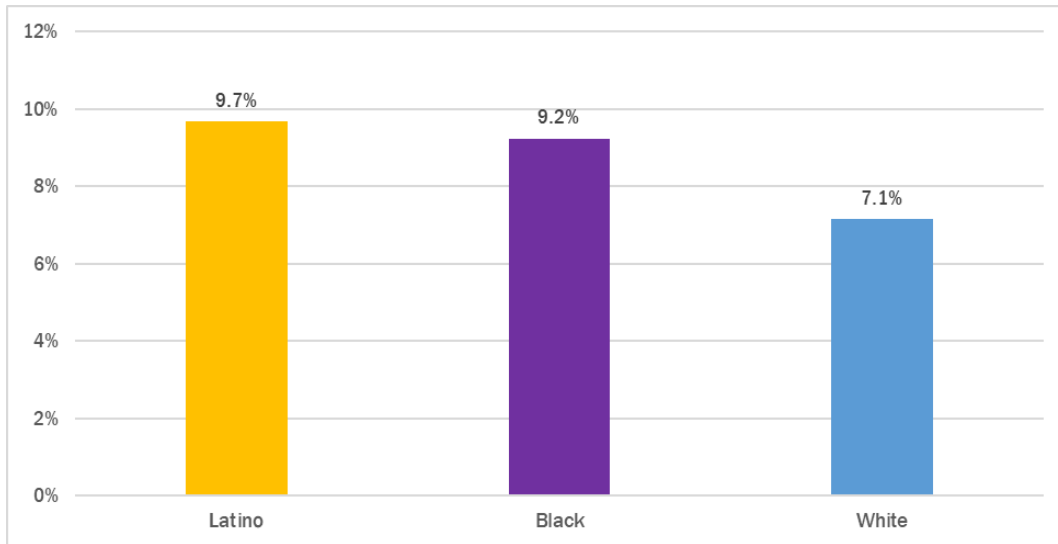
Figure 7: Labor Force Participation among Individuals 16 Years and Older by Ethno-Racial Group



Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey– C23002

The unemployment rate for Brockton was 8.3% during this period. The unemployment rate for Latinos in Brockton was the highest of the three populations, at 9.7%. Black residents have a similar rate (9.2%), but even the unemployment rate for Whites at 7.1% is higher than the overall state unemployment rate (4.8%). The Latino unemployment rate in Brockton is higher than the statewide Latino rate of 4.8%.

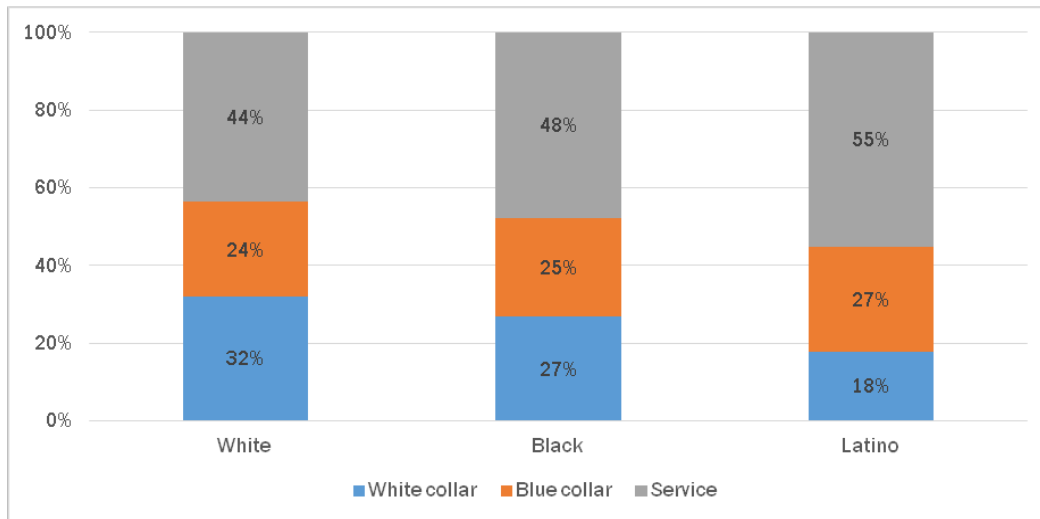
Figure 8: Unemployment Rates by Ethno-Racial Group (ages 16+)



Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey– C23002

Among those employed in Brockton, Latino residents are more likely to work in service-related occupations and less likely to work in white-collar, managerial, and professional positions (Figure 9). In Brockton 55% of Latinos work in service occupations. This is high compared to the statewide distribution of Latino workers in service occupations (49%). The share of Latinos working in white-collar positions in Brockton is 18% compared to 26% for Latinos statewide. White workers and Black workers in Brockton are both less likely to work in service roles and more likely to work in white-collar positions than Latino workers.

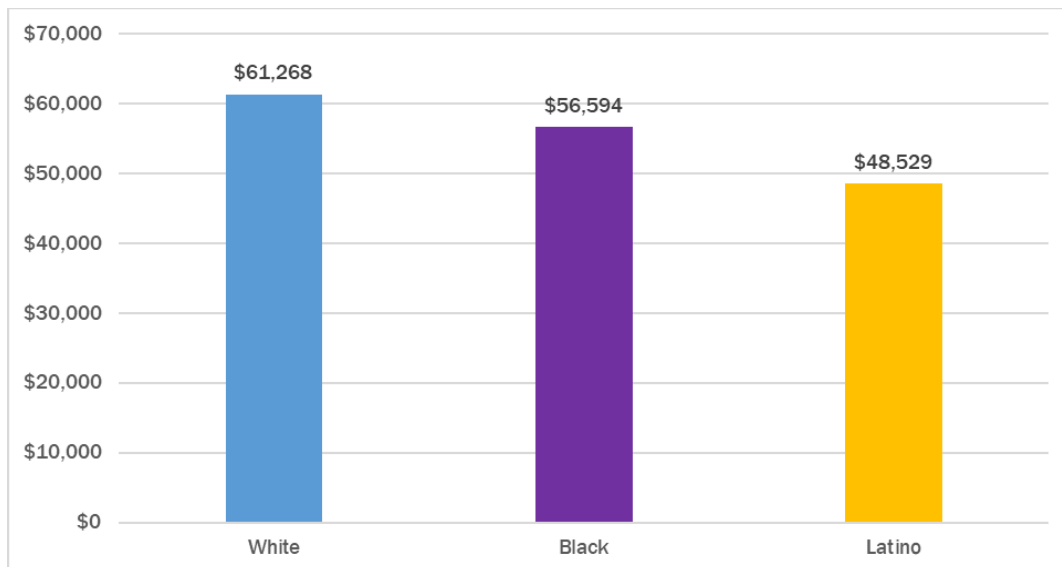
Figure 9: Population Employed by Occupational Category by Ethno-Racial Group



Source: 2015-2019, American Community Survey– C24010

Income

Figure 10: Median Household Income by Ethno-Racial Group

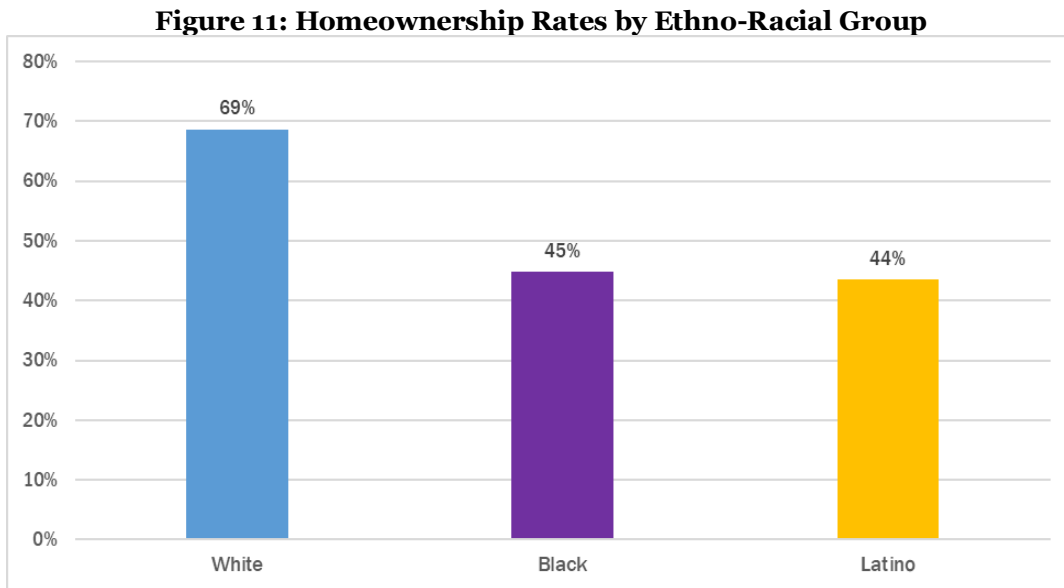


Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey– S1903

Median household income in Brockton, at \$58,469, is much lower than the statewide median household income of \$81,215. In Brockton, Latino households earn \$48,529. White households have the highest income (\$61,268), while Black households have a median household income of \$56,594. Median household income for Latinos in Brockton is similar to that of Latinos across the state. For Massachusetts overall, Latinos' median household income is \$44,885 (Figure 10).

Housing Status and Medical Uninsurance

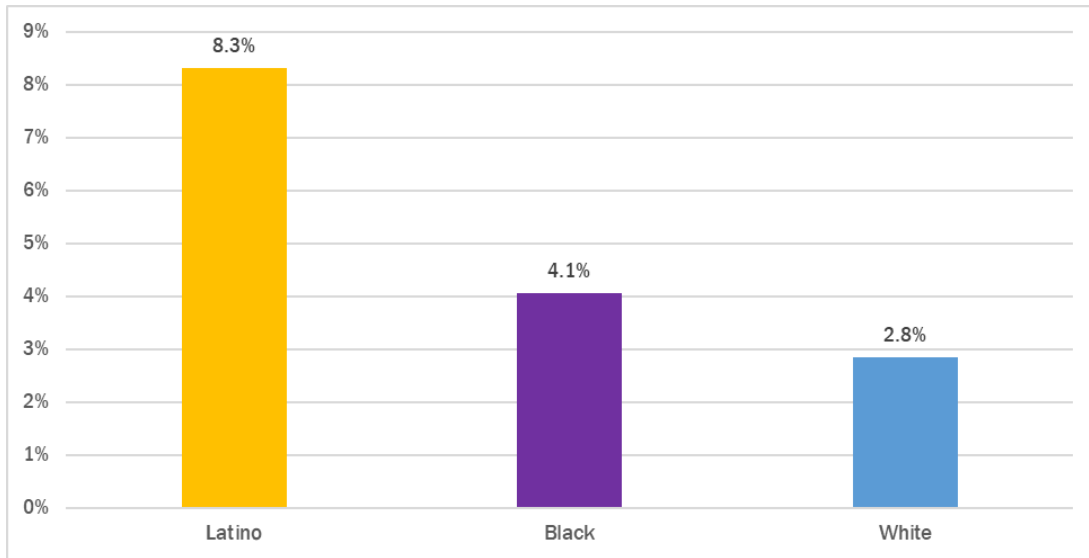
Homeownership rates vary dramatically in Brockton, where White residents have the highest ownership rate (69%), and Latino residents have the lowest rate (44%). Across the state, the Latino homeownership rate is 26%, indicating that Latinos in Brockton are faring better. The homeownership rate among Black residents of Brockton is slightly higher, at 45%. Overall, disparities in homeownership imply substantial economic inequality among the major ethno-racial communities in Brockton.



Source: 2015-2019, American Community Survey Estimates - B25003

The medical uninsurance rate in Brockton is 5.4%. Latino residents have the highest rate of uninsurance in Brockton, at 8.3%. Uninsurance is lower for Black and White residents. The uninsurance rate for Latinos in Brockton is much higher than the statewide Latino uninsurance rate (5.3%).

Figure 12: Medical Uninsurance by Ethno-Racial Group

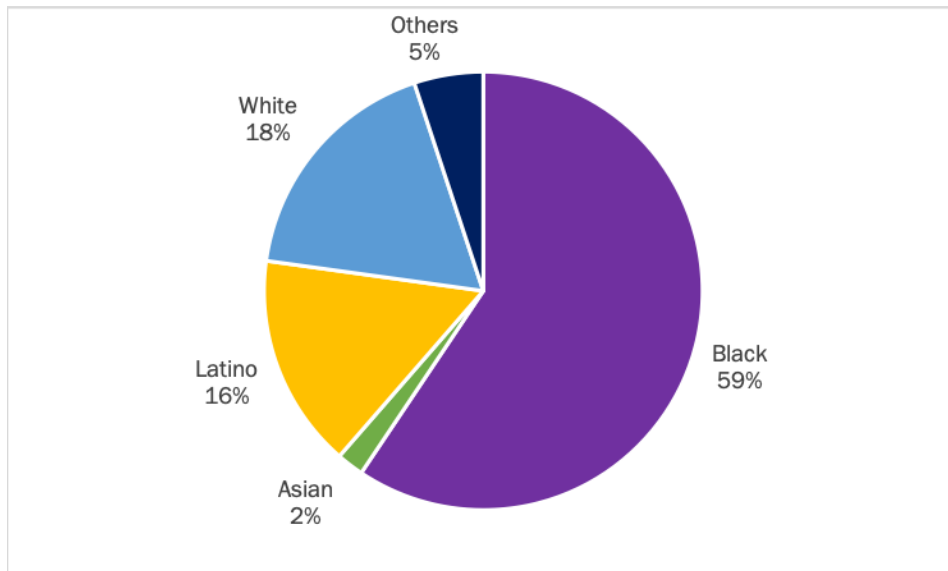


Source: 2015-2019, American Community Survey – C27001

Spotlight on Brockton Public Schools

Brockton Public Schools are the focus of this next section. Brockton Public Schools enrolled 16,349 students in school year 2018-2019, and Latinos make up 15.8% of the school population (Figure 13), which is slightly lower than the statewide Latino school population of 20.8%. Blacks are Brockton's largest population group is made up of Blacks (as shown in Figure 1), which is even more true in the schools, where Black students account for 59% of the population. These data are from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for school year 2018-2019. Asian student data are included in this analysis.

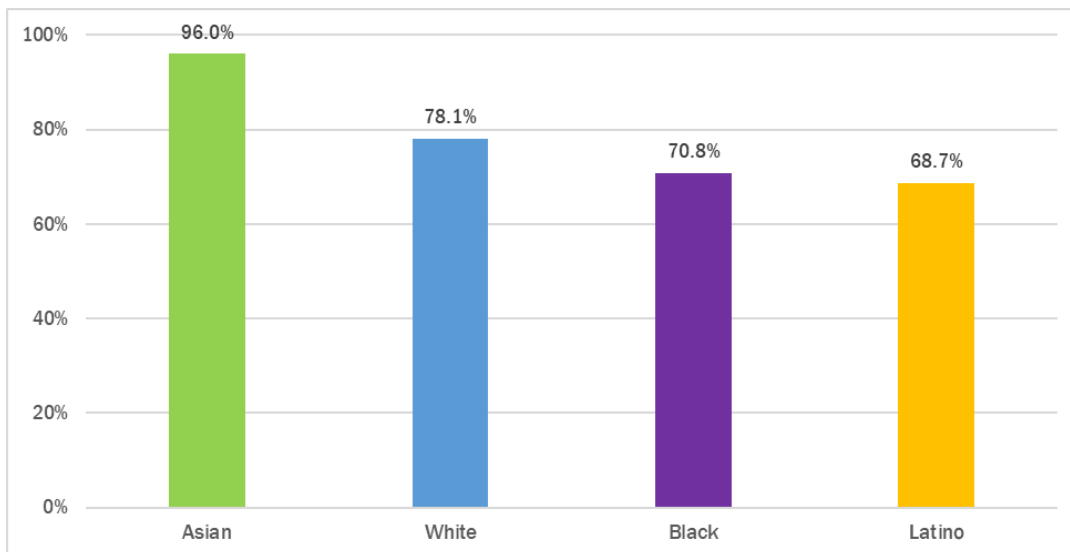
Figure 13. School Enrollment by Ethno-Racial Composition



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, SY 2018-2019

Brockton Public Schools' four-year high school graduation rate in school year 2018-2019 was 72.8%, and this is lower than the state's rate of 88%. Latino students have the lowest graduation rate in the Brockton Public Schools, 69%, but this rate is only slightly lower than Blacks, 71%.

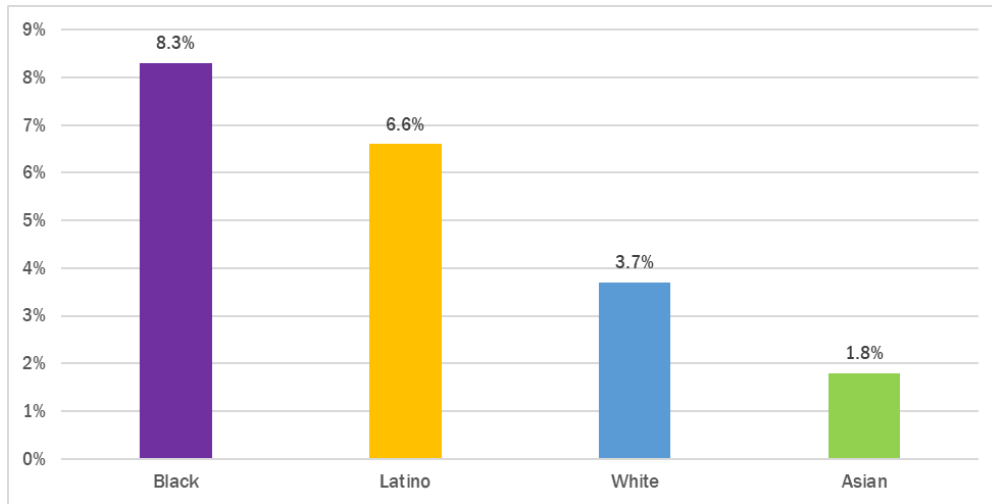
Figure 14: Four-Year Graduation Rates by Ethno-Racial Group



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, SY 2018-2019

Brockton Public Schools' out-of-school suspension rate is 7.1%, which is higher than the state's overall rate of 3.0%. Black students have the highest suspension rate in school year 2018-2019, 8.3%, and Latinos have the second highest rate, 6.6%.

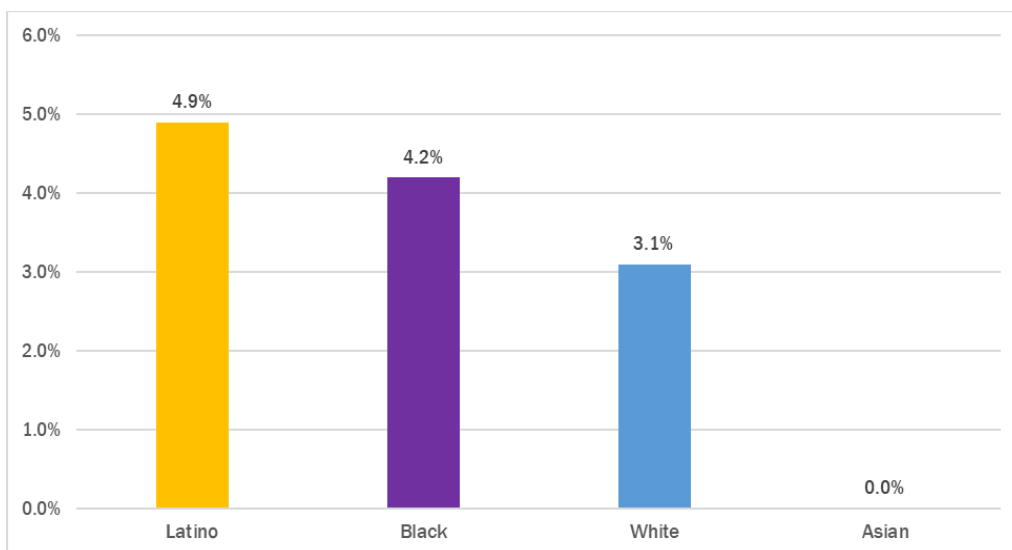
Figure 15: Out-of-School Suspensions by Ethno-Racial Group



Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, SY 2018-2019

Brockton Public Schools' dropout rate is 3.9%, and this is higher than the state's overall rate of 1.8%. Latino students had the highest dropout rate in school year 2018-2019, 4.9%, and Asian students had the lowest, 0.0%.

Figure 16: Dropout Rates by Ethno-Racial Group

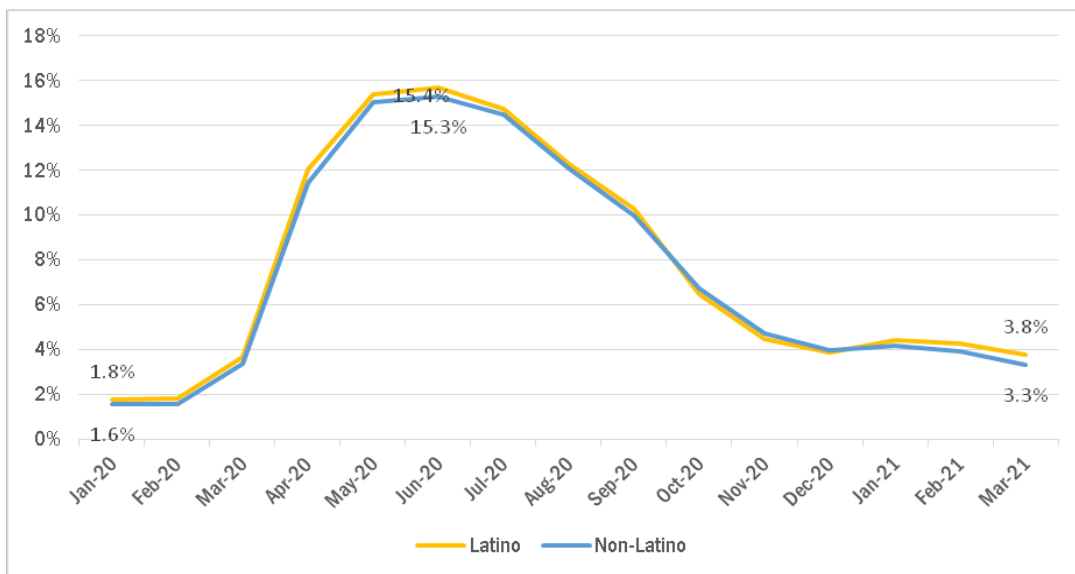


Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, SY 2018-2019

Impact of COVID-19

Starting in March 2020, when COVID-19 hit Brockton, unemployment claims rapidly increased, starting at 1.8% for Latinos. In June 2020, both Latinos and non-Latinos filed high numbers of unemployment claims, their rates rising to 15.4% and 15.3%, respectively. The shares of unemployment claims are calculated by dividing the number of reported claims by the population age 18 and older. From that peak, there was a mostly steady decline in the unemployment claims among both groups, standing in March 2021 at 3.8% for Latinos and 3.3% for non-Latinos.

Figure 17: Unemployment Claims (ages 18+)



Source: Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor & Workforce Development

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.

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 worked with various community-based organizations assisting recently arrived U.S. immigrants before earning a Ph.D. in Public Policy from UMass 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.

Vishakha Agarwal is a Ph.D. Candidate in Public Policy in the McCormack Graduate School at UMass Boston. Vishakha's research focuses on children's everyday classroom experiences, well-being, and education. Her dissertation examines how interactions between teachers and students and among students impact students' classroom experiences and, in turn, informs their subjectivity. She also holds a Bachelor's of Science (Research) in Economics from Shiv Nadar University, India, and a Master's of Science in Public Policy from UMass Boston.



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