

The fact that a much larger proportion of Latinos begin their life elsewhere in the US indicates that although it has been the recipient of large number of Latinos in the last two decades, Rhode Island is not an initial “gateway” for Latinos. In a gateway (or “port of entry”) area, large numbers of newcomers arrive directly from their country of origin and without any prior experience of life in the US, as is the case of cities like Miami, Los Angeles, New York and, to a much lesser extent, Boston. Rhode Island has been less exposed to the forceful and visible impact of the direct entry of large numbers of totally inexperienced newcomers. A more subtle entry, on the other hand, may contribute to both the invisibility of the newcomers to those outside their areas of settlement and the lack of readiness on the part of the receiving city’s systems of care to address the needs of the new immigrants.

## II. Geographic Concentration of the Latino Population

The long-standing Latino community that has lived in Rhode Island for more than 20 years is made up primarily of Puerto Ricans and Colombians who have settled in Providence and Central Falls. To this day, these are areas of high concentration of Latinos. Providence later became the entry point for Dominicans and Central Americans as well. Table 3 and the maps in Figure 5 and 6, show that in 2000, Latinos are present in several small pockets across the state, but that they are highly concentrated in the Greater Providence area, particularly in Providence, Central Falls, and Pawtucket.

Providence is home to the largest number of Latinos, where they make up about 30%

**Table 3**

Latino population of selected Rhode Island cities – 2000.

Place	Latino population	Percent of total population	Percent of Latino population
State	90,820	8.7	100
<b>Providence</b>	52,146	30.0	57.4
Pawtucket	10,141	13.9	11.2
Central Falls	9,041	47.8	10.0
Woonsocket	4,030	9.3	4.4
Cranston	3,613	4.6	4.0
Newport	1,467	5.5	1.6
Warwick	1,372	1.6	1.5
North Providence	1,247	3.8	1.4

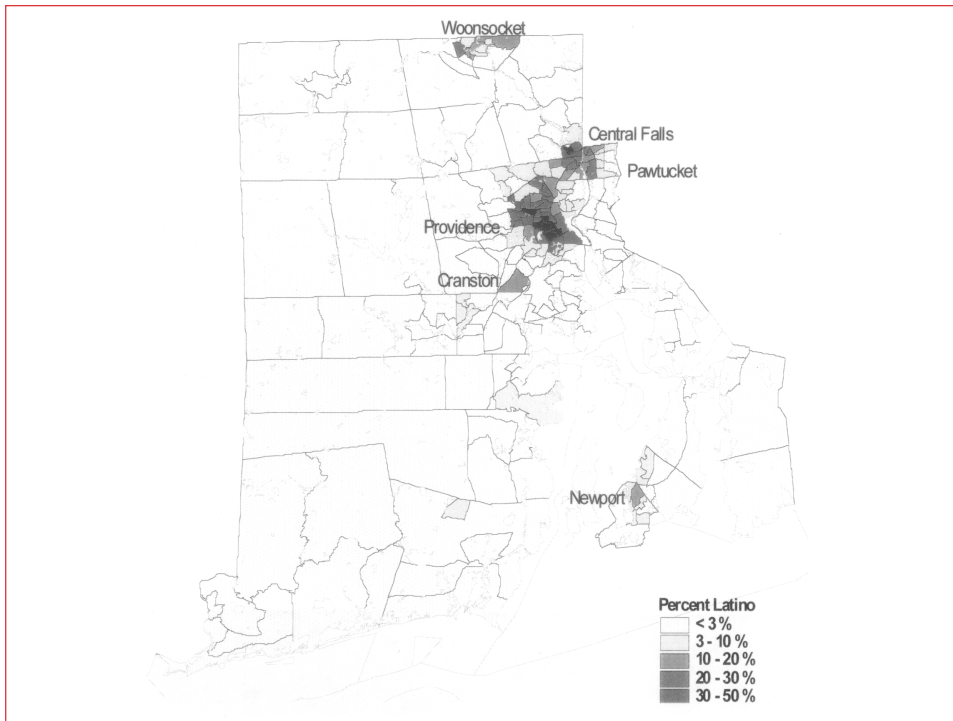
Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2001(a) and 2000(b)

of the population of the city. By contrast, Blacks account for 12.7% of the city’s population and Asians comprise 5.9%.<sup>13</sup> Latinos are also the largest racial/ethnic group in Providence, accounting for 55% of the minority population. In Providence, the Latino presence is densest in the neighborhoods of Elmwood, the West End, and South Providence. In those areas, Latinos account for more than 50% of the population (see Figure 7). The concentration of Latinos in geographically contiguous areas in the city has made it possible for them to field candidates for office and get them elected. “At this point, we have four neighborhoods in Providence that are almost all Latino,” says a Latino elected official from Providence, “although more than Latinos vote in those districts and those elected have to represent everyone, it helps make the process of getting elected much easier.”<sup>14</sup>

The two other areas of high concentration—Central Falls and Pawtucket—are small in comparison to Providence. They are both about one-fifth of the size of the Providence group. In Central Falls, the Latino presence is dense, even more concentrated than that found in Providence. Latinos account for 47.8% of Central Falls and comprise 82%

**Figure 5**

Geographic concentration of Latino population in Rhode Island – 2000.

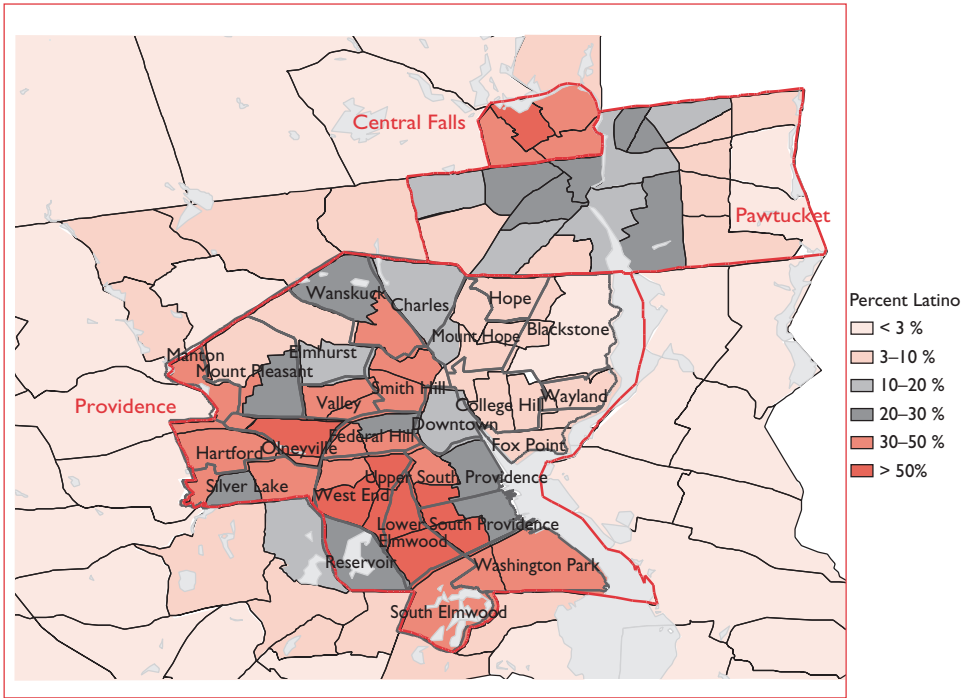


Sources: Population counts: US Bureau of the Census 2000a Geography Data: US Bureau of the Census 2001 Redistricting TIGER/Line Files (via Geography Network [online service]: [www.geographynetwork.com](http://www.geographynetwork.com))

of its minority population. Pawtucket has slightly more Latinos, but they are less concentrated than those in either Providence or Central Falls. Other cities in the state that have at least 1,000 Latinos are Woonsocket, Cranston, Newport, Warwick and North Providence.

Although the racial makeup of the state of Rhode Island remains overwhelmingly white (81.9% in 2000), the last 20 years have dramatically altered the face of its state capital. In the year 2000, for the first time, whites became the numerical minority of the Providence population. This is the result of, both, the decrease in the white population of the city and of the migration of Latinos into the capital. Between 1980 and 2000, Providence lost 35% of its non-Hispanic white population, declining from a high of 123,222 persons in 1980 to 79,451 in 2000. During the same years, the Black population remained stable at between 11 and 12%; the population of Asians and other races doubled, and the Latino population quintupled.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 6**  
Concentration of the Latino population in Greater Providence.



Sources: Population counts: US Bureau of the Census 2000a  
 Geography Data: US Bureau of the Census 2001 Redistricting TIGER/Line Files (via  
 Geography Network [online service]: [www.geographynetwork.com](http://www.geographynetwork.com)

## Conclusions

In the last 20 years Rhode Island, and particularly Providence, has experienced considerable changes in the make-up of its population. At the heart of this change is the large migration of Latinos to the state. The rate of growth of the Latino population in Rhode Island far outstrips that of the New England region. Providence, for example, has attained a high level of racial diversity in a very short period of time. It surpasses Boston and Hartford in the density of its minority population, both cities with longer-standing Black and Latino communities.

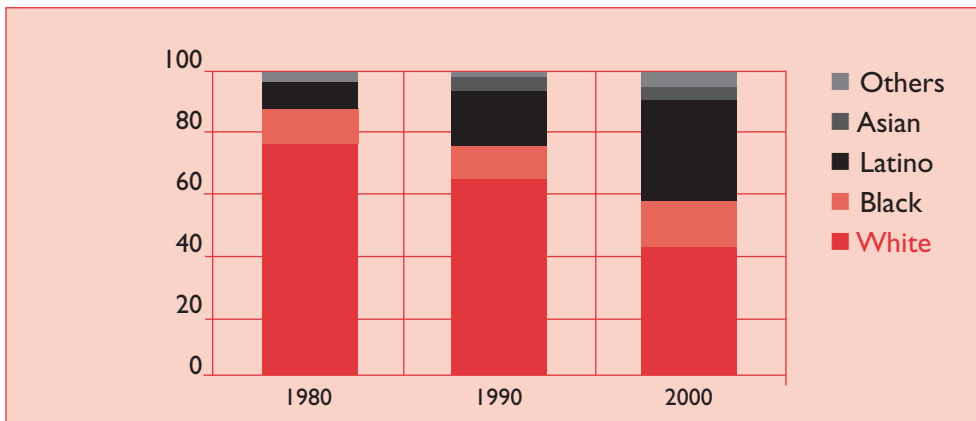
Immigration from Latin America and Puerto Rico fuels Latino population growth. Although a large number of Latinos in Rhode Island were born in the mainland US and, even among immigrant Latinos, there is a long-standing community, the felt experience and the numbers reflect a large number of relatively recently-arrived immigrants.

Either one, the arrival of a large number of immigrants or the swift racial transformation of a city, would have brought stresses and strains. In Rhode Island, and especially in Providence, both are happening at the same time. The rapid racial transformation of the population is often the source of stress as systems and structures resist and lag behind in their response to the demographic changes. The entry of large numbers of immigrants often require supportive services and initiatives that are seldom readily available in cities that are not traditional “ports of entry” or where large immigrant communities of the same group are already well established.

There is evidence to suggest that both—the effect of the change in racial composition and the impact on the service systems of a large number of new immigrants—are part

### Figure 7

Evolving racial diversity of Providence, Rhode Island – 1980 to 2000.



Source: US Bureau of the Census, 1983; 1990 (a); 2000 (a)

of the experience of Latinos in the Ocean State. This is because as they start a new life in Rhode Island, in many ways, the state and, especially, Providence is starting a new day as well.

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