



Latinas/os in the Northeast: A Historical Overview
Carmen Teresa Whalen, Latina/o Studies and History, Williams College

Latinas and Latinos have a long history of migrating to and settling throughout the Northeast. Puerto Ricans are often associated with the Northeast, while Mexican-Americans have long been associated with the Southwest, and Cubans with Florida. Indeed, Puerto Ricans were among the earliest settlers in the Northeast, and Puerto Rican migration increased in the aftermath of World War I and even more dramatically after World War II. In the post-World War II era, Puerto Ricans eclipsed both the scattered settlement and the pan-Latino nature of communities that characterized earlier periods. Latina/o diversity in the region then increased again, first with migrations from the Hispanic Caribbean—Cuba and the Dominican Republic. During the 1980s, Central American migrations augmented the Latina/o diversity in the region, and during the 1990s, larger numbers of Mexicans and Columbians came to the region. As with Puerto Ricans, Latin American migrations to the Northeast were propelled by United States’ military, political, and economic interventions in their countries of origin, as well as by employers’ continuous search for low-wage workers for particular sectors of the economy. Latinas and Latinos came to the region in search of a better life, relying on social networks of family and friends to facilitate migration, to meet their immediate needs, to confront challenges, and to build vibrant communities.

The Northeast represents areas of long-term settlement, particularly of Puerto Ricans in the Mid-Atlantic states, and newer destinations for Latinas/os in the New England states. By the 2000 census, both the Mid-Atlantic and New England states were home to sizeable and diverse

Latina/o populations. As an early foundation and continuous thread, Puerto Rican migration provides a useful lens to explore migration dynamics to the region, including its urban and rural dimensions. The reception of Puerto Ricans and the communities they built shaped the context for later Latina/o arrivals in many destinations. Puerto Ricans experienced the economic restructuring that paints in sharp relief the constrained economic environment that other Latinas/os confronted, an economic environment rendered more precarious by immigration status in some instances. There is also significantly more scholarship on Puerto Ricans in the region, given their longer history, their larger numbers, and the emergence of Puerto Rican studies in the 1970s.

Early Migrations and Pan-Latina/o Communities

Prior to World War I, trade and commercial ties fostered Puerto Ricans' scattered settlement along the eastern seaboard, while more concentrated pan-Latina/o communities emerged, especially in New York City and Philadelphia. Trade and commercial ties between Puerto Rico and port cities in the northeast fostered the settlement of some merchants and their families in cities, such as New Haven, Connecticut and Boston, Massachusetts. As early as the 1600's ships left Connecticut carrying cattle, horses, grain, lumber and other products, and returned from Puerto Rico with sugar, molasses, rum, and sometimes slaves. By the 1860 census, ten Puerto Ricans were living in New Haven, one of whom fought in the Civil War and then became a fire fighter. In Boston, settlement fostered by trade and commercial relationships was augmented by the cigar making industry and political exiles. In the 1890s, the *Cuba-Borinquen Club* and a chapter of the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano* were founded to struggle for Cuban and Puerto Rican independence from Spain. One Puerto Rican cigar manufacturer was listed in the 1880 *Boston Directory* among about a dozen cigar manufacturers who had Spanish surnames. The 1920 census identified forty-eight Puerto Ricans living in the city, with the men working as cigar

makers, porters, servants, or sailors, and with the women working as maids or servants. Historian Ruth Glasser found that “years of trade had strengthened ties between wealthy Puerto Rican merchant families and the Northeast coast of the United States.” These Puerto Rican families sometimes sent their children to elite universities, including Yale. In Boston, Puerto Ricans came to study at the New England Conservatory of Music and the Berkeley School of Music. Although not well-researched, children from wealthier families in Puerto Rico have continued coming to the States to study.¹

Pan-Latina/o communities emerged in New York City and Philadelphia. Prior to 1898, Cuban and Puerto Rican cigar-makers migrated to the Northeast, as well as to cigar-manufacturing areas in Florida. The cigar industry shaped migration patterns and social networks. Many Cuban and Puerto Rican migrants were political exiles, struggling to overthrow Spanish colonialism in Cuba and Puerto Rico. Political groups took root. In New York City, according to historian Nancy Mirabal, Puerto Ricans and Cubans lived, worked, and mobilized together forming revolutionary and cultural clubs, as well as exile newspapers into a vibrant political community. Merchants and professionals also continued migrating to these cities, sometimes playing leadership roles in community institutions. Hence, despite their working-class predominance, there seems to have been some socio-economic diversity in these communities, as well.²

¹ Ruth Glasser, “From ‘Rich Port’ to Bridgeport: Puerto Ricans in Connecticut,” 175; and Félix Matos Rodríguez, “Saving the *Parcela*: A Short History of Boston’s Puerto Rican Community,” 204-5, in *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vásquez-Hernández (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

² Nancy Raquel Mirabal, “‘No Country But the One We Must Fight For’: The Emergence of an Antillean Nation and Community in New York City, 1860-1901,” in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*, eds. Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 59. See also Virginia Sánchez Korrol, “Latinismo among Early Puerto Rican Migrants in New York City: A Sociohistoric Interpretation,” in *The Hispanic Experience in the United States: Contemporary Issues and Perspectives*, eds. Edna Acosta-Belén and Barbara R. Sjostrom (New York: Praeger, 1988).

With World War I, Puerto Rican migration increased, especially to New York City but also to Philadelphia. The Jones Act of 1917 (the second Organic Act) conferred U.S. citizenship on Puerto Ricans, while leaving the status of Puerto Rico as an unincorporated territory. Puerto Rico's political status became "foreign in a domestic sense."³ As U.S. sugar corporations amassed large tracts of land and U.S. tobacco companies reshaped and mechanized the island's industry, Puerto Rico's rural population was displaced. Puerto Ricans' newly acquired U.S. citizenship facilitated migration, at the same time that immigration restrictions were limiting European immigration and fostering employers' search for new sources of low wage labor. Puerto Ricans were also recruited to work in war industries (mostly in the southern states), and some were inducted into the U.S. military. Those recruited into African-American regimental bands sometimes settled in New York City after the war.⁴ Cigar makers, often socialists, remained prominent among the migrants, planting the seeds of vibrant pan-Latina/o working class communities in New York City and in Philadelphia.⁵ Puerto Rican women were also recruited as workers. In 1920, 130 Puerto Rican women were recruited by the American Manufacturing Company to Brooklyn, New York. Labor recruitment spawned social networks and communities grew. By 1920, New York surpassed Hawai'i, to become the state with the largest Puerto Rican population. By 1940, 88 percent of Puerto Ricans living in the continental United States made New York City their home.⁶

³ The phrase is from the Supreme Court's ruling in the Insular cases; see Christina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall, *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁴ Ruth Glasser, *My Music is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and Their New York Communities 1917-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁵ Virginia Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); and Víctor Vásquez-Hernández, *Before the Wave: Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia, 1910-1945* (forthcoming, Centro Press).

⁶ Carmen Teresa Whalen "Colonialism, Citizenship, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Diaspora: An Introduction," in *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vásquez-Hernández (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 20, 11, 3.

While Puerto Ricans were the largest group in New York City, other Spanish speaking groups contributed to vibrant pan-Latina/o communities including Spaniards, Cubans, Mexicans, and others. Between 1920 and 1940, the Spanish-speaking population grew from 41,094 to 134,252. The Puerto Rican population grew from 7,364 to 61,463, and from 17.9 to 45.8 percent of the total. In the same twenty year period, Spaniards' representation decreased from 35.7 to 18.8 percent of the total. By 1940, those from Cuba and the West Indies accounted for 17.2 percent of the total, those from Central and South America for 14.7 percent, and those from Mexico for 3.5 percent of the Spanish speaking population.⁷ Confronting a U.S. racial binary that classified people as either white or black, Afro-Puerto Ricans and other Afro-Latinas/os have sometimes been rendered invisible from the historical record, especially in this time period as both contemporaries and historians have not always adequately captured an urban environment that was also Caribbean and Afro-diasporic in ways that complicated racial and linguistic binaries.⁸

Post-World War II Puerto Rican Migration: Rural and Urban

In the post-World War II era, Puerto Rican migration increased dramatically and Puerto Ricans increasingly settled beyond New York City, especially throughout the Northeast and the Midwest. Puerto Ricans living in New York City decreased from 88 to 59 percent of those living in the continental United States between 1940 and 1970, even as New York City remained the largest Puerto Rican community.⁹ Puerto Rican men were recruited for agricultural jobs throughout the region, and many settled in nearby towns and smaller cities, while others headed

⁷ Gabriel Haslip-Viera, "The Evolution of the Latino Community in New York City: Early Nineteenth Century to the Present," in *Latinos in New York: Communities in Transition*, eds. Gabriel Haslip-Viera and Sherrie L. Bayer (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 9.

⁸ For example, see Melissa Castillo-Garsow, "Afro-Latin@s in Movement: Nueva York: Maymie De Mena and the Unsung Afro-Latina Leadership of the UNIA," in *Afro-Latin@s in Movement: Critical Approaches to Blackness and Transnationalism in The Americas*, eds. Petra R. Rivera-Rideau, Jennifer A. Jones, and Tianna S. Paschel (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 141-170.

⁹ Whalen "Colonialism, Citizenship, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Diaspora," 3.

for the larger communities of New York City and Philadelphia. Others migrated directly to the cities in search of manufacturing jobs, and Puerto Rican women became concentrated in the garment industry and other light manufacturing jobs. During what is too often portrayed as a hiatus in immigration history—a lull between European immigration at the turn of the century and the increase in immigration following the Immigration Act of 1965—Puerto Ricans’ labor migration had important parallels with southern African American migration to the Northeast and the Midwest and with increased Mexican immigration to the Southwest, the west coast, and the Midwest.

Important in its own right, Puerto Rican migration in this time period also paints in sharp relief the dynamics that would shape other Latina/o migrations in later years. This period witnessed the intensification of the export-oriented, labor intensive industrialization via the investment of U.S. capital that became the model for export processing zones in other countries. Puerto Rico’s postwar industrialization program was based on luring U.S. capital to Puerto Rico via low-wages for workers, tax incentives and other perks, and an aggressive advertising campaign.¹⁰ U.S. military, political, and economic interventions continued to shape emigration. As they were displaced from Puerto Rico’s rural economies, Puerto Ricans were recruited to fill low-wage jobs that other Latinas and Latinos would later come to fill.

Puerto Ricans’ recruitment as seasonal agricultural workers contributed to the growth of Puerto Rican communities, first in New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, and then increasingly in Connecticut and Massachusetts. During World War II, the War Manpower Commission recruited several thousand Puerto Rican workers, placing many in two large canning industries in southern New Jersey. After the war, however, the program shifted to

¹⁰ Carmen Teresa Whalen, “Sweatshops Here and There: The Garment Industry, Latinas, and Labor Migrations,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 61 (Spring 2002): 45-68.

recruiting Puerto Rican men for seasonal agricultural work. This contract labor program was operated through the United States Employment Service's Farm Labor Program and through the Puerto Rico Department of Labor's Migration Division. Although promoted as seasonal labor contracts, Puerto Rico's policymakers continued to define Puerto Rico's economic problems as stemming from "overpopulation" and sought ways to reduce the island's population and to steer migrants away from New York City, where their reception was less than welcoming. Initially, Puerto Rico's policymakers promoted a contract labor program for young women as domestic workers, hoping to send large numbers to suburban areas. Yet, as the numbers remained small, complaints emerged, and women seemed to prefer garment and other manufacturing jobs in urban areas, policymakers turned to men and farm work. At the same time, the United States turned to the recruitment of citizens, relying on Puerto Ricans and southern African Americans along the eastern seaboard, while instituting the Bracero program to meet labor needs in the Southwest and the West. Puerto Ricans, recruited for agricultural work, often continued their search for better opportunities, sometimes migrating to nearby towns or to cities in search of manufacturing jobs. Social networks then increased Puerto Rican migration to these areas.¹¹

At the same time, Puerto Rican women and men migrated directly to urban areas in search of manufacturing jobs. Women workers found jobs in light industries throughout the Northeast in the postwar era. Puerto Rican men found some manufacturing jobs, but also landed in the services sector, especially restaurants and hotels. Employment patterns reflected the racial/ethnic and gender segmentation of urban economies and the nature of manufacturing jobs in different urban areas. In New York City and Philadelphia, Puerto Rican women became

¹¹ Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

concentrated in the garment industry and other light manufacturing. On the other hand, it was Puerto Rican men who found work in Allentown and Bethlehem, Pennsylvania's steel industry and in Dover, New Jersey's iron mines and factories. Puerto Rican workers in Connecticut found a wide variety of jobs, including foundries, munitions factories, poultry processing, textile and garment factories, metal plating and other industries, as well as in the services sector. Although some were decent, blue collar manufacturing jobs, many were in the secondary sector, offering limited stability and limited opportunities for advancement. Even more problematic for Puerto Ricans who migrated to fill these jobs during the postwar economic boon was the rapid intensification of economic restructuring which relocated many manufacturing jobs out of these urban areas and downgraded many of those that remained. The garment industry's relocation to Puerto Rico and Pennsylvania was a harbinger of the deindustrialization and economic restructuring to come, leaving Puerto Rican women workers in New York City, Philadelphia and elsewhere displaced in its wake.

By 1970, an estimated 1,391,463 Puerto Ricans resided in the continental United States. New York City remained by far the largest Puerto Rican community with 817,712 Puerto Ricans making the city their home. Another 26,984 Puerto Ricans made Philadelphia their home. In New Jersey, 27,663 Puerto Ricans lived in Newark, 16,325 in Jersey City, 12,036 in Paterson, and another 10,047 in Hoboken. In Connecticut, 10,048 Puerto Ricans resided in Bridgeport and another 8,631 in Hartford. Boston's Puerto Rican population had grown to 7,335. Increased dispersion and settlement beyond major urban areas continued and by 2000, just 23 percent of Puerto Ricans lived in New York City, while sizeable Puerto Rican communities had taken shape in places such as Camden, New Jersey, Springfield, Massachusetts and Rochester, New York.¹²

¹² Whalen "Colonialism, Citizenship, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Diaspora," 32.

In the postwar era, Puerto Ricans' confronted racialization and discrimination, economic displacement, housing segregation and gentrification, and ultimately conditions of concentrated poverty in many of the areas they settled. Although U.S. citizens and officially classified as "white" in the U.S.'s binary system of racial classification, Puerto Ricans were frequently perceived and received as "foreigners" and as not white. Puerto Ricans' arriving in New York City, as well as elsewhere, were labeled as a "problem" and increasingly defined as having a "culture of poverty," a deficit model that determined Puerto Ricans' culture to be deficient and dependent, as well as the cause of their poverty. Historian Sonia Lee argues that in New York City, Puerto Ricans became racialized alongside African Americans in the postwar era.¹³ In addition to racialization, there were parallels in the labor recruitment of Puerto Ricans and African Americans for seasonal agricultural work, in economic incorporation and displacement, and in residential segregation.¹⁴

Latina/o Diversity in the Northeast

Although Puerto Ricans predominated in the postwar era, Latina/o diversity in the region then increased. Following the 1959 Cuban Revolution, Cubans settled in Union City and West New York, New Jersey, as well as New York City, even as the overwhelming majority settled in southern Florida. For Dominicans, the Northeast was the primary destination as migration increased in the late 1960s and 1970s. Communities emerged in Washington Heights in New York City, in Boston and surrounding communities, in Providence, Rhode Island, and in Waterbury, Connecticut. As wars raged in Central America during the 1980s, some of those fleeing made their way to the Northeast, though many settled on the west coast as well as in

¹³ Sonia Song-Ha Lee, *Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement: Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and the Pursuit of Racial Justice in New York City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Carmen Teresa Whalen, "Citizens and Workers: African Americans and Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia's Regional Economy since World War II," in *African American Urban History Since World War II*, ed. Kenneth Kusmer and Joe William Trotter, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

Washington, D.C. and southern states. Mexican immigration to the region increased, as well, and smaller numbers of South Americans, especially Colombians, settled in the region. As the Latina/o populations became more diverse, geographic dispersion increased. The Mid-Atlantic states remained a receiving region for Latina/o migrants and the New England states became a more significant destination,

With the 1959 Cuban Revolution, Cubans coming to the region differed significantly from earlier Cuban migrants and from Puerto Rican labor migrants. Cubans of the first two waves of migration following the Revolution were predominantly of higher socioeconomic status with higher levels of education, they were whiter, and politically, they were vehemently anti-Castro and anti-communist. They were received in the United States as refugees fleeing from communism and provided with refugee assistance and a facilitated path to citizenship. Union City and West New York, New Jersey became the second largest Cuban American community, following Miami. Although Cubans had already settled in the area, with most working in the garment industry, migration increased following the Cuban Revolution, with many arriving between 1965 and 1973, during what is referred to as the second wave or the “Freedom Flights.” Drawing on their previous education and skills, along with refugee assistance, Cubans established small businesses including grocery stores, restaurants, and garment shops, where many Cuban women found jobs. Robert (Bob) Menéndez became the first Cuban mayor of Union City in 1986, and after several other elected positions, he became a U.S. senator in 2006.¹⁵ Cubans settled in New York City as well, with the population growing from 42,694 to 84,179 between 1960 and 1970. The 1980 Mariel exodus, referred to as the third wave, brought a more representative group of Cubans in terms of socioeconomic class and education, and among them

¹⁵ Yolanda Prieto, *The Cubans Of Union City: Immigrants And Exiles In A New Jersey Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press Year, 2009)

were Afro-Cubans, artists and writers, and homosexual men. Fleeing the Cuban government's political repression, including repression of freedom of expression and the criminalization of homosexuality, writer Reinaldo Arenas and others settled in New York City. Cubans, many working-class and of color, continued to settle in New York City as the waves of *balseros* continued during the 1990s.¹⁶

Dominican migration increased following the 1961 assassination of long term dictator Rafael Trujillo and during the political and economic turmoil that followed. As in Cuba, the United States had long supported a repressive dictator, Batista in Cuba and Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. The United States was determined to prevent another Cuba, or left-leaning government, from coming to power in the Dominican Republic. While intervening to shape politics in the Dominican Republic, including the sending of marines, the United States also issued visas for Dominicans to travel to the United States. The recently passed Immigration Act of 1965, with its preference categories for family reunification and certain categories of workers, also provided a mechanism for increased migration. Yet, the complications, the expense, and multi-year delays of working through bureaucratic channels meant that many Dominicans either arrived undocumented or became undocumented as visas expired. Dominicans settled primarily in the Northeast, often in established receiving communities among Puerto Ricans, such as Washington Heights in New York City; Boston and Lawrence, Massachusetts; Waterbury, Connecticut; and Providence, Rhode Island.

As civil wars raged in Central American nations during the 1980s and the United States intervened to support repressive regimes, a refugee crisis emerged as people fled seeking safety.

¹⁶ Agustín Laó-Montes, "Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York City," in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*, eds., Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 21. See also Reinaldo Arenas, *Before Night Falls* (New York City: Penguin Books, 1993); and Berta Jottar, "The Acoustic Body: Rumba Guarapachanguera and Abakuá Sociality in Central Park," *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana*, 30 (Spring - Summer, 2009), 1-24.

The U.S. government initially refused to recognize Salvadorans and Guatemalans as refugees and overwhelmingly rejected their petitions for asylum. Unrecognized as refugees, Salvadorans and Guatemalans arrived overwhelmingly as undocumented immigrants. The sanctuary movement, political activism to change U.S. policies in Central America and bring peace, and legal activism around issues of immigration status resulted. Temporary protected status, as well as the Nicaraguan and Central American Relief Act, provided some relief, without fully resolving issues of immigration status.¹⁷ During the 1990s, Mexicans and Colombians have increasingly settled in the Northeast. Mexicans have migrated and settled far beyond original regions of concentration, contributing to new patterns of geographic diversity. For Colombians, migration increased in response to on-going violence in their home country.

Latinas and Latinos came to the Northeast in response to many of the same low-waged jobs that Puerto Ricans had been recruited to fill in earlier decades, even as economic restructuring shifted the region's economies. In agriculture, employers turned from a seasonal work force that had been comprised predominantly of southern African Americans and Puerto Ricans in the post-World War II era to one comprised predominantly of undocumented workers from El Salvador, Guatemala, and increasingly from Mexico. In New York state, Puerto Rican farmworkers, who had engaged in activism to improve working conditions, were increasingly replaced by undocumented agricultural workers. According to Margaret Gray, undocumented workers became the preferred source of low wage labor by the late 1980s, as employers characterized these workers as less expensive and less likely to complain than citizen workers.¹⁸

¹⁷ Miren Uriarte, Phillip J. Granberry, and Megan Halloran, "Immigration Status, Employment, and Eligibility for Public Benefits among Latin American Immigrants in Massachusetts," in *Latinos in New England*, ed. Andrés Torres (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 53-78.

¹⁸ Ismael Garcia-Colón, "Claiming Equality: Puerto Rican Farmworkers in Western New York," *Latino Studies* 6 (2008): 269-289; and Margaret Gray, *Labor and the Locavore: The Making of a Comprehensive Food Ethic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

Similar shifts occurred in other areas in the Northeast that had relied on Puerto Rican workers. In the Connecticut River Valley, shade tobacco growers relied heavily on Puerto Rican workers in the postwar era-- a labor recruitment that contributed to the growth of Puerto Rican communities in Connecticut, Western Massachusetts, and Boston. Puerto Ricans had joined Jamaican workers coming with temporary agricultural work visas, referred to as H-2A visas. Yet the presence of Mexican workers had increased, and although in 2002, researchers found that most Mexicans had H2A work visas, just two years later, most were working without work visas.¹⁹

In urban areas, a similar process emerged in manufacturing employers' search for low-wage workers. The garment industry provides an example. In the post-World War II era, Puerto Rican women, as well as increasing numbers of African American women, became concentrated in garment industry jobs in New York City, Philadelphia, and elsewhere. For Puerto Rican women, concentration in garment and other light manufacturing jobs was pronounced, whereas African American women remained over-represented in the low-wage services sector, as well. Following a postwar boon, the garment industry's relocation to low-wage areas resumed and accelerated, with the industry first relocating to Puerto Rico and to the anthracite coal regions of Pennsylvania, then the southern states, along the U.S.-Mexico border, and overseas. Garment industry jobs in many of the urban areas where Puerto Rican women had settled declined and Puerto Rican women's labor force participation declined, as well. Those garment jobs that remained became "downgraded" manufacturing jobs, characterized by worsening wages and working conditions. In New York City, garment employers turned first to Dominican workers

¹⁹ Michael Duke, "Ethnicity, Well-Being, and the Organization of Labor among Shade Tobacco Workers," *Medical Anthropology* 30.4 (2011): 409-424.

and then increasingly to Central American and Mexican workers, many of whom were undocumented workers.²⁰

Economic restructuring in urban areas throughout the Northeast meant the loss of manufacturing jobs, many of which had been union jobs. Increasingly, the manufacturing jobs that remained had lower wages and worsening working conditions, what some have called the return of the sweatshop. As manufacturing declined, the services sector grew rapidly and in a way that was polarized, with very high and very low wage jobs. As Saskia Sassen notes, Latina/o immigrants found jobs in the deteriorating manufacturing sector, in the low wage services, and in providing personal services to those in the high wage service sector, as domestics and nannies for women, and in lawn care for men.²¹ Latinas and Latinos were drawn to suburban areas, as well, as they became a preferred source of workers for household service jobs. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which imposed sanctions on employers for hiring undocumented workers, reduced the employment options available to undocumented immigrants and rendered them even more vulnerable as workers. In her 1989 field work in the Long Island, Sarah Mahler found that Salvadorans and South Americans, especially Peruvians, worked in peripheral manufacturing jobs spawned by the area's defense industries, but also increasingly in household services, which made them less visible to authorities. For Mahler, structural, economic, and demographic conditions created niches of low-wage jobs, that provided little opportunity for advancement in an increasingly polarized economy. Mahler concludes, "All

²⁰ Elizabeth Weiner and Hardy Green, "A Stitch in Our Time: New York's Hispanic Garment Workers in the 1980s," in *A Needle, a Bobbin, a Strike: Women Needleworkers in America*, ed. Joan M. Jensen and Sue Davidson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 278-296.

²¹ Saskia Sassen-Koob, "Changing Composition and Labor Market Location of Hispanic Immigrants in New York City, 1960-1980," in *Hispanics in the U.S. Economy*, ed. George J. Borjas and Marta Tienda (Orlando: Academic Press, Inc. 1985), 299-322.

of these disadvantages make immigrants an ideal source of labor for employers seeking cheap-often exploitable- workers.”²²

Throughout New England, Latinas and Latinos employment patterns and earnings reflected the impact of economic restructuring. During the 1990s, the number of manufacturing jobs declined by 29 percent, while service sector jobs increased by 108 percent and white collar employment increased by 16 percent. With the continued decline of blue collar jobs during the 1990s, Latinas/os were displaced more rapidly than for other racial/ethnic groups but remained over-represented. Latinas/os employment in service sector jobs rose faster than for other New Englanders. With the exception of Cubans, other Latinas/os were under-represented in expanding white collar jobs. Within these occupational categories, Latinas and Latinos were concentrated in the bottom rungs. Enrico A. Marcelli and Phillip J. Granberry found “that with few exceptions Latino workers earned less than other New Englanders across the three categories of employment, in both 1990 and 2000.” One exception, for example, was that Cubans and Columbians in white collar jobs had average hourly earnings that exceeded that of other racial/ethnic groups. Latinas/os also had lower rates of high school completion, with the exception of Cubans and Peruvians whose levels of educational attainment were above the average.²³

Hence, the Mid-Atlantic states remained an important receiving region for Latinas/os and the New England states became a more significant destination. By the 1990 census, New York City was home to 1,783,511 Latinas and Latinos, who together comprised 23.7 percent of the city’s population. This population was diverse, with migrants from at least 19 Latin American countries. The Latina/o population had more than doubled since 1960. In 1990, Puerto Ricans

²² Sarah J. Mahler, *American Dreaming: Immigrant Life on the Margins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 106-7.

²³ Marcelli, “Latino New England,” 41-43, 47.

comprised half of all Latinas/os, 50.3 percent. Dominicans became the second largest group, growing to 332,713 and 18.8 percent of Latina/o population. Having decreased in numbers to 56,041, Cubans accounted for 3.1 percent. Meanwhile, Colombians became the third largest group, with the population growing from 6,782 to 84,545 between 1960 and 1990. Ecuadoreans and Mexicans increased in numbers to 78,444 and 61,772 respectively. Central Americans were also well-represented. There were 23,926 people from El Salvador, 22,707 from Panama, 22,167 from Honduras, and another 15,873 from Guatemala. As in the pre-World War II era, the city had become pan-Latina/o again. Scholars explored instances of pan-Latina/o solidarities and some spoke of the “Latinization” of New York City.²⁴

During the 1990s, Latina/o populations in New England grew more rapidly than in New York state. By the 2000 census, the six New England states were home to over 871,000 Latinas/os. This population growth had been rapid, 60 percent between 1990 and 2000, and Latinas/os were the fastest growing racial/ethnic group in the region. Comprising 6.3 percent of the region’s total population, Latinas/os had settled in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, with far fewer settling in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. Puerto Ricans remained by far the largest group, and their population growth was seven times larger in New England than in New York during the 1990s. The Dominican population doubled to account for almost 10 percent of the Latina/o population in New England, with the population growth rate almost four times more rapid in New England than in New York. Mexicans constituted the third largest group in both New England and New York, with population growth almost five times greater in New England than in New York. In terms of population size, Colombians, Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and Cubans followed, with other Latina/o groups in smaller numbers, and with the

²⁴ Laó-Montes, “Mambo Montage,” 1-52.

same ten largest groups in New England and in New York state.²⁵ Reflecting the timing of migration, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Cubans had the smallest percentages of those born outside of the continental United States (48 and 43 percent for Puerto Ricans and Mexicans respectively), while 70 percent of Dominicans were foreign born, as were even more of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Colombians.²⁶ With the exception of Puerto Ricans and Cubans, other Latinas/os had to grapple with the vagaries of immigration status. Although most were legal permanent residents, some were undocumented, which impacted employment options and access to needed social services.²⁷

Community Building and Political Engagement

Community building initiatives began as efforts to meet immediate community needs and drew on the social networks that had facilitated migration and settlement. The shape those community building efforts took depended on the migration patterns and specific area of settlement, as well as the particular historical moment. For many Latinas and Latinos, community building and political engagement centered on both homeland and local issues. Political engagement has entailed trying to hold larger community and political systems accountable, struggling for “recognition” and inclusion, civil rights activism, and electoral politics. At times organizing was primarily along national origin lines, but as diversity increased, organizing has increasingly been more pan-Latina/o.

Among Puerto Ricans in the earlier and larger communities, New York City and Philadelphia, mutual aid societies and home town clubs evolved into community based

²⁵ Andrés Torres, “Latinos in New England: An Introduction,” in *Latinos in New England*, ed. Andrés Torres (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 4-5; and Enrico A. Marcelli and Phillip J. Granberry, “Latino New England: An Emerging Demographic and Economic Portrait,” in *Latinos in New England*, ed. Andrés Torres (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 31-33.

²⁶ Marcelli, “Latino New England,” 33-34

²⁷ Uriarte, “Immigration Status, Employment, and Eligibility,” in *Latinos in New England*, ed. Andrés Torres (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

organizations in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Aspira which developed youth leadership and supported youth in completing high school and attending college. Aspira represented a long continuum of activism around educational access, bilingual education, and the creation of Puerto Rican Studies programs during the 1970s.²⁸ The War on Poverty gave impetus and funding to community based organizations and brought Puerto Ricans more directly into roles where they could work to shape public policies.²⁹ Puerto Ricans were part of the social and political movements of the late 1960s and 1970s, as a plethora of groups emerged throughout the Puerto Rican communities of the Northeast. Puerto Rican activism centered on both local issues and home country politics, and where they intersected, as some groups called for the independence of Puerto Rico and connected its continuing colonial status to the poverty and marginalization of Puerto Ricans in the continental United States.³⁰ Activism also included efforts to improve working conditions. For example, Puerto Rican women became active in the garment workers' union in new York City following World War I and continuing. Effort to improve working conditions for farmworkers was important in its own right and could foster additional activism. Although some activists of the late 1960s and 1970s were critical of electoral politics, some Puerto Ricans had always sought inclusion through electoral politics and larger numbers increasingly turned to the electoral arena. Historian Ruth Glasser suggests that in Hartford, Connecticut, organizing farmworkers provided political impetus for some, and that the cynicism of electoral politics held by the radical activists of the late 1960s and 1970s gave way to increased activism in

²⁸ Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

²⁹ Lee, *Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement*.

³⁰ Andrés Torres,, and José Velázquez, eds. *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.

electoral politics. The result, by 2001, was the election of Eddie Pérez, the first Puerto Rican mayor in New England.³¹

As Dominicans arrived in larger numbers in the late 1960s and 1970s, they became part of the social and political movements of the era with activism that focused on politics in the Dominican Republic and on local issues. In New York City, many activists supported the *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano* or PRD, seeing themselves as political exiles working to overthrow the repressive regime of Balaguer. Within the political and social movements of the era, these activists formed a key component and a key coalition of the anti-U.S. imperialism that characterized the movements for Puerto Rico's independences, as well as opposition to the war in VietNam. Other Dominicans became more active in electoral politics, beginning with elections to local school boards.³² In other communities, Dominicans also developed social networks and transnational connections. In Waterbury, Connecticut, Dominican bodega owners and home childcare providers built social networks and strengthened community connections.³³ In Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood, Dominicans developed transnational connections, not only in the realm of politics, but also in community development and religious arenas.³⁴

During the 1980s and 1990s, arriving Salvadorans and Guatemalans, Mexicans, and Colombians had concerns about home country politics and local issues, like earlier migrants. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, *Centro Presente* was established in 1981 to help Salvadorans fleeing war but entering the United States primarily as undocumented migrants with legal and other immediate needs. In alliances with other activists, Salvadorans worked to change U.S. policies in

³¹ Glasser, "From 'Rich Port' to Bridgeport," 174-5.

³² Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York After 1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

³³ Ruth Glasser, "Mofongo Meets Mangú: Dominicans Reconfigure Latino Waterbury," in *Latinos in New England*, ed. Andrés Torres (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 103-124.

³⁴ Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

Central America through the Solidarity Movement and to create safe havens in local churches and ultimately in the city as a whole through the Sanctuary Movement. In 1985, the city council declared Cambridge a sanctuary city. Salvadorans continuing to arrive during the 1990s encountered less awareness of their on-going challenges, as well as a city whose economic restructuring and abandonment of rental control in 1994 had dispersed and decimated the earlier working class community of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans. Still, as happened elsewhere, a community based organization, *Concilio Hispano*, founded as a grassroots civic organization primarily by Puerto Ricans in 1969, had become a well-established, multiservice agency and it shifted its focus to meeting the on-going needs of Central Americans. Pan-Latino soccer leagues and church activities provided for less formal social interactions and community building.³⁵

At the same time that transnational connections and activism remained important, community building and electoral politics increasingly became pan-Latina/o in increasingly diverse pan-Latina/o communities. For example, in Providence, Rhode Island, a diverse Latina/o community entered electoral politics. By the 2000 census, 90,820 Latinas/os resided in Rhode Island—28 percent were Puerto Rican, 18 percent were Dominican, 9.8 percent were Guatemalans, 6.5 percent were Mexican, 6.3 percent were Colombians, and 29.8 identified as “others.” As early as the 1920s, Puerto Rican farm workers came to Providence, then later found jobs in the naval yard and manufacturing, with some migrating from New York or Connecticut. In the 1960s, Colombian textile workers were recruited to work in the textile mills in Central Falls, and by the 1970s, Dominicans also found work in the textile shops, even as the industry declined. Guatemalans initially stopped over on their way to Canada to seek asylum, but some also stayed. Entry level jobs in manufacturing and services fostered the workings of social

³⁵ Deborah Pacini Hernandez, “Quiet Crisis: A Community History of Latinos in Cambridge, Massachusetts,” in *Latinos in New England*, ed. Andrés Torres (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 149-169.

networks to the area, as did continuing violence and economic crises in their countries' of origin. Despite earlier histories, most Latinas/os were fairly recent arrivals. Most, 51.9 percent, had arrived in Rhode Island, during the 1990s, while 31.6 percent arrived between 1980 and 1989 and 16.6 percent before 1980 (these figures exclude Puerto Ricans). Scholar Miren Uriarte suggests that although initially social organizations focused on specific national origin groups, by 1976 more pan-Latina/o efforts emerged with the founding of the Latin American Community Center and that by 1985 pan-Latina/o efforts embraced electoral politics through the Hispanic Political Action Committee, and then the Rhode Island Latino Political Action Committee, established in 1998. Electoral successes followed. In 1992, Panamanian Anastasia Williams was elected to the state legislature. Puerto Rican and Dominican candidates were elected to Providence's city council, and a Colombian was elected to Central Falls' city council. In 2000, Dominican Juan Pichardo was elected state senator. In 2004, three Latinos were elected to Rhode Island statewide offices. For Uriarte, electoral activism and electoral success stemmed from economic barriers and institutional resistance to adapting to meet the needs of the rapidly growing Latina/o populations. With other avenues of inclusion closed, Latinas/os turned to electoral politics.³⁶

Scholar Suzanne Oboler charted U.S. government agencies' development of "Hispanic" as an umbrella term after 1970. Oboler argues that this "ethnic label" became both homogenizing and stigmatizing. For Oboler, the racializations of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, based on the conquests of 1848 and 1898 respectively, set the context for and shaped the racializations of other Latinas/os, as a result of "the ways that xenophobic nationalism and domestic racism have been conflated since the early nineteenth century." For Oboler, the

³⁶ Miren Uriarte, "Growing into Power in Rhode Island," in *Latinos in New England*, ed. Andrés Torres (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 125-147.

conflation of Latin Americans' race and nationality renders Latinas/os as perpetual "foreign others."³⁷ Layered upon this categorization has been another—the creation of the discourse of "illegality" and the category of "illegal." Focusing on Mexican immigrants in New York City, Jocelyn Solís charts how the act of crossing the border without proper documentation was transformed into a discourse that labeled people as permanently "illegal" and criminalized them, imposing a static identity.³⁸ Ideologies and policies that promote the "free market" and the unfettered movement of capital and products, while harshly restricting the movements of workers and labeling those who cross without proper documents, with a permanent, criminalized status as "illegals," is perhaps the most recent rendition of an on-going U.S. dynamic of recruiting people as low wage workers but not wanting those same people as community members or as members of the nation. The result has been debates over immigration that ignore that dynamic, and the role of U.S. interventions in shaping migration, as well as the resultant persistent poverty and marginalization of many.

³⁷ Suzanne Oboler, *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)presentation in the United States*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 15, 32.

³⁸ Jocelyn Solís, "Immigration Status and Identity," in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*, eds. Laó-Montes, Agustín and Arlene Dávila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 337-361.

