

imagine  
all the  
people

# Haitian immigrants in Boston

CITY OF BOSTON  
Thomas M. Menino  
Mayor

*New Bostonian Series*

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## imagine all the people: Haitian immigrants in Boston

The main destinations of Haitian immigrants are the United States (with 504,750 Haitian-born immigrants, according to the 2005-2007 American Community Survey <sup>1</sup>) and the Dominican Republic.<sup>2</sup>

The origin of the Haitian community in Massachusetts goes back to the late 1950s and the early 1960s when some Haitians fled the dictatorial regime of François Duvalier (Papa Doc). Massachusetts has the third largest Haitian community in the United States, after Florida and New York. According to the 2007 Census Bureau; American Community Survey there are an estimated 41,000 Haitians living in Massachusetts today.<sup>3</sup>

Boston's Haitian-born immigrants settled in various parts of Boston, with the highest concentrations in Mattapan, along Blue Hill Avenue, as well as Roxbury, Dorchester, and Hyde Park.

Many Haitians settled in Boston during the 1970s, but during the housing boom of the 1980s and the early 1990s, they relocated to the suburbs. Today, it is not uncommon to find pockets of Haitians scattered throughout the South Shore and areas of Lawrence, Lowell, Framingham and Worcester.

It is commonly argued that the first wave of Haitian immigrants moved temporarily to seek educational opportunities and shelter themselves from economic duress and political oppression in their home country. Raising a family in the United States has led many to adjust to the reality of providing for their immediate family, as well as supporting their relatives in Haiti.

Over the past thirty years, Haitians have played a collective role in the social, cultural and economic life of Massachusetts. They are very active in their churches and have started or joined numerous civic, social, or health organizations. A number of well-established, non-profit agencies



and professional organizations provide services that address a wide range of issues including advocacy, health, domestic violence, education, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, immigration status, and housing. In addition, more than 20 radio and television programs, and one print media offer educational programs and political news in Creole, French and English.

Individually, Haitians have made inroads in the professional arena, with many now working in high profile positions in academic circles, as either faculty or in Haitian student associations. Haitians also hold positions in the local police force, the health and public health fields and in the business, banking, and legal professions. A vibrant small business community offers a variety of goods and services.

Since the late 1990s, Haitians have become more visible in the political fabric of Massachusetts, organizing themselves in ad hoc committees that promote voters' education and participation. As a result, two State Representatives of Haitian descent have been elected in the Massachusetts legislature since 2000, and more Haitians are actively pursuing elected offices in various other states.

# imagine

*One in four  
Haitians in  
Boston are  
between  
the ages of  
20 and 34.*

## population share

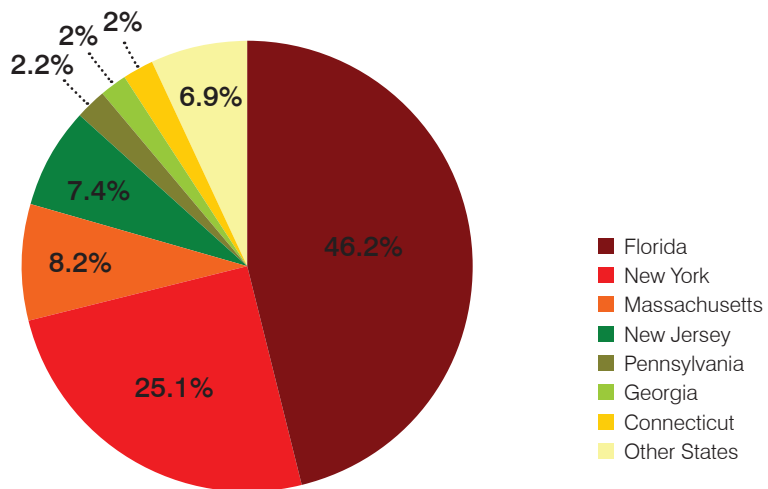
Florida (with an estimated 46% of the population) and New York (with 25%) are the most popular states for Haitian-born immigrants living in the United States. Massachusetts (with 8.2%) is third and New Jersey (with 7.4%) ranks fourth. Together, these four states account for 87% of the total foreign-born<sup>4</sup> population from Haiti in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

According to the 2007 ACS, there are an estimated 14,361<sup>6</sup> Haitian-born immigrants living in the city of Boston.<sup>7</sup> Haitians make up the second largest share of immigrants in Boston, with (8.5%), behind China (8.6%) and ahead of the Dominican Republic (7.9%).<sup>8</sup>

While we can look at the most recent ACS for estimating the total Haitian population, the most reliable cross-tabular data for relatively small groups, such as the foreign-born communities in Boston is the 2000 Census<sup>9</sup>. In 2000, 42% of Haitian immigrants in Boston were male. Fifty-eight percent were female. More than half of Haitian immigrants were or have been married. Almost one-quarter were between the ages of 20 and 34 and over 60 percent were 35 years of age or older. Thirty-nine percent of resident Haitians are U.S. citizens by naturalization.



Share of Haitian Population by State



Source: ACS 2005-2007, BRA Research Division Analysis

## educational attainment

Thirty-five percent of Haitians in Boston have not completed high school, a figure comparable to that of all foreign-born (34%) and twice that of the native-born (16%) population. Just over (25%) of Haitian immigrants have received a high school diploma with no further schooling. While 28% of Haitian immigrants have attended college, only 11% have completed

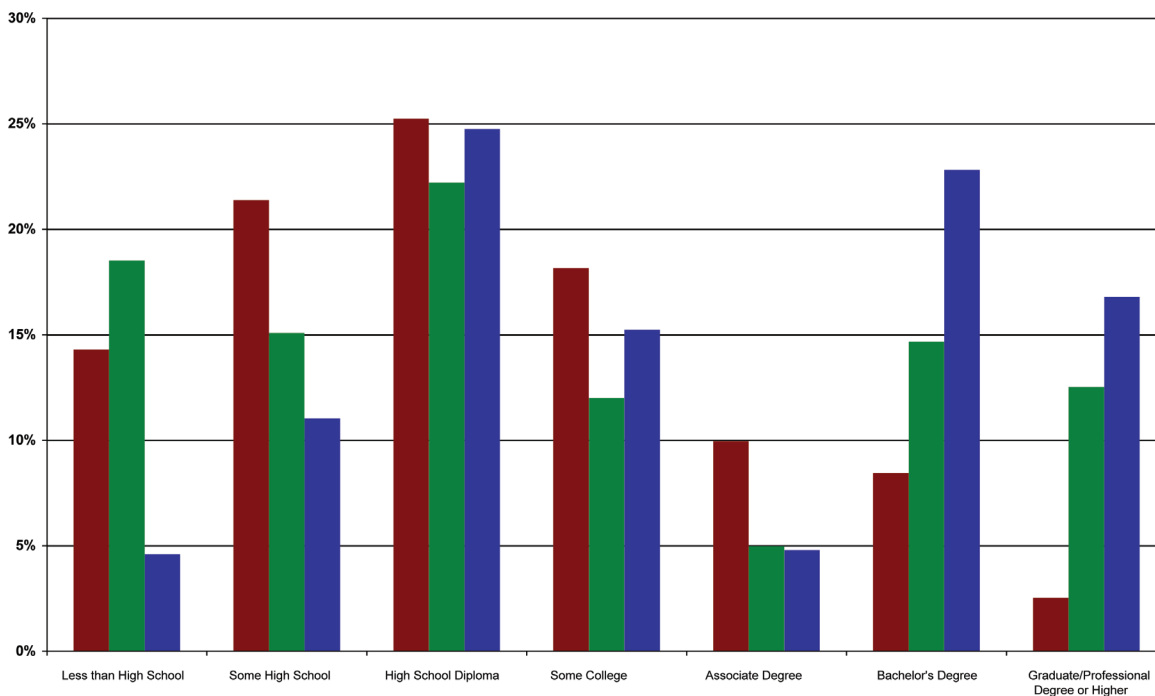
at least a bachelor's degree, compared with 27% of the entire foreign-born population and 40% of the native-born. With respect to advanced degrees, only 3% of Haitians living in Boston hold a graduate/professional degree or higher, compared with 12% of all foreign-born and 17% of the native-born.



*One in four Haitians hold a high school diploma with no further schooling, a figure higher than that of all foreign-born and slightly higher than that of the native-born population.*

**Educational Attainment for Population 25 Years and Older**

■ Haitians ■ Foreign-Born ■ Native-Born



Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata (PUM) 5% Sample, BRA Research Division

## occupations

More than one-third (35%) of Haitian immigrants living in Boston are employed in technical, sales and administrative support occupations. More than twenty percent (21%) are employed in both the managerial and professional occupations, and the service occupations category.

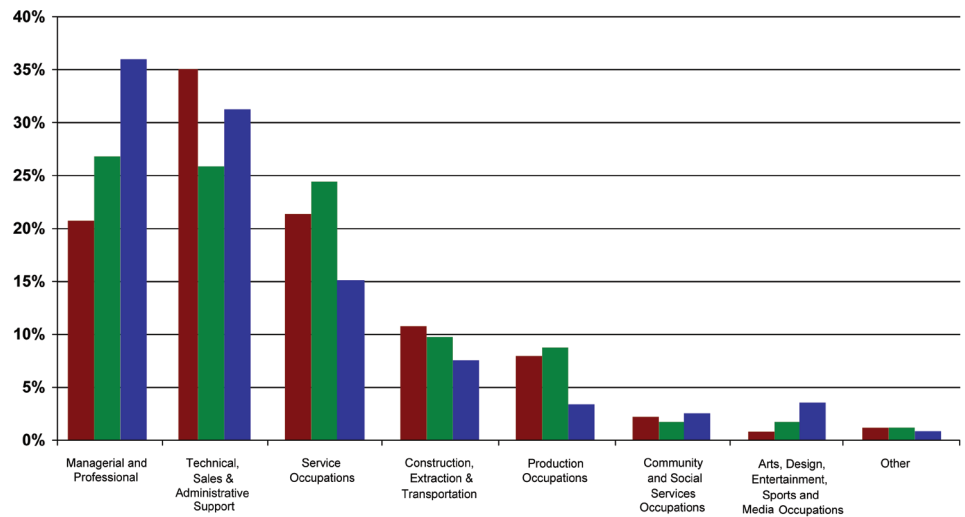
As Haitian immigrants are over-represented in the technical, sales and administrative support category, their high participation in the support occupations is mostly driven by health care. Twenty percent of Haitians are employed in the

health care support occupations, most of which are registered nurses, compared to 5% of all foreign-born and 2% of the native-born population.<sup>10</sup> In the construction, extraction and transportation occupations, representation of the Haitian population (11%) is consistent with all foreign-born (10%) but higher than the native-born (7.6%).

Haitians are under-represented in managerial and professional occupations, compared to all foreign-born (27%) and native-born (36%). A somewhat lower



**Occupations for Population 25 Years and Older** ■ Haitians ■ Foreign-Born ■ Native-Born



Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata (PUM) 5% Sample, BRA Research Division

## self-employed

percentage of Haitian immigrants are employed in service occupations than the average for all foreign-born (24%), but a higher percentage than the native-born (15%).

Fifty-nine percent of Haitian immigrants participate in the labor force. This figure is almost identical to the 60% of all foreign-born participating in the labor force and lower than that of the native-born population (64%).<sup>11</sup>

The unemployment rate among Haitian-born immigrants in Boston is estimated at 8%, compared to a 7% unemployment rate for all foreign-born and a figure of 8% for the native-born.<sup>12</sup>

An estimated 71% of Haitian-born immigrants in Boston work for a private, for-profit company. Another 10 percent work for private not-for-profit organizations.

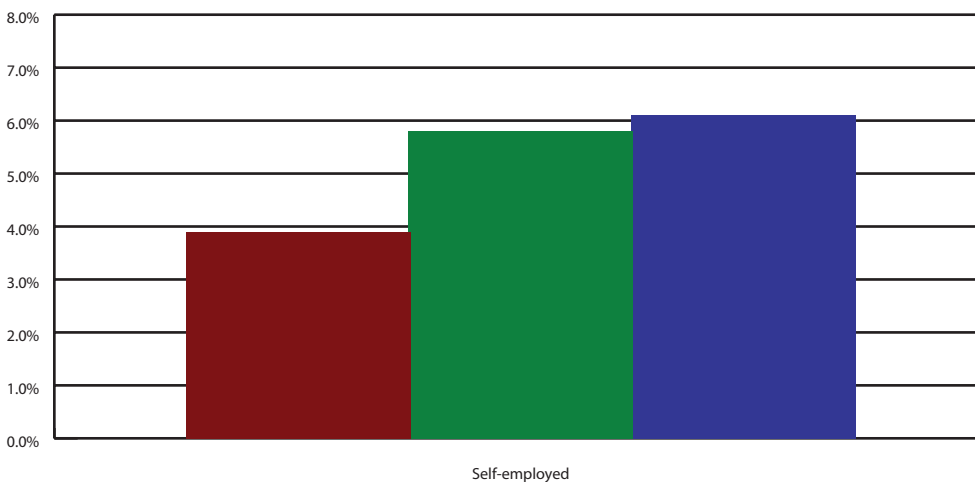
Overall, Boston's Haitian population is active in the labor market, reflected by their comparable labor force participation and unemployment rates relative to the city's foreign-born and native-born populations.

An estimated 3.9% of Haitian immigrants in Boston are self-employed. This compares to a rate of 5.8% for the entire foreign-born population and 6.1% for the native-born population.<sup>13</sup>



*Twenty percent of Haitians are employed in the health care support occupations, most of which are registered nurses, compared to 5% of all foreign-born and 2% of the native-born population.*

**Share of Self Employed Workers** ■ Haitians ■ Foreign-Born ■ Native-Born



Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata (PUM) 5% Sample, BRA

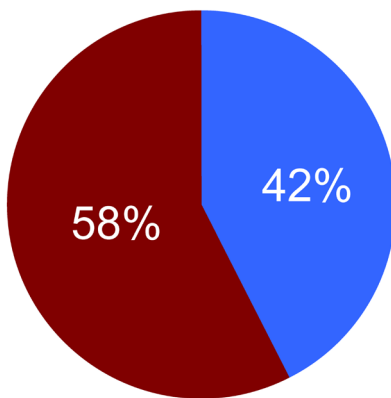
# imagine

504,750 Haitians live in the U.S.

Main destinations for Haitian immigrants:

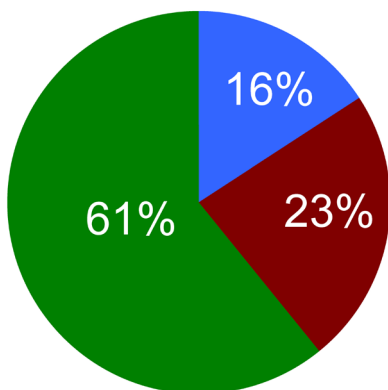
- **U.S.**
- **Dominican Republic**
- **Canada**

## Gender



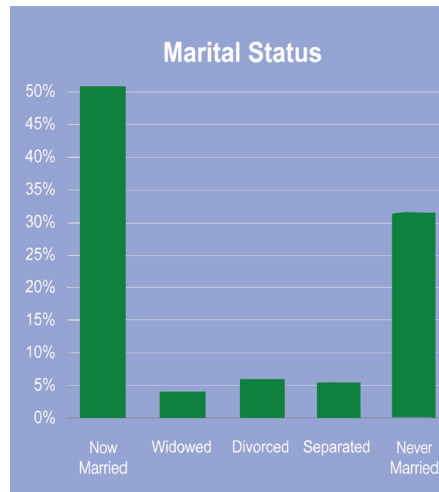
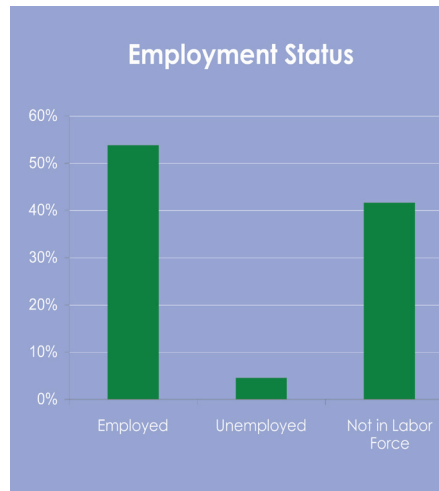
- Male
- Female

## Age



- 0-19
- 20-34
- 35+

# 14,361 Haitians in Boston



## occupations

**35%** technical, sales and administrative support

**21%** managerial and professional

**21%** services

**11%** construction, extraction and transportation

**8%** production

**2%** community and social services

**1%** art, design, and media

**1%** other

## entrepreneurship

business ownership

**108 small businesses**

## contributing

**\$252 million**

annual spending

**\$254 million**

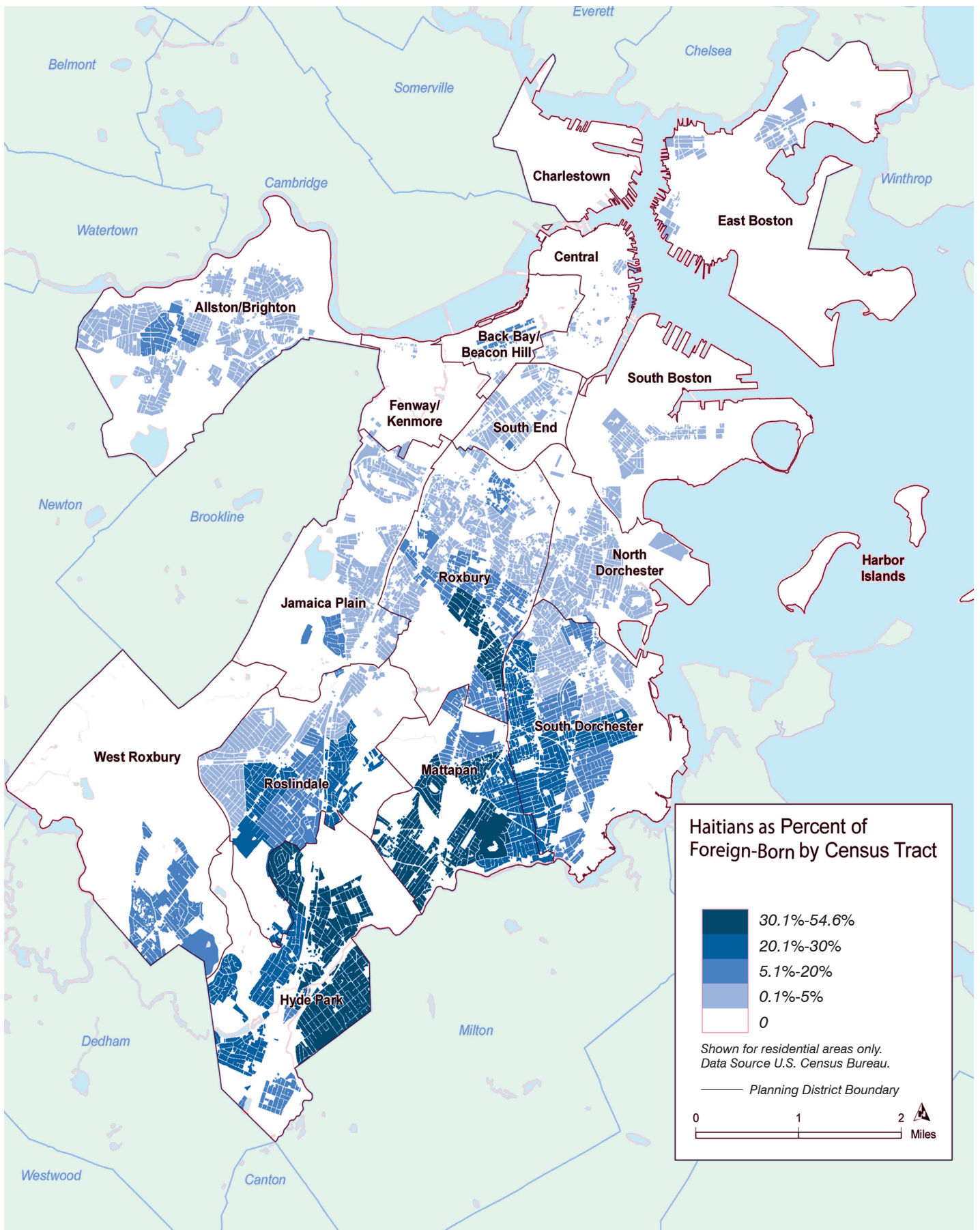
to the gross state product

**\$68 million**

in state and federal taxes

**2,545 direct and indirect jobs**

for the local economy



## spending

Haitian immigrants contribute to the local economy through their labor. The total value of their contributions is estimated using a regional economic model (REMI) that calculates the value of goods and services consumed on each dollar spent.

Haitian immigrants spend, from their after tax earnings, over \$252 million in Boston, annually.<sup>14</sup>

These annual expenditures generate a gross state product of over \$254 million in local spending, and approximately \$68 million in state and federal taxes.<sup>15</sup> This expenditure in turn, generates over 2,500 direct and indirect jobs in the local economy.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the contribution Haitian-born immigrants make to the U.S. and the local economy, they continue to play an important role in the economy of their native country. Each year Haitian-born immigrants living in Boston send an estimated \$11.1 million a year in cash remittances back to their homeland. This breaks down to an average of approximately \$162 per month sent back by each Haitian household<sup>17</sup>. This trend is also witnessed throughout the U.S. and beyond, with Haitians living abroad contributing more than \$1 billion, or 21.6% of GDP, to Haiti's economy in 2006.<sup>18</sup>

## entrepreneurship

Haitian-born immigrants further contribute to Boston's economy through entrepreneurship. They own 108 small businesses in the greater Boston area specializing in retail and food services among other industry sectors.

Combined, these Haitian-owned businesses employ more than 300 people and contribute over \$18 million to the gross state product, \$1.2 million in state and federal taxes and 180 indirect jobs.





## standard of living

Only 21.5 percent of Haitians have achieved a middle class standard of living compared to 38% of Boston's native-born population and 25% of all foreign-born.<sup>20</sup>

A combination of factors may contribute to Haitians low standard of living. One is the low educational attainment levels and lack of English proficiency among many Haitians, as seen in the table. While 45% of Boston's adult foreign-born population either lacks a high school diploma or has limited English proficiency, the rate of Haitian-born adults is a bit lower, at almost 44%.

Another barrier facing Haitians and other immigrants is the lack of general knowledge about how the local labor market works.



*Collectively,  
Haitians contribute  
\$254 million  
to the economy,  
pay \$68 million  
in taxes and  
create 2,545  
indirect jobs.*

### Distribution of Education and English Proficiency<sup>19</sup> in the Haitian Population (25+)

Education/English Proficiency	# of Haitian	% Haitian	% Foreign-Born	% Native-Born
Lack H.S. Diploma & English Proficient	2,144	17.3%	16.9%	14.5%
Lack H.S. Diploma & Limited English Proficiency	2,302	18.5%	17.2%	1.1%
Have H.S. Diploma & Limited English Proficiency	951	7.7%	11.3%	0.7%
<b>Lack H.S. Diploma or Limited English Proficiency</b>	<b>5,397</b>	<b>43.5%</b>	<b>45.4%</b>	<b>16.3%</b>

Source: U.S. Census 2000, Public Use Microdata (PUM) 5% Sample, BRA Research Division Analysis

# end notes



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ADVOCATING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT...  
**Connecticut HAITIAN VOICE**  
FEBRUARY 2007  
Grande messe de célébration de l'Indépendance d'Haïti

Award-winning Haitian journalist Michèle Montas appointed to top rank in UN hierarchy  
By Jean André Constant

...ing on her job-ing experiences in  
Montas has been well known for her  
reporting, for which she has won  
...and her husband.  
Michèle Montas started her career in  
...University's Graduate school of Journalism  
...Léopold Dumasque, a trained agricultural  
...were paid to change Radio Haïti into a  
...Flan. Two years after her husband assumed  
...in 2001. Michèle Montas had had to  
...the UN system working successfully at the  
...the Assembly General President's spee  
...Michèle Montas, a journalist on the UN  
...and human rights activists. She is expe  
...her success in journalism from UN's former  
...President M. Montas set her new position and

EXPLORING THE HAITIAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE  
**BOSTON HAITIAN REPORTER**  
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The Red & Blue parade on Blue Hill



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INSIDE THIS MONTH'S REPORTER

**A Painter's Pride**  
Boston-based association helps women take charge  
Story, page 2



Obama brings message to...

- 1 The ACS is a yearly survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau intended to allow communities to see how they are changing in the years between decennial censuses. The ACS is based on a sample of the population. While the data in this document are reported as specific numbers and percentages, all results from the ACS are subject to sampling error. The data in this report are from the 2005-2007 ACS 3-year averages. These data are the combination of 3 years of the ACS which reduces the level of sampling error. For more information on the ACS, please see: <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/index.html>
- 2 World Bank, Research and Data, Remittances Data 2007 <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1199807908806/Haiti.pdf>
- 3 American Community Survey, 2005-2007, American Fact Finder, BRA Research Analysis (2009).
- 4 The "foreign-born" population includes all people who are born outside the U.S., naturalized citizens; and non-U.S. citizens. The "native-born" population includes all people born in the United States, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Island Areas and persons born abroad by American parents. Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) Research Division. (2005).
- 5 American Community Survey, 2005-2007, American Fact Finder, BRA Research Analysis (2009).
- 6 The ACS's American Fact Finder website reports that there are an estimated 14,169 Haitians in Boston. However, the American Fact Finder website reports a total population for Boston that is lower than the currently accepted population total for the city (600,980 compared to 608,352 respectively). We adjusted the total number of immigrants in each group in order to account for lower total number of Bostonians estimated by the ACS. For more information on American Fact Finder please see: [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)
- 7 As mentioned earlier, ACS data is subject to sampling error. While our adjusted estimate using the 2005-2007 ACS for foreign-born Haitians in Boston is 14,361, the margin of error for this statistic at the 90% confidence interval is  $\pm 2,282$ . Meaning, the actual population size of Haitians in Boston is likely to be between 12,079 and 16,643. Throughout this report we will report the adjusted population estimate provided by the 2005-2007 ACS for foreign-born Haitians in Boston. These population counts are estimates, however.
- 8 American Community Survey, 2005-2007, American Fact Finder, BRA Research Analysis (2009).
- 9 Cross-tabulations of the ACS from relatively small groups can lead to making generalizations about subsections of a group from a very small sample and may not be reliable. As a result, in this report we will use 2000 Census data for all cross-tabulations of the Haitian community, while using the 2005-2007 adjusted ACS estimate to express the total population.
- 10 The technical, sales and administrative support sector consists of sales and related occupations, office and administrative support occupations and health care support occupations. (BRA Research Division).
- 11 Defined as the share of the working-age population that is either currently employed or seeking work. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2005).
- 12 These unemployment data are from the 2000 Census. It should be noted that unemployment rates are subjected to a much greater rate of fluctuation, varying from quarter to quarter, than all the other demographic data in this report.
- 13 There is no agreement among researchers regarding the reasons for variations in the self-employment rates among different immigrant groups. Reasons cited include human and financial capital of individual immigrants, high rates of solidarity and social capital in some immigrant communities, as well as the opportunity structure encountered by immigrant entrepreneurs.
- 14 Total gross income of Haitians totaled \$326 million in 2007. Adjustments were made for remittances assuming a monthly transfer of \$162 per household. This amount is in accordance with estimates made by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. Marcuss, M. (2005). International Remittances: Information for New England Financial Institutions. BRA Research Division Analysis, 2009, Regional Economic Model, Inc. (REMI) calculations.
- 15 Haitians generate \$13.7 million in state income taxes, \$3.9 million in state sales taxes paid, and \$48.9 million in federal income taxes. Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) Research Division. (2009). Regional Economic Model, Inc. (REMI) calculations.
- 16 BRA Research Division. (2009). REMI calculations.
- 17 Orozco, M. (2002), Remittances, Costs, and Market Competition, presentation of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.
- 18 World Bank, Research and Data, Remittances Data 2007 <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1199807908806/Haiti.pdf>
- 19 The Limited English Proficient includes immigrant adults who do not speak English at all or who do not speak it well. The English Proficient includes immigrant adults who speak only English, speak it very well or speak it well. In MassINC's The Changing Face of Massachusetts report, the authors used these same definitions, but labeled the two categories language challenge and no language challenge, respectively.
- 20 A family income four times the poverty line is used as a proxy for the middle-class standard of living. The actual income needed to achieve this standard depends on the number of people in the family. For a two-person family the income would be at least \$44,856, which is at the 43rd percentile of all families. Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth. (2005). The Changing Face of Massachusetts.



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