

# **The Brazilian Immigrant Experience**

A Study on the Evolution of a Brazilian Community in  
Somerville and the Greater Boston Area

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Methodology.....	6
Narrators.....	7
Origins of Brazilian Immigration.....	10
Modern Brazilian History 101.....	10
A Theoretical Analysis of Migration Flows.....	14
The First Contacts Between the United States and Brazil.....	16
Mass Migration and the Lost Decade.....	25
The Changing Face of the Brazilian Immigrant.....	31
Life in Somerville and Greater Boston.....	40
Migration Habits.....	40
Settlement Patterns and The Evolution of Community.....	46
Identity Development.....	54
Integration, its Barriers, and Future Prospects for the Next Generations.....	63
Concluding Thoughts.....	69
Evaluating the Brazilian Immigrant Today and Tomorrow.....	72
Recommendations for Future Research.....	74
Appendix.....	76
Work Cited.....	77

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# Introduction

For the most part, I grew up in Brookline, a small suburb neighboring Boston and well known for its strong public schools. As financing such an education is an expensive affair, it shouldn't be a surprise the public schools in Brookline are located in a very wealthy and predominantly Anglo-American school district. I, however, am neither Anglo nor wealthy.

Both my parents moved from Porto Alegre in 1984, two years before I was born. Although they were both doctors back home, they were never able to practice their professions once in the United States. We lived several years below the poverty line. As such, my parents have lived much of their lives in the United States as Brazilians who were also broke.

As I have grown up in the microcosm that is my life in Brookline, I have always struggled to grapple with an identity that has situated me somewhere between two worlds, adapting to a unique reality.

Just across Brookline's city limits the Brazilian immigrant community of Greater Boston was also coming of age, fighting to carve out a space for itself, one that synthesizes demands from a distant motherland and a new North American home.

My research, entitled *The Brazilian Immigrant Experience*, is to some extent an investigation into the maturation of a Brazilian presence that seems to have run somewhat parallel to my own.

This being said, I would like to begin by acknowledging that as difficult as it is to truly deconstruct one's own identity, understanding the development of the Brazilian immigrant community is far more difficult, even when there is a significant degree of shared experiences. For starters, so little is known about this population that no one really knows just how many Brazilian immigrants there are in the region.

According to Census data from 2000, there should be just over 200,000 Brazilians in the United States with more than 36,000 living in Massachusetts; however a number of studies have challenged this count, estimating a far larger population of Brazilian immigrants. For instance, in 2001, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimated the number of Brazilians in the United States to be somewhere between 800,000 and 1.1 million. In Massachusetts, a report by the Archdiocese of Boston calculated the Brazilian population at approximately 150,000 as of 1990.<sup>1</sup> In a more recent study, the Consulate of Brazil in Boston estimates that there are over 200,000 Brazilians living in Massachusetts.<sup>2</sup> It is likely that by now, the number of Brazilians in the area has continued to grow significantly. According to the Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth, Brazil contributed nearly a fifth of all new immigrants to the Commonwealth between 2000 and 2003.<sup>3</sup>

Although there are a number of reasons for the immense discrepancy in population estimates of Brazilian immigrants in the region, two explanations are of prime importance. First, the US Census does not clearly delineate how Brazilians should list themselves along its five-way split of ethno-racial identities.<sup>1</sup> However, a second and far more important explanation for the divergent population counts acknowledges the presence of a large number of undocumented immigrants. These immigrants, for a number of reasons, are especially difficult to account for. Comparing data released in 2001 from the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the 2000 US Census, we see that the US Census data does not account for approximately 80% of the Brazilians reported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Incidentally, in a report on immigration to North America, Franklin Goza estimated that 80% of the 195 Brazilians studied in his US sample did not have valid documents.<sup>4</sup> As such, the data is indicative of a marginalized Brazilian population, one that is not given a clear method of self-identification on surveys and that faces significant barriers to self-representation due to immigration status.

When combined with the discrepancy in population data, the reality of marginalization further complicates our understanding of Brazilian immigration. Studies on why Brazilians have migrated to the region, how they have arrived, and what distinguishes them from Brazilians back home, the North American population, and other immigrants are quite sparse. Once here, there is even less known about their interactions with the community and their identity development.

At the same time, the Brazilian immigrant population has become far more evident in the last few years. Already, the distinctive yellow and green dot many of the region's commercial districts. Thus, as the Brazilians immigrant community grows in size and visibility, it becomes increasingly important to understand this population.

In this study, I hope to shed some light on the way Brazilians have migrated and adapted to the Greater Boston Area. I have divided the bulk of my report into two chapters entitled "Origins of Brazilian Immigration" and "Life in Somerville and Greater Boston." This first chapter is further subdivided into five sections that address the conditions in Brazil, how the first migrants arrived, what conditions contributed to mass migration, and finally how these changes have affected the flow of migrants. My second chapter discusses how the individual has experienced the migration and adaptation process, the ways in which Brazilians have settled, how identity has formed, the barriers to integration, and finally the Brazilian's perception for the future. I will then conclude my report, suggesting areas for further investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> This ethno-racial divide offers census participants the options of White non-Hispanic, Black non-Hispanic, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American.

## Methodology

In this study, I home to encapsulate the evolution of the Brazilian immigrant community in a historical analysis as it shaped the identity of a Brazilians in Somerville and the Greater Boston Area.

Research took place from September to December of 2006. In this time, I have conducted 10 formal oral histories and had numerous informal dialogues. However, to limit my study of Brazilian immigrants to only the fall semester of my junior year at Tufts University would be a grave error. I was born into Boston's Brazilian Immigrant Community, and I have never stopped learning from this population.

This puts me in a unique position. Although there are several distinguishing features that separated me from the stereotypical Brazilian, being the son of two Brazilian immigrants offered me a myriad of information to pool from as well as considerable biases. I did my best to keep a professional distance in analyzing my findings.

In conducting my investigation, I relied heavily from a list of contacts that I already knew, to one degree or another. With their help, I also interviewed people that were completely new to me. Regardless, I learned a tremendous amount from each and every narrator.

This being said, I understand that there are some very significant limitations to my research. For starters, a handful of interviews can never adequately represent a large population. More importantly, as I tried to document the history of the Brazilian community, I polled heavily from some of the most established of Brazilian immigrants in the region. The sample included very few recent migrants or Brazilians who have grown up in the region's school systems. It is also my opinion that the bulk of my narrators were lighter-skinned Brazilians. None were distinctly darker skinned. Finally, the vast majority of those interviewed where fortunate enough to have proper documents permitting them to work in the United States. This characteristic stands in stark contrast with the rest of the Brazilian immigrant population. All of this significantly distorts any generalizations made about the Brazilian Immigrant Community as the narrator's opinions are clearly affected his or her personal experiences.

Given the characteristics of my sample, I hypothesize that the information collected from the various oral histories portray a more optimistic scenario than that experienced by most of the Brazilian immigrant population. However, I have done my best to address such biases in my data as I conducted my interviews and wrote this report.

## Narrators

**Jennifer Burtner** - Jennifer Burtner is an anthropology professor at Tufts University and Harvard. She has extensive experience studying migration and resettlement, primarily with regards to Brazil, Mexico, Central America and the United States. She has also studied the Brazilian immigrant community in Greater Boston. Jennifer Burtner is the only Anglo-American interviewed in my report. However, she has grown up in predominantly Latino neighborhoods and is currently married to a Brazilian.

**Regina Bertholdo** - Regina Bertholdo is currently the director of the Somerville Public Schools' Parent Information Center. She has extensive involvement in the Brazilian immigrant community of Somerville having served as an executive board member at MAPS (Massachusetts Alliance for Portuguese Speakers). Regina Bertholdo has also worked with the Brazilian Immigrant Center and the Brazilian Women's Group. Bertholdo immigrated to Boston in 1986 from Taquaritinga in the State of Sao Paulo when she was 25 years old as a college graduate of literature. She came hoping to improve on her English skills before returning to Brazil to pursue a career in journalism. However, she eventually settled and moved to Somerville in the mid 1990s where she has raised her daughter and gotten more involved in the Brazilian immigrant community.

**Fausto Mendes da Rocha** - Fausto da Rocha is currently the Executive-Director of the Brazilian Immigrant Center, an organization that he helped found in 1994 and has served as the Executive Director since 1997. The B.I.C is a community-based organization that works to empower Brazilians in the Greater Boston Area around issues of access to education, workplace rights and immigration. Their work is done through advocacy, education, organizing and leadership/capacity building, and Fausto has worked extensively to build alliances with government officials, churches, and other community organizations. Before 1994, da Rocha worked for several years at Legal Seafood, climbing up the ladder from the laundry room to manager, and at Bread and Circus also rising up the ranks in his 9 years there. Prior to his job at Legal Seafood and shortly after his arrival to the United States and Greater Boston in 1988, Fausto da Rocha worked as dishwasher, a fast-food cook and a construction worker. Always working one job full-time and another part-time In the time since his arrival, which originally was supposed to be a short sojourn to build up a nest egg, da Rocha got married and set up a new family in Boston with three children. Fausto, raised in the state Espírito Santo, left Brazil as an "economic refugee" in 1988 after a severe economic bust in Brazil. He came from a very large family with 11 brothers and sisters and had studied in technical school before worked as a secretary for the Caixa Economica, a government-run bank providing a variety of social welfare services.

**Pastor Carlos Ferreira** - Carlos Ferreira is an evangelical pastor and founder of the Assembly of God Alliance located near Union Square, which serves a Portuguese speaking community where most all his followers are Brazilians. His work with the church is part time and without pay. He also works at another job. Pastor Ferreira has been with the Assembly of God since he was 18 years old and is a Portuguese immigrant who came to Greater Boston eight years ago. He left his job as a branch manager at

Portugal's largest bank having received an invitation from a pastor of a World Revival Church in Greater Boston after previously visiting the region. After some time with the World Revival Church, Carlos Ferreira claims that God told him to found a new church, and he did. Today, Ferreira is quite humble about his congregation, but it appears that it includes 35 regular members and usually has several visitors.

**Eduardo<sup>ii</sup>** - Eduardo came to the United State for the first time when he was 18 years old in 1973. He was born into a family of 11 brothers in Governador Valadares. His father was a public worker (*funcionário público*) and his mother was a homemaker. Eduardo and his family always had to work. He graduated from middle school. Eduardo claims that in Brazil he was a part of the middle class. Other than this, Eduardo said that he remembers little about his life in Brazil. After leaving Brazil, Eduardo worked in the US for six years, returned to Brazil for a two year "vacation," and then went back to the US, where he has lived since. In this time, Eduardo worked in restaurants and construction. As in Brazil, he considers himself a member of the middle class.

**Fabio<sup>iii</sup>** - Fabio has been living in Somerville for the last two years. He works double shifts as a custodian and sends most of his money back in the form of remittances to his family in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. In 2004, after several failed attempts, Fabio gave up on the prospects of obtaining a tourist visa to fly directly to Boston. Instead he flew to Mexico where, at the time, Brazilians still did not need to provide a visa to enter. After several days waiting in Mexico, he finally crossed the boarder with a group of Brazilians, guided by *coyotes*, human traffickers. Once arriving in Dallas, packed with other Brazilians in a truck full of cargo, Fabio was placed in a van and driven straight to Somerville. The trip from Dallas to Somerville took full day. In total, the trip from Belo Horizonte to Boston cost \$7,500. Fabio has just paid back the last of his debt to friends and family for this trip earlier this year and plans to return to his family in Brazil in two years. He misses his two daughters and wife terribly.

**Naiara Souto** – Naiara was born in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais and migrated to the Somerville when she was seven years old with her mother, reuniting with her father and other siblings who were already living in the United States. However, when Naiara left Brazil, she was told that she was just going on vacation. Little did Naiara know that she wouldn't be able to see her family and friends back in Belo Horizonte until a change in her immigration status permitted such trips many years later. Before entering the Somerville Public Schools, Naiara had never gone to school. Fortunately, she enrolled in the now-defunct Portuguese bilingual education program, quickly graduating into the integrated school system and excelling there. Naiara is now a freshman at Tufts University.

**Ophelia Steadman** – In 1966, having just graduated from law school, Ophelia Steadman left her home in the city of São Paulo, planning to take a year off to travel. A cultural exchange program sent her to live with a host family in Newton, Massachusetts, where she would work as a housekeeper. However, what was supposed to be a short stay

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<sup>ii</sup> Eduardo did not provide his last name.

<sup>iii</sup> For the protection of this narrator, I have changed his name.

eventually proved to be a permanent change. With time, Ophelia married a North American, John Steadman, and changed jobs. Before eventually opening up her own insurance agency, Brasil Insurance, in Union Square, Ms. Steadman spent many years working as a social worker at the department of welfare and later as a councilor in the public schools' bilingual education. Ophelia earned significantly more at these jobs than she did in Brazil, where her salary was four times the minimum wage.

**Valter Vitorino** – Valter Vitorino was born in Conselheiro Pena, Minas Gerais, a small city neighboring Governador Valadares. There he was raised by his single mother and started working in restaurants at the age of 12. He left Brazil for New York City in 1969 when he was only 19 years old. However, because he couldn't find any jobs, within the first few days in the United States, Mr. Vitorino decided to move to Boston where he heard that the job market was more open. Valter did not know of anyone in the region before going to Boston. Still he estimates that at the time, there were no more than 15 other Brazilians in the area. In 1986, he opened Café Brazil on Cambridge Street in Allston, the first restaurant serving authentic Brazilian cuisine in the area. Mr. Vitorino is a resident of Somerville.

**Edirson Paiva** - Edirson Paiva was born in August of 1944 in Governador Valadares, where he graduated with the required degree in literature to teach Portuguese in a local high school. He stayed in Governador Valadares until 1982. Edirson explained the reason for his migration as two fold. On the one hand, he hoped to continue his education, perfecting English at the Harvard Extension School and then to return to school in Brazil so as to become a college professor. On the other hand, Edirson was looking to work hard and earn some money in the meantime. Since the second week he arrived in Boston, he already began working, particularly in restaurants. With time he quickly moved up in the industry, as he already spoke English. In 1988, he founded the Brazilian Times, the nation's first weekly newspaper devoted to the Brazilian immigrant. The newspaper was based out of the Portuguese Times office in Somerville, where Edirson had been living since migrating to the United States. Previously, in Brazil, he worked as a reviser of the *Diário de Aço de Ipatinga* (The Daily of Ipatinga's Steel). Still in Brazil, Edirson had also experienced starting his own small business, in that case, as a tutor for the Brazilian university entrance exams known as the *Vestibulares*.

# **Origins of Brazilian Immigration**

## **Modern Brazilian History 101**

According to popular history, the colonization of Brazil by Europeans and their descendants began on April 22, 1500. On that day, Pedro Álvares Cabral's fleet to the southern tip of Africa had been blown far enough off course that his explorers could see what is now known as *Monte Pascoal*, or Mount Easter. Although now contested by various esteemed historians, this is commonly believed to be the first sighting of Brazilian territory by Europeans.

Regardless, Cabral and his expedition flew under the Portuguese banner. As such, it was the Portuguese, and not the Spanish, that eventually colonized Brazil, making it the only Portuguese-speaking nation in the Americas. However, since the onset of Iberian conquest in the New World, Brazil has developed in a remarkably similar manner as its Spanish-speaking Latin American neighbors. One of the most striking commonalities revolves around the unequal distribution of land and income. Today, Brazil has the 7<sup>th</sup> highest Gini coefficient in the world, making it the second most unequally distributed nation in Latin America behind Bolivia in terms of income.<sup>5</sup> This is all the more impressive as historians and economists have long pointed to Latin America as the region with the greatest inequality in land, wealth, and income in the world, looking back to the region's colonial past for explanations.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the region stands out for its fusion of European, African and Indigenous genetics and customs at levels unseen in North America. This, along with the predominance of a Roman Catholic Church, has left Latin America with what Peter Winn has called a unique "colonial legacy."<sup>7</sup>

There are, however, several important aspects in Brazilian history that distinguish it from the rest of Latin America. One of these characteristics is of significant importance

and refers to the particularly acute form of income inequality in Brazil relative to its neighbors, which is all the more expressive when considering that the unequal distribution of wealth is a hallmark of the regions development. The second revolves around the extent to which revolutionary fervor has lead to socio-economic change. Unlike the rest of the Americas, which fought numerous bloody wars of independence to expel European colonial rule and later saw more radical conflict emerge to address more internal contradictions, Brazil has emerged without such dramatic clashes in its history. This can be typified by the manner that Brazil attained its formal independence in 1822. At that time, Portuguese colonial rule made way for the new Empire of Brazil, which was to be governed by Dom Pedro I. Dom Pedro I was previously known as Prince Pedro IV, heir to the Portuguese crown, and was advised by the Portuguese regent, Dom João, “If Brazil demands independence, grant it, but put the crown on your own head.”<sup>8</sup> There was to be no war for autonomy or great social change.

In the years since, Brazilians have seen its government oscillate many times between semi-democratic and more authoritarian rule, sometimes through violence, but rarely to the extent experienced in the rest of Latin America. However, one of the most shocking of these transitions occurred in 1964, when a military coup initiated two decades of dictatorial rule. Coincidentally, if we are to explain the impact that government policy has on Brazilian emigration, one must focus on the rise and fall of the military regime and its numerous repercussions.

In 1964, armed forces overthrew the civilian government of João “Jango” Goulart in a bloody coup and declared General Humberto de Alencar Castello Branco the provisional president of Brazil. The military justified Branco’s installation on “national

security” grounds, fearing that Jango was steering the nation towards communism and blaming his administration for an economic downturn that saw inflation rise into the triple-digits due to the failures of import substitution industrialization, which began to be apparent under the presidency of Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira in the mid 1950s and continued through to Jango’s government.<sup>9</sup>

However, what was supposed to be a temporary military government with the goal of reforming the political-economic situation within the remainder of Jango’s term limit soon became institutionalized.<sup>10</sup> A slew of Generals served their “presidential” terms, ushering a period of intense political repression and “a dirty war in which torture became routine and disappearances commonplace.”<sup>11</sup> Incidentally, as the dictatorship developed a more hard-line policy, the military government was able to spark growth of over 10 percent from 1968 to 1974. Although the gap between rich and poor expanded during this time,<sup>12</sup> Brazilians often referred to this time as the “Miracle,”<sup>13</sup> and military dictatorship touted this economic success as the touchstone of its political legitimacy.<sup>14</sup>

By the late 1970s, things had changed. Two successive oil shocks, in 1973 and again in 1979, drastically depressed Brazil’s balance of payments as the price of imported oil skyrocketed.<sup>15</sup> The military government decided to balance Brazil’s trade deficit by incurring debts instead of slowing growth.<sup>16</sup> While this practice maintained reasonable growth until shortly after the second oil shock of 1979, it had also led Brazil into an external debt crisis.<sup>17</sup> By 1981, Brazil’s foreign debt totaled more than \$75 billion, interest payments consumed two-thirds of the nations exports, while real per capita income dropped 5 percent, the sharpest drop in over a century.<sup>18</sup>

At the same, according to Professor Winn, “The deepening economic crisis provoked growing social unrest and political protest...[as] the military began to pay the price for decades of ignoring popular needs.”<sup>19</sup> With time, more moderate military presidents, namely Generals Geisel and Figueiredo, would begin a gradual opening of the political and economic system in a process known as the *abertura*.<sup>20</sup> However, the eventual transition to civilian rule in the mid 1980s did not come with significant economic improvements. Inflation continued to soar throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, reaching 2500% in 1993.<sup>21</sup> In their evaluation of Brazil’s development progress over the years, the World Bank noted that despite “big strides in reducing social and economic inequality, ...relatively low economic growth remains a persistent concern.”<sup>22</sup> In addition, the Brazil’s foreign debt, accrued largely due of the balance of payments crisis of the 1970s, continues to rank first in the developing world.<sup>23</sup>

For a country that, despite occasional boom-and-bust cycles, had become accustomed with the fastest economic growth in the world for over a century, spanning from 1870 to 1980, the economic downturn of the so-called “lost decade” and its slow recovery has had a profound impact on the Brazilian psyche.<sup>24</sup> Faith in a better future in Brazil waned, as epitomized by a popular adage claiming Brazil to be the country of the future, forever.

Perhaps a more appropriate way to quantify this new found pessimism is through studying immigration patterns, as it was during this “lost decade” that Brazil, traditionally a mecca for immigrants from all over the world, became a net exporter of people.<sup>25</sup> However, statistics alone do not quite measure the extent to which Brazil’s historic economic collapse affected its population. In my study of Brazilian immigrants in the

Greater Boston Area, the impact of the lost decade was a central factor in explaining their migration process.

## A Theoretical Analysis of Migration Flows

Although a basic understanding of Brazilian history is important if we are to explain the flow of Brazilian migrants to the Greater Boston Area, it is not enough. Nor is it enough to believe that individuals choose to migrate according to a cost-benefit analysis alone. In their study on immigration in the Americas, M. Patricia Hernández Kelly and Alejandro Portes denounced such a perspective for placing too much emphasis on economic considerations and for dehumanizing the migrant into a “*Homo economicus*, a convenient ideological distortion that did not take into consideration alternative rationalities or contextual factors that diminish the attractiveness of economic gain.”<sup>26</sup> Another similar theory emphasizes the importance of push-pull factors, claiming that the migrant is allured into a receiving nation at the same time that he is expelled from his homeland by a variety of socio-economic forces. As such, potential push factors include political repression and poverty at home, while the prospects of employment, higher wages could serve as a sufficient pull towards migration.<sup>27</sup>

However, if this were the case, Boston would be inundated with immigrants hailing from the lowest of social classes in the most impoverished and repressive regions of the world. Instead, according to the 2000 Census, 48 percent of Boston’s foreign-born population comes from Latin America alone, or more specifically South America (9%), Mexico and Central America (10%), and the Caribbean (29%).<sup>28</sup> For at least the last 40 years, this geographic region, that is, Latin America as a whole, has maintained the

highest level of GDP per capita in the entire developing world,<sup>29</sup> apparently contradicting both cost-benefit and push-pull theories of migration.

Instead, Fernandez Kelly and Portes argue “that migration in general, and that in Latin America in particular, takes place not *between* independent economic systems but *within* systems whose various sectors have experienced differing types and levels of private and public investment.... Thus, migrants walk across the invisible bridges created by particular capital flows and political linkages.”<sup>30</sup> This emphasis on socio-economic exchanges predating mass migration flows seems to be an appropriate one in explaining immigration from Latin America and Brazil in particular.

It is no accident that today people of Latin American origin represent not only the largest foreign-born population,<sup>31</sup> but also the largest ethnic-minority in the nation.<sup>32</sup> The US has been intimately involved in Latin American affairs for centuries and has traditionally maintained a near hegemonic influence in the region. As early as 1823, the government of the United States issued the Monroe Doctrine, declaring its right to intervene should any European nation look to reestablish control over any independent Latin American countries “as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved.”<sup>33</sup> By the turn of the century, US military forces had already been deployed to Argentina and Uruguay as well Nicaragua, in three separate occasions.<sup>34</sup> With the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine in December of 1904 explicitly giving the US the right to “exercise international police power in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence” by the independent governments of Latin America, US intervention and influence in the region increased significantly. Because the United States has historically exercised greatest military and political influence in Mexico, Puerto Rico,

and Cuba (annexing large portions of traditionally Mexican territory as part of the U.S. Southwest, occupying the entirety of Puerto Rico, and having kept Cuba as a protectorate through the Platt Amendment from 1903 to 1934),<sup>35</sup> it should be no surprise that within the Latino population,<sup>iv</sup> Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans are traditionally the most populous nationalities.<sup>36</sup> A similar relationship connecting US foreign policy to immigration patterns can account for the particularly large number of Dominican, Haitian, Salvadoran, Nicaraguan and other Central American and Caribbean immigrants currently residing in the United States.

## The First Contacts Between the United States and Brazil

Although the United States has exercised significant influence in Brazil, these political and economic linkages have not been as pervasive as those between the United States and other Latin American countries, particularly those in Central America and the Caribbean. Brazil, unlike many other countries in the region, has never been militarily invaded by the United States.<sup>v</sup> In fact, it was only during World War II that relations between Brazil and the United States picked up. This was in part motivated by US attempts to solicit Brazil's support for the Allies in the world war. Through the Good Neighbor Policy, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt launched a public diplomacy campaign to improve relations in the public's eye. Because of this, Hollywood began

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<sup>iv</sup> Defined as those individuals residing in the United States claiming heritage to a Latin American nation.

<sup>v</sup> This being said, recently declassified documents confirm US involvement in the 1964 coup that overthrew democratically elected President João "Jango" Goulart. On March 31<sup>st</sup>, President Johnson, speaking to top aids about preparations for Goulart's overthrow in Brazil, stated, "I think we ought to take every step that we can, be prepared to do everything that we need to do." The next day the Brazilian armed forces took the city of Rio de Janeiro as a naval task force sent from New Jersey lay waiting in the Bay of Guanabara with ammunition should the Brazilian military need it. (Kornbluh, Peter. "Brazil Marks 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Military Coup: Declassified Documents Shed Light on U.S. Role." 2004. The National Security Archive. 18 Dec 2006. <<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB118/index.htm>>)

some of the earliest cross-cultural exchanges between Brazil and the United States, introducing popular Brazilian characters, such Carmen Miranda and Ze Carioca, to North American audiences and distributing films, such as Disney's Saludos Amigos (1942) and Los Tres Caballeros (1945), in Brazil.<sup>37</sup> More importantly, "it was not until after World War II that the United States became Brazil's number-one trading partner and foreign investor."<sup>38</sup> This is a title that still holds true today. With nearly a fifth of Brazil's imports and exports coming from and go to the United States, the US is by far Brazil's greatest trade partner.<sup>39</sup> According to Fausto da Rocha, this was the beginning of the "Americanization of Brazil."<sup>40</sup>

The relatively late connection between Brazil and the United States, at the least when comparing it to relations to the rest of Latin America, helps to explain why Brazilian immigration is a fairly recent phenomenon. Still, to appreciate Brazilian migration to the Boston region, we need a more specific analysis of these socio-economic linkages. Although it is quite difficult, if not virtually impossible, to trace immigration patterns to a single source, the fact that the bulk of Brazilian migrants to Massachusetts have traditionally come from the state of Minas Gerais, or more specifically, the city of Governador Valadares (population 230,000) does help in narrowing our search.<sup>41</sup>

Proof of this connection can come in various forms. Wilson Fusco estimates that 6.7% of Valadarenses – natives of Governador Valadares – are currently abroad or had previously emigrated and returned,<sup>42</sup> and that 88.7% of those who had immigrated chose the United States as their country of destination.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, in a survey of 406 Valadarenses who had previously immigrated to the United States, over half chose Massachusetts as the state of destiny for their first migration experience. When broken

down historically, from 1967 to 1986, 45.1% of those immigrating for the first time migrated to Massachusetts. That number rose to 50.6% from 1987-89. From 1990 to 1997, 58.5% of all Valadarenses migrating for the first time to the United States chose Massachusetts as their destination.<sup>44</sup>

**State of Destination According to Time of First  
Migration to the United States from Governador Valadares (1997)<sup>45</sup>**

State of Destination	Time of Migration		
	1967 to '86	1987 to '89	1990 to '97
<b>Massachusetts (%)</b>	45.1	50.6	58.5
<b>Florida (%)</b>	18.9	13.9	12.7
<b>New Jersey (%)</b>	12.3	16.3	14.4
<b>New York (%)</b>	18.0	10.8	5.1
<b>Other (%)</b>	5.7	8.4	9.3
<b>Total (%)</b>	100	100	100
<b>Total (N)</b>	122	166	118

Total Surveyed: 456  
 Total Valid: 406

However, there are other ways to document a link between Greater Boston and Governador Valadares. In my study, two out of the eight Brazilian immigrant narrators hailed from Governador Valadares (Edirson Paiva and Eduardo), while another came from the neighboring city of Conselheiro Pena (Valter Vitorino). Two more narrators came from Belo Horizonte (Naiara Souto and Fabio), increasing the total of Mineiros<sup>vi</sup> interviewed to five. The remaining three Brazilians came from the states of São Paulo (Ophelia Steadman and Regina Bertholdo) and Espírito Santo (Fausto da Rocha), both of which neighbor Minas Gerais. If my sample is in anyway representative, then when mapped out, Governador Valadares is the epicenter of Brazilian immigration to Boston.

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<sup>vi</sup> The term “Mineiro” refers to residents of the state of Minas Gerais.

It is also indicative that without exception, every narrator in my study, including the two non-Brazilians interviewed, mentioned the historic and high representation of Mineiros and, more specifically, Valadarenses in the Brazilian immigrant population.

While it is quite clear that there is indeed an intimate connection between Boston and Governador Valadares, Minas Gerais, identifying the exact nature of this linkage is a great deal more complicated. As far as I know, there is no conclusive study on the matter. There are, however, several theories circulating within the Brazilian immigrant community and among academics that try to pinpoint the origins of Greater Boston's Brazilian population.

Although it is possible that migration from Governador Valadares began with something as simple as an amorous relationship between an American visiting the region or by an adventurous Mineiro looking to blaze a trail to Boston, many Brazilian immigrants have found more elaborate and profound connections between Valadares and Massachusetts.

One possible explanation deals with the role of religious institutions, namely evangelical churches. Pastor Carlos Ferreira, for instance, described a relationship between evangelical churches in Greater Boston and their counterparts based in Brazil, saying:

I know a lot of people coming from Brazil to Boston knowing they have a big church here to receive them, an evangelical church. They don't necessarily stay in the church after they arrive, but they come knowing that if they come, ...the people in the churches, they are always helping the people just arriving from Brazil, they help them find a job, a place to live, to buy a car. They come because

they know there is a big church here and the pastors are so interested in helping the people.<sup>46</sup>

Given this information it may seem that there are religious linkages between the two regions. When asked to trace this connection back, Pastor Ferreira added, “I know some Portuguese people; they went to Brazil and brought some people back to join their church here, like some 15 to 20 years ago. They would always go to Brazil, like two, three, four times a year, and bring back some families from the same church promising them a job and housing in the beginning.”<sup>47</sup> While this linkage may have contributed to the flow of Brazilian migration, because the arrival of many of the migrants in my study significantly predate this particular religious exchange, there would have to be a significantly older religious connection to initiate the migratory flow of Mineiros to Greater Boston.

Another theory as to the mythic roots of Brazilian migration came from Valter Vitorino. Mr. Vitorino is a Somerville resident and owner of Café Brasil, the region’s first authentic Brazilian restaurant. He is also one of the most established immigrants in my study and one of the first Brazilians to immigrate to the Greater Boston area, coming over from Conselheiro Pena, Minas Gerais in 1969, when he was only 19 years old. At that time, Vitorino believes that there were no more than 15 fellow Brazilians in the region.

Although Mr. Vitorino did not know anyone in the area before moving to Boston, he thinks that the mass migration of Brazilians can be traced back to a Greek man and a little team called the Astros, claiming:

The reason [why there are so many Mineiros in Boston] is that back in '69 and the '70s, there was a Greek guy from Lowell.<sup>vii</sup> He owned a shoe factory. He also started a soccer team called the Astros, so then he started to bring those people here to play for his team and he would give them a job in his factory. I know a lot of people who were professional over there or semi-professional. They played back home in the big teams in Minas Gerais, like Atlético-MG, América-MG, Cruzeiro. They were all teams from Minas Gerais and those guys who didn't have much of a chance over there and they saw an opportunity to come here and that is when they started to arrive. In the '70s and '69 a lot came in to Lowell to play soccer for his Astros team. I know a few of those guys, a guy named Brito and another called Noventa. They are still around there, they brought their families around here, I think these are some of the first people to come from Minas Gerais, yes.

I find this theory quite amusing, in part because it reflects how central soccer is in Brazilian life. While Mr. Vitorino could not provide more specifics on the matter, his theory is not an impossibility. Brazil has long been renowned as the world's greatest exporter of soccer players, sending footballers all over the world.<sup>48</sup> Other studies on the matter have found some evidence pointing to a circular migration of Mineiros going to Lowell to play soccer in explaining a transnational network linking Valadares to Massachusetts.<sup>49</sup> In an interview with Regina Bertholdo, director of the Parent Information Center, Bertholdo revealed that she had immigrated to Boston from

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<sup>vii</sup> Indeed, the Lowell Astros were already an established soccer team by 1969, having already won the New England Soccer League in 1967.

Source: Holroyd, Steve and Dave Litterer. "The Year in American Soccer – 1967." 31 March 2005. The American Soccer History Archives. 2 Jan 2007. <<http://www.sover.net/~spectrum/year/1967.html>>

Taquaritinga, São Paulo in July of 1986 with the help of “a soccer player who played for my city’s team, at the junior levels, who befriended my father. ...Shortly after he returned to Minas, he came over here.”<sup>50</sup> While, Bertholdo did not mention if her friend’s talents with the ball assisted in his migration experience, this story helps, at the very least, to verify the importance of social networks in the migration process, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Regardless, of all the theories used to trace migration from Governador Valadares to its source, the most popular revolves around that region’s vast mineral deposits. Several of the Brazilian immigrants interviewed in my study noted the presence of a large North American population attracted to Governador Valadares by the prospect of extracting precious and semiprecious stones as well as other important minerals. Edirson Paiva, a native of Governador Valadares who immigrated to Somerville in 1982 and founded the Brazilian Times in 1988 (the nation’s first weekly paper devoted to the Brazilian immigrant community), said the following:

In Valadares, the city where most Brazilians over here come from, there was a large concentration of Americans and the English. In fact, there was one neighborhood that only had Americans in it. In this neighborhood, everything was made of wood, and us Brazilians had never seen a house made just of wood, so this neighborhood was seen as something different, where everything was of fine wood. I remember going by there as a kid, looking in and thinking, “wow, what houses these Americans have!”

The Americans were in Valadares because they dominated the railroad construction, oh and in the 1940s, these Americans came because they bought this

one mineral that we mined a lot of, called mica. At that time, it was in high demand in the military to make bellicose products or radios. I'm not quite sure, but I believe that one American brought a Brazilian over here, and this one brought another who started this chain of migration.<sup>51</sup>

Eduardo, another Valadarense who migrated in 1973, echoed much of what Edirson had noted:

The first group of migrants to come over came because of the mica commerce. How can I explain this? The Americans came over to Brazil from New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and all over, and started to make contacts in Valadares in the trade of mica and other precious minerals. They started to make friends and when these guys visited America, they would come back and speak highly of America, saying that they paid well, that if you worked you would get a lot of money. This gave the incentives for greater migration.<sup>52</sup>

News of this mica connection has spread well beyond Minas Gerais and is quite popular in the Brazilian immigrant community. Regina Bertholdo, a native of São Paulo State, claimed:

The story that I know of is that there was a factory from here in Massachusetts. I can't tell you exactly what it was of. I don't know if it was of iron, except that it was installed in Governador Valadares. It sent workers from here to there. ...from there, they [then] sent workers [from Governador Valadares] to here to do an internship to learn more about manual labor and resources. Who came, stayed. So much that I know one of the first persons to come over that have been here more than thirty years.

These findings seem to confirm some of the most compelling of explanations used in other studies. According Siqueira and Lourenço, “It turns out that since the 1940s Brazilians in Valadares had been familiar with Massachusetts... because its soil contained large deposits of mica,”<sup>53</sup> which the United States and the Allied war machine desperately needed to run their radios and radar, especially after production levels dropped in British-controlled India.<sup>54</sup> Governador Valadares and the surrounding Rio Doce Valley was also rich in iron ore, which was needed for steel production and was also in short supply after the iron ore deposits of central Europe fell under Nazi control. As such, it was at this time that the first Boston-based mining companies arrived to the region to extract mica,<sup>55</sup> but they were not alone. US firms also came in to reconstruct a railway, needed to ship the precious minerals to a port in Vitória, Espírito Santo. In order to protect workers from a particularly viral strain of malaria and to maximize production, the Rockefeller Foundation developed a health program known as the Rio Doce Program.<sup>56</sup>

Considering this, Maxine Margolis concluded that “because of the city’s role as a mining center for materials needed in the war effort [during World War II], a public health office was set up to combat malaria. Both Public health concerns and the mica industry brought American medical personnel and engineers to town, and some hired Valadarenses as household servants.”<sup>57</sup> According to Peggy Levitt, “When mining executives returned to Boston after the war, they brought Brazilians with them to work as domestic servants.”<sup>58</sup> As such, the first linkages between Boston and Governador Valadares seem to be a product of US military and commercial interests in the region.<sup>viii</sup>

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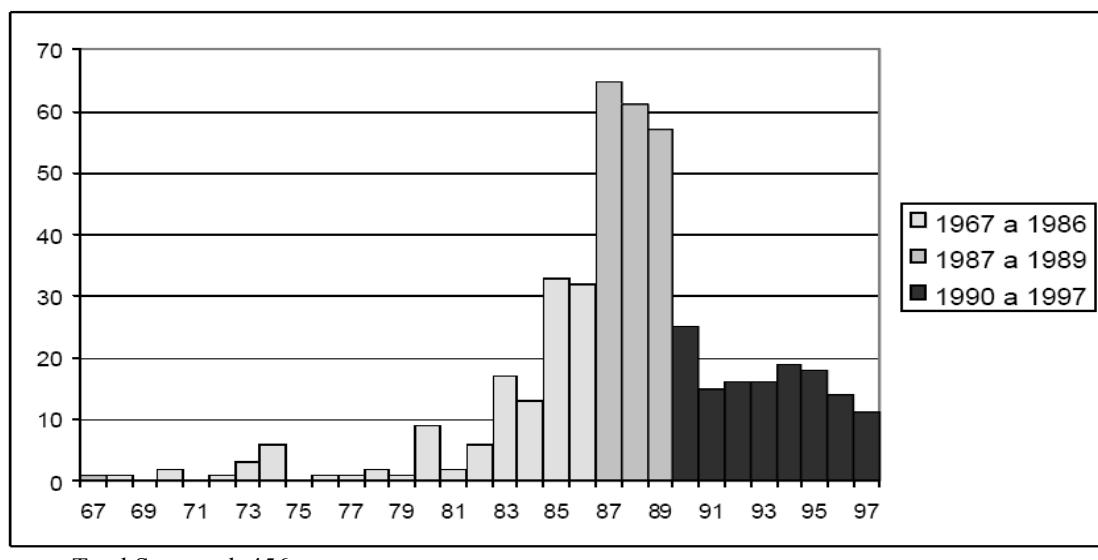
<sup>viii</sup> Curiously, while there are plenty of theories to account for the migration of Valadarenses to the United States and Greater Boston in particular, experts and community members alike are baffled as to why other

## Mass Migration and the Lost Decade

Regardless, there is a general consensus that by the 1980s Valadarenses, and more generally Mineiros, began to arrive en masse in Greater Boston, although exactly how the first contacts between Boston and Valadares originated remains a mystery. Wilson Fusco observed this phenomenon exodus of Valadarenses in his study of social networks and its role in explaining emigration from Governador Valadares.

When graphed according to the year of first migration to the United States, his survey of 449 immigrants from Governador Valadares to the US shows that emigration was virtually insignificant before 1980. His data is reproduced below.

**Immigration According to the Year of First Migration to the United States  
Governador Valadares, 1997<sup>59</sup>**



Total Surveyed: 456  
Total Valid: 449

Unfortunately, because his study dealt exclusively with the first immigration experience, it probably did not show the extent to which Valadarenses emigrated, especially after the

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Brazilian communities with strong ties to the United States have not immigrated to the same extent. Unfortunately, this is a question that is quite difficult to answer, especially when limited to studying the Greater Boston area.

onset of mass migration. For instance, the relative drop in Fusco's graph after 1990 may not represent an actual decrease in migration, as many Valadarenses may have been migrating for a second or third time by then.

Fusco's statistical analysis is supplemented by the words of Maxine Margolis, who stated, "The Small pioneer enclaves of Valadarenses and other Brazilians remained relatively unknown, [but then] during the 1970s and early 1980s the rate of immigration from Brazil began a slow by steady increase; then from the mid-1980s to the end of the decade it soared."

Moreover, in my study, various community members also noted the explosion in the Brazilian immigrant population some time during the late 1980s and early 90s. This change was so radical that some of the narrators could clearly feel it at the time. Valter Vitorino, for instance, migrated to Boston in 1969, when he believes that no more than 15 other Brazilians were living in the region, "but opened Café Brazil because at that time, in '86, [he] saw the potential, the opportunity to open up my own place because the Brazilian community was growing and growing, so I said, 'well, this is the time to open a restaurant.'"<sup>60</sup>

It is important to note that this wave of migration did not occur in a vacuum. Fausto, by calling himself an "economic refugee" when he emigrated from Brazil in 1988, echoed a common perception amongst Brazilian immigrants on how larger socio-economic changes affected their lives. Below I have transcribed part an interview with Regina Bertholdo to show how historically specific Brazilian migration to the US has been:

**Regina:** I think [Brazilians started to arrive en masse] in the 80s or the 90s. I think the late 80s, because of the situation in Brazil. [President] Tancredo Neves died,

and what's-his-name, the vice-president that became the president, [José Sarney,] there was a devalorization of the Cruzeiro, that then became the Cruzado, and then came Collor. So I think the political situation in Brazil gave the incentives to the people to leave there.

**Daniel:** Was it more political or economic?

**Regina:** Financial. Related to the politics. The Political-economy...the economic policy.

**Daniel:** Often times, it is said that during times of governmental repression, the people flee...

**Regina:** In the case of Brazil, it was inverted. It was during the “abertura” that people left Brazil.

**Daniel:** So it was because of the economic situation that people left Brazil in the late 80s?

**Regina:** Exactly.<sup>61</sup>

Reflecting on the changes in the Brazilian immigrant population, Eduardo added:

I can't talk about our community before 1973, but I imagine that it was the same as it was from '73 to '80 because from '73 to 1980, very few people arrived. It wasn't until after 1980, with the end of the Real, the Cruzeiro, no, the Cruzado, ah, I don't remember what it was, the currency changed so many times. Either way, it was at that time that people started coming here. They would come looking for a better market to help their families. So I think that the community started to grow in the '80s.<sup>62</sup>

From these dialogues, Regina and Eduardo made clear just how profound an impact the Lost Decade had on emigration. Indeed, the historical performance of the Brazilian economy can help our understanding of Brazilian migration patterns. Given the impressive growth that made Brazil the fastest growing economy in the world from 1870 to 1980,<sup>63</sup> it makes sense that emigration would be quite minimal before the Lost Decade.

However, with the economic crash of the 1980s and its political and economic reverberations that carried on well into the following decades, the need of Brazilians to find better economic opportunities abroad increased dramatically. Additionally, one can argue that after the Brazilian economic “miracle” raised expectations for a better future, the frustrations associated with the Lost Decade could have compelled Brazilians to emigrate with a greater sense of urgency than if they had become resigned to lower economic prospects.

Here, the trace migration of previous decades, originating from uncertain transnational networks between Boston and Governador Valadares, almost certainly facilitated the mass migration of Brazilian economic refugees. Indeed, in their work on Brazilian migration to Massachusetts, Siqueira and Lourenço sourced studies in Alejandro Portes’s The Economic Sociology of Immigration in defining migration as “a networking-creating process because it develops an increasingly dense web of contacts between places of origin and destination.”<sup>64</sup> They continue, adding that the “pattern of migration from Valadares suggests that each immigrant added his or her experience in the United States to a growing network composed of family, friends, and personal contacts” in a process known as “chain migration.”<sup>65</sup>

These statements support findings by Wilson Fusco, who noted that over 80% of migrants from Valadares leaving for the first time already knew of someone in the place of destination. Perhaps not surprisingly, the percentage of migrants who did not know of anyone in the region at the time of first migration decreased over time<sup>66</sup> and was smallest in Massachusetts. The data is reproduced below.

**MIGRANT CONTACTS**  
**Who Migrant Knew at Destination**  
**At Time of First International Migration to the United States**  
**Governador Valadares, 1997<sup>67</sup>**

<b>Who Migrant Knew at Destination</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Parents</b>	254	56.1
<b>Friends</b>	106	23.4
<b>People from Church</b>	1	0.2
<b>Nobody</b>	90	19.9
<b>Other</b>	2	0.4
<b>Total</b>	453	100

Total Surveyed: 456  
Total Valid: 453

**MIGRANT CONTACTS BY ERA OF IMMIGRATION**  
**Who Migrant Knew at Destination According to the Time of First**  
**International Migration Destined for the United States**  
**Governador Valadares, 1997<sup>68</sup>**

<b>Who Migrant Knew at Destination</b>	<b>Time of First Migration to US</b>		
	<b>1967 to '86</b>	<b>1987 to '89</b>	<b>1990 to '97</b>
<b>Parents (%)</b>	43.9	56.8	66.4
<b>Friends (%)</b>	25.8	23.0	21.6
<b>Nobody (%)</b>	29.5	19.7	11.2
<b>Other (%)</b>	0.8	0.5	0.7
<b>Total (%)</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Total (N)</b>	132	183	134

Total Surveyed: 456  
Total Valid: 449

**MIGRANT CONTACTS BY STATE OF ARRIVAL**  
**Who the Migrant Knew at Destination According to State of Destination**  
**at Time of First Migration to the United States**  
**Governador Valadares, 1997<sup>69</sup>**

<b>State of Destination</b>	<b>Who Migrant Knew at Destination</b>					<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>Total (N)</b>
	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Friends</b>	<b>Nobody</b>	<b>Other</b>			
<b>Massachusetts (%)</b>	56.3	26.0	17.3	0.4	100.0	208	
<b>Florida (%)</b>	50.9	21.3	27.8	0.0	100.0	61	
<b>New Jersey (%)</b>	64.4	15.3	20.3	0.0	100.0	59	
<b>New York (%)</b>	47.8	28.3	23.9	0.0	100.0	46	
<b>Other (%)</b>	58.1	19.3	22.6	0.0	100.0	31	

Total Surveyed: 456  
Total Valid: 405

The growing strength of the transnational networks and chain migration between Valadares and Boston that was addressed in Fusco's data and the report by Siqueira and Lourenço was also noted throughout my study. I found that Brazilian immigrants arriving later in the migration flow could rely on a far more extensive network of support than their predecessors could. For instance, when Valter Vitorino immigrated to Boston from Conselheiro Pena, small city neighboring Valadares, in 1969, he knew no one prior to migrating to the area. However, Valter did recognize that "of the 15 Brazilians here [in 1969], most were from Governador Valadares. They were the first ones to come to the USA. They were the ones who opened the door for the whole Brazilian community. So they came and started this big chain. Then the whole country showed up here."<sup>70</sup> By the time Eduardo emigrated from Governador Valadares in 1973, he already had a childhood friend living in Cambridge who could assist him in the migration process.

Moreover, we can observe the extent to which this transnational network had evolved by 1986 from Regina Bertholdo's description of her immigration process:

I decided on Boston because I already knew someone over here that would give me some help in coming over, finding a place to stay.... At the time I came over, he was living in Brighton. He already had some friends in the area. You know this mania of Mineiros coming over here, where one brings another who brings another who brings another. The majority of Brazilians here are Mineiros. It is impressive the amount of Mineiros over here, so I think he already had some friends over here that were already calling for him to come over.... After it seemed like things were not going well in soccer, so he came because every one was coming over, making money because there were many jobs at that time. This

was around the ‘80s and so he came over to Alston. We maintained contact as I graduated from the university, he found a place for me to live over here, and that is how I came over here. The first contacts were made through him, everything went through him.<sup>71</sup>

Knowing this, we can see how, with time, the transnational network between Minas Gerais and Boston had expanded well beyond the immediate vicinity of Governador Valadares and into Taquaritinga, São Paulo, more than 850km (500+ miles) away from the epicenter of emigration.

## The Changing Face of the Brazilian Immigrant

More than twenty years after Regina Bertholdo first migrated to the region in July of 1986, this network has grown even stronger, bringing migrants from a far greater range of Brazilian states. According to a May 2006 report from the New Bostonian Series, while immigration from Minas Gerais used to dominate the flow of Brazilian migration, today at least 16 out of Brazil’s 26 states are contributing to the migration stream. The states of Goiás, Paraná and Santa Catarina are now major exporting regions along with Minas Gerais.<sup>72</sup> Based on a study of Brazilians in Lowell, Massachusetts in 2002, Siqueira and Lourenço came to a similar conclusion, noting that over two-thirds of the population came from the states of Paraná, Santa Catarina, Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, or São Paulo (Map Provided in Appendix). Members of the community have also observed this change towards more geographic diversity. According to Fausto da Rocha:

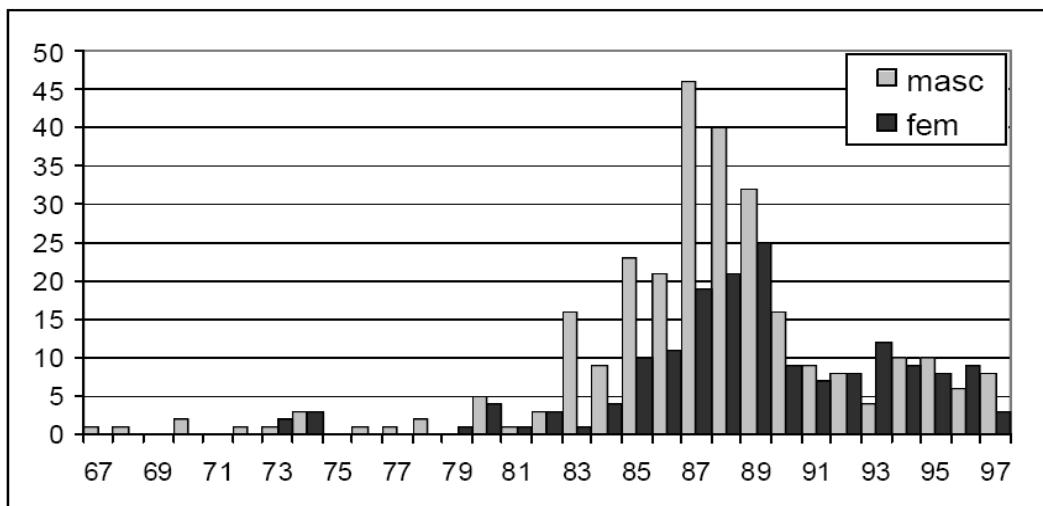
The Brazilian immigrant population here in Boston has always been predominantly Mineiro, but according to a study that we have done, the Capixaba

[native from the state of Espírito Santo] has long been the second largest group. So the Mineiro is first and the Capixaba is second. But today we see immigrants from practically all the states, like the Paranaense [native from the state of Paraná], Catarinense [Santa Catarina], Goiano [Goiás], and now, most recently we are seeing people from the Northeast, from Bahia, from Pernambuco and Alagoas.<sup>73</sup>

However there are other ways in which the Brazilian immigrant community has changed. Gender has been one of the most notable of these changes in the Brazilian immigrant community. Other community members have also noticed. Eduardo emphatically mentioned that when he first came to the United States in 1973, “for every 100 Brazilian men, there might be one or two women, if that.”<sup>74</sup> Edirson Paiva, who has lived in Somerville since immigrating in 1982, recalled organizing one of the first social events for Brazilians in the late 1980s at Charles’ Playhouse and attending several other “dinner and dancing” parties at a club in Boston’s South End. At these “festinhos,” which would regularly draw crowds of over two hundred, “maybe 40% were women and the rest, men.”<sup>75</sup>

Although both findings reflect a disproportionate amount of men relative to women, comparing these two responses does show a significant improvement in the gender balance between the early 1970s and late 1980s. Several other narrators have noted this trend and statistical data seems to be confirming their observations. Fusco, for instance, graphed the population of Valadaranse women and men according to the year of their first migration to the US. The data is reproduced below. Moreover, today estimates show that while there are still more Brazilian men than women, the break down is now 53% male, 47% female.<sup>76</sup>

**Immigrant according to Year of First Migration to the United States  
Governador Valadares, 1997.<sup>77</sup>**



Total Surveyed: 456

Total Valid: 449

Brazilian immigrants are also quite young. The Boston Redevelopment Authority estimates half of all Brazilian immigrants living in Boston are “young adults” between the ages of 20 and 34. In comparison, only a third of the general population in Boston fall in this same age bracket.<sup>78</sup> This information seems to match Edirson Paiva’s insight on the matter. He claims that “the bulk [of Brazilian immigrants], especially at the beginning, were mostly young people, between the ages of 18 and 40, at most.”<sup>79</sup> Given the profound economic instability that prompted such massive migration in the 1980s, it should be of little surprise that these findings have indicated a high concentration of immigrants of prime working age should be of little surprise. However, studies by Ana Cristina Braga Martes in 1996 have shown that the number of families have been increasing relative to single migrants since the 1990s. At the time of the investigation, she found that 48% of Brazilian immigrants were married at the time of migration to Massachusetts and that 52% brought all of their children with them.<sup>80</sup>

While it is fairly easy to measure the state of emigration, gender, and age of Brazilian immigrants, it is much more difficult to quantify the racial and class make-up of the Brazilian population in Greater Boston. In the case of Brazilians, race is especially difficult to measure as in Brazil the issue is not viewed in such black and white terms as in the United States. In my opinion, a look at the Brazilian population will show a great deal of shades as most have a mixture of European, African and Amerindian features. However, in her anthropological study of Brazilians in New York, Maxine Margolis did mention that this population was significantly lighter than the counterparts still at home. At the time of her study, Margolis considered 83% of her sample to be white, 8% to be of mixed ancestry or mulatto, with another 8% classified as black. In contrast, 45% of the population still living in Brazil chose to self-identify as black or mulatto.<sup>81</sup> Data from Brazilian Census in 2000 point to a similar demographic break down for the state of Minas Gerais.<sup>ix 82</sup>

Although I do not have a representative sample in my study, by Brazilian standards all of my subjects from Brazil probably would have been considered white. American standards, on the other hand, seem to be quite different. Regina, laughing, noted, “In Brazil I am ‘White,’ here I am ‘Other.’” Still, some of my interview subjects recognized African roots in their own bloodlines, many more noted that there is in fact a

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<sup>ix</sup> Interestingly, when taking a closer look at the 2000 Census data from a few key states, it appears that Minas Gerais is located at an ethno-geographic fault line where those states located to its south having an increasingly lighter complexion and those to the north often containing a population where the majority self-identify as black or mulatto. For instance, while the percentage of residents identifying themselves as “preta” or “parda” (black or mulatto/multiracial) in Minas Gerais is approximately 45%, that number tends to drop as one goes south, such is the case with the states of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Rio Grande do Sul, where the 44%, 27% and 13%, respectively, recognize African lineage. States to the north tend to have majority populations self-identifying as either preta or parda. In Bahia, for instance, 73% of the population consider themselves black or of mixed ancestry. In Pernambuco that number is 58% and in Amazonas it is 70%. Sources: Server Arquives. 2000. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. 15 April 2007. <[http://www.ibge.gov.br/servidor\\_arquivos\\_est/](http://www.ibge.gov.br/servidor_arquivos_est/)> Dir: Censos/Censo\_Demografico\_2000/populacao/Ufs. (N.B. Map Provided in Appendix)

large Afro-Brazilian and mulatto population. Particularly because my study focused on the first migrants from Governador Valadares, it is quite likely that my sample of narrators is a good deal lighter than the Brazilian immigrant population as a whole. Perhaps if emigration from Brazil spreads northward of Minas Gerais and not further into the noticeably more affluent and lighter south, then darker Brazilian migrants to Boston will become more pronounced. More importantly, as the social networks necessary for migration strengthen, it is quite possible that the immigration process incorporates more marginalized members of society, thereby including Brazilians with more African and Amerindian features.<sup>x</sup> However, at the moment, I am not aware of any studies that have noted significant changes in the racial makeup of Brazilian immigrants.

The class breakdown of Brazilian immigrants in the region may prove to be even more difficult to measure than racial background. One may wonder how even to begin to define class. Unfortunately, distinguishing between social classes is highly subjective and using self-identification, income, buying power, occupation, and education are all methods that have both merits and shortcomings. For this reason, in this final characteristic of class and the Brazilian immigrant population, I will simply present some statistical data on the matter, explaining only the most concrete findings and leaving the rest for the reader to decide.

Margolis estimates that according to buying power, in Brazil, 6% of the population is from the upper and upper-middle class, 34% are from the middle to lower-middle class, 34% are considered working class, and finally, 26% live in abject poverty. Interestingly, of those Brazilians immigrating to New York, 11% hail from the upper-

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<sup>x</sup> I will return to the issue of race in the Brazilian immigrant population in the subsection entitled “Identity Development” in the second chapter of this study.

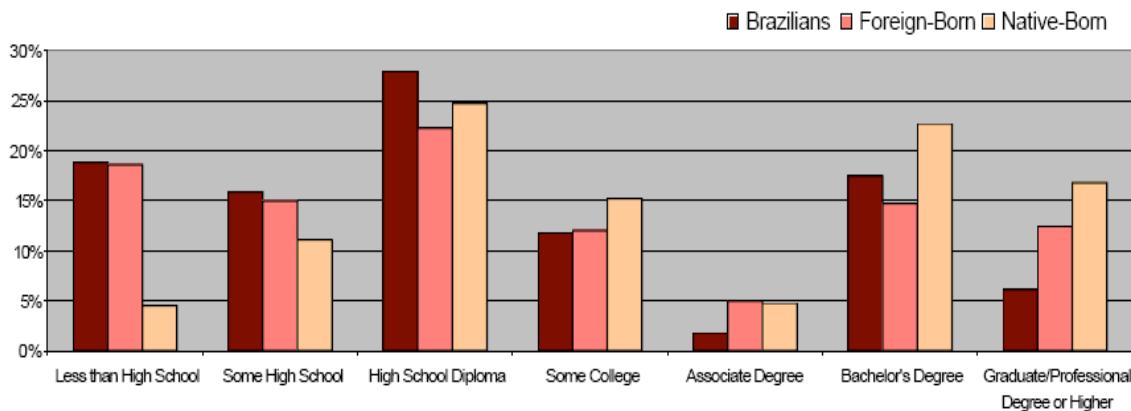
middle class, another 79% are middle and lower-middle class, and, finally, 10% live in the lower class.<sup>83</sup> From these statistics and data from other sources comparing the characteristics of Brazilian immigrants to that of the Brazilian population at large, it appears that migrants do not come from the poorest of socio-economic classes. This makes sense given that the cost of migration often prohibits those living in abject poverty from immigrating. Today, airfare alone can easily cost more than \$1,000. As for the upper class, many of the Brazilian narrators believed that the bulk of Brazilian emigrants left their homes as economic refugees, thereby making it less likely that domestic elites would choose to migrate.

Once in the United States, however, the relative position of the Brazilian immigrant is also one that cannot be characterized with either economic success or absolute failures. Turning to educational attainment, according to findings from the Boston Redevelopment Authority,<sup>xi</sup> the organization stated that “Brazilians are more likely to hold a high school diploma than both other immigrants and the native-born population.”<sup>84</sup> However, this may be slightly misleading. While Brazilians do appear to have the highest percentage of the population that stopped their formal studies with high school diploma, they are over represented, relative to other immigrants and the native-born, when it comes to the population without any high school or some high school experience.

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<sup>xi</sup> Because the Boston Redevelopment Authority bases much of its findings on US Census data, it is important to remember that for various reasons Brazilians tend to be under represented in their counts. Furthermore, those Brazilians that are most likely to be unaccounted for are the undocumented. This population often comes from humbler roots and once here experience far greater institutional barrier, namely the right to work. As such, findings based on Census data may be more optimistic than that actually experienced in the Brazilian immigrant community.

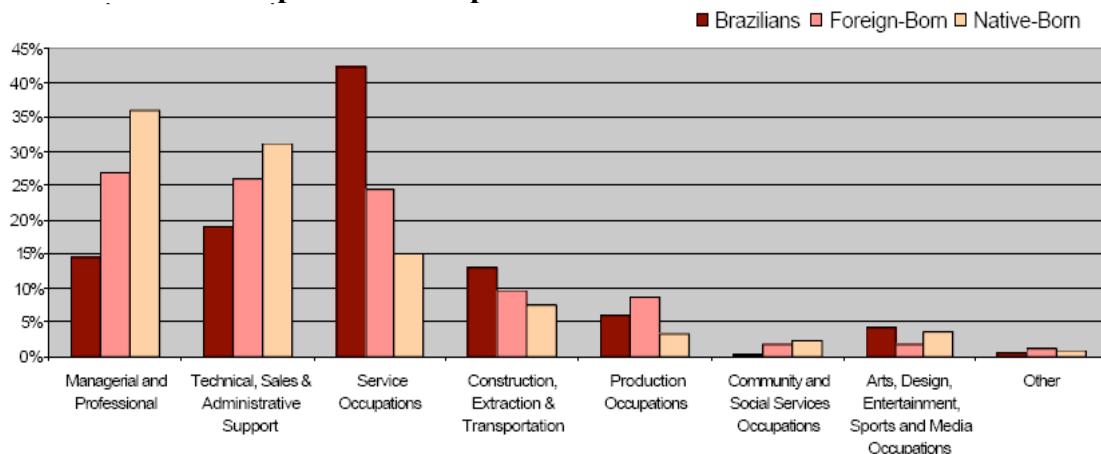
## Educational Attainment For Population 25 Years and Older<sup>85</sup>



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

When looking at labor force participation, the unemployment rate of Brazilians is less than half that of the rest of the population (3.4% compared with 7.2%). Furthermore, over 13% of Brazilians are self-employed, a rate that is three times higher than that of other immigrants and quadruple that of the native-born population. Still, when looking at the occupations that most Brazilians work in, one may note a particularly high representation of working class jobs, namely those working in the service sector and construction.<sup>86</sup>

## Occupations fro Population 25 Years and Older<sup>87</sup>



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

Another interesting find that makes it quite difficult to generalize the class background of Brazilian immigrants in Boston is the percentage of the population that

lives with a “middle-class standard of living.” Ultimately, the Brazilian’s standard of living relative to other immigrants and the native population varies considerably according to educational attainment, although their rate of return on education is quite low in general. While the Boston Redevelopment Authority probably is right to note that Brazilians with a master’s degree or higher have an alarmingly low return on their education mostly likely because their degrees may not be recognized in the United States and thereby requiring re-certification, I hypothesize that Brazilians generally suffer from their immigration status and the relative novelty of Brazilian social networks once in the US. While the transnational network may be strong enough to attract new migrants to the region, it may not yet be able to secure the highest paying jobs.

**Educational Attainment for 20-65 Year Olds in Boston with Middle-Class Standard of Living<sup>88</sup>**

Educational Attainment	Native-Born	Foreign-Born	Brazilians
1-12 years, no diploma or GED	16%	15%	8%
High school diploma or GED	31%	22%	16%
13-15 years, no college degree	38%	24%	30%
Associate's degree	45%	31%	50%
Bachelor's degree	59%	43%	47%
Masters or higher	75%	56%	29%
All	46%	28%	21%

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

In short, what can be concluded with certainty from this data is that the Brazilian population in the region can neither be considered destitute or wealthy relative to either their counterparts in Brazil or their new neighbors in Boston. In between these two extremes, however, are clear indications as to how the Brazilians socio-economic situation trails behind that of the native-born and other immigrants in certain key areas.

Turning now to the findings that can be gathered from my narrators, it is clear that they too fall somewhere in between the extremes of poverty and luxury. While I did not

ask about individual earnings, I was able to learn a little about each narrator's educational attainment, their occupations in Brazil and the United States, as well as their own assessment of their social class. In my study, two narrators left Brazil as university graduates, one with a degree in law (Ophelia Steadman), another in literature (Regina Bertholdo). Ms. Steadman, now retired, opened up her own insurance agency for Brazilians in Union Square called Brasil Insurance. Bertholdo currently serves as the director of Somerville's Parent Information Center. Two more attained the necessary schooling to work as a high school teacher (Edirson Paiva) and a bank secretary (Fausto da Rocha). Edirson founded and edits the Brazilian Times. Fausto is now the Executive Director of the Brazilian Immigrant Center. One more graduated from high school and worked in a metallurgy plant (Fabio). Fabio currently works a double shift as a custodian. Two more did not complete high school and immigrated young. One, Valter Vitorino, is the owner of Café Brasil, the other, Eduardo, works in construction. The final Brazilian narrator, Naiara Souto, left Brazil at age 7 and is currently studying at Tufts University.

Interestingly, despite the diversity in occupation and educational attainment, without exception, each and every Brazilian narrator identified oneself as a member of the middle class. While this could reflect their actual socio-economic status, I believe that it is more indicative of a society, both in the United States and in Brazil, that places high value in this class, while other classes, both higher and lower may be stigmatized for various reasons.

## **Life in Somerville and Greater Boston**

Having established the theoretical basis to explain the presence of a Brazilian immigrant community in Somerville and the Greater Boston Area, I turn now towards a more personal experience, describing the factors that play upon the everyday lives of this population.

### **Migration Habits**

The decision to migrate is a complicated process. As previously established, Brazilians, for the most part, leave their homes for economic reasons, hoping to raise their standard of living and that of their family, although some Brazilians come to the Boston area for educational reasons, hoping to study at the some of region's schools or, at the least, to practice their English. Either way, the goal is almost always to return after a short sojourn with more human and/or physical capital.

According to Valter Vitorino, "My plan, because when I was only 19 when left my mother in Brazil, was to tray things over here for one year and then I was going to come back."<sup>89</sup> Fabio echoed this sentiment, claiming:

I came here two years ago, through Mexico, because back in Belo Horizonte I was working, earning very little at the steel plant. Well it was a decent job but not enough to support my wife and two daughters who study at a private school back home. I am here to pay for there education. I plan to work here another two years, save up some money and then go back to open up my own little business, perhaps a bakery or a small restaurant. But lets see what God and America has in stored.<sup>90</sup>

Fausto da Rocha related the motivation behind his migration experience to that of other immigrants, asserting, “I came, like everyone else, to work. At the beginning, I always thought about going back. After four or five years, I’d save up enough to go back and start up my own business, buy some land, or a store.”<sup>91</sup>

However, not everyone came to Boston with the exclusive goal of making money. Edirson Paiva’s goals were two-fold. In explaining the why he immigrated to Boston, Edirson said, “I came to improve my English, because for me to lecture at the university, which was a dream of mine, I would have to perfect my English, either in Brazil or abroad. So I decided to come here, and take advantage of the wave of migration to mix things up, to mix working here, earning some dollars and to improve on my English.”<sup>92</sup> Both Regina Bertholdo and Ophelia Steadman also came, hoping to perfect their English before returning to their careers in Brazil. In the case of Ms. Bertholdo, “the goal was to stay only one year.”<sup>93</sup> Ophelia, who came through a cultural exchange program, also hoped to stay no more than a year.<sup>94</sup> Regardless, both economic- and education-driven migration were seen as only temporary, an experience that was supposed to enrich their value and the lives of their family back in Brazil.

It is important to note, however, that the migration process has significantly changed over the past few years. This is largely due to progressively more restrictive legislation emanating from the US Congress. Although some migrants were able to acquire student or work visas directly from Brazil through certain cultural exchange programs, as was the case with Ophelia Steadman, who migrated through an international agency based in São Paulo during the late 1960s,<sup>95</sup> traditionally the bulk of Brazilian immigrants entered the country with a tourist visa. After incurring the costs of getting a

visa and purchasing a roundtrip airfare, these migrants then overstay their visas, becoming undocumented immigrant workers in the process.

This practice has been used for many years amongst Brazilians. Edirson Paiva, for instance, did exactly this when he immigrated to the United States in 1982. Edirson was lucky enough to qualify for the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act's "amnesty" program that allowed him to have "legal" status and begin the path to citizenship. Mr. Paiva noticed a significant improvement in his life because of his regularized immigration status. Two years later he founded the Brazilian Times, the first weekly newspaper in the nation devoted to Brazilian immigrants.

Many others have not been so lucky. Fausto da Rocha, executive director of the Brazilian Immigrant Center, is one such example. In 1988, he entered the country with legal status, with the plan to overstay his visa limits and find employment, something that was not allowed through his tourist visa. Fausto lived more than 14 years in this country without the proper papers before turning himself in. While Fausto was fortunate enough to have his immigration status changed for the better, his decision to go to federal immigration officials and ask for his cancellation of deportation was quite risky and rare. Because of his work though the Brazilian Immigrant Center he was able to garner a great political support. At the time of his hearing in 2004, not only was there a crowd of hundreds of supporters rallying for his cause, but he also could count on the defense of local activists, politicians, such as the City of Boston's Councilor at Large, Felix Arroyo, and the press.<sup>96</sup>

However, in the last few years, it has become much more difficult to enter the country through such legal means. Border crossings are now quite common, bringing in a

population with an even more precarious legal situation. From Fiscal Year 1992 to FY 2005, the number of Brazilians apprehended every year at the US-Mexican border skyrocketed by more than 500-fold. While only 59 Brazilians were detained in FY 1992, the latest estimates from the US Border Patrol for FY 2005 predict that number to jump to 31,072, making Brazilians the third most apprehended nationality listed as OTM (Other than Mexican) in that year.<sup>97</sup>

**OTM (Other Than Mexican) Apprehensions Along the Southern Border  
By Country of Citizenship, FY 1994-2004\***

**\*Ranked by cumulative total apprehensions per country from FY 1992-2004.<sup>98</sup>**

Country	Fiscal Year												
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Honduras	2,679	3,536	2,963	4,031	5,523	5,161	7,758	15,982	9,687	8,680	8,872	13,841	23,843
El Salvador	4,393	5,174	4,935	3,528	4,671	4,711	7,317	7,568	8,026	8,464	6,835	9,347	16,726
Guatemala	3,690	4,458	4,376	3,839	3,334	3,592	5,275	4,703	4,600	4,586	5,386	6,958	10,819
Brasil	59	107	133	260	175	110	191	488	1,241	3,105	2,946	5,008	8,616
Nicaragua	406	1,049	1,113	902	678	335	399	759	607	597	525	688	1,380
Ecuador	178	340	685	517	225	199	313	498	1,106	1,418	598	440	530
People's Republic of China	150	710	96	133	134	49	196	205	308	249	319	286	865
Dominican Republic	451	113	60	121	179	173	122	206	239	426	247	331	350
Cuba	78	211	355	208	77	46	97	401	457	213	146	90	139
Colombia	183	141	121	141	111	96	104	147	231	292	143	164	168

Source: Office of Immigration Statistics, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, February 2006.

Included in this wave of Brazilians crossing the US-Mexican border is Fabio. In 2004, after several failed attempts, Fabio gave up on the prospects of obtaining a tourist visa to fly directly to Boston. According to Fabio, “it was crazy, the lines were so long that there was this one guy who would earn his living renting chairs for a dollar outside the US Consulate in Rio, and once you finally got in, after waiting all day with all your work papers to get the visa, the guy behind the desk would say that after September 11<sup>th</sup>, things had changed and he couldn’t give me the visa.”<sup>99</sup> Instead, Fausto flew to Mexico where, at the time, Brazilians still did not need to provide a visa to enter. After several days waiting in Mexico, he finally crossed the boarder with a group of Brazilians, guided by *coyotes*, human traffickers. Once arriving in Dallas, packed with other Brazilians in a

truck full of cargo, Fabio was placed in a van and driven straight to Somerville. The trip from Dallas to Somerville took full day. In total, the trip from Belo Horizonte to Boston cost \$7,500, leaving Fabio with an immense debt. In the two year since immigrating to Somerville, Fabio has worked double shifts as a custodian. It has only been because of this that he has been able to pay back the last of his financial debts to friends and family for this. Fabio plans to return to his family in Brazil in the next two years. He misses his two daughters and wife terribly, leaving him with an equally significant personal debt to his family. Unfortunately, it can be quite difficult to convince oneself that you are no longer indebted for having left loved ones behind.

However, in my interviews, many narrators have noted that the Brazilian's mode of entry is changing once again. Fabio laughed when I asked how migration patterns have changed, he said that the price of immigration keeps going up and that the last he heard, it costs at least \$12,000 to enter the US, adding that "the Mexicans are now asking for our visas too. If I were to do this all over again today, I'd have to fly into Guatemala first!"<sup>100</sup>

Indeed, until recently, Brazilians didn't need a visa to enter Mexico, however, all that has changed when Mexico suspended a prior agreement with the Brazilian government on October 23, 2005, presumably under pressure from the United States to curb Brazilian immigration.<sup>101</sup> Not surprisingly, this has had significant repercussions for Brazilians hoping to enter the country. According to Juliana Cézar Nunes, even before the Mexican government required visas to enter the country, in the first seven months of 2005, "7.2 thousand Brazilians were denied entry to Mexico, that is, they were not even allowed to leave the airport. Another 1.3 thousand were deported after being arrested by the Mexican police at border checkpoints."<sup>102</sup> Nunes estimates that with the changes in

Mexican immigration policy, the price of crossing the US-Mexico border could jump to \$25,000.<sup>103</sup>

At the same time that Brazilians are finding it increasingly difficult to cross the US-Mexican border, these immigrants now have to contend with the end of a “catch and release” policy for OTMs (Other than Mexicans). Previously, non-Mexicans apprehended by the US Border Patrol were not deported immediately, but were instead released in the United States with instructions to report back to authorities for a future court date. Recently, however, the Border Patrol has replaced “catch-and-release” practices with a “catch-and-return” policy, sending immigrants detained crossing the border immediately home.<sup>104</sup>

As one could imagine, this has put a dent, at the least for now, in Brazilian migration to the region, and the community has noticed. Fausto da Rocha of the Brazilian Immigrant Center estimates that only one fifth as many Brazilians are entering the country in 2006 as in the year before.<sup>105</sup> However, the US Border Patrol estimates that apprehensions in fiscal year 2006 dropped to 1,500, which represents a 95% decrease from FY 2005, when a record 31,000 Brazilians were apprehended.<sup>106</sup> Regardless, Fausto isn’t the only one in the community to have noticed this halt in recent migration. Some community members have hypothesized that this drop in migration may also reflect an improvement in the Brazilian economy; however, this may be more of an assessment of President Lula during his ultimately successful reelection bid than it is an actual analysis of life in Brazil.

## **Settlement Patterns and The Evolution of Community**

As director of the Parent Information Center, a large part of Regina Bertholdo's job is to enroll immigrant children into the Somerville Public Schools. Bertholdo confirmed this larger trend has had an impact on Somerville's Brazilian population, adding, "...around here...we can see that the influx has dropped. We know this from the drop of Brazilian children enrolling in the public schools. It has really dropped. The flux hasn't stopped increasing, it has decreased."

Bertholdo did, however, give another explanation for this Somerville phenomenon. "I think that the cost of life, the cost of rent, I think that... I went to a conference by SCC a few weeks ago in East Somerville and it is a factor of money and socio-economic factors, so poorer families are having to move out."<sup>107</sup>

Interestingly, by mentioning the increasing cost of rent as a way to explain the out migration of Brazilians, Regina Bertholdo has touched upon one of the things that first attracted Brazilians to Somerville: the availability of cheap housing for rent. When asked why the Brazilian community grew so fast in Somerville, Valter Vitorino responded, "Affordable housing. While an apartment in Allston might cost one price, in Somerville, the same place would be 30% cheaper. Today the market has inflated, but it used to be much cheaper in Somerville."<sup>108</sup> Regina Betoldo also adds, "The socio-economic situation [in Somerville] was always very dense. So there are lots of apartments in a little space. So everyone lives one on top of the other. So there was... the supply was equal to the demand, there were places to rent, large or small, and at accessible prices."

Indeed, such justifications for the large yet dwindling number of Brazilians in Somerville seems to fit well with statistical data and scholarly findings. Although still

cheaper than many other neighboring towns and cities, over the past two decades, residential property values have been growing rapidly in Somerville, pricing out more vulnerable and working-class residents as the city gentrifies. Pacini Hernandez is only one of a growing number of academics to have noted that the expansion of public transit, most notably into Davis Square in 1984, has coupled with a high-tech economic boom that emanated from neighboring Cambridge during the 1990s and the abolition of rent control by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to drastically change the face of Somerville residents.<sup>109</sup> While one can imagine the impact that rising real estate values can have for a city that more than doubles the national average of renter-occupied units (33.8%) with 69.4% of Somerville residents living in rental housing,<sup>110</sup> the result such gentrification has on immigrant communities is all the more dramatic. This is especially true when one considers Margolis's findings in her ethnographic work with Brazilians in New York City. In her own words, "After arriving in the United States, Brazilians, like other immigrants, have two immediate priorities: [the first of which is] finding a place to live."<sup>111</sup> As such, Brazilians and other recent migrants are among the most sensitive and vulnerable to changes in affordable housing.

However, there are other factors that help explain why so many Brazilians live in Somerville. One part of this explanation may derive from Somerville's history as a sanctuary city in the 1980s to better accommodate the large number of Salvadoran and other Central American immigrants that flooded the region, fleeing the bloody civil war that consumed their homelands region. Perhaps it is because this history as a sanctuary city that Regina Bertholdo concluded, "Where there is a sensation that the population is

welcomed, people go about establishing themselves. Somerville has always been a good place for immigrants [and] the schools were always open, for immigrants.”<sup>112</sup>

Still others, such as Edirson Paiva and Carlos Ferreira, the Portuguese pastor at the Assembly of God Alliance on 21 South Street in Somerville, have suggested that the presence of a more established Portuguese community in Somerville and Cambridge could have contributed to the initial flow of Brazilian migrants to Somerville. Edirson Paiva believes “that there is such a huge concentration of Brazilians in Somerville because it was so easy to find a place to rent because in Somerville, the majority of home owners are Portuguese, so this facilitated the first communication to find rent, because when you arrive, the first thing you do is find a place to live.”<sup>113</sup> Pastor Carlos Ferriera added, “the Brazilians started coming here because they found some people speaking Portuguese, I hear lots of cases of the Portuguese people helping the Brazilians living around Boston. So yes, it is true, there was a lot of *amizade* [friendship] in the beginning.”<sup>114</sup>

Such an explanation makes sense given the linguistic similarities between the two. Although relations between Brazilians and the Portuguese have often been antagonistic, for the first Brazilians, any contact with a fellow Portuguese speaker may be reason enough to begin a friendship.

A combination of these factors (low housing costs, a friendly city government, and the presence of a more established Portuguese-speaking community) is probably the best way to explain how a small community of Brazilians began to form. From this small establishment, a few entrepreneurs may have made the region more visibly Brazilian, opening the first restaurants and other stores that cater to Brazilians, essentially sending

up a flag and attracting more migrants to the region. Places that serve as a meeting ground also serve as places to establish the same informal networks that helped to bring Brazilians to the United States in the first place.

However, Edirson Paiva adds one important caveat to this explanation. He believes “you can’t just talk about a Brazilian community in Somerville alone because we are very spread out because the Brazilian comes here to work so he has to work somewhere, it doesn’t matter where, and then he will move to that city.”<sup>115</sup> Valter Vitorino added:

In Somerville, the problem is that it is hard to talk about just Somerville because the Brazilians around Somerville could actually be living in Somerville, Malden or Everett. They are all very close to each other, so the community has expanded far beyond just that area. You might think someone lives in Somerville but they just moved to Everett. So if you want to talk about Somerville, you really should talk about Greater Somerville. Well actually, if you want to talk about Brazilians, you have to talk about Greater Boston, which connects the Brazilians in Somerville, Allston, Brighton, East Boston, Malden, Everett, and so on because it is all one big community. Today, people are starting to take root in once city, buying a house, but in the past, we have always moved a lot.<sup>116</sup>

Indeed, as Mr. Paiva and Mr. Vitorino suggest, limiting a study about Brazilian immigration to any one city has its drawbacks. Especially once the immigrant has grown accustomed to the region and is no longer totally dependent on assistance from his first contacts in the area, one may wonder why a Brazilian immigrant would confine his stay to any one city if he had already crossed international borders by any means necessary in

hopes of working towards a better future. Furthermore, it is important to note that through the migration process, Brazilians in Massachusetts have become a population based far more on the strength of social networks than on the connection to a particular plot of land. This is characteristic of Diasporas and other immigrant communities.

Still, despite the relative mobility of this population, Brazilian immigrants have begun to settle in the Greater Boston Area. This, however, rarely is the original intention of the migrant. While not statistically representative, it is expressive that not one of the eight Brazilians interviewed in my study came to the United States planning to make a permanent move. Instead, with the notable exception of Naiara, who believed that she was on vacation when she migrated to Somerville at the age of seven, all of these participants came with the explicit goal of returning to Brazil after a couple of years of work and/or studying English.

While I did not encounter any of the “target earners”<sup>xii</sup> described in Maxine Margolis’s study on Brazilian immigrants in New York, these findings appear to be characteristic of the sojourners portrayed in her text and other scholarly works because the migrant’s intent is to have the migration experience be a temporary one. However, it appears that with time, Brazilians have been forced to confront a conflict in ideology in that their migration patterns do not necessarily match their original reasons for migrating. For instance, in my study, only one of eight Brazilian narrators, Fabio, still expects to return to Brazil in the near future. He has been living in the United States for just over two years. All of the others have been living in Greater Boston for at least ten years, with

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<sup>xii</sup> Immigrants who work with the specific objective of paying for a particular good, such as land or housing. Margolis, Maxine L. An Invisible Minority: Brazilians in New York City. Boston: Ally and Bacon, 1998. p. 13.

most living here for more than two decades. As such, these Brazilian immigrants seem more like settlers than the “birds of passage” described by Siquiera and Lourenço.<sup>117</sup>

These findings, of course, do not disprove the conclusions made by several other scholars. My report, after all, is a qualitative study and not a quantitative one capable of concluding a changing trend in Brazilian migration. However, there are quantitative studies that show that in 2005, nearly a third (30%) of all homes sold to immigrants in Massachusetts were sold to Brazilians.<sup>118</sup> In addition, there are over 150 small businesses owned by Brazilians in the Greater Boston Area alone.<sup>119</sup> These statistics showing such a large number of Brazilian small business and home owners are a testament to a growing community of Brazilian immigrants who have clearly invested in a more permanent stay in the region and behaving as settlers.<sup>120</sup>

However, the Brazilian immigrants in my study have also noted that a stronger Brazilian immigrant community has begun to sprout as more and more immigrants have decided to grow roots into the region. There are many reasons that could explain why Brazilians have decided to settle. Many have to do with personal choices. Some have become infatuated with their new home. Eduardo, for instance, is not alone when he says, “I have always loved America. I love everything about America.”<sup>121</sup> Valter Vitorino adds, “You know what, America, especially places like Boston, is a place to raise people. The education here is much better; there is less danger, less violence. Remember this is a First World country, although here there is a lot more stress, you can’t take it easy. But I love it here.”<sup>122</sup>

Others have noted that they have had troubles adapting to Brazil after having lived in the US, and still more explain that their stay has just happened as a result of

perpetually putting off their return home. Eduardo, for instance, conceded that not everyone stays because they adore the United States, suggesting that “when you are always helping family, your parents, and trying to earn more, you keep putting off your return and with the amount of time you stay here you learn to like the land. Once you learned to like it here, how do you go back? To start all over again? All my friends were left behind; I made new friends here. If I go back today, all I have is my family.”<sup>123</sup> Indeed, many Brazilians who have returned to Brazil have come back because they couldn’t readapt to the economic climate or because home isn’t quite how the migrant remembered.

However, Fausto da Rocha boldly placed the evolution of a Brazilian immigrant community within a larger change in the US legal system, noting that that this development has occurred within the last decade because of recent changes in immigration law. He said the following on the matter:

Another big change in our community is that it used to be a transitory community. People would come, stay two or three years, and then they returned to Brazil. And then after two years they came back again. So they came and went.

And so that is how things were until 1996, when some any immigrant legislation was passed.<sup>xiii</sup> So that completely changed the characteristics of our community. So they passed this law that said that if you were here more than 6 months without documents, and if you left the country, you were prohibited from

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<sup>xiii</sup> Here Fausto is referring to Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. According to Attorney Henry J. Chang: The new INA §212(a)(9)(B)(i)(I) provides that any alien who has been unlawfully present in the United States (presence in the United States after the expiration of lawful status or presence in the United States without being admitted or paroled) for a period of more than 180 days but less than 1 year and voluntarily departed the United States (whether or not pursuant to section 44(e) prior to the commencement of proceedings, is excludable for a period of 3 years. The new INA §212(a)(9)(B)(i)(II) provides that any alien who has been unlawfully present in the United States (presence in the United States after the expiration of lawful status or presence in the United States without being admitted or paroled) for 12 months or more is excludable for 10 years.

Chang, Henry J. “The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996.” 2006. Chang & Boos Attorneys-at-Law. 28 Dec. 2006 <<http://www.americanlaw.com/1996law.html>>

returning to the US for three years. If you lived here for more than one year, if you left the country and you wanted to come back, you were prohibited from returning for ten years.

It is a law that I question a lot, because they created it saying that it was supposed to stop people from coming, but it is my understand that it was created to stop people from leaving. Why? Because for you to become a productive worker, you need at least two to three years of experience, so when you start to be productive for your company, you would go home. So that business would have to train another guy and start again. So I don't know if this law was passed to keep people out or to keep them in. Because businesses were loosing money with these transitory immigrants, then the immigrants started living here seven, eight, nine, ten years or more.

So it was at this time that immigrants would stay here longer and the number of immigrants really began to grow because the husbands started brining their wives, the wives brought their husbands, and the couples would bring their children. So it increased the number of immigrants coming in through Mexico and so the community started to grow roots because until that moment the majority was transitory. So I think that with this law we started to see immigrants take root in the community.<sup>124</sup>

If such settlement patters have only accelerated within the last decade, it may partially explain why older studies, such as those by Margolis, Siqueira, and Lourenço, have described Brazilian immigrants as a sojourners or birds of passage. Recent developments, however, do indicate that a growing number of Brazilians are indeed settling in the region, creating a more established and stronger Brazilian immigrant community.

## **Identity Development**

This evolution towards a more settled Brazilian immigrant community may have a significant impact on the Brazilian migrant's identity development. However, any analysis on how Brazilians living in Greater Boston will identify themselves in the generations to come is purely speculative. As such, I will base this section of my report on the here and now, focusing on what Brazilian immigrants have said on the matter in the interviews conducted during the course of my study.

What I can conclude on the Brazilian immigrant's identity formation is that Brazilians do not willingly self identify as Hispanic. In fact, some actively resist being associated with the term Hispanic. This finding, however, is not terribly surprising. Many other scholars have come to the same conclusion. This can partially be explained by the fact that a reference to Spain and the Spanish language is implied within the very spelling of the word "Hispanic." As previously established earlier in this report, Brazil was colonized by the Portuguese and not the Spanish and, consequently, Brazilians are primarily Portuguese-speakers and do not necessarily speak Spanish. Therefore, it would be a misnomer to call a Brazilian a "Hispanic."

Indeed, virtually all of the Brazilians interviewed for this report pointed out how inappropriate a Hispanic identity would be for Brazilians on such etymological grounds. Edirson Paiva conceded, "Yes, there exists this dispute of terminology, of who we are, because the Americans box us in as Hispanic or Spanish and then we dispute this because we are not Hispanic because we are descendants of the Portuguese."<sup>125</sup> Mr. Vitorino seemed to demonstrated some frustration with this mix-up, claiming, "Many people say, 'Oh, you are Hispanic, you speak Spanish.' No we are not Spanish, we are Brazilians. In

Latin America we are the only ones that speak Portuguese. We are Brazilians with a Portuguese tongue.”<sup>126</sup>

However, unlike other studies depicting a certain animosity between Brazilians and Hispanics, I did not find any Brazilians rejecting a Hispanic identity because they dislike Hispanics or view this population as inferior. Instead, many Brazilians believe that society at large has a negative perception of Hispanics, and because of this, they have tried to dissociate themselves from a stigmatized population. According to Regina Bertholdo, “The Brazilian dreads being confused as Hispanic,” adding that “those who are here do not like being subjugated as Hispanics. ...[The term] is pejorative. And it irritates me.” When asked to elaborate, she noted that:

To be identified as a Hispanic is to be identified with a poor population and also with the presumption that people will look to you and start speaking in Spanish and that anyone who has a face that doesn’t look American speaks Spanish that looks Latino or is just darker speaks Spanish. It’s a question of ego, because this is how I felt when people looked at me and started speaking in Spanish. I felt infuriated. It was the presumption of others that bothered me. Why are you speaking Spanish with me?

Interestingly, at the same time that Brazilians reject the Hispanic title on the grounds that such a term is not only a misnomer, but also pejorative, several informants revealed that relations between these two populations are quite amicable. Ms. Bertholdo, for instance, mentioned that “there is camaraderie. In the work place... because of the language. It’s the language that divides; it’s the language that unites. I think that between a Brazilian and a Hispanic, the communication can exist. So, yes,

there is camaraderie.” Many of the other narrators have echoed such statements. Still, it is important to note that when Brazilians do speak of their amicable relations with Hispanics, they often refer to this population as Latinos. When this happens, it is not uncommon for Brazilians to show some affinity towards a Latino identity.<sup>127</sup> Ophelia Steadman offers one such example, saying, in one breath, “I identify more with Latino people,” and in the next, “I find it easier to get along with Latinos.”<sup>128</sup>

Others have spontaneously self-identified as Latino when asked about political or social forces that affect both Brazilians and Hispanics. Edirson Paiva caught me by surprise after adding to his commentary about the hysteria surrounding immigrants as a security threat that “*iso não tem nada que ver com nos Latinos,*” which translates to “this [security threat] has nothing to do with us Latinos.”<sup>129</sup>

Still another reason that helps explain why some Brazilians have adopted a Latino identity comes from geographic and cultural similarities between the ancestral homes of Brazilians and Hispanics. When asked to elaborate on why he used the term “*nos Latinos,*” or “us Latinos,” Edirson added that Brazilians are Latinos because “they speak a language derived from Latin” and that they “are a part of the Latin Peninsula.”<sup>130</sup>

Therefore, from what was gathered from these interviews, it is clear that the belief that Brazilians have geographic, cultural, and linguistic commonalities with other Latin Americans while also sharing similar experiences with Hispanics as a marginalized population once in the United States helps to explain why many Brazilians have accepted a Latino identity. Fausto da Rocha echoed these essential commonalities by saying:

In Brazil, a Latino is the citizen born in Latin America, which is us, Brazilians, and our neighbors who speak Spanish. What changes this is American culture, because in the US, they see the Latino as a Spanish Speaker. So here is where the differentiation begins. So, no, I am not a Hispanic, I am a Latino, I am a Brazilian. But the relationship with Latinos is an issue of work, we have to work together. We have already worked with Latinos in campaigns to improve the conditions for us all. So there is this necessity because we are Latinos, so there is a necessity to work with them because if we just considered ourselves Brazilian with just our Brazilian identity, for us to achieve the same results that we have with Latinos, it would take some 50 years. But if we work with them, who have been here for years and years, we will achieve more together, equally.

With this we can also see how an understanding of political power in unity strengthens the affirmation of a Latino identity.

However, there is an additional factor that was not directly addressed by the narrators during the course of this study that may still be quite significant and relates to the political origins of the terms Hispanic and Latino. Unlike the word Hispanic, which was made popular by the US Census in 1980 as a replacement for the unpopular “Spanish-surnamed” option, the term Latino is not one imposed on by North American society. Instead, “Latino” is believed to have been created by Latin Americans living in the US to refer to themselves, and as such is often viewed as more organic and empowering.<sup>131</sup> This difference, for instance, may have contributed

to Bertholdo's rejection of a "pejorative" Hispanic identity despite accepting a Latino identity.

Regardless of the reasons behind a far stronger affirmation of a Latino identity when compared to a Hispanic one, even those Brazilians who self-identify as Latino recognize that by doing so they are touching upon a controversial topic. Not all Brazilians are willing to accept a Latino identity, and those who do often only do so with lukewarm support. Ophelia Steadman, despite having previously stated that she identified "more with Latino people," added that "*o brasileiro quer ser brasileiro*," or "the Brazilian wants to be a Brazilian."<sup>132</sup> Edirson Paiva, who also self-identified as Latino, was quick to note that significant differences in song and dance are only some of the ways Brazilians are culturally distinct from the rest of the Latino population.

While Edirson may have made the mistake of ignoring the cultural differences not only between but also within the other Latin American nations by assuming that Hispanics come from one culturally homogeneous background, both Paiva and Steadman touch upon the importance of maintaining the cultural integrity of Brazilian immigrants. Regina Bertholdo also added that Brazilians might suffer from a certain "*mania de grandeza*," or a "mania of greatness." This phrase refers to a popular belief that has long been supported by local elites that prophesizes Brazil as a "sleeping giant" destined to be an economic and political superpower.<sup>xiv</sup> As such, my Brazilian informants made clear that the Brazilian immigrant community takes great pride in its unique cultural traditions. Other scholars have come to similar conclusions. In their study, Siqueira and Lourenço mentioned that such a reaffirmation of the Brazilian

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<sup>xiv</sup> This "*mania de grandeza*" is so pervasive that the Brazilian national anthem repeatedly alludes to Brazil as "an intense dream, a vivid ray / of love and hope" and "A giant by thine own nature."

immigrant's national identity is "a strategy for unity and survival," adding that "by asserting their identity, they reinforce internal cohesion, repeating the experience of most first-generation immigrants to the United States."

However, there is reason to believe that the halfhearted acceptance or outright rejection of a Latino identity is based on factors unrelated nationalist pride or even as a form of cultural integrity as a survival mechanism. Conflicting perceptions of Brazil's geographic location often is a significant complication. When asked if she believed that most Brazilians see themselves as Latin American, or rather if Brazil is situated in Latin America, Regina Bertholdo answered, "All this depends on the level of education. The more educated will say that yes, they are Latin American, but those who don't know anything about geography will say they are Brazilian and that is it."<sup>133</sup> Indeed, two respondents, neither of which had completed high school, insisted that Brazil was not located in Latin America but in South America. When asked to elaborate on what exactly they believed to be Latin America's geographic limits, one referred to several countries in Central America and the Caribbean, while the other included seemed to include all countries found between Canada and Chile. Through the course of several interviews, it appears that there is a certain degree of confusion as to whether the people of Brazil are simply Brazilian, South American, and/or Latin American. Given that the Latino identity is largely constructed from a Latin American origin, it makes sense that many Brazilians may not consider themselves Latino.

Another factor that may help explain this disassociation from a Latino identity may have to do with critical mass. In many regions in the Greater Boston Area,

Brazilians are among the most populous, if not the single most populous, foreign nationality. This is certainly the case in Framingham, Allston, Marlborough, Hyannis and Somerville, where the Brazilian immigrant community is most concentrated. In these places, Brazilian immigrants can count on a large enough population to affirm their own national identity as somewhat separate from a pan-American, Latino one.

One place where we can clearly see how such a critical mass can effect identity formations is in the region's schools. Until very recently, before the “Unz initiative” enforced an English-immersion program for immigrant students in the Massachusetts Public Schools, Somerville was able to cater to the needs of its large Brazilian immigrant population by providing a bilingual education in Portuguese. Although Naiara Souto had enrolled in this program when she moved to the country as a seven-years-old and has good memories from her experiences in it, she did notice that because Brazilian and Hispanic immigrants were divided into different bilingual classes, the two groups often socialized separately.<sup>134</sup> Especially when one considers that people, and children in particular, form friendships and cliques based on who they share common bonds with and feel most comfortable around, one can imagine how distinct identities could emerge from such a setting.<sup>xv</sup>

Still an even more complicated explanation behind the varying degrees of affinity towards a Latino identity may relate to race. As previously noted, part of the colonial legacy left to Brazil after the Portuguese imperial conquest is the cultural and genetic mixing of Amerindian, European and African peoples to a degree far

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<sup>xv</sup> I mention this without the intention of detracting from the merits bilingual education. Indeed, a fellow student in my Urban Borderlands class, Marcelo Norsworthy, evaluated the education Latinos received in Somerville and came to the conclusion that the replacement of bilingual education with the English-immersion program has severely limited the ability of immigrant students to excel in education.

surpassing that seen in the United States. In addition, Brazil's long history of receiving immigrants from all over the world has further diversified the Brazilian's racial make up. When coupled with an elite class that has traditionally come from more European stock and has often stressed the importance of national unity over racial divisions, it may not be surprising that many Brazilians have developed a belief that Brazil is a "racial democracy" because of the miscegenation and interracial relations that have been so pervasive throughout its history.<sup>135</sup> In contrast, US society has long developed a racial paradigm based on very strict racial divisions that are often boiled down into merely a matter of Black and White. Many scholars on the matter have even criticized the way in which North Americans have compartmentalized the matter in insisting that people have only one racial background.<sup>136</sup> Regardless, it should suffice to say Brazilians living in the United States, especially recent immigrants, might not be familiar with the racial and ethnic divisions that are so pervasive in North American society. Siqueira and Lourenço added that these categories are often dismissed by "most Brazilians immigrants as senseless because they do not match Brazilians' prior ideological, cultural, biological, and social experiences and discourses." Indeed, throughout the course of this study, several Brazilian narrators poked fun at these racial divisions, thereby echoing the thoughts of many Spanish-speaking Latinos.

However, confusion over the ethno-racial compartmentalization used in the United States is not a sufficient reason to explain why Brazilians may not self-identify as Latino. As previously stated, the Brazilian immigrant population is significantly lighter than the Brazilian population as a whole. According to Maxine

Margolis's ethnography of Brazilians living in New York, while approximately 45% of Brazilians are of African or mixed descent, only 16% of Brazilian immigrants can be similarly described.<sup>137</sup> Those Brazilians who can pass as white, therefore, may be less inclined to identify as Latino, a term that, while encompassing all peoples originating from Latin America, has been popularly contrived within the North American context as referring to one singular racial category comprised of people with darker, Amerindian, and or African features.<sup>xvi</sup> Even for the large Brazilian population that is not perceived by the general public as White or Anglo American but as foreign or even Latin-looking, it may be a stretch for such a Brazilian to consider him or herself aesthetically similar to the stereotypical Latino archetype. Moreover, despite the fact that many people of Latin American heritage living in the United States prefer the being identified as Latino over Hispanic, the term Latino often comes with derogatory connotations that many would rather avoid entirely.

With this information, we can understand some of the reasons as to why there are such varying degrees of support for a Latino identity. Still, as Ophelia Steadman noted, "the Brazilian wants to be a Brazilian."<sup>138</sup> Interestingly, when the Brazilian immigrants I interviewed responded to questions as to what makes the Brazilian immigrant population unique, most seemed to associate a Brazilian immigrant identity with a highly idealized work ethic.

Eduardo, for instance, repeatedly insisted that Brazilians have a "winning attitude," adding that "once a Brazilian sets a goal for himself, he will work hard,

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<sup>xvi</sup> The racialization of Latinos is a topic well beyond the scope of this report. However, it is a subject that is given significant attention within the realm of ethnic and Latino studies. Pacini Hernandez's "Quite Crisis," published in *Latinos in New England*, is one example of scholarly works recognizing "the profound heterogeneity" of Latino experiences and backgrounds.

work really hard, until he reaches this goal, and when he finally does achieve what he wanted, he will find something else to work even harder for.”<sup>139</sup> Others, such as Edirson, seemed to fan ideas that the Brazilian is very friendly, curious, and resourceful. Fausto would repeatedly point to figures showing Brazilians to have triple the rate of self-employment as other immigrants and quadruple the rate of native-born US citizens, adding, “You know, we are very entrepreneurial people.” Many even referenced the popular “*jeitinho brasileiro*,” which can be roughly translated as the Brazilian’s knack for adapting to a new environment and improvise to get ahead.

Regina Bertholdo effectively summarized the Brazilian immigrant identity, affirming, “I think Brazilians have this fame of being hard workers, fighters... It has to do with, that we are a much more open population, with a capacity of adaptation. We are ‘go-getters.’”<sup>140</sup>

## **Integration, its Barriers and Prospects for Future Generations**

Perhaps because the Brazilian affirms an identity that praises his work ethic and seems so eerily in tune with the American Dream, it may not be surprising that virtually all the Brazilians I have encountered appeared so very optimistic about the future of the Brazilian immigrant community. Eduardo epitomized this belief by responding to a question about the socio-economic prospects of future Brazilian generations in the United States, saying, “Oh, just give us a little more time here and we will out do everyone, including the Americans.”<sup>141</sup>

Justification for such optimism went beyond merely praising the value Brazilians place on hard work and high ambitions. A few narrators were quick to note that educational plays a large role, especially in helping future generations to succeed. In particular, Regina Bertholdo mentioned, "I think it is important to note that the parents of Brazilian children are literate. The Brazilian literacy rate is incredible. It is one of the highest in the world; at the least this is what I read most recently in the Boston Globe." She went on to add that because many Brazilians migrate from one urban area to another, they often "have a very different experience than immigrants from 'war-torn' countries... and very rural regions." In explaining her confidence that Brazilian immigrants have a bright future, Regina also noted that in the Brazilian immigrant community "the number of teen-pregnancies is low, ...very low compared with the Americans and Latinos.... I think this is because Brazilian girls are more educated with regards to sexuality [and knows] that if she has sex without protection, she will get pregnant, and then everything gets messed up."<sup>142</sup>

However, despite a general sense of optimism, many Brazilians in this study did mention that there are several barriers that may hold Brazilians back, at least in the short run. Edirson Paiva, for instance, echoed a common concern in suggesting that Brazilians are often stigmatized because of their accents, attracting fear and hatred from more xenophobic and nativist individuals. On a similar tract, Eduardo mentioned that many Brazilians have yet to learn English. While he insisted that these Brazilians could still find work, one can easily imagine how even with a limited level of English proficiency can keep Brazilians from higher paying jobs.

Still, it is important to note that in each and every one of the interviews conducted while compiling this report, at the very least one reference was made towards the crippling effects of improper documentation status. Not one narrator failed to stress how important a path towards “legalization” would be towards improving not only the lives of the undocumented immigrant population but also the Brazilian immigrant community as a whole and society at large. The Portuguese Pastor Carlos Ferreira, truly empathized with this problem, saying: “It is so bad. I know so many stories. The people don’t use some roads, some streets, to go to their house and to go to work. They use lots of different ways. It’s crazy. It’s a huge problem. They people are in some way living life day by day because they never know when they will have a problem on the road and the police will come.”<sup>143</sup> Fabio, himself an undocumented worker, added:

People without papers, the undocumented, feel very much afraid of doing many things. You live with one foot forward, the other back. Without papers you can’t do anything because today you can’t even open up an account at the bank without a passport. Sometimes you will get paid with a check and you can’t deposit it yourself, and those with papers don’t like cashing it in for you because it might mess with their taxes.”<sup>144</sup>

In addition to the impact that proper work papers would have on employment and income, many of the narrators also gave the example of how immigration status impacted youth. Regina Bertholdo concluded that “Nowadays, the undocumented Brazilian graduating high school doesn’t have prospective,” noting that these students must pay out-of-state tuition (often two to three times the in-state rate) and are barred from any governmental scholarships or loans.<sup>145</sup> As such, Fausto da Rocha seems to echo a popular

belief that “the single most important thing holding Brazilians back is our immigration status.”<sup>146</sup>

Fortunately for the Brazilian immigrant community, the problems associated with the migrant’s accent, English proficiency, and documentation should fade away as more Brazilians are born in the United States. However, there are other factors that could bar the Brazilian’s full integration into society for generations to come. Some community members have been particularly keen to note barriers associated with issues of socio-economic class. Regina said the following on the matter:

I think one of the great barriers for someone who came here young is adaptation, because the children don’t have a say, they are dragged here. So the adaptation is very difficult for them. After the adaptation, I would say not having the mother and father at home all the time, like in Brazil where there is at least one adult figure, maternal or paternal, in the home all the time. So, yes, this is another factor. The fact that parents work too much, and there isn’t the maternal or paternal presence in the home. So, the child goes directly home to do babysitting or stay alone after school, or the very young children goes to a baby-sitter at 5:30 in the morning and is picked up at 6 in the afternoon.

This is another factor. The factor of maternal compensation and the presence of parents. Comes the weekend, and the mother and father give their children every thing that they want. The children grow up without limits, because they want to make up the lack of...whatever is made during the week goes to whatever the kid wants. A notion of values is lost in the process. There are various problems. A question of limits and discipline, this is very difficult. The child

manipulates, because he learns English before mom and dad. He learns about the system quickly and tries to manipulate mom and dad.<sup>147</sup>

From this, we can see that Brazilians have noticed how class marks, such as an excessive commitment to work, can stunt the development of their children. Interestingly, while many Brazilian immigrants were quick to acknowledge the importance of classism, such an analysis on the basis of race was not only given very little value, but also often flat out rejected. Valter Vitorino, a light skinned Brazilian, proclaimed, “I don’t believe in discrimination. I always ask my friends, ‘if you work hard, what employer wouldn’t want to hire you?’”<sup>148</sup> Others were willing to recognize that racism exists, but did not seem terribly phased by it. Edirson, for instance, said, “Yes, racism exists, but there are laws that are capable of dealing with this problem,” while also suggesting that Brazilians may be able to pass as American once they lose their accents.<sup>149</sup> Eduardo, despite noting that Brazilian immigrants and their offspring will not be able to pass as Anglo American, did not believe that any racial prejudices would be able to hold Brazilians back.

This optimism was maintained even when the Brazilian narrators were informed that other immigrant groups, namely certain groups of Hispanics, have long occupied some of the lowest rungs in the North American socio-economic ladder, despite having lived in the United States for generations. For instance, after I introduced the hypothesis that this phenomenon affecting Hispanics and other immigrants of color could be a result of racial prejudices, Regina responded by saying, “Yes, there is racism, but I think the Brazilian will overcome this.” When asked why she believed this to be the case, Regina added, “ah, I really hate to make generalizations, but I think in the eyes of the Americans, Brazilians are more welcome than the Hispanics.”<sup>150</sup> As such, Regina has in part based her

evaluation on the viability of Brazilians in the Greater Boston Area on how well they are perceived by society at large.

However, if history is any guide, one would be wise to consider how quickly populations can be made to feel unwelcome and the effects that this has on community development. Of course, only time will be able to test the Brazilian immigrants optimism about how their community will fare in the future. In the meantime, all we can do is hypothesize.

## Concluding Thoughts

While this study has left many questions unanswered about Greater Boston's Brazilian immigrant community, there are important lessons that can be learned about this population from the oral histories of the community members and the existing literature on the matter.

First, the Brazilian immigrant is fairly new to the region. Although the exact origins of this migration flow is still somewhat shrouded in mystery, it is quite likely that the earliest contacts between Massachusetts and Brazil can be dated back to around World War II, when US influence in the region expanded significantly. The traditionally high representation Valadarenses in Greater Boston and popular myth seem to indicate that the strongest linkages were made in Governador Valadares, Minas Gerais, where supposedly a firm from Massachusetts began extracting valuable minerals, particularly mica, possibly initiating the first flow of Valadarense migrants in the. While this exact connection cannot be confirmed, we do know that by the 1960s there was already a small number of Brazilians, many from the region of Governador Valadares, living in Greater Boston.

Regardless, by the 1980s an unprecedented economic crisis hit Brazil, spurring a wave of emigration that reversed Brazil's historic reputation as net receiver of migrants. Around this time, the vast majority of emigrants from Governador Valadares chose the United States, and Massachusetts in particular, as their place of destination. Most already knew close family and friends in the region that were ready to assist them in the migration process, thereby confirming theories showing immigration to be largely a product of social networks.

Since the onset of mass migration from Brazil, characteristics marking the Brazilian immigrant have changed drastically. Whereas the first migrants were overwhelmingly men from the state of Minas Gerais, today Brazilian immigrants come from a more diverse set of states and now just about as likely to be male as female. Also, it appears as if the share of single migrants have dropped as entire families are being reunited in Greater Boston. It is still unclear, however, if there has been a significant shift in the racial and class make up of the Brazilian immigrant community. For the most part, it seems as if the Brazilian immigrant population has an abnormally high percentage of lighter skinned and middle class people when compared to the Brazilian population as a whole. Also, compared to other immigrants and “native-born” US citizens, Brazilians tend to have a slightly higher percentage of the population without a high school diploma.

Immigration patterns have also changed significantly with time, especially as immigration laws have become far more restrictive. Until fairly recently, Brazilians traditionally entered the country legally with a tourist visa. However, it has become progressively more difficult for Brazilians to obtain such visas, and, over the last decade, the number of Brazilians crossing the US-Mexico border has skyrocketed. As of fiscal year 2005, Brazilians were the third most apprehended nationality listed as “OTM” (Other Than Mexican) crossing the southern border. Since then, the cost of migration has increased markedly, as migrants are now flying into Guatemala and crossing into Mexico before finally reaching the US. It appears that as of 2006, the number of Brazilian migrants entering the country has dropped significantly.

Largely because of these transformations in the migration process, settlement patterns have also changed. In the past, Brazilians immigrants have behaved more like

sojourners, staying in the region for only a short time before returning to their home. These migrants often leave Brazil with the explicit goal of returning with more physical and human capital for their family and themselves, that is they hope to work hard in the United States to improve their English skills and to send money back home. However, after adapting to the region and with the increasing cost of migration and the difficulties associated with returning to the country legally, especially with the passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, Brazilians have begun to settle in Greater Boston. Proof of this can be seen in the dramatic increase in Brazilian small businesses and homeownership in the last few years.

Once here, Brazilians have developed a strong, nationally defined, immigrant identity largely based on an idealized work ethic and the famed “*jeitinho brasileiro*,” which alludes to the Brazilian’s sense of creativity and ability to adapt. Virtually all Brazilian immigrants reject a “Hispanic” identity. As they see it, the term Hispanic is an inappropriate one because it implies a connection to Spain that Brazilians do not have (they, after all, were colonized by Portugal) and because it often comes with pejorative intonations when coming from Anglo Americans. This affirmation of a unique national identity and a rejection of a “Hispanic” one does not necessarily mean that Brazilians do not accept a pan-ethnic, Latino identity based on a common “Latin American” heritage. Many Brazilians do indeed accept this Latino identity. Those who do often understand that Brazilians and Hispanics share very similar socio-economic experiences once in the United States and feel an important bond of camaraderie with Spanish-speakers. There are, however, some Brazilians who do not self identify as Latino largely because they do not see Brazil as Latin American. Curiously, these Brazilians sometimes limit the

geographic boundaries of Latin America to those Spanish-speaking countries bordering the Caribbean basin.

With regards to the Brazilian immigrant's perspective for future generations, there is an overwhelming sense of optimism. Much of this sentiment is derived from a belief that the Brazilian immigrant is a hard worker who is innovative and likes to win. While noting that a large percentage of the Brazilian immigrant community suffers from a lack of documentation and from prejudices against foreigners, particularly those who are unable to speak a flawless English, Brazilians immigrants do not fear for their future generations, believing that they can overcome any barriers associated with racism.

## **A Prospective Evaluation of the Brazilian Immigrant Community**

Predicting what will happen to the Brazilian Immigrant Community in the years to come is a difficult and highly uncertain process. However, there are essentially two important factors that will shape this immigrant population development for generations to come.

On the one hand, Brazilian immigrants, like most other immigrant groups, come to the country with a fresh determination to succeed. With that comes fresh new ideas that can fuel an entrepreneurial drive. In particular, many Brazilians migrate young, with the explicit purpose of working, often times already with a relatively high level of education. Sometimes the migrant already speaks English. Furthermore, at the moment, Brazilians often feel relatively comfortable in the region, noticing that they often are seen in a better light by Anglo Americans than other immigrant groups. All of this facilitates the Brazilian's inclusion into the market economy of Greater Boston and the United States.

On the other hand, the Brazilian immigrant community may underestimate the barriers that they may face in the years to come. Immigration status, commonly believed to be the primary barrier facing Brazilian immigrants, is only one of many hurdles that Brazilians will have to confront. Indeed, even US Census data shows that Greater Boston's Brazilians have not only a low percentage of the population with a "middle-class standard of living" compared to native born and foreign born residents, but they also have a slightly higher percentage of the population without a high school diploma. This is all the more daunting when one considers that the US Census often paints a highly optimistic picture, as it primarily counts those Brazilians with proper documentation status. The undocumented, who are unaccounted for, often come from more humble roots and face far greater barriers to inclusion both in Brazil because of socio-economic factors and in the United States, where legal barriers are imposed. As such, it is quite likely that the percentage of impoverished Brazilian immigrants without a high school education is quite a bit higher than previously imagined.

Additional barriers associated with race and class may also surface. For instance, even though all the narrators in my study acknowledged that they are light skinned Brazilians, virtually all noticed that they stand out aesthetically as non-white and foreign in the eyes of white North Americans. If we look at other immigrant groups, especially immigrants of color, we can see how racial prejudices could significantly limit the Brazilian immigrant's just inclusion into the society. Furthermore, if we consider that Brazilians immigrants often have a lower standard of living than other portions of society and often live in communities with high concentrations of poverty (the Somerville school district, for instance, ranks 11<sup>th</sup> out of 328 districts in the state according to "students

from low-income families")<sup>151</sup>, we can see socio-economic mobility relative to Greater Boston's population as a whole may be less drastic, especially in the generations to come, than initially perceived.

This, however, does not doom the Brazilian to poverty. Indeed, should Brazilians organize themselves around issues pertinent towards a just society and more inclusive community, as they are already doing around issues specific to immigration, their prospects seem much brighter. Indeed, the greatest challenge facing the Brazilian immigrant community revolves around the alliances they must build with their neighbors, particularly when it comes to matters that will confront the racial and class barriers they must face in the generations to come.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

In compiling this report, I hoped to provide a general and historic overview of the Brazilian immigrant to the Greater Boston Area seeing as there is an alarming shortage of material on the Brazilian immigrant community greatly contributed to the general scope of this research. Due to time constraints and the broad scope of the project, I was only able to touch upon a few key issues, overlooking many other important topics. Fortunately, I wrote this report for the community and others interested in the Brazilian immigrant population to use as a launching pad for future research.

I have broken this report into several chapters so as to offer an introduction to a number of issues, and I look forward to reading critiques that go in far more depth in specific areas. In particular, I would highly encourage a deeper analysis on strategies towards overcoming the socio-economic barriers facing the Brazilian immigrant

community. A specific analysis on access to quality education and health services could be one microcosm with which to address such obstacles.

Also there is much work needed to document exactly how the first connections between Massachusetts and Governador Valadares were formed. Any conclusive study verifying such a link, particularly if the connection was initiated by US citizens, would be vital in expand the discussion surrounding immigration to this country as it could show the impact that US foreign policy has on its domestic immigration policy.

I also highly suggest that future studies address the issues of gender. Lamentably, it is a topic that hasn't been given much consideration in previous studies and I found it difficult to address within this report. Such a gender analysis would deepen our understanding of the community.

Finally, I believe that an evaluation of community organizing in the Brazilian immigrant community would not only liven expand our base of knowledge, but could also be used as a tool towards acting for a more just society, however it is defined.

Good luck!

## Appendix

### Map of Brazil (Inset of Governador Valadares, Minas Gerais)



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