



MULTIRACIAL

IN GREATER BOSTON

THE LEADING EDGE OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

A special report from Boston Indicators

NOVEMBER 2021

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ABOUT BOSTON INDICATORS

Boston Indicators is the research center at the Boston Foundation, which works to advance a thriving Greater Boston for all residents across all neighborhoods. We do this by analyzing key indicators of well-being and by researching promising ideas for making our city more prosperous, equitable and just. To ensure that our work informs active efforts to improve our city, we work in deep partnership with community groups, civic leaders and Boston's civic data community to produce special reports and host public convenings.

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The Boston Foundation is one of the largest and oldest community foundations in America, with net assets of \$1.3 billion. The Foundation is a partner in philanthropy, with some 1,100 charitable funds established for the general benefit of the community or for special purposes. It also serves as a major civic leader, think tank and advocacy organization dedicated to bringing people together and advancing opportunity for everyone in Greater Boston.

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BOSTON INDICATORS
MEASURING WHAT WE VALUE

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OVERVIEW

The United States is a nation of immigrants. We've gone through waves of being more and less open to immigration, but the effect across recent generations has been a steadily diversifying population.

These trends accelerated after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 reversed many longstanding immigration restrictions and as the White population has grown older and birth rates have declined. Newly released data from the 2020 census show a continuation of these trends both nationally and across Greater Boston. Over the past generation our region has seen especially sharp increases in families coming from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.¹



Increasingly, families are forming across racial and ethnic categories. [Source: Rajiv Perera on Unsplash]

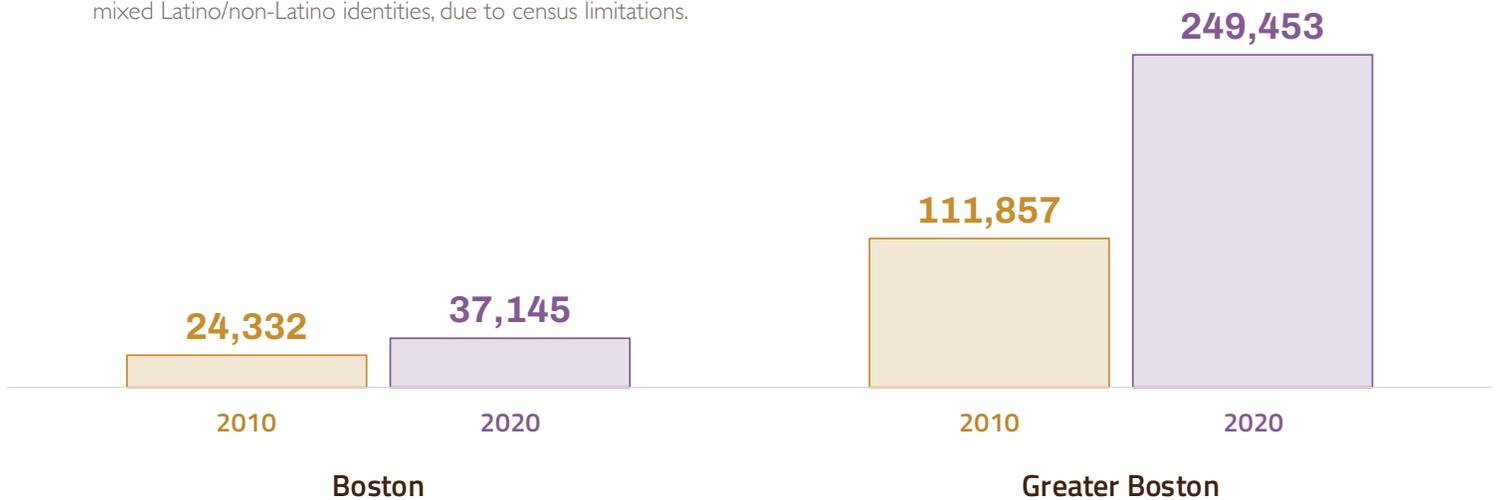
Less prominent in stories about these trends is the fact that not only is racial diversity increasing in the aggregate, but a growing number of families are forming across racial and ethnic lines. The growing number of people, especially children, with mixed backgrounds in some ways represents the very cutting edge of demographic change—according to new census data, multiracial population increases in Greater Boston outpaced that of any single race category over the past decade, increasing 123 percent between 2010 and 2020 (Figure 1).² But because our public data systems count people with mixed backgrounds in a variety of flawed ways, we rarely see focused analysis of who these people are. This paper aims to fill that void by taking a range of creative data approaches to paint a portrait of our region’s growing multiracial population.

People with mixed racial and ethnic identities are in many ways quintessentially American. To be clear, who counts as “American” has been contested and restricted in different ways throughout our history. And from the earliest days of our nation’s founding, much of our racial diversity was the product of colonialism toward Native Americans and of forced enslavement of people from Africa. But all this problematic history (paired with some more recent opening of immigration policies) leads us to where we are now, a uniquely multiracial society.

A growing number of prominent American leaders are themselves reflections of these trends. President Barack Obama, the nation’s first Black president, is also of mixed race. His father was Kenyan and immigrated to Hawaii for college, and his mother was a White woman from Kansas. Or take Vice President Kamala Harris, who is simultaneously our nation’s first Black vice president and our nation’s first Asian American vice president, not to mention our nation’s first female vice president. V.P. Harris’s Indian mother met her Jamaican father after they both came to the U.S. for graduate school.

Figure 1: Greater Boston’s multiracial population more than doubled over the last decade.

Individuals with 2 or more racial backgrounds. Does not include mixed Latino/non-Latino identities, due to census limitations.

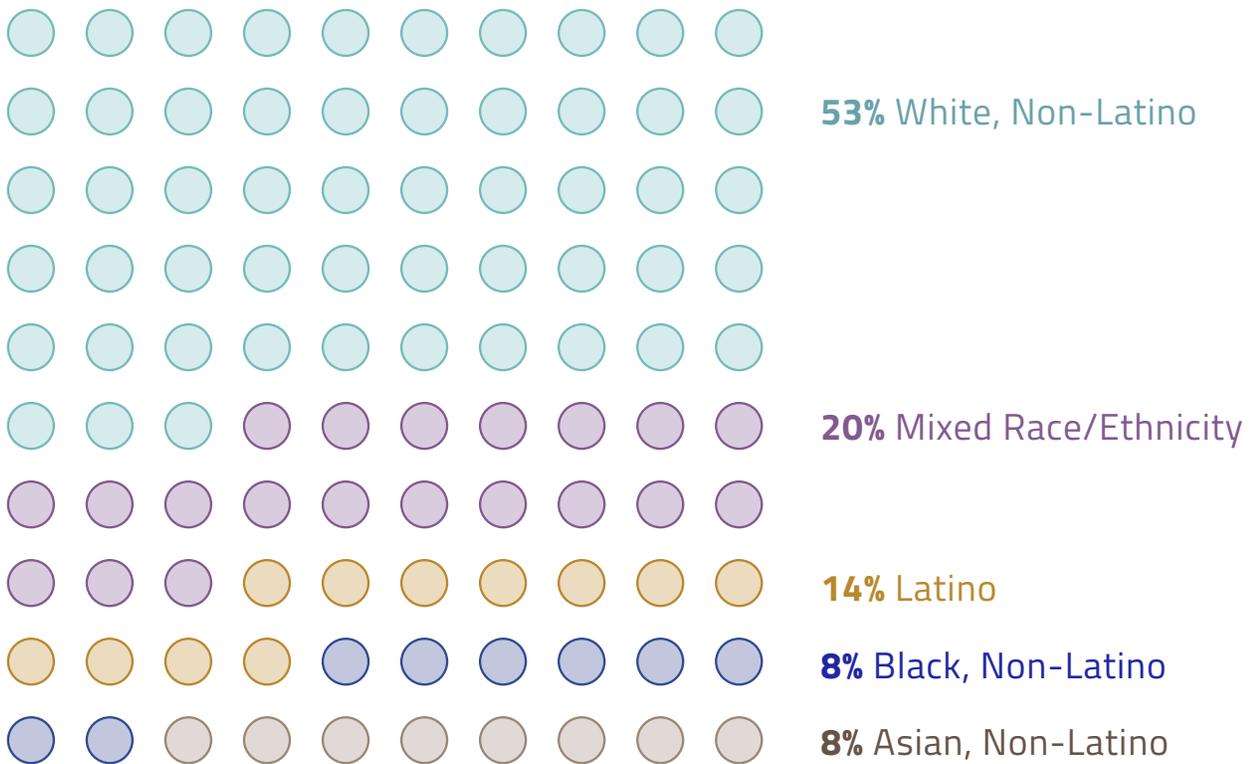


NOTE: The multiracial totals we present here differ from common presentations of multiracial data. 2010 totals include those who identify as Latino. 2020 totals include Latino individuals except Latino biracial individuals who are partially of Some Other Race (e.g., Latino Some Other Race/White). See the description later in this paper for why we think these adjustments lead to better, but still not perfect, multiracial estimates.

SOURCE: 2010, 2020 Census.

Figure 2: One in five babies born in Massachusetts is of mixed race or ethnicity.

Percentage of total births with complete race/ethnicity records, Massachusetts. 2019.



NOTE: Mixed Race/Ethnicity births include all combinations of race and ethnicity where the mother's race or ethnicity is different from the father's. Denominator is of all births in Massachusetts that have complete race/ethnicity data. Native American, Non-Latino births are not shown due to small sample size. Roughly 10% of records do not have complete information, or have been suppressed for privacy.

SOURCE: 2019 US Department of Health and Human Services, Natality Data.

Greater Boston has some prominent mixed-identity leaders as well. Suffolk County District Attorney Rachel Rollins, for instance, is half White (her father is second-generation Irish-American) and half Black (her mother is first generation from Barbados). Both V.P. Harris and D.A. Rollins are themselves in mixed-race marriages. These trends were also reflected in this year's race for Boston Mayor, where the top three vote-getters in September's primary election—Michelle Wu, Annissa Essaibi George, and Andrea Campbell—are all in mixed marriages. And as the daughter of a Polish American mother and a Tunisian father, Essaibi George is also of mixed identity herself.

Since they are adults, however, focusing on mixed-race leaders can almost serve to understate these trends. Where we see current patterns most directly is among new births. Perhaps the most striking finding from this research, which we describe in Part 3, is that 20 percent of babies born in Massachusetts in 2019 were of mixed racial or ethnic background—that's one in five births. Mixed-identity babies are now more common than births of any single race other than White.

We explore these trends throughout the bulk of this paper, which is organized into the following parts:

PART 1: Estimating the Size of Our Region’s Multiracial Population

PART 2: The Rise of Intermarriage after Loving v. Virginia in 1967

PART 3: The Multi Generation: Children with Mixed Racial and Ethnic Identities

PART 4: Implications for the Future

It’s important to note at the outset that while we present lots of data that can seem objective and impartial, concepts of racial identity are complex, contested, and ever-evolving. One important distinction, for instance, is between how someone sees their own identity and how others perceive and treat that person in their day-to-day interactions. It is not always the case that a mixed-race person looks so different from a person with a single racial background. And a person with a mixed background may or may not identify with all sides of their heritage, perhaps because they’ve spent more of their life with one side of their family.

Further, it’s not uncommon for one’s self-identity to shift over time. For instance, a study that linked the 2000 and 2010 census responses of specific individuals found that among the three largest multiracial groups in their sample (Black/White, American Indian/White, Asian/White), between 63 and 88 percent had changed their response from one census to the next.³

The way society at large and institutions of power treat race also shifts over time. From the earliest years of American slavery, southern states adopted versions of the “one-drop rule,” meaning that having one African ancestor, no matter how remote, made a person legally Black, and subject to racial discrimination and oppression. This approach was largely adopted nationwide and persisted through our nation’s Jim Crow era of segregation. While that legal definition is no more, many people’s perception of who is Black continues versions of this “one-drop” thinking. These dynamics are also influenced by differing physical appearances of people with mixed racial identities. The concept of “colorism,” for instance, explains the phenomenon that when people are phenotypically whiter, they often receive more of the privileges associated with whiteness. Even as the rise of multiracial Americans overall signals the possibility for fading racial divisions, this is by no means a guarantee, and it remains an open question as to whether these demographic changes will occur alongside broader social progress.

NOTE: Throughout this report we use the term “Latino” to refer to people of Hispanic or Latin American origin/ethnicity. We do this in part because our analysis relies heavily on data from the U.S. Census Bureau and so we chose a shorthand option for mirroring the language used in its surveys. It’s important to recognize, however, that these terms are imperfect and alternatives may be more inclusive. For example, a growing number of people prefer to use *Latinx* or *Latine* to be inclusive of all gender identities, whereas Latino is more associated with the masculine gender in Spanish.

PART 1

ESTIMATING THE SIZE OF OUR REGION'S MULTIRACIAL POPULATION

The Census Bureau began gathering data on the multiracial population in the 2000 decennial census, when it first allowed respondents to select two or more races. Since that time, the multiracial share of the population in Greater Boston has doubled from 2.5 percent to 5 percent.

While much of this two-decade increase is due to real increases in our region's multiracial population, some portion of the spike in 2020 likely has to do with a new response coding approach employed by the Census Bureau for the first time, which may more fully capture the multiracial population. We describe this change in more detail below.

Figure 3: Greater Boston's multiracial population has doubled since 2000.

Share multiracial population (does not include mixed Latino/non-Latino ethnicity due to Census data limitations).



NOTE: Data from 2000 and 2010 may be artificially low due to prior data processing methods that missed some racial and ethnic complexity. 2000 & 2010 totals include those who identify as Latino; 2020 totals include Latino individuals, except Latino biracial individuals who are partially of Some Other Race (e.g., Latino Some Other Race/White).

SOURCE: 2000, 2010, 2020 Census

Figure 3 above reflects the most common, straightforward presentation of census data on people of mixed race (with an adjustment for the 2020 census data that we explain below in **The Evolution of Census Questions on Race and Ethnicity**), but this approach has some real limitations. Foremost among these limitations is that it doesn't include people of mixed Latino/non-Latino background. Ever since the Census Bureau began asking about Latino identity in 1980, it has done so using a separate question from the census question about race. An important part of the way that the Census Bureau records the Hispanic/Latino ethnicity is that it does not allow respondents to indicate a partial Hispanic background; even if someone has, say, a Hispanic father and a non-Hispanic mother, that person is forced to simply indicate whether or not they have any Hispanic/Latino heritage. Although the Census Bureau tested a new question after the 2010 census that combined race

and ethnicity and the results were promising, the Office of Management and Budget (which ultimately decides which question may be used on the census) decided to forgo this alternative on the 2020 census. This is what leads to mixed Latino individuals not being included in multiracial population estimates.

While people of mixed Latino descent are not technically multiracial (by Census Bureau definitions), they represent a mixing across racial and ethnic lines that speaks to growing diversity and multiculturalism in our region. What's more, [survey data](#) show that as many as two-thirds of those in the Latino community tend to think of their Latin American heritage as a part of their racial identity. Further evidence that the Census Bureau's two-question approach doesn't work well for many people is the fact that of those who selected Some Other Race alone in 2019, 95 percent were Latino.

→ NOTE: Please answer BOTH Question 8 about Hispanic origin and Question 9 about race. For this census, Hispanic origins are not races.

8. Is Person 1 of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano

Yes, Puerto Rican

Yes, Cuban

Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin – *Print, for example, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, Guatemalan, Spaniard, Ecuadorian, etc.* ↴

9. What is Person 1's race?
Mark one or more boxes **AND** print origins.

White – *Print, for example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Lebanese, Egyptian, etc.* ↴

Black or African Am. – *Print, for example, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali, etc.* ↴

American Indian or Alaska Native – *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe(s), for example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, etc.* ↴

Chinese Vietnamese Native Hawaiian

Filipino Korean Samoan

Asian Indian Japanese Chamorro

Other Asian – *Print, for example, Pakistani, Cambodian, Hmong, etc.* ↴

Other Pacific Islander – *Print, for example, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, etc.* ↴

Some other race – *Print race or origin.* ↴

The race and ethnicity questions, as used for the 2020 Census [Source: United States Census Bureau]

The Evolution of Census Questions on Race and Ethnicity

Every U.S. census has included questions about race, but as social norms around race, ethnicity, and identity have shifted over time, so too has the census questionnaire.

The first census, conducted in 1790 according to the U.S. Constitution, grouped people into the following categories: free White males ages 16 and older, free White males under 16 years old, free White females, all other free people, and slaves. Slaves were counted as three-fifths of a person for purposes of distributing Congressional seats and Native Americans were not counted for another 80 years. The census first included a specific racial category for those of mixed White and African American descent, "mulatto," in 1850. Much of the racial reported mixing in the earliest censuses was linked with the institution of slavery, as sexual violence against slaves was pervasive and many children of mixed race resulted from the rape of enslaved Black women at the hands of White slaveholders.

During the 1930 Census, enumerators were required to classify anyone who was both Black and White as Black, even if their Black heritage was a small fraction of their background (this was called the "one-drop rule").⁴ Similar rules were used for individuals of mixed Native American descent. More recently, in 1960, Census enumerators were instructed to categorize individuals who were White and another race simply as members of the non-White race (this occurred even though 1960 was the first year that respondents themselves could actually indicate which race they were). As noted earlier, it was not until 2000 that the Census allowed respondents to select more than one racial category.

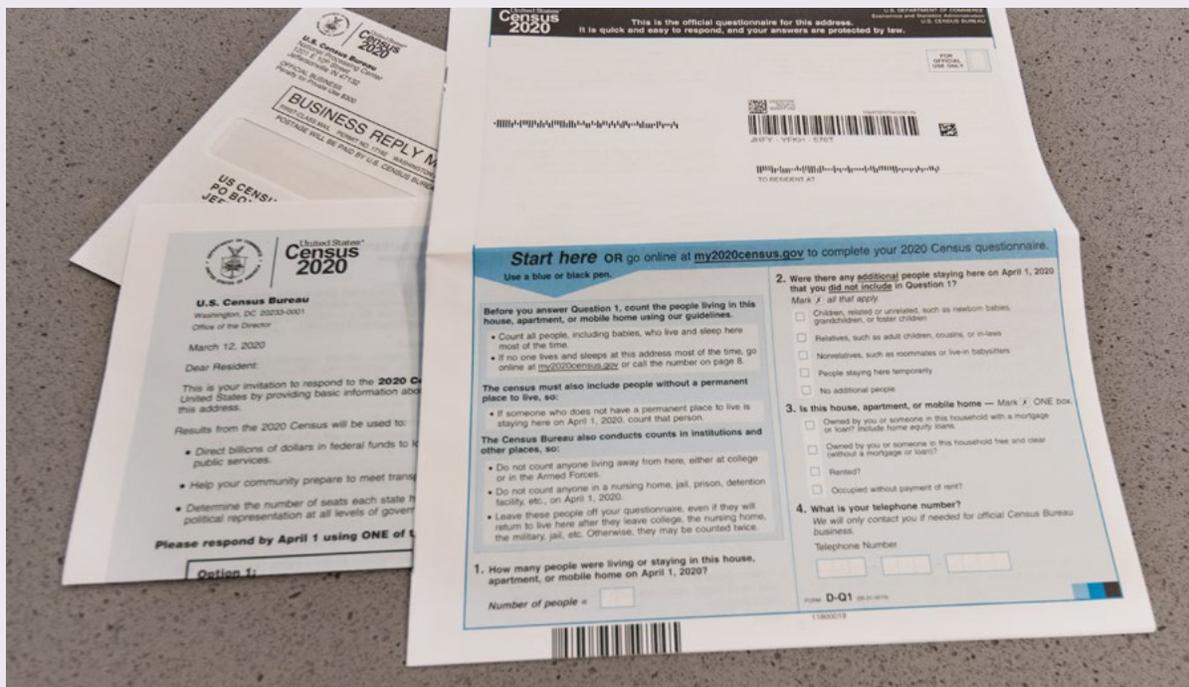
While the 2020 census did not adopt the overhauled race/ethnicity question that was tested in 2015, it nonetheless included a number of subtle, yet impactful, adjustments that do help us gain a more nuanced picture of demographics in the United States, including of our multiracial population.⁵

Recent changes include the following: The Census Bureau instructed respondents who selected White or Black as their race to write in additional details regarding their origins or heritage (this was already an option for other racial groups prior to 2020). Relatedly, they increased the number of allowable characters for writing in these additional details from 30 to 200, giving respondents more space to communicate multiple origins.

These changes, combined with more flexible coding of write-in responses, led Census Bureau researchers to more precisely identify the mixed-race population. In the past, the Census Bureau would only capture up to two responses from the write-in box. This would lead to, for example, a response indicating Hispanic, White, and Chinese origins being coded as just a White and Chinese response (prior coding rules privileged race responses over Latino ethnicity responses). By contrast, the more sophisticated 2020 enumeration procedures would help capture all three responses in the write-in section, so that the respondent would be accurately documented as Hispanic, White, and Chinese. This greater precision is probably part of the reason that the multiracial population in the 2020 census is much larger than that of the 2010 or 2000 censuses.

Most of the above changes help 2020 census data better capture our region's true multiracial population, but another change to 2020 coding is actually serving to overcount people of mixed racial backgrounds, and so our estimates throughout this paper attempt to adjust for this problem. With new detailed write-in responses under both the White and Black race options, the Census Bureau has begun hard-coding anyone who wrote in a country of origin indicating Hispanic or Latino origins as also being of "Some Other Race." For instance, if a person selected White and wrote-in Mexican below that, the census counted their Mexican heritage as indicative of identifying with Some Other Race (in addition to being White). So, in addition to being counted as Hispanic or Latino on the ethnicity question, this approach now leads some people with single Latino identities to be assigned two races for the race question—or White and Some Other Race in this example.

This has led to an unprecedented spike in people counted as multiracial in 2020 who were Hispanic or Latino and a biracial combination that included Some Other Race. Given changes to data processing, we believe a large share of this spike does not reflect a true increase in our region's multiracial population, but rather includes many single-race Hispanic or Latino respondents who were added to the Some Other Race group by Census Bureau enumerators. For this reason, we do not include in our multiracial population tabulations Hispanic or Latino individuals who are a biracial combination that included Some Other Race.⁶



The 2020 decennial census was the first to invite responses online—with paper questionnaires still sent to many. [Source: Wikimedia Commons]

Next we use census data to drill down into our region's multiracial population to get a sense of which racial groups are most common. Because White residents still make up a majority of the region's population, several of the most common mixed identity pairings are partially White. Among the multiracial population of Greater Boston, census data reveal that Some Other Race/White (29.6 percent) and Asian/White (18.6 percent) are the two largest multiracial subgroups. Black/White (14.5 percent) and Black/Some Other Race (13.3 percent) also make up sizeable shares of the multiracial population, as does the American Indian or Alaska Native/White population (10.1 percent).

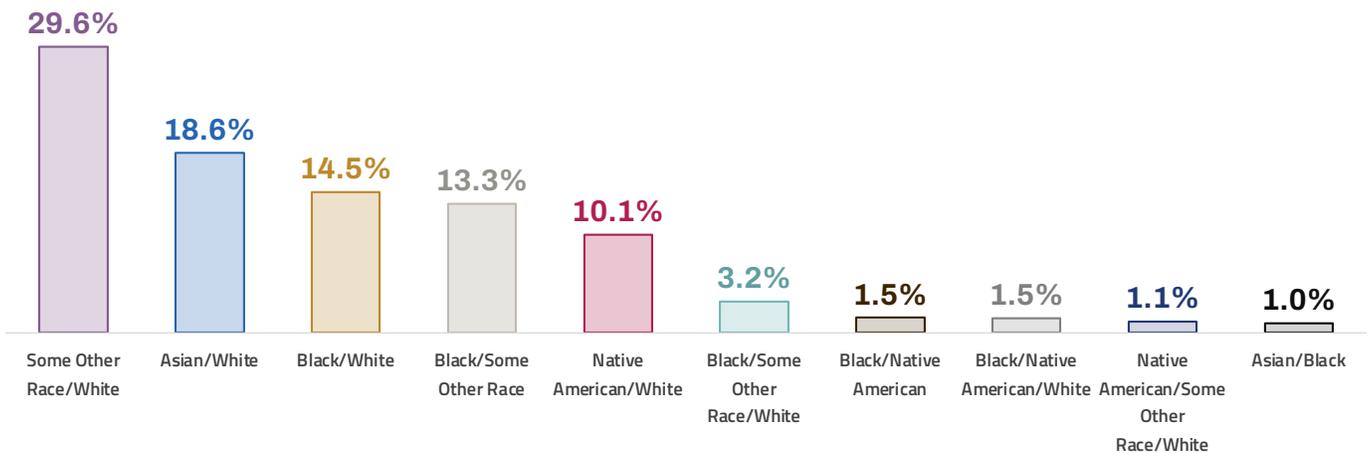
To adjust for the artificial spike for 2020 in biracial individuals driven by the Census Bureau's decision to assign many people to the "Some Other Race" group even when they didn't select that, the estimates presented above do not include biracial Latino individuals that identify as Some Other Race (because they are the group most affected by this practice). So the fact that Some Other Race combinations still feature prominently in the multiracial landscape of Greater Boston raises the question of who exactly falls into these groups.

There certainly are some people who may proactively select White or Black and then also choose to identify with Some Other Race, either because they think none of the racial categories fits them well or because they have mixed family lineage that they are expressing. At the same time, Census Bureau coding rules for Brazilians (they are assigned to Some Other Race even if they choose a different race, and they are not considered Latino), who make up a large group in our region, and for individuals from the Middle East or North Africa (they are assigned to White even if they select another race), may contribute to the prominence of these biracial combinations that include Some Other Race.

Similar to Greater Boston's multiracial population, mixed-race people with Native American heritage are among the larger multiracial groups nationally.⁷ However, Pew researchers found that many individuals (75 percent) of mixed race that includes Native American ancestry do not self-identify as multiracial.⁸ Overall, the number of multiracial individuals who identify as American Indian on the census has increased over time, but as with other multiracial groups, their personal sense of racial identity may shift over time.

Figure 4: A profile of Greater Boston's multiracial population.

Share of total multiracial population (does not include mixed Latino/non-Latino ethnicities due to data limitations), Greater Boston. 2020.



NOTE: Totals include Latino individuals, except Latino biracial individuals who are partially of Some Other Race (e.g., Latino Some Other Race/White). Multiracial subpopulations who made up very small shares of the overall multiracial population are not included due to small sample size.

SOURCE: 2020 Census

Multiracial identities are personally and socially complex, with particular challenges facing the mixed-Black population.

Census data are some of the best data available for attempting to get a comprehensive picture of the multiracial population and its most prominent subgroups at a fixed point in time. However, not all people with multiracial ancestry indicate they are multiracial on the census questionnaire, and even for those who do, this could change over the years. According to Pew Research Center survey data,⁹ not everyone who has parents or grandparents of different races considers themselves to be multiracial. By surveying 1,555 multiracial adults in 2015, Pew researchers were able to ask questions about the racial background of a person's parents and grandparents, and then compare their racial background to the way they identify racially. Results showed that just 39 percent of mixed individuals surveyed self-identified as multiracial.¹⁰ This "multiracial identity gap" is often driven by physical appearance or family experiences. And a person's sense of their own identity can also shift over the course of their lifetime—roughly 30 percent of individuals of mixed backgrounds report having shifted in their views about their racial identity over the years.

Those who do identify as multiracial tend to have highly varied experiences depending on their specific multiracial composition.

In particular, one common theme across the Pew survey findings is the persistence of anti-Black prejudice. Overall, up to 55 percent of multiracial individuals reported having experienced some form of racial discrimination. Among people of mixed Black heritage, there was a greater likelihood of having negative experiences that were linked to their race. For example, 57 percent of Black/White individuals reported poor service at a restaurant, hotel, or other business due to their race, compared to 25 percent of Asian/White individuals.

Substantial differences between multiracial subgroups also emerge in family, social, and community contexts. Survey data show that just one in four Black/White biracial individuals felt very accepted by White individuals. Among Asian/White biracial individuals, 62 percent reported feeling very accepted by White individuals. Whereas Black/White individuals were much more likely to feel accepted among Black individuals, Asian/White individuals were more likely to feel accepted by White individuals than by Asian individuals. Experiences also diverge at the neighborhood level, where Asian/White biracial individuals were 21 percentage points more likely to live in a mostly White neighborhood than Black/White biracial individuals. Social norms in mixed families follow this very same pattern: Black/White biracial individuals are far more likely to have contact with Black relatives than White ones. And Asian/White biracial individuals are substantially more likely to have contact with White relatives than Asian family members.

PART 2

THE RISE OF INTERMARRIAGE

POST LOVING V. VIRGINIA IN 1967

One reason racial mixing has increased markedly in recent decades is that up until 1967 marriage between White people and people of color was legally prohibited in much of the country. Massachusetts was the second state in the nation to repeal its anti-miscegenation law—back in 1843.

The local effort was led by slavery abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, who viewed these laws as reflecting the same racial prejudice fueling the institution of slavery. Over the next half-century a slow trickle of other states repealed their anti-miscegenation laws. While public data sources do not track this well, historical scholarship suggests these changes coincided with meaningful growth in racial mixing during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Study of marriage records from Shauna Lo and Laura Wai Ng, for instance, found that during the period of Chinese exclusion, which made it very difficult for Chinese women who were not laborers to immigrate to the United States, many Chinese men married White women in Massachusetts.¹¹ Similarly, work by Elizabeth Pleck found that during the late 1800s, 12 to 24 percent of married African American men in Boston were married to White women.¹²



Richard and Mildred Loving, plaintiffs in the successful 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court case that overturned anti-miscegenation laws nationwide. [Source: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution]

However, all kinds of racially discriminatory laws ramped up shortly after the period of Reconstruction and the turn of the 20th century, and between 1910 and 1913 nine states introduced legislation banning interracial marriage again.¹³ Even though Massachusetts had been an important center of abolitionist movement, and intermarriage was common in Boston, the legislature passed a law in 1913 that voided any marriages of non-residents whose marriage would be prohibited in their home state. Interracial marriage was not fully legalized again in Massachusetts until the Supreme Court's landmark *Loving v. Virginia* decision, which struck down prohibitions nationwide in 1967.¹⁴

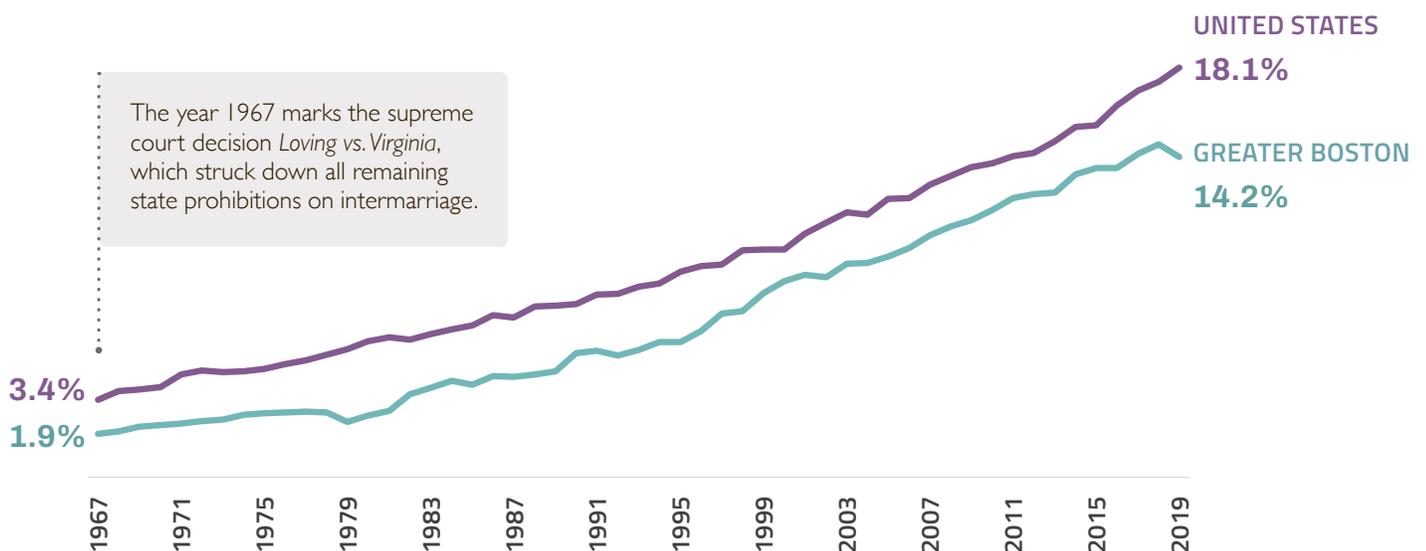
Since the *Loving* decision, rates of interracial marriage have increased steadily from about 3.4 percent in 1967 to 18 percent in 2019.

Figure 5 below and the marriage data in this section look at "intermarriage," a term we use to include mixed Latino/non-Latino couples, rather than just interracial marriage narrowly defined, since that would exclude couples with mixed Latino ethnicity.

During more recent decades, the country also saw a large increase in public support for interracial and mixed marriages. As recently as 1990, Pew analysis of General Social Survey data showed that 63 percent of non-Black respondents would oppose a relative marrying a Black person.¹⁵ While still troublingly high, more recent data collected in 2016 showed that figure had declined to 14 percent.

Figure 5: In recent decades the share of intermarriages has increased rapidly.

% of interracial or interethnic marriages among new marriages, US and Greater Boston.



NOTE: The estimates here rely on a question in the American Community Survey, which asks what year the respondent was last married. Analysis by the Pew Research Center roughly follows this approach; other studies have found this approach produces reliable estimates.

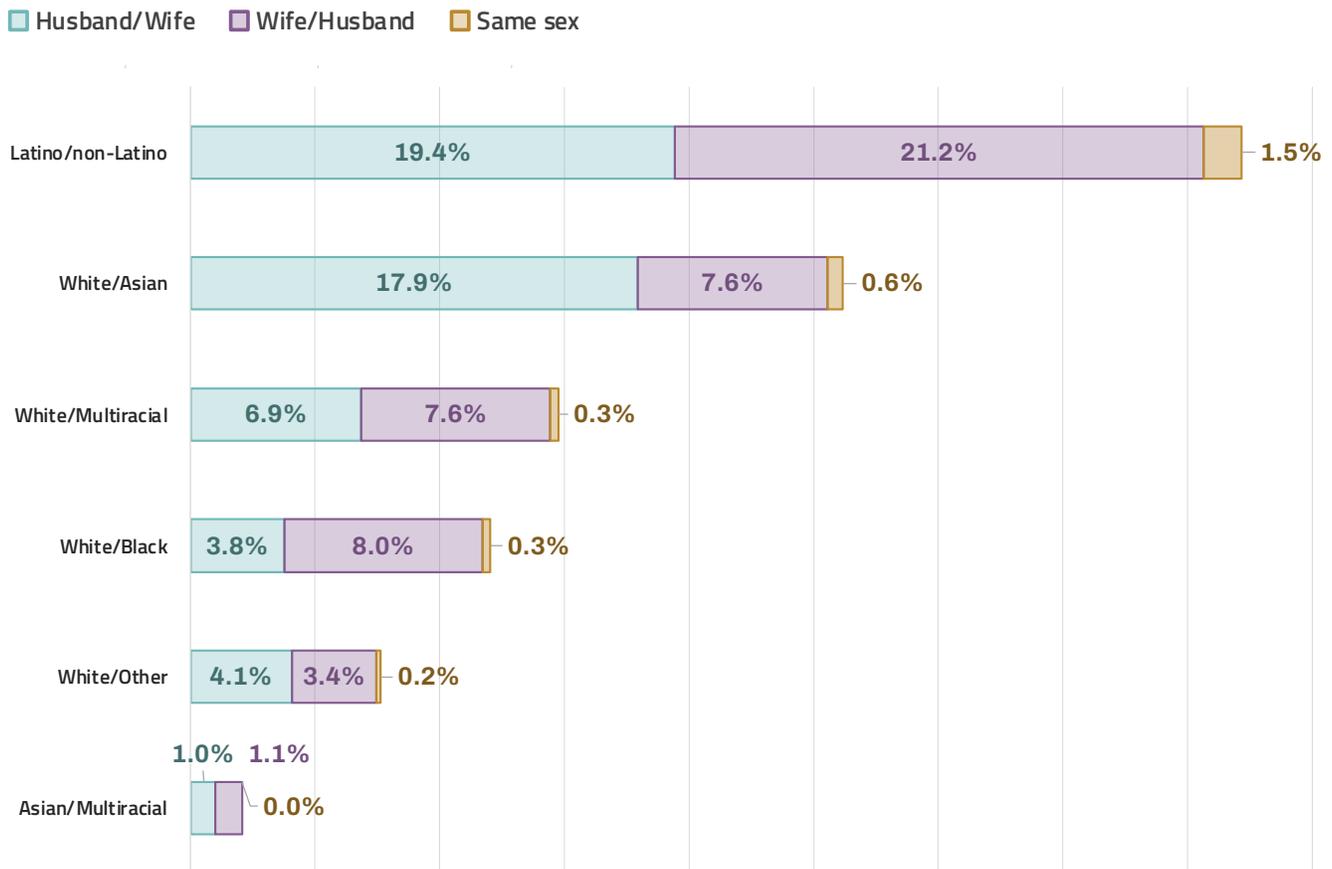
SOURCE: 2015-2019 American Community Survey PUMS via IPUMS USA

The most common types of intermarriage look similar to the most common multiracial subgroups noted above. Latino/non-Latino marriages make up the largest share (more than 40 percent) of intermarried couples in Greater Boston, followed by Asian/White intermarriages (Figure 6). Multiracial/White and Black/White intermarriages also make up sizeable shares of all intermarriages in the region, at 15 percent and 12 percent, respectively.

Among opposite sex intermarriages there are some interesting patterns that emerge, where particular husband-wife combinations are more common than others. Asian/White marriages are much more likely to be White husband/Asian wife than the other way around. A similar trend emerged among Black/White intermarriages, where twice as many are Black husband/White wife than are White husband/Black wife.

Figure 6: A profile of interracial and interethnic marriages in Greater Boston.

% of interracial or interethnic marriages among all marriages, Greater Boston.



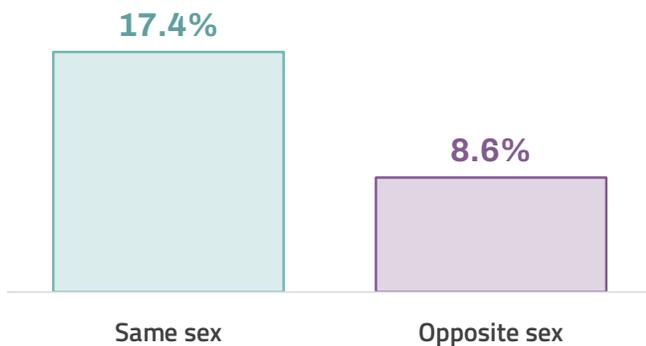
NOTE: Latino/non-Latino intermarriages may be of any racial combination, and interracial combinations include all combinations of Latino ethnicity. Therefore, the Latino/non-Latino bar overlaps with the other bars to some extent. Interracial marriage combinations that did not sum to at least 2 percent are not included here.

SOURCE: 2015-2019 American Community Survey PUMS via IPUMS USA

Interestingly, the rate of intermarriage among same sex marriages is more than double the rate among opposite sex marriages—17.4 percent versus 8.6 percent, respectively. Latino/non-Latino intermarriages have the largest same sex subgroup, which makes up 1.5 percent of all intermarriages.

Figure 7: Intermarriage is twice as common for same sex marriages.

% intermarried of all married couples, same sex and opposite sex, Greater Boston, 2019.



SOURCE: 2015-2019 American Community Survey PUMS via IPUMS USA

Data from the 2017 Pew analysis offer a number of interesting insights about the characteristics of individuals who tend to intermarry (specifically, among newlyweds).¹⁶ Key findings include:

Overall, intermarriage rates tend to be higher in metropolitan areas, but this varies by race.

- ▶ Double the share of White newlyweds are intermarried within metropolitan areas compared to those outside of metropolitan areas (12 percent to 6 percent).
- ▶ At 18 percent, Black newlyweds are equally likely to intermarry inside or outside of metropolitan areas.
- ▶ By contrast, intermarried Asian newlyweds are actually much more common in non-metro areas—47 percent of Asian newlyweds who live outside metropolitan areas are intermarried; 28 percent of Asian newlyweds who live in metropolitan areas are intermarried.
- ▶ Similarly, Hispanics living outside of metropolitan areas are also more likely to intermarry—32 percent versus 25 percent in metro areas.

Among all groups, higher education increases the likelihood of intermarriage. Between 1980 and 2015, the share of newlyweds who intermarried increased from 7 percent to 19 percent among those with a bachelor's degree or higher (it also doubled for those with high school or less, from 7 to 14 percent). Among Hispanic newlyweds, the intermarriage rate varies most dramatically by the level of educational attainment; just 16 percent of those with a high school credential or less are intermarried, while 46 percent of those with a bachelor's or higher are intermarried.

PART 3

THE MULTI GENERATION

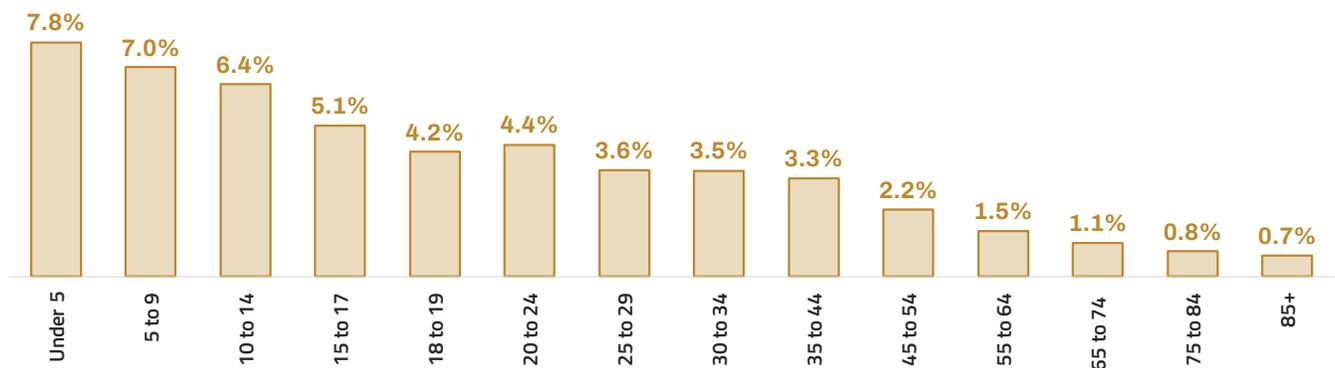
CHILDREN WITH MIXED RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES

Thus far our estimates of the multiracial population have included everyone from young children all the way up to the most elderly, serving to understate more recent multiracial population growth.

Prior generations were much less open to interracial marriage, with many people in their mid-50s or older having been born in states that still banned interracial marriage. Plus, our region has gotten much more racially diverse in recent generations, providing more opportunities for families to form across racial and ethnic lines. For these reasons, it's helpful to focus on younger generations. The fact that children under the age of 5 are several times more likely to be multiracial than older adults (Figure 8) underscores the way our society has changed since the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* decision that struck down intermarriage prohibitions nationwide.

Figure 8: Younger people are more likely to be multiracial, suggesting continued growth in our region's multiracial population over time.

Share of age group that identifies as two or more races. Greater Boston, 2019.



SOURCE: 2015-2019 American Community Survey PUMS

The above census data are helpful for comparing across different age groups, but it suffers from census data limitations discussed earlier; tops among them the fact that we cannot identify mixed Latino/non-Latino individuals. Given the high concentration of mixed-race children, state-level birth records provide a powerful alternative tool for examining our region's multiracial population.

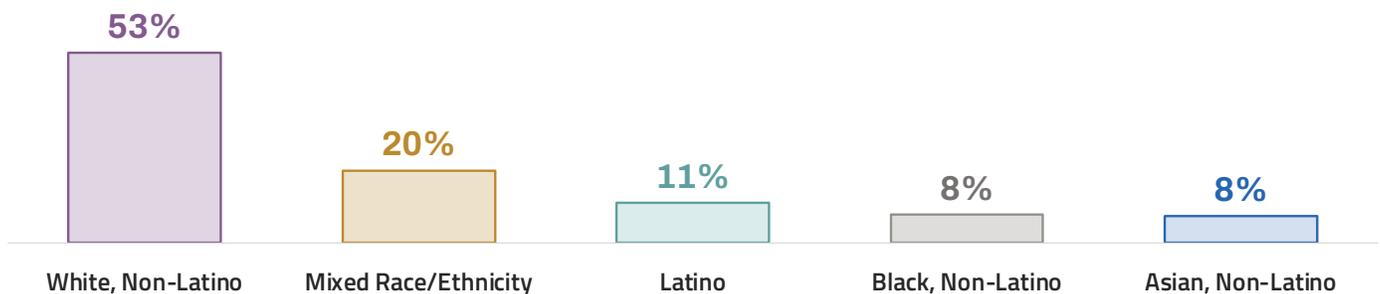
Birth records are helpful both because they focus our attention on the very leading edge of any new demographic patterns and because they often contain race and Latino ethnicity information for both parents, allowing us to capture mixed Latino/non-Latino children and not just those of mixed race. While about 10 percent of birth records don't have reliable data on both parents' backgrounds, the remaining records paint a striking picture: One in five babies born in Massachusetts in 2019 were of mixed ethno-racial background, as shown in Figure 9 below. There were more mixed-identity babies born in 2019 than babies of any single race other than White.

Birth records also allow us to identify which ethno-racial combinations are most common in Massachusetts. In 2019, mixed Latino babies (with one Latino parent and one non-Latino parent) were the most common ethno-racially mixed group, at 51 percent of all mixed-identity births (Figure 10). Black/White multiracial babies (including all Latino ethnicity combinations) are the next most common multiracial subgroup. Multiracial/White babies and Asian/White babies are the third and fourth largest mixed groups in Massachusetts.

This snapshot of state birth records reveals the scale and the composition of multiracial births today, but by turning back to Census Bureau data we can see how quickly multiracial infants have increased as a share of all infants over the last 40 years. By linking together parents and children living together in a household (this requirement means that we unfortunately cannot include children living with just one parent in this analysis), we calculate the share of children living with parents of different races and ethnicities. Figure 11 shows that our region has increased its share of multiracial infants from less than 3 percent in 1980 to nearly 13 percent by 2019. Given the rise in interracial marriage described earlier, and the larger mixed-race population overall, the rise in the share of multiracial births is likely to continue into the future.

Figure 9: One in five babies born in Massachusetts is of mixed race or ethnicity.

Percentage of total births with complete race/ethnicity records, Massachusetts, 2019.

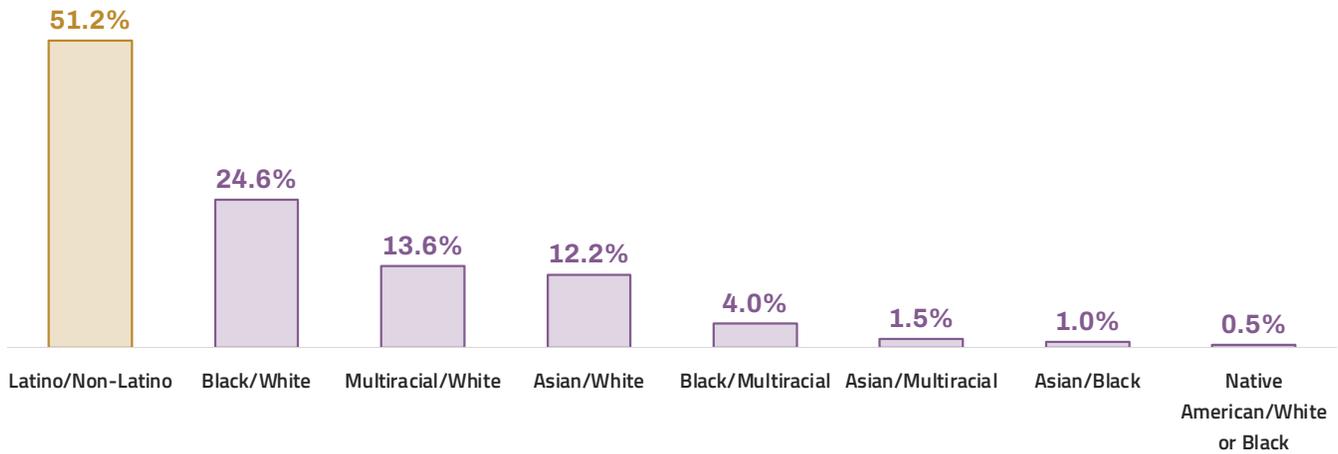


NOTE: Mixed Race/Ethnicity births include all combinations of race and ethnicity where the mother's race or ethnicity is different from the father's. Denominator is of all births in Massachusetts that have complete race/ethnicity data. Native American, Non-Latino births are not shown due to small sample size. Roughly 10% of records do not have complete information, or have been suppressed for privacy.

SOURCE: 2019 US Department of Health and Human Services, Natality Data.

Figure 10: More mixed Latino/non-Latino babies were born in 2019 than any other combination of mixed race/ethnicity births.

Share of all mixed race/ethnicity births in Massachusetts, 2019.

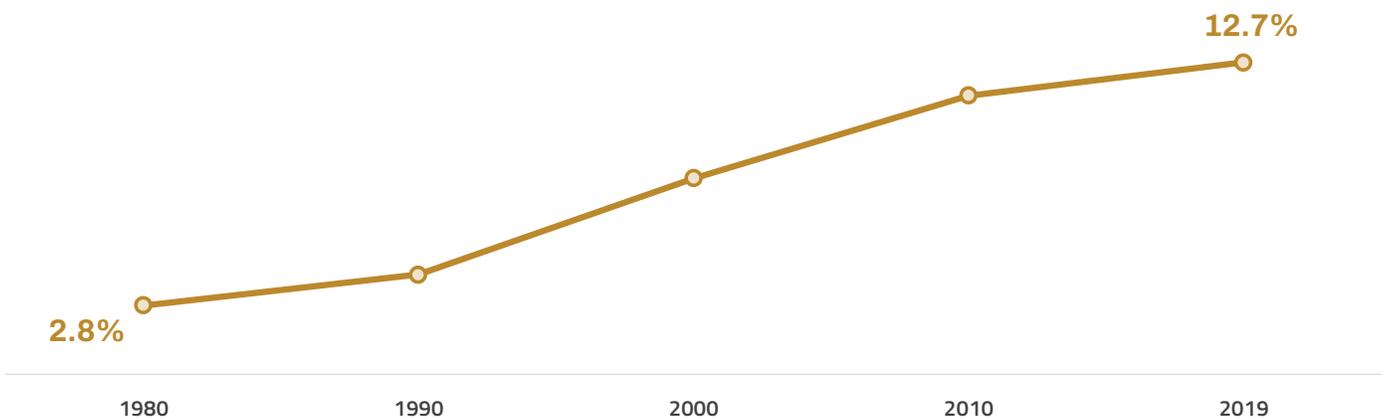


NOTE: “Latino/non-Latino” includes all race combinations where Latino is mixed. Thus, multi-ethnic Black/White infants are counted towards “Mixed Latino” and “Black/White” and therefore totals add up to more than 100 percent.

SOURCE: 2019 US Department of Health and Human Services, Natality Data.

Figure 11: The share of Greater Boston infants living with parents of different races or ethnicities has risen dramatically.

Percent of infants living with two parents that are of different races or ethnicities. Greater Boston.



SOURCE: 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010 Decennial Censuses; American Community Survey PUMS 2015-2019 via IPUMS USA.

PART 4

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Demographers expect the multiracial population to grow for years to come. In fact, three years ago the Census Bureau made multiracial projections for 2060 that have already been surpassed by the newly released 2020 numbers.¹⁷

A backdrop to these trends has been ongoing discussion around the nation's purportedly declining White population. The Census Bureau first predicted that the non-Hispanic White population would decrease to less than 50 percent of the total population by the year 2042.¹⁸ New 2020 data partially, but do not entirely, corroborate this projected change. The non-Latino "White alone" population (those who only selected White as their race) did decline by 8.6 percent over the last decade. On the other hand, including people who select White and at least one other race reverses this trend and shows a modest population increase of 1.9 percent.¹⁹



Children of Greater Boston are driving multiracial population growth, and adding to the expansion of all racial groups. [Source: Ron Lach on Pexels]

In Greater Boston, all race categories grew between 2010 and 2020, but the fastest growth is seen when factoring in single race groups and their mixing with other groups. Put another way, our fast-growing multiracial population is in fact contributing to the expanded presence of all racial groups. But when we look only at single race totals we fail to capture this complexity.

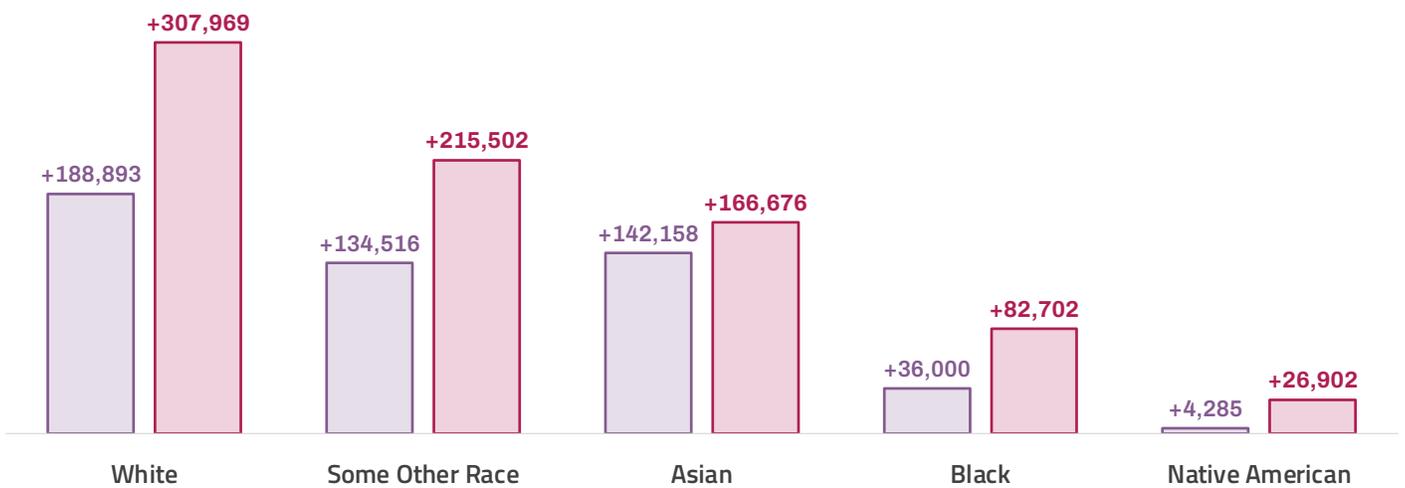
Proportionally, looking only at single race trends is most misleading when analyzing our region’s Black and Native American populations. Black population growth is more than twice as high when you include people who select Black in combination with another race. This is especially relevant in the Greater Boston context, as we have a large Afro-Latino population, which the Census Bureau may code as multiracial Black/Some Other Race. The difference is yet more extreme when looking at Native American population growth, which is six times higher when including people who select Native American in combination.

Presenting data by looking at single race categories leads to an increasingly unsatisfying reflection of who we are demographically, confusing the real changes taking place and making it harder to answer deeper questions about our changing society. What does the rise of the multiracial population signify for society more broadly? On the one hand, our fast-changing demographics can tell a uniquely American story that celebrates our continued evolution as a multiracial, multi-ethnic nation. But the same numbers have also been used by far-right voices to stoke racist fears of a White population decline that supposedly weakens America.

Figure 12: Greater Boston’s multiracial population was a significant driver of population growth among all racial subgroups.

Population increases between 2010 and 2020, Greater Boston.

■ Race alone ■ Race alone or in combination



NOTE: All groups include Latino, except Latino biracial individuals who are partially of Some Other Race (e.g., Latino Some Other Race/White) in 2020; Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders were not included due to very small population size.

SOURCE: 2010, 2020 Decennial Censuses

We've largely stopped using language about "the color line," a phrase that took root before 1965 immigration reforms and reflected an America that was largely Black and White. But even constructs that researchers like us use today—like "White and non-White" or "White people and people of color"—still assume people fit into one of two separate categories. Will continued multiracial population growth serve to blur these binary distinctions sometime in the near future? Or will deeply ingrained systems of structural racism perpetuate noxious versions of the one-drop rule, relegating anyone perceived as non-White to subordinate social status?

There is evidence of economic progress and social inclusion for some multiracial people, especially those who are Asian/White and Latino/non-Latino. But the persistence of interpersonal and structural racism continues to damage the prospects of many mixed-race Americans. Anti-Black racism has been especially pernicious throughout American history, and while legal uses of one-drop rules are no more, many people's perceptions of who is White or non-White follow that old world view and influence how they treat people. These dynamics are also evident in the differing experiences among people with mixed racial identities, whereby those who are phenotypically whiter often receive more of the privileges associated with whiteness.

With new families forming across racial and ethnic lines, it is a near certainty that the multiracial population will continue to grow. But it remains to be seen whether all people regardless of background will be able to fully participate in, shape, and lead social and economic institutions that have traditionally been White-dominated.

Current demographic trends help blur the hard lines that enable racism, but many experience any change as loss, and view the world in zero-sum terms even when that is irrational.

Indeed, recently we've seen a resurgence of political movements worldwide that reflect a fear-driven backlash to trends like these. Fortunately, with new generations comes the potential to course correct history's missteps. The fact that more young people come from mixed backgrounds adds promise to that potential for change.

FOOTNOTES

1. [*Changing Faces of Greater Boston*](#), Boston Indicators, UMass Boston and UMass Donahue Institute, 2019.
2. Researchers who study the multiracial population often exclude anyone with Latino or Hispanic heritage. In our report, we include people of Latino who heritage who indicate two or more races in addition to being Latino. However, we exclude biracial Latinos who are mixed with Some Other Race (e.g., Some Other Race/White, Latino) because many of these biracial Latinos have been added to the Some Other Race group by the Census Bureau for having written a Latino response under the race question. As a reference point for researchers who study multiracial trends: excluding Latinos, Greater Boston had 79,083 multiracial people in 2010 and 228,483 in 2020. The city of Boston had 14,959 multiracial people in 2010 and 32,721 in 2020, excluding Latino respondents.
3. Liebler, C. A., Porter, S. R., Fernandez, L. E., Noon, J. M., Ennis, S. R. [*America's Churning Races: Race and Ethnic Response Changes between Census 2000 and the 2010 Census*](#), Demography, February 2017.
4. Parker, K., Horowitz, J. M., Morin, R., Lopez, M. H. [*Multiracial in America: Proud, Diverse and Growing in Numbers*](#), Pew Research Center, June 2015.
5. Marks, R., Rios-Vargas, M. [*Improvements to the 2020 Census Race and Hispanic Origin Question Designs, Data Processing, and Coding Procedures*](#), The United States Census Bureau, August 2021.
6. Please contact the authors with any questions related to 2020 census coding changes and related adjustments made in this analysis. Contact information is available at www.bostonindicators.org.
7. Parker, K., Horowitz, J. M., Morin, R., Lopez, M. H., [*Multiracial in America*](#), Pew Research Center, June 2015.
8. Cohn, D., [*American Indian and White, but not 'multiracial'*](#), Pew Research Center, June 2015.
9. This Pew Research Center survey did not identify individuals of mixed Latino heritage as multiracial and did not record their experiences as such.

10. Marks, R., Rios-Vargas, M. [Improvements to the 2020 Census Race and Hispanic Origin Question Designs, Data Processing, and Coding Procedures](#), The United States Census Bureau, August 2021.
11. Lo, S., Ng, L.W. [Beyond bachelorhood: Chinese American interracial marriage in Massachusetts during the exclusion era](#). Chinese America: History & Perspectives, January 2013.
12. Pleck, E. Black Migration and Poverty, Boston 1865-1900, Academic Press, New York, 1979.
13. Miletsky, Z. [The Dilemma of Interracial Marriage: The Boston NAACP and the National Equal Rights League, 1912-1927](#). Historical Journal of Massachusetts, 2016.
14. It is worth noting that the 1913 Massachusetts law, the Uniform Marriage Act, remained on the books and impacted gay marriages, for example, until it was repealed in 2008. State representative Byron Rushing and State Senator Dianne Wilkerson led the successful efforts to repeal the law.
15. Livingston, G., Brown, A. [Intermarriage in the U.S. 50 Years After Loving v. Virginia](#), Pew Research Center, May 2017.
16. Livingston, G., Brown, A. [Intermarriage in the U.S. 50 Years After Loving v. Virginia: Trends and patterns in intermarriage](#), Pew Research Center, May 2017.
17. Vespa, J., Medina, L., Armstrong, D. M. [Demographic Turning Points for the United States: Population Projections for 2020 to 2060](#), Population Estimates and Projections, Current Population Reports, The United States Census Bureau, March 2018.
18. [An Older and More Diverse Nation by Midcentury](#), The United States Census Bureau, August 2008.
19. Wang, H. L., Talbot, R. [This Is How The White Population Is Actually Changing Based On New Census Data](#), NPR, August 2021.

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