

The Changing Face of the Empire State:

Latinos, Portuguese and Brazilians in Upstate New York

*Part of an ongoing series of briefs prepared by the
New York State Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force*



Hon. Peter M. Rivera, Chair
Hon. Sheldon Silver, Speaker



*Prepared by Michael Fondacaro
Edited by Guillermo A. Martinez
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Preface

Today, the headlines that once declared our rise to being the largest ethnic minority in the nation have been replaced with headlines proclaiming that the “Sleeping Giant” has awoken. Reactionary immigration policies have prompted diligent action from our communities that have in turn placed millions of people in protest marches across the nation. A new civil rights movement has been born.

The work of the New York State Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force is fueled by such passionate demands for justice and fairness.

It is clearly obvious that no wall, no army, no policy will reverse the critical mass that has already been reached with the present growth of the Latino community throughout this nation. Every 2.5 seconds, there is another Latino in the United States; this mostly through births from the children of first generation immigrants. We indeed are the future of this nation. Inclusive, practical and fair policies that embrace our growing communities will lay the groundwork for a prosperous America. Nothing short of this will suffice.

This reality should be embraced by policy makers and elected officials across New York State because the growth mentioned above is dynamic especially here in our State. This publication, *The Changing Face of the Empire State: Latinos, Portuguese and Brazilians in Upstate New York*, clearly outlines the demographic changes impacting New York and briefly highlights some issues that need more government attention, especially if Upstate economies are to grow.

Latinos moving and settling throughout the New York with their families are searching for a better quality of life, a better education system, more employment opportunities, affordable housing options, safer neighborhoods, and more opportunities for their children. They bring with them a deep desire to improve their lives and are looking for leaders who embrace the change they signify with an open dialogue that includes them in the policy making process.

These are historic times. The lyrics of one of the songs in the musical *Les Miserables* spells out the humanity of these feelings perfectly:

Do you hear the people sing?
Singing a song of angry men?
It is the music of a people
Who will not be slaves again!
When the beating of your heart
Echoes the beating of the drums
There is a life about to start
When tomorrow comes!



Peter M. Rivera
Chairman, New York State Assembly
Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force
April 2006



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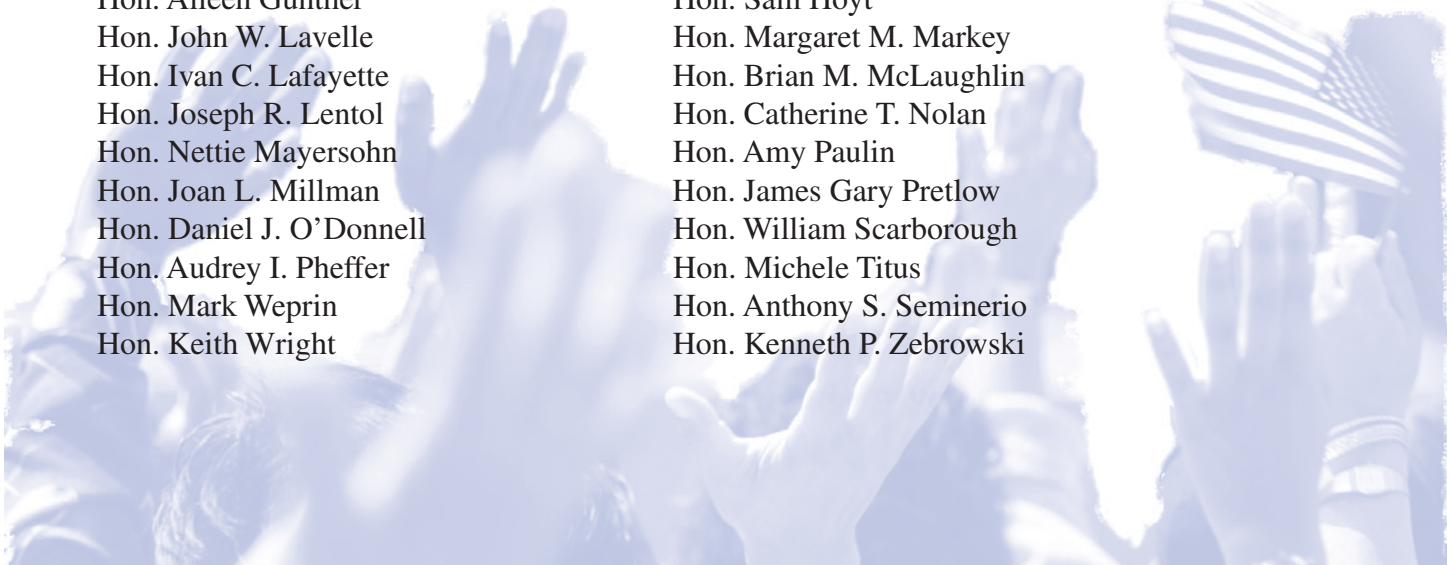
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Edited by Guillermo A. Martinez

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Introduction

In 1870, two-thirds of the population of New York State lived north of the Bronx County line. Included in the nearly 2.9 million individuals were 101 people of Mexican, Spanish and West Indian descent, and another 24 Portuguese. Much has changed since the days when the population of St. Lawrence County was about twice that of Suffolk County; those 125 people constituted .004% of the entire Upstate population; the Census Bureau's use of such terms as "insane," "dumb," "idiotic" and "foreign born stock" to describe parts of the citizenry; and the fact that while the Bureau has a tall task in trying to count every individual living within our borders, it has indeed become much more sophisticated in its work, and its ability to define the ethnicities of people.

When most people think of New York's Latino population, attention immediately focuses on New York City, and increasingly to Long Island. However, the last few Censuses have shown an explosion in the population of Latinos in Upstate, which, for the purposes of this report, is defined as the 55 counties north of the Bronx County.

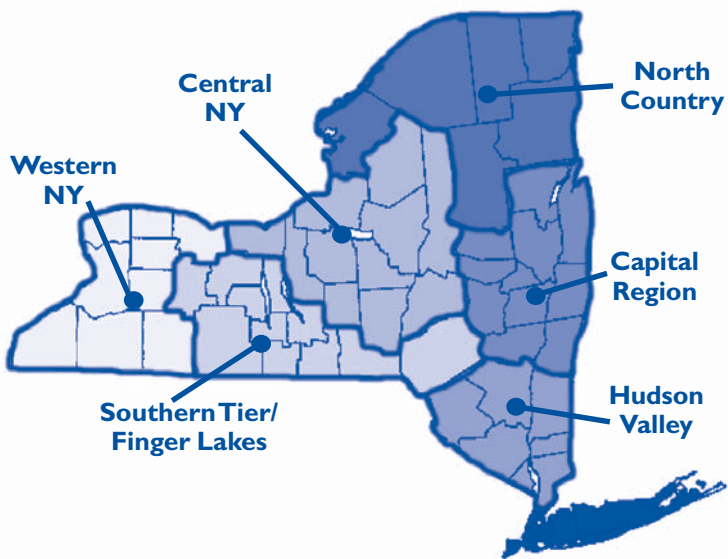
Community and social services organizations catering to Latinos have existed for years, if not decades, in such cities and towns as Syracuse, Buffalo, Rochester, Albany, Amsterdam, Poughkeepsie, Haverstraw, White Plains and Yonkers. New organizations and associations have also popped up in the last few years in Saratoga Springs, Utica, Auburn and Binghamton. Here in Albany, as is the case elsewhere, there are cultural organizations for Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Mexicans, Argentineans, Colombians and Brazilians.

The population is different from that of New York City in a way other than size and density: the migrant agricultural population. In every region, Latinos have had a growing presence on all sorts of farms. Cornell Cooperative Extension has even held events for dairy farmers looking for Latino laborers in Watertown. Indeed, from the North Country to the Hudson Valley, and from the Capital Region to the Finger Lakes and to Western New York, numerous organizations both government run and those run by religious and other groups have striven to help these laborers in all facets of their lives.

Where ethnicities have congregated in various locations, there are organizations representing them, such as the Ecuadorian Society in Sleepy Hollow, and a Guatemalan Chamber of Commerce in Mount Kisco. There are social organizations for Portuguese in Yonkers and Rochester. Businesses are forming, and people are running for public office. Consider that Upstate is home to a number of Puerto Rican elected officials, including the President of the Syracuse Common Council and Clerk of Schoharie County. Dominican-Americans serve in Rockland County and in the village of Sleepy Hollow. Mexican-Americans serve in Ithaca and New Rochelle, a Portuguese-American man serves in Middletown, a Spaniard-American has just started her first term as District Attorney of Essex County, located in the Adirondacks of the North Country, and a Colombian has served as a Trustee in Monticello.

This paper will examine the population history of Upstate Latinos, and numerous important statistical categories, including home ownership, educational attainment, household income, poverty status, and ability to speak English. It will also compare some of those statistics with those of Caucasians and African-Americans; let you know where the Latino communities are in some of Upstate New York's largest cities and those with the highest concentration of Latinos; look at business development; discuss the dynamics of the Portuguese and Brazilian populations; and look ahead to what may be the most important issues that will affect Upstate communities in the years to come.

The 55 Counties in Upstate have been divided into six regions, with their counties as follows:



Capital Region - Albany, Columbia, Fulton, Greene, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, Warren and Washington.

Central New York - Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Herkimer, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego, Otsego and Wayne.

Hudson Valley - Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster, and Westchester.

North Country - Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence.

Southern Tier/Finger Lakes - Broome, Chemung, Delaware, Livingston, Ontario, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Tioga, Tompkins and Yates.

Western New York - Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Monroe, Niagara, Orleans and Wayne.

Finally, while statistics present an interesting snapshot, several individuals representing these ethnicities have shared their reflections on life in Upstate New York. These essays are included at the end of this report.

Population

The latest estimates from the United States Census Bureau said that the Latino population of Upstate New York was close to 500,000 as of July 1, 2004. The estimates also demonstrated that the entire Upstate population dropped by about 30,000 people since 2000, while the Upstate Latino population increased by more than 66,000 during the same period. This should not come as a surprise to anyone who understands the economic condition of Upstate New York.

An Associated Press article from September of 2003 noted that “Latinos were clearly the driving force”¹ in the state’s population increase for the 2002 population estimates. For 2004, were it not for Latinos, Upstate’s population could have dropped by some 100,000.

When it comes to study of population, Census counts must be taken with a grain of salt.

Until 1980, researching census statistics required looking for such words as “foreign stock,” and trying to find the country of origin. Among the nations, regions and categories listed: Mexico, Spain, Portugal, West Indies, Cuba and West Indies, Central America, South America, Central and South America, Other America, Spanish Origin or descent and Puerto Rican Birth and Parentage. (The last two categories listed in 1970 demonstrated significant gains in population counts.)

Thus, it is not known if someone listed from Cuba and the West Indies is Cuban, or of another island in the West Indies settled by the French, British or Dutch. Likewise, those from Central and South America might have been from Belize, Guyana, Suriname, and not one of the Spanish or Portuguese settled countries.

The past few years have seen lobbying for statistical sampling, whose proponents say would provide a more accurate count of racial and ethnic minorities.

After the count in 1870, the Census records say the Latino population in Upstate fluctuated between .005% to .1% of the Upstate population through 1940. Since then, the population has shown at first steady, then dramatic increases, to .25% in 1960, 1.66% in 1970, 1.94% in 1980, 3.27% in 1990, 5.17% in 2000. When Portuguese and Brazilians are included, that figure rises to 5.48%. As of July 1, 2004, Latinos account for 5.99% of the Upstate population. (Census estimates do not account for Portuguese or Brazilian ancestries.)

In terms of their location, the Hudson Valley is clearly the commanding region, with more than 305,000 people (60% of the Upstate Latino population) living in those seven counties. In fact, Westchester County's estimated Latino population — at 165,929 — is larger than the total Latino population of all but 13 of Upstate's 55 counties. The totals in other regions include some 90,000 in Western New York, 35,000 in the Capital Region, 31,000 in Central New York, nearly 18,000 in the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes and some 11,000 in the North County.

In terms of percentage of total population, Latinos account for more than 13% of the Hudson Valley. The figure is 3.87% in Western New York, with the other regions further behind.

Ethnicity

Puerto Ricans account for more than 40% of the Upstate Latino population. Mexicans come in second at 14.3%. Following the "All Other Latino or Latino" category, were Dominicans (6.4%), Cubans and Spaniards/Spanish/Spanish Americans (both 3.2%), and Ecuadorians and Colombians (both about 2.9%).

Other ethnicities with more than 5,000 residents in Upstate include Guatemalans, the most populous Central American ethnicity (1.75%), Peruvians and Salvadorians.

In each region, Puerto Ricans are also the predominant ethnicity, accounting for more than a half of the Latino population in the Capital Region, Western New York and Central New York, and nearly half the Latino population in the Southern Tier/Finger Lakes and North Country.

In this instance again, the Hudson Valley sets itself apart with less than a third of the Latino population being Puerto Rican.

While Puerto Ricans have maintained a growing presence in the other regions, their percentage of the total Latino population has decreased in the Hudson Valley since 1980.

**TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE OF PUERTO RICANS IN LATINO POPULATION BY COUNTY:
HUDSON VALLEY 1980-2000**

COUNTY	1980	1990	2000
Dutchess	53.6	51.6	45.6
Orange	63.6	55.3	48.2
Putnam	54.7	44.9	38.9
Rockland	53.9	47.8	36.6
Sullivan	65.1	57.2	53.1
Ulster	59.6	57.1	51.1
Westchester	39.2	31.4	24.2

SOURCE: 1980, 1990, 2000 Census

Ethnicity Beyond the Hudson Valley

What is interesting here is that while some might think that while the Hudson Valley ethnicity trends may be a picture of the future of Latinos in other regions, it has in fact not been the case.

In 1980, only 12 counties not in the Hudson Valley, New York City or Long Island had Latino populations that were majority Puerto Rican. There were 30 counties in which they represented the highest number of Latinos, excluding the aforementioned “all other” category.

In 1990, Puerto Ricans in 17 counties had reached majority population status among Latinos.

In 2000, Puerto Ricans in 23 counties had reached majority population status among Latinos, while in 24 other counties Puerto Ricans were in the most populous ethnicity category.

The next most populous ethnicities by region were:

Capital Region: Mexicans, Spanish/Spaniard/Spanish-Americans, Dominicans and Cubans.

Hudson Valley: Mexicans, Dominicans, Ecuadorians and Cubans.

Western New York: Mexicans, Cubans and Dominicans.

Central New York: Mexicans, Cubans and Dominicans.

Southern Tier: Mexicans, Spanish/Spaniard/Spanish-Americans, Dominicans and Cubans.

North Country: Mexicans, Dominicans and Cubans.

Colombians were the most populous South American ethnicity in the Capital Region, Western New York, Central New York, the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes. Costa Ricans were the most populous Central American ethnicity in the Capital Region; Guatemalans were the most populous Central American ethnicity in the Hudson Valley, Central New York and the Southern Tier. Panamanians were the most populous Central American ethnicity in Western New York and the North Country.

TABLE 2: The Census projections for July 1, 2004 continue to show significant population increases in most of the regions.

REGION	2000 Population	2004 Estimate	Percentage Change
Hudson Valley	254,073	305,450	19.77%
Capital Region	30,250	35,226	14.13%
Sou. Tier/Finger Lks.	15,491	17,892	15.50%
Central New York	27,780	31,230	11.05%
Western New York	84,079	89,223	5.77%
North Country	11,782	11,600	-1.54%

SOURCE: 2000 Census, 2004 Census Estimates

Race

As for racial makeup:

- nearly half of Upstate's Latinos say they are white;
- 8.7% say they are of two or more races;
- 5% say they are African-American;
- .8% percent say they are Native American or Alaskan Native;
- .3% say they are Asian;
- .1% say they are of Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Island descent; and
- 37% say they are of some other race alone.

Age

In terms of age, the Latino population Upstate is relatively young and is clearly a precursor to the high rate of population growth that Upstate will experience well into this century.

As of 2000, some 70% of Upstate Latinos were under 40 years of age. African-Americans under the age of 40 constitute about 55% of the Upstate black population, while the majority of Caucasians living in Upstate New York are older than 40.

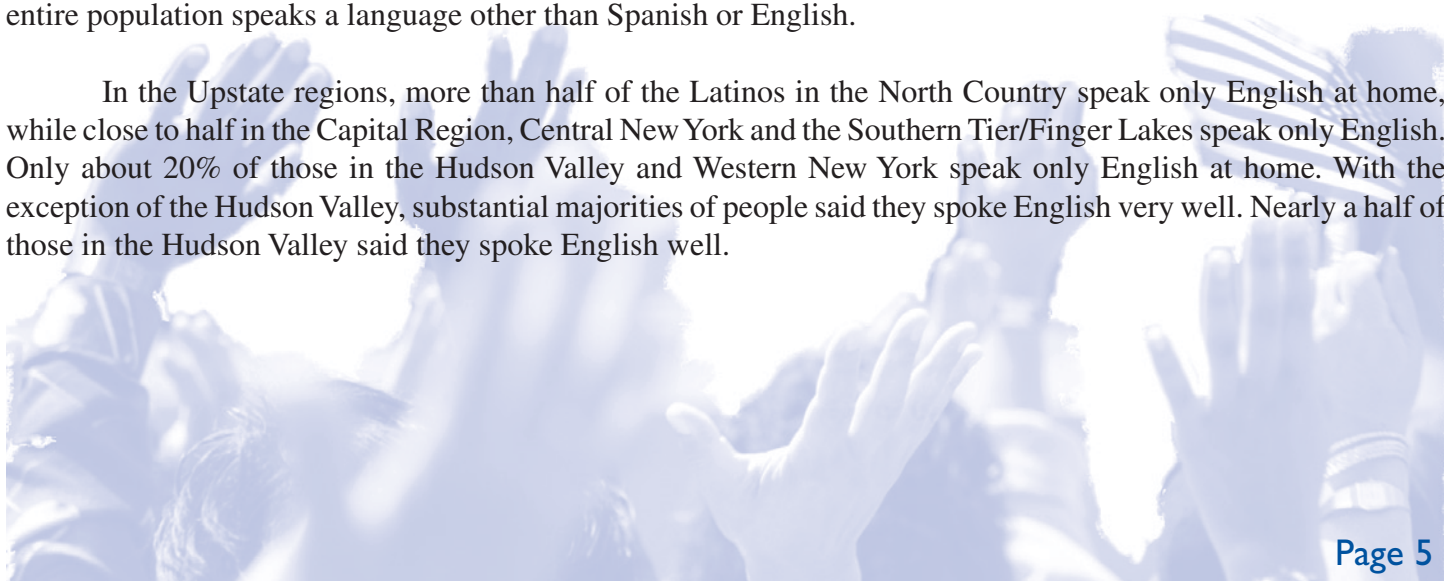
Place of Birth

Nearly 70% of Upstate Latinos were born in the United States, and 68 percent of that group were born in New York State. The other 30% in this statistic were born in foreign nations and territories. About a third of this group are naturalized citizens, while the remainder are not citizens.

Language

Finally, in terms of the language spoken at home, among those five and older, 29% of Upstate Latinos speak only English. Of the 70% of those who speak Spanish, more than half speak English very well, about a quarter speak English well, 17% do not speak English well, and 5% do not speak English at all. About 1% of the entire population speaks a language other than Spanish or English.

In the Upstate regions, more than half of the Latinos in the North Country speak only English at home, while close to half in the Capital Region, Central New York and the Southern Tier/Finger Lakes speak only English. Only about 20% of those in the Hudson Valley and Western New York speak only English at home. With the exception of the Hudson Valley, substantial majorities of people said they spoke English very well. Nearly a half of those in the Hudson Valley said they spoke English well.



Population in Major Cities

In the major cities of Upstate New York, Latinos have for the most part found their own neighborhoods. Yonkers, Rochester, Syracuse, Buffalo, New Rochelle, Mount Vernon and other medium and small cities with significant Latino populations are among the examples. An exception is Albany. Albany's core is on the southeastern side, but there are significant pockets in the northern and western areas as well.

The following table shows the Latino populations in some of New York State's largest municipalities, and those areas with a high percentage of Latino population.

TABLE 3:

Municipality	County	Total Pop.	Latino Pop.	% Latino
Buffalo	Erie	292,648	22,076	7.5
Rochester	Monroe	219,773	28,032	12.8
Yonkers	Westchester	196,086	50,852	25.9
Syracuse	Onondaga	147,306	7,768	5.3
Albany	Albany	95,658	5,349	5.6
Ramapo	Rockland	108,905	8,923	8.2
Greenburgh	Westchester	86,764	7,825	9.0
Clarkstown	Rockland	82,082	5,683	5.9
New Rochelle	Westchester	72,182	14,492	20.1
Mount Vernon	Westchester	68,381	7,083	10.4
Schenectady	Schenectady	61,821	3,632	5.9
Utica	Oneida	60,651	3,510	5.8
White Plains	Westchester	53,077	12,476	23.5
Troy	Rensselaer	49,170	2,131	4.3
Binghamton	Broome	47,380	1,849	3.9
Town of Rye	Westchester	43,880	14,264	32.5
Mount Pleasant	Westchester	43,221	6,057	14.0

In Upstate New York, there are more than 60 municipalities with Latino populations that constitute more than 10% of that municipality's population, Westchester County has 16 municipalities and Orange County has 10. Others can be found in Sullivan, Rockland, Dutchess, Ulster, Putnam, Greene, Montgomery, Washington, Delaware, Chautauqua, Erie, Monroe, Cayuga, Oneida, Clinton, Franklin and Jefferson counties. Here are some of those municipalities:

TABLE 4:

Municipality	County	Total Pop.	Latino Pop.	% Latino
Village of Haverstraw	Rockland	10,117	5,998	59.3
Port Chester	Westchester	27,867	12,884	46.2
Sleepy Hollow	Westchester	9,212	4,153	45.1
City of Newburgh	Orange	28,259	10,257	36.3
City of Middletown	Orange	25,388	6,375	35.1
Village of Brewster	Putnam	2,192	694	32.1
Village of Ellenville	Ulster	4,130	1,173	28.4
Village of Monticello	Sullivan	6,512	1,508	23.2
City of Peekskill	Westchester	22,441	4,920	21.9
Town of Ossining	Westchester	36,534	7,282	19.9
Dunkirk	Chautauqua	13,131	2,608	19.9
Village of Fleischmanns	Delaware	361	79	19.7
Village of Dannemora	Clinton	4,129	770	18.6
Town of Wawarsing	Ulster	12,889	2,326	18.0
Village of Mamaroneck	Westchester	18,752	3,284	17.5
City of Amsterdam	Montgomery	18,355	2,941	16.0

Education

In 1998, the renowned British publication *The Economist* noted that 400 years had passed since Don Juan de Oñate’s claiming of land to the north of the Rio Grande for Spain; 150 has passed since sesquicentennial of the annexation of the south-west after the Mexican-American war; and it was the 100th anniversary of Puerto Rico’s entry into the Union after the Spanish-American war.²

This quote followed: “*Our growth means nothing if we remain under-educated. We Latinos have to become obsessed with education,*” *Antonia Hernandez, the Mexican-American Legal Defense Fund*³

In the article, *The Economist* devoted several paragraphs to the education of Latinos. It was with good reason, especially when one considers Upstate New York.

The 2000 Census information notes that of the nearly 225,000 Latinos in Upstate New York ages 25 or older, ***more than 90,000 do not have a high school diploma, and more than 43,000 of that number have less than a ninth grade education.***

More than 50,000 have a high school diploma or equivalency degree, and 35,000 more have taken college courses, but do not have a degree. The remainder do have associates, bachelors or professional degrees.

Comparing these statistics with African Americans in Upstate, close to a third of the 365,000 do not have high school diplomas, about 27 percent do have diplomas or equivalency degrees. More than 70,000 have attended college without receiving degrees, and 27,000 have associates degrees, 31,000 have bachelors degrees and about 21,000 have graduate or professional degrees.

Among the 4.66 million Upstate Caucasians, 14.5% do not have a high school diploma, while nearly 22% do. Another 22% have attended college without getting a degree, 9% have an associates degree, 15% have bachelors degrees and about 12% have graduate or professional degrees.

Upstate districts represent five of the top ten districts statewide in terms of Latino school enrollment in grades K-5, with Yonkers, Rochester, Buffalo, Newburgh and New Rochelle represented. Among the top ten districts in terms of Latino high school diploma recipients are the Tarrytowns, Port Chester-Rye UFSD, Greenburg Eleven UFSD, Yonkers public schools and Haverstraw-Stony Point Central School District.⁴

Perhaps the best assessment is in a report on the educational profile of Latinos published by Hunter College last year. It notes “there is a major blockage in the pipeline to higher education — whereby large numbers of Latinos are leaving high school before graduating.”⁵

Child Poverty

Three years ago the Children’s Defense Fund analyzed Census data on child poverty, and noted that, of the 244 American cities with populations of 100,000 or more, Buffalo, Syracuse and Rochester had respectively the first (56.7%), second (53.3%) and sixth (48.9%) highest rates of Latino child poverty in the nation. Yonkers finished further down the list at 57th, but still had a 32.7% Latino child poverty rate.

The numbers for the rest of the state’s cities are equally depressing.

The economic decline of Upstate is reflected across all regions. The highest poverty rate is found in Central New York (43.1%), followed by Western New York (38.8%), the Capital Region (33.3%), the North Country (23.3%), the Hudson Valley (22.7%) and the Southern Tier/Finger Lakes (20.1%). (See table 6)

Of course, many counties have a mix of rural, suburban and urban populations. To see the true impact of the child poverty numbers, I selected several smaller cities with substantial Latino child populations. The poverty rates again follow each city:

Albany (39.9%), Amsterdam (39.9%), Beacon (25.2%), Binghamton (54.3%), Dunkirk (55.8%), Geneva (51.4%), Hudson (51.4%), Jamestown (42.6%), Kingston (34.9%), Lackawanna (30.4%), Middletown (35.3%), Mount Vernon (24.8%), Newburgh (35.8%), New Rochelle (31.7%), Niagara Falls (56.3%), Peekskill (28.6%), Poughkeepsie (42.8%), Rome (59.5%), Schenectady (53.2%), Troy (42.7%), Utica (69.0%), Watertown (49.9%), White Plains (21.6%).

Businesses

In the recently released statistics of Latino-owned businesses from the United States Census Bureau’s 2002 Economic Census, the figures showed a small gain in the number of businesses for Westchester County (2.7%),

and declines in such areas as the Capital Region and Rochester, when compared to the 1997 Economic Census. Owing to the difficulty Upstate New York's economy has had, this should come as a surprise to no one.

There was a significant increase in the number of businesses in Dutchess, Erie, Monroe, and Orange counties, while there were decreases in Onondaga, Ulster and Sullivan counties.

The following chart shows the number of Latino businesses in these Upstate counties in 2002. The chart comes from the survey's listing of counties with 100 or more Latino owned businesses. It should be noted that the Census Bureau suppressed statistics for Albany, Broome, Greene, Montgomery, Niagara, Oneida, Ontario, Putnam and Wayne counties, saying that publication standards were not met.

COUNTY	BUSINESSES
Dutchess	874
Erie	784
Monroe	1,095
Onondaga	306
Orange	1,370
Rockland	1,669
Saratoga	232
Sullivan	119
Ulster	427
Warren	128
Westchester	8,356

Home and Income Statistics

Latinos have been moving into homes at a faster rate than Caucasians or African-Americans. From 1995 to 2000, close to 70% of Latino homeowners moved into their current residence. African-Americans were at 60% and Caucasians were at 35%. The median household income for Latinos is within the \$35,000 to \$39,999 range. For African-Americans, the median is within the \$30,000 to \$34,999 range. For Caucasians, the median is within the \$45,000 to \$49,999 range.

Our Brothers and Sisters Who Speak Portuguese

The 2000 Census says there are more than 5,400 Brazilians Upstate, and more than 18,000 Portuguese.

Brasileiros Se Não Nos Contam, Não Existimos⁶

(from a flyer Brazilian businessmen distributed prior to the 1990 Census)

In the case of Brazilians, there has been in the past reason to believe the population has been undercounted nationwide, especially in the Northeast, where in 1990 an undercount was estimated to range between 33 and 80 percent. Many complained of an "ethnic straitjacket" in the 1990 Census forms, noting that to represent their ethnicity, they checked the "other Spanish/Latino" box, then wrote "Brazilian."⁷

While Brazilian immigration to the United States began on a larger scale in the mid-1980s,⁸ Brazilians have worked in Catskill Mountain resorts in Ellenville and Monticello since the late 1960s.⁹ Westchester County has represented a hodge-podge of Brazilian social strata, with affluent members living in Bronxville, Scarsdale and Rye,¹⁰ while others live in White Plains, New Rochelle, Mount Vernon and Port Chester.¹¹

Other areas of Upstate New York have seen growth in their Brazilian communities. Some colleges have Brazilian student groups. Buffalo's El Museo hosts the Annual Allen Street Samba Festival. Deixa Sambar is a band that plays samba music in the Ithaca area and beyond, and Albany has OBA, Organização Brasileira de Albany, which last year brought selections from the New York Brazilian Film Festival to Albany. Capital Region Brazilians who need their paçoquinha candy and guarana soda need only travel to Pittsfield, MA, where a Brazilian grocery store exists.

While many Portuguese who came to America stayed in New England, especially Fall River, Dartmouth and New Bedford, Massachusetts, Upstate does have some communities, most notably in Westchester County, with the Portuguese-American Community Center in Yonkers, the Portuguese American Club of Mount Vernon, and other clubs in New Rochelle, Ossining and Tarrytown. There is also a club in Spring Valley, Rockland County.

The arrival of the Portuguese in Lower Hudson Valley is said to have started when they "began arriving there from New England's Textile mills and from Newark in the 1920s."¹²

In the late 1970s, the Portuguese Roman Catholic community of Yonkers acquired land to build what would become Our Lady of Fatima Portuguese Roman Catholic Church.

Rochester became home to Madeiran workers some 100 years ago, when a foundry moved to the city from Corning.¹³ Each May parishioners of the Portuguese Committee of the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward honor the Virgin of Fatima by marching from St. Monica Church to Our Lady of Good Counsel Church.

Conclusion

The Latino population's growth in Upstate New York is truly impressive. The City of Albany's Common Council has 15 seats, or one seat for every 6.7% of the population. Given that the 2000 Census noted Albany's Latino population constituted 5.6% of the city, it is easily conceivable that the 2010 population will reach that 6.7% threshold, increasing the hope that a Latino will undertake a major party candidacy for Common Council.

Some three dozen Latinos ran for office last year in urban, suburban and rural settings. Continued growth will no doubt mean an increased number of Latino candidates.

It is very important to remember the comments of Antonia Hernandez in *The Economist*, that the well-being of the Latino community depends on the education of its children. That some 40% of Latinos ages 25 and older did not graduate from high school is of grave concern. That substantial numbers of Latino children in our cities live in poverty is equally distressing.

In rural areas, meanwhile, there is continued discussion of the need to help migrant farm workers, who have in past years needed legislation to be granted access to fresh drinking water and toilets. The battle over such additional issues as rights to collective bargaining and overtime pay is sure to continue in the halls of the State Legislature.

"In Our Own Words"

Hilda Chacón

Costa Rican, Rochester

Director, Women's Studies Program and Emerson Language Lab, Nazareth College

One of my favorite theoreticians, feminist filmmaker and author Trinh T. Minh-ha, states: "Traveling can turn out to be ... a disturbing yet potentially empowering practice of difference." For those of us who comprise the immense diasporas that characterize the globalization era, "traveling back and forth between home and abroad becomes a mode of dwelling" in Minh-ha's view.

I can relate to her statements. The very notion of "home" has been "problematized"/disturbed/enriched by my experience, living 14 years in the United States, the last seven in Rochester, to which my family and I now refer as "home."

I was born in Costa Rica, a tiny country in Central America.

I studied journalism at the University of Costa Rica and worked as a reporter for radio, television, news agencies, and newspapers for almost a decade.

I even produced TV spots for the then-president of Costa Rica, Dr. Oscar Arias Sánchez, and his wife, Margarita Penón de Arias. I was hired by them to direct a national TV campaign to prevent the use of illegal drugs and the expansion of narco-trafficking. I never considered the possibility of leaving my country.

However, I came to Miami on a business trip in 1991. I then traveled to Arizona to visit my sister, and arrived in Flagstaff. There in the middle of the desert, I was lucky enough to find the most incredible man on Earth. To this day he is my companion, my friend, my best minutes on Earth. He is also my husband. He is Mexican and was finishing his master's degree in Arizona when we met and married.

Then both of us decided to go to the Midwest to pursue our doctorates; we graduated from Ohio State University in the 1990s. My husband is a biologist, specializing in conservation biology and has worked with endangered plant populations. My doctorate is in Latin American culture and literature.

I was the one who found a suitable job position first, at Nazareth College, and the three of us came here in 1999. Our daughter, who grew up in Columbus, Ohio, thought she would "never" like any city other than Columbus. However, Rochester grew in her heart, and she also calls Rochester home. Now it is almost funny to listen to her bragging over the phone with her Ohioan friends about Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony — "our" civil rights pioneers from Rochester. Certainly, in comparison with many Midwestern cities, Rochester has a strong sense of history and legacy. It is a small city with personality. The three of us love it here.

I remember that when I came for my job interview at Nazareth, I saw an inscription on the wall at the student union: "We, the Nazareth community, embrace diversity." Then I thought to myself, "If there are people who feel that way here, this is where I want to be." And I said yes to Nazareth College, even though I already had a job offer from a university in North Carolina, where the climate is more benign than here.

As a foreign feminist and a scholar at Nazareth, my role has been to expose students to "the foreign" cultures and views. I have been their guide in this journey, in this traveling experience. I always tell my students that this journey may have moments of discomfort and I acknowledge their right to feel this way, as long as they commit to "travel back and forth," as Trinh Minh-ha would say, from their notion of home to "the foreign view." This movement becomes their journey, their "mode of dwelling" (Minh-ha).

Maruja Lander
Peruvian, Vestal
Mathematics Professor, Broome Community College
Southern Tier Latino Association

I came from Peru to Binghamton 20 years ago and I consider myself very lucky for the opportunity to raise my three children in this safe place. I had left Peru in the middle of a civil war between Shining Path, the military and paramilitary forces; but it is safe also because I never had to worry about assaults or robberies, which were very common in Peru, as happens in societies where the majority lives under extreme poverty.

Among many other things, I had to learn to drive following the rules and not blowing the horn at each corner, to stop at the "stop" sign, etc. It was a very pleasant surprise to see the orderliness of the traffic, even when roads merged!

As a Peruvian, I tried to preserve my heritage, to teach my children to appreciate it and be proud of it. I always talked Spanish at home, I introduced them to Peruvian history and geography, played games, sang songs I learned as a child and often visited Peru with them. At the same time I wanted them to appreciate and respect the customs of peoples other than those they grew up with.

Soon after I arrived in Binghamton, I met three Peruvian families who became very close friends and took the place of my extended family that I missed so much. Our children grew up together and we supported each other from babysitting to sharing happy and sad experiences of every day life.

We were very fortunate to live in Vestal, where the population is diverse, tolerant and receptive about my culture. There are many events in the city and schools that encourage the show of this multiculturalism. In the last few years the Latino population has increased in this area and I feel that I have to help the newcomers adapt to this new life-style, but at the same time to maintain their pride in their rich Hispanic heritage.

C. Sonia Martínez
Dominican, Utica
President of the Board of Directors, Mohawk Valley Latino Association

Thirty four years have passed and they still feel like yesterday! Yes, I left my country, Mami and small siblings in the Dominican Republic and my life has changed here but the love for my country has not changed.

My father came to this country first with his wife and two step-sisters. After he spent five years working, he decided to bring the rest of us to this country. I did not know anything about coming here until the day came to go to the Immigration appointment in Santo Domingo. I was only 14 years old then.

The first five years were very hard due to the new changes of schools, getting to know other cultures, the mass of people all over in New York City, different weather, dealing with a tyrant step-mother and living in buildings instead of a single house. After graduating from high school in 1977 I moved to Upstate New York.

I have lived in the Mohawk Valley because of the safety of raising children compared to other parts of the country, its four beautiful seasons, the diversity of the people, how much the people give to others in need of assistance, and the low housing costs.

I remember the first time visiting College Open House at Herkimer County Community College, in May of 1977; still some cold weather residue in the ground. My dad said to me, "Are you sure that you want to come here for your studies?" and I replied, "Yes, definitely. It is pretty and feels like I could make it my home!"

I graduated from Herkimer County Community College in June 1980. When my oldest child was three months old, I left the area and moved back to New York City. I was thinking of giving my daughter a closer family lifestyle and raising her to know and understand her Hispanic Heritage, since all my immediate family was living there.

Well, within six months I found out that my daughter (Cristina) and I were not going to make it, due to the high cost of living, could not find immediate assistance with housing, employment, food and day care. A very long list of people were ahead of me and waiting for the same things.

I decided that there was a rainbow of opportunities for me and my daughter in the Mohawk Valley. I returned to the area before my daughter's first birthday and have been here ever since. This was 1984. In 1989 my son was born (Michael). I did make another attempt to move out of the area to Jacksonville, Florida in 1997. Again, I am still here to help raise my grandchild, Cristian, and now other my family members have followed me here from New York City.

The Mohawk Valley Latino Association was formed in October 2003, after several discussions with other Hispanic Community leaders. The board of directors was formed and the project came to fruition in 2004, when the first grant was written by me and the request sent to Assemblywoman RoAnn M. Destito. The grant was awarded in November 2005.

We are researching other grants and funding opportunities to help operate the office with staff. Many community leaders have come forth to help with ideas and support. This year, 2006, should be MVLA's year to get more funding and fully staff the office with an executive director, administrative assistant and project team leaders for all special projects at hand. Any help is welcomed and appreciated by all of us involved.

***Juan E. González,
Colombian, Fallsburg
Senior, Fallsburg High School***

Six years ago my family and I left our family, friends and culture behind. We were victims of the civil war taking place in our country, Colombia; targeted because of our economic status, social class, and involvement in government. My family and I were surrounded by danger my entire life. Before I was even born my mother's father was assassinated because of his political position. When I was four, one of my uncles was kidnapped.

Only four years later, another uncle was murdered in a kidnapping attempt. In the years to come, persecution haunted my family. Moving from one city to another in order to find peace became a routine for my family. As a child it was difficult for me to understand why we had such heavy security surrounding our property, or why we had dogs that I could not play with, or why could I not go to my friends' house. Why? It was only for our safety. At my young age life seemed secure, but for my parents the situation degraded as time went on.

In February of 1999, tragedy hit our family once again; my father was robbed and threatened with death. This time my parents informed us that we would move one more time. They were tired of leaving one place for another and sooner or later finding ourselves in danger again. This time we were not only moving to a different state or city, we were leaving the country. We were moving to the United States of America. Any sign of preparation for departure might have led to catastrophe. We did not take anything. We just left.

When we arrived in America my siblings and I were not happy. We had traded our beautiful houses, cars, and private schools for a one bedroom house on Bennett Street where my sisters and I slept on the floor. After being in the U.S. for a while, we started to realize how life was completely different. We were safe! There was no more running away from violence, no more guards, no more fear.

Today my family and I are refugees in this country. Fleeing our country, leaving behind loved ones, an outstanding name, and a great deal of property forged my personality in positive ways that I never would have foreseen in Colombia. It has been extremely hard to make a change that was not a matter of choice but was a matter of life or death. These personal experiences and the support of my parents have molded me into the individual that I am today.

Here in the U.S. I can safely express my interest in service. At Fallsburg I have worked in the Thanksgiving Food Drives making sure that the less fortunate have food. When CHAP (Comunidad Hispana Abriendo Puertas) wanted to network with my school, I made the presentation to the Board of Education. When my school planned a Blood Drive I helped organize it and donated blood.

I respond well to a challenge and enjoy the rewards of hard work. For five years I have worked in the same pizzeria a few hours after school and twelve hours a day on Saturdays, Sundays, and school vacations. In academics, in community service, and at my job I take pride in myself and my work, and derive considerable satisfaction from doing an assignment well.

I believe leadership is important. The Hispanic Youth Leadership Institute is an organization that trains potential leaders in New York. For two years the HYLI has selected me as a representative from Fallsburg. Last year I participated in a mock assembly session held at the State Capital in Albany. Communities need leaders who demonstrate good character, service, and dedication. I try to represent those qualities.

I excel in high-stress situations and can manage a variety of projects simultaneously. Although I invest passionately in my academics and job, community service and family, I have found time to compete in track and field for five years and played on my high school's varsity soccer team for three years.

My success in the past has stemmed from my strong commitment and sense of professionalism. In Webster's Dictionary the word "root" has twenty-one definitions. For me roots are the values that my family instilled when I was a child in Colombia; values that were deepened by being transplanted into American culture.

Dorothy Nowhitney
Mexican, Ballston Spa
Teacher, Saratoga Springs High School
Founder, Latino Community Advocacy Program

I was born in Ballston Spa but only spent summers there until 1974, when I was entering sixth grade. My father, siblings and I were the only Latinos in the community at the time. For an eleven year old, that was a very lonely experience. From 1974 through 1979, my family and I relocated back and forth between Upstate NY and California, finally settling in Ballston Spa in 1979. I went from living in a community of Latino families to being, again, the only Latino family.

Over the years, I had noticed an increase in the Latino population throughout Saratoga County and it was not only during the racing season. I wanted to walk up to these individuals and families and tell them my name, that I know this area, I speak Spanish, listen to their stories and let them know if they needed assistance, they could call me. Realistically, I knew that was not the best idea. I made several phone calls to find out about any outreach programs in Saratoga County for Latinos, but there were none that any organization knew of.

The question of how to reach Latinos in the community, assist them in becoming a part of their community and putting them in touch with the resources available to them would not let go of me.

On July 1, 2005, with the support of Dennis Brunelle, Executive Director of Saratoga County Economic Opportunity Council and Julie Hoxie, Finance Director, my daughter Krystle and I established the Latino Community Advocacy Program. This program is my way of helping Latinos to become a part of their community and avoid feelings of isolation as I felt upon moving here.

Watching the program grow as community partnerships have been formed and individual successes achieved has been truly inspiring for all involved. My hope for the future is for the Saratoga County community at large to recognize the Latino people and culture as an important part of our community and enrichment to life here.

Diana de Avila,
Bolivian, Ballston Spa
Co-Founder, www.tolerance4all.org

I grew up in a family of 6 and my father came directly from Bolivia. Some of my siblings grew up in Bolivia and some of us in the US. I grew up in the US and am not Spanish-speaking, which sometimes makes me sad and keeps me one step away from my “Latina-ness.” I was able to evade my requirement to take foreign languages in school because I was a musician, and taking all the music classes that I did were considered a substitute for Spanish. Good or bad, it is what it is. At the very least I have my music!

I identify myself as a Latina, but you could never tell. You wouldn't be able to tell by the way I look, or the way I act. I've been out of touch with the Bolivian community since I was a child growing up in a suburb of Washington D.C. We had so many Bolivian and South American friends growing up. I had spent much time around the language then and the culture and habits. This always felt a little different and I knew that I was different from my classmates in many ways.

When my family relocated to Glens Falls, New York in 1985, I was just getting out of the US Army where I'd been recovering from a motorcycle accident that would change my life forever and label me as a "Service-Disabled American Veteran". As an 18 year old, I dealt with a long hospital stay and recovery from that motorcycle accident. As a 40 year old, I deal with multiple sclerosis. On top of the layer of health matters, I am a minority in several ways and identity as a female service disabled veteran, Hispanic, and lesbian.

My partner and I live a peaceful life in a nice niche suburban community near Saratoga, New York. I look around me and don't see a large prevalence of minorities. But then again, I look in the mirror and at my own skin and cannot tell that I am disabled, lesbian or from Bolivia. These are all of things that hide beneath my skin until I am ready to have them emerge. Most of the time, they are not as visible to the outside world as they are to me.

Teresita Barcia-Varno
Cuban, Glenmont
Teacher, Bethlehem High School

Things have changed in Cuba since the 1980's, but Cubans keep coming to the U.S. looking for freedom, better opportunities, and family reunification. My family was one of those who were lucky enough to be able to leave by legal means, and reach the U.S. with a green card and supportive relatives waiting for us in a suburb of Albany. The journey to the Capital District was not an easy one, however.

My parents, my sister and I had permission to leave the country via Spain after a very long immigration process. The repressive Cuban government wanted to make sure that it was not going to be pleasant. Like many Cubans who left the island in the years following the Mariel exodus of 1980, we suffered humiliations, my father was fired from his job, and we were marginalized and scolded at school for being "traidores a la revolución." Anyone who requested permission to leave was labeled as a worm, a scoria, a piece of garbage. Then came the inventory. People from the Communist community organization had to come to our house and inventory everything they found to make sure that we could not take out, or sell anything. They would inventory our home once again before our departure. They had the "right" to invade our privacy and go through and record everything. They kept our home with most property inside. We were able to take some important things out, but it had to be done at night and before the inventory, as someone had given us warning that they would be coming soon.

Although my sister and I were only teenagers, the Internal security forces in military uniforms interrogated us away from our parents about our desire to leave the country. Any hesitation on our part would have resulted in a cancellation of our permission to leave, and the state would then become our guardian, but our parents would be allowed to leave without us. Needless to say, it was a very stressful time for our parents, because they did not know how we would react to the pressure of the interrogation.

So we left towards a new life, with twenty-five pounds of clothes, no pictures, no jewelry, no music, no wedding rings (if they had a stone on them), no physical mementos of the past, and only ten Cuban pesos which had no value outside of Cuba, but a heart full of memories, love, nostalgia, and images of Cuba, of our family, neighbors, and friends that we will forever hold dear.

After waiting for two-and-a-half years in Spain for our chance to come to the U.S., the papers were finally approved in 1985. The Capital District had been the home of my maternal family since the 1970s, and it also

offered more opportunities than Miami, which was already saturated by Cuban immigration, so it was the obvious choice. Here, with the support of our relatives and much hard work and sacrifice especially from my parents, we started to rebuild our lives.

It was very difficult because the Latino community was always present, but not as united as it now is, especially in the suburbs, and there is a great sense of isolation for our people when they come to situations like this. The language barriers can soon begin to fall, but the culture gap is harder to close. After completing high school, both my sister and I found the support we needed to successfully complete our bachelor degrees at the College of Saint Rose, in Albany.

Two decades later, although I will always cherish Cuba and its people, I am proud to call the Capital District home. This is where I have worked as a teacher of Spanish, sharing the richness of our language and cultures with my high school students for the last sixteen years; here is where I am raising my own family, where I have found lasting friendships, and a Latino community that is growing stronger, more united, and supportive of each other every day. Yes, it was a difficult and long journey, like that of most immigrants, but now my two daughters and my nephews will have the rights that have been denied to Cubans since 1959. They are lucky indeed to be growing up happy, carefree, and free in our beautiful Capital District.

Fernando Pinho
Portuguese, Yonkers
Sleepy Hollow Bank, Yonkers

I recall the day as if it was yesterday. It was a sunny but crisp day. At 19 years old I felt as if my life had just begun. Everything I observed was new. They say pictures speak a thousand words, but being part of that “picture” was a long-time dream. Finally, I arrived in New York. I was in AMERICA!

Being born and raised in Portugal, in many respects soon I felt I never left my homeland, and this is one of the beauties of America, the land of opportunity. Since the early days I noticed and learned to appreciate how my countrymen were able to preserve their culture, costumes, language and values. The Portuguese American Community Center of Yonkers, NY was and is today the main conduit for that. Founded 75 years ago, in 1930, by a handful of Portuguese emigrants, the Center continues to provide the means for the Portuguese to gather and to celebrate our rich heritage and history. I became a member in 1973 and I’ve been able to participate in many of its activities which allow me and my family to preserve my roots in America. This has been a basic need for my existence and something I will always treasure.

My story is the same as most of those that come to America from abroad. The language, the customs, the culture are some of the fundamental obstacles to overcome and assimilate quickly in order to succeed. So, perhaps like you, the first order of business was to find a job. My first job was to wash dishes in the cafeteria at a local hospital. I did that for several years while going to college because soon I learned that without an education my career choices would be limited. For a while, continuous learning and self-development became a priority (obsession?) to me and in 1986 I achieved a Masters Degree in Computer Science specializing in Software Engineering from Iona College, New Rochelle, NY. My inspiration and primary motivation was my family and work colleagues.

Thanks to my lovely wife Maria de Lourdes, my daughters Laura and Monica, my parents and many of my friends and colleagues that always gave me great support, I truly believed that in America, I could achieve anything I set my mind into.

At this point in my life in America, the challenge now is to create a balance that meets my basic needs for happiness. In addition to family and work responsibilities, being able to be part of the Portuguese community not only in Yonkers but in the metropolitan New York area is something very important in my life and it provides a healthy balance. It energizes me to get up in the morning and to deal with the challenges of a new day.

Those tears leaving Portugal on that sunny October 25th 1969 soon turned into possibilities and most became reality. Thank you USA for allowing me to be a Portuguese-American....in America!



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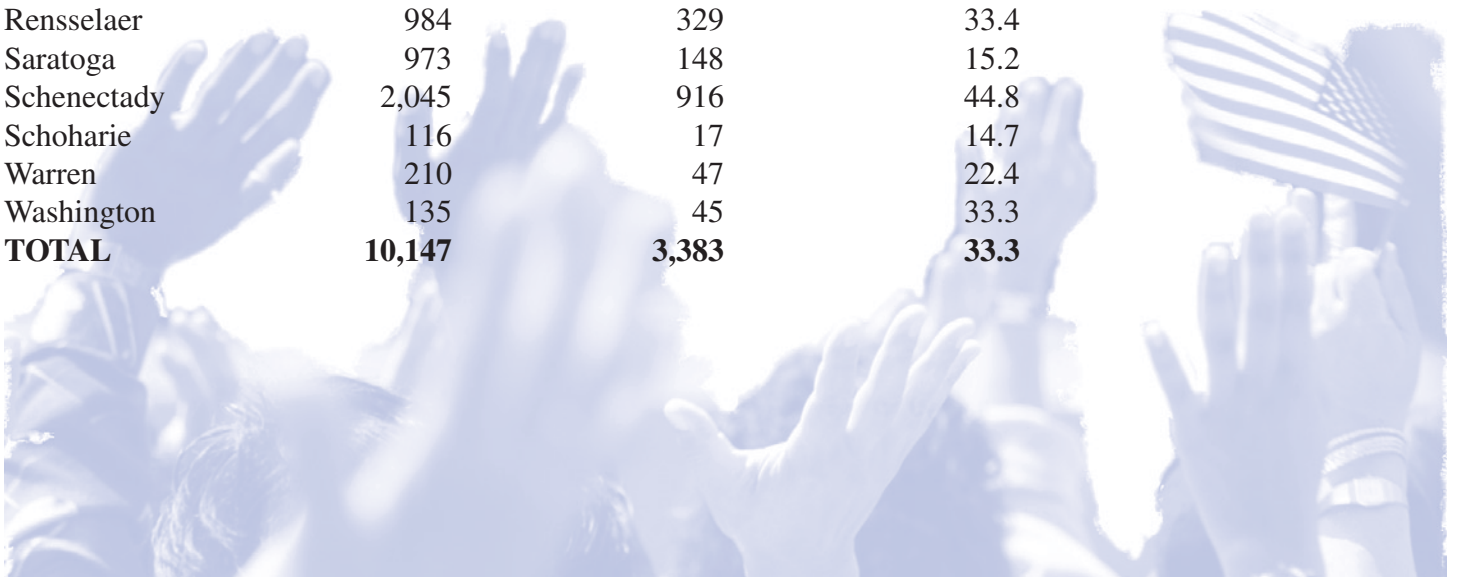
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Table 6 - Latino Child Poverty by County and Region

CAPITAL REGION	Latino Children 17 & Under	Children In Poverty	% Children In Poverty
Albany	3,196	962	30.1
Columbia	549	180	32.8
Fulton	256	97	37.7
Greene	315	105	33.3
Montgomery	1,368	537	39.3
Rensselaer	984	329	33.4
Saratoga	973	148	15.2
Schenectady	2,045	916	44.8
Schoharie	116	17	14.7
Warren	210	47	22.4
Washington	135	45	33.3
TOTAL	10,147	3,383	33.3



HUDSON VALLEY	Latino Children 17 & Under	Children In Poverty	% Children In Poverty
Dutchess	5,187	901	17.4
Orange	14,014	3,324	23.7
Rockland	8,548	1,210	14.2
Putnam	1,270	118	9.3
Sullivan	2,292	857	37.4
Ulster	3,059	803	26.3
Westchester	42,934	10,357	24.5
TOTAL	77,304	17,570	22.7

WESTERN NEW YORK

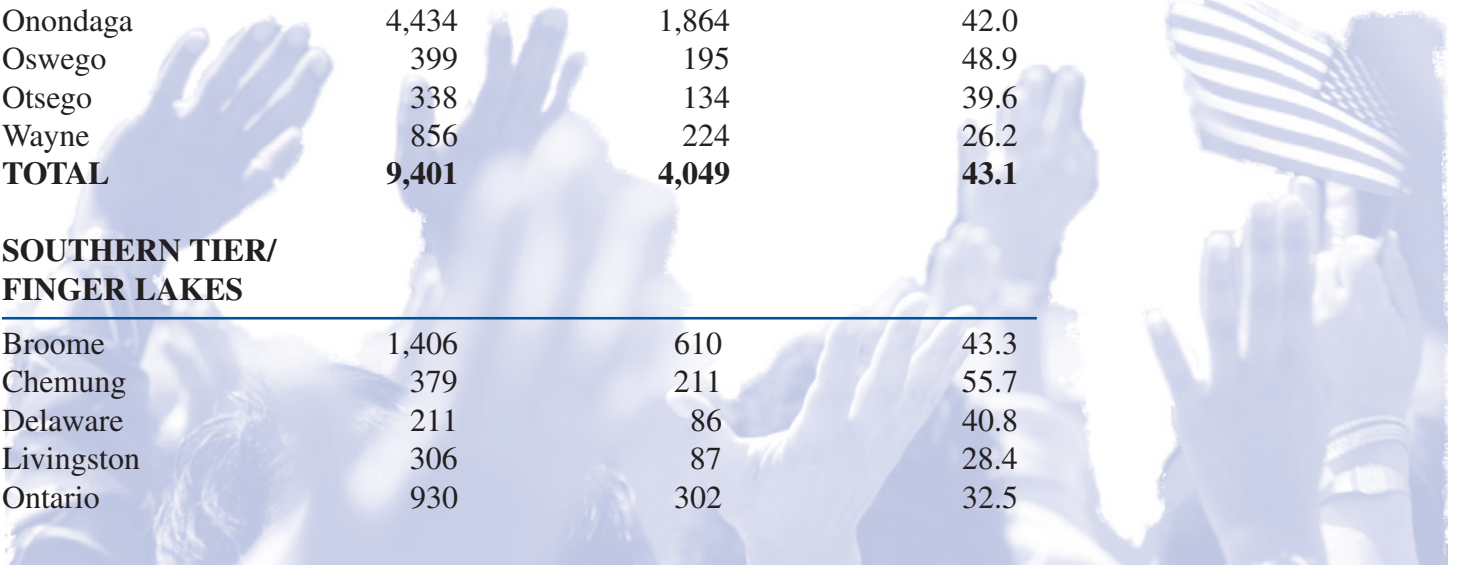
Allegany	110	25	22.7
Cattaraugus	889	93	10.5
Chautauqua	2,230	1,038	46.5
Erie	11,752	5,525	47.0
Genesee	252	109	37.9
Monroe	18,223	6,249	34.3
Niagara	1,043	419	40.2
Orleans	659	217	32.9
Wyoming	110	26	23.6
TOTAL	35,268	13,701	38.8

CENTRAL NEW YORK

Cayuga	291	116	39.9
Chenango	151	32	21.2
Cortland	188	42	22.3
Herkimer	155	24	15.5
Madison	236	40	16.9
Oneida	2,353	1,378	58.6
Onondaga	4,434	1,864	42.0
Oswego	399	195	48.9
Otsego	338	134	39.6
Wayne	856	224	26.2
TOTAL	9,401	4,049	43.1

SOUTHERN TIER/ FINGER LAKES

Broome	1,406	610	43.3
Chemung	379	211	55.7
Delaware	211	86	40.8
Livingston	306	87	28.4
Ontario	930	302	32.5



SOUTHERN TIER/FINGER LAKES <i>cont'd.</i>	Latino Children 17 & Under	Children In Poverty	% Children In Poverty
Schuyler	68	46	67.6
Seneca	144	38	26.4
Steuben	221	72	32.6
Tioga	210	44	20.9
Tompkins	526	121	23.0
Yates	40	15	37.5
TOTAL	8,106	1,632	20.1

NORTH COUNTRY

Clinton	208	27	12.9
Essex	65	10	15.4
Franklin	100	34	34.0
Hamilton	8	0	—
Jefferson	1,342	332	24.7
Lewis	55	6	10.9
St. Lawrence	280	70	25.0
TOTAL	2,058	479	23.3

