

# Caribbeans in Boston

## An Integral and Growing Population



*A Report Prepared By*  
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# JOSEPH E. CORCORAN CENTER FOR REAL ESTATE AND URBAN ACTION

BOSTON COLLEGE CARROLL SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

The Corcoran Center for Real Estate and Urban Action is an academic center focused on advancing real estate education while ensuring that students emerge with a principled understanding of the impact that real estate decisions have on people, communities, and cities.

The Corcoran Center has developed a strong connection with the neighborhood of Mattapan and has strived to develop the infrastructure that supports community-engaged learning for partners across the University. A number of the priority needs of the neighborhood of Mattapan include housing and service to the immigrant population, of which a large portion originated from the Caribbean.

The following study highlights trends and characteristics of the Caribbean population in the Boston region, including the geographic clustering of populations, some of the economic challenges, and the successes of the Caribbean population.

When we were invited to work with Caribbean Integration Community Development (CICD) on this project, we were pleased to be able to support and advance the interests of an organization with priorities so closely aligned with the Boston neighborhoods in which we have recently developed collaborative relationships.

Research outlined here was initiated and undertaken as part of a course called the Urban Action Lab. In this course, students work in close cooperation with a non-profit or government agency to advance the needs and interests of a strategic research or program development effort.

We are pleased to be able to offer this piece of research and analysis to CICD and are grateful for their commitment to working with our students.

**Urban Action Lab**  
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# Executive Summary

Immigrants from the Caribbean represent a substantial – and growing – portion of Boston’s population. Dating back to the 18th century, Caribbean immigrants have always been important to the city. But the real growth in Caribbean immigration came in the 1980s and 1990s, when the population of Caribbean immigrants nationally sky-rocketed into the millions. In 1980, a total of 1.2 M Caribbean immigrants lived in the United States. Between 1980 and today, that number has grown to 4.5 M. The Caribbean population in the United States has grown more than 50% in the last 40 years.

Within the same time period, the Boston metropolitan area has seen the Caribbean population increase dramatically. In 2017, Caribbean immigrants represented 8.5% of Boston’s overall population. Most of these individuals hail from the Dominican Republic and Haiti, but countless other places contribute to the thriving Caribbean culture in the region.

“When we are talking about affordable housing, you know, the word ‘affordable’ we have to be careful with it. Because things that could be affordable for you are not affordable for me.”

**-Anonymous Resident**

The areas within the region that include the highest populations of Caribbeans include the Mattapan, Dorchester, and Roxbury neighborhoods of Boston. Outside of the city of Boston, notable concentrations of Caribbeans are found in Everett, Brockton, and Randolph.

Despite their ever-growing significance in the region, Caribbean immigrants face a unique set of obstacles. Unemployment and poverty stubbornly remain at above-average rates for Caribbeans, and in several areas, the Caribbean population is hit particularly hard by the housing crisis.

This report explores the standing of the Caribbean population with regard to key economic and social indicators, and hopes to call attention to the challenges faced by this population in the Boston metropolitan area.

In addition to providing a snapshot of the key demographic information for these immigrants, we have attempted to catalog concerns and priorities of the Caribbean population through interviews, which have been referenced throughout the report.

# Methodology

This research was conducted in 2019 and depends predominantly on American Community Survey (2017) five-year data. Various findings were calculated by the Corcoran Center in QGIS using this data. In any place where the data departs from the American Community Survey, a source is indicated.

## *Key Terms*

**Caribbean** is a designation by the Census Bureau which encompasses the following countries: Antigua & Barbuda, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Netherlands Antilles, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, and Trinidad & Tobago, among various others.

**Metro Boston** in this report refers to the Census Bureau's "Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH" Metropolitan Statistical Area, an official designation that encompasses much of eastern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire.

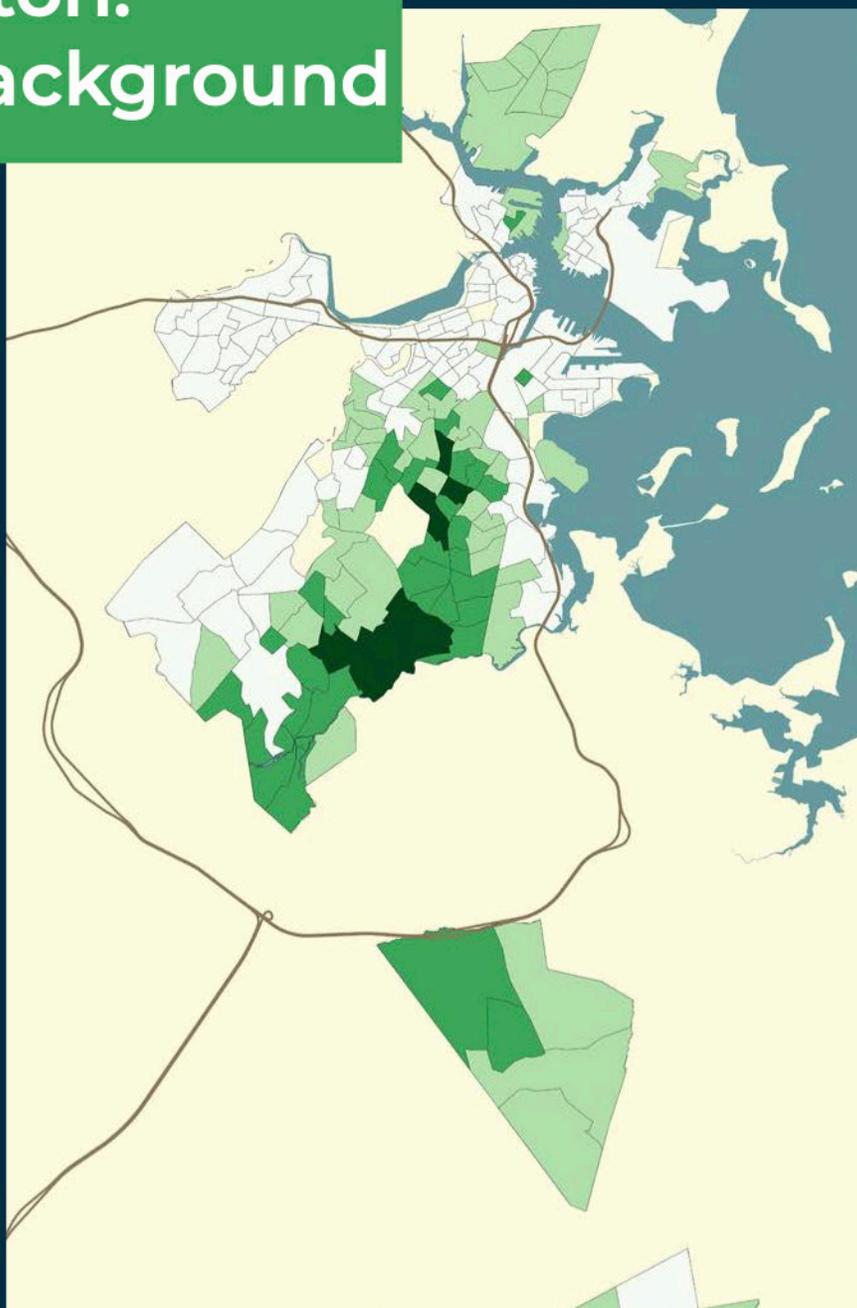
**Foreign-born** refers to "anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth." This includes those who have become U.S. citizens through naturalization.

**Service occupations** refers to 13 specific sectors as defined by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS):

- Utilities
- Transportation & Warehousing
- Information
- Finance & Insurance
- Real Estate and Rental & Leasing Services
- Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
- Management of Companies and Enterprises
- Administrative & Support and Waste Management & Remediation Services
- Educational Services
- Health Care and Social Assistance
- Arts, Entertainment & Recreation
- Accommodation & Food Services
- Other Services

More information can be found at [www.census.gov/glossary/#term\\_ServicesEcon](http://www.census.gov/glossary/#term_ServicesEcon)

# Caribbeans in Boston: A Background



## Legend

Caribbean immigrants as % total pop.

Study area Census Tracts

- 0.0 - 5.0%
- 5.0 - 15.0%
- 15.0 - 25.0%
- 25.0 - 35.0%

Highways

Massachusetts

# 55,212

Caribbean immigrants in the city of Boston

# 155,031

Caribbean immigrants in Metro Boston

# 1 in 12

Bostonians is a Caribbean immigrant

# 1 in 5

Boston immigrants is from the Caribbean

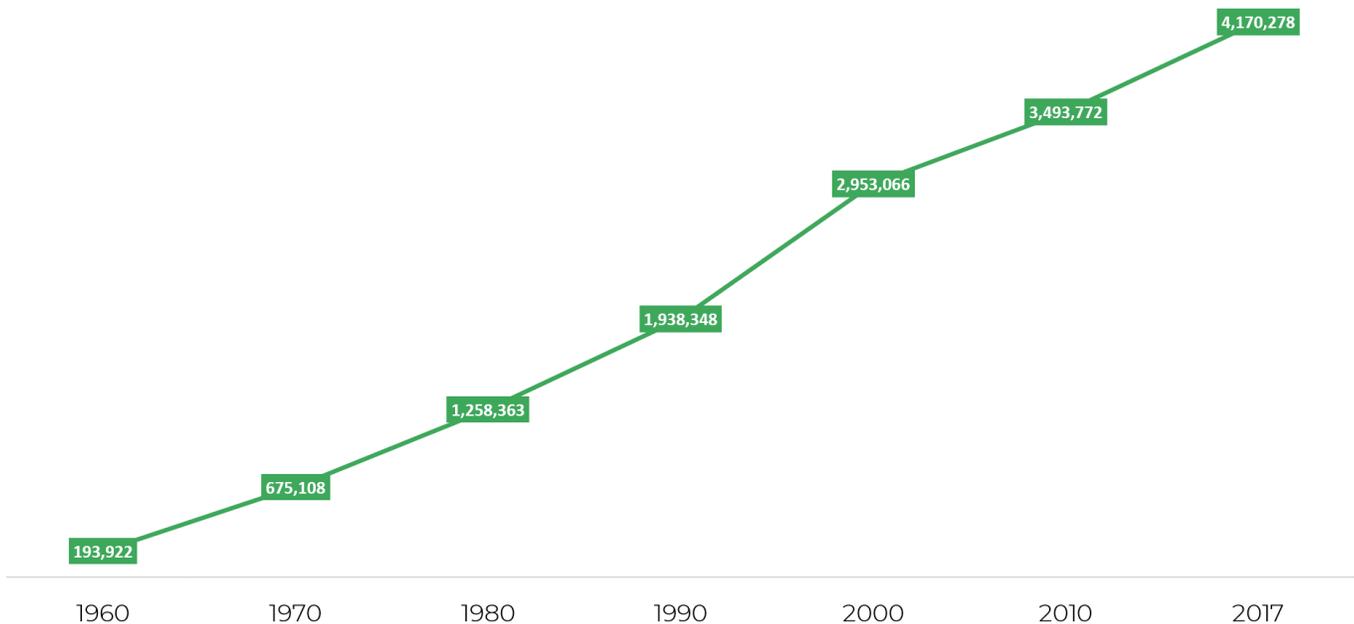
Our study area included the cities of **Boston, Everett, Randolph, and Brockton** - four municipalities with large Caribbean populations. This map shows every Census tract in those cities by the percentage of its population that are immigrants from the Caribbean.

Caribbean immigrants constitute a large and growing segment of Boston's population. Estimates from the 2017 American Community Survey place the Caribbean population of the City of Boston at **55,212 individuals**, which makes up **8.25%** of the total population of the city.

*"It's important to recognize that Caribbean people in America are not a monolith ... we don't all just come from one island. And that policy should reflect that diversity in folks..." -Anonymous Resident*

*"An immigrant must find their community ... like a restaurant that makes the food my mother used to make. Once you find that place, from there you find other things ... you find flyers, events that are happening, or you hear gossip, you get magazines ... and products or stuff like that that are sold. So, in addition to being restaurants, they are cultural institutions for the community that is away from home." -Dorchester Resident*

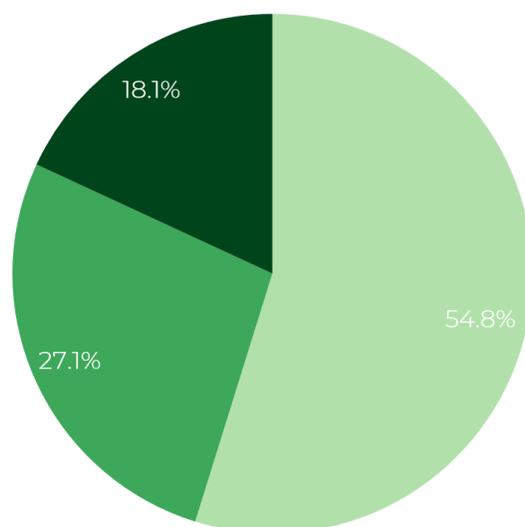
**FIGURE 1.2: TOTAL NUMBER OF CARIBBEAN-BORN RESIDING IN US**



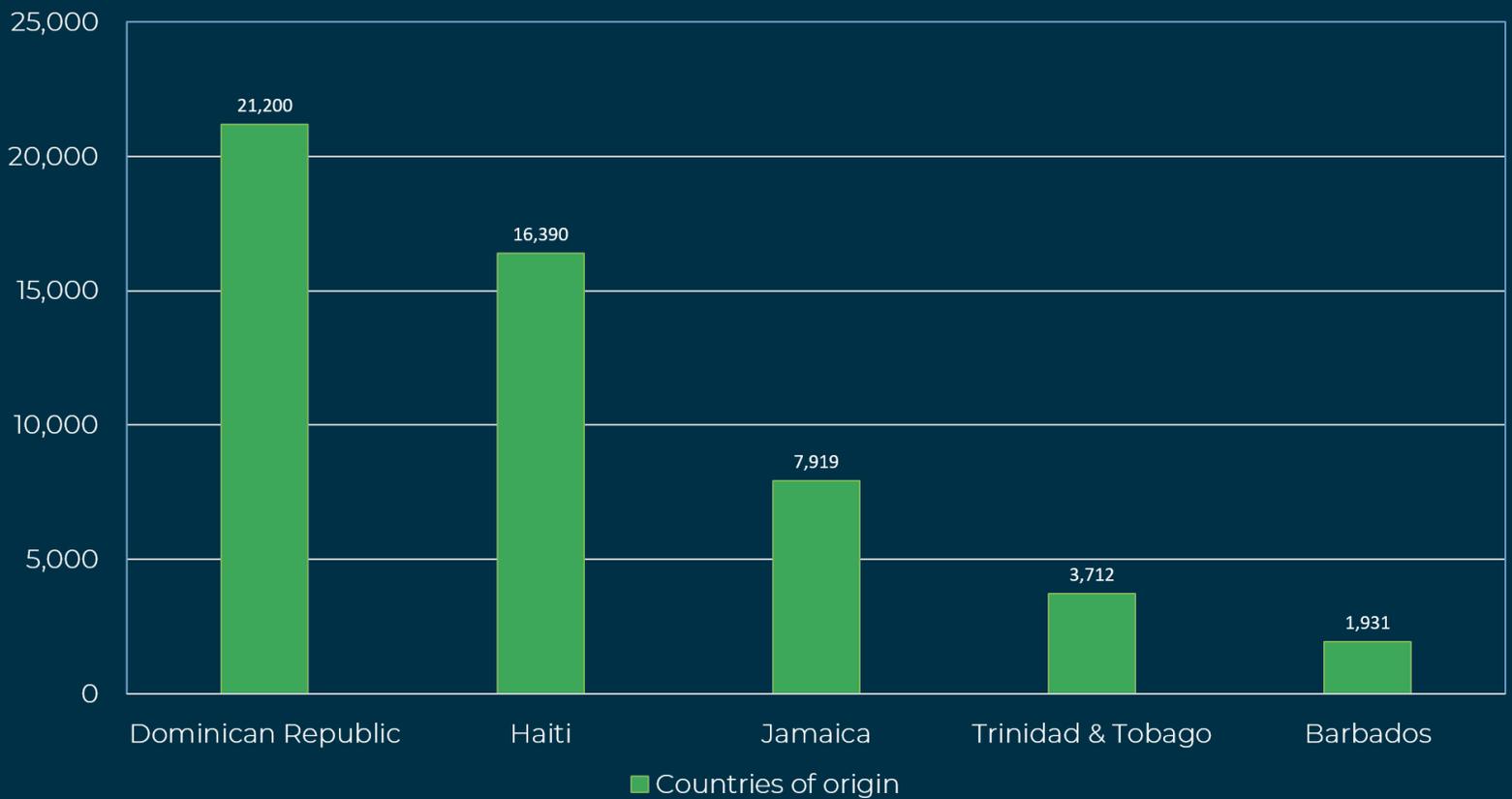
The wider metro has **155,031** Caribbean immigrants. This is the **third largest** Caribbean population of any metro in the country, placing Boston just behind New York and Miami. At 17.9% of Metro Boston's total immigrant population, Caribbeans represent nearly **1 in 5** immigrants to our region. They also represent almost half of the region's immigrants from Latin America.

The Caribbean population of the United States began to grow rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s, and has maintained high growth rates ever since. As Figure 1.2 shows, the U.S. Caribbean population grew by 1.7 million between 1980 and 2000, more than doubling in just 20 years. As a result, much of Boston's Caribbean population has been in the U.S. since before 2000.

**Figure 1.3: Caribbean-born, year of entry into US, Metro Boston**



## Figure 1.4: Number of Caribbean immigrants by country of origin, Boston



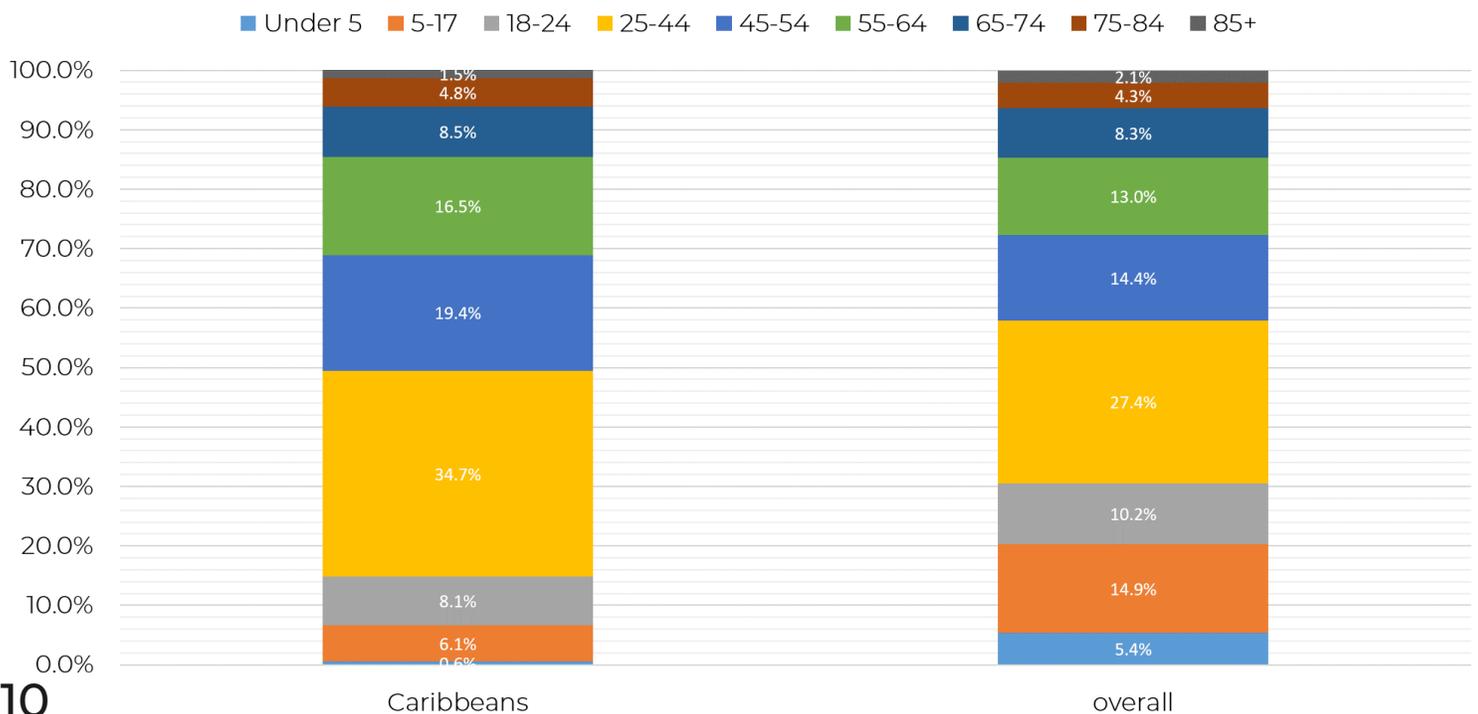
Almost three-quarters of Boston's Caribbean immigrants hail originally from the **Dominican Republic** and **Haiti**. Figure 1.4 shows the top five countries of origin for immigrants to the city in absolute numbers.

Caribbeans are highly concentrated in working age groups – **25-44, 45-54, 55-64**. The percentage of the population in older age groups tapers off above that, becoming more or less even with the general population.

The discrepancy between the youth populations of each group is noteworthy as well – **children ages 5-17** make up nearly 15% of the overall population, but **only 6%** of the Caribbean population. Figure 1.5 shows these findings in detail.

*“My neighborhood is changing fast ... jobs are leaving ... Our population is migrating out, our communities are migrating out.”*  
 -Anonymous Resident

**Figure 1.5: Caribbean and overall populations by age group**

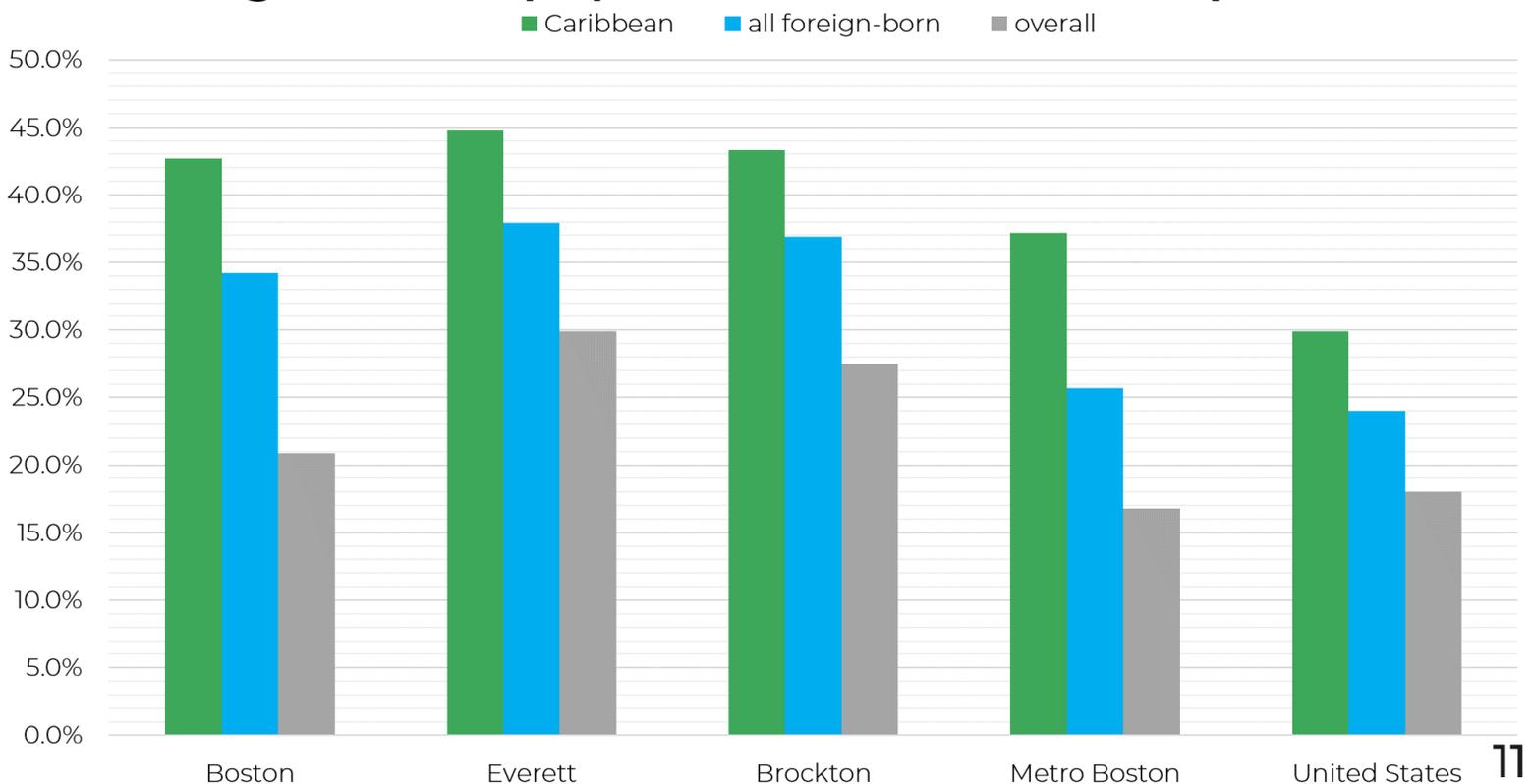


# Labor, Employment, and Finances

## Caribbeans are concentrated in service occupations.

Caribbean immigrants are substantially more likely to work in **service occupations** than both the overall population and the overall immigrant population. Service occupations encompass a broad range of professions, including **health care and social services, education, food services, transportation**, and more. This finding is consistent across our entire study area, and also holds true for the United States as a whole.

**Figure 2.1: % population in service occupations**

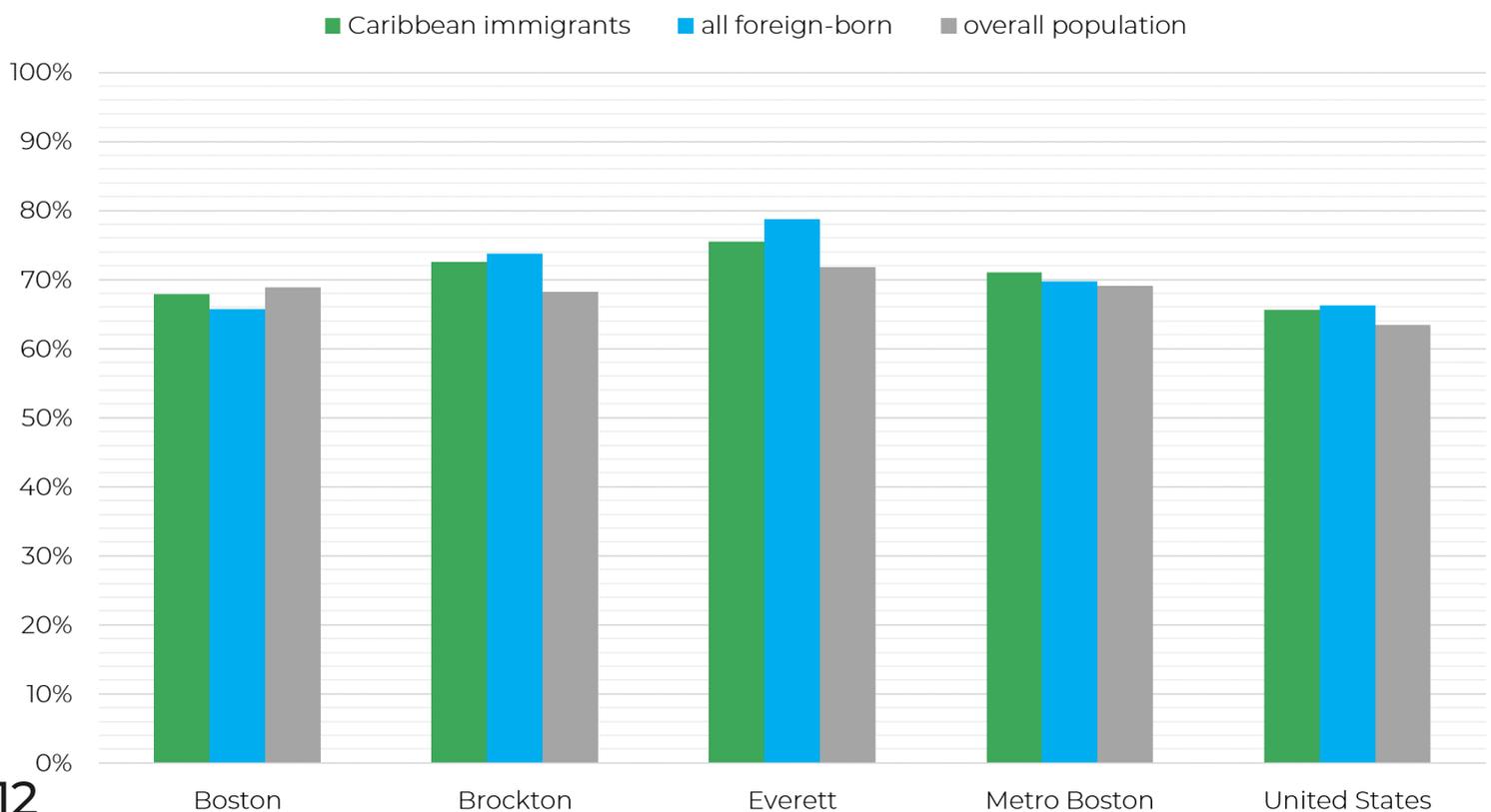


# Caribbeans participate in the labor force at above-average rates...

The labor force participation rate (LFPR) refers to the percentage of the population that is either employed or actively seeking work. The Caribbean LFPR is as high or higher than the overall population's LFPR. This indicates that Caribbeans are **more likely to seek employment** than their non-immigrant counterparts in Boston.

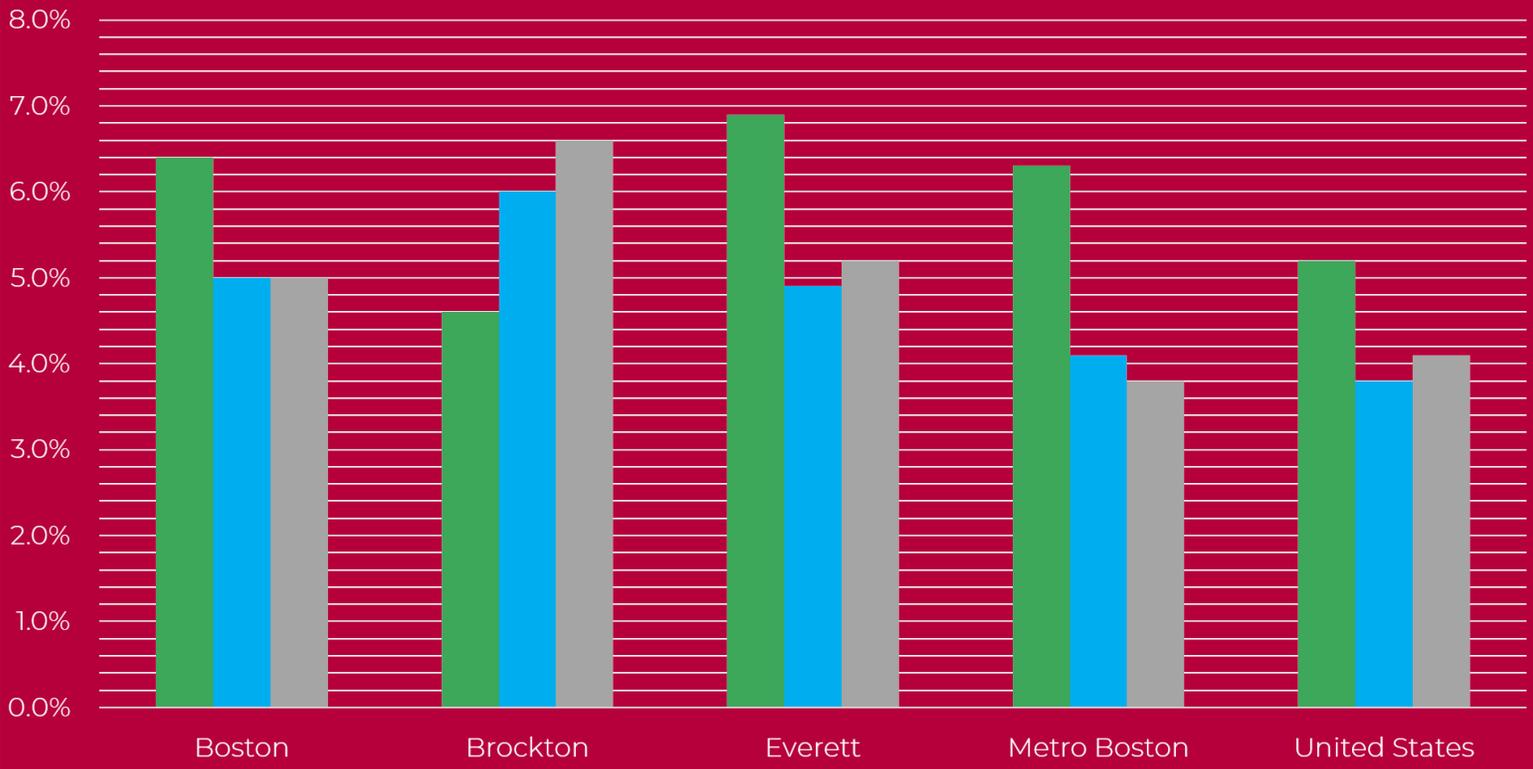
*"Those [in the Haitian community] who are low to moderate income strive to be middle income; middle income striving to be upper-middle income or upper-class. They are very entrepreneurial ... and they adapt."*  
-Brockton Resident

## Figure 2.2: Labor force participation rate



## Figure 2.3: Unemployment rate

■ Caribbean immigrants   ■ all foreign-born   ■ overall population



**...but often have much higher unemployment rates.**

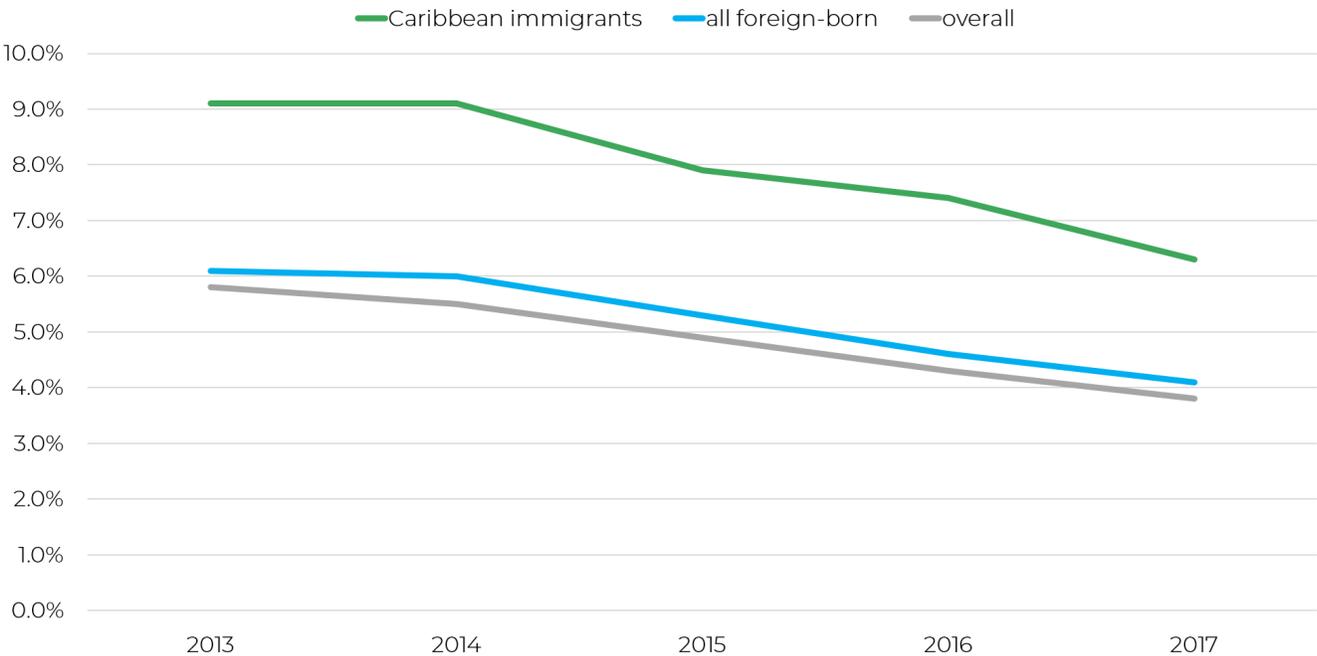
Despite this, Caribbean unemployment rates are higher than unemployment rates for the overall population and for other immigrants. Figure 2.3 shows these discrepancies, which, with the exception of Brockton, are consistent across the entire study area.

# The Caribbean unemployment rate is falling, but is still higher than average.

Caribbeans have recently seen a steep **decline in unemployment**, dropping nearly three percentage points while the overall unemployment rate fell by two.

However, the Caribbean rate in 2017 was still **6.1%** - higher than the overall rate of 3.8%. The unemployment rate for all immigrants has remained within .5% of the overall rate for several years, meaning that Boston's Caribbeans consistently have higher unemployment than immigrants from other regions.

**Figure 2.4: Unemployment rates, Metro Boston**



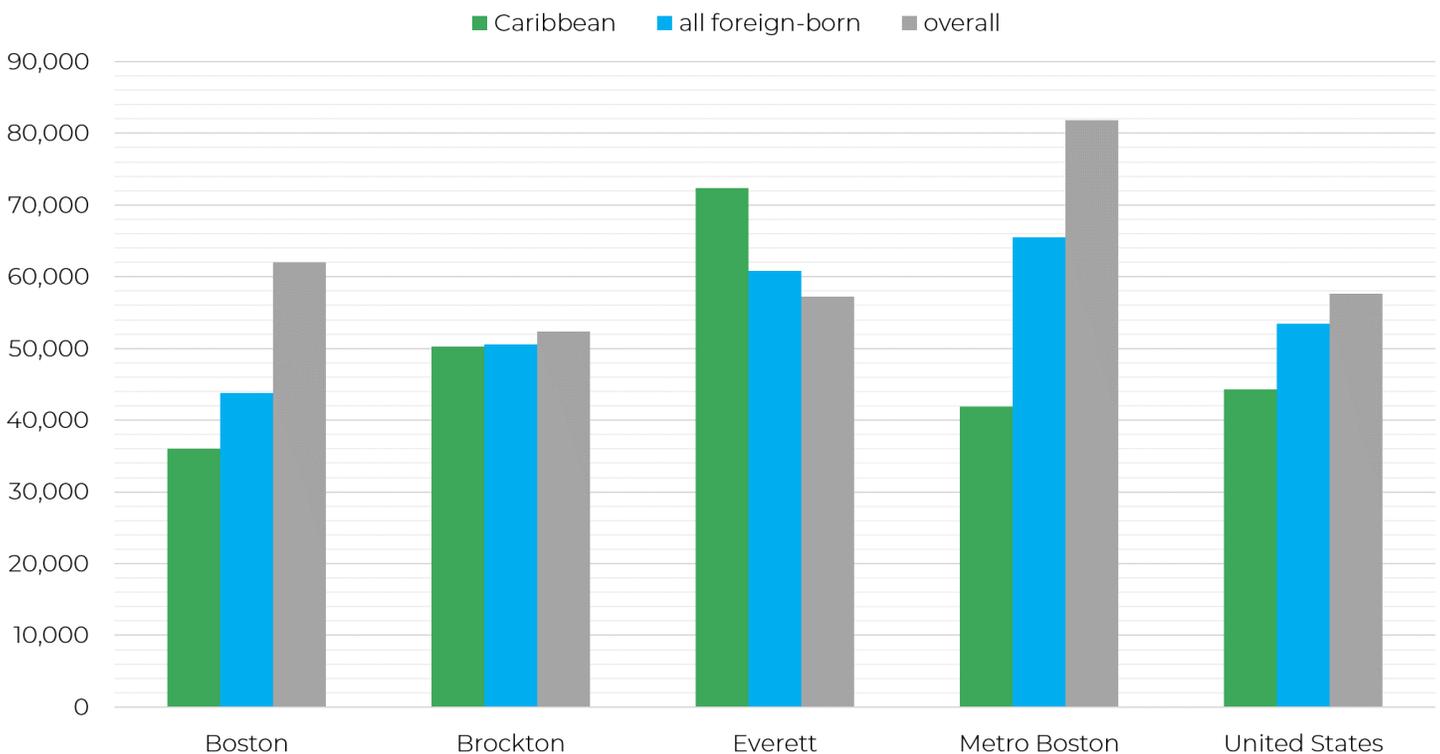
# Household income varies greatly.

Financial status relative to the rest of the population is varied. Caribbeans in Everett bring home considerably more than the overall median for their city, while Caribbeans in Boston only earn slightly more than half the median for theirs. In Brockton, the difference is very slight.

Figure 2.5 shows median household incomes for Caribbean immigrants, all immigrants, and the overall population across our study area, and provides the same data for the entire U.S. for reference.

*“My neighborhood is changing fast ... jobs are leaving, stores are closing because they cannot keep up ... people not having jobs you have housing prices going...”*  
-Anonymous Resident

## Figure 2.5: Median Household Income



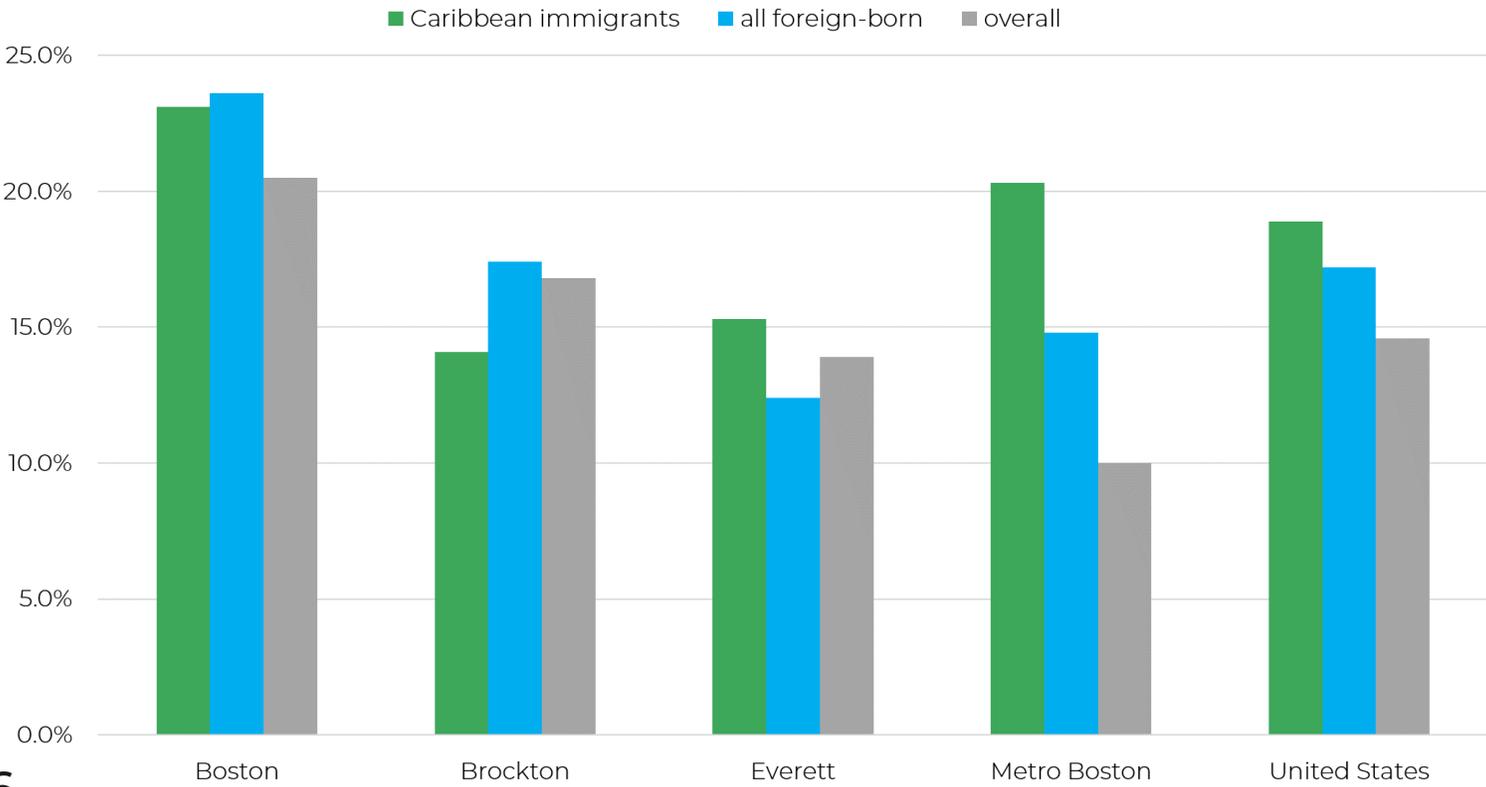
# Boston's Caribbean poverty rates are high.

Caribbean immigrants have **higher rates of poverty** than the rest of the population. Figure 2.6 shows the percent of the population below the poverty level.

The Caribbean poverty rate is higher than average for the entire study area except Brockton. Caribbean poverty rates in Boston and Everett are slightly higher than the overall poverty rate.

For Metro Boston, the percent of the Caribbean population below the poverty line is a full **10 percentage points higher** than the overall rate.

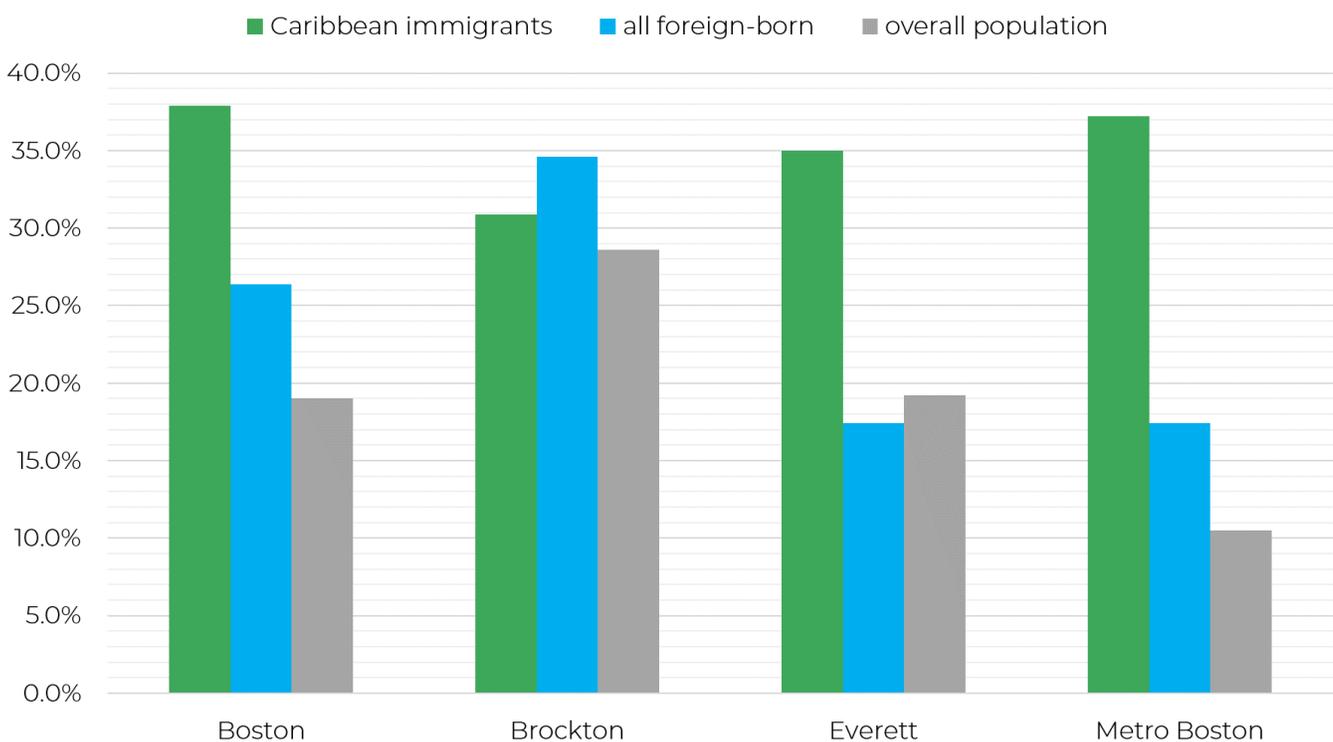
**Figure 2.6: % population below poverty level**



# Caribbean immigrants rely on SNAP benefits at high rates.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly known by its former name food stamps, is a federal poverty relief program that helps individuals in need to purchase food. Caribbean immigrants in Boston rely on SNAP benefits at high rates compared to the overall population. For example, in the City of Boston, the Caribbean rate of SNAP reliance is roughly twice that of the overall rate; for Metro Boston, the Caribbean rate is more than three times the overall rate. Figure 2.8 goes into detail, showing rates of SNAP usage across the region.

**Figure 2.8: % receiving SNAP Benefits**

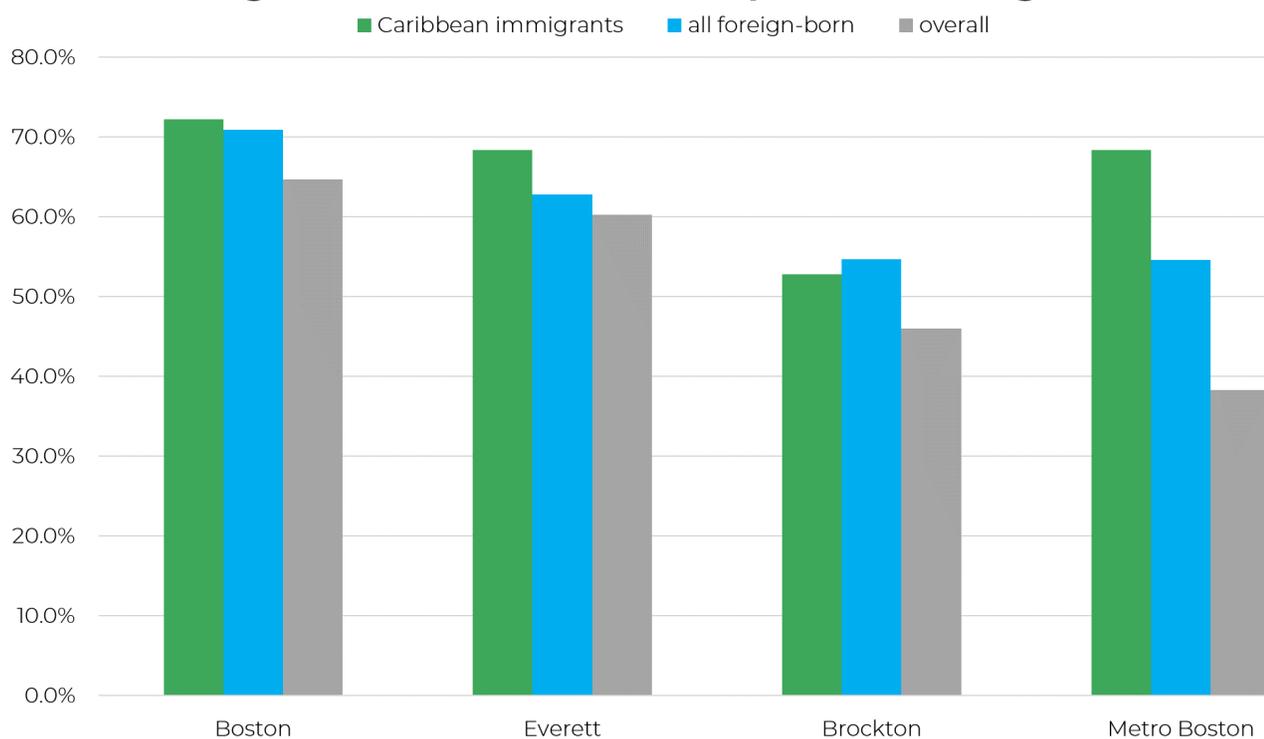


# Housing

## Caribbeans are more likely to rent their homes.

Caribbean immigrants are in all cases **more likely to rent** than the overall population; with the exception of Brockton, they tend to rent at higher rates than other immigrants too. The difference is most stark when looking at the numbers for the metro as a whole, where **68%** of Caribbeans rent while only 38% of the overall population does. In no municipality does the percentage of Caribbeans that rent fall below 50% of the Caribbean population, meaning that renting is standard for Caribbean populations across the metro.

**Figure 3.1: % renter-occupied housing units**

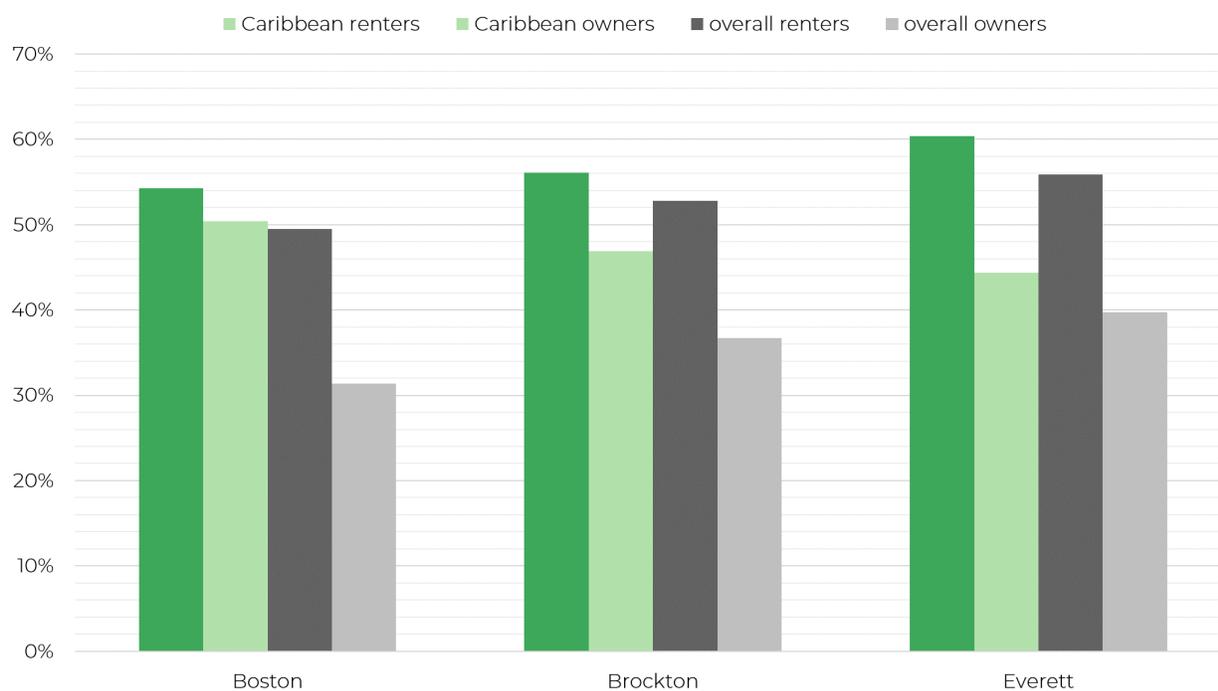


# Caribbean immigrants are more housing-burdened.

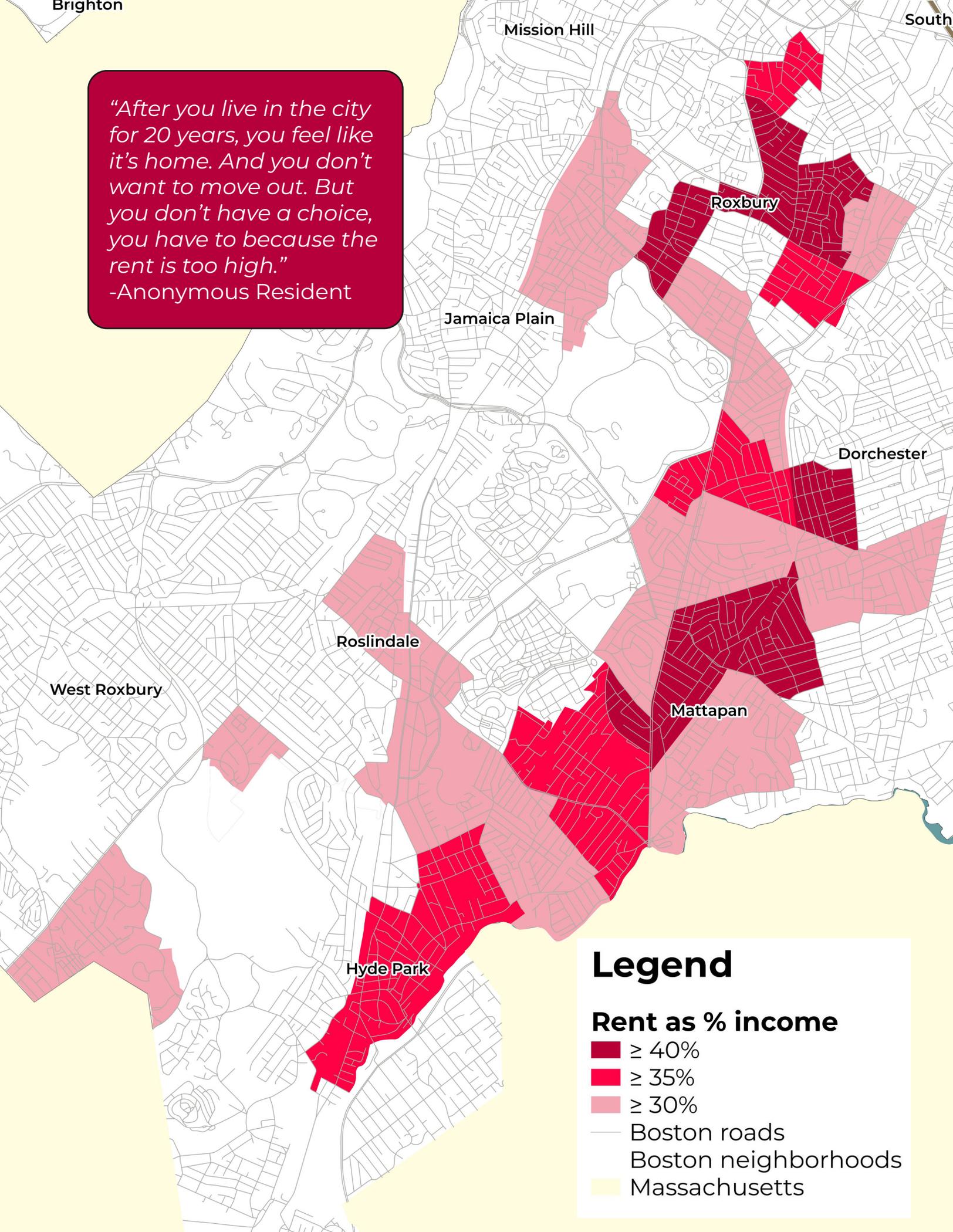
Caribbean immigrants also spend a **higher percentage of their income on housing costs**. Figure 3.2 displays this, showing the percentage of Caribbeans spending greater than 30% of their income on housing costs. This is broken down by owners and renters for the Caribbean and non-Caribbean populations, and it shows that Caribbean renters are across the board the highest-burdened population. Furthermore, in some places - see Boston, for example - Caribbean homeowners are forced to spend a greater percentage of their income on housing than the overall renter population.

*“...The initial cost that you need to get into a rental unit within the city is very expensive, while we could afford the rent. Putting together all the money, all the ‘firsts’ and ‘lasts’ and broker fees, it was just a lot for anybody to do.” -Dorchester Resident*

**Figure 3.2: % of households spending > 30% on housing, by rental status**



*"After you live in the city for 20 years, you feel like it's home. And you don't want to move out. But you don't have a choice, you have to because the rent is too high."*  
-Anonymous Resident



## Legend

### Rent as % income

■ ≥ 40%

■ ≥ 35%

■ ≥ 30%

— Boston roads

— Boston neighborhoods

■ Massachusetts

Boston's Caribbean population is harshly and directly affected by the housing crisis. More than half of Caribbean renters in our study area are classified as **housing-burdened**<sup>1</sup>, meaning they spend **30% or more of their income** on housing. Where in the city is this issue the most notable?

Figure 3.3, the accompanying map, reveals the most housing-burdened regions of the city for Caribbeans. It shows census tracts in Boston that meet two criteria:

- 1) at least 20% of the population are Caribbean immigrants**
- 2) rent as a percentage of household income is 30% or higher**

The most housing-burdened Caribbean communities appear to be in Mattapan, Central Dorchester, and Roxbury.

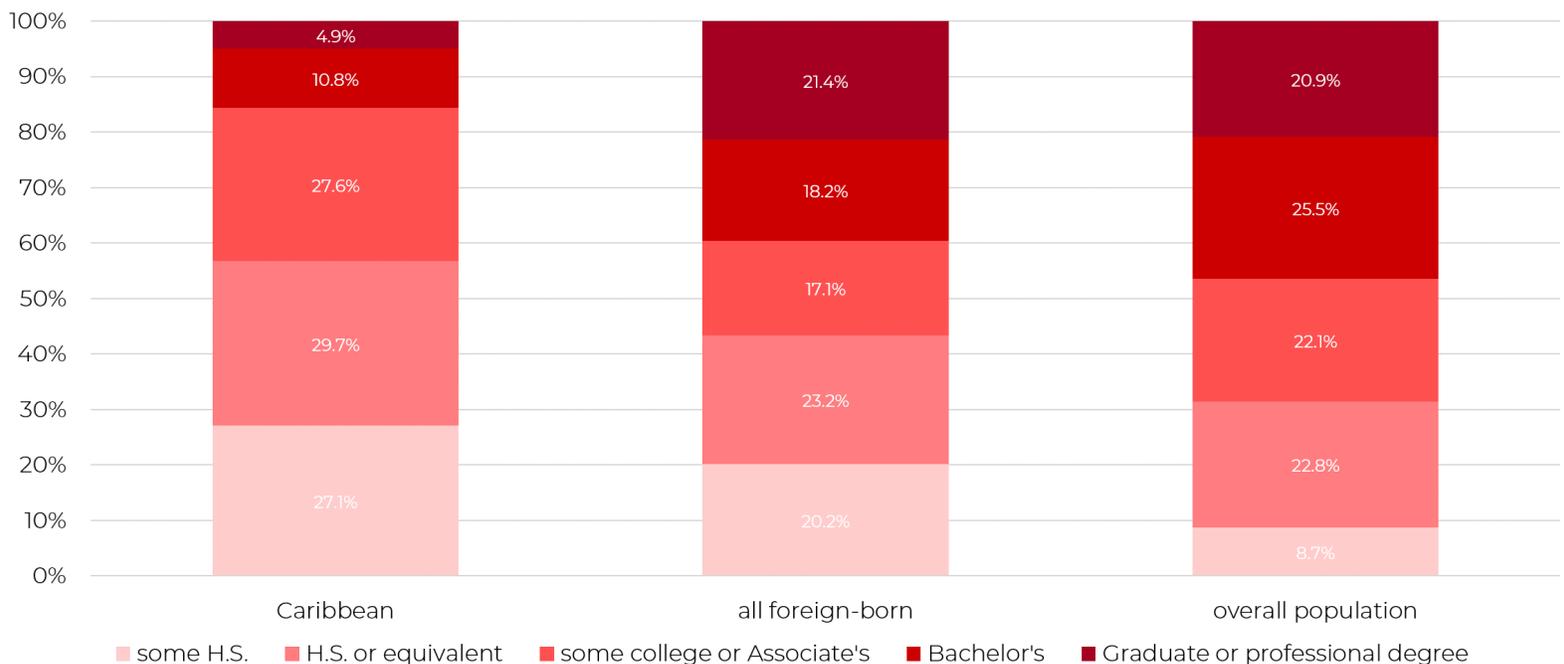
<sup>1</sup>Households are “cost burdened” if they spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing. Households are “severely cost burdened” if they spend more than 50 percent of their income on housing.

# Education

## Caribbean immigrants are less likely to have graduated from college.

Caribbean immigrants in Boston are highly concentrated among lower levels of educational attainment. Figure 4.1 shows the breakdown of the Caribbean population, the immigrant population, and the overall population **over the age of 25** by category of **educational attainment**: some H.S., H.S. graduate / equivalent, some college / Associate's, Bachelor's degree, and graduate or professional degree.

Figure 4.1: Educational Attainment, Metro Boston



In Metro Boston, only **15.7%** of Caribbean immigrants have attained a **Bachelor's or higher**, compared with 46.4% of the overall population. Over one-quarter of the Caribbean population has attended some college and/or received an Associate's degree.

One finding that stands out is the percentage of the Caribbean population that did not complete high school or the equivalent, at **27.1%**. Compared with the percentage of the overall population in this category - just 14% - this number is particularly high.

Graduate degree attainment is another category in which there is a noteworthy discrepancy between Caribbean immigrants and immigrants overall. 21.4% of the total foreign-born population has attained a graduate or professional degree, while only **4.9%** of the Caribbean population can say the same. This may be skewed by the fact that foreign-born individuals often come to the U.S. for the express purpose of attaining a graduate degree. But the gap is worthy of attention all the same - the percentage of Caribbeans attaining graduate or professional degrees is far behind that of the city's foreign-born population.

# Conclusion

This report displays and examines the status of Boston's Caribbean immigrant community with regard to key social and economic indicators, namely, labor, employment, and finances; housing; and education. Caribbean immigrants to the region are as numerous as ever, representing an incredibly important community within our city. But there are a number of issues which face the Caribbean community more than they face the region's other populations.

Addressing the issues important to Boston's Caribbean population must begin by identifying those issues and their specific locations. The findings laid out in this report hope to call attention to those issues facing Boston's Caribbean immigrants, and the most worthy of attention are those in which the Caribbean population falls behind the native and immigrant populations. Specifically, it is imperative that we address high rates of Caribbean unemployment despite equal labor force participation; that efforts to take on the housing crisis consider the disproportionate impact on Caribbeans; that we support the pursuit of higher education by Caribbean immigrants. Conducting research spatially has also allowed us to display the areas of the city where these issues are predominant, a crucial step toward addressing the population's needs.

Continued growth in Boston's Caribbean population must be met by increased attention to the demographic trends of that population. As the human and cultural connections between our region and the Caribbean become ever stronger, it is important not only to continue to track the findings laid out in this report but to use those findings to direct efforts at community engagement. These findings provide an excellent opportunity to continue to support a community that has become an integral part of our city and region.

*"If you have a child who was born here and already knows the city, you're going to tell your kid 'we are going to move....' They're going to say, 'No, Daddy, we are already here! My friends are already here!'"*

-Anonymous Resident

# Sources

The American Community Survey data tables used in this report are as follows:

U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2017 5-year estimates, Table S0501; generated by Colin Cross; using American FactFinder

U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2017 5-year estimates, Table S0506; generated by Colin Cross; using American FactFinder

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017 5-year estimates, Table B05006

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017 5-year estimates, Table S0601

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017 5-year estimates

Other sources include:

Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, “Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850-2000” (Working Paper no. 81, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, February 2006)

-The Philanthropic Initiative and Boston Indicators, “Enduring Ties: The Human Connection Between Greater Boston, Latin America and the Caribbean”

“Enduring Ties: The Human Connection Between Greater Boston, Latin America and the Caribbean.” Prepared by the Philanthropic Initiative and Boston Indicators.

*This project was undertaken as a collaboration between Caribbean Integration Community Development and the Urban Action Lab, a class based out of the Joseph E. Corcoran Center for Real Estate and Urban Action.*

*Cover Photo: Taylor Perkins*

*The primary researcher and writer was Colin Cross.*

*Interviews were conducted in partnership with Boston College School of Social Work doctoral student Joshua Lown.*



Caribbean Integration Community Development (CICD) is a housing and community development organization that creates and maintains affordable housing in areas of Boston where large numbers of people of Caribbean descent reside.

We leverage real estate development in struggling communities to build healthy neighborhoods and broaden access to economic opportunities.

## **JOSEPH E. CORCORAN CENTER FOR REAL ESTATE AND URBAN ACTION**

BOSTON COLLEGE CARROLL SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

The Joseph E. Corcoran Center for Real Estate and Urban Action leverages a multidisciplinary approach to cultivate discussions and develop actions that foster community transformation.

In accordance with the mission of Boston College, The Corcoran Center aims to develop the next generation of ethical real estate professionals by educating and inspiring students, alumni, and other key stakeholders so they may harness real estate as a catalyst for needed change in areas where the marginalization of vulnerable citizens is most severe, and enact broad-scope solutions to neighborhoods of concentrated poverty.