



Center for Latin American, Caribbean & Latino Studies

# Puerto Ricans in the United States, 1900—2008: Demographic, Economic, and Social Aspects

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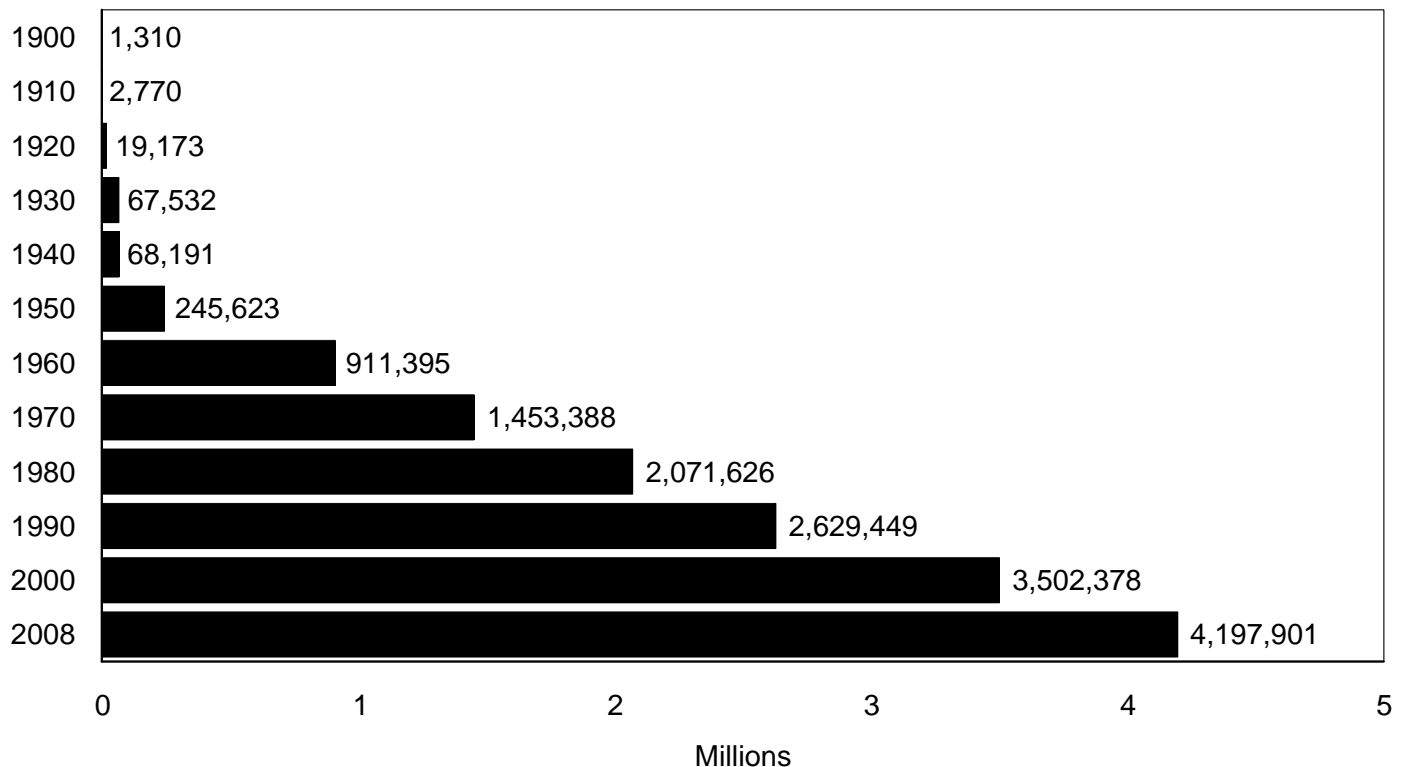
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## Population Trends

In 2008 there were nearly 4.2 million people of Puerto Rican descent living in the United States, slightly more than the 3.9 million people enumerated in Puerto Rico by the U.S. Census Bureau in its American Community Survey data for that year.<sup>1</sup> Although there were small communities of Puerto Ricans living mainly in New York City during the 1920s and 1930s, it was during the 1940s that migration from the island to the U.S. rose substantially and this set the stage for the large-scale out-migration from Puerto Rico during the 1950s and 1960s. The Puerto Rican population stood at about 68,000 in 1940; by 1950 it was over 245,000; and by 1960 there were over 900,000 Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. That population more than doubled by 1980 to over 2 million; and it doubled again between 1980 and 2008. (See figure 1).

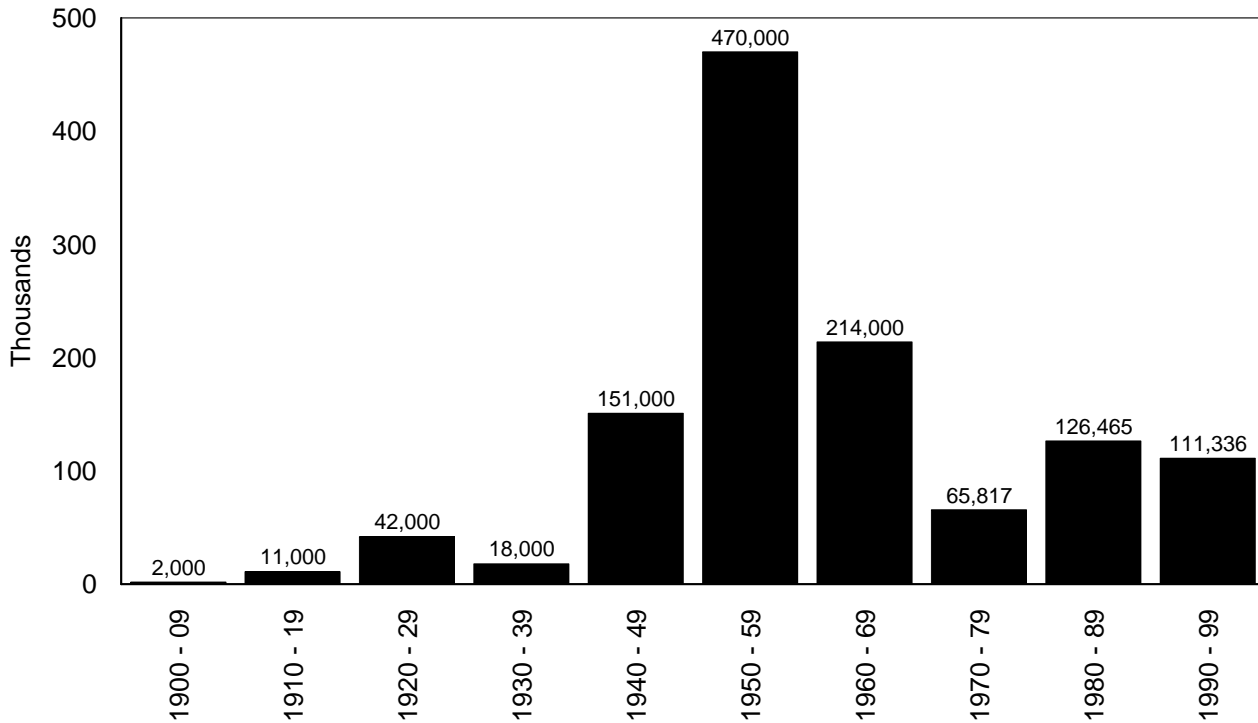
Figure 1  
Puerto Rican Population of the United States, 1900 - 2008



<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted all data in this report were derived from the U.S. Census Bureau, Public Use Microdata Samples for censuses of 1900, through 2000 and the American Community Survey 2008 as organized and made available by Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2009, found at the internet site <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>

Although migration from the island continued into the 1970s and beyond the volume was reduced considerably and Puerto Rican communities in the United States began to grow largely because of natural reproduction among extant populations. (See figure 2).

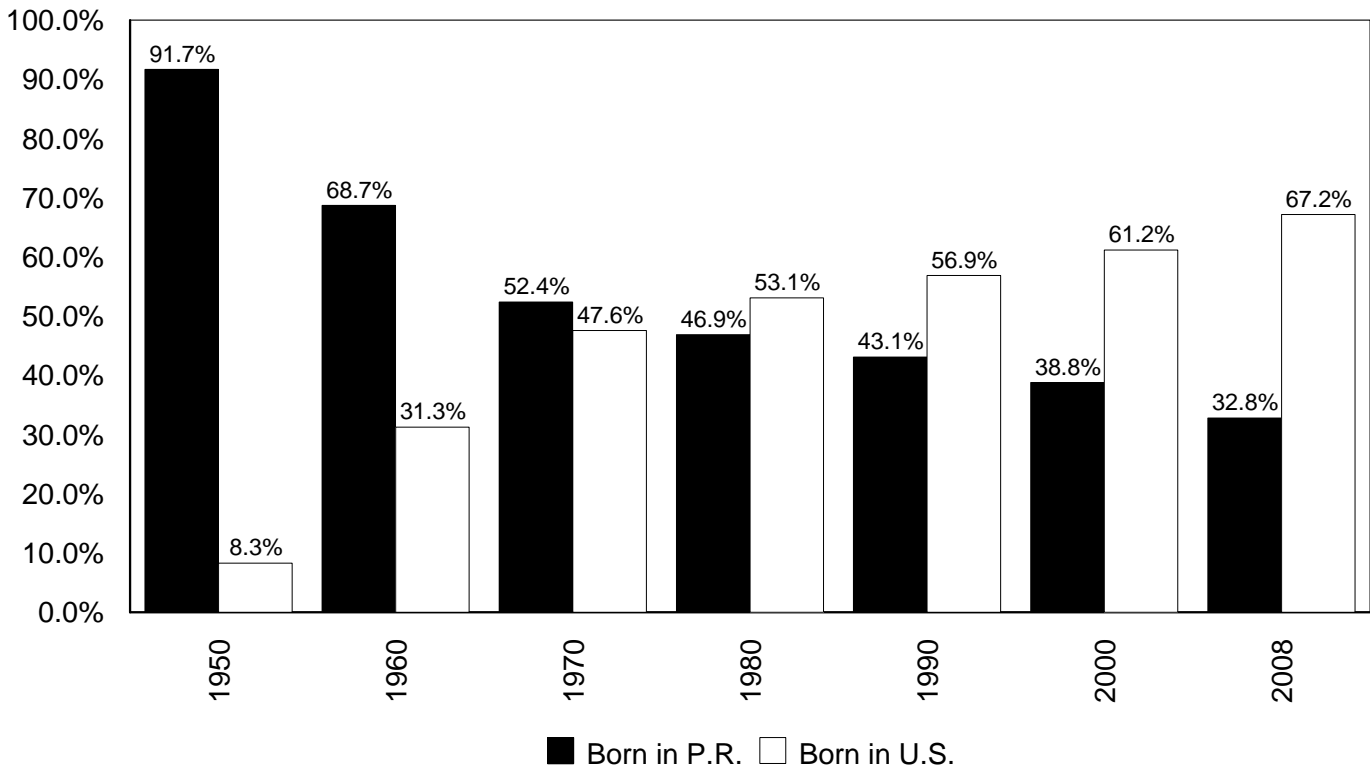
Figure 2  
Estimates of Puerto Rican Migration to the United States by Decade, 1900 - 1999



Sources: Data for 1900-1970 were derived from José L. Vázquez Calzada, *La población de Puerto Rico y su trayectoria histórica* (Río Piedras, P.R. : Escuela Graduada de Salud Pública, Recinto de Ciencias Médicas, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1988); data for 1970-1990 were from Francisco L. Rivera Batiz and Carlos Santiago, *Island Paradox: Puerto Rico in the 1990s* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996); data for 1980 - 1999 were from Matthew Chirstenson, "Evaluating Components of International Migration: Migration Between Puerto Rico and the United States" Population Division, U. S. Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C. 20233, December 200, Working Paper Series No. 64, found on the internet at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0064.html>

In 1950 about 92% of all Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. were born in Puerto Rico. Two decades later, in 1970, about 48% of all Puerto Ricans living on the mainland were born in the United States, and by 1980 a majority were. In 2008 approximately two-thirds of all Puerto Ricans residing in the were U.S. born. (See figure 3).

Figure 3  
Birthplace of Puerto Rican Population of the United States, 1950 - 2008



Puerto Ricans born on the island were significantly older than those born in the U.S. as would be expected within any migrating population when the process of migration diminished as was the case with Puerto Ricans after 1970. About 45% of all island-born Puerto Ricans were 50 years of age or older in 2008 compared with only 9% of U.S.-born Puerto Ricans. Almost 48% of domestic-born Puerto Ricans were under the age of 20 compared with only 11% of those born on the island. (See table 1).

Table 1  
Age Structure of the Puerto Rican  
Population of the United States in  
2008 by Birthplace

Age Category	Born in Puerto Rico	Born in the U.S.
0-9	3.9%	26.4%
10-19	7.2%	22.0%
20-29	10.9%	17.1%
30-39	16.5%	14.3%
40-49	17.0%	11.7%
50-59	17.3%	5.9%
60-69	15.2%	1.6%
70-79	7.9%	0.7%
80-89	3.4%	0.3%
90-99	0.7%	0.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

## Settlement Patterns

Puerto Ricans arriving in the United States during the peak decades of Puerto Rican migration during the 1940s and 1950s settled largely in the states of New York and New Jersey with a heavy concentration in New York City and contiguous New Jersey cities and towns just across the Hudson River to the west. Even by 1970 nearly three-quarters of all Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. resided in these two states and in 1980 when city data are available, about 70% of this New York/New Jersey Puerto Rican population lived in New York City.<sup>2</sup> However during the 1970s and after Puerto Ricans began moving from New York to other states, metropolitan areas, and cities, and the reduced number of migrants arriving from the island also began to settle in different areas of the country. By 2008 only a little over a third of all Puerto Ricans resided in New York and New Jersey. It is also evident that a process of suburbanization took place among Puerto Ricans living in these states. In 2008 a little over half of New York and New Jersey Puerto Ricans lived in New York City. (See figures 4 and 5).

<sup>2</sup> The PUMS data from the U.S. Census Bureau does not provide city data for 1960 and 1970.

Figure 4  
 Percentage of Puerto Rican Population of the United States  
 Living in New York and New Jersey, 1950 - 2008

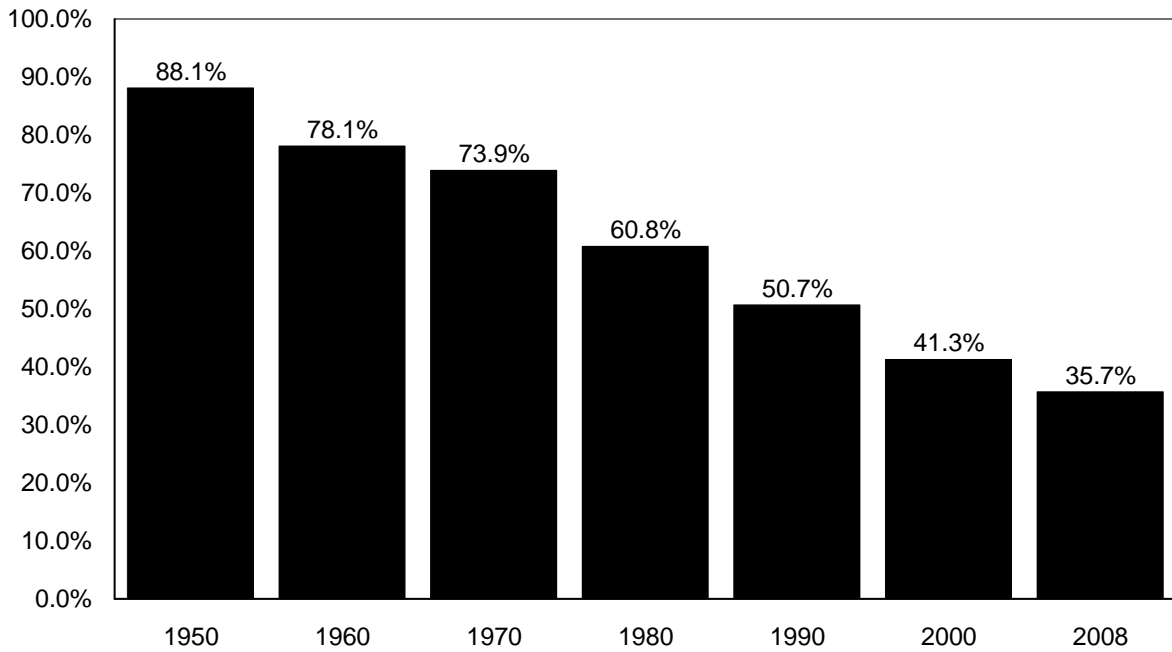
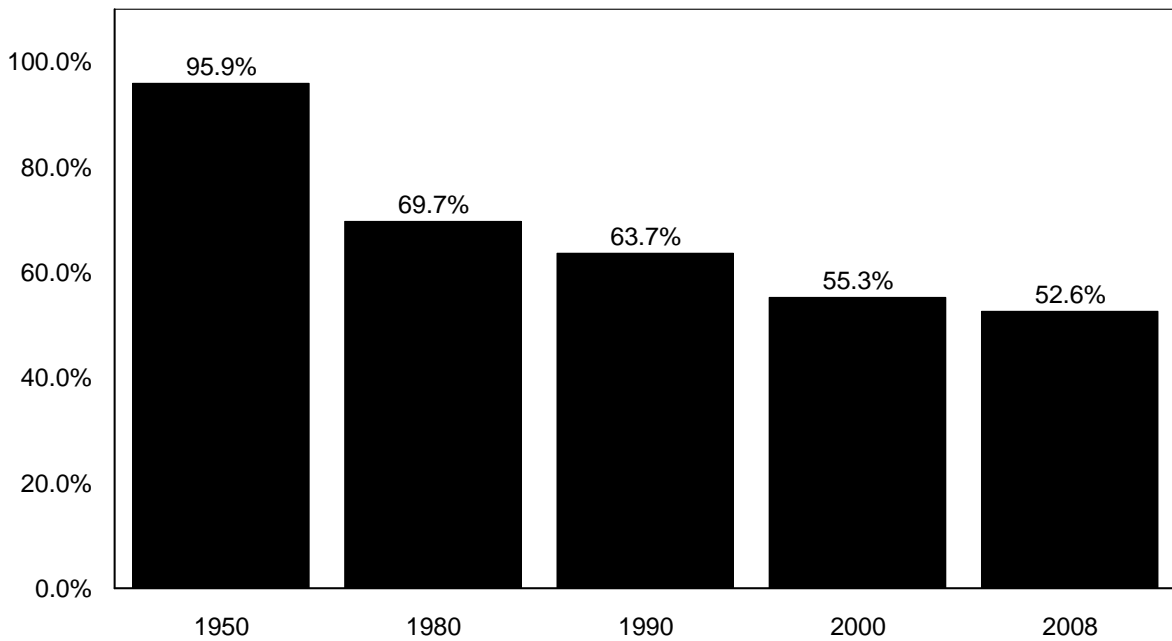


Figure 5  
 Percentage of Puerto Rican Population of New York and Jersey  
 Living in New York City, 1950 - 2008



Note: There are no data on city populations in PUMS data for 1960 and 1970.



During the 1960s and 1970s Illinois was the third largest state of Puerto Rican settlement because of migration to Chicago. In 1980 the state's 134,000 Puerto Ricans accounted for 6.5% of all Puerto Ricans in the U.S. and nearly all lived in the Chicago metropolitan area. But by 1990 Florida replaced Illinois as the third largest state of Puerto Rican settlement because of migration of Puerto Ricans from the island and from other states in the U.S. By 2008 Florida's Puerto Rican population of over 750,000 was second only to New York's approximately 1 million residents. If the trends established between 1990 and 2008 continue, Florida's Puerto Rican origin population will surpass that of New York within the next ten years. (See table 2 for major states of Puerto Rican settlement 1940 – 2008 and figure 6).

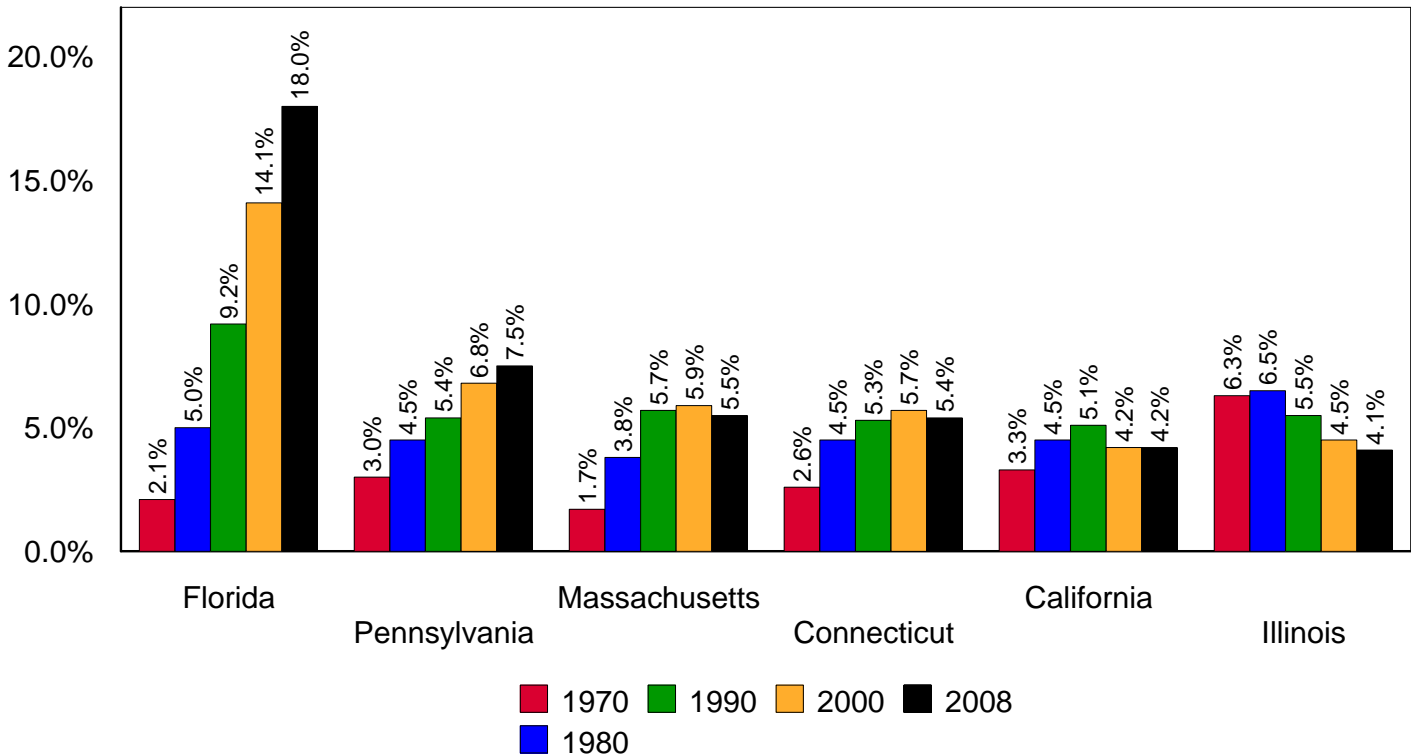
Table 2  
Puerto Rican Population by Largest States of Settlement, 1940 - 2008  
(in order of largest concentrations in 2008)

	1940		1950		1960		1970	
	Population	% of Total	Population	% of Total	Population	% of Total	Population	% of Total
New York	60,192	88.3%	214,134	87.2%	656,140	72.0%	931,874	64.1%
Florida	266	0.4%	2,813	1.1%	19,446	2.1%	30,125	2.1%
New Jersey	606	0.9%	2,281	0.9%	55,258	6.1%	142,270	9.8%
Pennsylvania	606	0.9%	3,415	1.4%	17,345	1.9%	42,963	3.0%
Massachusetts	378	0.6%	449	0.2%	2,986	0.3%	25,120	1.7%
Connecticut	189	0.3%	201	0.1%	15,123	1.7%	37,252	2.6%
California	2,626	3.9%	5,572	2.3%	29,867	3.3%	47,363	3.3%
Illinois	303	0.4%	3,478	1.4%	37,370	4.1%	91,202	6.3%
Others	3,025	4.4%	13,280	5.4%	77,860	8.5%	105,219	7.2%
Total	68,191	100.0%	245,623	100.0%	911,395	100.0%	1,453,388	100.0%

	1980		1990		2000		2008	
	Population	% of Total	Population	% of Total	Population	% of Total	Population	% of Total
New York	1,008,862	48.7%	1,031,948	39.2%	1,066,360	30.4%	1,087,183	25.9%
Florida	102,862	5.0%	240,722	9.2%	495,066	14.1%	754,993	18.0%
New Jersey	250,920	12.1%	300,775	11.4%	380,655	10.9%	410,269	9.8%
Pennsylvania	92,423	4.5%	142,102	5.4%	238,483	6.8%	315,132	7.5%
Massachusetts	77,912	3.8%	149,350	5.7%	206,671	5.9%	229,749	5.5%
Connecticut	92,239	4.5%	140,115	5.3%	200,957	5.7%	226,389	5.4%
California	93,874	4.5%	133,794	5.1%	147,016	4.2%	174,432	4.2%
Illinois	133,810	6.5%	145,200	5.5%	158,932	4.5%	171,559	4.1%
Others	218,724	10.6%	345,443	13.1%	608,238	17.4%	828,195	19.7%
Total	2,071,626	100.0%	2,629,449	100.0%	3,502,378	100.0%	4,197,901	100.0%

Figure 6  
 Percentage of Puerto Rican Population of the United States Living in  
 Florida, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Connecticut, California, Illinois, 1970 - 2008



Along with this major shift in settlement patterns away from New York toward the nearby states of Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, and to Florida, California and Illinois, was the relative decline of Puerto Ricans living in New York/New Jersey metropolitan areas and the parallel increase in population living in urban areas of these newer states of settlement. In 1970 about two-thirds of all Puerto Ricans lived in New York and New Jersey metropolitan areas in or close to New York City. By 2008 only one-quarter of all Puerto Ricans living in the United States resided in these same metro areas and about 12% lived in Florida metropolitan areas surrounding Orlando, Tampa, Miami, and Fort Lauderdale. What is most impressive, however, is the dispersion of Puerto Ricans to smaller metropolitan areas throughout the nation. In 2008 nearly half of all Puerto Ricans lived in relatively small numbers in metropolitan areas which each comprised less than 1.5% of the total Puerto Rican population. (See table 3). Thus, Puerto Ricans clearly repeated the experiences of previous migrant groups to the United States with respect to the evolution of their residential patterns. Migrants arriving during the great wave of migration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries first clustered in great metropolitan centers, mainly New York and other northeastern U.S. cities. Subsequent generations then spread throughout the country to nearly all regions, or moved to suburban areas and states close to the New York metropolitan area.

Table 3  
Puerto Rican Population in Selected Metropolitan Areas, 1970 - 2008  
(in order of largest concentrations in 2008)

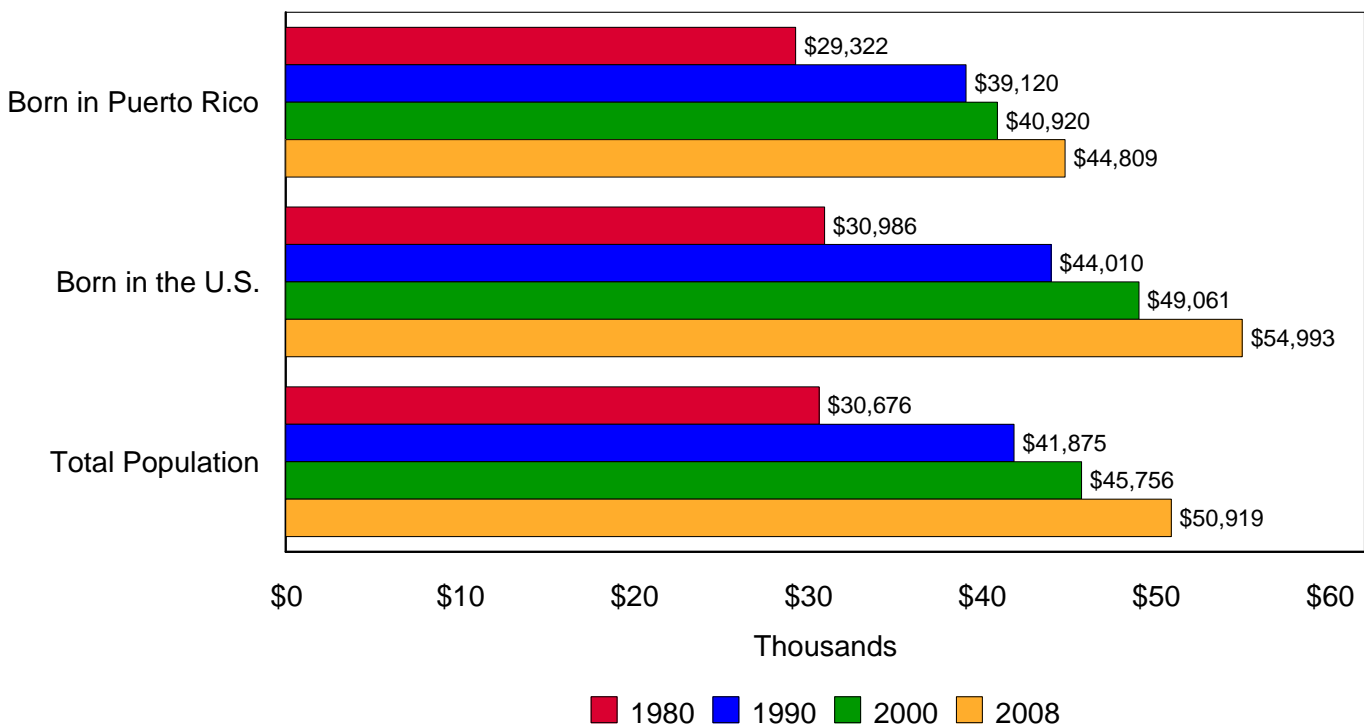
	Population in Metropolitan Areas				
	1970	1980	1990	2000	2008
New York-Northeastern NJ	852,310	909,048	884,044	848,902	839,405
Orlando, FL	300	8,921	52,422	147,151	222,033
Philadelphia, PA/NJ	45,065	80,533	111,505	167,443	186,136
Chicago-Gary-Lake, IL	90,413	131,209	130,833	151,811	157,981
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	3,210	11,299	35,625	74,150	128,651
Newark, NJ	30,567	64,926	70,031	87,109	102,222
Miami-Hialeah, FL	15,111	45,104	66,652	83,476	86,595
Hartford-Bristol-Middleton-New Britain, CT	14,722	26,503	42,603	72,994	86,008
Springfield-Holyoke-Chicopee, MA	5,706	20,116	39,160	64,179	78,445
Nassau Co, NY	39,552	53,111	57,683	78,811	77,906
Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood-Pompano Beach, FL	2,202	10,825	25,407	54,403	71,685
Boston, MA	16,813	29,271	45,471	61,470	67,971
Bergen-Passaic, NJ	28,431	36,681	53,387	61,833	64,147
Other Metropolitan Areas	298,304	644,079	1,014,626	1,548,646	2,028,716
Total	1,442,706	2,071,626	2,629,449	3,502,378	4,197,901

	% of Total Population in Metropolitan Areas				
	1970	1980	1990	2000	2008
New York-Northeastern NJ	59.1%	43.9%	33.6%	24.2%	20.0%
Orlando, FL	0.0%	0.4%	2.0%	4.2%	5.3%
Philadelphia, PA/NJ	3.1%	3.9%	4.2%	4.8%	4.4%
Chicago-Gary-Lake, IL	6.3%	6.3%	5.0%	4.3%	3.8%
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	0.2%	0.5%	1.4%	2.1%	3.1%
Newark, NJ	2.1%	3.1%	2.7%	2.5%	2.4%
Miami-Hialeah, FL	1.0%	2.2%	2.5%	2.4%	2.1%
Hartford-Bristol-Middleton-New Britain, CT	1.0%	1.3%	1.6%	2.1%	2.0%
Springfield-Holyoke-Chicopee, MA	0.4%	1.0%	1.5%	1.8%	1.9%
Nassau Co, NY	2.7%	2.6%	2.2%	2.3%	1.9%
Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood-Pompano Beach, FL	0.2%	0.5%	1.0%	1.6%	1.7%
Boston, MA	1.2%	1.4%	1.7%	1.8%	1.6%
Bergen-Passaic, NJ	2.0%	1.8%	2.0%	1.8%	1.5%
Other Metropolitan Areas	20.7%	31.1%	38.6%	44.2%	48.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Income**

Puerto Rican households experienced significant improvements in median incomes between 1980 and 2008 when systematic household income data are available. Overall, median household incomes rose from \$30,676 in 1980 (in inflation adjusted 2008 dollars) to \$50,919 in 2008, an increase of 66% in real terms. There were, however, significant differences in median income levels, and overall improvement, by birthplace. Those born in Puerto Rico not only had lower median household incomes in all years between 1980 and 2008, but their overall percentage increase was lower as well. By 2008 the median household incomes of those born in Puerto Rico was \$44,809 compared with \$54,993 for Puerto Ricans born on the U.S. mainland, or about 20% lower incomes for those who were born on the island. Additionally, median household incomes for those born on the island improved by 53% between 1980 and 2008 compared with a 77% improvement among U.S.-born Puerto Rican households. (See figure 7).

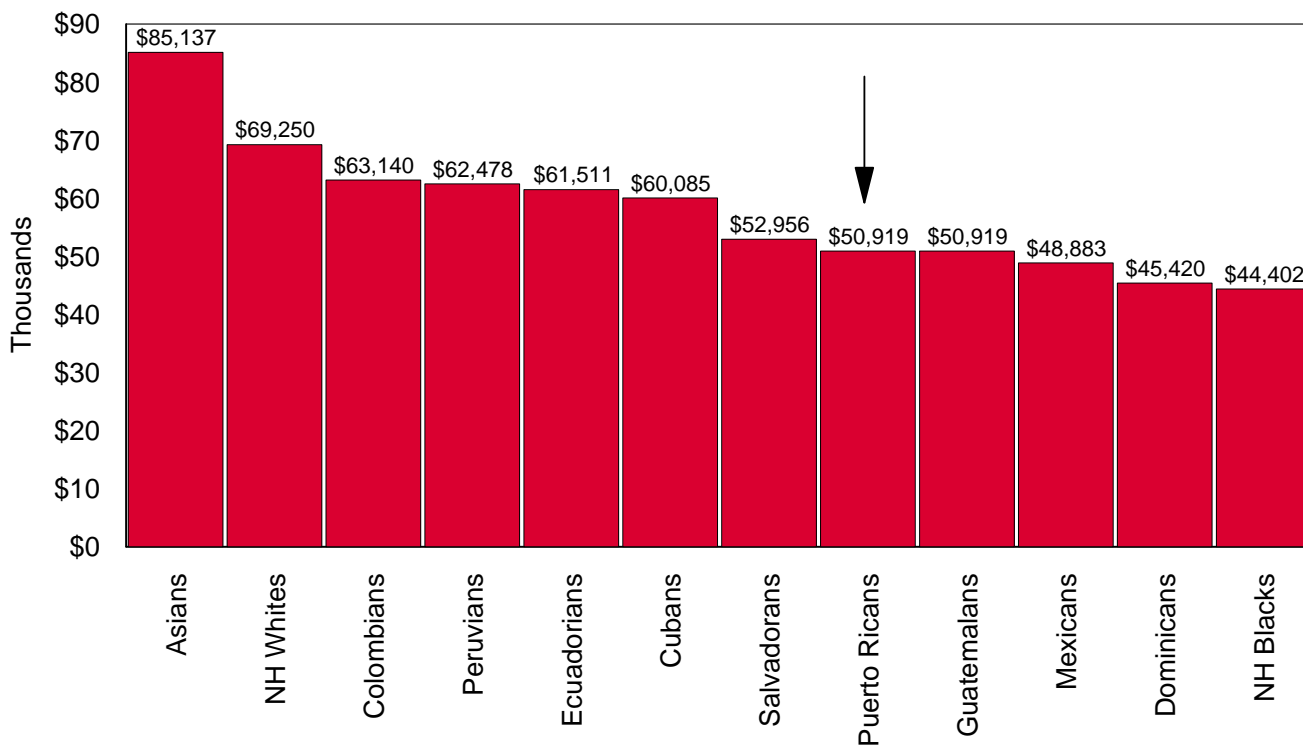
Figure 7  
Median Household Income Among Puerto Ricans by Place of Birth, 1980 - 2008  
(in inflation adjusted 2008 dollars)



Nativity	% Increase 1980 - 2008
Born in P.R.	52.8%
Born in U.S.	77.5%
Total	66.0%

Puerto Rican median household income was significantly lower than found among Asian, non-Hispanic white, and other Latino national subgroups in 2008, although it was higher than Mexican, Guatemalan, Dominican, and non-Hispanic black median household incomes. (See figure 8).

Figure 8  
Median Household Income of Puerto Ricans Compared with other Race/Ethnic Groups and Largest Latino National Subgroups, 2008



Median household income data do not indicate how income was distributed among Puerto Ricans in the United States. Examining household income distribution data between 1980 and 2008 reveals several important processes. First and foremost there was and is a very clearly delineated class structure within the Puerto Rican population using household income as an indicator, making it very difficult to generalize about wealth or poverty within Puerto Rican communities across the U.S. Second, the percentage of all households in the lowest income categories – earning under \$20,000 yearly in inflation-adjusted dollars – declined significantly between 1980 from 34% of all Puerto Rican households to 19% in 2008. Third the percentage of Puerto Rican households earning more than \$100,000 and more than \$75,000 increased substantially between 1980 and 2008 indicating a very clear process of upward social mobility for many Puerto Rican households. In 1980 only 4% Puerto Rican households earned more than \$100,000 annually and only 10.6% earned greater than \$75,000. By 2008 an impressive 20% of all Puerto Rican households earned greater than \$100,000 and 33% earned more than \$75,000. (See table 4 for complete data and figure 9). Fourth, there was

Table 4  
Household Income Structure Among Puerto Rican Households, 1980 - 2008  
(in inflation adjusted 2008 dollars)

	1980		1990		2000		2008	
	% of Income	% of Households	% of Income	% of Households	% of Income	% of Households	% of Income	% of Households
Less than 10,000	1.9%	13.0%	1.4%	12.2%	1.0%	10.1%	0.8%	8.4%
10,000-19,999	8.0%	20.8%	4.0%	14.0%	3.0%	11.9%	2.4%	10.7%
20,000-29,999	10.1%	15.5%	5.5%	11.3%	4.8%	11.2%	3.7%	10.0%
30,000-39,999	12.0%	13.1%	7.2%	10.7%	6.6%	11.1%	5.2%	10.0%
40,000-49,999	12.5%	10.5%	8.5%	9.8%	7.6%	10.0%	6.4%	9.7%
50,000-74,999	26.6%	16.5%	23.4%	19.6%	19.9%	19.0%	16.9%	18.4%
75,000-99,999	14.7%	6.5%	18.9%	11.3%	17.3%	11.8%	16.5%	12.8%
100,000 - 199,999	14.1%	4.1%	25.3%	10.1%	28.5%	12.8%	33.6%	17.0%
200,000+			5.8%	1.1%	11.4%	2.1%	14.6%	3.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Figure 9  
Percentage of Puerto Rican Households Earning Less than \$20,000, More than \$75,000, More than \$100,000, 1980 - 2008 (in inflation adjusted 2008 dollars)

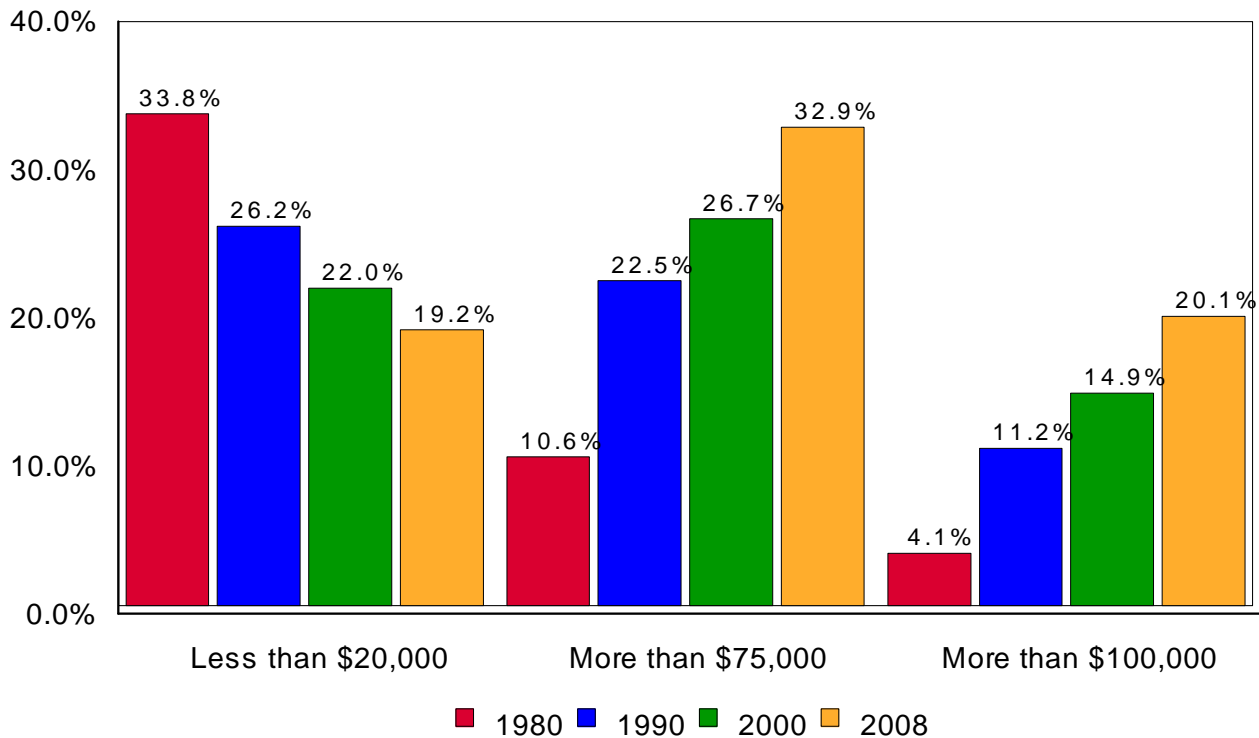


Figure 10  
 Percentage of Income Controlled by Puerto Rican Households Earning More than \$75,000,  
 and more than \$100,000, 1980 - 2008 (in inflation adjusted 2008 dollars)

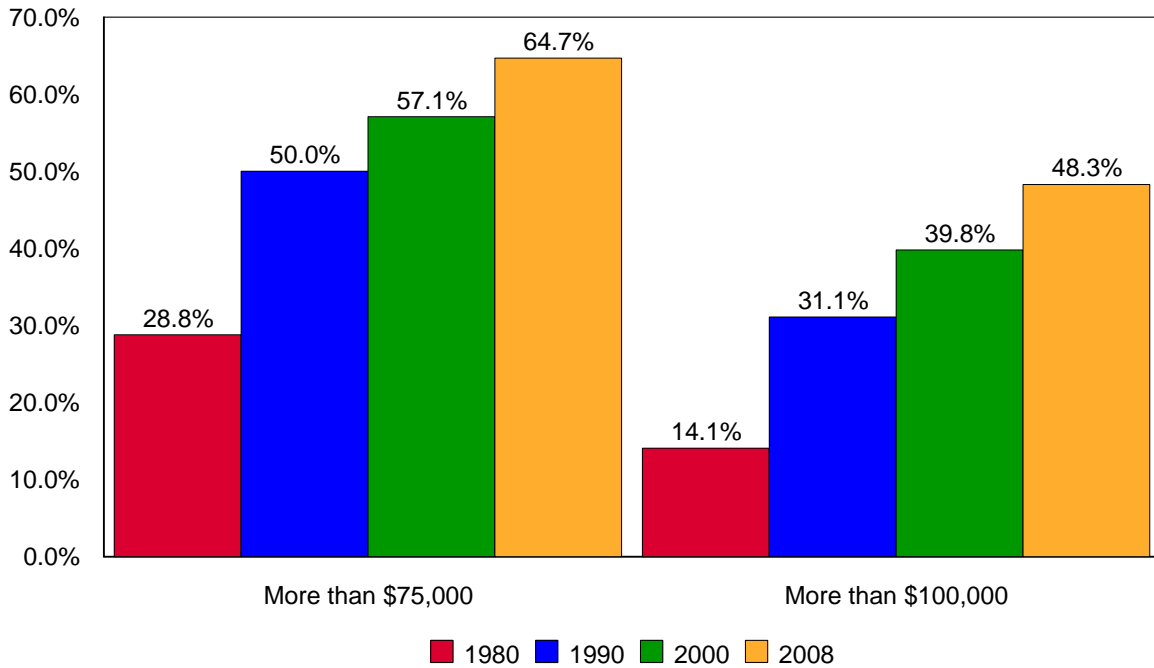
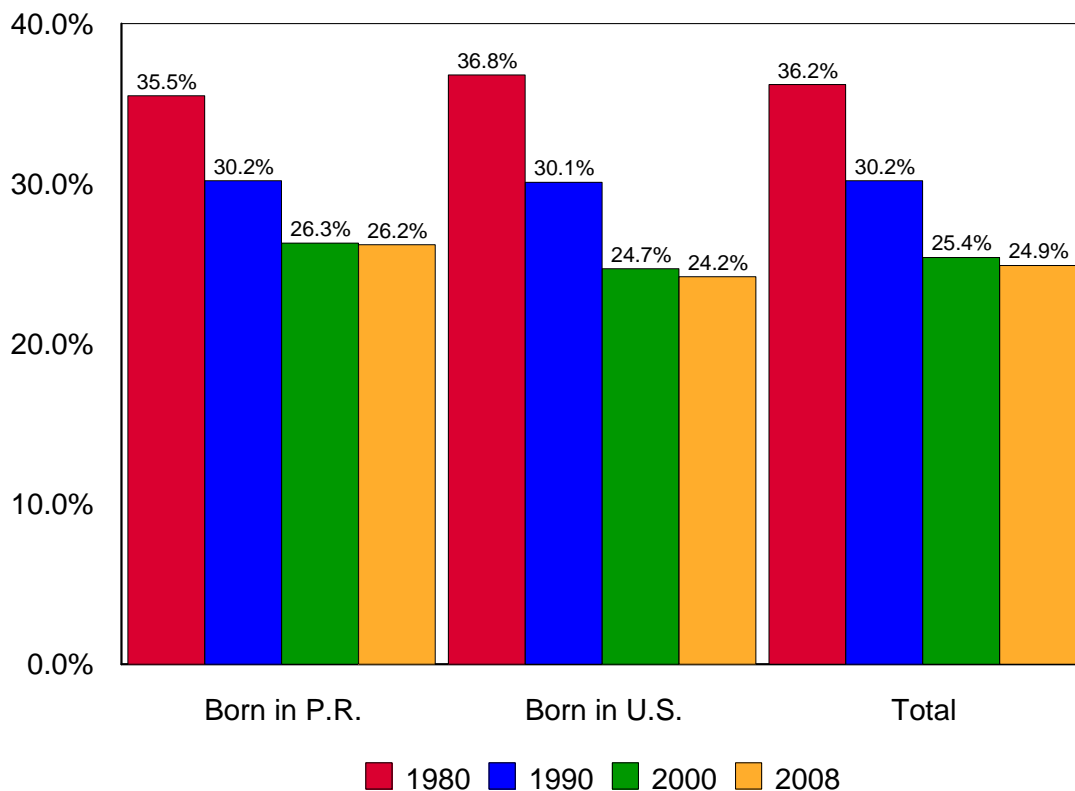
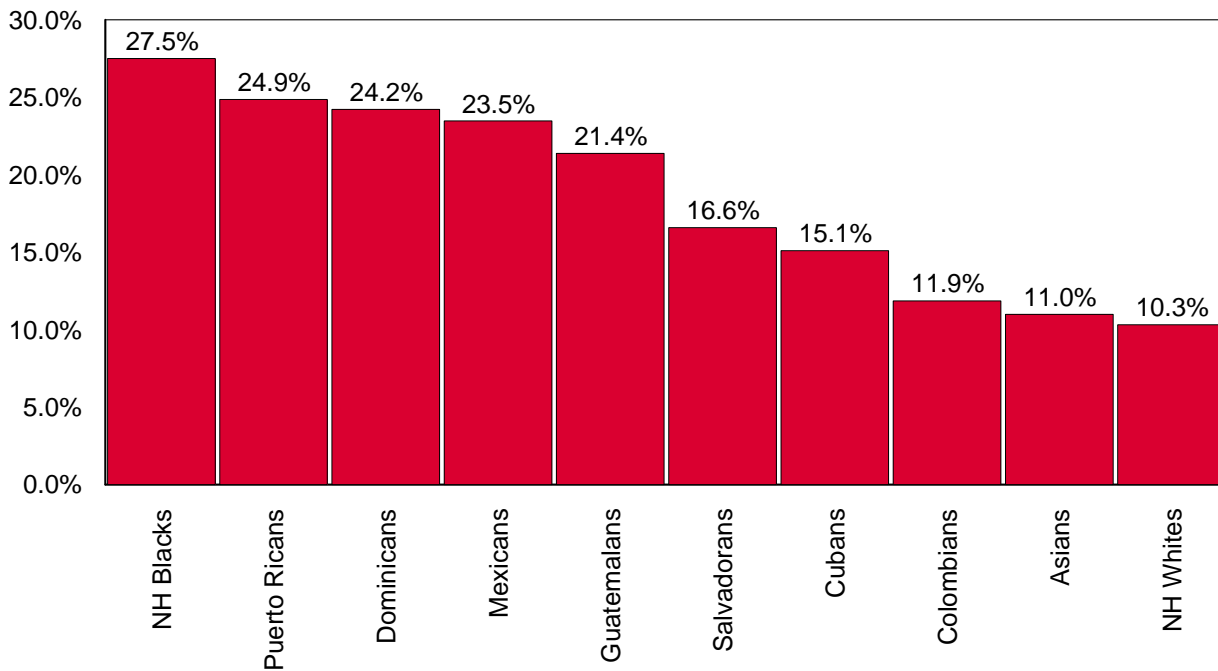


Figure 11  
 Percentage of Puerto Ricans Living in Poverty by Birthplace, 1980 - 2008  
 (in inflation adjusted 2008 dollars)



an impressive concentration of income within higher-earning Puerto Rican households and a decline in the overall percentage of income within poorer households. In 1980 Puerto Rican households earning more than \$100,000 earned 14% of the total income earned by all Puerto Rican households. In 2008 these same income-category households earned 48% of all Puerto Rican income and those earning over \$75,000 accounted for nearly two-thirds of all income derived by Puerto Rican households. (See figure 10). These income data indicate a process of ongoing social stratification within the Puerto Rican population as well as the increasing concentration of wealth in higher income-earning households.

Figure 12  
 Percentage of Puerto Ricans living in Poverty compared with other Race/Ethnic Groups and Largest Latino National Subgroups, 2008



**Poverty**

The percentage of Puerto Ricans living in poverty fell from 36% in 1980 to 25% in 2008, a substantial decline. There was little difference in poverty rates between those born in Puerto Rico or in the United States. However, compared with the other major race/ethnic groups and the major Latino national sub-groups in the United States, Puerto Ricans were only surpassed in poverty rates by non-Hispanic blacks. Dominicans, Mexicans, and Guatemalans all had poverty rates in 2008 above 20%, but the other major Latino nationalities had much lower poverty rates. (See figures 11 and 12). Thus, despite the fact that a substantial sector of the Puerto Rican population had become fairly well off economically as indicated by household income data, poverty has remained as a serious problem within Puerto Rican communities. These poverty data, despite improvements between 1980 and 2008, underline the fairly acute social stratification prevailing among Puerto Ricans. It also should be noted that there was little differentiation by sex among Puerto Ricans in poverty. About 25% of Puerto Rican males and the same percentage of females lived in poverty in 2008.



## Educational Attainment

Puerto Ricans in the United States experienced extraordinary improvements in educational attainment levels among adult men and women regardless of whether they were born in Puerto Rico or the United States between 1980 and 2008. In 1980 nearly 60% of all Puerto Ricans 25 years of age or older had not completed high school. This percentage dropped steadily and in 2008 it had fallen to 25%. Over the same period the percentage of Puerto Ricans who had completed a B.A. degree or higher increased from 5.6% of all adults to 18.6% of the total Puerto Rican population over the age of 25. Improvements in the college graduation rate were most impressive among Puerto Rican women. By 2008 a greater percentage of Puerto Rican women had graduated from college – 20% – compared with 16.7% of Puerto Rican men 25 years of age and older. U.S. born Puerto Rican females had the highest college graduate rates at 22% in 2008 compared with 17% of U.S. born males, 18% of Puerto Rico-born females and 16.7% of Puerto Rico-born males. These rates were all substantially higher than found in 1980, 1990, and 2000. (See figures 13 and 14 and table 4 for complete data).

By 2008 Puerto Rican adults in the U.S. had lower college graduation rates (18.6%) than Asians (51%), Colombians (34%), non-Hispanic whites (31%), and Cubans (27%); but they had slightly higher rates than non-Hispanic blacks (18%), Dominicans (17%) and significantly greater rates than Guatemalans (10.6%), Mexicans (10.4%), and Salvadorans (9.5%). (See figure 15).

As to be expected, the connection of educational attainment levels with income-earning ability was direct. Puerto Ricans 25 years of age or older who had not graduated high school lived in households with a median household income of about \$28,000 in 2008. If they graduated high school median household income levels were dramatically higher at nearly \$49,000. With even some college and no degree, median income was about \$60,000; with an associates degree near \$64,000; and those who had achieved a B.A. degree or higher lived in households with a median household income of over \$89,000. (See figure 16).

## Employment and Unemployment

Unemployment rates among Puerto Ricans ages 16–60 in the United States increased from 6.4% in 1980 to 7.1% in 2008. However, this is not the most important aspect of the labor market for Puerto Ricans because unemployment rates are calculated only for the population which is actively seeking work. Those who were ‘not in the labor force’ for whatever reason, or were not looking for jobs, were not included in unemployment calculations. In 1980 an astounding 43% of all working-age Puerto Ricans were officially not in the labor force, even though many may have been underemployed or not working regular jobs. This fell dramatically by 2008 to 28%. This also meant an increase in the percentage of Puerto Ricans who were employed from 51% in 1980 to 65% in 2008.

The principal reason for the extraordinary change in the labor market situation of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. was that Puerto Rican women were increasingly employed, both those who were born in Puerto Rico and in the United States. In 1980 only 37% of all Puerto Rican women between the ages of 16 and 60 were officially employed and 58% were not in the labor force. Among women born in Puerto Rico 61% were not in the labor force and 53% of Puerto Rican women born in the U.S. were not actively seeking employment. But the percentage of women employed increasingly rose and by 2008 nearly 60% of working-age women born in Puerto Rico and 64% who were born in the U.S. were working so that similar percentages of all Puerto Rican women had jobs (63%) compared with men (66%). There was little change in the percentage of Puerto Rican men who were working in 1980 (66.4%) and in 2008 (66.5%). (See table 5 and figure 19).

Figure 13  
 Percentage of Puerto Ricans who did not Graduate High School or Acheived a B.A. Degree or Higher by Sex, Population 25 Years of Age or Older, 1980 - 2008

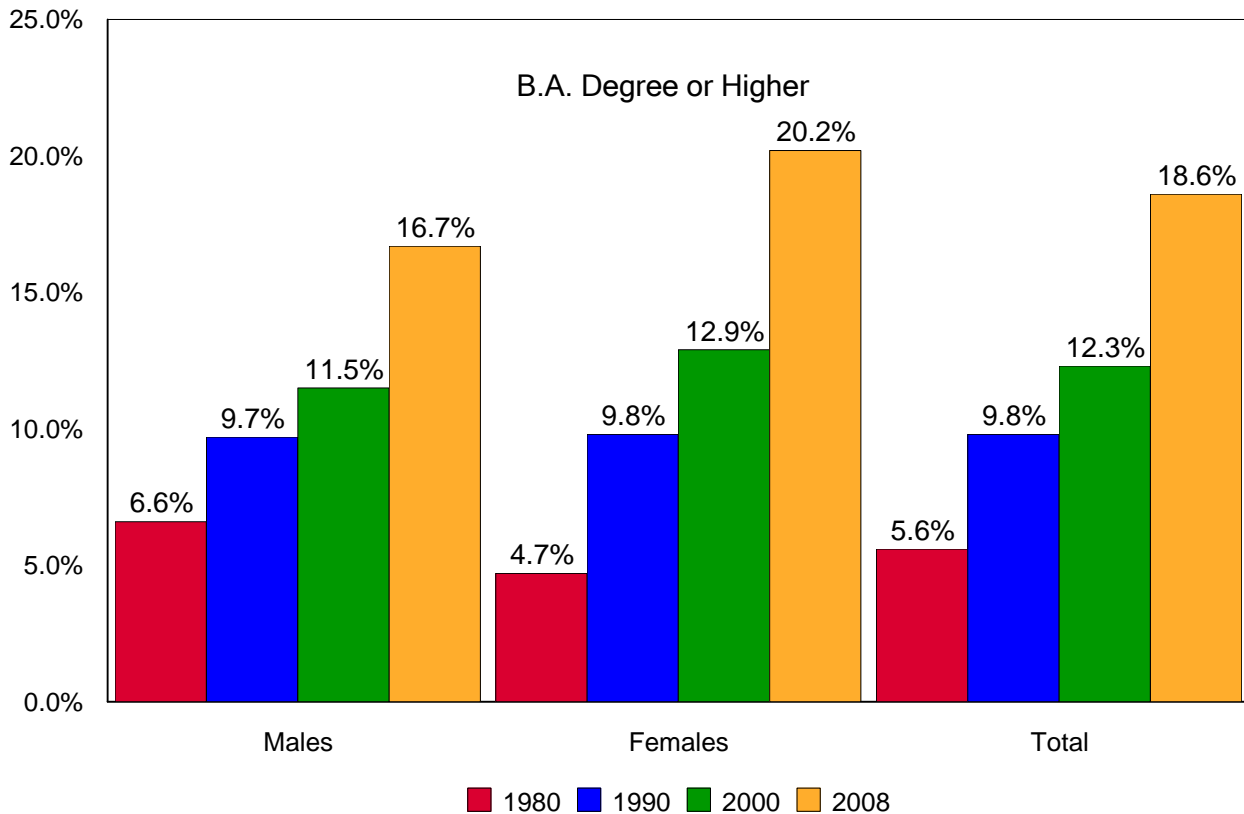
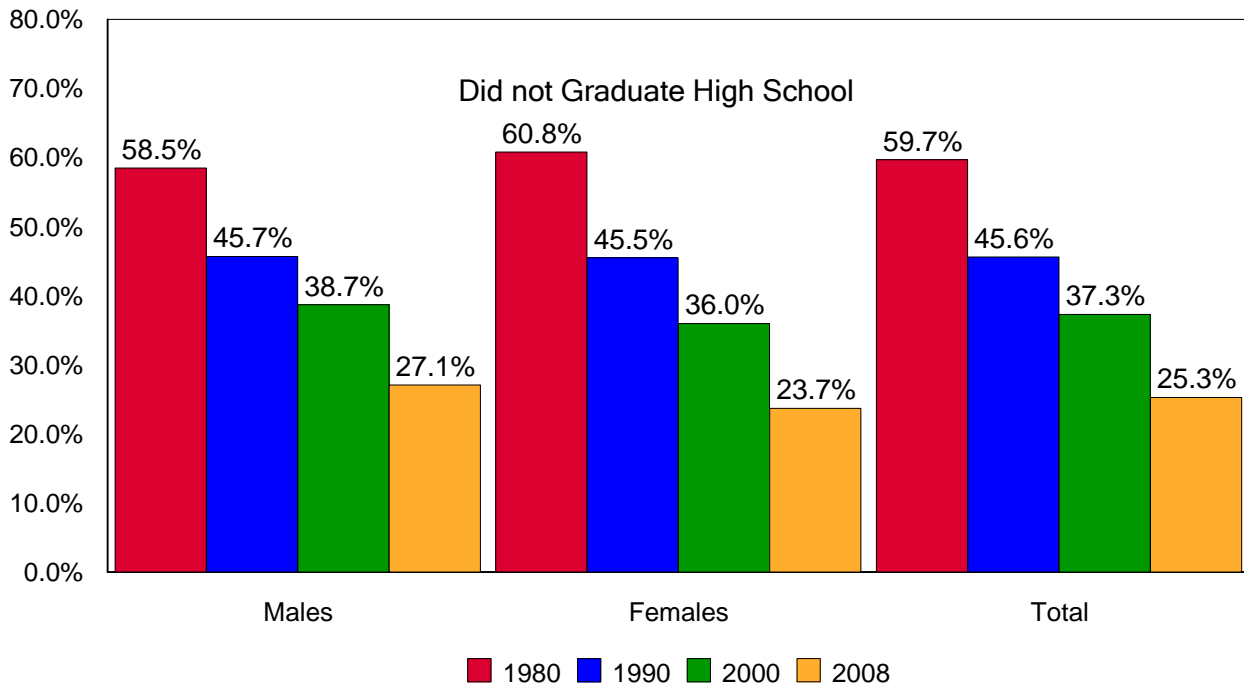


Figure 14  
 Percentage of Puerto Ricans who did not Graduate High School or Acheived a B.A. Degree or Higher by Birthplace and Sex for Population 25 Years of Age and Older, 1980 - 2008

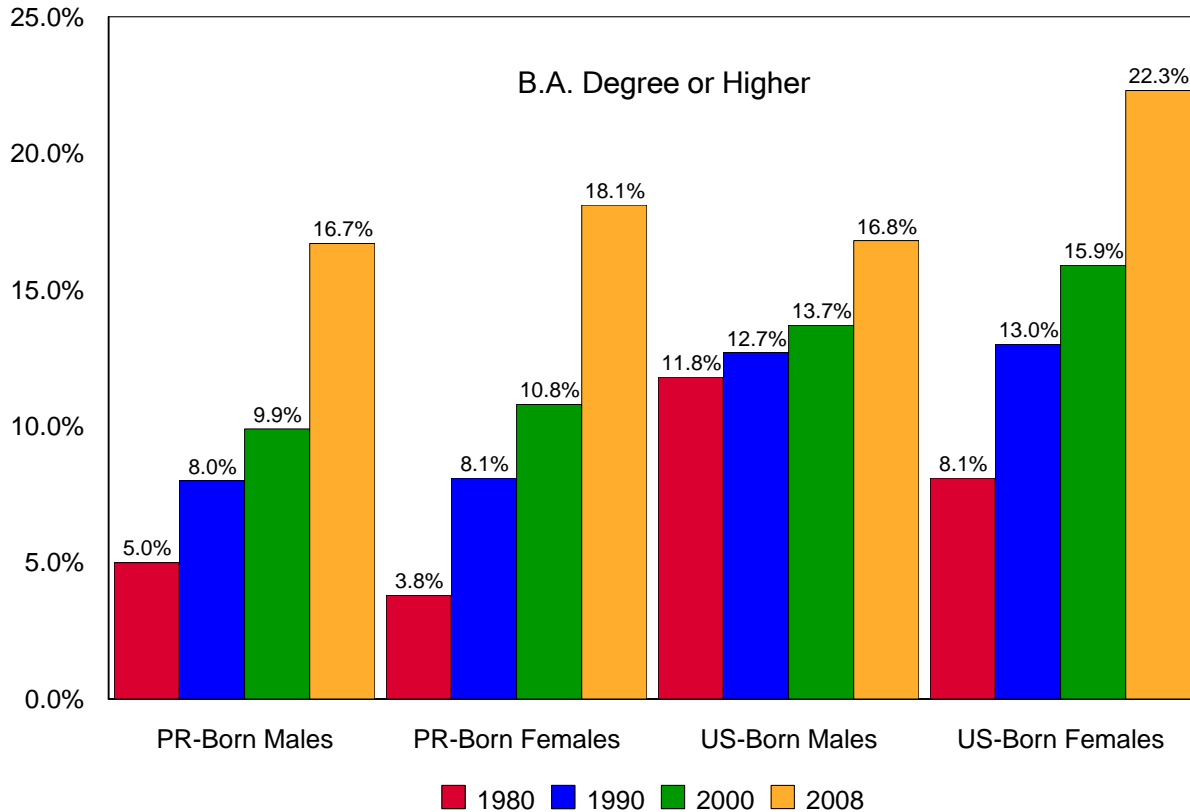
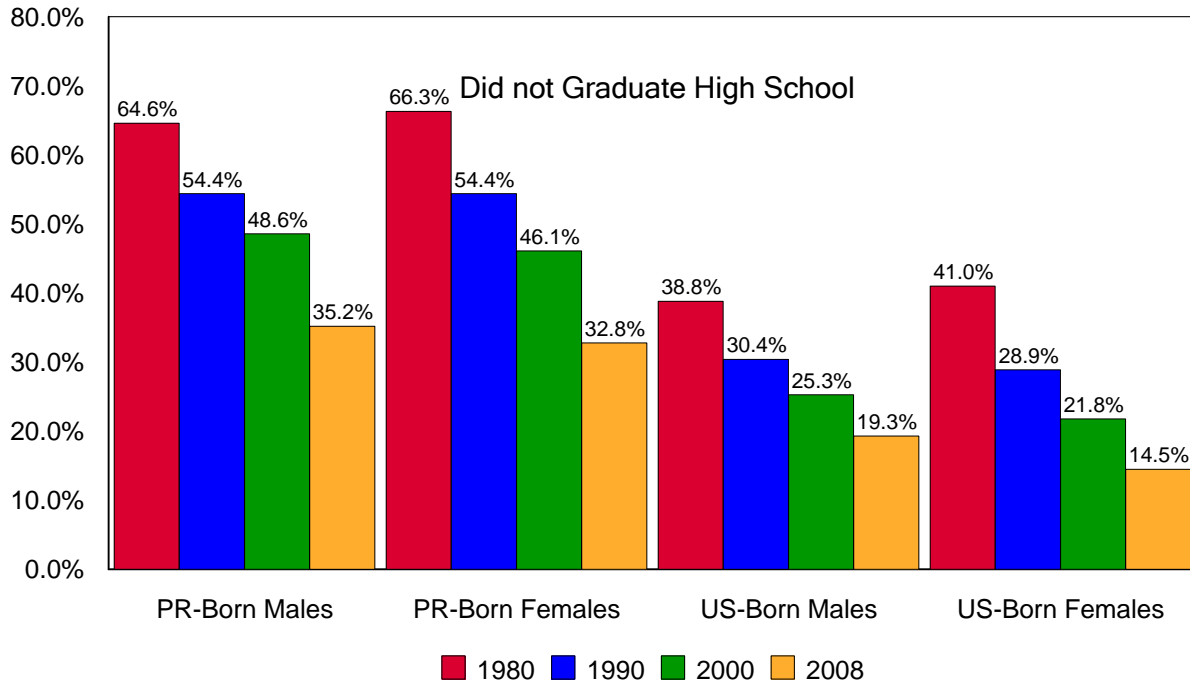


Table 5  
Educational Attainment Rates for Puerto Ricans by Sex and Birthplace for  
Population 25 Years of Age and Older, 1980 - 2008

	1980								
	Born in Puerto Rico			Born in United States			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Did Not Graduate High School	64.6%	66.3%	65.5%	38.8%	41.0%	39.9%	58.5%	60.8%	59.7%
High School Graduate	21.6%	22.4%	22.0%	30.6%	35.4%	33.1%	23.8%	25.2%	24.6%
Some College No Degree	8.8%	7.5%	8.1%	18.8%	15.5%	17.1%	11.2%	9.2%	10.1%
Associates Degree	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na
BA or Higher	5.0%	3.8%	4.4%	11.8%	8.1%	9.9%	6.6%	4.7%	5.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

	1990								
	Born in Puerto Rico			Born in United States			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Did Not Graduate High School	54.4%	54.4%	54.4%	30.4%	28.9%	29.6%	45.7%	45.5%	45.6%
High School Graduate	22.4%	22.4%	22.4%	28.9%	28.8%	28.9%	24.7%	24.6%	24.7%
Some College No Degree	11.8%	11.1%	11.4%	21.6%	21.9%	21.7%	15.3%	14.9%	15.1%
Associates Degree	3.4%	4.0%	3.7%	6.5%	7.4%	6.9%	4.5%	5.2%	4.9%
BA or Higher	8.0%	8.1%	8.1%	12.7%	13.0%	12.9%	9.7%	9.8%	9.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

	2000								
	Born in Puerto Rico			Born in United States			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Did Not Graduate High School	48.6%	46.1%	47.3%	25.3%	21.8%	23.5%	38.7%	36.0%	37.3%
High School Graduate	24.3%	23.4%	23.8%	30.3%	27.9%	29.0%	26.8%	25.3%	26.0%
Some College No Degree	13.6%	14.5%	14.1%	24.1%	25.8%	25.0%	18.0%	19.2%	18.6%
Associates Degree	3.6%	5.2%	4.4%	6.6%	8.7%	7.7%	4.9%	6.6%	5.8%
BA or Higher	9.9%	10.8%	10.4%	13.7%	15.9%	14.9%	11.5%	12.9%	12.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

	2008								
	Born in Puerto Rico			Born in United States			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Did Not Graduate High School	35.2%	32.8%	33.9%	19.3%	14.5%	16.8%	27.1%	23.7%	25.3%
High School Graduate	26.5%	25.6%	26.0%	31.0%	26.4%	28.6%	28.8%	26.0%	27.3%
Some College No Degree	15.7%	16.9%	16.3%	24.6%	25.5%	25.1%	20.2%	21.2%	20.7%
Associates Degree	5.8%	6.6%	6.2%	8.4%	11.2%	9.9%	7.1%	8.9%	8.1%
BA or Higher	16.7%	18.1%	17.5%	16.8%	22.3%	19.7%	16.7%	20.2%	18.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Figure 15  
 Percentage of Puerto Ricans who did not Graduate High School or Achieved a B.A. Degree or Higher Compared with Major Race/Ethnic Groups and Largest Latino National Subgroups, 2008

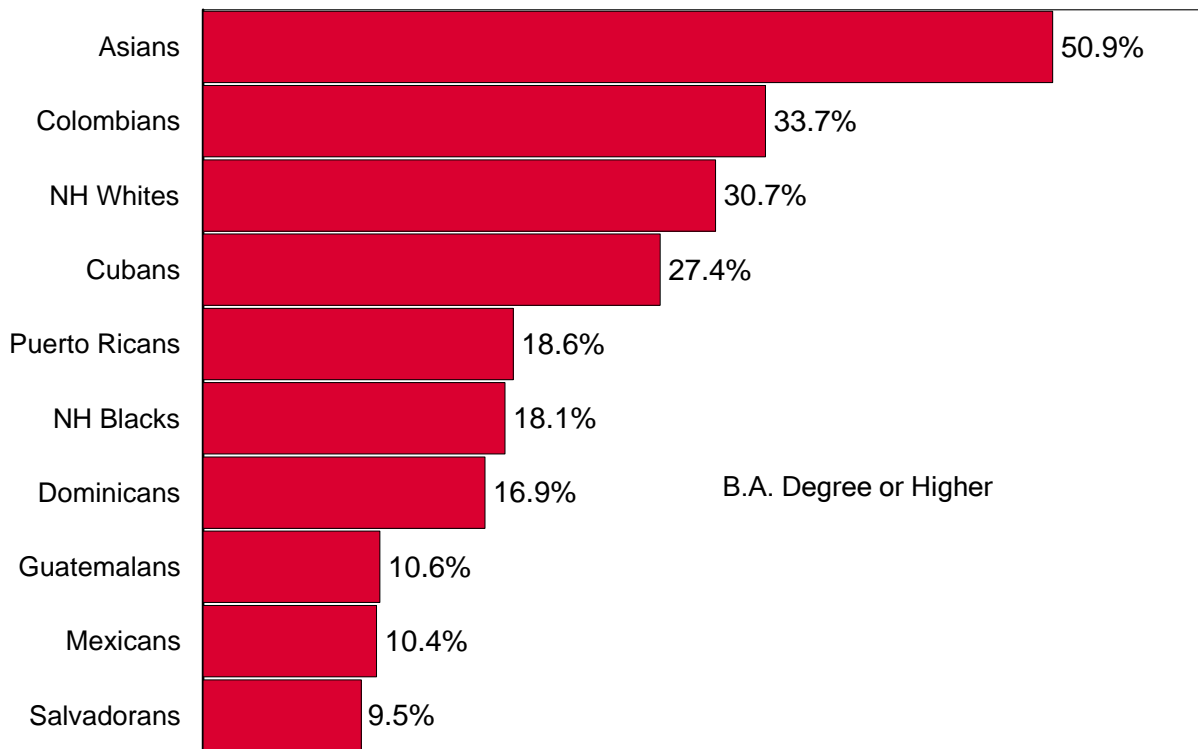
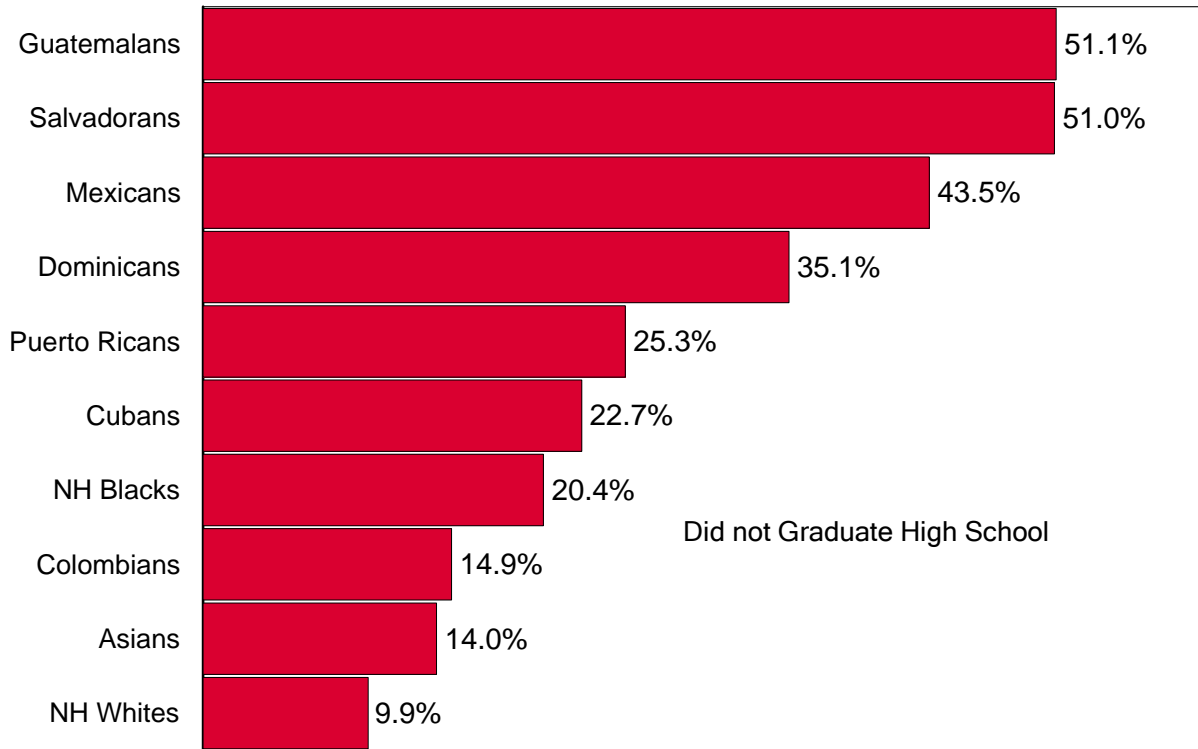


Figure 16  
 Median Household Income by Educational Attainment Level Among  
 Puerto Ricans in the United States, 2008

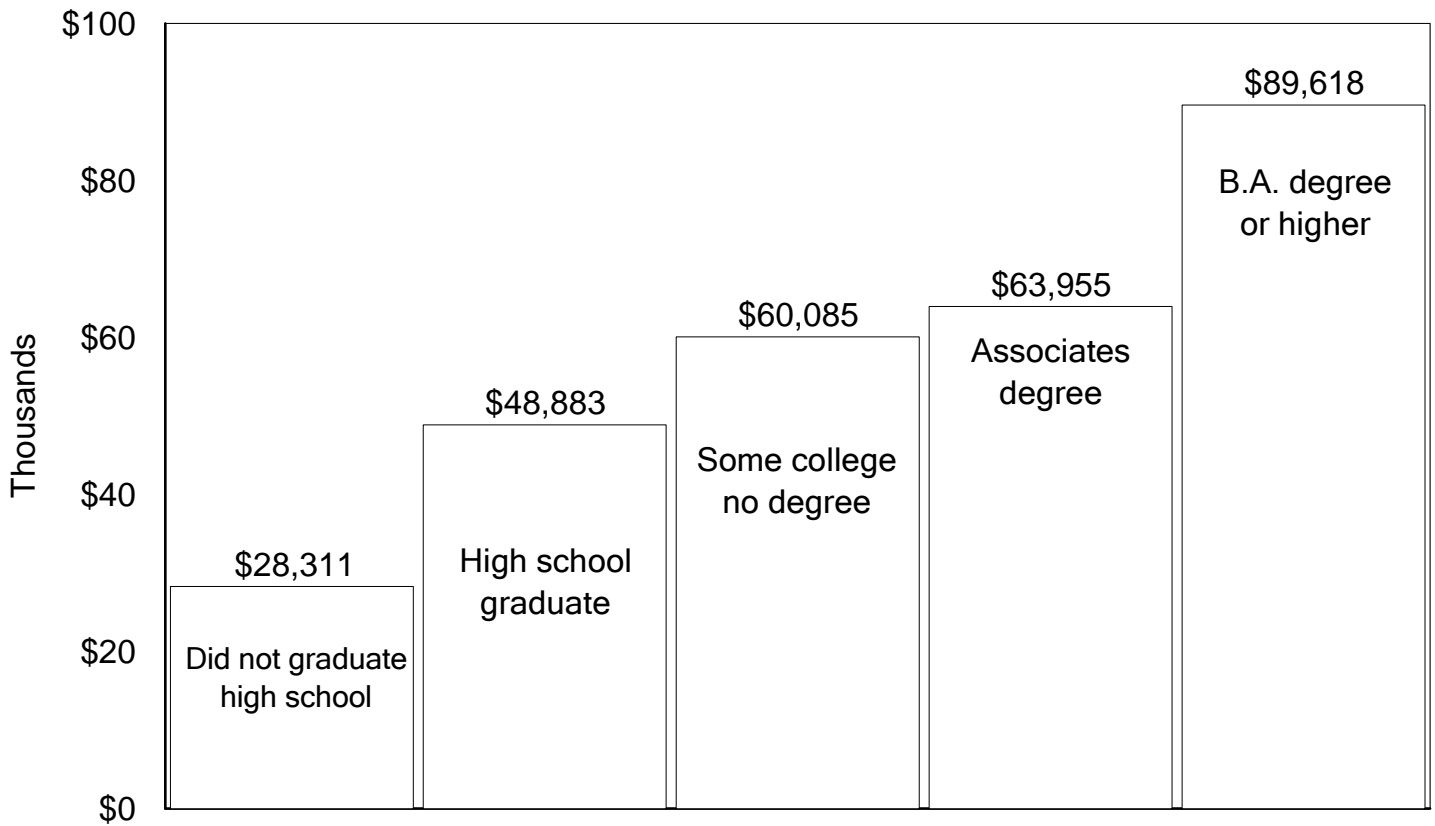


Figure 17  
 Employment and Unemployment among Puerto Ricans in the United States, 1980 - 2008  
 Population Ages 16 - 60

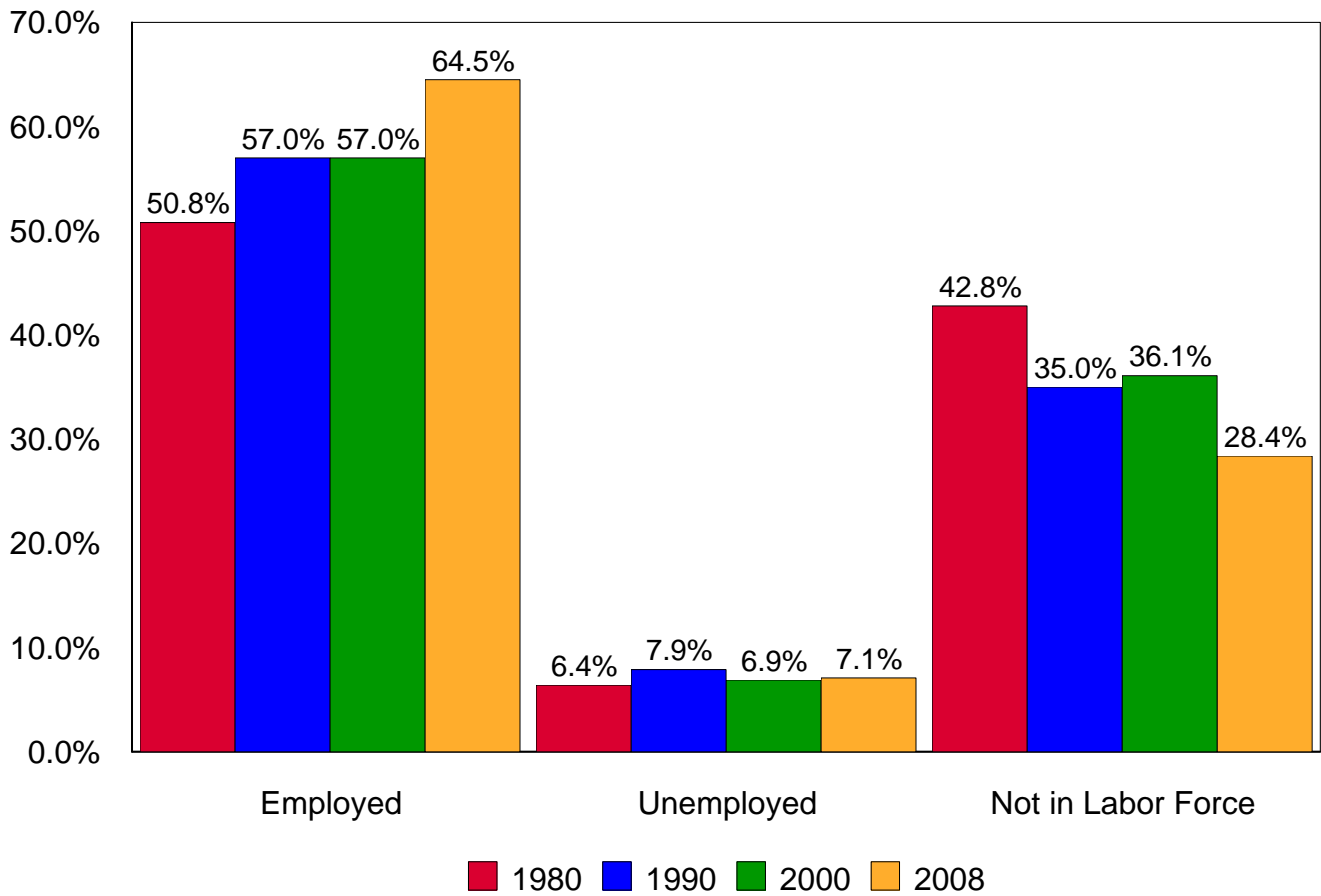


Figure 18  
 Employment and Unemployment among Puerto Ricans in the United States compared with other Race/Ethnic Groups and Largest Latino National Subgroups, 2008 (Population Ages 16 - 60)

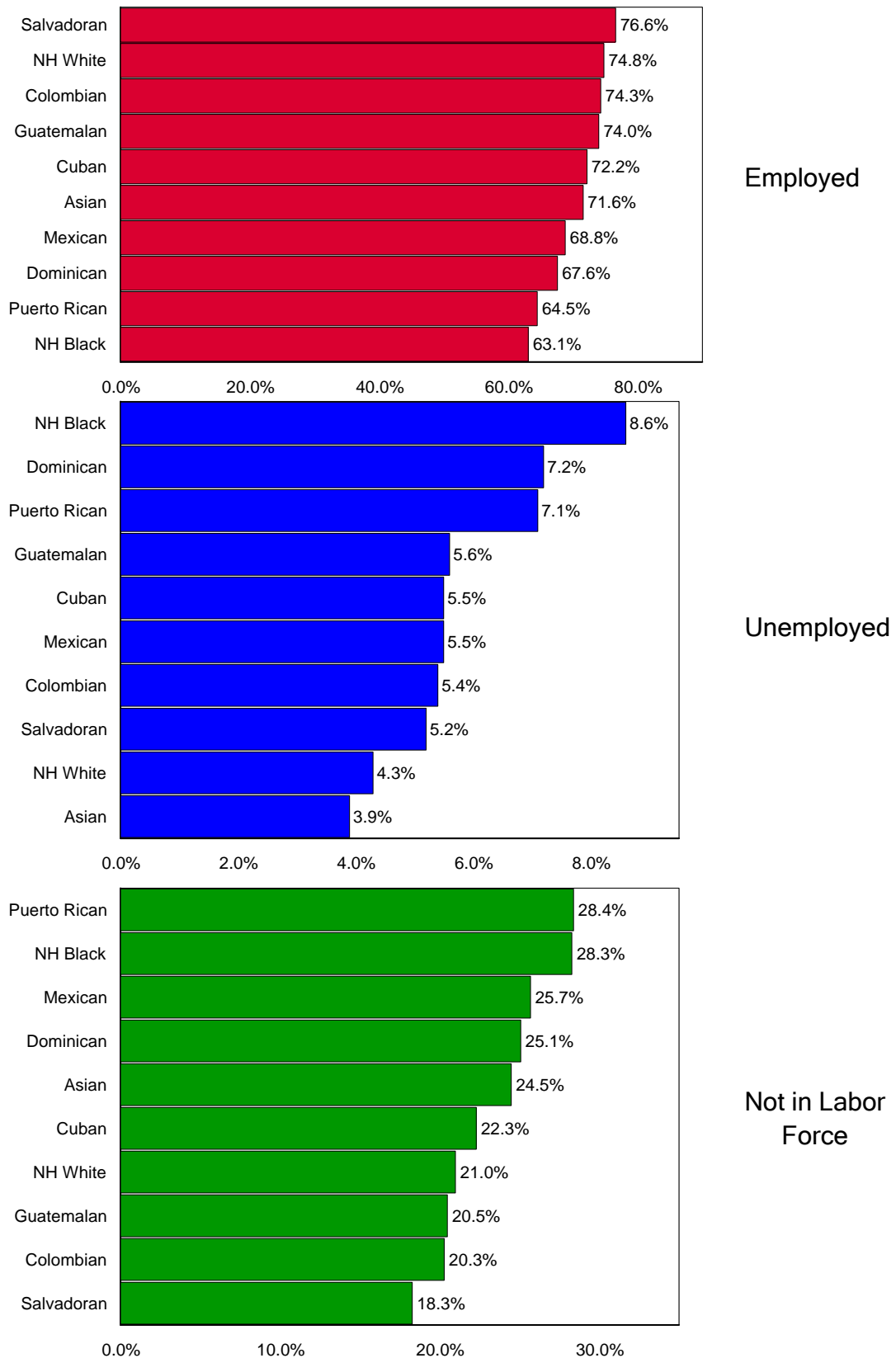
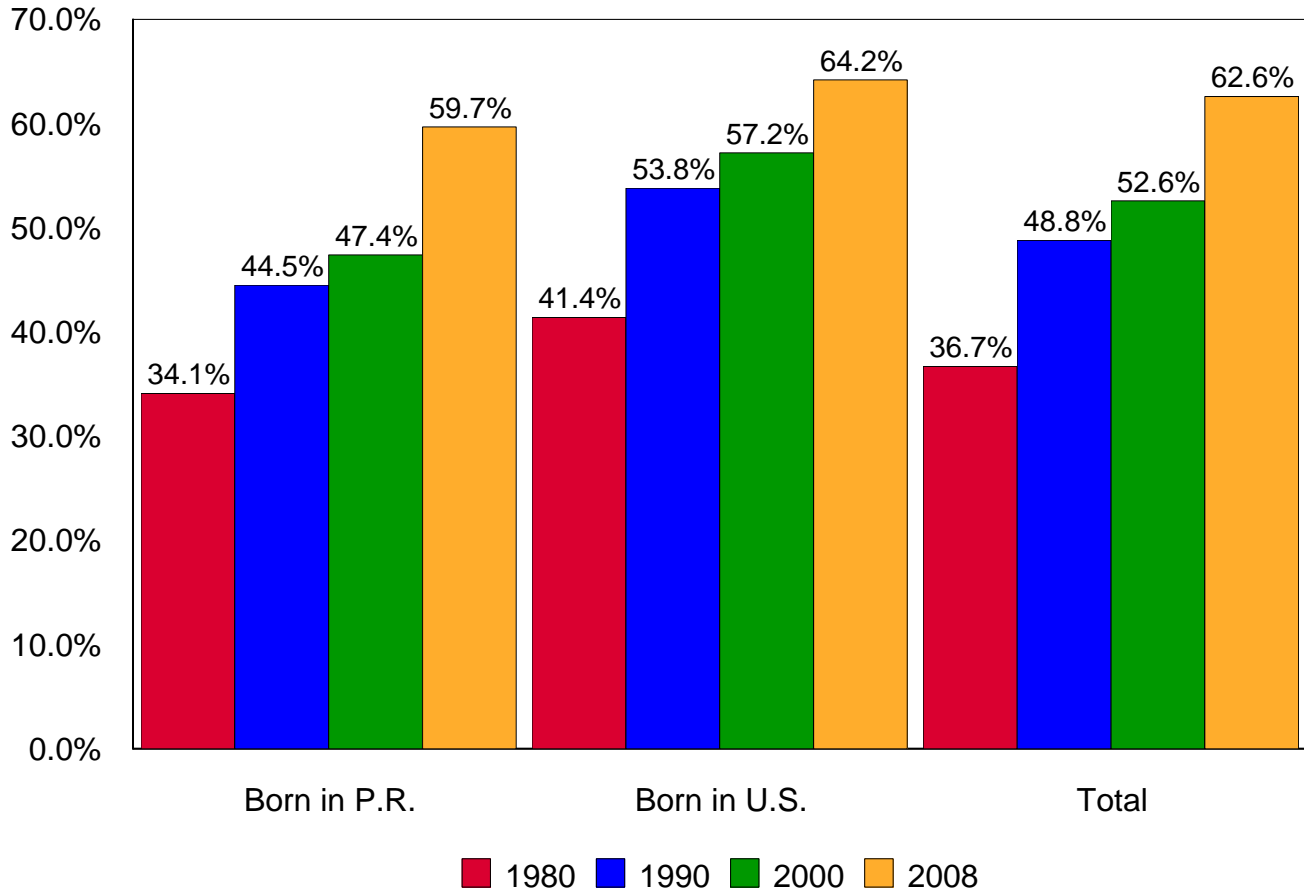




Table 5  
 Employment, Unemployment, and Not in Labor Force Rates for  
 Puerto Ricans in the United States by Sex and Birthplace, 1980 - 2008

	Employed					
	Born in P.R.		Born in U.S.		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1980	70.8%	34.1%	59.5%	41.4%	66.4%	36.7%
1990	69.0%	44.5%	65.4%	53.8%	67.3%	48.8%
2000	59.6%	47.4%	62.4%	57.2%	61.1%	52.6%
2008	67.3%	59.7%	64.5%	64.2%	65.5%	62.6%
	Unemployed					
1980	7.4%	4.9%	8.2%	5.9%	7.7%	5.3%
1990	8.5%	6.6%	9.4%	7.2%	8.9%	6.9%
2000	5.8%	5.8%	7.8%	7.6%	6.9%	6.8%
2008	5.7%	5.7%	7.7%	6.9%	7.0%	6.5%
	Not in Labor Force					
1980	21.8%	61.0%	32.3%	52.7%	25.8%	58.0%
1990	22.5%	49.0%	25.2%	39.0%	23.8%	44.3%
2000	34.5%	46.8%	29.8%	35.2%	32.0%	40.6%
2008	27.0%	34.6%	27.9%	28.9%	27.5%	31.0%

Figure 19  
 Employment Rates for Puerto Rican Women by Birthplace, 1980 - 2008  
 Population Ages 16 - 60



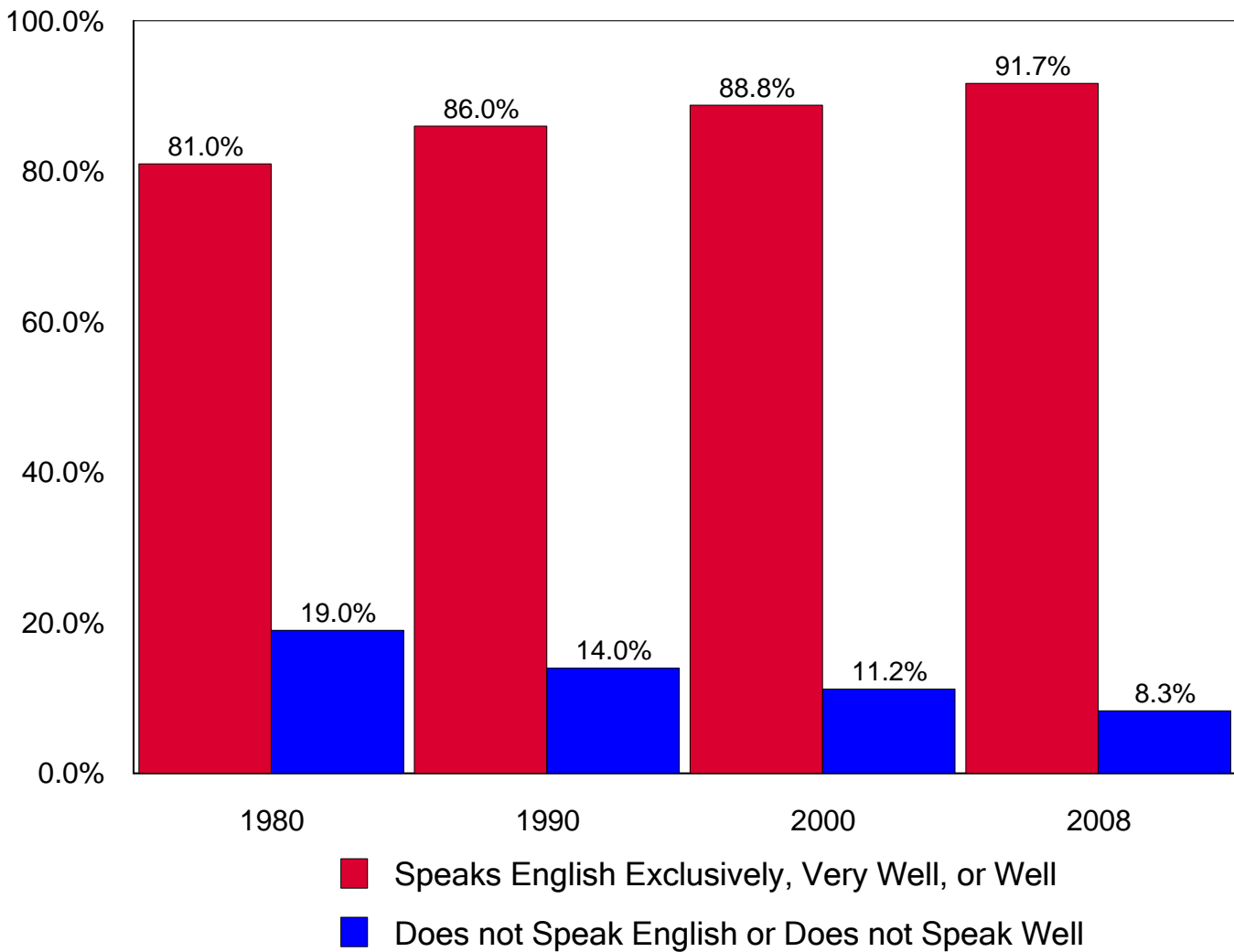
**English Language Abilities and Domestic Usage**

Two parallel trends were evident with respect to the development of English language skills and the use of English or Spanish at home. First, the percentage of the Puerto Rican population with good English language skills steadily increased between 1980 and 2008 both among those born in Puerto Rico and in the U.S. By 2008 over 90% of all Puerto Ricans in the U.S. declared that they spoke English exclusively, very well, or well. (See table 6 and figure 20). Second, it is clear that bilingualism was an important part of Puerto Rican culture in the United States, although there is evidence that it began to diminish somewhat as the Puerto Rican population born in the U.S. increased. This is indicated by the fact that the percentage of people who spoke Spanish at home declined between 1980 and 2008. In 1980 81% of all Puerto Ricans spoke English well or better, but 85% reported they spoke Spanish at home. Puerto Ricans who spoke Spanish at home decreased with each census and in 2008 64% of the total population spoke Spanish domestically. Thus, although bilingualism continued to be central to Puerto Ricans in the U.S. the evidence suggests that this is decreasing. This, as to be expected, was especially true for Puerto Ricans born in the U.S. About three-quarters of all mainland-born Puerto Ricans spoke Spanish at home in 1980. This had fallen to slightly less than half in 2008. (See figure 21).

**Table 6**  
**English Language Abilities by Puerto Ricans in the United States by Birthplace**  
**in Percentage of Population Ages 5 and Older, 1980 - 2008**

	Born in P.R.		Born in U.S.		Total	
	Speaks English exclusively, very well, or well	Does not speak English or does not speak well	Speaks English exclusively, very well, or well	Does not speak English or does not speak well	Speaks English exclusively, very well, or well	Does not speak English or does not speak well
1980	70.6%	29.4%	92.2%	7.8%	81.0%	19.0%
1990	76.6%	23.4%	94.3%	5.7%	86.0%	14.0%
2000	78.2%	21.8%	96.5%	3.5%	88.8%	11.2%
2008	81.5%	18.5%	97.6%	2.4%	91.7%	8.3%

Figure 20  
 English Language Abilities among Puerto Ricans in the United States, 1980 - 2008  
 Population Ages 5 and Older

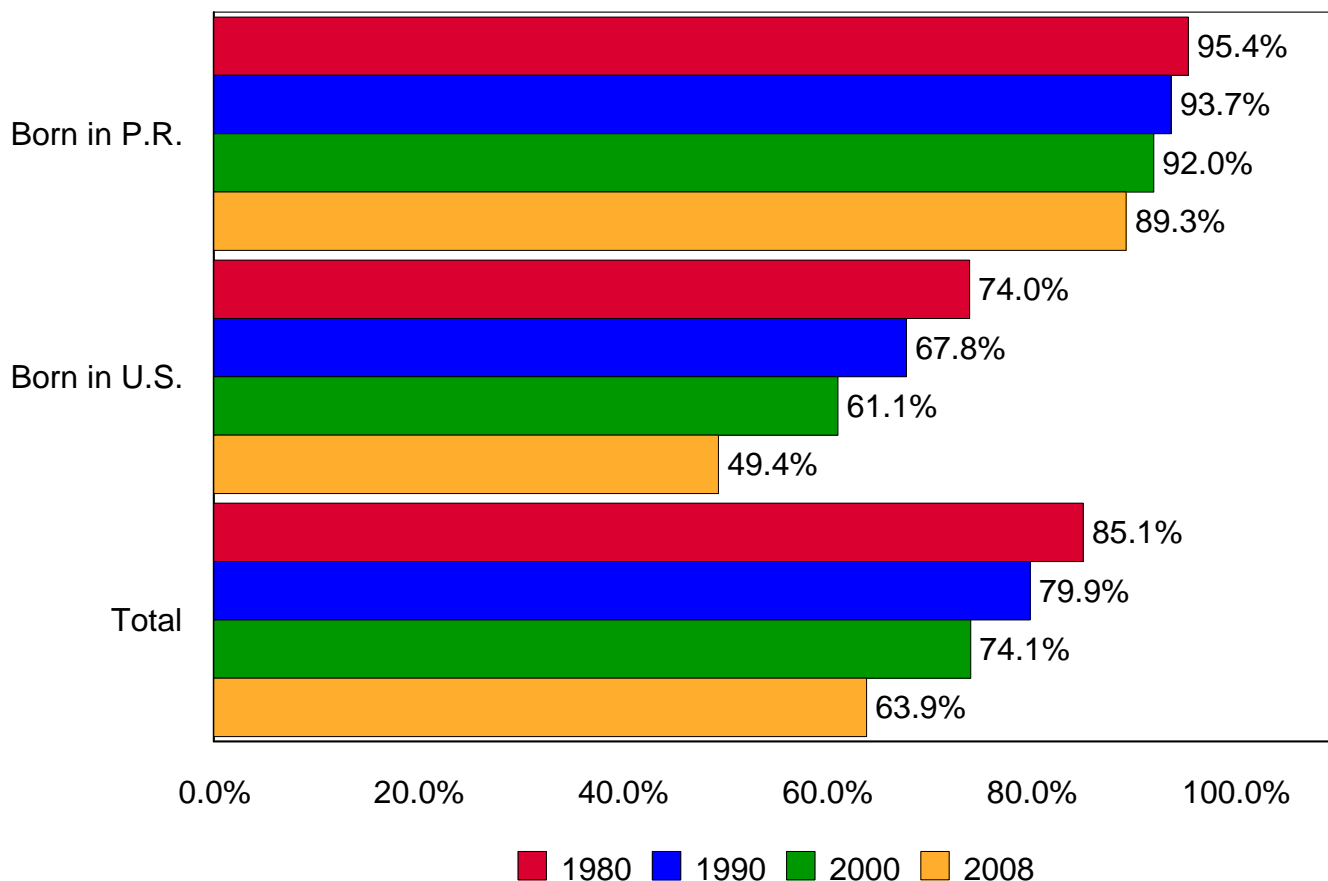


**Race**

The issue of race is complex because data generated by the U.S. Census Bureau are based upon self declarations rather than any objective criteria. This implies that answers to questions on race reflect how people perceive themselves within the broader context of U.S. culture. An additional problem in reporting data on race as they changed over time is that the way in which the question on race appeared in census forms has changed since 1980.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the entire conceptualization of race in Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, and the rest of Latin America is entirely different than the black/white polarity prevalent in the United States. People may conceive of themselves as neither black nor white and indeed the data on persons of ‘some other race’ reinforce the fact that racial self-conceptualizations among Puerto Ricans do not parallel the way race is conceived of by non-

<sup>3</sup> See Clara E. Rodríguez, *Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2000). “Some other race’ are all of those who did not declare black or white.

Figure 21  
 Percentage of Puerto Ricans who Spoke Spanish at Home in the United States  
 Population Ages 5 and Older by Birthplace, 1980 - 2008



Hispanic whites or blacks. Nevertheless, some general observations on race may be used as indicators of change over time rather than as anything absolute or definitive. First, between 1980 and 2000 about an equal percentage of Puerto Ricans, whether born in the U.S. or Puerto Rico, declared themselves to be white or ‘some other race.’ In 2000 about 47% of all Puerto Ricans reported they were white and the same percentage indicated they were of ‘some other race.’ The other 6% self-declared as black. There seems to have been a major change in the first decade of the 21st century, although until the census of 2010 is conducted with a larger sample size it will not be known if these trends are accurate. In 2008 about 55% of all Puerto Ricans self declared as white; 38% as ‘some other race’; and 7% as black. This rise in those declaring themselves to be ‘white’ may have been related to the fact that a greater percentage of Puerto Ricans were born in the U.S. in 2008. (See figure 22).

Yet, race does indeed matter when socio-economic indicators are examined. Puerto Ricans who declared themselves to be white had higher median household incomes, lower poverty rates, and greater percentages of adults who had achieved a B.A. degree or higher than the other two racial groups. Those who declared themselves to be of ‘some other race’ had higher incomes and lower rates of poverty than self-declared blacks, although more Puerto Rican blacks had graduated college than those of ‘some other race.’ (See figures 23, 24, and 25).

Figure 22  
Racial Self-Declarations by Birthplace, 1980 - 2008

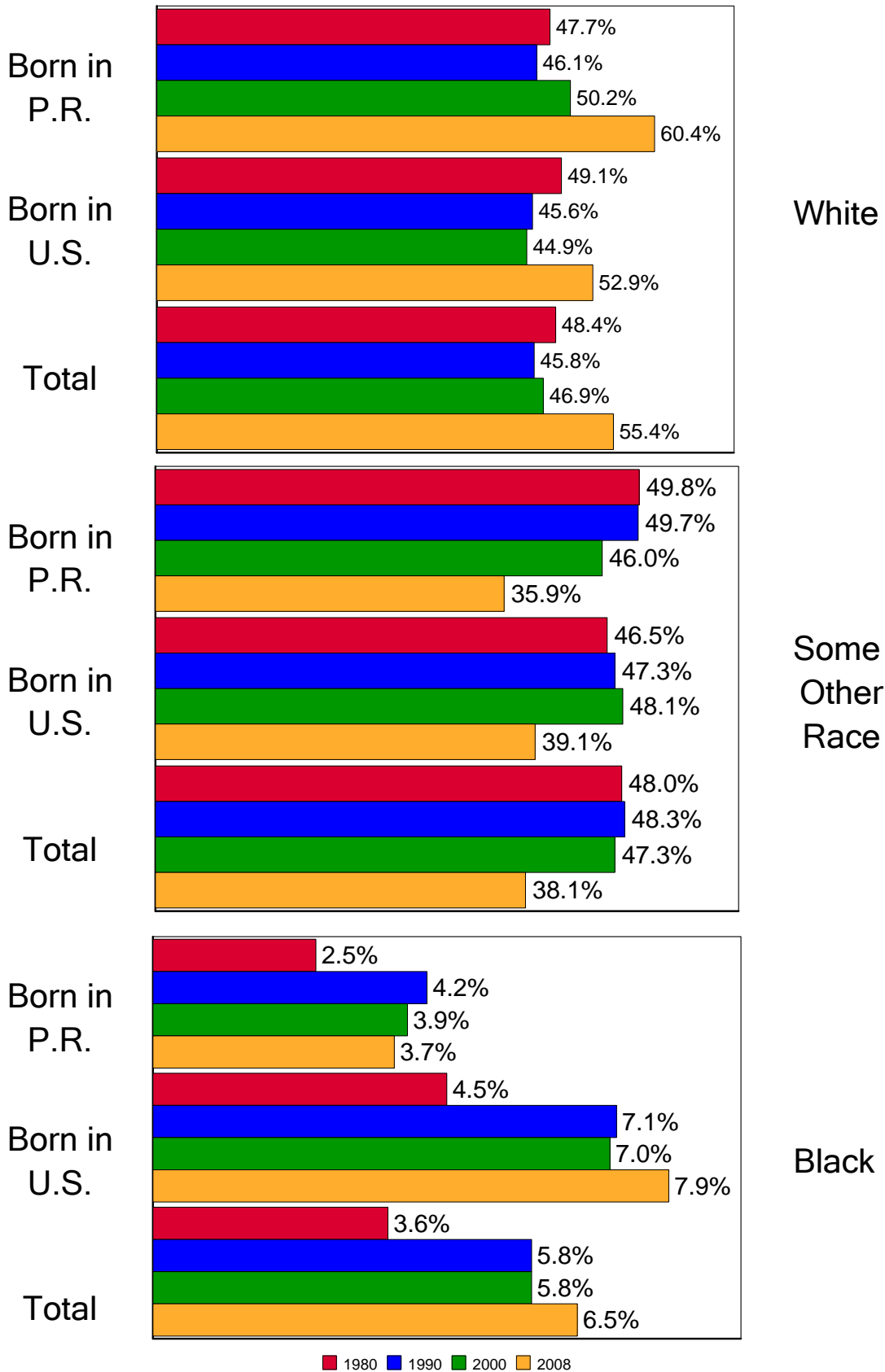


Figure 23  
Median Household Income by Race Among Puerto Ricans, 2008

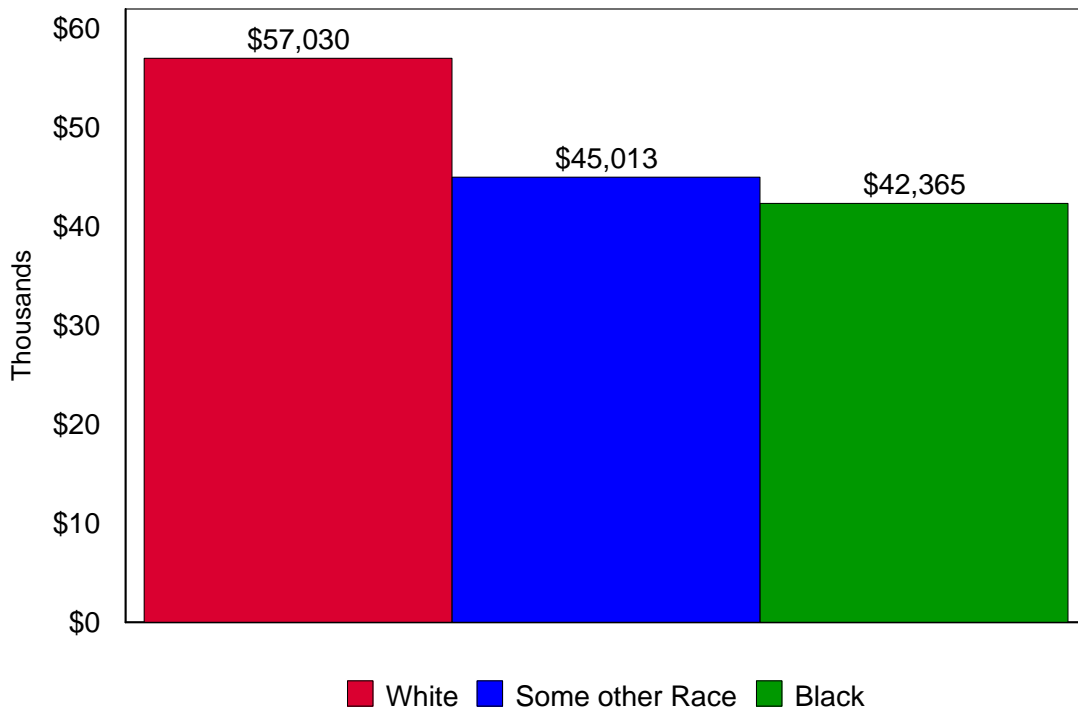


Figure 24  
Percentage of Puerto Ricans Living in Poverty by Race, 2008

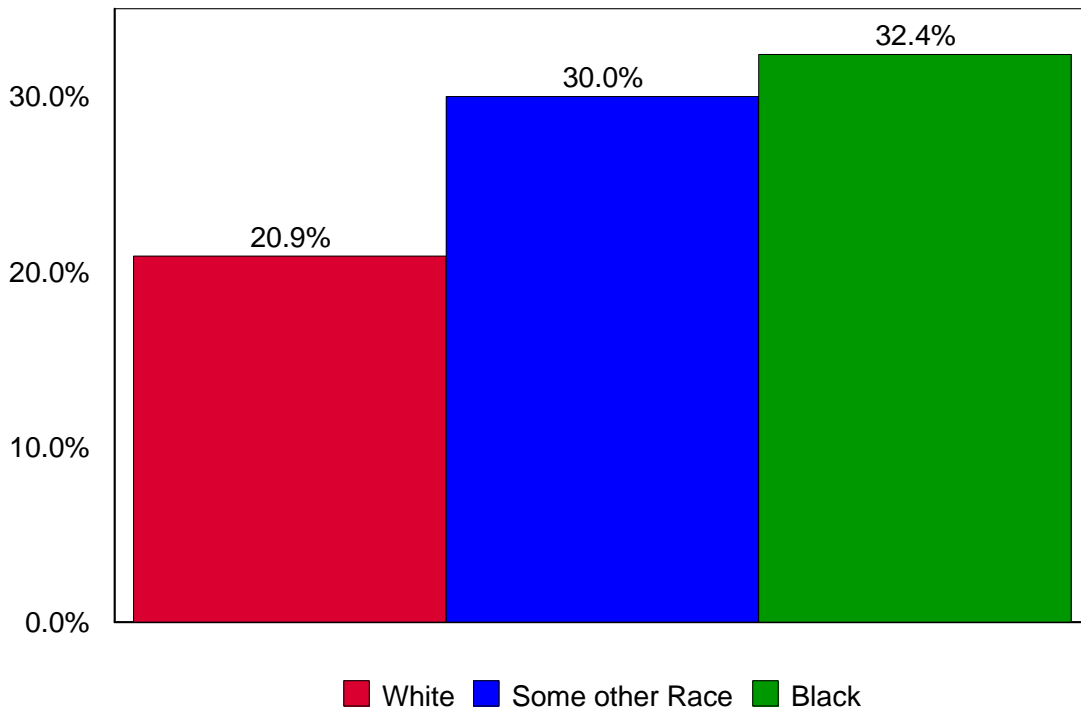
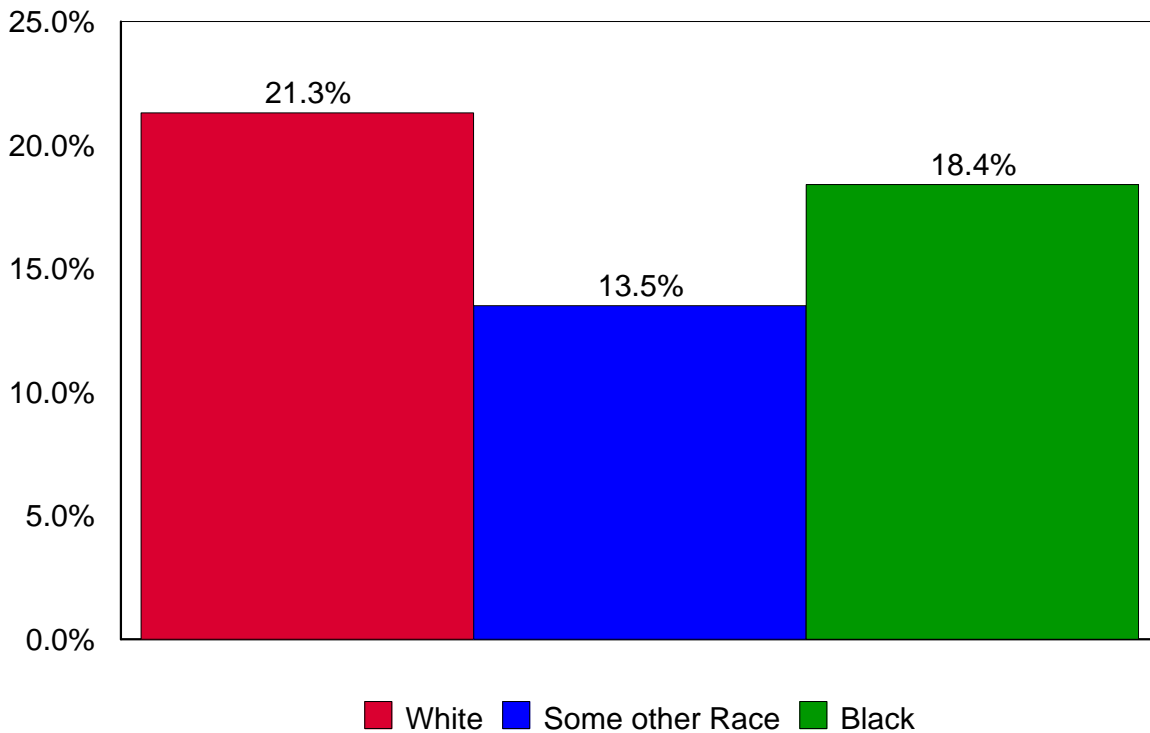


Figure 25  
Percentage of Puerto Ricans Ages 25 and Over with a  
B.A. Degree or Higher by Race, 2008



### Endogamy and Exogamy

Evidence suggests that Puerto Rican men and women who are household heads are increasingly choosing to marry non-Puerto Ricans, and even non-Latinos.<sup>4</sup> In 1980 72% of all Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. were married to other Puerto Ricans and 83% were married to Latinos including Puerto Ricans. This fell steadily to 2000 when about two-thirds of Puerto Rican male and female household heads were married to other Puerto Ricans and a little over three-quarters were married to Latinos including Puerto Ricans. (See figures 26 and 27). Very few Puerto Ricans were married to non-Hispanic blacks – less than 3% between 1980 and 2000 – and only about 1% were married to Asians. Non-Hispanic whites were the major marriage partners for Puerto Ricans. About 19% of Puerto Rican men and 13% of Puerto Rican women were married to non-Hispanic whites in 2000. The 2008 data reveal significantly higher levels of marriage to non-Hispanic whites – nearly one-quarter of all household heads – but these data should be interpreted with caution because of smaller sample sizes. However, they do suggest a trend toward greater marriage with non-Puerto Ricans.

<sup>4</sup> The data for 2008 should be viewed with caution because the sample size for household heads was significantly smaller than the sample sized for the decennial censuses of 1980, 1990, 2000. Smaller sample sizes imply less statistical reliability. Nevertheless, the trend toward marrying non-Puerto Ricans seems to be fairly certain.



Figure 26  
Puerto Rican Household Heads Married to Other Puerto Ricans by Sex  
1980 - 2008

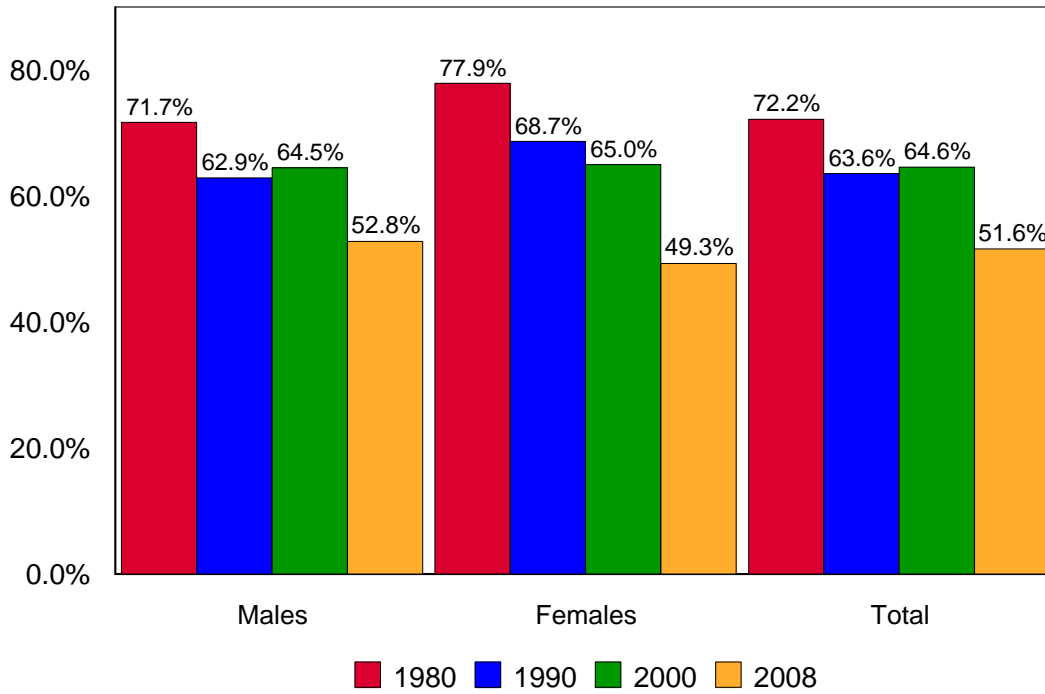


Figure 27  
Puerto Rican Household Heads Married to Latinos including Puerto Ricans  
by Sex, 1980 - 2008

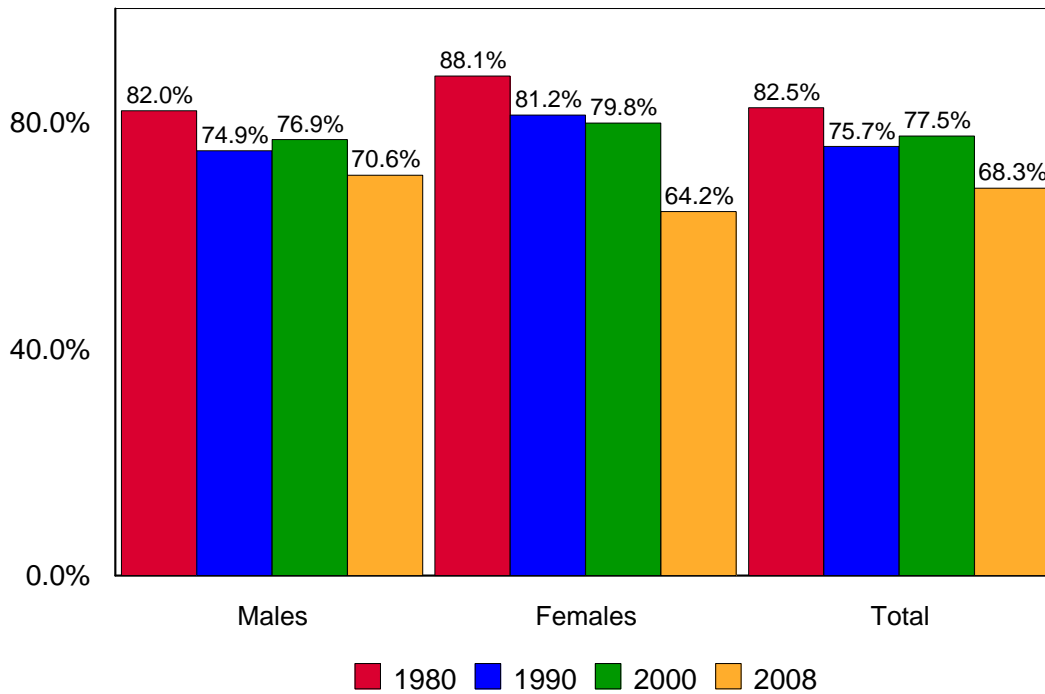
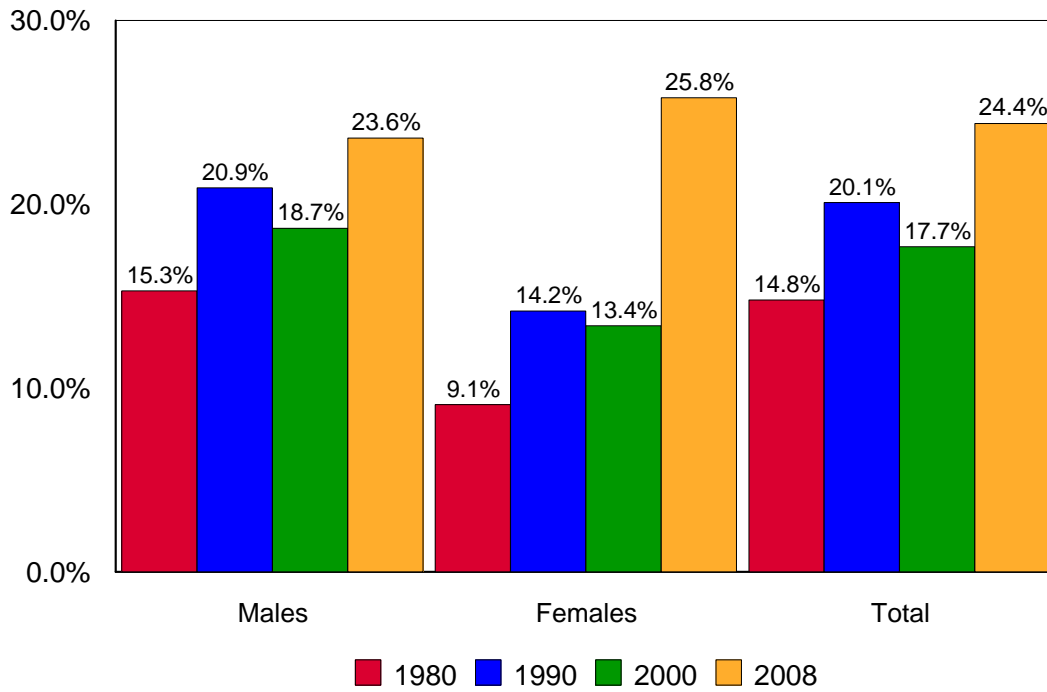


Figure 28  
 Puerto Rican Household Heads Married to Non-Hispanic Whites by Sex  
 1980 - 2008



## Summary

- By 2008 there were as many Puerto Ricans living in the United States – about 4 million – as living in Puerto Rico.
- About two-thirds of all Puerto Ricans in the United States were born on the U.S. mainland in 2008.
- When Puerto Ricans began migrating to the U.S. during the 1940s they largely settled in the New York metropolitan area. By 1960 about 80% of all Puerto Ricans lived in the states of New York and New Jersey.
- However, like most previous migrant groups in U.S. history they began moving away from original areas of settlement. By 2008 about one-third of all Puerto Ricans lived in New York and New Jersey.
- The greatest concentration of Puerto Ricans outside of New York/New Jersey in 2008 was Florida where about 18% of the total population resided.
- Puerto Rican households experienced rising median income levels in real terms between 1980 and 2008. However, in 2008 these incomes were still significantly lower than the other major race/ethnic groups in the U.S. and among Latino national sub-groups only Mexicans and Dominicans had lower median household incomes.
- There was a very clear and stratified social structure among Puerto Ricans in the United States when income is used as an indicator. About one-third of all Puerto Rican households earned more than \$75,000 in 2008 and about 20% of all Puerto Rican households earned more than \$100,000. Yet 20% of Puerto Rican household earned less than \$20,000 in 2008.
- The percentage of Puerto Ricans living in poverty fell significantly from 36% in 1980 to 25% in 2008. However, more Puerto Ricans lived in poverty than any other Latino national sub-group and only more non-Hispanic blacks lived in poverty than Puerto Ricans in the U.S.
- Puerto Ricans experienced extraordinary improvements in educational attainment between 1980 and 2008. In 1980 only 6% of all Puerto Ricans 25 years of age and older had achieved a B.A. degree or higher. This increased to almost 19% in 2008. Over the same time frame the percentage of non-high school graduates fell from 60% to 25%.
- The employment situation among Puerto Ricans improved considerably between 1980 and 2008 mainly because more Puerto Ricans were employed and fewer were not seeking work. This was in large part linked to the integration of Puerto Rican women into the labor force. In 1980 only 37% of Puerto Rican women between ages 16 and 60 were employed. This soared to 63% by 2008.

- English language skills improved notably, yet bilingualism remained an important part of Puerto Rican culture in 2008 although it does seem to be waning. Over 90% of all Puerto Ricans 5 years of age or older reported good to excellent English language skills. About 64% reported speaking Spanish as the dominant language at home, a decline from previous census years.
- Puerto Ricans increasingly identified themselves as ‘white’ when they reported their race to the U.S. Census Bureau, and very few identified themselves as ‘black.’ About 55% self-declared that they were white; 7% as black; and over 38% as belonging to ‘some other race.’ Puerto Rican whites had higher median incomes and lower rates of poverty than the other two major race categories.
- Evidence suggests that Puerto Rican men and women are still predominantly marrying Puerto Ricans and Latinos. However, the percentage who are married to non-Hispanic whites seems to be increasing significantly.