

Demographic and Census Trends of Latinos in the Kansas City Area

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This paper is based on my presentation in the session “Kansas City Latinos: Past, Present, and Future,” which was part of the Cambio de Colores 2003 conference held March 12-14 at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. In the paper, I use the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” interchangeably. Although the two terms would appear to have somewhat different meanings, the US Census Bureau has considered them to be synonymous since 1997. I begin by reviewing the different ways in which the US Census Bureau has tried to enumerate Hispanics so that the reader has some sense of what census statistics can and cannot relate about the Latino population over the years in the United States. Then I briefly discuss the recent rapid growth of Latino population in the Midwest to serve as a kind of benchmark for the State of Missouri’s growth in Hispanic population. Next, I address Missouri’s dynamic increase in Hispanic population between 1990 and 2000, a period in which Missouri’s rural and urban areas were undergoing fundamental change in the composition of their populations. The Kansas City and St. Louis metro areas are compared for their growth in Latino population and for their segregation of Latinos from the rest of their populations. The pattern of Latino settlement in the Kansas City metro area is discussed and explained. Finally, I make some predictions about the future demographics and spatial distribution of the Kansas City metro area’s Latino population.

The US Census Bureau is the main source of information on the Hispanic population in the United States. Unfortunately for researchers, the census criteria for identification of that population have changed over time, reflecting evolving social attitudes and shifting

political considerations (Gibson and Jung, 2000). The first time the Census Bureau partially enumerated Latinos was in 1930, when the census had a separate racial category for Mexicans. This 1930 census included estimates of the Mexican population in this country for 1910 and 1920 based on data on place of birth. In an attempt to record more Latinos than just Mexicans, the 1940 census eliminated the Mexican category but enumerated the White population with Spanish as a mother tongue. This approach, of course, produced too low an estimate of the Hispanic population as many second and third generation US Latinos would have considered English as their mother tongue. Oddly, the 1950 and 1960 censuses did not make an effort to document the Latino population. The 1970 census marks the first serious attempt to record the Hispanic population in this country. In the Southwestern states, the Census Bureau conducted a 15% sample in which Latinos were identified by Spanish surname or by Spanish heritage. Throughout the entire country, the Census officials conducted a 5% sample that aimed at identifying people of Spanish origin or descent. Unfortunately, this 5% sample vastly overestimated the Hispanic population for Southern and Midwestern states as many respondents incorrectly assumed that the census category of “Central or South American” referred to the Central or Southern United States. This was the case in Missouri. Only beginning with the 1980 census was there an effort to record Hispanics in a 100% sample. Also, the 1980 census was the first not to make the assumption that Hispanics always considered themselves to be White. Of course, we all know that the Census since 1980, despite 100% samples, has significantly undercounted the Hispanic population. The degree of undercount can only be estimated, but a figure of 50% underestimation is not a bad guess.

Let us now turn our attention to the Midwest (Fig. 1), a vast region that began to experience rapid growth in its Hispanic population in the 1990s (see Driever, 1996, for further discussion of the Midwest and Latinos). According to the census statistics, from 1990 to 2000 the Midwest had an 81% increase in its Hispanic population, the largest increase for the four US census regions (Table 1). As Lazos Vargas (2002) has documented, recent Latino settlement in the Midwest has been both urban and rural. The former is more important in absolute numbers of Latinos, of course, but the latter is

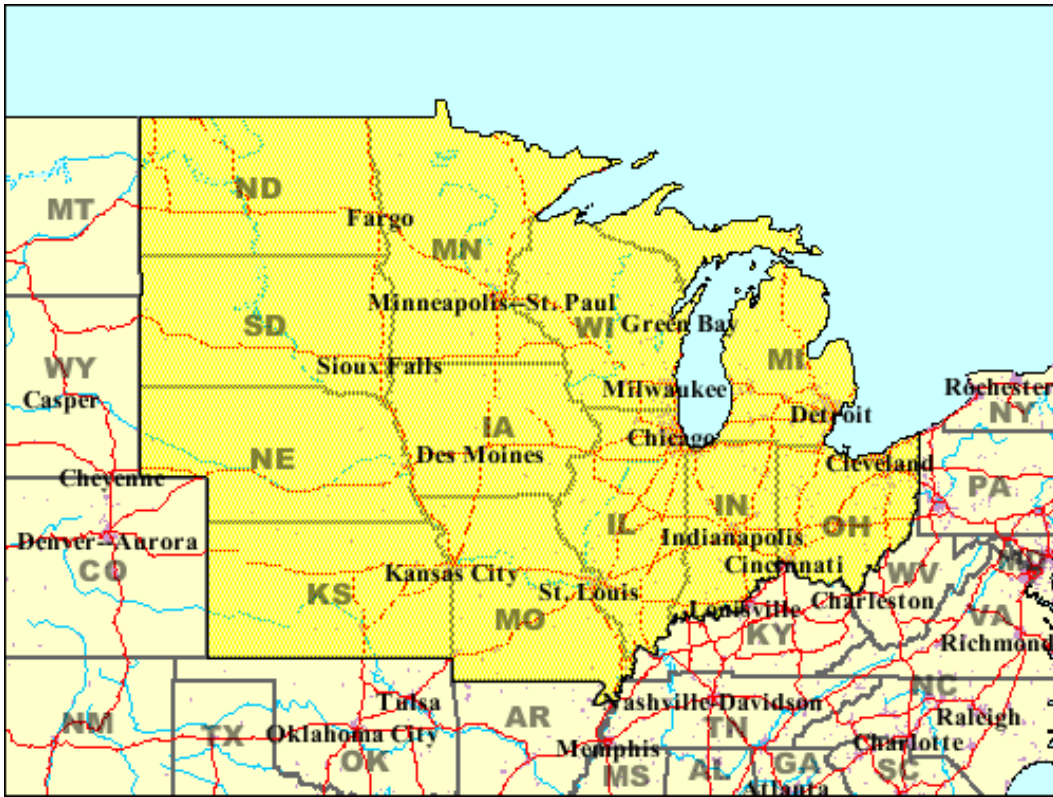


Fig. 1 The Midwest

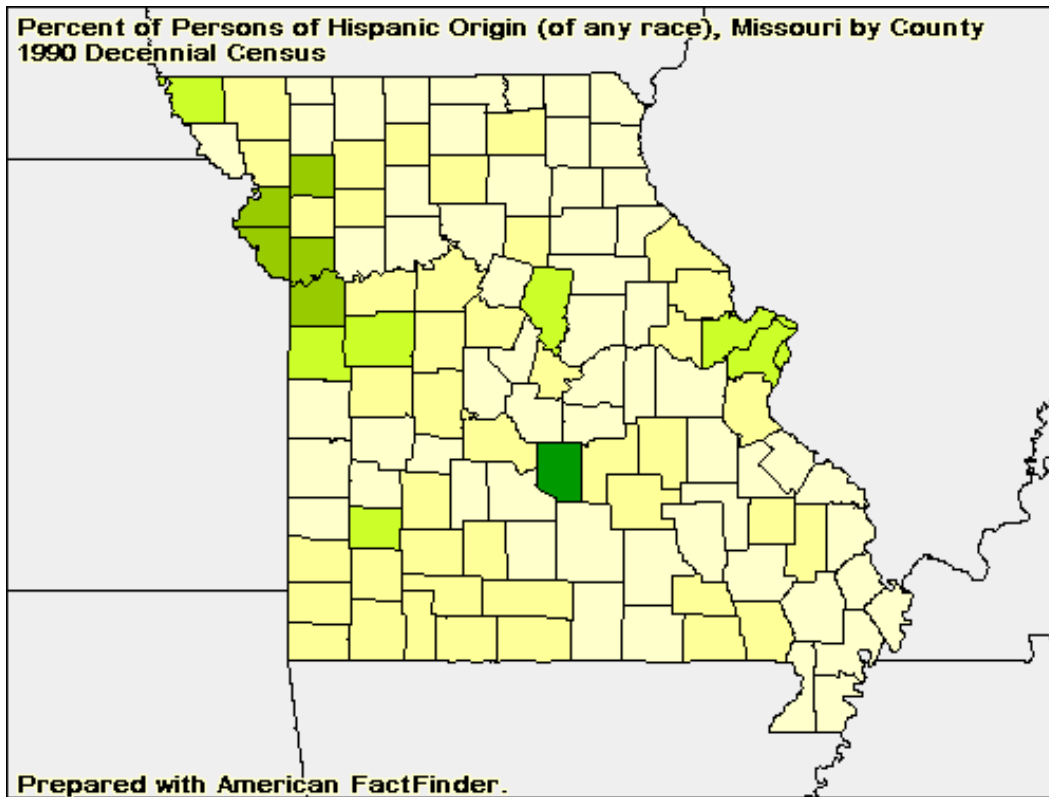
experiencing by far the greatest proportion of Latino population growth, with the tremendous influx of Latinos into *agromaquila* centers created by large meat processing corporations. If we turn our attention to Missouri, we see that in 1990 (Fig. 2) there were modest concentrations of Latinos in all Missouri counties. The most Hispanic county in Missouri then, Pulaski County, had only 4.7% of its population identify itself as Hispanic; at the same time the Hispanic population for the United States as a whole was 9%. Pulaski County has no meat packing plants and, in fact, may well have had a relatively high proportion of Hispanics because of certain other activities attractive economically to the Latino population (Ft. Leonard Woods, jeans wear manufacturing, etc.) and because of a low population growth rate among the general population and a net outmigration during the 1980s (Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services, 2001).

	1990 Hispanic Population*	2000 Hispanic Population*	% Change
Midwest	1,726,509	3,124,532	81
Northeast	3,754,389	5,254,087	40
South	6,767,021	11,586,696	71
West	10,106,140	15,340,503	52

*Source: US Census Bureau, 1990 and 2000 Summary Tape File (STF 1) – 100% data

Table 1: Persons of Hispanic Origin

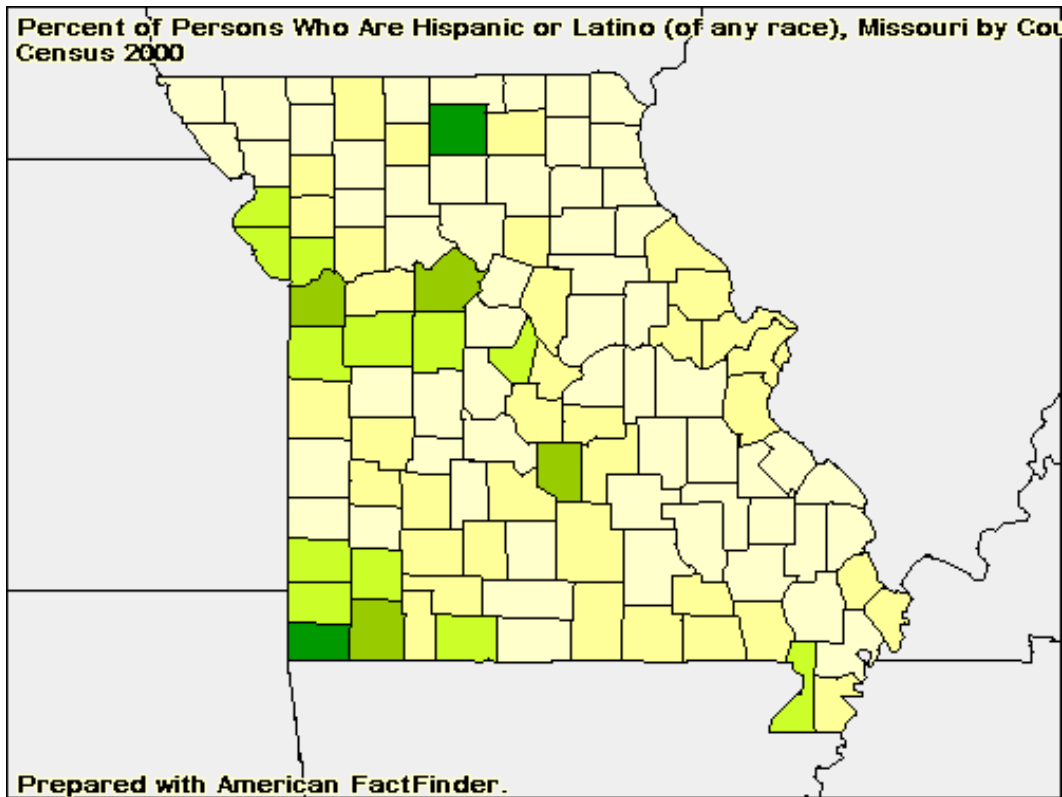
If we compare the 1990 map (Fig. 2) with the 2000 map of Missouri counties and their percentages of Hispanic population (Fig. 3), we see that the Latino population grew at a faster rate than the overall population in virtually every county during the 1990s. Larger concentrations of Latinos occurred in Sullivan and McDonald counties in response to job openings in the beef and poultry processing industries. Regional concentrations of Latinos formed in southwest Missouri and in and around the Kansas City metropolitan area in response to labor demands in the service sector. In general, the greater proportion of Latino population throughout Missouri reflected two phenomena: increased Latino component of net migration and increased Latino component of natural increase (births minus deaths). The 1990s witnessed a dramatic increase in net migration to Missouri. A state that had been experiencing decennially a net migration loss or scant net migration from 1930 to 1990 unexpectedly had a big net migration for 1990 to 2000 (over 250,000



Data Classes:	
Lightest color	0.2 – 0.5%
	0.6 – 0.9
	1.0 – 1.7
	2.0 – 3.0
Darkest color	4.7 – 4.7

Fig. 2 Percent of Persons of Hispanic Origin in Missouri, by County, 1990 Decennial Census

individuals). Latinos comprised over 17 percent of that net migration in the 1990s (Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services, 2001). As impressive as those figures are, the Latino component of natural increase likely played a greater role in the changing population structure. Whereas for Missouri’s entire population there were 1.4 births for every death, for Missouri’s Hispanic population there were slightly more than 5 births for every death (Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services, 2001).



	Data Classes:
Lightest color	0.3 – 0.9%
	1.0 – 2.0
	2.2 – 3.9
	4.4 – 5.8
Darkest color	8.8 – 9.4

Fig. 3 Percent of Persons of Hispanic Origin in Missouri, by County, 2000 Decennial Census

The dynamic natural increase in the Hispanic population is evident when one compares its school-age cohorts with those for the rest of the population. Normally, as the grade level descends from 12 to K, the proportion of Hispanic students in a given grade level increases significantly (Jaramillo, 2003; Lazos and Jeanetta, 2003, esp. pp. 25-26).

Within Missouri the largest concentrations of Hispanic population, of course, are found in the two major metropolitan areas of Kansas City and St. Louis (Fig. 4).

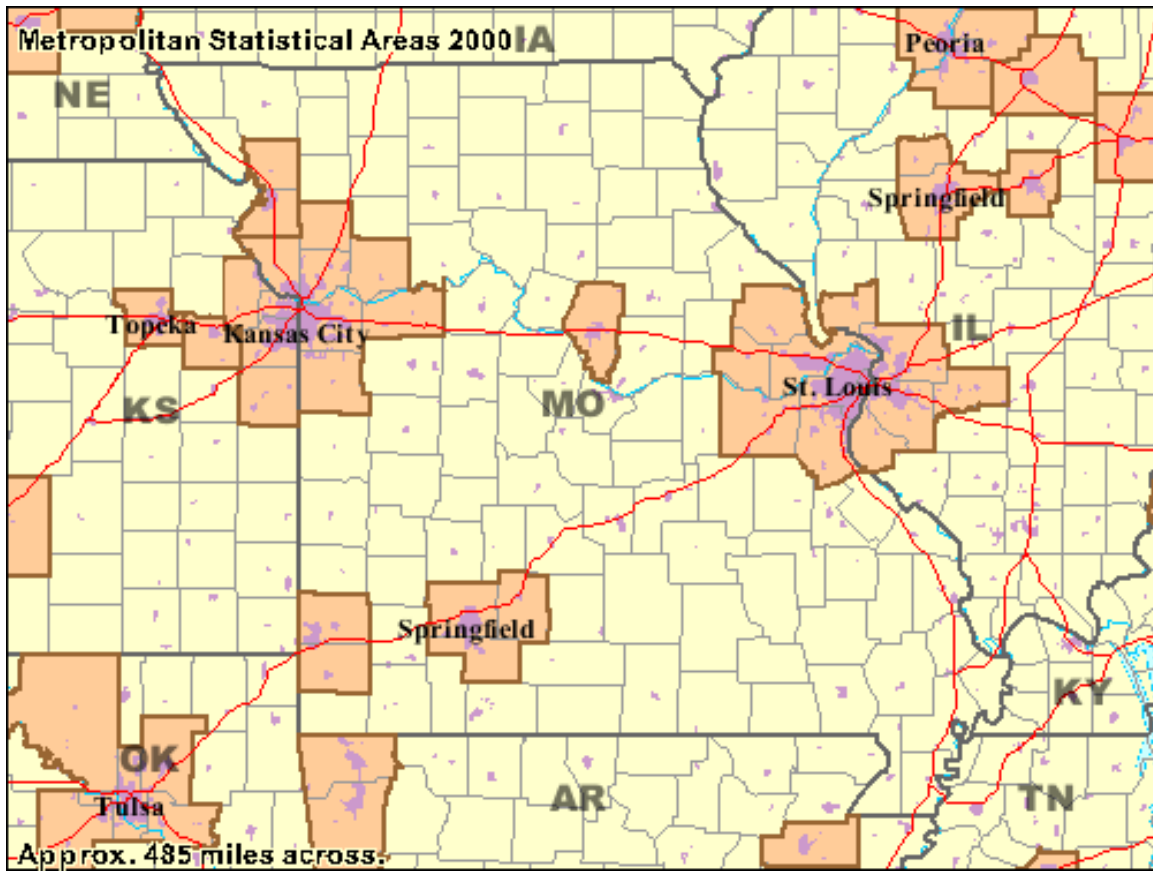
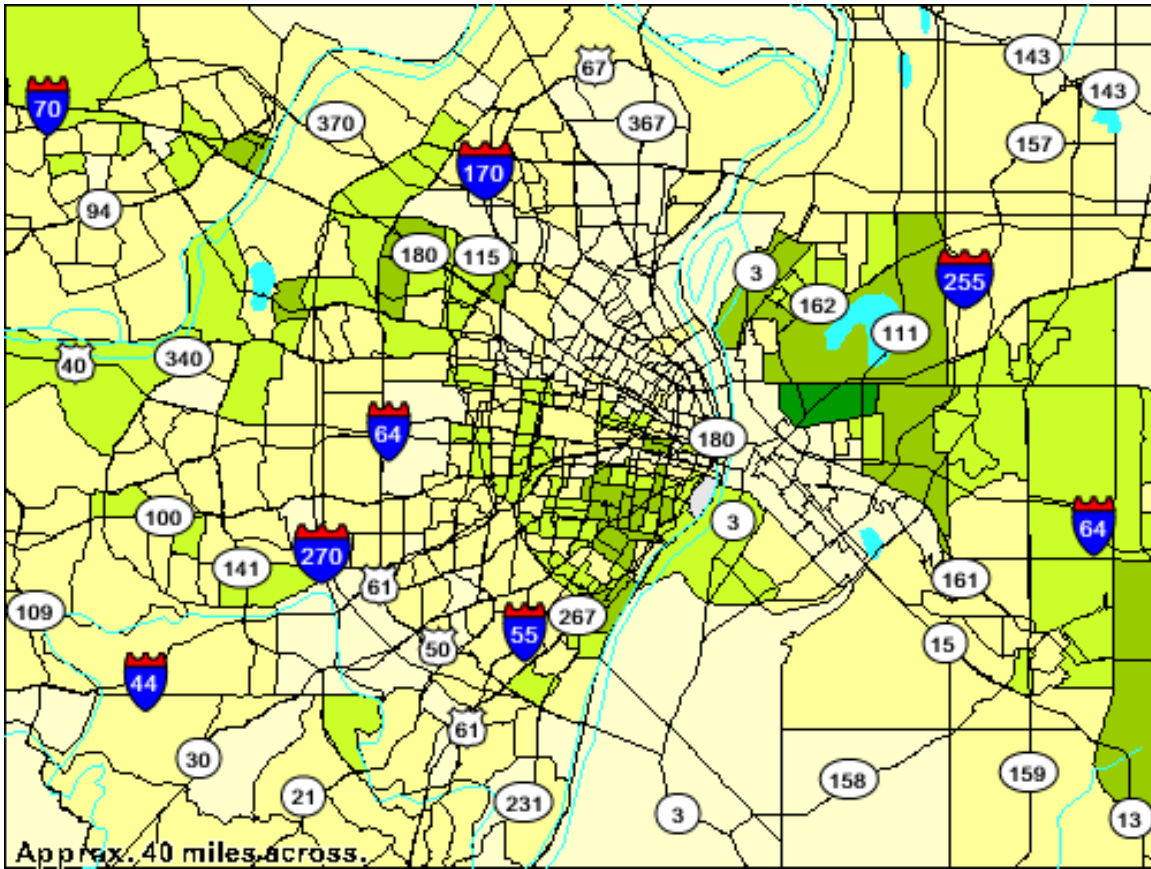


Fig. 4 Kansas City and St. Louis Metropolitan Areas

If we look at the 2000 map of St. Louis metro's census tracts by percentage of the population that is Hispanic (Fig. 5), we observe a relatively widespread Latino population, especially on the Missouri side. This diffuse pattern is characteristic of metropolitan areas with relatively low Hispanic populations that also have not experienced recently large increases in that population (Iceland and Weinberg, 2002). Indeed, the St. Louis metro area has a modest number of Hispanics and the growth in their population has been slower than that in Missouri as a whole (Table 2). The pattern of Hispanic settlement in the St. Louis metro area is so diffuse that it is the second least segregated large metropolitan area (over one million population) in the country for Hispanics (Iceland and Weinberg, 2002).



Data Classes:

Lightest color	0.0 – 0.9%
	1.0 – 1.8
	1.9 – 3.3
	3.5 – 7.5
Darkest color	55.7–55.7

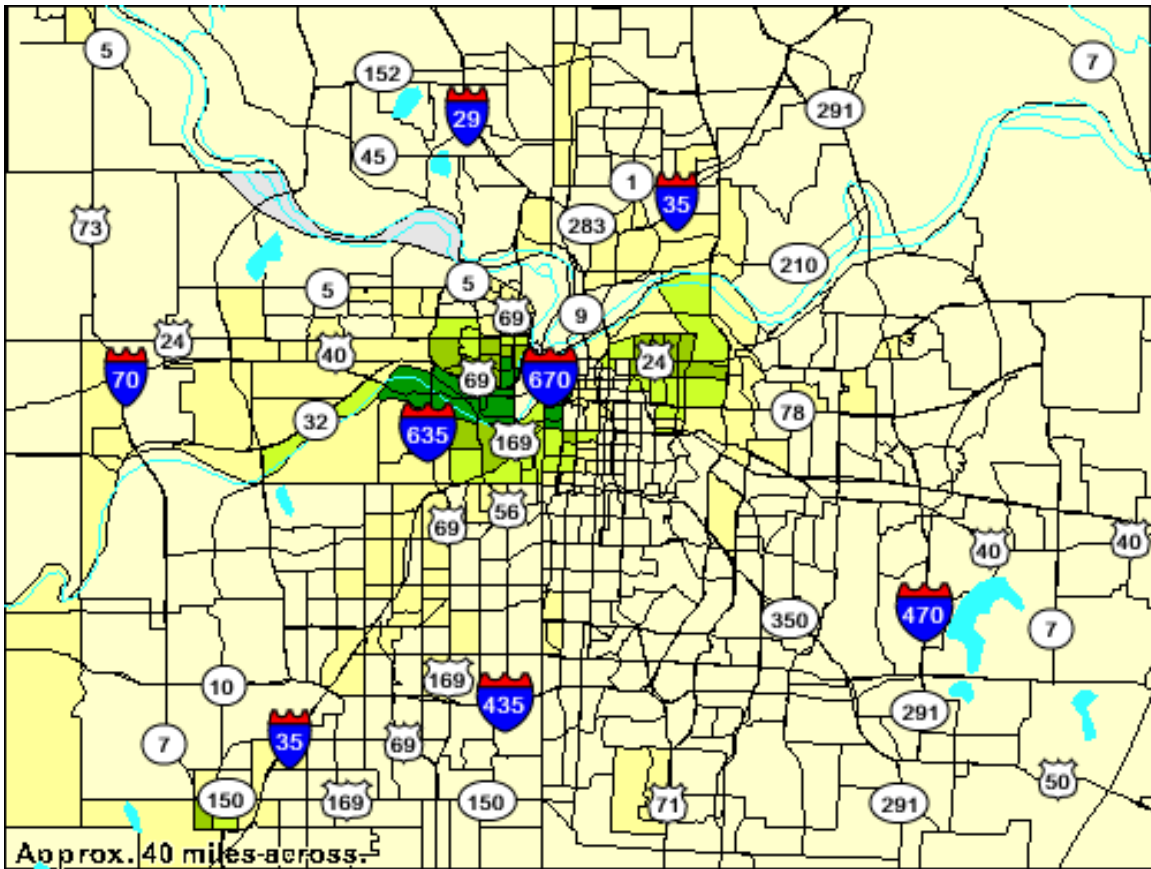
Fig. 5 St. Louis MSA 2000 Percent Hispanic by Census Tracts

The dynamics of the Latino population are quite different in the Kansas City metropolitan area. If we look at the 2000 map of the Kansas City metro’s census tracts by percentage of the population that is Hispanic (Fig. 6), we see a Latino population concentrated in the two core cities, Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas. This

	1990 Hispanic Population*	% of Total 1990 Population	2000 Hispanic Population*	% of Total 2000 Population	Rate of Increase in Hispanic Population, 1990 to 2000
St. Louis MSA	26,014	1.1%	39,677	1.5%	53%
Kansas City MSA	45,227	2.9%	92,910	5.2%	105%
Missouri	61,702	1.2%	118,592	2.1%	92%

*All population figures are from the US Census Bureau

Table 2. Hispanic Populations in Selected Geographic Areas, 1990 to 2000



Data Classes:

Lightest color	0.0 – 4.7
	4.8–12.3
	12.8–23.2
	29.2–47.7
Darkest color	55.7–55.7

Fig. 6 Kansas City MSA 2000 Percent Hispanic by Census Tracts

concentration reflects a higher proportion of Hispanics in the overall population, over 5 percent, and a rapid rate of increase (105%) in the Latino population during the 1990s

(Table 2). In the Kansas City metro area, the Latino population has always tended to cluster in a few neighborhoods close to the rail yards and five meatpacking plants (all five of which closed by the mid 1970s). Although the Northeast Side (by highway symbol 24 in Fig. 6) has recently become an area of Hispanic settlement, the centralization of Latinos in the Kansas City metro area (the degree to which they reside near the center of the urban area) increased slightly from 1980 to 2000. Especially in the late 1990s, a rapid influx of foreign-born immigrants, most from Mexico, moved into already established Latino neighborhoods and seemingly also liked to locate in the Northeast Side because of local social service providers assisting non-English speakers there. The appeal of the Northeast Side for many new immigrants may account for the increase in centralization of Latino settlement because this neighborhood is, in fact, quite centrally located.

The relative centralization of Hispanics in the metro area does not mean that they are not also increasing in numbers in the suburbs, both inner and outlying. Iceland and Weinberg (2002) ranked Kansas City only 29th in overall segregation of Hispanics among the 36 large metropolitan areas they studied. Olathe, the Johnson County seat, has two census tracts (by highway symbol 150 in Fig. 6) that have Hispanic populations well above the average; Anglo locals refer to that area as “Little Mexico.” Although this settlement may have been established in the days of trade along the Santa Fe Trail, it has experienced enormous growth over the last decade, as has all of Olathe, the most rapidly expanding city on the Kansas side of the metro area. Today an estimated nine thousand Hispanics, the vast majority of Mexican origin, call Olathe home, and many of them work in local construction, landscaping, restaurants, box stores in the more affluent southeastern corner of the city, and in light industry along Interstate 35. They make up about 10 percent of Olathe’s population. In the City of Belton, Missouri (by highway symbol 71 in fig. 6), Hispanics residents number about 2000, also accounting for about 10 percent of the population there. According to a local Belton official, many of the Latinos moved to there from Texas in search of better paying jobs available locally (Ruiz).

What are some trends for the Kansas City metropolitan area’s Latino population? If its present population growth rates remain constant, the Hispanic population will

replace the African-American population as the largest minority in official Census figures by 2020. In reality, this historic substitution will occur by 2010. Also if the present growth rates remain constant, the Hispanic population will experience more segregation, that is, physical isolation; however, it will spread out from the several core city barrios and from the suburban census tracts where Hispanics already make up a significant proportion of the population and so become less centralized. Finally, the mix of nationalities will change somewhat. There will continue to be a decline in the proportion of Cubans, a modest increase in the proportion of Puerto Ricans, and a modest increase in the proportion of those who the Census identifies as “other Hispanic or Latino.” Of course, the proportion of those of Mexican origin should increase as Mexico and the US border counties are the closest and largest sources of Latino immigration and immigration to Greater Kansas city. The significant increase in the Latino population and its gradual diffusion throughout the Kansas City metropolitan area will pose real challenges of community integration and coordination and will offer unprecedented opportunities for Latino leaders to articulate the role their people will play within the metropolitan area.

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