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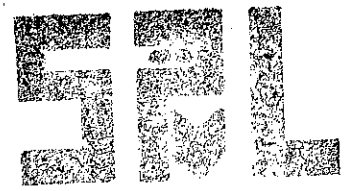
CITY OF SOMERVILLE
MINORITY AND IMMIGRANT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

June 1988

Submitted to:
The Mayor's Office of Human Services
Somerville, Massachusetts

Prospect Associates
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I. INTRODUCTION

In many respects 1988 is a watershed year for the immigrant community in Somerville. The complete implementation of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) has ended one era of immigration law and begun another, the implications of which are still not clear. The Massachusetts Gateway Cities program, during its first year, has successfully demonstrated that, with effective municipal leadership, local agencies can make significant strides in meeting the basic needs of new immigrant groups. And, perhaps most important, the public at large has begun to recognize that immigration is still an important part of Somerville's municipal life. This report, which provides a brief outline of the demographics of Somerville's immigrant groups and their needs, is intended to assist the City in meeting the continuing challenges to public policy which are posed by the events of 1988.

A. Historical Overview: A City of Immigrants

Perhaps no process is more characteristic of American community life than the way in which one generation's immigrants become assimilated and begin to consider the next generation's immigrants intruders. Somerville has seen this process repeated many times in the past two centuries, as successive waves of immigration have shaped the city's character.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the city's foreign-born population has been substantial, averaging from twenty to thirty percent of the whole. The first immigrant groups to arrive in number were the Canadians and Irish; they were followed by immigrants of at least forty distinct nationalities. The two largest period of influx were 1880 - 1895 and 1900 - 1915. During these brief periods the ethnic character of the city changed radically.

An outmigration of the Yankee and long-established Irish population began in the late nineteenth century, followed by the arrival of a new working class population of Eastern Europeans, Greeks, and Italians. In 1895, the population was 52,200. Of the 15,211 foreign-born residents, 5,249 were native-born Irish, and 2,654 Canadian. The next significant wave of immigrants were Portuguese and Italian, but in 1895 these groups were still represented in relatively small numbers: only 255 Portuguese and 352 Italians were included in the 1895 census. No persons of Greek birth were recorded. Many of the first Italian and Portuguese immigrants, like the later Greek arrivals, settled in East Somerville, Ward II, and the Brick Bottom or Asylum Hill areas . . .

Somerville's population reached 103,903 in 1930 . . . The foreign-born population totaled 29,548. Among well-represented new groups were 553 Russians, 521 Greeks, 5,039 Italians, 1,240 Portuguese, and 115 persons born in Armenia, Palestine, Syria, or Turkey. Irish immigrants totalled 5,800 and 10,069 Canadians (including 905 persons from Quebec) were the largest foreign-born group. Somerville's small Black population had grown slightly, to 328 by 1920, but dropped to 274 in 1930.

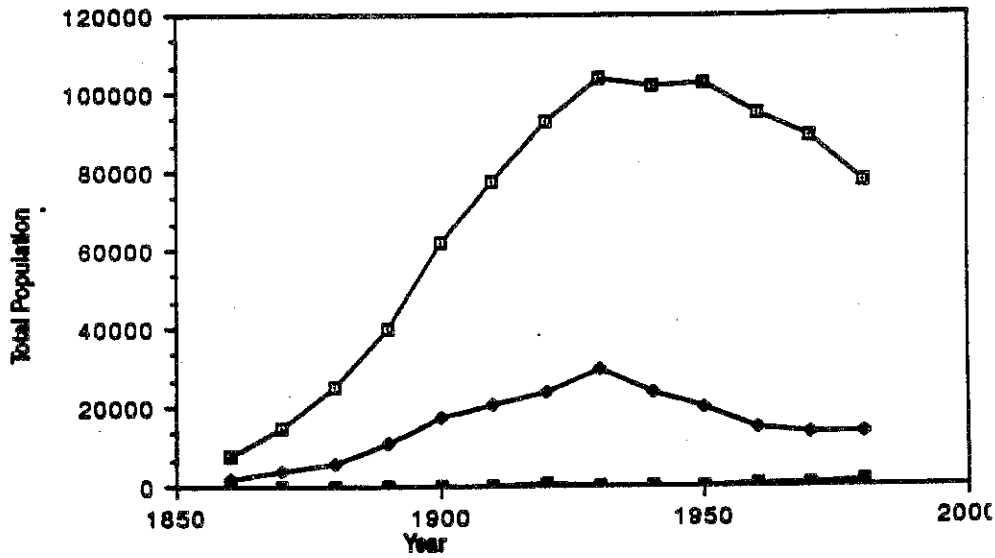
*Beyond the Neck: The
Architecture and Development of
Somerville, Massachusetts*

Immigration to Somerville never stopped. During periods of restrictive immigration law, it slowed down, and entry was largely restricted to the family members of citizens or established residents. In the years between 1930 and 1950, for example, Somerville cemented its special relationship with the Portuguese community — a population of immigrants which established a thriving center of culture, reinforced by a continual flow of new compatriots.

While each wave of immigration to Somerville has had its special character, some elements of the process have been historically very consistent.

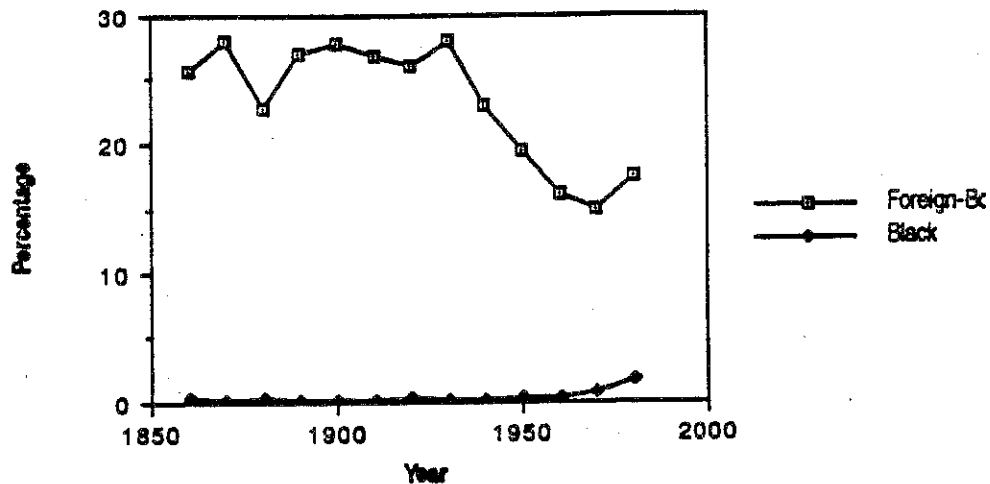
- In the face of major immigration, previously arrived residents have become anxious about the security of their jobs and their homes. Fear and prejudice have resulted in overt discrimination and, occasionally, in episodes of violence directed at immigrants.
- Newly arrived immigrants have taken the lowest-paying jobs, sometimes jobs which better-established workers would reject, and frequently have worked longer hours, on the average, than natives. Historically, immigrant labor has been of great benefit to the Somerville economy, supporting, for example, the brick-making and meat-packing industries of the city's past.

Figure 1
Total Foreign-Born and Black Population
in Somerville, 1860 - 1980



Year	Population Number	Foreign-Born Number	Black Number
1860	7997	2049	28
1870	14685	4132	26
1880	24933	5681	77
1890	40152	10688	75
1900	61643	17160	140
1910	77236	20751	217
1920	93091	24182	328
1930	103908	29548	274
1940	102177	23855	262
1950	102351	19921	319
1960	94697	15160	350
1970	88779	13226	707
1980	77,372	13,493	1345

Figure 2
Percentage, Foreign-Born and Black Population
in Somerville, 1860 - 1980



Year	Population Number	Foreign-Born Percentage	Black Percentage
1860	7997	25.6	.35
1870	14685	28.1	.18
1880	24933	22.8	.31
1890	40152	27	.19
1900	61643	27.8	.23
1910	77236	26.9	.28
1920	93091	26	.35
1930	103908	28	.26
1940	102177	23	.26
1950	102351	19.5	.30
1960	94697	16	.40
1970	88779	15	.80
1980	77,372	17.4	1.74

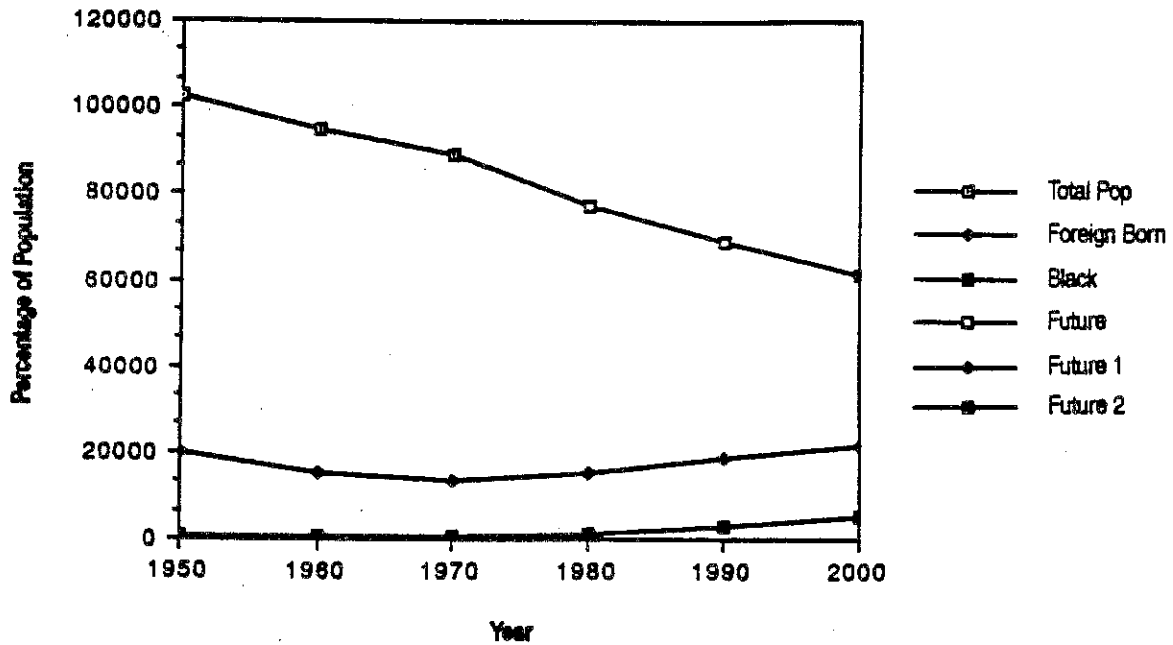
- Newcomers have placed special burdens on municipal services — particularly schools — due to language barriers, health problems and the difficulties of adapting to a new culture. But these burdens have typically been transient, being much reduced by the second generation.
- Assimilation, at least in an economic sense, has been rapid for most of Somerville's immigrants. While many immigrant groups have retained their cultural identity, significant differences between natives and newcomers in income, housing quality, and other indicators of economic success have tended to become less significant by the second generation.

Somerville has generally been a hospitable city for newcomers, despite the inevitable stresses which accompany the introduction of new residents from diverse cultures. Not only has it attracted immigrants coming directly from other countries, it has long been a target of "secondary migration": a place that immigrants move to once they become established, perhaps when they have the resources to buy a house or start a business. This pattern has continued to the present day.

Currently Somerville is experiencing a period of new immigration which rivals, in size and significance, the great waves of the past century. In many respects the historical generalizations above are being borne out, but in some respects this immigration is different. The newcomers arriving from Brazil, Central America, Haiti and South-East Asia are more likely than any immigrant groups before them to bear the scars of political persecution, war and illegal entry. For many, the cultural distance between their homelands and the urban United States of the twentieth century represents a larger gap than immigrants faced in any previous era. And the majority of new immigrants in the nineteen-eighties are separated from their new neighbors not only by culture and language but by race and color.

For these reasons, the current immigration poses special hurdles for the community as a whole and for the city's policy-makers in particular.

Figure 3
Projected Total and Foreign-Born
Population in Somerville, 1960 - 2000



Year	Total Population	Foreign-Born		Black	
		Number	(Percentage)	Number	(Percentage)
1950	102,351	19,921	(19.5)	319	(0.30)
1960	94,697	15,160	(16)	350	(0.40)
1970	88,779	13,226	(15)	707	(0.80)
1980	77,372	15,493	(20) ³	1,345	(1.74)
1990	68,862 ¹	18,493	(26.9) ⁴	2,690 ⁵	(3.9)
2000	61,287 ²	21,493	(35.1) ⁵	5,380 ⁶	(8.8)

Notes:

- ^{1,2} Based on a continued constant decrease of 11% per year
- ^{3,4,5} Based on agency estimates of documented and undocumented immigration
- ^{5,6} Based on continued constant growth of 100% per year

B. Purpose of Study

In March 1987, the Mayor's Office of Human Services, stimulated by the Massachusetts Gateways Cities initiative, undertook a brief needs assessment for new immigrant communities in Somerville. Data obtained in this agency survey underlined the significant problems facing newcomers, as well as the shifting demographics of the City as a whole. The survey, though limited, provided a conceptual base for development of a range of new services subsequently funded by Gateway Cities, and began the process of sensitizing the City's community leaders and human services providers to the changing needs of their minority constituents.

A year after this step, a number of indicators suggested that Somerville's immigrant population continued to grow, and that the survival issues facing racial, cultural and linguistic minorities had intensified. The Gateway Cities projects themselves helped to identify further unmet needs. At the same time, the lack of readily available, verifiable data continued to complicate planning, and to limit the visibility of minority issues on the political agenda.

In order to facilitate the development of improved human services for minorities, in March 1988 the Human Services Department initiated a more extensive needs assessment, which forms the basis of this report.

C. Outline of Methodology

The needs assessment process utilized was designed to be conservative of time and money, while being broad enough to draw a useful picture of target groups and their needs. It relied largely on the collation and analysis of existing primary source data, supplemented by the use of agency surveys and key

informant interviews.¹ In this multiphasic approach, the inherent deficiencies of each data source were compensated for, in part, by the strengths of others. The mix of methods also allowed a flexible approach, one which utilized the resources available in local agencies and community groups. To the extent feasible the study was open-ended, and as unanticipated issues were raised, they were pursued.

The specific methods utilized were:

- Review of selected secondary sources, to establish the broad demographic outlines of Somerville's minority communities. Sources reviewed include:
 - US Census of Population and Housing;
 - Massachusetts State Census;
 - Somerville voting lists and police street listings;
 - school enrollment figures and PLINE (Primary Language Is Not English) figures.
- Review and follow-up of the 1987 Gateway Cities survey to identify expressed needs, services being delivered, and potential access barriers. The 35 respondents to the original survey were recontacted, and approximately forty agencies which did not respond were also reached by telephone. The survey was reformatted to allow for computer coding and re-use in successive years.
- Key informant interviews with a total of 89 individuals were conducted, by telephone and in person. Contacts included human services agency directors, direct service workers, and community leaders.

¹Plans to conduct a series of community focus groups were abandoned for lack of time.

- Review of local agency records was used, as feasible, to check secondary sources and to expand on the insights provided by key informants and survey responses. Some of the records reviewed (with agency consent and appropriate precautions to maintain confidentiality) include:
 - CDBG and Gateway Cities reporting;
 - intake and referral logs; and
 - membership lists (for churches, clubs, and fraternal organizations).
- Additional primary and secondary sources — including newspaper articles, academic studies, and needs assessments by other agencies and groups — were also gathered and evaluated.

The needs assessment was conducted with the cooperation and assistance of the Gateway City Advisory Board, numerous immigrant service agencies, and community leaders. Among the agencies which provided interviews and information were the following: