

VIRGINIA

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The Latina and Latino presence in Virginia is largely new, mostly a matter of mere years. In the early twenty-first century, indeed, the story is so novel and so rapidly unfolding that it defies attempts to identify patterns and trends. Remote origins date back centuries: Spanish navigation of the Chesapeake and short-lived settlement in the Tidewater occurred at least as early as 1570, more than a generation before the English founded Jamestown. In early national times, a link to Latin America arose through Thomas Jefferson's friendship with Venezuelan patriot Simón Bolívar, leading Bolívar's nephew Fernando to travel to Charlottesville in 1827 to enroll at the University of Virginia.

Around World War II, small Latina and Latino communities arose in the Washington, D.C., area, stimulated in part by the capital's diplomatic sector; no one nationality predominated. By the 1960s, the needs of a growing population in Northern Virginia spurred formation of the Hispanic Committee of Virginia (1967), the commonwealth's first such mutual-aid organization.

Modest numbers of agricultural laborers, mainly Mexican, were joining the East Coast migrant labor stream around this time. In the 1970s, many such laborers appeared in rural areas, particularly the Shenandoah Valley. That decade saw dramatic urban population growth, as a surge of Central American settlement in metropolitan Washington, D.C. extended into Northern Virginia. Refugees from violence and dislocation accounted for much of this increase; Salvadorans became the commonwealth's largest Latina and Latino nationality group, remaining so into the twenty-first century. Arlington County and neighboring jurisdictions had the commonwealth's largest and most deeply rooted Latina and Latino communities, some areas entering the new century with populations nearly one-quarter Latina and Latino.

Late 1980s changes to U.S. immigration law, the deepening crisis of Mexican agriculture under NAFTA (1994), and Southern rural transformations combined to spur an unprecedented influx of Mexican and other Latina and Latino migrants into Virginia from the 1990s forward. While established urban communities with considerable Latina and Latino middle classes kept growing, smaller communities and rural places witnessed veritable explosions. Galax in southwest Virginia, famed for its Fiddlers' Convention, symbolized the migration's suddenness and scale: it went from a few dozen Spanish-speaking residents in 1990 to nearly a thousand in the early 2000s, making its population one-tenth Latina and Latino. Indeed, the decade saw several communities' Latina and Latino populations grow tenfold.

Many fruit orchards, tree nurseries, poultry plants, construction firms, and restaurants became dependent almost overnight on Latina and Latino workers. Cities attracted numerous day-laborers. After September 11, 2001, undocumented residents, a substantial segment, faced vulnerability and increasing difficulty in obtaining driver's licenses and other basic services. Communities were hard pressed to provide health care and children's education, and to meet other needs. Institutions arose to face the challenges, including business alliances (Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, founded 2000), community groups (Virginia Coalition of Latino Organizations, VACOLAO, 2002), and government agencies (Governor's Virginia Latino Advisory Commission, 2003; Richmond's Hispanic Liaison Office, 2004). Migrant populations increased, but so too did settlement and home ownership. A profusion of Latino soccer leagues, Spanish-language newspapers and religious services, and bilingual bus schedules were just some of the evidence of the more than 400,000 Latinas and Latinos, more than one in every twenty residents, transforming Virginia early in the twenty-first century.

See also District of Columbia; Immigrant Incorporation into U.S. Society; *and* Immigration.

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Pablo Julián Davis

Virginia Foundation for the Humanities

