

# GATEWAY TO THE FUTURE

	BOSTON	BROCKTON	FALL RIVER	FITCHBURG
<b>POPULATION (2007)</b>	599,351	93,092	90,905	39,835
<b>% FOREIGN-BORN (2005-2007 AVG)</b>	28%	24%	20%	9%
<b>HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE* (2007)</b>	65%	72%	57%	75%
<b>% WITH COLLEGE DEGREES (2005-2007 AVG)</b>	40%	16%	14%	17%
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2005-2007 AVG)</b>	\$48,729	\$50,572	\$36,291	\$43,828



Left out of Boston's prosperity, these industrial cities have joined forces to forge a new future.

# Rethinking the Mill Cities of Massachusetts

by **John R. Schneider**

HAVERHILL	HOLYOKE	LAWRENCE	LOWELL	NEW BEDFORD	PITTSFIELD	SPRINGFIELD	WORCESTER
59,902	39,737	70,066	103,512	91,849	42,931	149,938	173,966
8%	4%	35%	26%	21%	4%	10%	18%
74%	57%	50%	74%	64%	72%	57%	75%
29%	23%	11%	21%	13%	25%	18%	28%
\$61,730	\$32,650	\$31,718	\$47,377	\$34,626	\$42,930	\$32,319	\$43,631

**Although I did not know it at the time,** I was born and raised in a Gateway City. The Pittsfield, Massachusetts, of my youth was a thriving and prosperous city of just under 60,000. Up until the early 1970s, Pittsfield had a lot going for it. Downtown was a retail hub with a couple of department stores and many specialty shops and restaurants. The schools were good, and there were enough students to support three junior high schools, two public high schools, and a Catholic high school — which of course made sports rivalries both competitive and legendary. Four Little Leagues (I played in the East league) and numerous youth leagues in other sports created the talent pool that fueled the city’s sports obsession. Pittsfield had a literary and cultural heritage, too. Melville wrote *Moby Dick* while living at Arrowhead, his Pittsfield farm. The Shakers established a prosperous community just over the city’s western border. Many famous writers and artists settled in the Berkshires — “America’s premier cultural resort” — and Pittsfield was, and still is, the center of it all.

But what made Pittsfield really prosperous and wealthy were jobs, and those jobs were at General Electric. GE’s plastics, transformers, and ordnance plants were in the city, and they employed thousands. My dad was one of them. He came to Pittsfield in 1955 to work in the ordnance plant and soon married, started a family, bought a house, and then bought another (where he still lives), successfully pursuing the American Dream. I never knew exactly what my father did for a living, other than it involved submarines and the nation’s defense during the Cold War, but it was a good job that paid good wages, and that’s all that mattered to a growing family of seven. In short, Pittsfield had everything needed for blue- and white-collar families to feel good about themselves and their community, and for merchants and the professional classes to live the good life as well.

And then GE closed or relocated its local operations, leaving behind only one unit, which was sold in 2007 to a Saudi conglomerate that today employs fewer than 300 people in town.

These cities offer extraordinary opportunities for smart growth, affordable housing, and the workforce — three significant challenges facing Massachusetts. Built during eras of prosperity, they feature walkable downtowns and attractive housing, as well as transportation and cultural infrastructure.

➤ **What is a Gateway City?** Although they share attributes with many mid-size, post-industrial cities, the Gateway Cities are defined as 11 formerly prosperous mill cities in Massachusetts: Brockton, Fall River, Fitchburg, Haverhill, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, New Bedford, Pittsfield, Springfield, and Worcester. What distinguishes them from other former industrial cities in the region is their size — between 35,000 and 175,000 — and the fact that they lie outside the immediate economic influence of Boston.

In 2007, MassINC, a nonpartisan think tank that focuses on the goal of promoting the growth and vitality of the American Dream in Massachusetts, worked with the Brookings Institution to study the needs and challenges of these cities, which had been left out of the growing prosperity of the Greater Boston region. The “gateway” name was selected, not only to suggest the opportunity that these cities represent and their role as regional centers, but also to reflect the fact that most of these communities are home to many recent immigrants.

The resulting report, *Reconnecting Massachusetts Gateway Cities: Lessons Learned and Agenda for Renewal*, documented job losses, rising poverty, and weakening educational attainment — the results were not surprising. But in a state like Massachusetts, a national leader in per-capita income and educational attainment rates, what was shocking was the increasing concentration of poverty in the Gateway Cities. Representing just 15 percent of the state’s population, these 11 cities are home to 30 percent of the state’s poor. As Greater Boston was booming, the rest of Massachusetts was having a hard time connecting to the source of our wealth: the knowledge economy. Between 1970 and 2005, while Greater Boston added 467,000 jobs, the Gateway Cities as a group lost more than 11,000 jobs. Since the 1960s, the Gateway Cities have lost 134,000 manufacturing jobs, one-third of the state’s total decline in such jobs.

At the same time, the Gateway Cities have received a disproportionately low share of state-level support. Year after year, Massachusetts has invested more than half a billion dollars in a variety of incentives to attract and retain

businesses, but less than 5 percent of those dollars has gone to programs that draw companies to economically distressed areas like the Gateway Cities. Tax credits intended for “Economic Opportunity Areas” in distressed areas have been diverted to EOAs in “distressed” communities such as Lexington and Bedford.

And yet, these 11 cities offer extraordinary opportunities for smart growth, affordable housing, and the workforce — three significant challenges facing Massachusetts. Built during eras of prosperity, they feature walkable downtowns and neighborhoods with attractive, low-cost housing stock; many have transportation and cultural infrastructure already in place. Many also have growing immigrant populations eager for jobs, as well as culturally and socially rich urban environments that can attract young workers and middle-class families.

Since the report was published, several significant new initiatives have already been launched to help the Gateway Cities compete by attracting more private-sector investment and reforming state policy. The chief executives of all 11 cities signed a compact in May 2008, agreeing to work together on economic and community development; the 11 economic development directors meet regularly as part of an economic development “roundtable.” UMass Dartmouth has established the Urban Initiative Center to expand the university’s involvement in the economic and social development of Gateway Cities. MassINC itself has embarked on focused initiatives with individual cities, such as the Springfield Growth Strategy — a plan for the long-term economic growth of the city.

Other efforts address legislative and policy concerns. The Gateway Cities Legislative Caucus, which includes legislators from districts in each of the 11 cities, has filed a bill entitled “An Act to Promote Economic Development in Gateway Cities,” which would expand the state’s Historic Tax Credit Program, provide resources for market-rate housing development, and enhance the state’s Economic Development Incentive Program. Governor Patrick’s administration has established two grant programs for the Gateway Cities, one for housing and one for urban parks.

And the Gateway Cities “brand” is sticking, at least partly because of the opportunity that the term suggests. The Gateway Cities represent an industrial heritage that helped to make Massachusetts prosperous, but they also symbolize a legacy of opportunity — the chance that, through hard work and some luck, the American Dream is accessible.

Each of the Gateway Cities is home to families with stories like mine. After I graduated from Pittsfield High School in 1975, I moved to Boston, then to Chicago and on to Haverhill, before finally settling down and buying a house in Lowell.

Today I live in an ethnically and economically diverse neighborhood; some people might call me an “urban pioneer.” My home is a modest, 1920s four-square. Across the street is a family that represents the best of what this country is all about. Refugees from the Cambodian genocide, they settled in Lowell after barely escaping with their lives. Over time, they bought a house, with several generations living together to save some money so other family members could also buy a house. The kids went to school and learned English, becoming new Americans while holding onto their family’s cultural heritage. Some are now graduating from the city’s community college, and some are getting married (often in the traditional Cambodian way, which includes three days of celebration). They all work, often at more than one job, and they pool their resources to get ahead. It is no accident that this family, and many like them across Massachusetts, live in a Gateway City.

I have a soft spot for scrappy places that won’t quit. Lowell is like that — but so is Pittsfield, and so are the rest of the Gateway Cities. We ignore them at our own peril. These cities won’t quit and we should not quit on them. We know what we need to do. Do we have the will to do it? ■

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## JOBS

Many Gateway Cities are holding on to manufacturing jobs. In 2003, more than 25 percent of private-sector jobs in Fall River, Lawrence, and New Bedford were still in the manufacturing sector. In the 1980s, the number of manufacturing jobs in the Boston Metro area (as a percentage of private-sector jobs) dipped below 25 percent.

## IMMIGRANT POPULATIONS

Some of the Gateway Cities have long been home to large immigrant populations, although their countries of origin have varied widely.

Today, approximately 70 percent of Lawrence’s immigrant population is from the Dominican Republic, while approximately 70 percent of New Bedford’s immigrants are from Portugal. Brockton and Fall River’s immigrant populations both comprise approximately one-third from Cape Verde and one-fifth from Haiti.

Lowell’s immigrant community is even more heterogeneous: Cambodia (24 percent); Portugal (10 percent), India (9 percent), Brazil (9 percent), Vietnam (6 percent), Colombia and Thailand (5 percent each), Dominican Republic and Laos (4 percent each).

## POVERTY

There is a high level of concentrated poverty in some of the Gateway Cities: 34 percent of Springfield’s and 51 percent of Holyoke’s poor live in “high poverty” neighborhoods. By comparison, New Orleans had a concentrated poverty rate of 38 percent on the eve of Hurricane Katrina.

## POPULATION GROWTH

Population growth and decline has been uneven in the Gateway Cities. Between 1960 and 2000, Lowell grew by 14 percent, while Brockton’s population grew by 30 percent and Haverhill by 31. During the same period, Pittsfield and Holyoke lost 21 and 24 percent of their residents respectively. (Boston experienced a 15 percent decline in population.)

## GATEWAY PLUS

In addition to the 11 Gateway Cities, 12 communities that share similar concerns and that also play roles in the state’s smart-growth strategies have been designated “Gateway Plus” Cities by Governor Deval Patrick: Barnstable, Chelsea, Chicopee, Everett, Leominster, Lynn, Malden, Methuen, Revere, Salem, Taunton, and Westfield.

Source: MassINC.