

## Characteristics of the Foreign-born Population in the District of Columbia

by  
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### Introduction

The US Census Bureau uses the term *foreign-born* to define anyone who was not a U.S. citizen or U.S. national at birth. This includes those who have become U.S. citizens through naturalization and those who are not U.S. citizens. People who are not U.S. citizens may be legal permanent residents (immigrants), temporary migrants (e.g., foreign students), humanitarian migrants (e.g., refugees), and unauthorized migrants (people present in the United States without legal documentation). By comparison, the term *native* refers to people residing in the United States who are US citizens in one of three categories: (1) People born in one of the 50 states or the District of Columbia; (2) People born in the US Island Areas such as Puerto Rico or Guam; (3) People born in a foreign country of at least one parent who was a United States citizen..

This report describes the demographic, socioeconomic, and housing characteristics of the foreign-born population in the District of Columbia in 2008. It describes

region and country of birth, age, educational attainment, poverty status, and geographic distribution of foreign-born population in the District of Columbia. These characteristics are compared with the native population of the District. Specific references are also made to the growth of the foreign-born population since 1850.

### Foreign-born Population Since 1850

In 1850, there were 4,918 foreign-born persons in the District of Columbia. One hundred years later in 1950, the foreign-born increased to 42,740. By 1970, this population declined to 33,562. Since 1980, the foreign-born population has increased rapidly from 40,559 in 1980 to 77,884 in 2008. The 2008 American Community Survey (ACS) reported that the foreign-born population increased by 5.9 percent between 2000 and 2008, compared with 3.1 percent increase in the native population of the District of Columbia. The foreign-born population in the District of Columbia comprised 13.2 percent of the total population in 2008 (Table 1).

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**Table 1. Population of District of Columbia by Nativity: 2000 and 2008**

Population	2000		2008		Change 2000-2008	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	572,059	100.0	591,833	100.0	19774	3.5
Native	498,498	87.1	513,949	86.8	15451	3.1
<b>Foreign-born</b>	<b>73,561</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>77,884</b>	<b>13.2</b>	<b>4323</b>	<b>5.9</b>
Naturalized citizen	22,050	3.9	27,221	4.6	5,171	23.5
Not a citizen	51,511	9.0	50,663	8.6	-848	-1.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey (ACS)

### Foreign-born Population by Period of Entry

As presented in Table 2, of the 77,884 foreign-born population of District of Columbia in 2008, 18.2 percent entered the United States before 1980, 16.0 percent came between 1980 and 1989, 25.3 percent came between 1990 and 1999, and the remaining 40.5 percent came in 2000 or later.

### Foreign-born Population by Region of Birth

As presented in Table 3, among the 77,884 foreign-born population of the District of Columbia in 2008, 47 percent were born in Latin America, 19 percent in Asia, 16.9 percent in Europe, 14.8 percent in Africa, 1.8 percent in Northern America (Canada), and the remaining 0.5 percent were born in Oceania (Australia, New Zealand).

### Foreign-born Population by Country of Birth

The foreign-born residents in the District of Columbia are quite diverse in terms of country of birth. Of the total foreign-born population, 45.7 percent were born in ten countries and the remaining 54.3 were born in other countries of the world (Table 4).

People of Salvadorian origin were the largest foreign-born population in the District of Columbia (14.9), followed by Mexicans (5.1 percent), and Ethiopians (4.6 percent).

### Foreign-born Population by Race

Of the total foreign-born population in the District in 2008, 43.2 percent reported their race as White alone, 24.1 percent as Black or African American alone, 16.2 percent as Asian alone, 0.9 percent as American Indian and Alaska Native alone, 13.2 as Some Other Race, and 2.3 percent as Two or More Races (Table 5).

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**Table 2: Foreign-born Population by Period of Entry to the United States**

Year of Entry	Population	
	Number	Percent
Total Foreign-born	77,884	100.0
Entered in 2000 or later	31,528	40.5
Entered 1990 to 1999	19,722	25.3
Entered 1980 to 1989	12,497	16.0
Entered before 1980	14,137	18.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

**Table 3: Foreign-born Population of District of Columbia by Region of Birth: 2000 and 2008**

Population	2000		2008	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Foreign-born Population	73,561	100.0	77,884	100.0
Born in Latin America	37,079	50.4	36,607	47.0
Born in Asia	12,503	17.0	14,809	19.0
Born in Europe	12,909	17.6	13,137	16.9
Born in Africa	9,208	12.5	11,532	14.8
Born in Northern America	1,271	1.7	1,431	1.8
Born in Oceania	585	0.8	368	0.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census and 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

**Table 4: Top Ten Countries of Birth for Foreign-born Population: 2008**

Country of Birth	Foreign-born Population		
	Number	Percent	Rank
El Salvador	11,634	14.9	1
Mexico	3,969	5.1	2
Ethiopia	3,611	4.6	3
Jamaica	2,804	3.6	4
United Kingdom	2,592	3.3	5
China	2,493	3.2	6
Honduras	2,430	3.1	7
India	2,350	3.0	8
Guatemala	1,897	2.4	9
Dominican Republic	1,792	2.3	10
Others	42,312	54.3	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

**Table 5: Native and Foreign-born Population of District of Columbia by Race: 2008**

Race	Native	Foreign-born
White	36.6	43.2
Black or African American	57.9	24.1
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.3	1.0
Asian	1.5	16.2
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.1	0.0
Some Other Race	1.7	13.2
Two or More Races	1.9	2.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

### Gender and Age of the Foreign-born Population

In 2008, 5.2 percent of the foreign-born in the District of Columbia were under 18 years as compared to 21 percent for the native born population. About 82.7 percent of the foreign-born were 18 to 64 years, compared with 67.1 percent of the native population. The proportion of foreign-born population aged 65 years and over (12.1 percent) differed slightly from the native population aged 65 years and over (11.9 percent).

The foreign-born population of District of Columbia had an older median age than the native population of the District. The median age is a simple summary measure of age structure: half of all the people are older than the median age and half are younger. In 2008, median age of the foreign-born population was thirty-eight years, while for the native population the median age was thirty-four years.

The median age for the foreign-born population by region of origin also differs. The median age for the foreign-born from Europe was 40 years, from Africa 39 years, from Latin America 38 years, from Asia 36 years and from Northern America 33 years. Almost three-quarters (74.5 percent) of the foreign-born population in the District of Columbia were between the ages of 25 and 64, compared with 53.6 percent of the native population. The foreign-born population was almost evenly split between males (50.4 percent) and females (49.6 percent). For the native population males comprised 46.9 percent and females 53.1 percent.

### Foreign-born Population by Marital Status

Among the population 15 years and older in the District of Columbia, the foreign-born were more likely than the natives to be married. In 2008, 41.9 percent of foreign-born residents of District of Columbia aged 15 years and over were married, compared with 22.4 percent of natives aged 15 years and over (Table 7). About 42.7 percent of foreign-born were never married, compared with

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**Table 6: Foreign-born and Native Population by Age and Gender: 2008**

Age and Gender	Native		Foreign-born	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Total</b>	513,949	100.0	77,884	100.0
Under 5 years	35,464	6.9	896	1.2
5 to 17 years	72,458	14.1	3,153	4.0
18 to 24 years	69,840	13.6	6,254	8.0
25 to 34 years	87,182	17.0	21,174	27.2
35 to 44 years	67,716	13.2	17,372	22.3
45 to 54 years	64,872	12.6	11,757	15.1
55 to 59 years	29,252	5.7	4,587	5.9
60 to 64 years	26,051	5.1	3,299	4.2
65 to 74 years	31,274	6.1	5,431	7.0
75 years and over	29,840	5.8	3,961	5.1
<b>Under 18 years</b>	107,922	21.0	4,049	5.2
18 years and over	406,027	79.0	73,835	94.8
25 to 64 years	275,073	53.6	58,189	74.7
65 years and over	61,114	11.9	9,392	12.1
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	241,198	46.9	38,641	49.6
Female	272,751	53.1	39,243	50.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

**Table 7: Foreign-born and Native Population 15 Years and Over by Marital Status: 2008**

Marital Status	Native		Foreign-born	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Total</b>	424,469	100.0	74,567	100.0
Never married	246,278	58.0	31,821	42.7
Now married, except separated	95,290	22.4	31,263	41.9
Divorced	44,318	10.4	5,634	7.6
Widowed	25,648	6.0	3,606	4.8
Separated	12,935	3.1	2,243	3.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

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58.0 percent of the natives. The remaining 15.4 percent of foreign-born population aged 15 years and over were separated, widowed, or divorced, compared with 19.5 percent of the natives.

**Foreign-born Population by Educational Attainment**

The foreign-born population 25 years and over in the District of Columbia were less likely to have graduated from high school than natives of the same age. In 2008, 26.6 percent of the District's foreign-born population aged 25 years and over lacked a high school diploma while 47 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher. In comparison, only 11.7 percent of the native born population aged 25 years and over lacked a high school diploma and 48.5 percent had a bachelor's or higher degree.

**Educational Attainment of Foreign-born Population by Region of Birth**

Educational attainment among the foreign-born population in the District of Columbia varies by region of birth. In 2008, the foreign-born population from Europe were the most likely to have graduated from high school and those from Latin America were the least likely to have graduated from high school. A significant proportion (47.5 percent) of foreign-born population of District of Columbia from Latin America lacked a high school diploma, compared with only 1.2 percent of the foreign-born from Europe. About 12.8 percent of foreign-born from Africa lacked a high school diploma, followed by 10.1 percent of foreign-born from Asia, and 4.2 percent foreign-born from Northern America. As shown in Table 9, the proportion of foreign-born population with a bachelor's degree or higher was highest for foreign-born population from Europe (81.2 percent), followed by foreign-born from Asia (77.3 percent), Northern America (72.1 percent), Africa (43.2 percent), and lowest for foreign-born from Latin America (23.1 percent).

**Table 8: Population 25 Years and Over by Educational Attainment: 2008**

Educational Attainment	Native		Foreign-born	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	336,187	100.0	67,581	100.0
Less than high school graduate	39,440	11.7	18,010	26.6
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	71,229	21.2	8,840	13.1
Some college or associate's degree	62,502	18.6	8,988	13.3
Bachelor's degree	75,530	22.5	11,563	17.1
Graduate or professional degree	87,486	26.0	20,180	29.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

**Table 9: Educational Attainment by Region of Birth for Foreign-born Population: 2008**

Educational Attainment	Latin America	Asia	Europe	Africa	Northern America
Less than high school graduate	47.5	10.1	1.2	12.8	4.2
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	14.0	9.0	6.5	22.7	0.0
Some college or associate's degree	15.0	3.6	11.0	21.2	23.6
Bachelor's degree	10.5	22.5	22.3	22.6	37.5
Graduate or professional degree	13.0	54.8	58.9	20.6	34.6
<b>High School Graduate or Higher</b>	<b>52.5</b>	<b>89.9</b>	<b>98.7</b>	<b>87.1</b>	<b>95.7</b>
<b>Bachelors' Degree or Higher</b>	<b>23.5</b>	<b>77.3</b>	<b>81.2</b>	<b>43.2</b>	<b>72.1</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

**Table 10: Employment for Population 16 Years and Over: 2008**

Employment Status	Native	Foreign-born
Population 16 years and over	418,539	74,202
In labor force	66.6%	76.3%
Civilian labor force	65.9%	76.2%
Employed	60.2%	73.1%
Unemployed	5.6%	3.0%
Percent of civilian labor force	8.5%	4.0%
Armed Forces	0.7%	0.2%
Not in labor force	33.4%	23.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

**Employment Status of Foreign-born Population**

In 2008, 76.2 percent of the foreign-born population aged 16 and over in the District were in the civilian labor force, compared with 65.9 percent of the natives. About 73.1 percent of the civilian labor force foreign-born population aged

16 and over were employed and 3.0 percent unemployed, compared with 60.2 percent of the natives employed and 5.6 percent unemployed (Table 10).

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### Foreign-born Population by Occupation

Foreign-born workers in the District of Columbia were more likely than native workers to be in service occupations, whereas native workers were more likely than foreign-born workers to be in management, professional and related occupations. In 2008, 47 percent of the civilian employed foreign-born workers aged 16 and over in the District of Columbia were in management, professional, and related occupations, compared with 57.5 percent of the native workers.

Service occupations employed 31.8 percent of the foreign-born workers, compared with 12.6 percent of the native workers. Similarly, a larger proportion of foreign-born workers (6.3 percent) worked in construction, extraction, maintenance, and repair occupations, compared with 2.3 percent of the native workers. On the other hand, about 10.3 percent of the foreign-born workers were in sales and office occupations, compared with 22.2 percent of the native workers.

Foreign-born women were more likely than foreign-born men to be in management or professional and related occupations. In 2008, 48.2 percent of civilian employed foreign-born women aged 16 years and over worked in management or professional and related occupations, compared with 46.0 percent of civilian employed foreign-born men aged 16 years and over (Table 11).

### Individual Income of Foreign-born Population

In 2008, 6.9 percent of foreign-born population 16 years and over, full time year round workers reported incomes below \$15,000, compared with 3.1 percent of population 16 years and over full time year round native workers. About 66.7 percent of foreign born full time year round workers reported incomes between \$15,000 and \$74,000, compared with 62.6 percent of natives. On the other hand, 25.4 percent of the foreign-born population 16 years and over full time year round workers reported incomes \$75,000 or more, compared

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**Table 11: Foreign-born and Native Population by Occupation: 2008**

Occupation	Native	Foreign-born
<b>Civilian employed population 16 years and over</b>	<b>252,115</b>	<b>54,251</b>
Management, professional, and related occupations	57.5%	47.0%
Service occupations	12.6%	31.8%
Sales and office occupations	22.2%	10.3%
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	0.1%	0.0%
Construction, extraction, maintenance, and repair occupations	2.3%	6.3%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	5.3%	4.6%
<b>Male civilian employed population 16 years and over</b>	<b>119,265</b>	<b>28,941</b>
Management, professional, and related occupations	58.5%	46.0%
Service occupations	13.2%	26.8%
Sales and office occupations	15.6%	7.8%
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	0.1%	0.0%
Construction, extraction, maintenance, and repair occupations	4.6%	11.7%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	8.0%	7.7%
<b>Female civilian employed population 16 years and over</b>	<b>132,850</b>	<b>25,310</b>
Management, professional, and related occupations	56.6%	48.2%
Service occupations	12.2%	37.4%
Sales and office occupations	28.2%	13.3%
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	0.0%	0.0%
Construction, extraction, maintenance, and repair occupations	0.2%	0.0%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	2.9%	1.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

**Table 12: Earnings of Full-time Year Round Workers 16 Years and Over, 2008**

Earnings in the Past 12 Months for Full-Time, Year Round Workers	Native	Foreign-born
Population 16 years and over with earnings	193,973	40,013
\$1 to \$9,999 or loss	1.10%	3.10%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	2.00%	3.80%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	8.80%	16.60%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	11.60%	14.40%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	19.80%	18.90%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	22.40%	17.80%
\$75,000 or more	34.40%	25.40%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

with 34.4 percent of native workers (Table 12).

Among the foreign-born population 16 years and over full time year round workers, only 0.9 percent of foreign-born workers from Asia reported incomes below \$15,000, compared with 13.0 percent workers from Latin America, and 2.0 percent workers from Africa. On the other hand, the majority (40.2 percent) of foreign-born population 16 years and over full time year round workers from

Asia reported incomes \$75,000 or more, compared with 13.6 percent of workers from Latin America, and 9.9 percent of workers from Africa

### Household Income of Foreign-born Population

In 2008, the median income for households with a foreign householder was \$51,670, compared with \$59,814 for households with a native householder.

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Among the foreign-born households, households with a householder born in Europe had a median household income of \$118,447. This was well above the median income of native households as well as other foreign-born households. The median household income \$36,922 for Latin American households was the least of the foreign-born households in the District of Columbia.

**Poverty Status of Foreign-born and Native Population of District of Columbia**

The foreign-born in the District of Columbia were less likely to live in poverty than the natives. In 2008, 16.2 percent of the foreign-born were living below the poverty level, compared with 17.4 percent of the natives.

**Housing Characteristics of Foreign-born Population**

The foreign-born in the District of Columbia were more likely than the native population to live in renter occupied housing units than owner occupied housing units. In 2008, only 34.9 percent of the foreign-born households lived in owner occupied housing units, compared with 44.9 percent of the native households. On the other hand, 65.1 percent of the foreign-born households lived in renter occupied housing units, compared with 56.6 percent of the native households (Table 15). A larger proportion of foreign-born householders from Europe (51 percent) lived in owner occupied households than foreigners-born householders from other regions. The foreign-born from Latin America (28.4) and Northern America (28.3) had the lowest percentage of householders living in owner occupied units.

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**Table 13: Households and Median Household Income of Foreign-born Population: 2008**

Income	Native	Foreign -born	Latin America	Asia	Foreign-born		
					Europe	Africa	Northern America
Households	212,777	37,219	16,504	7,435	6,602	5,660	1,018
Median household income (dollars)	59,814	51,670	36,922	72,701	118,447	42,396	79,650

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

**Table 14: Poverty Status of Foreign-born and Native Population: 2008**

Poverty Status	Income below poverty level		Income at or above poverty level	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	96,769	17.2	465,105	82.8
Native	84,555	17.4	401,840	82.6
Foreign-born	12,214	16.2	63,265	83.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

**Table 15: Native and Foreign-born Population by Housing Tenure: 2008**

Housing Tenure	Native	Foreign-born
Occupied housing units	212,777	37,219
Owner-occupied housing units	44.90%	34.90%
Renter-occupied housing units	55.10%	65.10%
Average household size of owner-occupied unit	2.34	2.68
Average household size of renter-occupied unit	2.09	2.18

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American community Survey (ACS).

### Foreign-born Population by Language Spoken at Home and Ability to Speak English

Table 16 shows language spoken at home by ability to speak English for 5 years and over foreign-born population of District of Columbia. In 2008, 36.3 percent of the total foreign-born population aged 5 years and over spoke only English at home, 27.5 percent spoke Spanish at home, 16.2 percent spoke other Indo-European languages, 9.0 percent spoke Asian or Pacific Island languages, and the remaining 10.9 percent spoke other languages.

English speaking ability varies by region of birth. Foreign-born from Latin America are more likely to speak English "less than very well". In 2008, 34.7 percent of the foreign-born population from Latin America, 25.0 percent from Africa, 21.4 from Asia, and 13.4 from Europe spoke English less than "very well".

### Geographic Distribution of the Foreign-born Population

According to the 2000 Census, the majority (or 86.8 percent) of the foreign-born population of the District of Columbia lived in Ward 1, Ward 2, Ward 3, and Ward 4. The remaining 13.4 percent of the foreign-born population lived in other wards of the District. In 2000, about 28.1 percent of the total foreign-born population of the District lived in Ward 1, 20.8 percent in Ward 2, 19.8 percent in ward 3, and 18.2 percent in Ward 4. Ward 7 had the lowest concentration (1.3 percent) of the foreign-born population (Map 1). Note: Census 2000 is the most current data available by ward.

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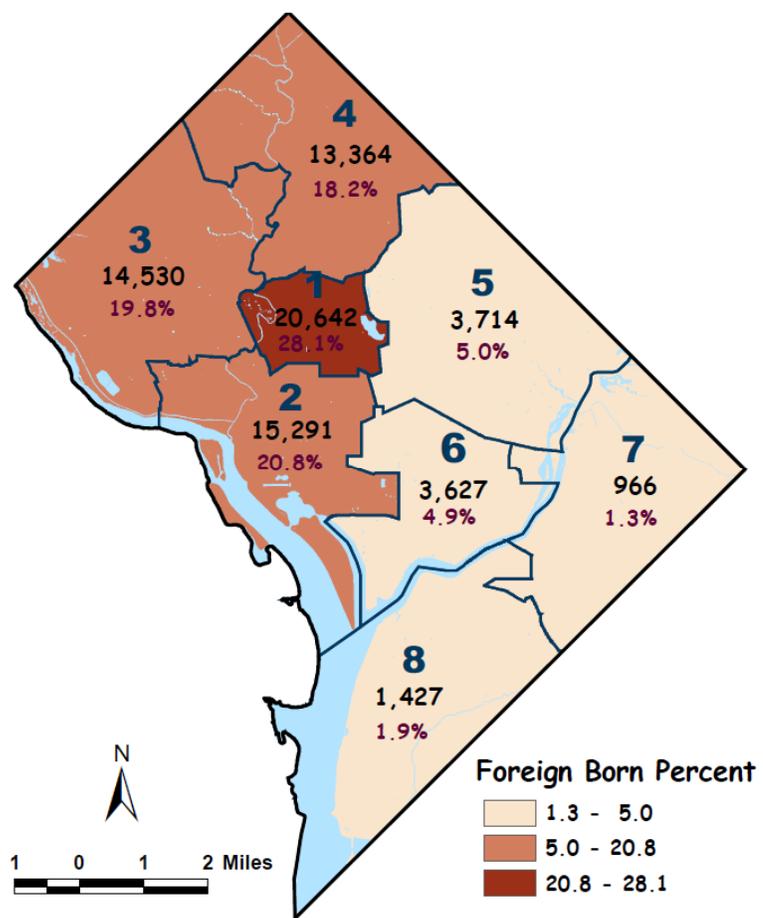


Government of the District of Columbia

Language Spoken at Home	Foreign-born Population	
	Number	Percent
Total	76,988	100.0
Speak only English	27,938	36.3
Speak Spanish	21,176	27.5
Speak English "very well"	8,542	11.1
Speak English less than "very well"	12,634	16.4
Speak other Indo-European languages	12,503	16.2
Speak English "very well"	9,913	12.9
Speak English less than "very well"	2,590	3.4
Speak Asian or Pacific Island languages	6,960	9.0
Speak English "very well"	4,083	5.3
Speak English less than "very well"	2,877	3.7
Speak other languages	8,411	10.9
Speak English "very well"	6,077	7.9
Speak English less than "very well"	2,334	3.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

**Map 1. Foreign-born Population of District of Columbia by Ward, 2000**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census.