

# Immigrants in New York City: Reaping the Benefits of Continuous Immigration

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*Abstract: Using New York City as an example, this essay examines how American cities that have a long and continuous history of absorbing immigrants develop welcoming institutions and policies for current immigrants and their children. Cities such as Chicago, San Francisco, and New York have been gateway cities for many previous waves of immigrants and continue to absorb new immigrants today. The ethnic conflicts and accommodations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries continue to shape the context of reception of today's immigrants. In contrast to "new destinations," which in recent years have often been centers of anti-immigrant sentiment and nativist local social policies, New York has generally adopted policies designed to include and accommodate new immigrants, as well as repurposing institutions that served earlier European immigrants and native-born African Americans and Puerto Ricans. The continuing significance of race in the city is counterbalanced in the lives of immigrants by a relative lack of nativism and an openness to incorporating immigrants.*

New York ... is a city in which the dominant racial group has been marked by ethnic variety and all ethnic groups have experienced ethnic diversity. Any one ethnic group can count on seeing its position and power wax and wane and none has become accustomed to long term domination, though each may be influential in a given area or domain. None can find challenges from new groups unexpected or outrageous. While this has not necessarily produced a reservoir of good feeling for groups different from one's own, the evolving system of inter-group relations permit accommodation, change, and the rise of new groups.

—Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan,  
*Beyond the Melting Pot*<sup>1</sup>

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Immigration is a national issue, yet it is experienced locally. What sociologists Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut term the "context of reception"<sup>2</sup> varies greatly by region of the United States, a fact that has become more important in recent years as states, cities, and towns have undertaken constitu-

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tionally dubious efforts to craft their own immigration policies. Local contexts of reception are framed by many factors: demography, the local labor markets, and the distribution of political power, just to name the most obvious. They are also shaped by history. Traditional gateways greet newcomers with institutions, political cultures, and social expectations about the role of immigrants different than those of new destinations. Nowhere is this more obvious than in New York City, home to the nation's largest concentration of immigrants. Immigration in New York is a palimpsest in which the life chances of today's newcomers are shaped by a history of which they are often only barely aware. In this essay, we use New York City to explore how ethnic conflicts and accommodations of the past shape the position of immigrants today.

Demographer Audrey Singer has divided America's immigrant-receiving communities into four broad categories.<sup>3</sup> There are *former gateways*, such as Detroit, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, and Cleveland. These cities, mostly in the Northeast and Midwest, all had large and diverse immigrant populations at the peak of the mass European migration to United States at the turn of the twentieth century. That diversity shaped their politics and cultures, at least for a while. Today, however, these cities have mostly lost their allure for newcomers and natives alike, as evidenced by their declining populations. Some of the educational, social, and cultural institutions that fostered the incorporation of earlier immigrants and their children survive, but most have fallen by the wayside.

There are also *contemporary gateways*—cities such as Los Angeles, Miami, San Diego, and Houston. Having now received large numbers of immigrants for nearly a half-century, such cities can no longer be seen as new immigrant destinations. Yet

having become significant immigrant destinations only since the late 1960s, their cultural and institutional infrastructure of immigrant reception was largely created in a post-civil rights context.<sup>4</sup> Of course, these communities do have an immigrant past. Indeed, several of them were founded as Mexican cities and faced their first immigration crisis when an influx of English-speaking Anglo-Americans transformed their culture and politics in the nineteenth century. Some also received an influx of Mexican immigrants during the Mexican revolution, as well as some European immigrants and their children in the mid-twentieth century. Yet only after the 1960s did these cities become major gateways for a sizable portion of America's new immigrants. Local institutions had little in the way of immigrant-receiving traditions, and the white European-origin populations were often generations removed from their own immigrant roots. Thus in Los Angeles, for instance, when new immigrants took up styles of politics created in part by struggles of the long-standing Mexican American community, issues were often articulated as Mexicans versus Anglos; immigrant history was a source of conflict, not a shared tradition and common origin.

The third category is made up of what are now being called *new destinations*.<sup>5</sup> These are communities that received very little immigration prior to the 1990s, but where the immigrant population has grown rapidly over the past two decades. The new destinations are mostly suburbs and small towns, often in the South and the Midwest, although the term is also sometimes applied to major cities, including Nashville and Las Vegas. They are home to a relatively small portion of the nation's immigrants, yet they are noteworthy for the speed with which they have been transformed into diverse communities and the virulence of the politics

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that has often accompanied this transformation.

Finally, there is the handful of major cities that are *continuous gateways*. These cities have been important immigrant destinations for well over a century. Three American cities were significant immigrant gateways in 1900, 1990, and 2010: New York, Chicago, and San Francisco.<sup>6</sup> These cities managed to integrate immigrants of European origin and their descendants throughout the twentieth century, as well as attracting a much more diverse immigrant flow during the past fifty years. The origins of the immigrants have changed, but these cities' role as points of entry into U.S. society has remained constant. In such cities, the immigrant population is often highly diverse, as migrants who entered at different times were often from different regions.

Therefore, the immigrant/native division does not easily map onto racial cleavages. Because they are not overwhelmingly recent arrivals, the portion of the immigrant population that is undocumented tends to be lower in states with a continuous gateway. In New York State, the undocumented population is estimated at about 12 percent of all immigrants; in California, it is around 26 percent. By contrast, nearly half of all immigrants in Arizona and the majority of immigrants in such new destination states as Georgia and North Carolina are estimated to be unauthorized.<sup>7</sup> Does the long history of immigrant integration make a difference in the lives of current immigrants and their children in these continuous destinations? Do legacies of the past make a difference in current-day lives? Considering the example of New York – by far the largest and most diverse of these cities – we think it does.

New York City today is an advanced outpost of the demographic diversity that is transforming the nation. “Non-Hispanic

whites” now make up less than one-third of the city's population. Thirty-six percent of the city's population is foreign born – including 27 percent of whites, 32 percent of blacks, 41 percent of Hispanics, and 72 percent of Asians – and many of the “natives” are in fact the young children of immigrants. Whites are now a minority in the city, and the numbers of the “traditional” native minority groups – African Americans of native parentage and Puerto Ricans – are also in decline. Immigrants make up an even larger portion of the city's young adults, and most of the city's children have immigrant parents.

These young people grow up amidst many institutions that were built for past generations of immigrants and their descendants. The exclusion and mistreatment of immigrants in the past led to the creation of many of the city's most immigrant-friendly institutions. Catholics and Jews created schools, universities, hospitals, day camps, sports leagues, and nursing homes because they either did not feel comfortable in or were actively excluded from established institutions. As the original immigrants who needed those institutions moved away or assimilated into the middle class and the demography of the neighborhoods around those institutions changed, the institutions began to serve the newcomers and their children. In a country like the United States, which has no federal agency devoted to immigrant assimilation (unlike many immigrant-receiving countries), these local institutions and local government actions are resources that facilitate immigrant integration and social mobility.

Catholic elementary and high schools are an example. Many Catholic immigrants in the nineteenth century did not feel welcome in the Protestant-dominated public schools. Over time, and especially during the height of immigration at the turn of the twentieth century, they founded a net-

work of Catholic schools. By 1920, there were 1.8 million students in Catholic schools nationwide. New York City was home to many of these Catholic schools, which educated the children and grandchildren of Irish, Italian, and Polish immigrants. At their peak enrollment in the 1960s, the Catholic schools had already begun to enroll the African American and Puerto Rican children whose parents came to the city seeking the same better life. As the third-generation whites began to leave the city or chose other forms of education, the Catholic schools began to attract the children of the new immigrants coming to New York from all over the globe. Today, the Archdioceses of New York and Brooklyn enroll more than 100,000 children, the majority nonwhite, and at least a quarter of whom are not Catholic, but whose parents scrape together the average \$3,500 a year in tuition for a better education than they believe the local public schools can provide.

Most children of immigrants attend the city's public schools, which came into being at the height of immigration and have a long history of serving immigrant children. One part of the mission of the public schools has been to "create" American citizens. These schools currently serve over a million children, with about 150,000 classified as English-language learners. The schools translate basic information, including report cards for parents, into nine languages: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, Haitian-Creole, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu. This covers about 95 percent of the city's families, and for the remainder there is a phone translation service that allows school personnel to speak to parents in 109 languages, including Malagasy, Khmer, Serbian, Gujarati, and even Gaelic and Yiddish.

After graduation, many of these young people enroll in the City University of New York (CUNY), which is not only the

largest urban university in the United States but one of the largest concentrations of first- and second-generation immigrants in any institution in the country. The first of its colleges, City College, is widely remembered for having provided a free university education to many second-generation Jewish immigrants who were excluded from Ivy League institutions because of quotas and anti-Semitism. Today, CUNY enrolls 217,000 degree-credit students who trace their ancestries to 205 countries and speak 189 languages; 43 percent of these students are themselves immigrants, and the vast majority are either first- or second-generation Americans.

The civil rights movement and the urban riots of the 1960s also led to the development of institutions specifically aimed at non-whites: museums celebrating African American history, public colleges designed for and located in Puerto Rican and African American communities, and youth programs to socialize young people away from crime and toward a better life. As non-whites, many of the city's Latino, black, and Asian newcomers can take advantage of these institutions as well. Hostos Community College, founded in 1968 to meet the demands of Puerto Rican activists for an institution of higher education in the South Bronx, now enrolls Dominicans as its largest demographic group. Medgar Evers College, founded in 1970 in the predominantly African American community of Bedford Stuyvesant after pressure from community organizations, including the NAACP, now enrolls students from all over the world, and has thriving clubs for African, Latin American, and Haitian students.

New York's local government has also generally taken a firm pro-immigrant stand – a sharp contrast to many local governments elsewhere in the country. While Arizona and Alabama have passed laws designed to prevent undocumented people from getting public services, and to

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identify, arrest, and deport them, the New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs has given advice to undocumented immigrants about the city services they have a right to receive. The website of the office features the mayor's Executive Orders 34 and 31 guaranteeing "privacy" to immigrants asking for city services and ordering city workers to protect the confidentiality of any immigration-status information they learn about people.

Interestingly, the other continuous gateways have largely followed New York in bucking the anti-immigrant trend among American localities. In 2011, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel established an Office of New Americans, similar to the Immigrant Affairs Office in New York, and in 2012, he unveiled the "Chicago New Americans Plan," a set of policy initiatives whose goal is to make Chicago "the most immigrant friendly city in the nation."<sup>8</sup> San Francisco, long known for its immigrant-friendly policies, is also a "sanctuary city" in which local authorities generally limit their cooperation with federal immigration officials.

While thirty-one states have passed some sort of law requiring that government business be conducted in English, New York is doing a great deal to accommodate the one-half of New Yorkers who speak a language other than English at home, as well as the 1.8 million people who have limited English proficiency. In 2008, the mayor ordered every city agency that has direct contact with New Yorkers to develop a policy to ensure communication with people who do not speak English. All essential public documents are now translated into the most commonly spoken languages – Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean, Italian, and French Creole – and a phone translation service is available from the city for these and other far less common languages.

In some cases, post-1965 immigrants have also benefited from direct family or other

connections with earlier immigrant communities. In New York City's West Indian and Chinese communities, for example, the earliest post-1965 immigrants were sometimes connected to the smaller but substantial coethnic communities of pre-1924 immigrants.<sup>9</sup> In other cases, the connections are institutional. While many of the approximately 300,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union who settled in New York after 1980 were probably related to the descendants of pre-1924 immigrants, few were aware of specific connections. Almost all, however, benefited from resettlement programs, English language and job training programs, educational support, as well as financial assistance from community-based social service organizations run by their co-religionists.<sup>10</sup>

The origins of this dense Jewish social service infrastructure can be traced to efforts by the more assimilated German Jews to aid Eastern European newcomers at the end of the nineteenth century. Over time, these organizations were taken over by the Eastern Europeans, who would later turn their attention to aiding Holocaust-era refugees and still later to the "new" immigrants from the former Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup> While the Jewish social service infrastructure in New York is particularly dense, similar church and social service-based organizations also made connections between older and newer waves of Polish and Greek immigrants.

Even new immigrant groups with no connection to earlier communities may benefit from the legacies of previous migrants. Older groups may serve as "proximal hosts" for newer ones.<sup>12</sup> Dominican, Mexican, and Ecuadoran migrants often initially moved into Puerto Rican neighborhoods, where they benefited from services available in Spanish. Puerto Rican civil rights, social service, and cultural organizations reached out to serve these immigrants and over time often transformed themselves

into pan-Latino organizations with a broadly “Hispanic” agenda. Similarly, African American civil rights and social service groups often found themselves in the “immigrant aid” business as the communities they served became home to growing numbers of (usually black) immigrants.

Elected officials and labor union leaders who had come to power representing one group also frequently found themselves reaching out to newcomers – a strategy that in the New York context made more sense than an anti-immigrant stance.<sup>13</sup> We doubt that organizations like the Henry Street Settlement or the Educational Alliance, established for earlier generations of newcomers, drew Asian and Latino newcomers to the Lower East Side. Yet the fact that such local groups exist does benefit the children of immigrants with services largely absent in “new” immigrant destinations.

Of course, relations between newer and older groups rarely run smoothly in the crowded, competitive city. Established groups seldom simply put out the welcome mat for newcomers. Ethnic succession struggles have been fought in New York’s neighborhoods, industries, labor unions, churches, in local politics, and on the streets since at least the 1840s. Sometimes reasonable accommodations are reached; other times things get ugly (remember *West Side Story*). Newcomers often grow impatient with their proximal hosts, and old-timers can bitterly resent what they see as a “take over” of “their” turf. When the established groups are native African Americans and Puerto Ricans, as has often been the case in recent years, rivalries can be particularly bitter, because they add to the perception that the native minorities are, once again, being surpassed by new immigrants, albeit now generally black and Latino ones.

You can hear these resentments in mutterings on CUNY campuses such as Hostos

and Medgar Evers, or when East Harlem’s Museo del Barrio shifts its focus from specifically Puerto Rican to broadly Latin American culture. You could see it clearly in 2012, when veteran congressman Charles Rangel, whose Harlem seat has been represented by an African American since 1945, came within a few hundred votes of losing his seat to a Dominican immigrant. Still, if New York seems perennially beset by small ethnic struggles, its diversity of groups, its complex quilt of overlapping interests and alliances, and the broad acceptance of the idea that ethnic succession, if not always pleasant, is both legitimate and inevitable have generally prevented city-engulfing racial or ethnic conflagrations.

Perhaps even more important than the actual terrain of competition and cooperation between groups is how immigration is understood and talked about. In New York, the discussion of immigrant incorporation often begins with reference to earlier immigrants. Many New York whites (and a sizable portion of the city’s African Americans who are of Caribbean origin<sup>14</sup>) *see themselves* as members of ethnic groups and the descendants of immigrants. This is not just because a larger portion of local whites (and blacks) *are* descendants of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century immigrants. It is also because New York’s traditions, neighborhoods, and ethnically concentrated labor force<sup>15</sup> encourage them to see themselves that way. While cousins who crossed the Hudson River may have begun to regard themselves as “un-hyphenated” whites, those who remained in New York often had reason to continue to define themselves in ethnic terms – even three, four, or five generations past Ellis Island.

The importance of immigration in contemporary New York City is seen not only in the lives of the immigrants themselves,

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but also in those of their American-born children, the “second generation.” When we ask what sort of New Yorkers the newcomers will be – and what sort of New York they are creating – we often must look to this second generation for answers. By 2009, this American-born second generation constituted approximately 22 percent of the city’s population and 24 percent of the young adult (aged 18 to 32) population. Another 11 percent of this age group belongs to what Rubén Rumbaut has termed the “1.5 generation”: those who were born abroad but arrived as children and came of age in the United States. Another 23 percent migrated as young adults.<sup>16</sup> Together, these groups make up more than half of all young adult New Yorkers, and they far outnumber the children of white natives, the group many Americans still think of as the “mainstream.”

The growth of this population is made all the more important by the aging of the native population and the impending retirement of the large baby boom cohort. For better or worse, the children of immigrants will play an expanding role in the city’s life in the coming decades. In an effort to understand the second generation and the challenges it faces, we (along with our colleague John H. Mollenkopf) undertook a study of young adults whose parents are immigrants from around the globe. The “Immigrant Second Generation in Metropolitan New York” project surveyed about 2,000 young adults of Chinese, Dominican, Russian-Jewish, South American (Colombian, Ecuadoran, and Peruvian), and West Indian immigrant parentage. For comparative purposes, we also surveyed young adult New Yorkers of native black and native white parentage as well as mainland-born Puerto Ricans. The survey was supplemented with life history interviews with about 10 percent of the respondents and a series of linked ethnographic projects.<sup>17</sup>

The study revealed that by most measures, these young people are rapidly “assimilating” into American society. Language assimilation is particularly dramatic, a finding that is consistent with research in the rest of the country.<sup>18</sup> Nor is there much reason to worry about divided loyalties. Few children of immigrants stay deeply connected to their parents’ homelands. In general, the young people we spoke to tended to see themselves as Americans and “New Yorkers,” albeit ethnic ones. They are more likely than other New York residents their age to have grown up in the city (many “native” young adult New Yorkers are, in fact, newcomers from other parts of the United States), and they often identify strongly with the city’s culture and institutions.

Yet there are also reasons to be concerned about the second generation’s future. Racial differences among the groups we studied are marked, if somewhat less so than among the children of natives. By most measures of economic and educational achievement, the black and Latino children of immigrants, while generally better off than black and Latino natives, still lag well behind Asians and whites. Many of the young people report experiencing discrimination in daily life. For dark-skinned children of immigrants, negative encounters with the police are common and a source of considerable frustration and alienation.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps because of their youth, the second generation also has yet to enter the city’s political leadership proportionate to their numbers, although the recent emergence of several high-visibility second-generation politicians – congresswoman Yvette Clarke, city controller John Liu, and New York’s first Asian American congressperson, Grace Meng, prominent among them – suggests that this may be changing.

Finally, it is worth noting that as New York’s second generation sets the tone for

the city's urban culture, they demonstrated a fluid and nuanced approach to the oldest and most vexing of American social divides: race. Much of today's second generation does not fit easily into American racial boxes and categories. Racism continues to tragically circumscribe many people's life chances, but racial boundaries are blurring as the categories become more complicated. And young people – both the second generation and those who grow up with them – seem more comfortable with that fact than their elders. In a world where almost everyone's family is from somewhere else, ethnicity is a source of everyday banter. One 18-year-old told us about how often people tried to guess her identity: "I have been asked if I am Egyptian, Cuban, Greek, Pakistani. I say no, I am Peruvian, Spanish. I like my culture and I am proud to be Peruvian, the Incas and all that." This is not a world of balkanized groups huddled within their own enclaves, but rather of hybrids and fluid exchanges across group boundaries. Most of our respondents took it for granted that having friendships with people from a variety of backgrounds is a good thing, that it makes one a better, more fully developed person.

Even for those defined as "black," race is not the monolithic barrier it was in the mid-twentieth century. Immigrants and their children who are defined as black often do face serious racial barriers. Indeed, many of the victims in the city's most well-known incidents of racial violence – the attacks in Howard Beach and Bensonhurst, for example, or the police shooting of street vendor Amadou Diallo – were in fact immigrants. At the same time, members of the second generation have benefited from the institutions, political strategies, and notions of rights developed as a legacy of the civil rights movement. Ironically, affirmative action and other policies designed to redress long-standing American

racial inequities often work better for immigrants and their children than they do for the native minorities for whom they were designed.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the fact that children of immigrants have come to be categorized as members of native "minority groups" does not mean their experience has been the same as that of the native minorities. They clearly do suffer much of the same prejudice and discrimination, but they do not inherit the scars and handicaps of a long history of racial exclusion.

In post-civil rights America, the heritage of the African American struggle for racial justice has given young people new strategies, vocabularies, and resources for upward mobility.<sup>21</sup> While the African American experience of discrimination has been harsher than that of other groups, the African American civil rights struggle has also provided a heroic model for opposing discrimination. Today's children of immigrants are quick to take up this model. While their immigrant parents are often willing to accept unfair treatment, the second generation children are quick to challenge discrimination whenever they see it. In the post-civil rights era, this is one of the ways in which they are becoming American.

They also have the advantage of becoming American in New York City, where they can feel included even if they experience discrimination. In this hyper-diverse world, assimilation (if that is the right word) seems to happen faster and with less angst than in the past. The children of European immigrants who arrived at the beginning of the twentieth century often felt forced to choose between their parents' ways and those of American society. Many were embarrassed when their parents could not speak English and even changed their names to fit in. As the Italian American educator Leonard Covello later recalled, "We were becoming American by learning how to be ashamed of our parents."<sup>22</sup>

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By contrast, today's second generation is far more at ease with both their American and ethnic identities. One woman told us that learning Russian from her parents has been beneficial for her because "there's a certain richness that comes along with having another culture to fall back on. People are always intrigued. They ask what does it mean to be Russian and you feel a little special to explain and it adds color to you." Far from being "torn between two worlds," the children of immigrants increasingly make use of the second generation's natural advantage: the ability to combine the best of their parents' culture with the best that America has to offer. Twenty-three-year-old Maria said that being both American and Colombian was "the best of two worlds. Like being able to keep and appreciate those things in my culture that I enjoy and that I think are beautiful, and, at the same time, being able to change those things which I think are bad."

The intergenerational progress and rapid assimilation of these young people is often missed in immigration debates that are focused only on recent arrivals. A more long-term view, one that takes into account the progress of the second generation, would do much to inform local and national conversations about immigration. Yet, lest we draw too optimistic a portrait about the incorporation of the new second-generation New Yorkers, a few notes of caution are in order.

The first is economic. Our study was conducted during very good economic times – indeed, toward the end of what was, for the city, a remarkable period of economic growth. Although we do not know how our respondents fared in the great recession, it is worth noting that many of the most successful were concentrated in industries that were particularly hard hit: high tech, construction,

and finance. Upwardly mobile members of the second generation have fewer familial resources to fall back on than do their native white counterparts. And what of the very large cohort of second-generation New Yorkers who had the historical misfortune to enter the labor force just when the recession hit? Will second-generation resilience help them reinvent themselves in a changing economy? Or will they find themselves locked out of opportunities by better-established groups, now anxious to safeguard their own position in leaner and meaner times?

Even after the present downturn passes, the need to integrate such a large number of young people from immigrant backgrounds into a twenty-first-century labor force presents profound challenges for the city's public educational systems. Nothing could be more vital to the city's future than the successful incorporation of the children of immigrants; thus, investment in education is crucial. Yet the question of how to pay for this investment during a time of austerity and increased popular reluctance to pay for public goods represents a serious challenge.

There is also the question of emerging differences among various second-generation groups, and between second generation and native minority groups, in the degree to which they have been able to successfully make use of the educational system. Moves toward greater diversity and increased choice in public education at all levels have, on the one hand, guaranteed that *some* students from modest backgrounds have access to an excellent education. Yet they have also deepened inequalities within the system.<sup>23</sup>

The children of Asian and former Soviet immigrants have done extremely well – better by most measures than the children of native whites. About 12 percent of the city's population, Asians are now in the majority at the city's most competitive

public high schools. The declining numbers of native black and Latino students at these elite high schools and the more highly regarded CUNY campuses are alarming. Even among blacks and Latinos, real cleavages are emerging – although the use of racial terms like *black* and *Latino* tends to obscure this fact. The children of some Latino immigrant groups (notably South Americans) are doing better than others, and the children of all immigrant groups, including blacks from Africa and the West Indies, are doing better than native African Americans and Puerto Ricans.

We urgently need new research to understand the different rates of educational success. Moreover, we should not let the success of large parts of New York's second generation mask the continuing failure of the city's institutions to address the poverty and social isolation of parts of the native minority population. One ironic effect of an increasingly choice-based school system is that African Americans remain highly segregated in the city's schools even while some traditionally black residential areas including Harlem and Bedford Stuyvesant have been integrated by gentrification. For all the talk of diversity in the city's best high schools, racial integration has all but disappeared from the school reform agenda. Many of the city's most celebrated charter schools take their nearly all-black student bodies for granted, even while the growing number of whites and Asians now living within their catchment areas travel to schools in other parts of the city.

Although it is rarely acknowledged, the Bloomberg administration's school reform efforts have pursued nearly opposite strategies when it comes to educating different groups. Among whites (now returning to the system in significant numbers), Asians, and better-off Latino immigrants, the neighborhood school is becoming a thing of the past. High school students are ex-

pected to take advantage of New York's extensive mass transit system to avail themselves of the best opportunities the huge city has to offer. African Americans and poorer Latinos, however, are still largely educated in neighborhood schools and local charter schools, which sidestep competitive admissions processes and discourage students from venturing out into the big, multicultural city. The most competitive of the city's public schools, usually ranked among the nation's best, celebrate the astounding diversity of their talented students. Yet this "diversity" obscures the virtual disappearance of native African Americans from these schools.

Finally, we should note the effects of legal status. While New York City has never had as large a concentration of undocumented immigrants as communities closer to the southern border, many parents of our respondents lacked legal status for part of the time while their children were growing up. Indeed, it was not uncommon for second-generation New Yorkers to grow up in "mixed status" households, which include undocumented immigrants, legal permanent residents, naturalized citizens, and birthright citizens. Up until the mid-1990s, this diversity of legal status had little impact on the children raised in such households. Deportation was rare and largely restricted to those with serious criminal records. And while regularizing legal status was never easy, opportunities to do so did exist. Eventually most of those who wanted to become "legal" were able to do so.

Since the mid-1990s this has no longer been the case. The United States has been engaged in what sociologist Robert Courtney Smith calls a "cruel natural experiment."<sup>24</sup> By restricting the opportunities of long tolerated, if technically illegal, immigrants to obtain legal status, we have created a large population of semi-permanent undocumented immigrants

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who are part of the city economically, socially, and culturally but not legally or politically. This is a profoundly troubling situation for a democratic society. Despite the strong pro-immigrant stance taken by city government and the generally pro-immigrant stance of the population, the crisis of the undocumented makes clear that the incorporation of immigrants – and of the second generation – is a problem the city cannot solve on its own.

New York City's attitude toward immigrants highlights a conceptual confusion that marks much of the politics and scholarship about immigration: namely, the conflation of racism and nativism. Racism and nativism are often interrelated, of course. Attacks on immigrants in the past and present are often made in racial terms, and attacks on members of racial minority groups sometimes emphasize their alleged foreignness. Still, the history of New York and the other continuing gateways – which combine a relatively warm welcome for immigrants with frequent hostility toward African Americans and other “racial” minorities – reminds us that nativism and racism are fundamentally different ways of thinking even when their victims are actually the same people. New York's proud history of incorporating immigrants stands in sharp contrast to its history of relations with its “racial” minorities. At various points in American history, blacks have been subject to virulent racism, and European immigrants were subject to virulent nativism. Asians and Hispanics were subject to both, although the degree to which their exclusion and suffering was due to one or the other is a subject of debate.

Scholars sometimes try to understand the immigrant experience in racial terms, and vice versa. Among the New York intellectuals of the 1950s and early 1960s it was common to assert that while Southern

racism represented a unique and deeply rooted caste-like form of inequality, migration to the Northern cities would allow blacks to follow a “Northern model” of immigrant-like upward mobility. The boldest statement of this position was probably Irving Kristol's 1966 *New York Times* essay, “The Negro Today is Like the Immigrant of Yesterday.”<sup>25</sup> Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's classic *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963) provides a more nuanced example of the application, with some caveats, of the “immigrant” model to African Americans.<sup>26</sup>

Recently, observers have been more likely to turn the analogy around. The growing literature on the construction of “whiteness” among nineteenth-century European immigrants reminds us of both the intensity and the racial – that is to say, pseudo-biological – basis of hostility toward Celtic as well as Southern and Eastern European immigrants. For these writers, whiteness was a status achieved as the outcome of social and political struggles.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, other groups – Mexican Americans most prominent among them – are increasingly seen as having been “racialized”: considered over time to be a “racial” minority analogous to African Americans.<sup>28</sup>

Whatever their historical connections, it probably makes more sense to see racism and nativism as distinct forces in contemporary life. As non-whites, today's immigrants experience some of the best and the worst legacies of American history and intergroup relations. In today's continuing destination cities, and particularly in New York City, nativism, while present, is not particularly strong compared to other parts of the country. The vitality of the city as a global crossroads and the diversity of its inhabitants are generally understood as positive, and this ideology affects the politics, policies, and discourse about immigration in the city.<sup>29</sup> Thus,

nonwhite immigrants enter a city that is relatively welcoming and hospitable to immigrants *qua* immigrants, yet at the same time not very welcoming to them *qua* “non-whites.”

New York City does not provide immunity to American racism. Its demography and history have entrenched a great deal of racial inequality that shapes the experiences of both natives and new immigrants. Indeed, an overview of past and present conditions points out how completely Irving Kristol got it wrong: the native black, and arguably the Puerto Rican, experience has been profoundly *unlike* that of immigrants. Today, despite substantial post-civil rights era progress, the African American and native Puerto Rican communities in the city are highly segregated from whites, with substandard schools, high crime rates, aggressive policing, and high rates of imprisonment, unemployment, and health inequality.

Recent research on residential segregation shows these conflicting trends. Looking at the twenty most diverse metropolitan areas in the United States, sociologists John Logan and Charles Zhang show that two important trends characterize the pattern of racial distribution across neighborhoods. One trend is the stubbornly persistent hyper-segregation of blacks from whites in many cities. The other trend is the new growth of stably integrated “global” neighborhoods: census tracts where all four major racial ethnic groups – blacks, whites, Hispanics, and Asians – live side by side. New York, paradoxically, is at the forefront of both these trends.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the level of black/white segregation in the city has barely changed since 1980. Yet about a third of whites (35 percent) live in these new global neighborhoods, along with 32 percent of Asians, 22 percent of blacks, and 28 percent of Hispanics.

On the one hand, Logan and Zhang conclude that these neighborhoods show that

stable integration is possible. Hispanics and Asians have moved into previously all-white neighborhoods without provoking white flight, and they have been followed by African Americans. On the other hand, whites living in such “diverse” neighborhoods can easily look around and conclude that they live in a postracial, cosmopolitan community; and to an extent, this is true. Yet it can also obscure the isolation and segregation of a large part of the poor and particularly the native African American community, the majority of whom continue to live in segregated census tracts.

In light of these ongoing problems, which affect immigrants of color as well as many native African Americans, some will no doubt see our insistence on the distinction between nativism and racism as a matter of semantics. Yet this distinction matters for the future integration of nonwhite immigrants and their descendants. Race, by definition, is immutable. Exclusion based on race creates a permanent (or at least very long-lasting) boundary, giving rise to reactive ethnicity and societal cleavages. Nativism could have the same result, but it does not have to. Even during peak periods of nativist sentiment, anti-immigrant attitudes in our nation of immigrants are always more ambivalent than racist ones.

The current upsurge of nativism underlines the degree to which the local context of reception counts. In the new immigrant destinations, the combination of very rapid in-migration and a concentration of unskilled undocumented immigrants has created a potent stew of anti-immigrant feeling and behavior.<sup>31</sup> Immigrants now face restrictive local laws that sanction landlords who rent to undocumented people, target day laborers gathering in public places, and authorize police to inquire about legal status and share that information with federal authorities. These laws

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also restrict undocumented immigrants from any local aid or services.<sup>32</sup> In 2010, state legislatures around the country considered 1,400 legislative bills targeting immigration, passing 208 of them.<sup>33</sup>

In the continuous destinations, immigrants and their children are less affected by these nativist developments, at least so far. It is almost impossible to imagine such negative legislation being enacted in New York, or other contemporary and continuing gateway cities where the majority of immigrants live (cities such as similarly pro-immigrant San Francisco and Chicago). Whether the tolerance and acceptance that immigrants and their children

experience in New York City will spread to the rest of the country, or the intolerance and exclusion that characterizes other parts of the country will spread to places like New York, is an open question. Yet as America comes to grips with the increased diversity of its population, it is important to pay attention to those places where the tradition of managing diversity runs deep. New York City's history of successful immigrant integration is a resource for immigrants who settle there. Perhaps it could also serve as a resource or model for new destinations struggling with the complexities of diversity.

#### ENDNOTES

- \* Contributor Biographies: MARY C. WATERS, a Fellow of the American Academy since 2006, is the M. E. Zukerman Professor of Sociology at Harvard University. Her publications include *Coming of Age in America: The Transition to Adulthood in the Twenty-First Century* (edited with Patrick J. Carr, Maria J. Kefalas, and Jennifer Holdaway, 2011), *The Next Generation: Immigrant Youth in a Comparative Perspective* (edited with Richard Alba, 2011), and *The New Americans: A Guide to Immigration since 1965* (edited with Reed Ueda, 2007).

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