IMMIGRANT NEW YORK AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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In the last four decades, New York City has been transformed by a dramatic wave of immigration. This, of course, is not the first large wave. A hundred years ago, hundreds of thousands of eastern European Jewish and southern Italian immigrants settled in New York so that by 1910, 41 percent of the city's residents, or some two million people, were foreign-born. Today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century—after forty years of massive immigration—the sheer size of the city's immigrant population is greater than ever before. At the time of the last census in 2000, more than a third of New York City's population (36 percent) was foreign-born—2.9 million people. Today's immigration, in absolute numbers, is the greatest wave in the city's history.

In what follows, I sketch out some basic features of the recent immigration and its impact on New York to provide a backdrop for the essays in this volume. This brief overview helps to situate Africans in the context of the larger influx to New York and to appreciate how they, like other new arrivals, are taking their place in, and remaking, the city.

Who are the Recent Immigrants?

What stands out, perhaps above all, about contemporary New York City's immigrant population is its extraordinary diversity. In the past two great waves, immigrant groups, to use Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's apt analogy, came two by two—the Irish and Germans in the mid-nineteenth century, followed by the Russians Jews and Italians at the turn of the twentieth century (Glazer and Moynihan 1970: 8). Today, no two groups dominate New York that way, and most immigrants come not from Europe but from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia.

It is often said that virtually every country in the world is represented in New York City. What is remarkable is the large number from so many different countries. Between 1990 and 1996 alone, as many as twenty countries sent more than 5,000 immigrants to the city (Kraly and Miyares 2001). In 2000, the top three groups—Dominicans, Chinese, and Jamaicans—were just under 30 percent of all the foreign-born. No other country accounted for more than five percent, and there were substantial numbers of many West Indian, Latin American, Asian, and European nationalities (see Table 1).

The Caribbean presence is striking: in 2000, one out of five immigrant New Yorkers was from the non-Hispanic Caribbean (see Table 2). West Indians of African ancestry, along with African Americans, make up the vast bulk of the city's non-Hispanic black population. Africans are still a small group, but their numbers are rapidly growing. There were about 92,000 foreign-born Africans living in New York City according to the 2000 census (some 70,000 from sub-Saharan nations), more than double the 1990 figure.

A third of the city's immigrants are from Latin America—and this does not include the more than 800,000 Puerto Ricans, who, even if born on the island, are not classified as immigrants because they are U.S. citizens by birth. A quarter of New York City's foreign-born are Asians; Chinese are the largest group, but there are also many Koreans, Indians, and Filipinos, as well as a growing number of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis. A substantial proportion of the newest arrivals hail from Europe. In 2000, the former Soviet Union (including Russia and the Ukraine) ranked fourth among the top sending countries to New York City, Poland was fifteenth, and altogether, about one out of four of the city's non-Hispanic whites was foreign born.

The incredible ethnic diversity of New York's immigrants is matched by the heterogeneity of their skills. The mixture of nationalities has ensured a mix of class and occupational origins, with high skilled and low-skilled immigrants roughly equal in number in the New York urban region (Waldinger and Lee 2001: 50, 52, 63). At the time of the 2000 census, nearly a quarter of foreign-born New Yorkers 25 years and older had a college degree, and the figure was slightly higher (27 percent) for those who entered the United States in the 1990s; at the other end of the spectrum, 35 percent of the foreign-born 25 years and older had not graduated from high school (Lobo and Salvo 2004: 154, 169).

Why Have They Come?

The reasons for the current massive influx are complex and multifaceted. A crucial factor was the change in U.S. immigration law in 1965 that abandoned the national origins quota system favoring northern and western Europeans and introduced a policy emphasizing family reunification and skills. The big winners were Asians, who had been severely restricted from immigration, and natives of the English-speaking Caribbean, who had been subject to small quotas for dependencies. U.S. policies with regard to refugees also allowed the large-scale admission of particular groups, Soviet

Jews and Cubans being especially prominent in the New York area. The diversity visa program, which was instituted by the 1990 Immigration Act to create an entry path for those without close relatives in the United States, has led to the emergence of significant numbers from new groups, including Ghanaians, Nigerians, Poles, Bangladeshis, and Ukrainians.

Economic factors have also underpinned the large-scale immigration in recent years. Neither the resource base nor the levels of economic development in many countries of origin are adequate to the meet the needs and expectations of their expanding populations. In many sending countries unemployment and underemployment are high, and there is little chance of advancement. The growth of high-level jobs in many places has not kept pace with the expansion of higher education so that the well-educated often cannot find jobs that match their training. At the same time, the United States holds out the promise of higher wages, steady employment, and improved living conditions.

Political factors in sending countries have also played a role. Unstable or oppressive political conditions have driven some people out of their homelands. Moreover, changing exit policies in several sending countries have enabled large numbers to emigrate in recent years. In China, for example, tight emigration restrictions, in place since 1940, were relaxed in the late 1970s at the end of the Great Cultural Revolution. Soviet Jews were allowed to emigrate in significant numbers only after 1971, although in the early 1980s Soviet authorities again slammed shut the doors. By the late 1980s, in the context of political changes in the Soviet Union, the policy toward Jewish emigration was again liberalized.

Once begun, migration has a kind of snowball effect. Immigration movements become self-perpetuating so that migration can be thought of as a process of progressive network building. Network connections lower the costs, raise the benefits, and reduce the risks of international migration. Immigrants spread the news of the benefits to be had in New York and facilitate the move of relatives by sending back money to finance the trip, serving as sponsors for immigrant visas, and offering a place to live (at least at first) and help in getting work. By allocating most immigrant visas along family lines, US immigration law reinforces the operation of migrant networks.

What about undocumented immigrants who have been the subject of so much attention and concern? According to one estimate, about one out of five immigrants, or roughly 650,000, in New York City are undocumented (Beveridge 2006). Only a minority

of the city's undocumented have snuck secretly across borders. Most—an estimated nine out of ten of the city's undocumented—entered the United States legally with temporary visas. They became undocumented—or visa overstayers, in immigration parlance—by failing to leave when their visas expired.

How are Immigrants Changing New York City?

Neighborhoods

If immigrants have brought about a dramatic demographic transformation of New York City, they have also been remaking it in other ways. Certainly, immigration has changed the residential landscape. New ethnic neighborhoods and ethnic conglomerations have cropped up in every borough. New York City now boasts three Chinatowns, a little Odessa-by-the-Sea, Caribbean Brooklyn, and a Dominican colony in Washington Heights.

As in the past, the new arrivals often gravitate to areas with kinfolk and friends, where they find comfort and security in an environment of familiar languages and institutions; at the same time, they are limited by the availability of affordable housing and by prejudice and sometimes outright discrimination by dominant groups.

Many sections of the city have taken on a new cultural character. In Crown Heights, Flatbush, and East Flatbush in central Brooklyn—and, increasingly, in many bordering neighborhoods—West Indian beauty parlors, restaurants, record stores, and bakeries dot the landscape and Haitian Creole and West Indian accents fill the air. Several neighborhoods in the northeast Bronx and southeastern Queens also now have a definite West Indian flavor.

For West Indians, race is a primary factor determining where they live, placing severe constraints in their way. Demographic studies measuring residential segregation show that West Indians, like African Americans, are highly segregated from white New Yorkers. Real estate agents often steer them to black neighborhoods or withhold information on housing availability elsewhere. Those who have braved open hostility and branched out from black communities in Brooklyn and Queens to adjacent white areas find that their new neighborhoods become increasingly black. Antiblack prejudice tends to fuel a process of racial turnover as whites begin to leave and no new whites move in; at the same time, the growing number of black families makes the neighborhood seem more welcoming for West Indians (and African Americans) looking for homes. The result

is a pattern of segregation in which West Indian residential enclaves are located in largely black areas; in 1990, the index of dissimilarity, which measures residential segregation (100 indicates total segregation), was 83 between West Indians and non-Hispanic whites in New York City (see Crowder and Tedrow 2001).

Dominicans are almost as segregated from non-Hispanic whites as West Indians, with a segregation index of 80 in cities in the New York Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA) in 1990 (Alba et al. 1999). Dominicans have created a city-within-a-city in northern Manhattan's Washington Heights. Upper Broadway, one journalist has written, "abounds with *bodegas, farmacias…*restaurants serving *pollo* and *platanos* and travel agents offering bargain [flights] to the Dominican Republic" (quoted in Foner 2000: 49). With the surge of Dominican immigration in the 1990s, Inwood and areas of the Bronx to the north and Hamilton Heights to the south of Washington Heights have also taken on an increasingly Dominican character; Corona, in Queens, has become the third largest Dominican immigrant neighborhood in the city.

Manhattan's expanding Chinatown has spilled over into adjacent districts—and what have been called satellite Chinatowns have developed in Flushing (Queens) and Sunset Park (Brooklyn). The Chinese, it should be noted, are much less segregated from whites than Dominicans and West Indians—with a segregation index of 58 calculated for cities in the New York CMSA in 1990 (Alba et al. 1999).

Immigrant settlement in New York is not just about ethnic enclaves. Polyethnic neighborhoods have emerged that are amalgams of newcomers from all parts of the world. The number 7 train that connects Times Square in Manhattan with Flushing in Queens has been dubbed the International Express as it weaves through multiethnic neighborhoods which have no parallel in previous waves of immigration. Elmhurst is one of New York's most diverse immigrant areas, with large numbers of Chinese, Colombians, Ecuadorans, Mexicans, Koreans, Indians, Filipinos, Dominicans, Bangladeshis, and Peruvians (Lobo and Salvo 2004). Although Flushing is sometimes referred to as a new Chinatown in the making, it is in fact home to a growing number of Central and South Americans as well as Chinese, Indian, and Korean immigrants who join a still quite sizable native-born white population.

Africans tend to live in ethnically diverse neighborhoods, often in the Bronx and Brooklyn. In Williamsbridge and Wakefield in the Bronx and Flatlands-Canarsie in Brooklyn, they live beside West Indians and African Americans. In Morrisania, in the Bronx, Nigerians and Ghanaians live among Dominicans, Hondurans, Jamaicans,

Ecuadorians, Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans, to name some of the major groups.

Race and Ethnicity

A major impact of the new immigration is the way it has been changing the racial and ethnic dynamics of the city. More and more, in political and street-level discourse, New Yorkers think of a four-race framework of white, black, Hispanic, and Asian. The proportion of Asians and Hispanics is growing; the proportion of whites is on the decline. Between 1980 and 2000, non-Hispanic whites went from 52 to 35 percent of New York City's population; Hispanics from 20 to 27 percent; Asians from 3 to 11 percent; and non-Hispanic blacks held fairly steady, 24 percent in 1980 and 26 percent in 2000.

Gone are the days when Hispanic meant Puerto Rican; in 2000, Puerto Ricans accounted for only a little more than a third of the city's Hispanic population, outnumbered by a combination of Dominicans, Mexicans, Ecuadorians, Colombians, and other Latin Americans. Asian no longer means Chinese but also Korean, Indian, and Filipino (to name the largest non-Chinese groups). The black population is being Caribbeanized – and an increasing number of Africans is also adding new diversity. Altogether, by 2000 more than a quarter of the non-Hispanic black population was foreign born.

The growing number of Caribbean and African blacks may well be "tweaking" monolithic notions of blackness, as Milton Vickerman (2001) has argued—making whites (and others) more sensitive to ethnic distinctions within the black population. Hispanic immigrants, for their part, often see themselves in terms of the relatively new Hispanic or Latino category—and are often identified as Hispanic or Latino by others—even if most prefer to be known in terms of their group of national origin (see Foner 2005: 23-28). Asians have undergone a contemporary metamorphosis. Once stigmatized as "aliens ineligible for citizenship," they are now often cast in the model minority stereotype, a view that flourishes in New York, with its large numbers of well-educated Asians. New York's Asians rank just below non-Hispanic whites in the city's ethnoracial hierarchy—and they generally meet with greater acceptance from middle-class white New Yorkers than other racial minorities.

The new racial and ethnic amalgam in New York City is not only changing perceptions of race and ethnicity but also creating new divisions, alliances, and relationships. On the down side, tension and conflict between racial and ethnic groups

persist, although in new forms and with the involvement of new groups. As I have already noted, residential segregation between whites and blacks continues at extraordinary high levels, with serious implications for hundreds of thousands of immigrants of African ancestry. Black and Latino immigrants often engage in distancing strategies to set themselves apart from, and to claim superiority to, African Americans and Puerto Ricans. For their part, native minorities often resent what they see as numerical, residential, economic, or political encroachment by immigrants. And there is a general tendency, out of preference but also on account of prejudice, for members of racial and ethnic groups to stick to their own kind in day-to-day interactions. This is true even in the city's polyethnic neighborhoods. In his study of a multiethnic Queens neighborhood with a mix of Latino and Asian immigrants, African Americans, and whites, Michael Jones-Correa (1998: 32) speaks of communities that overlap but do not touch. In the 1990s, the city witnessed several black boycotts of Korean-owned stores, and tensions have been reported in many neighborhoods between long-term residents and new arrivals—Flushing being one example, where old-time whites often resent the influx and increasing dominance of Asian groups (Zhou 2001).

The fact is, however, that by and large peaceful coexistence between members of different racial and ethnic groups is the rule in New York. Nor is it just a case of tolerance and accommodation; genuine cooperation and coalition building also often occur. Among other things, friendships develop in schools, colleges, playgrounds, and workplaces, and political alliances are formed on certain issues and in certain campaigns (see Sanjek 1998).

The increasing number of multihued neighborhoods that have emerged all over the city provide the basis for the creation of ties. By 1990, only 8 percent of neighborhoods in the New York City region were all white, down from 29 percent twenty years earlier. Nearly half of the region's neighborhoods could be classified as white, Hispanic, and Asian or as white, black, Asian, and Hispanic (Alba et al. 1995). Significant numbers of American-born Hispanics and Asians have non-Hispanic white spouses or partners (Liang and Ito 1999); an increasing number of marriages are taking place between Dominicans and Puerto Ricans (Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 200: 241); and unions between African Americans and West Indians or Africans are not unusual, especially among the second generation. All over the city, countless examples exist of amicable relations developing among immigrants from different countries, as well as between immigrants and the native-born, in work, school, and neighborhood contexts.

Among the second generation, or American-born children of immigrants, cultural hybrids are being created that have a particularly New York flavor, partly because they are being melded out of the interaction of such a remarkable number of groups—Asians, Latin Americans, Caribbeans, and Africans from many countries as well as native-born African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and non-Hispanic whites, the latter mostly Jewish-, Italian-, and Irish-American.

Although the children of immigrants, like their parents, often feel the sting of disadvantage and discrimination, they "move in a world where being from 'somewhere else' is the norm" (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf and Waters 2004: 97). Because established minority and second generation immigrant young people in New York dominate their age cohort—63 percent of New Yorkers under age eighteen are second or 1.5 generation immigrants—they have a great deal of contact with each other in their neighborhoods and a variety of city institutions (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters 2002:1027; 2004::2)). Sociologists have described a vibrant inner-city youth culture emerging in New York—a "melting pot of urban youths, all 'of color' but from a variety of cultures," with new forms of music, street slang, and dance (Kasinitz 2000:41).

Public Schools and Health-Care Institutions

The city's nearly three million immigrants are, not surprisingly, having an impact on a wide range of dominant formal institutions in the city. Briefly consider two: public schools and health-care institutions.

The surge of immigration has led to major increases in public school enrollment which is now over the one million mark. With so many students and a limited budget, the public schools are squeezed for space. Although many immigrant students are doing remarkably well in school, there is no denying that they bring with them a host of special needs. Many have to overcome poor educational preparation in their home countries or, at the very least, unfamiliarity with subjects taught and the teaching methods (and discipline) used (see Foner 2000, chapter 7).

In addition to adjusting to new norms and customs in this country, immigrant students often have a language problem to contend with. With the diverse mix of immigrants in New York this often means a dazzling array of languages. In one Queens elementary school, nearly 80 percent of the incoming students arrived speaking no English; among them, the children in the school spoke thirty-six different languages (Hedges 2000). In the late 1990s, close to 80,000 students were enrolled in bilingual

programs in the New York City public schools. The largest number (85 percent) were of Spanish-speaking background, followed by, in descending order, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Russian, Korean, Bengali, Polish, Arabic, French, Urdu, and Punjabi. In response to the immigrant influx the city has opened several new schools specifically designed for recent immigrant children with limited English proficiency. Higher up the educational ladder, the City University of New York (CUNY), the largest urban public university system in the nation, reflects the city's amazing ethnic and racial diversity. Its more than 190,000 undergraduates come from 164 countries and speak 117 native languages in addition to English. In 2005, 40 percent of CUNY's first-time freshmen were born outside the U.S. mainland.

The composition of the staff and patients in New York City's hospitals has changed as well. The nurses, aides, and orderlies are often West Indian or Filipino (along with a growing number of Africans); patients, especially at municipal hospitals, are frequently non-English speaking immigrants who bring with them their own set of cultural values regarding health and medical treatment – which, in the New York context, means a bewildering array of patterns. New York hospitals have begun to establish programs to address the need for better interpreter services, although what is available, in terms of language services and responsiveness to cross-cultural health care, is unfortunately still often inadequate. The fact that large numbers of immigrants lack health insurance—and that the undocumented are often afraid to seek medical treatment—not only creates enormous problems for immigrants themselves but also special dilemmas and challenges for city agencies and institutions concerned with public health.

Conclusion

New York, the quintessential immigrant gateway city in the United States, is once again being transformed by a massive inflow from abroad. In 2000, more than a third of the city's residents were foreign-born. Over 70 percent of foreign-born New Yorkers, or about 2.1 million people, entered the United States in 1980 or later (Lobo and Salvo 2004: 16).

The newest New Yorkers have radically changed the city—and more changes are in store. Even if there is some move toward restrictionism, the United States is likely to remain an immigration country for some time to come. New York can expect to receive a large proportion of the new arrivals, if only because of the networks that link

newcomers to settlers. New York's share of the nation's immigrants may well decline somewhat—as immigrants continue to disperse (as they have done in the last decade) to new destinations—but there is every reason to predict that the city will still welcome an extraordinarily high number of new arrivals and retain its role as a major immigrant city.

The continued inflows will enrich and replenish New York City's ethnic communities. With fresh memories and connections to the homeland, new arrivals will help to keep alive old-country traditions and orientations as well as actual ties to the country of origin. A number of trends already evident in New York's ethnoracial dynamics are likely to persist or even accelerate. This includes the increasing Mexicanization, Dominicization, and Latin Americanization of the city's Latino population as well as the ongoing Caribbeanization of the black population and growing prominence of Africans, particularly if sizable numbers of African Americans continue to leave for the South and the suburbs (Roberts 2006).

If the United States is the permanently unfinished country, to an even greater extent the same can be said of New York City. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, new immigrants keep arriving every day, newcomers who came in the 1970s and 1980s are by now oldtimers, and a large second generation is growing up and making its way in the city. The story of New York today, as in the past, is, to a great extent, an immigrant story, as immigrants continue to shape the city's culture and its institutions and revitalize and reinvigorate the city. Africans are bound to play an increasingly important role in these processes in the years ahead.

Table 1

Top Fifteen Source Countries of the Foreign-born, New York City, 2000

Country of Birth	Number	Percent
Dominican Republic	369,186	12.9
China	261,551	9.1
Jamaica	178,922	6.2
Guyana	130,647	4.6
Mexico	122,550	4.3
Ecuador	114,944	4.0
Haiti	95,580	3.3
Trinidad/Tobago	88,794	3.1
Colombia	84,404	2.9
Russia	81,408	2.8
Italy	72,481	2.5
Korea	70,990	2.5
Ukraine	69,727	2.4
India	68,263	2.4
Poland	65,999	2.3
Total Foreign-Born	2,871,032	100

Source: Lobo and Salvo (2004: 11) based on 2000 U.S. Census SF3

Table 2

Area of Origin of Foreign-Born Population, New York City, 2000

Latin America	32%
Asia	24%
Non-Hispanic Caribbean	21%
Europe	20%
Africa	3%
All Others	1%

Source: Lobo and Salvo (2004)

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