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THE INTERCULTURAL CITY
MAKING THE MOST OF DIVERSITY

**Immigrants as urban saviors:
When Immigrants Revive a City and When They Don't -
Lessons from the United States**

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Précis:

Over the past 25 years, many American cities have absorbed huge numbers of foreign immigrants, whose energies and skills have transformed the economies and social makeup of these cities. The American urban experience, of immigrants reviving aging inner-cities, sharply contrasts with that of Europe, where immigrants often cluster in large cities but remain marginalized economically and socially, imposing many costs and becoming seen as a long-term drag on growth and vitality. The immigrant “bonus” for U.S. cities, however, breaks down on closer inspection. Some U.S. cities attract many immigrants and receive tangible benefits from them. Others do not. And among those cities that attract high numbers of immigrants and are boosted, some do so organically, without any explicit plan, while others apply self-conscious and rigorous policies towards immigrant-attraction and promotion of immigrant success. In this paper, we examine the differences among American cities in attracting immigrants - and what happens when immigrants arrive. We also describe some practical lessons for cities, both in the U.S. and Europe that wish to attract immigrants in order to achieve economic and social benefits.

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In 2004, a strange contest unfolded in the U.S., a battle between two cities for the right to give homes to thousands of Hmong refugees awaiting resettlement in Thai refugee camps. The political leaders of the Minneapolis-St. Paul area and Stockton, Calif. both traveled to the camps to essentially give a sales pitch to the refugees, pitching the virtues of their respective cities. In the end, the U.S. government, which oversaw the resettlement program, made a Solomon's decision and split the Hmong between the two metropolitan areas.

The competition for Hmong refugees is a reminder of how American cities love immigrants. Immigrants also love American cities. Of the roughly one million immigrants who have moved annually to the U.S. over the past quarter century, virtually all come to large cities and remain there. Indeed, during the 1990s, a steady flow of immigrants to American cities became one of the key drivers - if not the key driver - in reviving declining centers of American cities and increasing the vitality of already successful cities. With the spread of suburbs around the U.S., it is safe to conclude that without a massive inflow of non-Americans, the biggest and most economically-vibrant American cities - New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Atlanta, Houston - would surely have stagnated or worse.

To be sure, the influx of immigrants puts pressure on receiving cities and imposes costs, especially fiscal costs on local governments providing educational and other services. But gains accrue from immigrants, who both increase domestic consumption and expand the workforce. As an exhaustive study by the U.S. National Research Council found in 1997, the U.S. experiences "a significant positive gain in absolute terms" from immigration. To be sure, there are certain economic losers from immigration, notably low-skilled natives. But even within this group, wage losses are small, maybe a few percentage points. And while certain states and localities incur costs from immigration that are not recouped, government overall is not fiscally harmed, the National Research Council found. Scholars have similarly found economic benefits to the cities and countries that receive immigrants. One British migration expert summarizes the consensus view as follows: "The popular myth about immigrants is that they will 'take' something from the country they enter - that they will grab jobs or sponge off the welfare systems. The reality is very different. Most industrial economies would be worse off without the help of immigrant workers, and without this injection of new blood the receiving countries will see their populations age and decline even more rapidly." (Stalker, 63)

While the general economic benefits of immigration are well established, an explanation for immigrant destinations is not. The crucial riddle is whether immigrants chase jobs, heading for cities that are already growing and vibrant? Or does the arrival of immigrants spawn economic growth?

A definitive answer to this chicken-or-egg problem is difficult to achieve. Most likely the answer is a little of both. Immigrants are drawn to cities with employment

opportunities, but the arrival of immigrants also sets off a virtuous economic cycle, as newcomers require services and spend savings on building a new life.

Civic leaders are not academics. They must craft policies out of the best available knowledge, not definitive analysis. And civic leaders, in virtually every large American city, are pro-immigrant.

Indeed, by the start of the 21st century, the immigrant-driven revival of America's largest cities had become so clear and compelling that many less successful cities began to view immigrants as their salvation. These cities - notably Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Cleveland and Des Moines - were losing population, losing jobs, facing the burden of an aging population and deemed unappealing to most Americans, making the task of attracting large numbers of immigrants seemingly daunting. These Rust Belt cities also had to contend with increasing competition for the very immigrants they coveted, for indeed the civic chase for immigrants was not limited to declining cities. Sun-belt stars, such as Tampa-St. Petersburg, Las Vegas and Salt Lake City, also wanted "our fair share" of immigrants. So did Portland, Oregon, historically one of the most homogeneous places in the U.S. but a city that in recent years has attracted numerous "cultural creatives."

Interest in attracting immigrants has not flagged, despite some of the publicized difficulties of entering the U.S. since 9/11 and continuing questions about whether immigrants are a net gain to an urban economy. Indeed, one new study suggests that in the first half of this decade immigration to the U.S., in absolute numbers, was the largest in history, with an estimated 7.9 million people settling in the country both legally and illegally. (Camarota, 2005)

The case of Minnesota's "twin" cities, of Minneapolis and St. Paul, provides a critical inspiration to urban reformers who see the embrace of immigrants as a critical piece of a revitalization program. The Twin Cities's transformation is neatly presented by an urban planner from Pittsburgh, a city that attracts the fewest immigrants of any similarly sized city in the U.S. Like Minneapolis-St. Paul, Pittsburgh has an aging industrial base and has gone through decades without attracting large numbers of immigrants. These obstacles are often cited as a reason why Pittsburgh won't ever attract immigrants, despite ultra-low housing costs and a terrific public infrastructure. Yet the Twin Cities brushed aside these same barriers and became an immigrant magnet. The playbook was straight forward: go to immigrants if they don't come to you, and when they arrive in your city continue to woo them with special services not available even to natives. This means helping immigrants in their local languages, encouraging them to wrest services from tangled bureaucracies and establishing an immigrant safety-net centered around education and activism.

The result, in the case of the Twin Cities, was a cornucopia of energetic newcomers. From 1980 to 2000, number of foreign-born in Twin Cities rose by 196%, to 210,000 out of a population of 2.9 million, compared to a mere 70,000 out of 2.1 million residents 20 years prior.

Don Carter, a Pittsburgh civic activist, recounts a visit to the Twin Cities in 2000:

“At a typical public meeting we had six translators: Vietnamese, Laotian, Hmong, Somali, Spanish, and Native American. You might be surprised to learn that the city was Minneapolis, Minnesota. Could any of you in this room imagine such a public meeting occurring in Pittsburgh?”

How in the world did such diversity end up in Minneapolis, one of the whitest European stock cities in America? Minneapolis is not a coastal gateway city like New York City, with a 30% immigrant population, or Los Angeles, which had an influx of one million foreign immigrants in the 1990's, or Miami with a 50% foreign immigrant population. Why Minneapolis?

It was not by accident. A combination of civic leaders, religious leaders, and foundations decided in the 1970's that Minnesota would become a destination for international refugees. The motivation was initially humanitarian. The first people rescued were Hmong tribesman from Laos who had been allies of the Americans during the Vietnam War. After the U. S. withdrew from Vietnam in 1975, the Hmong were persecuted, imprisoned, and murdered by the Laotian Communist government. They were given preferred status under U. S. immigration law. The Lutheran Brotherhood and the Minneapolis Foundation became active in recruiting Hmong refugees to Minnesota.

Today over 60,000 Hmong live in Minnesota, the largest urban Hmong population in the world. Hmong is the second most spoken language in the Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts. The Hmong arrived with no written language and mostly rural skills. They moved from the rain forest to the northern climate of the Twin Cities. One cannot imagine a more unlikely destination.

What has happened since then? Not surprisingly, like all previous immigrants to the U. S., the first arrivals took jobs that did not require language proficiency, such as factory and service jobs. But soon, some started retail businesses catering to other Hmong, others formed a farmer's market which became renowned regionally, and many began to climb the educational ladder. Now many Hmong children excel in school, attend college, and are moving into professional jobs. Hmong are buying homes and improving neighborhoods. What was initially a humanitarian program has now become an economic development machine.

Minnesota did not stop there. The next people welcomed to the Twin Cities were from the African country of Somalia. Somalia has no functioning government and has been the scene of political strife and civil war for over ten years. Clan wars and flood, famine, and drought have forced over 600,000 Somalis to leave the country for Kenya and Ethiopia, and some to the United States. Minnesota, active again through the Lutheran Brotherhood and the Minnesota Foundation, sought out Somalis to come

to the Twin Cities. In the past five years over 15,000 Somalis have immigrated to Minnesota, which now has the largest Somali population in the U. S. Many families arrived without men, who were civil war casualties. But again, like the Hmong, the Somalis are quickly entering the economic mainstream from the bottom up. Some Somalis were already highly educated and have moved faster than the Hmongs into higher paid positions.

So Minnesota, ranked 21st in population in the 2000 U. S. Census, is ranked 16th in percentage of population of foreign immigrants, whereas Pennsylvania, ranked 6th in population, is ranked near the bottom in percentage of foreign immigrants. Furthermore, although refugees represent about 8% annually of immigrants to the U. S., in Minnesota the percentage has ranged from 25% to 45% refugees.

And Minnesota continues its campaign of compassionate open arms. They are now looking to Bosnia and other war torn and ethnically troubled Balkan countries as the next source of refugees.” (Carter, 2001)

The transformation of Minneapolis-St. Paul from Midwestern backwater into multicultural trendsetter was perhaps the most striking example of immigrants driving positive urban change in America. There were so many other examples, in American cities, large and small, that the Urban Institute, a think-tank, has credited immigrants with “reviving once-abandoned commercial areas and with revitalizing entire neighborhoods” throughout the U.S.

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Let’s next look briefly at the powerful forces acting on cities that constrain their ability to respond to the economic, social and cultural opportunities presented by mass immigration.

Once an American city decides to become an immigrant-magnet, what can city officials and civic leaders actually do to realize this ambition? How can a city become more attractive to a diverse collection of immigrants, whose choices of destinations are highly personal and conditioned by past immigration patterns, which can reward past winners in the hunt for immigrants and punish losers?

The initial answer is sobering. In the U.S., neither cities nor states have little formal influence on the immigration process. They have no influence on who enters their dominion, why and what they will do when they land. Unlike Canada, where the province of Quebec has its own immigration procedures, in the U.S. an immigrant who gets an entry visa can settle anywhere in the entire nation. This means that the most popular destinations - the so-called “gateway cities” -- have a huge advantage over everywhere else. The national policy on immigration, meanwhile, trumps local

policies. The city of Pittsburgh can't, for instance, enact its own rules and regulations governing immigrants, taking away much of its competitive leverage.

Cities also have little leverage with immigrants themselves. They possess no formal machinery, for instance, for influencing the location decisions of immigrants. And cities with relatively few immigrants risk getting mired in a vicious cycle. Boiled down crudely, the literature on migration concludes that immigrants choose destinations based, chiefly, on how many other members of their ethnic or national group are already present in a destination. "Migrants have the world to choose from," writes Peter Stalker, a British migration expert. "But they tend to follow well-established routes - based on historical ties and networks created by earlier pioneers" (Stalker, 40). If a city already has, say, large numbers of Somalis, more will come - and even if city officials actively discourage them and there are few job opportunities for the migrants. But if a city has no Somalis, none are likely to come, unless civic leaders somehow raise their profile. But how? Cities lack formal mechanisms to direct immigrant flows. Only national governments can do so, and usually only in the case of refugees that are set to receiving continuing government assistance.

The other problem besetting city officials and civic leaders is the riddle around causality. Do immigrants come to a city because it is thriving or does a city thrive because immigrants come? Proving the latter is difficult because clearly immigrants are attracted to cities that are already growing. But the arrival of immigrants then spurs further growth. This pattern highlights the difficulty of jumpstarting the immigration engine but also underscores the impressive rewards of doing so.

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Broadly, American cities have followed two paths to becoming immigrant-rich. One path is organic, occurs slowly over a long period of time, involves haphazard public policies and a lack of clear civic direction and derives its momentum chiefly from the private energies of private actors. The other approach, illustrated by the Twin Cities, is highly focused, benefits from the will and vision of community leaders and depends ultimately on a city going against its historic grain.

The organic path best describes the largest immigration metropolitan areas in the U.S., the major gateways of New York, Los Angeles and Miami. Both New York and L.A. attracted more than one million immigrants each during the 1990s, and Miami added 485,000 new immigrants. Given the immigration momentum in these cities, large numbers of immigrants would come no matter the job or housing picture. But even cities that add immigrants organically can spoil their attractiveness to newcomers, and they can do many things to enhance their attractiveness too.

Let's look at the case of Oakland, California, a city of 400,000. About forty percent of Oakland's residents are born outside of the U.S. It is a Mecca for immigrants. The city's downtown boasts a vibrant Asian community, drawing

especially on immigrants from Hong Kong, mainland China and the Philippines. In the 1970s and 1980s, the city spent tens of millions of dollars in an ambitious “redevelopment” project that resulted in a waterfront mall, a convention center, office buildings and a mammoth hotel. But these additions didn’t reverse the decades-long decline of Oakland’s center. What’s brought people streaming into the downtown on weekends, especially, are immigrants energies, tastes and most importantly, money. Today, Oakland’s “Chinatown” is booming, fueled by investors from Hong Kong and the many Asian-Americans who live in Oakland and surrounding smaller cities. Asian immigrant leaders in downtown also shrewdly forged political alliances.

Because it sits across a famous bay from San Francisco, a major immigrant-attractor for more than a century, Oakland long has received spillover immigration. Today, the city boasts large communities of immigrants from Mexico, China, the Philippines, Yemen, Nigeria and many other Asian, Latin American and African countries. Is Oakland simply a creature of geography? Is its success in attracting immigrants a “natural” endowment that can only be appreciated but not explained?

Not at all. The immigrant onslaught occurred after Oakland underwent a profound transition that left it searching for a new identity as a black American city. “By the 1970s, the pillars of the old [white] downtown elite had collapsed,” writes Yale University sociologist Chris Rhomberg in his study of race and class politics in contemporary Oakland (Rhomberg, 183). “As the older business elite fell away, so did much of the conservative white middle class. The flight to the suburbs continued: Between 1970 and 1990 Oakland’s white population declined absolutely by more than 90,000,” or more than a quarter of the city’s residents. African Americans, meanwhile, were politically ascendant. By 1993, the city’s workforce was 40 percent black compared to only 15 percent in 1969.

But the rise of Oakland’s black political leadership coincided with the decline of the city’s traditional economy. The twin pillars of Oakland’s industrial economy - light manufacturing and military bases - broke down during the 1980s. Crime rose. An ineffective police force often only worsened matters. Then in October 1991, a devastating fire engulfed one of Oakland’s poshest “hill” neighborhoods, killing 25 people, destroying nearly 2,449 single-family dwellings and burning 437 apartment and condominium units, burned over 1,600 acres. The fire, which got out of control because of failures by Oakland firefighters, highlighted the city’s problems in delivering public services. As the city declined, its population grew more black and poor, which in turn helped to cement a Black political aristocracy that, however democratic, seemed helpless to halt Oakland’s decline.

In the drive to cement the status of Oakland’s African American middle class, the presence of immigrants easily might have been overlooked. Instead, black civic leaders wooed the growing numbers of Asians and Mexicans, building political partnerships across ethnic and racial lines, realizing the potential of the so-called “rainbow coalition” that was predicated on a belief that people of color shared

fundamental interests. “Blacks in Oakland were more welcoming towards immigrants than whites, more welcoming than we expected,” recalls William Wong, a Chinese American journalist in Oakland.

The city’s mayor for most of the 1990s, was an African American, Elihu Harris, who undercut his affirmative alliances with blacks by forging effective links with new Americans. In a bold stroke, Harris had a Chinese-American woman as his chief of staff. She played a critical role in bridging the gulf between often-insular Chinese immigrants and African Americans focused on their own drive to catch up. She spoke Cantonese (the language of Hong Kong immigrants), basic Spanish and of course English. Born in 1962, Jeanette Dong embodied the Oakland transformation from white ethnic bastion to multicultural Mecca. Dong’s parents were from China; her father, a doctor, fled Mao’s takeover in 1949, going first to Hong Kong and then the U.S. As a child in the 60s, living in a white neighborhood, Dong recalls, “No one would play with me.”

How Oakland had changed by the time Dong reached her 30’s in the 1990s. “Ethnic and racial mixing, of all combinations, was now the norm,” Dong remembers. By the second half of the 1990s, immigrants were transforming Oakland’s neighborhoods, vaulting immigrants from Mexico and Asia to equal importance economically and socially with African Americans. Government responded to the sea-change by offering services of all sorts to immigrants regardless of their legal status and in their native languages whenever possible. Two-year community colleges were open to all; the children of immigrants devoured this opportunity. Free English classes also abounded, with schedules flexible enough to allow adult students to drop in and out at will. By the year 2000, the face of Oakland politics had become transformed. The city council boasted a Mexican immigrant as president and three Asian immigrant members. In Oakland, at least, the rhetoric of multiculturalism matched the reality.

What makes the immigrant-led revival of Oakland especially interesting case is the city’s large African-American population. With few exceptions, notably Atlanta, cities with large African American communities have not attracted large numbers of immigrants. Part of the explanation is squishy, resting on a rough sense that immigrants would prefer not to penetrate dense concentrations of inner-city black Americans. Somehow, Oakland avoided the fate of other heavily-black cities, where resistance to immigration often stemmed from blacks themselves. The reason for black openness to immigrants in Oakland may stem from the experience of World War II, when war-manufacturing jobs exploded in Oakland and the surrounding East Bay (the essential Liberty Ship was built in Oakland, for instance). Thousands of blacks flocked to Oakland during the early 1940s from the Deep South, obtained relatively high paying manual labor jobs, and then stayed. “Defense migration, more than the economic changes that triggered it, permanently transformed life in the East Bay,” one scholar has written of the World War II period. (Johnson, 4)

The rush of African American newcomers constituted a kind of rehearsal for the mass immigration to Oakland of the 1980s and 1990s. African Americans, having only

recently supplanted whites as Oakland elite, proved secure enough to share power with immigrants. This is a different racial and ethnic narrative than in cities where blacks are a large but still distinct minority. In Oakland, white flight left blacks in charge, opening the way for the emergence of a diverse political coalition.

Economic hybridization occurred in parallel with political hybridization. Pan-Asian businesses abound in the Oakland area, erasing the boundaries that exist between Chinese, Filipinos, Korean, Japanese and even immigrants from Latin America and Africa. Consider the rise of the “Ranch 99” supermarket chain catering to a wide range of immigrants and offering products from throughout Asia. Ranch 99 draws crowds because of its wide array of fresh vegetables, its massive fresh fish counter, its large bakery, its huge takeout window for cooked foods and its quirky offerings of packaged foods. In Oakland, ethnic foods remain the preserve of small corner grocery stores that tend to charge higher prices, have poor selection and few amenities. Ranch 99 imitates mainstream grocery chains, with large stores, wide aisles, fabulous selection and frequent discounts. But customers get products only available in specialty stores. The whole experience of shopping in Ranch 99 reflects the hybridizing tendencies of Oakland’s immigrants.

Traditional businesses also benefit from immigrant energies. Oakland is experiencing a housing boom, for instance, with new homes being constructed literally by the thousands. “We have billions of dollars being invested in the city thanks to the surge we’ve received from immigrants,” says Ignacio de la Fuentes, president of Oakland’s city council and a native of Mexico.

The economic boom fueled by immigrants to Oakland can be grasped simply by looking at the raw numbers. In 1980, the Oakland metropolitan area’s foreign-born population stood at barely more than 10 percent, or 186,956 out of 1.7 million residents. In 1990, the percentage of foreign-born stood at 15 percent, or 337,435 out of 2.08 million residents. By 2000, the foreign-born exceeded 25 percent of Oakland’s population, totaling 573,000 out of 2.39 million. The magnitude of Oakland’s immigrant influx is breathtaking. From 1980 to 2000, number of foreign born in Oakland rose by 206 percent. (Singer, 21).

The result is that today Oakland is an energetic immigrant city, a *mélange* of ethnicities that co-exists profitably with the city’s older African American core. For the first time, there is real fear in the African American community that immigrants are seizing the upper hand, not just economically but politically and culturally. In the early jockeying for the next mayor’s race, set for November 2006, a Mexican immigrant was poised to win, only to be upstaged by a hugely popular former black congressman, Ron Dellums, who was drafted to run, despite his advanced age and long distance from the city, in order to keep the mayoralty in black hands.

The growing tensions between blacks and immigrants are a sign of health, however. The attractiveness of Oakland to immigrants is today unquestioned and civic leaders take for granted the city’s high degree of diversity and the ease with which

people cross social and ethnic boundaries. No one group dominates civic life any longer, and the high fragmentation of immigrant nationalities insures that alliance-building will define Oakland politics for many years to come.

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On a Sunday morning in September of 2005, readers of Pittsburgh's largest newspaper, the Post-Gazette, were greeted with a plea by two professors of law at the University of Pittsburgh:

"Pittsburgh needs more Latinos. Pious, industrious, roll-up your-sleeve immigrants from Mexico and Central America, raring to work at jobs like construction, food processing, restaurants and old age homes, save their money, send their kids to school, move up the ladder and relive the American dream.

"Many American cities (not Pittsburgh -- we rank dead last of the 30 largest) have welcomed working-class Latino immigrants. What would we gain if we did, too? And what would it take to get them here?

"Consider: Pittsburgh is losing population, while cities that have encouraged Latino immigration are gaining it. Pittsburgh is closing cherished neighborhood schools for lack of children. Latino families have lots of children. Pittsburgh boasts a fine stock of older houses, many needing remodeling. Latinos love working in the construction industry. Pittsburgh's acres of parks and gardens need tending. Latinos enjoy and understand caring for plants. Pittsburgh's economy is unbalanced toward high technology. A vibrant low-tech sector fueled by immigrants can complement the area's strengths in computers, law and medical services, much as cities such as Los Angeles and Raleigh, N.C., have done." (Delgado and Stefancic)

Pittsburgh's "immigrant shortage" has been clear to civic leaders for some years. The city long has attracted very few immigrants, though the immigrants that do come to Pittsburgh tend to be highly educated, on average the most highly educated immigrants in any U.S. city, with 58 percent of them having university degrees. Demographer William Frey, in noting the paradoxical manner in which Pittsburgh and other old-line industrial cities attract small numbers of highly-skilled immigrants and few low-skilled ones, has written that these "are areas that suffer the double whammy of being located in the less attractive snowbell, and maintaining ties to the old economy." (Frey, "Brain Gains")

Pittsburgh's smart immigrants tend to replace natives who have left the city for greener pastures. These immigrants tend to be one-offs, knowledge workers with specific skills. But Pittsburgh, to revitalize, needs a vast infusion of people, who can do the brute labor - and the brute force spending - required for an economic renaissance. Once the center for American steel production, Pittsburgh epitomizes the cliché of the "Rust Belt": aging workers, industries and infrastructure. The city

lost 200,000 people in the 1980s, and has continued to suffer population decline ever since. Yet the city has a remarkable quality of life, major sports teams and museums and some of the finest, low-cost housing stock in the U.S. The city would seem to be primed to receive a flood of immigrants. Yet, they have not come.

Pittsburgh's failure to attract significant numbers of immigrants is well documented. In one authoritative survey, the city ranked next to last, 47th out of 48, only behind Buffalo, in immigrants attracted - a mere 4,578 from 1990 to 2000, compared to 122,251 for Minneapolis/St. Paul (Frey, Census 2000).

Civic leaders in Pittsburgh are certainly aware of the problem and have occasionally talked about taking action. In 2001, a prominent local architect named Don Carter sketched out an ambitious plan to turn Pittsburgh into a magnet for immigrants by taking advantage of the city's low housing costs, strong local universities and need for an injection of youth. Specifically, Don Carter called for xxx The plan amounted to emulating the success of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, the largest cities of Minnesota who in the 1990s overcame a sluggish economy, awful weather and a homogenous population (heavily white) to attract 66,000 immigrants, or more than twice the number of Americans who moved in. Carter's approach made sense, yet Pittsburgh civic leaders failed to back a broad effort at immigrant-attraction. Today Carter won't even talk about his plan, and the pro-immigrant forces in Pittsburgh are languishing, if not defeated. They receive no support from city officials and region-wide civic groups, while rhetorically in favor of an immigrant influx, have done little to tackle the widespread sense among foreigners that Pittsburgh is not an attractive destination.

Some observers of Pittsburgh blame the lack of job growth for the poor immigrant flow. "Its hard to build an immigration flow when there's not any employment growth worth speaking of," says Chris Briem, a demographer at the University of Pittsburgh. Briem argues that immigrants follow jobs, and without new jobs, there will be no immigrants. To other observers of the city, however, this reasoning sounds like a rationalization, a way of avoiding an examination of how people in Pittsburgh make newcomers feel unwelcome. Whereas in Oakland, Calif., intermingling of diverse peoples became the norm, in Pittsburgh such cross-pollination remains an exception. In Oakland, immigrants are not only tolerated and celebrated, they are actively engaged by the native population. In Pittsburgh, the natives are tolerant but have gotten no further than considering the value of celebrating immigrant cultures.

"We're somewhat unwelcoming of outsiders," says a Pittsburgh native, a white professional who has closely observed immigrants in the city. if you look and talk different you'll have trouble getting accepted."

Immigrants echo this perception. An immigrant doctor, who has worked in Pittsburgh for 14 months, says, "I don't think I'll stay in Pittsburg. I want to go to a place that seems more friendly. I can see the suspicion in people's faces here. This

guy is not from the U.S., so I'd better be careful.”

“What policies could help?” this immigrant asks. “There could be more education for white Americans about being friendly with people of different races and colors/

“There’s a need for more organizations to help immigrants. To help them find place to live, overcome the language barrier, to meet other immigrants.”

These sorts of tools for immigrants abound in cities that attract them. In the Twin Cities, church groups have prepared orientation manuals for immigrants. The police operate under a standing order that says that they should never ask any person for documentation on their legal status in the U.S. A civic group, the Minnesota Foundation, launched a public relations campaign aimed at easing the anxieties of immigrants who realize that to some extent they invariably will threaten some natives. The slogan of the campaign was simply, “Minnesota Nice.”

While policymakers often struggle with abstruse mechanisms to shape public behavior, cities that succeed at attracting and integrating immigrants often rely on idiosyncratic, existential and psychological tactics that operate well below the level of rules and bureaucracies. One of the ads in the “Minnesota Nice” campaign contained the following:

“Some recent immigrants to Minnesota think it is a rather cold place.
And they don’t mean the weather.

Have you noticed? Minnesota is becoming more and more diverse every day. Trouble is, some of us Minnesotans are having a hard time warming up to these newcomers. Perhaps we have forgotten that our traditional Minnesota Niceness is supposed to be applied equally to everyone. Before you point your finger at others, ask yourself: how am I relating to these new immigrants from Africa, Asia, and Mexico?”

Such an ad campaign would suit nicely in Pittsburgh, but there has been no such campaign in the city. It is not clear that there is a will within Pittsburgh to make the changes that would make the city more attractive to immigrants. People don’t really see immigrants,” says a white professional who moved to Pittsburgh from California in order to take a job. “Immigrants are not visible. They aren’t in the media. They are not in the middle class consciousness.”

Pittsburgh’s elite considers the need to attract more immigrants “to be a very hot topic,” says one civic leader. “A topic we’ve brought into focus in the last few years. We’ve seen how immigration became a big driver for the Twin cities, and we know that one of the stark differences with Pittsburgh is that we lack a strategy for attracting immigrants, we lack a focus.”

Yet civic leaders are ambivalent about immigrants, speaking more passionately, for instance, about the benefits of attracting people from New Orleans displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Indeed, the city is torn over whether to target immigrants or simply try to market itself to Americans from other parts of the country. “Its not clear Pittsburgh needs to focus on immigrants,” says one urban activist. “In terms of reversing population loss, what difference does it make if the city attracts Americans from other places?”

The trouble is that immigrants deliver a different boost than Americans who relocate. Consider the reflections of an industrialist in Pittsburgh who has operations as well in more immigrant-heavy parts of the U.S.

“We are a very specialized plastic blow molding company approximately \$18 million in sales, that has grown rather rapidly in the last 4 years, and (plans) to grow at a 20%+ rate in the years to come. (In blow molding, you make hollow plastic objects, such as 5 gallon returnable water bottles, medical sharps containers for used syringes, industrial hollow plastic parts, flat panels and even furniture items like rocking chairs, etc.) We currently have over 105 employees and run a 7 day per week operation, 24 hours a day. We built a state of the art 117,500 square feet facility that has 20 blow molding lines in an air-conditioned environment, rare for our industry. We are reasonably profitable and pay above average wages for our industry.

“I am also a partner in a different blow molding company in [another state] with over 80+ employees and have previously owned and operated blow molding companies in [a third state] and in Canada.

“Here is my experience with employee background and ethnicity and work ethic

“In the second state: 65+ employees from 18 different nationalities, approx. 75% Hispanic, 20% Asian, 5% American born - no absentee problem

“In the third state: 80+ employees, 65% Filipino, 32% Mexican or Central American Hispanic, 3% American born - no absentee problem.

“In the Canadian plant: 50 employees, 85% Asian Indian (Sikhs predominantly), 13% Other Asian or West Indian, 2% Canadian born - no absentee problem.

This Pittsburgh industrialist concludes that diverse workforces are at least the equal of his workforce in Pittsburgh, which is completely American-born and bred.

The promise of immigrant energies has Richard Delgado, a University of Pittsburgh law professor, bemoaning the absence of Latino immigrants from Pittsburgh:

“Once a center of European immigration, Pittsburgh ranks lowest of all American cities in any kind of immigration, including that of Latinos. The extraordinary changes that emerged from the 2000 census showing that the Latino population has

grown by 58 percent in the previous decade—13 percent in the last three years alone—have bypassed Pittsburgh almost entirely. Every year, about 700 thousand to one million Latinos immigrate to the United States. Only a handful of these come to Pittsburgh.”

Indeed, Pittsburgh is actually experiencing a *decline* in the absolute numbers of its foreign-born residents. The number of foreign-born in metropolitan Pittsburg fell by 23.3 percent from 1980 to 2000. The city is home to only 62,286 immigrants out of a total population of 2.3 million. The Oakland metropolitan area, with virtually the same population, is home to nearly ten times the number of immigrants.

The economic cost of being immigrant-poor is evident to Pittsburgh’s leaders (just as Oakland’s leaders know well the dividends accruing from its immigrant boom). So in Pittsburgh people as asking, what might the city do to woo immigrants? The city might provide seed money for settlement houses, labor centers, and immigration law clinics, bilingual services, including translators, as some North Carolina cities such as Charlotte, Monroe, and Gastonia, have provided, and periodic, informal community meetings to keep abreast of what the newcomers need. The public schools could offer courses in English as a second language. Neighbors could offer a helping hand. Employers could relax rules about speaking English only on the job, especially for assignments that do not entail working with the public. Unions could relax the wariness with which some have treated newcomers and minorities.

One of the possible benefits to Pittsburgh of Latino immigration might be a reduction in tension between blacks and whites. Pittsburgh, historically, has been defined by relations between blacks and whites and the city remains today, forty years after the flowering of the Civil Rights movement, racially tense, if not polarized. Delgado argues that the injection of Latinos would undercut black-white tensions. Delgado says:

“Pittsburgh is currently a black-white binary city in which “race” means black and racial issues come framed in black/white terms. What would the arrival of substantial numbers of Latinos do to the fortunes of African Americans? A recent book by political scientist Rodney Hero shows that racialized minorities tend to do best in cities with at least one other large minority group than their own. What he calls a “bifurcated” situation, with a large white population and a single minority group of color is a recipe for big trouble. There is more to his analysis than that, of course, but it does suggest that a larger Latino presence is apt to accompany improvement in African American fortunes and lessen the burden of racism that each group bears. A pluralist environment, for reasons that are ill understood, seems to be safer and healthier than the opposite.”

It is no coincidence that the same virtuous process unfolded in Oakland, where blacks and whites stared across the racial divide only to see their perspective revolutionized by the arrival of immigrants.

(6)

Immigrants are not always a catalyst for change. They sometimes create self-contained communities that are walled off from the wider society. In Europe, immigrants are prone to create sealed communities, but not in the U.S. In American cities, immigrant communities, while often distinct geographically, are porous. Several important forces open up immigrant communities, forcing interaction with the dominant society and spawning new forms of hybridized identities that, over time, both raise the awareness within the dominant society of the special characteristics of immigrants and promote assimilation in to the wider American society of various sorts on the part of the immigrants themselves.

Intermarriage is perhaps the most profound factor in promoting outward-looking immigrants and hybridized urban communities. A recent survey of intermarriage in America found:

“Social acceptance of multiple-race Americans and of marriages across racial boundaries has varied over the country’s history, but prejudice and discrimination have been constants. The last few decades, however, have witnessed an apparent sea change in Americans’ racial attitudes. Many articles on multiracial Americans, interracial couples, and multiracial families appeared in the mass media, some generated by the new 2000 Census option to choose more than one race. New surveys of racial attitudes suggested dramatic improvements in American race relations. According to a Gallup poll conducted at the end of 2003, 86 percent of black, 79 percent of Hispanic, and 66 percent of white respondents would accept a child or grandchild marrying someone of a different race. The percentage of whites that favored laws against marriages between blacks and whites declined from 35 percent in the 1970s to 10 percent in the 2000s. And in another survey conducted in 2003, 77 percent of respondents agreed that it was all right for blacks and whites to date each other.

Interracial marriage has increased across most racial groups and, although they are still the exception to the norm, these interracial marriages are generating a growing population of multiracial Americans. Marriage between Hispanics and non-Hispanics, already quite common, has further contributed to changing racial and ethnic boundaries in America. The shift to allow Americans to identify with more than one race in the 2000 Census was both a reflection of and response to these trends.

Of the 281 million people enumerated in the 2000 Census, more than 2.4 percent, or 7 million people, reported more than one race. Several observers believe that these figures underestimate the number of Americans who come from multiracial backgrounds.” (Lee and Edmonston)

Because rates of intermarriage are rising in the U.S., the problem of immigrant and racial enclaves in America, while real, is considered less of a threat than in

Europe. Immigrants, through the highly idiosyncratic process of choosing a mate, become individual agents for hybridization, giving a new cast to urban diversity. As one analyst of American social trends has written, “The race problems of the past will be well on the way to solution because the very idea of races, always dubious, cannot possibly survive the amount of mixing” today between Americans (Clausen, 115).

Other forces driving the interaction the native-born and immigrants are the professional and business opportunities open to the latter. For many immigrants, so-called community colleges are the launch pad into a middle-class, professional life. These colleges generally accept all applicants and offer the first two years of course work leading to a four-year university degree. The colleges are inexpensive (and sometimes free), tolerant, open “and provide ample opportunities for upward mobility,” observes Anna Lee Saxenian, an urban economist who lives in Oakland and a professor at the University of California at Berkeley.

The ability of immigrants to gain an elite education underscores a major difference with Europe, where higher education is often closed-off to all but the best native-born students. In contrast, immigrants pour into Oakland’s Laney College, a two-year college that sits on a pretty, spacious campus a short walk from the city’s center. Immigrants are assisted by a pro-diversity environment. Many of the professors, for instance, are foreign-born. “You end up with a self-reinforcing system,” Saxenian says.

Because an institution such as Laney is shared by immigrants from many countries, rigid differences between immigrants tend to soften, undermining further the potential for enclave-formation. In some sense, Laney College itself becomes an enclave, with the student body more than 50 percent foreign-born and native-born students unlikely to view the school as the upward-escalator imagined by immigrants. But because so many immigrants from so many places are present, the tendency to look outward at the dominant culture is high. At the same time, the dominant culture sends various signals to immigrants that their presence is welcome. The open display of immigrant languages, dress and symbols is a daily staple of the Laney experience.

To be sure, cities that become magnets for immigrants will always see some self-segregation. Immigrants from a particular country often choose to live in certain neighborhoods or even in certain apartment buildings. That immigrants often prefer their own kind, however, does not mean that they inevitably will form “ghettos.” American cities have a variety of strategies open to them in order to undercut immigrant concentrations. But the biggest forces pushing immigrations to look outward, rather than inward, are endemic to the U.S. society as a whole. Home ownership rates are very high; more than two-thirds of Americans own their own homes. Immigrants often begin in enclaves but rarely stay in them. Jobs, marriages, real-estate investments and educational choices force immigrants to interact with the wider American society.

(7)

Recent American experience suggests that immigrants in significant numbers benefit their destination cities in many ways and that it is possible for cities to take clear actions that will increase the flow of immigrants and help improve the quality of the contribution of those immigrants who arrive and remain. Immigrant flows remain high, and cities in Europe, as well as the U.S., will continue to have opportunities to get their fair share, or more than their fair share, of immigrants. Based on the American experience, cities in search of immigrants should consider the following:

- 1) There is no single action that will improve immigrant flow. Cities operate under many constraints. They don't dictate, and rarely even influence, national policy on immigration.
- 2) Cities have many soft options. They can open promotion offices in sending countries. They can support welcome centers for new arrivals. They can instruct city employees, from police to schoolteachers to public health officials, to adapt their practices to the needs of recent immigrants.
- 3) Actions speak louder than words. City leaders can say they want more immigrants in order to appear dynamic. But actually attracting more immigrants means guaranteeing that a city will undergo profound change. Immigrants naturally want to understand and adapt to their new homes. But they also want to be heard, they want to be included. And in this process of mutual engagement, both the immigrants and the cities change.

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Notes

This study is based on both published sources and personal interviews with civic leaders:

in Oakland (Jeanette Dong , Ignacio de la Fuentes, Hagage Masaed, Anna Lee Saxenian, William Wong)

in Pittsburgh (Chris Briem, Richard Delgado, Richard Florida, Mike Langley, Gary Rotstein, Yvette Shipman, Andrew Wein

in Cleveland (Richard Herman, Sanda Kaufman)

in St. Petersburg, Florida (Michelle Bauer)

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