

**Nancy Foner, ed..** *New Immigrants in New York*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. viii + 313 pp. \$49.50 (cloth), 22.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-231-12414-0.



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## The "New" New York Immigrants

Readers may be surprised to find a review of a book on immigrants in New York City on the H-Florida list. Nancy Foner's edited *New Immigrants in New York*, however, offers a nice look into current scholarship on immigration post-1965, and serves as a point of comparison to Florida immigration. While often illuminating, historians will sometimes be frustrated by the language and forms of analysis used, since nine of the ten authors are outside the discipline. But this will not come as a surprise to scholars of recent immigration. These interdisciplinary studies draw from the social sciences: the geographers' population studies and conceptions of space, and the political scientists' mapping-out of political power, voting, organizing, and integration into political systems through surveys, polls, and interviews. Anthropologists, historians, and sociologists integrate all these approaches into their analyses of ethnographic sources (interviews, field studies, etc.). Perhaps because of the nature of historical research, historians have devoted less attention to immigration post-1965.

Foner's edited book argues that New York City is "America's quintessential immigrant city" (p. 6) because of its extreme heterogeneity; by 1999, 35 percent of the city's population was foreign-born, and this does not account for the hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants (p. 15). However, she does not, nor do the other authors, claim New York to be exceptional. Rather, Foner prefers a relativistic suggestion that all cities are exceptional and special (p. 5). This approach keeps open the possibilities for research and excludes no city. She refers to anthropologist Caroline Brettell's suggestions that researchers must also keep in mind a "city's history when dealing with immigrants and the number of immigrants from different societies, the presence or absence of residentially segregated immigrant receiving areas, the structure of the city's labor market, and the particular urban ethos (or dominant set of values) that shapes economic and institutional life" (p. 6). Foner adds that "the city's racial/ethnic structure, and political system, and civic institutions" are also important (p. 6). Hence, context is key, and in our rapidly changing world, immigrant research remains never-ending. New York

alone captures much attention (understandably so), with numerous articles and books published continually.[1] *New Immigrants in New York* contributes to this endeavor.

This new and revised edition of the 1987 book contains ten chapters, seven new authors and two new co-authors. The three authors kept from the first edition--Annelise Orleck, Ellen Percy Kraly, and Patricia Pessar--all rewrote their original essays and two added co-authors. The first three chapters outline broad themes and analysis while the last seven chapters focus on case studies of recent immigrant groups: Soviet Jews, Chinese, Koreans, Jamaicans, West Africans, Dominicans, and Mexicans. Nancy Foner's revamped introduction provides a broad overview of recent immigration to New York, and offers a larger framework in which to understand the subsequent chapters. Ellen Percy Kraly and Ines Miyares, both geographers, give a nice, succinct summary of immigrant policy and demographic shifts and patterns throughout New York City. One will often find oneself returning and skimming back to this useful chapter, which also serves to place the individual case studies into a coherent whole. Richard Wright and Mark Ellis, also geographers, provide an interesting and essential article on the ethnic division in the labor market since 1970. The chapter, though, is weakened by jargon and redundancy between graphs, charts, and the text.

Immigration in the post-1965 era, shaped by Cold War political dynamics, witnessed unprecedented ethnic diversity, drawing peoples from around the world. U.S. immigration policy created a hierarchy of preferences based on family reunification and employment. Political refugees have also received preference, although this immigration has been shaped by politics and race, as in the case of Haitians (a subject ignored by Kraly and Miyares).[2] Post-1965 immigrants have tended to possess higher skills and more education. That, however, has not affected the high rate of employment in low-wage work. This is the case

particularly with first-generation Central Americans, South Americans, and Chinese. Ellis and Wright find that immigrants have benefited from the decline in the size of the white population, and that their minority-majority status has helped them gain the preponderance of jobs in the city, "most notably in the retail trade, but also in professional services and even the public sector" (p. 107). Building on the groundwork laid by the first three chapters, the subsequent case studies explore how the immigrant experience is shaped by the city's particular social context ("the economic opportunities of an advanced industrial society" and exposure to "key values and institutions of American culture"), what immigrants bring with them ("cultural beliefs, social practices, human capital, other socio-demographic features"), and ties with their homeland ("transnational connections"). Each of the chapters use similar methodologies and varying qualitative sources that include interviews, surveys, polls, newspapers, and other forms of media (pamphlets, bulletins, television, and radio) to tell their stories. All the essays are written fairly well, making solid use of demographic data and quotes from immigrants when appropriate.

Annelise Orleck's chapter on Soviet Jews adeptly discusses, among other things, the differences between third wave and fourth wave =migr=s--that is, immigrants arriving in the 1970s and post-1987 immigrants. As with other Eastern European immigrants, Soviet Jews embraced a wide range of Jewish identities, an issue that has created tension between them and older American Jews. Min Zhou's essay, on Chinese immigrants, makes particularly good use of quantitative data. Chinese residential patterns in old Chinatown, Flushing, and Sunset are linked to issues of affordable housing, ethnic networking, and dependency on an ethnic enclave. Pyong Gap Min's chapter on Koreans makes an interesting use of telephone books and last names to assess the population and mobility of this immigrant group. Koreans, he finds, are culturally homogeneous be-

cause of their "monolingual background and Confucian customs and values" (p. 196).

The chapters on Dominicans by Patricia R. Pessar and Pamela Graham, and on Mexicans by Robert C. Smith demonstrate the especially strong transnational connections of these immigrant groups. Pessar and Graham highlight how Dominicans have "dual political engagement with the country of origin and the country of settlement," a reality that has not hurt them (p. 252). Historical development of an extensive organizational life and an embracing of cultural politics has expanded their influence. Robert Smith describes the little Mexicos that have sprung up throughout New York City and offers three reasons for Mexican disempowerment: large percentage of undocumented immigration, geographic dispersion, and "socioeconomic heterogeneity and uncertain relationship to New York city's established racial and ethnic hierarchies and to the related political space" (p. 285). Milton Vickerman's chapter on Jamaicans contains interesting quotes, though he over-emphasizes their self-image as hard workers. One can easily find that belief among most, if not all, immigrant groups. Treating this faith in meritocracy uncritically results in creating unclear and imprecise distinctions between American blacks and Jamaicans. Finally, Paul Stoller's essay tells an interesting story of West African marginalization, a function of the male-dominated population pool and their undocumented status. Each of the book's essays offers intricate descriptions, most of which a short review is not able to discuss. This is particularly the case with various political, social, religious, and cultural organizations that are dealt with in the individual case-study chapters.

While *New Immigrants in New York* contains several admirable qualities, it is hampered by slippery handling of the issue of race and ethnicity. Though several of the articles do offer excellent analysis, most of them provide more description than analysis. This is particularly the case with

race. Wright and Ellis find that immigrants have benefited from the decline of the white population, but fail to discuss the issue of white flight, preferring to explain this phenomenon as the result of aging, retiring, and out-migration (a politically neutral term). Their over-emphasis on demographic analysis is complemented by Vickerman's cross-pressures concept to explain Jamaican tensions between ethnic and racial identity. Jamaicans are socialized in their home country, he contends, in an environment that "deemphasizes race and extols achievement as a cultural ideal, especially through education" (p. 205). They then confront the challenge of race because of their skin color. As suggested earlier in the review, over-emphasis on achievement conflates categories of analysis and accepts too much the perspective of his Jamaican interviewees. Too much weight placed on achievement as a cornerstone of identity can potentially negate other aspects of Jamaican culture, especially when the author does not discuss them. More importantly, Vickerman never defines what he means by race or ethnicity. Similar problems of definition or failure to dive deeply into race and ethnicity appear in most of the essays: for example, Pessar and Graham's devote only one paragraph; Zhou and Ming tend to group all non-Asians as white and thus fail to problematize whiteness; and Robert Smith really blunders on definition while citing inappropriate sources such as Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness* (a book on antebellum America) to support assertions made on race in the late-twentieth century America (p. 286).

The book would have been helped by a conclusion to highlight in summary the similarities and differences of the immigrant experience. A more detailed index was also needed. If one can read past this, the book does offer a good introduction to new immigrant life in New York City. For Florida scholars, New York City's large population and heterogeneity may represent a big difference in immigration patterns between Florida cities and that city. However, growing patterns of

diversity in Florida, while incremental in some cases such as in the Asian population, have been steady over the past several decades. This is particularly the case for south Florida.[3] In addition, the historically close migration link between Florida and the northeast suggests a residual effect the sunshine state may experience, and should prove a continual area for research. Interesting as well will be the effects of the September 11 terrorist attacks on immigration patterns and on immigrants' lives. *New Immigrants in New York* brings the story up to 2000, and will prove a good reference on immigration studies. While there is plenty of literature on immigration, this book proves as good as any.

#### Notes

[1]. Hector R. Cordero-Guzman, Robert C. Smith, and Ramon Grosfoguel, eds., *Migration, Transnationalization, and Race in a Changing New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001) includes chapters on Peruvians, Salvadorans, Puerto Ricans, and Indians while also carrying over five of the thirteen authors from *New Immigrants in New York*. Nancy Foner published a longer history comparing New York's turn of the century immigrants with the post-1965 era in the previous year. See *From Ellis Island to JFK: New York's Two Great Waves of Immigration* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000). Finally, Roger Waldinger's edited book, *Strangers at the Gates: New Immigrants in Urban America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) offers a comparative perspective of the new immigration in its analysis of Miami, Chicago, San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles.

[2]. See Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick, *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and Cheryl Little, "Intergroup Coalitions and Immigration Politics: The Haitian Experience in Florida," *University of Miami Law Review*, 53, no. 4 (1999): 717-741.

[3]. Raymond A. Mohl, "Asian Immigration to Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 74:3 (Winter 1996): 261-286. For Florida immigration in historical perspective see Raymond A. Mohl, "From Migration to Multiculturalism: A History of Florida Immigration," *The New History of Florida*, ed. Michael Gannon (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996): 391-417.

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