From Ellis Island to JFK

New York's Two Great Waves of Immigration

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Introduction

In the history, the very personality, of New York City, few events loom larger than the wave of immigration that peaked in the first decade of the twentieth century. Between 1880 and 1920, close to a million and a half immigrants arrived and settled in the city—so that by 1910 fully 41 percent of all New Yorkers were foreign born. The influx changed the way New Yorkers lived, the shape of their institutions, the flavor of their politics, the very food they ate. The new arrivals, mostly eastern European Jews and southern Italians, left a living legacy as well, since a large and influential part of New York's current citizens are their descendants.

Today, a new wave of immigrants is again changing the face of the city. This time, however, they no longer come predominantly from Europe. Instead, they arrive from the Dominican Republic, from China, from Mexico, from Jamaica. They are Asians, Latin Americans, and West Indians in the main, and they are mostly people of color. Immigrants already constitute over a third of the city's population. More than two and a half million have arrived since 1965, and they are now streaming in at a rate of over one hundred thousand a year.[1]

A reedy, low-lying mud bank in the Upper Bay called Ellis Island grew famous as the port of entry for the last great migration. More than twelve million people passed through its halls between 1892 and 1954, the vast majority landing there in the first three decades of its existence as an immigrant-processing center. The story of these multitudes—the "huddled masses"—was, of course, immortalized in verse and was tied as well to the extraordinary statue in whose shadow they arrived. Today most people coming to the city enter through the more prosaic gates of John F. Kennedy International Airport. And so far, nothing monumental marks their passage.

That does not mean that their arrival is unnoticed. Indeed, there is every

indication that the new migration will have as much impact on the city as the old. The new immigrants are already changing the economy. They're affecting the city's institutions—the schools and colleges, the hospitals, the social services, the political landscape. Whole neighborhoods are changing, new cuisines are turning up in restaurants, the driver of your taxi is speaking Urdu on his intercom. And the commentators and analysts, popular and academic, in the press and in the journals, are comparing the new immigration with the old.

This is not surprising. The future of the city and, in fact, the shape of the entire country in the years ahead will be affected by the wave of new arrivals. The relationship between this movement and the influx of a century ago is both a useful and an unavoidable concomitant to any understanding of what's happening now.

Another element makes the comparison essential. An elaborate mythology has grown around immigration at the turn of the century, and perceptions of that earlier migration deeply color how the newest wave is seen.

Memories of the last great immigration are emotional and strongly held. Family lore and stories celebrate the grit and determination that drove European immigrants to make it in America; films and fiction portray their struggles and achievements; they are even honored in a national museum on Ellis Island that draws several million visitors every year.

The literature alone is copious. New York's Italian immigrants have been immortalized in novels like *The Godfather* and *Christ in Concrete,* while the successes—and angst—of Jewish immigrants and their children form the basis for many fictional accounts, from Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* to Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint.* There is a virtual industry based on recording and analyzing the experiences of New York's Russian Jewish immigrants. *The World of Our Fathers* spawned a counterpart, *The World of Our Mothers;* academic accounts chronicle everything from Jewish involvement in labor unions and vaudeville to tales of Jewish gangsters.[2] Countless memoirs by successful immigrant entrepreneurs, politicians, entertainers, and intellectuals record their humble roots and memories of things past. And library shelves are filled with biographies of such famous immigrants as Rudolph Valentino and Irving Berlin.

In addition, those who comment on and, in some cases, set policies about the newest New Yorkers—politicians, scholars, and writers—are often themselves descendants of the earlier wave. Understandably, they frequently hark back to the triumphs and tribulations of their ancestors when they speak about the latest newcomers.

A process akin to what historians have called the invention of tradition

has taken place, a kind of "invention of immigration."[3] A century ago, many native-born Americans viewed newly arrived eastern and southern European immigrants with fear and loathing, as "repulsive creatures" who menaced the very foundations of American civilization.[4] These negative attitudes have long been forgotten in a haze of history, replaced by images that glorify the past. For many present-day New Yorkers, their Jewish and Italian immigrant forebears have become folk heroes of a sort—and represent a baseline against which current arrivals are compared and, unfortunately, often fail to measure up.

A series of strongly held, if often contradictory, images has come to characterize the earlier immigrants: they worked hard; they strove to become assimilated; they pulled themselves up by their own Herculean efforts; they were, in the case of Jews, "the people of the book"; they had strong family values and colorful roots. They were, in short, what made America great.

Against this image of immigrant giants of the past, present-day arrivals often seem a pale imitation. Admittedly, many politicians and public figures praise the newest New Yorkers for their traditional immigrant work ethic, initiative, and drive. At the same time, a common popular fear is that the newcomers will have trouble—indeed, often resist—fitting in; that they are here for government handouts rather than to work; and that their origins in non-Western cultures are poor preparation for American life. Many worry that today's arrivals are undermining American values and changing America's racial makeup—that they will make America, to use Peter Brimelow's phrase, an alien nation.[5]

As is often the case, popular myths and images give a distorted picture of the complex realities that underlie them. Some of the popular beliefs are misleading, others too simplistic. A detailed comparison of immigration at the beginning and end of the twentieth century will show what really happened in both periods and what the lives of immigrants, then and now, have been like.

There is another reason for comparing the two immigrations. Much of the scholarly material on immigration is fairly narrowly drawn, focusing on specific groups of immigrants and specific aspects of their experiences at one point in time. There is virtue in the broad view that a comparison encourages. Widening the focus to include earlier as well as recent immigrants gives a better sense of the impact they have had on New York City over time—and how the immigrants themselves have been transformed in the process.

The comparison also brings into sharper focus particular aspects of

today's immigration that might be overlooked or minimized if the latest arrivals were simply considered on their own. As Reinhard Bendix has put it in another context, comparative studies "increase the 'visibility' of one structure by contrasting it with another."[6] Certain contemporary patterns, like improvements in the position of immigrant women and the role of education in immigrant mobility, stand out in sharper relief when set against those of earlier arrivals. And while the differences stand out, a comparison makes clear that there are also many similarities and continuities with the past.

There are other benefits to bringing together the historical and contemporary literature on immigration. So far the two literatures have largely flowed in separate streams, with historians or sociologists often "discovering" what has been acknowledged and treated in the other's discipline for some time.[7] Insights from historical studies—for example, on the reasons for the varying success of different immigrant groups—can enrich our understanding of contemporary immigration. In much the same way, sociological research on such topics as immigrants' incorporation into the labor market can shed light on the past.

The comparison may also be of value from a theoretical point of view. It helps to evaluate whether conceptual frameworks that have been used to understand the turn-of-the-century immigration, like analyses of the process of becoming "white," are useful in understanding the new arrivals. And it raises questions about whether models and concepts elaborated in light of today's immigration, from economic restructuring to transnationalism, are, as they're often presented, unique to our current period or whether they also pertain to the past. Indeed, by setting the present against the past, we can better understand what is really "new" about the new immigration. As the historian David Kennedy puts it, "The only way we can know with certainty as we move along time's path that we have come to a genuinely new place is to know something of where we have been."[8]

As an interpretive synthesis, the book brings together strands from the mass of literature on past and present immigration. It draws on both qualitative and quantitative material. Census data cannot capture the rich texture of the immigrant experience; narratives of particular individuals and families, by the same token, must be placed in the context of wider group patterns. The sources I use are extremely varied. They range from historical accounts of Jews and Italians to contemporary ethnographic studies of the newer arrivals; statistical material, from census reports to surveys collected by social science researchers and governmental bodies; and a broad array of novels, memoirs, and biographies. Along the way, I draw on my

Table 1 Foreign-Born Population of New York City, 1900–98

Year	Total Population (in thousands)	Foreign-Born Population (in thousands)	Percentage of Foreign Born in New York City	Percentage of All U.S. Foreign Born in New York City
1998	7,520.6	2,810.6	37.4	10.7
1990	7,322.6	2,082.9	28.4	10.5
1980	7,071.6	1,670.2	23.6	11.9
1970	7,894.9	1,437.1	18.2	14.9
1960	7,783.3	1,558.7	20.0	16.0
1950	7,892.0	1,860.9	23.6	17.8
1940	7,455.0	2,138.7	28.7	18.3
1930	6,930.4	2,358.7	34.0	16.5
1920	5,620.0	2,028.2	36.1	14.5
1910	4,766.9	1,944.4	40.8	14.3
1900	3,437.2	1,270.1	37.0	12.2

Source: Kraly 1987: table 2.2; Mollenkopf 1993: appendix, table 2; U.S. Bureau of the Census, March 1998 Current Population Survey, Annual Demographic Supplement, calculated by John Mollenkopf, Center for Urban Research, CUNY Graduate Center; Camarota 1998.

firsthand research on Jamaican immigrants as well as on my study of immigrant health-care workers in New York.[9]

Broad as the book is, it does not, of course, cover everything. In comparing the two immigrations, it focuses on some fundamental aspects of the immigrant experience, from why immigrants come in the first place to where they live and work, the dynamics of race and homeland ties, the nature of migrant women's lives, and the role of education. The book is not meant to be an exhaustive comparison, and in choosing to examine certain topics in depth I have inevitably neglected others. There are, for example, no chapters on immigrants' religious practices, their role in politics and labor unions, or nativist reactions to immigration, all important subjects that deserve careful historical-comparative study by other scholars.[10] As is already clear, the book also limits its focus to New York. New York is the quintessential immigrant city and has long been a main gateway for new arrivals. Since 1900, between 10 and 18 percent of the nation's foreign-born population has lived in New York City, with the figure at 14 percent in 1910 and about 11 percent in 1998 (see table 1). Currently, few cities in the country have a percentage of immigrants as high as New York's—and the same goes for the wider metropolitan area. More than one out of three of New

York City's residents is now foreign born, and the figure is one out of four for the whole metropolitan area.[11]

Of concern here are the two peak periods of immigration to the city. The "old" immigrants in this book refer to those who arrived between 1880 and 1920, and the "new" to those who have come since the mid-1960s. In the earlier era, the focus is on Italians and eastern European Jews. Although they were not the only newcomers of the time, it was the enormous tidal wave of eastern European Jews and southern Italians that defined what was then thought of as the new immigration. The Irish and Germans, who had dominated the immigrant flow to the city since the mid-1800s, were still arriving, but in the last decade of the nineteenth century, their numbers had declined, eclipsed by the newer waves from Italy and Russia.[12] By 1920, nearly half a million foreign-born Russian Jews and about four hundred thousand immigrant Italians lived in the city. With their children, New York City's Italian Americans numbered over eight hundred thousand; the Jewish population had soared to over 1.6 million, or almost 30 percent of the city's population.[13]

No two groups now dominate in this way. Today New York's immigrants include sizable numbers of most Asian, West Indian, and Latin American nationalities and many European groups as well. For this reason, the discussion of the present era ranges over a large number of groups, although there is more attention to the top ten—for example, Dominicans, Chinese, and Jamaicans—who, not surprisingly, have been the subject of a number of studies. Other groups with substantial numbers (and who have also been the focus of scholarly accounts) also come in for examination along the way.

The plan of the book is as follows. Chapter 1 begins the comparison with some basic questions about immigrants in the two eras: Who are they? Why and how have they come? Obviously, today's immigrants come from many different countries and a variety of backgrounds. Does this mean that they come to America for different reasons? Or do some of the same underlying causes of migration still operate? And how do illegal, or undocumented, migrants fit into the picture?

In Chapter 2, I look at immigrant residential patterns now and then. We think of immigrants as inevitably clustering in their own ethnic neighborhoods, and I discuss the extent to which this was, and remains, the case. There are also new features to the settlement process in that some immigrants head straight for middle-class suburbs, while others play a role in reviving New York City neighborhoods that have sunk into decline.

Chapter 3 considers the way immigrants in the two eras have been incor-

porated into New York's economy. It's a case, in many ways, of déjà vu, as recent arrivals again work in bleak garment sweatshops and set up shop to sell wares to their compatriots. But what difference does it make that turn-of-the-century newcomers came at a time of industrial expansion, whereas today they enter a postindustrial, service-oriented economy? Today's immigrants also arrive with much more educational and occupational variety than their predecessors. In addition, New York is now home to a large native black and Hispanic population, which gives the issue of competition for jobs at the bottom of the occupational ladder a different tone. In Chapter 4, I continue the discussion of work by focusing on immigrant women. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, working daughters have given way to working mothers, and the key question is how this shift has affected immigrant women's lives both inside and outside the home.

Chapter 5 attempts to unravel the complexities of racial perceptions in the two eras. "The swarthy Italian . . . content to live in a pig-sty," Jews with "their unmistakable physiognomy. . . . Money is their God"—these epithets remind us that immigrants a century ago were victims of harsh prejudice and did not seem fully white to many New Yorkers.[14] In the current period, the crucial issue is how the latest immigrants fit into New York's changing racial hierarchy. How does being black affect West Indians? Are Hispanics a race? And have Asians become almost white?

In Chapter 6, I take up the issue of transnationalism—a term coined by contemporary social scientists to characterize the way today's migrants forge ties across national borders. Transnationalism isn't new, even though it often seems as if it was invented yesterday, and I explore continuities as well as differences between past and present migrants' links with their home societies.

Chapter 7 shifts the focus to education. Many New Yorkers look with longing to a time when the public schools taught immigrant children how to become Americans and were the gateway to better jobs and a better life. Such views say more about the frustrations of the current era than the realities of the past. How did immigrants perform in school in the past? How are they doing now? As for notions that the schools have abandoned their assimilating mission in the wake of bilingual programs and multiculturalism, these fears are, I argue, ungrounded. In fact, one of the paradoxes of the current period is that immigrant children who become too American, and shed their immigrant culture and associates in the process, are often at risk of academic failure.

Chapter 8, in conclusion, looks to the future. At issue is whether—and in what ways—the descendants of the latest immigrants will repeat the ex-

periences of their Jewish and Italian predecessors. Will the children of the current immigrants, like second-generation Italians and Jews, progress up the social ladder? Will they become "white" the way Jews and Italians did? Will they cut off ties to their parents' homelands? The past, as the book makes clear, is not a blueprint for the future, yet a look at what happened then is helpful in coming to grips with the contemporary situation—and in assessing what is in store for the children of today's immigrants as they grow up and take their place, as native New Yorkers, in an ever changing New York City.

CHAPTER 1

Who They Are and Why They Have Come

Emma Lazarus was wrong. Or to be more precise, she took a modest amount of poetic license. "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free"—the words of her poem, engraved at the base of the Statue of Liberty, have a strong resonance today as America welcomes a new wave of immigrants to its shores. Although immigrants still often come to escape oppressive governments and poor economic conditions, much has changed. Emma Lazarus's characterization of immigrants as "the wretched refuse of your teeming shore" and "the homeless, tempest-tost" was overdrawn for the past. It is even less appropriate today, when so many newcomers are from the ranks of their home country's professional and middle classes.

Obviously, today's arrivals are no longer mainly European, and they come from a much wider array of nations and cultures than their predecessors. But because most immigrants are from relatively poor and developing nations does not mean, as many Americans believe, that the immigrants themselves are uniformly poor and uneducated. Although many now arrive, as before, with little education and few skills, significant numbers of the newest New Yorkers enter with college degrees and technical expertise.

The reasons why millions have left their homelands to come to America are complex and multifaceted. It has always been too simple to see immigration to this country as a quest for liberty and freedom. Nor is the move inevitably an escape from hunger and want, as the occupational backgrounds of many of today's newcomers make clear. An analysis of the underlying causes of immigration shows that the forces historians have identified as important in the last great wave—population growth, persecution, chain migration, and the globalization of capitalism—still operate, although additional factors are also involved. Changes in U.S. immigration

policy have affected the magnitude and shape of the latest wave; they have also altered the immigration process itself.

A hundred years ago, immigrants arrived at Ellis Island dirty and bedraggled, after a long ocean journey in steerage; now they emerge from the cabin of a jet plane at John F. Kennedy International Airport, often dressed in designer jeans or fashionable attire. Because of the new barriers to legal entry, many end up living in New York without proper documents. Illegal aliens, of little concern at the turn of the past century, have become a dominant theme in public discourse and debates about the latest wave, although fears about their numbers and threat to society have been vastly overblown.

Who Has Come

In the years just before and after 1900, New York City's new immigrants were overwhelmingly Russian Jews and Italians. They came two by two, to use Glazer and Moynihan's apt analogy, much like the Irish and Germans who dominated the immigrant flow in the mid-nineteenth century.[1]

In 1880, just before the mass migration began, only 12,000 foreign-born Italians lived in New York City; by 1910, the number had soared to 341,000. The growth of the city's Russian Jewish immigrant population was even more astounding, going from around 14,000 in 1880 to 484,000 in 1910.[2] Bear in mind that New York City was then a much smaller place, with a little under 5 million people in 1910.[3] In that year, Russian Jewish and Italian immigrants together accounted for close to a fifth of the city's population; all the foreign-born made up 41 percent of the citywide total. The heavy concentration of Jews and Italians was a New York phenomenon. According to the 1910 census, a quarter of the Italian-born population and about a third of the Russian-born Jews in the entire country lived in New York City. No other big city came close: the next most popular destination for Italians, Philadelphia, had 45,000 Italian immigrants, while Chicago, the second choice for newly arriving Russians, had 122,000 Russian Jews.[4]

Today no two immigrant groups dominate New York that way, and most immigrants come not from Europe but from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Never before has the United States received newcomers from so many different countries—all of which seem to be represented in New York. From a nationwide perspective, the city stands out for its remarkable ethnic diversity. In Los Angeles, the nation's other premier immigrant capital, more than half of the post-1965 adult immigrants counted in the 1990 census came from just three countries: Mexico, El Salvador, and Guate-

Table 2 Foreign-Born Residents of New York City, by Country of Birth, 1990

Country of Birth	Number	Post-1964 Arrivals
Dominican Republic	226,560	202,102
China[1]	164,586	145,362
Jamaica	116,100	101,580
Italy	101,651	37,557
USSR	80,333	60,110
Guyana	73,846	70,523
Haiti	70,987	65,287
Colombia	68,787	61,383
Poland	61,634	25,490
Ecuador	60,119	54,616
Trinidad	58,212	53,586
Korea	57,555	55,688
India	42,674	41,503

Source: For total figures, Mollenkopf, Kasinitz, and Lindholm 1995; for post-1964 arrivals, Flores and Ortiz 1997, both based on U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990, Public Use Microdata Sample.

Note: This table lists the top thirteen foreign-born groups in 1990.

[1]Includes Hong Kong and Taiwan.

mala. Miami's immigrant arrivals are overwhelmingly Cuban, Haitian, and Nicaraguan. New York City is a different story. The top three groups in 1990—Dominicans, Chinese, and Jamaicans—were just under 30 percent of all post-1965 arrivals there. No other foreign country accounted for more than 5 percent, and there were substantial numbers of nearly all European as well as most Asian, West Indian, and Latin American nationalities.[5] Altogether, in 1990, post-1964 immigrants constituted a significant chunk—22 percent—of the city's 7.3 million residents.[6] That year all of the foreign-born constituted 28 percent of the city's population; by 1998, the Census Bureau estimated that the proportion had gone up to 37 percent—an astounding 2.8 million immigrants.

The Caribbean connection is especially strong. In 1990, one out of every three immigrant New Yorkers was Caribbean born, with Dominicans heading the list (see tables 2 and 3).[7] In fact, they are the largest new immigrant group in the city, accounting for just over 200,000, or about 12 percent, of the post-1964 arrivals tallied in the 1990 census. Their number keeps growing. With increases in annual immigration after the passage of the Immigration Act of 1990, and more visas available to spouses and children of permanent resident aliens, the number of legal Dominican immigrants arriving in New York City went from an annual average of 14,470 in the 1980s

Table 3 Foreign-Born Residents of New York City, by Country of Birth, 1998

Country of Birth	Number	Country of Birth	Number
Dominican Republic	412,431	Jamaica	137,698
Former Soviet Union	235,708	Ecuador	132,117
Mexico	198,041	Haiti	99,998
China[1]	192,612	Italy	80,897
Guyana	159,973	Korea	80,007
Trinidad	146,186	Poland	74,353

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, March 1998 Current Population Survey, Annual Demographic Supplement, calculated by John Mollenkopf, Center for Urban Research, CUNY Graduate Center.

Note: This table lists the top twelve foreign-born groups in 1998.

[1] Includes Hong Kong and Taiwan.

to over 22,000 in the 1990–94 period.[8] By 1998, according to the Current Population Survey, some 412,000 foreign-born Dominicans were living in the city.

The city's black population is increasingly West Indian. Almost a third of the non-Hispanic black population is now foreign born. Jamaica is a major source of immigrants, as are Haiti and Trinidad. Guyanese, who were barely noticed in the 1960s, ranked as the city's sixth largest immigrant group by 1990. That year the fourteen Commonwealth Caribbean nationalities, if considered as one category, were the largest group in the city.[9] From a national perspective, what is striking is how heavily Caribbean immigrants are concentrated in New York. Over half of the Haitians, Trinidadians, and Jamaicans and close to three-fourths of the Dominicans and Guyanese who legally entered the United States between 1972 and 1992 settled in the New York urban region.[10]

There has also been a huge Latin American influx. Although New York City is home to only a tiny proportion (3 percent) of the country's Mexican immigrants, they are newly emerging players in the immigration picture. The city's Mexican population grew by a striking 173 percent between 1980 and 1990 and continued to mushroom in the 1990s. By 1998, according to Census Bureau estimates, Mexicans were the third largest immigrant group in New York City. The number of foreign-born Ecuadorians, about sixty thousand at the time of the 1990 census, had more than doubled eight years later.

The days when Hispanic meant Puerto Rican are over. Puerto Ricans first started arriving in large numbers after World War II, the migration to New York peaking in the 1940s and 1950s. (As U.S. citizens by birth,

Puerto Ricans born on the island of Puerto Rico are not classified as immigrants when they move to New York.) Although since 1970 more Puerto Ricans have left than entered the city, they are still one of New York City's largest ethnic groups, accounting for 12 percent of the population in 1990. The growing number of Central and South Americans and Dominicans, however, has dramatically changed the city's Hispanic population. At the time of the 1990 census, 897,000 Puerto Ricans accounted for only about one-half of the city's Hispanics, down from 61 percent in 1980.[11] Their proportion shrunk even further during the 1990s. Dominicans are now the second largest Hispanic group, making up about a quarter of all Hispanic New Yorkers; a combination of Ecuadorians, Colombians, and Mexicans represent about another quarter.

Asians are also a major presence in the new New York; in 1990 they made up close to a quarter of the city's post-1964 foreign-born population. The Chinese lead the list. Indeed, in 1990 New York had the largest Chinese population of any American city.[12] By 1998, an estimated 193,000 foreign-born Chinese (mainly from China but also from Hong Kong and Taiwan) lived in the city, more than twice the number of any other Asian immigrant group.

Yet in New York, Asian does not mean only Chinese, as any visitor to the city knows well. The largest Asian Indian population in the country is now in the New York area. Most Indian immigrants live in the suburbs, but in 1998 a sizable number, close to fifty thousand, resided in the five boroughs. Although New York and its suburbs may not be as popular a destination for Filipinos and Koreans as West Coast cities, the New York region attracts significant numbers of these groups, too. According to the 1998 Current Population Survey, the city was home to about eighty thousand Koreans and thirty-eight thousand Filipinos.

Nor has European migration disappeared. Once more, New York City is home to thousands of Russian immigrants. (Whereas Southeast Asians are the dominant refugee population in many other parts of the country, most refugees in New York are from the former Soviet Union.) In the 1970s, about 35,000 Soviet Jewish refugees moved to the New York metropolitan area, although the number slowed to a trickle when the Soviet Union slashed the number of exit visas in the 1980s. In the 1990s, the immigration picked up again. Average annual immigration from the former Soviet Union rose tenfold from the 1980s to the 1990s, with some 66,000 arriving in New York City between 1990 and 1994 alone. By 1998, immigrants from the former Soviet Union were the second largest foreign group in the city, some 235,000 strong. A special diversity visa program established in 1990

to allow immigration from underrepresented countries benefited Irish and Polish immigrants, whose numbers had also been on the rise in the 1990s. By 1998, about 74,000 Polish immigrants lived in the city. Migration from Italy, by the same token, slowed to a trickle of about 400 a year in the early 1990s; most foreign-born Italian New Yorkers arrived before 1965.

The extraordinary ethnic diversity of today's immigrants is matched by the variety of their occupational and class backgrounds—from poor farmers and factory workers to physicians, engineers, and scientists. There are immigrants like Pradip Menon, born into a wealthy professional family in Poona, India, who arrived in New York with a college degree in engineering from a prestigious university and an M.B.A. from an equally prestigious management school.[13] And there are those like Benjamin Velasquez, a poor farmer in El Salvador who worked on his family's parcel of land growing corn and beans.[14] A century ago, the immigration to New York was not marked by the same extremes—or by anywhere near the current proportion of professionals and executives.

This does not mean that the "old" Jewish and Italian immigrants were from the depths of their societies. An exceptionally high proportion of Jewish immigrants had worked in skilled trades before they emigrated. No other eastern or southern European group came close. Whereas Jews accounted for only 9 percent of all immigrants with work experience who entered the United States in the first decade of the twentieth century, they constituted 29 percent of all skilled immigrants.[15] "Who leaves for America?" went a common saying among Russian Jews. "The tailors, shoemakers, and horse thieves." Fully two-thirds of the Jewish immigrants arriving in the United States between 1899 and 1910 who reported an occupation were skilled workers, the largest group being tailors, followed by carpenters, dressmakers, and shoemakers.[16]

The Italian immigration was strikingly different. It was primarily a peasant migration from the agricultural regions of the south. Only 16 percent of the Italians who came to America between 1899 and 1910 who reported prior work experience were skilled workers. Three-quarters were farm workers or common laborers. Even so, those most likely to leave Italy for America were in the middle and lower-middle levels of the peasantry rather than day laborers with no land at all.[17]

Then, as now, immigrants were positively selected in terms of ambition, determination, and willingness to work and take risks. Immigration, Rubén Rumbaut observes, requires both restlessness and resourcefulness. "On the whole," he writes, "the main reason the richest of the rich and

the poorest of the poor do not immigrate is because they are, respectively, unmoved or unable to move."[18]

Although yesterday's newcomers were more skilled than we may recall, professionals were scarce. Of those arriving in America between 1899 and 1910, only 1.3 percent of previously employed Jewish immigrants were professionals, and only .5 percent of the Italian immigrants.

This is a far cry from today. Enormous changes in educational and occupational structures throughout the world have produced growing numbers of professional, technical, and white-collar workers. A substantial number who move to the United States—and New York—are so-called brain-drain immigrants. In the 1980s, 23 percent of working-age male immigrants and 20 percent of female immigrants entering New York City who reported an occupation to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) were professionals, executives, or managers. In the early 1990s, the proportions were even higher: 27 percent for men, 36 percent for women.[19] According to the 1990 census, 10 percent of the working-age immigrants living in New York City were college graduates; an additional 6 percent had a master's degree or more.

Large numbers of professional and highly educated newcomers are a modern-day phenomenon, but huge numbers of low-skilled and poorly educated immigrants also continue to arrive. In 1990, 18 percent of the working-age immigrants in New York City had less than a ninth grade education. Another 22 percent had gone beyond the eighth grade but had not graduated from high school. The disparities in some groups are especially striking. One out of five of the working-age post-1965 Chinese immigrants had a college degree or more, whereas one out of four had less than a ninth grade education.[20]

Just as Italians and Jews had strikingly different occupational backgrounds, so, too, there are marked differences among today's groups. In the current wave, Caribbean and South and Central American arrivals have the lowest proportions with college degrees and experience in professional and managerial positions. At the time of the 1990 census, under 10 percent of New York City's Dominicans, Ecuadorians, Haitians, Guyanese, Trinidadians, and Colombians over the age of twenty-five who had arrived in the 1980s were college graduates. This compares to a third or more from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and western Europe, who also, not surprisingly, often held high-level jobs before they emigrated; more than 30 percent of the Asian, western European, and African immigrants entering New York City in the 1980s who reported an occupation to the INS were pro-

fessionals, executives, and managers.[21] Indians, Filipinos, and Taiwanese stand out with extraordinarily high levels of educational attainment: in 1990, about half or more who arrived in the 1980s had college degrees, putting them ahead of non-Hispanic white New Yorkers, for whom the figure was 42 percent.[22] Again, as one would expect, these groups also had high proportions with professional backgrounds.[23]

What about the background of undocumented immigrants? This is a relevant question today, but not for turn-of-the-century European arrivals. A hundred years ago, the nature of immigration restrictions and immigrant travel meant that very few newcomers lived in New York "illegally."

Then, as Alexander Aleinikoff puts it, "a diligent foreigner could sell the family farm and cow, buy steerage tickets to the U.S. and take up residence here (provided he or she was not infected with a contagious disease or offensive foreign political ideology)."[24] Until the 1920s, there were no numerical limits on European immigration—and no immigrant visas or special papers that had to be secured from the United States. Europeans were excluded only on qualitative grounds; criminals, prostitutes, and the physically and mentally ill were prohibited entry, as were those likely to become public charges. In 1917, illiterate immigrants were added to the list with the imposition of a literacy test, basically a simple reading test in the language of the immigrant's choice.[25] Since nearly all newcomers to New York came by boat and were processed through Ellis Island, they had no way to avoid immigration inspections intended to weed out the unhealthy and undesirable. Even before this, steamship companies had their own examinations in the port of origin; immigration legislation of 1891 made these companies responsible for returning deportees to their homeland and for providing food and lodging while they were detained in the United States.

Admittedly, some Italians whom America would not accept for medical or criminal reasons resorted to illegal strategies. According to one account, "There was no document or stamp essential to emigration that could not be expertly forged, including . . . health certificates. In addition, legitimate documents sometimes changed hands repeatedly. . . . For 50 lire one could rent American citizenship papers that had been brought to Italy by repatriated emigrants. Fifteen lire would be refunded if the person returned them after use."[26] A number of Italians were smuggled on ships, like Matteo, who, in 1913, was turned away at the medical screening by the ship's doctor in Palermo because of an injured eye. For the price of eight hundred lire, he soon managed to board a New York–bound cargo ship as a seaman, shoveling coal in the boiler room.[27] New York's small Chinese community was also home to some who had entered illegally, despite the Chinese Ex-

clusion Act of 1882, which banned the immigration of Chinese laborers.[28] The "paper son" strategy, the main illegal route to entry, became common after Supreme Court cases in 1915 and 1916 ruled that foreign-born children of Chinese who were American citizens were entitled to American citizenship. A Chinese American returning from a trip to China would report to the immigration authorities that he and his wife had produced a son during his stay in China. He would then sell the legal papers to someone who wanted to come to America.[29]

The number of these illegal immigrant New Yorkers at the beginning of the twentieth century was minuscule, however. Today, limits on the number of available immigrant visas, combined with the continuing desire of many to move to the United States, have created a climate in which undocumented immigration flourishes. Nevertheless, fears about the numbers involved are exaggerated. Illegal aliens are not flooding the New York area. At any one time, a relatively small proportion of New York City's immigrant population is undocumented. A widely accepted figure from the Immigration and Naturalization Service put the number in New York State at about 540,000 for 1996—an estimated 80 percent of whom live in New York City.[30] California has the lion's share—some 40 percent of the nation's illegal immigrants, compared to 11 percent in the state of New York.

The overwhelming majority of the undocumented in the New York area have not snuck secretly across the border or hidden out in boats. Most enter the United States legally on temporary visas and become illegal immigrants—or visa overstayers, in immigration parlance—by failing to leave when their visas expire. According to INS estimates, nine out of ten of New York State's illegal residents in 1996 had overstayed their visas.[31] The undocumented rarely come from the ranks of the very poorest in their home countries. Available studies show that, like their legal counterparts, unauthorized immigrants are self-selected in terms of ambition and willingness to work. They tend to have above-average levels of education and occupational skills in comparison with their homeland populations.[32]

Indeed, a study of Dominican immigrants in New York City in the early 1980s found that the undocumented held more prestigious jobs before emigrating than did the documented immigrants; they were far more likely to have been professionals and managers in the Dominican Republic.[33] Another survey of some two hundred undocumented immigrants in New York and New Jersey concluded that they often came from lower-middle- and middle-class households in their home countries.[34]

The various scams and schemes to get into the United States described later in the chapter do not come cheap. Getting a tourist visa—the way

most undocumented New Yorkers initially enter—requires resources. Applicants have to prove to consulate officials that they have a job and accumulated assets in their home country and have the incentive to return home after a brief visit to the United States. If they do not actually have the assets, it is expensive to purchase false documents to show they do. It helps to have confidence and a sophisticated sense of how bureaucracies work, something often associated with high levels of education. Other schemes, from buying false passports to coming through Puerto Rico or Mexico, can cost thousands of dollars, which means that the undocumented often come from the ranks of the more economically secure or have relatives abroad willing to underwrite their expenses.[35]

Why They Come

To uproot oneself and move to another country is a major, often traumatic decision. Why did hundreds of thousands move to New York in the past—and why do they keep coming? At first glance, the differences in their reasons are striking. After all, if so many professionals and highly skilled people are coming today, it seems logical to assume that their motivations differ from those of Italian peasants and Jewish artisans a century ago. Indeed, contemporary immigration has a lot to do with America's political and economic penetration worldwide and the diffusion of a modern culture of consumption, a culture out of the reach of most people in developing countries. Also, liberalized U.S. immigration policies in the past few decades have opened America's doors to many groups who were once shut out.

Yet if the causes of immigration in the two eras differ, closer examination also shows many broad underlying similarities. As Douglas Massey and his colleagues put it, in a review of international migration theory, individuals and families emigrate in response to changing circumstances set in motion by political and economic transformations of their societies.[36] Population growth and economic disruptions, attendant upon industrialization, urbanization, and agricultural development, set the stage for large-scale migration from Europe in the past and still operate as underlying causes of migration in many developing countries today.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the incorporation of eastern and southern Europe into the orbit of the expanding capitalist economy had a devastating impact on Russian Jews and southern Italians.[37] A hundred years later, a globalizing market economy set populations in developing regions on the move. In both eras, immigrants have sought to raise their in-

comes, accumulate capital, and control economic risks by moving to New York, where higher-paying jobs may be had.[38]

But migration is not simply a matter of rational calculations in response to market forces, as neoclassical and new economic theory would suggest.[39] If Russian Jews a century ago were escaping political oppression, so, too, many of today's immigrants are in a flight to freedom. Whatever the initial causes, once set in motion, immigration movements become self-perpetuating, so that today, as in the past, migration can be thought of as a process of progressive network building. "Networks developed by the movement of people back and forth in space," Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut write, "are at the core of the microstructures that sustain migration over time."[40] Historians use the term chain migration to describe the way past migration encourages present migration: migrants encourage and sponsor friends and relatives to join them. Contemporary social scientists theorize about the role of network connections in lowering the costs, raising the benefits, and reducing the risks of international migration. Among the mechanisms involved in what has been labeled "cumulative causation" is the emergence of a culture of migration; migration becomes integrated into the structure of values and expectations so that it is seen as a part of the normal course of events.[41]

Going to "LaMerica" and the "Golden Land"

Thomas Archdeacon has observed that at the end of the nineteenth century the pressures of overpopulation, the prospects of economic mobility, and the availability of rapid transportation set people all over the world on the road.[42] Italians were especially likely to move, and most Italians who came to the United States between 1876 and 1930—about 80 percent—were from the regions south of Rome known as the Mezzogiorno.[43]

Dislocations in the nineteenth century caused by rapid population growth and the expansion of capitalist agriculture left southern Italians worse off than before. Although the population of Italy increased by 25 percent between 1871 and 1905, the economy slackened. Population growth put greater pressures on the land, especially in areas where the pattern of inheritance led to fragmentation of holdings. Many peasants, according to one account, were left barely clinging to their fields and hence vulnerable to any agricultural setback.[44]

With the end of feudalism, peasants faced a growing need for money to pay rent on the land they worked or to pay interest on loans extended by landowners and contractors at the beginning of the growing season. Op-

pressive taxes were an added burden.[45] Making a living, or supplementing the family income, as an artisan or craftsman became less promising as cheaper manufactured goods flooded rural markets.[46] Peasants hungered for land. The breakup of church, state, and communal property meant that land was for sale in many areas, but peasants lacked the cash to buy it. According to one account, emigration rates were higher from regions of small properties, where land was for sale and farmers were in competition, than from regions dominated by large estates that gobbled up the land on the market.[47]

The changing world market for southern Italy's agricultural products brought more troubles. In the 1880s, wheat prices plummeted as cheap American grain entered European markets on a mass scale; the southern Italian citrus industry suffered when the emerging North American citrus industry in Florida and California led to cuts in American imports of Italian fruit. Between 1888 and 1898, a Franco-Italian tariff war reduced the French importation of Italian wines, and the Italian protective tariff on wheat raised bread prices, placing an added burden on peasants. Organizations by peasants in Sicily to agitate for lower rents and higher wages were suppressed in the 1890s. And natural calamities, such as a phylloxera epidemic that destroyed Sicilian grape vines, major earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions of Vesuvius and Etna in the early 1900s, added to the level of human misery.

For eastern European Jews, political and religious persecution aggravated economic hardships.[48] A combination of industrialization, the overcrowding of the cities, and rampant anti-Semitism, including discriminatory laws, created a severe crisis in the already oppressive conditions of Jewish life.[49] By 1880, the number of Russian Jews had risen to about 4 million, up from 1.6 million in 1825. As the century came to a close, the pressure of numbers on a limited range of occupations had become intense.

Russian Jews were confined to the Pale of Settlement, a region stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea (in what is now Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine). The May Laws that followed the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881 imposed additional constraints. Jews were now prohibited from owning or renting land outside towns and cities of the Pale, and wholesale expulsions of Jews from villages of the Pale, on the grounds of illegal residence, became common.

Even before the May Laws, however, Russian Jews had been moving into industry and trade. The services they traditionally offered peasants, as middlemen and moneylenders, were less in demand owing to improvements in communication and transportation. Plus they faced increasing

competition from a growing Christian middle class. As the principal buyers of the peasants' produce and sellers of finished products, Jews were hurt by the peasantry's increasing poverty. With the prohibition of rural residence, the May Laws added to Jews' economic difficulties by cutting them off from their customers, the peasants.[50]

In the cities and towns where Jews now had to live, overcrowding and overcompetition were the rule.[51] As Moses Rischin graphically puts it, "The bulging cities and withered towns rivaled one another in their raw poverty."[52] In the four-year period 1894–98, the number of Jewish paupers increased by almost 30 percent, and large numbers of Jews in many communities depended on charity.[53] Growing up in the town of Polotzk, Mary Antin experienced the overcrowding of occupations and physical confinement typical of many places within the Pale during the last years of the nineteenth century: "It was not easy to live, with such bitter competition as the congestion of the population made inevitable. There were ten times as many stores as there should have been, ten times as many tailors, cobblers, barbers, tinsmiths. A Gentile, if he failed in Polotzk, could go elsewhere, where there was less competition. A Jew could make the circle of the Pale, only to find the same conditions as at home."[54]

In 1891, thousands of Jews were expelled from Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kiev. In 1897 thousands more were deprived of a livelihood as restaurateurs and innkeepers when the liquor traffic became a government monopoly. The introduction of the "percentage rule" in 1886, which restricted the proportion of Jewish students admitted to secondary schools and universities within the Pale, made it more difficult for Jews to enter the professions.

Worse still was the anti-Semitic violence. The assassination of Alexander II set off a wave of pogroms, massacres of Jews, and destruction of shops and synagogues that was encouraged, and perhaps even organized, by the czarist government. "I remember sitting by the window," Mollie Linker recalled. "When it got dark, you close the shutters, you were afraid. You were actually always in fear because of big pogroms. . . . I remember that scare . . . was in us all the time."[55]

Unwanted and unprotected, Russian Jews saw little hope for improvements in their native land. Indeed, the czarist government pointed to emigration as a solution open to Jews. "The Western borders are open to you Jews," said Count Ignatiev, author of the May Laws. The Russian government relaxed its rigorous rules forbidding emigration, giving Jews the right to leave, under obligation of abandoning Russian citizenship forever.[56]

America, with its expanding industrial economy, job opportunities, and

higher wages and standard of living, beckoned to Jews and Italians. For Jews, there was also the promise of a less hostile government, without official anti-Semitic restrictions—and the knowledge that earlier Jewish immigrants, largely from Germany, had found freedom and economic success in the "Golden Land."[57] "I heard so much about America," said Fannie Shapiro, "a free country for the Jews."[58]

By the end of the nineteenth century, travel to America had become quicker and cheaper. Railroads made German ports accessible to the towns of eastern Europe, and steamships penetrated ports deep in the Mediterranean basin.[59] More steamships were now crossing the ocean, and the newer ones were bigger, faster, and safer than before.

Greater speed meant that each ship could make more transatlantic crossings annually; with greater size, as many as two thousand to three thousand people could be crammed into steerage sections, where most immigrants traveled. To recruit immigrants, steamship companies advertised with posters showing the prices and sailing dates. Tickets could be paid for in installments. In 1880 a transatlantic passage in steerage from Naples cost fifteen dollars; by 1899 it was twenty-eight dollars, and the fare from the port of Bremen was between thirty-six and thirty-eight dollars.[60]

Once migration from southern and eastern Europe got under way, it had a self-sustaining, indeed, a cumulative effect. Relatives in New York sent back money and prepaid tickets for the transatlantic voyage so that more and more family members could afford to come. Networks reduced the risks as well as costs of migration; relatives in New York could provide help with housing and getting a job. In one Italian village, a cobbler was nicknamed "Cristoforo Colombo" for being the first to migrate to the New World. When he heard by chance that a worker in New York could earn in a single day what it would take a week to earn in the village, he sailed from Naples. Within a year of landing in New York, he had saved enough money to send for two of his brothers, thereby initiating a chain of migration that eventually brought more than half of the population of his village to the new land.[61]

"America letters" and remittances spread the news of opportunities and inspired prospective emigrants. "The most effective method of distributing immigrant labor in the United States . . . is the [international and domestic] mail service," concluded an early twentieth-century report prepared for the U.S. Bureau of Labor on southern and eastern European unskilled workers in American factories.[62] Mary Antin felt a "stirring, a straining" while reading a letter from her father, who had gone to America ahead of the family. "My father was inspired by a vision. He saw something—he

promised us something. It was this 'America.' And 'America' became my dream."[63] In Italy, "birds of passage" who returned from America for a visit or short stay were also important sources of information and inspiration. Returning emigrants were called "americanos," a word meaning "someone who got rich, no one knows how."[64]

Over time, a culture of migration developed as migration became ingrained in the repertoire of people's values and behaviors.[65] "America was in the air," Mary Antin recalled of her home in Russia. "Businessmen talked of it over their accounts; the market women made up their quarrels that they might discuss it from stall to stall; people who had relatives in the famous land went around reading their letters for the enlightenment of less fortunate folk. . . . Children played at emigrating."[66]

In Italy, "America fever" became an epidemic. "Going to America has become so popular recently," wrote the *prefetto* of the province of Cosenza in 1894, "that young men feel almost ashamed if they have not been overseas at least once. Ten years ago America evoked images of danger and distance. Now people feel more confident about going to New York than to Rome."[67] The mayor of one southern community officially greeted visiting dignitaries: "I welcome you in the name of the five thousand inhabitants of this town, three thousand of whom are in America and the other two thousand preparing to go."[68]

Still the Golden Door

Today, it is towns in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and China that are sending masses of people to the city of New York. By 1981, almost four hundred people from Los Pinos, a Dominican village of about one thousand, had migrated to the United States, and nearly every one of them had a neighbor, friend, or relative in New York.[69] Perhaps as many as half a million Jamaicans now live in this country, a fifth of the population of the island itself. A joke along the migrant stream has it that Greater Kingston, Jamaica's major urban center, has added two new postal zones: Miami and New York.[70]

One reason so many immigrants come today is that they can. Government policies, as Alexander Aleinikoff argues, are an important part of the migration story.[71] In the past, the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 played a critical role in ending the massive influx of Russian Jews and Italians by establishing very small nationality quotas for southern and eastern European immigrants.[72] After decades of restrictions, America opened its gates in 1965, abandoning the old country-of-origin quotas that favored

northern and western Europeans. Instead of allocating visas primarily on the basis of place of birth, family reunification and, to a lesser extent, skills were now emphasized within the context of annual immigration ceilings that, after a series of legislative changes, stood at 675,000 in the mid-1990s.[73] 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 toward refugees also allowed the large-scale admission of certain groups, Soviet Jews and Cubans being especially prominent in the New York area.

In some cases, it was also a question of the countries of origin loosening their exit policies. The world's major communist nations, China and the Soviet Union, allowed few people to leave until the 1970s. Like other independent Latin American countries, the Dominican Republic had been exempt from the national-origins quota system and had no numerical cap on immigration to the United States before 1965; by introducing numerical limits for the Western hemisphere for the first time, the new American law actually made it harder for Latin Americans to enter the United States. But even before the 1965 law, the extremely restrictive emigration policies of the right-wing dictator Rafael Trujillo made it difficult for Dominicans to leave; only after his death, in 1961, did migration to this country become significant.[74]

American immigration law opened the gates to many groups, but there are clearly other reasons for the enormous response—and for the huge backlogs; in the early 1990s the wait for a visa was often between two and nine years, and sometimes even longer.[75] It is hard to generalize about the movement of millions of people from so many different cultures, classes, and countries, yet a number of factors stand out. Economic, demographic, and political disruptions have led people to come here in search of a better life. In the context of a modern culture of consumption, their expectations may be even higher than those of their forebears a century ago.

In the nineteenth century, railroads, steamship lines, state bureaus of immigration, and letters from emigrants spread information about the New World. Since World War II, information about the good life in America has become more plentiful than ever. Television—and imported American programs—reach into even the poorest areas, bringing images of American society and American goods that are reinforced by movies and radio programs.[76] Newspapers, movies, and magazines tell of American events and life. Aspirations are further fueled by letters, phone calls, and visits from migrants as well as by promises of political elites and the expansion of educational opportunities.

Usually, these aspirations cannot be fulfilled at home. American lifestyles are not attainable for the overwhelming majority in Third World countries, partly because of demographic pressure as populations have spiraled upward, and even more because of the inequalities of economic development. Neither the resource base nor the levels of economic development in immigrants' home countries are adequate to meet the needs and expectations of the population.

In the English-speaking Caribbean, the legacy of plantation slavery and the distorting effects of colonial rule, as well as continued dependence on world powers, lending institutions, and corporations, have combined to produce economies that cannot deliver the kinds of jobs, lifestyles, and consumption patterns that people want. In Jamaica, as one man I met said, "money is hard." The Jamaican economy cannot provide enough "good" jobs that pay enough to support what people there consider a decent living. In recent years, Jamaican living standards have fallen in the face of the country's crippling foreign debt, the decline in prices for major exports, and soaring inflation. According to one survey, 60 percent of the population of the island would move to the United States if given the chance.[77]

In nearby Haiti, migration is an alternative employment strategy in an impoverished country with a chronically high unemployment rate, a ravaged economy, and little opportunity for the middle class to advance.[78] The Dominican Republic, although more prosperous than Haiti, offers a variation on the same themes. The enormous outflow from the Dominican Republic to the United States, two social scientists argue, has been sustained by the failure to modernize agriculture, the exclusion of labor from the benefits of increasing industrialization, and the expanding and increasingly frustrated middle class.[79]

In general, migration provides the means for small farmers and skilled workers to stabilize their family livelihoods and to meet long-desired aspirations for consumption items like domestic appliances, automobiles, and television sets, as well as for additional land and implements. For urban professionals, it offers a way to reach living standards commensurate with their educational achievements.[80]

In many sending countries, like India, Korea, Taiwan, and the Dominican Republic, the growth of high-level jobs has not kept pace with the expansion of higher education, so that the well educated often cannot find jobs that match their training. One study speaks of college graduates in Taiwan fiercely competing for jobs requiring only an elementary or junior high school education. Another discusses Indian college graduates spending years in underpaid starting positions or paying enormous bribes just

to get a foot in the door.[81] In Brazil, many university graduates have to content themselves with lower-status jobs than they had expected from their training—and lower living standards. Where there is soaring inflation, as in Brazil in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the middle as well as the lower strata find their living standards eroded. By 1994, inflation had reached over 2500 percent annually in Brazil, a rate of 40 percent a month. Prices for many goods bought by average middle-class Brazilians, from a can of Coca-Cola to a pair of Levi's, were far higher than in the United States, while salaries lagged behind.[82] In the Philippines, in the 1980s, the economic crisis meant that even a schoolteacher could afford to buy no more than two chickens a month and only low-quality rice.[83] Haitians in New York from middle-class backgrounds explain that they send home photos showing them in front of a packed refrigerator. "It's something to be very proud of," they say, because relatives in Haiti have trouble keeping food in the refrigerator for fear of losing electric power.[84]

In tandem with basic economic factors, oppressive political conditions have driven many people out of their homelands. Once again, anti-Semitism and government restrictions on educational opportunities, as well as a bleak economic outlook, impel Russian Jews to leave. "Everyone just knew that it had to be better," said one professional who moved to New York in 1983. "Materially, yes, that had something to do with it, but I mean in all senses of the word—to breathe freely, not to have to make all sorts of deals on the black market, not to be afraid."[85]

In the 1970s and 1980s, Haitians fled not only a ravaged economy but the dictatorships of "Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc" Duvalier, and in the early 1990s they were escaping the brutality following the military coup against Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Salvadorans left a country devastated by a long civil war (1979–92), often emigrating under the threat of violence and death.[86] Certainly, a major reason many Chinese leave their homeland is the unpredictable and rigid communist system and the limits on freedom and advancement.[87] Unstable political conditions also have been a factor in the case of Taiwanese, Korean, and Hong Kong immigrants. Indeed, many wealthy Hong Kong Chinese fled with their capital in fear of what would happen in 1997 when the People's Republic of China claimed sovereignty over the British crown colony. Political insecurity played a role in Korean emigration to the United States in the 1970s and early 1980s, although it has been reduced substantially since 1987, when a popular presidential election put an end to the sixteen-year South Korean military dictatorship.[88]

America holds out the promise of political and cultural freedom—and material abundance. The magnet for professionals as well as the less skilled

is the chance to earn higher wages and maintain a better standard of living than was possible at home. In 1987, the minimum monthly salary for full-time work in the United States was six times higher than that in the Dominican Republic; by 1991 it was thirteen times higher. Consumer goods that are taken for granted by people at all class levels in the United States, like telephones, refrigerators, and automobiles, are beyond the reach of the Dominican lower class and not a certainty for the middle class either.[89] In Brazil, salaries for professionals and semiprofessionals pale in comparison to what immigrants can make here, even in the most menial jobs. In one week, they can earn as much, if not more, than they would earn in a month back home—though in the 1980s and early 1990s, the cost of living in some Brazilian cities and New York was nearly comparable. A woman who earned two hundred dollars as a head nurse in a large urban hospital in Brazil spoke in wonder of how she made five times more in New York City by working long hours as a babysitter.[90] "In Brazil," said one woman, "if you want a $50 dress, you can only buy it by paying on credit over twelve months. And by the time it's paid for, the dress is worn out. But in the United States, if you want a $50 dress, you just go out and buy it for cash. And, can you imagine, in New York, a TV costs one week's earnings? But in Brazil even a month's wages won't pay for one."[91]

It is not just that wages are better here. Jobs are also available. New York may not be the expanding industrial center it was at the turn of the last century, but it continues, even in years when the economy has flagged, to provide employment opportunities for new immigrants in service jobs, burgeoning-enclave economies, and the much smaller, but still active, manufacturing sector (see Chapter 3).

As before, migration, once begun, has a kind of snowball effect. Immigrants spread the news of the benefits to be had in New York; as one Jamaican woman said, "People telling you all the while, so you say you would like to know New York." In the Dominican village of Los Pinos, migration to New York was the daily and endless subject of discussion. Information about wages, the price of food, and working life in New York was widely circulated in the community. When a teacher asked her first-grade class what they would do with a million dollars, a seven-year-old boy answered that he would buy an airplane and go to New York.[92] Wherever they are from, immigrants in New York encourage and facilitate the migration of relatives and friends by sending back funds to finance the trip, serving as sponsors, helping prospective newcomers meet requirements for entry or immigration, offering accommodations, and showing the ropes to new arrivals.

By allocating most immigrant visas along family lines, United States immigration law reinforces and formalizes the operation of migrant networks.[93] According to one estimate, the immigrant multiplier for each immigrant worker is around 1.2. In other words, for each new immigrant admitted as a laborer rather than as a relative of someone already established here, 1.2 additional immigrants can be expected to arrive within ten years.[94] Another study calculated that for each new Filipino immigrant, one additional family member would arrive in the future; for each Korean immigrant, .5 family members would eventually come.[95]

Networks of friends and relatives serve as financial safety nets for the new arrivals and as sources of all kinds of information about life in New York. And they help the newcomers get jobs. One of the first men to arrive in New York from the village of Los Pinos eventually found union jobs for more than a dozen later arrivals in the large New York hotel where he had worked for fifteen years.[96]

Steamship lines no longer channel immigration into New York, yet the presence of large numbers of friends and relatives continues to attract immigrants to the city and the surrounding region. Once an immigrant community develops, it tends to expand as compatriots are on hand to offer newcomers a sense of security and the prospect of assistance. Immigrants, as Charles Tilly puts it, create "migration machines: sending networks that articulated with particular receiving networks in which new migrants could find jobs, housing, and sociability." Moving to New York, as one Jamaican woman said, "became the thing to do. Most of my friends were here."[97] New York is also appealing because newcomers do not stand out; it has a tradition of immigration, with many different immigrant and racial groups evident in daily life.

The city itself has an image that draws certain immigrant groups. With large numbers of Caribbean people in New York, the city has become, as Bryce-Laporte writes, the special object of their "dream[s], curiosity, sense of achievement, and drive for adventure."[98] To Caribbean immigrants, New York is often synonymous with America. The city is salient in Caribbean immigrants' mental map as a center of North American influence and power and as a logical entry point into the country.[99]

In general, countries with a history of American military, political, and economic involvement and intervention have been sending large numbers to the United States. The entire Caribbean region has known the presence of the United States. During the past hundred years, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nicaragua, Panama, and Grenada have all been under direct U.S. military rule at one time or another. The United States

has also exercised overwhelming economic dominance in the Caribbean region.[100] In Asia, the Korean War was followed by American economic and political involvement and military presence in South Korea; and in the Philippines, strong military and business connections and a century of colonial and postcolonial rule have produced a pervasive cultural Americanization of the population—to name but two countries in that region of the world.[101]

How They Come

For most immigrants today, the journey to New York is shorter and easier than at the turn of the last century. Despite horror stories in the media about dangerous border crossings and shipboard smugglings, the fact is that the vast majority of contemporary immigrants—documented and undocumented alike—spend only a few hours on a plane before arriving at Kennedy airport. A century ago, Jewish and Italian immigrants had to undergo a grueling ocean voyage as well as long, sometimes dangerous trips to their port of departure.

For many Jews and Italians of that time, getting to the port was an ordeal involving travel by train or wagon, or even stretches on foot. For Jews there were legal difficulties as well. Russian Jews often traveled west through Austria-Hungary to German ports. Because most of them probably lacked the necessary papers, they were crossing the borders illegally, although, according to one account, German authorities looked the other way because Jewish emigration was good business for German shipowners.[102] Mary Antin recalled that without the help of two kindly German Jews, the local authorities would have sent her family back to Russia for want of two hundred rubles. En route to Hamburg, the "emigrants were herded at stations, packed in cars, and driven from place to place like cattle."[103] The railroad cars that carried Morris Cohen and his mother to Bremen "might have been cattle cars, for there were no seats. We sat on the floor and slept by reclining our heads on our bundles. In the morning and in the afternoon when the train stopped at stations, mother or I would go out and purchase some hot water which, with the hard bread and a few other things, served as our meals."[104]

Because train schedules were not coordinated with sailing dates, emigrants had to wait days or sometimes weeks at the port for their paperwork to be completed or for their ship to arrive. In the 1880s and 1890s, the port of Genoa "was woefully congested; . . . the sleeping and eating facilities did not provide for more than one-third of those awaiting transport."[105] An

emigrant named Tontonno, who arrived in Naples in 1906, described in his diary how he and his *paesani* slept ten to a room and two or more to a bed in a hotel managed by the ship company. In Italian port cities, moreover, emigrants "had to run the gauntlet of a small army of peddlers, thieves, and confidence men . . . all of whom earned their daily bread by extracting every possible penny from their departing conationals."[106]

Arriving in Hamburg in 1892 with her Aunt Masha, after days of travel by wagon and then train from a small village in western Russia, Rose Cohen wrote that "we were all shown (really driven) into a large room where many dirty, narrow cots stood along the walls." Her father, who had gone to New York two years earlier, had sent two prepaid steamship tickets to his family. Now in Hamburg "Aunt Masha shivered as she looked at the cot in which we two were to sleep. . . . The air in the room was so foul and thick that it felt as if it could be touched. From every corner came sounds of groaning and snoring. But worst of all were the insects in the cot. . . . We stayed in Hamburg a week. Every day from ten in the morning until four in the afternoon we stayed in a large, bare hall waiting for our names to be called." After the cholera epidemics of 1892, the German government subjected migrants from eastern Europe to medical exams that included baths and fumigation. Rose Cohen remembers how her little "underwaist, which still had some money in it" was taken to be "steamed." Although the money was not touched, "when I looked at my pretty little slippers I wept bitter tears. They looked old, and wrinkled, and two of the buttons were off."[107] In Hamburg, men and boys had their heads closely cropped and received a chemical shampoo; women and girls had their hair combed with fine-tooth metal combs.[108]

There was questioning, too. In the wake of immigration legislation in the 1890s, each passenger bound for America had to answer a series of twenty-nine questions recorded on the manifest lists, concerning, among other things, physical and mental health, ability to read and write, and whether they had at least thirty dollars. Steamship companies, which now had to bear the cost of returning rejected immigrants, instituted inspections of their own to weed out those with diseases and defects. In 1907, examiners at Italian ports turned away more than 35,000 intending emigrants for medical and other reasons—far more than the 4,707 Italians rejected at Ellis Island in 1904 and 1905.[109]

Then there was the crossing in steerage, quite literally next to the ship's steering equipment below the waterline.[110] Passengers were crammed together in dark, crowded, unsanitary, and foul-smelling quarters on tiers

of iron bunks with straw mattresses. A journalist traveling as an immigrant from Naples in 1906 reported: "How can a steerage passenger remember that he is a human being when he must first pick the worms from his food . . . and eat in his stuffy, stinking bunk, or in the hot and fetid atmosphere of a compartment where 150 men sleep, or in juxtaposition to a seasick man?"[111]

In 1908, the Immigration Commission sent an agent disguised as an immigrant to cross the Atlantic in steamship steerage to investigate conditions. The ship's crew, she found, scrubbed and disinfected the lavatories only on the last day of the journey—just in time for the official inspection upon landing. Sleeping compartments were never mopped; receptacles for the seasick appeared only on upper decks. As a result, the air below deck was foul. "During these twelve days in steerage," the immigration official reported, "I lived in a disorder and in surroundings that offended every sense. Only the fresh breeze from the sea overcame the sickening odors."[112] Recalling his own trip across the Atlantic, Samuel Chotzinoff writes of the smell of "ship": "This pervasive, insidious odor, a distillation of bilge and a number of less identifiable putrescences, settled on one's person, clothes, and luggage and stayed there forever, impervious to changes of habitat, clothing, and the cleansing agents available to the poor."[113]

"We were huddled together in steerage literally like cattle—my mother, my sister and I sleeping in the middle tier, people being above us and below us as well as on the same level," Morris Raphael Cohen recalled. "We could not eat the food of the ship, since it was not kosher. We only asked for hot water in which my mother used to put a little brandy and sugar to give it taste. Towards the end of the trip when our bread was beginning to give out we applied to the ship's steward for bread, but the kind he gave us was unbearably soggy."[114] According to the immigration agent investigating steerage conditions in 1908, the meat and fish provided by the steamship company reeked, the vegetables were a "queer, unanalyzable mixture," and the stewed fruit seemed more like the refuse of edible fruit.[115] The open deck space reserved for steerage passengers was usually small and situated in an area most directly affected by dirt from the stacks.

Finally, after about ten days or two weeks, the immigrants arrived in Manhattan, where they were packed on the top decks of barges that took them to Ellis Island. Once there, they had to wait on long lines for medical inspections and questioning, all the while afraid that they might be turned away. At peak times, thousands of persons were processed in a single day. Most went through easily in a day, although some were detained for further

inspections. Relatively few were denied entry. In 1905, for example, the first year in which a million immigrants arrived, barely more than 1 percent were deported or excluded.

Today, the actual trip to New York is less harrowing for most newcomers. In the contemporary jet age, time-consuming ocean voyages and land journeys are no longer necessary. It is now fast—and relatively cheap—to travel by airplane to John F. Kennedy International Airport, the "port" of entry for most of New York's latest immigrants. For many bound for New York, the international airport where they board the plane is in their home city; modern transportation by plane, car, bus, or train usually makes getting there fairly easy for those who live far away. Depending on the country of departure, the flight to New York itself takes anywhere from three or four hours up to a day or so. As in earlier times, newcomers worry about passing muster with immigration authorities upon arrival, but the vast majority get through immigration control in a couple of hours at most.[116] Even those who end up staying illegally in New York usually arrive with valid passports and legitimate tourist visas.

The main difficulties involve getting an immigrant visa and "green card" in the first place. The immigration process typically begins in the United States, with a resident family member or employer filing an application with U.S. authorities (about 70 percent of immigrant visas go to family members). Because of long backlogs it can take years to be legally admitted as a permanent resident alien after the approval of the application for entry. In 1997, more than 3.6 million people were waiting for immigrant visas to the United States, 98 percent of whom were on the list for family preference visas. (Mexicans accounted for more than 25 percent of the waiting list; Filipinos, 16 percent; Indians, 7 percent; Chinese, 6 percent; and Dominicans, 4 percent.)[117] Frustrated by the wait, or the inability to get on the list at all, many decide to come in other—illegal—ways.

U.S. consular officials are wise to the strategies of those who abuse tourist visas; the current standard for a tourist visa in major sending countries is guilty until proven innocent, the presumption being that tourist-visa applicants will stay in the United States and work unless they can prove other intentions.[118] Tourist visa applicants have to convince the U.S. consulate in their home country that they will return; this is usually done by showing they have strong ties and sufficient resources to be attracted home again. Acceptable proof includes titles to land, savings passbooks, and deeds to vehicles.[119] If real documents are not available, prospective migrants resort to false ones. Dominicans, for example, pay hefty sums for false titles to landholdings or forged savings passbooks. Maxine Margolis

describes Brazilians presenting consular officials with inflated bank statements and tax returns and borrowing large sums of money from friends and relatives that they temporarily deposit in their bank accounts.[120] One enterprising Dominican university graduate, Enrique, who had no permanent job or savings, employed the following strategy: he opened a bank account with money borrowed from three relatives and held the account for a few months in order to receive monthly statements of his balance. He also had an uncle who managed a money-exchange house write a letter stating that Enrique had been an employee for several years and would return to his job after his holiday. Enrique and his wife were granted temporary visas for recreational travel; rather than return after the visas expired, they remained in New York, where they both found work as sales clerks.[121]

Another route is to purchase or borrow someone else's passport that has a valid U.S. tourist visa already stamped on it. The photo of the legitimate owner is replaced with that of the person who is going to travel on the passport; after entering the United States, the passport is returned to the "seller" for use by another customer.[122] In 1997, the going rate for false documents in the Dominican Republic, from passports to visa stamps and marriage certificates, was anywhere from five thousand to eight thousand dollars, depending on what was needed.[123] Once in the United States, fake marriages to a U.S. citizen, typically for a price of several thousand dollars, have been a way to legalize one's status, although various laws to combat marriage fraud and illegal immigration have made this more difficult.

The least desirable, and least common, way for Dominicans to come to New York is through Puerto Rico or Mexico or as stowaways on cargo ships bound for the United States. The border route involves flying to Mexico, taking a bus, assisted by a guide, to the border, crossing into the United States at night with the help of a "coyote," or smuggler, and finally flying to New York. In the 1990s, many Dominicans were paying at least seven hundred dollars each for places on yolas, rickety narrow boats equipped with outboard motors, which made the trip across the hazardous Mona Passage to Puerto Rico carrying up to forty or fifty passengers.[124] Those who succeeded in landing in Puerto Rico, a U.S. Commonwealth, could board a domestic flight to anywhere in the United States with a minimum of documentation that is easily forged back home.[125] For Salvadorans, the price of traveling to the United States under coyote escort through Guatemala and Mexico was up to three thousand dollars in 1995.[126]

The price is much higher for Chinese immigrants who have been smuggled into the United States on freighters and fishing vessels from Asia. These activities came to public attention in June 1993, when the *Golden*

Venture ran aground off Queens with nearly three hundred Chinese migrants aboard, ten of whom died as they tried to swim ashore through the frigid waters. Since then, a crackdown on the shipborne smuggling of Chinese into this country has led smugglers to seek new routes through the Caribbean, Central America, and Canada. In the 1990s, for a fee of up to forty thousand dollars, prospective immigrants have been taken to Central America and then smuggled into the United States by plane, by land, or on small boats.[127]

For those few who take such complicated, sometimes dangerous routes, the physical trip to the United States can be the hardest and most frightening part of the immigration process. Peter Kwong describes the appalling conditions that illegal Chinese immigrants experience at the hands of "snakeheads" (smugglers). On one boat that the Coast Guard boarded off Hawaii in 1996, 120 men were "packed into a tight, twenty-by-thirty-foot camouflaged compartment that had been nailed shut. The men were naked and had been held between decks for several weeks without showers or ventilation; they were caged in their own waste and ate in a mass-feeding area where bowls were nailed to the table."[128] Among the travails undocumented Salvadoran migrants face on their thousand-mile-or-more journey to the United States are long treks through desert, with little water or food; the constant threat of detection and deportation in Guatemala and Mexico; the possibility of being strip-searched by thieves, smugglers, and officials who slit open the seams of travelers' clothing looking for hidden money; drownings in rivers they must cross; separation and abandonment; and, for women, rape and other forms of sexual abuse. One woman now living on Long Island told Sarah Mahler, an anthropologist, about her near-death experience: she was left by coyotes inside an airtight trailer (with only one small window) with 150 other Salvadorans, without food or water, for nearly a day.[129]

That such conditions exist today is horrifying. Fortunately, they are the exception rather than the rule. Indeed, for the overwhelming majority of contemporary immigrants, the trip is relatively easy. For most, getting to New York is only the beginning of a much longer and more difficult journey that involves settling in, adjusting, coming to terms with life in a new country, and ultimately deciding whether to make America their permanent home.

In story, film, and family lore, turn-of-the-century immigrants are often recalled as noble sufferers and heroes who weathered hardships in Europe

and a traumatic ocean crossing to make it to America. That is a hard act to follow.

Indeed, those who endure the most difficult journey to America today by risking their lives crossing borders or being smuggled on ships are not modern-day heroes in the public eye. As undocumented immigrants, they are stigmatized and unwanted. Illegal entry, as I have shown, was not an issue a hundred years ago for European immigrants. Today, however, it is a major public concern. One reason for the focus on "illegals" in immigration debates is that it is one way that old-time Americans can support the notion that immigration is good and made America great while at the same time distancing themselves, and their ancestors, from contemporary arrivals. My people, the argument goes, came legally in the past—they were the model immigrants; today, too many are illegal and should not be here at all.

But contrary to conventional wisdom, New York is not awash in a sea of illegal immigrants. At any one time, the undocumented are a fairly small proportion of New York's foreign-born. And the evidence suggests that many come with skills and education—and are not inevitably of "lower quality" than their compatriots who arrive legally, green card in hand.

Although many contemporary immigrants, as in the past, have suffered economic difficulties and political oppression in their homelands, they are not the "huddled masses" in modern dress. Even a century ago, immigrants did not come from the very bottom of their societies; now a substantial minority are from the top levels. The Korean greengrocer and the Indian newsstand dealer on the corner may have college and even graduate degrees. The West Indian nanny may have been a clerical worker in her homeland, the Polish beautician, a teacher. Poor farmers, factory workers, and artisans still arrive, of course. But a new kind of professional, middle-class immigrant is also a part of the current stream. Diversity, the buzz word of the 1990s, is an apt description of the newest New Yorkers. In almost every way—economically, educationally, and culturally—they are more diverse than their predecessors a hundred years ago, and this has enormous implications for understanding what happens when they settle in New York. As we shall see, the distinctive characteristics of modern-day immigrants—in combination with the distinctive qualities of late twentieth-century New York—go a long way toward explaining why their experiences and lives differ in so many ways from those of their predecessors in the last great immigration wave.