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Record Immigration Is Changing the Face of New York's Neighborhoods

By NINA BERNSTEIN

The immigrants who remade New York in the 1990's are now indelibly shaping its future, according to new city figures showing that 6 in 10 babies born in the city since 2000 have at least one foreign-born parent. The foreign-born groups growing fastest through immigration, including Mexicans, Guyanese and Bangladeshis, also have among the highest birthrates, the figures show.

Even for a city with a storied immigrant past, the sheer size and diversity of the present foreign-born population is greater than ever before, according to the most detailed and sweeping portrait of immigrant New York ever to be issued by the City Planning Department. Demographers counted 2.9 million immigrant residents in 2000 and estimate the current number is at least 3.2 million, a record high.

The report, to be released today as a 265-page book called "The Newest New Yorkers 2000: Immigrant New York in the New Millennium," offers a comprehensive look at the foreign-born residents who have transformed the city's neighborhoods, schools and businesses, bringing sari shops to Queens, halal pizza to Brooklyn and Ghanaian preachers to the Bronx. Unlike earlier city reports that dealt only with legal immigrants recorded by federal authorities, this analysis tries to capture legal, illegal and temporary residents alike, combining census information, city housing surveys and vital statistics to offer a fine-grained topography of a global resettlement unmatched by any other metropolis.

One result is the striking emergence of Mexicans as the fifth largest immigrant group in the city. Their census numbers quadrupled to 122,550 in the decade since 1990, when they ranked 17th with 32,689. City demographers said the true growth was still higher, possibly to a total of 200,000, and not expected to slow. Births to the city's Mexican-born mothers - 6,408 in 2000 - are second only to births to foreign-born Dominicans, who remained the most numerous of the city's foreign-born groups at 369,000 residents, followed by the Chinese, the Jamaicans, and the Guyanese.

The report did not try to calculate rates of illegal immigration for Mexicans or any other group, though Mr. Salvo acknowledged that the large increase in the Mexican-born population could not be accounted for by recorded legal immigration. Jeffrey Passel, a

demographer with the Pew Hispanic Center who has studied the issue, said that nationally, 80 to 85 percent of all Mexican immigration since 1990 was undocumented, while among other immigrant groups, a great majority had entered legally.

"Any place that's getting a lot of new immigration from Mexico, virtually all of it is undocumented," Mr. Passel said, "and that certainly includes New York."

Still, the city is home to only 1 percent of Mexicans in the United States - compared with 54 percent of the nation's Dominican-born immigrants and 45 percent of its Bangladeshis, who are the city's fastest-growing group. Too few to count in 1980, Bangladeshis surged to 17th place from 42nd in the 1990's, mainly through diversity visas issued by lottery. They now place 10th in the number of births, with Pakistanis right behind them. One reason is that nearly 80 percent of Bangladeshi households are married-couple families, as are more than 6 in 10 Indian, Chinese, and Pakistani homes, compared with only 31 percent of native-born New Yorkers' households.

At a time when a Congressional push for crackdowns on illegal immigrants is converging with backlogs in legal immigration, the report stresses the economic benefits that sheer numbers of newcomers brought the city in recent decades, replacing residents who died or moved out, filling housing vacancies, revitalizing small businesses, and now accounting for 43 percent of the city's work force. High rates of migration to other states are still offset only by a combination of foreign immigration and births increased by immigrant fertility, the demographers said.

"If we didn't have immigration, I don't know where we'd be," said Joseph Salvo, director of the department's population division and co-author of the report with Arun Peter Lobo. "Immigrant flows have mitigated catastrophic population losses in the 1970's, stabilized the city's population in the 1980's, and helped the city reach a new population peak of over 8 million in 2000."

In the new world limned by the report, ethnicity and race are moving categories. More than a third of the city's black population is now foreign-born, the demographers said, with Afro-Caribbeans, who represent 21 percent of the city's immigrants, tending to replace African-Americans moving outside the city and to southern states, and the African-born population more than doubling to 92,400, or more than 3 percent of the foreign born.

Though Europeans increased in numbers through a surge of refugees and the use of diversity visas, available to people with low rates of recent immigration, like Poland, they declined to 19 percent of the city's foreign-born population from 24 percent. Had the countries of the former Soviet Union been counted together, as in earlier reports, immigrants born there would have been the city's fourth largest group, with 164,000 residents. Instead, Russia placed 10th, with 81,408, with Ukraine, Belarus and others lower on the list.

Nearly a third of city immigrants are from Latin America. Yet they seem as much divided

as united by their Hispanic origins, with Mexicans joining the Chinese in Sunset Park, Ecuadoreans in Jackson Heights beside Bangladeshis, and Salvadorans and Guatemalans showing up in Far Rockaway. In that seaside neighborhood, demographers also discovered Russians, Ukrainians, Haitians, Israelis, Nigerians and Jamaicans after Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, noticing its unusually high numbers of non-English speakers on a map of literacy needs recently, asked them, "What's going on down there?"

In his 1997 book "A Far Rockaway of the Heart," the Bronx-born poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti might have provided an answer:

Everything changes and nothing changes

Centuries end

and all goes on

as if nothing ever ends...

And the fever of savage city life

still grips the streets

But I still hear singing...

A century ago, when immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe poured through Ellis Island, the foreign-born made up more than 40 percent of the city's population - 80 percent when their American-born children were counted, too. But the city's total population was then only 4.7 million. At 36 percent of today's 8 million New Yorkers - up from a low of 18 percent in 1970 - the size of today's foreign-born population is a record, and taken together, foreign-born residents and their offspring account for more than 55 percent of the city's population. More than 43 percent of the foreign-born arrived after 1990, and 80 percent after 1980.

The same dynamic that New York experienced then is now under way in the 31 counties of the metropolitan region, the report said, especially in Hudson, Passaic, Union, Middlesex, Bergen and Essex in New Jersey and Westchester in New York, which all count the foreign-born as more than one-fifth of their populations.

Increasingly, some immigrant groups, like Jamaicans and Haitians, are bypassing the city and settling directly in adjacent counties, drawn to housing vacated by aging European immigrants of earlier migrations and their children.

"New York City is as much a process as a place," the report said of these crosscurrents.

What Mr. Salvo called the report's "wall-to-wall statistics" conveyed a strikingly mixed bag of socioeconomic factors, with some large groups, like Dominicans and Mexicans,

far below the city's median education and earnings, and others, like Filipinos and Indians, far above it. In many groups, high rates of homeownership coexist with high rates of overcrowding - 42.2 percent of Chinese households are owner-occupied, for example, and 34.2 percent are overcrowded, compared with citywide rates of 30.3 and 14.6 percent respectively.

Just over one in four foreign-born Dominicans has completed high school, and only 30 percent speak English very well. Nearly a third are in poverty, compared with a citywide rate of 21 percent, and 18.6 percent of households are on public assistance, compared with 7.5 percent for all residents.

Though Mexicans had the city's lowest median earnings (\$16,737 for women, \$21,284 for men) and lowest levels of education (slightly more than a third graduated from high school), they managed to bring their household incomes to 85 percent of the city median of \$37,700, by having multiple workers in overcrowded households.

That was a strategy used even by highly educated foreign-born groups like the city's 49,600 Filipinos, at the other end of the spectrum. Median female earning among Filipinos was \$51,000, and median household income \$70,500, both the highest of any immigrant group. Though there are only 60 Filipino men to every 100 Filipino women, the Filipino poverty rate is only 5.3 percent, a fourth the citywide rate of 21 percent; only 2 percent receive public assistance.

"There is no typical New York immigrant," Mr. Salvo said. The report assembles an intricate mosaic of facts to support that assertion, from the highest rates of homeownership (Italians, 64 percent) to the most skewed sex ratio (161 Pakistani men to every 100 Pakistani women). Its combination of maps and tables pinpoint the whereabouts of the top 40 immigrant groups, from the 90,336 Dominicans in Washington Heights, to the five French immigrants settled in the Great Kills Zip code on Staten Island.

"The level of complexity and diversity is beyond anything we've had in our history," Mr. Salvo said. "We've evolved into a city that's just an unprecedented mix. And for the most part all these people get along - it's a testament to the power of the city."

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