Immigrants and Intergroup Relations in the 21st Century: New Challenges, New Opportunities

Discussion Paper

Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees

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About GCIR

GCIR is a national network of foundations interested in issues affecting the growing newcomer populations in their communities across the U.S. and in Canada. Founded in 1990, GCIR seeks to promote awareness and understanding among grantmakers about national and international migration trends, public policies, and other issues affecting immigrants and refugees, and to increase financial support for projects and activities benefiting immigrant and refugee communities. We view immigrant and refugee issues within the human rights framework and as part of a broader social, economic, and racial justice agenda and are committed to fostering alliances between immigrants and other communities of color around common issues of concern.

About This Paper

This paper responds to the growth of the immigrant and refugee population and the resulting increase in diversity in rural and urban communities across the U.S. It seeks to enhance grantmakers’ understanding of intergroup relations within the dynamic context of immigration and to identify effective strategies for foundations to consider.

This paper is intended to serve as background for discussion only. In 2003, GCIR will build on the ideas put forth in this paper and produce a more extensive publication that offers a deeper look at promising models and grantmaking strategies.

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## Table of Contents

I. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 4

II. Demographics .............................................................................................................. 5
   A. The Astonishing Growth of Immigration in the 1990s
   B. New Diversity in New Regions of the Country

III. The Challenges of Diversity and Their Impact on Intergroup Relations 7
   A. Public Perceptions of Immigrants
   B. Grappling with the Immigrant Influx
   C. Anti-Immigrant Activities and Hate Crimes
   D. Post-September 11 Concerns

IV. The Economics of Immigration: Are Immigrants Taking Jobs Away .... 11 from Natives?
   A. The Point of Contention
   B. What the Research Says
   C. No Clear-Cut Answer

V. Promising Responses: Multiethnic, Multiracial Coalition Building ..... 14

VI. Recommendations for Funders .............................................................................. 16
   A. Funding Opportunities
   B. Evaluating an Intergroup Relations Program
   C. Lessons from Experienced Funders

VII. Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 19
I. INTRODUCTION

Immigrants have been redefining the face of the United States for over 200 years. The “sending” nations have changed over time. Since the 1970s, Asian and Latin American countries have dominated immigration with the entry of African newcomers on the rise. The numbers of immigrants entering the U.S. over the past three decades far surpass the totals for any other 30-year period. Today, more than 31 million foreign-born individuals reside in the United States, representing 11 percent of the total population. One in five residents of the country is an immigrant or the child of an immigrant. Latinos now constitute about 13 percent of the total population, the same percentage as African Americans, while Asian Pacific Americans, the fastest growing minority group, represent about four percent of the total population.

Immigration, coupled with higher birth rates among Latinos and Asians than among whites, has considerably increased the diversity of the United States. The influx of immigrants to new gateway states and cities, along with rural and suburban communities, means that intergroup relations and tensions are no longer challenges facing major cities and a handful of states. Expanded diversity forces a shift in minority-group definitions and dynamics and changes the framework for debates on social and economic justice. It creates both intergroup challenges and opportunities for coalition building. An increasingly multiethnic and multiracial society points to the limitations of the black-white paradigm in understanding the experiences of other communities of color. A new paradigm is needed to advance constructive intergroup relations and progress toward racial justice.

This discussion paper provides background information to help grantmakers understand intergroup relations in the dynamic context of immigration. It presents an overview of the demographic and economic profile of immigrants, a description of the expanding role that immigrants play in community life, and challenges facing immigrants that exacerbate intergroup tensions. The paper also offers examples of promising responses and presents recommendations to help grantmakers identify funding opportunities and think strategically about how best to support intergroup relations programs, both within their current fields of interest and through special initiatives. Recognizing that this paper provides only a basic introduction to the complex issue of intergroup relations, a list of publications and organizations is included as resources funders can consult for additional information on this topic.
A. The Astonishing Growth of Immigration in the 1990s

Nathan Glazer’s 1985 description of the United States as the “permanently unfinished country” continues to be apt.\textsuperscript{3} With the number of foreign-born residents in the U.S. increasing by 13 million during the 1990s, our nation clearly remains a land of immigrants. According to the 2000 Census, the foreign-born population numbers more than 31 million, 11 percent of the total population due to the stunning 50 percent increase in Latino and Asian American populations fueled largely by immigration over the past ten years.\textsuperscript{4}

The growth of the Latino population in the U.S. outstripped overall population growth throughout the country.\textsuperscript{5} In 2000, Latinos numbered over 35 million, slightly more than African Americans, making each about 13 percent of the total population. Within two years, 18 of the 25 most populous U.S. counties will have larger Latino than African-American populations. Latinos are already one-third of the population in California and are projected to outnumber whites by 2025.

Asian American growth almost matched Latino growth in the 1990s. The Asian American population soared from about 7.2 million in 1990 to 12 million in 2000, although Asian Americans still represent only about four percent of the total U.S. population.

B. New Diversity in New Regions of the Country

Immigration enriches the diversity of the U.S. in many ways. In the 1990s, immigrants expanded racial, ethnic, and religious diversity beyond the traditional gateway states. They bring to these communities different cultures, worldviews, social and political experiences, languages, customs, and religious practices. Integrating these differences is a constant challenge for American communities, particularly those that have experienced little diversity in the past and those that still perceive diversity as black and white.

1. New-Growth States

Immigration-driven population growth is not limited to a few states. During the 1990s, the foreign-born population grew by a dramatic 95 percent in the new-growth states, compared to only 23 percent in the traditional immigrant states of California, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas.\textsuperscript{6} The 19 new-growth states are Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Utah, and Virginia.\textsuperscript{7}

2. Urban and Rural America

The 2000 Census found immigrants in a range of communities and neighborhoods, from urban areas to small rural towns and from areas that have experienced little diversity in the past to areas whose diversity is being redefined. These demographic changes are raising and re-raising a variety of questions relating to intergroup relations.
The Latino population experienced explosive growth outside the nation’s urban areas, as Latino immigrants helped to fill increasingly available low-wage jobs in suburban and rural areas during the 1990s. Immigrants from Latin America came to the U.S. to, among other things, work in meatpacking plants in Nebraska, tend crops in Kentucky, process chickens in North Carolina, and manufacture carpets in Georgia mills.8

The Asian Pacific American population also grew considerably in non-traditional immigrant states. Kentucky, for example, saw a 75 percent population increase in Asian Pacific Americans since 1990.9 In Utah, Asians are the second-largest minority group following Latinos. In Massachusetts, the Asian population increased nearly 70 percent, while Latinos grew almost 50 percent. The Asian population doubled in South Dakota.10

3. Increased Diversity in Traditional Immigrant Strongholds

Even traditional immigrant destinations have become more diverse. For example, in New York City, while Chinese Americans remained the largest Asian Pacific American group, the Asian Indian American population grew 80 percent (to 170,899) in the 1990s and Bangladeshi Americans surged 285 percent (to 19,148).11 The city’s Mexican American population grew from 62,000 in 1980 to about 200,000 in 2000.12

4. Religious Diversity

Immigration has engendered more than racial and ethnic diversity. Consider the religious diversity that has ensued in a traditional “Bible Belt” city like Nashville, Tennessee, which is currently home to six Buddhist communities, five Jewish congregations, five Islamic mosques, a Baha’i center, a Hindu temple and a Hindu ashram, or teaching abode, plus assorted Sikhs and Jains. In Nashville, two categories of new religious expression are apparent: the Christian and the non-Christian variety. Enclaves of Laotian Buddhists, Kurdish Muslims, and a scattering of Jains, practitioners of an ancient Indian philosophic tradition, can be found in addition to Korean Protestants, Armenian Christians, and Eastern Orthodox practitioners.13 In Bowling Green, Kentucky, the population of 50,000 includes 4,000 Muslims.14

Immigration has a profound effect on diversity in the U.S. With immigration-driven diversity likely to continue in the foreseeable future, intergroup relations will be an issue that many communities, towns, and cities across the U.S. will have to address for years to come.
III. THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY AND THEIR IMPACT ON INTERGROUP RELATIONS

A. Public Perceptions of Immigrants

Public perceptions and attitudes toward immigrants, which can profoundly affect intergroup relations, have always been divided, often influenced by factors such as size of the immigrant population and the nation’s economy.

In recent years, attitudes toward immigrants underwent a remarkable turnaround, particularly regarding their economic impact. In 1994, 63 percent of the public saw immigrants as “an economic drain on the country.” But a year before the unspeakable September 11 tragedy, that number had dropped, with 38% holding an unfavorable view of immigrants.

Although the country was more welcoming toward immigrants, a generalized concern about the increase in their numbers was evident. Only 32 percent of those polled in April 2001 viewed the increase as a good thing, while 50 percent were worried by it. Among non-Latino whites, 28 percent thought the immigrant population increase was good, and 54 percent felt it was bad; blacks and Latinos had a more favorable view.

Prior to September 11, 42 percent of Americans viewed ethnic and racial diversity fueled in large part by immigration as a “good thing,” while 28 percent viewed it as a “bad thing.” And 43 percent of those polled said that immigrants now adapt better to American life than prior generations of immigrants, while 21 percent felt they do not adapt well. On the other hand, more than a third of the public believed that legal immigrants enjoyed too many “special rights.”

Americans also were divided on the question of legalizing undocumented immigrants prior to September 11. In an August 2001 survey, 49 percent opposed and 40 percent favored an amnesty-like legalization program. Support rose to 62 percent, however, and opposition fell to 31 percent when respondents were asked if they would support legalization for undocumented immigrants who have lived in the United States since 1995, working and paying taxes.

Since September 11, attitudes toward immigrants have changed. For example, trust toward Arab Americans is now about 10 percent below the level expressed toward other ethnic minorities. Americans are somewhat more hostile to immigrant rights, as evidenced by strong public support for antiterrorist law-enforcement techniques. Surveys have shown that public skepticism about immigration increased after September 11, although that trend may reflect the economic recession as much as it does the terrorist attacks.

But increased anti-immigrant sentiment is clear. Recent polls in Georgia and Florida may be typical. In Georgia, a quarter of the respondents admitted that their attitudes toward immigrants became more negative after September 11; only 7 percent had a more positive attitude toward immigrants. And 49 percent called for a decrease in immigration. Rocked by the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, 8 out of every 10 Floridians now support
stronger curbs on immigration and greater federal scrutiny of immigrants already living in the U.S. Seventy percent said they supported expanding federal police powers to “indefinitely detain legal immigrants suspected of crimes during a national emergency,” even if it meant suspending civil rights like due process and the right to a speedy trial.\(^{19}\)

Yet, the signals are not all bad. In a poll that compared attitudes one year before with those immediately following the September 11 tragedy, researchers found evidence of enhanced trust across ethnic and other social divisions. Whites trust blacks more, Asians trust Latinos more, and so on. An identical pattern appeared in response to classic questions measuring social distance: Americans in the fall of 2001 expressed greater open-mindedness toward intermarriage across ethnic and racial lines, even within their own families, than they did a year earlier. And despite signs that the public was somewhat more hostile to immigrant rights, the survey found that Americans are in some respects more tolerant of cultural diversity than they were a year earlier. In short—with the important but partial and delimited exception of attitudes toward immigrants and Arab Americans—the results suggest that Americans feel both more united and more comfortable with the nation’s diversity.

B. Grappling with the Influx of Immigrants

The growth in Asian and Latino immigrant populations outside of urban areas has introduced new social dynamics and problems once thought strictly the province of big cities, from overcrowded schools and health centers to simple communication between English and non-English speakers. This rapid growth is straining already-scarce public and community resources.

The widespread influx of immigrants means that controversies over bilingual education and publicly funded services for non-citizens are spreading to some unlikely places. And unlike New York City and Los Angeles, the new centers of Latino or Asian migration have little experience dealing with them.

Beardstown, Illinois: Increased Intergroup Tensions and Surprising Opportunities

In Beardstown, Illinois, population 5,000, the Latino population exploded 3,229 percent during the 1990s, revitalizing the decaying community on the banks of the Illinois River. A local pork-processing plant was the magnet. Some 30 percent of the plant’s 1,950 workers are Latino immigrants. Officially, more than 1 in 6 residents are Latino. Many local officials believe however, the actually Spanish-speaking population is twice that figure.

To some, the influx has been positive. “It’s just breathed new life into the community,” says Mayor Mike Bonansinga. “They are people you would want to have in your town.” Young Latino men began arriving here in the mid-1990s, lured by jobs that start at just under $10 an hour. Then they brought their wives and families, often directly from Mexico. Now they are buying homes. A Mexican restaurant/grocery store has opened on the town square. Latinos have started a soccer league. The local Roman Catholic Church now holds one of its three weekly masses in Spanish. “Generally, it’s been a good thing for Beardstown,” says J.J. DeSollar, an insurance agent and president of the local chamber of commerce. “It’s an initial shock for both cultures.”

But tensions climbed in 1996 when the murder of a white man by a Mexican immigrant prompted a cross-burning and the burning down of a Mexican restaurant in town. Afterwards, local ministers got whites and Latinos talking to one another. “The tension has quieted down,” says Police Chief Moe Genseal. But “you never know when something like that could happen.” Latinos complain local police stop them more frequently than other drivers. No one on the police force speaks Spanish, so routine traffic stops can drag on while officers wait for a volunteer interpreter to show up.

The local school district is scrambling to educate the area’s newcomers. One fifth of its 1,360 students are enrolled in history, math, and science classes taught in Spanish, while these students work to improve their English. Of the 108 certified teachers, only eight are bilingual, and the district is looking for more.

The district already has voter approval of a bond to build a $20 million middle school to accommodate the expected growth. “I think in time we’ll fight the same battles that California fought,” says school superintendent Jim Lewis.
C. Anti-Immigrant Activities and Hate Crimes

The influx of immigrants into areas unaccustomed to diversity or areas with a long history of racism has fueled fervent anti-immigrant activities, including hate crimes. Reports of anti-immigrant activities abound. These examples, unfortunately, are not isolated incidents but illustrate a disturbing trend.

• In Iowa, a state that is 97 percent white, anti-immigrant groups have targeted Governor Tom Vilsack for his plan to recruit immigrants to stave off the decline in the state’s population. And they have popular support: two of every three Iowa residents oppose the arrival of new immigrants, according to poll results released shortly after the Governor announced his initiative to attract more immigrants.

• In Bybee, Tennessee, more than two-thirds of the town’s residents tried to block the opening of a Head Start center for Latino children.

• In Lexington, Kentucky, residents circulated a petition opposing efforts to make the city “a safe place for Hispanics.”

• In Marietta, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta, the City Council passed an ordinance prohibiting day laborers and contractors from gathering on city streets to arrange for work.

• In Long Island, New York, two Latino immigrants were viciously attacked with a rock and knife by two white men who had lured them into their truck with the promise of work.

• In San Diego, California, immigrant workers have been shot, beaten, and robbed by members of white supremacist groups.

• Roger and Dan Barnett in Arizona regularly boast of their practice of rounding up and capturing immigrants on their ranch and holding them until the Border Patrol agents whom they have contacted arrive.

• At a David Duke rally in Siler City, North Carolina, signs read: “To hell with the wretched refuse” and “No way, Jose!” “Siler City is at a crossroads,” declared Duke, the former Ku Klux Klan Grand Dragon. “Either you get the INS to kick the illegal aliens out, or you’ll lose your community and your heritage.” County commissioners in Burlington, North Carolina, unanimously called for a halt to all immigration—legal and illegal. In one poll, 79 percent of white North Carolinians said their neighbors would oppose living among Latinos. Siler City police chief acknowledge, “A lot of the older people, they will never accept them [Latinos].”

These activities are often fueled, if not inspired, by anti-immigrant rhetoric from anti-immigrant groups like the Washington-based Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). Such groups invest funds in public relations campaigns aimed at turning public opinion against immigrants and encouraging Americans to blame newcomers for the
social problems that most inflame them, such as deteriorating public schools, economic disparities, and urban and suburban sprawl. Ads sponsored by FAIR, for example, blame immigrants for urban sprawl. According to the group’s political algebra, immigrants cause population growth, population growth causes urban sprawl, so immigrants cause sprawl. FAIR also blames immigrants for a rise rubella cases in North Carolina. A typical ad from FAIR reads: “[Immigrants] come in and undercut jobs that natives have always worked in….Immigration is also a key factor in the severe overcrowding of many New York schools….In Queens, the schools need additional space for roughly 30,000 more students.”

D. Post-September 11 Concerns

Within hours of the terrorist attacks of September 11, Americans of Muslim, Middle Eastern, and South Asian descent—and those mistaken for them—found themselves targeted for acts of hatred and racial profiling.

- In Bridgeview, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, three hundred protestors, many waving American flags and chanting “USA! USA!” marched on a mosque. One 19-year-old demonstrator exclaimed, “I’m proud to be an American and I hate Arabs and I always have.”

- In Huntington, New York, a 75-year-old man tried to run over a Pakistani woman in the parking lot of a shopping mall. He then followed the woman into a store and threatened to kill her for “destroying my country.”

- Near San Diego, a Sikh woman was attacked by a knife-wielding man, shouting “This is what you get for what you’ve done to us.” A Sikh family was followed out of a restaurant by two white men who screamed to the family, “Go back to your country.”

- In Phoenix, Arizona, a Latino man killed an Arab American as part of his multiple-incident shooting rampage that included shootings at a Lebanese-American clerk who escaped injury and at the home of an Afghan family.

- In Reedley, California, a Yemeni grocer was shot to death in his shop after receiving a death threat that included anti-Arab statements.

In contemplating this targeting of Muslim, Middle Eastern, and South Asian Americans by private individuals and official government policies after September 11, a clear theme emerges. In spite of the fact that these people have been part of the fabric of our country for some time, in the eyes of many, those among us of Muslim, Middle Eastern, and South Asian background are not “real” Americans.

The fact that hateful acts and words of private citizens are followed up with official regimes of detention and profiling only reaffirms the subordination of the victims through suspicion of loyalty. Within two months of the terrorist attacks, over 1,200 “suspicious” individuals, mostly Muslims and people of Middle Eastern descent, were detained by government officials, without access to family or counsel. As of August 2002, about 300 remain in custody, although the exact number is unknown because of the secrecy that shrouds the
detentions. Less than two months after the September 11 attacks, the Department of Justice developed a list of 5,000 Middle Eastern men, between the ages of 18 and 33, who were to be “voluntarily” interviewed. The governmental imprimatur further marginalize these communities in U.S. society.

Of course the most official action taken was the passage of the United and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 (USA Patriot Act) on October 26, 2001, with only one dissenting Congressional vote. The law has substantial immigration overtones, by expanding border enforcement, increasing INS access to investigative data, implementing a Foreign Student Visa Monitoring Program, creating new grounds of inadmissibility related to terrorism, providing for mandatory detention of terrorists, and sanctioning the indefinite detention of deportable persons who present national security risks.

IV. THE ECONOMICS OF IMMIGRATION: ARE IMMIGRANTS TAKING JOBS AWAY FROM NATIVES?

A. The Point of Contention

Misperception of immigrants’ impact on wages and the job market is a leading cause of intergroup tensions. Critics of immigration claim that people who come to the United States take jobs away from native-born workers and cause significant lost wages for “real Americans.” This myth has driven a wedge between immigrants and African Americans, two marginalized groups that are often excluded from economic opportunity.32

While it may be too simplistic for anti immigrant groups to make broad, sweeping claims that immigrants take away jobs from native workers, equally simplistic are the claims of pro immigrant groups that immigrants take only jobs that native workers do not want. The pro immigrant claim may be generally true, but individual willingness to take a job also depends on a person’s age, stage in life, attitude, opinion of the job, wage level, work conditions, and the like. For this reason, a nuanced look at the labor market, regional variations and worker preferences is imperative to understanding who is working, who is not, and why. An understanding of who is moving into certain jobs and who is moving out is also essential. Is there a push/pull effect? Are employers looking for less expensive labor? Do the practices of employers exacerbate intergroup relations? Is there evidence of discrimination, especially in a post 9/11 era where certain groups face higher levels of discrimination? All these questions are relevant to a full understanding of the issue.

B. What the Research Says

Although this paper does not attempt to provide a comprehensive response to these questions, it provides a summary of the recent research findings in this area. According to Nelson Lim, research director of the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey and authority on social inequality based on race, gender and nativity, quantitative researchers have yet to find conclusive evidence showing that immigration substantially harms the jobs or livelihoods of native-born workers—despite more than a decade of work on this issue. However, that is not to say that subtle competition is precluded from the range of possibility.33
1. Structural Changes in the Economy Displace Native Workers

The continued marginalization of low-wage native workers has complex roots and is not necessarily the result of competition from low-wage immigrant workers. The literature suggests that native workers who have been displaced because of the economic recession or structural changes in major industries are generally not in competition with immigrants. The low-wage, unstable, menial jobs held by most immigrants are not long-term solutions for native workers who have lost jobs nor the immigrants who have no other options. Certainly, some displaced workers might be willing to take such jobs for a while, but it is questionable whether many would do so for the long term. Retraining and relocation assistance are the preferred strategies for improving employment prospects for displaced African-American and other workers.

2. Immigrant and African American Workers Are Concentrated in Different Sectors

Data from existing research also suggest that African Americans and immigrants are concentrated in different industries and job sectors, reducing the likelihood of direct competition between the groups. In the food industry, for example, African Americans generally work in fast food outlets and intermediate sector chains, while immigrants work primarily in ethnic restaurants. Likewise, African Americans are concentrated in unionized construction, whereas immigrants often work for nonunion contractors or subcontractors. Certainly, the occupational division may be far from complete, and competition far from separate. For example, were it not for nonunion immigrant construction, union firms that employ African Americans would have more opportunities.

On the other hand, many businesses would simply dissolve, move abroad, or automate if they were unable to use immigrant labor. In these cases, immigrants do not directly displace native workers. This has been demonstrated in research on Los Angeles automotive parts firms, the garment industry, other light manufacturing, and assembly jobs. So immigrants who are used as transitional workers or who comprise certain industries’ flexible workforces in order to survive or compete are probably not hurting African Americans. In fact, despite their low wages, immigrant workers become consumers who help create jobs that native workers fill.

A quick look at two low-wage job sectors, restaurants and construction, in different parts of the country that are associated with immigrant workers begins to provide a better understanding of the complexities involved.

a. Restaurant Industry

This sector is an example of the complementary nature of a workforce in which immigrants mostly work without displacing native workers. Broad and diverse, the restaurant industry has parts in which immigrants play an important role, and others in which they play only a minimal role. Two studies, one in New York and the other in San Diego, begin to explain why.

The New York restaurant industry can be divided into four parts: fast food, intermediate, full service, and immigrant owned. While all four employ many unskilled workers, only the full-
service and immigrant-owned restaurants recruited immigrant workers. A further illustration of the complementary nature of the work performed by immigrants in the restaurant industry is a unique look at two different types of full-service and immigrant-owned restaurants in San Diego: American/seafood places and Mexican food businesses. Both groups used Mexican workers but to different degrees. In the American/seafood restaurants, 20 percent of the workers were Mexican, compared to 80 percent in the Mexican food restaurants. In both cases, Mexicans dominated the kitchen and busboy positions. However, to create an ambiance of authenticity in the Mexican-theme restaurants, Mexicans held most of the jobs in the “front-of-the-house” in those restaurants. Front-of-the-house positions are important as they constitute 80 percent of restaurant jobs.

b. Construction Industry

The construction industry provides yet another example of the potentially complementary nature of immigrants’ participation in the labor market in their role as contractors and as workers. While major builders continue to dominate the large construction market, immigrant entrepreneurs in New York, for example, have become strong competitors with nonunion shops and African American-owned construction firms in the non-standardized residential market and, to a degree, as subcontractors for major builders. However, African American companies often rely on government contracts targeting minority-owned firms, while immigrant-owned companies tend to specialize in residential additions and rehabilitation work.

3. Employer Discrimination against African Americans Continues to Persist

Researchers have examined the relationship between immigrants and African American joblessness. One analysis of two Los Angeles groups—young African Americans and those with limited education—found a small increase in joblessness resulting from the increased presence of Latino immigrants with limited education. However, the researchers concluded that the findings resulted from employer racism. When a pool of low-skilled Latino workers was available, employers were able to reject African Americans.35 Research elsewhere is consistent, confirming employers’ conspicuous prejudice against African Americans.36 The “discriminatory predispositions” of Chicago employers also were examined, and consistent with the Los Angeles results, immigrant workers—be they Mexican, Asian, or Eastern European—were consistently praised and preferred over African American.

These labor economic surveys confirm a serious and persistent societal evil—employers’ continued discrimination against African Americans. Thus, in areas of the country such as Los Angeles and Chicago where a ready supply of low wage immigrant workers exists, employers with discriminatory instincts against African Americans choose immigrants over low skilled, less educated African Americans. Solving this problem is a matter of eradicating prejudice; the solution does not lie in keeping foreign-born workers out.

C. No Clear-Cut Answer

The large body of research on this issue does not provide a clear-cut, definitive panorama of immigration economics and its impact on native workers. However, the existing
literature indicates that immigrants generally do not take jobs away from native-born workers and that their overall effect on the labor market is positive. The policy challenge for African Americans with limited education entails the development of strategies for drawing less-skilled workers, be they native born or foreign born, into the economic mainstream.37

VI. PROMISING RESPONSES: MULTIETHNIC, MULTIRACIAL COALITION BUILDING

Flexing their numerical strength, immigrants have begun to exert their influence on key aspects of U.S. society. Particularly relevant to intergroup relations, Latino and Asian Americans have become active participants in the fight for racial and economic justice. Although it would be erroneous to assume that Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans are of one mind on political and social issues, coalition-minded members of these communities have a long history of coming together on issues of common concern going back to the ethnic studies movement of the 1960s as well as low-wage workers’ rights for decades. The National Council of La Raza, League of United Latin American Citizens, Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, Organization of Chinese Americans, and the Japanese American Citizens League are a few examples of diverse organizations that regularly join forces with the NAACP, the Urban League, and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. As an example of new realizations, just this past April, members of the Congressional Black, Hispanic, and Asian Pacific Caucuses held their first tri-caucus retreat. The three-day event was an attempt to create an atmosphere of understanding among groups that have often felt pitted against one another for resources and recognition.38

Coalition building among immigrants and between immigrants and African Americans is not occurring only at the national level. Efforts to build multi-ethnic alliances and promote intergroup relations are gaining strength in urban and rural communities across the country.

• In Los Angeles County, low-wage garment workers, day laborers, restaurant workers, ethnic supermarket workers, and domestic workers are working together as part of the Multi-Ethnic Immigrant Workers Organizing Network (MIWON) in support of legalization and workers’ rights. What’s astonishing is that these workers are not all Latinos—they are Koreans, Thais, Chinese, Filipinos, Salvadorans, Mexicans, among others. Their meetings are often conducted in multiple languages.

• The North Carolina Center for International Understanding, based in Raleigh, regularly organizes groups of local civic and political leaders—including police chiefs, mayors, county commissioners, and school superintendents—to visit Mexico and gain a better understanding of the Latinos in their midst. The Center has also worked closely with African American leaders to improve intergroup relations with the Latino community.
• In Gainsville, Georgia, the New Town Flower Club, a volunteer group of African Americans who purchase flowers for indigent people’s funerals, brought together older, lower-income African Americans and young Latinos to address the high incidence of cancer in their community. Together, they have become a force for social change.

• In Raleigh, North Carolina, African American and Latino workers, through Black Workers for Justice and the Farm Laborers’ Organizing Committee, are joining forces to fight for better wages and work conditions in the poultry industry, countering the efforts of employer to pit the two groups against each other. Black Workers for Justice, among other leading organizations in the African-American community, have stated its public support of legalization for undocumented immigrants. Honoring the civil rights movement, Latino workers joined their Black counterparts in a Juneteenth march last summer.

• In South Central Los Angeles, where the infamous “riots” took place ten years ago, Latino and African American high school students through the Community Coalition are working together to demand a better education from the public school system.

• In Chicago, immigrants and refugees from Latin America, Asia, and Africa formed a grassroots coalition in response the 1996 welfare law’s disproportionate impact on immigrants and refugees. They have since worked together on many other issues and have brought into their coalition Bosnian, Polish, and Arab immigrants.

• In Boston, Irish immigrants are working with Caribbean immigrants to make sure that all immigrants, regardless of their immigration status, have access to a driver’s license. Through the Irish Immigrant Center, they are working to overcome the painful history between Irish and African Americans and work together toward common goals.

• In Arlington, Virginia, African-American and Latino parents have come together to improve the quality of education for their children and to make sure parents have a voice in the school system.

• In central Brooklyn, African and Caribbean immigrants are working with African-Americans to build economic power by managing a community-controlled credit union.

These multiethnic alliance-building efforts are helping immigrants, African Americans, and other native-born groups find common ground. Building on the foundation created by the civil rights movement, they hold considerable promise for the future of intergroup relations.
VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

A. Funding Opportunities

In light of growing diversity in the U.S. and the continued rise in the immigrant population, intergroup relations has emerged as a critical issue facing communities across the country, from large urban centers to isolated rural hamlets. As civic leaders, foundations are well positioned to play a pivotal role to improve intergroup relations in their communities.

This section of the discussion paper identifies strategic funding opportunities that can help bridge differences among immigrant groups and between immigrants and natives include:

1. Ongoing research on the economic incorporation of immigrants and their impact on African American and other native-born workers.

2. Dissemination of high-quality research to communities, organizations, journalists, and policymakers concerned with the unemployment of less-skilled African Americans and with immigration and immigrant integration policies.

3. Ongoing documentation and dissemination of promising practices in intergroup relations involving immigrants.

4. Public education and media campaigns to increase understanding of immigration, particularly their contributions to the economy. Public education should include the use tools of popular culture (e.g. music, live performance, film, television, radio) as well as more established non-profit strategies such as community meetings.

5. Education of local civic and political leaders in new immigrant gateways to increase their understanding of the immigrant experience. This might include site visits to the hometowns of immigrants in the community.

6. Educational activities that enable participants to teach others about historical and contemporary facts regarding race, racism, immigration status, gender, class, sexual orientation, and culture.

7. The development of model programs to integrate immigrants into their new communities, particularly in areas that are unaccustomed to diversity or areas where diversity is being redefined.

8. The development of new leaders of all ages who have a multiethnic and multiracial vision and perspective.

9. Programs that encourage participants to examine their conscious and unconscious attitudes about race, immigration status, gender, class, sexual orientation, and culture.
10. Encouragement and opportunities for participants and leaders, both immigrant and native born, to take action in addressing racial reconciliation.

11. Multiracial, multiethnic coalition building and campaigning at the local, state, and national levels, among diverse immigrant groups and between immigrants and native-born communities on issues of common concern, such as enforcement of worker protection laws and improvements in public education.

12. Support efforts to reform the ways in which organizations, institutions, and systems operate in order to lessen racial disparities and eliminate discrimination.

Funders working within the limits of their current fields of interests can support intentional intergroup work within their priority categories. For instance, an education funder might support efforts to bring parents together to discuss ways to improve the quality of education at their local public school.

Funders new to this issue might consider collaborating with other funders. Collaboration allows funders to explore a new area, take more risks, enrich their learning experience, and leverage their grant dollars.

B. Evaluating an Intergroup Relations Program

Drawing on scientific and practice literature on intergroup relations and diversity training, the Association for the Study and Development of Community developed a list of ten questions grantmakers can use to evaluate the merits of an intentional intergroup relations program.39

1. Do all the participating groups share a common goal that will benefit all of them when the goal is achieved?

2. Do the members from different groups recognize each other as equal sources of knowledge and resources?

3. Are there adequate opportunities and processes for members of different groups to get to know each other on an individual level and not as representatives of particular social group?

4. Are there adequate opportunities and activities for members of different groups to share their traditions and history and discover their commonalities?

5. Is there a process where different groups recognize and appreciate each other’s unique assets and build on their strengths to bridge differences and work together?

6. Is there a process for developing constructive norms for handling conflicts so that conflicts are viewed as opportunities and not as obstacles for strengthening collaboration?

7. Are there opportunities for celebrating collective actions to illuminate successful cooperation across different groups?
8. Is there a process for frequent contact and cooperation among different groups to foster their relations and build trust?

9. Is there support from institutions to sanction and reinforce the intergroup relations?

10. Are there strategies and processes to strengthen intergroup relations at the individual, institutional, and systems levels?

C. Lessons from Experienced Funders

In addition to posing these questions, experienced intergroup-relations funders suggest the following considerations in evaluating a grant request or engaging in an effort to promote positive intergroup relations:

1. Begin with clear definitions, goals, and objectives. Have an explicit conversation about indicators of success and milestones along the way to maintain accountability and to measure impact.

2. Bring all groups involved to the table at the beginning of the process. Not doing so will create barriers that will be difficult to overcome.

3. Be ready to invest a significant amount of time; the process can be tedious, but it can reap enormous rewards.

4. Consider each grant a mutual learning experience for the grantmaker and the grantee that can produce innovative solutions.

5. Add value by helping grantees connect with and learn from other organizations engaged in intergroup work.

6. Build in a strong evaluation component, so that the learnings can be shared.
VI. CONCLUSION

The rapidly changing demographic landscape, compounded by the events of September 11, have spurred America’s leaders, citizens, and immigrant populations to think seriously about intergroup relations. The influx of immigrants to new gateway states has broadened the geographic scope of intergroup relations and requires us to move beyond the black and white paradigm to understand the experiences of other communities of color. The challenges typically associated with diversity are giving rise to opportunities for multi-ethnic and multi-racial coalition building. From the New Town Flower Club in Gainsville, Georgia to the Multi-Ethnic Immigrant Workers Organizing Network in Los Angeles, California, multiethnic alliance-building efforts are helping immigrants, African Americans, and other native-born groups to overcome the pitfalls of race and find common ground.

This dynamic context creates enormous opportunities for philanthropic institutions to make a difference. As civic leaders, foundations are well positioned to support intergroup relations programs and initiatives that bridge the divides of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and/or immigration status. The promising solutions highlighted in this discussion paper demonstrate the potential for strengthening intergroup relations and can guide foundations’ exploration and investment in this exciting field.

Much like work in the fields of immigrant rights and social and economic justice, efforts to improve intergroup relations will unlikely produce immediate, concrete results. Relationship building across racial and ethnic lines requires time, and the outcomes will unfold in small increments. However, if pursued with thoughtfulness and patience, the long-term benefit will be well worth the wait.
END NOTES

1 For the purposes of this discussion paper, the term “immigrants” is used to refer to any person who is not a citizen or national of the United States. Immigrants as used in this paper refers to persons with many forms of status, e.g., foreign students, tourists, temporary workers, lawful permanent residents, asylum seekers, refugees, etc.


6 Id.

7 Growth of California’s Foreign-Born Population Slows as Immigrants Move to Other States News Release, the Urban Institute, Jan. 11, 2001.


13 Ray Waddle, Bible Belt Getting Stretched; City Known as Protestant Vatican Now Includes Variety of Religions, Study Shows, The Tennessean, Apr. 1, 2001, at 1B.

14 Id.

“Advancing the American Journey—An Outlook on Public Opinion,” by Belden Russonello & Stewart, commissioned by the Communications Consortium Media Center, May 21, at 16.


Mark Bixler, *Immigrants’ Rights at Risk?*, The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, Feb. 27, at 1E.


This incident is found at the Sikh Coalition website: www.sikhcoalition.org

31 Id at 8.


34 Id at 220.


36 Id at 40-42.


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