

Conclusion: The Future of Us All

At no one's request and by no one's design, Elmhurst-Corona was transformed from a solidly white neighborhood in 1960 to "perhaps the most ethnically mixed community in the world" by the 1990s. The United States is still at the early stages of a similar transition. The arrival of a "majority-minority" population on a national scale in the next century will not repeat the story told in this book, nor will the many local transitions from now to then follow any single script. Still, the elements and forces of change that transformed Community District 4 are already at work elsewhere and will recur in varying combinations and patterns in the coming decades. If our goal as citizens and neighbors is indeed, in Lani Guinier's definition, "an integrated body politic in which all perspectives are represented, and in which all people work together to find common ground," we need to ask what lessons may be drawn from the Elmhurst-Corona story.

Government Matters

In contemporary America, government is involved at every step in the movement toward common ground. It is not simply by individual choice that people of so many diverse origins live together in CD4. Individual whites, blacks, and immigrants indeed chose to move to, stay in, or leave Elmhurst-Corona, but they did so in response to shifting job opportunities, federal highway and housing programs, suburban zoning restrictions, inconsistent fair-housing law enforcement, and changing immigration policies—all the results of government actions.

Neighborhood New Yorkers endured assaults on quality of life resulting from the 1975 fiscal crisis and continuing budget cuts, clearly the product of permanent-government and mayoral decisions. Zoning regulations and diminished

housing-code enforcement defined neighborhood realities for all residents of Elmhurst-Corona and set the stage for their struggles to change them. Individuals innovated new alliances and forms of organization but did so within a political field shaped by decentralized community boards, district cabinets, and school boards—structures created by city policies that dated to the very years in which Elmhurst-Corona's majority-minority transition began.

All this occurred within a field of power relationships. The power of resources in New York City faced a major threat as the speculative-electronic economy dispersed nationally and globally, and the office buildings that had housed it began to empty. The power of numbers, divided by race, ethnicity, language, religion, and cultural background, faced new organizational challenges. Lubricatory power, either serving to contain the coalescing power of numbers in neighborhood New York or used on its behalf by wardens, renegade professionals, and citywide advocates, was more important than ever.

Contemporary antigovernment conservatives maintain that declining quality of life in neighborhood New York is inevitable. They expect those who can to practice "choice" and move away, and those who cannot to "trust the market" and "display a healthy respect for the natural economic development of the city."¹ Critics of this view point to the underlying power arrangements that such ideas reinforce. They show how permanent-government projects are promoted as "common sense" and "development" and defended "almost entirely on the basis of how many jobs or how much tax revenue they would produce," whether or not such claims can be substantiated. They also show how any use of public resources for the improvement of neighborhood quality of life is denigrated as "redistribution" to "low-income groups or 'minorities.'" ²

Elmhurst-Corona civic activists had their own ideas about what was "natural." They did not accept the permanent government's and Queens developers' faith in "market" solutions to inappropriate zoning, unsafe housing, crowded schools, and unresponsive police. They joined other Queens civic activists to defeat the Quality Housing plan and win downzoning. Their local efforts resulted in three new schools and additions to others. And as crime rates rose, they called for "cops on the beat"; with similar pressure from neighborhood New Yorkers elsewhere, the Community Patrol Officer Program was phased in citywide, police numbers were restored to 1975 levels, and crime rates began to fall. Only as power relations and then government policies change do new "truths" about who gets and deserves what begin to seem "natural."

What Brings People Together?

Politics is about more than attitudes. It is also about interpersonal connections and group action. Too much social science research defines only attitude surveys as "real," and brands real-life, real-time ethnographic observation as "anecdotal"

or "unrepresentative." The struggles, defeats, and victories that constitute neighborhood politics occur not because attitudes somehow change but because wardens act, leaders innovate, people meet, and numbers coalesce. Those who watch and listen systematically in places where this happens can observe politics unfold. Those who limit themselves to interviews and opinion polls miss all this and are left to design after-the-fact explanations of why political change occurs.

¹ Community District 4's extreme racial and ethnic diversity is unique, but more neighborhoods and cities will "look like Elmhurst-Corona" as America's great transition proceeds. Some whites will resist or move away, but others will increasingly interact with new neighbors across ethnic and racial lines. As this occurs, people first sort one another according to their own sets of racial and ethnic categories; then, over time, they begin to add to their networks actual persons with names, occupations, families, and individual characteristics.³ Where and how in Elmhurst-Corona does this second step start to happen?

First, self-introductions, exchanges of pleasantries, and sometimes friendships arise between neighbors on blocks and in apartment buildings. New residents frequently next encounter a local warden who offers advice on garbage collection or other immediate street and building matters. Sometimes they are also approached by members of block, tenant, co-op, and civic associations, or they see a newsletter or flyer and find their way to an organization meeting. Only a few will become active members of such groups, but along with neighborly ties these are the residential frontlines in bridging ethnic and racial borders. Categorical and personal relations with others, of course, also emerge in workplaces, and ties there affect the way people view and relate to neighbors.

For many whites, houses of worship are another site of cross-ethnic and cross-racial contact.⁴ Immigrants also establish their own houses of worship where languages other than English are spoken and little contact occurs with established white or black Americans—yet even here one often finds diverse congregations sharing space, and second-generation English-speaking youth groups beginning to appear. Just as Dutch, German, Polish, Italian, and other European-language congregations in Elmhurst-Corona's past became English-speaking and multi-ethnic over time, today's new houses of worship may face similar futures; already non-Chinese worship at Elmhurst's Ch'an Buddhist temple. In both predictable and no doubt unexpected ways, houses of worship will be important locations for solidifying and expanding interethnic and interracial ties.

Neighbor-to-neighbor relationships and houses of worship are "private," but wardens and civic groups involve residents with government policies and with efforts to influence and change them. Wardens ask neighbors to "obey the law" about the placement of garbage for collection and other matters; block watchers and "feelers in the community" form connections to police precincts, district-level city agency personnel, and local government bodies such as community boards and their district managers. Block and civic associations do the same, and

tenant and co-op associations, though formed for "private" purposes, make use of public laws and courts and frequently take on civic-association-like activities.⁵

This field of local political action brings participants together across racial and ethnic lines and can be expected to do so even more in coming decades. It is what these wardens and associations actually do, however, not any "joiner" impulse, that motivates them and their supporters. Most important, they struggle against assaults on the quality of life resulting from government shrinkage and budget cuts. In Elmhurst-Corona people of all races want effective policing to control drug trafficking, prostitution, gambling, and illegal dumping; and they want livable neighborhoods where parking, public transportation, schools, recreation facilities, access to hospitals, and a safe, decent housing supply are in balance.

The most universally supported quality-of-life concerns in CD4 focus on children: the two-decades-long struggle, still not over, *against* school overcrowding and *for* more youth programs. White wardens fought for expanded hours at the Elmhurst Branch Library and organized afterschool and summer youth programs and the Teen Center; black wardens ran summer cleanup and sports programs and tutored at the Lefrak City Branch Library; Latin Americans organized afterschool and summer programs; Latin American, Asian, and African American candidates ran for seats on School Board 24, and a Chinese woman from Elmhurst was its first member of color.

Some youth programs drew on CD4's annual two-dollar-per-child city youth services allocation and supplemented this money with volunteer adult effort. The need for sites, programs, and adult involvement, however, is far greater than what exists, and schools and youth programs remain underfunded. In 1989 two-thirds of New York City voters favored tax increases over cuts in programs, and six years later 61 percent of New York City parents were ready to pay higher taxes to improve public education. In 1997 two-thirds of New Yorkers remained dissatisfied with their city's schools.⁶ Parents of all races well understand the importance of education to their children's future. Joint efforts to secure more resources for schools and youth programs will promote racial and ethnic comity and accord.

Expect More Rituals

Rituals, ceremonies, commemorations, and demonstrations are "transmitters of culture" in human societies and are "generated in social relations." As culture becomes more variegated and complex and social relations more categorical and unpredictable, new rituals emerge to affirm old beliefs and routines, to integrate new ensembles of cultural elements, and to "bring order into experience" for changing groups of neighborhood co-residents.⁷

Rituals of ethnic celebration are created to mark the presence of new ethnic

groups and to affirm the persistence of established ones, and more of these rituals will appear as American communities become more diverse. Their ethnic particularity, however, rubs against the multiethnicity of street neighborhoods and city districts; hence, they migrate to central locations where they draw upon areawide populations; Israeli and St. Patrick's Day parades in Manhattan, the Dominican parade in the Bronx, the West Indian-American Day Carnival in Brooklyn, and ethnic festivals in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park provide examples. Their audiences, however, become more diverse over time; public officials of all races appear as marchers and guests; and their formal properties grow increasingly alike.⁸

Civic rituals such as Christmas tree lightings and Memorial Day observances are organized by established whites and celebrate values of continuity. They are revived when newcomers increase in number and these values are under question, but those that remain inwardly focused are unstable and may not survive. When they do, it is because they begin to incorporate newcomers, not only as audience members but as participants, and the parochial assertion of local priority yields to the communal value of place. When this happens, civic rituals no longer belong exclusively to their creators, and like Corona's tree lighting they continue because they now help "neighborhoods . . . retain their identities and boundaries despite . . . shifts in ethnic composition."⁹

Whereas civic rituals deemphasize ethnicity and race, rituals of inclusion openly celebrate diversity. Cultural Sharing Days, International Nights, and Parades of Nations symbolize multiethnic and multiracial communities and seek to promote tolerance, respect, and harmony. In these quintessentially American rituals the distilled, vestigial form in which European ethnicities survive becomes the model for assimilating new foreign cultures. The living cultures of adult immigrants evident in rituals of ethnic celebration risk trivialization as they are reduced to a song, a sharable food, a dance, a costume, a greeting, and a holiday. Perhaps rituals of inclusion work best when enacted by children, because assemblages of children are in themselves a positive symbol to adults of all races and ethnicities.¹⁰

If participation matters more than content in rituals of inclusion, content is paramount in quality-of-life rituals. These submerge ethnic and racial diversity to stress common neighborhood identity in celebrating new parks and clean streets, or in protesting drugs, prostitution, subway crowding, and other assaults on quality of life. Neighborhood residents who "share a common fate at the hands of city planners, realtors, [and] politicians" are reminded by these rituals that they "simply cannot ignore each other."¹¹ The power of numbers is valorized symbolically in quality-of-life rituals, and they bolster the work of wardens and local associations.

Listen to Women (They Listen to Each Other)

Early in my fieldwork, warden Bill Donnelly compared Elmhurst during the 1930s with the contemporary neighborhood:

In those days. . . only the rich had telephones. We had no telephone, and yet I couldn't do anything and get home before my mother knew about it, and met me on the way in the door with a smack. So my father called it the mothers' union—all the mothers were plugged into the clothesline, he said. Well, the world hasn't changed. The school bus for the primary school stops in front of my house. So there are eighteen to twenty kids and a good collection of mothers and fathers every morning waiting for the school bus. One morning a year ago, the kids were all lined up, and a mother was coming down the block, a new American from Korea, with a kid late for the bus. . . . And a little [Indian] boy on the end of the line—you could see this little lawyer's mind at work—he peels off and heads for home because he's got a good idea. His mother wasn't there; she didn't come with him; he's going home. So the kids get on the bus, the Korean mother packs her kid on the bus, and then she steps over and says to this little boy who's going up the road, "Where you go?" He says, "Home, I'm sick, I've got a cold." She opens his mouth, looks in, and says, "No sick. On bus." He goes on the bus. And I said to myself the mothers' union is alive and working. . . . The fathers can bitch and belly all they want, but the mothers are going to make sure that it all works out.

In the mid-1970s women began moving into Elmhurst-Corona's district-level political field and unblocking the channels between whites, immigrants, and blacks. As the sociologist Herbert Gans observes, "In communities where similarity of backgrounds . . . is scarce, collective action requires a sizeable amount of interpersonal negotiation and compromise—and leaders who can apply personal skills that persuade people to ignore their differences."¹² It was women more than men who supplied this leadership, and one should be prepared for more female leadership everywhere as America's majority-minority transition unfolds.¹³ Male wardens continued to be active in Elmhurst-Corona civic politics, but by the mid-1980s women held key leadership positions, and racial and ethnic relations began to change.

White Women

As district manager Rose Rothschild put it, "Men work, but women are at home, and talk to each other about children and schools." She became a parent leader at PS89 in the early 1970s "as the Spanish were moving into the neighborhood. I was the first to have things translated into Spanish for the parents, using a teacher to do it." After joining CB4 she served as health committee chair in the

early 1980s; there she solidified ties with white female CB4 members and met social service and health-care providers of all races. In her 1984 CB4 leadership bid, Rothschild was supported by Carmela George—who had organized block associations with advice from Democratic Party leader Helen Marshall, an African American, and with help from her own white and Latin American female neighbors—and by Judy D'Andrea, another block association leader. As district manager, Rothschild worked closely with black, Latin American, white, and Asian women, including several female CB4 members.

The core of white female leaders in CD4—Rothschild, George, D'Andrea, and Lucy Schilero of the Coalition of United Residents for a Safer Community—were Italian. Two others—Miriam Levenson at CB4 and Helma Goldmark in Sherwood Village—were Jewish. These women belonged to the last two white ethnic groups to arrive in Elmhurst-Corona, both of which had faced hostility and housing discrimination into the 1950s. Jews were long "restricted" from many apartment buildings. And Italians, as Bill Donnelly recalled, endured "the lament of the old established people here [that] we were going to have tomatoes and green peppers grown where the front lawns used to be, grape arbors in the driveways, and a goat grazing in the back yard." Carmela George's family encountered these attitudes from Irish and German neighbors in Corona in the mid-1940s, and Lucy Schilero was called "a black guinea" when her family arrived in Elmhurst in the 1950s. Italians and Jews later constituted most of the "white flight" from Corona Plaza and Lefrak City and were among those antagonistic to black and immigrant arrivals in the mid-1960s and 1970s. Still, when cooperative relations between established whites and newcomers began to form, it was women from these two groups who nurtured them.

Black Women

African American female leadership was also evident by the mid-1980s with Helen Marshall, Edna Baskin, and others active in the Lefrak City Tenants Association, the Democratic Party, and CB4. These women were heirs to the "race woman" tradition of outspokenness and organizational leadership in the black community, and they worked with their "race man" counterparts. Nonetheless, it was women—especially Marshall and Baskin—who formed links between their own networks and Elmhurst-Corona whites, white women in particular.

"Women can relate to each other around shopping, children, and daily neighborhood activities," Baskin explained. "I started organizing my group in the supermarket, putting up signs, and then talking to women on Saturday mornings. . . . [Borough president] Claire Shulman, Rose [Rothschild], and Miriam [Levenson] are the women's leadership that I can relate to. [Women] are the glue that holds things together in this community." When the C-Town incident occurred in 1991, Ruby Mohammad called Rothschild, who then called Baskin;

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the Community Task Force was begun, and it included several black female members.

Immigrant Women

Among Latin Americans male leaders dominated the many nationality-based associations, but it was women—Haydee Zambrana, Nayibe Nuñez-Berger, Aida Gonzalez—who formed organizations seeking to unite all Latin Americans. At CB4 it was again women—Clara Salas and Zambrana—who remained members for more than a year or two. Their appointments, moreover, came during the mid-1980s when CB4 was undergoing its own transition to female leadership.

Although Korean leaders were predominantly male, it was a woman—Daok Lee Pak—who became the first Korean CB4 member.¹⁴ Edna Baskin told me that when she first met the male leaders of the Korean American Association of Mid-Queens, “even though Mrs. Pak made the introductions,” they asked why women in the United States “took such an active role. I asked my husband [Ron Baskin] to answer them, sensing they would listen better to a man. He told them that women are the glue also.”¹⁵

Why Women?

Why was it women more than men who formed this network of cross-racial ties in Elmhurst-Corona? Sociologist Nancy Chodorow would trace these patterns to maternal socialization, which incorporates daughters into a world of women characterized by “relational” identification and “connection to other people,” whereas sons exit this world to adopt male roles emphasizing “positional” identification and individual achievement. Consequently, as linguist Deborah Tannen observes, women’s ways of talking are more likely to stress “a community of connection,” whereas men’s talk operates “to preserve their independence in a hierarchical world.” Furthermore, as historian Temma Kaplan posits, “the gender system of their society . . . assigns women the responsibility of . . . guarding their neighbors, children, and mates against danger”; under conditions of change “a sense of community that emerges from shared routines binds women to one another” and “politicizes the networks of daily life.” Political scientist Carol Hardy-Fanta concludes that women more than men “focus on . . . connecting people to other people to achieve change” but that such “participatory qualities are [not] the unique realm of women [and] these skills and values are within the abilities of men.”¹⁶

In Elmhurst-Corona women certainly acted to “guard their children.” When one district cabinet meeting turned to Parks Department capital projects, Rose Rothschild remarked, “I always suggest preschool buildings [in park reconstruction plans] because I’m a mother. Men never look at that.” Nonetheless, men such as Bob Tilitz, Al Fernicola, Richard Italiano, Tom Rodriguez, and Al Blake

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did champion library, afterschool, and recreation programs for school-age youth. Male wardens, particularly men who grew up or had long resided in the neighborhood, could also possess “a sense of community that emerges from shared routines.”¹⁷

As for race, women moved sooner from categorical to personal ties, relating more readily to women of another race as women than men did to other men. The “positional” and “hierarchical” values that continue to mark race relations in the United States are not only more characteristic of male socialization and gender roles but reinforced by the structural relationships of workplaces and hierarchical organizations. Many of Elmhurst-Corona’s women leaders were housewives or worked from their homes; men were more likely to be employed in formal settings. Women who entered civic politics, moreover, had frequently had experience in school, religious, or block association groups where improvisation and abilities to involve others were more important than tables of organization and titled positions.

Strengthen Local Democracy

As the quality of life in neighborhood New York worsened after 1975, local “parapolitical” activity expanded, and the city’s 3,500 civic, block, tenant, ethnic, and other associations in 1977 grew to 8,000 by 1995. Community boards, where many of these groups voiced their views on municipal services, land-use issues, and budget recommendations, provided new arenas for local politics at a time when political party clubs were becoming less powerful. Whatever their shortcomings, community boards strengthened local democracy. “Resolution of the grievances experienced at the level of communities,” organizer Prudence Posner points out, “requires the exercise of power that can enforce policies, regulations, and restrictions on very powerful economic entities.” This power of numbers working through community boards was exemplified in the 1989 downzoning of Elmhurst-Corona and in the 1996 defeat of Mayor Giuliani’s megastore plan.¹⁸

Neighborhood New Yorkers of all races—in 1988, 78 percent of Roman Catholic “white ethnics,” 79 percent of Asians, 84 percent of African Americans, and 88 percent of Latin Americans—favored *more* government decentralization.¹⁹ City charters affirming the power of community boards were approved by voters in 1975 and 1989. Eight-year limits for city council members, approved twice by voter referendum, will take effect in 2001, potentially devolving more power to the district-level political field. Still, community boards by the mid-1990s were less inclusive than they could have been. Their members were appointed, not elected, and particularly in racially and ethnically diverse community districts they did not fully “look like New York City.”

Making Community Boards More Inclusive

Appointment need not have unrepresentative results if it is directed toward creating "an integrated body politic in which all perspectives are represented." (District school board elections, moreover, *have* produced unrepresentative results and are marked by low turnout.)²⁰ Community board appointments are made annually by New York City's five borough presidents with advice and consent from the city council members representing each community district. This appointment process certainly broadened CB4's membership after the mid-1980s, but it has not yet produced a board that "looks like Elmhurst-Corona." By the mid-1990s whites and blacks were overrepresented, and Latin Americans and Asians still underrepresented.

Like other elected officials, city council members have little interest in expanding their electorates and encouraging demands from new groups; doing so could make reelection less likely and empower potential rivals.²¹ Council members cannot be expected to produce more diverse results in community board appointments until the power of numbers—registered voters—forces them to do so. Whites and blacks are not so much deliberately overrepresented on CB4 as appointed according to how sitting officials read their electorates. Stronger affirmative pressure toward inclusiveness is needed from the borough presidents, even to the point of turning down all a council member's recommendations if more diverse appointments are not forthcoming.

At the Queens hearings of the Mayor's Commission on Hispanic Concerns in 1986, one commissioner asked an aide representing council member Joseph Lisa Jr., "How many Hispanics are there on Community Board 4?" The aide dissembled, stating, "It is representative of the community." This was not true; Elmhurst-Corona was at least one-third Latin American, but there were only six Latin Americans among thirty-nine CB4 members. Borough president Claire Shulman was more honest. "On community boards, if an Hispanic wants to become a member they can easily be considered," she testified. "They can get [applications] from [my Hispanic liaison]. Five years ago we tried to get Hispanic members. Some did apply, but many work two jobs and can't come to night meetings. I have the power to appoint to community boards, and will appoint if they are interested in community affairs." Shulman's response reflected modest steps to make community boards more representative and identified some of the real barriers to greater immigrant participation.

In 1992 city council member John Sabini told the political scientist Michael Jones-Correa, then studying the many nationality-based Latin American associations in Jackson Heights, that he did not "know of any Latino groups holding regular meetings."²² Subsequent CB4 appointments reflected not only Sabini's unfamiliarity with the Latin Americans in his district but also his sensitivity to black votes in Lefrak City: African American numbers on CB4 rose; Latin American membership did not.

Reinventing Government from the Bottom Up

"Voting is a relatively inefficient mechanism for communicating voter concerns on particular issues," political scientist Jeffrey Davidson observes. Community board meetings, in contrast, provide both members and audience an arena where "average citizens can be stirred to overcome their apprehension [of government, politics, and politicians] and attempt to make their wishes known."²³ Community boards and district cabinets are also places where "ground truth" can be obtained from persons who are "at the location in question and observe conditions firsthand."²⁴

Bottom-up ideas about reinventing city government have received diminishing attention during the last three mayoral administrations. Nonetheless, as David Rogers, a student of New York's decentralization experience, concludes, "Ways must be found to link better the increasingly politicized and agitated neighborhoods with the power elites of the city, [and] to ensure that quality of life considerations are given higher priority in land use and service delivery decisions. As things stand now, the city . . . follows a style of reactive, top down, and crisis management that only triggers off a similarly reactive style from the neighborhoods, lessening the chances for the collaborative planning and service delivery that are so essential to the city's future."²⁵

The key to making Rogers's recommendation work is the district manager, the person who receives and filters local ground truth from board members and residents, presides over the district cabinet, and crystallizes policy recommendations in annual District Needs statements. Cuts in the district managers' budgets work against more democratic and effective city government.

The city's fifty-nine district cabinets are also potential sites of municipal unions' involvement in reinventing city government. Here union members work across bureaucratic agency lines to solve local problems. Rather than limiting themselves to salaries and benefits, city workers' unions could enlist their own members' ground truth in proposing service improvements, management strategies, and productivity gains from the bottom up.²⁶

Regulating and Inspecting the Quality of Life

Reversing two decades of assaults on the quality of life in neighborhood New York will require improved enforcement of many city regulations. More personnel are needed to supervise and coordinate housing and building code compliance control of illegal dumping, and workplace safety and wage-and-hour inspections.²⁷ Civic groups, community boards, and district cabinets support this increase. Against them stand "free market" conservatives championing deregulation.²⁸ Giuliani advisor Peter Salins is correct that "the poor receive much less benefit from the city's regimen of subsidies and price regulations than do the [upper] middle classes and the rich." This, however, is as much an argument for

redirecting budget resources and tax expenditures to quality-of-life concerns in neighborhood New York as it is a justification for deregulation and cutting taxes.²⁹

In the struggle for reregulation, differences in attitudes toward government between white and black Americans, on one hand, and immigrants, on the other, need to be acknowledged. White and African American civic activists seek to restore an era when government was on their side; most immigrants never experienced such an era. The working- and lower-middle-class white civic activists of Elmhurst-Corona benefited from government policies such as Social Security, workplace regulations, housing and homeowner-loan programs, and the public transportation, higher education, and health care that continued to expand until the 1975 fiscal crisis. Blacks began to enjoy greater access to these benefits as a result of 1960s civil rights laws that also widened their employment and housing opportunities. Indeed, few African Americans at all would live in Elmhurst-Corona if "the market" prevailed rather than the 1968 Fair Housing Act under which discriminatory practices were ended in Lefrak City.

Immigrants arrived mainly after 1975 and have seen only cuts and shrinkage in government services. Many paid substantial sums to navigate the immigration laws, utilize family reunification provisions, and become citizens. Some resent paying taxes, and many bring home-country fears and distancing tactics with respect to government. They ask what their taxes in fact provide as school crowding and other quality-of-life problems worsen. Immigrant small business proprietors object to revenue-producing city fines, which they see as arbitrary and punitive. And some business owners shade or evade the law, and welcome reduced enforcement of housing, zoning, and labor regulations. They find allies in conservatives who lionize immigrant entrepreneurship in order to promote deregulation and tax cuts.³⁰

Despite these differences, points of commonality emerge and need to be embraced by established resident and newcomer alike. Korean merchants protest city inaction on a Korean megastore that evades zoning regulations; Chinese Staff and Workers Association organizers target employers who pay subminimum wages; the Centro Civic Colombiano and Queens Hispanic Coalition join other Queens residents to fight privatization of Elmhurst Hospital. Room exists for negotiation and agreement among all neighborhood New Yorkers as to where and how government can improve their quality of life.

Increasing Coterminality

The overlapping boundaries of New York's fifty-nine community districts, fifty-one city council districts, and thirty-two school districts serve to "fragment" and "diffuse" the "loyalties, interests, and demands" of neighborhood New Yorkers seeking to influence city policy.³¹ Only community districts have any historic and geographical integrity. School districts have none; city council districts,

equally artificial, will again be redrawn after the next census. David Rogers urges that "school districts . . . be integrated into district cabinets to facilitate more needed collaboration with other city agencies," and political scientist Joseph Viteritti argues that "[full] coterminality between community districts, school districts, and council districts is essential in order to achieve effective community government."³²

In moving toward this goal, the "one-person, one-vote" question arises because community district populations vary in size. The integrity of their existing boundaries would be forfeited if they too were redrawn every ten years, but creative alternatives are imaginable: joining very small adjacent districts; giving very large ones two council seats; grouping several districts into like-sized constituencies with two or more representatives, perhaps elected by proportional representation; new modes of computerized, weighted voting.

After a frustrating 1988 district cabinet discussion of personnel cuts in Elmhurst-Corona parks, Rose Rothschild joked, "I'm going to run for mayor, because I know where the needs are. With my luck, I'd get voted in." As political scientists Susan and Norman Fainstein pointed out, in 1991 New York had not yet "had a mayoral candidate with roots in neighborhood politics."³³ (Unsuccessful 1997 Democratic candidate Ruth Messinger, a former district school board member, was the first.) Steps toward "full coterminality" would make this more likely.

*Bid Adieu to a *Longue Durée**

With the dispersal and deconcentration of the speculative-electronic economy that began in the early 1980s, New York City is no longer "the capital of the world," and no single city will replace it. Instead, what Fernand Braudel calls the "coherent and fairly fixed series of relationships between realities and social masses" which shaped New York's permanent government and neighborhoods for three hundred years is now winding down.³⁴ In its place, neither rhetorical celebrations of "the world city" nor the policies of the last three mayors offer much of a future to the children of Elmhurst-Corona.

In contemporary New York the "giant sucking sound" is that of government subsidies and personal income flowing upward to the fortunate fifth and outward to the suburbs. In addition to the continuing alphabet soup of permanent-government tax breaks and "hardship" property-assessment reductions, the Giuliani administration's twenty-seven corporate "designer packages" through May 1997 totaled \$310 million per year in taxes forgone. Subtracting the 61,000 jobs these deals "retained" from the 120,000 private-sector jobs added since 1993, and also subtracting 46,000 government jobs lost since then, New York City had added only 13,000 unsubsidized private-sector jobs.³⁵

Against this figure stand the 1989-1992 loss of 330,000 jobs, a labor force par-

ticipation rate of only 55 percent, and an unemployment rate by July 1997 of 10 percent, or some 320,000 people looking for work. Another 80,000 persons were slated to lose public assistance by 2002 with the expectation that they would move "from welfare to work." For New Yorkers with jobs, the gap between rich and poor continued to widen. Between 1991 and 1996 the wages of persons making \$25,000 or less fell by 7 percent, while earnings for those making \$75,000 or more rose by as much as 60 percent. And an increasing share of employment was going to commuters. In 1995 they held 21 percent of all New York City jobs; then in the first quarter of 1997 the city gained 20,000 jobs, but resident employment fell by 21,000.³⁶

This meager job picture, moreover, occurred in the midst of a speculative-electronic boom. By the end of 1996, 77 million Americans—an all-time peak—had invested in the stock market, and in summer 1997 the Dow-Jones average topped 8,000. Still, employment in the securities industry of New York City rose by only 5,600 during 1996, since nationally and globally dispersed trading was taking place everywhere. And part of even this job growth resulted from the increasing role of the city's investment houses in overseas mergers and acquisitions, activities in which fewer people doing deals in New York City may be anticipated in the future.³⁷

New York's *longue durée* was over. The \$2 billion a year in subsidies to fill empty Manhattan office buildings and "retain" speculative-electronic firms was not producing enough jobs for neighborhood New Yorkers.³⁸

Grow the Real Economy

Beneath events, conjunctures, and even long-lasting social orders, the "sites of cities endure" in relation to "geographical constraint" and the "linkage of the local ecosystem with other [systems] translocally."³⁹ The natural advantages of its harbor first determined New York City's physical location, and public investment in "the Great Dock" in 1676, the Erie canal in 1825, and three centuries of waterfront development maintained its centrality in overseas trade and the national economy. Countinghouses arose around the port and an expanding hinterland to supply it, and by the twentieth century they had evolved into the downtown-midtown office-building complex and what is still the largest regional economy in the nation. An infrastructure of bridges, tunnels, subways, and highways consolidated employment, land values, wealth, and face-to-face decision-making in the Manhattan core.⁴⁰

All this is now changing, and jobs for neighborhood New Yorkers in the new social order will depend upon renewed attention to the city's geographical constraints and translocal linkages. Moves to cheapen the cost of labor will do little to benefit neighborhood New York, but policies to lower land costs and improve transportation could provide the city's employers with competitive advantages in

both the regional and global economies. Instead of subsidizing Manhattan office rents in an effort to retain companies that are leaving anyway, New York could "let the market find its own level" and allow falling rents to spiral outward into the rest of city. An abrupt halt to permanent-government aid, rather than a planned shift of public support to the real economy, would leave a hole in the city's budget: receipts from the property-tax would drop, and so would income tax collections—in 1995, for instance, the heavily subsidized securities sector accounted for only 5 percent of New York's jobs, but 17 percent of all private-sector wages. For neighborhood New Yorkers, however, the budget is already full of holes, and tax money from permanent-government sources will decline in the future. Some speculative-electronic firms will remain in the city because of their executives' life-style preferences, and for them policies could be adopted immediately to award tax benefits only for "job creation" or retention verified by payroll-tax receipts.⁴¹

Downshifting the city's commercial rents from their artificially high levels could help retain employers and jobs that move to cheaper suburban locations but still require proximity to the region's suppliers, business services, and 18 million consumers.⁴² Some jobs do leave New York City for overseas sites, but more move within its regional borders. As the economist Paul Krugman explains, "When you look at the economies of modern cities, what you see is a process of localization: A steadily rising share of the work force produces services that are sold only within that same metropolitan area. [These] activities . . . make up the . . . employment that occupies most people in modern cities."⁴³

In addition, U.S. exports increased by 50 percent between 1990 and 1995, and the New York region still houses the largest East Coast port complex, one employing 165,000 workers. Beginning in the mid-1950s, however, overseas shipping shifted from Brooklyn to New Jersey with its direct connections to inland trucking and rail networks. Docks and cranes for containerized exports and imports were erected, and by 1990 more than 90 percent of sea cargo was moving through the Jersey ports.

The rail-freight tunnel that the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey was created to build in the 1920s was never constructed, and both foreign imports and New York City's manufactured goods have to be carried either by rail north to Albany and then south, or more expensively by truck across the George Washington Bridge and over a road system increasingly threatened with deterioration and gridlock. The public administration scholar Annmarie Hauck Walsh notes that "all of the highways, loans, partnerships, industrial parks, and tax abatements that authorities in the city have funded cannot produce a fraction of the economic advantage that low cost and efficient freight access to the container port facilities and to the interstate lines could have provided to manufacturing in the boroughs of New York."

As world trade boomed in the 1990s, the U.S. trucking system approached saturation, and rail-freight traffic revived, increasing to 40 percent of U.S. haulage

by 1996. Asian exports arriving on the eastern seaboard for nationwide distribution have grown, and global shipping companies have turned to larger vessels and use fewer ports. By 2000 a new generation of international ships will require fifty-foot deep docks. New Jersey's ports hit bedrock at forty feet, but Brooklyn's underused docks are sixty-five feet deep.

U.S. Representative Jerrold Nadler sees New York City's disadvantaged position in the geography of national distribution and overseas trade as a major cause of its manufacturing job losses, and since the late 1970s he has advocated construction of a Brooklyn–New Jersey rail-freight tunnel. With the larger ships that eventually will service only one East Coast “hub” port linked to trucking, rail, and midsized coastal shipping, existing port jobs in the New York region as well as manufacturing are at risk. The \$1 billion costs of either blasting the New Jersey harbor to fifty-foot depths or constructing the trans-Hudson River rail-freight tunnel are similar; other port facilities, moreover, will need to be enlarged at a cost of \$3 billion, whether on one or both sides of the harbor. In 1997 Mayor Giuliani endorsed Nadler's plan.⁴⁴

Three years earlier Giuliani had backed another proposed tunnel, one to extend suburban rail lines from Grand Central and Penn Stations to lower Manhattan, and in 1997 Governor George Pataki began planning studies for this “multibillion dollar” project. Whether both tunnels can or should be funded—one to grow the real economy, the other to bail out lower Manhattan's permanent government again and allow commuters to avoid the city's subways—are critical questions for the city's future.⁴⁵

Encourage Small Business

“Where large organizations are relied upon for economic expansion and development, [and] small organizations find little opportunity to multiply, to find financing, and to add new work,” Jane Jacobs warned in 1969, “the economy inevitably stagnates.” Notwithstanding the flow of economic favors to big landlords and corporations since 1975, during 1993–1995 New York City's small businesses created 80,000 jobs, and large firms lost 38,000.⁴⁶ The number of manufacturing jobs held steady at 280,000 after 1992, and experienced a slight increase in 1995 (export-led manufacturing nationwide expanded more robustly). Change within the city's manufacturing sector is intense, however, with an ongoing shift from standardized to “differentiated” production. Mass-market, assembly-line factories continued to leave the city (the Taystee Bread, Farberware, and Swingline Stapler closings, for example, received considerable attention), but smaller, more numerous “batch” manufacturing firms proliferated.

These companies respond to customized local and even international “niche markets” for furniture, metal and glass products, jewelry, commercial printing, microbrewery beer, paper products, construction materials, office furnishings,

specialty foods, arts and entertainment supplies, and garment industry innovations.⁴⁷ The planner Roberta Brandes Gratz explains that “30 percent of the [city's] former manufacturing buildings vacant in 1985 were reoccupied by 1990. . . . High-productivity manufacturing and the valued jobs it brings are coming back, in new configurations that incorporate new technology. . . . These enterprises employ local residents, train low-skilled workers, provide classic moving-up opportunities, and enjoy the stabilizing effect of being part of or near residential communities. [They] create three to four times as many secondary jobs as the business, financial, or retail sector.”⁴⁸

Affordable rents are important to the growth of small firms and differentiated production, and to the nurturing of business districts where suppliers, competitors, and customers are close at hand. Between 1992 and 1996 there was an “explosion of computer, software, and multimedia companies in the city,” including some that moved to New York from nearby suburbs and even from California for the “benefits of agglomeration.” Despite city subsidies to a “New York Information Technology Center” office building in lower Manhattan, most of these 18,000 new jobs were located neither in downtown nor in midtown but in the lower-rent manufacturing lofts and older office buildings in the “Silicon Alley” area between them.⁴⁹

City initiatives begun in 1995 to reduce organized crime's control of commercial trash haulage and of loading activities at New York's five wholesale food markets are positive governmental moves for small business.⁵⁰ So are the transportation policy changes and modest tax breaks to assist manufacturing which were begun by the Giuliani administration in 1995 and 1996.⁵¹ Working against these steps, however, are budget cuts, delays in highway, bridge, and tunnel repairs, and attempts to rezone manufacturing land for megastores.

At the street neighborhood level the city's small retail businesses in neighborhood shopping strips provide points of congregation and personal connection for individuals of all ages, and their owners serve as “street watchers and sidewalk guardians.” At the district level, notes Queens storeowner Julie Wager, local merchants “are the people that support the myriad of charities that exist out there, not [like] the trendy franchised stores who just take the bucks and get out.” High rents and megastores destroy these strands in the fabric of neighborhood New York.⁵²

Plan and Tax a Regional Economy

Economic growth in New York City's future will not arise from maintaining the three hundred-year-old pattern of subsidizing land values in the Manhattan central business district. As Robert Fitch emphasizes, “The city has had a real estate strategy—expand the CBD / shrink manufacturing—which it has presented as a jobs strategy. . . . ‘Growth’ is not the aim. . . . What's really at stake is making

certain parcels of land worth more, which is something very different."⁵³ As economic activity increasingly deconcentrates, locally, nationally, and globally, the vitality of New York's regional economy will depend upon reducing internal barriers to the movement of labor, materials, and products. Lower, unsubsidized land costs, improved transportation linkages, restored and expanded local quality of life, and a healthy, well-educated work force will be needed throughout the region.

What stands in the way of regional economic expansion is what the economist Carol O'Cléireacáin calls "the growing discontinuity between city boundaries and the functioning of the real economy." A divided political structure of city, suburban, and state jurisdictions reinforces inequalities in wealth, public amenities, and education.⁵⁴ It also disadvantages New York in the global arena. Most large cities around the world already benefit from regional planning and governance, as do many U.S. cities, particularly those with growing economies.⁵⁵ New York City last expanded its political boundaries in 1898, and it is improbable that this will happen again. Decisive political power over the city, therefore, will continue to reside in the state capital in Albany.⁵⁶

"In New York," O'Cléireacáin explains, "the state controls all city taxes, even charging a fee to administer the income and sales taxes, and setting rules for the property tax." In 1983 New York State passed a 10 percent capital gains tax on the sale of buildings worth \$1 million or more, virtually all of which were located in New York City; it thus captured billions in tax benefits from the city's 1980s real estate boom. Other tax revenues that could tap economic activity located within the city have been blocked by the state: the city's income tax has been cut and made less progressive; the stock transfer tax, which by the mid-1990s would have been worth \$2 billion per year, was repealed by the state in 1980; business and legal services are excluded from the sales tax; elite nonprofit organizations pay no property or sales taxes.⁵⁷

Commuter income, amounting to more than a third of the city's \$220 billion in annual personal earnings, continues to be taxed at a small fraction of the resident rate; even economists Charles Brecher and Raymond Horton of the Citizens Budget Commission agree that "present commuter rates are unreasonably low."⁵⁸ In the absence of a unified regional tax base to support infrastructure and human capital investment, equalization of New York's commuter and resident tax rates would add \$1 billion to the city's annual budget—but this is unlikely to happen. As O'Cléireacáin emphasizes, "State legislators from suburban New York feel the anti-tax mood so strongly they do not want to vote for any tax increase on their constituents." They are willing, however, to raise transit fares and City University tuition for New York City residents.⁵⁹

Conservative economists rail against any tax increases on the city's expanding economic sectors or its fortunate fifth. They argue that "the combined load of New York City and State income, sales, and property taxes is the highest in the country," and cite studies finding that "the tax burden in New York [State] is . . .

34 percent above the national average [in 1996]."⁶⁰ What they do not emphasize is that output per worker in New York City is 46 percent higher than nationwide, and average wages are 57 percent higher. With much of this substantially higher city income concentrated at the top of the economic ladder, New York's taxes are much less out of line than antitax advocates suggest.⁶¹

"Taxes are not just dead weights," holds the economist Robert Heilbroner. "They are the means by which a society gathers its resources for public purposes. They are the ways we pay for our defense, education, roads, . . . clean streets, policemen, water supplies, . . . and old-age . . . support."⁶² As taxes shrink, so does the quality of life in neighborhood New York. "Personal responsibility" cannot build schools, fund sufficient youth programs, put cops on the beat, reduce subway crowding, inspect unsafe homes and workplaces, or eradicate illegal dumping, gambling, and drug dealing. Over the past two decades, Elliot Sclar and Walter Hook explain, America's "tax-cutting approach [and] drop in public revenues [have] led to a loss of critical public investments in both the infrastructure and work force, making our economic activities more costly and less efficient. In addition, the upward redistribution of income implied by such policies has not led to a new burst of productive private investment. Instead, it has caused domestic consumer demand to stall, which has further postponed economic revitalization. . . . More progressive tax policy would help stimulate economic growth."⁶³

Color-full before Color-blind

Suppose the worst. In 2080 the all-white fortunate fifth is ensconced in gated suburbs and edge cities. Its schools, police, health-care and recreation facilities, and transportation and communication links are all private. Taxes everywhere are a pittance. For the rest of the population—now 37 percent white, 29 percent Latin American, 19 percent black, and 15 percent Asian—public schools, hospitals, parks, sanitation services, and mass transit barely function. Most wages permit only minimal subsistence. Crime and the underground economy sustain enormous numbers, and the few police officers and government inspectors do not interfere. Government statistics on income, poverty, and race are neither published nor collected. The era of big government is over. "Individual choice" and "the market" reign. People live in a "color-blind" society.⁶⁴

Things in 2080 will not be this clear-cut. The power of numbers can be contained but not eliminated by the power of resources and its lubricatory allies. The fortunate fifth, no matter how wealthy and politically powerful, will not be solely white. And as intermarriage and cross-racial kinship blur the lines, the population may not fit so easily into current racial categories. Within the working- and lower-middle-class majority, several alternative scenarios may all find advocates and occur simultaneously: racial and ethnic group competition (en-

couraged by the fortunate fifth), unity among "people of color," dark-light rather than black-white polarization, rising "mixed" and "multiracial" self-identification, Latin American-styled views of "race" as appearance rather than ancestry, and the confrontation of "people of all colors" with the power of resources.⁶⁵

The more divided the power of numbers, the more likely it is that the worst will prevail. No racial or ethnic group will be able to counter this on its own. As the political philosopher Cornel West puts it, "There will be no fundamental change in America unless we come together. It's a fact—we just have to face it." Only the fortunate fifth can afford to be "color-blind." To the extent that others find themselves only in settings filled with people who look like themselves, they will be doomed to political ineffectiveness. People will need to ensure that block and civic associations, local government bodies, ritual audiences, workplaces, and leadership slates are color-full.

"Ultimately, reform of our cities must arise from broad-based citizen movements for change," writes the urban politician-scholar David Rusk. "People who share a common goal find they have common enemies," asserts Robert Fitch. "A sense of what New York means could be created by community movements from below."⁶⁶ In Elmhurst-Corona people have been moving in this direction, some more consciously than others, and learning from both successes and failures. An exchange at Community Board 4 following the pool club site defeat in 1988 highlighted the need to strengthen the power of numbers.

Judy D'Andrea: The high-power developers in this city are trying to eliminate the ULURP process because we stand in their way and they make political contributions to high-power politicians.

Ron Laney: We have no power. The Board of Estimate and the Mayor opposed us.

Judy D'Andrea: It goes back to the community. They [Bayside] get buses and go. We are not like that. We had seven people at the Board of Estimate. If we had 7,000 it would be different.

Welcome a Multiethnic, Multilingual City

Coalescing the power of numbers among whites, immigrants, and blacks, whether in Elmhurst-Corona, in New York City, or nationwide, will require reciprocal recognition of one another's concerns as well as common goals. Angelo Falcón, founder of the Institute for Puerto Rican Policy, raised this matter at a 1990 forum:

[We] need to . . . understand that our strength is in our community and in our identification as Latinos in terms of our numbers. . . . The fact that we're 25 percent of the city's population is something we've got to find ways of leveraging [to] create some sort of counterforce. . . . The question of language policy—for

years our people can't get services. . . . You'd think by this time that New York would already have a mechanism for incorporating new populations who don't speak the language. . . . If we're successful in getting New York to adopt a language policy . . . we're leaving a legacy . . . for future generations, . . . for the Asian community, [and] for other communities. . . . We need to frame our own issues in that broader context.⁶⁷

Many white Americans today believe that immigrants resist learning English and that bilingual education perpetuates "linguistic separatism." In fact, of the 41 percent of New Yorkers who spoke another language at home in 1990, three-quarters also spoke English. The quarter who did not turned to adult English classes and the public schools to learn, but by 1993 only 30,000 English-class seats were available for 600,000 non-English-speaking adults; government support for these classes amounted to only \$20 million per year, and waiting lists ranged from four months to three years. Federal bilingual education funds for the 150,000 "limited English proficiency" students in New York City's public schools had been cut by half during the 1980s, even while the number of children availing themselves of such programs continued to rise.

Children of primary school age acquire English rapidly: in New York City most of them "mainstream" from bilingual to regular classes in three years or less; many do so more quickly in Elmhurst-Corona, where the large number of different languages facilitates English learning among children themselves in both school and neighborhood play groups. Older youth have a harder time, and many immigrant high school students take longer to graduate (although their drop-out rate is lower) than U.S.-born students. Long Island Congress member and "English Only" advocate Peter King distorts the issue by emphasizing that sixth- to ninth-grade immigrant teenagers take longer than three years to "mainstream" in the crowded, underfunded city schools of the 1990s. The alternative—English-language "immersion"—works well when trained instructors, full-day programs, and small teacher-pupil ratios are provided. Even immersion proponent Diane Ravitch admits, "It is not a new [English-only] law that is needed, but better education in the English language for children and adults."⁶⁸

Notwithstanding the meager assistance government provides, in fact today's "immigrants and their children may be acquiring English faster than in the past," Philip Martin and Elizabeth Midgley point out. Although the immigrant parents or grandparents of Elmhurst-Corona whites "rarely learned English well during their lifetimes," their children were fully or partly bilingual, and the third generation was monolingual in English. Most third-generation Latin Americans also speak English exclusively. Today, however, "the handicaps of not knowing English" are increasing, and much evidence suggests that "the three-generation shift to English may shrink to two generations by 2000."⁶⁹ Still, as the linguist Ana Celia Zentella advocates, steps to preserve the linguistic resources of America's 40 million bilingual residents could prove advantageous in the global

economy of the twenty-first century. By the 1980s less than one-fifth of U.S. students studied a second language as compared with four-fifths earlier in this century.⁷⁰

Large numbers of white Americans also believe that the country is "saturated" with foreign-born newcomers, even though today's 8 percent immigrant population is less than the 14 percent of 1910 and is not likely to reach that level before the 2040s. (New York City's higher 33 percent foreign-born population in 1995 is also below its 41 percent foreign-born peak in 1910.) Further, many mistakenly believe that the majority of newcomers are "illegal aliens." In 1995 the Census Bureau estimated that 4 million of the nation's 23 million immigrants were undocumented, or only 1 in 6. In New York City the ratio was also 1 in 6, but here 90 percent of undocumented immigrants were "overstayers" who had entered the country legally with nonresident visas, versus just 40 percent nationally. Two of New York's three largest undocumented groups, moreover, were white—Italians and Poles—and together they accounted for 1 in 9 of the city's "illegal alien" population.⁷¹

In Elmhurst-Corona three-quarters of the population by 1990 consisted of immigrants and their children.⁷² The cries against "illegal aliens" that stirred numbers of whites in the mid-1970s continued to be raised occasionally at public meetings, by both whites and Latin Americans, but with little effect. At a 1988 school-site hearing one man asked, "How many who will go here are children of illegal aliens? . . . If they did a survey, how many would be deported along with their parents, and free up space for other children?" Only one audience member applauded, and the meeting's business resumed. CB4 did pass a resolution in 1994 calling on Mayor Giuliani to end Mayor Koch's 1985 executive order that prevented city agencies from reporting undocumented immigrants to federal authorities in cases not involving criminal activity. But later that year, when an audience member introduced "illegal aliens" as a quality-of-life problem, CB4 members Luz Leguizamo and Clara Salas objected, and the discussion ended.

Support for decreasing immigrant admissions rose from 42 to 61 percent nationally between 1977 and 1993 but has fallen since.⁷³ Leadership makes a difference in fanning or dampening anti-immigrant sentiments, and they run lower in New York City, where Mayor Dinkins continued the Koch executive order; so did Mayor Giuliani, who objected publicly both to its nullification by a federal court in 1997 and to the anti-immigrant positions of several national Republican leaders.⁷⁴ In Elmhurst-Corona, Carmela George and Lucy Schilero both depended on bilingual members of their block associations, and Schilero invited immigration-rights speakers to her coalition meetings. White civic associations using only English saw their numbers contract.

The 1990 and 1996 federal immigration laws raised yearly admission ceilings but restricted opportunities for family reunification. The 1990 act increased the annual number of occupational visas from 54,000 to 140,000, and by the mid-1990s U.S. technical and professional workers found their employers sponsoring

lower-paid immigrants to replace them. An attempt in the 1996 bill to reduce this number and increase funds for scientific and technical U.S. education was killed by business lobbyists and supply-side conservatives who wanted even more such "quality" immigrants. The impact of this policy, curtailing "market" demands to invest in education, is enormous and affects both the U.S.-born and immigrants already here. "The question is, should immigration be encouraged or should national policy encourage training to allow those here, including blacks, to take those jobs?" asked the African American economist Arthur Brimmer. "My own view is that we should do both." Whether both are done will depend upon coalescing the power of numbers against the power of resources.⁷⁵

In 1994, 69 percent of whites and 61 percent of blacks nationwide were registered to vote, as were only 53 percent of Latin Americans and Asians. California's Proposition 187 limiting immigrant rights, which passed in 1994, and similar national legislation proposed by Republicans and passed in 1996 have frightened legal immigrants and increased naturalization rates. The number of immigrants becoming citizens jumped nationally from 270,000 in 1990 to 1.1 million in 1996; in the New York metropolitan area the numbers rose from 30,000 in 1991 to 141,000 in 1995, and a million more immigrants were eligible for citizenship.⁷⁶

The power of numbers in the coming century will need to cross language borders and welcome ethnic alliance. As the journalist Ellis Cose advises, "If we are wise . . . we will realize that the problems of blacks, or Latinos, or whites, or Asian-Americans, inevitably, in an inextricably interrelated society, affect us all."⁷⁷

Overcome the Impasse of Race and Place

There are two versions of the American story. The first is one of inclusion: according to David Ward, "American nationality [is] founded on the idea of political participation rather than on common origins."⁷⁸ INS Commissioner Doris Meissner phrased it succinctly in 1996: "We have to be absolutely certain that new people learn that we live in a democratic society where there are certain things we do—vote, send kids to school, pick up the trash, join the PTA."⁷⁹ Civic politics in Elmhurst-Corona embodies this view. As district manager John Rowan put it, "The sooner those newcomers can start sharing some civic responsibilities with their older neighbors, the stronger our entire neighborhood will be." And in the words of COMET's president, Rosemarie Daraio, "We don't care who moves in as long as they obey the rules."⁸⁰

The second version of the American story is one of exclusion, the denial of political participation on the basis of race. For Native Americans, African Americans, and Puerto Ricans dispossessed of land, personhood, and sovereignty, and for Asians who could not become citizens until 1952, opportunities for "political

participation" arrived only recently—mainly after the civil rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s—and are still being contested.

The two versions of the American story unfolded simultaneously, and both are true. In the future of us all, believers in the first version must be willing to admit the continuing existence of the second if the power of numbers is to coalesce. They must be prepared to broaden the quality-of-life agenda, which everyone can support, to include concerns of immigrants and blacks. If they do not, then civic politics itself becomes one more destructive episode within the American story of exclusion.⁸¹

Immigrant concerns will continue to include language issues and family reunification. For African Americans the most glaring point of exclusion in Elmhurst-Corona, as elsewhere, is residential segregation. Most black residents live in one tiny portion of Community District 4—in and around Lefrak City. The situation mirrors that of Queens generally: there is little or no income differential between blacks and whites, yet there are still concentrated black neighborhoods.⁸² The situation is perpetuated by the real estate industry. People are "steered" to different neighborhoods; different financial data are utilized for whites and blacks; different information on housing availability and loans is given to persons of different races. All of this is illegal, but it continues unless lawsuits are mounted, tester evidence is collected, and real estate agents' and landlords' records are inspected by government agencies.

The national situation is well documented. Major books detailing what their titles suggest are the sociologists Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton's *American Apartheid* (1993) and economist John Yinger's *Closed Doors, Opportunities Lost* (1995). The first emphasizes that "residential segregation is the most important item remaining on the nation's civil rights agenda" and that policies to end it "do not require major changes in legislation. What they require is political will." The second concludes that "discrimination in housing and mortgage markets . . . imposes costs on us all. A balanced, comprehensive attack on this . . . would make a vital contribution to the goals of fair treatment and equal opportunity which remain central to our potential as a free, democratic—and diverse—nation."⁸³

Enforcement of fair housing laws means preventing whites who discriminate from doing so. We cannot expect progress toward "an integrated body politic . . . in which all people work together to find common ground" when black people are excluded from that common ground, as even conservative urban policy scholar Roger Starr insists: "The city should make clear that all housing will be open to all who can afford to pay . . . without discrimination by race, ethnicity, or religion."⁸⁴

How much testing and inspection are necessary? As much as for parking meters. If there were no inspections, no one would put coins in meters, but not every meter has to be checked every day to ensure compliance. Only enough inspection is needed to convince potential lawbreakers that they risk being caught. (The same is true for housing code, workplace, and other quality-of-life violations.) And when landlord and realty operations are inspected, the procedures

used by bank examiners need to be followed: "The examination . . . is always begun without prior notice and in a manner that will preserve the element of surprise. . . . The examination staff should assemble near the bank as briefly and inconspicuously as possible. . . . At the beginning . . . it is important to obtain immediate control of . . . all records."⁸⁵

People Can Change

"I think what happened in the course of the 1970s and 1980s was that the United States really redefined itself as a multiracial society," the economist Michael Piore observed in 1990. "I don't want to say there's no resentment. There is a lot. [And] the problems of working out a multiracial and multiethnic society are immense."⁸⁶ Whites confront the biggest change: after 2080 they will no longer be the majority but one of several numerical minorities. Elmhurst-Corona whites made this transition in the 1970s, and white New Yorkers in the 1980s.

After the 1986 killing of a black immigrant by white youths in Howard Beach, Jesse Jackson noted, "There is, in fact, more integration in Queens County than in the board rooms of . . . any Wall Street firm. Those good, comfortable people . . . work in more segregated offices, send their children to more segregated schools, [and] go home to more segregated communities" than do many white residents of Queens.⁸⁷ Elmhurst-Corona whites live among Latin American and Asian neighbors, and they encounter racial diversity at work and in their churches. Many work with black colleagues, and white civic leaders interact with their African American counterparts on Community Board 4 and in the Democratic Party. Their encounters with immigrants and blacks have different sources, but many whites have moved from categorical to personal relations with individual African Americans and immigrants.

Many of these whites insist they treat their acquaintances of color as individuals—as they do other whites—and not as members of groups. "You can't generalize. I don't have any bias; I judge people individually," explained Mary Walensa. Elmhurst warden Bill Donnelly told me, "It's the old problem of the gray eyes. I don't walk around thinking of myself having gray eyes, largely because I can't see them. I figure the rest of the world is the same way. I don't figure Koreans walk around thinking of themselves as Koreans. I think it's probably like the Australian Aborigines who consider themselves 'people.'"

But whites who do treat individual immigrants and African Americans in personal rather than categorical terms must be prepared to admit that others do not. Certainly the white real estate industry, many white employers, and those whites who routinely use ethnic and racial slurs do not. At one public hearing, for instance, a white CB4 member referred to a Colombian radio-car company as "a bunch of sleaze-bag Third World lowlifes." Among themselves, some white

Elmhurst-Corona leaders joked negatively about blacks. And on one occasion a white Corona grandmother I had met at a school assembly program stopped me on the street to ask about rumors that Lefrak City would be sold as cooperative apartments: "Does this mean the blacks are moving out? They cause trouble, and things are getting worse with them. We pay all our tax money for police to watch them. It's a shame."

People moving from categorical to personal relationships are sometimes caught in mid-transition. Some white Elmhurst-Corona leaders who joked privately about blacks also kissed African American Helen Marshall when greeting her. Elmhurst resident Mary Walensa told me, "The Orientals are of a higher class; the Spanish are lower, but not all, not Rosie," her Puerto Rican neighbor. And at a CB4 meeting one Latin American member announced, "We met with the Lefrak City Tenants Association. They were very nice people. I was pleasantly surprised." Black LCTA officers responded angrily, "What did you expect?" and Edna Baskin said, "I take that as an insult."

When people are spoken of and treated in negative categorical terms, they may respond in kind. As Cornel West explains, "Oftentimes, when we run up against this deep white supremacist sensibility and behavior, we then tar the whole white community with white supremacy, as if there hadn't been [any exceptions]. How easy it is to somehow generate our own homogeneous blob and call it whiteness—in the same way that white supremacy creates its homogeneous blob of blackness. That mentality says all black folk come out of that blob—one stereotype holds for all and our humanity is then rendered invisible. Our individuality is held at arm's length."⁸⁸

The point is not to be color-blind; race, after all, is something one learns to see from childhood, and racial categories are in constant use. The goal, rather, should be to see racial identity as one among the many characteristics of every person and to appreciate the full range of human physical diversity in what always has been and is increasingly now an interconnected, color-full world.

People usually move from categorical to personal relationships not because of mysterious inner changes but because of the changing circumstances around them. Despite Mary Walensa's belief that "the ones that stay in Elmhurst don't have the prejudice," I have no reason to believe that white Elmhurst-Corona residents are fundamentally different from white residents of Flushing, Jackson Heights, Howard Beach, or Ridgewood; both tolerance and prejudice are alive in all neighborhoods, if my exposure since 1972 to white college students from all over Queens is any guide. Still, the intolerant tendencies of the 1970s were reversed in Elmhurst-Corona as CB4 and its civic politics acquired new leaders and more diverse participants, developing what Cornel West calls "a public sphere in which critical exchange and engagement take place. . . . Principled alliances—tension ridden, yes, but principled alliances and coalitions. That's the new kind of public sphere that we are talking about. There will be no fundamental social change in America unless we come together [within it]."⁸⁹

The public sphere of decentralized government and civic politics moved one warden from railing against "people pollution" and "Kim" and "Wang" to welcoming black and immigrant children to a summer program and attending a four-hour program in Korean. It is also this public sphere in which black state assembly member Jeff Aubry could place on CB4's quality-of-life agenda the issue of racial discrimination should Mount Sinai Hospital buy and privatize Elmhurst Hospital: "I am concerned, with privatization, about the equality of care. If the privates don't provide it, then we don't want them taking over."

Race divides, but people can change. This book, beginning as an ethnography of one neighborhood's majority-minority transition, became a study of the roots, and weeds, of local democracy. "The political strength of citizens can only be aggregated by assembling the collective aspirations of the many into a coherent, reliable whole," writes the journalist William Greider. "This is the daunting challenge of democracy and it is difficult to do in any era. But it is not impossible."⁹⁰

Early in my fieldwork Bill Donnelly told me, "All of life, everyplace, is the same thing—trying to get people to see that we're all in the same damn thing together. I've been standing on the street corners and hollering for fifty years, and it doesn't amount to nothing. [But] let one [other] person [say], 'Yeah, we're in the same boat together,' then everyone says, 'Hot damn, we're in this same boat together. Let's get together and paddle this boat.'"

Nothing is impossible if we believe that people can change.