Immigration and citizenship rights are integral and fraught subjects in the making of the polity and social fabric of the United States. The current climate of heightened anti-immigrant rhetoric and actions is evidenced by President Donald Trump’s escalating cruelty that, for example, resulted in the death of two Guatemalan children in the custody of U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Trump has sought to end travel from certain majority Muslim countries; strip Haitians, Salvadoreans, Nicaraguans, and Hondurans of Temporary Protected Status; rescind Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA); and detain and deport undocumented immigrants, long-settled Southeast Asian refugees, and others with no criminal convictions.

Perhaps one of the most egregious actions of the Trump administration, to date, has been to separate young children (including babies as young as nine months) from their parents at southern border crossings, resulting in thousands of unaccompanied minors being detained by the Department of Homeland Security, such as several hundred youth housed in New York City (Robbins 2018a). After a grueling monthlong trek from Guatemala to the Mexico-U.S. border, seven-year-old Jakelin Amei Rosmery Caal Maquin was in the custody of the U.S. Border Patrol when she died December 8 of septic shock and cardiac arrest (Miroff and Moore 2018). Later that month, on Christmas Eve, eight-year-old Felipe Gomez Alonso, also from Guatemala, died after being held in several border facilities known as hieleras (Spanish for “iceboxes” or “refrigerators”), where children sleep in cages on
concrete floors with only Mylar blankets for warmth (Jordan 2018a; Merchant 2018).

Trump’s zero tolerance for refugees and undocumented immigrants has generated substantive profits for privately owned and operated prisons and detention centers, a $4 billion industry dominated by two corporations—CoreCivic and GEO Group (see Haberman 2018; Luan 2018). According to the New York Times, an unprecedented thirteen thousand or more migrant children were held in federally contracted detention centers and shelters in mid-September 2018 (Dickerson 2018). Five congressional representatives visited an unregulated tent city described as a “child prison” in west Texas and affirmed the troubling conditions found in a November 2018 inspection by the Department of Health and Human Services (Levinson 2018). In addition to their miserable conditions, immigrant detainees were forced to do unpaid labor, as claimed by several lawsuits (Levy 2018).

National immigration policy pivoted toward enforcement, surveillance, and antiterrorism in the post-9/11 era, evidenced by the passage of the 2002 Homeland Security Act. The act dismantled the Immigration and Naturalization Services agency and transferred its functions to the new Department of Homeland Security, whose functions are carried out by three component agencies: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. In the first week of the Trump administration, the numbers and categories of immigrants considered a priority for deportation were greatly expanded beyond those Trump deemed “bad hombres” (Bennett 2017). ICE made 10,800 noncriminal arrests (of immigrants whose only crime was that they lacked regularized status) in the early months of the Trump administration—a threefold increase from the same period in 2016 when Barack Obama was president (Mark 2017). In his mission to greatly increase the number of foreign born eligible for expulsion, Trump has targeted Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees who settled in the United States in the 1980s, resulting in a sudden and significant uptick in their deportations (Dunst 2018). In the case of Cambodian refugees, deportations increased dramatically as soon as Trump took office. Since October 2017, ICE raids occur every four months, in which between fifty and one hundred Cambodians across the country are picked up for deportation (Lo 2018).

While Trump’s actions are an affront to humanity, the racialized discourse and practices of dehumanization, scapegoating, and banishment are not unprecedented. The evolution of U.S. immigration policies is replete with accounts of a deeply divided and contested national discourse about migrant illegality and criminalization and about citizenship rights for non-whites (De Genova 2004; Ngai 2014; Hernández 2017). A 2017 Ric Burns documentary, The Chinese Exclusion Act, explores the political interests and
alliances that coalesced to pass the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the only immigration policy that banned the entry of a class of people, Chinese laborers, explicitly on racial grounds. Moreover, Chinese nationals already in the country were barred from citizenship. In 1894, native-born Wong Kim Ark tested the principle of birthright citizenship after he was denied reentry after traveling abroad. The ensuing legal decision in the 1898 United States v. Wong Kim Ark established territorial birthright citizenship for the children of all aliens (Ngai 2007). Because Asians were early nonwhite immigrants, their treatment was integral to testing the tenuous citizenship rights of those perceived as perpetual outsiders.

Today, in a city with more than half a million undocumented residents, accounts of the detention and deportation of immigrant New Yorkers have become alarmingly commonplace (Devereaux 2018). In January 2018, Jean Montrevil, founder of the New Sanctuary Coalition of New York, composed of 150 faith-based organizations, was deported to Haiti, while the coalition’s executive director, Ravi Ragbir, was detained several days later when he reported to ICE for a regular check-in (see Hawkins 2018). A protest march of Ragbir’s supporters from the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building to city hall in Lower Manhattan ended in the arrest of eighteen people, including two New York City Council members—Jumaane Williams and Ydanis Rodriguez (Neuman and Robbins 2018). A news account of Jean Montrevil’s deportation reported that an ICE agent responded, “Don’t you see who we have as president now?” when Montrevil, who has no criminal record and never missed an ICE check-in, asked the reason for his arrest (McMullen-Laird 2018).

In May 2018, Xiu Qing You of Flushing, Queens, was also detained at ICE during a scheduled interview for his application for permanent residency (i.e., a green card) (Fuchs 2018a). A married father of two young children and small-business owner, You was immediately separated from his family and sent to Bergen County Jail, a federal detention facility in New Jersey, where he was detained for a month. Even with an IDNYC card, a cornerstone of Mayor Bill de Blasio’s progressive agenda that provides a government-issued identification card for all New Yorkers regardless of citizenship status, immigrants have been detained. A prominent case is that of a pizza delivery worker at a U.S. Army base in the summer of 2018 (Robbins 2018b). As he had done in a prior food delivery to the Brooklyn military base, Pablo Villavicencio Calderon presented his IDNYC card at the gate, but this time his official municipal ID was rejected. A background check showed a 2010 open order of deportation for illegal entry to the United States. Villavicencio was subsequently turned over to ICE and detained in a New Jersey facility for nearly two months. To assist New York immigrants caught up in “ICE’s cruel and fanatical crusade” (Fuchs 2018b), Mayor de
Blasio has allocated over $30 million for free legal counsel (City of New York 2018).

As an epicenter of immigration, the New York metro area has also seeded mass mobilizations to resist Trump’s racist and xenophobic actions. Upon Trump’s Executive Order 13769 (Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States), referred to as the Muslim ban, the response was immediate as hundreds of protestors and attorneys gathered at the site of two major international airports—John F. Kennedy and LaGuardia—in Queens to welcome and offer assistance to immigrant arrivals in the waning days of January 2017 (Walters, Helmore, and Dehghan 2017; Knefel 2017). Immigrant activists and supporters similarly gathered at LaGuardia Airport in June 2018, anticipating the arrival of children who had been separated from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border (Surico 2018). Growing numbers of New York’s elected officials have joined the call to abolish ICE, including New York senator Kirsten Gillibrand. Part of Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s winning strategy against her ten-term opponent, Joe Crowley, who retains leadership of the Queens Democratic Party, was her dogged demand that he account for voting to pass the 2002 Homeland Security Act (which established ICE) (McElwee 2018).

Trump’s zero tolerance extends to legal immigrants, as evidenced by the White House web page titled “It’s Time to End Chain Migration” (White House 2017). Chain migration refers to the family reunification provisions in the 1965 immigration act (Hart-Celler Act) that eliminated racist national-origin quotas, replacing them with qualifications based on priority relationship categories. According to the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, “It’s the way many of our Asian American families have been built for generations. In immigration terms, we don’t have family trees so much as a strong family unit in the multi-generational homes we build in America” (Guillermo 2018). Trump’s rant on “shithole countries,” criminalization of Mexicans, and preference for immigrants from countries like Norway make clear his policies are motivated by a deep-seated racism and white supremacist ideology. In 2018, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services eliminated “nation of immigrants” from its mission statement (Jordan 2018b). This political climate lays bare the crossroads where we find ourselves today.

The history and contemporary politics of migration and settlement in the United States underscore that the concept of an immigrant crossroads is not new. Immigration studies is an interdisciplinary social science field. It examines the processes of settlement and community formation, incorporation, assimilation and hybrid identities, and second-generation mobility, and it deploys disciplinary methodological approaches and theoretical frames to study migration, diaspora, transnational and translocal networks,
and social and economic conditions. Robert Park’s classic studies of race relations in Chicago in the early 1920s and into the 1930s laid the intellectual foundation for urban sociology and immigration studies. Contemporary immigration scholarship focuses on the continuities and disruptions represented by renewed migration and settlement in the United States as a result of the transformative 1965 immigration act.

Scholars have developed analytic frameworks to address the “context of reception” and entrepreneurial enclaves and immigrant economies (Zhou 1992; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Vitiello and Sugrue 2017); racial constructions and identities of nonwhite immigrants (Cordero-Guzman, Smith, and Grosfoguel 2001; Waters 2001; De Genova 2004); opportunity structures for second-generation mobility (Kasinitz et al. 2008); impacts of deindustrialization and economic globalization for immigrant labor market incorporation (Mahler 1995; Ness 2005; Mize and Swords 2011); rise of neoliberal governance and austerity in shaping a migrant civil society composed of nonprofit, community-based, and political organizations that mobilize immigrant activism and coalitional alliances (Theodore and Martin 2007; Varsanyi 2010; de Graauw 2016); and transnational lives, social practices, and networks heightened by technology (Foner 1997; Levitt 2001; Smith 2006).

Our book contributes to this rich interdisciplinary scholarship by acknowledging the centrality of race and racialization processes in shaping post-1965 immigrant politics and lived experiences (Romero 2008; Omi and Winant 1994), and our focus on Queens underscores the necessity and value of a place-bounded approach in studying the mutual dynamics of transnational migration, racial capitalism, and the socio-spatial and political processes of transformative neighborhood change. Space is not a neutral backdrop for immigrant lives and experiences. As the urban theorist Saskia Sassen (2015) notes, “Cities are the spaces where those without power get to make a history and a culture, thereby making their powerlessness complex.” Concretizing place-based immigration studies is critical to enriching a theory and praxis of immigrant urbanism that centralizes migration (overwhelmingly nonwhites from the Global South) in the politics of planning, policy, and development in postindustrial urban economies and centralizes migration in mobilizing coalitions and actions for social inclusion and for racial and economic justice.

Why Queens?

The unparalleled hyperdiversity of Queens’ 2.3 million residents, of which nearly one in two (48 percent) is foreign born (see Chapter 1) cements its status as an immigrant epicenter. If Queens were considered a separate city,
it would follow Los Angeles, Chicago, and Brooklyn (the most populous New York City borough at 2.6 million) as the fourth-largest city in the United States. Apart from its demography, Queens is an outer borough that exemplifies a social and spatial crossroads of urban and suburban formations and sensibilities. After all, Trump, who grew up in the wealthy enclave of Jamaica Estates, is a product of Queens. He was mentored by his father, whose real estate business practices deepened the patterns of residential segregation that disadvantaged black citizens (Mahler and Eder 2016; Horowitz 2015). By focusing on Queens, our book examines the local place-based processes of economic globalization and postindustrial urbanization and the contestations centered on residential patterns and neighborhood identities, immigrant incorporation and mobilizations, and community building and activism.

Even though New York is the world’s most racially and ethnically diverse city, residential segregation persists in shaping local neighborhood landscapes, and this remains evident in a hyperdiverse Queens where the color line is largely redrawn along black and nonblack spaces (Navarro 2016; see also Chapter 13 for a description of succession from African American to Afro-Caribbean in southeast Queens). Middle-class African American and Afro-Caribbean immigrants are well established in the stretch of neighborhoods, such as Laurelton, Cambria Heights, and St. Albans, that make up southeast Queens. Along with Corona and East Elmhurst, these neighborhoods are also renowned among jazz enthusiasts as the home of Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne, Count Basie, and Louis Armstrong. Similar to black neighborhoods in central Brooklyn, southeast Queens was targeted by predatory mortgage lenders, and in the aftermath of the 2008 Great Recession, these neighborhoods had the highest rates of foreclosure, putting at risk the primary assets of New York City’s black middle class (Dunn 2011).

Three-term governor Andrew Cuomo and his father, Mario Cuomo, also a three-term New York governor, have deep roots in Queens. As a local attorney, Mario Cuomo was recruited by Mayor John Lindsay’s administration to negotiate a compromise in a highly contentious proposal to develop a public housing complex of three towers, each twenty-four stories, in Forest Hills, Queens. This project was part of Mayor Lindsay’s scattered-site housing plan to desegregate New York City. Like much of Queens in the early 1970s, Forest Hills was an exclusively white, middle-class neighborhood. Fierce resistance to the proposed complex was fueled by racist stereotypes of public housing tenants and led by Forest Hills Residents Association president Jerry Birbach, who also owned properties on the West Side of Manhattan (Roberts 2017). Mediation led by Mario Cuomo resulted in a compromise that reduced the proposed housing units by half and set aside...
40 percent for seniors. In current debates on affordable housing, some urban planners have proposed upzoning—that is, increasing housing density—in neighborhoods like Forest Hills (Gates 2015).

Notable Queens neighborhoods are characterized as global microcosms because of the hyperdiversity of Latino and Asian immigrant residents, including new and fast-growing groups such as Ecuadorians (Castano 2017), Indo-Caribbeans (Haller 2013), Bangladeshis, Tibetans, and Nepalese (see Chapter 1). The urban anthropologist Roger Sanjek conducted an extensive ethnographic study of Queens Community Board Four, and in *The Future of Us All* argues for the promise of community boards in building interracial relationships and leadership in neighborhoods experiencing rapid demographic change due to immigration (1998). More than two decades later, a long-time member of Community Board Four (which includes Elmhurst and Corona) was removed for saying and defending a provocative and hateful statement about immigrant cyclists (Kilgannon 2017). To address a persistent and significant representation gap between community board members and majority residential groups, New Yorkers passed a controversial measure to impose term limits on board members (Honan 2018; Murray 2018).

Michael Bloomberg, a billionaire businessman, served three terms as New York City mayor, from 2001 to 2013 for a symbolic one dollar a year, and had an enormous impact in remaking and rebranding New York as a luxury commodity for affluent residents and tourists (Brash 2011; Busa 2017). His legacy includes rezoning approximately 40 percent of the city to facilitate denser and more vertical commercial and residential development and repurposing the city’s extensive industrial infrastructure and waterfronts for luxury residential and recreational uses. Bloomberg was first elected in the aftermath of the September 11 tragedies, and one of his top priorities was to demonstrate that the city could rebound and rebuild. This open-for-business attitude informed his administration’s approach to urban governance and use of planning tools such as zoning and eminent domain to restore market confidence and facilitate private investments (Doctoroff 2017). Changes to Manhattan and Brooklyn receive more attention in the press, but Queens continues to be a site of transformative development.5

Before serving as Bloomberg’s deputy mayor for economic development and rebuilding, Daniel Doctoroff worked on a plan to bring the 2012 Olympics to New York City. Doctoroff’s 2017 book, *Greater than Ever: New York’s Big Comeback*, details how his NYC 2012 vision evolved into the Bloomberg administration’s cornerstone five-borough economic development strategy that catalyzed northern Queens real estate investments in formerly industrial waterfront neighborhoods such as Flushing and Long Island City. The post-9/11 rebuilding priority to diversify New York City’s economy was
echoed in an earlier plan outlined by New York senator Charles Schumer’s Group of Thirty-Five that advocated for new central business districts in outer boroughs like Long Island City (Bagli 2001). Flushing and Long Island City are on opposite ends of northern Queens, and both neighborhoods have evolved into “dynamic economic growth poles” (Sánchez 2016).

Flushing, in northeast Queens, a hub of cross-border Pacific Rim real estate investment and development, has a high concentration of Asian banks and ancillary professional services in real estate, law, and finance. The ubiquity of construction cranes accounts for the rise of a dramatic skyline in the downtown center. The 2004 Downtown Flushing Framework exemplified Bloomberg’s five-borough economic development strategy to promote public-private partnerships and facilitate the influx of transnational real estate finance to underwrite the growth of outer-borough commercial districts. A key initiative of the 2004 Downtown Flushing Framework was the redevelopment of a municipal parking lot in the heart of downtown Flushing. With spaces for over a thousand cars on five acres, the two-story, above-ground parking lot was the pilot project in the city’s early 1950s initiative to generate revenues through constructing off-street parking lots (New York Times 1949, 1954). It was part of the federal urban renewal program that was overseen by Robert Moses in his role as chairman of the city’s Slum Clearance Committee. To accommodate the parking lot’s 2004 redevelopment, a largely black neighborhood was razed, and some displaced residents were relocated to the New York City Housing Authority’s Bland Houses near the Flushing waterfront.

The old parking lot was sold below market value (at $20 million) to a consortium of developers that included the Rockefeller Development Group, AECOM Capital, and the F&T Group to build Flushing Commons, a mixed-use development featuring “premier luxury condominiums” (Trapasso 2014). One of the most prolific Flushing developers, F&T Group is a Chinese transnational real estate development company whose development vision is to build an Asian Times Square in Flushing, Queens (La Guerre 2016). Just two of F&T’s numerous projects, Flushing Commons and nearby Tangram, add three million square feet of luxury residential, retail, and commercial space including hotels. Increasingly, Flushing is evolving into a live, work, play enclave for the Chinese fuerdai, or “rich second generation” (Fan 2016).

Immigrants make up a disproportionate share of the New York City workforce and remain concentrated in labor-intensive sectors in formal and informal economies (Hum 2011). Even though industrial manufacturing has provided scores of jobs for immigrants and workers of color for generations, manufacturing land uses, especially in Manhattan, is generally not supported by city elites and their urban growth coalitions (Schwartz 1993).
The demise of the city’s industrial sectors such as garment manufacturing tells a story of both economic globalization and exploitation of more profitable land uses. The dismantling of Willets Point (also known as the Iron Triangle and separated from downtown Flushing by a narrow creek) is a particularly stark example of the city’s disdain for industrial businesses (deMause 2019; Kensinger 2018). Despite decades of city neglect and lack of public investment in basic services such as paved streets and sewage infrastructure, hundreds of auto repair shops employing over a thousand mostly Latino immigrant workers created a vibrant industrial ecosystem that included the nation’s largest Indian and Pakistani food manufacturer and distributor, House of Spices (Wiloski and Lauinger 2008).

The redevelopment of this sixty-plus-acre site was so integral to Mayor Bloomberg’s luxury city agenda that he engineered a change to the city charter to allow mayoral third terms, in part to ensure his administration’s oversight of development of the city’s “next great neighborhood” (Salazar 2012). Even though new construction has yet to commence as of 2020, most of the small immigrant-owned auto repair shops and their employees have already been displaced. While the New York City Economic Development Corporation provided support for the relocation of a handful of businesses, who formed an owners’ collective, to a renovated warehouse in the Bronx Hunts Point neighborhood, prospects for these auto-body repair shops appear grim (Bagli 2016).

Long Island City is in the geographic center of New York City and has a long history as an industrial waterfront neighborhood, with manufacturing firms such as the Swingline Stapler factory, which still employed 225 workers when it closed in 1999 (Toy 1999). Occupying several city blocks near Long Island City’s industrial warehouses and factory buildings is Queensbridge Houses, the country’s largest public housing development, comprising twenty-nine apartment buildings and over six thousand residents. Starting with Mayor Edward Koch in the 1990s, New York City has invested heavily to shift perception of Long Island City, with its proximity to Midtown Manhattan and its expansive waterfront, as a modern commercial, retail, and residential district (Tarquinio 2009). As a New York Daily News article predicted, “Nothing this close to Manhattan can remain factory land forever” (Sheftell 2008). Initiatives to diversify New York City’s economy to reduce its dependence on Wall Street accelerated after the 2008 Great Recession, and the tech sector has become one of the city’s top economic development priorities (Glaeser 2012; David and Eisenpress 2018; NYCEDC 2018). Public and private investments in massive Long Island City warehouses such as the Falchi Building and the Factory produce spaces (with industrial loft aesthetics) for accommodating the city’s technology, advertising, media, and information and artisanal manufacturing sectors (La Guerre 2015).
In mid-November 2018, Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo held a joint news conference to announce the decision of e-commerce giant Amazon to locate a second headquarters in Long Island City, Queens (and a third in Northern Virginia). New York’s winning proposal promised $3 billion in public money, largely tax credits, along with a capital grant of $505 million from the state, purportedly to help defray the cost of Amazon’s planned build-out of a four- to eight-million-square-foot facility along the Long Island City waterfront. In return for this massive public commitment, Amazon promised to add twenty-five thousand jobs, reportedly at an average salary of $150,000, to the city’s economy and establish an East Coast tech center to rival Silicon Valley.

Immediately after the Amazon announcement, widespread and wide-ranging criticism of this ambitious public-private partnership was evident in street protests and rallies, a packed teach-in at City University of New York’s LaGuardia Community College in Long Island City, and the formation of social media groups such as PrimedOut NYC. Notable criticisms focused on how the negotiations on New York’s benefit package to Amazon were shrouded in secrecy (Kimmelman 2018); massive public incentives had been offered to Amazon while the city’s public housing, transportation infrastructure, and education systems remain severely underfunded (Colon 2018); Amazon’s central role in developing facial recognition technology (ReKognition) and software such as the Investigative Case Management System that are integral to the ICE databases is highly problematic in a dense, hyperdiverse immigrant borough such as Queens (Hao 2018; Lande and Menchaca 2019); and Amazon’s headquarters would supercharge residential and commercial rents, deepening a housing insecurity crisis and threatening to displace working-class and working-poor New Yorkers from Long Island City and surrounding neighborhoods (Goodman and Fitzsimmons 2018; Garun and Liao 2018). Finally, local public review through the city’s uniform land use review procedure had been circumvented because the megadevelopment project is deemed a General Project Plan, allowing the Empire State Development Corporation (a state agency) to control the development and review process (Geiger 2018). In a sudden and unexpected move, Amazon withdrew its plans to relocate a headquarters in Long Island City’s Anable Basin on Valentine’s Day in 2019 (Goodman 2019). Just a little over a week later, the New York City Economic Development Corporation announced it would resume working with the Anable Basin property owners–developers on a transformative rezoning and redevelopment plan (Gannon 2019).

The growth poles of Long Island City and Flushing are connected by Roosevelt Avenue, a heavily trafficked five-mile commercial corridor, with the elevated 7 train, that links the dense, diverse Latino-Asian immigrant
neighborhoods of Woodside, Sunnyside, Elmhurst, Jackson Heights, and Corona. These neighborhoods exemplify the dynamism, informality, and juxtapositions of “the immigrant city within its narrow corridor” (Heathcott 2008, 17). Roosevelt Avenue and its elevated 7 train serves as a metaphor for the immigrant city in scholarship on political incorporation and diversity in urban life (Jones-Corrêa 1998; Tonnelat and Kornblum 2017). In 2015 the final stop for the Manhattan–Queens 7 line was extended to the far West Side, described as “Manhattan’s last frontier” by the Bloomberg administration (Doctoroff 2017, 49), and now links the massive mixed-use luxury commercial and residential Hudson Yards site to Queens.

Spatially bounded immigrant neighborhoods are vital social, cultural, and economic spaces that are often distinguished by new forms of transnational practices (e.g., satellite babies). Small businesses, including street vendors, distinguish the ethnic commercial corridors that anchor neighborhood economies and provide their distinctive character, lending to monikers such as Little Colombia and Little Guyana. Numerous community studies document the social reproduction functions of immigrant enclaves (Zhou 1992; Kwong 1996; Lin 1998). Immigrant spaces also foster the formation of a migrant civil society to counter pervasive housing and labor precarity and advocate for immigrant participation in city planning and redevelopment (Theodore and Martin 2007). Many of these neighborhoods and their vital functions are at risk because the search by urban growth coalitions and real estate investors for undervalued properties is frequently accompanied by efforts to sanitize, regulate, and police immigrant spaces (see Chapter 12).

Queens is an incubator for immigrant political leadership and trailblazers. Most notably, New York’s first Chinese American elected to public office is John Liu, who made history with his 2001 election to represent Flushing, Queens, on the New York City Council. He went on to become the first Chinese American in a citywide office when he was elected New York City comptroller in 2009. In this position, he proved to be an effective counterbalance to Bloomberg’s New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC) by demanding transparency and “light shining into the black hole that has been EDC” (Liu 2012; see also Crain’s New York Business 2013). His 2013 mayoral run, however, was doomed by a federal investigation of his campaign finance practices that ultimately resulted in the conviction of his campaign finance manager and a donor (Rashbaum, Chen, and Weiser 2011; Chen 2012).

Described as the comeback kid at his January 2019 swearing-in ceremony, Liu was elected to the New York State Senate to represent northeast Queens in an election season that swept out virtually all the Independent Democratic Conference, breakaway Democrats who had helped Republicans
maintain control of the state senate for several years. The 2018 midterm elections witnessed the election of numerous trailblazers, including Democratic Socialist Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, whose Fourteenth Congressional District includes Queens’ dense immigrant neighborhoods of Astoria, Jackson Heights, Corona, Elmhurst, and Woodside.

While Queens is an epicenter of transformative social and economic change, the borough has been the subject of relatively few scholarly studies. This book seeks to fill this gap by building on the work of authors who examined the dynamics of political and economic restructuring, neighborhood change, and community activism and civic engagement in Queens two decades ago, including Roger Sanjek (1998), Michael Jones-Correa (1998), Steven Gregory (1998), Madhulika Khandelwal (2002), and Milagros Ricourt and Ruby Danta (2002). As in the field of immigration studies, the scholarship in this book is interdisciplinary, with authors based in urban studies and planning, political science, sociology, history, anthropology, economics, and demography.

Several of the contributing authors are at Queens College of the City University of New York. Queens College’s motto “We learn so that we may serve” is exemplified by the heroism and leadership of our students in advancing racial and social justice. Andrew Goodman was a Queens College student when he joined the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project in 1964 to register African American voters. He and two other activists, James Chaney and Michael Schwerner, were kidnapped and brutally murdered by the Ku Klux Klan. The distinctive clock tower at the Rosenthal Library building is named in their honor and the accompanying plaque, “They Died for Our Freedom,” continues to inspire faculty and students (Newman 2014).

Queens College students will shape the future of the city and country. They reside in surrounding immigrant neighborhoods, and along with their families, our students exhibit the grit, determination, and aspirations that working-class New Yorkers are famous for. At age thirteen, Cristina Jiménez Moreta entered the United States with her parents and brother in 1998 as undocumented immigrants from Ecuador. Through social networks, her family initially found a home in Elmhurst and later moved to Jackson Heights, where she “lived the immigrant experience,” which in Cristina’s case, included the constant fear of deportation (Jiménez Moreta 2018). She credits Queens College for exposure to the borough’s rich cultural diversity and introduction to friends and mentors who helped cultivate the intellectual foundation and skills that propelled her to become a national leader of a youth-led immigrant rights movement. Shortly after graduation from Queens College, Cristina Jiménez Moreta cofounded United We Dream, and in 2017 she was named a MacArthur Foundation Fellow (MacArthur Foundation 2017).
The genesis for this book on immigrant Queens is based, in part, on CUNY’s Macaulay Honors College seminars—in particular, the seminar “The People of New York City.” The seminar introduces students to the interdisciplinary scholarship on the ways that migration and immigration have shaped New York City’s past, present, and future and engages students in experiential learning through community-based research. In the semesters I taught this seminar, I noted the need for an updated compilation of current social science research on the city’s most dynamic immigrant borough. Globalization, incorporation, and placemaking emerged as the key themes my students lacked, the lens needed to frame their introduction to post-1965 immigration and the making of New York City. I hope this book will be a useful resource for all those interested in the study of immigration and global cities.

**Book Organization**

Our interdisciplinary collection of essays uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods to ask several questions: Who are the actors in the social production of space (on the neighborhood level), and how is this process contested? What global and local political economic conditions shape the conditions in a postindustrial context of reception? What public policies and private practices facilitate or impede immigrant incorporation? What kinds of activism and strategies do immigrants engage in and to what ends? What are the challenges and prospects for a multiracial egalitarian democracy in the twenty-first century? The implications of the answers to these questions extend beyond this borough, because Queens shares important similarities to other large- and medium-sized cities, including contextual factors such as rapid demographic change, global and local economic restructuring, rising inequalities, persistent racial hierarchies, and enduring political structures—all of which affect the processes and outcomes involved in immigrant activism, political incorporation, and placemaking that shape future possibilities.

The first part of the book focuses on globalization and details the unprecedented racial and ethnic diversity as a result of international migration during a period of massive deindustrialization and constriction of historical avenues of immigrant mobility. From the extraordinary diversity and the formation of global microcosms that Joseph Salvo and Arun Peter Lobo describe in Chapter 1, the segmented labor markets that David Kallick depicts in Chapter 2, and the decline of manufacturing documented by Lynn McCormick in Chapter 3, we can simultaneously see seismic demographic shifts and restructuring economic sectors that combine to shape employment opportunity and outcomes. In Chapter 4, on worker cooperatives, Christopher Michael presents possible models of economic democracy. He
elaborates on nonmarket community economic development strategies (including community land trusts) that gained traction in this century.

The book’s second part, on incorporation, focuses on immigrant participation and representation in electoral politics and on advocacy for immigrant inclusion in urban governance and service provision. Chapters 5 and 6, by Arianna Martinez and Alice Sardell, respectively, focus on the critical role of Queens’ extensive migrant civil society, composed of grassroots groups, nonprofit organizations, worker centers, and community activists, in protecting and advancing immigrant rights and access, especially for those who lack regularized status. Arianna Martinez provides an account of DACA, which granted temporary protections to undocumented immigrants who entered the United States as children. Although President Trump ended DACA in 2017, Martinez’s insights underscore that a vibrant migrant civil society is essential to effective community outreach and mobilization. Alice Sardell, in a comprehensive case study, examines the opportunities and limitations of the coalitional efforts led by Make the Road New York, a membership-based immigrant rights advocacy organization, to win language access in pharmacies throughout New York State.

In Chapter 7, Michael Krasner and Ron Hayduk examine the relationship between the Queens Democratic Party and new immigrant groups. The chapter points to gains that immigrants have made through formal electoral mechanisms and representational systems. Sayu Bhojwani’s chapter on South Asian political incorporation, Chapter 8, emphasizes how a shared panethnic identity as desi cultivates a more inclusive definition of community that helps promote a unified political agenda. Bhojwani lays out the challenges and opportunities faced by nonprofit desi leaders who act as the “new machine” in facilitating the political incorporation of Queens’ expansive and highly diverse South Asian population. In Chapter 9, Ron Hayduk, Diana Tamashiro Folla, and Kristen Hackett investigate how the New York City Council’s participatory budgeting process created innovative and accessible participatory mechanisms to facilitate immigrant engagement and a more inclusive and responsive governance.

The third part, on placemaking, focuses on the production of neighborhood spaces and identities and looks at immigrant activism for community control of development. Sofya Aptekar, in Chapter 10, reveals the multiple interactions of past and present—old-timers and newcomers who jostle to define the community in gardens, parks, commercial areas, and residential blocks. Donovan Finn’s case study, in Chapter 11, of Flushing Meadows–Corona Park is an example of insurgent placemaking. Alliances formed among different park users, particularly from the surrounding immigrant neighborhoods of Flushing, Corona, Jackson Heights, and Elmhurst, to reject the soccer stadium supported by Mayor Bloomberg that would have
privatized and reduced the green space. In Chapter 12, Samuel Stein and Tarry Hum examine the different modes of populism mobilized by community stakeholders in response to a proposal to expand a business improvement district along Roosevelt Avenue (the commercial heart of immigrant Queens). Stein and Hum’s case study contextualizes these districts as a mode of neoliberal placemaking and analyzes the campaign against the business improvement district waged by Queens Neighborhoods United as a model of successful antigentrification organizing against long odds.

We also define placemaking broadly as creation of social identities that are geographically based and those that are based on ethnic, national, or religious lines. Francois Pierre-Louis Jr., in Chapter 13, describes Haitian-immigrant community building in southeast Queens, a middle-class area predominately African American and Afro-Caribbean that is also experiencing immigrant succession with increasing numbers of South Asians. Nazreen Bacchus’s study, in Chapter 14, is of a relatively lesser known (but much feared and misunderstood) immigrant group, Muslim Americans, whose communities were targeted for surveillance in the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedies. Bacchus explores Queens’ diverse Muslim populations, including the sizable Bangladeshi community in Jackson Heights.

Conclusion

Immigration and cities are at a crossroads yet again. Cristina Jiménez Moreta (2018) describes this current crossroads as an ideological crisis because Trump is testing a fundamental principle of liberal democracies to uphold and protect basic human rights. At the center of this crisis is contemporary immigration, and Queens, as a preeminent site of global migrants, presents an ideal focal point for research and inquiry about the urban condition and immigrant crossroads. Our interdisciplinary book investigates the local forms of socio-spatial restructurings and the persistence of inequality in shaping urban life in Queens. We also study strategies and examples of immigrant engagement and mobilization to strengthen democratic institutions and processes.

Queens exemplifies a “frontier zone” for immigrant urbanism (Sassen 2015). Immigrants are integral to the borough’s dynamic cosmopolitanism and robust ethnic economies. The influx of global or transnational finance capital into property ownership and development in local neighborhoods is a signature quality of urbanization that followed the 2008 Great Recession (Hum 2017). Manhattan proclaimed itself the “real estate capital of the world” (Angotti 2008, 37). Manhattanization of the outer boroughs proceeds with massive capital investments and transformative developments that threaten neighborhoods that have provided sanctuary to working-class
immigrants. In a Huffington Post column, Mayor Bill de Blasio (2016) describes working-class tenants in rent-regulated units and public housing as embodying the soul of their neighborhoods. Migrant civil society organizations such as Queens Neighborhoods United and Make the Road New York along with newly elected representatives are leading the fight to save the soul of our city. We believe this collection of essays on immigrant Queens contributes to a robust analysis of contemporary immigration and urbanism and provides productive directions for future research and strategies to build a just city.

NOTES

1. Trump’s executive order, known as the Muslim ban, sought to suspend travelers from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.
2. Temporary Protected Status is a provision of the 1990 Immigration Act, which provides temporary immigration status to certain nationals who are at risk if they return to their countries.
4. The research collections of the Louis Armstrong House Museum in Corona are housed at Queens College.
5. City and State describes Queens as a “hotbed of redevelopment and rebuilding.”
7. See also the Flushing Commons website, at http://flushingcommons.com.
8. The several films on Willets Point include the 2017 documentary The Iron Triangle. For more about the film, see its website, at http://theirontrianglemovie.com.
9. For more on Bloomberg’s neighborhood projects, see “Neighborhoods,” n.d.
10. The Flushing office of the Chinese American Planning Council offers an innovative program to address the developmental needs of satellite babies, or children reared by family members in China and then sent back to the United States when they are school age. Chinese American Planning Council 2016.

REFERENCES

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