

# [The Immigrants Trump Denounces Have Helped Revive the Cities He Scorns](#)

The New York Times

October 14, 2019 Monday 09:40 EST

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**Section:** UPSHOT

**Length:** 1001 words

**Byline:** Emily Badger and Quoc Trung Bui

**Highlight:** Two of the president's oft-cited problems have been solutions to each other throughout American history.

## **Body**

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Two of the president's oft-cited problems have been solutions to each other throughout American history.

President Trump has turned repeatedly throughout his tenure and his re-election campaign to two targets: [immigrants](#) whom he has described as "invading" the country, and American [cities](#) he has called out of control.

Through his language, the two are linked. His foils are depicted as violent and infested, and in some deep sense at odds with American values.

But to the extent that each presents real policy challenges — how to integrate foreigners, what to do about struggling places — [cities](#) and [immigrants](#) are intertwined. The president's two oft-cited problems have historically been solutions to each other.

"There's this symbiotic relationship that [immigrants](#) need [cities](#) in order to acclimate to a new society, and [cities](#) need new [immigrants](#)," said Jacob Vigdor, a professor of public policy at the University of Washington.

Research by [Dowell Myers](#) at the University of Southern California has shown that [immigrants](#) increase home values in sagging markets, and Mr. Vigdor's work at the county level has shown that their arrival encourages U.S.-born residents [to follow](#), spurring population growth where it had been declining.

Other studies have shown that some of the biggest urban crime declines have been [in neighborhoods where new immigrants have arrived](#). That's most likely because [foreign-born residents](#) have [lower crime rates than native-born ones](#), and their population growth in neighborhoods previously full of vacant properties can help restore eyes on the street.

One implication of this is that immigration can help address the problems of urban crime and decay that the president has lamented in [cities like Chicago and Baltimore](#). Put another way, the president's immigration policies — rooted in the belief that America has [run out of room](#) for even legal migrants — threaten the cycle of how [cities](#) rejuvenate themselves.

The last 40 years offer a vivid example of how this symbiosis has worked in America. [A.K. Sandoval-Strausz](#), a historian, recounts the period in a book out in November, "[Barrio America](#)," that argues that Hispanic immigration during this era helped save many American [cities](#).

The accelerating arrival of Hispanic [immigrants](#) in the 1970s came at a fortunate moment for many American [cities](#). White flight had taken hold. The Great Migration of African-Americans out of the South was winding down.

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“In a way, it’s a twofold historical accident,” said Mr. Sandoval-Strausz, a professor at Penn State. Domestic demographic trends left [cities](#) in need of people (and businesses, and tax revenue), just as [major new waves of immigrants](#) began to enter the country after the immigration overhaul of 1965.

In Chicago and Milwaukee, new Hispanic residents blunted population losses. In Boston and Oakland, their arrival helped reverse population declines. In booming [cities](#) like Los Angeles and Houston, Hispanic population growth has explained the entirety of the boom.

Between 2000 and 2010 in 76 of the country’s 100 largest metro areas, Hispanics contributed more than any other racial or ethnic group to [city](#) population gains, or reduced population losses, according to “[Diversity Explosion](#)” by William Frey, a demographer. This Hispanic growth in [cities](#) has mattered all the more as African-Americans have increasingly moved to the suburbs, too.

Today, Mr. Sandoval-Strausz says too much focus has been placed on the white, college-educated “creative class” for resurrecting American central [cities](#). It was Hispanic [immigrants](#), he said, who rebuilt the housing in places like Dallas’s Oak Cliff neighborhood, and who revived the commercial district in Chicago’s Little Village (making such places more desirable to everyone else).

The “creative class” itself depends on [immigrants](#). They staff the restaurants, gyms, dry cleaners, florists, nail salons and cafes that [have helped lure educated residents back to cities](#). They provide the child care that makes dual professional-parent households possible, and they carry out the renovations and housing construction that newly prosperous [cities](#) have seen.

During much of this time, many [city](#) officials appear not to have understood what was happening, Mr. Sandoval-Strausz argues. They were focused on constructing highways, parking garages, new housing developments and indoor malls — suburban-style amenities to lure back white families who had moved away.

“[Cities](#) spent decades trying to figure out, ‘How do we get those people back,’” he said, “as opposed to asking, ‘Who are these new people?’”

And yet, [this process is an old one](#). Urban neighborhoods and jobs have repeatedly been restocked as one group — the Irish, Italians, Chinese, Mexicans — moves in, prospers and moves away, to be replaced by newer arrivals.

Democratic candidates for president have nodded to this rationale for immigration, but it’s likely to become more prominent as the general election approaches.

“The only reason that South Bend is growing right now, after years of shrinking, is immigration,” Pete Buttigieg, mayor of the Indiana [city](#), said in the third presidential debate. He has proposed “[community renewal visas](#)” to steer [immigrants](#) to places that need them most.

This cycle of renewal works, Mr. Vigdor suggested, not only because [immigrants](#) are willing to do jobs Americans may not want, but also because they’re willing to accept living standards Americans won’t, in a tenement apartment or a run-down neighborhood, or in a [city](#) that has been emptying out.

If the recent [immigrants](#) Mr. Sandoval-Strausz describes move up and out, too, and there isn’t a next wave to replace them, [cities](#) much larger and more prosperous than South Bend would have reason to worry.

PHOTO: Children in Mexican folklore outfits braving Chicago weather for an “El Dia del Nino” parade in Pilsen in April. (PHOTOGRAPH BY Abel Uribe/Chicago Tribune, via Associated Press FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

## Classification

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Language: ENGLISH

## The Immigrants Trump Denounces Have Helped Revive the Cities He Scorns

**Document-Type:** News

**Publication-Type:** Web Blog

**Subject:** IMMIGRATION (90%); NEGATIVE PERSONAL NEWS (89%); **CITIES** (89%); **CITY** LIFE (89%); HISTORY (88%); POPULATION GROWTH (86%); RACE & ETHNICITY (74%); COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS (74%); ELECTIONS (74%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (73%); SLUM DWELLINGS (73%); IMMIGRATION REGULATION & POLICY (73%); REAL ESTATE VALUATIONS (72%); PUBLIC POLICY (71%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2020 (69%); CRIME RATES (68%); HOME PRICES (67%); CRIME, LAW ENFORCEMENT & CORRECTIONS (66%); PROPERTY VACANCIES (63%)

**Organization:** UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA (55%); UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON (55%)

**Industry:** COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS (74%); REAL ESTATE VALUATIONS (72%); HOME PRICES (67%); PROPERTY VACANCIES (63%)

**Person:** DONALD TRUMP (78%)

**Geographic:** CALIFORNIA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (95%)

**Load-Date:** October 15, 2019