

THE WORLD SETTLES IN:  
WASHINGTON, DC, AS AN IMMIGRANT GATEWAY

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*Abstract:* This study examines the ethnic geography of a new immigrant gateway, Washington, DC. According to Census 2000, more than 832,000 foreign-born individuals reside in the Washington metropolitan region. This research uses Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) data in an effort to map the residential decisions of immigrant newcomers by zip code from 1990 to 1998. Spatially, a very diverse, dispersed, and suburbanized pattern of newcomer settlement emerges, a pattern that contradicts many of the assumptions of the spatial assimilation model. Whereas the overall pattern is one of dispersion, an analysis of country-of-origin groups results in a settlement continuum ranging from concentrated (Vietnamese) to highly dispersed (Indians). Current research in Washington suggests that a pattern of *heterolocalism* (community without propinquity) may be a better model for understanding the role of immigrant settlement patterns and networks. [Key words: immigrant gateway, spatial assimilation, heterolocalism, immigrant settlement, Washington, DC.]

During the past four decades, the “fourth wave” of immigration to the United States had a dramatic impact on the demographic dynamics and ethnic composition of many major metropolitan areas, including the nation’s capital. The search for an understanding of the demographic composition and spatial distribution of immigrants in such major metropolitan gateways as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami has produced a substantial and impressive body of literature (e.g., Portes and Rumbaut, 1996, 2001; Clark, 1998, 2003; Waldinger, 2001). According to Census 2000, the Washington, DC, region has the seventh largest immigrant population among all U.S. metropolitan areas.

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Surprisingly, Washington has merited scant attention in the contemporary literature concerned with immigrants and cities.

The ethnic geography of metropolitan Washington has become far more complex as the number of foreign-born residents increased by half a million people from 1980 to 2000. According to the 2000 census, there were 832,000 foreign-born residents in the Washington Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (PMSA), an increase of more than 228% since 1980. Beyond this extraordinary growth, the diversity of the immigrant flow makes Washington, DC, different from the other major receiving areas. Administrative records from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) show that immigrants from 193 countries and territories made Washington their intended residence during the 1990s.

Washington, DC, which has traditionally and popularly been discussed along the biracial lines of its native White and Black populations (Manning, 1996), is now being forced to see itself anew as thousands of newcomers from Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and the Middle East settle within its limits. To date, only a handful of scholarly works have focused on contemporary immigration to the Washington metropolitan area (Repak, 1995; Cary, 1996; Singer et al., 2001; Singer, 2003; Chacko, 2003; Friedman et al., in press). They generally noted that immigrants are more likely to settle in the Maryland and Virginia suburbs than in the District of Columbia itself. What remains less well known is the residential distribution of immigrant groups by their country of origin and across specific suburban areas.

High levels of racial residential segregation in the Washington area necessitate such a detailed analysis of immigrants' settlement patterns. Census 2000 revealed that 63% of Blacks and nearly half of Latinos would have to relocate in order to achieve an even spatial distribution with Whites (Logan, 2003). How immigrants, who are disproportionately non-White, penetrate the Washington area housing market is important to understand because it has implications for their access to transportation, employment, good quality schools, and a broad array of neighborhood amenities. One study examined immigrants' residential distribution, relative to that of native-born Blacks, who are the most segregated group in the region, and found that a racial hierarchy exists (Friedman et al., in press). Recent Asian immigrants are the most likely to live in the suburbs and be dispersed throughout the entire metropolitan area compared to Latin American and African immigrants. The limitation of this study, however, is that it examines immigrants only by their region of origin rather than by their country of origin. Emphasizing the latter will shed more light on the role that race and ethnicity play in their residential location.

The goal of this study is to document the settlement patterns of recent immigrants using data from the INS from 1990 to 1998. By mapping the location of immigrants by zip code areas and country of origin, this research identifies the types of settlement patterns that exist among recent arrivals to the area. Specifically, we examine recent immigrants by country of origin, focusing on the residential choices of immigrants from selected countries. Observations are made about the most recent immigrant newcomers, including those that tend to *concentrate* (Vietnamese and Somalian), versus groups that are *dispersed with some areas of concentration* (Ethiopian and South Korean) and those that are *highly dispersed* (Indian and Chinese). The underlying reasons for such disparate patterns of settlement will be developed. In addition to presenting empirical data on the diversity and distribution of immigrants in the Washington region, we will consider the

utility of the spatial assimilation model for understanding the immigrant experience in cities. Since many of the assumptions in that model do not hold for metropolitan Washington, the relevance of an alternative model of heterolocalism (Zelinsky and Lee, 1998) will be considered.

Scholars who study ongoing immigration tend to work at different scales of analysis. At the national level, the concentration of immigrants in a few states (CA, NY, FL, TX, NJ, and IL) or major metropolitan areas (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami) is not disputed. However, the 1990s also saw the rapid rise in immigrant residence in new settings, such as North Carolina, Georgia and Nevada. At the same time, metropolitan areas that had previously not been major recipients of immigrants, suddenly saw their numbers of foreign-born surge, one of the largest of which was the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. Between 1990 and 2000, the foreign-born population in the Washington metropolitan area grew by 69%; by comparison, in metropolitan Los Angeles, the foreign-born population grew only by 29% (Friedman et. al, in press). In addition, Singer's analysis (2004) of newer immigrant gateways, including Washington, revealed that the percentage of foreign-born population living in suburbs is far greater than that in established gateways such as Chicago and New York.

Shifting to the scale of a particular metropolis, questions arise as to where immigrants settle within cities and how settlement patterns impact immigrants' ability to assimilate within the host society. Assumptions concerning the tendency of new immigrants to cluster among fellow ethnics increasingly fail to explain the growing ethnic and racial fragmentation of American cities and suburbs (Gober, 2000). Amid such complexity, the notion of the *EthniCity* (Roseman et al., 1996), the *ethnoburb* (Li, 1998a, 1998b) and even the *global city* (Sassen, 1991) have been proffered as a means to understand the heterogeneous ethnic-mosaic.

Focusing on the Washington, DC, metropolitan region is important because it may be a prototype of a new postindustrial immigrant gateway that is not well characterized by existing conceptualizations of immigrant settlement. Unlike the more established urban immigrant destinations, the District of Columbia is not built upon a rich history of immigration and has only recently become an immigrant destination. Thus there are few historically ethnic immigrant neighborhoods or enclaves (Ward, 1968, 1971). The lack of such areas bears directly on the settlement of today's immigrants to the area and indirectly has implications for their social and economic assimilation. Given the context of a relatively new and extremely diverse flow of immigrants, it should not be surprising that prevailing settlement processes do not apply. In fact, as anthropologist Caroline Brettell persuasively argued (2003), one must consider the particular historical, social, and structural context of a city when attempting to understand how immigrants are incorporated into the urban fabric.

Through examining the pattern of intended residence in the metropolitan region, this research questions the relevance of the spatial assimilation model in explaining immigrant residential choices. For several reasons, new immigrants to Washington settle in a dispersed pattern, which contradicts the settlement processes suggested in the model. The spatial assimilation model has attracted considerable attention and refinement during the past two decades as scholars have tried to understand its relevance for a new wave of immigrants (Massey and Denton, 1985; Alba and Logan, 1991, 1992; Allen and Turner, 1996; Clark, 1998; Alba et al., 1999; Alba and Nee, 2003). One of the assumptions of the

model is that immigrants, who typically possess fewer economic resources, will cluster together upon their arrival. As time passes, immigrants will become integrated into the labor market, achieve upward social and economic mobility and, in turn, adjust their residential location to match their improved socioeconomic status.

The fact that immigrants in Greater Washington are significantly dispersed upon their arrival suggests that spatial dispersion should not necessarily be equated with social and economic integration. Geographers Richard Wright and Mark Ellis (2000) challenged the implied relationship between *spatial* dispersion and *social* integration, arguing that dispersed immigrants may not necessarily be socially integrated into the mainstream. It may be that many immigrants maintain a sense of “community” with their fellow ethnics that relies less upon residential proximity and more upon the practice of heterolocalism (Zelinsky and Lee, 1998; Singer et. al., 2001). Similarly, Peach (1996) reminded us that ethnic segregation, in and of itself, does not preclude economic assimilation: “There are positive as well as negative reasons for segregation. Segregation is the net outcome of two gross forces, the negative preventing dispersal and the positive, fostering solidarity” (pp. 379–380). For immigrants, voluntary segregation may foster solidarity and enhance a group’s status so there may be distinct advantages in forming residential or commercial enclaves. At the same time, highly segregated immigrant groups exist, especially in the older metropolitan cores, with low levels of socioeconomic attainment and limited interaction with other ethnic groups.

#### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ON IMMIGRANTS’ SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

The main theoretical model used to characterize immigrants’ residential location is the spatial assimilation model (Massey and Denton, 1985). This model maintains that the socioeconomic status of immigrants is reflected in their residential distribution. It assumes that upon entry, immigrants cluster with fellow ethnics in less desirable neighborhoods. Over time, with higher levels of education and income, immigrants seek to bring their residential status into line with their improved socioeconomic status. Thus immigrants leave their ethnic neighborhood as they undergo this process of translating their socioeconomic mobility into residential attainment (Alba and Logan, 1991; Logan and Alba, 1993).

For the purposes of this study, the spatial assimilation model offers two important theoretical assumptions. First, it assumes that recent immigrants of the same ethnic background, and who have limited economic resources, settle in areas in which there is a concentration of people with similar ethnic background. Second, it assumes that the neighborhoods in which recent immigrant arrivals settle tend to be of lower quality and generally provide the immigrants with less access to the opportunity structure that would enable them to achieve upward mobility.

Most of the research that tests spatial assimilation is based on the assumption that immigrants improve their socioeconomic status and residential location after they have been in the United States for a number of years (Alba and Logan, 1991; Logan and Alba, 1993; White et al., 1993; Logan et al., 1996; Schill et al., 1998; Alba et al., 1999; Galster et al., 1999; Rosenbaum et al., 1999). Such studies presume that immigrants initially settle in poorer quality neighborhoods, often in the inner city, and that over time they seek out suburban areas with greater amenities. But as Allen and Turner (1996) reminded us,

for some ethnic groups an immigrant's length of stay and socioeconomic status in the United States has relatively little influence on residential assimilation.

Fewer researchers have tested the assumption that immigrants, particularly those who are not financially well off, cluster in ethnic neighborhoods upon arrival in the United States. The limited research that exists tends to use historical data and examines the settlement patterns of immigrants during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Such research, however, yields mixed findings. On one hand, Taeuber and Taeuber (1965) reported that immigrants settling in Chicago at the turn of the century were indeed clustered and segregated within their own ethnic neighborhoods, thereby lending support for the *spatial assimilation model*. On the other hand, a study by Philpott (1978) revealed an integrated pattern of settlement among European groups settling in Chicago at the turn of the 20th century. Allen and Turner's study of Los Angeles using 1990 census Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) data concluded that although many recent immigrants resided within ethnic clusters the majority did not live in concentrated areas—which contradicts one of the basic assumptions of the spatial assimilation model (Allen and Turner, 1996, p. 149). The lack of consensus in the literature, and the fact that the existing research has not focused on settlement patterns among recent immigrants, makes the present study especially timely.

#### WASHINGTON'S IMMIGRANT CONTEXT

Throughout most of its history, the Washington region attracted few immigrants because it lacked the industrial core that drew immigrants to other mid-Atlantic cities such as Baltimore or Philadelphia. Washington shifted from a national capital to an international capital after World War II. During the postwar period, several intergovernmental agencies such as the World Bank were established in Washington and foreign embassies expanded their presence in the city as well. Although the number of foreign-born within the metropolitan population was quite small, this became a base for subsequent waves of immigration built on family and social networks as well as the settlement of various refugee groups from Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

In 1970, only one out of every twenty-two residents in metropolitan Washington was foreign born; 30 years later, however, one out of six of the region's residents (16.9%) was foreign-born. As the metropolitan area grew and prospered in the 1980s and 1990s, immigrants continued to be drawn by employment opportunities and until recently experienced relatively little competition with other immigrant groups. According to the 2000 census, Washington grew by nearly 17% during the 1990s, making it one of the fastest growing major metropolitan regions in the country. Nearly half of this growth was a result of the increase in the resident foreign-born population (Singer, 2003).

The booming regional economy is a significant factor in explaining this growth. In the 1980s, the metropolitan employment growth rate was the sixth most rapid among the nation's 25 largest metropolitan areas, and the growth rate for the District of Columbia itself was the 12th among central cities (Kingsley et al., 1998). The growth of the region's private sector has largely been driven by increases in jobs in high-end service industries such as information technology, biomedical industries, and business services. Indeed, between 1980 and 1996, employment in the information technology sector grew by 178% (Kingsley et al., 1998). Such growth is reflected in a recent study which found that the

cities with the largest number of dot-com, dot-net, and dot-org addresses per capita in the United States are Herndon and Fairfax, Virginia, both suburbs of Washington, DC (Henry, 2000). Moreover, the growth of high-tech and well-paying jobs was accompanied by a surge in demand for lower-skilled service workers.

Consequently, Washington's immigrant stream consists of both high- and low-skilled workers. Suro (1999) showed that Washington benefits from the influx of educated immigrants. For example, whereas natural scientists constitute only 1% of the total workforce in the Washington region, recent immigrants to the metropolis comprise fully one-quarter of those employed in this occupational group. In the realm of lower-skilled employment, newcomers are over-represented in such occupations as construction, cleaning, and personal services. Among construction laborers, for example, recent immigrants account for no less than half of all people employed in this sector (Suro, 1999, p. 56).

### STUDY DESIGN

This analysis of immigrants' residential patterns is based on administrative data from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service for fiscal years 1990 to 1998. These data represent all immigrants who were admitted as legal permanent residents (LPRs) during the period and who indicated their intended residence was in the Washington metropolitan region. We define the Washington metropolitan region as consisting of the following jurisdictions: the District of Columbia; Arlington, Alexandria, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William counties in Virginia; and Charles, Frederick, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties in Maryland.<sup>2</sup> These data constitute the flow of legal permanent immigrants ("green card" recipients) into Greater Washington. For each legal entrant, the data exhibit the zip code of his/her intended residence, date of arrival, origin country, age, sex, and visa type.

We choose to analyze the INS data rather than the Census 2000 data for this portion of our analysis because the INS data provide more detail on immigrant newcomers than can be obtained from Census 2000. The INS data allow us to analyze immigrant newcomers' settlement patterns by their countries of origin. What is available from Census 2000 is the country of origin information on the stock of foreign-born within each neighborhood. However, for the portion of the foreign-born stock that entered between 1995 and 2000, or the newest segment of the stock population, we can not get information on their countries of origin. We are particularly interested in immigrant newcomers to Greater Washington because examining their settlement patterns will be more valuable in testing hypotheses derived from the spatial assimilation model.

The INS data, however, are limited to legal permanent residents. These data exclude undocumented immigrants, temporary immigrants, and immigrants who received legal permanent residence through the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). It

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<sup>2</sup> The definition here is similar to the Washington Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) used in the 1990 census, but unlike the census definition our definition excludes Calvert, Maryland and Stafford, Virginia, fringe suburban counties with relatively few people and fewer immigrants. The boundaries of this study are also consistent with the definition used by the Brookings Institution in a 1999 study of the Greater Washington region and the governance boundaries of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

is recognized that undocumented immigrants are attracted to and reside in the metropolitan area, but there are no data available to map this population. There is evidence, however, that the residential patterns of the undocumented mirror those of the legal immigrant population (Newman and Tienda, 1994). Estimating the size of the undocumented population for a specific metropolitan region is fraught with problems and we do not attempt to do so here. Although we are confident that the data represent the majority of new immigrants to the region, the data do not capture the share of the area's undocumented population. Even though this snapshot of the region's immigrant population in the 1990s based on INS data is incomplete, it is the most detailed spatial analysis available given the data limitations.<sup>3</sup>

The analysis is also limited to the flow of immigrants who arrived during the 1990s. Because of the incompatibility of these data for both the "flow" and the "stock" of foreign-born residents, we are unable to overlay immigrants who arrived in the 1990s with respect to those already residing in the Washington metropolitan area to examine whether newcomers are choosing destinations that correspond to the residences of their fellow ethnics.<sup>4</sup> While we assume that immigrants make good use of their social networks in deciding where to live, we cannot determine in this analysis the degree to which they contribute to an existing concentration of people from their origin country.

It is instructive to point out here some basic comparisons regarding what census and INS data capture to illustrate some important differences in these datasets. The 2000 census counted 832,002 foreign-born individuals in the Washington PMSA. Of the foreign-born (which would include both recent and longer-term immigrants) 38.6% were from Latin America and the Caribbean, 36.2% from Asia, 11.2% from Africa, and 12.1% from Europe. In comparison, INS data for the 1990–1998 period show that of all *legal* immigrants settling in the region, 31.5% from Latin America and the Caribbean, 42.0% from Asia, 16.2% from Africa, and 10.3% from Europe.

These comparisons make evident that the foreign-born Latino population in the 2000 census constitutes a larger group than Asians in the metropolitan area, whereas the INS data of new arrivals show more Asians. There are several reasons for this. First is that the census data include all foreign-born counted in 2000, regardless of legal status. Some unknown share of foreign-born are in the region with temporary status (such as H-1B or Temporary Protected Status [TPS]) but still counted in the census. Second, the INS data only capture intended residence of new immigrants; if recent immigrants settle in another metropolis and then move to Washington, they would not be counted in the INS data. Third, the census data captures all foreign-born people regardless of their length of stay.

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<sup>3</sup> The maps in this study are based on the immigrants' "intended" residence at the time of application for permanent residence. Upon obtaining their legal residence, immigrants could leave the area; likewise, immigrants may move into the metropolitan area after residing elsewhere in the United States. An analysis by Newbold (1999) examined the issue of immigrant settlement in the period immediately after arrival through a comparison of 1990 census data and INS data from 1985 to 1990. Although there appears to be mobility of immigrants shortly after arrival, it does not necessarily result in apparent changes to the concentration of the immigrant population.

<sup>4</sup> The flow of immigrants refers to recent legal arrivals to the United States who chose Washington as their area of intended residence. The stock is comprised of all foreign-born individuals counted in the census regardless of legal status or year of entry. The two figures are important but not the same. Flow indicates current immigration trends while stock represents both past and current population movements.

Thus, for example, while Asians account for 36.2% of the foreign-born they could easily be a larger percentage of the immigrant flow that legally entered during the 1990s.

Immigrants are mapped according to their intended place of residence, as denoted by the zip code they enter on their application for legal permanent residence. The use of zip code information for immigrants offers a far more recent and precise rendering of immigrant newcomer residential patterns than what is available from the 1990 or 2000<sup>5</sup> census. However, the use of data at the zip code level has some limitations. Zip codes are created by the U.S. Postal Service for the purposes of delivering mail, and therefore they do not necessarily reflect meaningful community boundaries. Moreover, zip code areas vary greatly in size, with some in the Greater Washington region containing as many as 50,000 residents. Another drawback of using data on immigrants' settlement patterns at the zip code level is that it does not make clear the residential clustering that may exist within a zip code area. Despite these limitations, these data are the only data available on recent immigrants' settlement patterns at a level of spatial generalization smaller than the metropolis that provides greater detail concerning an immigrant's country of origin.

## RESULTS

Nearly a quarter of a million immigrants from 193 countries and territories chose the Washington metropolitan region as their intended residence during the study period (1990–1998). There is relative gender parity among the recent arrivals: 53% are female and 47% are male. The average age of this immigrant population is 29; three-quarters of the new arrivals are younger than 40. The age composition of new immigrants to Washington is fairly typical when compared with other metropolitan areas. The majority of the newcomers are in their prime working years and constitute an important supply of new labor.

Out of the more than 240,000 legal immigrants who chose to reside in the metropolitan area during the 1990s, about half were from the following countries: El Salvador, Vietnam, India, China, the Philippines, Korea, Ethiopia, Iran, Pakistan, and Peru.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike some other major immigrant destinations such as Miami or Los Angeles, where one or two immigrant groups tend to predominate, no single national group dominates Washington's immigrant flow. The largest flow of recent immigrants from a single country (El Salvador) accounts for only 10.5% of the stream of immigrants. The diverse regions of origin are reflected in the 10 leading source countries listed earlier. There are immigrants from Central America (El Salvador), South America (Peru), East Asia (China and South Korea,) Southeast Asia (Vietnam and the Philippines), South Asia (India and Pakistan), the Middle East (Iran), and Africa (Ethiopia) (Fig. 1).

As stated previously, Asian immigrants were the largest regional group, making up 42.0% of the flow, according to the INS data. In the 1990s Washington emerged as a

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<sup>5</sup> At the zip code level, Census 2000 only provides data on the foreign-born from selected countries and only for the entire foreign-born stock. The country-of-origin data is not disaggregated by year of entry. Through the use of INS data this study tracks more countries of origin as well as the settlement patterns of recent arrivals.

<sup>6</sup> See Singer et al. (2001) for a list of the top 27 immigrant source countries which represent three-quarters of the total number of immigrants who came to the Washington area during the study period.





**Fig. 1.** The diversity of recent immigrants to metropolitan Washington, DC, is reflected in this greeting at the Long Branch Library in Montgomery County, Maryland. Visitors are welcomed in 11 languages: English, French, Vietnamese, Russian, Ukrainian, Korean, Arabic, Spanish, Chinese, Farsi, and Hindi. Photo by Rob Crandall.

major East Coast destination for Asian immigrants. Of the top ten source countries for this metropolitan area, seven are located in Asia.

Similarly, Latinos have been drawn to Washington during the past two decades in ever increasing numbers. The leading source country is El Salvador, followed by Peru, Bolivia, Jamaica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago, the Dominican Republic, and Colombia. Notably, whereas Mexicans accounted for 29% of all legal newcomers to the United States between 1990 and 1998 according to the INS, they comprised only 1.2% of Washington's recent immigrant arrivals and only 4% of the Latin American

newcomers.<sup>7</sup> The rise of Latinos in metropolitan Washington mirrors their rise in other nontraditional urban areas such as Atlanta and Raleigh-Durham (Suro and Singer, 2002).

Another distinguishing feature of the nation's capital is the significant influx of African immigrants in recent years. African immigrants account for 16.2% of the recent arrivals, but they comprise only 3.6% of all new arrivals to the United States. Indeed, the percentage of immigrants from Africa to the Washington region constitutes the largest proportional flow of Africans to any U.S. major metropolitan area (Singer et al., 2001; Wilson, 2003). Ethiopians account for one-quarter of all African newcomers to Washington, followed by migrants from Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Somalia. Some of these immigrants arrived as refugees; others came as students and later had their status adjusted to that of legal permanent resident. Moreover, as with all immigrant groups, family unification and other chain migration processes have fueled the further expansion of the African population in the metropolitan area.

The spatial dispersion of new immigrants within the Washington metropolitan region is mapped in Figure 2. The residential choices of immigrants mirror the region's overall suburban growth trend. Nearly every zip code in the metropolitan area was an intended residence of at least one immigrant during the 1990s. Moreover, two-thirds of all zip code areas had 50 or more new arrivals.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, the jurisdictions that received the most immigrants were the affluent suburban counties of Fairfax, Virginia and Montgomery, Maryland, which each received more than one-quarter of the region's newcomers. Prince George's County in Maryland and the District of Columbia each drew approximately 13% of the new immigrants.

### THE TOP TEN IMMIGRANT DESTINATIONS

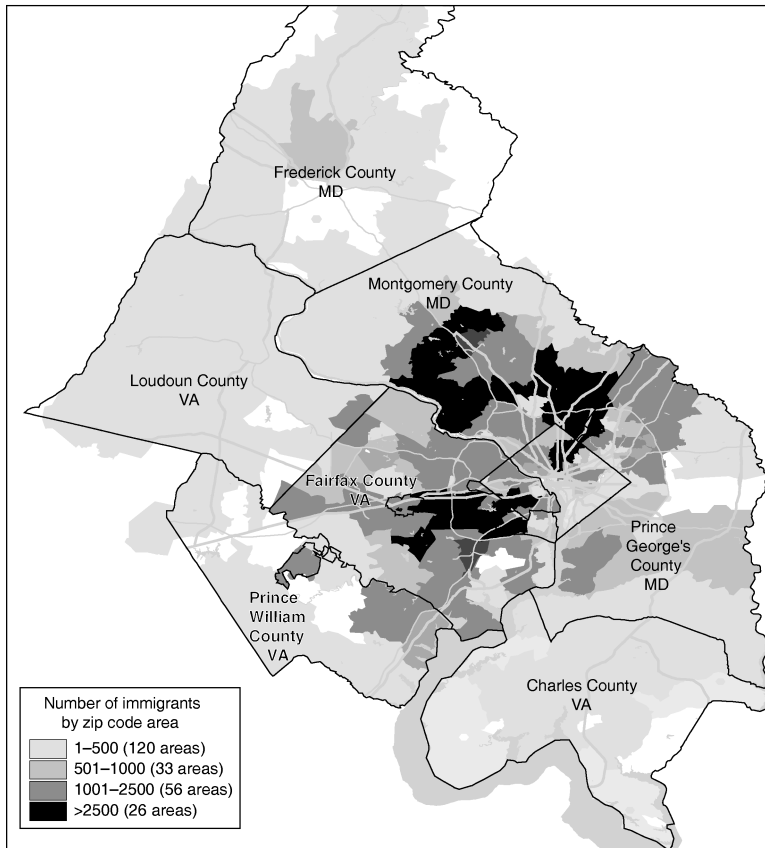
Shifting to the neighborhood scale, here represented by zip codes, there are certain areas that attracted a higher percentage of immigrants. Contrary to what would be expected under the spatial assimilation model, these zip code areas are some of the most ethnically diverse locales in the metropolitan area. Within these more popular immigrant destinations, for example, it is common to have more than 100 countries of origin represented.

Washington differs from residential patterns in cities with long-established immigrant communities, such as New York or Chicago, where immigrants are still drawn in large numbers to the inner city. In metropolitan Washington, Montgomery and Fairfax counties contain five of the top ten zip code areas. Two more are in Arlington and Alexandria, one is in Prince George's County, and two are in the District (Fig. 3). The number of recent immigrants in these ten zip codes ranges from nearly 4,400 to more than 7,800. Collectively, these ten areas account for one-fifth of the region's new immigrants.

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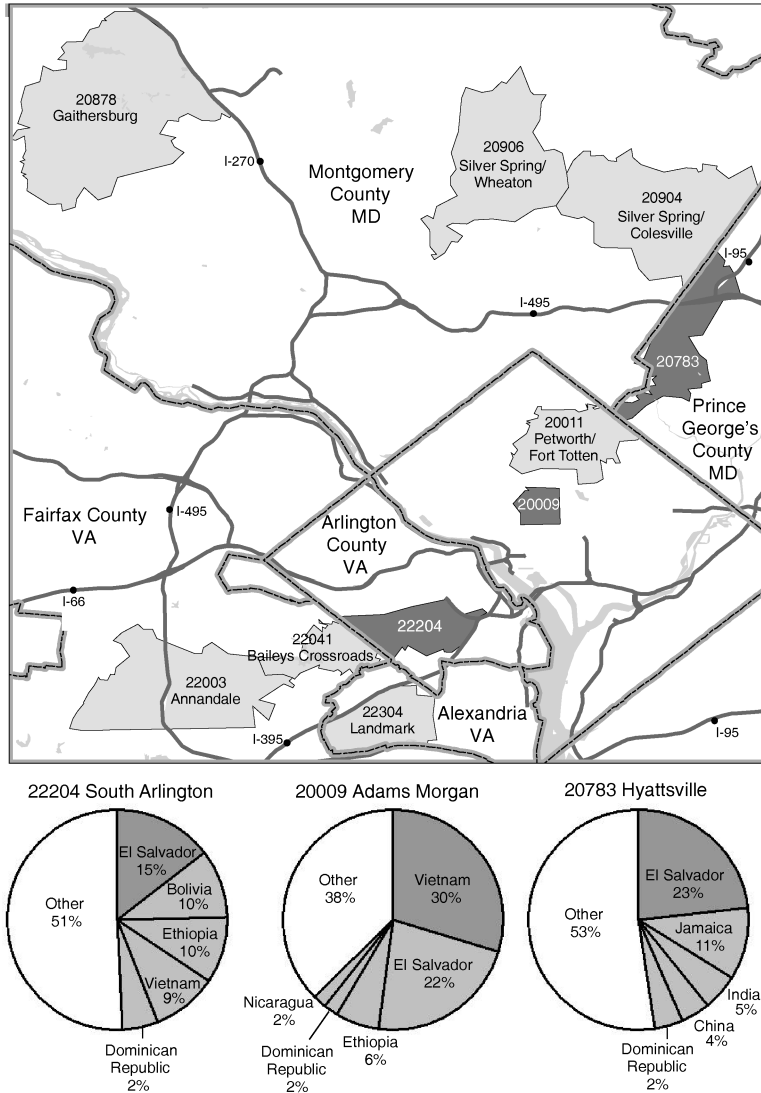
<sup>7</sup> Census 2000 revealed a larger population of Mexicans in the metropolis. Since INS data only reveal the initial intended residence of legal immigrants, Mexicans who relocated to Washington from other U.S. cities would not be counted in the INS database. Other discrepancies between INS and census data can be explained by the movement of undocumented workers and the recency of Mexican immigration to Washington.

<sup>8</sup>Of the 258 zip code areas mapped in our study, only 23 were not cited as intended residential destinations. Many of these are institutional zip codes (such as universities) in which individuals do not permanently reside.



**Fig. 2.** Distribution of recent immigrants in metropolitan Washington, DC. Of the zip code areas, 23 show no immigrants. *Source:* Administrative data from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service for fiscal years 1990–1998.

A closer examination of the immigrant composition of these top ten zip code areas underscores the ethnic complexity of a new gateway metropolis. The South Arlington area along Columbia Pike (Zip 22204) is one of the most diverse in the metropolitan region (with recent immigrants from 128 countries). Immigrants from the top ten source countries all chose this destination zip code, with the largest groups coming from El Salvador, Bolivia, Vietnam and Ethiopia. The top ten sending countries account for half of the newcomers to this zip code area. The next most popular destination is the Adams Morgan/Mount Pleasant area of the District of Columbia (20009). Here, one finds recent immigrants from 136 countries. But unlike South Arlington, there is a notable clustering of Salvadoran and Vietnamese immigrants, a result more consistent with the patterns predicted under the spatial assimilation model. Immigrants from those two countries account for half of the new immigrants in that zip code area. However, no other zip code area from Figure 3 has such a high concentration of immigrants from just two countries.



**Fig. 3.** Top ten immigrant zip code areas in metropolitan Washington, DC. *Source:* Administrative data from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service for fiscal years 1990–1998.

Turning to the outer suburbs, different immigrant profiles are evident. In the Gaithersburg/Rockville, Maryland zip code of 20878, the top ten sending countries account for just more than half of the recent immigrants. In this area, the largest numbers come from India, China, Taiwan, and Iran. In the closer-in Maryland suburb of Langley Park/Hyattsville (20783) in Prince George's County, the top ten sending countries only account for 40% of the immigrant population, yet it is heavily weighted toward Salvadorans who make up 23% of all recent immigrants to this zip code area.

## PATTERNS OF SETTLEMENT

In this study the top 27 sending countries are sorted along a continuum of three categories: (1) highly dispersed (such as immigrants from India, Mexico, and the United Kingdom), (2) dispersed with areas of concentration (Salvadorans, Koreans, Filipinos, and Ethiopians), and (3) concentrated (Vietnamese, Somalis, and Bolivians; Table 1). The sorting is based on the percentage of newcomers residing in the leading zip code destination areas for a particular national group.

Groups that had 10% or more of newcomers in their top zip code were classified as concentrated, with one in ten newcomers settling in their group's top zip code. Groups that had less than 5% in their top zip code (or 1 in 20 newcomers) were considered highly dispersed. The largest category included those countries that were "dispersed with areas of concentration," which means between 5 and 10% of newcomers have settled in the top zip code for that particular country.

A rough sorting of the national groups along this dimension suggests that there is a continuum of settlement patterns from highly dispersed to concentrated that deserves further examination. The extremes in Table 1 underscore the variation in what, overall, is a dispersed pattern of settlement. Indicative of a concentrated group are the newcomers from Somalia, of whom 15% reside in their top zip code. In addition, 63% of all newcomers from Somalia reside in the country's top ten zip codes. In contrast, just 2% of recent immigrants from the United Kingdom reside in their top zip code and their top ten zip codes account for only 18% of the population.

Table 1 also shows the percentage of immigrants found in the ten leading zip codes for each national group. Thus in the case of Ethiopians, 49% are found in ten zip codes (which is not the same as the top ten zip codes mapped in Fig. 2). The percentage of national groups in their top ten zip codes ranges from 18% to 63%. Recall that 22% of all immigrants were found in the top ten zip code destinations areas. Yet when one examines the top ten zip codes by national group (which is different for each group) the percentage is much higher. This suggests that microclusters may be forming, which leads to clear preferences for certain zip code areas. To better appreciate what this ethnic geography might look like, three national groups will now be discussed.

### *Highly Dispersed*

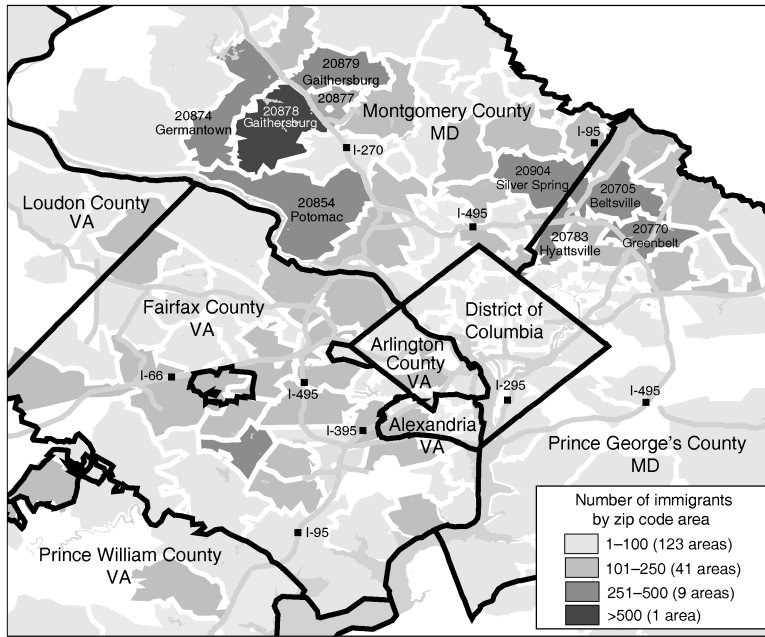
Immigrants from India were the third largest group in the study, after Salvadorans and Vietnamese. The Indian immigrants exemplify newcomers who almost exclusively chose residences in the suburbs. As Figure 4 shows, few Indians live in the District of Columbia, opting instead to reside in suburban jurisdictions. In fact, 71% of recent Indian immigrants, who total more than 13,000, live in the outer suburbs, beyond the Washington Beltway (Interstate 495). Of the 258 zip codes in the study area, Indians are found in two-thirds of them. Yet there is only one zip code area, in Gaithersburg, Maryland, that contains more than 500 Indian newcomers.

In recent years, many highly skilled Indian professionals with advanced degrees were drawn to metropolitan Washington's high-tech complexes, which are primarily located in Montgomery and Fairfax counties. As Roberto Suro observed: "Often these newcomers take a drop in status, leaving behind a university research job to supervise a testing

**TABLE 1. TENDENCIES IN RESIDENTIAL CONCENTRATION BY ZIP CODE, WASHINGTON, DC, METROPOLITAN AREA**

Country	Top zip code	Number of people in top zip code	% in top zip code	% in top ten zip codes	Total
Concentrated groups					
Somalia	22204	390	15.38	63.25	2,536
Bolivia	22204	786	13.93	46.55	5,644
Taiwan	20878	462	13.28	41.82	3,479
Jamaica	20783	603	11.87	52.11	5,082
Vietnam	20009	1944	10.98	49.33	17,702
Afghanistan	22304	270	10.68	52.08	2,529
Dispersed with areas of concentration					
Dominican Republic	20783	241	9.16	54.69	2,631
Ethiopia	22204	773	8.24	49.43	9,381
Nigeria	20011	441	8.08	42.28	5,461
Bangladesh	22204	211	7.94	38.18	2,658
Trinidad and Tobago	20783	216	7.86	35.75	2,747
Sierra Leone	22312	292	7.79	44.37	3,750
Ghana	22304	356	7.47	44.31	4,764
The Philippines	20744	770	7.26	23.69	10,599
Nicaragua	22204	214	6.90	42.70	3,103
South Korea	22003	650	6.53	35.76	9,948
Russia	22314	192	6.02	31.97	3,190
El Salvador	20009	1443	5.71	36.25	25,263
Peru	22204	394	5.61	29.93	7,029
Iran	20878	412	5.49	33.24	7,506
China	20878	595	5.43	30.37	10,966
Highly dispersed groups					
Guatemala	22204	187	4.95	35.59	3,774
Colombia	20906	119	4.74	26.26	2,513
India	20878	590	4.43	27.23	13,330
Mexico	20110	131	4.36	30.59	3,004
Pakistan	22306	281	3.92	28.76	7,165
United Kingdom	22101	78	2.05	18.34	3,805
Total (top 27)					168,589
Total (All)					240,390

Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1990–1998.



**Fig. 4.** Recent Indian Immigrants to the Washington Metropolitan Area. Of the zip code areas, 84 show no Indian immigrants. *Source:* Administrative data from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service for fiscal years 1990–1998.

laboratory, for example—but they also experience a substantial boost in income” (Suro, 1999, p. 57). Typically, immigrants from South Asia are also fluent in English, a legacy of their British colonial history. It could be argued that, for South Asian Indians, English language fluency and a middle-class economic status could reduce the need to live among fellow ethnics thereby contributing to a highly dispersed pattern of settlement. Immigrants from Pakistan and the United Kingdom were also in the highly dispersed group, but so were Spanish-speaking Mexicans, Guatemalans, and Colombians—so language alone is not the only factor although it might contribute some to greater immigrant dispersion.

Although Indians are not residentially concentrated, they show a clear preference for suburban living. And it is in the suburbs where specialized retail centers have emerged. One of the largest of these centers is found on University Avenue in Langley Park, Maryland (20783). Shops such as India Sari Palace (Fig. 5) and Bollywood rely upon a steady stream of Indian consumers who do not necessarily live in the immediate vicinity. University Avenue, however, is an important commercial strip for many immigrant retailers because dozens of independent retailers exist to serve Latino, Caribbean, African, and various Asian customers.

#### *Dispersed with Areas of Concentration*

Recent immigrants from Ethiopia, the seventh largest group (9,381 newcomers), are less dispersed than the Indians but are still found in well over half of all zip code areas

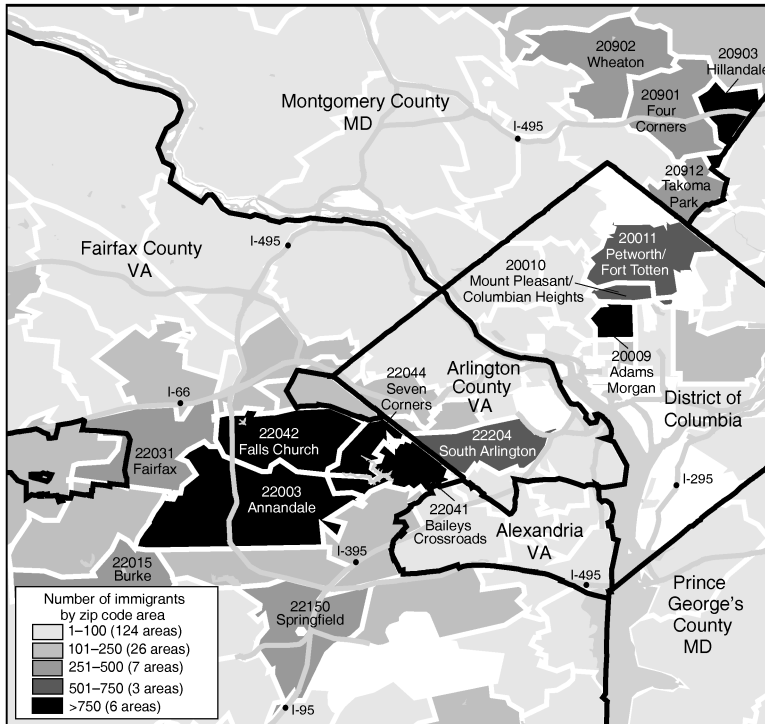


**Fig. 5.** Indian commercial centers are not always in the areas with the highest concentrations of Indians. This shopping center along University Avenue in Langley Park, Maryland (zip code 20783) is more noted for its residential concentration of Salvadoran immigrants. Photo by Rob Crandall.

(57%). Ethiopians are disproportionately found in areas that have high concentrations of immigrants in general. They are ranked third among newcomers in South Arlington's 22204 zip code and in the District of Columbia's Petworth (20011) neighborhood. They are the single largest immigrant group in the ethnically diverse Landmark area (22304) of Alexandria, Virginia. Indeed, this may be a residential enclave in formation. Ethiopians have a commercial presence in Landmark, as well as Adams Morgan in the District of Columbia. Chacko's study of Ethiopians (2003) identified several *socioconsumerscapes* (small concentrations of Ethiopian businesses) that have formed in the Washington area. These commercial clusters play a significant role in Ethiopian community maintenance and social interaction. While the overall pattern is one of community without residential propinquity, there are efforts at placemaking through commerce and special events such as festivals that mark the presence of Ethiopians in the metropolitan area.

The top ten zip codes of Ethiopian residence account for nearly half of all recent immigrants from that country. Therefore, this group shows some tendency to cluster and may, over time, be classified as a more concentrated group like the Vietnamese. They also constitute one of the older ethnic migrant flows from Subsaharan Africa. Immigrants from the African Horn began to arrive in Washington in the late 1970s and 1980s when drought and civil war bedeviled their homeland. Some arrived as refugees; others were students who later changed their status. Although warfare has ended in Ethiopia, immigration is still substantial due to family unification and diversity visas. Ethiopians account for one-quarter of all African newcomers.





**Fig. 6.** Recent Vietnamese immigrants to metropolitan Washington, DC. Of the zip code areas, 92 show no Vietnamese immigrants. *Source:* Administrative data from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service for fiscal years 1990–1998.

### *Concentrated*

The Vietnamese population, which is one of the older Asian communities in the Washington region, shows clear areas of concentration in the Bailey's Crossroads and Seven Corners (22041, 22042, 22044) areas of northern Virginia as well as the Adams Morgan neighborhood (20009) in the District of Columbia (Fig. 6). The Vietnamese are the second largest immigrant group in study, with nearly 18,000 new arrivals in the 1990s. Six zip code areas had more than 750 recent arrivals, the largest being in the District of Columbia. Unlike other Asian immigrants, such as the Koreans and Indians, recent Vietnamese arrivals commonly reside in the inner suburbs and the District. In fact, 11% of recent Vietnamese immigrants reported the DC 20009 zip code as their intended residence. In the inner suburbs, straddling Virginia's Arlington/Fairfax county line, one finds the best example of an ethnic neighborhood and nucleus for Vietnamese investment. Eden Center, a shopping area that serves the large Vietnamese population (Wood, 1997), is the largest Vietnamese-operated retail center in the country (Fig. 7). And, half of all Vietnamese new arrivals can be found in ten zip codes.

With areas of initial settlement in the inner city and close-in suburbs, recent Vietnamese immigrants seem to follow the assumed residential behavior of the spatial



**Fig. 7.** Eden Center, a Vietnamese shopping center in Northern Virginia (zip code 22041), is the most important central place for Vietnamese goods and services on the East Coast. It is also located in the area where Vietnamese immigrants have clustered. This community has its roots to refugees flows in the 1970s. The community asserts its political identity by retaining the flag of the former South Vietnamese Republic along side the U.S. flag. Photo by Rob Crandall.

assimilation model. Yet, at the same time, two-thirds of all zip code areas in the region have at least one Vietnamese newcomer residing in them. Even in the case of a more concentrated group such as the Vietnamese, newcomers might live far from an ethnic enclave, or with longer-term immigrants who could potentially reside nearly anywhere in the metropolitan region.

## DISCUSSION

Given the absolute number of immigrants, it is reasonable to add Washington, DC, to the list of America's immigrant gateways. Yet it is also clear that the pattern of immigrant settlement in metropolitan Washington may not mirror that of traditional urban gateways such as New York or Chicago. This analysis does not specifically examine whether immigrants' dispersed settlement is reflective of their integration into American society, as the spatial assimilation model would predict. Alternatively, a different model of immigrant social space is warranted given that contemporary ethnic communities could exist beyond residential enclaves.

Our results show an overall residential dispersion of immigrant newcomers in the Greater Washington area that does not conform to the basic assumption of the spatial assimilation model—that immigrants, particularly those with fewer socioeconomic resources, will reside in areas with their fellow ethnics. Although there are areas where new immigrants tend to cluster, these seldom are the exclusive domain of any one or two national groups. This relative lack of exclusive areas of ethnic concentration may

represent a new pattern of immigrant settlement, particularly in such emerging immigrant gateways as Washington, Atlanta, Dallas-Fort Worth, and Las Vegas (Singer, 2004).

More importantly, the data show that recent immigrants to the Washington region tend to bypass the central city and choose to settle in the suburbs, revealing another potential weakness of the spatial assimilation model in characterizing recent immigrants' residential behavior. This finding suggests that recent immigrants to the Washington metropolis, by virtue of their destination in suburban areas, are likely to have access to an opportunity structure and resources that may facilitate their prospects for upward social mobility and, in turn, their assimilation. This is especially important when one considers access to better educational opportunities for both children and adults.

The tendency toward dispersed settlement in the suburbs raises important questions about assimilation versus the maintenance of ethnic communities. In general, sociological theory has tended to equate residential dispersion with cultural assimilation and the erosion of ethnic communities (e.g., Massey and Denton, 1985). Geographical research has tended to focus on pattern, seeking out immigrant clusters (the *ethnoburbs* and enclaves) or assessing measures of dissimilarity. Yet this same research has been surprisingly mute on exploring the notion of ethnic community formation beyond a residential or commercial context.

One recent model that addresses the maintenance of ethnic community without propinquity is *heterolocalism* (Zelinsky and Lee, 1998). Heterolocalism does not make the assumption that immigrants necessarily cluster residentially with fellow ethnics when they first enter the United States. Instead, the theory maintains that immigrants can create communities through social networks and organizations rather than through residential proximity. Instead of living side-by-side within ethnic enclaves, immigrants, regularly gather informally at social, cultural, religious, and sporting events. Such heterolocal behavior helps explain how dispersed recent immigrants maintain vital social networks and ethnic communities.

Several new studies of immigrant communities in and around Washington illustrate how heterolocalism operates. Researchers at Catholic University are investigating the role of religion in immigrant communities. Their research suggests that immigrant worship communities are attentive to immigrant social needs and create a formal space for fellow ethnics to regularly gather (Foley and Hoge 2003, p. 3). Even in very large congregations, it is common for worship services to be offered in native languages that serve specific immigrant communities.

Secular organizations, especially soccer leagues and hometown associations, also illustrate the workings of heterolocalism. Price and Whitworth (2004) studied the role of immigrant-run soccer leagues for Latinos in metropolitan Washington. They found that leagues were often organized by country of origin and that the teams were often village-based. For many recent immigrants from Central and South America, Sunday soccer games at regional parks scattered throughout the metropolis have become the time and place where newcomers can temporally reassemble themselves in social units that replicate community patterns back home.

Following Wood's (1997) research on Vietnamese retail areas in northern Virginia, Chacko's (2003) research on Ethiopian immigrants illustrated that in most cases the social spaces of Ethiopian groceries, restaurants, and churches do not match the distribution of Ethiopians within the metropolitan area. Chacko (2003, p. 22) argued that

“despite relatively weak residential clustering, robust ethnic places have emerged in the area, fulfilling many of the functions of the traditional inner-city ethnic neighborhood”.

We are persuaded that immigrant communities throughout the metropolitan region are maintained as heterolocal communities without propinquity. Therefore, immigrants probably have not achieved “full integration” into American society just because they are residentially dispersed. Immigrants may be spatially assimilated but socially they may choose to frequently gather with their fellow ethnics. Although such networks are not as readily mapped as residential patterns, they are fundamental in facilitating an immigrant’s ease of entry into the new social milieu of Greater Washington while at the same time fostering an ethnically based sense of community and belonging. How such networks facilitate or impede integration into American society merits further study.

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