

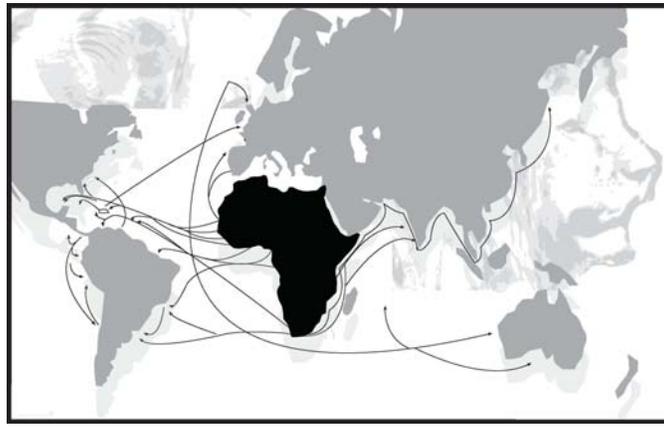
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Immigrants in Baltimore: How Warm the Welcome?

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Abstract:

Elizabeth Clifford, "Immigrants in Baltimore: How Warm the Welcome?"

This paper focuses on the contemporary situation of immigrants in Baltimore. Immigrants in Baltimore face a situation different from those in many other cities in important ways. First, the immigrant population is incredibly diverse in Baltimore, and in Maryland more generally, with no one or two nationalities predominant, whereas in many cities the majority of immigrants are from one of a few origins. Second, in the early years of the 21st century, Baltimore's growing immigrant population encountered a city in which the city government officially and warmly welcomed them, in an effort to stave off population decline, whereas in many cities local governments are hostile to immigrants. In this paper, I examine current demographics of immigrants in Baltimore, and examine the official response to this immigrant flow. This research draws from secondary analysis of Census data and government sources regarding the official city standpoint on immigration, as well as from fieldwork with an immigrant organization in the city. In addition, the author reflects on her experiences organizing and coordinating the Baltimore Immigration Summit, an annual event that brings together academics, service providers, activists, and others interested in the issue of immigration in Baltimore.

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Introduction

“The story of how immigrants shape and reshape American cities is being written and revised every day” (Pandit and Holloway, 2005, p. 3).

This paper focuses on the contemporary situation of immigrants in the city of Baltimore. As noted by Pandit and Holloway (2005), “immigration destinations are shifting from the few, large ‘gateway’ cities – for example, New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles – to midsize cities...” (p. 2). Winders (2006) is more specific, noting that “In 2000, nearly one in three immigrants in the US lived outside traditional immigrant-receiving communities” (Winders, p. 421)¹. As immigrants move away from those few large immigrant destinations, Baltimore is one of the mid-size cities they come to.

Immigrants in Baltimore face a situation different from those in many other cities in important ways. First, the immigrant population is incredibly diverse in Baltimore, and in Maryland more generally, with no one or two nationalities predominant, whereas in many cities the majority of immigrants are from one of a few destinations. Second, in the early years of the 21st century, Baltimore’s growing immigrant population is encountering a city in which the local government officially and warmly welcomes them, in an effort to stave off population decline, whereas in many cities local governments are hostile to immigrants.

In this paper, I give an overview of statistics about Baltimore’s immigrant population, to give a sense of who the new arrivals are. I then discuss the city’s response to immigration, and how it contrasts with municipalities that are currently passing hostile legislation intended to discourage immigrant settlement. Lastly, I discuss the origin and development of the Baltimore Immigration Summit, a concerted effort to increase awareness of Baltimore’s immigrant population and the issues they face, as well as to facilitate networking among Baltimore’s immigrants and those who work with them.

This research draws from secondary analysis of Census data and government sources regarding the official city standpoint on immigration, as well as from fieldwork with an immigrant organization in the city. In addition, I reflect on my experiences

¹ Michael Alexander (2003) points out that this is not a phenomenon unique to the U.S. He writes, “More and more European cities are coming to terms with the permanent presence of a significant migrant population” (p. 412).

organizing and coordinating the Baltimore Immigration Summit, an annual event that brings together academics, service providers, activists, and others interested in the issue of immigration in Baltimore.

How many immigrants?

The 2000 Census enumerated 518,315 Marylanders who were foreign-born, which made up 9.8% of the state's population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003, p. 3). From 1990 to 2000, Maryland's foreign-born population increased by 65.3%, while the nation's foreign-born population increased by 57.4%. During these years, all states except Maine experienced increases in immigration, with Georgia, Nevada, and North Carolina experiencing increases of over 200%. Maryland had the fourteenth largest immigrant population in 2000, with 518,315 foreign-born residents. The states leading the way were, not surprisingly, California (almost 9 million), New York (almost 4 million) and Texas (almost 3 million).

To bring data both closer to home and more up-to-date, we can look at the American Community Survey² 2006 data, which has just been released. According to this data, Maryland's foreign-born population had grown to 683,157 by 2006. This represents 164,842 immigrants entering the state during the six years between the Census and the most recent ACS data. The ACS lists Baltimore City's 2006 population as 631,366, with 38,579, or 6%, being foreign-born. This is lower than the national figure of 13%. However, it still represents a sizeable number. In addition, 43% of that population arrived since 2000, suggesting that it is growing in popularity as an immigrant destination. Fully 72% of Baltimore City's immigrants arrived in the years since 1990. When we expand the region a bit, and look at the Baltimore MSA, we see that 7.5% of the population of 2,658,405 is foreign-born. Just since the year 2000, over 67,000 immigrants have made the Baltimore MSA their home.

² The American Community Survey is the Census Bureau's attempt to get reliable data on the American population more frequently than the decennial census. For the ACS, a sample of American households are surveyed, as opposed to the whole population for the Census. While this is helpful in that it gives more up-to-date data, care must be taken, especially when looking at small sub-groups of the population (as in immigrants in Baltimore city). Thus, the following data gives a general picture, but must be interpreted with caution.

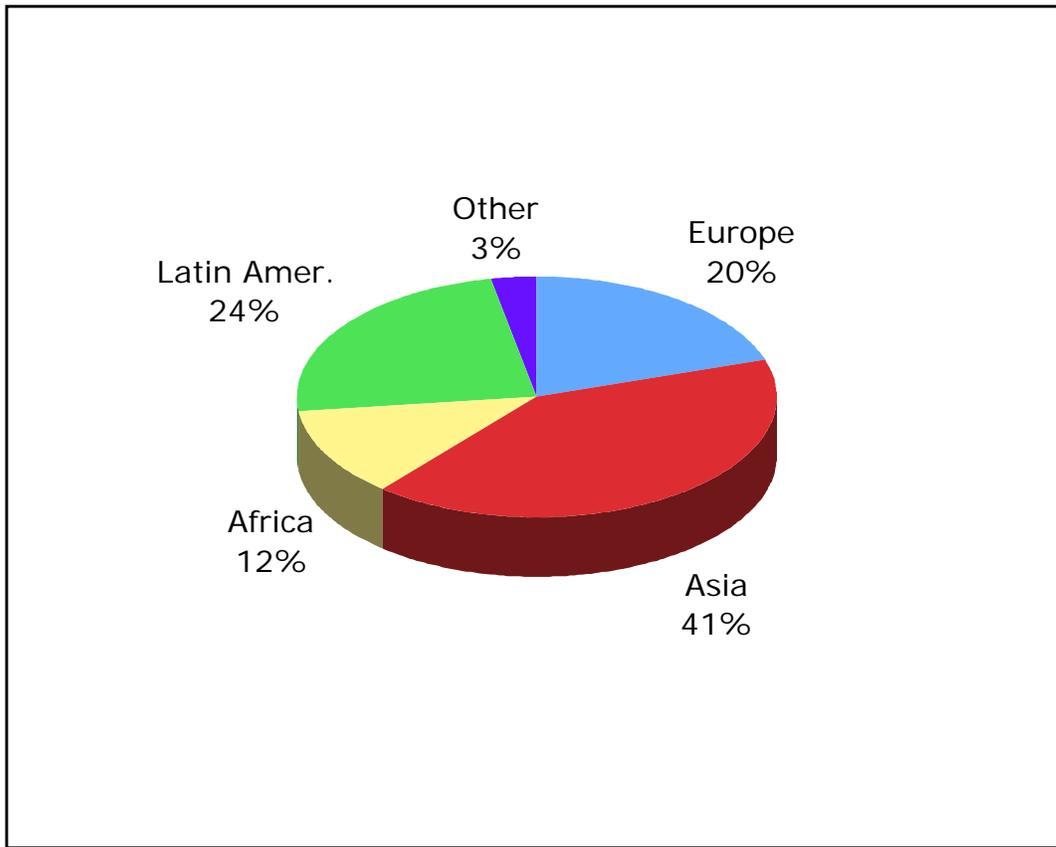
Who are Baltimore's immigrants?

To get detailed demographics about Baltimore's immigrants, we need to consider the Baltimore metropolitan area, rather than simply the city. Because the ACS is only a subset of the population, when the numbers are broken down into too specific of categories, they are not reported for the city alone. Thus, the following discussion applies to the metropolitan area, rather than just the city.

The 2006 ACS found that the region sending the largest number of immigrants to the U.S. was Latin America, with 53.5% of the foreign-born population having originated there. Next was Asia, with 26.8%, followed by Europe (13.3%). The remaining are small populations originating in Africa, "Northern America", and Oceania.

As shown in Figure A, the ACS shows the Baltimore area foreign-born population having slightly different origins. Asia was the region of origin for the largest percentage of the foreign-born population, with 41% originating there, compared to the next most popular area, Latin America, with 24%. Africa, which only accounted for 3.7% of the nation's foreign-born population, made up fully 12% of the Baltimore area's foreign-born population. The Baltimore area European (20%) percentage was more than that of the nation as a whole.

Figure A
Baltimore MSA Foreign-born, Region of Origin 2006



Source: 2006 American Community Survey, S0502, Selected Characteristics of the Foreign-born Population by Period of Entry, Baltimore-Towson, MD MSA

In addition, the most common countries of origin differ between the Baltimore area and the nation. They also differ, though less drastically, from those of Maryland as a whole. Clearly, Baltimore and Maryland's immigrants hail from a wide variety of countries, with no one source making up more than 9% of the area's foreign-born.

**Top 10 Countries of Origin,
Baltimore, Maryland, and the U.S.**

Baltimore MSA, 2006	Maryland, 2006	U.S., 2006
1. Korea (8.2%)	1. El Salvador (9.0%)	1. Mexico (31.0%)
2. India (7.2%)	2. China (6.5%)	2. China (5.0%)
3. China (6.3%)	3. India (6.1%)	3. Philippines (4.4%)
4. Mexico (5.8%)	4. Korea (5.3%)	4. India (4.0%)
5. Philippines (5.0%)	5. Mexico (4.6%)	5. Vietnam (3.0%)
6. Nigeria (4.1%)	6. Philippines (3.7%)	6. El Salvador (2.8%)
7. Jamaica (4.0%)	7. Nigeria (3.4%)	7. Korea (2.7%)
8. El Salvador (2.7%)	8. Guatemala (3.0%)	8. Cuba (2.5%)
9. United Kingdom (2.4%)	9. Jamaica (2.9%)	9. Canada (2.2%)
10. Pakistan (2.3%)	10. Vietnam (2.4%)	10. Dominican Republic (2.0%)

Source, American Community Survey, B05006 PLACE OF BIRTH FOR THE FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION

The most striking difference is how far down Mexico ranks on the Baltimore and Maryland lists. Accounting for almost one third of the nation's foreign-born population, it ranks fourth and fifth, respectively, for Baltimore and Maryland, with 5.8% and 4.6%. For the Baltimore area, 4 of the top 5 countries of origin are Asian, and a few countries which do not make the nation's top ten are represented: Nigeria, Jamaica, the UK and Pakistan. On the other hand, Vietnam, Cuba, Canada, and the Dominican Republic, all in the nation's top ten, do not show up in Baltimore's.

The gender breakdown of the foreign-born population in the Baltimore area is not very different from the native-born population. The foreign-born population is 49.2% male and 50.8% female, compared to the native-born population being 48.1% male and 51.9% female. The median age for the Baltimore area foreign-born is older than for the native population, with immigrants' median age being 40.5 years old, and natives' being 37.2. For both groups, the most common age group is the 25-44 year old age bracket. Children are more scarce in the immigrant group than in the native-born group, with only 8.8% of the foreign population being 17 and younger, compared to 25.2% of the native population.

The racial makeup of the Baltimore area foreign-born population differs drastically from that of the native-born population. The percentages white and black are smaller, while the percentage Asian is bigger. More foreign than native-born refuse to fit

into any of the racial categories provided, instead indicating “some other race,” a phenomenon Clara Rodriguez (2000) has explored. In addition, the foreign-born are more likely than the native-born to indicate that they are Hispanic.

Race and Hispanic Origin, Baltimore MSA, 2006

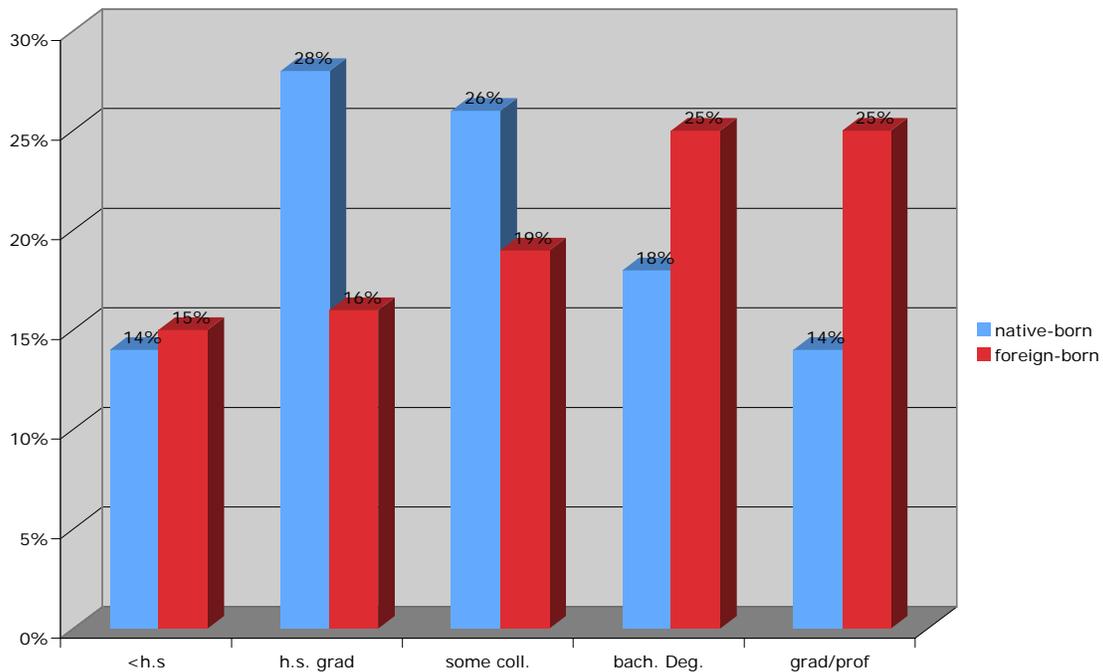
Race	Native-born	Foreign-born
White	67.0%	38.4%
Black	29.1%	18.1%
Asian	1.1%	35.3%
“Some other race”	0.7%	5.7%
Hispanic Origin (of any race)	1.9%	14.8%

Source: 2006 American Community Survey, S0501, Selected Characteristics of the Native and Foreign-born Populations, Baltimore-Towson, MD MSA

Immigration scholars have long noted a bifurcated educational status amongst immigrants, and Baltimore’s figures bear this out. As shown in Figure B, based on ACS data, the foreign-born in this area are slightly more likely to have less than a high school diploma than the native-born population. They are less likely to be high school graduates or have some college, but they are also more likely to have a bachelor’s degree, and much more likely to have a graduate or professional degree than the general population. This partially agrees with Hempstead’s (2007) finding that “foreign-born residents of non-gateways states [such as Maryland] have higher average levels of educational attainment” (than those who migrate to gateway states) (Hempstead, 2007, pp. 471, 472). However, Baltimore’s immigrants are both more likely to have low levels AND high levels of education than the native-born population.

Figure B

Educational Attainment, Native vs. Foreign-born, Baltimore MSA, 2006



Source: 2006 American Community Survey, S0502, Selected Characteristics of the Foreign-born Population by Period of Entry, Baltimore-Towson, MD MSA

Do immigrants earn more or less than native-born citizens? This is not as simple of a question as it might seem. First, the answer depends on gender. In the Baltimore area in 2006, native-born males earned more than foreign-born males, at \$52,052 and \$44,889, respectively. However, foreign-born females earned more than native-born females, at \$41,597 and \$40,366, respectively. Furthermore, immigrants who are naturalized earn considerably more than those who are not, for both males and females. Naturalized males earn \$53,564 to non-naturalized males' \$32,370, while naturalized females earn \$43,687 to non-naturalized females' \$37,075. In addition, the non-naturalized group is the only group in which women out-earn men.

While much public discourse about immigration focuses on the poverty of immigrants, the data do not support this association, at least for the Baltimore area. Immigrants are more likely to live under the poverty line than non-immigrants, but the difference is not large, and is within the ACS margin of error. 9% of the native-born population in the Baltimore MSA is below the poverty line, while 10.1% of the foreign-

born population does. Again, it is important to separately consider naturalized and non-naturalized immigrants. Those foreign-born Baltimoreans who have become naturalized are less likely than the native-born to live in poverty (7.2%), while the higher rates are found in the non-naturalized population (12.9%).

How is Baltimore reacting to its newcomers?

“Only with increased immigration can Baltimore City expect to grow.”

- The Abell Report, November 2002, Vol. 15, No. 6, p. 6.

Census 2000 provided a wake-up call to Baltimore’s local government. The city’s population had long been in decline. When the results of the 2000 Census were released, the city had seen a loss of about 85,000 residents since the previous Census in 1990 (Abell, 2002, p. 1). In addition, a close look at the numbers showed the city had a lower than average rate of foreign-born residents. Further analysis showed that Baltimore was not alone in this convergence. Particularly across the formerly industrial areas of the Northeast and Midwest, cities with small immigrant populations were shrinking, and those that were growing had larger populations of foreign-born residents. What Baltimore needed to do, so the thinking went, was to recruit and retain more immigrants, as a measure to stop and potentially reverse its population loss.

These arguments were put forth in an influential report sponsored by the Abell Foundation, a local philanthropy. In “Attracting New Americans into Baltimore Neighborhoods,” author Bruce Morrison analyzed data comparing Baltimore with other cities, and came to the conclusion stated in the report’s subtitle: “Immigration is the Key to Reversing Baltimore’s Population Decline.” Michael Alexander (2003) notes that local authorities have a number of possible reactions to immigrant newcomers: “The local authority may regard these newcomers as a passing phenomenon best ignored, as a threat to stability, [or] as a positive potential for the neighbourhood and city” (p. 415). Clearly, this argument would fit into the last of these three categories.

As the report noted, Baltimore’s then-mayor Martin O’Malley was already a proponent of immigration. The report, however, bolstered his case that the foreign-born could help boost the city’s population, and provided suggestions on how best to achieve that goal. While not all of the suggestions have been implemented, key to the Abell Foundation’s recommendations was the appointment of an immigration coordinator.

Many of the other suggestions, such as compiling a list of available translators in municipal agencies, hinged on this coordinator position. The Mayor's office did hire such a staff person, who did indeed make progress in making Baltimore a more welcoming and accessible place for immigrants³. In *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, Portes and Rumbaut focus on the importance of the *context of reception* on immigrant adaptation. Part of the context of reception includes how governments respond to immigrants. Portes and Rumbaut list three possible government responses: exclusion, passive acceptance, or active encouragement (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996, p. 84). The Abell Foundation report and Mayor O'Malley's response to it would be classified as active encouragement. Newly elected Mayor Sheila Dixon has not shown any indication of a desire to exclude, but it's possible that her administration's approach may be more of one of passive acceptance. It is still too early in her tenure to be certain which approach she will take.

It is also less certain how much this official, top-down pro-immigration stance translates into the actual lives of Baltimore's foreign-born. The Abell Foundation report rightly noted that it is not enough to recruit immigrants to Baltimore. Rather, efforts need to be made at retaining the existing immigrant population. Is the city *actually* a welcoming place for immigrants?

An example of the clash between official and common sentiment regarding immigration was seen when the O'Malley administration attempted to make some home-buying information available in Spanish, and this was interpreted by many (including letter to the editor writers) as favoring Latino immigrants over native-born city residents. Certainly, it is still better as an immigrant to live in a city that at least officially welcomes them, than to live in a jurisdiction openly hostile to many immigrants, such as Prince William County in Virginia, and others that are excluding undocumented immigrants from municipal programs. But such negative reactions to some city initiatives suggest that there may be a strong undercurrent of hostility towards immigrants, in some cases, and significant obstacles in immigrants' lives.

³ It is less certain, however, what is happening to this position and issue with the transition to newly-elected Mayor Sheila Dixon's administration.

Since 2000 I have been involved with the Immigration Outreach Service Center, or IOSC. The IOSC is located at St. Matthew Catholic Church in Northeast Baltimore, and serves immigrants regardless of nationality, religion, or legal status. Through this work I have seen the struggles many of Baltimore's immigrants face. While some of the problems they face are shared by Baltimore's native-born, such as inadequate schooling and health care, immigrants face unique issues as well. For example, while many of Baltimore's residents are unhappy with the school system, immigrants also struggle with scarce ESOL programs, as well as learning to navigate an educational system with very different standards and expectations than in their home countries. In terms of health, accessibility is a problem faced by many. Undocumented immigrants struggle with accessibility all the more, with concerns about eligibility for public programs. In addition, immigrants sometimes find that their health care ideas and practices from their home country clash with those prevalent here. In addition, trauma associated with immigration, particularly for refugees, may create both mental and physical health problems that need attention.

Employment is another area that both native and foreign-born Baltimoreans can struggle with. For immigrants, however, it may not just be an issue of not being able to find a job. Even those immigrants who have degrees and advanced training may not find their accreditation recognized in the U.S., and thus may find themselves underemployed. A Kenyan doctor may find himself working as a nurse's aide, for example. Those immigrants who are undocumented may not have trouble finding work, as there are many willing to hire them, but they can be very susceptible to exploitation. For example, one many I spoke with worked for a month at a restaurant without being paid, but felt he could not go to authorities, because of his undocumented status.

As I worked with the IOSC, and saw our staff struggle to help our constituents with these and other issues, I grew frustrated at the lack of coordination and networking among those working with and for immigrants in the city. There were other groups working with immigrants and refugees, but too often we did not all know what groups existed and what they all did. And rarely did folks from different organizations get together and network. Beery Adams had begun this process with her Mayor's Immigrant Services Working Group, but I felt more was needed. This was how the idea for the

Baltimore Immigration Summit began. Initially, the idea was to bring together folks concerned with immigration in Baltimore, to learn more about what the various organizations were doing, and to brainstorm about what more could be done to help Baltimore be a more welcoming place for the foreign-born population.

The Baltimore Immigration Summit

On November 17th, 2006, 150 people came together at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture in Baltimore, Maryland for the 3rd Annual Baltimore Immigration Summit. They had come to spend the day focusing on issues of immigration. While this may initially sound like any number of academic conferences, this event differed in two very important ways. First, it was a thoroughly local event. People were not there just to talk about immigration, but to discuss the issues, challenges, and contributions of immigrants in the Baltimore area. Second, while academics were present, so too were service providers, activists, and community leaders. Too often, conferences academics attend include a narrower audience, consisting solely of academics, and too often our attention is focused solely on the international and national sphere, without similar attention to our local areas. This was the most recent of three highly successful Baltimore Immigration Summits.

While not generally thought of as an “immigration hub,” as I have discussed above, Baltimore is an area with a growing and diverse immigrant population, as well as local government that views immigrants as an important part of the city’s resurgence. For three years now, my organizing committee and I have used this summit to bring together people in the Baltimore community to address issues of interest to immigrants and others who want to learn more about immigration. The Summit is a one-day free event attended by scholars, service providers, activists, and community leaders. Its purpose is to share information, talk about issues, and facilitate networking among immigrants and those who work with and for them. It is a collaborative effort between Towson University and the Baltimore City Mayor’s Office, with organizers also representing other area universities and non-profits.

The theme of the 2006 Summit was “Building Bridges.” Bridges are needed among immigrant groups, as well as between immigrants and the native-born. In the city of Baltimore and elsewhere, there is particular concern about building bridges between

immigrants and African Americans, as too often the two groups are pitted against each other. This was part of the motivation for having the Summit take place at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture. The Summit's mission is also to build bridges between and among those in the academic, non-profit, governmental, and activist communities. Thus, having the Summit take place at a cultural institution off-campus is a way to symbolize this connection between the universities and the community.

Each year the summit includes a combination of plenary and keynote speakers and breakout sessions. Throughout, the mission of the summit is to avoid having academics merely "talk at" and "instruct" the other attendees. Rather, the assumption is that the service providers, activists, and community leaders have as much, if not more, to "teach" the academics as vice versa. Thus, organizers strive to create and encourage panels that combine members of these various constituencies, as well as to have an overall diversity of participants.

With the theme of "Building Bridges: Community, Legislation, and Immigration," the plenary panel included Luis Borunda, Maryland's then Deputy Secretary of State, Shirley Nathan-Pulliam, a state delegate in Maryland representing parts of the Baltimore area, and Ben Vinson, the director of Africana Studies at Johns Hopkins University. Not only did this panel draw from those with government and academic expertise, but also drew from the Latino, African American, and Jamaican-American communities. In addition, it brought together individuals from two groups perhaps as much in need of bridge building as any in America today: Democrats and Republicans.

Panels in breakout sessions likewise included presenters from a wide variety of backgrounds. For example, a panel examining using the arts to connect cultures included the Outreach Coordinator for a local arts organization (Luisa Bieri de Rios, of the Creative Alliance), a neighborhood activist (Mario Diaz), an artist (Mari Gardner), and a high school student who was heavily involved with the arts initiative (Terry Barnes). Similarly, a panel on understanding domestic violence in Immigrant communities included sociologist Natalie Sokoloff, who does research in the area, together with service providers and activists from non-profits working with immigrant women facing domestic violence (Blanca Picazo of Adelante Familia, Deepa Bijpuria of the Multiethnic

Domestic Violence Project at the Women's Law Center of Maryland, and Flor Giusti of Casey Family Services' House of Ruth).

Other topics covered in panels included "Bridges between the Americas: Latinos in Baltimore," "Immigrant Health Care: New Models and Challenges in the City of Baltimore," "Baltimore's Asian Immigrant Communities," "Building Bridges with Intercultural Communication," "Building Bridges through Religion," and "Building Bridges to Healthy Living: Addressing Mental Health Issues that Affect Immigrants of Color."

The highlight of the day was the keynote address "Building Power in Immigrant Communities for Social Change," by Juan Carlos Ruiz. Ruiz, the President of National Community Capacity Consultants, was one of the key organizers of the Spring 2006 immigration demonstration in DC, and brought his insights and lessons regarding the current state of immigration politics and immigrant activism in Baltimore, the state of Maryland, and the U.S. as a whole.

From its inception, a key goal of the Baltimore Immigration Summit has been to help immigration scholars, activists, service providers, and community leaders better network. This Summit is therefore markedly different from standard academic conferences. Academics come out of our ivory (or cinderblock, as the case may be) towers, to learn from those in the community. Community members offer their expertise, and also learn from the research of academics. High school, undergraduate, and graduate students interact with professors, immigrants and non-immigrants discuss issues. Jews, Muslims, and Catholics discuss religion's role in immigrant communities. Those who work on a daily basis with immigrants share their struggles and triumphs with those who merely read about immigration in books. And activists remind us all of this work needs to be related to policy proposals that can either enhance or detract from immigrants' successes in our city and country.

The Baltimore Immigration Summit is on hiatus this year, as it shifts from an annual to a bi-annual event. It will occur again in November 2008. Since the last Summit, immigration has moved onto the front pages of our nation's newspapers, and into the center of the 2008 presidential campaign. By November 2008, we'll know more about what place immigration ultimately had in the presidential campaign, as well as

which candidate has won. In addition, Baltimore's newly elected mayor will have had a year to figure out how, or whether, to continue the effort to make Baltimore a more welcoming city for immigrants, and no doubt, more immigrants will have arrived. The question that will need to be addressed at that point is "how warm the welcome in Baltimore?"

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