

Multicultural Waves of Migration Shaping the Identity of a Midwest Neighborhood

A Case Study of Refugees in Towns
Albany Park, Chicago, USA

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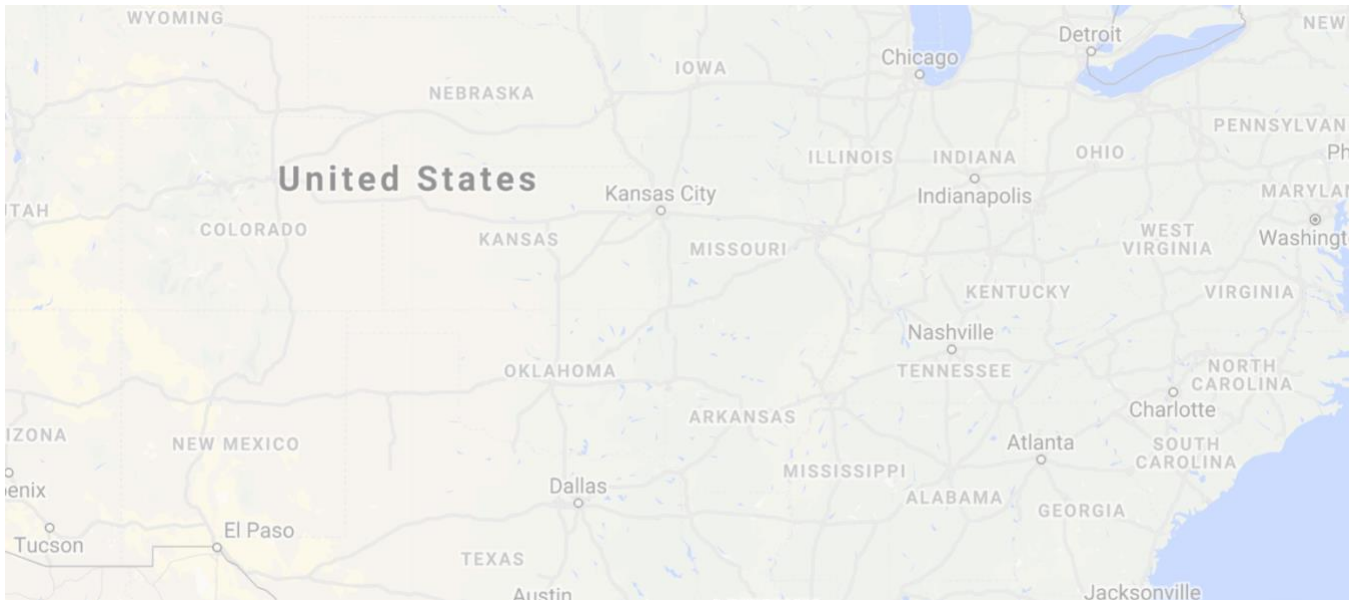


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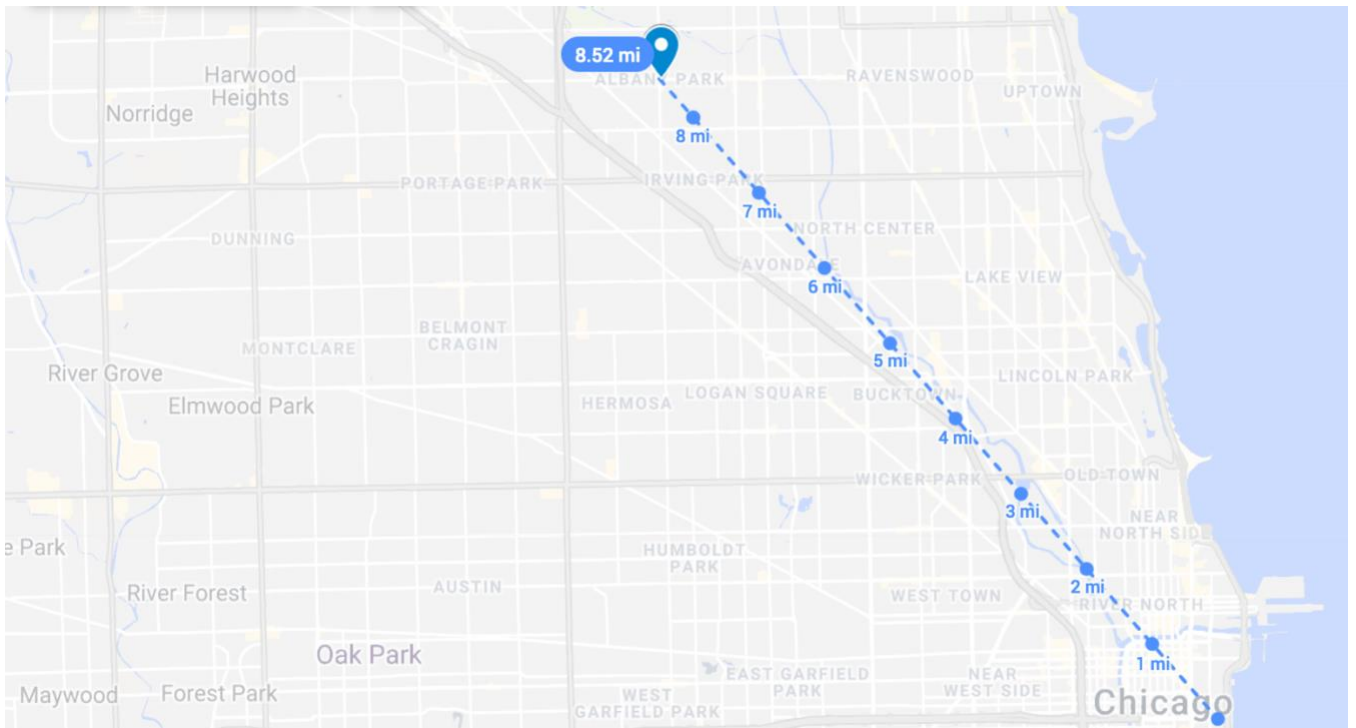
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Cover photo: The store fronts along W Lawrence Avenue, the main retail street running through Albany Park, showcase the shifting and diverse demographics of the area. All report photos by author.

Location



Chicago is a historic “gateway city” where migrants have settled in the United States for generations, but the role of the city, and the US, as a destination is shifting. Base map imagery © Google 2019.



Albany Park is a relatively affordable suburb roughly 8 mi (13 km) from downtown Chicago.

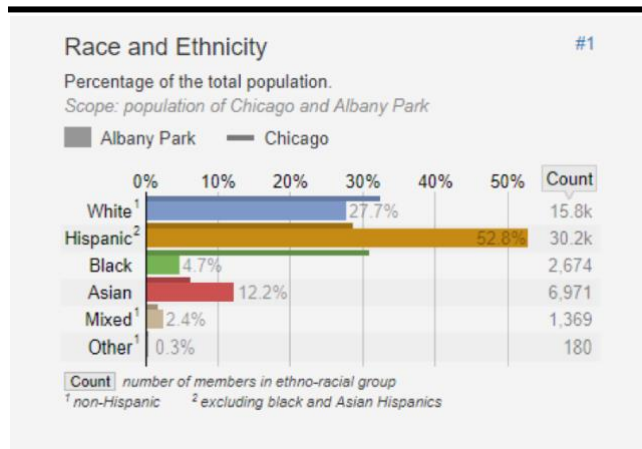
For more background on migration in Chicago and the US, continue to the appendices.

Introduction

Chicago is one of the main destinations for immigrants in the United States.¹ Its Albany Park neighborhood is described as “Chicago’s gateway to the world” and is one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the U.S. (see Figure 1). Walking down the streets of Albany Park is like taking a trip around the world without a passport. There are over 40 languages spoken in its schools,² and one can see these different languages on the storefronts around the neighborhood (see Figure 2).

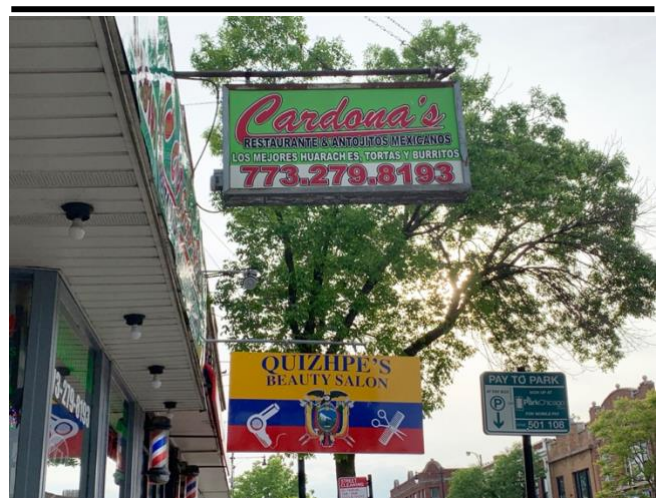
Albany Park has been through several waves of migration, with varying impacts on the neighborhood. Over the generations, many migrants have left the neighborhood to settle down in nearby suburbs. Nonetheless, their legacy remains in Albany Park today in the architecture of the buildings and the different businesses, institutions, and community centers they founded. This case report shows how the current “wave” of refugees continues to impact Albany Park. It looks at refugee and immigrant experiences and how the neighborhood has been transformed by their presence.

Figure 1: Race and Ethnicity in Albany Park



Albany Park is one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the country. Chart from U.S. Census Bureau, [data available here](#).

Figure 2: Race and Ethnicity in Albany Park



The ethnic diversity of the Albany Park neighborhood is shown in the storefront signs of businesses written in a wide range of languages.

¹ Singer, 2004.

² “Albany Park Community Center.” Retrieved from https://www.apccchgo.org/about_us.

The Author's Position in the Town and Experiences Researching this Case

I started at North Park University two years after my family moved from Syria to the U.S. I'm Assyrian, born and raised in Syria as part of a minority group, so a sense of belonging to a tightly knit community like I experienced at North Park comes naturally to me. Despite being raised in a close-knit community, my parents encouraged me to be open to other cultures and religions, so when I first moved to Chicago, I found it a great place to get to know people who came from diverse backgrounds.

During a tour around the North Park University campus (see Figure 3), the diversity of the neighborhood was the first thing I noticed. I enjoyed discovering the mom-and-pop shops selling food from every corner of the world. I felt like I was in my element. As time went by, I made a diverse group of friends, most of whom are native Chicagoans, but some of whom are immigrants and international students. Since graduating, I have explored more neighborhoods. My recent experiences in Albany Park stem from interactions with locals and refugee families who I meet through volunteering with World Relief Chicago. I help refugee families sign their kids up for school, work with high school students on preparing college applications, and discuss their career plans for after graduation.

Speaking with migrants has been fairly easy, as the entire neighborhood is open to different types of people and most residents are approachable. One reason people feel comfortable talking to me, perhaps, is that I can speak with them in their native language if they speak Arabic or Assyrian. Even with other languages, I can use the few words I know to connect with them, usually getting them to smile and helping to start a conversation. I've found this ease of conversation with both U.S.-born and foreign-born residents of Albany Park.

For more on the methods used for this case report, continue to Appendix A.

Mapping Immigrant Populations in Albany Park

The census tract maps below show segregation of residences by ethnic group where shops and residential buildings from the same ethnic group all concentrate together. However, public services buildings, community centers, and some privately-owned businesses are more diverse than the residences of the neighborhood. For example, schools in the neighborhood tend to have a diverse body of students despite the homogeneity of people living near the schools. Some plazas have shops from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds that are not all clustered in one little area, although the residences surrounding these plazas may be ethnically homogenous.

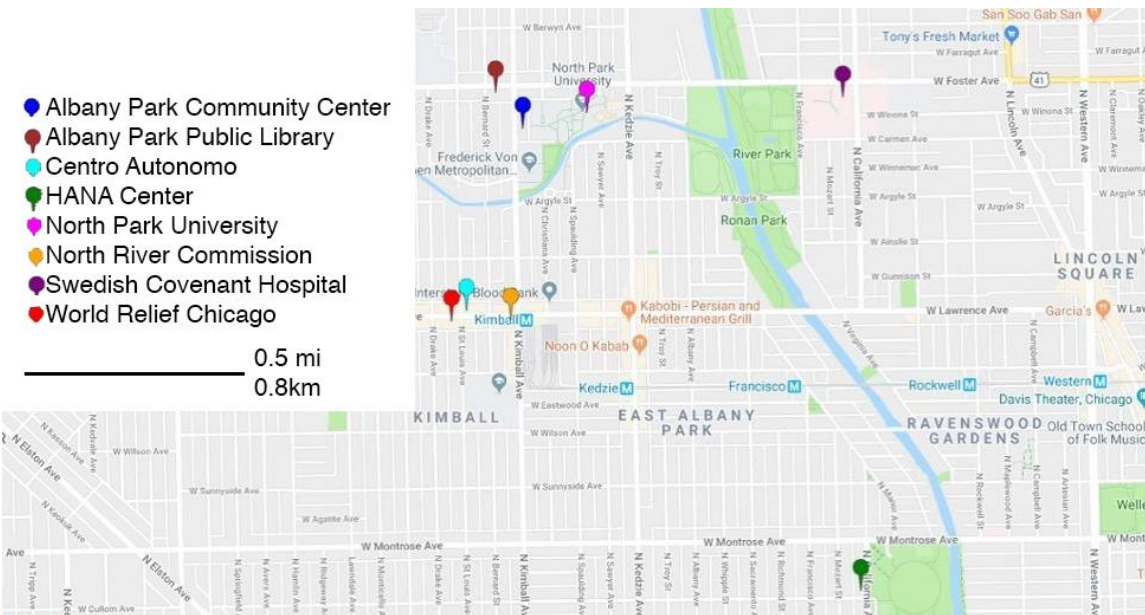
The series of maps below show White, Hispanic, and Asian race and ethnicity as a percentage of the population and their distribution in Albany Park neighborhood. See Figures 5, 6, and 7.

Figure 3: North Park University



North Park University acts as an anchor institution to the Albany Park area, providing jobs and contributing toward an inclusive culture that permeates the surrounding neighborhoods.

Figure 4: Points of Interest to Integration



Institutions supportive of migrant integration in Albany Park. Map by author. Base map imagery © Google 2019.

For many years, the neighborhood had residential ethnic enclaves, but the location of these enclaves and their nationalities have changed over time. From volunteering and studying in the area, I've noticed that while certain areas have businesses and residences of one or two nationalities, people from other nationalities will shop there. A Hispanic market surrounded by Hispanic-housing apartments, for example, will usually have a large non-Hispanic clientele. Residential and commercial segregation does not mean there isn't mingling in day-to-day interactions.

Figure 5: Asian Populations by Census Tract

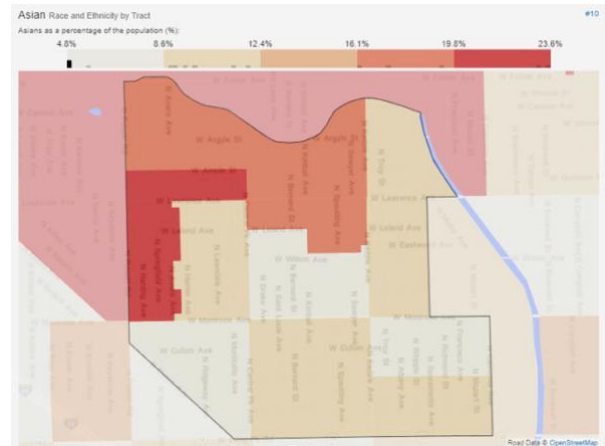


Figure 6: White Populations by Census Tract

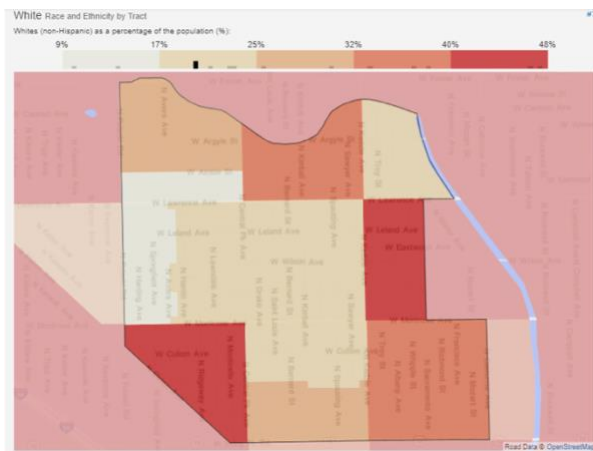
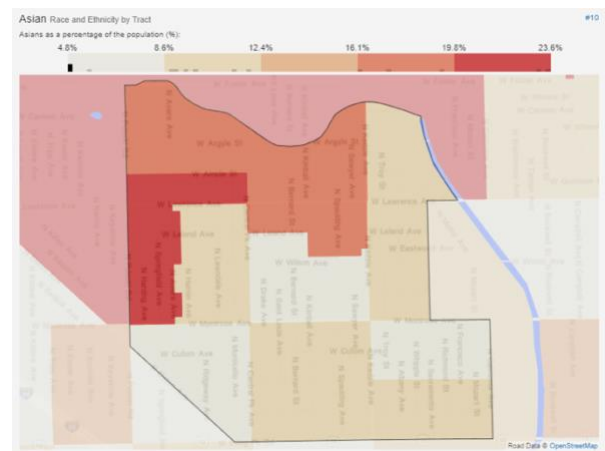


Figure 7: Hispanic Populations by Census Tract



Asian, white, and Hispanic populations as percent of the total population in each census tract in Albany Park, Chicago. Darker red indicates greater white to other ethnicity ratio of the tract's residential population. Map from U.S. Census Bureau, 2018.

The Urban Impact of Waves of Migration

Today's politically charged news headlines about refugees and immigration are tempered by taking a long historical view of immigration to American cities. Albany Park has changed and evolved from many waves of migration over the past century. Germans and Swedish immigrants came in the 1910s,³ followed by Russian Jewish immigrants from Chicago's crowded Near West Side neighborhoods seeking a better quality of life outside Chicago's urban core. These immigrants opened synagogues, public schools, and parks in the neighborhood.⁴

After World War II, many Jewish families moved out of Albany Park to the northern suburbs of Chicago such as Skokie and Lincolnwood, which led to several changes in the area.⁵ Over the next 30 years, these demographic changes came at a high price to the community, with property values plunging and the number of vacant buildings and businesses increasing. This in turn led to a growing number of gangs, a prevalence of drug abuse, and prostitution.⁶

In 1961–62, the North River Commission was formed by a group of caring residents and institutions, including North Park University, to mitigate this deterioration of the neighborhood. However, it was not until 1977–78 that a sustainable reversal in Albany Park was achieved.⁷ In 1978 the city government—along with the North River Commission and the Lawrence Avenue Development Corporation—got together to help restore Albany Park through street cleaning, building renovations, low-interest loans on residential spaces, and other financing programs that helped elevate the value of the neighborhood's buildings and decrease the number of vacancies.⁸

Immigrant residents also helped the renewal. During the downturn of the neighborhood in the 1960s and 1970s, many migrants had moved from Albany Park to the suburbs, since they no longer found the neighborhood suitable for raising families and preferred residences in upper- and middle-class areas. However, those I spoke to who were part of immigrant families who left the neighborhood during this suburban exodus never detached themselves completely from the community: many families had businesses or community centers that remained in the neighborhood and kept it economically and socially alive. They also maintained social connections with relatives and community members who stayed in Albany Park up to today. Therefore, restoring the neighborhood back to how it was before the 1960s decline was not as difficult as it would have been if those who moved their residences elsewhere had fully abandoned all of their connections to the area. Instead, these suburban-dwelling former Albany Park residents helped the neighborhood remain economically viable while maintaining its reputation as a welcoming place for immigrant communities.

³ Conversations by the author with longtime residents. See also: [North River Commission website](#).

⁴ Keating, 2008.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Keating, 2008.

⁷ Conversations by the author with a community member.

⁸ Keating, 2008.

Scandinavian Impact

Swedish immigrants' contribution to local healthcare

In 1885, immigrant followers of the Swedish Mission Covenant Church started the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant of America. With its focus on mission work, the church became a major provider of healthcare and education to residents of Albany Park with its Home of Mercy, established in 1886. Home of Mercy included a hospital, a nursing home, and an orphanage. Its goal was the care of other immigrants in the community.⁹ The hospital continues to provide medical care to patients in the community; services include emergency visits, inpatient/outpatient services, and home care, as well as other health and wellness resources.¹⁰

Swedish migrants' contribution to education in Albany Park

North Park University was founded by Swedish immigrants in 1891 in Minneapolis.¹¹ In 1894, North Park College and Theological Seminary relocated to Albany Park, where it is now close to the Swedish Covenant Hospital and trains pastors for the church's denomination.¹² According to my interviewee whose family has lived in the neighborhood since the 1920s, Albany Park was a strategic place to relocate the church's headquarters because the Swedish community was already established there. Furthermore, moving the location to a big city in the center of the country with good railroad access meant it would attract urbanizing people from many different states. Further, the new location along the river was pretty farmland that made the area aesthetically attractive. Today, the school continues to take pride in being a pro-immigrant institution that serves a diverse community of local and international students. As a central institution in the neighborhood in terms of employment and housing, it sets a tone of immigrant hospitality for the entire neighborhood.

When I attended North Park University, most of my interactions were with friends and classmates from different cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. The school supports several cultural organizations for students, and many of the professors at North Park took the classroom experience to the streets of Albany Park and Chicago, having us explore the neighborhood to learn about the social sciences. They also brought the neighborhood to the university by, for example, offering public lectures to the neighborhood residents.

⁹ Kurian, Lamport, & Marty, 2016.

¹⁰ Retrieved from <https://swedishcovenant.org/for-health-care-professionals/residency-program>.

¹¹ Retrieved from <https://www.northpark.edu/about-north-park-university/history-and-heritage/>.

¹² Kurian, Lamport, & Marty, 2016.

Asian Migrants' Impact on Albany Park

The first wave of Filipino migrants came to Chicago in the 1920s¹³ and were later joined by another wave of Filipinos in 1965, after U.S. immigration laws were changed to be more open.¹⁴ By the 1970s, Filipinos were one of the largest immigrant groups in Chicago. Unlike other Asian immigrants, many Filipino immigrants had some exposure to American culture and language before arriving in Chicago, due to the U.S. military and political involvement in the Philippines since 1898.¹⁵ By the 1990s, after the urban renewal, yet another wave of Filipinos came to Albany Park.¹⁶

Figure 8: Honorary Seoul Drive



Honorary Seoul Drive is a tribute to the thriving Korean population in Albany Park.

In the 1990s and 2000s, Korean immigrants, who were educated professionals living in other parts of the city, moved to the suburbs and less-population-dense neighborhoods of Chicago such as Albany Park, North Park, and West Ridge as they became financially stable.¹⁷ In many cases, migrants from Asia worked in the medical field and came to Albany Park because they had easy access to employment at hospitals or the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) lines.¹⁸

Nowadays, there is still a strong Korean presence in Albany Park, and one can find numerous Korean shops and restaurants scattered throughout the neighborhood. The community also hosts a Korean festival that celebrates the culture through food, music, and live performances. One can also find several Filipino restaurants and markets in the neighborhood. These are so popular that people come from surrounding areas to visit them.

¹³ Cutler, 2006.

¹⁴ Retrieved from <https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/us-immigration-since-1965>.

¹⁵ David, 2013.

¹⁶ Keating, 2008.

¹⁷ Cutler, 2006.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Hispanic Migrants' Impact on Albany Park

Today, the Hispanic population of Albany Park is the largest immigrant population in the neighborhood. This is a diverse group, including Mexicans, El Salvadorians, Ecuadorians, and many others.¹⁹ See Figure 9. Mexican immigrants form a large percentage of the neighborhood's residents. Nonetheless, there are also many Ecuadorians, Guatemalans, and Central and South American families who take part in different programs at Centro Autónomo.²⁰

Centro Autónomo

Centro Autónomo is a non-profit organization located in Albany Park. The center provides different programs that service the community, including ESL classes, adult high school, a study abroad program, and computer, art, and violin classes.²¹

According to Centro Autónomo, "The bilingual adult high school is formed by community members who, together with volunteer facilitators (or instructors), advance their education in education and methodology, health, work, community and housing, immigration and citizenship, computers, and Math and English."²² The center also tackles the housing problem in the neighborhood, including foreclosure and eviction, by hosting meetings and educational sessions to help residents better understand their options and manage their situation.²³

The impact of the Hispanic community is evident throughout the neighborhood in small shops, stores, and restaurants. Hispanic culture is on display through signs and flags on various storefronts and businesses. These businesses are spread throughout the neighborhood, and it is not unusual to see them next to shops of other communities. See Figure 9.

As described above, according to Census Bureau data, Hispanic populations have formed residential and commercial enclaves. My observations are that there is still diversity and integration in these areas in day-to-day life experiences. People of many different backgrounds are frequent Hispanic shops' customers, attend the same medical facilities, and send their children to the same schools.

Figure 9: Hispanics in the Neighborhood



The display of Hispanic flags and the Spanish language on the storefronts of different restaurants and shops in Albany Park. Some are adjacent to other Hispanic businesses, while others are situated next to other ethnic groups' businesses.

¹⁹ Conversations by the author with a team member from Centro Autónomo.

²⁰ Retrieved from <https://centro.community/albany-park-neighborhood/>.

²¹ Conversations by the author with a team member from Centro Autónomo.

²² Retrieved from <https://centro.community/adult-high-school/>.

²³ Retrieved from <https://centro.community/casas-del-pueblo/>.

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Refugee Resettlement in Albany Park

Figure 10: Hispanic Ancestry

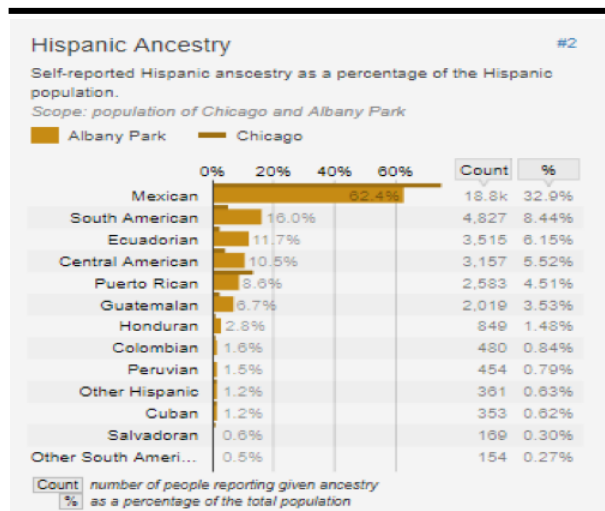


Chart from U.S. Census Bureau.

According to a Youth Services Program Manager at World Relief Chicago, many refugees are initially housed in neighborhoods other than Albany Park due to the limited number of landlords in Albany Park who are willing to work with refugees. This does not seem to be outright racism but more a problem of financial risk. Refugee families arrive in the U.S. without credit and employment history, so many landlords believe it is too risky to accept them as tenants. Landlords would rather take a family with a stable job history and good credit score. These financially low-risk renters are in good supply throughout Chicago, especially with the new wave of young professionals moving into Albany Park.

Therefore, even though Albany Park is considered one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the country, very few refugees are first resettled here by World Relief Chicago. Instead, many of these families are initially housed in Rogers Park and West Ridge/West Rogers Park—which are neighborhoods near Albany Park where resettlement agencies report there are more landlords willing to take refugee families—until they become more financially self-sufficient, at which point many Afghani, Syrian, and Iraqi families move to nearby suburbs such as Skokie and Niles, two neighborhoods that are farther away and more expensive but attractive because of their large communities of immigrants from the same national or ethnic backgrounds as the new arrivals. Other communities, such as the Rohingya one, have remained in the West Ridge neighborhood along Devon Avenue.

There are numerous institutions available in Albany Park and nearby neighborhoods to assist refugees and migrants, including World Relief, HANA Center, and the Albany Park Community Center.

Albany Park through the Eyes of Residents

One of Chicago's longtime residents is a North Park alumnus who is ethnically Filipino but was raised in the U.S. He and his family work in the medical field and live near a major hospital system, making it convenient for them to get to work. One of the main concerns he brought up was that small immigrant-owned shops seem to be shutting down, while big national chain stores are expanding. For example, he noticed that several Korean-owned businesses along Bryn Mawr Avenue in Albany Park are slowly going out of business. One Korean grocery store he recalled having a spectacular produce section and prepared food, but the shop owner was facing difficulties because of competition from larger chain stores. He said, "I will still stop by every once in a while to support him because I would like him to stay open."

Those I spoke with, and I myself, often said that they did not mind these changes but would prefer to see the neighborhood preserve its ethnic multiplicity. In my Filipino respondent's opinion, immigrants bring their culture to the U.S. and share it with others in the neighborhood, adding personality and character. As I walk down the streets of Albany Park and pass by different shops or restaurants, I cannot express how grateful I feel to be surrounded by such diversity. Whenever I speak to locals at different stores or people walking around the neighborhood, I feel welcomed and accepted, whether it is through their smiles or the way they respond to my casual greetings with such positive energy. See Figure 10.

People living and working in Albany Park noted that they care a lot about helping their neighbors despite their different cultural backgrounds. As an illustration, during my talk with an education coordinator at the North River Commission, she explained that a Korean community center, HANA, now serves mostly Latino families, since the demographics of the area have changed from predominantly Asian to predominantly Hispanic.

Figure 11: Shifting Demographics



While Albany Park's immigrant demographics are shifting from primarily Asian to a more Latino makeup, there are still many Asian storefronts visible while walking along the streets.

Conclusion

The Future of Integration in Albany Park

Historically, the general trend around Chicago is for many immigrant groups to first live in other parts of the city, then move to Albany Park once they became financially stable, and then move again to nearby suburbs where they can be closer to other families from the same ethnic background. Albany Park is a stepping stone from the urban core to the suburbs. This movement creates constant changes in the neighborhood, and yet institutions like the university, churches, medical centers, and immigrant-owned businesses maintain a culture of openness and inclusivity even as Albany Park's demographics shift. Because of these institutions' durability and the area's long history of openness, I feel that, despite changes in the commercial businesses around the area, Albany Park will continue to hold on to its diverse ethnic character.

Despite national-level immigration policies becoming more exclusive, communities here in Albany Park are still working on raising awareness about immigrant rights by holding public informational events. Further, because there is so much history established by immigrants, inclusivity is embedded in the neighborhood and will be difficult to wash away.

Audrey Singer (2004) writes:

Established gateways such as...Chicago are in many ways well positioned to receive and serve immigrant newcomers. After all, their long history of immigrant settlement frequently has evoked an organizational, service delivery, and advocacy infrastructure familiar with the needs of immigrants and their families. For many continuous and post-World War II gateways, moreover, immigration is part of their identity and a source of local cultural pride.²⁴

As long as the people of Albany Park continue to be welcoming to others despite their different religious and ethnic backgrounds, I believe that this neighborhood will continue to be Chicago's "gateway to the world," where people live and thrive together, successfully integrated.

A Long History of Unity

One of the most beautiful stories I've heard that depicts this idea of togetherness was one interviewee's memories of 1991–93. At this time, the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois wanted to rebuild the North River Bridge. However, the estimated time to complete the project was way too long for residents to bear, especially since the construction project caused traffic congestion throughout the Albany Park neighborhood, and workers had to deal with changes to their bus routes as roads were closed to make room for construction zones. Residents, businesses, and the North River Commission—all from different ethnic backgrounds—came together to lobby the city to finish the bridge in a shorter time period. In the end, the bridge was finished in 43 days instead of 2.5 years. The effort of the community received a special recognition from a national committee on immigration and refugee protection in Washington DC.

²⁴ Singer, 2004, 16.

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Appendix A: Methods

The report is based on observations, interviews, a literature review, and geocoded ethnic-racial data²⁵ collected from the U.S. Census Bureau. My observations were gathered as a student at North Park University (in Albany Park) and in North Park neighborhoods,²⁶ as well as in my current work as a volunteer at World Relief Chicago, a refugee resettlement agency in the Albany Park neighborhood. I have spoken with numerous migrants, longtime residents, refugees, and resettlement services providers. Individuals interviewed for this report included a North Park alumnus of Filipino background who is a longtime Chicago resident, the Youth Services Program Manager from World Relief Chicago, the education coordinator at North River Commission, an executive director who served the North River Commission and Lawrence Avenue Development Corporation in Albany Park for 25 years and who has been around the neighborhood for over 40 years, and a team member from Centro Autónomo, as well as another longtime resident of Albany Park.

²⁵ Residential locations of different ethnic groups at the census tract level.

²⁶ North Park neighborhood sits directly north of the Albany Park neighborhood.

Appendix B: Refugees in the US

By: Saidouri Zomaya, Anna Ackerman, Hania Mumtaz, Heba El-Hendi, Gina & Taj, Sharon Granados Mahato, May Mzayek, Saidouri Zomaya, and Brinkley Brown

The United States has a long history of welcoming refugees, and though recently resettlement numbers have declined, the U.S. remains one of the top resettlement countries in the world. Over 3 million refugees have been resettled in the U.S. since 1975.²⁷ Resettlement of refugees is conducted through the United States Refugee Admission Program. The program is comprised of several federal agencies, including the State Department, Homeland Security, Department of Justice, and the Department of Health and Human Services.²⁸ The President of the United States each year determines the number of refugees who may be admitted, along with the designated nationalities and processing priorities.²⁹

The U.S. history of refugee settlement began with the end of World War II when the U.S. resettled nearly half a million Europeans through the Displaced Persons Act of 1948. Resettlement of refugees continued through the Cold War period, with the U.S. focusing its resettlement initiatives on taking in refugees from Communist states.³⁰ Following the large resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees in the 1960s and 1970s, Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, which incorporated the United Nations definition of a refugee as defined by the 1951 Convention. Through the Refugee Act, the U.S. standardized the resettlement services for refugees by creating the U.S. Refugee Admission Program. Since the 1980s, refugee resettlement demographics in the U.S. have become more diverse and less defined by Cold War dynamics, with refugees coming mostly from Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Burma, Iraq, Somalia, and Bhutan.

The largest shift in resettlement patterns occurred post-September 11. Under the Bush and Obama administrations, refugee resettlement numbers decreased, with the lowest numbers reaching 27,110 in 2002. Numbers under the second term of the Obama administration began to increase, only to shrink again under the Trump administration, with a projection of 45,000 refugees to resettle in 2018.³¹ In addition to formally resettled refugees, historically there have been large numbers of irregular migrants to American cities.

Since the 1990s, efforts like the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program have attempted to provide “provisional” humanitarian relief to displaced persons. The program is meant to protect displaced persons from deportation and offer the right to work until the “triggering event” of their displacement has been recovered from.³² By contrast, “immigrant bans” bolstering Federal immigration enforcement and efforts to remove TPS protections under the Trump Administration have put strains on both legal migrants from singled-out countries—especially Muslim majority countries—and irregular migrants alike.³³

²⁷ Refugee Council USA, 2017.

²⁸ Refugee Admissions Program, U.S. Department of State, 2018.

²⁹ Refugee Council USA, 2017.

³⁰ Igielnik, 2017.

³¹ Rose, 2017.

³² Messick and Bergeron, 2014.

³³ Pierce and Meissner, 2017.

Appendix C: Migration in Chicago

As of July 1, 2017, [Chicago's estimated population was 2,716,450](#). Albany Park's estimated population was 57,201 as of September 14, 2018, [the most recent available statistics](#). Chicago is divided into four main areas: [Downtown, North, West, and South](#). It consists of 77 community areas that contain more than 100 neighborhoods. Albany Park is one of the 77 community areas. Today, Albany Park is considered one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the country. Albany Park's ethnic background is White 27.7%, Hispanic 52.8%, Black 4.68%, Asian 12.2%, Mixed 2.39%, Other 0.32%.³⁴

Chicago has diverse economic sectors. Some of its largest employers are public, including the U.S. Federal Government, Chicago Public Schools, the City of Chicago, and the Cook County Government. [The largest private employer is Advocate Health Care](#). Some of [the main occupations](#) in the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin and the Illinois-Indiana-Wisconsin regions are business and finance, computer occupations, architecture and engineering, life sciences, and community and social services.

Albany Park is officially represented by three wards: the 33rd, 35th, and 39th wards. The neighborhood also has representatives in the Illinois House of Representatives and on the Cook County Board of Commissioners. Politically, Chicago is one of the main sanctuary cities in the U.S., and former Mayor [Rahm Emanuel talks about the city's status](#): "Since the presidential election, there has been a sense of uncertainty among many immigrant communities in Chicago and across the nation. I want to assure all of our families that Chicago is and will remain a Sanctuary City. Chicago has been a city of immigrants since it was founded. We have always welcomed people of all faiths and backgrounds, and while the administration will change, our values and our commitment to inclusion will not."

While policy is set at the national, district, municipal, and neighborhood levels, refugee resettlement services are provided by a mix of agencies such as [World Relief Chicago](#) that provide services such as cultural adjustment, employment counseling, job placement, medical case management, family reunification, citizenship guidance, youth services, matching grants, and adult education programs.

³⁴ As of September 14, 2018, [latest available U.S. Census data](#).

About the RIT Project

The **Refugees in Towns (RIT)** project promotes understanding of the migrant/refugee experience in urban settings. Our goal is to understand and promote refugee integration by drawing on the knowledge and perspective of refugees and locals to develop deeper understanding of the towns in which they live. The project was conceived and is led by Karen Jacobsen. It is based at the Feinsein International Center at Tufts University and funded by the Henry J. Leir Foundation.

Our goals are twofold

Our first long-term goal is to build a theory of integration from the ground up by compiling a global database of case studies and reports to help us analyze and understand the process of immigrant/refugee integration. These cases provide a range of local insights about the many different factors that enable or obstruct integration, and the ways in which migrants and hosts co-exist, adapt, and struggle in urban spaces. We draw our cases from towns in resettlement countries, transit countries, and countries of first asylum around the world.

Our second more immediate goal is to support community leaders, aid organizations, and local governments in shaping policy, practice, and interventions. We engage policymakers and community leaders through town visits, workshops, conferences, and participatory research that identifies needs in their communities, encourages dialogue on integration, and shares good practices and lessons learned.

Why now?

The United States—among many other refugee-hosting countries—is undergoing a shift in its refugee policy through travel bans and the suspension of parts of its refugee program. Towns across the U.S. are responding in different ways: some resist national policy changes by declaring themselves “sanctuary cities,” while others support travel bans and exclusionary policies. In this period of social and political change, we seek to deepen our understanding of integration and the ways in which refugees, migrants, and their hosts interact. Our RIT project draws on and gives voice to both refugees and hosts in their experiences with integration around the world.

For more on RIT

On our website, there are many more case studies and reports from other towns and urban neighborhoods around the world, and we regularly release more reports as our project develops.

www.refugeesintowns.org

About the Author

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Refugees in Towns is a project of the Feinstein International Center. More information on the project, including more case study reports, is available at <https://www.refugeesintowns.org/>

The Feinstein International Center is a research and teaching center based at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. Our mission is to promote the use of evidence and learning in operational and policy responses to protect and strengthen the lives, livelihoods, and dignity of people affected by or at risk of humanitarian crises.

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