

Place, Poverty, Welfare...
And Immigration/Ethnicity
in the United States

By

Barbara R. Bergmann

More than half of US poor are now “immigrant/ethnics”

	poor persons (mil.)	percent of group in poverty
whites, non-Hispanic	15.9	8.2 %
blacks	9.1	24.3
Hispanics	9.0	22.5
Other	1.9	11.8

(2003 data, US Census)

Immigrant/Ethnic neighborhoods are nothing new

In New York:

- Irish Chelsea
- Jews Lower East Side, the Bronx
- Italians Little Italy
- Blacks Harlem
- Hispanics Spanish Harlem, the Bronx

Distribution of Population by Poverty Level of Census Tract, 1999

	0--12%	12—20%	20—40%	<40%
White, non-hisp	72.8	17.7	8.5	1.0
Black	31.7	22.3	36.7	9.2
Hispanic	35.5	24.2	33.8	6.5

Causes of concentration of ethnics/immigrants

- desire to be with own people
- discrimination by landlords
- poverty

Organized Criminal Activity

- Irish gangsters
(Bugs Moran, Whitey Bulger)
- Jews The Mob
(Bugsy Siegal)
- Italians The Mafia
(Albert Anastasia, the Gotti family)
- Blacks narcotics dealers
- Hispanics Mara Salvatrucha

Problems of poor neighborhoods

- bad schools
- lack of job information
- bad public services – police, garbage, social services
- dilapidated housing
- “culture of poverty”
- teen pregnancy, lone motherhood
- crime

Modes of Escape (for individuals)

- entrepreneurship
- entering professions
- escaping employment discrimination (becoming “white”)
- entering politics
- government employment – police, firefighting, garbage collection

Possible policies

- Dispersal of the poor through housing vouchers
- More spending on schools
- Better public services
- More (or alternatively less) generous stipends for lone mothers
- Legalization (or alternatively deporting) of illegal immigrants
- Prosecuting employers who hire illegal aliens
- “Family values”
- Improving employment opportunities
- Attacking discrimination in employment
- Emulating the Scandinavian welfare state

References

- Bergmann, Barbara, "What Policies Toward Lone Mothers Should We Aim For?" *Feminist Economics* 10(2), July 2004: 240-246.
- Fried, Albert, *The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Gangster in America* (Columbia University Press, 1994).
- Glasmeier, Amy K., *An Atlas of Poverty in America: One Nation, Pulling Apart, 1960-2003*. (University Park, PA : Department of Geography, Pennsylvania State University, 2005).
- Goetz, Edward G., *Clearing the Way: Deconcentrating the Poor in Urban America* (Washington, DC : The Urban Institute Press, 2003)
- Myrdal Gunnar, with the assistance of Richard Sterner and Arnold Rose, *An American Dilemma; the Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, London: Harper & Brothers, 1944).
- Roediger, David R., *Working Toward Whiteness : How America's Immigrants Became White : The Strange Journey From Ellis Island To The Suburbs*. (New York : Basic Books, 2005).
- Waldinger, Roger, Howard Aldrich, Robin Ward with the collaboration of Jochen Blaschke, *Ethnic Entrepreneurs: Immigrant Business in Industrial Societies* (Newbury Park, Calif. : Sage Publications, 1990).
- Waldinger, Roger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, editors, *Ethnic Los Angeles* (New York : Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).
- Wilson, William J., *The Declining Significance of Race : Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1980).