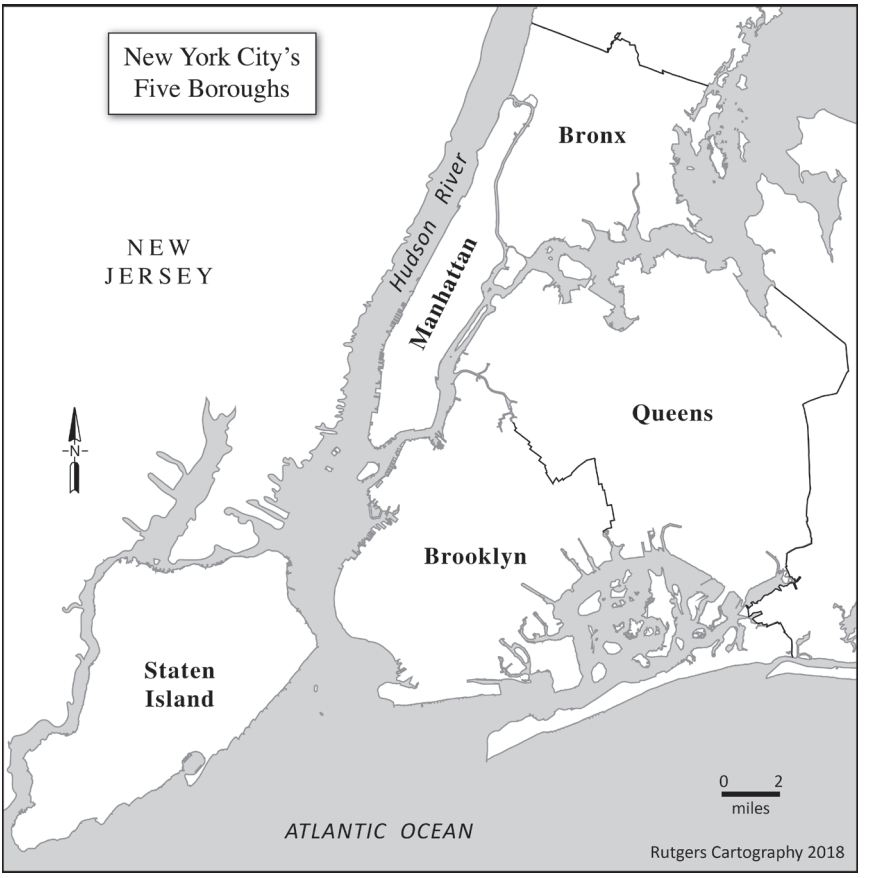
PREFACE

As the 1880s gave way to the 1890s, the reporter and reformer Jacob Riis trekked through the immigrant streets of lower Manhattan seeking answers to some of the most pressing questions of his time: What is the relationship of immigration, industry, and poverty? What kinds of homes will the many ethnic groups and nationalities of New York find? How should public and private institutions respond to poverty and bad housing in a growing city? The answers Riis offered in his books, newspaper articles, and photographs are still studied as early examples of muckraking journalism and documentary photography, but his questions endure. Indeed, they animate the second edition of *All the Nations Under Heaven: Migrants, Immigrants, and the Making of New York*.[1]

All the Nations Under Heaven is a narrative and analytical history of New York and its peoples, from the city's beginnings as a Dutch trading post through its contemporary incarnation as a global metropolis. In an era when immigration, inequality, and globalization are subjects of bitter debate, the history of New York City offers fertile ground for analyzing the blessings and burdens of immigration, the volatile history of inequality, and the significance of global flows of people, goods, and ideas in one great city.

It is common to interpret the twenty-first century as an age of globalization, but since its founding New York has been shaped by global patterns of trade and immigration. Indeed, the city's changing position in the world's economy is central to any understanding of its wealth and human diversity. The most wrenching changes in New York—and its greatest surges in immigration from abroad and migration from within the United States—have begun with factors

originating far from the city. In colonial times, New York prospered as an imperial British seaport with strong links to the Caribbean, rising and falling in response to military and mercantile decisions made in London. In the nineteenth century, once the city had become a major presence in the transatlantic shipping economy, starvation in Ireland or economic dislocation in Germany, Russia, and Italy spurred thousands to board ships headed for New York. African Americans chafing at life under Jim Crow or cast adrift economically by the mechanization of agriculture in the American South rode trains or buses to New York. In the years since 1965, when changes in federal immigration law opened New York to a wider range of nationalities, immigrants have again transformed the city's population and contributed mightily to its economy.



0.1 New York City's five boroughs.

Source: Robert W. Snyder collection.

Yet New York's position as a "city of the world," as Walt Whitman called it, has long made it a place with an ambiguous standing.[2] In New York State, since the nineteenth century, the city has been viewed as a wealthy, populous, and suspiciously heterogeneous place that must be kept under state control. To immigrants, New York has long been the first stop in the United States, but to many native-born Americans, the city is an inscrutable outpost of the Old World. Finally, the international factors that have allowed New York to accumulate people and capital are well beyond the city's control. Seen in this light, New York's wealth and power are not signs of permanent preeminence. Instead, they are the gains that came from successfully riding an economic tiger. The panics of the nineteenth century, the Great Depression in the twentieth, the economic slump of the 1970s, and the wrenching economic inequality of the twenty-first century are all reminders that the economic forces that lift up New York can also bring it down.

Indeed, we argue that New York's two fundamental traits—economic dynamism and human diversity—have long made it a city of ceaseless change, one that inspires dreams and sparks conflict but frustrates efforts to establish enduring levels of order and general prosperity.

Immigrant groups have learned to thrive in sectors of the economy—consider Jews in the garment trade and Italians in construction. Yet New York has also been a city of sweatshops and socialists: some of the city's most determined reform efforts have been wrought by newcomers seeking to wrestle their share of prosperity from the capital of capitalism.

The history of women who migrated or immigrated to New York City sharpens the larger questions of liberation, confinement, and change that define the city's ethnic history. Over generations, women have come to New York seeking refuge, new opportunities, and freedom from patriarchal constraints. Sometimes they found new freedom, sometimes they found new forms of exploitation, and sometimes they built lives that their grandmothers would have barely been able to imagine.

The city's ethnic diversity makes New York culturally fertile but never at peace. For our purposes, all New Yorkers are ethnic New Yorkers. The concept of distinct races has no scientific legitimacy. Census categories such as black, white, and Hispanic notwithstanding, it is more useful to think of the city's peoples—such as African Americans, Irish Americans, Jewish Americans, and Dominican Americans—as ethnic groups defined by a shared sense of identity and history.

Immigration changes immigrants, and immigrants change New York. At the same time, New York exerts an incalculable but real cultural force internationally. The city is a floodgate between the United States and the rest of the world, admitting and releasing people, goods, and ideas in transformative quantities. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Irish immigrants found in New York

a refuge from famine in Ireland. Within decades, the songs, dance, and comedy of Irish performers had changed American popular culture profoundly. As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, Jewish socialists circulated political tracts in Yiddish on both sides of the Atlantic. In the late twentieth century, rap music from the battered streets of the Bronx and Brooklyn, drawing on African American and West Indian traditions, redefined youth culture worldwide.

Yet the same ethnic diversity that animates the city culturally makes it a politically contentious place. Ethnic mobilizations are an accepted part of politics, and ethnic conflicts sharpen battles over power. New York politics is forever tugged between inclusion and exclusion, between the pursuit of justice and the reality of inequality. Since the days of the New Deal and Fiorello La Guardia in the 1930s, the city has enjoyed a reputation for liberalism sometimes belied by its own history. For all its strengths at absorbing immigrants from Europe, and to a lesser extent Asia and Latin America, New York—like the rest of the United States—has never extended a full measure of justice and prosperity to African Americans. And Puerto Rican New Yorkers, despite being American citizens, suffer disproportionately from poverty.

New York today prides itself on the diversity of its 8.5 million inhabitants—37 percent of them immigrants—and a climate of toleration and accommodation.[3] Yet the establishment of such a climate was not easy and even today is not fully realized. Now, as in the past, conflict is part of New York City life, and racism stubbornly endures in the city. But alignments of conflict do change over time. In the twenty-first century, it is difficult to imagine that in middle of the nineteenth century the streets of New York were once roiled by battles between native-born Protestants and immigrant Irish Catholics. Equally hard to imagine are the years when Jews were barred from universities and professions.

Some of the success that New York has enjoyed at incorporating successive waves of immigrants is attributable to the development, over time, of a political culture that values immigration and accepts diversity (within limits). It is also true, especially for the descendants of European immigrants, that New York and the United States have offered a sustaining degree of security and prosperity that has enabled them to leave their ethnic enclaves. The Huguenots, French-speaking Protestants who were visible during colonial times, began to assimilate and blend into the broader population before the eighteenth century was over. Walking through the East Village in Lower Manhattan, it takes a sharp eye to note the handful of German-language signs that remain from the years in the nineteenth century when the neighborhood, then known as Kleindeutschland, was the largest German community in the United States. At the same time, in the twenty-first century there is a real concern that growing white populations in historically African American communities such as Harlem and

Bedford-Stuyvesant will displace African Americans without fostering either an inclusive integration or an end to the dual real estate market that has long undermined housing opportunities for African Americans.

Although much has been written about the United States being a refuge for millions of people from all corners of the globe, it is in New York City that Americans have grappled longest with what it means to be a nation of immigrants. New York has long stood as a symbol of America's immigrant heritage, and until relatively recently the majority of immigrants entered the United States through New York City's seaports and airports.

In New York, the history of migration and immigration is a chronicle of epic proportions. In this city where many people have their eyes on the future and the past under their feet, it is possible to lose sight of the relationship between yesterday and today. We believe, however, that the story of the city's past and its peoples reveals enduring problems, changes to ponder, and strengths to appreciate.

ALL THE NATIONS UNDER HEAVEN