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## Can immigrants save the region? The right kind not only boost population, but also create jobs, leaders say

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### A Quiet Crisis

Yelena Maydel eyed the storefronts that stretched like a long train up Mayfield Road in South Euclid, took a breath and started walking. She stepped nervously into shop after shop, asking for work in a thick Russian accent.

At Ness Alterations, Nisreen Kaisi smiled at the Jewish immigrant from Uzbekistan. Kaisi, a Muslim, had come from Iraq nine years before. She did not need help in her tiny tailor shop, she said, but she was interested in selling the business. She offered to teach Maydel her trade.

Three days later, Maydel returned and accepted her offer.

"My heart told me, yes, it's my chance, try," she recalled.

But she had more than her heart telling her to try. The Hebrew Free Loan Association of Cleveland gave her an interest-free \$7,000 loan. She's expected to pay back the money so it can help another Jewish immigrant get started here - and chances are she will.

More than 6,000 Russian Jews settled in the Cleveland area during the 1990s, and resettlement experts say the vast majority landed jobs, and many created jobs, having started their own businesses.

They are the new huddled masses, the kind of fast-achieving immigrant group some civic leaders envision when they talk about repopulating Cleveland and its inner-ring suburbs with people who can revive neighborhoods and reignite the local economy.

If immigrants are skipping Northeast Ohio for other places, the thinking goes, they might have to be lured here. And if you are going to recruit immigrants, you may as well go after the most likely to succeed.

The strategy calls for a kind of social engineering that few, if any, cities have tried before. It sails into the headwinds of xenophobia, stricter enforcement of federal immigration laws, and tricky issues of fairness.

But in a city that has lost nearly one-half of its population in the last 50 years, some are eager to try.

"When you think about what made us great a hundred years ago, we had an incredible influx of folks who built the economy," said Brad Whitehead, a senior fellow for

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economic development at the Cleveland Foundation. "I think we would greatly benefit from doing that again. The question is, how do we make ourselves an international city again?"

The idea of marketing Cleveland to foreigners has been percolating for years among global-minded academics and business leaders. But it took strength from a recent Cleveland State University study that found a connection between prosperous American cities and new blood.

Social scientists Sanda Kaufman and William Olson concluded that immigrants not only filled jobs but also created them in the last decade, in cities like San Francisco and Houston, and that certain kinds of immigrants create more jobs than others.

They suggested the city go after immigrants who arrive rich or educated or highly skilled, ready to contribute to their new hometown. They also advised investing in newcomers who, while poor or persecuted, enjoy a built-in network of support. Quick assimilators who do not tax public services.

People like Yelena Maydel.

When the collapsing Soviet Union began allowing Jews to emigrate in 1990, agencies like the Jewish Family Service Association sprang into action.

Its resettlement office in Cleveland Heights offered job training, English classes and help with the rent to arriving Jews. The Hebrew Free Loan Association, founded here 99 years ago by Jewish immigrants to help Jewish immigrants, freed start-up cash from a revolving loan fund.

Three years after stepping off a plane in Cleveland, Yelena and her husband, Grigory, own their house in Cleveland Heights and - as of September - a tailor shop. Their son and his wife and child have since joined them here.

Standing before a peg board bright with spools, the artist's palette, Yelena clasped her hands and smiled.

"Step by step, we move in this difficult life," she said.

Some envision those steps multiplied by tens of thousands.

An ethnic city no more

Seventy-five years ago, more than half of Clevelanders called themselves Italians, Germans, Slovaks and Poles.

Today, less than 5 percent of the city's residents were born abroad. During the 1990s, a decade of record immigration to America, Greater Cleveland drew fewer immigrants than 42 of the nation's 48 largest metropolitan areas.

As midwestern cities like Chicago, Indianapolis and Columbus grew with immigrants, Cleveland's population fell by 5 percent. It dipped to 467,851 in July 2002, according to the US Census Bureau, continuing a slide that started in 1950, when about 915,000 people lived in the city.

While the regional population grew slightly between 2000 and 2002, Cuyahoga County lost residents and so did many of the older suburbs, including Euclid, Lakewood, Garfield Heights, Cleveland Heights and Lyndhurst, the Census Bureau found.

Alarmed business leaders noted that population growth tends to coincide with economic growth. Social planners who had hoped to fill empty urban neighborhoods asked, Where are the immigrants?

Researchers came up with some new thoughts on an old phenomenon.

For much of the region's history, immigrants came looking for work - and found it. But in a diverse world economy, some say, jobs are not the top lure.

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Kaufman and Olson argue that immigrants are followers. When they achieve their goal of reaching America, they seek out their cultural kin and settle nearby.

It's not that immigrants don't like Cleveland, the researchers say. They just don't know about it. Our largest ethnic communities are European. Today's immigrants are coming in waves from Asia and Latin America.

"Their attention is focused on the social issues - where are there people like me?" Kaufman said. "We have the wrong kind of foreign-born."

That reality leads to another new thought, one gaining momentum in Cleveland and other staid cities. Instead of something that happens to a city, maybe immigration is something a city can make happen.

For now, local recruitment efforts are small and scattered, often sponsored by an ethnic or religious group helping its own. But a desire is growing among some business and civic leaders to coordinate a larger campaign.

Some want to copy tactics being tested in cities like Pittsburgh. Others hope to pioneer homegrown strategies. Often, they are motivated by couples like Shashi and Shalini Joshi.

They came to America from India in the 1990s, he a computer engineer, she a medical student, and settled in Atlanta. When it came time for her medical residency in 1998, Shalini Joshi grew excited about an offer from Cleveland's Fairview Hospital. She had a friend who had done his medical training there.

"When you come all the way from India, around the globe, moving from Atlanta to Cleveland is no big deal," Shashi Joshi explained.

The couple settled in Solon, where they are raising two young children, and observed a characteristic of the region's Indian-American community.

"Many of the Indians who come here are highly skilled professionals," Shashi Joshi said.

He's not the only one to notice.

500,000 or bust

Richard Herman worked for two years in Moscow in the early 1990s before returning home and establishing his law practice downtown. The 39-year-old immigration lawyer has since become the city's biggest cheerleader for immigrants.

He trumpets immigration as an economic development tool, making his case in weighty reports that he's been dropping on the desks of politicians, journalists and business people all over town.

"We spend so much money trying to attract tourists to our city," Herman argues. "What are tourists? They're temporary immigrants. Why not, like any business, attract customers to come and live in our city?"

His crusade received an unexpected boost in February, when Cleveland Mayor Jane Campbell announced a goal of pushing Cleveland's population back over 500,000 by 2010. She said reaching the half-million mark would require only a 4.5 percent growth rate and could be achieved with new housing and high-tech jobs.

A few weeks later, a pair of Case Western Reserve University researchers responded with sobering news. William Sabol and Kristen Mikelbank said Cleveland actually lost 13 percent of its population in the last decade, mostly white people, and that only a high birth rate kept the net loss moderate. Reversing the decline and growing by 4 or 5 percent would require tens of thousands of new residents.

Suddenly, an imperative was born.

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David Goldberg, a CSU historian who studies immigration to America, said the 500,000 goal all but defines the strategy.

"That could only happen through immigration," he said.

Brains or bodies?

In mid-May, CSU's Ruth Ratner Miller Center for Greater Cleveland's Future hosted the leading proponents of an immigration drive. The brainstorming session illustrated two emerging schools of thought.

On one side stands "critical mass" advocates like Herman. He says the city needs immigrant waves like the old days to create new ethnic neighborhoods.

At the other pole are business leaders like Whitehead, Albert Ratner, co-chairman of Forest City Enterprises, and David Yen, director of the World Trade Center of Cleveland. They say the smart move is to attract a smaller, select class of people who bring needed skills or the wealth and savvy to create jobs.

"We want to increase the population in this area with very well-trained, well-educated, hard-working foreigners," Yen said.

Skeptics were few at the CSU gathering but they emerged soon after.

Sabra Pierce Scott represents the Glenville and St. Clair-Superior neighborhoods on Cleveland City Council. Her ward is losing population despite a good housing stock, yet she does not see newcomers as the answer.

"I just can't believe all these wonderful things happen by importing these people to our community," she said, adding that some of the ideas smack of elitism.

"What they're saying is, 'We'll bring in a more intelligent group of people.' Well, that's not the answer. We need to begin to develop ways to help our own people."

The idea of targeting immigrant groups leaves others uneasy.

"Who's going to get the most immigrant status?" asks Leo Serrano, director of The Spanish American Committee in Cleveland.

August Pust, a longtime leader in the Slovenian immigrant community, said the very idea sounds un-American.

"The Statue of Liberty doesn't say 'Give me your educated, your good looking and your rich,' " he said.

Practical considerations loom. It could be difficult using immigrants to repopulate the city when many, like the Maydels and the Joshis, move right to the suburbs.

Immigrating to America, never easy, became a more arduous process after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. And some question the ethics of recruiting ambitious people from poorer countries that probably need them more than we do.

Still, other cities with Cleveland's problem are forging ahead.

Open for immigrants

Go to [globalpittsburgh.org](http://globalpittsburgh.org) on the Internet and you'll see Pittsburgh's new welcome mat. The Web site describes the city's international communities, welcomes immigrants and tells them where to find job centers and English classes.

Pittsburgh's new Hispanic Center, meanwhile, is trying to recruit Latinos from elsewhere in America using a \$250,000 grant from the Heinz Endowments.

A uniquely focused drive is under way in Schenectady, N.Y., Mayor Albert Jurchynski travels back and forth to a neighborhood in Queens to personally recruit

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families from **Guyana**, an English-speaking nation of South America. So far, about 5,000 Guyanese have accepted his offer and moved north to his aging industrial city of 62,000.

"They're hard working," said Jurczynski, the grandson of Polish immigrants. "They're buying homes and they're investing in our city and they don't ask for a penny, which is one reason that I love them so much."

For now, recruitment efforts in Cleveland are small and scattered. Jewish Family Service recently teamed up with The Spanish American Committee to market Cleveland to Spanish-speaking Jews in Argentina, where the economy is in a tailspin.

Yen said the World Trade Center is ready to launch a program to retain foreign graduate students by landing them jobs with local corporations.

It's a start, he said, but a broader effort is needed. So is a new attitude.

Advocates of recruiting immigrants say Clevelanders need to look at immigrants in a new light - and see a bigger world.

Arriving Russians and Indians may settle in the suburbs, but Dominicans, Chinese and Vietnamese are buying homes in Cleveland's inner city.

Quietly last decade, Africans became 4 percent of Cuyahoga County's foreign-born population. They are the era's most educated immigrant group. And they often buy in the city.

Also, Cleveland does not have to reach all the way to Africa to find them.

The United States accepts a limited number of immigrants - about 1 million each year. Often, families get started in gateway cities like New York or Miami and then move in search of cheaper rents or safety.

It is this "secondary migration" that immigration advocates hope to tap.

"They're coming to America anyway. We might as well get our share," Pust agrees.

A consensus is forming around a strategy of building upon groups already here - Asian Indians, Russian Jews, Chinese and Latinos - and using them to welcome more.

As Mayor Campbell's chief of strategic planning, Lewis Adkins leads City Hall's repopulation campaign. He said he sees immigrants playing a key role in pushing Cleveland back over the 500,000 plateau, and that a marketing campaign should target both people and businesses.

Leaders of CSU's Ratner Center said they hope to coordinate a public-private effort to shape strategies.

Recruitment models are few, but proponents say it might not take much to start a wave. The levers that steer an immigrant family to one place or another are often slight. A tip. An uncle. A friendly church.

Herman said he always asks his clients how they ended up in Cleveland from halfway around the world, and they usually tell him the same thing.

"They knew somebody," he said. "It's as simple as that. They knew somebody here."

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**GRAPHIC:** JILL RICHARDS THE PLAIN DEALER A writer in Uzbekistan, Yelena Maydel took a job mopping floors when she immigrated to Cleveland three years ago. Now she owns

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a home and a business and talks of dreams coming true. PHOTOGRAPHS BY JILL RICHARDS THE PLAIN DEALER Nisreen Kaisi founded Ness Alterations after immigrating from Iraq nine years ago. Last year, she sold the tailor shop to another immigrant, Yelena Maydel, and taught her the business. She still stops by to lend a helping hand. The Joshi family is part of an Indian immigrant community characterized by skilled professionals. The couple arrived in 1998, when Dr. Shalini Joshi (in doorway) began her medical residency at Fairview Hospital. Shashi Joshi is a computer engineer who writes children's stories for his daughter Pragya, 5, and son Pranav, 3. Pranav and Pragya are part of an Asian Indian community that grew by nearly 70 percent in Northeast Ohio last decade. They danced to Indian pop music recently while mom prepared dinner in their Solon home. With 10 children, including 6-year-old Bridget, Adjoah Ofosuhene usually has plenty of help in the West 25th Street grocery store she runs with her husband, Nana. The couple, originally from Ghana, caters to a small but growing African immigrant community. JILL RICHARDS THE PLAIN DEALER A writer in Uzbekistan, Yelena Maydel took a job mopping floors when she emigrated to Cleveland three years ago. Now she owns a home and a business and talks of dreams coming true. PHOTOGRAPHS BY JILL RICHARDS THE PLAIN DEALER Nisreen Kaisi founded Ness Alterations in South Euclid after immigrating from Iraq nine years ago. Last year, she sold the tailor shop to another immigrant, Yelena Maydel, and taught her how to run an American business. The pair became friends and Kaisi still stops by to lend a helping hand. The Joshi family is part of an Indian immigrant community characterized by skilled professionals. The couple arrived in 1998, when Dr. Shalini Joshi (in doorway) began her medical residency at Fairview Hospital. Shashi Joshi is a computer engineer who writes children's stories for his daughter Pragya, 5, and son Pranav, 3. Pranav and Pragya are part of an Asian Indian community that grew by nearly 70 percent in Northeast Ohio last decade. They danced to Indian pop music recently while mom prepared dinner in their Solon home. With 10 children, including 6-year-old Bridget, Adjoah Ofosuhene usually has plenty of help in the West 25th Street grocery store she runs with her husband, Nana. The couple, originally from Ghana, caters to a small but growing African immigrant community.

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