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Current 'Welcoming' and Receiving Community Initiatives as an Immigration Integration Strategy: Comparing Selected Cities of the U.S., Canada, and Europe

Transatlantic Studies

M.A. Dissertation Evaluation

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JoEllen Koester has opted to write her Master's thesis on how recent strategies to integrate newcomers in selected North American cities could be successfully applied in Europe. In my opinion, the treatise is beautifully written in English by a native speaker, which is a welcome respite from the "Czenglish" I often find difficult to fathom. The work contains an Introduction (Literature Review, Definition of Terms, and Methodology sections), seven main chapters, and a Conclusion. There is an extensive bibliography as well and the referencing is correct and consistent.

JoEllen clearly points out the main aim of her thesis, which is that certain "welcoming strategies" adopted in North American cities to integrate immigrants and prevent alienation could be applied in the European cities of Prague and Birmingham. In the Introduction, JoEllen clearly states: "Disaffected immigrants are a pressing national security issue for the United States, Canada, and all other countries which receive migrant populations." The Introduction maps out the content of the body of the work, which is a series of case studies of North American and European cities. In North America, JoEllen analyzes the cases of Dayton, Nashville, and Austin (U.S.), as well as Halifax (Canada). In Europe, JoEllen examines the cases of Birmingham (UK) and Prague (Czech Republic).

The definitions of terms and methodological explanations present in the Introduction are clear and straightforward and I have no problem here.

Chapter 1 is aptly entitled “Theories of Immigrant Integration and the Role of Host Societies.” The concept of “welcoming initiatives” is discussed and the ideas of scholars David Bornstein and Jeffrey G. Reitz are scrutinized. The Welcoming America initiative discussed differs from traditional approaches to the integration of immigrants “by incorporating the receiving culture in three ways: “contact”, “dialogue”, and “joint projects.”” As JoEllen states, Michael Jones-Correa takes this even further in his “Key Strategies for Receiving Communities”, which include “lobbying government and business to “Encourage leadership to address the changes taking place locally and manage them effectively,” increasing opportunities for “contact between immigrants and the native born” to the greatest possible extent, opening inroads for recent immigrants to access “state and local government,” and, finally, to “reframe the issues to counter misconceptions about immigrants.”” JoEllen then alerts the reader to contradictions in American public opinion concerning immigration and potential obstacles to success as new waves of immigrants have tended to move to cities where mass immigration has only recently become a mass phenomenon. This chapter is very well conceived and neatly leads the reader into the case studies involving individual cities.

Chapter 2 discusses Austin, Texas. As Austin has only recently become a magnet for settlement by newcomers, JoEllen feels that the city deserves attention. She portrays the composition of new immigrants, which ranges from under-skilled Mexican migrants to highly skilled technology workers from Asia. The discussion of welcoming initiatives in Austin is very informative and

detailed. In my view, the experiment with the Austin Police Department is very noteworthy.

In Chapter 3, JoEllen focuses on the midwestern city of Dayton, Ohio. Unlike Austin, Dayton does have an extended history of immigration. Dayton underwent major industrial decline in the decades following World War II and the city's attractiveness for newcomers also decreased. Many of Dayton's recent migrants are actually refugees. In Dayton, police officers generally do not try to determine the immigration status of foreigners so long as they are not involved in major criminal activity. Again, this friendly reception of foreigners seems to have met with success.

Chapter 4 deals with Nashville, Tennessee. Though in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Nashville was quite accepting of Irish immigrants, Italians were less welcomed. The most recent wave of immigrants began to arrive in the 1990s and there were indeed some problems between immigrants and the established population. Though studies have indicated that immigrants have brought improvements to Nashville and Tennessee as a whole, scholars are not in agreement on the extent to which the local population has welcomed newcomers. As in most of the Deep South, Nashville's residents are quite religious. Therefore, welcoming initiatives have sought to build bridges through faith. Multi-sector (government, nonprofit sector, and business) approaches to plan for demographic change seem to have paid off in Nashville.

Chapter 5 is unique because it describes the reception of migrants in the small Canadian coastal city of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Unlike the "Welcoming America" initiative, Halifax's "Connector Program" Unlike its American counterpart, the "Connector Program" mainly tries to get immigrants into

employment. “Connectors” teach “Connecties” how best to tackle the local job market. Indeed, this approach is more economically based.

In Chapter 6, JoEllen discusses the case of Birmingham, England. As stated in the chapter, Birmingham is no stranger to discrimination against immigrants. After World War II, many immigrants arrived and faced resentment and employment discrimination. Well, Birmingham’s immigrant population has grown and diversified. Three main groups, namely the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership, Restore, and the Birmingham New Communities Network, have led welcoming initiatives in Birmingham. The problem with all these noble efforts is that the initiatives focus too much on immigrants themselves and not on changing attitudes of the native population toward them.

Chapter 7 deals with Prague, Czech Republic. JoEllen provides an overview of the changes in immigration policy since the fall of Communism and the opinions of the scholars Šišová and Drbohlav. JoEllen questions the effectiveness of Czech efforts, which are by no means minimal. NGOs such as the Integration Centre of Prague, the Centre for the Integration of Foreigners, and others. Basically, JoEllen criticizes the effectiveness of these organizations’ efforts because of their limited outreach.

In her Conclusion, JoEllen states that other North American cities would do well to follow the examples of Austin, Dayton, Nashville, and Halifax when integrating newcomers. The same applies to Birmingham and Prague. She sheds light on the dangers present if the problems in Birmingham and Prague are not addressed and differentiates which North American examples would probably work best in Birmingham and Prague respectively.

JoEllen has produced a laudable thesis that exceeds the minimal formal requirements for an M.A. dissertation. I recommend an **excellent** mark.

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