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# 9 New Chicago Polonia: Urban and Suburban

POLES HAVE BEEN immigrating to Chicago for over a century. Immigrant numbers peaked in the first decade of the twentieth century and by the time national quotas were introduced during the 1920s, almost half a million Poles and their children were living in Chicago. During the middle of the twentieth century, Polish migration was limited to mostly postwar refugees, but in the last decades, a new surge of immigrants arrived. These contemporary immigrants are similar to the earlier arrivals in that most of them are coming in search of jobs and a better life, many of them work as skilled laborers or in service positions, and a significant number do not initially intend to stay permanently. This recent migrant wave differs, however, in that today immigrants are more educated, they are more likely to have had managerial and professional occupations in Poland and, because of the changes in immigration policy, the newcomers are not classified only as “immigrants” but also as political refugees and undocumented workers. Another difference is that, while the majority of immigrants continue to live in the city in the old Polish neighborhoods, an increasing number of new arrivals are resettling in nonethnic suburban communities. Today, over a million Poles and their descendents live in the larger Chicago metropolitan region and, although the newcomers make up only a small percent of the total population, they have a noticeable presence in the city and the suburbs.

## THE NEW IMMIGRANTS: EDUCATED AND UNDOCUMENTED TRANSNATIONAL WORKERS

In 2000, 133,797 foreign-born Poles were living in metropolitan Chicago (along with nearly 900,000 Americans of Polish heritage). The presence of new Polish immigrants in Chicago is a consequence of larger global patterns, which include cold war conflicts and the dismantling of the Soviet Union, as well as neoliberal U.S. immigration policies that support capital’s need for low-wage labor. During the first half of the 1960s, roughly 7,000 Poles were admitted into the United States annually; the 1965 policy revisions cut this rate in half for the next 20 years. Despite this rate reduction, the migration cohort grew steadily throughout the 1970s and 1980s with the arrival of political refugees and temporary visitors. The 1968 upheaval in Poland produced the first wave of refugees, but the largest numbers came after the national strikes in Poland in 1976 and the formation of the trade union *Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy* (Independent Self-Governing Trades Union), popularly known as *Solidarność* (Solidarity) in 1980. In December 1981, the Polish state declared martial law, disbanded Solidarity, and jailed opposition activists. The United States, always receptive to political exiles from communist countries, admitted more than 40,000 Polish refugees during the 1980s.



In addition, over the last 30 years, an increasing number of temporary nonimmigrants arrived, particularly “visitors for pleasure,” known within the community as *wakacjusze* (vacationers) or *turysci* (tourists). Many of these vacationers overstayed their visas for significant periods (in some cases, for decades) and worked without authorization. Their numbers rose from an average of 24,000 admitted annually during the 1970s, to 36,000 during the 1980s, to almost 52,000 annually during the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Although the majority of *wakacjusze* intended to return to Poland, estimates made during the mid 1980s indicated that roughly a third had overextended their visas, and that 95,000 Poles were living (and working) illegally in the United States. Efforts to reduce this population through the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) gave amnesty to more than 16,000 Poles and another 2,000 of their dependents. A decade later, estimates of the illegal Polish population dropped to 70,000.

The number of permanent immigrants also has grown steadily. Just over 42,000 Polish immigrants arrived during the 1970s; this doubled to almost 82,000 during the 1980s. During the 1990s, more than 180,000 Poles were admitted into the United States.

Metropolitan Chicago attracted the largest share of the new immigrants. One-third of all Polish immigrants in the United States live in Illinois (mostly in the Chicago metropolitan region). Between 1972 and 2000, roughly 100,000 Poles immigrated to the Chicago metropolitan region, and two-thirds of them came during the last decade of the century (Figure 9.1). During the early 1990s, an average of 11,000 new Polish immigrants resettled annually in Chicago.

The increase in immigration during the 1990s is explained by a variety of factors. First, not all new admissions were new arrivals. The recipients of the 1986 IRCA program arrived during the 1970s and 1980s, but they were not officially admitted until after they received amnesty. As a result, most of them were entered on the books during the early 1990s.

More significantly, the increase in Polish immigration during the 1990s is explained by the instability of the economic system in Poland, the established nature of the migration flow itself,

and changes in U.S. immigration policy. Prior to 1989, Poles often said they chose to emigrate because of the political oppression and economic limitations of the communist system in Poland (Erdmans 1998). But the communist system imploded in 1989. Almost immediately after Poles voted the communists out of office, the new leaders began to dismantle the centralized command economy and establish the institutional structures for a free-market system. For some groups, the collapse of the communist state increased their opportunities in Poland and thereby discouraged emigration (Kolarska-Bobinska 1993, 108; Lipinski-Wnuk 1993; Czapinski 1995). The young, educated, urban population was best positioned to take advantage of new business initiatives; jobs in new technology markets (e.g., computers and telecommunications); economic and development aid provided by the United States, Sweden, and Germany; and managerial, skilled, and unskilled positions in Western companies like Pepsico and Bell Telephone. More vulnerable groups, however, fared better under the socialist system, including retirees and those with less education. Moreover, without state subsidies, several large industries collapsed—mining in Lower Silesia, textiles in Lodz, and shipbuilding along the Baltic coast. In these regions, the transition to capitalism led to the displacement of workers. In addition, farmers lost state subsidies, and the younger generation left the farms to look for work in cities at home and abroad. Finally, under communism, artists, writers, sculptors, and actors were state workers supported by stipends. Today, they depend on a still-developing market.

With unemployment rates as high as 12 to 15 percent during the 1990s (and as high as 25 percent for 15- to 24-year-olds), the “liberalization” of Poland and the move toward a more capitalist economy has left many Poles still looking for work and wages *za granice* (abroad). The introduction of capitalist markets created unequal rates of development as well as high rates of inflation. The privatization of Poland has outpaced the democratization of Poland, and growing poverty, unemployment, underemployment, and social inequality sustain the large pool of potential emigrants lined up



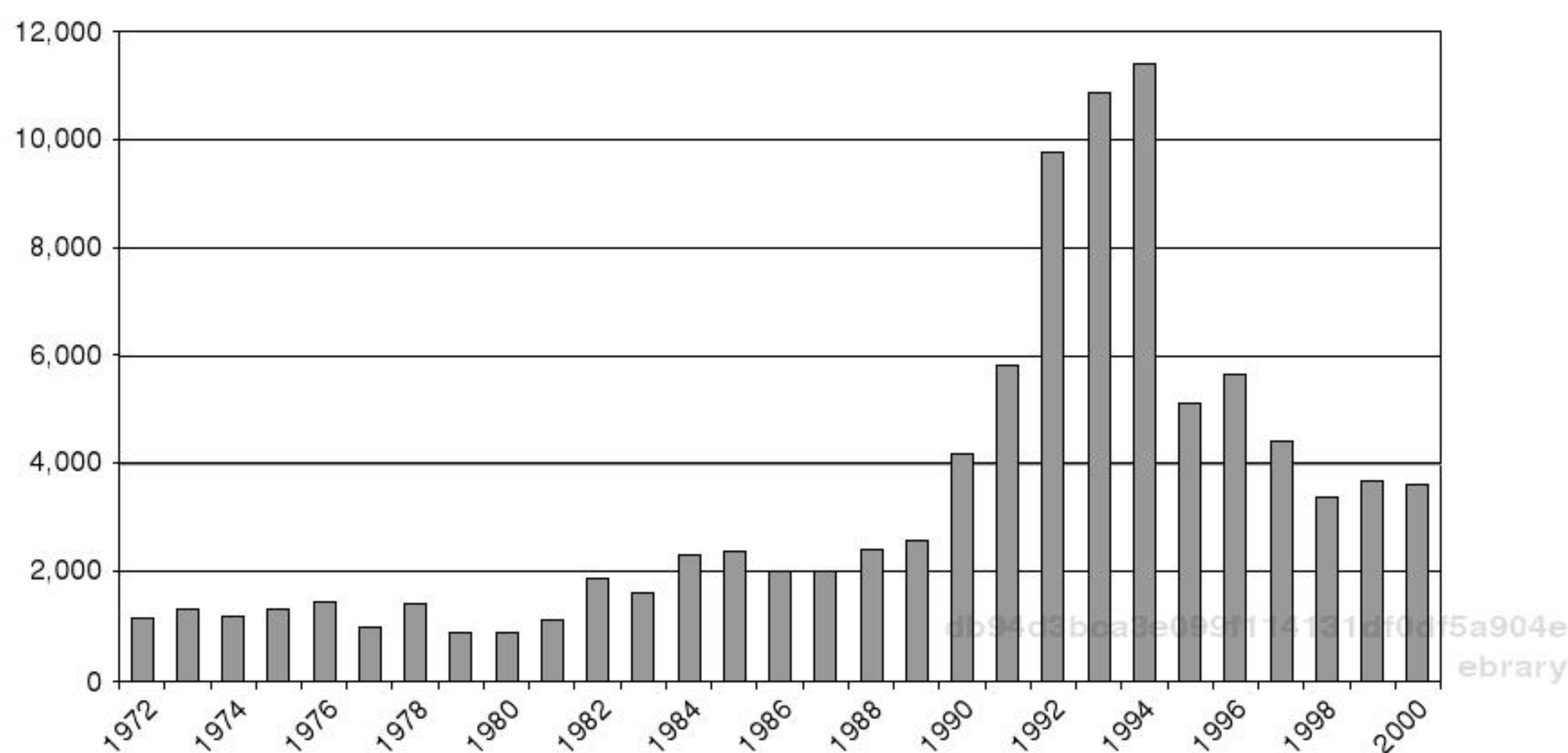


FIGURE 9.1. Polish immigrants to Illinois, 1972–2000.  
Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

outside the American embassies in Warsaw and Krakow, waiting for a chance to come to Chicago to earn the “green.”

Poland is still in transition, and this unsettled state encourages emigration even among the more educated. Even people in a relatively good position in Poland to take advantage of the new market, given the opportunity to come to the United States, often take the Green Card Gamble.<sup>2</sup> Although some actively pursue this route, others more or less fall into the opportunity. One woman explained her situation this way:

My godmother she sent the application for green card for everyone in her family, I’m her godchild, and for my family. And I was studying Polish philology, and I was on the fourth year of my university, I was thinking about staying at the university. I wanted to go to Jagiellonian to the class of the creative writing. I never thought to emigrate. And then I won. Nobody else but I. And then it was at the beginning of the 1993, I was at the beginning of my fourth year in the university. And then I said, ‘I won’t go.’ And they said, my family, ‘You should try. People are paying \$10,000 to have a green card. You have to try. It’s a chance that you’ve got.’ I have to try.

Ask why she emigrated, another woman, who had been a dentist in Poland, explained:

I hope I don’t mess up your research because I didn’t come here because I wanted to. I came here only because my husband’s biggest dream was to live in the United States. And he had an uncle who was working in Germany [and] after World War II, he decided he didn’t want to go back to Poland, so he decided to emigrate to the United States in 1953. Since then, until my husband came to the United States in 1991, he visited maybe three times. But they exchanged letters, and my husband was in love with the United States. And he wanted to come. He came, and he won the lottery. We were not married at the time. But we had been dating six years. ‘Why don’t you come, and you can be a legal immigrant?’ I said, I’m not going to come, I just come for honeymoon, and my honeymoon has lasted nine years.

Even when it is possible to live a satisfying and fulfilling life in Poland, Poles continue to go abroad because migration to the United States (and Germany and Canada) is part of a national habit for Poles. As Douglas Massey (1987) has shown in association with the migration of Mexicans to the United States, although economic factors stimulate the onset of emigration,



cultural and social factors better explain the continuation of migration. In the example above, the cultural habits are evident in her husband's "dream" to come to the United States, and his uncle who was living in Chicago represents the social factors.

Given the cultural and social factors that sustain old migrant flows, even when economic conditions improve, we can expect emigration to continue from Poland. Peter Stalker argues in *Workers Without Frontiers* that emigration rates often drop when the wage ratio between sending and receiving countries equalizes, which is expected to occur with free-market practices and globalization. He found, however, that emigration often increases initially after the introduction of free-trade practices because markets are unstable during the transition stage (2000, 57). And the more rapid the changes, the more disruptive they are. In Poland's case, the "shock therapy" introduced to jumpstart the economy destabilized certain labor markets. Development itself may encourage emigration by "shaking people loose from their communities, raising new possibilities, and providing them with the funds to travel" (103). Stalker's model factors in the complex of mechanisms that influence the migrant flow, including established networks that minimize the costs of migration, the affordability of travel, the openness of borders and receptivity of policies for professionals, the Internet as an information node, and the presence of family (and a community) in the receiving country. In sum, although wage ratios are important, other factors come into play, especially in old migration flows.

In addition to the economic instability in Poland and the maturity of the migrant wave, immigration increased during the 1990s because of more open U.S. immigration policy. The Immigration Act of 1990 created more permanent visas and temporary work visas. First, it raised the ceiling for all immigrants from 270,000 annually to a level of 700,000 for 1992–1994, and then to 675,000 beginning in 1995. Included under the numerical cap were slots for "diversity immigrants," defined as aliens from countries adversely affected by the 1965 Immigration

Act. This included Poles and, between 1992 and 1996, more than 50,000 Poles were admitted under this program. Second, this act expanded categories and ceilings for nonimmigrants arriving for cultural exchange, business, employment, and tourism. The United States needs workers in certain industries, and Poles often work in two of these—construction and domestic services. Neoliberal practices, designed to deregulate the economy and allow both labor and capital to move more freely, translate into the high immigration ceilings in advanced economies that allow for the inflow of low-wage labor.

These policy changes brought a larger number of migrants to the United States, willing to work longer hours, for less pay, and with fewer benefits than their native-born counterparts. In the case of Polish migrants, many of these workers employed in changing bedpans, roofing buildings, and working in maintenance are well educated, and they arrive with skilled technical and professional training (Erdmans 1996). For immigrants arriving in Chicago during the 1980s, 76 percent had at least a high school and 18 percent had at least a bachelor's degree; for those arriving during the 1990s, 64 percent had at least a high school degree, and 12 percent had at least a bachelor's degree. This drop in educational level reflects, I would argue, the absence of political refugees during the 1990s and the increase in temporary migrants (including undocumented workers).

During the last 25 years, an increase has occurred in the percent of Polish immigrants who had professional and managerial occupations as well as technical, sales, and administrative positions in Poland; at the same time, the percent of operators, fabricators, and laborers has decreased (Figure 9.2). For men, the percent of skilled workers doubled from 21 percent in 1972 to 46 percent in 2000. For women, those who had held professional and managerial positions in Poland almost doubled during that same period. In 2000, just over a quarter of female immigrants had professional and managerial positions in Poland, and another 43 percent were in technical, sales, and administrative support occupations. In addition, roughly one-fifth of the



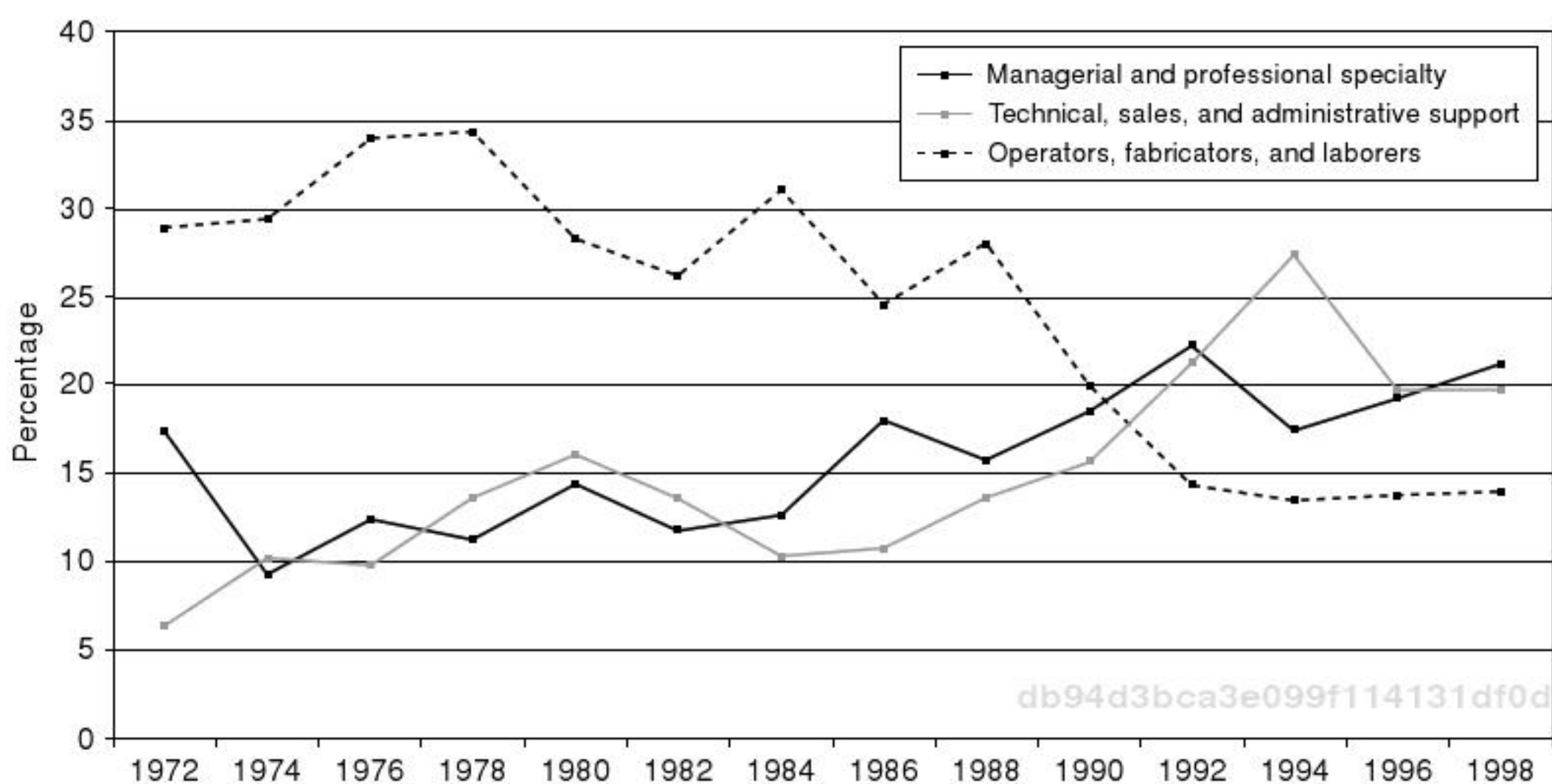


FIGURE 9.2. Polish immigrants to Chicago metro area by occupation.

women were in service positions, and this has remained steady over the past quarter of a century.

Although their education and skills help them to secure jobs, many immigrants pay a steep price for their newness, expressed in the Polish phrase *emigracja to deklasacja* (“emigration leads to downward class mobility,” whereby class is assessed as much by status indicators as by economic indicators).

Compared to the native-born Polish American population (which has rates similar to the general white population), Polish immigrants are more likely to work in semi- and low-skilled positions (almost twice as likely if they are new arrivals) and in the service sector (again almost twice as likely if they are new arrivals). Over time, the foreign-born population begins to resemble their native-born counterparts, but they still remain slightly over-represented in service and manual labor occupations (U.S. Census of the Population 1993a, 365–66). Several factors influence this decline in occupational status, including lack of a green card, family obligations that require newcomers to find work immediately instead of first learning English and recertifying their degrees, and the perception that further education in the United States will not always pay off monetarily.

COMMUNITY BUILDING IN CHICAGO POLONIA

*Polonia* refers to a community of Poles living abroad and their descendants. Chicago Polonia has been and continues to be one of the largest, most vibrant Polonias in the world. In this new century, it has more than 100 Polish organizations, three prominent Polish-language radio stations with 217 different programs, four television stations, three daily newspapers, and more than two dozen magazines, both weeklies and monthlies. There are fifteen Polish bookstores, and city-wide events include the May 3rd Constitution Day parade, the Polish Film Festival, Taste of Polonia Festival, and the Festival Polonaise.

At the beginning of the last century, the heart of the Polish community was *Trojska Polska* (the Polish Triangle) at the intersection of Milwaukee, Division, and Ashland Avenues. Along with this North Side neighborhood, a large community of Polish immigrants who emigrated mostly from the mountain region of southeastern Poland settled on the Southwest Side of Chicago during the late 1800s, near the meatpacking industries (known as the Back of the Yards community). Today, new Polish immigrants settle along the tracks laid down by their



predecessors—along Milwaukee and Archer Avenues, at the southwest and northwest edges of the city, and in the suburbs (see Map 9.1, color insert).

Anchored by the spires of the first Polish churches in Chicago, St. Stanislaus Kotska (1867) and Holy Trinity (1872), *Trojska Polska*, also known as the Polish Downtown, was home to the large ethnic insurance fraternal organizations (e.g., the Polish National Alliance and the Polish Roman Catholic Union), the Polish Museum of America, and the Chopin Theatre, as well as to numerous Polish restaurants, stores, and professionals providing services to the Polish community. At the beginning of the twentieth century, St. Stanislaus Kotska was one of the largest parishes in the United States, with 8,000 families registered (40,000 parishioners), almost all Polish. By mid-century, the neighborhood started to decline as the processes of suburbanization, urban renewal, and racial integration pushed and pulled the second and third generations north up Milwaukee and eventually into the suburbs. During the 1950s, the newly constructed Kennedy Expressway dissected the community and contributed to the tailspin as residents moved out, businesses closed, property values plummeted, buildings were boarded up, and low-income and transient populations moved into the area, a majority of whom were racial minorities.

In West Town (made up of the Wicker Park and Bucktown neighborhoods), where the Polish Triangle is located, the white population dropped from 98 percent to 55 percent between 1960 and 1980. By 1981, St. Stanislaus Kotska had only 850 families registered; today, this parish serves an aging Polish community and a growing Latino community, mostly Mexican. On Sunday, two Masses are celebrated in English, one in Polish, and three in Spanish. By 2000, 40 percent of the population in the tract where St. Stanislaus is situated was Latino (80 percent of them were Mexican), and only 9.5 percent ( $N = 8,326$ ) of the total West Town population was Polish (a third of them were foreign-born).

Despite this decline in the Polish population, the Polish Triangle has witnessed a renaissance of

Polish culture with the Kennar Art Gallery, home of Polish sculptor Jerzy Kennar, who immigrated to America in 1978, and the 1112 Gallery whose curator, Christopher Kamyszew, also organizes Polish Film Festivals in Chicago (as well as New York and Los Angeles). In addition, the Polish Museum and Library have been refurbished, and the Chopin Theatre reopened. The few Polish immigrants moving into the area are often well-educated professionals who work in the city.

Two blocks up the street from St. Stanislaus, in the vicinity of Holy Trinity Church, a new Polish intellectual community is taking hold. Originally a diocesan parish, today Holy Trinity is a mission church designated to serve the Polish immigrant community. All its priests are foreign-born Poles, and its Masses are all celebrated in Polish. More than 600 children are enrolled in its Polish Saturday classes, and the four Sunday Masses attract hundreds of worshipers, with standing room only on the holidays. Polish consulate members attend Holy Trinity, as well as many well-educated newcomers, some of them driving in from their suburban homes. The parish is unique in that it serves the larger metropolitan immigrant community and not the local neighborhood. As is evident, very few Poles live in this neighborhood; most of them have moved north.

#### CONSUMER-SERVICE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES: JACKOWO AND BELMONT-CENTRAL

Three-quarters of all new arrivals resettle in the city, mostly on the Northwest Side. When the Poles began moving out of the Polish Triangle at mid-century, they moved North up Milwaukee Avenue. By the time the newest wave of immigrants began arriving in the 1970s, a new Polonian center was already established near St. Hyacinth's parish. Known as *Jackowo*, this Polonian neighborhood also shares its borders with Mexican neighborhoods.

In 1990, the highest concentration of Polish immigrants was near St. Hyacinth Church, in an area known as Jackowo (see Map 9.1). In tract 2105, where St. Hyacinth is located, 65 percent



of the population was Polish and 81 percent of the Poles were immigrants ( $N = 3,880$ ). By 2000, however, this tract was 65 percent Latino ( $N = 5,341$ ) and only 30 percent Polish (but 86 percent of the Poles were immigrants). In this community, the Poles were concentrated in the areas surrounding Milwaukee Avenue and St. Hyacinth parish (on the block where the church is located, only 28 percent of the population was Latino).

Today, Jackowo hangs on as the heart of Chicago's Polonia, primarily because of St. Hyacinth parish and the retail and professional services in the area. Founded in 1894, St. Hyacinth had almost 4,000 registered families in 1990 (40 percent of whom were new immigrants) and again as many nonregistered Polish families who attend Mass (the majority are new immigrants). For the past 15 years, as many as 10,000 Poles attend weekly one of the sixteen Polish-language Masses (four on Sundays and two each weekday), more than 4,000 Easter baskets are Blessed on Holy Saturday, and at least 2,000 people participate in the Feast of the Corpus Christi in June. The neighborhood surrounding St. Hyacinth is composed of single-family dwellings, two-flats, and small apartment buildings. The newest immigrants rent apartments, rooms, and sometimes only a 10-by-20-foot space cordoned off by a sheet in a basement. Renters are often undocumented workers not intending to stay permanently in the United States, or they are the newest arrivals, who quickly move into other (better) neighborhoods once they are oriented.

Jackowo's Polish concourse on Milwaukee Avenue has shortened over the last 20 years. During the late 1980s, the block between Central Park and Diversey was a trilingual community, home to a Polish bookstore, several Polish restaurants, and numerous store signs advertising "Mowimy po Polsku" and "Hablamos Espanol." Today, the Polish bookstore, restaurants, and "Mowimy po Polsku" placards are gone from this block, and Spanish has become the *lingua franca*.

One block north, however, it is still indisputably Polish urban space. In the summer of 2002, more than 90 percent of the stores had Polish-language signs and/or names, and only

five had any Spanish-language signs (and this included the laundromat, where the sign asking customers to please mind their children was written in Spanish but not in English or Polish). More than half (56 percent) of the 85 stores on the block have the same name and sell the same goods or provide the same services as they did in 1989. One of the new businesses, however, is a Mexican restaurant sandwiched between the Polish florist and a Polish department store.

Although Jackowo businesses provide goods and services in Polish, Jackowo does not resemble a traditional ethnic neighborhood. No ethnic organizations are present in the community, the Polish Welfare Office is not located there, nor are the fraternal, political, cultural, or intellectual organizations. The Poles attending the Masses and shopping in the stores come from the entire Chicago metropolitan region, and the transient shoppers do not contribute to building a community, although they do stabilize the area as a market region. Mostly this is an immigrant consumer-service community of retail shops and professional offices that includes Polish-speaking doctors, dentists, lawyers, and accountants as well as meat markets and delicatessens, liquor stores, bakeries, florists, travel agencies, and the central shipping company, Polamer. The businesses that have expanded over the last fifteen years are those providing immigrants services (travel agencies, passport and visa services, translators, and shipping companies) as well as the deli-liquor stores. On this strip, only three restaurants and three bars are present (there are more herbalists than bars), and few public places are available for gathering or community-building—no theaters, concert halls, auditoriums, libraries, or even parks. It is not a companionate neighborhood, but an urban strip where Poles buy goods and receive services.

Jackowo is well known in Poland, and new arrivals quickly find their way to the community. It is a central place to shop, and it even has tourist appeal—visitors from Poland come to see St. Hyacinth the same way they go to visit the Sears Tower. Despite these attractions, however, it does not have a good reputation. New immigrants refer to the area as a place "with a lot of



primitivism and simplicity” that “looks sloppy” and has a lot of “people who drink and swear.” One Pole said, “I only go there to see the dentist. I was down there last week at ten in the morning and people were drunk already.” Another said that, in Jackowo, there are “mostly more poor people, recent immigrants, those who came just shortly and this is more like a ghetto.”

Farther west, on Belmont Avenue, is a newer Polonian community considerably more attractive to immigrants than Jackowo. Today, the Central and Belmont intersection is known as “the center of Polonia.” According to the 1990 census, in the tracts adjacent to this intersection, a third to a half of the population was Polish, and half of the Polish population was foreign-born. Throughout the 1990s, this section continued to attract new Polish immigrants so that, by 2000, half of the population was Polish and over three-quarters of them were immigrants. Just south of Belmont, the Polish population decreases, and the Latino population increases. In tract 1511, bordering on Belmont, half the population is Polish and 20 percent is Latino; one tract south, the Polish population drops to 34 percent, and the Latino population rises to 41 percent. One farther tract south, 68 percent of the population is Latino and only 20 percent is Polish.

The Belmont-Central community looks like a traditional Polish neighborhood, with more owner-occupied homes, long-term renters, and more public ethnic space in bookstores, cafes, and the library. In addition, numerous professional, retail, and immigrant-service businesses are present, as well as restaurants, nightclubs, the headquarters for a Polish-language newspaper (*Kurier*), and a Polish medical clinic. Of interest, however, is the recent marketing strategy of using “European” rather than “Polish” for businesses: European Foot and Ankle; European Optical; Continental Café; European Kwiaty (*kwiaty* is flowers in Polish); European Quality Tuck-pointing; European Motors; and European Music. Despite the pan-ethnic symbols, the area is predominantly Polish.

The local neighborhood library, Portage-Cragin, houses the second largest Polish-language collection in the Chicago Public Library system (the first is housed in the Harold Washington central library). Helen Ziolkowska,

an immigrant who arrived in 1974 with a degree in Polish philology from Jagiellonian University and started working at the branch in 1984, was instrumental in amassing the 7,000-volume collection that includes fiction, reference books, and nonfiction work on Poland. After 1989, a proliferation of English-language books was translated into Polish, and today, Danielle Steele and Edith Wharton are found on the shelves next to Henryk Sienkiewicz and other classic Polish writers. Ziolkowska is representative of the large number of educated immigrants from Poland, and her professional life is dedicated to meeting the needs of and expanding the spaces for educated immigrants. She started a Polish-language book club at the branch in 2002 (two others are at branches in Northwest neighborhoods and a fourth is on the South Side), and she is also the founder and editor of *Głos Nauczyciela*, a quarterly journal for Polish educators, established in 1985. New immigrants created a demand for bilingual services in city offices, schools, and institutions, and they also supply the teachers, librarians, and professional bilingual personnel to meet these needs. Polish bilingual programs, started in 1978, enrolled more than 300 students city wide by 1990, and this number jumped to 4,300 students by 1998 (Coleman 2004).

The city also expanded its collection of Polish-language materials in the library system. The Slavic Librarian of the Literature and Language Division at the Harold Washington Library, Maria Zakrzewska, an immigrant with a master’s degree in philology from Poland, began working at the Chicago Public Library (CPL) in 1993. In 1995, she applied for and received a grant for \$21,000 to build the Polish-language collection, which dates back to 1883. Currently, the library has approximately 15,000 Polish-language volumes in its collection as well as five daily newspapers from Poland and twelve magazines. Eleven branches of the Chicago Public Library have Polish collections along with five suburban public libraries (the Skokie Public library houses the largest collection, containing 630 Polish-language books). This growth in Polish collections at suburban libraries parallels the growth of suburban Polish residents.



## SUBURBAN POLES: EDUCATED PROFESSIONALS AND SKILLED LABORERS

Although temporary immigrants and recent arrivals often resettle in traditional Polish quarters in the city, an increasing number of immigrants are moving to suburban communities. Between 1983 and 1998, the number of new arrivals listing a suburban zip code as their intended residence more than doubled from 16 to 36 percent (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 1983–1998). In addition, within five to ten years after arrival, many immigrants buy homes in the suburbs. This represents a marked difference from earlier immigrants, many of whom lived and died in the urban neighborhoods and whose descendants had assimilated culturally and structurally before moving into the suburbs. The suburbs on the northwest and southwest borders of the city (those adjacent to the Polish communities in the city) experienced the largest influx of new immigrants (Map 9.2, color insert).

Immigrants' move to the suburbs reflects a general population trend. From 1960 to 1990, the overall city population declined, especially the white population, whereas the population outside the city increased, in Cook and the collar counties. According to the 2000 census, 60 percent of all people reporting some Polish ancestry in Cook County lived outside of the city. Most Polish immigrants and Polish Americans are moving for the same reasons as the general white population—better public schools, more affordable housing, and increased quality of life (e.g., larger yards, better air quality, lower crime rates). Suburban life also represents social mobility—as immigrants become established and more secure in their occupations, they want to “move up,” and moving up often involves moving out of the city. One immigrant said: “In the Polish mentality, for young immigrants this is a step up: You made it in America, you move to the suburbs.” Asked why he moved to the suburbs instead of buying a house in the Belmont-Central neighborhood where his medical practice is located, one doctor said, “My status is such that I can afford something nicer, bigger, more independent. You want something bigger, some comfort, to live in the

house with no neighbors below or above. Status. Comfort. So people are moving, when they are somewhat richer, they are moving outside.”

Moving out of the urban community also means moving away from encroaching minority communities. Poles in America quickly develop stereotypes that indict blacks and Latinos as undesirable neighbors. One Polish priest stated that Polish immigrants were moving out of the city “because blacks, Asians, and Spanish-speaking people [were] moving more into the city. The black community is coming, more and more, along the CTA, you know.” Several Polish realtors and priests made similar comments:

- “[They are] moving away from Mexicans. . . [They] move to escape the Mexicans.”
- “Clients prefer all-white neighborhoods. This constitutes a better neighborhood for them.”
- “A better neighborhood has better schools and is usually white. Polish immigrants want a white neighborhood.”
- “Churches are being overrun by Hispanics. They don’t want to live by blacks or Hispanics.”
- “How about Asians? They prefer to live by whites than Asians.”
- “[They] don’t want to live near people of color. They are worried property values will go down. . . . They have a really bad attitude toward living near people of color. I shouldn’t even be telling you this.”
- “They want to live in a good neighborhood. And a good neighborhood is usually white, but they will never escape the Mexicans. There are so many of them. They are everywhere.”

Where Poles live also suggests they prefer white neighborhoods. According to an article in the *Chicago Sun-Times* (June 7, 1992), Polish Americans tend to move to suburban towns that have more Germans, Italians, and Irish than racial minorities. In 1990, in city tracts with the highest concentration of Poles, there were no African Americans; by 2000, less than 3 percent of the *Jackowo* community was African American.

Polish immigrants who move to the suburbs tend to be homeowners rather than renters, permanent immigrants rather than working



vacationers, and better-educated professionals and skilled laborers rather than low-skilled workers (Grammich 1992). Although knowledge of English is not a necessity, it is easier to make the move if they are not dependent on a Polish-language community. One realtor explained: "Polish immigrants coming to the United States are better educated, and the city is not as attractive to them." While English-proficient immigrants are more likely to "go suburban," speaking English is less necessary if they move to more Polish-populated suburbs such as Harwood Heights, Niles, Norridge, Des Plaines, and Park Ridge, where they can rent Polish videos, visit Polish dentists, and find bilingual cashiers at chain stores. Shoppers can buy the *Dziennik Zwiazkowy* in their local Osco or Jewel, and residents can socialize with compatriots at Polish sports clubs and social groups organized in places like Des Plaines and Park Ridge.

The immigrants buying homes in the suburbs usually have been in the United States five to ten years. They have moderate incomes and buy houses in the range of \$120,000 to \$300,000. Their move often corresponds with their children's educational needs (e.g., moving to the suburbs when the child is entering high school). Leona Stagg, a former Chicago English-as-second-language (ESL) instructor stated: "These immigrant parents will secure two or three jobs, save their money, then move to the suburbs, where they feel the best possible education is available to their children. . . . They most likely will not need a Polish bilingual program at their new suburban school" (Coleman 2004, 35).

Although the bilingual programs are located in the city schools, in the suburbs, Polish children are more likely to attend Polish Saturday Schools that teach Polish language, history, geography, literature, and culture three hours a week (usually on Saturday mornings). Parents pay tuition for the schools (the classes are often held in the classrooms of parochial schools), which covers the nominal costs of the teachers (\$10 per hour in 2002), most of whom are immigrants themselves with master's degrees from Polish universities. The materials for the elementary and high school courses are developed,

compiled, and distributed by the Polish Teachers Association in America, which is located in Chicago. In 1983, there were 18 Polish Saturday Schools, with 130 teachers and 3,000 students; by 2002, there were 27 schools with 647 teachers and 13,425 students. Before 1974, only one of the schools was located in the suburbs; today, over half of them are.

In the suburbs, Polish immigrants are more visible than later-generation Polish Americans, who often marry outside the ethnic group, no longer speak Polish, and are more evenly dispersed throughout the suburbs. The new Polish immigrants are not assimilated Americans. In the suburbs, the Polish presence is visible, but it is tucked between the national chains. For example, in a strip mall at the corner of Lawrence and Harlem, across from the Old Warsaw Restaurant, Rich's Food and Liquors advertises in Polish and hires only Polish immigrants, many of whom do not speak English well. Next to the liquor store is a Polish calling card-phone store, a Polamer (shipping company), and an Avis Car Rental, Office Max, Copy Max, and an Italian restaurant. Polish business owners share space with other ethnic retail shops. Nearby, on Lawrence, another strip mall holds the Aztec Mexican Restaurant, Sobieski's Deli, a Filipino restaurant, and a Polish video store. In Niles, Harwood Heights, and Des Plaines, a variety of professional shingles with Polish last names (e.g., doctors, dentists, accountants, lawyers, travel agents) are visible, as is an occasional Polish deli, and signs for Polish realtors and construction companies abound, but no "Mowimy po Polsku" signs are visible in the windows (yet). Although the Polish presence in the suburbs is noticeable, unlike in *Jackowo* and Belmont Central, it does not define the community.

With the delis, video stores, and professional services, many immigrant needs are met in the suburbs, but not all of them. Krystina Flaherty, a Polish immigrant and Director of the European American Ministry for the Archdiocese of Chicago said:

Everything moved out there. They don't want to come to the city [because] all the Polish stores, moved there—Polamer, Koligowski Sausage and, when you have that, people say, well why not churches? They used to go [into the city]



shopping for the Polish food, stop for the Mass, and then go home. Now they don't need to do that because they have all these things available where they are. So they think, people are very comfortable with their nice homes and shopping malls, so what's missing? The missing part would be a Mass. The problem is, from the church point of view, that there are not too many services offered for ethnicity in general in the suburbs. Suburbs are perceived as very American.

Even when immigrants are comfortable speaking English to buy toothpaste, they prefer to pray in Polish. As Flaherty said: "I know many people who are living in the suburbs, driving a Volvo; they have a huge villa and speak perfect English and still prefer to go to a Polish Mass." The archdiocese is slowly responding to meet this preference.

#### PARISH LIFE IN THE SUBURBS: INTEGRATING POLISHNESS TO MAINTAIN CATHOLICISM

The presence of immigrants in the suburbs has led to an increased number of Roman Catholic churches offering Masses and other services in Polish. Unlike their urban counterparts, however, immigrants today are not building "Polish" churches but instead are integrating themselves into Roman Catholic parishes with the help of Polish-speaking priests. The function of the Polish-speaking priest is not to retain Polishness, but to maintain Catholicism. Prayer and spiritual attachments are deep, emotional, and more easily accessible through one's native language. One immigrant said, "Praying in Polish has a special feeling. It helps to connect me." To maintain her Catholicism, she attends a Saturday Polish Mass for herself and a Sunday English Mass with her children.

In the Chicago metropolitan region, 54 churches offer Polish masses, and one-third of these are located in suburban parishes. The traditional "Polish" churches in the cities are larger, often celebrate several Masses in Polish, and they have Polish-speaking priests in residence. In comparison, suburban churches are more likely to offer only one Mass in Polish, often celebrated by a visiting priest. These suburban

churches are not defined as "Polish parishes" but, instead, as parishes with a Polish Mass. Even a parish such as St. John Brebeuf in Des Plaines, where Polish immigrants make up 40 percent of its members, the resident Polish priest stated, "This is not a Polish parish." Whereas in the past, urban ethnic churches attracted a particular group to the exclusion of others, today Polish- or Spanish-speaking priests serve the purpose of opening the door wider, not creating a wall. One Polish suburban priest stated: "We believe Jesus is the same in your language, in my language. Jesus connects us. When we have to express our emotion in English, in Polish, in Spanish, it is okay, you can. But we in the Catholic Church have one very good point to connect all the nations. . . . Jesus will never divide, Jesus always connects. . . . It is a Catholic church, not Polish."

The initiative for Polish-speaking Masses comes from the parishioners, not the archdioceses, and more requests for Polish Masses are made than can be satisfied because of a shortage of Polish-speaking priests. The diocese keeps adding more Polish-language Masses "but there is never enough," said Flaherty. "And that creates the problem, because there are no resources available." In 2002, the archdiocese had 30 priests from Poland and a few more arrive each summer. The recruitment of Polish priests is aided by changes in immigration policy through the Immigration Act of 1990, which added a new category for workers in religious occupations (R1 visas). According to the *Statistical Yearbook of Immigration and Naturalization*, between 1993 and 1997, the United States admitted 60 to 65 Polish priests annually; in 1998, this number increased to 144, and to 177 the following year.

The Polish-language Masses in suburban parishes often attract immigrants from beyond the parish boundary and, at times, even from surrounding archdioceses (e.g., Joliet). On some Sundays or special holidays, 1,000 or more worshippers may overwhelm a church, creating parking problems and safety issues. The community within which the church is located can resent the intrusion of these "outsiders" who are not always respectful. One priest said: "They park everywhere: on sidewalks, people's lawns.



Nobody cleans up. Nobody takes care of it. That's why there is a conflict. It used to be, 'I'm from *Jackowo*, I'm from *Brunowo*.' That's their neighborhood. Now they're coming from Naperville. What do they care?"

In these cases, the Polish-language Mass does not necessarily build a geographic community, but instead serves a clientele's language needs. St. Zachary Catholic Church, in Des Plaines, a parish of roughly 2,400 families, has mostly white parishioners (Irish, Italian, Polish) with a growing Latino population. Although only 10 percent of the parishioners are Polish immigrants, the Polish-language Mass on Saturday attracts 600 to 700 devotees from neighboring suburbs, including Arlington Heights, Park Ridge, and Mount Prospect. The visiting priest who says the mass travels from Indiana.

St. John Brebeuf, in Niles, a northwest suburb located along Milwaukee Avenue, is one of the few suburban churches that has a Polish-speaking priest in residence. The parish is comprised of roughly 3,000 families; 40 percent are Polish immigrants, many of whom joined the parish in the last 10 years. Twenty years ago, Mass was celebrated in Polish by a visiting Jesuit priest, but in 2002, Father Galek, a Polish immigrant priest, joined the parish. Today, the visiting Jesuit priest celebrates the Saturday Mass (400 people attend on average). The resident Polish priest celebrates the Sunday noon Mass in Polish (for roughly 1,000 people), as well as the English-language Masses for the other parishioners. Half of those who attend the Polish-language Masses are parishioners, and the rest come from surrounding suburbs. In addition to the two Polish Masses, a Wednesday evening Marion worship group is offered for Polish-speaking parishioners, along with a Bible study group and a first-Friday devotion. The parish also features a Polish Saturday school. The Poles have changed the parish in other ways, including an increased number of processions during the holidays (e.g., Lent and Corpus Christi) that include more Polish banners. Father Galek maintains, however, that Poles have not changed the church in any significant ways, that the immigrants strengthen the church by bringing in new members, and that the church serves Catholics, not Poles. He states that, for new immigrants, the

"experience of the Mass in the Polish language is better for them. . . . We care that the Polish community becomes good Catholic Americans."

Krystina Flaherty often hears Americans criticize the Polish-language Mass as potentially fragmenting the church and taking away from the parish "because they don't bond if they go to a Polish parish. My answer to them is, if there is no Polish [Mass] they won't go at all, so instead of losing people, it's at least better that they hang on." She said the suburban priests resent the ethnic-language Masses more than urban priests, who are used to the multiethnic community and "don't make a big deal out of it. If we were to open up more Masses in Polish in the inner city, we would not have half of the problems that we have in the suburbs." Regarding resistance to Polish-language Masses in the suburbs, Flaherty said, "I think the bottom line is that the suburbs don't want to be called ethnic. They all want to be Americanized. The churches in the city were built by the immigrants, so they become the 'Polish' church. But in the suburbs, there is an American church."

Polish-language Masses recapitulate the larger pattern of Polish immigration in the suburbs in that immigrants are not creating Polish neighborhoods, nor are they residing in the suburbs as assimilated, nonethnic Americans. Instead, they are being incorporated into nonethnic suburbs as Polish immigrants.

## CONCLUSION

Emigration from Poland has existed for over a century, and it will continue for as long as the United States keeps open its borders, because cultural and social factors keep the sending and receiving country linked. In some regions of Poland, emigration has become embedded in the collective memory of the villages: It is written into songs, it finds its face on gravestones, and it is expressed in the material growth of the village (Erdmans 1999). For these villages, Chicago is an intimate component of their economy and culture. For example, almost every one of the 300 residents in Dlugopole in the province of Nowy Sacz has a close relative living in Chicago. The wealth of the villages of Nowy Sacz is reflected in



the large two- and three-story “Chicago houses” so named because of their source of capital, not their architectural style (Hundley 1998). Marriages, births, and deaths that happen in Chicago are recorded in the parish books in Poland. And most important, the money continues to flow from the labor of immigrants to their families in Poland. Between 1994 and 1999, Polish workers’ remittances to Poland from the United States totaled \$4.4 billion.

During the 1990s, two of every five Polish newcomers to the United States settled in the Chicago metropolitan region, as did almost half the Polish refugees of the 1980s. They settled here because of habit, because they knew people here, and because the established ethnic and immigrant community made it easier to locate jobs and housing, secure bank loans, and find a doctor, priest, or herbalist who spoke Polish. Social networks attract new immigrants because they are conduits for information, reduce the risk of working illegally, and counter the threat of loneliness with restaurants, nightclubs, churches, theaters, sports clubs, and media. Polish-language newspapers and employment agencies help new immigrants find jobs and facilitate their incorporation into American society. And finally, because of the way our immigration laws are designed, family networks bring in new immigrants. Neoliberal migration policies, global inequality, national habits, thick social networks, and ethnic institutional completeness ensure the continuation of Polish immigration to Chicago.

When they arrive, the new immigrants settle both within and beside the old established Polish neighborhoods. The two types of neighborhoods discussed in this article represent old and new forms of integration. The immigrants in the *Jackowo* and Belmont–Central areas are living in ethnic Polish communities, working, praying, socializing, and shopping with other immigrants. They reproduce old patterns of resettlement and represent new Polonia in old neighborhoods. Polish immigrants finding homes in the suburbs represent new patterns of integration. Unlike their Polish American counterparts who assimilated before suburbanizing, the new immigrants are in the process of culturally assimilating even as they are more rapidly structurally assimilating into labor markets and educational institutions. They move into the suburbs as immigrants, not homogenized ethnic whites and, as such, they bring some cultural variation (though not racial variation) into “white-bread” suburbia.

## NOTES

1. *Annual Report of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1960–76; Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1977–99*. Tables: immigrants admitted by selected class of admission and region and selected country of birth; nonimmigrants admitted by class of admission and region and selected country of birth.

2. This is the name of a television series in Poland produced and directed by Slawomir Grunberg.