



**OWENS:** Boston is not typically seen as an immigrant city today, but rather a bastion of New England, Irish, white, and other demographics. How far from reality is this perception? How has this changed in recent decades?

abandon those in order to integrate into American society.

I think it varies by social class. Of course, we have many more high-income, highly skilled immigrants today because of the skill preferences in the 1965 Immigration Act and other legislation that's been passed since then that's provided different kinds of visas to bring in skilled workers. Many of those workers do speak English already. They have skills, they're able to go into workplaces, and they have the income to be able to settle in a variety of different city neighborhoods or suburbs. Their integration experience is relatively smooth compared to less affluent immigrants and immigrants in the past who were disproportionately semi-skilled and unskilled workers.

It's really split, I'd say, because for these working class immigrants, especially if they don't speak English, which many of them don't, it can be very difficult to learn English for a variety of reasons. Language acquisition can be really important in terms of integration. If you're working two or three jobs, it can be difficult to have the time or energy to take language classes. There's also a tremendous backlog in English language classes. People who try to get into them often have to wait months, if not years, to get in. There have been efforts by the city of Boston and by various nonprofits to try and shorten those lines and deliver those services. Still, I think the odds are pretty stacked against people, given the various demands that they have and the availability of services.

**owens:** So does that lead to a strong separation of non-English speakers from the general population?

**johnson:** It does, because the less familiarity you have with the culture, the less ability you have to engage with it. One way to engage is through speaking English. There are many services now that are delivered in a number of different languages. But in general, and particularly in many workplaces, it really

helps to have English. What happens then is that immigrants tend to cluster in certain neighborhoods, especially ones they can afford, to get the support that they need. So integration takes longer, and it's usually not going to happen until the second generation—the children who grow up here and have familiarity with the culture.

**owens:** As a religion scholar, I was pleased to see a chapter on immigrant religion. Could you say a bit about what you

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discovered about the religious practices of immigrants and how they've changed over time?

**johnson:** This was something that I wanted to do from the outset because religion is such a big force in Boston. You can't understand local politics without understanding the role of the Catholic Church. Until recently, there wasn't that much writing by sociologists or by religious scholars about the role of immigrant religion. There is increasingly more now, but not a whole lot on the Boston area.

This is something I became interested in initially in looking at the Catholic Church. I was trying to understand how the church was welcoming and inte-

a forerunner—various groups split off from it and formed mosques in Cambridge, Roxbury, and another down in

