

Chapter 1 | Nashville in the New Millennium

They want immigrant labor, and then they want everybody to pack up and go home at night.

—Yvonne, a school psychologist

IN THE MIDST of one of the last interviews I conducted with schoolteachers for this study, Yvonne, a school psychologist, shared a sentiment that I had heard across Nashville since the early 2000s, and that I had largely accepted: Nashville wanted immigrant labor but not immigrant residents. Nashville, like many new destinations (Murphy et al. 2001; Rich and Miranda 2005), initially seemed to welcome the arrival of Latino workers, who filled an important labor niche in the city's residential and commercial expansion in the late 1990s and became the workers of choice in parts of the local labor market, especially its lower end. When Latino workers became Latino residents who had families, whose children enrolled in local schools, and whose daily lives became visible, however, the attitude toward immigrants in Nashville seemed to shift. Yvonne made sense of that attitudinal change by explaining that Nashville wanted immigrant laborers, but only if they went home at night. As this book suggests, Nashville's desires were more complicated than that, especially in southeast Nashville, where most of the city's immigrant population had settled. When immigrant workers went home at night, Nashville's need for immigrant labor in the city and long-term residents' concerns over cultural change in their neighborhoods came face to face in the intimate spaces of everyday life. To give a sense of what that encounter looked like in the late 2000s and how long-term residents dealt with it, let me share a vignette.

In late August 2007, my research assistant and I headed to an informational meeting on an upcoming Diversity in Dialogue (DID) series on neighborhood living in Woodbine, a Nashville neighborhood that had once been synonymous with the city's white working-class population

and was now increasingly known as “Little Mexico.” The DID series, which began in Nashville in the late 1990s as a way to bring people together to discuss pressing issues, had become a national model for addressing race relations. In these sessions, small groups of people gathered to talk about issues in their communities and to discover, according to the DID official description, “their own and others’ views on racism, diversity and immigration, and faith traditions and practices to create long-term change.”¹ In the early 2000s, the first dialogue sessions with Latino residents were held in Nashville. By the late 2000s, immigration was being addressed in its own DID series.

The organizational meeting for Woodbine’s DID in late August 2007 drew the usual group of active neighborhood residents—local men and women who participated in neighborhood associations, attended neighborhood festivals and cleanups, and generally took an interest in the affairs of the place where they lived. As the meeting began and the DID facilitator passed out flyers advertising the sessions, a participant looked around at the group of almost exclusively white attendees and commented on the irony of the *lack* of diversity at a planning meeting for a series *on* diversity. The facilitator quickly explained that the dialogues were meant to include participants from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, genders, and ages, but that participation was voluntary. Participants had to want to be part of the sessions in the first place. Another attendee shared that he had tried unsuccessfully to recruit Latino residents in his neighborhood, an effort I had observed at a neighborhood festival a few weeks earlier. Others suggested that distributing an announcement about the dialogue series over neighborhood listservs might help diversify attendance, although most agreed that immigrants were not on these listservs, which ran in English and often themselves featured heated debates about immigration. Participants also had to acknowledge that conducting the DID sessions in English, not providing child care, and holding the meetings at the same time every week put up structural barriers to the participation of younger, working immigrant families. Eventually, it was decided that participants could bring their own interpreters if they did not speak English. However, there was no funding for interpreters in the budget; and anyone who came forward to interpret would have to volunteer his or her time.

As the conversation about how to diversify Woodbine’s Diversity in Dialogue series progressed, another attendee suggested that groups such as the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) and local Hispanic churches could be asked to help with recruitment. This suggestion met with a strong response from participants, who stressed that the DID meeting was about “interactions across the street with your

neighbor," not broader community relations involving immigrants and the organizations representing them. Hispanic churches and TIRRC, it was argued, not only worked across the city, rather than in the neighborhood, but also addressed broader issues, not the specifics of residential life. For the same reasons, participants opposed inviting community leaders, who would bring "politics" to the dialogues. As one participant remarked, "There are other sessions on immigration. *This is about neighborhood living.*"

In the midst of this discussion about the differences between dialogues on immigration and dialogues on neighborhood living, a neighborhood association president asked whether the DID sessions should include participants who were "resistant" to the changes that southeast Nashville was experiencing through immigrant settlement. He shared the observation that his own association was losing members because some people felt that they were not able to talk about the main issue they saw in their neighborhood—"how to get rid of the Hispanics." Working with folks who were "ready to line up all the Hispanics and deport or shoot them," he described a man who walked through his neighborhood wearing a border patrol hat and keeping his camera out, ready to take pictures of immigrant codes violations to send to the city's Metro Department of Codes and Building Safety. Did the DID group want to invite these residents to participate as well? Another neighborhood association president answered with a resounding no, arguing that such residents were "potentially violent" and "just looking for a fight," not a constructive dialogue about life in Woodbine. The facilitator, however, again stressed that DID sessions were open to all who wanted to participate, no matter what their views were. Although there were "mechanisms" for "inviting" disruptive people to leave, she would not exclude anyone up front, based on his or her personal opinions. At this point, another attendee raised the issue of inviting "more than Hispanics." Listing the other ethnic groups living on her street—Kurds, Arabs, and Somalis—she wondered whether they too should be included. This question precipitated a discussion of what specific ethnic and racial combination in the DID sessions should represent Woodbine's multicultural mix. How could a dialogue on diversity accurately represent the diversity of *diversity*—not to mention the diversity of opinions on diversity—in southeast Nashville?

Since I knew that this attendee lived in Glencliff, a historically middle-class, predominantly white neighborhood close to but not part of the neighborhood of Woodbine, I asked how the group defined the neighborhood at the center of these dialogues. Some of the places identified as sites where a more diverse group of participants could be recruited, such as a local community center with a strong immigrant outreach program, drew

immigrants from across Nashville, and some of the participants in the room did not themselves live in Woodbine. After a lengthy discussion, the facilitator agreed to settle the matter by bringing a map to the next meeting, and the conversation returned to the need *for* diversity at a dialogue *on* diversity. Everyone was on board with diversifying the dialogue on diversity. No one, however, had a clear sense of how to do so. What is more, no one had clear ideas about whose neighborhood and which kinds of diversity the sessions should discuss.

The challenges faced by these residents in their efforts to create a space to discuss diversity and neighborhood living in southeast Nashville sit at the center of this book. Wanting to address Woodbine's racial and ethnic diversification, southeast Nashville residents struggled with how to handle the structural factors that limited the participation of the immigrants who constituted the growing "diversity" these sessions were meant to address. At the same time, although the absence of immigrants pointed to a lack of diversity in these sessions, participants were reluctant to make the meetings about immigration itself. With the politics of "neighborhood living" and the politics of immigration increasingly intertwined—not only in public discourse about neighborhoods like Woodbine but also in the minds and actions of long-term residents—how were DID participants to parse the two areas of concern? When the neighborhood in question was both nostalgic Woodbine and Nashville's "Little Mexico," talking about neighborhood living without talking about immigration was nearly impossible. Finally, in trying to focus on neighborhood living, these residents bumped up against the reality that "neighborhood" was a slippery geographic and social concept. With multiple boundaries and meanings, the neighborhood whose dynamics sat at the center of these dialogues was not identified in the same way by all attendees. Although it was clear to participants that immigration was not the main topic to be discussed but that immigrants should be present in the discussions, the question of whose neighborhood and what kind of diversity—racial and ethnic, age and gender, public opinion—remained topics to be debated at later sessions.

This book addresses how long-term residents and the local institutions with which they worked dealt with this complex situation in Nashville in the 2000s. At the same time, it examines how immigrants themselves came to grips with their new lives in Nashville as they responded to the reception they received from long-term residents. If long-term residents, like the ones at the DID meeting, understood the neighborhood to be a key locus and site of cultural contact and social dynamics in Nashville, many Latino immigrants struggled to see where they lived as an identifiable neighborhood with clear boundaries and a shared social meaning.

Aware of the dominant social norms for how one should behave in “American neighborhoods,” Latino immigrants often tried fit into their new neighborhood by conforming to these standards. Nonetheless, the ideas, practices, and institutions that long-term residents used to define the neighborhood were frequently as invisible to immigrants as immigrants were at the DID session. Living side by side, many long-term residents and new immigrants lived in social worlds defined in different ways.

Thus, even in the midst of immigrant settlement and the emergence of multicultural neighborhoods across the city, Nashville in the new millennium was home to two groups. Black and white at the top of its population pyramid yet deeply multicultural in its youngest cohorts, the city had long-standing black and white populations whose histories dated to Nashville’s founding as well as a new immigrant population whose history in the city began in the late 1990s. These two groups took different paths into Nashville, spoke different languages, and held generally different meanings of life in the Music City. Nonetheless, they met in key social spaces and institutions across the city, especially in schools and neighborhoods, even as they led separate social lives within and across these spheres (Chaney 2010). During the 2000s, long-term black and white residents and new Latino immigrants not only began to sort out together what it meant for a Southern city with a drawl to become a multicultural city with a new cosmopolitanism but also tried to sort out the details of living and working in places whose social and cultural meanings were suddenly up for grabs.

As this book suggests, those negotiations took on particular saliency in schools and neighborhoods—two social institutions that looked toward Nashville’s future and grounded memories of its past, respectively. In addition, these two institutions were profoundly reshaped by immigrant settlement in the 2000s. Moving between institutional and individual perspectives in both schools and neighborhoods, this book elucidates these shifts associated with immigrant settlement by following several threads: neighborhood and demographic change; local history and multicultural present; and immigrant adjustment to and reception in Nashville schools and neighborhoods.

In the 2000s, Nashville, like many new destinations, was unsure how to proceed at the crossroad of immigrant arrival and immigrant settlement where it found itself. In that first decade of the new millennium, Nashville registered not only initial surprise at an immigrant arrival as has been documented across other new destinations but also a more complicated response as it adjusted to an established foreign-born presence that constituted just over 10 percent of the city’s population by 2010.² With a strong

economic base in the service, construction, and light manufacturing sectors and with strong cultural links to its rural hinterland (Doyle 1985; Kyriakoudes 2003), Nashville was both a Sun Belt success story in which immigrant labor had played a key role and a quintessentially Southern city whose immigrant population had forced a reconsideration of the local social and cultural fabric. With patterns of racial segregation that dated to the antebellum period (Lovett 2005), the already divided city saw immigrant enclaves begin to change some neighborhoods from white to multi-cultural (Chaney 2010) and the rise of new forms of racial, if not social, integration in what was now “Little Mexico” and the historic heart of white, working-class Nashville. As the Music City became a popular destination for Latino immigrants in the 2000s and as the composition and politics of its neighborhoods and schools were transformed, Nashville sat at a crossroad where immigrant settlement, urban transformation, and social belonging were inextricably linked.

Nashville had little to go on in determining how to negotiate that crossroad. In traditional immigrant gateway cities such as Los Angeles and New York, and even in some new destinations where immigrants had settled in the recallable past, the arrival of immigrants could be placed within a local history of immigrant settlement.³ White and black residents, second-, third-, and fourth-generation immigrants, city officials, and other actors in such locales could access that local history of an immigrant presence to make sense of and respond to new immigrants, either framing them as similar to previous immigrant groups or marking them as different from those groups. Either way, recallable histories of immigrant settlement give destination cities cultural, political, and racial frameworks that local actors can mobilize as they interact with the newest cohort of immigrants. Equally important, a city’s recallable history of immigrant settlement gives new immigrants themselves something to draw on in their efforts to find a place there. Where native-born populations at least acknowledge a local immigrant past and where local institutions, from schools to hospitals to courts, have become accustomed to working with foreign-born populations, arriving immigrants encounter a social, cultural, and institutional context in which a recallable history of immigrant settlement, in some ways, has anticipated their presence.

How long-term residents and new immigrants across different receiving communities operationalize a recallable local history of immigrant settlement is an empirical question that, to date, has received little attention. That they can do so, however, marks a key difference from the situation in a city like Nashville, where the *absence* of a history of immigrant settlement shaped not only the institutional, cultural, social, and political incorporation of Latino immigrants who arrived in the 2000s but also un-

derstandings of those immigrants. Although Nashville had German and Irish immigrant populations as early as the 1840s and 1850s (Lovett 2005) and although Mexican workers lived near a World War I munitions factory in the early twentieth century (Kyriakoudes 2003), memories of these newcomers were too distant to be mobilized by long-term residents or local institutions to make sense of the recent Latino immigrant settlement. In addition, although the arrival of refugees in Nashville from the 1970s onward had sensitized institutions like schools and local government to a foreign-born presence, the speed and scale of Latino immigrant settlement and the legal situation faced by undocumented immigrants were so different from the experiences of refugees that Latino settlement in the Music City was looked upon as unprecedented. With no obvious way to contextualize immigrant settlement historically and no clear identity as part of a “nation of immigrants,” Nashville, like other new destinations, offered a context of reception that was arguably unique in its sharp differences from what gateway locales offered. To date, we know very little about these differences around context of reception, details of which this book examines.

Two questions, then, lie at the heart of this book: How did Nashville as a city, a local government, and a society interpret and respond to Latino immigrant settlement in the 2000s? And how did Latino immigrants come to understand their place in Nashville? As its chapters suggest, in cities like Nashville that lack a cultural framework and local history of immigration, long-term residents and the social institutions they create and embody (schools and neighborhoods, in this case) draw on key aspects of local histories and landscapes to respond to immigrant settlement. However, even as long-term residents use specific elements of local histories and collective memories to fashion a way to address demographic and social changes that otherwise seem not only out of place but also outside local history and collective identity, the absence of a recallable history of immigrant settlement shapes their adjustment to the new immigrants in their midst.⁴ In new destinations, long-term residents lack not only a language to describe Latino immigrants—as Helen Marrow (2011) noted in the early years of Hispanic migration to rural North Carolina—but also a set of experiences to suggest how to approach the immigrants newly settled in their neighborhoods, schools, and other social spaces and institutions. This book examines how that lack of a readily available way to understand and respond to immigrant settlement shaped immigrant incorporation in Nashville.

At the same time, immigrants in new destinations like Nashville also lack a readily available interpretive framework to help them adjust to their new surroundings. As documented in other studies (for example,

Stuesse 2009; Marrow 2011) and as confirmed by my own research in Nashville, Latino immigrants settling in Southern destinations often know little about these locales, especially their local and regional histories (Winders 2011). Coming to these destinations, as one Latina woman put it, “with your eyes closed,” Latino immigrants are often as unfamiliar with how immigrant settlement will proceed in new destinations as the long-term residents are. In places like Nashville, many immigrants are not only unaware of local histories but also unfamiliar with the present conditions of these places. With no intergenerational immigrant presence to relay stories of immigrant success and failure, with local immigrant memories beginning only in the mid-1990s, and with no cultural representations of Southern cities in the telenovelas, corridos, and other media through which Latin Americans learn about the United States, Latino immigrants in new destinations become familiar with their new homes primarily through their own encounters with very local landscapes and populations. As Marrow (2011) notes, it is difficult to parse out what Latino immigrants knew of race before they came to Southern locales and what they learned on-site. In other matters, however, Latino immigrants in other cities like Nashville learn about American cultural practices, social norms, and expectations through their local observations and experiences. When it came to immigrant incorporation in new destinations in the 2000s, immigrants, like long-term residents, were in uncharted territory, where local landscapes and interactions provided some of the only markers that shaped immigrant incorporation.

This book charts the features of that unknown territory of immigrant settlement and incorporation in Nashville, with the goal of showing where new destinations might fit in wider understandings of the adjustment processes associated with immigration. Moving from the school to the neighborhood, shifting from the perspectives of individuals to those of government and nongovernment institutions, and tacking between past and present, the book offers a multifaceted look at the multifaceted phenomenon of immigrant incorporation. Its path admittedly is not smooth, jumping as it does from the intimate spaces of elementary school classrooms to the bird’s-eye views of Nashville urban planners and city officials and then back to the neighborhood. Such scalar shifts are necessary, however, as is the book’s oscillation between perceptions of the neighborhood now and memories of it in the past, if we are to understand how immigrant settlement is proceeding in places like Nashville and what the different groups involved understand to be at stake in the resultant cultural and demographic transformations. To grasp the complicated nature of immigrant incorporation as it plays out on the ground, a complicated approach to the subject is required.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

To begin that process of examining immigrant incorporation in Nashville in the new millennium, chapter 2 lays out the wider context of immigrant settlement in new destinations and this book's place in the expanding literature on this topic. In part a review of key works in the field and in part an introduction to the basic idea of new immigrant destinations, the chapter discusses the new questions raised about immigrant incorporation by recent shifts in where immigrants are settling across the United States. Identifying key differences between gateway locales and new destinations, it also highlights the contribution of this study of Nashville to the growing body of work on new destinations. The chapter concludes by describing the research on which this book is based and explaining its focus on schools and neighborhoods.

Chapter 3 introduces southeast Nashville, the part of the city where most immigrants settled in the 2000s and whose local history helped shape long-term residents' perceptions of and responses to the area's changing demographics. This historical contextualization of southeast Nashville is key to understanding how its long-term residents contextualized immigrant settlement, but since this book provides a relational portrait of understandings and responses to demographic change, chapter 3 also discusses the contemporary context of reception that Latino immigrants faced in Nashville in the new millennium. These wider sets of immigrant experiences and encounters across Nashville shaped how Latino men and women came to understand neighborhood life in southeast Nashville. In moving between the longer history of southeast Nashville necessary to make sense of long-term residents' responses to immigrant settlement and the more recent features of immigrant reception necessary to understand immigrants' reactions to life in southeast Nashville, the chapter admittedly combines two themes that seem unrelated. One goal in doing so, however, is to show how these two different ways of contextualizing southeast Nashville shaped long-term residents' and immigrants' responses to one another in the 2000s. The different frames of reference used by immigrants and long-term residents to understand neighborhood life produced different narratives of neighborhood change and different individual and institutional responses to these changes. Chapter 3, thus, lays the foundation for more textured examination of the politics of immigrant incorporation and community change in Nashville, by showing the different foundations on which immigrants and long-term residents based their understandings of neighborhood life in Nashville.

Chapter 4 moves the discussion of immigrant settlement and community change into the public schools. Beginning with the history of Metro

Nashville Public Schools, especially the district's struggles to desegregate schools from the 1950s on, the chapter contextualizes one of the book's main arguments concerning the role of local histories in understanding and addressing immigrant settlement in Nashville. Although seasoned teachers in southeast Nashville used their past experiences with students, especially their experiences during the era of busing, to make sense of their present multicultural student body, they did so outside a language of race or ethnicity, despite the fact that both busing and immigrant settlement were deeply racialized events in Nashville and beyond. Examining the comparisons that teachers drew between bused children brought to southeast Nashville schools from the 1970s through the late 1990s and ELL (English-language learner) students coming to southeast Nashville schools from surrounding neighborhoods in the 2000s, the chapter examines why teachers avoided a language of race to describe racialized transitions in their classrooms and how they struggled with their decisions to do so.

Chapter 5 builds on these arguments, analyzing how teachers handled diversity in their classrooms by claiming not to see it. Through a discussion of teachers' ways of addressing ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse classrooms in the 2000s, it examines what happened when teachers' efforts not to talk about race encountered wider discourses of multiculturalism, broader debates about immigration, and the politics of Southern history. Teachers in southeast Nashville worked hard not to see, or acknowledge seeing, differences among students and to keep Nashville's immigration politics out of the classroom. Such strategies enabled them to work through the demographic and political shifts associated with immigrant settlement in Nashville in the 2000s, especially the city's growing anti-immigrant rhetoric in 2007. When it came time for history lessons, however, teachers struggled to find ways to help immigrant students place themselves in Nashville's local past, especially in the eras of Jim Crow and the civil rights movement. Immigrant children, faced with no recallable history of immigrants in Nashville and sitting in classrooms where difference was downplayed, struggled to link their own identities to those of past Southern residents, black or white. The same strategies that teachers used to cope with social and political changes related to immigrant settlement made it difficult for them to provide both a contemporary and a historical context for their students' connections to Nashville's own history.

Chapter 6 shifts the focus and scale of analysis from the intimate spaces of the classroom in southeast Nashville to the wider institutional context of government and nonprofit organizations across the city. Examining how Nashville saw, understood, and addressed Latino immigrants as urban res-

idents, it argues that immigrant institutional invisibility is an unacknowledged precursor to immigrant incorporation. The chapter lays out the ways in which Latino immigrants in Nashville were often institutionally invisible as neighborhood residents, as recipients of social services, and as part of the city's urban future and suggests that this invisibility resulted from institutional practices of local government that empowered Nashville neighborhoods but made immigrants hard to see and to serve. When restructurings of local government further reduced the city's ability to identify immigrant residents and their needs, the link between the structure of local governance and the increasingly multicultural public it served and represented across Nashville became complicated.

Chapter 7 shifts the focus and scale of analysis again, this time from the citywide view of immigrant Nashville to the intimate spaces of daily life in the neighborhood. Through an examination of how Latino immigrants understood and adjusted to life in southeast Nashville neighborhoods, it discusses why these neighborhoods had silent streets and why Latino immigrants chose not to speak in them. Latino immigrants made the decision to be quiet in their new neighborhoods in response to what they observed of their white neighbors, what they knew of negative stereotypes of Hispanics across Nashville, and what they had heard or imagined about African American neighborhoods elsewhere in the city. Their decision, however, backfired: rather than being accepted in the neighborhood by being quiet, immigrants were viewed by long-term residents as failing to adopt local norms of neighborliness. Immigrants' strategy of silence in the neighborhood demonstrates two key factors in immigrant incorporation in a new destination. First, it shows the role of geography in immigrant integration and exclusion in Nashville: immigrants came to understand how they should live in southeast Nashville neighborhoods by comparing those neighborhoods to other parts of the city. Second, it makes clear how racial distancing, especially between Latino and black residents, was accomplished through the city's social geography of race, especially its long-standing patterns of racial segregation. In the end, Latino immigrants' attempts to acculturate in the neighborhood were interpreted by their long-term neighbors as a refusal to adopt locally recognized standards in the neighborhood, and both groups were left with conflicting definitions of what it took to be a neighbor in southeast Nashville.

Chapter 8 augments chapter 7's discussion of Latino immigrants' understanding of neighborhood life in southeast Nashville by examining the corresponding viewpoints of long-term residents. As it shows, not only did long-term residents and Latino immigrants understand neighborhood in different ways, but long-term residents institutionally defined neighborhood in a manner that inadvertently excluded immigrants from

its social meanings. Detailing how long-term residents struggled to narrate immigrant settlement in the context of a wider local history of neighborhood, the chapter lays out how immigrants unintentionally redefined local neighborhood spaces that, for long-term residents, were intimately bound up with their own identities. Long-term residents responded by turning to historical events, especially busing, to tell the story of those changes and explain an immigrant presence in the present. The chapter ends with a discussion of the institutional histories of two southeast Nashville neighborhoods that dealt with neighborhood change by mobilizing a local past that redefined the present state of their neighborhoods but inadvertently excluded Latino immigrants by predating them.

Chapter 9 brings together the discussions of the politics of immigrant settlement in Nashville schools and neighborhoods, again rescaling these dynamics to the wider context of Nashville's overall racial and class politics. Revisiting some of the book's main arguments, it examines how population growth and ethnic and racial diversification in southeast Nashville combined with long-standing racial inequalities in historically black north Nashville to bring Nashville's multicultural present and biracial past together in the late 2000s. This joining of past and present also forced the city to think about diversity beyond the concentrated residential geography of southeast Nashville. Using this discussion as a springboard, the chapter lays out three interventions in the wider field of migration studies called for by a fine-grained analysis of a new destination like Nashville and outlines areas for future research on new destinations to which this study points. The chapter closes with a reflection on one neighborhood's effort to think about local history and ethnic diversity at the same time and to work along the two axes of history and diversity that shaped immigrant incorporation and the politics of immigrant settlement in Nashville in the new millennium.