

Ewelina Gdaniec¹

SOCIAL TOPOGRAPHY OF THE BRONX IN NEW YORK CITY

Abstract: The article presents potential sources of diversity of New York City's borough of the Bronx. Subsequent points in the article describe the historical substrata of sociotopography of present-day city. Newcomers and immigrants settled in diverse neighborhoods in the city because of its specific features. It will be the essence of the article's analysis.

Key words: Substrata of the sociotopography of NYC, the Bronx, immigration.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article² is to present the Bronx' neighborhoods and analyze them in terms of biculturalism. The United States is said to be *a melting pot*, meaning that it includes a variety of ethnic groups, which mix together and form one concrete nation. Thus it seems only partially true about the country, thus there is an instance of New York City, which is a unique place and requires further research. New York City should rather be called *a salad bowl*³. A salad bowl of New York City is made of many pieces, which are completely separate, but are tied up by a dressing of Americanism that involves the English language, unique American customs and traditions, and specific political system. Ethnic assimilation has taken place in the United States since first immigrants came to the mouth of Hudson River; still many immigrants feel a strong sense of separateness and are therefore bicultural. A sense of biculturalism may be seen in many of New York City's neighborhoods⁴.

This paper aims to give insight to specific indicators relevant to sustainable diversity in New York City's social topography. Sections of this paper discuss historical substrata of the sociotopography of present-day New York City's borough of the Bronx. Newcomers and immigrants settled in diverse neighborhoods in the city because of certain features in specific

¹ Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego w Bydgoszczy. Absolwentka studiów na kierunku historia oraz filologia angielska. Obecnie jest doktorantką w Instytucie Historii i Stosunków Międzynarodowych Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, gdzie zajmuje się historią polityczną Wielkiej Brytanii po II Wojnie Światowej. Jej zainteresowania badawcze to kultura popularna Stanów Zjednoczonych i Wielkiej Brytanii, Zimna Wojna oraz szerokokorozumiana polityka kulturalna.

² The article is a follow up of author's article on Manhattan's social topography: Ewelina Gdaniec, *Freedom in the sociotopography of Manhattan in New York city*, [in:] *Wolność t. I.*, ed. P. Szczepańczyk, Warszawa 2016 and an extended version of the author's M.A. thesis in the University of Kazimir the Great in Bydgoszcz: Substrata of sociotopography of New York City form 2014.

³ Maryanne K. Datesman, JoAnn Crandall, *The American Ways: An Introduction to American Culture*, New York 1997, s. 140-145.

⁴ *ibidem*, s. 147-148.

periods of time. Both are the main points of interest to this paper. A comparative approach was used to examine important historic periods in order to examine the development of ethnic neighborhoods in the borough. Rapid reshaping of New York City caused by surge into the suburbs and gentrification processes are also points of interest of this paper.

The analysis of the article is built upon qualitative data collected from New York City census data, local newspapers, maps, and reports of governmental and non-governmental organizations over the previous eighteen years. The main source of information about population diversity in certain neighborhoods is culled from New York City's census data from 2000 and 2010. Distribution of ethnic groups in each of five boroughs of New York City can be found on maps from *New York Times* magazine⁵, which appear to be a resplendent tool to investigate exact amount of inhabitants of certain ethnic background in a specific neighborhood. These maps visualize apparent differences in the sociotopography of five boroughs, especially the Bronx, which is the essence of this article.

Through centuries New York City has been reshaped as people of Hispanic, Asian and African American origin surged from the city's center into the suburbs. Gentrification by people of White Nonhispanic origin was widening in the neighborhoods of Manhattan, Brooklyn and Staten Island. These processes have changed the look of the Bronx as well. Castle Hill and Hunts Point in the Bronx are perfect examples of neighborhoods, which were mainly inhabited by non-Whites and are now transferring into 'Little-somethings' because of a rapid expansion of a certain ethnic group in the area.

Nonetheless, this tendency has a positive influence on social diversity of New York City. The previous European-like architecture and landscape has been enriched by additions of different cultures succeeding one after another. The thriving immigrant communities have been giving visitors access to wares and culinary delights from all over the world in one place. That is why New York City and especially the Bronx are so attractive for the research.

2. Migration to the Bronx

The first man who entered New York's harbor in the 16th century was Giovanni da Verrazzano. Exactly a century after him first settlers from the Netherlands came to the newly discovered territories. A lot of immigrants coming from other European countries immediately followed them and commenced the creation process of New York City's exceptionality. The majority of

⁵ *The Bronx. Demographic Profile – New York City Community Districts 2000 and 2010*, 2010, [in:] <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx1profile.pdf>, [bx2profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx2profile.pdf), [bx3profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx3profile.pdf), [bx4profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx4profile.pdf), [bx5profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx5profile.pdf), [bx6profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx6profile.pdf), [bx7profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx7profile.pdf), [bx8profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx8profile.pdf), [bx9profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx9profile.pdf), [bx10profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx10profile.pdf), [bx11profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx11profile.pdf), [bx12profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx12profile.pdf), accessed January 14, 2014.

newcomers were Englishmen followed by French and Dutch people. With ongoing years others came the new inhabitants from Ireland, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Finland, and German territories⁶.

The rapid colonization of coastal terrains of what is now New York encouraged people of all cultures, ethnic backgrounds, and religions to settle there. As a result, latter-day New York City is an assortment of many unique neighborhoods, all of which have very distinct backgrounds.

Immigration has a very wide context especially when it comes to the migration to a specific city and to a particular country. Migration is a movement of a person from a particular place to another. It can be said that a migrant is a person who moves from one city to another or from one country to another; therefore everyone who moves is a migrant. Immigration is, on the other hand, a term used to describe a person who moves from their motherland to another country with an intention to settle there for a particular time⁷.

Nowadays there are three criteria for immigrants, namely: legal immigrants, illegal immigrants and refugees. Legal are those who possess permission to stay in the new country. Illegal, or undocumented, migrants are those whose stay is not allowed by the authorities of the country of migration. Refugees are those migrants who escape threats of persecution or war, which they may encounter in their own country⁸.

Reasons for immigration are diverse and have been changing through ages. In the colonial times main reasons for migration were: hunger, the want to find a job, dream of a better life, seeking religious freedom, curiosity, etc. As Stuart Anderson points out about points of similarity between early colonization of New York City and immigration now: “Two aspects of immigration to the United States have rarely changed. First, immigrants come to America for a variety of reasons, primarily for economic opportunity and the chance to live in a free society. (...) Second, opposition to immigration has always existed in America, with the degree of partial obstacles to those immigrating (...)”⁹. Be that as it may, in the colonial times there were also waves of immigrants who were transported against their will, namely African slaves.

Reasons for immigration to America were also dictated by historical events that had been happening on certain continents. Whenever a war or an uprising took place in a region of Europe or another continent, more and more people from that region decided to flee and seek

⁶ Caroline Cox, *Opening Up North America, 1479-1800*, New York 2010, s. 27-28.

⁷ Cath Senker, *The debate about immigration*, New York 2008, s.2.

⁸ *ibidem*, s. 3-4.

⁹ Stuart Anderson, *Immigration*, Santa Barbara 2010, s. 2.

stabilization in America. Other push factors for people to migrate were, and still are, natural disasters as floods or famine. However, not everyone could have made a decision to immigrate as extremely high spending followed such an endeavour¹⁰.

3. Ethnic background of the Bronx

The establishment of a dominant culture was immediate after newcomers from England and Netherlands settled there. It casts back to the 1790 and the first census that showed that eight out of ten people living in New York City, at that time, had English roots. Though, the sociotopography of the city transferred rapidly; newcomers from all over Europe, Asia, Central and South America were constantly arriving and settling there. Some ethnic groups still occupy areas in which their ancestors and kin have been living since 18th or 19th century. On the other hand, some ethnic groups moved to other areas, subsequently creating new homogeneous neighborhoods. Some places in New York City have never been dominantly homogeneous and still remain ethnically diversified¹¹.

As it appears, the grounds of latter-day social topography of New York City may be grouped as follows: 1) neighborhoods with unchanged ethnic background of inhabitants, 2) neighborhoods with changed ethnic background of inhabitants, 3) mixed neighborhoods. Substrata of today's topography of New York City are visible in the city's history¹². In previous centuries ethnic groups, other than White Nonhispanic, were forced to live in certain areas because of the price of land, proximity of cultural center, religious temple, and potential work place. With time, people moved because of private or cultural reasons, leaving land for sale, and other groups moved in, subsequently attracting others of similar ethnicity to move there as well. That is how second and third models of neighborhood were created. Even regarding this, it is troublesome to elucidate why neighborhoods in which number of inhabitants of each ethnic background is even are so hard to find in today's New York. Still, in the city there is a noticeable preference to live in ethnically homogeneous neighborhoods.

To conclude, it seems that New York City has never been ethnically homogenous. From its very beginning the land around what is now the biggest city on the East coast has been occupied by people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In the 16th and 17th century, people of Dutch and English origin lived side by side with native people, who were later forced to move. Beginning in the 16th century efforts were made to preserve Dutch settlement

¹⁰ Senker, op. cit., s. 6-7.

¹¹ Datesman, Crandall, op. cit., s. 148.

¹² ibidem, s. 149.

exclusively, though it was not successful as more and more immigrants surged. New Amsterdam's citizens protested against the newcomers, but the authorities ignored this reluctance, as they sought workforce and inhabitants to add to the population number. Moreover, the term 'complementary identity' can be used to characterize all inhabitants of New York City, as they possess both an ethnic identity and a national identity as American citizens. In today's America the trend is toward multiculturalism, not assimilation. The old 'melting pot' metaphor is giving way to new metaphors such as 'mosaic' or 'salad bowl', meaning mixtures of various ingredients that keep their individual characteristics. It is exactly that way in New York City. Immigrant populations within New York City are not particularly blending together into one nation, but rather they combine a multicultural mosaic¹³.

Critics of the 'salad bowl' theory argue that because of the fact that citizens of New York City preserve their original customs and traditions they cannot now become truly New Yorkers. It seems thought, that from its very beginnings up to that day New York City has been that way. Thanks to such diversity, New York City has become a very unique place on earth where people of all races live alongside each other.

4. The Bronx nowadays

At the beginning the Bronx was a separate area of farms sustaining the city's needs, however, in the 19th century a railway station was built there and that initiated the abrupt development of this area. The population growth slowed during the Great Depression.

The Bronx is situated on the mainland, though several small islands are attached to its boundaries: Hunters Island, City Island, Hart Island, North Brother's Island and Rikers Island. There are also four peninsulas: Hunt's Point, Clason's Point, Throg's Neck, and Screvin's Neck. Its boundaries include the East River, the Hudson River at New Jersey, and the Long Island Sound¹⁴.

The Bronx River, which is the only source of freshwater in New York City, divides the Bronx into West and East halves, although the official boundary of West Bronx and East Bronx is set on the Jerome Avenue, which leads from the Macombs Dam Bridge to the Mde Service Road. It is worth mentioning that nearly twenty per cent of the Bronx's area is park; it appears that the reason for that may be seen in its rural beginnings. The largest park in New York City is situated there, namely, Pelham Bay Park. Other open-space areas are: Bronx Park, Crotona

¹³ *ibidem*, s. 147-150.

¹⁴ *N.Y. ADC. LAW § 2-202: NY Code - Section 2-202: Division into boroughs and boundaries thereof*, n.d., [in:] <http://codes.lp.findlaw.com/nycode/ADC/2/2/2-202> accessed January 2, 2014.

Park, the New York Botanical Gardens, Van Cortlandt Park and Woodlawn Cemetery. There is also a zoo, which is one of the largest city zoos in the United States¹⁵.

The most characteristic points of the West Bronx are: Wave Hill, Woodlawn Cemetery, Hall of Fame for Great Americans, Van Courtland House Museum and Our Lady of Angels Parish Church. On the East side of the Bronx representative are: Bronx Botanical Garden and Bronx Zoo. In the area of Concourse there is the Bronx Museum of Arts and Yankee Stadium. What is more, on City Island there are numerous Yacht Clubs and City Island Nautical Museum. In the area of Morris Park Avenue there is Muslim Centre, and nearby Our Lady of Solace Church and St Dominic Church are situated¹⁶.

After the Great War ended the population number rose from 200,507 in 1900 to 1,265,258 in 1930. Until 1950, Bronx was the third most populated borough, however, from that time Queens took over with the total population of 1,550,849. After 1960 the population of the Bronx decreased from 1,424,814 to 1,203,789 in 1990 and after that rose again to 1,385,108 in 2010. Interestingly, the number of foreign-born population changed in the same way: increased from 61,258 in 1900 to 479,451 in 1930 and later decreased to 306,592 in 1960 and 274,793 in 1990. In 2010 it increased again to 475,434¹⁷.

The newest census data show that of all foreign-born citizens of the Bronx the largest group is people of Hispanic origin, most of them come from the Dominican Republic, namely 161,957 of foreign-born citizens of Bronx, 49,053 from Jamaica and 47,164 from Mexico. Other significant groups were born in: South America 44,383, Africa 39,766 with more than thirty-two thousand from Western Africa and majority from Ghana, Asia 34,540 and Eastern Europe 14,214¹⁸. The tables below¹⁹ are based on Census data from 2000, and present inhabitants' ethnicity in each of twelve districts of the Bronx:

1. Melrose, Port Haven, Port Morris
2. Hunts Point, Longwood
3. Claremont, Corotona Park East,
4. Concourse, Mount Eden,
5. Morris Heights, Mount Hope, Fordham

¹⁵ *The Bronx Map*, n.d. [in:] <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/parking/bx.pdf?epi-content=GENERIC> accessed January 14, 2014.

¹⁶ *ibidem*.

¹⁷ *Total and Foreign-Born Population - New York Metropolitan Region by Subregion and County, 1900–2000, 2000* [in:] http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/nny_table_5_3.pdf accessed January 4, 2014; *Place of Birth for the Foreign-Born Population, 2010*, [in:] http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/nyc_boros_2010_place_of_birth.pdf accessed January 4, 2014.

¹⁸ *ibidem*.

¹⁹ *The Bronx. Demographic Profile...*, accessed January 30, 2014.

6. Belmont, Bathgate, Bronx Park South, West Farms, East Tremont
7. Bedford Park, Kingsbridge Heights, Norwood
8. Kingsbridge, Riverdale,
9. Bronx River, Castle Hill, Parkchester, Union Port
10. Country Club, Edgewater Park, Westchester Sq., Pelham Bay
11. Pelham Gardens, Morris Park, Bronx Dale, Van Nest
12. Baychester, Eastchester, Edenwald, Woodlawn

Dominant groups were marked in bold.

Table 1. The Bronx' ethnicity (part 1)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
White Nonhispanic	1,428	694	918	2,193	1,791	6,219
Black Nonhispanic	23,680	11,536	31,387	47,344	36,795	21,548
Asian or Pacific Islander Nonhispanic	542	341	380	2,258	1,949	952
Other Nonhispanic	177	236	429	926	944	425
Two or More Races Nonhispanic	216	350	635	1,382	1,121	675
Hispanic Origin	62,887	39,089	46,013	92,338	85,600	53,449
TOTAL	91,497	52,246	79,762	146,441	128,200	83,268

Source: *The Bronx. Demographic Profile – New York City Community Districts 2000 and 2010*, 2010, [in:] <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx1profile.pdf>, [bx2profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx2profile.pdf), [bx3profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx3profile.pdf), [bx4profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx4profile.pdf), [bx5profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx5profile.pdf), [bx6profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx6profile.pdf), [bx7profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx7profile.pdf), [bx8profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx8profile.pdf), [bx9profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx9profile.pdf), [bx10profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx10profile.pdf), [bx11profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx11profile.pdf), [bx12profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx12profile.pdf), accessed January 14, 2014.

Table 2. The Bronx' ethnicity (part 2)

	7	8	9	10	11	12
White Nonhispanic	10,023	39,190	4,749	41,554	31,037	10,869
Black Nonhispanic	26,165	11,434	53,070	26,713	22,981	99,083
Asian or Pacific Islander Nonhispanic	9,189	5,048	9,937	5,529	8,705	2,922
Other Nonhispanic	1,260	538	2,559	997	1,080	2,062

Two or More Races Nonhispanic	1,670	1,365	2,632	1,534	1,591	2,498
Hispanic Origin	90,979	44,156	99,351	44,065	47,838	34,910
TOTAL	139,286	101,731	172,298	120,392	113,232	152,344

The Bronx. Demographic Profile – New York City Community Districts 2000 and 2010, 2010, [in:] <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx1profile.pdf>, [bx2profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx2profile.pdf), [bx3profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx3profile.pdf), [bx4profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx4profile.pdf), [bx5profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx5profile.pdf), [bx6profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx6profile.pdf), [bx7profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx7profile.pdf), [bx8profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx8profile.pdf), [bx9profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx9profile.pdf), [bx10profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx10profile.pdf), [bx11profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx11profile.pdf), [bx12profile.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bx12profile.pdf), accessed January 14, 2014.

What can be observed is the fact that mostly people of Hispanic origin populate eleven out of twelve districts. In eight districts people of African-American origin are the second largest group and in the twelfth districts they outnumber people of other origins. What is more, they also inhabit the most populated district ninth. There is a small population of White Nonhispanic people in the areas from Melrose, Port Haven and Longwood up to Fordham and Claremont Village. Though, in the western neighborhoods of Kingsbridge, Riversdale, Country Club, Edgewater Park, Pelham Gardens, Morris Park, Bronx Dale, Van Nest and City Island, White Nonhispanic is the second largest group.

What can be observed is the fact that people of White Nonhispanic origin mostly inhabit the Northwest coast of the Bronx and the Northern neighborhood of Van Cortlandt Park. Great majority of inhabitants of Norwood, Kingsbridge and Marble Hill are people of Hispanic origin. As Joyce Cohen points out: “By the mid-1900's, the Kingsbridge area was largely Irish; immigrants from Italy, Greece and Eastern Europe followed. Today, many newcomers are from the Dominican Republic, Central America and South America. "When you say mosaic, this is a mosaic," said Terry Bastone, a 30-year resident originally from Cuba”²⁰.

It was similar in areas of Norwood and Marble Hill, which originally were ‘WASP’ neighborhoods and later were taken over by people of Hispanic origin. People of African-American origin are in a visible majority over other nations in the area of Williamsbridge and Baychester. However, an increase in the number of people of Hispanic origin can be observed in every district of this area.

In the North of the Bronx White Nonhispanic people inhabit the neighborhood of Middletown and Morris Park. Moreover, they densely inhabit the residential neighborhood called Country Club, which is located from Layton Avenue to Pelham Bay Park and East of the Bruckner Expressway; there are eighty-two per cent of White Nonhispanic inhabitants. There

²⁰ Joyce Cohen, *If You're Thinking of Living In: Kingsbridge, the Bronx; A Place Convenient to Almost Everything*, The New York Times, Sept. 6 1998, accessed May 17, 2018.

is a visible dominance of people of African-American origin in the residential area of Parkchester where they center on Unionport Road and Metropolitan Avenue. In the Soundview district people of African American origin are the majority between Soundview Park, Buckner Expy and Morrison Avenue. In Melrose more than eighty per cent of population between Concourse West and East are also African-Americans. People of Hispanic origin dominantly inhabit the rest of the Bronx in this area²¹.

5. Summary

To sum up, it has to be stated that the Bronx represents the essence of a salad bowl metaphor. From the beginning of a small-scale settlement in the area of today's New York City up to present-day millions of people migrated to and from New York City. There was a constant movement from different parts of Europe through the Atlantic Ocean to the city itself. It seems that New York City has never been ethnically homogenous. From its very beginning the land around what is now the biggest city on the East coast has been occupied by people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In the 16th and 17th century, people of Dutch and English origin lived side by side with native people, who were later forced to move out. At the beginning of the 16th century efforts were made to preserve Dutch settlement exclusively, though it was not successful as more and more immigrants surged to the area. New Amsterdam's citizens protested against the newcomers, but the authorities ignored this reluctance, as they sought workforce and inhabitants to add to the population number.

Nowadays people of all nations inhabit it and there still is a strong bond between them and countries of their origin. Even though, most of the inhabitants of the Bronx are US-born, they have a need to express their individuality and uniqueness. It does not mean that the Bronx is full of separated neighborhoods. Each is different and there is a wide diversity, though they are all a unity. This way of living is strictly American: one can be both a unity and individuality in the notion of ethnical background.

Topography of present-day Bronx was reshaped through centuries. Some ethnic groups were forced to live in certain areas of the borough because of: 1) the price of land, 2) proximity of cultural centers or religious temples, 3) closeness of work places or factories. Times passed and people migrated because of private or cultural reasons, leaving land for sale, and other groups moved in, subsequently attracting others of similar ethnicity to move there as well. Still,

²¹ *The Bronx. Demographic Profile*, accessed January 30, 2014.

in the Bronx there is a noticeable preference of living in ethnically homogeneous neighborhoods.

In today's US there is a trend towards multiculturalism, not assimilation. The old 'melting pot' metaphor is giving way to new metaphors such as 'mosaic' or 'salad bowl', meaning mixtures of various ingredients that keep their individual characteristics. Such diversity makes the Bronx and New York City itself a very unique place on earth where people of all races live alongside each other creating a unity.

6. Literature

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SOCJOTOPOGRAFIA BRONXU - DZIELNICY NOWEGO JORKU

Streszczenie: Artykuł prezentuje potencjalne źródła kształtowania się różnorodności dzielnicy Nowego Jorku – Bronxu. Poszczególne punkty w artykule opisują również historyczną substratę socjotopografii dzisiejszego miasta. Przyjezdni i imigranci osiedlali się w różnych sąsiedztwach w mieście, z uwagi na specyficzne cechy tych miejsc. Fakt ten zostanie poddany analizie.

Słowa kluczowe: substrata socjotopografii Nowego Jorku, Bronx, imigracja.