

# Diasporas

I RECENTLY VISITED CLEVELAND, WHERE A RESIDENT BOASTED to me that his city had the largest population of Slovenians anywhere outside of Ljubljana, Slovenia's capital. It was a dubious claim, not least because there are several other cities in Slovenia filled with Slovenians, but also because immigrant demographic data is notoriously difficult to quanti-

fy given the vague ethnic categories on census surveys, the often underreported populations of immigrants, and the shifting definition of what it means to be of a certain national or ethnic origin. But what interested me more than the truth of this man's statement was the impulse behind it—we want our hometowns to be destinations, to be diverse, to have the *most* of something. And indeed the US is filled with such remarkable diasporic hot spots, where immigrant and refugee communities have sprung up, most often due to secondary migration patterns. Sometimes these hot spots can be in unexpected places.



## Tehrangles

Los Angeles, CA



After the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iranian immigration to the US skyrocketed. Many opponents of the Ayatollah regime, including a large concentration of urban elites and non-muslims, sought refuge in Los Angeles, a city which topographically resembled Tehran. Estimates vary, but between 200,000 and 500,000 Iranian Americans now live in greater Los Angeles, with the largest concentration along Wilshire Boulevard in what has been dubbed “Little Persia” or “Tehrangles.” The Iranian-American population is well-educated, with six times the national average of doctoral degrees, and well-off, with 40 percent higher per capita income than the national average. Certain studies estimate that nearly 20 percent of Beverly Hills is of Persian descent, a phenomenon gratuitously depicted in the Bravo reality TV show “Shahs of Sunset.”

## Little Bosnia

St. Louis, MO



During the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, a large number of Bosnian refugees sought resettlement in the US. After several successful university scholarships were established for Bosnians in the St. Louis area, news quickly spread through Bosnian familial networks about the city's welcoming attitude toward refugees. The initial 7,000 refugees sponsored by the International Institute of St. Louis has now become a flourishing Bosnian community estimated at 70,000 people. This stands in contrast to St. Louis's recent difficulty at attracting non-refugee immigrants through more normalized channels. The city—and its large Bosnian neighborhood—remains extremely segregated.

## Little Cambodia

Lowell, MA



The primary influx of Cambodian refugees to the US occurred after the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, when about 150,000 Cambodians were resettled across the country. Lowell, a postindustrial mill town on the Merrimack River, initially had only 160 Cambodian refugees, but as the Massachusetts tech economy thrived in the 1980s, word about employment opportunities available in Lowell and its surroundings spread among the Cambodian communities scattered across the US, initiating a large secondary migration to the area. The town now boasts nearly 20,000 Cambodians—the highest per capita concentration in the country—and hosts the annual Southeast Asian Water Festival.

## Ellis Island of the South

Clarkston, GA



Clarkston was once a seat for the Klu Klux Klan and a little over twenty years ago was still 94 percent white. Refugee resettlement programs began targeting the town in the 1990s because of its ample affordable housing and its location on the outskirts of Atlanta's public transport system. Today a third to one half of the town's 7,500 residents are foreign born, including Sudanese, Burmese, Bhutanese, Eritrean, and Somali, earning Clarkston the nickname “The Ellis Island of the South.” Several of the town's historically white churches which saw a dramatic decrease in attendance have had to reinvent themselves as international congregations. The town's diverse youth soccer team, nicknamed the “Fugees,” became a minor *cause célèbre* after a *New York Times* article and a book was written about them. Still, Clarkston has struggled with the challenges brought on by its new demographics, leading town officials to recently call for a moratorium on all future refugee resettlement.