The 2000 census shows that New York City experienced an ethnic renaissance spurred by immigration of close to 200,000 persons annually in the 1990s. The numbers don't surprise, but New York's ability to settle so many immigrants and avoid the ethnic chaos that many once feared certainly does. In the early 1990s black activists were boycotting a Korean grocery store in Brooklyn, several black and Hispanic boys were on trial for the rape of the "central park jogger," and Crown Heights blacks were rioting against Hasidic Jews. Even the New York Times, normally the most passionate guardian of the multicultural zeitgeist, reported in 1992 that "ethnic tensions are inflamed as they have rarely been since the race riots of the 1960s."

Yet a decade later New York City is enjoying both peace and prosperity at a time when new immigrants have pushed the population above 8 million for the first time in the city's history. There have been no race riots on the level of Crown Heights, the turnout for the annual Million Youth March, which typically headlines some of the worst black anti-Semites, has dwindled to almost nothing, and potentially explosive episodes - such as the firebombing of a white-owned store in Harlem in 1995 - have ignited no wider civil unrest.

We have two things to thank for this remarkable ethnic tranquility: 1) the racial diversity of New York's immigrants and 2) Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

DIVERSITY HAS

To a certain extent the sheer variety of newcomers has served to alleviate ethnic tensions. Today the black/white standoff that weighed so heavily on New York and other big cities has been eased by the melange of different races that piled into the city over the last decade. With the exception of Staten Island, there is no borough in New York City where a single ethnic/racial group constitutes a majority of the population.

Hispanics, who are the engine powering the city's explosive population growth, now number 2.2 million,
a figure that makes the number of men, women, and children who consider themselves Hispanic even greater than the number of blacks in the city, which is almost 2.0 million. Whites remained the largest group in the city at 2.8 million, but Asians, who now number 780,229, had the fastest rate of growth at 50 percent and account for one in 10 New Yorkers.

This racial pastiche serves to mitigate problems that might once have had dangerous racial implications. Just last year, for example, the actor Danny Glover made a well-publicized complaint against a cabdriver in order to draw attention to a longstanding problem: the refusal of many New York cabbies to give rides to black men. Glover and his supporters insisted that the problem was racial prejudice and demanded immediate action from Mayor Giuliani. When Giuliani beefed up "Operation Refusal," handing out hefty summonses to cabbies caught discriminating, it became immediately clear that the problem extended beyond the enforcement of anti-bias laws. Over 80 percent of New York cabbies are non-whites, and most of those given summonses were immigrants from South Asia and the Caribbean. Most were acting in what they believed was their economic self-interest: namely, avoiding being stiffed or mugged, and prowling richer neighborhoods where a quick turnover in fares is guaranteed. Ultimately, Glover issued a statement through his lawyer explaining that "using the police to demonize the drivers is not the approach Mr. Glover wants to take," an embarrassing retreat that would not have occurred had the cabbies been mostly white.

DIVERSITY IS NOT EVERYTHING

But racial diversity alone is not enough to ensure civic health, and could as easily lead to new ethnic rivalries as it could to the easing of existing ones. This is especially true today when it is no longer necessary for immigrants to assimilate in the traditional sense. Globalization, the internet, e-mail, cell phones, fax machines, and high speed travel potentially turn today's immigrants into "transnationals," people whose lives traverse national boundaries and who are beholden to no particular culture, political institution, or mode of civic behavior, and this could have serious negative consequences. According to a recent report published by the American Association of University Women, Latina girls have the highest school dropout rate in the nation among females - 26 percent compared with 13 percent for black girls and 6.9 percent for whites. The report attributed most of the gap between Hispanic girls and others in drop-out rates to confusion between old-world models of womanhood and contemporary gender thinking. "Many Latinas face pressure about going to college from boyfriends and fiances who expect their girlfriends or future wives not to be 'too educated'" the report finds.

And even if the forces of assimilation still operate on new immigrants, who is to say that the culture they assimilate will be the desired one, the one that inspires a sense of common purpose and civic decency? Particularly among non-white immigrants, who is to say that the "oppositional" attitudes of the ghetto underclass will not be more attractive than the staid, consumer culture of the middle-class? Who will be their American role models, Louis Farakhan or Colin Powell? Linda Chavez or "J-Lo?" As Hunter College sociology professor Philip Kasinitz has written, "If assimilation means joining the street culture of the urban ghetto, 'becoming American' can be every immigrant parent's worst nightmare!"

STRONG ECONOMY - BUT NOT JUST THAT

Many observers believe that the key to ethnic peace is a strong economy, and that New York's job machine has been the great cultural synthesizer of the 1990s, instilling hope and tolerance in newcomers as they contribute to, and partake in, the city's affluence. The Wall Street Journal, for example, editorializes that "More people mean a bigger pie for all . . . we can at least hope that the record growth of the economy during a period of record population growth should remind us that the way to look at human beings is not as mouths but minds."
But data suggests that the economics of recent immigration might not lend itself overwhelming to civic good cheer. A National Academy of Sciences study in 1998 estimated that the annual negative fiscal impact of new immigrants in the Northeast might be as high as $1,000 per family. It also found that immigration lowered wages for unskilled workers, many of them native-born minorities. More recent research has found that the lack of education among the newer waves of immigrants makes moving up the economic ladder more difficult. A study conducted by the Taub Center for Urban Research at New York University in 1994 concluded that "Immigrants that choose to live in New York City are increasingly unqualified to work here." Indeed, the influx of so many poor immigrants is a large part of the reason why New York City's poverty rate has remained at 22 percent throughout the 1990s, despite low unemployment and record job growth.

THE MAYOR'S ONE STANDARD FOR ALL

There is, therefore, more to New York's success in managing ethnic relations than illimitable diversity and a strong economy, and it has to do with the political and social changes made possible by Mayor Giuliani's approach to governance. Giuliani helped bring about ethnic peace by reorienting New York's civic life around a universal standard of decency, something his predecessors going back to John Lindsay were unwilling or unable to do. The centerpiece of Giuliani's program was the well-known "quality of life" policing methods he promoted. Motivated by the idea that minor public disorder leads to crime, and that cracking down on small offenses reduces the incidence of serious crimes, Giuliani and his first police chief William Bratton began cracking down on "quality of life offenders," insisting that a uniform code of public decency be respected. Besides contributing to the city's low crime rate, which is at its lowest in three decades and includes a two-thirds drop in the murder rate, it has also had an incalculable effect on New Yorkers' sense of citizenship. This is especially true for newcomers, for whom the ability to make choices about where to live and work and the use of city amenities like libraries, museums, and parks translates directly into expanded opportunity, the very purpose for their being here. A Quinnipiac poll conducted in February found that almost 80 percent of New Yorkers believe the city is "very safe" or "somewhat safe."

But Giuliani has extended the "one city, one standard" principle beyond law enforcement to touch almost every aspect of city governance. Along with demanding civil behavior on the streets, Giuliani has attacked the regime of entitlement that set one group of New Yorkers off against another, insisting that those benefiting from city policies perform specific deeds in return for those benefits. Thus, recipients of welfare must make a good faith effort to find work in return for benefits. Stores selling mostly pornographic material must not encroach upon schools, churches, and residences. In return for attending a 4-year college of the City University of New York, entering students must demonstrate college-level proficiency. Even municipal employees have been asked to give back something in return for city jobs. Giuliani has uniformly demanded more productivity and accountability from the city's major unions, including the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, whose support has been crucial to Giuliani's success and whose leaders have unsuccessfully tried to bring cop salaries in line with those of budget-busting suburban police departments.

Giuliani has not always succeeded in implementing uniform standards. The courts have blocked his efforts to require residents of city shelters to work, and his attempt to de-fund the Brooklyn museum for displaying art deemed offensive to some created a firestorm of protest. But all of these policies have one thing in common: they are designed to institute a reciprocity of citizenship, an expectation that everyone will respect the sensibilities of others. In Giuliani's view, the benefits of citizenship require a certain measure of responsibility, and applying this principle to all New Yorkers instills a sense of belonging, equality, and fair play.
"It means," Giuliani explained at a Livable Cities Conference in 1999, "that for every right, there is something that you have to give up, there is something that you have to concede, something that you have to do in order to preserve that right."

RESTORING THE IMMIGRANT MODEL

Giuliani's approach to citizenship is really about restoring what has long been known to social scientists as the "immigrant model" of social mobility, the one that says hard work, respect for others, stable families, and education are the keys to economic mobility. Back in the 1960s, as Fred Siegal explains in his seminal book The Future Once Happened Here, New York liberals became convinced that when it comes to blacks, and to a lesser extent Hispanics, the reality of racism rendered obsolete any beliefs about the close connection between hard work and success, between strong families and civic well-being. Under a new "dependency" model of mobility, welfare programs were expanded, racial preferences in hiring and contract letting were implemented, academic standards were relaxed and crime, both petty and serious, was written off as an understandable response to racism and poverty.

The calamitous results of the dependency model reached their apogee in the mayoralty of David Dinkins. During the Crown Heights riot, in which rioting blacks killed one Jewish man and injured eighty-one others, Dinkins, a true son of identity politics, ordered the New York City Police to "let the rioters vent." The following year, when New York police officer Michael O'Keefe killed a drug runner named Jose "Kiko" Garcia after a life-and-death struggle with Garcia, Dinkins apologized to the residents of Washington Heights and had the city foot the funeral bill for the slain drug dealer. As Professor Siegal has written, Dinkins "was like the ruler, described by Machiavelli, who 'never preaches anything except peace and good faith; and he is an enemy of both."

ANSWERING THE MAYOR'S CRITICS

There is no shortage of critics who argue that Giuliani has been terrible for group relations. In his recent book Rudy! An Investigative Biography of Rudolph Giuliani, Wayne Barrett insists that "Rudy's government, by and large, has been a government of, for, and by white people." Queens Councilwoman Helen Marshall and Manhattan Councilman Bill Perkins have even called City University of New York's termination of "open admissions" a form of "ethnic cleansing."

But the gains that blacks have made under Giuliani are too great to ignore. The stigma of permissiveness that the "dependency" model of mobility had saddled blacks with has been largely removed. With the change from welfare to workfare and the dramatic decline in crime, the once dominant images of blacks as welfare queens and criminals have faded from the public conscience. When asked about the rise in black political fortunes in the 1990s as compared with the 1980s, Elaine C. Kamarck, a professor at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard said "It was a perception of people getting something for nothing. When you change the welfare system to a work system, you suddenly get rid of that."

The improvement in the quality of life for black inner-city residents has also been demonstrable. Blacks were the primary victims of the crack-induced violence of only eight years ago. Today, the worst predators have been removed from the streets, and Harlem is enjoying a second renaissance. New investments in brownstones and businesses have revitalized former war zones like Mott Haven, Port Morris, and Hunts Point in the South Bronx. And while the American Civil Liberties Union believes the police are more dangerous to blacks than criminals are, the number of intentional shootings by police dropped over 50 percent between 1993 and 1999. Fatal shootings by police officers are at their lowest level since 1973. Black New Yorkers know the difference between hype and reality: eighty percent of blacks believe their neighborhoods are "safe" or "very safe" and 93 percent say they feel "safe" or "somewhat safe" walking around in them.
There are many battles ahead in the fight for uniform standards and ethnic peace, the most important of which is probably the reform of the city's system of bilingual education. Bilingual education is another policy born of the desire to help the underprivileged through favoritism. The results have been disastrous, and, naturally, divisive in a school system where 150 foreign languages are spoken. Giuliani has made some changes to the system, but he did not succeed in requiring children to move from bilingual programs into general education classrooms within a year, as he had wanted.

The problem is that Giuliani has left no political heir to carry on his fight. None of the four major Democratic contenders for mayor have grabbed at the Giuliani mantle, and the lone Republican is still a mystery. Here, as elsewhere, the prospect for ethnic peace in a post-Giuliani New York does not look good.

_Seth Forman is the author of "Blacks in the Jewish Mind: A Crisis of Liberalism" (NYU Press 1998) and teaches Political Science at SUNY at Stony Brook_