

THE NEWEST POLISH NEW YORKERS: A SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

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According to U.S. Census data, New York City is the one of the main places of concentration for members of the Polish diaspora. Despite the fact that the migration stream from Poland to the United States is not as large as it was in the past; Polish immigrants continue to be in the top twenty ethnic groups coming to the city after 2000. The literature—both in Polish and English—lacks complete research about the Polish diaspora in New York City. This article attempts a description of Polish immigrants in New York City. In the analysis, particular attention is focused on general demographic characteristics and socioeconomic characteristics. Four dimensions of socioeconomic characteristics are included: education, occupation, income, and residence patterns. The sociological significance of the analysis lies in the fact that these characteristics provide us with the basic indicators of social status and give us a general picture of the group's adjustment and integration, or lack of it, to the vertical structure of the host society.

Keywords: New York City, Polish Immigrants in New York City; Polish emigration to the USA, European Immigrants in New York City

INTRODUCTION

Nearly two decades ago, a Polish scholar named Władysław T. Miodunka, while drawing up the state of research on the Polish diaspora, stated that “in research on the Polish diaspora there are periods of low and high activity and there are trends to work on a particular continent or country of destination.”¹

¹ W.T. Miodunka, ‘Stan badań nad Polonią i Polakami w świecie,’ *Przegląd Polonijny*, No 1, p. 89.

At present, it seems that the trend (dating from the 1970s to the 1990s) to research American Polonia has ended.² There are many questions left unanswered, and many areas which have not been touched. Such *terra incognita* is without any doubt the issue of Polish migration to New York. So far, since *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*,³ there has been no work which describes the Polish community in New York.⁴

New York, right after Chicago, is at present the main place of concentration of Polish immigration to the United States. According to American census data, at the moment 12.5% of all Polish migrants in the USA live in New York, making it the main area of new Polish migration.⁵ Despite the fact that the migration

² I have tackled the issue of the lack of research on Polish migration to the USA: 'Współczesna polska emigracja w Stanach Zjednoczonych: skala, rozmieszczenie przestrzenne, przyczyny wyjazdów,' *Studia Migracyjne-Przegląd Polonijny*, No 2 (2014), p. 105–108. In the article, I claim that not only the Polish migration to the USA is neglected, but also migration of other European groups to the USA.

³ Meaning the famous work of Floriand Znanacki and William Thomas, *Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, published between 1918–1920.

⁴ Polish, as well as American literature on the Polish diaspora in America is of course very ample. It includes sociological as well as historical analyses. It covers works devoted to Polish communities in particular states, metropolitan areas or cities. The complex issues are also analyzed, as they are very different. Considering the limited length of the article, I will not quote them. The state of research on the Polish diaspora in the USA is partly described in the article I mentioned before 'Współczesna polska emigracja w Stanach Zjednoczonych,' published in 2014 in *Studia Migracyjne*. In many of these works, the subject of Polish New Yorkers was mentioned only briefly, while discussing other subjects. I mean only a few works here: a book by Danuta Piątkowska devoted to Polish churches in New York and analyses of intergroup relations by Anna Sosnowska and Anna Fiń. See: D. Piątkowska, *Polskie Kościoły w Nowym Jorku*, Nowy Jork–Opole 2002; A. Sosnowska, *Polacy, Żydzi i Portorykańczycy. Liderzy polskiego Greenpointu o nowojorskich grupach etnicznych*, CMR Working Papers, Warsaw 2012; A. Sosnowska, 'Robotnicza arystokracja i biedni profesjonalści. Imigranci z Polski i byłego Związku Radzieckiego w Nowym Jorku na przełomie XX i XXI wieku,' *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*, No. 1 (2013), pp. 37–54; A. Fiń, 'Odtworzone sąsiedztwo. Polscy i ukraińscy imigranci w nowojorskiej East Village,' *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny*, No 1 (2013), pp. 105–129 and A. Fiń, 'In the space of "displaced borderland." Reflections on the relations between Polish and Ukrainian immigrants in the United States,' *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny*, No 1 (2014), pp. 143–160.

⁵ For comparison, 10.2% of the entire population of Polish immigrants live in Chicago. It seems that the situation has changed during the last decade, since in the 1990s, Chicago was still the main destination for Polish immigrants. See: M.P. Erdmans, 'Polonia in the New Century: We will not Fade Away,' *Polish American Studies*, No 1 (2000), p. 7; J.C. Booza, 'A Profile of Polish Americans: Data from the 2000 U.S. Census,' *Polish American Studies*, No 1 (2007), p. 67.

flow from Poland to the United States is not as large as it was in the past,⁶ Polish immigrants continue to be in the top twenty ethnic groups coming to the city since 2000. In such a situation, it is extremely important to answer the question about the scale of migration processes and socioeconomic standing of Polish migrants. At present, in an era of dynamic changes in migration and transformations of American and European societies, information on the subject serves as a starting point for understanding objective social processes determining the situation of immigrants, in the individual and group dimension. And to be clear, it applies not only to Poles but also to other ethnic groups of European heritage.

The presented article seeks to explore the general characteristic of Polish groups in New York, and thereby it is one of the first attempts to fill an existing gap in academic literature. I limited my analysis to show the demographic and socioeconomic profile of Polish immigrants. The issues at hand can be reduced to three main questions: a) about the changes in the scale of the inflow and the number of Polish immigrants in New York; b) about the demographic structure of the community; and c) about the socioeconomic status of the group and its place in the structure of the host society. Even though the phrase quoted in the title *The Newest Polish New Yorkers*⁷ generally refers to the category of people born in Poland, the analysis provides some general information about Polish groups in New York, thus about everyone who indicates their Polish ancestry.

The focus of the article is mainly on the reconstruction of quantitative data. The source materials consist mostly of American census data, including: *US Census 2000*, *US Census 2010* and statistics included in *American Community Survey*. What is more, the research involves statistical data on immigrants in the USA published in *Yearbook of Immigration Statistic* and information collected and shared by New York Department and City Planning. I also refer to passages from the results of my own research. Between 2006 and 2008 I researched the issue

⁶ The downward trend has been continuing since 2000; See more: I have tackled the issue of the lack of research on Polish migration to the USA: 'Współczesna polska emigracja w Stanach Zjednoczonych: skala, rozmieszczenie przestrzenne, przyczyny wyjazdów,' *Studia Migracyjne-Przegląd Polonijny*, No 2 (2014), pp. 105–108.

⁷ The title of the article refers to a report by the New York Department of City Planning: *The Newest Polish New Yorkers. Characteristics of the City's Foreign-Born Population: edition 2000 and 2013*; See: 'The Newest New Yorkers. Immigrant New York in the New Millenium,' NYC DCP 2004 and 'The Newest New Yorkers. Characteristics of the City's Foreign-Born Population 2013 Edition,' NYC DCP 2013, at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/nny.shtml>, 5 June 2014.

of relations between immigrant groups in New York.⁸ The text presents some of the outcomes of desk-research. It was based on socioeconomic characteristics of ethnic cluster areas. This kind of analysis presents important information about the living conditions of the immigrants as well as their environment and social status.⁹ The basic unit of my analysis was a census tract. I based my research on census-tract data from the US Census 2000.¹⁰ It is important to keep in mind that the analysis in this presentation includes data on legal migration and does not contain the number of illegal migrants that come to NYC with the intention of staying.

POLISH IMMIGRATION TO NEW YORK CITY AND THEIR CONTEXTS

While writing about Poles in New York, one cannot omit the significance of the broader context, namely the context of the European migration in which Polish emigration is rooted. The issue of European immigration to the USA, starting from the already classical and so often cited book *The Uprooted*¹¹ by Oscar Handlin, has been researched by historians and sociologists respectively.¹² The

⁸ The research was realized as part of the project *Polish and Ukrainian Diaspora in Pluralistic American Society*, and was funded by a Kosciuszko Foundation Research Grant and John Kusiw Fund of The Shevchenko Scientific Society in America. It became the basis of a dissertation titled: *Ukrainian and Polish Diaspora in the United States. A Study of Mutual Relations in a Multicultural Society*.

⁹ It should be noted that such analyses, called in academic literature ecological analyses, are part of the Chicago School tradition. The ability to describe a group's status based on its environment stems from the characteristics of American society, where the position of an individual or a group is often based on their dwelling place. In Polish subject literature, this kind of research is represented by Grzegorz Babiński, while in the American context, it is continued by Richard Alba and his associates. See: G. Babiński, *Lokalna społeczność polonijna w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki w procesie przemian*, Wrocław 1977, pp. 61–94; R. Alba, N. Denton, S. Leung, J.R. Logan, 'Neighborhood Change under Conditions of Mass Immigration: The New York City Region 1970–1990,' *International Migration Review*, No 3 (1995), pp. 625–656; R. Alba, J.R. Logan, K. Crowder, 'White Ethnic Neighborhoods and Assimilation: The Greater New York Region 1980–1990,' *Social Forces*, No 3 (1997), pp. 883–912.

¹⁰ The analysis includes a census tract from Kings County and New York County. There were 1,079 census tracts in the territory of the analyzed counties. The only tracts included were those which had at least 100 people of Polish origin. As a result, 360 census tracts have been included.

¹¹ O. Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People*, Philadelphia, PA., 2002 (Handlin's book was first published in 1951).

¹² The research of the works in this subject was done, *inter alia*, by Rudolf J. Vecoli; see R.J. Vecoli, 'European Americans: From Immigrants to Ethnic,' *International Migration Review*, No 4. (1972), pp. 404–412; 418–429.

literature divides the European migration to the USA into two basic categories that differ in terms of the time of migration and their place in the social structure of American society: “the old” and “the new” migration.¹³ It has been established that a) Europeans assimilated; b) a category of Euro-Americans was created, in which the ethnic differences based on European ancestry were weakened; c) the number of ethnic communities of European ancestry decreased, though those which still function are becoming more ethnically and racially heterogeneous.¹⁴ Presently the focus is also on the significant decrease of European migration to the United States of America,¹⁵ which sometimes scholars call “the busting of the myth of America as a country of settling immigration.”¹⁶ The percentage of migrants from Europe in the whole USA is 12.1% of the entire population of migrants, and it is lower by 10.8 percentage points than it was in 1990 and 49.6 percentage points lower than in the 1980s.¹⁷ The causes of this state are to be sought in the changes of American migration law; secondly, in the changes of European migratory flows (especially after 2000); and, last but not least, in economic conditions, having in mind the American crisis in the last few years and the relatively low dollar exchange rate in Europe.

¹³ See: F.M. Binder, D.M. Reimers, *All the Nations under Heaven. An Ethnic and Racial History of New York City*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, pp. 102–106.

The “new migration” consists of groups from Central-Eastern Europe who settled in the USA in the second half of the 19th century. They came to the USA after the inflow of the “old migration,” which included migrants from the North and the West of Europe. The “old migration” is deemed as the first settlers in North America. It is worth mentioning that this division determined not only the status of each group, but also had a vital impact on relations between the groups of migrants. In the past, the lack of symmetry in relations caused ethnic conflicts, activated stereotypes and prejudices, and sustained social distance between groups.

¹⁴ See: R. Alba, *Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America*, New Haven 1990; R.J. Vecoli, ‘European Americans...’, pp. 404–408; R. Alba, Logan, K. Crowder, ‘White Ethnic Neighborhoods and Assimilation...’, pp. 883–912; R. Alba et al., ‘Neighborhood Change under Conditions of Mass Immigration...’, pp. 641–650; N. Foner, ed, *New Immigrants in New York*, New York 2001, p. 16.

¹⁵ See: R. Daniels, *Coming to America. A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in America*, New York, 2002, pp. 410–412; M.C. Waters, Reed Ueda, *The New Americans. A Guide to Immigration since 1965*, Cambridge, Mass. 2007, pp. 20–26.

¹⁶ See: K. Iglicka, *Kontrasty migracyjne Polski. Wymiar transatlantycki*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 73–99.

¹⁷ See: C. Gibson, K. Jung, ‘Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 2000’ Population Division. Working Paper 81, Washington D.C. 2006, p. 38; and S0201: Selected Population American Community Survey 2010.

Similar processes are taking place in the New York area, which is deemed to be the area of the greatest concentration of immigrants in the United States.¹⁸ Migration researchers dealing with the issue of migration in New York divide the process into two stages, 1965 being the point of division. The first stage is called “old migration.” Its core was mainly settlers from Europe. The second stage – “the new migration” – is characterized by a lower influx of Europeans and an increase of migration from Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and South America.¹⁹ These trends are reflected by statistical data. According to American census data, in 1970, 64% of the inhabitants of the city were Europeans. By the 1990s, the percentage had dropped to 23.8% and continued the trend down to 15.9%.²⁰ For comparison, migrants from Latin America are 32.1% and those from Asia 27.5% of the foreign-born population.²¹ It does not mean, however, that people from Europe stopped settling in the New York area. Liberalization of migration laws in 1990 enabled 229,000 legal migrants from Europe to come to New York in the 1990s, representing 20% of all migrants at that time.²²

The effect of the above-mentioned processes is rising ethnic diversity, changes in stratification and demographic structure of the population as well as in the area of local institutions and, last but not least, economics.²³ As was emphasized by R. Waldinger, “the new New Yorkers are more differentiated from the start, and those initial differences carry over into divergent paths into economy.”²⁴ Over decades, one can also observe growing ethnic differentiation of cities. In the

¹⁸ It is emphasized in the academic literature that 10% of 900,000 legal immigrants and refugees who arrive to the United States every year have settled in New York City, see P. Kasinitz, J. Mollenkopf, M.C Waters, ‘Becoming American/Becoming New Yorkers: Immigrants Incorporation in a Majority Minority City,’ *International Migration Review*, No 4 (2002), p. 1023.

¹⁹ In that year there were some changes introduced to the law, which were embodied in the Hart Cellar Act. The subject literature often calls the new New York immigrants “post-1970 immigrants.” See: F.M. Binder, D.M. Reimers, *All the Nations under Heaven...*, pp. 225–226; Foner, ed, *New Immigrants...*, pp. 2–4; R. Waldinger, ‘From Ellis Island to LAX. Immigrant Prospects in the American City,’ *International Migration Review*, No4 (1996), pp. 1079–1080; R. Waldinger, ‘Immigration and Urban Change’ *Annual Review of Sociology* (1989), pp. 211–213.

²⁰ ‘The Newest New Yorkers’ (2013), p. 12 and ‘Socio-economic Profile Social Characteristics, New York City, 1990 and 2000 Census,’ New York City Department of City Planing, at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/socionyc.pdf>, 25 April 2008.

²¹ ‘The Newest New Yorkers’ (2013), p. 12.

²² ‘Immigrants Admitted by Class of Admission and Country of Birth, New York City, 1990–1999, Appendix Tabel 3-3,’ at: http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/nyy_appendix.shtml, 10 January 2008. The largest groups among Europeans were Poles, Irishmen and emigrants from the former Soviet Union, which involved the possibility of taking part in the visa program.

²³ 641–650; Foner, ed, *New Immigrants...*, New York 2001, p. 2.

²⁴ R. Waldinger, *From Ellis Island...*, p. 1080.

1970s, the percentage of foreign-born people was 18.2%; in 2000, immigrants were 35.9% of the population of New York, and in 2011, 37.2%.²⁵ Among people of European ancestry, the most numerous groups are: Italian (about 590,000), Irish (405,000), German (250,000), Russian (239,000) and Polish (220,000).²⁶ Among the European immigrants, the most numerous category are the immigrants from Russia (2.5% in the foreign-born category), Ukraine (2%), Poland (1.9%), Italy (1.6%) and Great Britain (1.1%).²⁷

Polish immigration to New York City began at the end of the 19th century,²⁸ and for over two centuries it has continued in accordance with the general mechanisms of Polish migration to the USA. This means that it was processed in 4 waves, which were different in terms of intensity, composition and the nature of migration.²⁹ Immigrants of the first massive wave came mainly because of economic reasons and were initiators of the first Polish ethnic communities. Their influx was so intense that in 1920, New York statistics recorded 145,679 people born in Poland (see Map 1). The next wave of Polish immigrants came after WWII and lasted until the 1970s. It was caused mainly by political reasons. It is estimated that in 1970, over 292,000 Poles lived in New York, 41% of whom were people born in Poland and 59% of whom were born in the USA, with parents who came from Poland. In the 1980s, Polish people emigrated

²⁵ See: 'The Newest New Yorkers' (2013), p. 10.

²⁶ ACS Table B04003 Total Ancestry Reported (Detailed Table), New York City and Boroughs, American Community Survey 2011, at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/popacs.shtml>, 10 May 2014.

²⁷ See: 'The Newest New Yorkers' (2013), p. 13.

²⁸ Historical sources prove that the Poles were present in New York as early as the 16th century. In the descriptions of the Polish community in New York, they mention its legendary origins, mentioning the names of Poles who contributed to the history of New York and the whole United States, for example: the founder of one of the first higher learning institutions in NYC, Aleksander Kurczewski (Curtius); Kazimierz Teodor Goerck – the author of the first city map; and Casimir Gzowski – the designer of the bridge joining the USA and Canada over Niagara Falls. See: L. Jurewicz (ed.), *Polish-Americans in the City of New York. An Outline of Socioeconomic and Cultural Needs*, New York City 1979, pp. 74–75 and Piątkowska, 'Polskie kościoły...', pp. 43–44. The beginnings of Polish communities in New York were much later, namely the second half of the 19th century; while it is worth mentioning that reconstruction of the history of the group and legends fulfill various roles for the same ethnic group. Polish sociologist Jarosław Rokicki gives a few examples of such roles: integration, identification and compensation. See: J. Rokicki, *Więź społeczna a zmiana kultury: studium dynamiki polskiej zbiorowości etnicznej w USA*, Wrocław 1992, pp. 172–173.

²⁹ I have discussed four waves of Polish migration to the USA in the article 'Współczesna polska emigracja w Stanach Zjednoczonych....' See: A. Fiń, 'Współczesna polska emigracja...', pp. 109–113.

for political as well as economic reasons. American statistics indicate that in 1982–1989, 7,888 legal immigrants from Poland arrived in New York (for the years 1982–1991, it was 12,712 people).³⁰ In general, American census data from 1990 recorded 296,809 people with Polish ancestry living in New York. People born in Poland comprised 20.6% (61,265) of that number.

The most interesting period for us, the so-called “4th wave” of Polish migration, started with the fall of communism in the countries of Central-East Europe in 1990. Table 1 shows the size of the last wave of migration. These values show that from 1990 to 2011, 51,000 people born in Poland came to New York. One has to remember that these values are just approximate; they do not include illegal migration.

Table 1.

Number of People of Polish Ancestry, Born in Poland, Who Migrated to NYC,
by Year of Migration: 1990–2011

Years	Migrants
1990–1999	29,846
2000–2001	3,661
2002–2011	17,571
Total of 4 th Wave	51,078

Source: The author’s own compilation, based on: Immigrants Admitted by Class of Admission and Country of Birth, New York City 1990–1999, New York Department of City Planning The Newest Polish New Yorkers. Characteristics of the City’s Foreign-Born Population, 2013 Edition.

The greatest intensity of the migration was during the 1990s, which was caused mainly by three types of factors: political transformation in Poland, changes in American migration law (Immigration Act 1990) and by the opportunity to participate in the Diversity Visa Lottery (Diversity Program).³¹ As Table 2 and Graph 1 indicate, 47% of all migrants were beneficiaries of the visa lottery.

³⁰ ‘Immigrants Admitted by Class of Admission and Country of Birth, New York City 1982–1989,’ New York Department of City Planning, at: http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/nny_appendix.shtml 10 October 2007; ‘The Newest New Yorkers’ (2013), p. 259.

³¹ For information about the influence of political transformation on the increase of Polish migration to the USA, see: D.E. Gory, ‘Polish Immigration to America: Before and After the Fall of the Berlin Wall,’ *The Polish Review*, No 1 (1995), p. 76.

Since 2000, we have been able to see the Polish migration to NYC drop.³² What is more, the nature of migration has changed. Fewer people participate in the visa lottery – only 3% of migrants who came after 2000. Thus, a 43% decline can be observed between the decades. Migration is generated mostly through family ties, and one out of four migrants state that the reason for migration is work and employment ties. Interpretation of the data may conclude that a very important theme in coming to New York is a “social network” connected to having some family connections and friends who live in the city. The percentage of people who came from Poland to New York City because of having relatives who are American citizens rose between the 1990s and 2000s by 26 pp. Polish researcher K. Iglicka, on the basis of research into opinions of Poles on the subject of migration to the United States, has stated that the United States remains an attractive option as a migration country only for the people who already have relatives across the ocean.³³ It seems that the statistical data confirm this hypothesis.

Table 2.

Percentage Distribution of Major Class of Admission of Polish Immigrants
by Year of Migration: 1990–2011

Major Class of Admission	2002–2011	1990–1999
Family-sponsored preferences	22.3	25.6
Immediate relatives of U.S. citizens	37.9	11.4
Family-sponsored preferences	25.8	9.8
Diversity programs	3.2	46.9
Others	10.8	6.3
Total	100	100

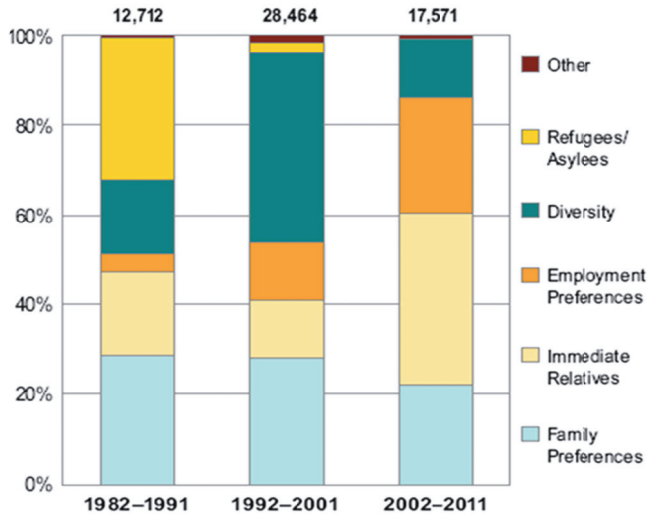
Source: The author’s own compilation, based on: Immigrants admitted by Class of Admission and Country of Birth, New York City 1990–1999; New York Department of City Planning The Newest Polish New Yorkers. Characteristics of the City’s Foreign-Born Population, 2013 Edition (2013), New York Department of City Planning.

³² As I mentioned before, the downward trend concerns the entire United States. Polish researcher K. Iglicka thinks it should be attributed to various factors, the most important being: a) emergence of new migratory routes in Europe; b) Polish accession to the EU and opening of the European labor market; c) the weak US dollar; d) distance and relatively high labor costs; and e) cultural differences. See: Iglicka, *Kontrasty migracyjne...*, p. 8.

³³ K. Iglicka, *Kontrasty migracyjne...*, p. 7.

Figure 1.

Immigrants Admitted from Poland by Class of Admission
New York City, 1982–1991, 1992–2001, and 2002–2011



Source: The Newest Polish New Yorkers. Characteristics of the City's Foreign-Born Population, 2013 Edition (2013), New York Department of City Planning.

The trends appearing in the last wave of migration have a direct influence on the size of the Polish population in New York. Generally, as shown in Table 3, 220,000 people in New York City identified themselves as having Polish ancestry. Of these, about 73% were US-born and 26% were foreign-born. Of the foreign-born people, 33% migrated before 1990. Migrants from the last two decades represent 67% of all foreign-born people.

Presently, Polish migrants are in the 15th place in terms of size of immigrant groups in New York. Considering previous years, mainly the 1970s and 80s, we can see a drop in the size of the population. This trend, as I mentioned before, is also characteristic of other European groups and it should be seen as connected to global conditions of migration processes in Europe and also migration processes in the USA. It seems important to emphasize that the inflow of the last migration wave has changed the view of the Polish society in New York City. It has influenced the internal diversity of the group as well as processes of changes in the community. Let us analyze the demographic and socioeconomic profile of the group.

Table 3.

Non-Migrants and Migrants by Period of Immigration to NYC:
People of Polish Ancestry; 2011

	Numbers	Percent
Total	220,118	100
Non-immigrants	162,353	73.7
Migrants	57,763	26.3
(2000), %	–	28.9
1990–2000	–	37.2
1980–1990	–	14.9
Before 1980	–	19

Source: The author's own compilation, based on: S0201 Selected Population Profile in the US; 2011 American Community Survey; The Newest New Yorkers. Characteristics of the City's Foreign-Born Population, 2013 Edition.

Table 4.

Changes in the number of Polish immigrants in NYC: 1970–2011

Years	Number of Foreign-Born in Poland	Rank of New York's Foreign-born
Before 1970	119,604	2
1980	77,160	6
1990	61,269	9
2000	65,999	15
2011	57,765	15

Source: The author's own compilation, based on: The Newest Polish New Yorkers. Characteristics of the City's Foreign-Born Population, 2013 Edition.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics of the demographic situation are very important, as they provide essential information about the state and the structure of the population, thus: gender, age, marital status and family. Data on the subject of the demographic profile of Polish New Yorkers are included in Table 5.

Table 5.

Demographic Characteristics of Polish Immigrants in New York City
(Percentage distribution of variables)

Variable	Total Population	Polish Ancestry	Migrants from Poland, 2012	Migrants from Poland, 2005
Sex Composition:				
Male	47.6	47.5	44.0	47.2
Female	52.4	52.5	56.0	52.8
Median of Age	35.5	40.6	49.7	48.1
Household Structure:				
Non-Families				
Families	40.1	50.7	39.7	42.9
– Married couple	59.9	49.3	60.3	57.1
– Male head, no wife	35.7	39.7	46.5	45.3
– Female head, no husband	5.7	2.8	4.1	4.1
Average Family Size	3.0	3.2	3.1	3.1
Marital Status:				
Married	38.6	46.6	58.7	56.5
Never Married	44.1	36.8	20.7	21.4
Divorced	6.4	8.1	7.7	7.1
Widowed	5.7	7.1	10.4	3.4
Language:				
Only English	50.9	64.4	8.5	11.9
Other than English	49.1	35.6	91.5	88.1
– Speaks English worse than “very well”	23.2	15.2	54.2	48.0

Source: The author’s own compilation, based on: S0201 American Community Survey 2012; S0201 American Community Survey 2005.

The majority of the population of Polish migrants in New York are women, who represent 56% of the population. What stands out in comparison to the whole society is the relatively high age of Polish migrants, which is, at present, nearly 50. We have to remember, however, that the group includes migrants who came to the USA before 1990. It seems obvious that the age structure has important implications for the community. The data indicate that the nature of the 4th wave of Polish migration is mostly family migration. 60% of migrant households are family households. Half of the families are married couples (and this indicator is higher than in the case of Total Population and all the people

with Polish ancestry). The average size of a family, similar to different given group categories, is 3. The data show the increasing cultural assimilation rate of the most recent Polish immigrants in New York. Its indicator is information on language used in homes and command of the English language. Even if most migrants speak Polish in their homes (88%), half of them know English very well. The percentage of immigrants who don't speak English fluently has decreased over the years. According to the US census, in 2000 and 2005 it was 57%, but the last census saw a decline down to 48%.

To sum up the above comments, one has to state that the newest Polish New Yorkers are a population which consists of middle-aged people, mostly married and having family households. What is important, the newest immigrants are rather well-prepared for life in the USA; they have a good command of English and relatively quickly undergo the cultural assimilation process.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

The next issue to be examined is the socio-economic characteristics. It includes four dimensions: education, occupation, income, and residence pattern. The variables are relevant to the determination of the place of the group in the stratification system of the host society and the level of structural assimilation. Throughout the years, a conviction rooted in the tradition of the Chicago School has been scientifically acclaimed that social mobility (vertical – “upwards”) and, in the case of American society, connected spatial mobility of individuals and groups are indicators of assimilation processes, especially structural assimilation. Historically, Polish immigrants, not only in New York, were a group which had a low position in the stratification system of the host society, which was a result of their low position in the labor market, the working nature of the diaspora, significant cultural differences and poor command of the English language. Lesław Jurewicz states that in the 1960s and 1970s the socioeconomic situation of Poles in New York was unfavorable. Most of the people from Poland had a low income and lived close to the poverty line.³⁴ Only the deepening processes of structural assimilation and the influx of the following wave of migrants from Poland have changed the socioeconomic profile of the ethnic group. The comparison of census data from the last decades shows that the Polish community has changed dramatically. It is reflected by the data in Table 6.

³⁴ See: L. Jurewicz, ed, *Polish-Americans in the City of New York*, p. 50.

Table 6.

Demographic Characteristics of Polish Immigrants in New York City

Variable	Total Population 2012	Polish Ancestry 2012	Migrants from Poland, 2012	Migrants from Poland, 2005
Education:				
High school graduate only	24.8	18.6	30.4	30.3
Bachelor's Degree or higher	34.0	55.5	31.2	30.5
Occupational Structure:				
Management, business, science, arts	38.0	54.8	28.3	24.7
Service occupations	23.3	11.5	24.8	23.4
Sales and office occupations	23.6	21.7	16.8	14.6
Construction and maintenance occupations	6.2	7.7	21.0	27.0
Production and transportation occupations	8.9	4.3	9.1	10.1
Occupational Structure by Industry:				
Construction	4.9	7.7	21.2	24.5
Manufacturing	4.0	3.7	5.3	5.7
Trade (including wholesale and retail trade)	12.4	9.2	7.5	9.2
Educational services and health care	26.2	24.0	18.8	15.9
Finance and insurance; real estate	9.9	13.1	10.8	7.7
Professional, scientific, and management; administrative service	12.6	17.2	12.9	10.0
Income (dollars):				
Median family income	55,695	93,322	59,083	58,975
Per capita income	30,826	54,103	34,313	30,677
Median value of house (dollars)	490,400	559,200	527,100	541,800

Source: The author's own compilation, based on: S0201 American Community Survey 2012; S0201 American Community Survey 2005.

The analysis of statistics in the table does not show any structural differences between the Polish population in New York and the whole society. The education structure of Polish emigrants is comparable to the corresponding structure of the whole NYC population. One out of three Poles has received a higher education.

A similar number have received a secondary education. Closer analysis has shown that the level of education increased in comparison to the earlier period. To illustrate this point: in 2000, 69% of migrants were at least high school graduates. One decade later, the percentage increased to 86%. It means that newcomers are well-educated and that they are similar to Americans in terms of received education. The statistical data simultaneously suggest that in the case of all people of Polish ancestry, the indicator is higher than in the case of the entire population of New Yorkers – more than half of them have a higher education. What is more, in this respect, people of Polish ancestry are in the top 5 groups of European ancestry – groups with a slightly higher percentage are as follows: German, Russian, French and English.³⁵ Similar trends can be observed in the case of occupational structure. As I already mentioned, the occupational distribution of early Polish immigrants was heavily concentrated in lower job categories. Considering the occupational distribution of the newest immigrants, we can observe significant changes. They are especially clear for people with Polish ancestry – half of them occupy high job roles and the indicator is nearly 17 percentage points higher than in the case of the whole population of New York. In the case of Polish migrants, the percentage is significantly lower – it is only 28%. It is worth mentioning that in recent years it has sharply increased. In 2005, only 24% of Polish immigrants worked in manager level positions. On the other hand, the percentage of blue-collar workers is still higher for Poles than for the whole American society. Recent estimates indicate that one out of three Poles in NYC is a blue-collar worker. For comparison, in 2005, 37% of Poles had such a position. It may mean an increase of work status and gradual change of the blue-collar status of Polish migrants. Despite the still low employment status, the position of Poles in society has consistently improved. It is indicated by variables such as income and the median value of one's home. It turns out that the median annual family income as well as income per capita is higher for Poles than for Americans. To illustrate, the median annual family income of people born in Poland is \$59,000, while the same indicator for the population of New York is approximately \$55,000. The median value of Polish houses is also higher than the general house value median. What is interesting is that the trends are characteristic of people with Polish ancestry and new immigrants. Although the presented data provide evidence that the absorption of Polish immigrants to the American mainstream is real, the information about

³⁵ 'Socioeconomic Characteristics by Race/Hispanic Origin and Ancestry Group' NYC 2010, Results from the 2010 American Community Survey, New York Department of City Planning, p. 7, at: http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/acs_socio_10_nyc.pdf, 10 May 2014.

the occupational structure of the newest Polish New Yorkers inclines us to do further research and ask questions about their standing in the stratification system of the host society. Many years ago, Vsevolod W. Isajiw stated that an ethnic group achieves middle class status if, among other things, it has a lower percentage of blue collar workers in comparison with other categories of employment.³⁶ This trend is not present in the case of people born in Poland. It is recognizable not only on the level of general data, but especially on the micro social level – the level of a census tract. As American researchers have noted, what happens in the area of a tract can indicate similar processes in a neighborhood. Data in the table below provide us with information on the social situation of people with Polish heritage in the area of one census tract, which is the area with the greatest concentration of Poles (census tract no. 57,100 in Greenpoint, Brooklyn).³⁷

Table 7.

Variables characterizing the main area of concentration of Poles
in New York in 2000 (Census Tract 57,100, Kings County)

Variable	Value of Variable
Percent of People with Polish Ancestry	71.0
Percent of people born in Poland	85.7
Percent of foreign born	70.0
Median family income (in dollars)	38.0
Median value of house (dollars)	231.9
Occupational Structure (percentage):	
Management, business, science, arts	11.9
Service occupations	24.7
Construction and maintenance Occupations	41.7

Source: The author's own compilation, based on: US. Census 2000, SF 3.

As can be concluded from the data, an area in which the residents are mostly of Polish ancestry is characterized with a lower than average percentage of senior level employees and simultaneously higher than average percentage of blue

³⁶ V. W. Isajiw, 'Sociological Implication at the Socioeconomic Characteristic,' in: O. Wolowyna, ed, *Ethnicity and National Identity. Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Persons with Ukrainian Mother Tongue in the US*, Cambridge 1986, p. 160.

³⁷ Due to a lack of data from the US Census 2010, I provide data from 2000, collected during my research.

collar workers. This can prove that the group belongs to a particular professional category. What is more, it is a highly “ethnic” region, characterized by a high percentage of immigrants. Taking into account the values of all presented factors, following the Polish researcher Anna Sosnowska, the new Polish New Yorkers can be described as “blue collar aristocracy.”³⁸ No doubt, Mary P. Erdmans is also right in stating that “Polish Americans are structurally assimilated in terms of education, occupation and income, and over time immigrants tend to look like ethnic on these indicators.”³⁹

What is also interesting is a comparison of the situation of Polish immigrants and other European immigrants. Table 8 includes information on the issue.

It turns out that the new Polish migrants enjoy a better social position than the entire migratory population in NYC – comparable to the position of European migrants, especially from Eastern Europe, but certainly weaker than the position of those from Western Europe. The differences are clear in the case of every variable. And the question appears if the historical differences in terms of the socio-economic situation between the “old” and “new” European migration are permanent.

The last dimension of socioeconomic characteristics is the settlement pattern. It is shown in Map 1 and 2. Poles began settling in the New York area in the 19th century. The first Polish community was created in 1875 in Lower East Side, Manhattan.⁴⁰ At that time, the second location in terms of size of the immigrant group was Brooklyn. The biggest Polish settlement in Brooklyn was located in the Greenpoint neighborhood. The community started to form in 1888⁴¹ and turned out to be one of the most stable Polish diaspora enclaves, as it has preserved its ethnic nature to this day. There were smaller Polish settlements in Brooklyn, in Park Slope and East New York/New Lots. Generally speaking, in the early period of settlement, the areas with the most Poles were as follows: Lower Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx. In the interwar period, Polish settlements were created in Queens County, mainly in Maspeth and Elmherst. During that time, the area with the lowest concentration of Polish immigrants was Staten Island. According to American census data from 1970, the biggest cluster of Poles

³⁸ A. Sosnowska, ‘Robotnicza arystokracja i biedni profesjonaliści...’, pp. 51–52.

³⁹ M. Erdmans, ‘Polonia in the New Century...’, p. 20.

⁴⁰ For more on the subject, see: D. Prasałowicz, ‘Old Neighbors in the New World: Germans, Jews, Poles and Ruthenians on Manhattan Lower East Side’, *Przegląd Polonijny*, No 4 (2005), pp. 77–92, and Fiń, ‘Odtworzone sąsiedztwo...’, p. 111–112.

⁴¹ On the beginnings of Polish settlements in Brooklyn, see: J.J. Bukowczyk, ‘The Immigrant “Community” Re-Examined: Political and Economic Tensions in a Brooklyn Polish Settlement, 1888–1894,’ *Polish American Studies*, No 2 (1980), pp. 5–16.

Table 8.

Socioeconomic Characteristics of Immigrant Groups in NYC, 2012
(data as percentage)

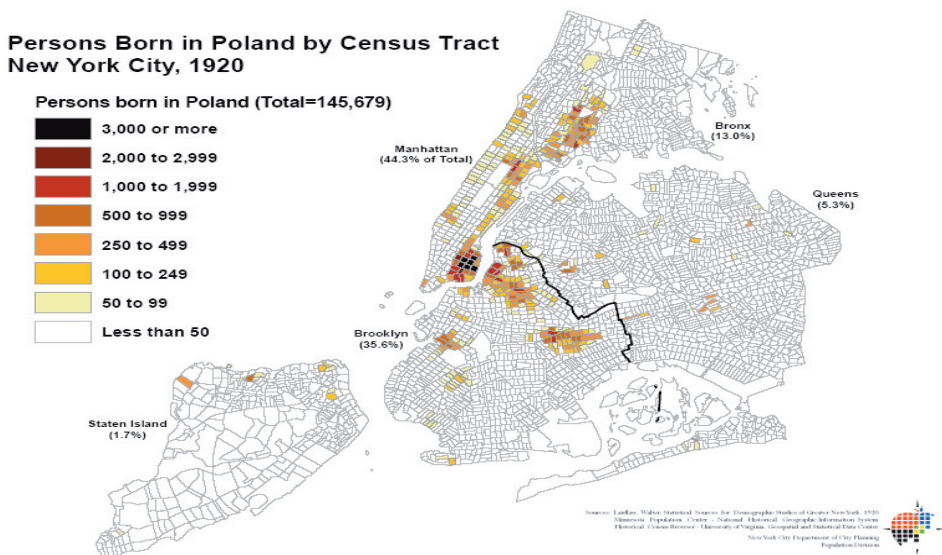
Variable	Total Foreign – born	Migrants from Poland, 2005	Migrants from Eastern Europe	Migrants from Western Europe
Education:				
High School graduate only	26.3	23.2	23.9	15.1
Bachelor's Degree or higher	27.2	42.4	43.6	62.5
Occupational Structure:				
Management, business, science, arts	27.9	45.6	38.9	69.0
Service occupations	31.2	20.0	23.7	8.7
Sales and office occupations	19.2	18.2	18.3	17.5
Construction and maintenance occupations	8.7	9.3	10.9	2.3
Production and transportation occupations	12.5	6.9	8.3	2.5
Occupational Structure by Industry:				
Construction	7.0	8.4	9.4	2.1
Manufacturing	4.9	4.4	4.7	3.6
Trade (including wholesale and retail trade)	13.0	8.7	8.9	6.1
Educational services and health care	25.6	24.9	27.3	21.3
Finance and insurance, and real estate	8.0	13.7	12.5	18.3
Professional, scientific, management, and administrative service	9.8	14.7	13.3	19.5
Income (dollars):				
Median family income	48,915	70,962	64,758	105,403
Per capita income	29,819	45,980	36,760	75,802
Median value of house (dollars)	481,400	557,900	509,000	638,400

Source: The author's own compilation, based on: S0201 American Community Survey 2012.

was in Brooklyn (Greenpoint and South Brooklyn); next came Queens (Maspeth/Elmhurst and Ozone Park), Manhattan (Lower East Side) and Staten Island (Port Richmond). The boroughs with the greatest number of Polish-speaking people were, in descending order: Brooklyn – 38%, Queens – 33%, Manhattan – 14%, Bronx – 11%, Staten Island – 4%.⁴² Over the years, some of the Polish ethnic communities have changed, and others have been completely split.⁴³ This happened, for example, to the Polish community in Bronx County and some areas in Brooklyn inhabited by Poles, e.g. East New York. Simultaneously, one can observe the creation of Polish communities in locations where there have not been any Poles yet. A good example of such a location is Ridgewood, Queens or Borough Park, Brooklyn.

Map 1.

Settlement Pattern of Polish Immigrants in New York City – Historical Perspective



Source: New York Department of City Planning.

⁴² L. Jurewicz, ed, *Polish-Americans in the City of New York*, pp. 13 and 102.

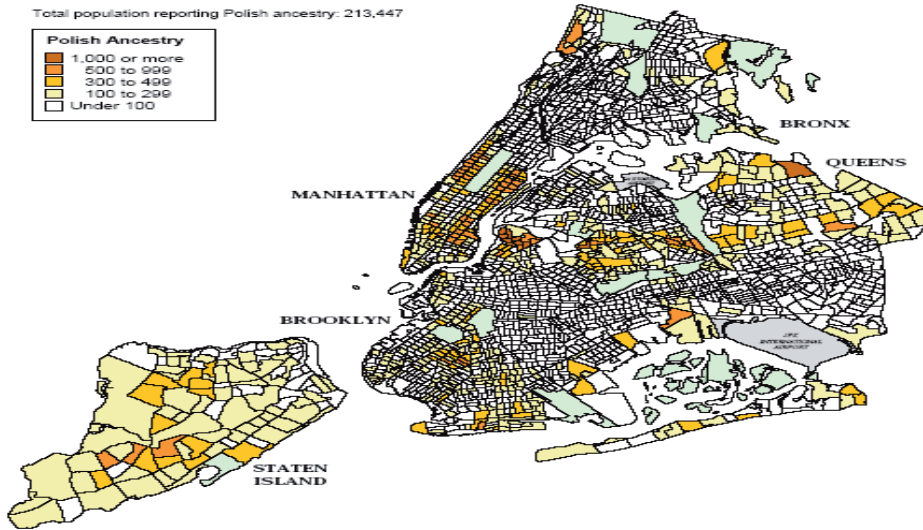
⁴³ Polish communities in New York were subject to changes similar to those of other white ethnic groups: Germans, Italians, and Irishmen. For more on the subject, see: R. Alba, J.R. Logan, K. Crowder, ‘White Ethnic Neighborhoods...,’ pp. 883–906 and R. Alba et al., ‘Neighborhood Change...,’ pp. 636–648.

Generally speaking, the main factors of changes are: urbanization, suburbanization, changes in ethnicity (especially marginalization of ethnicity), structural and cultural assimilation and change of ethnic structure, creation of ethnic neighborhoods and more polytechnic communities.

Map 2.

Settlement Pattern of Polish Immigrants in New York City
 – Contemporary Perspective

**Map SF3 SB P-13: Population Reporting Polish Ancestry by Census Tract
 New York City, 2000**



Source: New York Department of City Planning.

The review of the literature on ethnic changes of communities in the USA and collected statistical data enable us to observe that the nature of white migrant communities, including Poles, is quite permanent. To be honest, their nature is changing, they are becoming more ethnically heterogeneous, more transient, but they do not disappear completely. Richard Alba and Nancy Denton emphasize that “such a neighborhood cannot yet be described as a phenomenon of the past.”⁴⁴ The same applies to the Polish ethnic communities in New York City. As we can see, the spatial distribution of people with Polish ancestry through the ages hasn’t changed very much. Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan are still the main areas of concentration of the Polish diaspora. Data in Table 9 show that the newest immigrants from Poland are most often concentrated in Queens and Brooklyn.

⁴⁴ R. Alba et al., ‘Neighborhood Change...,’ p. 637.

Table 9.

Settlement Patterns of Polish Immigrants in NYC

Borough	Polish Ancestry – Number, 2012	Per cent	Migrants from Poland – Number, 2012	Per cent 2012	Per cent in 2000
Bronx	6,737	3.2	1,003	1.9	3.2
Brooklyn	64,291	30.4	21,793	40.5	53.0
Manhattan	62,539	29.6	4,724	8.8	8.0
Queens	58,789	27.8	22,371	41.6	32.0
Staten Island	18,847	8.9	3,872	7.2	3.1

Source: The author's own compilation, based on: Socioeconomic Profile Social Characteristic, New York City, 2000 Census, New York City Department of City Planning; American Community Survey 2012.

42% of Polish migrants in New York live in Queens (mainly Maspeth, Ridgewood and Ozone Park neighborhoods). Changes in the number of Polish immigrants in NYC: it is the highest 43 percentage of all the counties of New York. It is a result of an inflow of new immigrants, but also the gentrification process of Greenpoint, which causes migration of Poles to Queens.⁴⁵ There are 40% Polish migrants in Brooklyn (the number of Poles decreased here by 10 percentage points since 2000). The main places of concentration of Poles in Brooklyn are Greenpoint, Borough Park, Sheepshead Bay and Midwood. A more interesting conclusion can be drawn from analysis of distribution of Polish emigrants on the micro level – a so-called *census tract*. This makes it possible to determine the degree of group concentration. I performed such an analysis when I researched relations between immigrant groups in New York. It turned out that Polish immigrants are characterized by a high degree of spatial concentration. In the 15 highlighted census tracts, it was more than 10% of all residents in the area, and in 12 it was between 5 and 10% of the population of the area. Only in the case of 14, the percentage of immigrants from Poland does not exceed 3% of the area. Most of them are in the neighborhoods of Greenpoint, Borough Park, Sheepshead Bay and Coney Island; single exceptions are localized in East Village, Manhattan.⁴⁶ These areas tend to be middle-class.

⁴⁵ For more, see: A. Sosnowska, *Polacy, Żydzi i Portorykańczycy...*

⁴⁶ 21 regions in which Poles make up more than 10% of the population are in Ridgewood, Queens. These regions have not been taken into account in the socioeconomic analysis conducted during research on the issue of relations between groups.

It means that members of the Polish community are not so economically weak that they have to settle in the poorest parts of the city. But at the same time, they are not rich enough to concentrate in the higher-class areas. They tend to be residents of average areas in the city, which also indicates their medium position in the social stratification system. What is more, it turned out that Poles prefer to settle near other European groups, including Germans, Irish, Hungarians and Ukrainians.

SUMMARY

The analysis presented in the text is of a general nature. I have tried to present the most important characteristics of the new group of Polish New Yorkers, extensively, yet to the point. To synthesize the conclusions from the analysis, one can state that modern Polish immigrants quickly pass the process of cultural assimilation and hold a middle position in the stratification system of American society. Nonetheless, the data suggest that amongst the Polish groups in New York the processes of structural and spatial assimilation occur more often in subsequent generations of immigrants, and they apply to Polish newcomers only in individual cases. The last two decades are especially significant for modern Polish migration to New York. The 4th wave of Polish migration to New York has changed the image of the Polish community, influenced its internal diversity and processes of change, and created new issues and ethnic phenomena. For example, according to this data, further analysis needs to be conducted to examine the discrepancies between Western and Eastern European immigrants in the United States with special regard to their influence on the issue of ethnic relations. It is of great importance especially now when societies on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean are changing, modern migrations are being created by processes of globalization and regionalization, and when the meaning of ethnicity is transforming and transnational socioeconomic connections are becoming more important.