

LEGACY CITIES



THE FUTURE OF LEGACY CITIES IN AN ERA OF WELCOMING

September 16, 2014

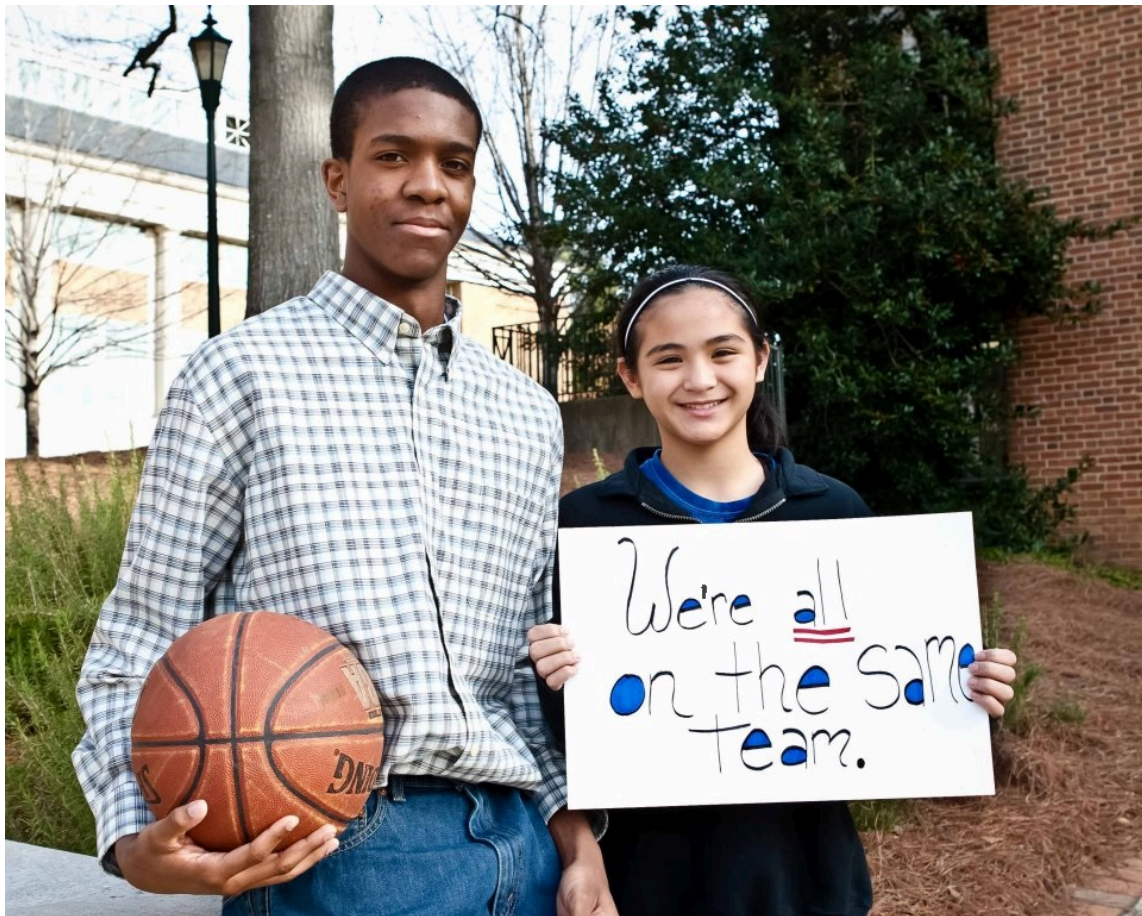


In honor of [National Welcoming Week](#), Rachel Peric, Deputy Director of [Welcoming America](#), joins us to discuss opportunities to embrace and engage immigrant communities in Legacy Cities like St. Louis and Dayton.

Immigration has dominated news headlines for much of this summer, with little progress made in the debate on Capitol Hill. Yet, regardless of what is happening in Washington, immigrants are being welcomed across the country into communities that recognize that their greatest strength comes from their diverse residents. In Legacy Cities, there is a growing recognition that a wellspring of resilience resides not only in the untapped assets of infrastructure and longstanding institutions, but in the people who have and will continue to shape the future. As in centuries past, New Americans should be welcomed as vital partners in expanding prosperity for our nation's cities.

Today marks the start of [National Welcoming Week](#), an event that celebrates the growing movement of communities and leaders across the United States that fully embrace immigrants and their contributions to the local and national fabric of our country. Hosted by the national organization, Welcoming America, the event taps into

the creativity of communities both small and large, rural and urban. In 27 states, from Virginia to Washington, local organizations are hosting events that celebrate the extraordinary untapped potential of their diverse residents. These events build personal connections among neighbors, business owners, parents, and newly naturalized citizens, and they are supported by community leaders ranging from mayors to the heads of economic development agencies, arts institutions, and community colleges.



And rightly so – forward-looking institutions and community leaders recognize the economic imperatives to open their doors to the increasingly diverse US population. In fact, communities across the country and around the world are in a race to the top to attract and retain the human capital that will allow them to thrive in a global economy. Becoming a more welcoming place for both immigrants and long-term residents gives cities and institutions a leg up in that competition and helps retain talented people of all backgrounds.

As a result, a growing movement of [cities and municipalities](#) in the United States – many of them Legacy Cities – are recognizing the [economic and social benefits](#) of attracting and integrating immigrants, and are creating a welcoming environment that

allows all residents to reach their fullest potential.



(Photo: St. Louis Mosaic Project)

Take for example, St Louis, Missouri, which seeks to become the fastest growing U.S. metropolitan area for immigration by 2020, bolstered by a business case developed by a local economist with Saint Louis University that showed how immigrants were key to the city's future prosperity and economic growth. The report led to the formation of a regional task-force, and ultimately the creation of the [St. Louis Mosaic Project](#), which works toward a goal of regional prosperity through immigration & innovation, based on a comprehensive, community driven strategy that engages all sectors of the community. Efforts such as the Mosaic Ambassadors program build bridges between newer immigrant communities and long-time

residents, while other initiatives promote economic growth and workforce participation,

such as through a mentorship program that connects immigrants to skilled professionals in their field.

In Dayton, Ohio, the [Welcome Dayton Plan](#), is a blueprint for positioning Dayton to become the most immigrant-friendly city in Ohio, if not the entire country. The plan, adopted unanimously by the city council in 2011, includes programs that provide marketing support for specific neighborhoods that have become hubs of immigrant entrepreneurship, community gatherings that create dialogue and empathy between U.S-born and immigrant residents and increase access to English language learning. Taken together, these efforts have attracted new residents from across the globe and led immigrants to participate more fully in the community, opening new businesses and buying homes that refresh the community and economy. The effort has also turned back Dayton's population decline, for the first time in half a century.

The great American city has long been shaped by migration, and will be again this century. But how cities respond to demographic change will influence their destiny, and whether they and all their residents can truly thrive.

Rachel Peric is the Deputy Director of Welcoming America, a national organization that helps communities across the country reach their full economic and social potential by becoming more welcoming toward immigrants. She has worked in community and international development for 15 years. To find out more, visit www.welcomingamerica.org.