

How Immigration Could Save Detroit

By [Esther Yu-Hsi Lee](#) on Jul 23, 2013 at 9:39 am



Detroit, a [city facing financial ruin](#), is becoming the destination choice for immigrants looking to settle in Michigan. Immigrants now make up five percent of the city's population, and are revitalizing the quality of life at a time that industries are vanishing. Detroit has one of the most diverse immigrant pools, with a slight majority of foreign-born Indians making up the [fastest growing immigrant group](#), according to a major [Global Detroit study](#) released last week.

Detroit could certainly benefit from more immigrants moving in. Steve Tobocman, director of Global Detroit [said](#), "Immigrants can create jobs for all of us and help everyone's economic future." A Fiscal Policy Institute study found that immigrants are [twice as likely](#) to start small businesses than U.S.-born individuals in Detroit.

There are other major economic and public safety incentives for encouraging immigrants to move into Detroit. For one thing, new immigrants buying the estimated 90,000 empty houses could put those properties [back on the tax roll](#). They would also discourage gangs and [squatters](#). Immigrants revitalized other cities this way. In Brooklyn, NY, there was a [90 percent drop](#) in crime when immigrants opened up businesses and actively made their neighborhoods safer.

Ethnic neighborhoods like Mexicantown offer proof that immigration helps population stabilize in Detroit. Markets and restaurants have sprung up alongside cafes. Although the majority of the Latino population in Detroit is low-income, it is the influx of new immigrants that reassures Tobocman. He [said](#), "I do think it may be the single great urban revitalization strategy in modern-day America, and it's one that doesn't cost tax dollars."

And at nearly half of its population between the ages of 25 to 44 years old, Detroit's foreign-born Indian population could continue to contribute to the economy during their prime working years. Overall, Asian immigrants in the Greater Detroit area do well economically with [over thirty percent earning over \\$75,000](#). Meanwhile, the average household income for Detroit is [\\$26,000](#).

Similarly, St. Louis launched the Mosaic Project in June to research ways that the city can attract and retain immigrants. If Detroit does not take cues about immigrants from Mexicantown, it may do well to look to St. Louis, which launched the [St. Louis Mosaic Project](#) in June to research ways that the city can attract and retain immigrants. Over the coming months, St. Louis seeks to create "virtual ethnic enclaves" that could make up for a physical community since immigrants are more likely to move into areas that already have immigrants.

Other cities find the economic value of welcoming immigrants too. [Immigrants coming to Philadelphia](#) is making up for its declining US-born population. Cleveland city officials sent recruiters abroad and launched a social media campaign specifically geared at encouraging [Latino](#) and [Asian](#) populations to move to its city. Such initiatives to retain immigrants could help such metropolitan cities garner the capital investment necessary to create [high-tech industries](#), which are overwhelmingly founded by immigrants.

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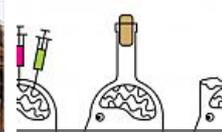
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