



5-1-2014

# Social Science Studio: Immigrants Make the City

Kushanava Choudhury  
kushanava@gmail.com

---

## Recommended Citation

Choudhury, Kushanava. (2014). Social Science Studio: Immigrants Make the City. *Social Science Studio Reports*. University of Pennsylvania. Retrieved from [http://repository.upenn.edu/socialsciencestudio\\_reports/5](http://repository.upenn.edu/socialsciencestudio_reports/5)

This paper is posted at Scholarly Commons. [http://repository.upenn.edu/socialsciencestudio\\_reports/5](http://repository.upenn.edu/socialsciencestudio_reports/5)  
For more information, please contact [repository@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:repository@pobox.upenn.edu).

## "Social Science Studio: Immigrants Make the City"

Dr. Kushanava Choudhury

How do American cities grow? Studies of urban transformation have focused on anchor institutions, the growth model of big business-generated employment, and "creative class" gentrification. After decades of decline, many major cities like Philadelphia are seeing gains in population again, as well as new commercial activity and street life, spurred by the influx of new immigrant communities. Yet few scholars have asked: What role do immigrants play in the current revival of the American metropolis?

In Spring 2015, six students at the University of Pennsylvania joined Prof. Kushanava Choudhury's "Social Science Studio" course to investigate how immigrants are remaking the American cities economically, politically and culturally. They focused closely on one neighborhood in one city: The Italian Market in South Philadelphia. South Philadelphia in the last decade has witnessed a transformation, with new businesses, rising property values, improving schools, and a very diverse population. This revitalization is most apparent in the Italian market area, where the arrival of immigrant communities and immigrant-owned businesses had transformed and revived the neighborhood. A focal point of this phenomenon in Philadelphia is the Italian Market area. Now a mix of Mexican, Vietnamese, Chinese and Cambodian populations alongside the traditional Italian community, the market and surrounding areas have been revitalized in the last decade by an influx of immigrants. Many new businesses have opened, the real-estate values have increased, as has enrollment in struggling public schools. This course will track the process by which immigration has transformed this urban space. By focusing on one city and one neighborhood, this course explored how immigrants are remaking the American city economically, politically and culturally.

The course, titled "Social Science Studio: Immigrants Make the City" used the design studio format to ask social science questions. Students used multiple methods drawn from architecture, planning, anthropology and political science, including mapping, sketching, photography, interviews, field notes and socio-economic surveys to develop independent projects over the course of the semester, that engage multiple methods and fields to produce new types of knowledge.

Their research draws on a tradition of doing detailed neighborhood studies with a group of students to seek insights into large theoretical questions that goes back to WEB Du Bois' Ward-level study of African Americans in the 7th Ward in Philadelphia, which became the classic sociological study, *The Philadelphia Negro*. The Social Science Studio format enabled students to collectively generate a large amount of new knowledge as well as new research questions in an emerging field. Their findings are

a

v

a

i

l

a

b

l

e

o

n

t

h

i

s