

**“Meeting the Challenges of Urban Diversity in an Age of Large Scale Migration”**

**The Gorbachev Foundation, Moscow**

**September 19, 2011**

---

**I. My Goal this morning is to prompt a conversation about tolerance, // urban diversity // and migration by offering a series of observations rather than by presenting a tightly argued analysis. In other words, what is to follow is more of a slide show than a feature film. I hope that you will not mind – sometimes snap shots can tell stories better than long discursive films. I am confident that, even if I fail to make a compelling argument, our distinguished commentators certainly will.**

**With that thought in mind let me start off with my first observation. We live in a time of cities as well as in a time of migration. These trends are interconnected with one another as both cities and migration are aspects of human existence.**

**The development of mobile populations, many times related to the globalization of economic and communication flows, comprises a new urban reality. Cities around the world have become agglomerations of neighborhoods defined by ethnicity, religion, class, or nationality. Creating inclusive and socially sustainable cities requires that urban policies pay close attention to the ways neighborhoods and local government interact to create community, // economic and educational opportunities // and provide services.**

**In this context, the creation of viable urban governance structures and strong democratic civic cultures are essential for sustaining inclusive cities which can accommodate migrants and diversity.**

**While these trends are global, the processes by which migrant communities are incorporated into a particular urban region vary from city to city. The history of place, community identities and public policy all have impacts on this process. Therefore, rather than set out specific policy recommendations I would like to suggest that a prior step in developing effective policies must begin with the promotion of new sensibilities about what such policies should be.**

**II. Such an effort begins with an observation: to be successful in a time of rapid global population movement such as the early twenty-first century, a city must simultaneously accept both different and shared points of reference. Local legends, memories, and the telling of history must go beyond exclusionary understandings of society to embrace an inclusive pluralism. In other words, urban civic identity must somehow embrace a variety of urban groups and individuals. Even if they have been divided in the past, cities must somehow create a shared sense of responsibility for a common future.**

**For inclusive civic identity to exist, city residents need to relate to one another in a shared // public manner that transcends individual and group needs and perceptions.**

**Cities are inevitably diverse, the center of changing patterns of interconnections. Therefore cities must strive to provide protected public meeting places in which people of difference come and go and interact with one another, incorporating the multiple histories of space, place, and identity. To do so, public space and public domain (both literal and figurative) must be both shared and protected.**

**Sometimes, the process of nurturing a shared sense of place and community emerges from the most mundane activities of everyday. Many Chicagoans of all races and classes identified with Marshall Field's Department Store as a central element of living in the city; a reality which became apparent only after Macy's had taken over the store. Local food – such as a Philadelphia Cheese Steak – allows people who**

**otherwise assume they share little // to find common ground. Sports teams similarly bring people together across all sorts of otherwise meaningful divides.**

**I mention these examples in particular as they are so trivial that nearly everyone in this room will not understand my references. But that is my point. Anyone who feels part of the Chicago or Philadelphia community will. It is precisely such obscure references that often pack the most emotional punch.**

**III. At other times, shared meaning can emerge from public protection of places used by all sorts of different people. Specialists writing about Montréal's extensive networks of parks, for example, have commented on how immigrants, Anglophones and Francophones use the same park space with ease even if they do not necessarily mingle with each other. Such co-presence can be an important first step towards something more meaningful.**

**Similarly, while commenting not long ago on the emergence of Washington's U Street as a place drawing different generations, races, and ethnic groups together, // community elder, jazz historian, and radio personality Jamal Muhammad // observed that, while people of different races and ethnicities coexist along today's U Street without commingling,**

such coexistence might be a first step toward something new. “One day,” he suggests, “there will be real diversity, and people will frequent the area and color won’t matter. We will all just hang out because we have the same interest.”

In other words, seemingly trivial aspects of everyday life may not be trivial at all when it comes to nurturing a broad umbrella of social identity that encompasses many competing identities. Policy makers need to build on these moments as they become more ambitious in their efforts to nurture shared identity.

To cite just one contemporary example, St. Petersburg officials have aggressively promoted tolerance in their city in response to rising violence and hate crimes.



**The city's tolerance program implemented in 2005 and recently extended for another five years involves introducing a tolerance curriculum in schools, // initiating cultural sensitivity training for local police, // and sponsoring community associations and festivals, among many activities. // The city's serious challenges from growing cultural diversity and mounting intolerance remain. No single program can be sufficient to transform a city of five million souls over night. Yet some sociologists are beginning to indentify deep changes in individual attitudes about cultural difference which point to a city that is becoming more accepting of difference.**

**In the case of St. Petersburg – a city built in no small measure by foreigners – retelling local histories with an emphasis on diversity can promote greater tolerance. Elsewhere in Eastern Europe – in such Polish cities as Łódź and Wrocław -- civic leaders have embraced their community’s diverse pasts as a way of making the presence of people different from oneself seem normal.**

**These Russian and East European experiences of recent years underscore the complexity of promoting shared points of reference among communities of great difference. Approaches must be multifaceted, // incremental, // and presumed to require persistence // and time // to succeed. There can be no “quick fixes.”**

**The challenge of policy-makers becomes how to achieve the goals of expanding the economic and social space for immigrants while balancing any number of conflicting assumptions about the appropriateness of specific policies.**

**The complexity of the challenges faced by cities that are becoming home to immigrant communities thus demands an appreciation of the reality that a city is subject to constant renegotiation. Residents and businesses alike constantly seek to re-establish the boundaries of the local social, economic, political, cultural, and linguistic landscape. Policies in response must be fluid, rather than constituting starkly posed regulations which create standards favoring single, black-and-white distinctions.**

Such a sensibility is more difficult to sustain than one might think. Moral relativism offends those who feel that they have played by the rules of the game only to lose to those who are playing by different rules of the game. This is why multiculturalism is under attack. There must be both agreed upon shared general assumptions and flexible individual policies. Otherwise, the complexities of migration and urbanization in a rapidly globalizing world can simply overwhelm local policy makers.

**IV. We know that these issues are complex because we have difficulty thinking of successful instances of diversity management in the past. When we think about diversity we think easily about conflict – conflict which began with the babbling languages of the Tower of Babel in biblical times. We think of contemporary tensions in Jerusalem, or in Sarajevo, or perhaps in our own Russian and American cities of today. // Americans of a certain age cannot think about Los Angeles without remembering the 1992 riots in South Central L.A.; or in Watts twenty-eight years before. Washingtonians know there have been significant outbreaks of communal violence within a mile of the corner of 14<sup>th</sup> and U Streets in Northwest Washington DC in 1919, 1968, and 1991. And what about London a few weeks ago? Or Paris just a couple of years before that?**

**Given how easy it is to think of such violence, I do believe that it is important to dwell a little bit on some successful examples of diversity. So let me turn to the city in which I grew up, New York.**

**V. New York University historian Thomas Bender, in a collection of essays commemorating the first anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on World Trade Center, explored the meaning of his city within an American – and, by extension, global – context. // “The special character of New York was evident from the beginning,” Bender observed. “If religion inspired the Puritans,” he continued, // “and if the dream of plantations and wealth drove the Virginians, // the practicality of trade engaged the first settlers of New Amsterdam. If churches and regular church service came quickly to both Massachusetts and Virginia, it was the countinghouse, not the church that represented early New Amsterdam.**

**In fact, the first substantial building in Manhattan was a stone countinghouse. There was little impulse to exclusion; trading partners were sought no matter what their background. Already in the 1640s eighteen languages were spoken in the area that is now New York City.”**

**“This very different history,” Bender goes on to argue, “became the material for a different understanding of society and politics, one that embraced difference, diversity, and conflict – as well as the dollar. The city was characterized by a divided elite and a rich diversity of groups and cultures. As a result, the city early experienced a continuing contest over the definition of itself.” // For Bender, New York’s search for itself is continuing in the wake of the tragic events of September 11.**



**Like the nineteenth century New York poet Walt Whitman, Bender believes that the city's meaning can best be found in its grand cacophony.**

**At a most superficial level, the origins of New York's embrace of difference originate at New Amsterdam's early stone countinghouse and the eighteen languages swirling around it. Russell Shorto, in homage to the Dutch legacy of tolerance and democracy that he sees as undergirding all that New York would become, emphasized the settlement's startling diversity from the very outset. Shorto writes:**

**“It was founded by the Dutch, who called it New Netherland, but half of its residents were from elsewhere.**

**Its capital was a tiny collection of rough buildings perched on the edge of a limitless wilderness, but its muddy lanes and waterfront were prowled by a Babel of peoples – Norwegians, Germans, Italians, Jews, Africans (slaves and free), Walloons, Bohemians, Munsees, Montauks, Mohawks, and many others – all living on the rim of empire, struggling to find a way of being together, searching for a balance between chaos and order, liberty and oppression. Pirates, prostitutes, smugglers, and business sharks held sway in it. It was *Manhattan*, in other words, right from the start: a place unlike any other, either in the North American colonies or anywhere else.”**

**New Amsterdam's Tower of Babel in miniature – that biblical image again -- was symptomatic of deeper structural properties. The city's commercial elite became too divided at the very outset of its existence to establish secure boundaries between those who were to be included in their community; and, those who would not. // Bender notes that, “you had a place in a [New England] Puritan village or town only if your values coincided with those of your neighbors. Rather than incorporating difference, Puritan town leaders were quick to offer strangers the ‘liberty to keep away from us’.”**

**New Amsterdam's corporate overseers dispatched by the Dutch West Indies Company had scant choice but to welcome all nature of beings to their mean and inconsequential settlement if they were to meet the demands for profit emanating from shareholders back in the Netherlands. Pragmatism, rather than community or virtue, became the order of the day.**

**As different groups arrived in New Amsterdam to seek fame and fortune, power became divided, dispersed, and contested. Local politics became neither a means to pursue virtue, nor to sustain community. Managing New Amsterdam – and the English colonial town to follow – required an at times forced accommodation of private interest.**

**“What matters about the Dutch colony,” Shorto tellingly observes, “is that it set Manhattan on course as a place of openness and free trade.” This continued to be the case following the arrival of British rule in 1664. To achieve any set of personal or group goals meant to transcend a “zero-sum game” through an engagement with others in pursuit of shared objectives.**

**VI. Such an embrace of “pragmatic pluralism” does not necessarily foster democratic institutions and good will among human beings. Pragmatic pluralism emerges from a willingness born of necessity to tolerate behavior that is to some degree offensive. Pragmatic pluralism – and the survival strategies associated with it so visible in as robustly cosmopolitan a city as New York – glorifies a middle ground that exists among all residents and communities. By doing so, it expands a city’s capacity to adapt.**

**Commercial entrepôts such as New York, and its parent Amsterdam, are predicated on the tumbling together of diverse populations for private gain.**

**They are marked almost from birth by high levels of a characteristic which Richard Stren of the University of Toronto and Mario Polese of the l'Université du Québec à Montréal have called “urban social sustainability.”**

**For Stren and Polese, urban social sustainability consists of “policies and institutions that have the overall effect of integrating diverse groups and cultural practices in a just and equitable fashion.”**

**VII. Urban meeting places such as New York or Amsterdam have demonstrated high capacities to accommodate diversity for decades, even centuries. Their histories are not always seamless. // Stren's and Polese's standard of "just and equitable" often represents an objective beyond the grasp of local residents. // On balance, they have proven themselves to be organic venues for the forced accommodation of difference through the practice of pragmatic pluralism. // In comparison to much of the world, they are communities with a deep-seeded capacity for absorbing diversity. Cities, in other words, with what might be considered to be high stocks of "diversity capital."**



**Diversity capital is an especially valuable resource in the early years of the twenty-first century. The present is a moment of rapid and large-scale movement of people around the globe. Migration has become a major concern in both “receiving” and “sending” countries. Diasporic cultures — often formed by the embittering and frustrating experience of displacement and exile — are powerful forces shaping the societies and cultures both of the countries left behind and the new homes of twenty-first century “global villagers.”**

**Migrants thus represent new challenges for nearly all of the world’s great cities as it is precisely in cities – and especially in large cities and metropolitan regions – that the existence of a plurality of interests, identities, communities, and individuals which migrants represent can not be denied.**

**Traditional conceptions of place and community collapse under the uncommon challenges of rapid metropolitan urban growth, // instantaneous communications, // and rapidly moving people.**

**Sustaining a civic consciousness beyond group identity in an age preoccupied with speed and velocity remains no humble task. A new era of metropolitan diversity disrupts previous understandings of power. Social groups in today's cities are forced to choose their ground carefully, moving to protect interests only in those areas that really matter for their survival or well-being. Urban life thus becomes an at times forced accommodation of competing private interests.**

**VIII. So, how do urban communities adjust and accommodate to the new realities of this century's massive transnational migrations?**

**At first blush, the answer to the twenty-first century urban conundrum of social diversity would appear to found in entrepôts such as New York and Amsterdam, urban communities which have accumulated diversity capital over their long histories. Such an approach, while illuminating, runs the danger of tautology: New York has accommodated a rich diversity of residents because it has done so since its founding in the early seventeenth century. Such observations fall short of revealing how a diversity capital perspective might be created in urban communities with less tolerant histories.**

Therefore, I now would like to seek clues about how a city's diversity capital can be formed and expanded through an examination of a more classically segregated community that has been accumulating new diversity capital in recent decades. In other words, I will try to discern moments when the qualities so evident in historically tolerant cities such as New York and Amsterdam emerge in even more hostile urban environments.

I will do so by speaking about the impact on communities long divided by language. More particularly, I would like to tell the story of the presence of tens of thousands of transnational migrants in Montréal.

**If successful, these remarks will encourage you to think about other cities that are rich in possibilities for accommodating diversity beyond traditional cosmopolitan centers such as New York, or Amsterdam; perhaps even close to home.**

**IX. Montréal is an ideal site for examining the creation of diversity capital as language has long framed the local cultural, social, and political landscapes. The city's realities became defined long ago through mutually exclusive linguistic categories which were thought to supersede neighborhood, occupation, gender, and class. Yet today, Montréal is one of the most successfully diverse cities in the world. How did this come about?**

**To answer that question, I would like to turn to one of the classic images of Montréal, that of “Two Solitudes.” In 1945, Canadian novelist Hugh MacLennan defined the reality of French and English Canada in his landmark novel *Two Solitudes* as parallel universes living in uneasy tension with one another along the shores of the St. Lawrence River valley.**

**“But down in the angle at Montréal,” he begins his tale of self-isolation, “... two old races and religions meet here and live their separate legends, side by side.”**

**Like race in the United States, language – and religion, for which it often served as a surrogate-- constitutes a founding incertitude to which Canada has yet to find a seemingly permanent accommodation; and probably never will. Indeed, language, culture and religion have combined with geography and history to produce at times unbridgeable chasms running through Canadian society.**

**Canada’s largest city for some two centuries -- before falling behind Toronto during the early 1970s -- and one inhabited by both linguistic groups, Montréal has remained a central venue for Canada’s unending renegotiation with itself.**

**The complex history of language, religion, and ethnicity in Montréal rests to a considerable degree on the post-1763-conquest British decision to permit French residents to retain their core institutions: the Roman Catholic Church, schools, and legal system. French Canadian life became centered around small parishes and rural settlements, leaving Montréal to colonial administrators and their commercial partners. // Montréal emerged as a predominantly English-speaking city by the early nineteenth century. Mid-twentieth century rural-to-urban migration – accompanied by a modernization of economic life // and a secularization of cultural life // known as Quebec’s “Quiet Revolution” -- once again transformed Montréal into a majority French-speaking city.**



**Montréal's Canadians of British-Protestant heritage retained control over senior management positions, especially in the private sector, well into the 1960s. An increasingly restive rising Francophone middle class and university-trained intelligentsia demanded opportunities for promotion. Language served as the central battleground on which Montréal's and Quebec's French communities sought both a shared civic identity and greater access to the wealth of local society.**

**The stage thus was set for a formidable political movement embracing Quebec sovereignty. With it began a Québécois drive to “re-conquer’ the urban metropolis” – to make Montréal French-speaking once again.**

**Migrants from abroad found themselves caught in the middle of what would become a half-century-long contest that played itself out in Montréal politics, economics, culture, as well as in the spatial and physical development of the city.**

**Three factors began to break down Montréal's linguistic frontiers during the last quarter of the twentieth century: // new migrants began to arrive from outside of the North Atlantic region; // Montréal – like all North American cities -- spun off a massive suburbanized region as center-city residents from all groups began to drive their automobiles out to new edge cities; // and, Law 101 requiring that immigrants send their children to French language schools refocused the process of ethnic assimilation around Francophone rather than Anglophone urban institutions.**

**X. Such profound changes in how Montréal functions expose the extent to which immigrants can alter the social and economic contexts within which the local political game is played. Despite all of the tensions and conflicts of the past fifty years – and despite the fact that Montréal is not yet heaven on earth in every regard -- the story of the city’s social, economic, cultural, and political transformations reveal how metropolitan communities can create new capacity for accommodating diversity even in the most seemingly hostile of environments. // The lesson is clear: cities can reinvent themselves.**

**But let's also understand that such achievements are fragile and can shift over night. City leaders everywhere must work constantly to maintain diversity capital so that it doesn't simply vanish under the turmoil of life on the street. Just think about the recent experience of London, in this context, as past achievements in promoting acceptance of diversity seemed to eviscerate in the blink of an eye.**

**XI. With these international observations in mind permit me to now turn to your country, to Russia. We in the West normally don't think of "Diversity" and the "Russian City" in the same phrase. Perhaps more importantly, neither do you. But we all should reconsider our notion that Russian cities are uniformly "Russian."**

**As you know, many major Russian cities have significantly diverse populations. To cite just two examples, by some estimates, Kazan's population is 52% Tatar, 43 % Russian, plus significant Chuvash, Ukrainian, Azeri and Jewish populations. Rostov-na-Donu's home to significant Ukrainian, Armenian, Korean, Chechen, and Metsketian communities. Indeed, according to some estimates approximately 50% of its population today consists of migrants.**

**I am sure that we can all think of other examples as well. The point is that Russia already faces a number of the challenges that I just spoke about with reference to New York and Montréal.**

**If diversity is becoming a normal state of affairs in the Russian city then Russia becomes another part of the contemporary world that is confronting very serious challenges of diversity; and you need to think collectively about what that means.**

**XII. Far be it of an American to tell you what to do with your country. So let me suggest one place you might consider starting. Russian cities need protected places for contact among diverse groups. While such spaces can be metaphysical and virtual – such as websites and blogs– they can also be quite physical and real – such as parks, stadiums, and student clubs.**

**What they have to share is a capacity to function as “zones of contact” among diverse groups. Such zones are places which bring a variety of people who often could barely tolerate one another crashing into close contact with one another as they come and go and play out the mundane realities of everyday life.**

Contemporary social scientists “problemitize” such places of intense group interaction as “zones of contact,” a notion, first used by Mary Louise Pratt in the early 1990s. For Pratt, such zones are the spaces where “cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other.”

“Zones of Contact” become the necessary proving grounds where the diverse becomes transformed from a challenge into an intercultural resource. // They are where accomplished cities in a diverse world become successful. // Like wetlands in the natural environment, such mixing bowls of urban diversity often appear to outsiders to be little more than wastelands. They are the first places to be rebuilt, redesigned, reconceived, and reconstituted when “reformers” think about “improving” a city. Yet this is a terrible mistake. Like



wetlands, zones of contact are among the most productive corners of urban life. Like wetlands, such communities must be revitalized from time to time for them to continue to enrich the city at large.

**XIII. The lessons to be learned from successful management of urban diversity do not yet point to specific policies as much as to a sensitivity promoting a forced tolerance of difference that creates a sufficiently large umbrella that a variety of different private interests can be accommodated together.**

**To do so, there has to be a menu of responses to diversity which promote, in Stren and Polese's words, "policies and institutions that have the overall effect of integrating diverse groups and cultural practices in a just and equitable fashion." And such policies and institutions, in turn, must protect spaces – both physical and virtual – in which meaningful interaction among people of difference – no matter how that difference is defined – can become commonplace; second nature, if you will.**

**That was New Amsterdam's founding accomplishment three centuries ago; as it has been Montréal's three decades ago.**

**Achieving these goals is not easy; but let us never forget that the alternatives can be horrific. Twenty-first century human beings have no choice if we are to avoid the horrors wrought by twentieth century human beings.**

**I fervently wish that all of you and your compatriots throughout Russia find the wisdom to make such accomplishments real.**

**Thank you.**