

# Who are we?

**That's the big question. And, like everything involving people—and Baltimore—there's a simple answer, and then there's the more complicated response.**

The simple answer to who we are is in the numbers. According to the latest census data, in Baltimore City, there's a 65 percent chance we're African-American. There's a 31 percent shot that we're white. And the odds are slim (about five percent) that we're Asian, Latino, Native American, or from a multitude of other heritages.

In Baltimore County, the majorities are reversed: Our chances of being white are 70 percent, and of being black are 23 percent. There's a slight (3.4 percent) chance we're Asian, and it's a long shot we're from a different race.

Easy, right? Numbers don't lie.

But people aren't numbers.

Because those numbers don't explain the flowing crowds of Spanish-speaking folks on Broadway in Fells Point. Or the Indian family who runs the York Road Dunkin' Donuts you go to every morning. Or why there are so many dialects of Russian spoken on Reisterstown Road.

The numbers don't explain why, in a city built on immigration, there's no Chinatown. Or why Baltimore County's black population has grown nearly 80 percent in the past decade.

A couple of years ago, two of our editors sat down with Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Taylor Branch and community activists April Garrett and Wendell Phillips to talk about Baltimore. Garrett and Phillips brought up something they had noticed: the face of Baltimore was changing. The group decided it was one of the most important evolutions in the life of the metropolitan area in recent history.

The face of the region is changing because of forces both internal and external. The late 20th century was the time of a massive population shift out of the city and into the surrounding counties. Put simply, a huge chunk of the city's middle and upper classes moved out. Those who remained in Baltimore City—either by choice or necessity—had to live with the resulting new problems and frustrations, and found themselves living in a very different city than the one in which their parents had grown up.

Today, Baltimore is changing again, this time from an influx of new faces. Immigration has once again become a hot topic, at

both the local and federal level—more so now than at any time since the Immigration Act of 1965.

Never heard of the Immigration Act of 1965? There's a good chance it's the reason some of your neighbors and coworkers are in Baltimore today.

The region's general economic vitality is part of the reason immigrants come here. But as Baltimore City continues to revive parts of itself, a lot of its citizens—nearly half of whom are unemployed—are wondering when the benefits of new waterfront condominiums and biotech parks will trickle down to them. Baltimore's downtown recently ranked above Washington, D.C.'s as a hot urban development prospect; one week later, our town was named the sixth most dangerous city in the nation.

It's confusing, to be sure. And it's not the simple picture the numbers draw.

This month marks the beginning of our yearlong journey to answer some of the big questions we found ourselves pondering: Who are we? Where are we going? What's working... and what isn't?

We've enlisted some of the area's best writers and thinkers to take a long, unblinking look at the state of Baltimore in 2005. Our multifaceted approach looks at the past (Locust Point was once second only to Ellis Island as an immigration center), present (the state of "Black Baltimore"), and future (the new generation of immigrants). Baltimore has always been hailed as a city of neighborhoods—and it's in those neighborhoods that we began our search to find the changing face of the city.

Along the way, we discovered some amazing stories, and learned that Baltimore cannot be described in simple "black and white" terms. It's much too wonderful and complex a town for that.

That's why we're beginning the series with a riveting look at life on a quarter mile of York Road by award-winning writer Rafael Alvarez and photographer Jim Burger. The men and women who work and live on these three blocks hail from all parts of the globe. Some are newcomers to Baltimore; others have been here for generations. All of them agreed to share their stories of success, and failure, and hope. And we learn that both an Irish teacher and a Liberian cab driver see Baltimore the same way—maybe more clearly than we can.

Who are we?

That's what we're going to find out. —THE EDITORS

People think  
Baltimore is a  
city of blacks and  
whites. In a three  
block stretch  
of York Road,  
things are a lot  
more colorful—  
and complicated—  
than that.

by **Rafael Alvarez**  
Photography By Jim Burger



AND



**"My friends say, 'It's a dangerous area, put up bullet-proof glass' . . . I tell them [that's] not necessary here. You have to get along with people, get to know them. If you're gonna die, you're gonna die."**

—Chris Kim, owner, Corner Carryout

At the corner of York and Woodbourne, near a vacant supermarket and a dilapidated clock tower, Chris Kim and her husband Kyung sweat out a middle class living at the Corner Carryout, serving hog maws the way the locals favor.

The Kims greet customers from behind a counter decorated with plastic fruit. Perhaps to affirm that she and her customers are more alike than they are different, Chris, who came to Baltimore from Korea at the age of 14, notes that the delicacy—the lining of a pig's stomach—is also savored back in Korea. It just isn't prepared the same way.

What country folk call "hog maws," the Koreans know as *osurigam tu*, boiled pig stomach dipped in Asian seasoning, Chris explains. At the Corner Carryout, which the Kims have owned since 2002, pig belly is boiled for hour upon hour before being seasoned with salt, pepper, vinegar, and the kind of hot sauce for which Louisiana is famous. Ready to eat, these soul food "maws" are served for \$3.68 a plate.

Sides include collard greens and macaroni and cheese, foods that Koreans learn to cook—and cook properly—if they want to prosper in African-American neighborhoods like this one, in the heart of the old Govans shopping district, a neighborhood built around commerce since the mid-18th century.

Michele Bradley, a 25-year-old stay-at-home-mom, has lived in the neighborhood since she was a teenager. She buys food at the carryout about twice a week. "It's the best around here," she says, recommending the baked chicken dinner for about six bucks, while noting that it costs a little more for the quality.

Two of the secrets: the Kims say they "taste everything before we serve it" and use real cheese and not processed cheese "product," apparently a rare thing in many neighborhood food joints.

Above- Kyung and Chris Kim.

"My parents thought this was a dangerous area, [and that] these couple of blocks were known for drugs," says Chris, while preparing a tray of hog maws. "But I said, 'I'm going to try.'"

## **"It's simply a new wave of people who want the same things that the old neighborhood did."**

**—Joseph Curran Jr., Maryland Attorney General/former Govans resident**

Once an Indian trail—thus the enduring Field's Old Trail saloon at the corner of York and Campbell Lane—then a fanner's turnpike to market and the route of the No. 8 streetcar, the stretch of York Road under consideration here is four lanes of parking metered asphalt where goods and services, U.S. currency, and at least a half-dozen languages are exchanged between hustlers from around the world.

"Self starters," says Lisa O'Reilly, an Irish immigrant working at St. Mary of the Assumption Catholic Church, of her fellow foreign-borns in the neighborhood. "What better way not to be a drain on society than to become a small businessman who earns his own salary and pays taxes?"



Since the days before the city's incorporation in 1797—when it had the largest population of free blacks in the nation, while, at the same time, shackled Africans were being brought ashore from ships docked along Thames Street—Baltimore has been perceived, often rightly, as two distinct cities: one white, now 31 percent, the other black, a half-notch above 65 percent, according to 2004 population figures.

But any time spent along the lick of York Road chosen for this article—from the Bangkok Place restaurant in an old drive-through bank near Glenwood Avenue to St. Mary of the Assumption a few stop lights away at Tunbridge Road—reveals the black/white dichotomy to be a flawed shorthand by people who didn't bother to get out of their cars.

This is not the Govans where a young Joe Curran Jr. —who grew up to become Attorney General for the State of Maryland—delivered the Sunpapers from a red wagon with wooden sides. It's no longer the neighborhood that erected a clock tower (now decrepit, it stands near the Kims' Corner Carryout) in honor of Curran's father, a longtime third district councilman that hardly anyone on the street remembers.

Curran first saw the changes up close, in 1982, while campaigning door-to-door as a candidate for lieutenant governor with governor-to-be Harry Hughes. Curran found himself knocking on the door of his childhood home, at 603 Radnor Avenue, looking for votes.

But it's not really that different, is it? Curran doesn't think so. "People want to own their own homes, to be safe, to take care of their families," says Curran. "To work."

Generally, Govans is populated by those kinds of people: those who want to work. There are others who can't or won't.

And then there are those obsessed with putting their shoulder to the wheel. It is this last group, those who bring a religious zeal to America's true religion—capitalism—which prospers on York Road.

Here, Pakistanis make their living alongside Indians, while Koreans—one of whom recently bought the local "dollar store" from an Indian family and renamed it "Mr. Bargain"—sell food and liquor.

A Chinese family who moved to Baltimore from Frederick two years ago to sell noodles had never heard of *Baltimore* magazine, and were too busy making deliveries to share stories of struggle and success.

Ukrainians sell vodka and anything else necessary to get your drink on; a man from Senegal who chose Baltimore over New York for the quality of life operates a pair of African hair-braiding salons; and a Trinidadian sells chunks of beef shin at his grocery store for a thick island stew the way his mama made it back in the islands.

Adding to the mix, this diverse stretch of road also cuts through neighborhoods that are segregated largely along economic and racial lines. On the west side of York Road, there are the well-to-do residents of Homeland, who are more likely to shop at Belvedere Square. On the east side, there are working people in a once-white stronghold that has been increasingly African-American since the late 1970s.

*Left* Joe Curran Jr.



Between this side and that side, people ran for coffee at the Dunkin' Donuts, buy toilet paper and flip-flops at discount general stores, have their taxes done at a Jackson Hewitt franchise, get drug counseling at a nearby treatment facility, buy booze and lottery tickets from several liquor stores, or get a haircut at My Barber Shop.

"All I do is cut hair," says Marvin Raymond, who rents space in an old church from a Korean man. Just straight-up hair cuts—in one of the few African-American-owned businesses along these three blocks—for "whites, blacks, Koreans, Chinese—anybody," says Raymond.

The sign outside his shop reads "All Are Welcome." "It's in everyone's interest that the corridor remain an eclectic mix," says Homeland resident Kathy Greenberg, a former aide to Mayor Martin O'Malley and a devotee of city life. "A good mix of shoppers adds vitality and can be a deterrent to crime."

Commercial, cultural, and residential.

Historic, stubborn, beleaguered, and hopeful.

Sad and beautiful in a short swath of 21212.

"Govans has always been cosmopolitan. Even in the old days, there were always some black families [near Schwartz Avenue]

and tons of German and Irish and English, a lot of Polish."

—Marty Clarke, co-owner,  
Swallow at the Hollow tavern

Govans begins around 43rd Street, on the edge of Waverly, and runs just about to the Senator Theater at Northern Parkway. Once a village known as Govane's Town—for land granted in the mid-1700s to William Govane by Frederick Calvert, the sixth Lord Baltimore—it has always been associated with the road that leads to York, Pennsylvania some 50 miles north.

Govans—which once housed the estates of the rich and influential, including library founder Enoch Pratt and art collector William Walters—was annexed by the city of Baltimore in 1918, and the neighborhood grew rapidly over the next decade. As automobile traffic increased, locals complained that York Road had become a "gasoline alley," and the rapid growth continued until the onset of the Depression. A housing boom rejuvenated the area after World War II, and brick rowhouses soon outnumbered the wood and shingle bungalows that were erected after the First World War.

Above- Robert Gibbs, Caribbean Variety.

Commercial development on and around York Road boomed in the 1940s. The Homeland and Belvedere shopping centers were constructed, and Horschid Kohn opened its Belvedere store.

But in subsequent decades, as the county siphoned off residents and businesses, the area went into decline. Even with the infusion of shops run by new immigrants, the area continues to struggle and lacks a few basic amenities. Liquor is in abundance, but groceries are hard to find.

A tenant for every storefront would be "heaven," according to Larry Ford, who served on the Govanstowne Business Association and dressed up as Santa at Christmas to reward the more civic-minded business owners with boxes of doughnuts.

Here, commercial rents average \$14 per square foot, much less than the \$35 per square foot charged at Belvedere Square just up the road. Close to downtown and Towson, it's understandable why Govans might appeal to a new wave of immigrants chasing the American Dream.

**"We looked everywhere for a new business, something in an office complex in the county: something sale, with short hours and weekends off, so we could do more catering. It didn't happen. We found this."**

—Chris Kim, Corner Carryout

Although the wholesale price of pig stomachs has risen from about 50 cents a pound to \$1.22 with the influx to Baltimore of Koreans and Mexicans who enjoy "tripe," the expense is not in the ingredients. The Kims get their pig stomachs in 30 pound tubs from the Manger Company, a meat-packing plant on Franklinton Road that dates to the 19th century, for approximately \$35 a tub. Rather, it's the time, care, and labor—about five hours of boiling the maws before they can be seasoned—that dictate price.

To understand why Chris and Kyung are judged better than some of the other foreign-born merchants along the strip—where relations between locals and business owners can be tense—set political correctness aside for a moment and listen to Chris talk about the difference between white customers and black customers.

Before she learned to cook soul food on York Road, the family owned a lunch counter at 1121 Light Street—Kim's—near the Cross Street Market.

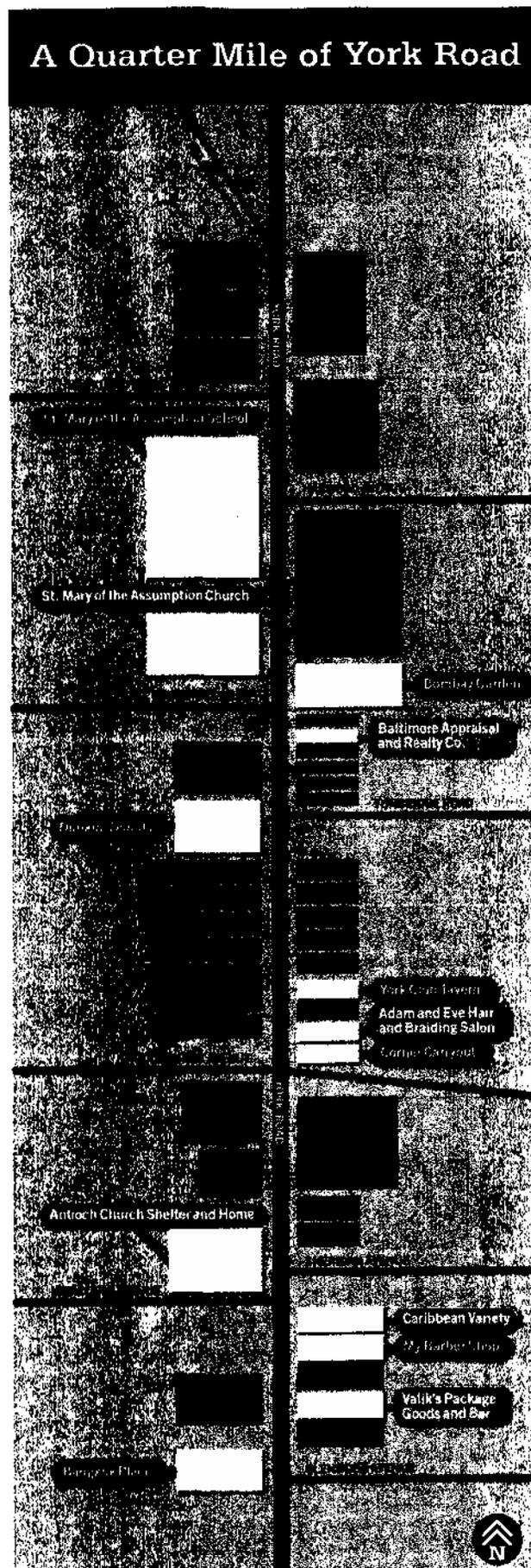
They ran the place for ten years, starting in 1992, and about 80 percent of the customers were Caucasian. Close to 90 percent of her customers in Govans, says Chris, are African-American.

It is not the pigment of one's skin, apparently, but its thickness that makes a difference. The white folks in South Baltimore were more reserved, she says, and after ten years she didn't feel as though she'd gotten past pleasantries such as "have a nice day."

On York Road, it's different

"You can joke with black people, play around a little bit, and that's what I try to do here," says Chris.

African-Americans, she says, "let me get to know them—that's how I remember their names and their faces, by laughing





with them ... they're human, I'm human."

On Sunday, the Kims—along with sons Bruce, a Towson University biology major, and Brandon, a Dulaney High School student—attend Presbyterian services in Baltimore County. After church, Chris does laundry and gets ready for the work week ahead.

"Work, work, work, until the kids are grown," says Chris, whose father came to this country and became a hospital janitor while her mother washed dishes in a Chinese restaurant. "That's how most Koreans are. When the boys are educated and have their own lives, well stop."

Well, maybe not *stop*. They may keep the current building, and Kyung would like to buy a gas station and collect the rent from it once the 12-hour, six-day-a-week shifts at the restaurant are over.

Chris looks forward to sitting home, drinking coffee, and listening to quiet music.

"That's the dream," she says.

**"It's a soup. We put in green bananas, potatoes, split peas, green beans, carrots, celery, and we make dumplings from [ground] yucca mixed with flour. But it always starts with the cow feet."**

—Celestina Louis, mother of Robert Gibbs, owner of Caribbean Variety

The ingredients for "cow feet" stew, and a store that sells them, can be found just south of the Corner Carryout, near

the intersection of York Road and Sheridan Avenue.

Robert Gibbs runs the Caribbean Variety, where—along with exotic soda pop, cigarettes, and Huggies—you can buy \$1.59 a pound beef shin bones.

Around the corner, Gibbs' mother, Celestina Louis (who landed here from Trinidad via New York City about 20 years ago), grows herbs on her windowsill to flavor island cooking such as "cow feet" stew made from the shin bones.

[In earlier waves of immigration to Baltimore—about two million Europeans, most of them Germans, landed here by ship in the late 19th and early 20th centuries—the meat of the shin, but not the bone, was used for sour beef and dumplings. Germans were also among the first immigrant corner store owners.]

Somewhat sweet and at times called "cow heel" soup, the stew is a rib-sticker that begins with a pound-and-half of cubed shins tossed into a pressure cooker until the marrow softens enough to flavor the stock.

A mother of eight who turns 62 in April, Louis often prepares a big batch of the stew, or callo-loo, a Caribbean crab soup, for Sunday dinner with her family.

Be it pasta and fava beans simmering in bacon fat near Our Lady of Pompeii, or long gone days of pot roast in Baltimore's old Irish enclave around Valley and Eager streets in the old 10th ward, Sunday has traditionally meant a big meal in the middle of the afternoon for tight-knit families.

A member of St. Mary's church, she gets "pigeon" peas in the pod at her son's store and boils the side dishes of sweet potatoes and plantains (to cut back on fried food). She uses

Above: Celestina Louis, Govans resident.

Spanish thyme and rosemary grown on the inside windowsill of her dining room, which overlooks the side of the Caribbean Variety. In summer, the backyard becomes a garden of tomatoes and green peppers and long beans.

After putting the bones on to boil on a Sunday afternoon and showing off a large plastic jug of home-ground seasoning—ginger, garlic, celery, cilantro, parsley, spring onions and thyme preserved with vinegar—Celestina stares out her front door at a gaggle of raffish-looking young men on the street.

"The old heads have gone," she says of original neighbors who died or moved away over the decades, "And a new set has moved in. We've got drugs, people drinking on the steps."

She sighs. "I don't want retaliation, so I stay inside," she says, and returns to the kitchen to check on the stew.

## "They'd steal the air conditioner out of the office window if it wasn't secured."

—Daniel Nolan, property appraiser

Northern District police officer Karen Brzowsky patrols a post that includes the downtown Govans shopping district. An evening ride-along with Brzowsky reveals nothing especially violent or peculiar in the context of crime in Baltimore, where

it's been a quarter-century since a teenager being murdered for his sneakers made front-page news.

From 2002 through early summer of 2005, city crime stats from the mid-Govans area reported one murder, eight shootings, and 52 robberies. Assaults were listed at 75, larcenies totaled 220, and crimes against property were most prevalent with 372, according to reports provided by Detective Donny Moses of the Northern District.

Much of Brzowsky's patrol time is spent answering "nuisance" calls: three grown men—brothers who happen to be neighbors—are drunk and fist-fighting on their own property, another resident suspects that a family member was stealing checks out of her mailbox, and someone complains about a party thrown by college students living in the area.

Mostly, Brzowsky cruises her post in her police car ("flying the blue flag") to make sure people know she is around and watching. The corner of York and Sheridan, just outside Celestina Louis's door, is considered one of the top problem spots in the area, police say.

The nuisance crimes bedevil Daniel Nolan, a man who would warm William Donald Schaefer's heart with his neighborhood trash obsession. A property appraiser working out of a rowhouse-turned-office alongside the Bombay Garden restaurant, Nolan has run Baltimore Appraisal and Realty Co. at 5509 York Road for the last eight years.

"I had to build a shed over the stairs that go down to the

*Below. York Road, near Daniel Nolan's office*



basement [outside] so people would stop [defecating] in it," says Nolan, who says he owns about 30 rental properties around the metro area. "People do drugs in the alley and you have to call the city a dozen times to pick up trash that people leave back there."

Perhaps to acknowledge Nolan's efforts, the city of Baltimore has posted a sign at the end of his block. It reads, "No Urinating."

**"So many times, when people come at night, they stop the car, look around and keep going. They think it's unsafe because young guys drink beer on the street, but it's not."**

—Balwinder Singh Ghana,  
Bombay Garden owner

The nuisance crimes, and the perceptions they bring, keep potential diners away from Bombay Garden, next to Holy Comforter Lutheran Church at 5511 York Road. That's the conclusion that proprietor Balwinder Singh Chana has drawn after he

puts out discount coupons or gets a good review in a local paper.

Ghana, 54, believes police could do a better job of keeping drunks and others from loitering out front, although that is easier said than done with so much carryout food available in the immediate vicinity.

But the real problem, says Chana, who does brisk business for his luncheon buffet, is not crime but a lack of well-lit parking that would allow customers to step from their car to his door, a door that each morning is fragrancd with incense in keeping with his Sikh beliefs.

"When I was young in India," says Chana, a Punjabi who worked as an agricultural inspector before he left Punjab, "I'd always think to come here."

Chana is an old hand at Indian food in Baltimore and takes credit for introducing chicken tikka masala to Crabtown. Arriving here in 1983, he was a chef at Akbar in Mount Vernon and helped found the Mughal Garden, the old Harvey House piano lounge to Baltimoreans of a certain age. Mid-town Charles Street was perhaps a better business address, with the Brass Elephant and the Maryland Club nearby, but there were still problems on the street and Chana stood sentry so none of it tumbled inside.

He began serving food in Govans in 2002, when the Bombay Garden was known as Jai Hind, and has employed waiters from Kenya and Nepal. Last year, he bought the building that houses his restaurant.

*Below. Ruby Jefferson, Govans resident, at an Antioch Church sidewalk sale.*





Like almost all of the other foreign-born entrepreneurs nearby, Ghana does not live in the neighborhood. When the last customer has pushed their plate away, he and his wife go home to Parkville.

**"Why can't black people get a break to sell fried fish to our own people?"**

**—Reverend Joyce Galloway, of the Antioch Church Shelter & Home**

Better than the old life in Senegal and certainly better than New York City—that's how Abdul Seek sees Baltimore, "a better environment" to raise a family and start *a*. business in traditional African hair braiding.

Abdul and his wife Adam (a common Senegalese name, they say, for a woman born a twin) left Africa about 20 years ago. Both are now in their late 30s and operate a pair of "Adam & Eve" hair braiding salons in Govans. The first shop did so well they opened a second, attracting customers from around the metro area.

The Seeks, who saw opportunity in Govans about seven years ago when many of the stores were vacant, are among the few, if not only, foreign-born merchants who live in the neighborhood and send their children to area public schools.

"I have no complaints," says Abdul.

Nor do the Slutskys. The lone Eastern European merchants along this three-block strip, the Ukrainians do things differently than the Asians. For one thing, they hire neighborhood residents to work in their liquor store/bar, Valik's, at 5303 York Road.

Valentine Slutsky studies business administration at Towson when he's not helping his father, Alex, at the liquor store. The Slutskys—along with mother, Irene—arrived in Baltimore from Kharkov in the Ukraine just after Christmas 1994.

Alex, who was a top manager for an automotive/trucking company in Kharkov, first took a job driving a cab and then an 18-wheel tractor-trailer. Irene, a computer programmer, was able to transfer those skills to a similar job. Val was 10 and, having studied English in the former Soviet Union, served *as* his parents' translator.

Hiring people from the neighborhood "is good business," says Val Slutsky, noting that local employees attract folks they

know and patrons are more likely to show respect for a business that hires familiar people.

When those people pay in pennies, rolled or loose, the Slutskys don't blink. "Money is money," says Val. "If you have ID [to prove age], I don't care what you pay with."

Such open-mindedness, if that's the proper term, gives the Slutskys a good rapport with customers.

Some people in the neighborhood told Val that after he opened, they were happy not to go anymore to nearby Rosen's, owned by Koreans perceived as unfriendly by some locals. The owners of Rosen's didn't want to be interviewed for this article.

The Reverend Joyce Galloway, of the Antioch Church Shelter & Home in the old Union Trust Bank at 5300 York Road, occasionally preaches about the cultural differences between African-American consumers and foreign-born business owners and the tensions it can cause.

At times, Galloway exhorts her congregation to take inspiration from the entrepreneurs' ambition—what local pest control company owner Charlie Libby admires as "a persistent stick-to-it-iveness"—and emulate it.

Other times, the minister bemoans the "mean and nasty" treatment African-Americans are sometimes subjected to by business owners who "take but don't give back."

Things were better, says Galloway, a native Baltimorean, when many of the stores were owned by local Jewish families.

"Everybody comes in to take from us," she says. "One of the gas stations won't take more than five pennies at a time—poor people get to the end of the month and all they have is pennies—and [another merchant] won't cut a hamburger in half so two can eat for the price of one.

But, she asks, "How can they be poor in their own countries and come here with no credit and start a business?"

"The black community needs to be driven, too," says Galloway. "We need more positive energy."

**"I was vegetarian when I got here. I didn't know the difference between bacon and sausage. My father said, 'You live in America and you can't even differentiate between their food? Learn it in a week.'"**

**—Hetal Patel, daughter of Dunkin' Donuts owners Vishnu and Gita Patel**

Hetal Patel is the heiress to a small fortune built on doughnuts and coffee sold to Baltimoreans.

Not that she was excited to come to America, at first. Sitting inside the Dunkin' Donuts owned by her parents,

Above: Reverend Joyce Galloway.



Hetal says she hated leaving her village in Gujarat, about an eight-hour train ride from Bombay in northwestern India.

Hetal joined her parents and two sisters in Baltimore in 1994, at age 9, arriving in the land that Columbus believed to be India, with two brothers. And no small resentment.

"Kids would take my lunch or open the door when I was going to the bathroom and I'd cry," she says, remembering her poor English. "I told my mom I didn't want to go back to school, and she said it would get better."

Somewhat similarly, Hetal's mother, Gita, now 40, has had her doubts. She was once robbed behind the counter at the Govans Dunkin' Donuts, anchor of the family's New World success, and it rattled her enough to not want to return.

"She asked herself if it was worth it," says Hetal, a University of Maryland medical student who earned a 3.75 GPA in biology at the UMBC. "But I don't think my father ever

had a moment" of doubt about the risks one takes to get ahead.

Things did, indeed, get better for Hetal when her English improved in the sixth grade, and she began making friends. Today, she is dismissive of the life she would likely have had in India.

"I would have had the opportunity to go to school through 12th grade," she says, "and if I did extremely good [I might have] commuted to the nearest college—no dorms, no car, I'd have to go back home every day—and if a male in the family ever saw you talking with some boy at school, you'd be doomed.

"Unless it was a college for pharmacy or medicine, it wouldn't mean anything. I would have been a housewife. Living in some village as somebody's wife."

Immigrants from India tend to begin their American dream as helpers to countrymen who arrived before them—doing what they are told, doing it well, and doing it for long hours. Many live together in a single apartment while the clan climbs the ladder together, as Hetal's extended family did shortly after her father arrived in 1987 to run the York Road "Dunkins" for a friend.

But Hetal, who started breathing flour dust at age 12, can sustain herself from dawn till dark on the enterprises controlled by her father, 44-year-old Vishnu Patel.

"On days when I don't want to spend money," says Hetal, who lived at the family's Comfort Inn near the Westview Mall when she attended UMBC. "I eat breakfast at one of the Dunkins,

*Top-* Charles Libby picking up his lunch at Subway, another Patel-owned store. Behind him are Perm Kumar Shresta and Muna Basnet. *Bottom-* Hetal Patel and sister-in-law Alka Patel.

lunch at Subway, and then go to Baskin-Robbins for dessert."

It's an obvious question: Why is Dunkin' Donuts—which don't yet exist in India, where breakfast tends to be a spot of tea and homemade bread—such a popular venture for Indians?

"Quick money for hard work," explains Hetal.

Though it's not for everyone: "I've seen a change in the way my father hires since he started," she says, noting that he fired one locally-born employee for alleged theft and was sued by another. "He's learned that for part-time work, an Indian student from Towson University is probably the best way to go."

Patel adds that the doughnut shop's focus on non-meat items—despite the occasional bacon or sausage breakfast sandwich—appeals to Indians, many of whom are vegetarians.

She learned the difference between bacon and sausage with the same application she used to master multiplication tables through 16 by the age of four. Sometimes the motivation was the threat of a spanking.

"When my parents got here, they both worked triple shifts," says Hetal. "They lived in somebody's basement and managed to save enough money to move when my uncle came here. Then there was one apartment for the whole family. They were able to drop down to double shifts then."

Besides the reduced workload, advances in technology have helped. Today, it's easy to make a good doughnut.

"It was hard in the old days when you had to roll the dough by hand," says Hetal. "Today you just throw the dough in the machine and turn a switch. It's the lazy way, says Dad, and people still get tired."

Vishnu Patel, apparently, never tires. Before he opens a business—whether for the first time or just another weekday morning—the former Gujarat! dairy farmer recites a ritual "pooja" that involves lighting a piece of cotton that has been dipped in butter. Sometimes incense is used.

"You light it near a picture of [the] god ... close your eyes, put your hands together, and say a prayer," says Hetal. "Everybody's prayer is a little different. There are so many million subdivisions of Hindu. A picture of the god Sat Kaival Saheb is in all of my father's businesses."

Among other graces, pooja is performed to gain legitimate wealth; to please the gods of wealth and prosperity. "Saying pooja is the first thing my Dad does before he turns on a single machine," says Hetal.

By her count, he owns seven Dunkin' Donuts stores, a liquor store, two motels, three Subway restaurants, and two Baskin-Robbins ice cream stores.

The gods, it seems, are well pleased.

"I don't think I could ever work that hard," says Hetal, who notes that studying is cake compared to running a business. "My father was the first person to come over from my family. He built the foundation and everyone else rises up on it. Seventeen of my relatives are in the United States now, all because of my father. And he considers York Road the beginning."

Poojas, hard work, discipline, and cunning have delivered nicely for Vishnu Patel. Triple shifts, an employee roster that doubles as a family tree, and enduring a robbery or two along the way are about to yield that fabled American measure of success: "My daughter the doctor...."

The price?

"He has less time now," says Hetal. "He's not the same Dad as he was when he only had three Dunkins. He used to come out and play volleyball with us. We still play cards, but it's not like it used to be."

**"I like it here. Baltimore is like a Jewish mother—the big comforter. You resent them and their smothering, but it still is the best thing for you when you need care and attention."**

—Lisa O'Reilly, teacher,  
St. Mary of the Assumption

Lisa O'Reilly crossed the ocean to teach the gospel in Govans. Five years ago, she responded to a classified ad in the

Lisa O'Reilly.





National Catholic Reporter and eventually left Ireland to become pastoral associate for religious education and youth ministry at St. Mary's,

"I'm about the only Irish immigrant you're going to find around here," says O'Reilly. "And I challenge American perceptions of the Irish immigrant I chose to leave, but not solely for economic reasons."

O'Reilly's situation differs greatly from that of Irish immigrants who escaped potato famine in an earlier era and landed in neighborhoods like Mount Clare to work the railroad. Before coming to America, O'Reilly drew a government paycheck, as a teacher, in a country experiencing an economic boom (the "Celtic tiger" she calls it). "Now, the Irish emigrate for specific jobs," says O'Reilly. "I wanted to see what the American church offered that the Irish church still is dreaming about—a professional ministry. My heart is in my job, and I consider my [current] life in the ministry to be more important than just being a teacher."

There was another factor that figured in O'Reilly's choice of Baltimore—a direct flight on Aer Lingus from Dublin to BWI. "At the time, my mother was recovering from cancer, and I needed to have that flight [in order to visit]," she notes.

In this way, O'Reilly says, her experience mirrors that of many immigrants: "We don't choose where we want to plant ourselves—circumstances dictate that we have to make do. In the past, the ship landed, and you went as far as the bag you carried allowed you to before you *had* to set it down."

O'Reilly, who patronizes the Caribbean grocery for cod liver oil and the Lucozade sport drink from the U.K., says assimilating was more difficult than she expected. "I speak a different English," she says, citing an example, "and within all language meaning is transmitted. Being from Dublin, we have a way of speaking and tone, not to mention a way of being with our words that just is not accepted here. It has been hard to let go of our stridency. That's why Irish get on so well in New York City: It's that in-your-face attitude and that 'f— you, but I love you anyway' attitude."

**"We [Africans] joke that Baltimore is a dead-end town. There's no bounce from Baltimore. This is where you come to settle down."**

—Ernie, cab driver

In a pan-African congress known as the York Club Tavern at 5407 York Road, funk tunes from the 1970s play to a room

Above: African immigrants gather at the York Club Tavern.

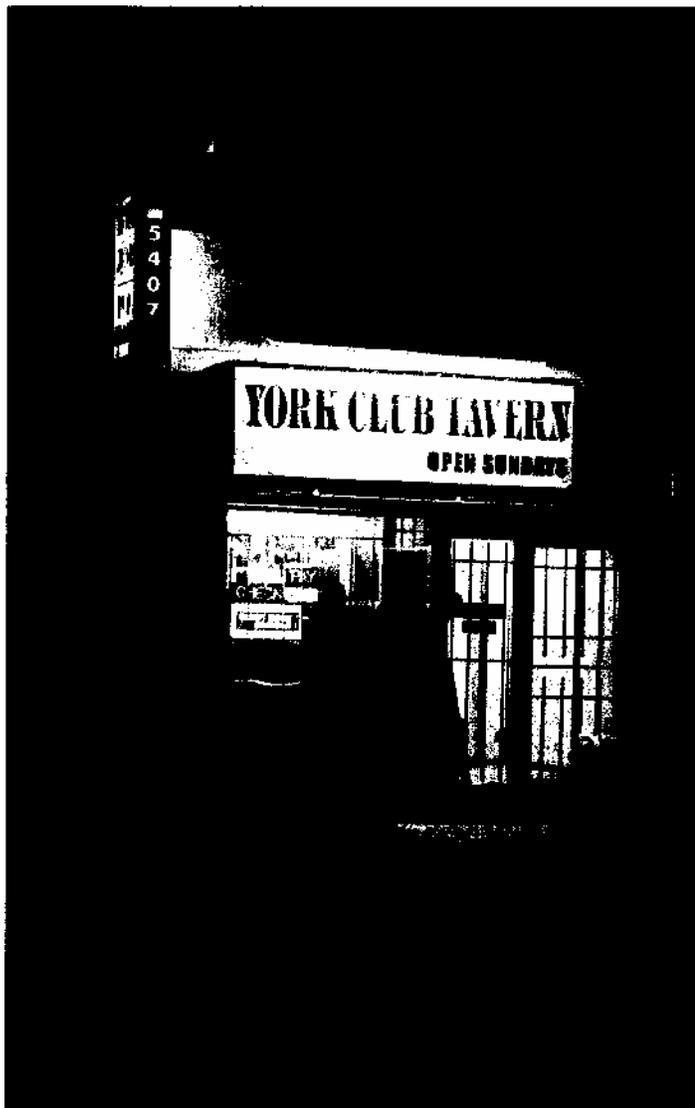
that the Fire Department says should not hold more than 30 people. It's a smoky, hole-in-the-wall no wider than a standard rowhouse, with enough fluorescent light to perform surgery on the white formica bar.

A round is served with working man's prices: A Heineken, a Schaefer ("America's oldest lager"), a can of National Bohemian and a Coke for five bucks. Try that math in Fells Point.

American football plays on the TV and, along with English, conversations are held in Kikuyu (a dialect of Bantu spoken from Nairobi to the southern and southwestern slopes of Mt. Kenya) and Swahili. Now and then, someone from Sierra Leone, just north of Liberia, walks in.

"I am a descendent of freed American slaves who went back to Africa," declares a Liberian cabbie named Ernie.

Not wanting to give his full name, Ernie seems to know everyone in the bar, and he's constantly shaking hands, slapping backs, and making introductions. He says he came to the U.S. seeking a better life. Ironically, his descendants had left this country and set out for Liberia—which was founded by a group of Americans that included George Washington's nephew, Bushrod—with the exact same goal.



The former owner of York Club was from Liberia, the current owner is Nigerian. And in the shadow of a Budweiser poster celebrating the great queens of Africa, talk among Kenyans and Liberians and Nigerians is of Julius Kambarage Nyerere, an African statesman, early proponent of the anti-apartheid movement, and first president of Tanzania who died in 1999. The discussion is lively, the mood familial.

Other topics include the consequences of the treaty of Brussels, the roots of Kenya's independence from Great Britain in the "Mau Mau" movement of the early 1950s, and, according to those present, how Kenya is the only African country to win independence from a colonial power without outside help.

It echoes countless conversations from bygone eras in taverns and restaurants frequented by immigrants and their descendants in neighborhoods like Greektown, Little Italy, and Canton. In the mid-1960s, for instance, Karcz's Cafe, in the 800 block of South Broadway, was an old seamen's saloon run by a Polish-American from St. Stanislaus, Agnes Karcz, and her husband, a Spanish sailor from Bilbao named Simone Garayoa.

There, Cutty Sark scotch was cut with a lone drop of water, the National Boh was still brewed down the road on Dillon Street, and 8-ounce bottles of Coca-Cola came with pictures of mighty Baltimore Colt football players inside the caps.

Tugboat men bought shots of Four Roses for Norwegians who crossed the ocean under full sail. Jerry Vale was on the jukebox, and the conversation inevitably veered from union waterfront politics to the Spanish Civil War, in which Garayoa had suffered under Franco.

It was a place where men—and sometimes women, if the bars weren't stag—gathered to talk about old days that weren't so good and new days that would surely be better.

People from around the world and around the corner occupied those barstools, raised a glass, and offered a toast: "God bless America,"

Today, on York Road, it's the same as it ever was.

"The mix," says Ernie, "is what makes America a great country."

*Writer/reporter ROSALIA SCALIA contributed research to this article.*