Evident in chapters 3 and 4 are tensions defining the final theme considered in this book: the steadily increasing multiculturalism of cities like New York and Los Angeles. Though most large cities (and many smaller ones) have long-standing immigrant communities, the number of immigrants from particular regions like Asia, Mexico, and Latin America grew significantly in the 1980s. According to Chalsa Loo’s *Chinatown: Most Time, Hard Time*, the “newcomers from these countries” constituted around 30 percent of immigrants in the United States; but from 1981 to 1985 the numbers ballooned to 83 percent of immigrants, vastly changing the face of cities.\(^1\) Changing the ethnic make-up of urbanism, however, was just the beginning for immigrants bringing their traditions, languages, and customs. In *Megalopolis*, Celeste Olalquiaga describes changes corresponding with immigration from Latin America: “cityspeak,” which blends Spanish and English toward new kinds of discourse, and “casitas,” which “install a piece of Puerto Rico in the middle of New York City.”\(^2\) What changes like these represent is the “Latinization of urban culture in the United States, the formulation of hybrid cultures such as the Chicano and the Nuyorican.”\(^3\) Celebrating this transformation is performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Peña, who contends that cities like New York and Paris “increasingly resemble Mexico City and Sao Paolo” and that Tijuana and Los Angeles “are becoming models of a new hybrid culture.”\(^4\) Unlike Gomez-Peña, however, many living in New York City and Los Angeles in the 1980s met these changes with anxiety and antagonism. Underlying the neotraditional movement discussed in Chapter 3 was the goal of returning to a “lily-white” Small Town America, an effort to preserve urban living from immigrants who are defined as intruders. Hostility toward immigrants is implicit in the processes of suburbanism and ghettoization, and that hostility became explicit in acts of violence or
intimidation against immigrants who, through their very presence, were at the center of sociospatial crisis.

Told symbolically and literally that they were unwelcome in many neighborhoods or cities, immigrants from Asia, Mexico, and Latin America were confronted with this dilemma. Geographically removed from their homelands—for any number of reasons—they are at the same time epistemologically distanced from the cities where they found themselves in the United States. Dramatist Dolores Prida, born in Cuba but living in New York at the time of this interview, describes how this quandary influences her writing: “Most of my plays have been about the experience of being a Hispanic in the United States, about people trying to reconcile two cultures and two languages and two visions of the world into a particular whole.” Normally, consideration of this dilemma takes place on the global scale, with emphasis placed on international displacement, but this dilemma can be compounded by the urban scale. In the city that is openly hostile to the presence of the immigrant, the attempted reconciliation described by Prida is both external and internal: coming to know the alien city that reminds the immigrant, daily, of his or her non-place, and struggling to know oneself in a city that actively denies or decries the immigrant’s presence. Certainly not easy, this “reality of contemporary immigration” has been defined by Chaudhuri in Staging Place as “the radical insecurity and contingency of urban existence. The contemporary immigrant is between Scylla and Charybdis, or as Americans would say, between a rock and a hard place.” But in Imaginary Homelands, Salman Rushdie extends Prida’s discussion of the immigrant quandary toward surprising possibility. Always subject to the “triple dislocation” of language, place, and history, the immigrant initially becomes caught up in the widening gyre of indeterminacy and individuation. But because the immigrant finds him or herself between here and there, then and now, he or she becomes “obliged to find new ways of describing himself.” And, I would add, new ways of knowing the city within which this process of reconciliation and individuation unfolds.

This chapter considers plays that dramatize the antagonism between immigrant and the city of Los Angeles as well as the immigrants’ determined, and frequently disillusioning, efforts toward reconciling this antagonism: David Henry Hwang’s FOB and Cherrie Moraga’s Giving up the Ghost. Neither play is the most well known for these dramatists, possibly because they represent early works in the careers of Hwang and Moraga, or because they highlight antagonism surrounding urbanism, citizenship, and identity that perhaps make the broad audiences necessary for major productions uncomfortable. This antagonism begins with the ways immigrants and their communities have been historically marginalized: pushed to the periphery