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978-1-107-03993-3 - Strangers and Neighbors: Multiculturalism, Conflict, and Community in America

Andrea M. Voyer

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Strangers and Neighbors

Multiculturalism, Conflict, and Community in America

The city of Lewiston, Maine, has struggled since its mills began closing in the 1950s. Historically recognized for its large French-speaking population descended from the Canadians who staffed the city's mills, in the new millennium Lewiston acquired a new identity as "Maine's Mogadishu." Beginning in 2001, substantial Somali immigrant settlement gave Lewiston the largest per capita Somali population in the United States and sparked controversies and collaborations that redefined the city.

In *Strangers and Neighbors*, Andrea M. Voyer shares five years of observations in the city of Lewiston. She shows how longtime city residents and immigrant newcomers worked to develop an inclusive and caring community in which they could all take part. Yet the sense of community developed in Lewiston was built on the appreciation of diversity in the abstract rather than on fostering close and caring relationships across the boundaries of class, race, culture, and religion. Through her sensitive depictions of the experiences of Somalis, Lewiston city leadership, anti-racism activists, and even self-described racists, Voyer reveals both the promise of and the obstacles to achieving community in the face of diversity.

Andrea M. Voyer (Ph.D., University of Wisconsin, Madison) is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Pace University.

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ANDREA M. VOYER

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For my father.

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The processes of social life, the “how” of everyday interaction and negotiation, the organization of humans into effective working units, the development of specific capacities and powers to move the world, are formed by meaning.

Reed 2011

In every community there are conventional understandings concerning the divisions of mankind, and there are customary procedures governing their social interaction.

Shibutani and Kwan 1965

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Acknowledgments

There comes a time in the life of a text when it is time to send it out in the world to see how it fares. For me this is a difficult task – acknowledging that I have taken this about as far as I can and now it is time to let it go. There are still so many ideas I wish I could present more effectively, so many empirical observations I would like to highlight, so many things I would do differently if I could roll back the clock and begin again. This book is not perfect, not by a long shot, but I hope that it will be a sufficient jumping-off point for discussion of a subject that can always use fresh perspectives – immigration, diversity, being, and belonging in modern, multicultural societies. Thank you for reading.

This project would not have been possible without the generous participation of the people of Lewiston, Maine, and my fellow diversity trainers-in-training. Thank you for bringing me in. I hope that I have made good on your trust and honored your good intentions and hard work.

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explorers, and fellow travelers are on an amazing journey. Thank you for sharing the ride with me. Laretta and Hazel, my true life's work born in the midst of this research enterprise, make it all worthwhile. I watch with joy as you grow.

As a child playing in the attic, I came across a box of my father's unpublished short stories. I read his work voraciously, in awe that my dad, someone I could not imagine outside out of the mundane world of family life, had created literature. My father's writing and his love of reading instilled in me a reverence for the beauty and power of words on a page. Dad, this book is for you.