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Crossing Borders, Changing Places:
Immigrant America in a World on the Move

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Abstract

The world is increasingly on the move. In 2013, the United Nations reported that there were 236 million international migrants worldwide, most of whom were born in the global South and migrated to the global North, reflecting widening global inequalities and intractable conflicts. These self-selected border crossers represent 3% of humanity; the other 97% are stayers, living in the countries where they were born. Their "changing places" are sites not only of cultural and demographic transformations, but also of social and political collisions that elicit predictable nativist responses. More immigrants — a fifth of the world's total — go to the United States than to any other country. This essay will focus on the story of "Immigrant America" over the past half century—from its historic nadir in 1970 to its resurgence as a Nation of Immigrants and to Deportation Nation. The subtitle is a *double entendre*, referring at once to the country and to our book *Immigrant America*—new editions of which have been published in each of the past four decades (the newest comes out this summer) as we seek continuously to grapple with and to represent a vertiginously changing world and this "permanently unfinished" moving target of a society.

Keywords: Immigrant America, international migration, economic inequality, social and cultural change, nativism, deportation.

The world is increasingly on the move. In 2013, the United Nations reported that there were 232 million international migrants worldwide, most of whom were born in the global South and migrated to the global North, reflecting widening global inequalities and intractable conflicts. These largely self-selected border crossers represent 3% of humanity; the other 97% are stayers, living in the countries where they were born. Moving to a foreign country isn't easy, even under the most propitious circumstances. Those who do tend to be young and intrepid souls, which is what makes migration the selective process it is. But the border crossing process of "*changing* places" is accelerating; between 1990 and 2013, the number of international migrants worldwide rose by over 77 million, with much of this growth occurring between 2000 and 2010. Their "changing *places*" are sites not only of cultural and demographic transformations, but also of social and political collisions that predictably elicit a range of nativist and exclusionary responses.

Since World War II, labor migration has flowed increasingly from poorer to richer countries and from younger to older countries. Refugees, the least desirable migrants, move mainly from one poor country to another. Today, only 1 percent of the populations of less developed countries are foreign-born, compared to more than 10 percent of the populations of more developed countries, which have declining fertility, aging work forces, and economies that generate significant demand for both immigrant professionals and (often unauthorized) low-wage laborers. Moreover, historical ties between countries underlie contemporary migrations. They're rooted in colonialism, war and military occupation, labor recruitment, and economic exchange. Once migration footholds are formed, family networks expand, remittances link communities across national borders, and all of this turns migration into a self-sustaining process.

More immigrants – a fifth of the world's total – go to the United States than to any other country. I will focus here on the story of "Immigrant America" over the past half century – from its historic nadir in 1970 to its resurgence as a Nation of Immigrants

and now to Deportation Nation – from the Great Inclusion to the Great Expulsion. I examine the historic transformation of the U.S. into a new nation of immigrants along two narrative axes – diversity and inequality. The subtitle is a *double entendre*, referring at once to the country and to our book *Immigrant America* (Portes and Rumbaut 1990, 1996, 2006, 2014) – new editions of which have been written and published in each of the past four decades as we seek continuously to grapple with a vertiginously changing world and with this "permanently unfinished" moving target of a society.

A New Nation of Immigrants

Contemporary immigrants to the United States comprise a hugely diverse population – in the unprecedented diversity of their national and class origins, their migration histories and cultural backgrounds, their legal statuses and contexts of reception, and the complex developmental transitions of their children. The most highly educated groups in American society today are immigrants, as are the least educated groups; the highest and the lowest poverty rates in the United States today are found among the foreign-born. The previous era of mass migration to the United States, extending from the 1880s through the 1920s, accompanied the American Industrial revolution and overwhelmingly brought immigrants of European origins. Today only about 1 in 10 come from Europe while most come from Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia, with significant additional flows from the Middle East and Africa. Partly as a result, the United States is becoming a "majority-minority" country. It is possible that the majority of the children of the immigrants may remain visible minorities and at risk of being treated as perpetual foreigners in the U.S. (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2015: n.p.). The manner of the incorporation of this "new second generation" will shape the destinies of the ethnic communities that are being formed in areas of principal settlement, and will represent the most consequential legacy of this era of mass immigration to the United States (Portes and Rumbaut 2001: 18).

Figure 1. The Evolution of the Foreign-Born Population of the United States, 1900-2010
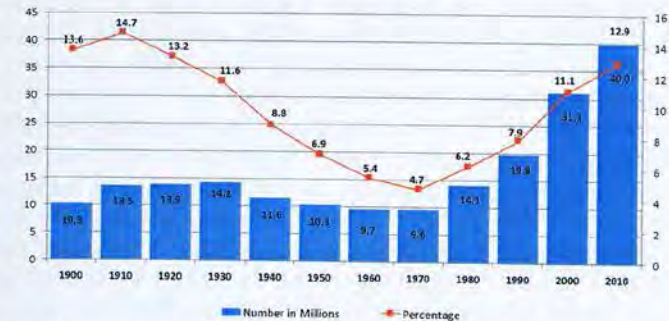
Source: Decennial Census for 1900 to 2000; American Community Survey for 2010.

Figure 1 graphs both the size and proportion of the foreign-born population of the United States from 1900 to 2010, based on decennial censuses until 2000 and the American Community Survey in 2010. The Great European Migration of 1880 to 1930 peaked in 1910, when 14.7 percent of the population was foreign-born (or 13.5 million immigrants), then slowed with the onset of World War I and the Russian Revolution. That era was followed by a period of retrenchment – with immigration declining further after the passage of the restrictive national origin quota laws of the 1920s (the quotas set aside 98 percent of visas for Europeans, mainly Northwest Europeans, and barred Asian and African immigration), and plummeting with the onset of the Great Depression (arguably the greatest immigrant control measure of all time, since no matter what the quota was, foreigners had no incentive to come and join the masses of unemployed Americans), followed by World War II. It reached a historic nadir in 1970 – both absolutely and relatively – when only 4.7 percent of the U.S. population was foreign-born.

Immigration then began a sharp increase, accelerating over a period that now extends into its fifth decade. By 2010 the American

Community Survey (which replaced the "long form" of the decennial census) counted a foreign-born population of 40 million, a historic high, quadrupling since 1970 (when it stood at 9.6 million), and growing by about a million a year. In 2010 the foreign-born comprised 12.9 percent of the total population, a share not yet at the levels reached from 1860 to 1920, but growing gradually nonetheless.

Concomitantly, the number and share of the children of the immigrants has also grown. Both first- and second-generation children of immigrants already are (or will soon become) the majority of children in many school districts and cities, and even in some states. By 2014 over 25 percent of all children under age 18, a total of 18.7 million, had an immigrant parent (*Child Trends*). This growth has been extremely rapid – in 1970 the child population of immigrant origin accounted for only 6 percent of all children. The majority are children born in the United States, who have birthright citizenship. Thus the bulk of the expansion of this population has occurred in the second generation – U.S.-born children of immigrant parents.

Figure 2. The Ten Largest Immigrant Groups in the United States, 2010
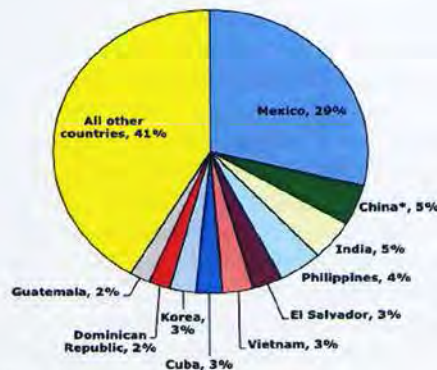
Source: American Community Survey, 2010.

In 2010, about two hundred foreign countries and possessions sent immigrants to the United States. Aside from basic statistical data supplied by the Department of Homeland Security and the Census Bureau, relatively little is yet known about most of these groups. More is known about the broader contours of the new immigration. *Figure 2* charts the ten countries that accounted for 60 percent of the immigrant population of 40 million in 2010. Five are Latin American countries, five are Asian countries. Mexico alone accounts for 29 percent of total immigration (legal and undocumented); China (including Taiwan) and India comprise 5 percent each of the foreign-born population, followed by the Philippines (4 percent); El Salvador, Vietnam, Cuba and Korea (3 percent each); and the Dominican Republic and Guatemala (2 percent each). *Table 1* lists those ten largest foreign nationalities in rank order by size, and by the size of each group in the top three states of settlement of each nationality.

Table 1.

TEN LARGEST FOREIGN-BORN GROUPS, 2010: STATES OF PRINCIPAL SETTLEMENT

Country of Birth	N	% of total foreign-born	First	%	Second	%	Third	%
Mexico	11,711,103	29.3	California	36.8	Texas	21.2	Illinois	6.1
India	1,780,322	4.5	California	18.3	New Jersey	11.6	Texas	9.2
Philippines	1,777,588	4.5	California	45.6	Hawaii	6.1	New York	4.8
China[a]	1,601,147	4.5	California	30.3	New York	21.3	Texas	4.5
Vietnam	1,240,542	3.1	California	39.3	Texas	12.7	Washington	3.9
El Salvador	1,214,049	3.0	California	34.8	Texas	13.9	New York	8.7
Cuba	1,104,679	2.8	Florida	76.5	New Jersey	4.5	California	3.4
Korea	1,100,422	2.8	California	31.4	New York	9.2	New Jersey	7.1
Dominican Republic	879,187	2.2	New York	50.1	New Jersey	14.5	Florida	11.0
Guatemala	830,824	2.1	California	31.7	Florida	8.4	Texas	6.8
Total foreign-born	39,955,854	100	California	25.4	New York	10.8	Texas	10.4
Total native-born	269,393,835	100	California	10.1	Texas	7.8	New York	6.6

[a] Immigrants from mainland China only.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey.

Clearly, immigrants are not randomly distributed across the United States, but exhibit specific patterns of ethnic settlement – of concentration as well as diversification in states and metropolitan areas. These patterns are in turn reflected in the changing composition of the student population in affected school districts. As the bottom rows of *Table 1* make clear, of the 40 million immigrants in the U.S. in 2010, 25.4 percent were concentrated in California (in contrast to only 10 percent of the native born), followed by 10.8 percent in New York and 10.4 percent in Texas (both larger shares than the native born who reside in those two states). Those three states combined to absorb nearly half of all immigrants in the country. Another 18 percent of the foreign-born were in Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey. Of the 11.7 million Mexican immigrants, about 37 percent were concentrated in California and 21 percent in Texas. In fact, California was the principal state of settlement for eight of the ten groups – the exceptions being the Cubans (three fourths of whom are in Florida) and the Dominicans (half are in New York). These patterns, however, have been evolving over time, and continue to change in response to a variety of economic and social factors.

Changing Places: Patterns of Immigrant Settlement

In 1910, at the peak of the era of mass European migration, the census counted a foreign-born population of 10.6 million, or 14.7% of the national total (as seen in Figure 1 above). At that time, the bulk of the immigrant population (62%) was concentrated in seven northern states, though only 39% of the U.S. population lived there: New York (21%), Pennsylvania (10%), Illinois (9%), Massachusetts (8%), New Jersey (5%), and Ohio and Michigan (4% each).

Table 2.
**Top States of Immigration and Growth of the Foreign-Born Population, 1990-2010**

| State | Foreign-Born Population | | | | % growth of foreign-born (1990 to 2010) |
| | 1990 | | 2010 | | |
	N	Rank	N	Rank	
United States	19,767,316		39,955,854		102.1
Top states of immigration:[a]					
California	6,458,825	1	10,150,429	1	57.2
New York	2,851,861	2	4,297,612	2	50.7
Florida	1,662,601	3	3,658,043	4	120.0
Texas	1,524,436	4	4,142,031	3	171.7
New Jersey	966,610	5	1,844,581	5	90.8
Illinois	952,272	6	1,759,859	6	84.8
Top immigrant growth states:					
North Carolina	115,077	21	719,137	14	524.9
Georgia	173,126	16	942,959	8	444.7
Arkansas	24,867	42	131,667	37	429.5
Tennessee	59,114	31	288,993	23	388.9
Nevada	104,828	23	508,458	16	385.0
South Carolina	49,964	34	218,494	28	337.3
Kentucky	34,119	39	140,583	34	312.0
Nebraska	28,198	41	112,178	38	297.8
Alabama	43,533	35	168,596	33	287.3
Utah	58,600	33	222,638	27	279.9

Source: U.S. Census, 1990; American Community Survey, 2010.

In 2010, a century later, 67% of the foreign-born population of 40 million was settled in just six states, and again only 39% of the U.S. population lived in those states: California (25%), New York (11%), Texas (10%), Florida (9%), New Jersey (5%), and Illinois (4%). Of those, three states remained from a century earlier as main areas of immigrant concentration, but their combined share of immigrants had decreased from 35% to 20%: New York, New Jersey and Illinois (reflecting largely the New York and Chicago metropolitan areas). The rapid growth of southern and western states as new immigrant destinations, notably California – which by 1990 accounted by itself for one-third of the foreign-born total, but only for 10 percent of the native-born population – Texas and Florida, reflects the post-war economic and demographic shifts to the country's Sun Belt.

The twin processes of continuing concentration as well as diversification in immigrant settlement patterns in recent decades are detailed in *Table 2*. It documents the growing size of the immigrant population in the top six states from 1990 to 2000 to 2010, but also the top ten states ranked by the *rate of growth* in their foreign-born populations from 1990 to 2010. Despite continuing immigrant population growth in the former, it is the extraordinarily rapid growth of the latter that has called attention to the emergence of "new destinations" in immigrant settlement. During these twenty years, the U.S. immigrant population doubled from 19.8 million in 1990 to 40 million in 2010. In the top six states the foreign-born population increased from 14.4 million to 25.9 million – in California alone it grew from 6.5 million in 1990 to 10.2 million in 2010 – but only Texas and Florida exceeded the national growth rate of 102 percent.

Figure 3. Patterns of Immigrant Settlement: Concentration and Diversification
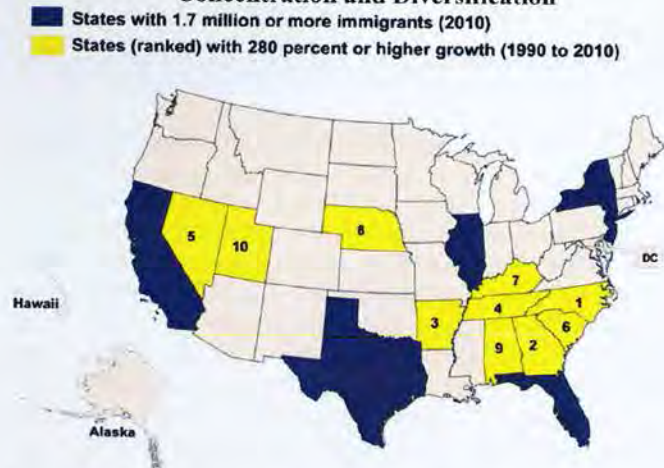
Source: U.S. Census, 1990; American Community Survey, 2010.

By contrast, as shown in *Figure 3*, ten states – all located in the south or in the mountain west – grew by 280 to 525 percent, led by North Carolina and Georgia, and followed by Arkansas, Tennessee, Nevada, South Carolina, Kentucky, Nebraska, Alabama and Utah. The areas experiencing the fastest growth rates were places that had relatively small immigrant populations prior to the 1990s. While the net increase in the number of immigrants in California during this period (nearly 4 million) was larger than the total foreign-born population in those ten fast-growth states combined, the impact of foreigners in regions unused to the incorporation of immigrants (and the schooling of their children) produced political reactions by natives at the state and local levels that have shaped the national policy debate.

Changing Tongues: Patterns of Linguistic Diversity

In 1910, nearly 15 percent of the U.S. population was foreign-born; of those 13.5 million immigrants, 3.4 million spoke English as their "mother tongue" – they hailed mainly from Ireland, Great Britain and Canada. German was by far the largest non-English language spoken, with 2.8 million speakers, followed by Italian (1.4 million), Yiddish (1.1 million), Polish (944,000), Swedish (683,000), French (529,000), Norwegian (403,000), and Spanish (258,000).

As mass European immigration waned over the subsequent decades, so did linguistic diversity. By 1970, in fact, the Census Bureau stopped asking its question on mother tongue. At that time, English was still the language spoken by the largest number of immigrants (over 1.7 million, again drawn chiefly from Canada, the U.K. and Ireland), followed now by Spanish (with nearly 1.7 million speakers and growing rapidly over the previous decade), then German (1.2 million), Italian (1 million), and – with less than 500,000 each – Yiddish, Polish, and French. *That year of 1970 likely marked the end, comparatively, of the most linguistically homogeneous era in U.S. history.* By 1980, for the first time, a non-English language – Spanish – surpassed English as the language spoken by more immigrants than any other, and the number of non-

English languages spoken has proliferated as well.

Table 3. Language Diversity in the United States, 1980 to 2010

Year	U.S. population 5 years or older N (millions)	Spoke English only N (millions)	%	Spoke non-English language at home N (millions)	%	Spoke Spanish at home N (millions)	%
1980	210.2	187.2	89.1	23.1	11.0	11.1	5.3
1990	230.4	198.6	86.2	31.8	13.8	17.3	7.5
2000	262.4	215.5	82.1	47.0	17.9	28.1	10.7
2010	289.2	229.7	79.7	59.5	20.3	37.0	12.6

Sources: 1980, 1990 and 2000 U.S. censuses; 2010 American Community Survey (ACS).

Table 3 presents a summary of the growth of linguistic diversity in the United States since 1980, which has accompanied the acceleration of international migration. In 1970 the census had reported the lowest proportion of foreign-born in the country's history: only 4.7% of the population consisted of immigrants. But by 1980, as *Table 3* shows, when the census began asking people aged 5 or older if they spoke a language other than English at home, it found that 23 million people or 11 percent of the 210 million aged five years or older answered in the affirmative; and of them, 11 million, or 5 percent, spoke one language: Spanish. In 1990, 32 million people or 14 percent of the 230 million aged five years or older said they spoke a language other than English at home. Those figures went up sharply still again in 2000 to 47 million and 18 percent; and most recently in 2010 to 60 million and over 20 percent of the population 5 and older. What is more, of those 60 million who reported speaking a non-English language at home, 37 million (nearly 13 percent) spoke Spanish.

Table 4.
Percent of Population Who Speak a Non-English Language at Home, by States and Metropolitan Areas, in Rank Order, ca. 2010[1]
(U.S. mean = 20.3%)

Top 25 States	%	Top 25 Metros	%
California	43.4	McAllen, TX	85.4
New Mexico	36.1	El Paso, TX	74.7
Texas	34.5	Miami, FL	73.0
New York	29.6	Jersey City, NJ	59.0
New Jersey	29.1	Los Angeles, CA	56.8
Nevada	28.8	San Jose, CA	50.8
Arizona	27.0	New York, NY	46.3
Florida	27.0	Orange County, CA	44.8
Hawaii	26.0	Fresno, CA	43.1
Illinois	21.9	San Francisco, CA	42.2
Massachusetts	21.5	Bakersfield, CA	41.0
Rhode Island	21.0	Riverside, CA	40.5
Connecticut	20.8	Bergen-Passaic, NJ	40.5
Washington	17.8	San Antonio, TX	40.2
Colorado	16.9	Houston, TX	38.8
Maryland	16.4	Oakland, CA	38.8
Alaska	16.0	Ventura, CA	37.4
Oregon	14.5	Fort Lauderdale, FL	37.1
Virginia	14.4	San Diego, CA	36.9
Utah	14.1	Middlesex-Somerset, NJ	34.4

District of Columbia	13.9	Las Vegas, NV	32.8
Georgia	12.9	Dallas, TX	32.1
Delaware	12.1	Albuquerque, NM	31.3
		Vallejo-Fairfield-Napa, CA	30.9
Kansas	10.6		
North Carolina	10.6	Chicago-Gary, IL	30.2

¹ Persons 5 years or older; metropolitan areas with populations above 500,000.

Source: American Community Survey (ACS), 2008-2010 merged files.

Because the census never asked whether this was the "usual" language spoken at home, or how frequently it was used relative to English, or how proficiently it was spoken, the question probably elicited a considerable over-estimate. With these data it is impossible to measure or determine the extent and meaning of "bilingualism." Still, the data do point to the presence of a very substantial and growing minority of people who are not English monolinguals. Most of those 60 million non-English speakers are immigrants: 57 percent are foreign-born, as are half (49 percent) of the Spanish speakers. But a sizable proportion are native-born. Among the 230 million who spoke only English at home in 2010, just 2.6 percent were born outside the United States (mostly immigrants from countries where English is a first or native language).

Table 4 ranks the top twenty-five states and the top twenty-five metropolitan areas with at least 500,000 inhabitants according to the percentage of non-English speakers as of 2010. Clearly, speaking a foreign language remains concentrated in cities and states along the coasts, the Great Lakes, and the U.S.-Mexico border. California tops the list of states with 43 percent of its 37 million residents speaking a non-English language at home, followed by 36 percent in New Mexico, 34 percent in Texas, and over 29 percent in both New York and New Jersey. The states listed

in *Table 4* include both the six most important immigrant-receiving states (California, New York, New Jersey, Texas, Florida, and Illinois) as well as a number of emerging immigrant destinations (Arizona, North Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, Utah, and Nevada). In a country where by 2010 one in five persons (20.3 percent) spoke a foreign language at home, states like West Virginia, Kentucky, Montana, North Dakota, Mississippi and Alabama stood in sharp contrast, with 95 to 98 percent of their populations speaking English only.

Linguistic diversity, like immigration, is chiefly a metropolitan phenomenon. Over 91 percent of the population of non-metropolitan areas in the United States speaks English only. The twenty-five metropolitan areas with the highest percentages of residents who speak a non-English language at home are confined entirely to the six gateway states; the sole exceptions are Las Vegas and Albuquerque. Ten of the top twenty metros are in California alone. Not surprisingly, the largest shares of people living in homes where a language other than English is spoken are found in the large border metropolises of McAllen and El Paso, Texas, where 85 percent and 75 percent of their populations, respectively, speak a non-English language at home (overwhelmingly Spanish). Miami (73 percent), Jersey City (59 percent), Los Angeles (57 percent), and San Jose (51 percent) are also home to dominant shares of non-English speakers. Even at the bottom of the list, 30 percent of the Chicago metropolitan area's population speaks a non-English language at home. Among metropolitan areas of newer immigrant settlement which do not appear in *Table 4*, by 2010 only Tucson, Phoenix, Seattle and Denver exceeded the national non-English-usage norm of 20 percent; but Portland, Atlanta, Salt Lake City and Raleigh-Durham were not far behind.

What non-English languages are spoken in the United States today? The Census Bureau records 382 discrete languages, coded into 39 main languages and language groups. As noted, Spanish dominates among non-English languages: 12.6 percent of U.S. residents aged five or older said they spoke Spanish at home. But no other language reached 1 percent of the U.S. population. The

next closest language was Chinese, accounting for just 0.9 percent of the population (2.4 million speakers), followed by Hindi, Urdu, and related languages at 0.7 percent (1.7 million), Tagalog and other Filipino languages at 0.6 percent (1.5 million), and Vietnamese at 0.5 percent (over 1 million). And the two largest non-English categories after Spanish hide considerable diversity, given the many mutually unintelligible varieties of Chinese and the diversity of tongues spoken by people from the Indian subcontinent.

To be sure, today's linguistic diversity is not new. Over the past two centuries, the United States – historically a polyglot nation containing a diverse array of languages – has incorporated more bilingual people than any other country in the world. Yet the American experience is remarkable for its near mass extinction of non-English languages – which is why the United States has earned a dubious reputation as a "language graveyard" (Rumbaut 2009). The general historical pattern is clear: Those in the first generation (especially immigrants who arrive as adults) learned as much English as they needed to get by but continued to speak their mother tongue at home. The second generation grew up speaking the mother tongue at home but English away from home – in the public schools and then in the wider society, given the institutional pressures for Anglicization and the benefits of native fluency in English. The home language of their children – and the mother tongue of the third generation – was mostly English.

Contemporary evidence based on longitudinal surveys confirms past patterns. In general, age at arrival, in conjunction with time in the United States and level of education, are the most significant predictors of the acquisition of English fluency among immigrants of non-English origin. The speed with which English fluency is acquired by immigrant children is especially notable, underscoring the importance of age at arrival. But their mother tongue atrophies over time and generation. Fluent bilingualism, American style, is unstable and scarcely outlasts the second generation.

Despite well-publicized alarms of linguistic and cultural

fragmentation – of a "Babel" of tongues – raised by pundits and politicians, historical and contemporary realities show that English has never been seriously threatened as the dominant language of the United States and that – with some 230 million monolingual English speakers – it is certainly not threatened today. The real threat has been to the viability of other languages, which have mostly succumbed in the wake of American-style assimilation. As the linguist Einar Haugen put it, reflecting on this paradox, "America's profusion of tongues has made her a modern Babel, but a Babel in reverse" (1972).

Changing Economic Contexts: The New Immigration and Widening Inequality

The big increase in immigration since 1970 has coincided with an era of widening economic inequality, so that the incorporation and prospects of social mobility of immigrants and their children has hinged on their levels of education, probably more than ever in history. Beginning in the 1970s and accelerating thereafter, the structure of the American labor market started to change under the twin influences of technological innovation and foreign competition in industrial goods. Industrial re-structuring and corporate downsizing brought about the gradual disappearance of the jobs that had provided the basis for the economic ascent of the European second generation.
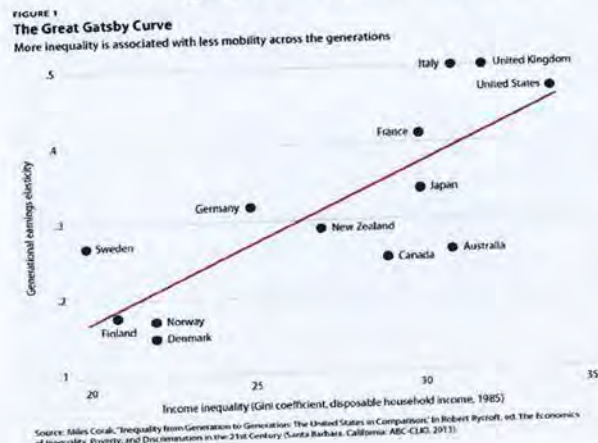
For instance, between 1950 and 1996, American manufacturing employment plummeted, from over one-third of the labor force to less than 15 percent. The slack was taken by service employment that skyrocketed from 12 percent to close to one-third of all workers. Service employment is, however, bifurcated between menial and low-wage jobs and the rapid growth of occupations requiring advanced technical and professional skills. These highly-paid service jobs are generated by knowledge-based industries linked to new information technologies. The growth of employment in these two polar service sectors is one of the factors that stalled the gradual trend toward economic equality in the

United States, especially from the end of WWII to the 1960s, and then reversed it during the following decades.

In this changed labor market, high demand exists at the low-end for unskilled and menial service workers, and at the high-end for professionals and technicians – with diminishing opportunities for well-paid employment in-between. In effect, immigrant labor has been attracted to fill jobs in both these polar service sectors of the U.S. economy. Contemporary immigration has responded to this new "hourglass" economy by bifurcating, in turn, into major occupational categories (cf. Portes and Rumbaut 2014: 25-29).

The Great Recession of 2007-2009 exacerbated the widening inequalities in income and wealth. By 2009, the net worth of black and Hispanic households (for homeowners, largely based on their home equity) was wiped out in the wake of the collapse of housing prices and a deep recession. Net worth among Hispanics dropped to a miniscule $6,300, and the wealth gap between whites and Hispanics rose to 20-to-1 – the widest in 25 years. Economic inequality – as measured by the Gini index and related indicators – reached Third World levels by 2010.

Figure 4. The Great Gatsby Curve

FIGURE 1
The Great Gatsby Curve
More inequality is associated with less mobility across the generations

Source: Miles Corak, "Inequality from Generation to Generations: The United States in Comparison," in Robert Rycroft, ed. The Economics of Inequality, Poverty, and Discrimination in the 21st Century (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2013)

This process in turn has been accompanied by sharply constrained social mobility: the higher the income inequality, the lower the mobility. As *Figure 4* shows (what Alan Kruger dubbed "the Great Gatsby Curve"), in comparison to other industrial nations, the U.S. is among the most unequal and least mobile societies – ironically, no longer the proverbial "land of opportunity." It is into this changing economic context that the new immigration has been inserted.

Diversity in Class Origins: Educational Attainment of Principal Immigrant Groups

Aside from their differences in national origins and cultural-linguistic backgrounds, there are two main dimensions along which contemporary immigrants to the United States differ: the first is their personal resources, in terms of material and human capital (especially their level of education), and the second is their classification by the government (their legal status). The first dimension ranges from foreigners who arrive with investment capital or are endowed with high educational credentials *vs.* those who have only their labor to sell. The second dimension ranges from migrants who arrive legally and those who as refugees also receive governmental resettlement assistance, to those who are categorized as illegals and are persecuted accordingly.

In this regard, consider first the huge spread in educational attainments among contemporary immigrants. Variation in educational background, shown in *Table 5*, highlights again the theme of great heterogeneity among the foreign-born. For example, the Nigerians appear as the most educated immigrants because close to 100 percent are high school graduates; if the indicator is college rather than high school graduation, then Asian Indians take first place.

The largest immigrant group by far – Mexicans – has the lowest level of schooling, according to both indicators. This result is not due to Mexico having a singularly bad educational system, but to its having a 2000-plus mile border with the United States,

allowing peasants and workers of modest origins to come in search of work. Mexico is a middle-income country with indicators of development generally superior to India's. However, there is an ocean in the middle barring the potential migration of tens of millions of impoverished Indian peasants. The Mexican immigrant population of the United States is composed of the peasants and workers who are on this side of the border at any given time, plus their families.

The generalization that low-educated immigrants come exclusively from Latin America and the Caribbean is contradicted, however, by the presence of European nationalities in the bottom educational category. Immigrants from Italy and Portugal, in particular, are noteworthy for their low average educational attainment. They represent, for the most part, the remnants of earlier migrant flows. Immigrants from South America (Brazilians, Colombians and Peruvians) slightly exceed the proportion of college graduates among the native-born, while immigrants from the Caribbean (Cuba and Jamaica) fall somewhat behind.

Has the educational level of immigrants been declining over time, as some have argued? The last column of *Table 5* shows the proportion of immigrants coming during 2000-2010 as a rough indicator of their recency of arrival. More than a third of most of the best-educated groups arrived in recent years. Notable is the continuation of highly educated flows from India, Pakistan, and Nigeria, close to 40 percent of whom arrived in the last decade. By contrast, high proportions of those groups with lower levels of education were already in the country before 2000.

Table 5.
Educational Attainment of Principal Immigrant Nationalities in 2010

Country of Birth	Total persons	% college graduates[a]	% high school graduates[a]	% immigrated 2000-2010
Total **U.S.-born**	267,410,918	28.2%	88.7%	
Total **foreign-born**	39,327,516	27.3%	68.1%	32.4%
Above U.S. average:				
India	1,783,907	74.8%	92.0%	46.8%
Taiwan	365,243	70.0%	95.0%	22.7%
Nigeria	207,106	61.1%	95.7%	42.9%
Former USSR (15 Republics)	1,012,621	52.9%	91.2%	34.6%
Iran	344,557	52.8%	89.4%	25.3%
Korea	1,088,870	51.1%	91.3%	30.1%
Philippines	1,785,404	50.0%	91.6%	28.7%
China	1,511,111	44.5%	74.1%	39.6%
Near U.S. average:				
Canada	808,749	41.5%	89.5%	24.9%
United Kingdom	667,138	41.4%	92.8%	21.9%
Germany	622,612	32.2%	88.4%	16.0%
Colombia	636,329	28.9%	83.2%	34.5%
Peru	413,562	28.7%	88.2%	38.9%
Vietnam	1,215,136	23.2%	67.7%	20.2%
Jamaica	649,925	21.7%	81.2%	22.3%
Cuba	1,039,550	21.0%	72.0%	27.6%
Below U.S. average:				
Italy	367,744	17.8%	62.4%	8.7%
Haiti	563,850	16.7%	73.4%	31.2%
Dominican Republic	828,776	13.6%	60.8%	28.5%
Cambodia, Laos	352,279	12.9%	58.9%	12.5%
Honduras	493,614	8.4%	48.7%	45.6%
Guatemala	798,430	7.3%	43.1%	46.1%
El Salvador	1,166,579	6.7%	44.4%	32.8%
Mexico	11,658,428	5.3%	39.2%	33.2%

[a] Persons age 25 or older.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2008-2010.

Such educational differences among the foreign-born require different levels of explanation: that of differences between nationalities and that of differences among individuals. Immigration policies and labor demand are the most important explanatory factors. Prior to 1965, U.S. immigration policy made it difficult for Asians and Africans to come. After that date, a new immigration policy opened the doors on the basis of two criteria: family reunification and occupational qualifications. Unlike European and certain Latin American nationalities, most Africans and Asians had few families to reunite with in the United States; hence, the only path open to them was that of formal credentials. This situation, plus the physical barriers to low-skilled migration created by oceans and long distances, explains the high education levels of most Asian and African immigrants.

Apart from regular immigration, the U.S. government has also chosen to admit certain groups at particular times for political considerations. Most of these refugee groups came in the past from Communism-dominated countries. At present, they come from countries hostile to the United States, such as Iran, and from those marked by extensive political turmoil, such as Bosnia and Somalia. The educational profile of each such nationality depends on the evolution over time of the inflow. Initial waves of refugees tend to come from the higher socioeconomic strata; but as the movement continues, they are increasingly drawn from the popular classes. The decline in schooling tends to be faster when refugees originate in poor countries where the well-educated represent but a small proportion of the total population.

In combination, these factors explain the low average levels of education of some Southeast Asian refugee groups, the middling average levels of Vietnamese and Cubans, and the high educational profile of Russians and Iranians. During the 1990s, the momentous process leading to the demise of communism in Eastern Europe was aided by an American policy that greatly facilitated the arrival of Soviet citizens as refugees. These were positively selected by U.S. consulates in Russia and other former Soviet republics, explaining the high educational level of this new immigrant cohort.

As Asians and Africans before them, Russians had few relatives to reunite with in the U.S., which accounts for their continuing positive educational selectivity.

Finally, demand for low-wage labor in agriculture and other labor-intensive industries has given rise to a sustained underground flow. In the past, unauthorized migration of low-skilled workers tended to be cyclical. The progressive enforcement of the southern border by the U.S. government did not stop the unauthorized flow, but deterred its return to Mexico and other sending countries, as migrants who succeeded in crossing opted for staying on the U.S.-side rather than repeating their harrowing experience. This population, which in the mid 2000s reached an estimated 12 million, plus migrants from the same origins that managed to legalize their status by one means or another, explain the low average education of immigrants from Mexico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and most of Central America – countries that have been the primary sources of unauthorized migration in the past.

Diversity in Legal Status

A second key dimension along which contemporary immigrants to the United States differ involves their legal status. In 2011, data from the Department of Homeland Security estimated the unauthorized population of the U.S. at 10.8 million – down from 11.8 million estimated in 2007, but tripling since the early 1990s. Thus, just over a fourth (27%) of the foreign-born residing in the U.S. today are undocumented – unprecedented both in its absolute and relative magnitude.

An immigrant's legal status is a critical factor in shaping mobility trajectories – an unauthorized status (a result of entering without papers, or overstaying a visa) can affect virtually every facet of an immigrant's life. And legal status, in turn, is to a significant extent correlated with human capital resources (educational attainment). Three main types of immigration – labor migrants, professional migrants, and state-sponsored refugees – are

listed in *Table 6* for the principal source countries of both legal and unauthorized immigration to the U.S. Each type is represented by several nationalities, but each nationality may also include individuals representing different types (Portes and Rumbaut 2014: 29). Indeed, the top countries of regular (legal) immigration are also among the top sources of irregular (unauthorized) migration.

Table 6.

U.S. Immigrants by Legal Status and Education, 2010						
	Foreign-born population in the United States					
Mode of Incorporation	**Foreign-born total**		**Undocumented**		**Education** (ages 25-64)	
	N (000s)	%	N (000s)	%	% college graduate	% less than high school
All immigrants	39,956	100.0	10,790	27.0	27.3	31.9
I:						
Low education, irregular entry						
Mexico	11,711	29.3	6,640	56.7	5.5	59.2
El Salvador	1,214	3.0	620	51.1	6.7	54.7
Guatemala	831	2.1	520	62.6	7.3	56.6
II:						
High education, regular entry						
China, Taiwan	2,167	5.4	130	8.1	54.3	16.9
India	1,780	4.5	200	11.2	77.8	5.9
Philippines	1,778	4.4	280	15.7	51.9	5.2
Korea	1,100	2.8	170	15.5	54.4	5.3
III:						
Refugees, state-sponsored						
Vietnam	1,241	3.1	160	12.9	24.9	29.0
Cuba	1,105	2.8	NA	NA	23.4	19.0

Sources: American Community Survey 2010 (Census Bureau 2011); Office of Immigration Statistics, DHS (2011).

It was seen earlier that 60% of all immigrants in the U.S. today are accounted for by only ten countries – five from Latin America, five from Asia. However, as *Table 6* shows, over half of all immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala (as well as Honduras) are undocumented, and over half of the adults from those countries have not completed high school; they share a common Spanish language, and are chiefly labor migrants with limited social mobility, including educational opportunities. They are the most isolated linguistically, economically, socially, legally and otherwise. They have been under systematic state persecution

for years, living under a constant threat of detention and deportation and family disruption, although their children are constitutionally entitled to a public education until 12th grade. Growing up in those circumstances and learning in the midst of instability is extraordinarily difficult. Multiple factors are arrayed against them (Gonzales 2011). Indeed,

> the lack of legal status constitutes an insurmountable barrier to social and economic mobility, not only for the undocumented immigrants themselves, but for their citizen family members. Not since the days of slavery have so many residents of the United States lacked the most basic social, economic, and human rights. (Massey 13)

In diametric contrast are immigrants entering from the largest Asian countries (India, China and Taiwan, the Philippines, South Korea). They tend to form a "brain drain" of professional immigrants: more than half of adult immigrants from those countries have college degrees (including 80% of those from India), and about a third have advanced degrees. While Asian groups also have a notable share of the undocumented (about 10 to 15%, primarily visa "over-stayers"), they generally enter through regular legal channels. They are significantly more educated than the native majority in the U.S., and also have lower fertility rates.

State-sponsored refugees form a third type: Vietnamese and Cubans are the largest, but also Cambodians, Laotians, Somalis, and those from Bhutan, Iraq and elsewhere. As noted, refugees tend to have a mixed socioeconomic profile, with more educated immigrants arriving as part of a first wave and then becoming more representative of other social classes over time. Refugees – who unlike other immigrants have since the 1960s been eligible to receive various forms of public (welfare) assistance on the same basis as U.S. citizens – are generally granted legal permanent residency in the U.S. one year after arrival. The Vietnamese in Table 6 who are found among the undocumented are those who entered not as refugees but as irregular migrants or on nonimmigrant visas that they subsequently overstayed. (Because
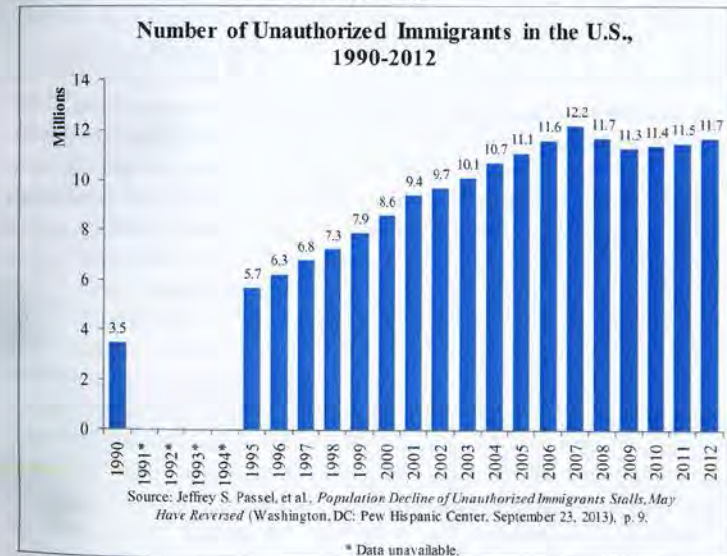
Cubans are exempted under a 1966 law, they are not among the unauthorized.)

Figure 5 charts the rise and estimated size of the undocumented immigrant population since 1990, when the amnesty provisions of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) legalized the status of nearly 3 million undocumented immigrants (both border crossers and visa over-stayers). [The estimates from the Pew Hispanic Center are slightly higher than those of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security reported above, though the annual patterns are identical.] The end of the Bracero Program – a guest worker program negotiated between the U.S. and Mexican governments in 1942 and extended for 22 years until 1964, which had brought nearly 5 million Mexican laborers to work in the U.S. during that span – eliminated the legal flow of temporary labor, but not the conditions of U.S. labor demand and Mexican supply, nor the well-developed social networks that sustained that flow, which continued thereafter as undocumented. As a result, after 1965 unauthorized migration from Mexico steadily rose until the majority of migrants were "illegal" by the late 1970s. IRCA was the federal government's response. Its provisions had sought to deter further unauthorized migration through increased enforcement (large increases of the Border Patrol, border fences and militarization of main entry points along the US-Mexico border, penalties for employers of undocumented immigrants).

Ironically, however, the enforcement measures instead led to the creation of markets for fraudulent papers and to the expansion of a smuggling industry ("coyotes"), redirecting the cross-border flow away from traditional entry points to much more dangerous terrain across the Arizona desert (leading to hundreds of deaths annually), and thus sharply increasing the risks and costs of crossing the border. What had been a cyclical flow of sojourners who came to work seasonally and then returned home was converted into larger flows of permanent migrants who now sought to bring their families and stayed; and where before the migrants went to main gateways in California and Texas, now they were

redirected to new destinations, nationalizing a growing undocumented population. Concomitantly, other factors added to the rise of this diverse population, which (as Figure 5 shows) nearly quadrupled from roughly 3 million in 1990 to a peak of about 12 million in 2007, whereupon the Great Recession and a hugely enhanced enforcement machinery (including, especially after 9/11, the creation of a vast net of immigrant detention centers across the U.S., unprecedented levels of raids and deportations) stopped and reversed the flow, leading to net zero growth in undocumented migration since 2009 (Meissner et al.; Massey 13).

Figure 5. The Rise and Size of Undocumented Immigration Since 1990

Number of Unauthorized Immigrants in the U.S., 1990-2012

Source: Jeffrey S. Passel, et al., *Population Decline of Unauthorized Immigrants Stalls, May Have Reversed* (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, September 23, 2013), p. 9.

* Data unavailable.

Deportation Nation: From the Great Inclusion to the Great Expulsion

The history of U.S. immigration law is replete with exclusionary cases – the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (not repealed until 1943), the barring of all other Asians (except colonized Filipinos) in 1917, the post-World War I Palmer Raids, the National Origins Quota Laws of the 1920s, the forced repatriations of persons of Mexican ancestry in the 1930s, and the World War II internment of Japanese Americans, among others (cf. Higham 1955, Kanstroom 2007, Ngai 2005, Pfaelzer 2007, Schrag 2010, Zolberg 2006). But the systematic persecution and criminalization of undocumented immigrants through the passage of punitive laws and the establishment of a "formidable machinery" (Meissner et al.) for immigration raids, detentions and deportations since the mid-1990s and especially since 9/11, has been unprecedented in U.S. history. How this exclusionary detention and deportation regime has evolved to its present gargantuan size – the polar opposite of the inclusionary vision which undergirded the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, which, at the peak of the Civil Rights movement, had ended the racist national origins quotas and sought to open regular immigration to the U.S. on the basis of skills and family ties with an equitable allotment of annual visas to all countries – is a complex story, fraught with ironies. As *The Economist* put it in a February 2014 article, with less hyperbole than may seem, "after the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks, by an odd jump of logic, a mass murder committed by mostly Saudi terrorists resulted in an almost limitless amount of money being made available for the deportation of Mexican house-painters" ("Great Expulsion" online).

In 1996, a Republican-dominated Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA). These laws increased the categories of people who could be deported and the offenses for which they could be deported from the United States. IIRIRA and AEDPA redefined a series of misdemeanors as "aggravated felonies" if they were committed by a noncitizen, lowering the legal barriers to "expedited removals." The expanded list included failing to appear in court, having fake

papers, or driving without a driver's license (which undocumented immigrants are not allowed to have in most states). It also removed time limits on these offences, so that crimes committed by teenagers could lead to deportation decades later (e.g., for a marijuana conviction from 20 or more years before). This decision was applied retroactively, making individuals who had already completed their criminal sentences suddenly deportable and subject to a ban on re-entry from 5 years to life. Judicial review and discretional authority were also eliminated, leaving deportable noncitizens without any real chance to fight or appeal their cases and sentences.

Figure 6. "The Great Expulsion: America's Deportation Machine"

Deportations, 1900 - 2012

409,849 deportations in 2012
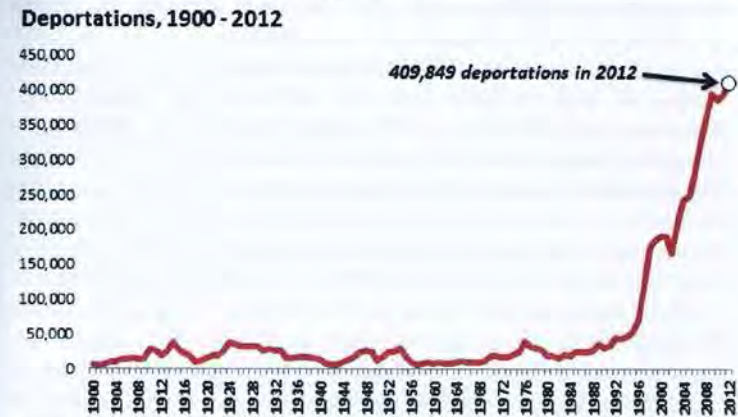
Source: U.S. Office of Immigration Statistics (2013); U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (2014).

Figure 6 graphs the annual number of deportations in the U.S. from 1900 to 2012. Historically, since 1892, there have been 6.6 million deportations. As the graph vividly shows, the level of deportations remained stable and relatively low (under 50,000) for nearly a century until seemingly exploding after 1996 and even

more notably after 2002, peaking at 410,000 in 2012. [The latest data show that deportations topped 410,000 in 2014.] As *Figure 6* shows, between fiscal years 1995 and 2012, formal removals (deportations) increased eightfold, from just over 50,000 to 410,000. Nonviolent offenses and immigration violations redefined as aggravated felonies have formed the basis of the vast majority of deportable crimes. Since 1996, only 14% of criminal deportations have been for offenses involving violence against persons. Conversely, immigration violations such as illegal entry and the use of false documents have nearly quadrupled. [When in 2014, in the first six years of the Obama Administration, the total number of deportations surpassed two million, immigration activists began to refer to President Barack Obama as the "Deporter in Chief." Two million people were deported during President George W. Bush's 8-year term in office (2001-09). The sum total of all people deported prior to 1997 adds up to two million.]

The effects of the 1996 laws were limited at first because the means to enforce them were not available, but that changed decisively after 9/11. A month after the terrorist attacks the Congress passed the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 ("Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act"), which among other things expanded immigration enforcement powers and resources. The Homeland Security Act of 2002 established the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and within it Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the agency charged with detaining immigrants (in what has become a vast network of immigrant detention centers and for-profit prisons) and doing the deporting. The last decade has seen an astonishing rise in the funding of immigrant enforcement agencies. The U.S. federal government now spends more money on immigration enforcement – $18 billion – than on all the other main federal law-enforcement agencies combined (the FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration, Secret Service, U.S. Marshals Service, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives). Over 400,000 men, women, and children are detained by ICE every year. Although ICE owns and operates its own detention centers, it

also "buys" bed space from over 312 county and city prisons to hold 67% of those who are detained. Every day 34,000 immigrants are held in detention centers and jails throughout the country at an annual cost of $2 billion. This includes funding to ICE to maintain an arbitrary daily number of immigration detention beds – 34,000 – as mandated by Congress. The U.S.-Mexico border has become further militarized and interior enforcement efforts, in the form of immigration raids and anti-gang operations, proliferated during this period. Significantly, an immigrant-industrial complex has also emerged in which public and private sectors are highly invested in the criminalization of undocumented migration and immigration law enforcement.

The series of immigration policies and enforcement practices that have emerged in recent years threaten the inclusionary model of membership that had defined the United States for the previous five decades. In the end, as we observed some time ago, "the way people are welcomed to become members of a society influences their joining behavior which, in turn, influences how the society invites others to join it" (Aleinikoff and Rumbaut). Like other self-fulfilling prophecies, *inclusionary* as well as *exclusionary* models of membership are influenced by the very phenomena they purport to be classifying. Thus, a state concerned about the successful integration of a large and growing resident immigrant population adopts policies that help orient and acculturate immigrants, provide skills and access, and foster tolerance and non-discrimination.

But the inclusionary political model of membership that generally prevailed in the United States in the latter half of the twentieth century has been buffeted by recent events and changing circumstances. Anti-immigrant policies are not integrative policies. In a vicious cycle, an unwelcoming polity that pillories and dehumanizes entire categories of migrant workers, makes entry and attainment of citizenship difficult or impossible, and requires would-be members to change drastically to conform to their new home is likely to produce an immigrant population less willing to choose to conform, and such behavior may then reaffirm for the polity its view of immigrants as persons in need of reform – or

deportation ("changing places" in reverse). In the dialectics of inclusion and exclusion, what goes around comes around. States, too, reap what they sow.

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