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Review: Crossing Borders: International Migration in the New Century

Reviewed Work(s): Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration by Richard Alba and Victor Nee; Becoming a Citizen: Incorporating Immigrants and Refugees in the United States and Canada by Irene Bloemraad; Divided by Borders: Mexican Migrants and Their Children by Joanna Dreby; States Against Migrants: Deportation in Germany and the United States by Antje Ellermann; Selecting by Origin: Ethnic Migration in the Liberal State by Christian Joppke; Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age by Philip Kasinitz, John H. Mollenkopf, Mary C. Waters and Jennifer Holdaway; Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration by Douglas Massey, Jorge Durand and Nolan Malone; Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America by Mae Ngai; Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation by Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut; Let Their People Come: Breaking the Gridlock on Global Labor Mobility by Lant Pritchett; Mexican New York by Robert Smith; Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development by

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## Crossing Borders: International Migration in the New Century

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*Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*, by **Richard Alba** and **Victor Nee**. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003. 359pp. \$25.50 paper. ISBN: 9780674018136.

*Becoming a Citizen: Incorporating Immigrants and Refugees in the United States and Canada*, by **Irene Bloemraad**. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006. 369pp. \$28.95 paper. ISBN: 9780520248991.

*Divided by Borders: Mexican Migrants and Their Children*, by **Joanna Dreby**. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010. 311pp. \$27.95 paper. ISBN: 9780520260900.

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*Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age*, by **Philip Kasinitz**, **John H. Mollenkopf**, **Mary C. Waters**, and **Jennifer Holdaway**.

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*Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration*, by **Douglas Massey**, **Jorge Durand**, and **Nolan Malone**. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002. 199pp. N.P.L. ISBN: 9780871545893.

*Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, by **Mae Ngai**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005. 377pp. \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 9780691124292.

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*Let Their People Come: Breaking the Gridlock on Global Labor Mobility*, by **Lant Pritchett**. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, 2006. 151pp. \$19.95 paper. ISBN: 9781933286105.

*Mexican New York*, by **Robert Smith**. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006. 375pp. \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 9780520244139.

*Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development*, by the **United Nations Development Programme**. New York, NY: United Nations Human Development Report, 2009.

On July 4, 1984, *The Wall Street Journal* called for a laissez-faire immigration policy, allowing labor to flow as freely as goods. Saluting immigrants, the editors asked, would anyone "want to 'control the borders' at the moral expense of a 2,000-mile Berlin Wall with minefields, dogs and machine-gun towers?" Answering no, the editors proposed a constitutional amendment: "There shall be open borders."

*The Journal* has kept beating that drum, reflecting the views of American business, which generally believes that the more immigrants, the better. Most Americans, however, see the matter differently. For the last decade or more, Republicans have been striving to heighten the already high barriers at the U.S.-Mexico border, while pushing to reduce rights and entitlements for immigrants living on U.S. soil. Not wanting to appear soft, Democrats have played along, with deportations reaching an all-time high under a president eager for Latino votes.

Similar challenges appear elsewhere. After 1945, Western Europe looked for workers abroad, only later to learn it had instead received people. Struggling to integrate the guestworkers' children and grandchildren, the Europeans are now striving to tap into global flows of high-skilled labor while simultaneously keeping unwanted, low-skilled newcomers off the old continent.

How to respond to international migration is not a dilemma for the residents of the rich countries alone. Bad as things are at the U.S.-Mexico border, the Mexico-Guatemala border is a circle closer to hell; for decades a country of *emigration*, and then a country of *transit migration* (by Central Americans), Mexico is now becoming a country of *immigration*, creating a furor that even gringos can understand. Further afield, migration to South Africa from Zimbabwe and Angola has triggered xenophobic violence, adding to the burdens of the post-apartheid transition.

These unending, global controversies have spurred a burgeoning of migration scholarship. A peripheral, somnolent area four decades ago, international migration has become an exceptionally lively interdisciplinary field. Once the nearly exclusive domain of American academics, migration scholarship is increasingly international, involving an especially strong current of ideas and knowledge flowing across the Atlantic. Though the proliferation of migration research means that sociology now shares the stage with other disciplines, the sociological contribution remains vibrant and indispensable.

This essay reviews the best of that scholarship, produced since the millennium. The survey is selective, treating books, skipping over many other excellent contributions to highlight a range of themes, going beyond U.S. boundaries, reaching out to other disciplines, and excluding books by the large group of immigration scholars and PhD graduates of my home university (UCLA), whose work certainly deserves attention, but from a less partial author. As I will show there is much to be admired: recent achievements are notable, significantly deepening our understanding of the phenomenon. Yet migration scholarship has not reached its full potential. The central handicap stems from the field's distinctive division of labor, with one literature situated at the point of origin studying *emigration* and the other at the point of destination studying *immigration*. Though understandable, this division of labor is problematic, obscuring the inherent, ongoing connections between home and host countries, the distinctively political nature of population movements across boundaries, and the continuing importance of the national interests and identities that impede migration. As a result this otherwise vibrant literature too often loses sight of the quality that makes migration a global dilemma of similar kind, regardless of local peculiarities.

### **Movement in a World of Restricted Migration**

U.S. scholars tend to see a world on the move. Globally, it is not true: a little under

three percent of the world's population lives outside its country of birth, a fraction that has barely budged in recent decades. The critical transformation, rather, is the one readily perceptible to the migration sociologists of the developed world: theirs are the societies on which international migration has increasingly converged. Over half of the world's migrants reside in the 28 very highly developed OECD countries; consequently immigrant density ranks high in the developed world, starting at 40 percent in Israel, averaging 13 percent, and falling to its lowest in South Korea at 1.2 percent (UN Development Programme 2009).

Because migration involves changing a poorer for a richer place, population movements across boundaries are good for the migrants, motivating the United Nations Development Programme to focus its 2009 Development Report on *Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development*, an essential source for experts and the uninitiated. The poorer the migrants' point of origin, the greater the gain from migration. On average, migrants from the poorest of the OECD countries experience a 15-fold increase in income, a 16-fold decrease in child mortality, and roughly a doubling of child enrollment, changes so great as to be unlikely the product of the processes "selecting" people for migration in the first place. By crossing boundaries the migrants achieve what the natives of the rich countries enjoy, not out of merit, but by the luck of birth in a wealthy place. As development economist Lant Pritchett notes in his provocatively titled *Let Their People Come* (2006), "nearly all the differences in wages between individuals in rich and poor countries are explained by the *location* of the work, not their personal characteristics" (p. 20). Hence, a Salvadoran high school graduate in the United States makes as much as his U.S.-born counterpart, but almost nine times as much as a similarly-educated compatriot, living back home.

Migration is not only good for the migrants: it does good things for kin and communities left behind. Moving to rich countries, the migrants consume at higher rates, gain access to everyday comforts that the people of the developed world take for granted, all the while saving money that they send home, at a volume greatly

exceeding the level of official aid and often comprising more than 10 percent of GDP in many developing countries. Gains to migrants occur with little, if any, damage to the people among whom they settle. Increased migration has little impact on the destination country's per capita income; if so, the effect is slightly positive. Migrant workers are most likely to compete with prior migrants, making aggregate labor market effects tend to be small or nil. However, nothing is cost-free: migration appears to harm the public fiscally, though more so where the tax system is more progressive; in the United States, where states and localities account for a large share of public expenditures, negative impacts are likely in the states where immigrants live.

If migration is so good for the migrants, doing little harm to the rich countries on which they converge, what accounts for all the fuss? One answer can be found in *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration* (2002), an invaluable summary of the research record compiled by the Mexican Migration Project (MMP). Initiated by Douglas Massey of Princeton and Jorge Durand of the University of Guadalajara almost three decades ago and continuing ever since, MMP may rank as the single most significant North American contribution to migration studies worldwide.

*Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, in my view the most important of the recent books to emerge from MMP, outlines the systematic features driving international migration and then demonstrates how U.S. policies, based on a *misunderstanding* of those systemic features, have shaped Mexico-to-United States migration in a fashion that neither Mexicans nor the *Norteamericanos* want. While global inequalities make international migration a persistent, *normal* feature of the world, migration entails more than a response to the economic gap between richer and poorer places. Migration requires resources, impeding the poorest—with the greatest to gain from migration—from leaving; since economic development generates resources, it ironically accelerates out-movement. *Emigrants* do not necessarily leave in order to *immigrate*, that is, settle down elsewhere. Rather, they often depart

in order to survive, responding to inadequacies in credit, capital, or insurance markets at home, temporarily relocating to a high wage country where they amass resources for use back home. The linkage between origin and destination derives from deep-seated, historical processes—colonialism, war, or investment—integrating societies across borders. Therefore, migrants often do *not* go to the nearest, wealthier neighbor but rather the country connected by other, longer-standing ties. Once begun, migration takes on its own dynamic: networks linking settlers and movers solve everyday migration-related problems, transplanting the home community onto foreign soil, creating a familiar environment and thereby diminishing migration's social and psychic dislocations. Nonetheless, migration *can* be stopped, not by the actions of receiving states, but rather by completion of the very developmental process that first spurred migration. Since *homo economicus* values not just hard cash, but also home and familiarity, migrations cease when the social and psychic costs of displacement outweigh the economic gains, and hence well before wages in the origin economy catch up with destination earnings.

These principles underlie the system of Mexico-to-United States migration, described as "well-ordered machinery operating in a predictable fashion according to a patterned logic..." (p. 4). As *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors* explains, U.S. policy during the first 75 years of the twentieth century took several twists and turns: first, the creation of a formal guestworker program, lasting from 1942 to 1964; then, after its abolition, an undocumented, but otherwise, largely unchanged flow, linking the same *emigration* regions in Mexico to the same places of *destination* in the United States. The result was the assembly of a stable system of circular migration, dominated mainly by men, crossing the U.S.-Mexico border with relative ease, seeking temporary work, generally returning home, rather than settling in the United States.

Unfortunately, U.S. policymakers threw "a wrench in the machine." Seeking to end undocumented migration, policy makers enacted a 1986 amnesty, leading previously temporary workers to settle permanently, bringing their families. Wanting to let

agricultural interests secure ample workers, Congress extended amnesty broadly, encouraging permanent migration of persons with little prior migratory experience. Hoping to curb undocumented migration, the United States stepped up border enforcement, perversely helping migrant smugglers, who could increase their prices because relatives living in the United States were willing to dig further into their pockets and absorb the additional costs. As the border-crossing experience became increasingly terrifying, new arrivals hesitated to go home and try their luck again; consequently, migrants who might have preferred a temporary sojourn in the United States ended up settling for good. With greatly heightened barriers to entry in California and Texas, new U.S.-bound migrants headed elsewhere, nationalizing a previously regional phenomenon. The result was "the worst of all possible worlds," with the huge expenditure on enforcement failing to diminish the flow, but utterly transforming the nature of Mexican migration.

The authors of *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors* are scathing in their assessment of U.S. policy and U.S. policy makers: the latter are self-deceiving, hypocritical, and schizophrenic, enacting "Potemkin village" type measures involving a "charade" and a "sham," which amount to nothing more than a magician's illusion designed to fool a gullible public. But is the U.S. state really both crazy *and* ineffectual? One might instead see the United States as crazy like a fox. Regardless of official rhetoric, acceptance of undocumented immigration *is* the policy, one not totally devoid of rationale. If dangerous, dirty, and disrespectable work requires foreign workers, they have to be selected. As potential farmworkers and dishwashers arrive without resumes and educational credentials in hand, an alternative is to see how well they do on the job. If they succeed, one can later formally let them through the door—exactly as did the 1986 amnesty and would any amnesty of the future. Moreover, cracking down on the border discourages the faint-hearted; again, not a bad selection strategy. While ugly and diverging from expert advice, the policy provides one way of staffing the least desirable jobs—a problem that no rich democracy can avoid.

Nor are efforts at migration control ineffectual. U.S. policy could not *stop* Mexican migration, but it *transformed* it, time and again. Policy failure also appears to lie in the eye of the beholder. Wanting immigration reduced, the developed world's people believe that their states' policies have failed. From the developing world perspective, as Lant Pritchett so effectively argues, the migration controls imposed by the United States and the other rich democracies are all too effective. Doors to international trade in goods and services have massively widened, leading differences in international *prices for goods to drop*: a Big Mac bought in a developed country is not even twice the cost of the Big Mac purchased in countries at the twentieth percentile (Freeman 2006). By contrast, differences in international *wages have grown* immensely, making gains to migration ever greater than before. Current wages ratios between numerous pairs of possible origin and destination countries (e.g., Vietnam and Japan at 1:9) are far higher than the "historical ratios between the mass senders and the United States" (Pritchett, p. 20). Although migration entails social and psychological costs deterring many potential movers, evidence indicates ample readiness to migrate. The Gallup poll estimates that 700 million people wish to migrate *permanently*: among them, 6.2 million Mexicans and fully *half* of the population of El Salvador, Haiti, and Ethiopia. Letting the world's poor move would appear to have immensely beneficial effects: according to one analysis, free migration could as much as *double* world income (Pritchett, p. 32). One need not go so far: if rich countries would let their labor force rise by a mere three percent, the gains to poor country citizens would exceed the costs of foreign aid by a factor of almost five (World Bank 2006).

However, "let them stay *there*, not let them come *here*" is the developed world's fundamental goal; far from inept, the United States and the other rich democracies do a remarkably effective job, facilitating cross-border movement by citizens of wealthy countries, while forcing people from the developing world to queue up for visas or climb over walls. Consequently, migrants' decision-making is inherently related to the policy decisions and preferences of the non-movers

in the developed world, making the determinants of emigration inextricably linked to the politics of migration restriction. Moreover, the idea that migration would be self-regulating if only politicians would get out of the way or listen to experts obscures the fundamentally political nature of population movements across borders. The reactions of the natives are as much a part of the phenomenon as the behavior and motivations of the migrants.

### The Political Sociology of International Migration

Governments of the developed world do what their peoples want: restrict migration. Opposition to free movement across borders is nearly universal: just 7.2 percent of OECD residents queried by the 2005 World Values Survey wanted their country to "let anyone come." Almost half of Americans wanted "strict limits," and 7.6 percent preferred an *absolute* ban on immigrants—making them more restrictionist than other OECD nationals. The Pew 2007 Global Attitudes Survey revealed the same pattern: residents of the rich democracies like foreign trade and free markets, without thinking that people should move as freely as goods. Large majorities everywhere want controls tightened up.

Economists find anti-immigrant preferences difficult to understand, as economically they do not make much sense: if migration has little material impact, why resist it? Sociologists have an answer, though one not compatible with the conventional inward-focused approach, which, assuming that state equals society equals nation, makes the political nature of international migration disappear.

Though it may be hard to admit, migration control is a constitutive aspect of a world of nation-states, which is why it is ubiquitous. The nation-state, in its liberal incarnation above all, is a state, not of humanity at large, but rather of, by, and for some particular sub-set of humanity, namely "the people." Though diverse and criss-crossed by various conflicts, "the people" is distinct from the other national peoples, located beyond the state's borders. Moreover, the national community is understood in

relational and territorial terms: “we” belong “here,” “they” belong “there.” Hence, maintaining the national community implies territorial boundaries, delimiting the identities of those whose interests should be reflected in and represented by *their* state. Those boundaries impede migrants seeking to get ahead by moving from a poorer to a richer state.

Policy makers and publics generally understand that zero immigration is neither feasible nor desirable; they also realize that many more immigrants would arrive were there no controls at all. Hence, restriction requires selection, the subject of Christian Joppke’s impressive comparative study, *Selecting by Origin* (2005). Contrasting eight different immigration states slotted into three different types—the settler states of Australia and the United States; the “post-colonial constellations” of France, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Portugal; and the “diaspora constellations” of Germany and Israel—Joppke shows that immigrant selection takes a different form than it did when the last age of mass migration ended shortly after World War I. Though portals were never entirely shut, the outsiders who arrived were almost always selected on the basis of national background: either similar to nationals or dominants or at least not too distant and therefore of adequate appeal.

However, ethnic selection fits poorly with the ideological environment that has swept the rich democracies ever since World War II. Policies discriminating on the basis of ascribed characteristics are taboo. Not only is neutrality required of the liberal state when it comes to the ethnic or cultural differences among the *existing* people of the state; the same principle applies to *potential* members of the state. Some types of sorting—for example, preferring engineers instead of dishwashers—are still allowable. But selecting on the basis of in-born characteristics—race, national origins, or ethnicity—is a no.

Analyzing Australia and the United States, Joppke shows how “liberal stateness” reshaped policy. These states reacted similarly to the global flows of people of the *last* era of mass migration: curbing movements across national borders, and providing access to newcomers whose national

origins were shared by dominant groups. Walls began tumbling after mid-century: key policy changes occurred during the 1960s in the United States and shortly thereafter in Australia. In Joppke’s view the two countries “*had to give up . . . ethnic immigration policy for much the same reasons. . . : an epistemic shift after World War II outlawed race as a legitimate principle of ordering the social world. . .*” (p. 32, emphasis added). Other considerations intervened—once having cast itself as leader of the “Free World,” the United States found it harder to ignore liberal principles; a “white Australia” policy became harder to justify, after Canada and the United States had abandoned ethnic selection. Though not pleasing all in either place, source-country universalism prevailed against subsequent challenges.

Joppke’s book is an essential source: his comparative approach illuminates the source of cross-state differences, while highlighting generic attributes of the challenge that migration poses to liberal nation-states and hence, common features shared by their policies. Nonetheless, the transition from ethnic selection to source country universalism is also a change about which Joppke is too enthusiastic, lapsing into talk about “universalistic immigration policies” (p. 51), or a “principle of nondiscriminatory immigration policies” (p. 69) as if the rich democracies were ready to take a neutral stance when confronting the number, not to speak of the range of persons, whom they are ready to let cross borders and settle down. In a point not adequately underscored in the book, selection is a second order matter; the first order issue concerns the commitment to restriction and control, a question definitively settled long ago. Moreover, Joppke’s insistence on ideological imperatives, “commanding” or “calling” for policy change, serves him ill, as nothing about the liberal state *requires* it to open its doors to all. While liberal states *could* follow the motto inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, they are equally free to keep immigrant numbers as close to zero as practicality will allow.

Emphasizing the “imperatives” of liberalism ignores the two-sided liberalism of today’s democratic nation-states. While

those states may be increasingly liberal *internally*, not so *externally*, as preventing otherwise law-abiding people from moving ahead is liberalism's very antithesis. Openness and closure are also hard to reconcile. Given the illiberalism entailed in territorial restriction—building walls, deporting immigrants, cracking down on asylum seekers—ideological consistency seems an inadequate explanation of policy change.

Nonetheless, Joppke's book brilliantly illuminates the *explicit* criteria that rich countries use when deciding who will be their chosen. Since states *try* to sift and select, but *never* fully succeed, attempts to regulate flows across national boundaries inevitably produce a new category of person: the "illegal" immigrant. Unable to prevent illegal immigration, but unable to accept it, the United States and the other rich democracies are left grappling with these "impossible subjects," to quote from the title of Mae Ngai's rightly influential, impressively researched history of *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (2005).

The creation of the "illegal alien," Ngai shows, occurred alongside the imposition of legislation in the early 1920s, prohibiting migration from Asia, impeding migration from Europe, and greatly diminishing entry from southern and eastern Europe. Restriction indelibly affected Mexican immigrants, whose role expanded as European immigration was shut off and for whom illegal status exacerbated the stigma associated with work.

Restriction immediately impelled other changes: formerly open, territorial borders now had to be controlled, resulting in a new agency, the border patrol, specialized in excluding undesirables. Notwithstanding efforts at policing, borders proved leaky, the consequences of which are among the book's most important points. Policy changes at the territory's *external* edge yielded corresponding *interior* shifts: with some immigrants evading border control, effective restriction required the capacity for deportation. However, the undocumented immigrants of the time put down roots, developing ties to spouses or children entitled to stay in the United States. Consequently, as America discovered in the 1920s and 1930s,

deportation proved both controversial and difficult to effect.

Ngai also treats the story of mid-1960s policy liberalization in the United States, showing the underside of this effort to undo the past's harms. That history has been mainly written by sympathizers with the winners, largely for reasons signaled by Joppke: ethnic selection is so discredited as to be beyond the pale. Ngai sees something else. While the ethnic winners of the 1965 legislation wrapped themselves up in the mantle of a good cause, theirs was also the politics of self-interest, establishing *their* origins and *their* groups, as the equal of all other Americans, regardless of vintage or ancestry. More than they realized, the reformers accepted restriction's root assumption: that America should be a bounded community, with doors open to only a selected few. By imposing new controls on immigration from the western hemisphere—until then largely regulated informally, without any country quotas—the 1965 Act yielded an exclusionary effect as important as its inclusionary impact so often lauded. Hence, barriers to legal migration from Mexico rose just as that migratory system shifted from its guest-worker to its undocumented phase, with the result that the capacity to cross over the boundary from undocumented immigrant to legal resident correspondingly declined.

For students of the contemporary scene, Ngai's analysis of the politics of deportation and the controversies it created should ring familiar. In a sense, she confirms the central insight of the sociologists of assimilation: namely, that the *social* boundaries between foreigners and nationals are blurry and relatively easily traversed. Since the migrants' quest to get ahead leads them to adopt competencies and practices rewarded in the place where they live, their capacity to connect with social insiders steadily grows.

What the conventional, inward-focused approach forgets, however, is that *every* foreigner also arrives as an alien; while the social boundary between *immigrants* and *natives* is informal and diffuse, not so the cleavage between *citizens* and *aliens*, which is rooted in law. Consequently, there are two opposing forces at work: settlement weaves the foreigners, regardless of legal status, into the society where they live;



alienage deprives *all* non-citizens of full rights, making them vulnerable to the exclusionary preferences of the people whose society they have joined.

For these reasons, deportation entails tearing the social fabric, making for controversy both in the immigrant America of the 1920s and in democratic immigration societies ever since, as explained by Antje Ellermann in her outstanding study of deportation policy in the United States and Germany, *States Against Migrants* (2009). For Ellermann deportation entails “coercive social regulation,” inherently raising issues of right and wrong. It also yields direct government intrusion into individual lives, in the case of deportation, exercising immense consequences for *both* the foreigner *and* the citizens to whom they may be linked. As deportation involves use of the state’s ultimate weapon—its monopoly over violence—it also produces social conflict.

Ellermann masterfully demonstrates the interweaving of the social *and* the political dimensions of international migration. Like Joppke, she shows that efforts to control migration present liberal states with fundamentally similar problems, producing comparable, though not identical reactions. Thus when deportation threatens, it sets in motion a like chain of events in both Germany and the United States. First, the person is on *this* side of the border, *not* the wrong side, making them more difficult to ignore. Since they may also be one’s co-worker, neighbor, spouse, or partner, the human dimension inevitably springs to the fore. Hence, the people *of* the state go to work for the alien people residing *in* the state, interceding with authorities to let that person *stay*, a more compelling humanitarian issue than that of letting some unseen, unknown outsider *come*. Moreover, undesirables cannot be levitated across borders; expulsion is a face-to-face job that someone must do. Various constellations of immigrant political embedding, combined with differences in governmental structure, ensure that deportation dilemmas systematically proceed in different ways. But neither Germany nor the United States nor any other like society can escape the quandaries and conflicts standing at the center of this impressive book.

Thus in crossing the territorial frontier, undocumented immigrants enter a new society, but not its polity, leaving them highly vulnerable. Since foreigners with permanent, legal resident rights are nonetheless aliens, they also find themselves in that liminal space between internal and external boundaries. Escaping entails crossing yet another obstacle: the barrier to citizenship.

Citizenship is carefully rationed, excluding far more residents from membership than democratic theory would allow. Some rich, immigrant dense democracies, like Austria or Switzerland are particularly stringent. Others, including Canada and the United States, are less so. Though immigrant densities are higher in Canada than in the United States, and the rules of citizenship acquisition are much the same in both countries, Canada’s naturalization rates are double those in the United States. Those disparities spill over into broader patterns of political incorporation: immigrants in Canada are more likely to gain political office than their U.S. counterparts.

Irene Bloemraad’s insightful *Becoming a Citizen* (2006) explains why the path to political incorporation has diverged in these adjacent, otherwise similar countries. Bloemraad dispenses of the obvious explanation: the gap is unrelated to the much greater undocumented presence in the United States, showing up across almost all nationalities. Instead, she highlights the differing responses to the cognitive and affective obstacles impeding political incorporation everywhere. As foreigners, the immigrants are hindered by lack of knowledge, neither grasping the means and mechanics of citizenship acquisition and the political game and nor possessing confidence that investment in trying to enter the polity will pay off. As political incorporation begins with acquiring a new citizenship, it is tied up with a pre-existing, deeply-rooted aspect of the ego, national identity. Hence, immigrants feeling that they are abandoning, even betraying, their origin are unlikely to take on another nationality.

Through an ingenious comparative case study of Portuguese and Vietnamese immigrants in Toronto and Boston, Bloemraad shows how policy can systematically lower these obstacles. The Boston comparison

highlights the difference between the prevailing U.S. laissez-faire approach experienced by the Portuguese, and the less common experience of the Vietnamese who as refugees benefited from government settlement assistance. Those programs mattered because they funded an ethnic organizational infrastructure in a way unavailable to the Portuguese, increasing access to political actors and facilitating political learning. The comparison between Vietnamese in the two cities demonstrates the impact of policies directed toward the affective obstacle. By providing support and recognition for home country identities and explicitly allowing for dual citizenship, Canadian multiculturalism led the Vietnamese in Toronto to view Canadian and Vietnamese national identities as compatible, unlike their counterparts in Boston, for whom home and host society national identities were experienced as conflictual.

*Becoming a Citizen* shows that citizenship can be both an instrument of inclusion and exclusion—a point first made by Rogers Brubaker more than two decades ago, though not absorbed by the sociologists of assimilation, who continue to think of citizenship acquisition as a matter for immigrants to decide on their own. Despite its many merits, Bloemraad's portrayal detaches control over the *inner* boundary of citizenship from that of the *outer* boundary of territorial access, when in fact the two are directly connected. Canada focuses on the latter, seeking to admit an ever more selective group of immigrants, whom it then ushers across the internal border. By contrast, the United States has opted for a laxer territorial approach, effectively waiting for the foreigners to provide a lengthy on-site demonstration of their worthiness before letting them into the people. And increasingly, Canada is opting for a hybrid system, ramping up its recruitment of temporary foreign workers, who enjoy the benefits of labor in a high-wage economy, but lacking the skills that Canada wants for its own, find the door to citizenship shut closed. Hence, the study of population mobility across boundaries is inextricable from the study of the barriers to movement itself.

## The Sociology of Assimilation

In a world where nation-states contain societies (as implied by the concept of "American society"), territory and people coincide: "we" are "here," "they" are "there." Since population movements across borders bring "them" "here," upsetting this isomorphism of people, place, and territory, the question of how the outsiders from abroad will belong inevitably arises.

Until recently, public and scholarly views more or less converged, expecting that newcomers and their descendants would abandon old country ties and habits for the ways and affiliations of the national community that they had joined. Assimilation's scholarly appeal, however, has been declining; currently, an increasingly influential current contends that the best that can be said for assimilation is that it did a good job of predicting the past.

In the new view, first propounded in a pathbreaking 1992 article by Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou, today's reality is less forgiving of problems than before. *Then*, newcomers and old-timers were white; *today*, new Americans are people of color encountering a "negative reception context." *Then*, children of peasant migrants could drop out of high school and move on to well-paying factory jobs; *today*, the factory sector is shrunken making incremental movement hard. *Then*, assimilation led into "mainstream culture"; *today*, growing up as stigmatized strangers leads many new Americans to absorb the "values and norms of the inner city." While peril is not everywhere—offspring of the large immigrant middle class can expect to move ahead smartly—children of working-class immigrants grow up under a shadow. Excessively rapid assimilation, weakening parental control, diminishing ethnic community ties, and unrealistically heightened aspirations for consumption threaten to transform today's second generation into a "rainbow underclass." However, when continued ethnic attachment combines with the acquisition of "mainstream" tools and competencies, upward movement can still ensue.

Pointing to so radical a departure in second generation trajectories, this hypothesis of "segmented assimilation," generated an

electric effect. The original statement had a speculative cast, resting on a then thin research corpus; much more ammunition has been provided since, especially via publication of *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (2001), co-authored by Alejandro Portes and R uben Rumbaut. *Legacies* testifies to its first author's extraordinary perspicacity, who quickly detected the social import and scholarly significance of immigration, when it was perceptible to very, very few. That depth of perception gave birth to one of the landmark immigration studies of the 1980s, *Latin Journey*. While other scholars were still focused on the foreign-born and their experience, Portes realized that immigration might yield its greatest impact via the immigrants' children. Hence, with Rumbaut he launched a longitudinal survey of immigrant children in 1992, just as the first major second generation cohorts were coming of age.

*Legacies* examines results from that survey's first two rounds, tracing experiences of immigrant offspring in San Diego and Miami as they moved from middle to high school. Analyzing language change, ethnic identity, mental health, and educational attainment, *Legacies* refined the original argument, while reiterating its core claims. The book innovated by specifying two acculturation types: "dissonant," in which children rapidly shift to host society culture, away from their parents'; "consonant" in which children and parents change at the same pace. Acculturation type combined with differences in social capital explains why children of working-class immigrants would follow different paths, with "downward assimilation" the label applied to those for whom "the learning of new cultural patterns and entry into American social circles does not lead... to upward mobility but to its exact opposite" (p. 59). As a multi-dimensional study of a myriad of ethnic groups, this book eludes easy summary. Perhaps the clearest statement of the authors' conclusions comes toward the book's end, where they review evidence regarding Mexican immigrant offspring, the largest component of the contemporary second generation. As they see it, *Legacies* bears out the "theoretically anticipated effects of low human capital combined

with a negative context of reception" (p. 277): Mexican parents get little support from their co-ethnics and report relatively low aspirations for their children; the children have the lowest self-esteem; they maintain lower educational expectations than most other groups; reacting to host society hostility, they are most likely to have moved toward an unhyphenated self-identity.

*Legacies'* legacy has developed through unending and increasingly international debate over its core contentions, exemplified by the powerful and cogent reply developed in Richard Alba and Victor Nee's *Remaking the American Mainstream* (2003). A book of synthesis and interpretation, *Remaking* seeks to rescue assimilation as scientific concept, demonstrating its continuing utility. The authors define assimilation, not as end-state, but as "the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences" (p. 14). As those differences lose salience, immigrants and their descendants enter the American "mainstream": "that part of society within which ethnic and racial differences" (p. 12) have modest impact.

The book packs a punch by showing how the potential for purposive, rational choice propels assimilation. Migrants' search for the better life, motivating the initial departure itself, usually bears no inherent relationship to assimilation. Rarely is assimilation consciously embraced; often it is the end that immigrants wish to *avoid*. However, migrants and their descendants encounter an environment that encourages changes yielding convergence with the expectations of the dominant group. While ethnic discrimination previously thwarted ethnic effort and mobility, changes in state policies "extending civil rights to minorities and women have increased the cost of discrimination... in non-trivial ways" (p. 57). Consequently, by switching to English, or acquiring higher-level skills, or moving to a safer neighborhood where out-group contacts are more plentiful, immigrants and their offspring succeed in finding a better future. Hence, most new Americans select "mainstream strategies," thereby progressing toward assimilation, whether wanted or not.

Equipped with this framework, Alba and Nee examine the experience of earlier, European- and Asian-origin groups. They

conclude that the “forces promoting assimilation are well entrenched in the American social order”; the structure of opportunities “compels the American-born descendants of European and Asian immigrants to choose between the optimum range of mobility chances, on the one hand, and strong attachment to an ethnic community and its culture, on the other” (p. 125, emphasis added). The authors then review evidence on contemporary patterns of assimilation and acculturation, masterfully synthesizing a vast array of data regarding language, social relations, economic attainment, education, and residential patterns. Worrying about the prospects for the relatively large population of low-skilled immigrants and their descendants, they depart from segmented assimilation’s pessimism, demonstrating that even the offspring of the least fortunate new Americans appear headed upward. Agreeing with Portes and Rumbaut that the Mexican immigrant and Mexican-American experience comprise assimilation’s acid case, Alba and Nee conclude that the relevant scholarship shows the move up from the bottom is likely, yielding a more diversified set of ethnic relations in its wake.

Philip Kasinitz, John Mollenkopf, Mary Waters, and Jennifer Holdaway’s book on second generation New Yorkers, *Inheriting the City* (2008) provides a still more explicit challenge to segmented assimilation. This book utilizes a wealth of information: a telephone survey of roughly 3,400 respondents from the New York metropolitan region; extensive in-depth interviews; lessons learned from separate, parallel ethnographic studies. Whereas *Legacies* emphasized the negative effects of “Americanization” without third-generation-plus Americans in its sample, this research includes U.S.-born white, black, and Puerto Rican respondents to benchmark the degree of second generation convergence or lack thereof. Unlike *Legacies*, which analyzed results from surveys of teenagers—for whom the tribulations of assimilation are impossible to disentangle from the tribulations of adolescence—*Inheriting* queried young adults (18–32), likely possessing more stable views and more shapen lives.

Though the analysis is nuanced, the take-away message is unmistakable: notwithstanding parental disadvantages, immigrant

offspring are doing gratifyingly well. While group differences are striking, emerging across many dimensions, the overall pattern is clear: downward mobility is not in the cards. Nor do working-class immigrants appear to thrive via ethnic retention (e.g., bilingualism), as contended by Portes and his associates. On the contrary, the most successful are those among whom Americanization goes the deepest. Though New York is a tough place, the environment is facilitating; immigrant offspring respond creatively to its conditions, generating a hybrid, multi-cultural lifestyle that builds on the immigrant past while connecting to the American future. That being said, the authors remain sober: the New York inherited by the immigrant offspring is not one in which America’s traditional racial divide will have been bridged: African Americans and Puerto Ricans lag behind. Dark clouds hover above the trajectories followed by at least some of the new New Yorkers, with lower levels of schooling success, early parenthood, and higher rates of single parenthood signaling possible, longer-term problems.

This capsule summary only skims the surface of a rapidly burgeoning literature, enriched by a broad array of qualitative and quantitative studies, new data sets, and a growing number of European studies, many beginning to draw on data the quality of which should be the envy of U.S. researchers. There is also a satisfyingly cumulative nature to the scholarship, though readers attending closely to the controversy over segmented assimilation might rightfully conclude that there is a little too much shouting.

Yet for all that is admirable, there is also something awry. In underlining the potential for “downward assimilation” into a “rainbow underclass,” the hypothesis of segmented assimilation has led researchers in an unpromising direction. As the “underclass” is a contested, highly ideological concept, debate centered around this possibility is unlikely to generate much enlightenment. On the other hand, one hesitates to accept a story about the disappearance of ethnic difference set in a society where class differences have grown, precisely during the period when the foreign-born population has so dramatically expanded. The United States

greeting today's immigrants is far more unequal than the society in which the descendants of the turn of the twentieth century immigrants gained acceptance. The immigrants of contemporary America have also been converging on those places in which inequality takes its most severe form. As quite the same thing could be said for Paris, London, Amsterdam, Toronto, and the other immigrant capitals of the developed world, the concerns voiced by the proponents of segmented assimilation do not seem entirely misplaced.

But there is a more important problem: regardless of perspective, the students of assimilation stand with their backs at the border, looking inward. Consequently, both the *international* and the inherently *political* nature of population movements across national boundaries fall out of view. Socially, the people opting for life in another state are not just *immigrants*, but also *emigrants*, retaining ties to people and places left behind. Though the *immigrant* search for a better life yields long-term changes likely to complicate interactions with the people left behind, the short- to medium-term effects take a different form, increasing the *emigrants'* capacity to help out their significant others still living in the home society—thereby encouraging further immigration and the ethnic densities that facilitate continued home country ties.

Moreover, the immigrants/emigrants are also *foreigners* from *foreign* places. Whereas sociologists understand international migration as normal, repeatedly bringing one society onto the territory of another state, nationals have a different view, believing that state, society, and territory *should* be one and the same. Disturbed by the influx of foreigners many nationals respond with hostility: some insist that boundaries *around* the state be tightened; others demand that boundaries of the political community *within* the state be narrowed; some are more accepting, but expect the newcomers to take on the native code and switch loyalties from home to host societies. Those reactions, comprising an inherent part of the phenomenon, shape and circumscribe the assimilation options available to the arrivals from abroad.

Focusing on the inter-*national* dimension of the phenomenon also highlights the

difficulties that the researchers encounter in identifying the population *into* which the immigrants and their offspring are meant to assimilate. The "mainstream" is apparently the concept of the day; however, as it also implies sidestream, one also needs to explain who gets into the sidestream, who stays there, and why. Alas, the conventional approach provides no such account. Politically, the population described as the mainstream is divided, whether by ideology, class, region, religion, or some material interest. Moreover, assimilation into the mainstream and a corresponding diffusion of identity is *not* what nationals want. Rather, they clamor that foreigners become nationals—in the U.S. case, "Americans"—replacing the particularism imported from abroad with the particularism found in their new home.

The immigrants are not just foreigners; they are also *aliens*, a condition shared by *every* foreigner crossing national boundaries, whether as legal permanent resident, temporary worker, tourist, or undocumented immigrant. *Social* boundaries of the sort emphasized by Alba and Nee may be blurry, but *legal* boundaries surrounding the myriad, formal categories of alien are bright. While the import of alien status varies by citizenship regime, exercising least weight where citizenship is a birthright, nowhere is its significance trivial. Naturalized citizens currently comprise one-third of all foreign-born people living in the United States; another third are legal permanent residents; another third belong to some other, more tenuous legal status. Undocumented immigration in Europe is lower, but naturalization barriers are higher. While immigrant offspring born in the United States are citizens, many young immigrant offspring *growing up* in the United States—a population comprising 40 to 50 percent of those studied in *Legacies* and *Inheriting the City*—are born abroad. No small fraction is undocumented; many more have undocumented parents or siblings. Consequently, the brightest boundaries are not imported and have nothing to do with ethnicity; rather, they are fundamentally political, made *in* and *by* receiving states, exercising long-term consequences at the individual level and beyond. Beginning outside the body politic, migrants have limited ability to influence "who gets what" let alone "who is what,"

making it easy for nationals to ignore the needs and preference of those who have no organized voice.

### Transnationalism

In moving to another country, the migrants pull one society onto the territory of another state, leading "here" and "there" to converge. As the home country society gets transplanted onto receiving states, *alien* territory becomes a *familiar* environment, yielding the infrastructure needed to keep up here/there connections and providing the means by which migrants can sustain identities as *home* community members, while living on *foreign* soil.

Thus, international migration both brings "them" "here" and imports aspects of "there," a phenomenon known as "transnationalism" and one that has recently absorbed extraordinary research interest. The term is unfortunate, confusing state and nation, one referring to a territorial unit, the other to a social collectivity. Moreover, migrants' cross-state connections are not "beyond the nation" (as implied by the Latin prefix *trans*), but highly particularistic, linking up to some specific set of people *there*, whether kinship network, village, region, nation, or ethnic minority.

However, as the concept is in full currency, it cannot be dislodged. Furthermore, the underlying social phenomenon is what counts, *not* the word by which it is called. The research on transnationalism has undoubtedly told us much about an important aspect of the immigrant reality.

Robert Smith's *Mexican New York* (2006) ranks among the best of this genre. The first sociologist to study Mexican migration to New York—a phenomenon presaging the later dispersion of Mexican migration around the United States—Smith has produced a community study reminiscent of Herbert Gans' classic, *The Urban Villagers*, engaging with the full dimension of migrant lives and worlds. But whereas Gans was focused on Italian Americans in Boston—whose ties to Italy had long been sundered—Smith's is a multi-sited study, treating both receiving and sending contexts. The product of fifteen years of ethnographic research, *Mexican New York* demonstrates the

value of an approach examining the flows of people, resources, ideas, and values between "here" and "there."

As Smith demonstrates, migrants' hometowns may be out of sight, but not out of mind, sufficiently so that the connection passes from immigrant parents to U.S.-raised or -born offspring. By crossing from Mexico to the United States, the migrants secured exit and voice, gaining access to some portion of the wealth of the rich country to which they moved, along with new degrees of political freedom used to influence communities left behind. Consequently, migrants and their dollars transformed home community politics; described by Smith as "transnational localism," the migrants' long-term engagement testifies to their persisting home society loyalties and capacity to connect, years of absence notwithstanding.

The migrants' children undergo what Smith calls "transnational life," growing up in New York, yet spending long periods of vacation time in their parents' home community. Experienced as a time of release, freedom, and tranquility compared to the difficult New York environment, these sojourns help transmit home community ties from first to second generation. However, persistent home community allegiance does *not* imply the unchanging retention of the values, attitudes, and behavior prevailing there. Rather, the cross-national space provides an arena and resources for negotiating a new set of compromises reflecting the influence of both old and new environments. The cross-national space is also a place of contention between migrants and stay-at-homes. While the former insist that they belong to the transnational "community," membership is a contingent event, and the subject of conflict among returning migrants and migrant offspring, stay-behinds, as well as the former New Yorkers sent back home as a result of deportation.

Timing is everything, said Shakespeare, a dictum brought home by a reading of this book. That Smith's *Mexican New Yorkers* could experience transnational life was not a given, but a stroke of very good luck. Having moved when lax border enforcement permitted circular migration, they later

benefited from the 1986 amnesty; possessing permanent residence, they then could go back and forth between new and old homes as preferences and dollars allowed.

Not so for the subjects of Joanna Dreby's fine book on Mexican immigrants and their children, *Divided by Borders* (2010), a compelling work of multi-sited ethnography. These transnational families are connected through travel, communication, and material exchange, but much separated by the territorial boundary demarcating Mexico from the United States. Dreby's book highlights the intellectual distance between the sociology of *emigration* and the sociology of *assimilation*. While some of Dreby's migrant parents could be called *immigrants*, many are not; rather, they are better understood as *emigrants*, having gravitated to the high-wage United States to support families left behind and amass resources allowing for later return. These cross-border connections are critical, informing the actions and behaviors of the migrants in so many ways; the continued transmission of resources back to the locus of *emigration* slows *immigrant progress*; material gains from migration need be weighed against the psychic and emotional costs of separation. Moreover, both emigration and the ensuing flow of resources transform the *home* communities where the migrants' children grow up, as well as the relationship between caretakers and children. The family disruptions resulting from *emigration* also feed back into the *immigrant* context because conflict often ensues when children rejoin their parents. Yet all this falls out of the sociology of assimilation, for which only the *immigrants* come into focus, as if those same people were not also *emigrants*, oriented beyond the place of destination and toward the place of origin where their most important human connections often remain.

Moreover, familial separation largely results from the ever-brighter boundary created at the territorial border. As Dreby shows, parents' reluctance to bring children along is heavily influenced by the dangers associated with undocumented border crossing; the same conditions keeping children behind lead parents to linger longer in the United States, as a return trip would entail another difficult passage across the U.S.-Mexico border.

The contrast between these two books highlights the quandary faced by scholars espousing the transnational perspective. Emphasizing "transnational life," Smith demonstrates how migration extends social boundaries across political borders, though legal status fundamentally conditions the capacity of his Mexican New Yorkers to circulate between here and there. Dreby's migrants experience those connections too, but far more constrainingly. Using the latest telecommunications technology to maintain cross-border contact, they find that arranging for calls is complicated: "there," not everyone has ready access to a telephone; "here," the press of daily life often makes telephone conversations a weekend pursuit. Calls and flows of money frequently falter when earnings fail to match up to parents' expectations. Movement to a difficult, far-removed place disrupts marital relationships, producing affairs, separations, divorces, remarriages, step-siblings never before seen by offspring at home. Possessing few resources and generally lacking citizenship status, Dreby's respondents find that cross-border social boundaries often fray at the territorial frontier.

Whether the typical experience represents that found in *Mexican New York* or *Divided by Borders*, temporal change involves the acid test for the transnational perspective. If cross-state ties are an integral part of the migrant phenomenon, what happens to those attachments as a new generation, raised and/or born in the country of destination, replaces the migrants?

This question lies at the heart of a debate about the importance of assimilation as opposed to transnationalism. Though originally posed as an alternative to assimilation, the consensus view sees assimilation and transnationalism as compatible, with the most engaged homeland activists also likely to be among the most deeply embedded in the hostland.

This now stock response is problematic for a variety of reasons, obscuring the tensions produced when international migration moves people from one state's territory to another's. By emphasizing the *blurring* of social boundaries and the *decline* of an ethnic difference, assimilation misses the ways in which receiving states transform foreigners

into nationals, exchanging one “we/they” distinction for another. Moreover, the preoccupation with differences *internal* to the receiving society ignores the specific challenge issued by transnationalism, which extends the scope to loyalties and attachments *beyond* the state of immigration. While the gradual withering away of home-country ties *can* be interpreted as evidence of assimilation, doing so neglects the ways in which the inherently political nature of international migration affects the capacity to maintain the connection between here and there. As shown in *Divided by Borders*, the capacity to keep cross-state ties alive is not for the immigrants to decide on their own. Rather, that potential is impeded by states’ ever more vigorous efforts at controlling migratory movements, placing barriers at the territorial frontier, and creating blockages for migrants who have crossed into the state’s territory but are not yet members of the state’s people.

### Conclusion

Though trying to range as widely as space would allow, I have only touched a few highlights of this exceptionally lively field, leaving too many themes (and too many authors) ignored. While mine is necessarily a backward look, the growing scholarly interest in migration ensures that the best is yet to come.

Looking ahead, progress is likely to come from an effort to go beyond the division of labor that has thus far characterized the study of international migration, with one literature situated at the point of origin and the other at the point of destination. By contrast, focusing on the cross-border dimension is likely to help define international migration as a distinctive field of study, one encompassing but going beyond “immigration” and “assimilation,” as conventionally defined.

The sociological contribution has occurred through attention to the social. The sociology of emigration demonstrates how the people crossing borders actively shape their own

destinies, doing what neither home nor host state wants, getting ahead by making effective use of the resource that they almost all possess: one another. The sociology of assimilation explains why a move to the territory of another richer state simultaneously improves the migrants’ lives, but transforms them in ways that they could not have expected, often producing distance from the people, places, cultures, and loyalties left behind. The problem is that these two separate sociologies describe the same people, thus failing to see the internal tensions and contradictions arising among people who are simultaneously immigrants *and* emigrants.

Going deeper entails attending to the links between here and there, while also highlighting the cross-state and political aspects that distinguish *international* migration from other forms of long-distance movement. International migrants do not move under circumstances of their own choosing; rather, they contend with states trying to control movement across both the *external* borders of the territory *and* the *internal* borders of membership; consequently politics and policy shape migrant options, yielding bright, formal, relatively unyielding boundaries. In seeking to sort and sift, states respond to their citizens, whose preferences for a bounded community—not just a prejudice but also an ideal—put them at the heart of the phenomenon. Hence, the study of international migration encompasses both receiving and sending contexts, focusing both on the processes that recurrently produce population movements across states *and* the mechanisms by which nation-states attempt to keep themselves apart from the world.

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