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*Review of Migrant Youth, Transnational Families, and the State.*

**Lauren Heidbrink. Reviewed by Laurie Melrood**

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agencies to make the types of reforms this book seeks. Without an organized countervailing force for reform—parents, families, youth, or a class action lawsuit—the seminal findings of this book will remain marginalized.

*David Tobis, Maestral International*

Lauren Heidbrink, *Migrant Youth, Transnational Families, and the State*. University of Pennsylvania Press (2014), 208 pages \$49.95, cloth.

Visions of the Southwest border in the 1980s were revisited the summer of 2014 when thousands of youth fleeing organized crime and endemic poverty in Central America's northern triangle—Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras—crossed into the U.S. seeking safety and economic stability. Customs and Border Protection officials apprehended more than 68,000 youth, about 23% of them from Mexico and the remainder from Central America, in FY 2014. After processing them at "holding facilities," they were transported without explanation to poorly equipped military bases in Oklahoma, Texas and California, and a FEMA-managed warehouse in Nogales, Arizona. Once transferred to the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), the youth were locked up for indefinite periods in privately contracted Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) youth detention shelters from California to Delaware. With minimal access to attorneys, family members, or even use of telephones, immigrant youth, far from feeling welcomed, found themselves in an incomprehensible maze of structures supposedly in place to protect them.

Though the United Nations recognized the majority of those fleeing northern triangle countries as refugees according to the 1951 UN Convention, the reasons for their desperate leave-taking were barely addressed by mainstream media. The youths' own voices and motives were utterly suppressed. By mid-November, a majority of U.S. voters endorsed the Congressional stalemate on immigration reform. Central American and Mexican children, despite U.S. and international laws in their favor, were on their own to defend their rights

and struggle for their futures, losing their slim freedoms as international travelers in the process.

Enter anthropologist Lauren Heidbrink's *Migrant Youth, Transnational Families, and the State*, a courageous and timely analysis bringing out the testimonies of five unaccompanied migrant youth caught in immigration and child welfare snares. "This ethnography," Heidbrink states, "focuses on a largely invisible population of unauthorized migrant children in highly restrictive and largely inaccessible spaces, such as immigration detention, border stations, immigration and family courts, and underground communities." Their narratives reveal a string of restrictive and contradictory government structures pertaining to migrant youth that scatter their scanty dreams into a cosmic dust. Their reasons for fleeing their homes—to escape gang and cartel violence, to earn money to send to families left behind, and to join or rejoin family members in the U.S.—are ignored. Case managers, juvenile court judges and detention officials become their "new family." Heidbrink demonstrates how their personhood, sense of agency and rights as children dissolve in government paperwork and procedures they neither understand nor accept.

Heidbrink advises her readers that, like immigrant adults, immigrant youth are entitled to certain important immigration remedies and to legal counsel. Yet rarely, she notes, except for an initial rights orientation, do they have immigration attorneys to assemble their legal cases. Attorney access to youth detention shelters is severely limited. Rare, too, on the child welfare side, is the juvenile judge, protective services case manager or child welfare attorney who understands the options available to youth and can help navigate successful pursuit of these options. Indeed, all of Heidbrink's subjects are disrespected and disincentivized, often even punished, for attempting to exercise their rights or agency while in government custody. The reader learns that even close and trusted relatives, including parents, with whom a child has had previous contact, may be found unsuitable for placement or even for communication. Security concerns, such as inappropriate and threatening contacts with smugglers, drug or human traffickers, understandably play a role. But the youth, while able to navigate an arduous journey alone across foreign

lands, are not considered qualified to help determine who may contact them. As an example, the internet is considered off limits, even though for the majority of Latino and African youth, Facebook is the only free communication option available to families. When youth protest such deprivations, privileges may be withheld. Yet these youth, neither criminals nor delinquents, are only seeking to be united or reunited as expeditiously as possible with parents or kin.

Lauren Heidbrink skillfully critiques the shortcomings of intersecting systems that frequently collide and too often sideswipe best interests of children and families. Successful advocacy by community immigrant networks and by national child welfare and immigrant advocate organizations for immigration policy changes and for greater transparency, not mentioned in the book, are slowly turning around some of these egregious effects.

*Laurie Melrood, Immigrant Family Advocate, Tucson, AZ*

Laurence Tribe and Joshua Matz, *Uncertain Justice: The Roberts Court and the Constitution*. Henry Holt & Co. (2014), 416 pages, \$32.00 hardcover.

Most best selling books on the Supreme Court have been of the “inside story” variety, like Woodward and Armstrong’s *The Brethren*, or biographical portraits like Linda Greenhouse’s *Becoming Justice Blackmon*. Combining fine-tuned analysis of arcane doctrines—such as rules about standing, with interesting vignettes about life in the chambers and sweeping predictions about the distant impact of today’s high court decisions—is not a job for sissies, and the authors of *The Roberts Court* have broken the mold by producing a delightfully readable and erudite volume that both places complicated legal concepts within the easy reach of non-lawyers and synthesizes a broad swath of case law for the legally trained.

The central insight the authors seek to convey is two-pronged: the Court that began with the 2005 appointment of Chief Justice Roberts defies and perhaps does not deserve the hard, crass political descriptions commentators and humorists alike have applied (Steven Colbert’s spoof on the campaign