



## European journal of American studies

4-3 | 2009

Special Issue: Immigration

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### Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/7715>

DOI: 10.4000/ejas.7715

ISSN: 1991-9336

### Publisher

European Association for American Studies

### Electronic reference

Jonathon W. Moses, « The Politics of Immigration: Introduction to a Special Issue on US Immigration », *European journal of American studies* [Online], 4-3 | 2009, document 1, Online since 01 December 2009, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/7715> ; DOI : 10.4000/ejas.7715

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## 1. Introduction

- 1 While the Obama administration is burdened with many pressing problems, the plight of undocumented immigrants ranks high among them. Luckily, some of the most xenophobic voices on the national scene have been temporarily stunned by Obama's victory. In this new political context, where Hope has vanquished Fear, we might hope that America can return to the task of constructing a reasonable and humane response to the needs of its *Illegal People*.<sup>2</sup>
- 2 The size of America's population of undocumented immigrants is impossible to gauge. Given their irregular status, we should not be surprised that they avoid being counted. As a rough estimate, however, Passel and Cohn suggest that there are less than 12 million unauthorized immigrants in the United States. If correct, this number is fewer than those who enjoy permanent legal status. These people keep the country running: they pick the crops, build the houses, wash the bathrooms, and care for the sick and elderly. In short, they perform the tasks that Americans are unwilling to do (at least not at the going rate). In return, they are treated mostly as second-class citizens.<sup>3</sup>
- 3 While undocumented workers have always suffered wide-ranging exploitation—working dirty jobs at miserable pay, subjected to raids and arrests, deterred from organizing—their plight was exacerbated by the post-9/11 political climate in the United States. In a context characterized largely by fear, the war on terror quickly and easily morphed into a war on the foreigner. After the 2008 election, and the signals it sends, a new Congress will have to re-think its approach to border control.
- 4 While undocumented workers have always been treated poorly, they were also welcomed (albeit implicitly) in a period characterized by economic expansion in the United States. As a commentator quoted in Benita Heiskanen's contribution tells us, undocumented workers are often met by mixed signals: "[W]e have two signs posted at our borders. 'Help

Wanted' and 'Keep Out.'" The American economy was booming, and the domestic labor supply was insufficient to meet the growing demand. Immigrant labor filled the void.

5 Like the political tide that comes with elections, this economic context is changing quickly. In the wake of the 2008 election, the US Government announced that over 500,000 jobs had been lost in the month of November alone—surging the unemployment rate to 6.7% (or 10.3 million jobless), a 14-year high. Since the start of the current recession (December 2007), over 2.7 million people have become unemployed—most of these jobs were lost in the three months surrounding the election! As the country experiences a severe recession, the plight of (and demand for) undocumented immigrants becomes all the more uncertain.<sup>4</sup>

6 It is this radically new economic and political context that sets the stage for the new Congress, and its work on immigration reform. At the center of its deliberations will be three related issues: the costs of immigration; border control and the war on terror; and the growing influence of Latinos. This special issue takes aim at these three important subjects.

## 2. The Economics of Undocumented Immigration

7 The first, and most contentious, of the background issues that will influence America's future immigration policy is the anticipated costs of undocumented immigrants. Political debate in the United States (not to mention most of the developed world) is remarkably myopic when it comes to immigration. Indeed, I was motivated myself to write a book in response to the significant gap that separates public opinion and academic research on the subject of international migration.<sup>5</sup>

8 In most political contexts it is simply assumed that undocumented immigration constitutes a drain on national resources. But this assumption flies in the face of experience, and actually contradicts much scholarship on the subject. Unless costs and benefits are calculated in a ridiculously narrow (and economistic) fashion, communities mostly benefit from immigration—both documented and undocumented.

9 Consider the recent writings of three very different commentators. A one-time journalist for *The Economist* magazine, Phillipe Legrain, argues in his recent (2006) book, *Immigrants: Your Country Needs Them*, that the free movement of people is just as beneficial as the free movement of goods and capital. How odd, then, that a country which has (for so long) embraced the free flow of international trade and capital, and whose own remarkable economy was built with the sweat and foresight of immigrant labor, should today spend so much money and energy keeping immigrant labor out!<sup>6</sup>

10 Similarly, the work of a World Bank economist, Lant Pritchett's *Let Their People Come*, considers how the developed world needs to devise better mechanisms for supporting and integrating the assimilation of immigrants from the developing world. For Pritchett: "The rich countries of the world should actively look for ways to increase the mobility of unskilled labor across their national boundaries. They should do this primarily because it is the right thing to do, because of the enormous potential benefits to people who are allowed to move."<sup>7</sup>

11 Finally, Jason Riley, a member of the *Wall Street Journal's* editorial board, wrote *Let Them In* to show how some of the most common arguments against immigration are simply, and obviously, wrong. For Riley, an open-border policy is not only consistent with American traditions and mores, but it is also in America's best economic interest.<sup>8</sup>

12 Each of these three, very different, authors makes the same point, but in different ways: it is in America's economic interest to open its border to immigrants from the developing world. In choosing these three examples, I do not mean to suggest that all economists believe that the benefits of greater immigration outweigh the costs. Economists, after all, are known for their inability to agree about anything. But even the most skeptical economists realize that the economic costs of immigration—if they do, in fact, exist—are remarkably small and vary by level of aggregation.<sup>9</sup> The costs associated with undocumented immigrants is probably even smaller, as these workers pay local and payroll taxes, but shy away from using many of the public services that these taxes support (indeed, their demographic profile makes them less likely to rely on public support, as they tend to be young male workers, without children and family). Even if we accept a small economic cost to immigration, there is no reason to dwell on these as the political, moral and social gains from immigration are almost overwhelming positive.

13 Still, this sort of myopic argument about the economic costs of undocumented workers continues to dominate political discussion, as evidenced in different ways in each of the three contributions that follow.

### 3. Border Control and the War on Terror

14 Terrorism is one obvious touchstone for any future debate about US immigration reform. In an era of Homeland Security, there is a common perception that foreign terrorists exploited America's porous borders to attack the country in 2001. In light of this perception, the country circled its bandwagons: beefing up the monitoring of its international borders and hermetically sealing off the rest of the world. Only an imminent threat to the security of the country could justify the phenomenal cost of such a (pointless) feat.<sup>10</sup>

15 But this fear-based perception tends to ignore the fact that most of the September 11 terrorists entered onto the United States via legal channels. Indeed, existing border controls have not been effective at stopping other attempts at terrorist infiltration into the US (or other countries, for that matter). Most suspected terrorist arrests are made by local police authorities, not border guards.<sup>11</sup>

16 Of course, none of this has stopped politicians from linking Homeland Security and border control under the Bush administration. This connection is especially clear in Catherine Lejeune's contribution, which examines how a new National Security State, borne of 11 September, has been used to intimidate immigrant workers. Lejeune's examination is done by way of a detailed survey of recent immigration legislation in the US, and the sundry political motivations that lie behind them. The picture that Lejeune paints is a disturbing one, where the Bush administration's War on Terror has slowly spread to a subsequent War on Immigrants.

17 It is in light of this sort of detailed, and up-to-date, survey of recent immigration legislation that we can clearly see how rapidly the political ground was changing prior to the recent presidential election. Lejeune provides us with a fascinating glimpse of the complicated ways that US immigration policy is infused with party politics. There are few other political issues that create stranger political bedfellows in the United States—as is evidenced by the co-authorship of the *Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act (S. 1033)*, a bill proposed in May 2005 by Senators Ted Kennedy and John McCain. Indeed, there are few other issues that are better-suited to splitting today's Republican Party (as witnessed

early-on in the race for the Republican Party nomination). Immigration policy is the venue for Super Bowl Politics.

- 18 It is because of the high-stakes nature of immigration policy that America finds it so difficult to secure the sort of considered and thoughtful legislation it deserves. It is also the reason that immigration policy lends itself so readily to political grandstanding. As Lejeune's contribution hints (and as the contribution by Frederick Douzet examines in more detail), the result of this political stalemate has been a rise in local responses that borders on the vigilante. Border state residents have been encouraged to organize in armed groups that informally patrol the borders, wrapping themselves in patriotic sentiment while promising to compensate for what they see is an inadequate federal response at the borders.
- 19 Finally, Lejeune's contribution points to a very interesting development, which I hope might be the subject of further study: the distributional range of cities that support immigrant sanctuaries. In light of the above-mentioned (and often misleading) assumptions about the costs of immigration to local political authorities, it is rather remarkable to find several of America's largest cities willing to provide sanctuary to undocumented workers.<sup>12</sup>
- 20 This observation reveals two puzzles worthy of further study. First, what is the motivation driving so many cities to protect these undocumented workers if they represent such a phenomenal drain on their resources? More importantly, why do some local authorities embrace and protect these undocumented workers, while others spend scarce local resources to hunt them down and throw them out? This second question lends itself to a promising comparative research project for some enterprising scholar.

#### 4. The Growing Influence of Latinos

- 21 Another issue that will certainly be considered when the US Congress returns to deliberate on a new immigration policy is the growing influence of America's Latino population. While Hispanics already make up the largest minority group in the US population, they continue to grow rapidly. Indeed, since the year 2000 Hispanics have accounted for more than half of the United States' overall population growth.<sup>13</sup>
- 22 With these numbers comes substantial influence—especially when they are politically engaged. The booming Hispanic population in political swing states delivered significant results in the recent presidential election. Since 2004, the number of Latino voters has doubled: there are now approximately 18 million Latinos eligible to vote in the United States. From the evidence provided by early exit polling, it is clear that Latinos overwhelmingly (just under 70%) supported Obama in the campaign.<sup>14</sup> This level of support is consistent with an earlier (summer 2008) nation-wide survey conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, future Republican strategists will have to weigh heavily the electoral costs of the Party's more xenophobic outbursts.
- 23 This growing Latino influence challenges the status quo on several fronts. One way to think about this challenge is made evident in Samuel Huntington's (2004) influential book, *Who are We?*<sup>16</sup> The reader may recall that Huntington is largely to blame for a common vision that scars our world: a view of civilizations clashing with one another (Huntington 1996). In *Who are We?* Huntington develops this view with a remarkably static picture of civilization and/or nation—a picture of something sterile, rigid, standardized, and tightly linked to specific territorial (national) spaces. Worse, this picture depicts national culture in stereotyped images of an idealized past. For

Huntington, American culture was set in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and steeped in romantic images of America's white Anglo-Protestant settlers.

- 24 Cultural stereotypes of this type fail to realize the degree to which political communities are themselves imagined and constructed.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, one of the great advances of modern cultural theory, to quote Edward Said (1995: 348-9), "is the realization, almost universally acknowledged, that cultures are hybrid and heterogeneous, and...that cultures and civilizations are so interrelated and interdependent as to beggar any unitary or simply delineated description of their individuality."<sup>18</sup> In contrast to the vision of static culture (or identity) as found in Huntington, modern cultural theory recognizes that culture is a complicated, reflexive process that include historical, social, intellectual and political processes, as well as the imagined constructions of oppositions, like them and us.
- 25 This matters because much of the current debate about undocumented immigration in the United States concerns this underlying tension about how to interpret (and react to) the country's changing identity. For those who draw on a pliable and reflexive notion of culture, there is no threat from a growing Latino presence in the US. Rather, the introduction of Latino voices offers new impetus and direction to the nation's identity, which is understood as a collage, or imaginative blend, of the near (US) and the far (Latin America).
- 26 Nowhere has this influence been more evident than at the "Day without Immigrants" march. It is this historic event that Benita Heiskanen uses to center her contribution to this special issue. On 1 May 2006 over a million immigrant supporters took to the streets to protest the sweeping provisions of the Sensebrenner Bill. Outraged by increasingly frequent attempts to paint immigrants as criminals and/or terrorists, these peaceful protestors rocked the political establishment with both their size and their message.
- 27 Heiskanen begins her investigation with a fascinating discussion of the roots to the American national identity. Because US immigration law has always been tied to racial categories, race has always been—in effect—a policy matter. In Heiskanen's discussion we learn of the role that race has played as a central premise for defining US citizenship, national identity and nationhood. This role remained important in the debates that followed the Day without Immigrants; debates that were largely about the nature of identity in a globalized world. In the one corner we find those, like Huntington, who see national identity as fixed in an idealized and ethnically homogenized past. For people in this corner, the growing Latino presence is a weed that needs to be plucked. In the other corner are those who understand American national identity to be fluid and constantly incorporating (and adopting) foreign influences.
- 28 In Heiskanen's portrayal of these political debates we see commentators on the left and the right struggle with how to interpret this important new and Latino voice in American politics, in the wake of the May Day protests. It is in these sundry reactions, and the political deals that will result from them, where I expect to find the seeds of any future American immigration policy. It is for this reason that Heiskanen's article constitutes a very important and insightful contribution.
- 29 This cultural and political tension is also very evident in the contribution by Frederick Douzet, which examines the rise of the Minutemen and recent anti-immigration attitudes in California. Drawing on her extensive field work along the Mexican-US border in California, Douzet is able to show how contemporary attitudes about undocumented

immigrants are fueled by different concerns than those that drove earlier anti-immigrant sentiment in California.

- 30 This field work reveals a number of related splinter groups, borne of the Minutemen, who have become so frustrated by the government's apparent failure in responding to undocumented immigration, that they have taken to the border to stop what they see as a foreign invasion. While explicitly denying any racial motivation, they see the US engaged in a cultural war—it is being invaded by those who don't respect its law, its language, or its (Anglo-Protestant) culture. The aims of this defensive and peaceful action are manifold: to man and protect the borders; to lobby the federal government and the larger political debate; to protest the employment of undocumented day laborers; to litter the border with American flags and warning signs...
- 31 What is interesting about the broader context of these protests, compared to the anti-immigrant sentiment revealed in the struggle over Proposition 187, is the fact that the local economy was in much better shape during the rise of the Minutemen. From Douzet's depiction, one sees how their struggle is only partly about the economic effects of this immigration. Sure, there are obvious concerns about the effects of immigration on the quality of local public services. But in contrast to earlier anti-immigration rounds, these protests matured in a relatively stable economy. From this favorable economic climate rose a grass-roots revolt that aimed to influence a national dialogue over the heart and soul of the country, in the face of a perceived threat.
- 32 The rise of the Minutemen, and like-minded organizations, illustrate the complicated mixture of motivations that animate the immigration issue in US political life. In Douzet's depiction we see the clear influence of all three of the motivating factors described in this brief introduction: concerns about the economic effects of the immigrants, concerns about the national security context in the post-9/11 world, and concerns about how these workers challenge America's cultural identity by living in ethnic enclaves, and refusing to integrate into the larger (white and English-speaking) melting pot that was once depicted on American TVs and in American history books.

#### 5. Conclusion

- 33 What follows are three contributions that examine the contentious nature of contemporary immigration policy in the United States. As we distance ourselves from the horrific events of September 2001, and once the Obama administration is able to clear its crowded desk of pressing problems, the United States will need to re-think its attitude about undocumented workers. There is much at stake, and many paths from which to choose. These three contributions, together, provide readers with the sort of information and background that will be necessary to understand the nature of the political struggle ahead.

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## NOTES

1. Formally H.R. 4437, this bill provoked massive protests across the United States, as described below in several of the contributions.

2. David Bacon, *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants* (Boston: Beacon, 2008).
3. Jeffrey S. Passell and D'Vera Cohn, "Trends in Unauthorized Immigration: Undocumented Inflow Now Trails Legal Inflow." *Pew Hispanic Center Report*. 2 October 2008. Online at: <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/94.pdf>. Accessed 2 December, 2008.
4. US Department of Labor (2008) "Employment Situation Summary." Bureau of Labor Statistics' Economic News Release. 5 December. Online at: <http://www.lbs.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>. Accessed 5 December 2008.
5. Jonathon W. Moses, *International Migration: Globalization's Last Frontier* (London: Zed, 2006).
6. Phillipe Legrain, *Immigrants: Your Country Needs Them* (London: Little Brown, 2006).
7. Lant Pritchett, *Let Their People Come* (Washington DC: Center for Global Development, 2006), 2.
8. Jason L. Riley, *Let Them In: The Case for Open Borders* (New York: Gotham Books, 2008).
9. See Jonathon W. Moses, *International Migration: Globalization's Last Frontier* (London: Zed, 2006), 111-122) for a review of this literature.
10. See Jonathon W. Moses, *International Migration: Globalization's Last Frontier* (London: Zed, 2006) 118-121) for an estimation of these costs.
11. The one exception that seems to prove the rule is the Port Angeles (Washington) arrest and later conviction of an Algerian, Ahmed Ressay, in December of 1999, for trying to smuggle bomb-making materials across the Canadian/US border in an apparent attempt to disrupt millennium celebrations on the west coast of the US.
12. Several major US cities have adopted "sanctuary" ordinances that ban city employees (and police officers) from asking people about their immigration status. These include, but are not limited to, Washington DC, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, San Diego, Phoenix, Dallas, Houston, Detroit, Seattle, Minneapolis, Miami, and Denver.
13. Fry, Richard (2008) "Latino Settlement in the New Century." *Pew Hispanic Center Paper*. 23 October. Online at <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/96.pdf>. Accessed 1 December 2008.
14. Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas, "The Power of the Latina Vote." *Williamson Daily News* 30 November 2008. Online at [http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?p\\_action=print&p\\_docid=124D66E7C7BE50A8](http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?p_action=print&p_docid=124D66E7C7BE50A8). Accessed 2 December 2008.
15. Mark Hugo Lopez and Susan Minushkin, "Latinos Overwhelmingly Support Obama and Democrats in 2008." 24 July 2008. *Pew Research Center Publications*. Online at <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/908/obama-latino-voters>. Accessed 2 December 2008.
16. This is a book-length extension of Huntington's article, which Douzet refers to in her contribution: *Who are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004) and *The Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).
17. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).



18. Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. With a new afterword (1978; London: Penguin, 1995).

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## ABSTRACTS

In reading this special issue we gain a remarkably insightful glimpse of the important role that immigration policy has played, and will continue to play, in several important aspects of contemporary American life. After eight years of the Bush Administration, a new immigration policy is poised to rise again from the ashes of the infamous Sensenbrenner Bill.<sup>1</sup> A fresh political and economic context ensures this.

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