

## Editor's Notes

As a nation there is probably no greater dividing point for most Americans than the topic of immigration. For the past eight years the American Congress has sought to establish a comprehensive immigration policy and pass sweeping legislation that seeks to define who is eligible to be an American citizen and resident and who will be ultimately included or excluded in terms of naturalization and citizenship. Recent failed attempts to pass a “Dream Act” to legitimate scores of immigrant children and young adults who have resided in the United States nearly all their lives, and in many cases have no conception of any other culture or national entity, illustrates both the urgency and complexity of projected legislation. Millions will ultimately be affected in terms of their status and identity.

Immigration has mushroomed as a public concern and governmental priority not only in the United States, but throughout the world. The implications of immigration policy are further impacted by the forces of economic globalization, nationalism, nativism, identity and gender politics, which complicate the previously understood patterns of “national integrity” and the notion of citizenship into the twenty first century.

What constitutes the roles and responsibilities of recently arrived immigrants, and in turn the role of host governments and societies to both new arrivals and long standing ethnic minority population groups, remains both a debatable matter and one fraught with economic, political as well as racialized overtones.

The selections for this particular edition look at the interplay of the issues of gender, identity, trans-nationalism and ethnicity within a comparative perspective. These are important questions that cross international boundaries and that need both collaborative and on-going examination by a host of scholars. The role of global

trans-national capitalism has brought about ever increasing changes and dynamic forces that continue to redefine national identity as well as economic and cultural sustainability.

Vernon Damani Johnson in his discussion “Immigration and Domestic Politics in South Africa: Contradictions of the Rainbow Nation,” offers an historical and political economic analysis of immigration policy and national racial polity in South Africa as they interface with the daunting socioeconomic problems facing that country. Johnson addresses immigration from a global-system perspective and responds to the overriding questions facing the newly defined nation state: What role has immigration played in the country’s economic and political development? How do we explain post-apartheid waves of xenophobic attacks on African immigrants? What has been the response of government and progressive actors in civil society to xenophobia? What are the prospects for enlightened immigration policy as South Africa moves forward?

David Aliano looks at the role that nation states have towards diasporic emigrants and in turn their overall economic and political utility to their former homeland. By looking at a recently changed Italian law granting its citizens living abroad the right to elect their own representatives to the Italian parliament, he explores the multiple ways in which citizenship and national identities are being redefined in an increasingly globalized world. In particular, his article explores both the problems and possibilities posed by transnational and extraterritorial citizenship law, placing the Italian case in a comparative perspective.

In Midori Takagi’s “Orientals Need Apply: Gender-based Asylum in the U.S.” recent court cases brought by Fauziya Kasinga and Rod Alvarado Peña are examined that have made genital mutilation and domestic violence possible bases for asylum. Although this can be viewed as a positive movement within asylum law, she projects that

judges, lawyers and social service providers are more apt to grant asylum if they stereotypically believe the victim's culture is somehow "barbaric" and "backwards," thereby allowing the U.S. to be the colonial saviors of the women. She further contends that within the U.S. asylum process, participants "orientalize" Asian women and their cultures as a way of seeing them as being "worthy" of being rescued. This more than often works to the disadvantage and denial of asylum to victims seeking asylum whose cultures are not viewed as "exotic" or "backwards."

In his analysis of the American job market, Chang Won Lee concludes that Asian Americans, specifically Chinese and Japanese Americans, are often stratified in particular fields and occupations that can be classified as Asian-Overrepresented (AO) and White Overrepresented (WO). Fields such as computer science healthcare and engineering tend to be overrepresented by Asian Americans while management, sales, and education tend to be the purview of "White" or majority group Americans. The implication of his findings seem to suggest that Asian Americas as a whole are selectively assimilated into the labor marked by occupational fields and by ethnicity.

Bill Hug's assessment of the work of Jacob Riis and *Double Consciousness*, looks at the contributions that the immigrant, photojournalist Riis made in exposing the early living and working conditions among the recently arrived immigrants and tenement poor in New York City during the nineteenth century. Unlike some earlier takes on Riis' work, Hug suggests that Riis, who worked within contexts later defined by the likes of W.E.B. DuBois and Mikhail Bakhtin, was a canny "ethnic rhetorician" who addressed genteel Anglo-Americans in terms of their own nativist assumptions so he could set about subverting them.

In their work "Women without a Voice" Sharon Wilson and Pelgy Vaz focus on the themes of self discovery and resiliency and how they are conveyed through images of

silence, loss of voice, confinement, and alienation. In their examination of female characters contained within the writings of Sandra Cisneros, Sashi Deshpande and Azar Nafisi, they discuss the socio-cultural and historical context in which the characters function. They further illustrate how the characters must often transcend traditional cultural and ethnic boundaries to reach their own self-fulfillment and actualization while at the same time risking their own familial and community ties that largely frame their identity.

As a group, these articles encourage readers to consider the past, present and future of immigration, ethnicity, and identity as affected by (inter)national racial policies, voting rights, gender-based issues, and the agency of the individual.

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