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Strangers As Neighbors: Religious Lanugage and the Response to Immigrants in the United States

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Fairfield University

Center for Faith & Public Life

Strangers as Neighbors:

Religious Language and the Response to
Immigrants in the United States

A White Paper Collection

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of New York in 2009*

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

During the past year, my colleague and co-director of this project, Dr. Jocelyn M. Boryczka, assistant professor of politics and director of the Peace & Justice Studies Program, and I led a Fairfield University academic research team which directly engaged a national group of over 100 scholars, advocates, religious leaders, and journalists from across academic disciplines and faith communities on the complexities of U.S. immigration. Funded by a planning grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York, we called this project: *Strangers as Neighbors: Religious Language and the Response to Immigrants in the U.S.* Through meetings with national leaders and a series of academic workshops, we examined ways in which religious language can affect the discussion of immigration. Two central questions drove the discussion in each of these contexts:

- How can faith groups, acting in concert, reframe the language of the national debate on immigration?
- What is the nature of the deliberative processes necessary to bring different faith groups together in a constructive dialogue about immigration?

With these two questions serving as a focal point, the project invited participants to consider immigration through the lens of various faith perspectives and to deliberate on how these perspectives might help transform the national discourse on this issue. The following three academic seminars were convened during the spring and summer of 2009.

ACADEMIC SEMINARS

Language and Political Transformation Workshop

This seminar focused on language and political transformation, and explored the issue of migration by including political scientists and theorists who have shaped the study of conceptual histories. This discussion focused on the concept of immigration and analyzed its role in American political discourse at crucial junctures of the immigration debate, particularly at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. This work located specific faith groups, viewed as political actors, at the center of its analysis and considered how they have shaped the discourse on immigration and could potentially reframe it. It also focused on the media as critical to the process of constructing the political discourse on immigration.

Religious Language and the Public Square

This seminar brought religious scholars and linguistics/media experts together to discuss the possibilities inherent in the religious language of different denominations, possibilities that might act in productive concert to change the national dialogue. It was recognized that this would have to be a nuanced and intentional conversation, as religious symbols simply cannot be set side-by-side. The group focused on the practices of religion and religious communities, and included an analysis of how these practices are shaped by popular media in the United States. Of particular concern was the development of a plan to address the sensibilities of religious communities in disparate regions of the U.S., as regional differences can frequently play as great a role as religious differences.

Politics of Migration and Faith Communities

This seminar examined the historical role of faith communities in the politics of U.S. immigration and their current involvement in trying to influence immigration policies.

Particular attention was paid to the religious language used in past and present political dialogue. The seminar sought to sort out the best and worst practices, laying a foundation for a recalibrated effort by these religious groups to reshape the underlying terms of the national political debate on immigration.

EMERGENT THEMES

Ultimately, two overarching themes related to humanism and collaborative processes emanated from these events.

First, it was accepted that all the major religions have rich wellsprings of stories and symbols that humanize the phenomenon of migration and frame it as a way of encountering God. A religious perspective serves to create a humanistic discourse that facilitates understanding immigrants as human beings on a physical as well as spiritual journey. This vision encompasses many dimensions of religious language that could help reframe our current discourse. The idea of journey is equally important to the three Abrahamic (Christian, Jewish, and Muslim) traditions. As a concept, “journey” recasts all of us, regardless of national origin, as people “on the move” – whether across or inside national borders, or within internal spiritual and personal ones. This perspective differs in orientation from the dominant legalistic or economic discourse. Legal discourse typically frames immigrants as either legal or illegal aliens and relies on an objective, rule-of-law approach that tends to obscure the personhood of each immigrant. Economic discourse similarly treats the immigrant as an object or individual economic unit that, in a depersonalized way, works for or against the economic system.

Second, the faith-based approach encompasses a view of the whole person that directs us away from oppositional “either/or” ways of entering the immigration debate. From a language perspective, the alternative “both/and” framework then creates space for considering how a religious starting point operates in relationship to the legal and economic platforms – in ways that neither prioritize nor ignore either of them. The “both/and” approach further changes how we consider the process for dialogue around immigration by emphasizing the deliberative means for public discourse on contentious issues. When the basis for engagement acknowledges the rich differences in identity, beliefs and backgrounds that constitute humanity under God, it leads to a more inclusive context for rigorous debate.

KEY FINDINGS

The project’s deliberations identified six key findings around religious language and immigration:

- the significance of personal experience as conveyed through stories and narrative;
- the pivotal importance of “home” in the immigration debate;
- challenges and opportunities for engaging members of faith communities;
- the role of fear in immigrant and non-immigrant communities;
- the powerful force of law as dominating the current discourse on immigration; and
- the marginal role of religious language in the media.

Addressing these key findings may provide an alternative way for the humanistic perspective of faith-based communities to enter into the national discourse on

immigration, rather than limiting the conversation to the dominant legalistic approach. To explore these ideas in greater depth, I am pleased to introduce the following four papers, which resulted from the Spring/Summer 2009 Academic Seminars. They are:

The Return of Family Values: Moral Guardianship & Immigration Reform in Contemporary Political Discourse by Jocelyn Boryczka, Ph.D. assistant professor of politics and director of the Peace & Justice Studies Program, Fairfield University

Immigrants and Race in the U.S.: Are Class-Based Alliances Possible? by Ron Hayduk, Ph.D., associate professor of political science at the Borough of Manhattan Community College of the City University of New York (CUNY)

Inclusive Religious Values in the Immigration Debate: Locating and Assessing its Past Role and Future Impact by Alethia Jones, Ph.D., assistant professor, Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, University at Albany, SUNY

Migration and Faith: Religious Language in the Public Square by Fr. Richard Ryscavage, S.J., professor of sociology and director of the Center for Faith and Public Life, Fairfield University.

CONCLUSION

Our work this year through the *Strangers as Neighbors* project strongly suggests that a faith-based perspective emphasizing humanism and the search for the common good allows for a more collaborative discursive environment, which could shift us away from the usual “winner-takes-all” atmosphere more commonly found in a highly charged political discourse. More broadly, the project has aimed to lift up the religious dimension of the American political tradition as a means for reimagining how we, as a nation, might approach the immigration issue.

Going forward, there is a need to further assess and test our hypothesis that debating immigration within a religious perspective will shift the nature of the discourse, which, by becoming more civil and humane, will serve to increase the likelihood of participants finding a common ground. A key question driving our further investigation is: Does the religious tradition that is so richly embedded within American political culture offer an effective framework for overcoming the polarizing public discourse dealing with immigration?



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THE RETURN OF FAMILY VALUES: MORAL GUARDIANSHIP & IMMIGRATION REFORM IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Nearly a thousand people marched through downtown Phoenix, Arizona on Sunday, April 19, 2009, to celebrate Cesar Chavez’s legacy. The United Farm Workers of America organized this march, as the last of many rallies held recently in various states, to draw the Obama Administration’s attention to the need for affordable and accessible immigration reform for more people.¹ Representative Luis V. Gutierrez, a Democrat from Chicago’s Fourth District, began a national tour in December 2008 with the hope of generating a broad coalition supporting immigration reform, similar to that mobilized during the Civil Rights movement.² This “Family Unity” Immigration Outreach tour visited evangelical and Roman Catholic churches where clergy from many denominations as well as Muslim imams were in attendance. This interfaith coalition advocates for immigration policies that preserve family unity, a message that resonates across religious, ethnic, racial, and political lines. Both of these efforts represent the Obama Administration’s strategy to shift some of the political burden for immigration reform to advocates representing these constituencies. President Obama spoke on this issue in June 2009 and his Administration began working with groups to advance legislation to be introduced in Spring 2010.³ Immigration, as suggested by the United Farm Worker and “Family Unity” campaigns, is an issue where politics intersects with religion to create the possibility for likely and unlikely allies to join forces for inclusion and social justice.

The project outlined in this working paper turns particular attention to the intersection of religious and political discourse in the American political script around immigration, in order to address the question: How can religious discourse facilitate changing the way people, as members of a political community, understand immigration in the United States? Particularly, what are the dualistic operations within both discourses that influence people – whether progressive, moderate, or conservative – to choose one side or the other in the immigration debate? Concepts such as virtue and vice, which operate in both religious and political discourses, can help us understand how moral beliefs undergirding various social constructions of immigrant categories keep this debate polarized and, therefore, stagnant in terms of the alternatives and solutions entertained by the people, politicians, and policymakers.

¹ “Hundreds Turn Out for Phoenix March.” Associated Press. 20 April 2009. www.kswt.com/global/story.asp?s. (April 21, 2009). The relation of labor to this struggle extends well beyond the United Farm Worker union. The AFL-CIO and Change to Win Foundation, two major labor federations, have joined forces to push for comprehensive immigration reform aimed at addressing the rising number of illegal immigrants in the U.S. estimated at 11.9 million in 2008.

² Julia Preston. “Obama to Push Immigration Bill as One Priority.” *The New York Times*. 9 April 2009. www.nytimes.com/2009/04/09/us/politics/09/immigr.html. (April 21, 2009).

³ *Ibid.*

Negative and positive stereotypes about immigrants abound, often correlating with the moral value attributed to a particular group in terms of what they can contribute to the American economy. Asian immigrants, for instance, are often welcomed and seen as hard workers who come to the United States legally, usually to work in the technology sector. Mexican immigrants, regardless of their citizenship status, are negatively viewed as “wetbacks” stealing American jobs. Arab immigrants, post-9/11, now incur extensive oppression. Often viewed as terrorists, they are held under the most serious scrutiny and suspicion by the American government. The USA PATRIOT Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act) became the starting point for further federal, state, and municipal laws targeting noncitizen immigrants, denying them rights to political association, free speech, due process, and privacy. The resulting “new immigrant profiling” intensified the suspicion already associated with various immigrant groups, particularly Muslim and Arab immigrant men, many of whom authorities detained and held without charges in the immediate wake of 9/11 (Krestsedemas 2008). One aspect of this project aims to look at how concepts such as virtue and vice operate within this discursive space to justify categorizing immigrants in ways that deny them full humanity and place them under suspicion.

Various religious groups employ welcoming initiatives and curricula to offer people alternatives – in and outside of their synagogues, mosques, and churches –for rethinking the relationship of immigrants to their communities. These efforts reflect the important fact that many Christian, Jewish, and Muslim groups, contrary to popular perceptions linking religion to conservatism, collectively organize and advocate to advance rights and protections for immigrants in the United States (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2008). Addressing these stereotypes plays an important role in these efforts which, among other things, focus on humanizing these “strangers” to American society.

This project will focus on material from welcoming initiatives and curricula to examine the potential use of language to shift perceptions of immigrants, in order to advance social justice and inclusion. “Welcoming the Stranger” initiatives hold in common a faith-based claim to seeing others as human beings sharing in a similar journey. Such programs often begin with quotes from different religious texts that similarly reflect a commitment to welcome people outside their own communities. The “For You Were Once a Stranger: Immigration in the U.S. Through the Lens of Faith” handbook created by Interfaith Worker Justice, for instance, introduces its approach by clearly communicating the following examples:

- The Hebrew Bible tells us: ‘The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt’ (Leviticus 19:33-34);
- In the New Testament, Jesus tells us to welcome the stranger (cf. Matthew 25:35), for ‘what you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me’ (Matthew 25:40);
- The Qur’an tells us that we should ‘serve God...and do good to...orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer that you meet, [and those who have nothing]’ (4:36); and

- The Hindu scripture Taitiriya Upanishad tells us: ‘The guest is a representative of God’ (1.11.2).⁴

This religious perspective forms the foundation for the “Welcoming the Stranger” initiatives that, depending on the faith tradition, work from a shared premise which facilitates interfaith coalitions that can advance comprehensive immigration reform.

Faith-based initiatives have popped up around the country during the past few years to challenge the dehumanizing construction of immigrants as either “legal” or “illegal,” “documented” or “undocumented” – categories that beg the question: Can a person be “illegal”? The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), for example, takes on this framing in its interactive “What it Means to Welcome the Stranger” curriculum. Such efforts collectively represent how religion can offer an alternative way into the political discourse about immigration by interjecting the value of the human being. The latter is lost when framing a person – not their actions – as illegal. The “illegal” moniker locates an already vulnerable population in a category permanently outside the social contract and, thereby, less human than those considered “legal” and “citizens.” The ethos of welcoming the stranger, found in the Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu faiths, indicates a moral imperative to bring immigrants into American society. This viewpoint creates a counterweight to rhetorical imperatives that justify building a 700-mile border wall, increasing border security, and increasing Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) raids on homes and workplaces. In short, the religious perspective’s emphasis on valuing human beings, treating them with dignity, and embracing outsiders suggests the humanizing impact as a powerful alternative to the dehumanizing dominant discourse that characterizes and identifies the immigrant as criminal, invader, and/or diseased.

Examining curricula such as HIAS’ will facilitate answering the question, what can we learn from these religious contexts to inform broader political change, with particular attention to the moral dynamics undergirding the social construction of immigrants?

Additionally, I plan to locate these materials within a broader political context by examining other documents, positions, policies, pieces of legislation, and political speeches. In particular, I will explore the language of various anti-immigration forces to identify the moral concepts and stereotypes upon which they rely to counter pro-immigration efforts. Also to be examined will be the discourse of more recent major political players including former President George W. Bush and current President Barack Obama, key debates around major immigration legislation, and public statements by religious leaders from the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities. Together, these materials will provide a means for parsing key discursive operations within the current language of religious and political discourse.

Methodologically, this project will use the conceptual histories approach that conceives of political concepts as “essentially contested,” or key elements in understanding how people create political change.⁵ This approach spotlights contradictions between

4 “For You Were Once a Stranger: Summary and Users Guide.” Interfaith Worker Justice. www.interfaithworkerjustice.org. (August 26, 2009).

5 W.B. Gallie introduces this position in “Essentially Contested Concepts,” in *The Importance of Language*, ed. Max Black (Englewood, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1962), 121-146. Other theorists apply this approach to

actions and ideas or beliefs by locating concepts in relation to political actors and historical contexts. Language then *constitutes* the political world to the same degree as observable actions such as a voter pulling the lever on election day or soldiers marching into battle. James Farr refers to this as “the linguistic constitution of politics.”⁶ This conveys how political figures use specific concepts to influence, negotiate, and alter the course of events given changing historical circumstances that determine different directions of language usage. Specific concepts, importantly, have a corresponding vocabulary that creates a shared set of meanings and a constellation of beliefs. Concepts, as such, then track change when a political context stretches the human imagination to the point that current frameworks, beliefs, actions, and practices no longer meet the demands of the existing belief system. At these points, contradictions between political action and beliefs often arise and can be captured by observing how political actors struggle over specific concepts related to the set of beliefs being contested. This offers us the opportunity to identify how concepts contribute to political change. Significant enough political contests can lead to revisions in how members of a community understand certain political concepts. This approach to language as essential to political transformation facilitates tracking conceptual change at critical junctures such as the one forming around the greatest wave of immigrants, with legal outnumbering the illegal, to the U.S. since the 1920s.

A promising area of analysis for this process that brings together political and religious discourse in this developing pro-immigrant movement for inclusion and social justice centers around the role and construction of women who, whether immigrant or U.S.-born, represent the virtuous moral guardians of their families and cultures. The “Family Unity” tour, led by Representative Gutierrez, in many ways capitalizes on the family-values position embraced, though in very divergent ways, by both progressives and conservatives from a wide range of religious backgrounds. At these church meetings, legal immigrants give testimony to the challenges confronted by their families, torn apart by the deportation of some members. Such stories evoke compassion in favor of pro-immigration reform that will “Keep Families Together” as one sign read at the La Placita Church meeting in Los Angeles in March 2009. The recent increase of illegal immigrants (though none of them are invited to speak at these meetings) raises deep concerns about the impact of deportation on family life.⁷ The Family Unity tour highlights an issue central to the broader debate. News coverage of the march in Phoenix organized by the United Farm Workers, for instance, spotlighted women such as Lucia Vergara, whose husband currently faces deportation.⁸ Deportation of illegal immigrants and its impact on families

redeploys a family values argument with the potential to allow often-polarized groups from the left and right to come together in reforming immigration policy.

Ironically, an appeal to families and motherhood also arises from the anti-immigration groups such as the Arizona-based Mothers Against Illegal Aliens. Before disbanding, this organization made extremist claims that America is at war with Mexico, which it said was trying to take the nation over through the vast number of illegal “aliens” coming across the border. The threat to children and families anchored their position as conveyed by its mission to provide “up-to-date information on the growing illegal alien problem and how it affects every aspect of your life and that of the lives of our children.”⁹ The protective role of mothers framed this position, “THEREFORE, it is up to a mother to protect her family, and it is a family’s job to protect each other. Members and families of MAIA are NOT only mothers; they are fathers, sisters, brothers and legal citizens of America.”¹⁰ This nativist appeal to protecting America from immigrants who threaten the “American way of life” taps into a central theme of moral guardianship in the nation’s political script. Such anti-immigrant positions will inform this project to help determine the ways in which appeals to family values operate in the political discourse around immigration reform.

The Family Unity Tour and Mothers Against Illegal Aliens, though to very different ends, each derive moral authority from implicit and explicit appeals to motherhood and the guardianship of the family. Religion and politics intersect in this discourse around moral guardianship, a critical theme in the American political script. Female virtue – basically defined as the standards of excellence established by the political community for women – often plays a part in explaining how American women gained political status as protectors of the family. The private spheres of tradition, religion, and morality grants women the virtue to anchor the nation against the political and economic cycles of change inherent in liberal democracy and market capitalism.¹¹ Feminist historians capture this dimension of women’s political role in various ways reflecting historical contexts that range from the Republican Mother and Wife to the Victorian era Traditional Woman to the New Woman of the 1950s. I use the term moral guardianship to capture a shared dimension underlying these historical symbols of women that convey a theme running through the American political script: female moral virtue, regardless of changing political contexts, entails a double burden of moral responsibility that extends from the private sphere to the common good and becomes a type of civic obligation.

9 “Mothers Against Illegal Aliens – MAIA Mission.” <http://mothersagainstillegalaliens.org/site>. (April 21, 2009).

10 Ibid.

11 Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* captures the shift of moral and civic virtue to the private sphere amidst the chaos of Jacksonian democracy when, not coincidentally, immigration and migration played a central part in the nation-building process. While economic virtues fell to public man, women became the keepers of moral and civic virtue in large measure due to their relationship to religion. Tocqueville captures the expansive implications of the double burden of moral responsibility assigned to women by identifying them as the ones who shape mores or *moeurs*, “the habits of the heart...the sum of ideas that shape mental habits...the whole moral and intellectual state of the people.” [*Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), Vol. II, 527]. For a complete gendered analysis of male and female virtue and vice in Tocqueville’s *Democracy*, see Jocelyn M. Boryczka “The Separate Spheres Paradox: Habitual Inattention and Democratic Citizenship,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Alexis de Tocqueville* eds. Jill Locke and Eileen Hunt Botting (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2009), 281-304.

political concepts. See Hanna Fenichel Pitkin’s *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972); William Connolly’s *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); and *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, eds. Ball Terence, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

6 “Understanding Conceptual Change Politically,” in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, 24-29.

7 Jason DeParle. “Downward Path Illustrates Concern About Immigrants’ Children.” *The New York Times*. 19 April 2009. www.nytimes.com/2009/04/19/us/. (April 21, 2009). See the recent study for further information, Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn. “A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States.” Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, April 2009.

8 Omadelle Nelson. “Groups March for Immigration Reform.” KPHO.com. 20 April 2009. www.kpho.com/print/19225198/detail.html. (April 21, 2009).

This project will engage in a gendered analysis of the discourse around moral guardianship, women, and families in the pro and anti-immigration contexts. The goal is to understand how languages of morality that emanate from religion inform the politics of groups mobilizing to impact immigration reform in 2009 and beyond. Doing so, I think, helps to locate this deployment of family values positions which reflect the historical theme of moral guardianship within the broader American political script. The family values position, on both sides, will be read against alternative discursive approaches taken in welcoming initiatives and various curricula, to begin considering the strengths and weaknesses of redeploying such positions that tend towards the polarization characterized by the culture wars of the past thirty years. In this discursive context, the way in which religion – in terms of its relationship to moral beliefs captured by virtue and vice – operates within the politics of immigration informs our consideration of the transformative possibilities for the future that may involve departing from the past.

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IMMIGRANTS AND RACE IN THE U.S.: ARE CLASS-BASED ALLIANCES POSSIBLE?

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INTRODUCTION

The United States is experiencing the largest wave of immigration since the early 20th century – one in five people in the U.S. is an immigrant or a close relative to one. In some states and regions – most notably New York – their proportion of the population is even higher. These demographic changes are re-shaping group relations and institutions in America, which will have lasting impacts. In New York City, for example, newcomers are rapidly changing the ethnic and racial makeup of the city. Until the 1950s immigrants came predominantly from Europe. Today, by contrast, most of the immigrants are Hispanic, black, and Asian.

How is the new migrant influx affecting inter-groups relations? Is it enhancing multiracial alliances or exacerbating interethnic conflict and competition? Under what conditions does cooperation prevail over conflict? How these processes unfold will affect American political and social development well into the future.

Mass migration poses particular challenges and unique opportunities for progressives in the United States. On the one hand, immigrants are being pitted against the native-born, especially African-Americans, causing increased competition and conflict among low-wage workers. This process threatens to further fragment an already divided working class. On the other hand, new immigrants are rapidly changing the country's ethnic make-up, creating opportunities to address structural racism and economic exploitation.

Current trends could turn out to be either opportune or disastrous. The outcome depends largely on how immigrants line up with African-Americans, and vice versa. As race continues to affect group dynamics, so racism continues to complicate immigrant political incorporation and the development of class consciousness. Because blacks suffer particularly invidious forms of oppression, attacking racism is integral to building the kind of multiracial working-class political organization that is essential to revolutionary social transformation. As Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun put it, "In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way."¹

We begin by highlighting how the contemporary context differs from that which faced earlier immigrants, paying particular attention to the intervening struggles for civil rights and minority empowerment. We then explore factors that impede and factors that facilitate working-class multiracial alliances. We conclude by presenting a set of proposals that aim to mitigate conflict and build coalition.

¹ Supreme Court *Bakke* case (1978).

A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS?

According to the Bureau of the Census, the United States will become a nation of ethnic and racial “minorities” within a matter of years. Since the 1970s, the overwhelming majority of immigrants have been so-called “people of color” – from Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa. Four states and the District of Columbia already have a larger share of minorities than non-minorities: Hawaii (75%), District of Columbia (68%), New Mexico (58%), California (57%) and Texas (52%).² Hundreds of cities and counties are also comprised of “majority minority” populations.

Projections of such an outcome are not new; they were common at the turn of the 20th century and led to new laws in the 1920s which greatly reduced immigration and sharply restricted it to Western Europeans. Anti-immigrant hysteria took many forms, including anxiety that the newcomers would not assimilate because they spoke different languages, practiced different religions, had different customs, were not white in the taxonomy of the day, and possessed divided loyalties. While such depictions have a familiar ring today, turn-of-the-20th-century immigrants eventually “assimilated” – became white and thus American – over time.³

Present-day immigrants face hardships in some ways greater than those of their predecessors. First, they tend to be darker-skinned and hence more readily targeted for discrimination.⁴ Second, today’s immigrants and their children face a very different economic environment. In the past, manufacturing provided a ladder of mobility for many first- and second-generation immigrants (even as they leap-frogged over African-Americans), but recent economic restructuring and the loss of unionized manufacturing jobs has narrowed the options for newer arrivals.⁵ Third, the sheer volume of immigration has increased as a result of globalization, as free-trade policies have undercut the livelihoods of more and more third-world people. Fourth, reductions in government spending on domestic programs have contributed to increased competition among Latinos, Asians, native-born blacks, and low- and middle-income whites for public and private resources in employment, housing, education, health, and welfare. These contextual factors affect ethnic and race relations, and will shape American political development for years to come.⁶

2 Close behind are Nevada, Maryland, and Georgia at 42% each. US Bureau of the Census. “US Hispanic Population Surpasses 45 Million.” May 1 2008. www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/population/011910.html.

3 A useful distinction is sometimes made by analysts between “immigration policy” and “immigrant policy.” “Immigration policy” determines which immigrant groups are permitted to enter the United States and in what numbers. “Immigrant policies” refer to federal, state, and local laws that influence the integration or the treatment of immigrants after they have arrived. The federal government sets U.S. immigration policy. U.S. immigrant policy is comprised of various state and local provisions and programs, which are less consistent and coherent than federal policy. Of course, both immigration policy and immigrant policy flow from the larger political economy. Here we focus on immigrant policy and its impact on multiracial politics.

4 DeWind & Kasinitz 1997; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Hellman 2008. To be sure, many 19th- and early 20th-century immigrants were not regarded as “white” at the time of their arrival, but became so as a result of violent social conflict and historical processes creating different patterns of ethnic group identity (Roediger 1991; Ignatiev 1995).

5 Gans 1992; Waters & Eschbach 1995; Ness 2005.

6 Massey 2005; Marable et al. 2006; Widener 2008.

THE IMMIGRANT MOMENT: RACE AND CLASS REDUX

Today ethnic and racial minorities, many of whom are immigrants, make up the majority of the working class.⁷ Recent changes in the U.S. political economy (and globally) have contributed to growing inequalities, particularly between people of color and whites. Today, of 300 million inhabitants of the United States, about 36 million are poor and another 54 million are near poor, and most of these are people of color. Thus, one out of three Americans is poor, working-class, and “colored.”⁸ Furthermore, inequalities among racial groups are increasingly severe. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, for example, the median net worth of “Hispanic” households in 2002 was only 9% of that of “non-Hispanic White” households; the median net worth of “Non-Hispanic Black” households was lower still.⁹

Race and ethnicity are often used interchangeably, yet they are different. To simply substitute one for the other obscures their distinct meanings. Race is most often associated with color; however, understanding race merely in terms of skin color masks the real issues (Steinberg 2007; Hattam 2007). Following Allen (1997), we contend that race was created by ruling groups in early America who used racial laws to divide the working class. Race, therefore, is an instrument of social control. Race contributes to the oppression of the working class by subordinating black people. White workers, especially European ethnics, have been allowed to rise socially above blacks, but at severe cost to their own collective advancement.

By contrast, ethnicity typically refers to a common genealogy or ancestry and a group’s distinctive culture, language, and practices. Historically, many immigrant groups from Europe – including Irish, Italians, Jews, and Greeks – were not initially perceived as white. But as ethnic groups, rather than racial groups per se, they were able to become “white” – gain rights and privileges – and “assimilate” over time. This process has never been an option for blacks. In fact, it is anti-black racism that is *the* structuring ideology of race relations and social inequity in the United States. Whiteness is fluid and has maintained itself by the absorption of previously excluded groups. Today, the flip side of the “browning of America” could end up being the “yellowing of whiteness” (Yancy 2003).

Mass immigration poses challenges for racial justice advocates. Immigration could further reinforce racial polarization by pitting newcomers against the native-born, especially African-Americans. During the 1980s, riots broke out four times in black neighborhoods in Cuban-dominated Miami (provoked each time by the killing of a black man by Latino or white police officers). In the early 1990s, three days of looting and shooting in Washington, D.C. were sparked by a police shooting of a Salvadoran immigrant. In Brooklyn, violence flared between African-Americans and a Korean greengrocer, and also with Hasidic Jews. The 1992 Los Angeles riots of mostly African-

7 Of course gender issues are also integral to the socialist project. See *New Labor Forum* (Summer 2008) and Eisenstein (forthcoming).

8 According to a recent study published by the Center for Economic and Policy Research, “Bad jobs – ones that pay less than \$17 an hour and provide neither health nor retirement benefits – account for about 30% of all jobs in the typical state.” This means that around 30% of Americans live in poverty, that is, around 90 million people (Fremstad, et. al. 2008).

9 “The Wealth of Hispanic Households: 1996 to 2002.” <http://pewhispanic.org/>. Of course, class inequalities within immigrant groups may also be wide and are concentrated spatially.

Americans – but also Latinos – resulted in the destruction of approximately 4,000 businesses (30% were Latino-owned, though a greater percentage of Korean-owned shops were targeted). More recently, racially motivated hate crimes have ravaged dozens of cities and towns across the United States, particularly in new immigrant destinations. Tensions are visceral between immigrants from the Caribbean and native-born African-Americans, between Dominicans and Puerto Ricans, Mexicans and South Americans, Chinese and Koreans, and so on.¹⁰ On top of this, anti-immigrant legislation has led to an increasing number of government-led raids on immigrants, with mass detention and deportation becoming de facto policy. Immigrants are one of the fastest growing segments of the U.S. prison population and are the largest group prosecuted for federal crimes.¹¹ At the same time, we witness a further rollback of affirmative action policy and the erosion of anti-discrimination legislation and enforcement.

Evolving race relations are affecting patterns of minority political representation and will likely continue to do so as second-generation immigrants reach voting age. Electoral districts in states and locales that were designed to be “majority minority” increasingly comprise new immigrants who compete with other minority factions for seats and votes. Similarly, the scarcity of jobs that pay a living wage pits native-born workers against the foreign born, particularly those with low levels of skill and education. And, as some immigrants intermarry and assimilate, the racial hierarchy can be kept intact or reproduced anew.¹²

In some instances, newcomers distance themselves from African-Americans in order to avoid what some scholars have called “downward assimilation.”¹³ In their classic work on “segmented assimilation” Portes and Zhou (1993) describe the process whereby some immigrant groups – particularly members of the second generation – benefit from their parents’ relatively higher “human” and “social” capital and experience to gain a more favorable reception in the United States, thus experiencing upward mobility. On the other hand, they argue, where immigrant groups do not have access to resources and cannot build social and/or economic capital, the second generation often experiences “downward assimilation.” In some instances, poverty, inadequate services, and exposure to native-born blacks for second-generation immigrants can “contaminate” their life chances.¹⁴

10 Waldinger 1996; Hamermesh & Bean 1998; Jones-Correa 2001; Mollenkopf & Logan 2003; Rogers 2004; Steinberg 2005.

11 In 2007 alone, more than 280,000 immigrants were held in detention and 270,000 were deported; nearly two million have been deported since 1996 (New York Immigration Coalition). In March 2008, 57% of all new federal criminal cases involved the prosecution of immigrants, particularly the undocumented, an all-time high (Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, TRAC, Syracuse University. www.trac.syr.edu).

12 Yancy 2003. While many Latinos and Asians report their identities as “white” on Census forms (Allen 2001), most recent immigrants identify as neither black nor white and occupy – or are ascribed – an “in between” or “transnational” space. Jones-Correa 1998; Roediger & Barrett 2002; Lien 2004; Kasnitz, et. al. 2004; Tienda & Mitchell 2006.

13 Many non-white immigrants – whose skin is dark as any African American – do not consider themselves black or the descendants of Africans. For example, darker skinned Dominicans frequently say their roots are Taino (an indigenous group on the island of Hispaniola).

14 Portes & Zhou 1993; Portes & Rumbaut 1996; 2001a; 2001b. The foregoing description of this literature is based on a summary in Nancy Foner 2005: 56.

Others have criticized this analysis as patently racist. The emphasis on such stereotypical fears fails to acknowledge, for example, how some second-generation Hispanic youth in New York City have embraced Black culture and have leveraged this choice to achieve upward mobility (Kazinitz et. al. 2002). Similarly, hybrid cultural formations, such as Reggaeton (a mixture of dancehall reggae, hip-hop, and Puerto Rican culture), show a melding of cultural exposures that defies “fixedness.” On the other hand, however, as Steinberg argues, the extension of race beyond the binary of black and white, the admission of permutations in the middle, has deflected attention away from the unique and unresolved problems of race *qua* African-Americans. The result is that the nation congratulates itself on its “diversity” and celebrates its “multiculturalism,” while the problems of African-Americans continue to fester from neglect (2005: 51).¹⁵

As many have noted, an ethnic group’s position in the white social order and its prospects for social mobility are not individually determined. That is, how those at the lower end of the white privilege scale perceive themselves, or how they behave, may be less significant to their racial privilege status than broadly held perceptions. For example, European immigrants that came to 19th-century America could not “become white” by simply adopting the mainstream habits. They had to be given opportunities to obtain rights and social privileges that come with being white and seize them, forging pathways to white-only occupational, educational, residential, and other settings that had previously excluded them (Allen 1997). In other words, the relative position of the racial and ethnic group reflects the dominant group’s exclusionary or inclusionary exercise of political, economic, and cultural power (powell 2007), as well as the specific power subordinate groups possess to resist or fight such domination. Structural racism, or a changing but persistent racial hierarchy (Aspen 2004), complicates the process of immigrant political incorporation and has blunted working class alliances (Allen 1997; powell 2007).¹⁶ To be sure, there is no single response to structural racism by immigrants. Nevertheless, all immigrants – in every region and in every sector of the economy – are forced to navigate the fault line of race. If immigrants and their advocates can do this by exposing and confronting structural inequality – particularly racism – we all will benefit. But how is this possible?

BLACKS, IMMIGRANTS, AND CLASS INEQUALITY

Racial dynamics are central to current debates about newcomers, particularly within the African-American community. Nowhere is this more evident than in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Muhammad 2006). Many immigrants – particularly Latinos – were hired to “rebuild” New Orleans. Today, newcomers and their offspring comprise a growing proportion of the population of this once majority African-American city. The contours of the “new” New Orleans look more like a playground for the white middle and upper

15 Steinberg (2005: 42) quotes Toni Morrison’s stark challenge to advocates of multiracial alliances: “...the move into mainstream America always means buying into the notion of American blacks as the real aliens. Whatever the ethnicity or nationality of the immigrant, his nemesis is understood to be African-Americans.”

16 “The word ‘racism’ is commonly understood to refer to instances in which one individual intentionally or unintentionally targets others for negative treatment because of their skin color or other group-based physical characteristics. This individualistic conceptualization is too limited. Racialized outcomes do not require racist actors. Structural racism refers to a system of social structures that produces cumulative, durable, race-based inequalities” (powell 2007).

classes than a home for blacks and people of color. This is a classic case of divide and conquer.

Although many immigrants share similar economic and social conditions with African-Americans, alliances do not naturally occur. They must be organized. Common class interests may exist but unless commonalities coalesce, differences will continue to divide. As history shows, race consciousness can impede class consciousness. The current anti-immigrant climate provides fertile ground for both black and white workers to displace anxieties about rising costs, declining wages, and an uncertain future onto immigrants. Sadly, the “presumed alliance” among working-class people of color has not been axiomatic (Vaca 2003). As Marx might argue, the class “in itself” has not yet become a class “for itself.”

For one thing, a persistent racial hierarchy affects immigrant incorporation. As many have pointed out, new immigrants are transforming – without erasing – racial hierarchies that characterize social structures, workplaces, neighborhoods, public agencies, and legislative bodies. As Roberto Lovato argues perceptively, a new racial and political landscape is emerging in the United States (particularly in the Deep South) in which Latinos’ subordinate status bears more than a passing resemblance to that of African-Americans who lived under Jim Crow:

Call it Juan Crow: the matrix of laws, social customs, economic institutions and symbolic systems enabling the physical and psychic isolation needed to control and exploit undocumented immigrants. . . . Along with the almost daily arrests, raids and home invasions by federal, state and other authorities, newly resurgent civilian groups like the Ku Klux Klan, in addition to more than 144 new ‘nativist extremist’ groups and 300 anti-immigrant organizations born in the past three years, mostly based in the South, are harassing immigrants as a way to grow their ranks (Lovato 2008).

Lovato points out that in Georgia alone, more than 500,000 undocumented immigrants live in a state of terror, fearing every time they go out and having to think more than twice before going to a hospital or health clinic because of laws requiring them to prove their legal status before they can receive state benefits.

Capital has not only helped create Juan Crow but also benefits from it. Companies employing undocumented immigrants have profited mightily from their low wages, especially in poultry, meatpacking, rugs, and tourism. The second- and third-class status of immigrant workers fits alongside the “most visible legacy of Jim Crow – Georgia’s massive and growing population of black prisoners. . . . By keeping down wages of the undocumented and documented workforce, Juan Crow doesn’t just pit undocumented Latino workers against black and white workers. It also makes possible every investor’s dream of merging Third World wages with First World amenities” (ibid.).

The widening class divide also breaks largely along racial lines. Although there is disagreement among economists about the overall economic impact of immigrants, there is a growing consensus that large-scale immigration heightens competition over low-wage jobs, particularly among people of color.¹⁷ Immigrants serve as scapegoats for problems

17 Waldinger 1986; Bean et al. 1993; Borjas 2005; Bacon 2007; Widener 2008.

exacerbated by the current economic contraction. The rise in unemployment among blacks, for example, is due principally to the decline in manufacturing, cuts in public employment, and business attacks on unions (Schmitt 2008). Displacement by immigrants has been just a single factor in a situation whose primary causes – capitalism, greedy and unscrupulous employers, structural racism, economic restructuring, and neoliberal economic and public policy – are too easily ignored.

The need to reframe who are enemies and who are allies is urgent. Immigrants need to know that they owe a great debt to civil rights activists. One year after the Civil Rights Act was signed into law (July 2, 1964) and just months after the Voting Rights Act became law (August 6, 1965), the Hart-Celler Act of October 1965 (formally titled the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965) prohibited using race or nationality as criteria for immigration and naturalization. This abolished the nation-of-origin restrictions that had effectively limited immigration to Western Europeans since 1924.¹⁸ This opening to immigrants from third-world countries was in addition to the civil rights movement’s other victories for equal rights, in the form of anti-discrimination laws and affirmative action policy.

Immigrant progress cannot be made on the backs of blacks (or workers). Otherwise, we will end up reinforcing the subjugation of people of color by the white ruling class. Fighting for immigrant rights means also fighting against the corporate capitalist class. Business and Bush have been “pro-immigrant” for good reasons – they want a particular brand of immigrant policy that provides a pool of cheap, abundant and pliable labor. Of course, they also seek high-tech workers, teachers, physicians, and nurses, among others, who fit in the racial and class division of labor above blacks and other native workers. Clearly, workers of all stripes have an interest in fighting against such policies. Thus, we argue, immigrant rights without worker rights is a formula for disaster.¹⁹

Similarly, blacks have a stake in the emancipation of immigrants, particularly the undocumented. As David Bacon (2007: 66) observes, “inequality is the most important product of U.S. immigration policy, and a conscious one.” Essentially, U.S. immigration policy is based on capital’s need for a reserve army of cheap labor. Predictably, it

18 Under the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, “The national origins quota system classified Europeans as nationalities and assigned quotas in a hierarchy of desirability, but at the same time . . . deemed all Europeans to be part of the white race, distinct from those considered to be not white. . . . The 1924 Act also excluded from immigration Chinese, Japanese, Indians, and other Asians on grounds that they were racially ineligible for naturalized citizenship” (Ngai 2004: 7). Mexicans and other Latinos from the Western Hemisphere were considered white and not limited by quotas. However, “enforcement provisions of restriction – notably visa requirements and border-control policies – profoundly affected Mexicans, making them the single largest group of illegal aliens by the late 1920s” (ibid.) Of course, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was an earlier instance of restricting immigrants on the basis of race and national origin.

It is interesting to note that the Ku Klux Klan played a key role in passing the Johnson-Reed Act. See Curran 1975: 143; Chalmers 1965: 283; Heer 1996; Miller 1998. A 1924 House of Representatives Report acknowledges this fact (Report #350, 68th Congress, 1st Session, II, 4f).

19 The need to include victims of racial oppression finds a parallel in the history of the women’s movement. The “second wave feminism” of the early 1970s was born out of civil rights struggles. Because this wave was dominated by white women, it maintained a blind spot to race and racism. Hence, the voices of black women were not heard. Subsequently, many of those voices expanded discussion and analysis of women’s oppression and how to combat it. Today, immigrant women are increasingly calling attention to the value of women’s rights.

reproduces inequalities and spreads the pain. Immigrants – especially the undocumented – do not have equal rights. As with practices rooted in slavery and the Black Codes, making someone “illegal” justifies exclusion and subordination. Weekly government raids on the undocumented, resulting in mass incarceration and deportations, assure that the state of terror remains unbroken (Chacon & Davis 2006). Equity as a goal in itself can foster common ground, as can the goal of secure jobs at a living wage, and rights in workplaces and communities. Successful struggles for these goals require political unity among diverse constituencies.

BUILDING BRIDGES

The plight of immigrants and their fight for equal rights has gained a sympathetic response on the part of many African Americans. Surveys show that blacks are less likely than whites to say that immigration should be cut back and are less likely to hold negative views of immigrants (even while blacks are slightly more likely than whites to believe immigrants take jobs from Americans).²⁰ Twice as many blacks as whites think immigrants should be eligible for government-provided social services; 79% of blacks – as opposed to about half of whites – think immigrants should attend public schools; and 47% of blacks – as opposed to only 33% of whites – believe immigrants should be able to stay in the country. Similarly, most African-Americans believe that their interests and immigrants’ interests are linked.²¹ A recent survey of immigrants and minorities in New York City showed that blacks and immigrants (particularly of color) expressed similar concerns and ranked issues of importance in close proximity to each other.²² Blacks, however, are more likely than whites to say they or a family member have lost a job, or not been granted a job, because an employer hired an immigrant worker (22% and 14%, respectively); and blacks are more likely than whites to feel that immigrants take jobs away from American citizens rather than take jobs Americans don’t want (34% and 25%, respectively).²³ Similarly, some black leaders have expressed a growing unease about immigrants or have remained silent.²⁴

A number of African-American groups and leaders – from radical groups such as TransAfrica Forum and the Black Radical Congress to mainstream organizations such

as ACORN, Rainbow Push, the NAACP, and the Urban League – voiced opposition to proposed federal anti-immigration legislation (HR 4437) and expressed support for immigrants rights. Some groups are making concerted efforts to work more closely with immigrant rights organizations. Similarly, immigrant rights leaders and organizations, which have employed the language of the Civil Rights movement in demonstrations, are attempting to forge working relationships with black organizations, labor unions, and public officials. A central message they articulate is that immigrants are not responsible for the divisive use to which they are put by the capitalist class. Jesse Jackson has responded evoking the similar conditions of immigrants and African-Americans: “Few complain when African-Americans and immigrants are deprived of their rights and relegated to enslavement or cheap labor. But when we become too numerous, begin to demand our right to fair wages, human rights or citizenship, suddenly we are denounced as ‘undermining the economy.’”²⁵ Such leaders hailed the immigrant-led protests of 2006 as a natural sequel to the civil rights movements of the 1960s. Some African-Americans and progressives have argued for a “neo-rainbow coalition” (Glover & Fletcher 2005), which would be led by people of color and organized around a class-based, anti-racist agenda for equal rights and social justice.

ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK?

Just when African-Americans seemed to have gained a modicum of political influence – both as elected officials and as holders of government jobs – their overall condition began to slip backward (Mollenkopf & Logan 2003; Thompson 2006). While many factors are at work in depressing real wages, the influx of new immigrants working in low-wage sectors is surely one. Studies have found that immigrants adversely affect low-wage native-born Americans, especially those with low skill and education levels who tend to be concentrated in cities with large black populations (Waldinger 1986; Bean et al. 1993; Bacon 2007). In addition, examination of particular industries reveals that some employers discriminate against blacks in unskilled work sites, preferring to hire immigrants (Kerschenman & Necherman 1991; Waldinger 1989). This research confirms the perception of many native blacks that they are losing jobs to immigrant workers (Diamond 1998; Borjas 2005). Some studies find that employers rely on informal networks when looking for new hires in immigrant-dominated sectors of the economy. Use of immigrant networks reduces the employer’s recruitment costs at the same time that it effectively excludes African-Americans and other non-immigrants from the hiring process (Waldinger 1993; 1996). As Steinberg notes, “employers who make their hiring decisions on the basis of what group a person belongs to, rather than on individual merits, are engaged in patent acts of prejudice” (2005: 47).

In addition, a rising nativism has allowed some to exploit tensions and divisions between immigrants and blacks, fostering conflict rather than cooperation. Thus, pundits and candidates, particularly associated with the Republican Party, have put forth African American spokespeople to denounce immigrants, claiming that they take jobs away from blacks, create a drain on public expenditures, and contribute to crime. Candidates

20 Pew Center for the People and the Press. “America’s Immigration Quandary: No Consensus on Immigration Problem or Proposed Fixes.” March 30 2006. (<http://people-press.org/report/274/americas-immigration-quandary>); Leslie Fulbright. “Polls, leaders say many blacks support illegal immigrants.” *San Francisco Chronicle*. April 13 2006.

21 David Bacon. “Looking for Common Ground.” *ColorLines*. Vol 9, No. 1. Spring 2006; Mary-Frances Winters. “Why Blacks, Latinos need each other.” *USA Today*. April 21 2006. Chaka A.K. Uzundu. “African-Americans, Economic Well-Being, and Immigration.” United for a Fair Economy, The Radical Wealth Divide Project. April 17 2006; Ajamu Dillahunt. “Solidarity Statement to the April 10th Immigration Justice Rally.” Black Radical Congress. April 17 2006.

22 Community Service Society. “US and Foreign-Born Low-Income New Yorkers: Competition or Coalition?” New York: Community Service Society. January 2007. www.cssny.org/pdfs/uh06slides/ImmigrantSurvey.pdf

23 Carroll Doherty. “Attitudes Toward Immigration: In Black and White.” Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. April 26 2006.

24 Earl Ofari Hutchinson. “AWOL: Black Leaders and Immigration. Where are the Old Line Civil Rights Groups?” *BlackNews.com*. March 29 2006; Rachel L. Swarns. “Growing Unease for Some Blacks on Immigration.” *New York Times*. May 4 2006; Yvonne Abraham. “Immigration hits home in Lynn: Blacks voice fear of a loss of jobs.” *Boston Globe*. April 16 2006; Valencia Mohammed. “Immigration: Where Blacks Stand.” *New American Media*. April 18 2006.

25 Jesse Jackson, Sr. “‘Si Se Puede’ means ‘We Shall Overcome.’” May 3 2006. Email communication from the New Jersey Immigration Policy Network.

like Obama, who attempt to downplay race in order to reduce conflict, may be able to build broad political support across constituencies in the short run, but because race is never far below the surface, opponents can use race to stoke fears and exploit competition to drive a wedge between voting blocs, as the 2008 presidential campaign has shown. Multiracial political alliances are fragile and problematic. Coalition partners sometimes wrongfully compromise issues crucial to African-American empowerment, such as affirmative action and the struggle for reparations. How many times do African-Americans have to hear that their time must wait in the name of “unity,” political feasibility, or expediency?

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MULTIRACIAL WORKING CLASS ALLIANCES²⁶

New immigrants afford unique opportunities to foster progressive politics. As in the past, previously excluded groups have gained access to power principally through political struggle. They fought their way into the polity through political agitation, whether within the major parties or via third parties or through social movements and independent organizations. Ultimately, they needed the support of other sectors in society to win social, economic and political rights. One thing is certain: attainment of increased political clout by immigrants and African-Americans as an organized bloc is integral to achieving radical social change.

In some cases, commonalities have formed the basis for multiracial alliances – within and between pan-ethnic groups (Latinos, Asians) as well as between African-Americans and progressive whites – to wage and win significant battles, such as by increasing minimum and living wages, fighting mass incarceration, enforcing equal rights protections, improving public education and healthcare, and scoring electoral victories. Such coalitions have involved immigrant and civil rights groups, worker centers, labor unions, community-based organizations, policy groups, and even some progressive public officials.²⁷ The growing political strength of the immigrant rights movement – which filled the streets with millions of marchers in dozens of cities across the country in 2006 – holds promise for building anti-racist, class-based, multiracial alliances. Numerous community-based and civil rights organizations that represent and provide service to newcomers have sprouted up and mobilized to fight for a broad range of social and economic rights. Some successful and innovative coalitional efforts suggest possible strategies and policy goals for a multiracial politics (Widener 2008).

David Bacon tells of one such effort, the Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance (MIRA). Established in 2001, the MIRA is an exemplary model that brings together

26 We prefer the term “multiracial” as opposed to “multiethnic.” The term multiethnic can lead to burying race and thus power dynamics. As for “people of color,” the advantage of this term lies in its inclusiveness and its equalizing effect. This strength, however, is also a weakness. The formulation homogenizes groups that possess different rights and social privileges. Moreover, it sometimes leads to disregarding the white working class. For example, some contend that people of color can and should organize themselves separately as a bloc to gain power. Although this position has a certain short-run merit, we believe that multiracial alliances are necessary for changing power structures. The failure to engage working-class people could cause the Left to succumb to one of the great failures of progressive movements – not confronting white supremacy. Thankfully, as we show below, new political formations are not taking the bait and are instead building multiracial working-class alliances.

27 Martinez 1998; Forester 2004; Ness 2005; Fine 2006; Marable et al. 2006; Sen 2008; Fletcher & Gapasin 2008; Widener 2008.

the growing number of Latino immigrant workers with black workers, recognizing the importance of addressing racism as a necessary precondition to achieve social justice for all. In the 1990s, casino construction began in Mississippi. As a result, Latino immigrants, along with Southeast Asians, moved into the state to work in the construction industry and also sought employment in northern Mississippi’s traditionally black-dominated catfish and chicken plants. Several years later, labor leaders, in conjunction with church and civil rights activists, joined forces to combat problems that both groups were facing. “In Mississippi, African American political leaders and immigrant organizers favor [the slogan]... ‘Blacks plus immigrants plus unions equals power’” (Bacon 2008). A key to the success of the MIRA has been its emphasis on direct action: grassroots union organizing taking place on the shop floor and pushing progressive policies through the state legislature, such as no longer requiring parental social security numbers to enroll students in public schools. Shortly after Hurricane Katrina hit, however, the MIRA switched its focus to reconstruction. Racial and political equity are the MIRA’s basic goals. “Finding common ground among immigrants, African Americans, and labor is the pillar of the MIRA’s long-term strategy.” As one of their members, Jaribu Hill, argues, “we have to talk about racism. The union focuses on the contract, but skin color issues are also on the table... We are coming together like a marriage, working across our divides” (ibid.).

The Rev. Joseph Lowery was a lieutenant to Martin Luther King Jr. and now leads the Georgia Coalition for a People’s Agenda. He sees the millions who marched in Atlanta and across the country during 2006 as a sign that significant change is in the making. “We’ve globalized money, we’ve globalized trade and commerce, but we haven’t globalized fairness toward work and labor. The solution to the ‘problem’ of immigration and other problems is globalization of justice” (quoted in Lovato 2008). Of the relationship between American blacks and Latino immigrants, Lowery says: “There are many differences between our experience and that of immigrant Latinos – but there is a family resemblance between Jim Crow and what is being experienced by immigrants. Both met economic oppression. Both met racial and ethnic hostility. But the most important thing to remember is that, though we may have come over on different ships, we’re all in the same damn boat now” (ibid.).

Interestingly, immigrant rights advocates have employed the language and tactics of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements in struggles for equal rights and social justice. In 2003, for example, immigrant rights advocates and several labor unions (UNITE/HERE) organized an Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride – where hundreds of immigrants and their allies went from California to Washington D.C. and then New York City – which was inspired and modeled on the Freedom Rides of the 1960s civil rights movement. During the spring of 2006, millions of immigrants and their allies filled the streets in dozens of cities across the United States to protest proposed federal legislation (HR 4437) that would have criminalized the undocumented (and those who provide aid to them), and equally important, to demand equal rights and treatment. Since then, May Day has taken on greater visibility as a day marked by protesters who explicitly link immigrant rights, civil rights and anti-imperialism. Progressives of all stripes – including African-Americans – have taken stands and marched in solidarity with activists for immigrant rights to demand good jobs, social benefits, and a halt to racial profiling and

police brutality. For many, the link between advocating immigrant rights and attacking racial discrimination, white supremacy, and class privilege is clear.²⁸ In the process, the civil rights framework is being transformed into a broader human rights framework.

Although there is nothing new about calls for multiracial cooperation and solidarity, the failure to create and sustain such a common front may end up being the Achilles heel that could again thwart gains for immigrants, African-Americans and working people more generally. “Universal” or “class-based” solutions must directly address racial disparities and discrimination if they are to be truly universal or advance the working class as a whole, let alone people of color. As Rinku Sen, the editor of *Colorlines* magazine and a long-time racial justice advocate, put it: “Policies designed without racial justice goals can actually deepen the divide, while creating the illusion that they’ve taken care of everyone.”²⁹ Thus, racial justice goals must be at the forefront of coalition building. Because inequalities extend beyond class, we are not all in the “same boat.” Nevertheless, by taking up racial injustice as part of the struggle for full inclusion, including via reparations to reverse past exclusion, we might build a boat capable of moving us forward. There are signs that this is beginning to happen.³⁰

For example, in New York City, several organizations have and are making concerted efforts to forge alliances between immigrant and African American organizations, particularly leaders of key immigrant advocacy organizations and civil rights groups in New York City, including the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), the Community Service Society (CSS), the Center for Social Inclusion, and a number of unions that have diverse constituencies such as SEIU 32-BJ and HERE/Unite.³¹ These and other groups have held numerous meetings and organized several large-scale public conferences in recent years with the aim of “building bridges.” (The first few conferences were entitled: “*Race and Immigration: Challenges and Opportunities for the New American Majority*,” held on December 9, 2006; “*Building Bridges: How African-Americans and Immigrants Can Create Social and Economic Justice Together*,” held on October 13, 2007; “*Galvanizing Our Power for Action: Building Bridges between African-American and Immigrant Communities*,” held on November 22, 2008.) These events represent the culmination of efforts particularly

28 Ness 2005; Fine 2006; Jayaraman 2005; Sen 2008; Widener 2008.

29 Sen, Rinku. “White Progressives Don’t Get It.” *Colorlines*. Oakland, California. January/February 2007. www.colorlines.com/article.php?ID=169

30 David Bacon. “Looking for Common Ground.” *ColorLines*. Vol 9, No. 1. Spring 2006; Mary-Frances Winters. “Why Blacks, Latinos need each other.” USA Today. April 21 2006. Chaka A. K. Uzundu. “African-Americans, Economic Well-Being, and Immigration.” United for a Fair Economy, The Radical Wealth Divide Project. April 17 2006; Ajamu Dillahunt. “Solidarity Statement to the April 10th Immigration Justice Rally.” Black Radical Congress. April 17 2006.

31 The NYIC, comprising more than 200 member organizations representing hundreds of thousands of immigrants in New York, was founded in 1987 to “promote and defend the rights of immigrants and their family members, improve newcomers’ access to services, resolve problems with public agencies, and mobilize member groups to respond to emerging issues and needs.” CSS is “a 160 year-old institution that has been on the cutting edge of public policy innovations to support poor New Yorkers in their quest to be full participants in the civic life of the nation’s largest city. CSS employs a variety of tools – advocacy, direct service, research and policy analysis, and strategic partnerships – to forge consensus on appropriate policy interventions to facilitate the economic mobility of low-income New Yorkers.” The respective quotes are from each organization’s websites.

by the NYIC over the last several years to begin, “the long and necessary process of building lasting relationships between local African-American and immigrant community leaders.” Interestingly, these efforts were taken partly in response to attempts by marginal anti-immigrant groups to exploit possible tensions between immigrants and African-Americans, particularly the idea that immigrants take away jobs and economic opportunities that belong to African-Americans. According to the NYIC, they “recognized the critical importance of combating such divide-and-conquer tactics by building alliances with the African-American community, developing an understanding of the distinct and common challenges our communities face, and identifying strategies to work together. It became increasingly clear that several groups in New York City shared an interest in discussing these issues in a way where we could both acknowledge and identify conflicts between our communities but also overcome these tensions to explore common solutions for promoting social justice.”³² These efforts continue and have already born fruit in concrete programmatic and policy terms.

Clearly, no one movement can resolve or obliterate the multiple oppressions experienced by any group. Nevertheless, the immigrant rights movement can learn lessons from other movements. Although the immigrant rights movement rightly focuses on the particular challenges facing immigrants, it cannot achieve its goals without also confronting the problem of racism. Immigrant activists need to make the attack on racism a central piece of the fight for human rights.

A BETTER DEAL

Far-reaching proposals are needed to increase the political strength of the working class. For example, a full employment jobs program (similar to the New Deal Era Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration) set at living wages to (re) build infrastructure (schools, hospitals, transit, and the environment) – coupled with a guaranteed income – could provide the basis to organize class-based multiracial alliances and help mitigate tensions among ethnic and racial groups, particularly in the low-wage sector. Such proposals could be linked to winning amnesty and greater rights for immigrants – as Representative Sheila Jackson Lee proposed in 2005 – and would ensure that the 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States do not compete through a back door. Some of these ideas are making their way onto the agendas of labor unions, community groups, and policy organizations, and manifesting on the ground in multiracial political formations.³³

How can progressives help resolve the social and economic conflict between immigrants and blacks and advance a progressive agenda? Many proposals have been put forth, ranging from open borders to increasing worker rights to engaging in direct action. While each of them makes a contribution in its own right, they are incomplete. Each is a necessary but insufficient response to the economic, political, and racial inequities experienced by immigrants and blacks. If we heed the call by some to focus attention on providing jobs at a living wage for African-Americans, reduce discrimination in housing, and the like but fail to challenge policies that deny immigrants access to basic rights, we

32 NYIC. Conference notes. On file with the author.

33 Fine 2006; Bacon 2007; Boushey & Fremstad 2008; Fletcher & Gaspin 2008; Widener 2008, Sen 2008.

would get only part of the way toward achieving a progressive outcome. Similarly, if we work to organize immigrants into unions, expand worker centers, and increase immigrant wages and labor rights – but leave structural racism intact – we would only complete part of the necessary work. There are shortcomings to both approaches. The former presupposes scarcity of jobs and resources, a “zero sum game.” The latter keeps systems intact and does not challenge racial inequities.

Taken together, however, these approaches constitute a more comprehensive response to resolve the discrimination and oppression faced by both groups. Immigration, racism, and labor issues must be tackled together.

First, we call for redistributive justice. Reparations, a progressive tax structure, and a reallocation of war funding – where more than two trillion has gone to Iraq and Afghanistan alone – (along with a reorientation of U.S. foreign policy), would go a long way to build a more equitable society.

Second, we need government accountability to build a truly democratic society. Government that is responsive to working-class interests would produce jobs at living wages, rebuild infrastructure and build sorely needed public goods, such as quality and affordable housing, healthcare clinics and hospitals, schools, etc. Radical democratic governance able to meet human needs would thereby mitigate tensions between immigrants and the native born working class.

Third, we call for a massive, government-led jobs program – at a living wage – capable of putting to work the nearly one in six (17.5%) of people who are unemployed or underemployed, as recently reported by the U.S. Department of Labor.³⁴ At the same time, we need a comprehensive guaranteed income program. Such an income support program assumes an unconditional entitlement grounded in a rights-based philosophy; it “belongs in the same league as the abolition of slavery or the introduction of universal suffrage” (Van Parijs 1992: 7). In conjunction with a full employment, living-wage jobs program, it would create upward pressure on wages and help dampen competition among people of color.

Immigration reform is not merely a “liberal” project. Current U.S. policy is rife with contradictions. U.S. neoliberal trade policies (GATT, NAFTA, CAFTA, CAA, etc.) support the free movement of capital across borders, which contribute to the commercialization of land and have spurred the largest wave of migration from rural areas to cities and from country to country in human history. At the same time, U.S. immigration policy restricts the number of foreign workers admitted contingent upon capital’s need for low-wage labor (“guest workers,” a reserve army of the super-exploited). Draconian measures restrict rights and benefits or at times deny them outright, and criminalize those who arrive illegally or overstay their visa. Exposing these contradictions – and capital’s hand in shaping these policies – can provide the grounding for a working-class strategy that would transcend internal divisions.

Obviously, to achieve these goals the dominant ideology must be effectively challenged. A political education program cannot be left up to public educational institutions that have historically taught from a white hegemonic standpoint. The Left needs to insert new language into the civic dialogue that challenges the class- and race-obscuring way in which notions like “standards,” “accountability,” and “personal responsibility” have been traditionally deployed (Jennings 2007). Alternative modes of engagement, curriculum, organizing models, and cultural activity can help expose capitalism’s hand in oppression and at the same time inspire hope (Widener 2008). For example, advocates of multiracial coalitions have developed creative ways to identify capitalism as the real culprit that produces low-wage work, unemployment and underemployment (not to mention lack of healthcare, affordable housing, and good schools) rather than seeing an immigrant co-worker or struggling low-wage worker of color as the enemy. They flip the script. Immigrant and African-American members of the working class can be seen as allies and can struggle together in community-based campaigns against practices such as outsourcing. “Black-brown alliances” can bring super exploited blacks and new immigrants together as a class to fight against their collective and multiple oppressions and for their mutual liberation.

CONCLUSION

Immigration has significant and potentially long lasting consequences for race relations and multiracial politics in America. Although there is a growing body of literature about recent immigrants and their offspring, there is little research about how the newcomers get along with each other and with the native-born, particularly African-Americans. Nor do we know much about how immigrants relate to each other and the native-born vis-à-vis race.

Yet, millions of newer immigrants, who come mostly from Latin America, Asia, the Caribbean and Africa, are affecting the ethnic and racial composition of the U.S. population, and with it, intra- and inter-group relations. These demographic changes have significant implications for a multiracial progressive politics.

Contemporary debate about immigrants provides an opportunity to expand the conversation about race and class in America. The newcomers complicate racial categories and formation, putting them in flux, while simultaneously opening possibilities to address historical and contemporary racial inequalities.

Immigrants and their advocates would benefit from greater understanding of racism. The current nativistic backlash provides an opportunity for immigrant advocates to highlight racism’s hand in xenophobia. The challenge to immigrant advocates is to confront white supremacy and class domination in order to advance the cause of equality and social justice. Linking the struggle for immigrant rights with the steadfast African-American civil rights movement is essential to this agenda.

34 David Leonhardt. “Broader Measure of U.S. Unemployment Stands at 17.5%.” *New York Times*, November 7, 2009.

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INCLUSIVE RELIGIOUS VALUES IN THE IMMIGRATION DEBATE: LOCATING AND ASSESSING ITS PAST ROLE AND FUTURE IMPACT

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To paraphrase W.E.B. Dubois, “The problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of the citizenship line.” Legal status and citizenship have been transformed into the defining terms of legitimate presence in the United States and in participation in the country’s social, economic, cultural and political life. A wave of state and local laws have swept across the country in the last ten years, including Official English ballot initiatives, the denial of driver’s licenses to the undocumented, fining employers who hire the undocumented as well as landlords who rent to them, and the use of local police to identify and detain undocumented immigrants on behalf of federal officials (National Council of State Legislatures 2009; Light 2006). In combination, these laws create a state of constant surveillance of an individual’s legal status. As a result, one could argue that the construction of the “illegal” is one of the most significant human rights issues of our time.

These legal and policy decisions have been supported by rhetoric that denigrates the presence of new immigrants. A number of watch words have come to frame the immigration debate that portray immigrants as carriers of disease, perpetrators of crime, job stealers, and welfare freeloaders. For students of history, this dehumanizing rhetoric raises the specter of mass expulsions and crimes against humanity. Add war and economic depression to political opportunists who blame specific groups of people for society’s woes and everyday callousness can quickly lurch into egregious acts of individual and state-sponsored violence. This combination of fear, loathing and opportunism shaped Indian Removal politics of the 19th century, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Japanese internment camps of World War II, and the 2002 Special Registration program which required all men from predominantly Middle Eastern and Muslim countries to register in person with the federal government.¹ If the contemporary immigration debate degrades into morally untenable, even abhorrent acts, we will create yet another historical moral hangover – our descendants will wonder how we could have denied the obvious humanity of our foreign-born neighbors.

Religious communities play a variety of roles in addressing immigration, particularly with regard to the moral concerns of the nation. While it seems that the “law and order” wing of the political spectrum has done a better job of capturing and defining the public debate on immigration than its “love and inclusion” counterpart, the latter has neither been wholly ineffective, nor silent on the matter. Its value, however, as a source of moral authority and inclusiveness has not made its way into in the broader mainstream immigration discourse. The Carnegie Corporation’s Strangers as Neighbors project

prompts the exploration of some important questions: Why aren’t more clergy addressing immigration as a moral issue? Why do the efforts that exist seemingly fail to stake out a clear and compelling ground for progressive religious values in the public debate?

This paper assesses faith-based strategies to capture the public’s heart and mind on immigration, drawing on my participation in an array of immigration-related events – including conferences, strategy sessions, media training workshops, local press events and political actions. In addition, I draw on my academic background in immigration politics and policy.² The analysis is deliberately provocative, with the aim of stimulating discussion. It examines the structure and nature of language of public conversations on immigration rather than advocating for a rationale for a specific message on immigration. Achieving a more inclusive rhetoric based on progressive religious values goes well beyond offering facts about immigrants and weighing in on the fine points of policy proposals. The aims of the Strangers as Neighbors project clearly indicate the belief that a purely legal victory will be incomplete if the inherent humanity and worth of all persons is not recognized. To this end, in addition to addressing questions of rhetorical strategy, later sections of the paper raise questions with respect to political and media strategy as well.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

How are we to understand this gap between a well-organized, articulate, educated, clergy and the moral vacuity of the public debate on immigration? Before answering this question, it is important to note that the public square in this context refers to that which is dominated by the mainstream mass media. In contrast, smaller, more specialized publics can furnish more friendly venues for religious voices. For example, the progressive faithful may receive pro-immigrant arguments through sermons from the pulpit, religious newsletters and pamphlets, or events (such as talks, panels, and potluck dinners) sponsored by an institution’s social justice committee. These outlets certainly have a significant bearing on how individuals affiliated with these institutions understand their faith and its implications for policy positions. However, they do not necessarily play a role in the larger, more dominant public square.³ Clearly, this absence is a problem if we are interested in shaping public debate in inclusive terms that draws on faith-based rhetoric.

In the last 15 years the immigration debate has shifted decisively from questions of assimilation to a focus on legal status. California’s Proposition 187, a ballot initiative to deny public services to “illegals,” was the opening shot in this transition. Immigration restrictionists consistently portray immigrants as non-taxpaying freeloaders, blaming them for costly public services. The referendum passed in 1994 with 59 percent of the vote but a federal judge later invalidated the measure as unconstitutional. The legal defeat in California, however, did not end the matter. Instead, it ushered in an important cultural and policymaking turning point. Repeated attempts to succeed where Prop. 187 failed fueled a new wave of state and federal laws that eventually shifted the rhetoric and policy surrounding undocumented immigrants (Jacobson 2008). For example, this narrative,

1 To learn more about Special Registration program, see the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund report, “Special Registration: Discrimination and Xenophobia as Government Policy” (2004).

2 A rigorous empirical study, in contrast, would investigate the number and type of pro-immigrant commentators that appear on key news programs.

3 This paradox may prove to be similar to one Andrew Rich (2001) identified in the think tank world where conservative think tanks dominate the airwaves but nonpartisan think tanks, like the Brookings Institution, hold more influence in the halls of power and decisionmaking.

despite its factual distortions, shaped federal welfare reform in 1996 that denied *legal* taxpaying immigrants access to welfare services for five years (Newton 2008).⁴

As a result of these victories, the legal status of immigrants has become the defining question about immigration often captured in the rhetorical trope, “What part of *illegal* don’t you understand?” One can find a religious link to this transformation. The Christian Identity movement and the Council of Conservative Citizens publicize their belief that the United States is a Christian and European country and that those traditions and people should remain dominant.⁵ Others root their concern about the “illegal” problem in a more secular sense of patriotism. These views have also translated into anti-immigration action and policy. Fueled by a desire to control the Southern border, the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps sends volunteers with guns and binoculars to “help” the Border Patrol capture unauthorized migrants emerging from the desert (www.minutemanhq.com). Overall, a suspicious and hostile relationship to immigrants that has come to dominate the public discussion on immigration,

Drawing on longstanding traditions of welcoming the stranger, progressive religious groups have also developed valuable rhetorical resources for pro-immigration politics and ethics. The full inclusion of faith-based voices in the public square has powerful implications for both the cultural tenor of the society we live in and the laws we pass. At the very least, a religiously-based inclusive discourse can demonstrate to the American public how to disagree without engaging in the dehumanization of entire categories of persons. We would critique facile and pernicious linkages to terrorism and disease and other strategies that easily construct an easily denigrated and discardable “them” to a pristine and privileged “us.” We can acknowledge the lack of appropriate documents and differences over policy options yet respect the fundamental humanity of all immigrants. The presence of a compelling pro-immigrant rationale rooted in religious traditions of inclusion that demonstrates a more compassionate tone affects how the public reasons about immigration and the actions individuals engage in on this issue.

THE PARADOX OF RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION

Many religious communities embrace the presence of the undocumented but the services they provide and their policy victories occur without a comparable impact on the mainstream discourse. Catholic social teaching, for example, fuels efforts to recognize the humanity of immigrants and to serve their needs. A variety of religious communities have translated social justice traditions into specific practices. For example, the Humane Borders project, created by an interfaith coalition, built and operates more than 70 emergency water stations on and near the U.S.-Mexico border to help those crossing the desert to survive the journey (www.humaneborders.org). More generally, a religious tie

can be found in a number of immigration-related programs and projects: the provision of refugee services, border witness delegations that forge links with Mexican communities, fair trade relationships, and participation in the international Jubilee campaign that seeks debt forgiveness for poor countries, not to mention countless private acts of charity.

Although the power of anti-immigration rhetoric and politics cannot be denied, pro-immigrant forces have attained some major policy victories over the decades. Faith-based organizations have played a decisive role in procuring key policy outcomes. They established the field of refugee services, and the ongoing work in this field. They also played a decisive role in the successful Sanctuary movement of the 1980s that obtained legal status to previously undocumented El Salvadorans and Guatemalans by securing them a political asylee designation (Coutin 1993; Haines 1997). In addition, religious organizations were part of the coalition contributed to the 1986 landmark federal law granting legal status (often referred to as amnesty) to approximately three million undocumented persons.

Furthermore, supporters of legalization and comprehensive immigration reform, including religious groups, have also enjoyed key electoral victories over anti-immigration candidates. Republicans who ran on immigration issues in 2006 and 2008 election cycles often lost. In fact, Democrats won majorities in the House and Senate in 2006. Enforcement-only hardliners consistently lost to Democrats with practical comprehensive reform stances (they won 14 out of 16 seats in 2008 House races; five out of five reformers won in the Senate) (America’s Voice n.d.).

Despite these victories, there seems to be a decided absence of rhetorical bounce. Why does the sense that immigrants are welfare free loaders, or that amnesty is a reward for illegality, remain so powerful in the public imagination and rhetoric? Amnesty recipients receive justice and fairness as individuals in the courts (and as a class in law), but the culture is not left with a sense of having done the right thing. Individual immigrants benefit from these changes but the larger culture and the public debate seems immune; they remain largely unaware, uneducated and unmoved on this issue. An odd paradox comes to light, one where legislative and legal successes coexist with a lack of concordant rhetorical clarity in the public square.

This state of affairs seems especially puzzling insofar as religious progressives have overcome one of the foremost obstacles to participation in the public square: they possess a large number of devoted leaders and laypersons who can speak passionately on this issue from a faith perspective. Religious leaders are practiced public spokespersons and many traditions have well-defined positions that articulate the moral obligation to ‘welcome the stranger.’⁶ The Catholic Church, as well as the Methodists, the Unitarians, the Quakers and other denominations and faith traditions has powerful statements on both the moral and policy issues at hand.⁷ Moreover, several interfaith coalitions have

4 The welfare exclusions occurred under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. Some benefits were restored to elderly and disabled immigrants in 1997 (namely Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid) (See Fragomen, Jr 1997 to learn more). Two other 1996 laws, the Illegal Immigration and Immigrant Responsibility Act and the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, also curbed the rights of legal immigrants and increased criminal penalties for the undocumented.

5 To date, immigration has not made it onto the list of issues for religious groups concerned with the culture war, where abortion, gay marriage and a culture of life (stem cells, assisted suicide) remain the dominant policy concerns.

6 In the Hebrew Bible, see Leviticus 19:33-34 (Judaic); in the New Testament, see Matthew 25: 31-40 (Christian); in the Qur’an, see 4:36 (Islamic).

7 From the Friends Committee on National Legislation (A Quaker Lobby in the Public Interest): “All those seeking to enter the United States or residing here should, without regard to immigration status, be treated with justice and equity.” From the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “As a nation, we cannot

publicly stated their support for policies that embrace fair and humane treatment of all immigrants, especially the undocumented. The Interfaith Immigration Coalition's policy statement declares that, "We engage the immigration issue with the goal of fashioning an immigration system that facilitates legal status and family unity in the interest of serving the God-given dignity and rights of every individual."⁸ Furthermore, many religious bodies have an established presence in Washington, D.C. and skillfully convey their policy positions through press releases, reports, and prayer breakfasts. The lack of "bounce" to an inclusive religious view is not due to a lack of skill, devotion, or a well defined counter-framing of the immigration issue.

EXPLAINING THE PARADOX

While the politics of the mainstream media certainly plays a role in choosing which messages to support and disseminate, my focus here is on strategies available to faith-based communities for improving their chances of being selected by these outlets. It is worth reiterating that this analysis is suggestive, based on my experience as a participant in a number of local and national immigrant organizations, some of which employ a congregation-based model of political organizing. In addition, I have participated in several media trainings on immigration (sponsored by a variety of organizations), made statements at press conferences and serve as an interviewee in print and broadcast media (TV and radio). These observations seek to promote discussion and analysis that can be explored more systematically at a later point. I offer four reasons for the limited presence and impact of progressive voices, in general, and religious voices in particular, in the national immigration debate.

1. The absence of a meaningful media strategy and dedicated media spokespeople

The media strategies I have observed and participated in tend to be episodic and haphazard in nature. Advocates know media coverage is important but often lack the resources (training, additional staff, time) to embark on a strategic and well-executed media strategy. Instead, they pursue coverage for an individual event, be it a press conference, a march or protest rally. They also rely on appealing to individuals to write letters to the editor and op-eds. While these activities can secure coverage of individual events, they are often insufficient for addressing major policy issues. A case in point is the public's reaction to then-Governor Spitzer's (D-NY) 2007 proposal to restore the ability of undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses.⁹ The announcement sparked public opprobrium. Spitzer's poll numbers plummeted and the endorsement of immigrant rights, civil rights, and other groups, such as the New York State Catholic Conference did not stem the tide.¹⁰ Spitzer withdrew his proposal two months after he introduced it. The battle for hearts and minds was lost in the relentless barrage of local

conservative talk radio, possible lawsuits by local administrators, and a chilly silence from political supporters taken aback by the public's negative reaction.

Press conferences, op-eds and protests are episodic and inconsistent compared to sustained public acts that visually and viscerally link principles, actions and policy. The Minuteman stake-outs at the border (binoculars, lawn chairs, and firearms) were visually compelling. The mailing of bricks to Congress in support of building a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border was a deeply arresting message. Both captured the media's imagination spurring additional coverage and commentary (i.e. the coveted "free" or earned media).

Which events captured the public's imagination in a similar way on behalf of immigrants? The Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride certainly had that potential. It tapped into the imagery of the Civil Rights era cross-country bus rides and provided a coherent narrative that paired that history with the contemporary struggle for status and dignity for the undocumented (see www.immigrantworkersfreedomride.com). Unlike its Civil Rights predecessors, however, the Immigrant Freedom Rides did not attract sustained public attention. Lasting only two weeks (September 20 to October 4, 2003), the rides lacked the public resistance and drama that made the original bus rides iconic. Similarly, the progressive response to the brick sending strategy also fell flat. Activists belatedly mobilized mailings of work gloves to Congress, but this did not create anything like the media firestorm that followed the brick-sending strategy.

More recent attempts to attract media coverage have also had limited impact. For example, between February and May 2009, Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-IL), chairman of the Immigration Task Force of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, went on a national Family Unity Tour, visiting congregations in 21 cities and listening to the impact of our laws on immigrant families. However, the town halls, prayer vigils and other events in this first-of-its-kind national tour attracted, did not attract much coverage in the national press.¹¹ Whatever benefits the Tour yielded with respect to "firing up the religious community," cathartic sharing, and community organizing, its impact on the national dialogue remains to be seen.

In contrast, the numerous immigrant marches in spring 2006 brought hundreds of thousands to the streets to support progressive immigration reform and elicited extensive and sustained media coverage.¹² Organizers learned by doing, switching from holding Mexican and other foreign flags to U.S. flags. But many wondered if the marches represented a sustained social movement (such as the original freedom rides) or an

11 *The New York Times* referenced the tour once as part of a page one story covering Obama Administration's announcement that immigration is very much on their agenda ("Obama to Push Immigration Bill as One Priority" Thursday, April 9, 2009). *The Washington Post* did an extensive feature on Gutierrez's role in immigration reform battle that featured the Tour, see "No Turning Back: Rep. Luis Gutierrez Is Making Immigration Reform a Personal Cause," May 8, 2009 (published the day before the last tour event which was scheduled the day before Mother's Day, May 9. The story, which includes a retrospective angle of the national tour, did not run in the Sunday edition on May 10). Gutierrez's hometown paper, *The Chicago Tribune*, had one feature on March 5, 2009 ("Immigration reform movement looks to evangelicals, children left behind by deported parents). There was no coverage of the Family Unity Tour in the *Los Angeles Times*.

12 Marches occurred in over a hundred cities and on a variety of dates. But simultaneous national marches occurred primarily on April 10 (declared the National Day of Action for Immigrant Justice and May 1 (International Workers Rights Day, aka May Day).

continue to employ an immigration system that leads to the exploitation of millions of our fellow human beings. ... This strikes at the very character of our nation and lessens us as a people." (Statement of the Chair of USCCB, June 28, 2007, "The Failure of Immigration Reform."

8 From the "Interfaith Statement in Support of Comprehensive Immigration Reform," updated October 24, 2008. Accessible at www.interfaithimmigration.org/.

9 Governor George Pataki, a Republican, ended this practice in 2002 by introducing a new requirement – driver's licenses could only be given to individuals with a valid Social Security number. See www.state.ny.us/governor/press/0921071.html.

10 See "Catholic Conference Backs Spitzer's Driver's License Plan," *The New York Times*. October 4, 2007 (City Room).

episodic flare-up in response to Rep. Sensenbrenner's punitive immigration bill H.R. 4437.¹³ A review of public opinion data on immigration since 2006 does not identify any major shifts (positive or negative) occurring as a result of the marches (Boryczka and Jones 2009). Public opinion polls consistently show that the American public continues to support both strong enforcement *and* a path to legalization.

2. *The emphasis on the human interest story*

Immigrant human interest stories provide an alternative to the unflattering stereotypes that are often available. Such stories delve into the complicated life, health and bureaucratic obstacles that individuals and their families face. Whether they address the plight of legal or undocumented immigrants, these profiles often rely on compelling cases with emotional resonance. The Congressional Hispanic Caucus's Family Unity/*Familias Unidas* Tour offered many such tragic stories of family separation and desperation. Rep. Luis Gutierrez, the tour's primary organizer and spokesperson, explained the strategy to humanize illegals as one designed to "[m]ake them brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandchildren, [and] grandparents of American citizens," taking them beyond the categories of legal/illegal (Montgomery 2009).

While the human interest approach counters negative stereotypes by offering a well-rounded view of immigrant struggles, it also has risks. This approach can appeal to reporters, who will do the occasional feel-good feature story of an individual immigrant that emphasizes the "good" or "innocent" immigrant, such as the hard worker who takes thankless jobs or the smart young student who is undocumented. Too often however, such coverage amounts to a pinprick of goodwill, while the dominant frame of "illegality" and illegitimate presence remains in place. The focus on morally worthy individual immigrants does not necessarily educate the public about the systemic problems of the immigration system.

Discussing the good traits of individual immigrants does not amount to an alternative frame that captures the essential humanity of the entire group. Lina Newton's investigation of Congressional debates on immigration and welfare reform found that portraits of "good immigrants" did little to stem the rhetorical tide against immigrants as freeloaders (Newton 2008). Instead of shifting the terms of the debate, the "good immigrant" strategy often reinforces the notion that the moral measuring stick for individual immigrants is appropriate and only "worthy" immigrants deserve to be here. This is precarious position; any hint of human frailty or error can undermine all claims to the worthiness of the immigrant cause.

Another form of the human interest approach suggests that if one knows an immigrant – really knows them – then one would love them and be for legalization and immigration reform. However, insisting upon such relationships as a primary route to structural change is tantamount to suggesting that the success of the civil rights movement

13 H.R. 4437 stressed strong enforcement provisions, such as expansion of the wall at the U.S./Mexico border. In addition it increased or created criminal penalties for the undocumented and those who assisted them. Proponents insisted these provisions targeted smugglers; opponents stressed that family members, clergy and volunteers who assist an undocumented person in anyway would also face prosecution. The Senate bill (S. 2611) stressed comprehensive reform and a path to legalization. In the absence of a conference committee and a single unified bill, neither bill became law.

would occur because enough whites developed a personal loving relationship with individual blacks. Although individual relationships do matter and can be transformative, one wonders if it is an effective rhetorical strategy when seeking social justice for a class of persons?¹⁴ The dehumanizing rhetoric trades in broad generalizations and categories, while humanizing rhetoric stresses the experiences of individuals. One rhetorical strategy casts immigrants as a coterie of criminals, the other as a gathering of saints; both reinforce unrealistic assumptions and expectations.

3. *An unclear target audience: professional racists or the amateur American public?*

To many pro-immigrant advocates, the anti-immigration rhetoric that equates immigrants with criminality, disease, and greed amounts to little more than sanitized racism. Several organizations, such as the Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center, have documented the financial and ideological ties between explicitly racist organizations (like the Federation for American Immigration Reform, commonly known as FAIR) and supposedly "neutral" and nonpartisan restrictionists (like the influential D.C. think tank, the Center for Immigration Studies). However, the valid recognition that hate speech and hate organizations have successfully shaped the mainstream discourse on immigration does little to address how individuals who don't consider themselves racist can think about the substantive issues raised by immigration reform. By focusing their arguments to address racist and nativist attacks, progressive groups may leave unanswered the legitimate concerns of an undecided constituency who is genuinely concerned about the fate of the nation and struggling to understand the issues.

One can argue that racism is so prevalent in the United States and so fundamental to its culture that many are inured to the racism embedded in the sanitized anti-immigrant rhetoric. Consequently, many do not believe that their concerns about the link between immigrants and crime, disease, jobs and taxes are inherently racist. In her investigation of supporters of California's Proposition 187, Robin Dale Jacobson found that supporters saw it as a vehicle to "create colorblindness and a fair society" (2008: 28).¹⁵ **If someone does not see him or her self as racist, charging them with racism can short circuit conversation rather than educate them further.**

If the audience is the general American public, regarding them all as crypto-racists leaves a sizeable void in the public debate. If advocates equate the naïve racism with the strategic (but sanitized) racism of political professionals, they may find it difficult to reach the persuadables – the undecideds, swing voters, and independents who are potential allies. Pointing out the inherent racism in the dominant rhetoric does not address the substantive issues at hand – the effect of immigration on taxes, jobs and crime. Religious voices with a

14 See the Morgan Spurlock program *30 Days* episode titled "Immigration" (season two, FX Network) for a fascinating test of this assumption.

15 Similarly, sociologist Lawrence Bobo and his colleagues concluded that the widespread belief in individualism, merit and market forces persists despite empirical evidence that minorities are disproportionately and negatively affected by such social structures. They characterize this belief structure as *laissez faire racism*. *Laissez faire* captures the respondent's faith in the fairness of the free market to appropriately reward each person and group according to their merit and an unwillingness to revise one's view despite evidence to the contrary (Bobo, Kluegel and Ryan 1997).

language of moral authority can re-frame the issue and the types of solutions policymakers should pursue. Their compassion for those who commit the sin of believing that an entire group is diseased, poor and/or illiterate makes it easier for individuals to learn a different way to think about and talk about this issue. Instead of dismissing someone's concerns as racist, new voices can illuminate the passion that motivates many volunteers, healthcare workers, educators, and law enforcement officials to fight for the health, safety, education and dignity of immigrant communities and the country as a whole.

4. Multiple agendas: stopping the hate, mobilizing activists, and growing the love

Currently, progressives seem well organized to respond to hate speech and to mobilize their base, but seem to have fewer resources invested in efforts to increase the love, the compassion and the empathy for immigrants. Immigrant rights advocacy groups tend to spend a lot of their time responding to anti-immigration rhetoric and associated activities. The successful effort to pressure CNN to drop the Lou Dobbs Show offers one example of challenging the barrage of opposition in the public sphere. These efforts are important and often urgent. At best, such tactics are part of larger strategies for social change.¹⁶ However, they can also become ends in themselves that limit how individuals participate. For example, the National Council of La Raza's "We Can Stop the Hate" campaign (www.wecanstopthehate.org) alerts members about hateful speech acts and organizations, encourages members to write letters of protest and to educate themselves to identify racial code words (National Council of La Raza 2008). But the focus on what one is against (hate speech), though important, does not provide a language or a strategy for articulating what one stands *for*.

Another area of significant investment is campaigns to obtain just and fair comprehensive immigration reform from Congress. Advocates seem well organized to mobilize their base into action, especially to lobby Congress. With almost a thousand activists in attendance, the immigration conferences sponsored by the Center for Community Change in Washington, D.C. re-energized a veritable army of ground troops.¹⁷ However, events like this sharpen the skills, knowledge and energy of those most devoted to securing policy change and mobilizing their communities. Yet these approaches do not develop tactics that target the persuadables and expand the base, which takes us back to the question of how best to make an impact within the public square. The means to "grow the love," especially among non-immigrants, appears to be the least well developed or institutionalized of the strategies, particularly with regard to altering the terms that both shape and limit the discussion about immigration in the public square.

STRATEGIES TO "GROW THE LOVE"

While I have so far focused on impediments to the process of bringing progressive and religious views into the public square, I also seek to identify promising sites of possibility. I offer the admittedly sappy "grow the love" label in an effort to identify and

¹⁶ The public condemnation of Arizona's Sheriff Joe Arpaio also advanced efforts to reform immigration detention practices and the 287(g) program. These efforts have met with some success. See July 10, 2009 Department of Homeland Security announcement on amendments to the program and an August 2009 announcement to re-design the detention system overall.

¹⁷ See for example the Reform Immigration For America conference, June 2-5, 2009.

name a counterpart to the "stop the hate" approach. Some specifically faith-based strategies exist, such as DVDs and discussion guides that educate respective constituencies on the nature of the immigration system.¹⁸ However, I will focus on Welcoming Initiatives (WI). Even though WI is not explicitly faith-based, it has the advantage of being part of a new national campaign, known as Welcoming America. The Welcoming title implicitly invokes the ethos of "welcoming the stranger" but it also calls up secular values that have important counterparts in religious ones: acceptance, compassion, fairness and respect (see www.welcomingidaho.org/about.php). This initiative offers practical resources for "growing the love." Although these possibilities are not yet fully tied in to the national media, they do point in a positive direction.

Welcoming Initiatives is a multi-pronged public communication strategy that seeks to influence the tone and tenor of public debate through both paid and earned media. Paid media fits the budgets of nonprofits – such as high-visibility billboards with warm family pictures and slogans such as "Welcome the Immigrant You Once Were" and "Like you, we work hard, we pay taxes and we are people of faith. We love America, and we're proud to call Shelbyville home" (www.welcomingtn.org). Paid media complements the more traditional approach of press releases that encourage coverage of events of interest. These efforts are linked to concrete successes, such as the routing of FAIR in the 2004 Iowa caucuses and the passage of an immigrant driver's license provision in the Tennessee legislature (Dubitsky 2008; Lubell, personal communication).

Originally launched in Iowa in 2004 during the Presidential caucuses and gradually expanded to other states, the new Welcoming America organization (created in 2009) seeks to hone and expand the strategy beyond the 12 states that have participated to date.¹⁹ However, another important element of Welcoming Initiatives is the creation of "dialogue circles" – groups of 8 to 12 persons from a cross-section of the community who agree to attend weekly discussions on immigration for 4 to 7 weeks (www.welcomingtn.org). These dialogues proactively engage pro-immigrant supporters in meaningful and extended conversations. Most importantly, the initiative targets non-immigrants.

Based on my own experiences creating and leading dialogues in upstate New York and a review of materials from the Welcoming Tennessee and Welcoming America websites, dialogic approaches seek to provide a conversational space where mirroring, reflection, sharing, experimentation and invention occur. However, these risks occur in a safe space. To preserve their integrity and permit genuine exploration, participants must not be manipulated into agreeing with a pre-existing point of view. While all views are allowed, the sharing is based in a foundational belief in the rights and dignity of all immigrants. Known as the Diversity in Dialogue program, TIRRC describes the discussions as an opportunity for participants to "share their feelings, opinions and thoughts. . . in a non-defensive, non-critical environment" led by trained facilitators (www.facebook.com/event, Diversity in Dialogue Circles, accessed November 5, 2009). This intimacy permits the expression of the impolitic,

¹⁸ For example, *Echando Raices/ Taking Root: Immigrant and Refugee Communities in California, Texas, and Iowa* (2002, American Friends Service Committee); *Welcoming the Stranger* (2008, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society); *Strangers No Longer* (n.d., Justice for Immigrants – U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops).

¹⁹ The Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) enthusiastically pursued the Welcoming model and its former executive director, David Lubell, who will direct the Welcoming America initiative.

the politically incorrect, the ugliness of anger, fear and perhaps hate. Just as exposing a wound aids in healing, these uncoverings are opportunities to move through such feelings rather than remain stuck in them. The discussions are also a context where relationships can be forged and new strategies constructed from the well of genuine exchanges. Participants understand that the foundation of the work rests on efforts for “. . . increasing understanding of how new Tennesseans share our values, contribute to our economy, enhance our combined culture and strengthen our communities” (www.welcomingtn.org).

Welcoming Initiatives do not solve all problems. Indeed, they can't. Some obstacles are practical. The effort is still relatively new and it will adjust its tactics as it expands and learns from its most committed participants. It will invariably have to address challenges, such as the pull to succumb to a warm and fuzzy notion of immigration that devolves into a celebration of “heroes and holidays,” to use the term coined by multicultural education specialist, James Banks (2007 [1998]). Especially as southern states are targeted, participants will need to address the shared history of disenfranchisement experienced by African-Americans and undocumented immigrants in ways that furnish context and continuity rather than discord and distraction, or worse – silence. In general, especially with facilitators present, the Welcoming Initiatives context can furnish a gentle yet determined strength of purpose to ensure that participants address hard issues, challenging them and others to reflect, step forward, and choose words and actions that reflect their better selves. This will also avoid the drift into a therapeutic or conflict resolution/mediation model, remaining focused instead on the social- and cultural-change goals that defined the project's origins.

But the question remains, do these activities translate to CNN? The discursive and deliberative space that Welcoming Initiatives furnishes is especially refreshing in light of the shallow and vitriolic public debate. But with respect to the issues of concern to the Strangers as Neighbors project, the question of how Welcoming Initiatives will obtain sufficiently large-scale visibility and impact on the public debate invites exploration. In what ways can Welcoming workshops shift the public debate? Can these small-scale local meetings have a greater impact?

The larger political strategy of which the workshops are a part can shed light on the question of large-scale impact. The nature of the coalition of people who devote themselves to these initiatives will determine its impact. Based on the Welcoming Tennessee website, the model seeks the participation of a cross-section of residents – from business, law enforcement, community and faith sectors – who will lay the foundation for an important and diverse coalition. However, it is unclear from this source whether the outreach relies on strategically engaging “grasstops” – a community's prominent local citizens and decision makers. Doing so would naturally increase the leverage and reach of the initiative.²⁰ As it forges ties with an array of people and organizations, one question that arises is whether WI can or will create meaningful linkages between

20 One model is suggested by the Highlander Folk School (now the Highlander Research and Education Center) whose retreats and strategic trainings with social activists provided experiences, exchanges, trainings and ideas that fueled the civil rights and other movements. Highlander's deliberate engagement with civically active community members inspired Rosa Parks, who spent several weeks on its campus, to act.

traditional rivals, such as business elites and organizers for workers rights. Moreover, Welcoming Initiatives could systematically incorporate faith communities into its strategy. Like the U.S. population as a whole, faith communities reflect a diversity of opinions on immigration. Dialogues that bridge divides can occur within churches, temples, mosques and storefronts as well as between them and other segments of society.

NAVIGATING THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

This essay began by raising four aspects of a progressive approach to the rhetoric of immigration reform that may restrict the reach of its message. But some obstacles are indeed endemic to the growing complexity of the media landscape. No doubt one of the obstacles to achieving “stickiness” in one's messages is the simultaneous centralization of ownership in the commercial, for-profit media coupled with the extreme decentralization of outlets on the Web.²¹ Both developments make it difficult to define and penetrate the media juggernaut. They make a decidedly nonlinear process of influencing public opinion even more complex and layered. Success in the media market place is possible. In this section, I draw attention to two logistical issues that make it difficult for groups to consolidate their message and get talented speakers onto relevant airwaves. I also recognize a few important efforts now underway to ensure that a communications strategy becomes a fundamental feature of the pro-immigrant skill set.

The notion of *the* public square suggests the ability to become an important touchstone for the mainstream media – be it print or broadcast (or the Web). Whether on mainstream news programs, opinion shows, comedy shows, or talk radio, progressive religious voices (and religious voices in general) are often absent. The consistent absence of these voices may reflect the “Rolodex problem” – clergy and other progressive persons simply aren't in the contact lists of many journalists. If clergy were an established point of departure in the immigration debate, then a media that adheres to neutral objectivity would make it a point to include faith leaders to “balance” their reporting. So, too, political talk show hosts would have clergy in their Rolodexes as part of a reliable stable of fiery and entertaining talking heads. For overburdened organizations, getting the press release out or organizing a press conference is just one of many tasks on a long “To Do” list. They aren't public relations professionals devoting time to media relations or executing a long-term strategy of Rolodex building.

The Massachusetts Immigration and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA) case study demonstrates the kind of skills, capacities and resources that are needed to capitalize on media attention when it occurs. The Carnegie Corporation case study (2007) of successful coverage of a workplace raid in New Bedford, Mass., highlights some of the critical ingredients. These include a full-time staff devoted to media relations, contacts

21 Centralization of ownership of major news outlets has made the drive for higher profits and lower costs especially demanding. Conflict sells newspapers and gets ratings. While “if it bleeds it leads” has been a longstanding tenet of journalism, the apparent adoption by the mass media privileges salacious titillation over meaningful coverage of substantive issues. Immigration stories appear to be especially vulnerable to news-tainment values. A recent study focused on coverage of immigration in California confirmed that conflict sells. Its authors found that newspapers near the border consistently had more stories about crime and conflict than papers located further away, with for-profit media companies especially prone to have coverage that matches the perceived negative opinion of their readership (Branton and Dunaway 2009).

with local families (as well as advocates), and responsiveness to media inquiries that also protects the needs of undocumented immigrants. In addition, organizations like the Spin Project (www.spinprojecct.org) and *smartMeme* (www.smartmeme.org) work with social justice and human rights organizations to provide media and communications training. Their efforts include workshops at major immigration conferences, such as the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and the Fair Immigration Reform Movement.

The complexity of the media landscape heightens the need to overcome internal hurdles to coordinating the media messages of a sprawling coalition of immigrant rights supporters. One approach is to have a thousand flowers bloom and hope one of them goes viral. But many good ideas may receive short shrift with such a *laissez faire* approach. Well-developed faith-driven messages of inclusion clearly exist, but have failed to work effectively enough to remain on the public radar. Consider that during the 2004 presidential campaign, John McCain offered the view that undocumented immigrants are “. . . God’s children as well. And they need some protection under the law; they need some of our love and compassion.” Rather than becoming a clear basis for discussion to contend with, this view served only as a rhetorical blip during a hectic Presidential race (GOP YouTube debate in St. Petersburg, Florida Nov 28, 2007). Clearly, making a compelling claim is insufficient; more is needed. If a faith-based framework fully existed in the mainstream media, then the notion of all immigrants as God’s children would not only shape how the problem is presented, but also provide the public with important alternatives when thinking about and reasoning through the country’s immigration problems.

In contrast, a consistent and disciplined message from multiple actors and venues can also produce the “stickiness” desired in delivering a message to the public. Strategic sites of consolidation and leverage are needed in the media sphere and several entities have begun to fill this niche. Sophisticated use of polling data and media strategy is available through the work of Opportunity Agenda and America’s Voice. Their approach to media messaging brings the best practices of political and public relations consultants to progressive political organizations. However, strategic messaging via polling does not replace the need to forge relationships with the journalists, editors and producers who can make stories happen, as the MIRA case demonstrates. Moreover, efforts to address journalistic training may also need to be part of this strategy. For example, the International Center for Journalists has a multi-faceted training program for journalists on how to cover immigration. It includes conferences, fellowships, links between U.S. and Latin American journalists, and Web-based training resources, such as a basic how-to document titled “Reporting Immigration” (See www.icfj.org and Franklin and Puente 2009).²²

In this way, clergy can speak to the media, as well as speak from the pulpit. A well-rounded strategy deepens the bench, as well as makes the media aware of the bench’s existence. In this respect, perhaps one dimension of Welcoming Initiatives will be the creation of a diverse array of community leaders who are trained as media spokespersons. Hopefully, those skills will be coupled with more sophisticated strategies for penetrating

22 Franklin, Stephen and Teresa Puente. 2009. “Reporting Immigration.” Washington, D.C.: International Center for Journalists.

local and state media outlets. Achieving these outcomes requires more investment of resources, strategic thinking and time.

CONCLUSION

The raw materials to articulate religious rationales for inclusive immigration reform exist.²³ Despite this, supporters of legalization and immigrant rights appear to be marginalized in the mainstream media and often are on the rhetorical defensive. Admittedly, the public will never agree on immigration. This country has long been defined by “multiple traditions” that proclaim our belief in the principles of liberty, equality and prosperity yet harbor practices and rationales that reinforce nativism, nationalism, racism, sexism and other social hierarchies (Smith, 1993). Inclusion would not eliminate opposing voices; rather it would make progressive religious voices an important touchstone in the debate – a clear and defining point of departure that the public must consider with perspectives and rhetoric that trouble the waters of their soul.

The Strangers as Neighbors project offers an opportunity to examine the causes and consequences of the ongoing efforts to infuse and deepen the public dialogue on immigration with religious perspectives. The questions and concerns driving this project recognize that achieving comprehensive immigration reform without a shift in the national rhetoric would be a hollow victory. More is at stake than the text of the laws. The quality and tone of the debate affects the culture of society in general, going well beyond the immediate policy question about who can legally enter and remain in the United States. Whether Congress resolves this issue in 2010 or not, the settlement and absorption of millions of legal immigrants and their children is a long-term task that will remain on the country’s agenda for the foreseeable future. How we address this challenge will determine whether immigrants and their descendants will be treated as legitimate and full members of this continuing American experiment or will function as unwanted stepchildren in the American family.

Birds do it. Bees do it. Most of us have or will do it – change our geographical location in order to improve the life chances for one’s self and one’s family. Because virtually everyone does it, the sharing of migration experiences offer a point of connection between established and new Americans. Unfortunately, demagoguery is both easy and highly effective. It appears that constructing the rhetoric of respect and having it permeate the airwaves and heartwaves is a more formidable strategic and logistical challenge. The role and presence of religious voices and spiritual values remains an important institutional, rhetorical, cultural and financial resource. They are often the bedrock of efforts to cultivate individual change and interpersonal relationships that advance the creation of a more just society.

23 To recap, these raw materials include an analysis of holy texts, articulate religious leaders devoted to this topic, a large number of denominations and interfaith coalitions that offer cogent public statements on the immigration, and a history of policy successes.

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CHRISTIAN LANGUAGE AND POLITICAL ACTION

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This paper is a working draft on the connection between faith and migration. The first part of this essay seeks to affirm the voice of religion on such public policy issues as immigration. It stresses that there is a right to use religious language in the public square when discussing such volatile social issues as immigration.

The second part looks at the language of a specific religious tradition – Catholicism – as it touches the phenomenon of migration. Much of this Catholic language and history is a shared language within all of Christianity, which clearly draws on roots that lie directly in Judaism. This essay seeks to show the immense depth of the Christian reflection on migration.

Finally, the essay takes a look at specific language being used today by the Catholic Church and other faith organizations in public advocacy around the issue of immigration in the United States.

I

A few years ago, when we created the Center for Faith and Public Life at Fairfield University, there was considerable discussion about the name. What did we mean by the term “public life”? Normally in the United States when we refer to public and private, we are distinguishing the public sector (meaning government) from the private sector (meaning non-government).

But this distinction can be highly misleading when it comes to religion – especially when it comes to biblical religion, which constitutes the majority religious tradition in America. In fact, one could say that all three Abrahamic faiths – Islam, Judaism, and Christianity – recognize a God who created all life, seen and unseen, whose dominion transcends the nation-state. For these religions, nothing public *or* private falls outside the concern of religion. Certainly within Christianity, Lenin’s notion that religion is a private thing – comparable to a personal hobby – makes no sense. Belief in Christ can never be a strictly private thing. By its nature it has to overflow into public life.

The second way religion is rightfully public is this: “public” can mean the exact opposite of its more commonly understood connection to government. This pattern began to develop in the 18th century, where the notion of “public” came to include not only citizens who chose their representatives for governance, but who also who reflected on matters of common social concern as well. In this sense of public, religious bodies were – and are – very much part of the term’s definition, because churches enter into everyday discussion about the public good. Even in a secular forum, they can and should be part of this discussion, bringing to it their own language and theological principles.

Just as no religion is to gain favored status under the First Amendment’s “no establishment” clause, every religious body has a right of public expression. The Founders were quite clear about the public place of religion in making an essential contribution to

the formation of a responsible citizenry. John Adams and other Founders saw democracy as being built on a moral and religious people.

When sociologist Robert Bellah writes about the “public church”, he means a church that fully participates in the public square. But this is not the same as his concept of “civil religion,” in which religion’s role is that of social integration, of holding society together in a sociological functional sense, following Durkheim.¹ In fact, religion has often played an opposite role by being disruptive socially, creating public conflict, and inserting moral judgments into the public discussion of issues such as abortion, civil rights, gay marriage, prohibition of alcohol and gambling, etc.

Historically clergy, religious bodies and religious associations have concerned themselves with public issues in American life. Many clergy supported the American Revolution. Many Anglicans opposed it. Quakers first called for abolition of slavery. Prohibition laws could not have been enacted without support from the Protestant churches. And it was a coalition of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish organizations that successfully opened the doors of America to refugees after World War II.²

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 cannot be understood except in light of the long period of protest largely led by persons within the religious communities. In all these cases, clergy leaders skillfully used religious language to prompt social action. It would be difficult to find in American history any major social change that did not involve churches and faith groups who employed the language of their religious tradition to urge social change.

II

From the Catholic Church’s perspective, at least, immigration is not just another social justice issue. And it would be misleading to view the Church as just one of many pro-immigrant lobbying organizations. Politicians in Washington, and sometimes Catholics themselves, wonder why it is that both the liberal and conservative leadership of the Catholic Church is united on so many aspects of immigration policy. Where does the Church’s unwavering concern for immigrants come from?

For the government and many advocacy groups, the starting point in discussing immigration is human rights law or labor economics. The Church, however, sees the issue of migration through a much richer prism – of global history, spirituality, social theory, theology, and concrete pastoral experience. Legal categories for classifying migrants (economic migrants, undocumented workers, asylum seekers, convention refugees, etc), while recognized by the Church, are not the primary way the Church relates to migrants. It does not ask first whether a person is legal or illegal, but instead looks at the migrant as a human person or human family. Legal status is just one of many dimensions the Church sees in the migrant person.

What makes the Catholic Church’s political reflection on migration exceptional is its spiritual roots. Migration was central to the Jewish experience of meeting God. Christianity built on this tradition and, through its notion of “mission,” incorporated the idea of encountering God through the movement of the Church into the world.

1 Bellah, Robert N., et al., *The Good Society*, 1991, Alfred Knopf, New York Chapter 6

2 J. Bruce Nichols, *The Uneasy Alliance*, Oxford U. Press, 1988

Even at the personal level of individual spirituality, St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.), among other Christian teachers, emphasized the view that humans are resident aliens in this world, pilgrims on a journey home to the City of God, which is our true citizenship and homeland.

This spiritual perspective gives the Church some unusual insights into the immigrant reality. The Church understands that the impulse to migrate goes far beyond an economic choice. Emigration can represent a family's longing for a happier life in a better place. It is a longing that, though it may turn a person's world upside down, can never fully satisfy in this life. Something is always lost in migration; sometimes even faith in God is lost. It is not unusual, however, for a person to *discover* God in the process of migration. The act of uprooting oneself or being uprooted tends to concentrate the mind on the true priorities of life, including our dependence on God.

Three of the great monotheistic religions – Judaism, Islam and Christianity – share one astonishing commonality. Not only do all three trace their lineage to the call of Abraham, but also to God's "call within the call"—that Abraham abandon his homeland and migrate to a new territory. The experience of God begins to unfold for all three religions in the process of migration. Somehow God meets his people in migration. To meet God we have to migrate where God leads us. This migrating call and impulse runs all the way through the history of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

Judaism was the first religion to define its relationship to God through migration – through the physical movement of people. This begins with the initial wanderings of Abraham, as Deuteronomy 26:5 famously puts it: "My father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt and lived there as an alien." It goes on to recount the migration of Jacob's sons to Egypt in search of food, the great Exodus from Egypt, the 40 years of migration in the desert, and the Babylonian exile migration. This pattern encompasses both forced migration/refugees and voluntary migration as primary crucibles for the Jewish experiences of God. At least until the later Temple period, God was the God of a migrant people. In the throes of their moving, God revealed himself and his Covenant. And God ordered the Jews to remember their migratory past: "Befriend the alien because you yourselves were aliens once, too, in the land of Egypt." (Deut. 10:19)

Christianity inherited and rooted itself squarely in that tradition, but theologically presented the notion of God migrating to humanity. We not only move toward God, but God moves toward us in the person of Jesus. God and humanity cross paths in Christ. Matthew and Luke's infancy narratives swirl with movement. Mary moves in with Elizabeth (Lk. 1:39-41, 46), Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem (Lk. 2:1-5), then the family flees persecution to Egypt (Mt. 2:13-15), then goes back to Nazareth (Mt. 2:19-23, Lk. 2:30), and makes required trips to Jerusalem with the boy Jesus (Lk. 2:41). Then comes a silent period in the gospels where Jesus seems wedded to one place. But as soon as his public ministry opens in the gospel, he is on the road, moving all the time.

Christ is the migrant preacher with, as he says, "... no place to rest my head." (Lk. 9: 58)

Even the Last Supper's foundation of the Eucharist – the central sacrament of the Catholic faith – recalls the migration of the Jews, the story of the passage through death, recounted again by Jesus at Emmaus (on still another journey, Lk. 24:13-35). Is it any wonder, then, that the earliest name for Christianity was the *The Way* or *The Road*? So then, it was not much a leap for the early Church fathers to interpret the following of Jesus – the spiritual life itself – as a journey, a migration, a movement in the spirit.

One of the very first crises that the Church faced in early Christianity was the problem of forced migration, what we would call today refugees. Eusebius,³ in his history of the Church, makes it clear that many Christians fled Roman persecution rather than face martyrdom.

One of the Church fathers, Tertullian (160-220 A.D.), wanted the Church to condemn Christians who fled persecution as cowards. But this position was challenged by Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria (297-373 A.D.), himself a refugee. In his tract, *Apologia de Fuga (In Vindication of Flight)*, he says that we should condemn the persecutors, not blame the victims. Though not well known, this tract is one of the earliest discussions of human rights theory in Western thought. Athanasius saw forced migration as a kind of blessing, not a shame to be punished. How was running away a blessing? First, it echoed the flight of the holy family; it also reflected the flight of Jesus from his persecutors until the ordained time of his death. It also was in line with the guidance of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, "If they persecute you, uproot yourself and flee to the next town." (Mt. 10:14) And finally, it recalled the old story of God leading the Jews out of Egyptian persecution. For Athanasius, migration was good, not bad. In fact it was a blessing from God.⁴

Anyone who has worked with refugees and immigrants can attest to how the hardships of migration deepen their spiritual resources. It seems that in the process of leaving so much behind, many migrants refine their priorities in this life and come to be more dependent on God. "A man holds dear what little is left," said Oscar Handlin in his book *The Uprooted*. In many cases what is left is their faith in God.⁵

Augustine is another early Church figure who understood the spiritual dynamics of migration. For Augustine, bishop of Hippo, the world is a profoundly dangerous and chaotic place, which we, as Christians, are simply passing through as pilgrims. Actually, "pilgrims" is a poor translation of the word *peregrini* that Augustine uses, by which he means "aliens." We are, all of us, aliens on this planet, in this life. We are all strangers in a strange land. This world is not our home. We are migrating through this life to our true homeland in the city of God.⁶

Thus, Christians should have an almost ontological empathy for the foreigner, for the outsider. In fact, for Augustine, human migration is a symbol of the way the Church should view itself – linked directly to the history of salvation. This thought will pop up again in the Vatican II Council which speaks of the "pilgrim Church."

³ Bishop of Caesarea, Palestine, c.260-341 A.D.

⁴ F.L. Cross, *The Study of St. Athanasius*, Oxford U. Press, 1941; H. von Campenhausen, *The Fathers of the Greek Church*, New York, 1953

⁵ Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*, Little, Brown and Company, NY, 1951 Chapter V

⁶ Peter Phan, *Social Thought: Message of the Fathers of the Church*, Volume 20. Chapter 6. Wilmington Delaware: Michael Glazier Publisher, 1988

Augustine asks Christians, “Where is your home?” Of all the needs of the human spirit, the need for roots is one of the most important. The concept of “home” seems simple at first, but home is never truly understood until one leaves home and then feels the uprootedness of not being in a place of one’s own. Migration is never a casual life choice. It almost always entails an experiential crisis which must, ideally, engender the Church’s pastoral care.

Augustine was not alone in this perspective. In the very early Church, it was quite common to begin official letters from bishops or Christian leaders to other communities with this salutation from the epistle of Clement of Rome (fl.96 A.D.) to the Church in Corinth: “Greetings in the Lord from the community of Christ temporarily residing the city of Rome to the community of Christ temporarily residing in the city of Corinth.” The Bishops wanted young Christians to think of themselves as resident aliens, not permanent residents of the Roman Empire.

Even the Greek word from which we derive the word “parish” – *paroikos* – means a body of migrants or sojourners living in a specific territory. Originally applied to particular clusters of Jews in the Diaspora, the word was adopted by Christians to define their territorial communities.⁷

Because Christians are strangers in a strange land, they should participate in a special outreach to the foreigner, or those uprooted from home. Formal houses of hospitality were created by the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.). They were called *zenodochia*, or homes for strangers, and were primarily places for restful spiritual conversations, apparently including inter-religious dialogues with Muslims and Jews.

From the earliest beginnings of Christianity, the human phenomenon of migration was consciously integrated into the spiritual base of the faith, both through the teachings of the Church and through the experience of migrants themselves. This early focus was not lost during the Middle Ages.

At that time, migration itself became a devotional form of prayer – a spiritual exercise – with the rise of pilgrimages across Europe and the attendant structures that grew up to house, feed and protect the pilgrims. The physical journey to a shrine had special spiritual blessings associated with it. It was a temporary spiritual and physical migration. At the same time, the notion of Christian hospitality to strangers was greatly stressed in the monasteries and abbeys. Hospitality and migration were directly linked. Often repeated were the words of Jesus, “I am the stranger. You welcome the stranger. You welcome me.” (Mt. 25)

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 A.D.) gave to his great master work of theology, the *Summa Theologiae*, the form, the structure, the plan of a journey because he said that our life on earth is journey to God. The sacraments of the Church are rites of passage that mark life as a journey from our birth in baptism until our death and life beyond.⁸

And finally the complex notion of Christendom – a Christian world – created at least theoretically the model for a borderless world where people could move freely at peace.

By the time our modern system of nation-states took hold (what we today call the community of nations or the international community of states), the Church, which organizationally preceded the formation of the nation-state and modern territorial borders, already had close to 2,000 years of faith-based reflection on the human phenomenon of migration under its belt – most of it understandable only when seen through the eyes of theology and faith. As the increasingly secular Western nation-states asserted more and more legal and political control of their territorial borders, a wide disconnect developed between the Church and the political states. The Church, which was used to operating transnationally, found herself caged in by the nationalism and legal restraints of the countries in which it operated. These secular states did not and could not look at migration through the eyes of spirituality.

As Christianity – Catholicism included – has become a self-consciously global religion, the responsibility of people beyond the national community gets more and more relevant. In the age of globalization, the language of the Christian faith remains deeply tethered to the human phenomenon of migration.

III

What about religious language and religious advocacy in the United States today? Does religious advocacy around immigration reflect the strength of the faith tradition outlined in Part II?

Linked to national denominations and interdenominational coalitions, religious advocacy groups tend to embody the public face of religion in the United States today. These groups bring religious faith and ethical reflection to bear on social issues by educating their members, mobilizing them for moral and political causes, and influencing the wider public through media. They also use congressional testimony, research, lobbying, and litigation.

The explicitly religious language used by religious groups on the issue of immigration, however, often tends to be quite simplistic, reduced to the “Welcoming the Stranger” passage in Matthew 25 and a few quotes from Leviticus. Religious advocacy groups are often impatient with theological or faith-based justifications. They tend, instead, to fall into the secular language of economics or law when they discuss immigration. They are often so theologically inarticulate that they are unable to persuade the faithful in their own churches who do not already agree with them. They come across, not as witnesses to a rich religious tradition, but as political partisans in a domestic social policy battle, using more secular than religious language.

Many advocates cannot communicate to the faithful the truths and stories that inspire their efforts to live out the gospel or argue moral principles that justify specific actions.

What is really behind this failure to tap the power of religious language and faith? Why cannot faith-based advocates communicate to the faithful the truths and stories that could inspire their efforts to live the Gospel? Perhaps the Catholic Church and other faith organizations have not taught this language and faith very effectively to their members. Even very basic elements of the faith tradition that touch on the issue of the alien or immigrant sometimes seem lacking in religious education. For example, recently a focus group conducted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Office

⁷ See *Oxford English Dictionary* – “parish”

⁸ G.K. Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Sheed and Ward, NY, 1923

of Migration and Refugee Services (studying the attitudes of Catholics in Philadelphia toward immigrants) found that the group had trouble seeing the relevance of the Good Samaritan story to the issue of the immigrant today.⁹ The Churches need to be more intentional about drawing those kinds of connections.

But perhaps there is another aspect to the problem. In the process of learning the state's language of legal rights, cost-benefit utilities, and justice as due process, religious advocates have forgotten the language of covenant, communion and the common good.

In helping develop the right strategy, they have allowed their unique endowment – their biblical and theological heritage – to suffer a kind of erosion. Instead of tapping that endowment, they tend to echo secular legal ideas, but without the real expertise and authority of a secular lawyer. They speak the language of individual rights, due process, and fair contract, but not the language that speaks of the common human family and caring for each other.

As religious policy activists, we should start with God and then go to the practical problem of immigration reform. We should be searching for more compelling ways to bring people of faith in God together around the practical problem of immigration.

The intertwining of biblical, spiritual, personal and social contexts can put the public in a broader context that binds us all together, immigrant and non-immigrant.

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⁹ Kevin Appleby, Policy Director US Catholic Conference of Bishops Migration Refugee Services. In his presentation at the "Strangers as Neighbors: Religious Language and the Response to Immigrants in the U.S." National Leadership Team Conference. November 18, 2008. Washington, DC

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