

THEMES AND VARIATIONS

The Study of Immigration in the Era of the Obama Campaign

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As we write this introduction, Senator Barack Obama, son of an African immigrant to the United States, is in the middle of a fierce fight to secure the Democratic Party's nomination for president. Obama's candidacy brings into stark relief the fluid and evolving status of immigrants of color, regardless of either the outcome of the electoral battle or what one might think of the senator and his politics. Further, the Obama campaign is illuminating the complex and conflicted ways that racial and immigration politics intersect. Questions such as how our understandings of the constitution of racial groups are refigured, how the formation of arguably new racial groups proceeds, and what the role of racial and ethnic conflict and resentment are have all come into play during the course of the Democratic Party's contest. Obama's life story is a new one, in that it is the story of a descendent of an immigrant from a non-European part of the world, but the mythology of his story is also a very familiar one—the children of immigrants who take advantage of the opportunities available in this nation overcome large obstacles, and succeed in previously unimaginable ways.

Yet, at least during the primary season, there has been relatively little debate about immigration as an issue *per se*. Paradoxically, immigration is an issue that is both fraught and at the same time invisible. Many, many Americans, on both sides of the issue, have deep feelings and opinions about immigration. It is these deep feelings that encourage many—though not all—politicians, in both parties, to try to avoid the issue, as any stance is likely to alienate a potentially key constituency. What is missing from the debates over immigration, by and large, is opinions and positions informed by careful research. In this second part of the special volume of the *Du Bois Review* dedicated to immigration, we continue our presentation of the cutting edge

Du Bois Review, 4:2 (2007) 267–270.

© 2007 W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research 1742-058X/07 \$15.00
doi:10.1017/S1742058X07070154

research and discussion on immigration currently occurring within the social science community.

The articles in this issue of *DBR* can be roughly categorized according to five themes. The first theme involves research focused on analyzing the effects of immigration on the country of origin, and more generally what we can learn from international patterns of migration. Tomás Jiménez and David Fitzgerald explore this theme by concentrating on not only the adeptness of immigrants from Mexico in assimilating, but also the diverse effects that immigration have on the place of origin—in Mexico itself. They show, for example, that the two-way flows in people, materials, and culture significantly transform the place of origin. John García's comprehensive essay discusses how we must generally view immigration to the United States within global patterns of immigration, as well as understand immigration's effects on countries of origin. He persuasively argues that it will be impossible to either design effective and fair policy, or to have civil and reasoned discourse on immigration, without a broader, more global discussion of immigration and its effects. García also argues that critical to such a discourse is the necessity for taking into account the "gendered dimensions" of immigration, without which we will not be able to fully understand immigrants' situations with respect to rights and political standing within the host country.

A second theme focuses on the challenges faced by immigrant groups in trying to become economically, politically, and socially integrated within this nation. Janelle Wong's research demonstrates how the political incorporation of immigrant groups is facilitated through both civic organizations and the mobilizing activities of the political parties. She further shows the role that indigenous media, such as the Spanish-language media in the 2006 demonstrations, can play in the mobilization and political incorporation of immigrant communities. Steven Raphael and Lucas Ronconi assess the state of the research on the contentious topic of the economic effect of immigration on the economic fortunes of native-born Americans. They find that immigration has economic consequences on the native-born, but that those effects are generally modest. Saenz and his colleagues approach the question of incorporation from a radically different vantage point. They ask the basic question: "Are Mexicans in the United States a threat?" After detailed analyses of several different indicators, their answer is that, like previous waves of immigration, Mexican immigrants are integrating into the society, and the level of their incorporation increases with time. This finding should not be surprising, but, as the authors point out, Samuel Huntington's claim about how Latino culture (along with other non-European cultures) represents a threat to American "civilization" has become common both in the academy and public discourse. The authors confirm the lack of empirical basis for this form of hysteria.

A third theme is how immigration and perceptions of immigration affect and are affected by group identity and group identifications, and how these in turn contribute to the process of racial formation. Several articles in the existing literature focus on this aspect of immigration. After an exhaustive examination of the contours of the development of the Latino population within the United States, Alejandro Portes concludes that, contrary to what researchers found two decades ago, a "thick" pan-Latino identity is in the process of forming. Taeku Lee's article asks us to consider how we might modify the ways we measure racial and ethnic identity in order to better conform with our theory about racial identity formation. He links that discussion to an analysis of what the actual connections are between racial and ethnic identity, political opinion, and public policy, using immigration as an ideal domain within which to investigate those links.

A fourth theme, which directly flows from the first three, is how immigration is related to and has changed racial and ethnic conflict in the United States. Pyong Gap Min builds on the work of those such as Claire Kim (published in the *Du Bois Review*, Volume 4, no. 1), which examines ethnic conflict between Latino and Korean Americans. Here Min finds distinct differences between patterns such as those that Kim has discovered, and the pattern of interaction and conflict that Min has observed between Latinos and Korean Americans. One mitigating factor according to Min is the relatively widespread practice in Korean American–owned establishments of employing members of the Latino community. Bloemraad analyzes the multiple effects that multiculturalism has on immigrants' ability to integrate politically and within the socioeconomic realm. Multicultural policy seems to facilitate the former, but there is not enough evidence to determine its role in facilitating or hindering immigration integration in the economic sphere. She concludes by trying to anticipate how the relationships between civil society, the economy, and the polity *vis-à-vis* immigrants would be different if the immigrant integration process were group based, rather than individually based. The comparative evidence from Canada and the Netherlands that Bloemraad provides suggests that multicultural policy can lead to political integration, which can, in turn, facilitate socioeconomic integration.

The concluding theme examines the relationship between immigration and racial orders, both nation-specific and transnational. These articles also detail the relationship between, on the one hand, racial discourses and, on the other hand, the racialized barriers that the current generation of immigrants face from non-European countries of origins. Nadia Kim shows how racialized discourses which argue that immigrant populations from south of the border burden the economy are ultimately damaging to the nation on strictly instrumental grounds, since studies conclusively show that these same populations substantially *contribute* to the economic prosperity of the nation as a whole. Further, Kim argues, these discourses fueled by entrepreneurial anti-immigration politicians are becoming more racist and classist in this period. Similarly, Mark Sawyer and Tianna Paschel argue that migrants of African descent have to confront not only nation-specific racial hierarchies in host countries which categorize Black migrants at the bottom of society, but a global, transnational racial order which places Black migrants at the bottom of the hierarchy. Further, the authors argue, these populations are often “othered” by native-born Black populations, thus adding an international element to the nation-based processes of racial formation and racialization. By studying how Asian immigrants in different eras were differently racialized, Jane Junn shows how the state shapes racial formation and racial discourses. The differences between stereotypes of Asian Americans across different waves of immigration serve to highlight how even seemingly benign stereotypes such as “model minority” can not only serve to belittle and homogenize the target group, but also reinforce structural inequalities and racial conflict, thus reinscribing racial hierarchies. Given the strong role of the state in this process, Junn argues, politics must play a central role in combating these processes.

Immigration will become an increasingly critical area of study and a social, political, and economic flash point, both within this society and globally, as the articles throughout this special volume on immigration systematically emphasize. Although, as we write, immigration is not playing a central role in the presidential campaign, the work in these pages show that debates on immigration policy should be a central focus of both the public and the candidates, and that such a debate in this era will primarily involve groups who are visibly racialized (the large influx of immigrants from Europe has largely been politically invisible), and increased racial and ethnic conflict, unfortunately, is also a likely outcome, given current economic,

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social, and particularly *political* trends. Hopefully, the thoughtful articles in this volume and similar research can begin to provide the foundation for informed deliberation and just public policy that break down rather than reinforce structural racial, economic, and political inequalities.

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