Does Immigration Hurt U.S.-Born Workers?

written by Martin Oppenheimer | June 13, 2009

1.

IMMIGRATION HAS BECOME THE MOST DIVISIVE ISSUE in domestic American politics since civil rights. Not for the first time in American history, immigrants have become scapegoats for many of the real problems of America's middle and working classes. Unemployment, high taxes, crime rates, the economic plight of African-American teenagers, the decline of traditional American values, even the cost of auto insurance, you name it, somebody has tagged "aliens." Once again immigrants like African- Americans yesterday and still today are being used to divert and divide the working class. In this divisive political climate there should be no question of where the left must stand: the human rights of immigrants, both legal and undocumented, must be defended against the resurgence of xenophobia regardless of its source. We need to develop a strategy that defends the immigrant worker and petty bourgeois in the face of the anti-immigrant sentiments of many white and African-American workers and many U.S.-born small-scale employers. The defense of immigrants must be coupled to an educational mobilization that has as its goal the reversal of the diversion of workers from an understanding of the roots of our problems, and, equally, the exposure and overcoming of every attempt to foment divisions within the working class. In order to do this we must be as clear as possible about the material roots of the hostility of many U.S.- born (including African-American, and even second and third-generation immigrant) workers towards recent immigrants. This hostility is not only fomented by reactionary political elements, but is also undergirded by what appears to be respectable scholarship emanating from some academic circles and think tanks.[1] Immigration is a far more complex issue than civil rights in the 1950s-1970s. In those days the issue was (for most people at least outside the South) relatively simple: you were for equal rights, or not. You were for including African-Americans in the "American dream" or you were for continuing to exclude them. Most important in understanding the difference between then and now is that resistance to integration was rooted in social and political fears: old-fashioned racism in all of its historical complexity plus fear of Black political power. White workers were little concerned with African-Americans taking their jobs or undercutting their wages since for the most part the latter were either located in non-competing sectors of the labor market, or were in unionized sectors getting similar wages. It was a time of relatively full employment: the great sucking sound of American jobs going offshore had not yet begun. This time around, economic fear forms much of the basis for anti-immigrant hostility by both white and African-American workers, although the fear of immigrant political power is a factor especially in the Southwest. It has also been mentioned in connection with the potential loss of political power by African-Americans, whose clout might be diluted by large-scale legal immigrant participation in the electoral process, especially at the local level. The immigration issue (which, insofar as it is considered a "problem," is mainly about Latinos) is therefore more complicated. Elements of the power structure appear to be pro-immigrant for their own purposes (access to low-wage workers), while other fractions, especially small business enterprises now forced to compete with low-wage immigrant small businesses are hostile to immigration (always, of course, "only illegal immigration"). Many union and non-union but well-paid workers, particularly in contracting, believe (and cite anecdotal evidence) that their wages and sometimes their jobs are melting away as lower-paid non-union immigrant work crews move in. Do immigrants have a deleterious effect on U.S.-born, especially African-American workers, as has been charged by any number of writers, from Christopher Jencks[2] to the Center for Immigration Studies' George Borjas[3] to Stephen Steinberg (writing in this journal, summer 2005 and winter 2006)? Does immigration add to their costs especially in unemployment, underemployment, and wages? Do

immigrants survive, never mind rise, on the backs of the native-born proletariat, especially African-American workers? Whatever else immigrants are charged with, it is these questions, and their answers, that are crucial to understanding and overcoming divisions within the U.S. working class (the primary one being white versus all workers of all other colors, the second the division between Latinos and Blacks.) What strategy to develop to overcome these divisions is crucial to the future of progressive politics in this country.

2.

MASSIVE MIGRATION FROM ALL PARTS OF THE GLOBE began after the immigration reforms of 1965. The result was that immigrants were "thrust into competition with blacks for job opportunities," according to Steinberg, author of the highly regarded *The Ethnic Myth*. He asks, are African-American workers becoming superfluous because immigrants (including the undocumented) have arrived in such large numbers so as to undercut Black progress? He assumes that the jobs are there: "Although it is often argued that blacks arrived [in urban job markets: M.O.] at a time when the industries that had provided opportunities to earlier immigrants were in decline, the fact is that millions of new immigrants were rapidly absorbed into both the residual blue-collar sector and the expanding service industries." He states that if immigration had remained at the low level of 1965, then "tight labor markets would have provided incentives for employers to lower their racist barriers, to hire and train black workers, and if necessary, to improve wages and conditions to make even these marginal jobs attractive to native workers." What has happened, Steinberg says, is that the presence of immigrant labor has kept wages down, sidelined African-American labor (via discrimination), and in some cases has even led to the exodus of African-Americans from some communities. Although Steinberg comes at the issue from what he sees as a left perspective, the gist of his argument is little different from that of Jencks, Borjas, or any of the writers who want to stop, or at least slow-down, immigration. He dismisses studies concluding that immigration has only small negative effects on the economic situation of African- Americans. This, he says, defies common sense given the horrendous unemployment statistics for Black men in so many urban areas. In the follow-up issue of *New Politics,* Michael Hirsch, a sociologist and labor journalist, concentrates on the structural factors that historically pushed and pulled Black workers into Northern and Western cities, resulting in significant economic advances (the push factor of collapsing agricultural prices and continuing racism in the South, and the pull factor of wartime jobs in both World Wars). Deindustrialization[4] is the major factor that has destroyed these advances and has pauperized large sectors of the industrial heartland and cities dependent on manufacturing generally. This is where the African-American population came to be concentrated after World War II. "The tragedy of deindustrialization," he says, "is that the closing of the mills liquidated this generation of well-paid black breadwinners and the shop-floor leadership that was emerging." Immigration was not a factor in that, nor, for instance, in the containerization process in the shipping industry, or in the computerization of auto plants, among other examples. Hirsch summarizes: If the U.S. had limited immigration instead of liberalizing it post-1965, then "outsourcing of U.S. products and services would have happened that much sooner." This point is made by a number of researchers. For example, Nelson Lim, a researcher at RAND, writing in Roger Waldinger's edited *Strangers At the Gates*, puts it succinctly: "In the era of (NAFTA), any decline in the supply of low-skilled immigrants will simply push employers to move their businesses abroad." The point is not so much that if labor costs become too high labor will be exported. "Too high" is after all simply a cost factor determined by competition and profit rates. It is that if labor costs are lower elsewhere, work will be moved there so long as it can be. And if it cannot be moved? In the absence of immigrants, would African-American (and white) workers be mowing lawns, cleaning hotel rooms, and nailing up sheetrock (jobs that are not exportable) at union-level wages? Following Steinberg's argument, would white employers hire African-American workers in a more or less nondiscriminatory way because they were needed, as they once were in heavy industry, if immigrants were not available? To get at some

answers to this and the broader question of whether or not immigrants are undermining U.S.-born labor, it is useful to break the issue down into three discrete parts: (1) are immigrants hired in preference to U.S.-born, especially African-American workers? (2) do immigrants displace U.S.-born, especially African-American workers? (3) does immigrant competition lower the wages of U.S.-born workers? The short answer to each of these questions is: Yes and No, Sometimes, and Maybe. Whatever else, the answer is not an unequivocal Yes, despite what anti-immigrationists from the Minutemen and Lou Dobbs on the "populist" right to some unions, and even some respected researchers, say. This brief essay can do no more than summarize. But first it should be made clear that any social science research that relates to policy is political: there is no "objective" or "neutral" methodology. Immigration research is no exception.[5] **(1) Are immigrants hired in preference to U.S.-born, especially African-American workers?** There is a consensus about one aspect of this allegation at least: employers, especially of younger, lower skilled, less educated workers, often hire immigrants (generally Latinos) over African-Americans. As Steven Camarota, Director of Research at the Center for Immigration Studies told the U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary on Oct, 30, 2003, "There is certainly a lot of anecdotal evidence and some systematic evidence that immigrants are seen as better workers by some employers, especially in comparison to native-born African Americans." Roger Waldinger and Michael I. Lichter, in their 2003 book *How the Other Half Works*, devote en entire chapter to addressing "Whom Employers Want," and conclude that employers have a "hierarchy of ethnic preferences" in which African-Americans are at the bottom. As Andrew Sum, also associated with the C.I.S., told an American Youth Policy Forum in March 2005, there is "a perceived reputation of many immigrants as hard-working and loyal," with the implication that African-American youth are not, that they have "attitudes" that make them less reliable, more troublesome, employees. As for the realities underlying these preferences, any number of observers, including scholars, have pointed to the employment consequences of "ghetto-related behavior," as African-American sociologist William Julius Wilson, a former President of the American Sociological Association put it, which is by no means limited to African-American youth.[6] There are a lot of reasons for dysfunctional (to job-seeking) behavior among some lower stratum working class youth, but understanding them doesn't change employers' discrimination. We don't actually know the extent of these behaviors, but we do know that many employers buy into these stereotypes. In support of the discrimination thesis Andrew Sum cites data showing that among low-income male high school students 23 percent of whites, 12 percent of Hispanics, but only 7% of African-Americans are employed. Steven Steinberg, in his *New Politics* essays, challenges the accuracy of employer claims, and says that even if this stereotype has a basis in fact, employers are obligated to hire on the basis of individual merit and not on the reputation of the group. For him it's plain old-fashioned prejudiced, racist- based discrimination. More to the point, he says employers use "network hiring" of immigrants to keep African-Americans out. Network hiring, all experts agree, is crucial in creating employment niches for many (not only immigrant) ethnic/racial groups. Once an employer hires a worker who proves reliable, the employer will ask that worker to recruit another, who will likely be of the same ethnicity. In that it excludes other ethnicities, network hiring constitutes a form of institutional racism, true enough, but hiring that relies on referrals from present employees is universal. Why is this "naked bigotry" (Steinberg's expression) when African-Americans are excluded (consciously or not), but not when they do the "excluding" as they develop niches, as in several of the Los Angeles industries described by Waldinger and Lichter?[7] Employment niches, sociologist Frank Wilson noted several years ago, involve a "substantial share of the workforce of urban minority workers": 37 percent of African-Americans, 36 percent of Hispanics, and 27 per cent of Asians.[8] Of course the reasons for the development of these niches vary. Frequently they are the result of exclusion from other occupations. And minorities create businesses that cater to specialized minority markets. Regardless of the reason an ethnic quasi- monopoly or niche develops in an occupation, or in a business, other groups tend to stay away. Short of legally mandating hiring halls for all employment, a political impossibility, network or nepotistic hiring will continue in the private sector, and will, naturally, cause resentment among those excluded. Aside

from discrimination, some econometricians argue that the sheer number of immigrants entering particular occupations will create a competitive structure leading to more unemployment and lower wages for African-Americans. Using a worst-case scenario, George Borjas estimates that the 1980-2000 influx of immigrants might in theory have reduced the employment rate of African-American men by 5 percent at the national level, and in addition increased the incarceration rate of black high school dropouts by 1.7% (the incarceration rate, he says, is correlated to unemployment). But as Borjas admits, "much of the decline in employment and increase in incarceration…would have taken place even if the immigrant influx had been far smaller."[9] Presumably this would have been due to deindustrialization rather than to immigration. In any case, immigrants are increasingly dispersed away from urban areas in recent years, so they are not competing as much with African-Americans for jobs in large urban centers, formerly the gateways for all immigration. As for immigrant enterprises taking business away from native-owned, particularly Black-owned companies, while there are a lot of stories, there is little hard evidence. A 1997 study by Robert Fairlie and Bruce Myer of U.C. Santa Cruz and Northwestern University found that immigration had no effect on Black self-employment. Steve Camarota, in a 2000 C.I.S. report arguing that the positive effects of immigrant entrepreneurship have been overrated, indirectly confirms this. There appears to be no decline in native, including African-American entrepreneurship in major immigrant-receiving areas.[10] **(2)Do immigrants displace U.S.-born workers?** The answer is mired in methodological controversies, pitting one set of researchers, those generally associated with the Center for Immigration Studies who, with only a few qualifications, say "Yes" against a range of others whose conclusions are more mixed, more nuanced. There is some agreement on the dynamic underlying the increasing employment of immigrants at the lower end of the economy. Immanuel Ness, writing in the left *Dollars and Sense* (Sept.-Oct. 2006) tells us that "industrial restructuring and capital mobility have eroded traditional industries…in ways that have led many companies to create millions of low-wage jobs and to seek vulnerable workers to fill them." Employers try to maximize profit by making labor cheaper. They increasingly do this through outsourcing or subcontracting, hiring part-timers, and in some industries paying workers under the table. The influx of immigrants provides many of those workers since U.S.-born workers without a high school degree, who are the most vulnerable in our labor force, are now just 12 percent of all U.S.-born workers. So as businesses restructure, if insufficient numbers of U.S.-born workers are available (or those who are available are deemed undesirable) immigrants are hired. Some of them are no doubt among the estimated 6.3 million "illegal" workers in the U.S. economy (4.3 percent of the civilian labor force). Andrew Sum and colleagues at the C.I.S. pretty much agree: "(S)ome employers have begun to reorganize work in ways that systematically exclude certain native-born workers, especially those under 35, from employment and that create work that does not meet the basic labor standards that have been developed over the years." But their conclusion is not, as you would expect, to advocate enforcement of labor standards. Rather, they assert that "If the jobs held by new immigrant males aged 16 to 34 were made available to jobless native-born males, then the job deficit among the native born [allegedly 1.7 million in 2005-M.O.] would be completely eliminated." (The number of new immigrant males in that age group is estimated at 1.85 million.)[11] The assumption of the C.I.S. econometricians apparently is that you simply plug 1.7 million non-immigrants into those 1.7 million jobs, just like that. Wouldn't it be nice if the labor market operated that efficiently. In real life workers do not have perfect information about where jobs are, and even if they did many would not, and often could not (due to age) move, willy-nilly, away from family, friends, churches, neighborhoods, to chase jobs in faraway places unless they were indeed desperate, as desperate, say, as many…immigrants. So one question is: does the U.S. economy need immigrant workers because there aren't enough U.S.-born workers available? Anti-immigrationists say no, there are enough available, and if there were no immigrants the U.S.-born (including African-American) unemployed would be hired, and discrimination against African-Americans would have to decline. Some pro-immigrationists argue that immigrants are needed because there are jobs "Americans won't do," to which the anti- immigrationists reply, "there are no jobs Americans won't do, you just

have to provide decent wages and working conditions." Are there jobs at the less-skilled end of the occupational spectrum that "Americans won't do," that is, for which they are not available? Maybe there are. The term "available" can mean many things. Many African-American youth are not "available" for field agricultural work because the pay is too low (the average wage of a field agricultural worker is $9.50 an hour), it might require a move to another state, and perhaps there is an onus on doing work associated with slavery. And surely there are other jobs where the pay and working conditions are below what a U.S.-born worker would consider even minimally survivable. It would be nice if living wages were available throughout the economy, but in highly competitive, non-unionized, labor-intensive small business sectors wages are low, and will remain as low as the law allows (or lower, off the books) and desperate immigrants are often willing to take them. Rob Paral, at the Immigration Policy Center, a branch of the pro-immigrant American Immigration Law Foundation, argues that immigrants are hired to supplement, rather than displace, the U.S.-born, at least in some job categories. "Thirteen occupational categories collectively would have been short more than 500,000 workers during the 1990s without recently arrived immigrant employees, *even if all unemployed natives with recent experience in those categories had been re- employed*." [my emph.: M.O.][12] These jobs include everything from farm workers to cooks, painters, janitors, maids, and construction workers. Moreover, Paral demonstrates that not all immigrants get wages significantly below those of similarly educated and skilled U.S.-born workers, although many do. The unionized workers at Swift Co. in Greeley Colorado, who were raided by Immigration and Customs Enforcement in December, 2006, were earning $12.75 an hour, not a magnificent wage but more than twice the Federal minimum wage. As immigrants become naturalized and get older, their wages approach or exceed U.S.-born workers' wages. This trend will likely continue as more immigrants join unions. One set of researchers looks at specific geographical areas (usually states), or at specific industries. For example, the Pew Hispanic Center, in an August, 2006 report by Rakesh Kochbar, tells us that there are wide variations in the relationship between the growth of immigrant population and the employment outcomes of U.S.-born workers. About 25 percent of them live in states where growth of immigration is correlated to favorable outcomes for native workers. About 15 percent live in states where the outcome is negative. The rest live in states where immigrant growth was below average, but employment for the U.S.-born wasn't good either. "The size of the foreign-born workforce is also unrelated to the employment prospects for native workers." Even more interesting, the Pew report says, "the relative youth and low levels of education among foreign workers appear to have no bearing on the employment outcomes of native workers of similar schooling and age."[13] Still, it is clear that a much lower percentage of young African-Americans are employed than other groups. That doesn't prove that Hispanics are displacing African-Americans, but questions remain. Another approach, associated with the work of Roger Waldinger and Michael Lichter, focuses on specific industries, in this case in Los Angeles. They examine six low-wage industries and find that the concentration of Latino immigrants and African-Americans differs. Each industry contains disproportionally large components of one or the other. They argue that overall even when immigrants create a "niche" in, say, the apparel industry, and over time displace some U.S.-born workers, the industry's strength in turn creates more jobs for the U.S.-born, at higher wages. "A city experiencing an influx of immigrants may well find itself with more buying power," thus benefiting the job situation for natives. So maybe native workers in positive growth areas would not have been better off without immigration. What accounts for the skewed distribution of workers of color in Los Angeles (or any) industries? How do ethnic niches develop? In summary, Waldinger and Lichter tell us, "Immigration is a network-driven process, and the prominent role played by ethnic networks in the labor market makes for ethnic separation." Different industries rely more on network recruitment than others. African-Americans are disadvantaged in this process in L.A. at least because of their smaller numbers relative to Latinos, and because of discrimination. In a period of twenty years (1970-1990), "African- American concentrations in those industries in which immigrants were already overrepresented in 1970 simply disappeared." On the other hand, African-American concentration increased where immigrants were underrepresented in 1970. Meanwhile,

African-American educational levels had increased. Thus African-Americans, according to Waldinger and Lichter, were "pulled" rather than "pushed" out of their employment concentrations, moving more into higher-skill sectors where bureaucratic rather than network hiring is the pattern, mainly, that is, in the public sector. Nevertheless, in this changing environment "the less-skilled members of the [African-American] group who cannot pass the employers' tests may be left out in the cold," especially since they must look for work where immigrants have come, over the years, to predominate. Even when overall employment for African-American workers is stable, "immigration may harm the most vulnerable African- Americans and yet yield no net negative effects on Los Angeles African-Americans as a whole." Borjas and others associated with the C.I.S. dispute this approach. As Jencks puts it, "we have to treat the United States as one big labor market, figure out how immigrants change the national distribution of skills, and estimate the effect of these changes on different groups' earnings." Also, they argue, if some U.S.-born workers facing immigrant competition decide to move out, those remaining will correspondingly face a tighter labor market and will not be displaced, creating an artificial impression that things aren't so bad in a particular locality. And, since many immigrants' jobs are in sectors created by immigration itself-the many niche businesses that cater to immigrants– this might well create some kind of multiplier effect, generating more jobs also for the U.S.-born. In general, apart from the C.I.S. group, researchers going back to the mid-1980's have given us mixed messages. They have told us either that the foreign-born share of the population has no significant effect on U.S.-born employment, or if it does, it is very slight, or that the impact on jobs differs from place to place and industry to industry. We cannot dismiss the idea that a large influx or "labor supply shock" as Borjas & Co. call it, of immigrants, especially at the low-skill end, might have a negative effect on some U.S.-born workers' employment rates, and in some cities and industries, especially among African-Americans. But we also should not accept the unqualified generalization that "immigrants take American workers' jobs away" because this is not only misleading, but politically dangerous. **(3)Does immigrant competition lower the wages of Black and other U.S.-born workers?** A number of observers say it does little if any damage to wages. Waldinger and Lichter, summarizing a lot of studies, claim that "Immigration seemed to have no effect on the wages or employment of white natives…and very slight, if any, negative effects (on) native blacks." A 1997 National Research Council report concluded immigration had small negative effects on wages, including for African- Americans.[14] David Card, of U.C. Berkeley, found that since 1980 the wages of U.S.-born dropouts relative to high school graduates has remained constant despite immigrant influxes.[15] A February, 2007 study by Giovanni Peri, for the Public Policy Institute of California says that in California immigration has had a positive effect on U.S.-born workers. According to his calculations, "immigration induced a 4 percent real wage increase for the average native worker." Even high school dropouts saw a slight improvement. This effect, Peri theorized in an earlier study, is due to the fact that "the foreign-born tend to be employed in different occupations than U.S. natives." However, earlier immigrants do suffer significant losses of income when an influx of new immigrants takes place.[16] Wage gaps between immigrants and the U.S.-born, as well as wage levels for each group in cities with large numbers of immigrants, it turns out, varies significantly from city to city, as Mark Ellis, an immigration demographer, discovered.[17] The gap is due to the labor market that channels each group into a different segment of the local economy, one paying somewhat better. In some cities, despite immigrant influxes, wages for the U.S.-born, including African Americans, increased due to a shift to higher-paying services, even as wages for Latinos remained low (hence a growing gap between them and the U.S.-born). The most often cited studies that contest the more benign view are by George Borjas and his colleagues at C.I.S.. His conclusion in a May 2004 report: "Weekly wages grew fastest for workers in those skill groups that were least affected by immigration…the immigrant influx of the 1980s and 1990s lowered the wages of most native workers, particularly of those workers at the bottom and top of the education distribution."[18] In criticizing President Bush's immigration reform program, which would have paved the way to legalizing many illegal immigrants and opening the door to many new immigrants, he states further: "It is clear that Mexican

immigration, which is predominantly low-skill, accounts for virtually the *entire* [emph. in orig.] adverse impact of immigration on low-skill native workers." Theoretically any large-scale increase in the labor force, or in a particular skill group, will tend to lower wages, especially in the absence of strong unions. But at the local level there can be positive wage gains despite immigration, Borjas admits. "If immigrants…cluster in cities with thriving economies, there would be a built-in spurious positive correlation between immigration and wages…[However] The flow of jobs and workers tends to equalize economic conditions across cities." Therefore if we measure the labor market impact of immigration at the national level, the positive picture in some localities is wiped out. Borjas argues that we need to analyze information on millions of workers over many years, using many variables such as experience, age, education, etc. and see what happens as immigration increases the number of workers in any given group. The bottom line, according to Borjas, is that "immigration does adversely impact the wages of natives in competition with immigrants." That impact is largest for African-Americans. In short, while native workers' wages may not be negatively affected by immigration in many areas, overall, when we average it out and look at many discrete labor variables, Borjas seems to say, we can create a model that tells us how much an increase in a skill group's size will affect annual earnings. This amount can be sizable: "In 2000, for example, the typical native man without a high school diploma earned $25,000 annually. This implies that immigration reduced this worker's earnings by $1,800." No wonder he/she is upset! These and similar figures are consistently quoted by anti-immigration advocates. Borjas' theoretical assumption from the beginning is an old economics truism: that if the supply of labor (boosted by immigration) exceeds the demand in any given occupation, wages will decline all other things being equal. But this truism often fails because all other things are rarely equal. Employer resistance, including the threat to close plants, out-and-out union busting tactics, or industry restructuring by deskilling work (and firing better-paid workers), can push wages down even when there is little surplus labor. On the other hand, an upgrading of skills due to technological change can push wages up. Also, unionization can improve the wages of all workers, both immigrant and U.S.-born. Just as the generalization about immigrants taking "American" jobs away has to be qualified, so the generalization that immigration adversely affects the wages of U.S.-born workers has to be qualified as well. Again, not to do so is not only inaccurate, but politically dangerous. The rhetoric of "immigrants getting ahead on the backs of African- Americans" is therefore neither accurate nor useful. It is not accurate because the immigrant group that most clearly impacts African-Americans is at the bottom of the pole; it isn't getting ahead, period. If African-Americans aren't getting ahead it is much more likely due to the changing structure of the economy in urban areas, plus the erosion of the buying power of the minimum wage. And the rhetoric isn't useful because it is divisive.

3.

AS FOR SOLUTIONS, no matter what immigration policy is proposed, its logic leads to its negation. One policy often espoused by those wishing to reduce immigration for whatever reason, from "saving American culture" to saving American wages to slowing population growth, is "to help create more jobs in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean," as Christopher Jencks said in a 2001 *New York Review* piece said. Here is *Business Week* (April 24, 2006): "Labor-exporting nations must do more to provide employment opportunities and access to social mobility for citizens at home." (By "liberalizing" their economies, and eliminating governmental interference, as far as BW is concerned.) In fact, as Julie Hollar reminds us in the September/October issue of the media muckraking *Extra*, this was the rationale used in promoting NAFTA back in Bill Clinton's day. Clinton's Attorney-General Janet Reno wrote, in 1993, that "We will not stop the flow of immigration until these immigrants find decent jobs, at decent wages, in Mexico." However, NAFTA's free trade policies had the opposite effect, destroying agricultural jobs, promoting low-wage assembly (maquiladora) jobs, and leading to a decline in average household income, thus promoting emigration further. The logic of world capital drives it always to export labor costs to cheaper areas,

or, alternatively, to import cheaper (immigrant) labor as local labor costs rise (or as labor shortages develop)-or indeed both. Hence improving Mexican standards of living, desirable as that might be, means raising wages, which will lead to a flight of capital from Mexico to even lower-wage areas. Once that occurs (and it began in 2001 as Mexican manufacturing started to move to China), the cycle begins again and immigrants resume their flow into the U.S. to find work. Most immigration reformers focus on bettering the condition of immigrants so as to level the playing field with U.S-born workers, that is, so that the U.S.-born won't be undercut. Raising the minimum wage, creating hiring halls and requiring employers to use them and pay living wages, providing access to drivers' licenses, etc. are examples. Jencks and many others advocate increasing the number of unskilled immigrants given legal status, while also cracking down on employers who hire the undocumented. However, tough enforcement will at most slow illegal immigration as long as conditions below the Rio are dismal, no matter how many walls are built to stop them, no matter how many National Guard are sent (assuming they could be spared!), and no matter how many employers are fined. Furthermore, improving conditions for legal immigrants would result in more employers joining those who have already taken their businesses offshore. This in turn might lead to an improvement of conditions in the sending countries on the very questionable assumption that foreign investment leads to higher incomes, or at least more jobs, but would it create enough? So far there is little evidence of that. There would also be fewer jobs for the U.S.-born victims of outsourcing. The point is simply this: neither an improvement of conditions in sending countries, nor an improvement for immigrants in the receiving country can solve the immigration "problem." The first will lead to outsourcing to even lower-wage areas from the sending country and the second will also lead to outsourcing if not to the original sending country, then to another where wages are even lower. The consequence of this "race to the bottom" is that poverty-stricken people throughout the world will continue with their desperate and dangerous border crossings to find work under whatever conditions.

4.

LARGE SEGMENTS OF THE PUBLIC have come to define immigration as a "problem" because it is seen as undermining American culture, increasing crime, raising our taxes, and taking jobs away. The simple reason this problem exists, in the popular mind, is that "there are too many of them." The politics of immigration today therefore hinges on slowing or reversing the flow of immigrants, especially Mexicans and Central Americans. But no program, no body of legislation, here or in any country, can stop the flow of economic emigration because it cannot be done country by country, or even if two countries devise a common program. It can only be resolved on a global basis, when and if all boats rise. This cannot happen in the context of present-day global capitalism. Meanwhile, demystifying the economic dimension (jobs, wages, discrimination) as well as exposing other myths about immigrants may help in slowing down reactionary political and economic elements presently exploiting the immigration issue for whatever reason (not the least of which is electioneering.) This is not, however, a solution. But there is a larger solution, at least potentially, on the horizon. Global capitalism has sown the seeds of this solution as its depredations have slowly generated opposition. The headlines mostly feature the increasing skepticism, if not total opposition, to U.S.-sponsored international monetary policies on the part of several Latin American governments. They have come to power promising to liberate their countries from the disastrous economic programs that go by the spurious name "free trade," which generate poverty and emigration. More important, however, is the dissent to these programs "in the streets," in the form of what is called the global justice movement, with its now famous Forums. Finally, there is the beginning of cross-border labor organizing. The globalization of capital that Marx and Engels predicted long ago is also slowly but inexorably leading to a globalization of working class solidarity. Only when popular movements (and the governments they elect) put an end to the exploitative rule of capital will the immigration "problem" be solved.

Footnotes

1. Solana Larsen, "The Anti-Immigration Movement: From Shovels to Suits," NACLA *Report On the Americas*, May/June, 2007.
2. "Who Should Get In?" a review of eleven books including two by scholars associated with the Center for Immigration Studies, *The New York Review of Books,* Nov. 29 and Dec. 20, 2001. Jencks' series pretty thoroughly summarizes the views of the sophisticated restrictive immigration crowd. A follow-up essay appears in the *Review*, Sept. 27, 2007.
3. *Heaven's Gate: Immigration Policy And the American Economy* (Princeton University Press, 1999).
4. Deindustrialization refers to the movement of factories and jobs away from their traditional geographical base to lower-wage areas (in the South, or off-shore) where unions are weak or non-existent. Technological change, in that it displaces traditional factory labor, is also a major factor in deindustrialization.
5. Specifically, the Center for Immigration Studies, which sponsors research that emphasizes the negative effect of immigration, is think-tank spin-off of the militantly anti-immigration Federation for American Immigration Reform, and is funded by several extremely conservative foundations.
6. William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears* (New York: Vintage Books,1997) ch. 3.
7. Roger Waldinger and Michael L. Lichter, *How the Other Half Works* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
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9. C.I.S. Working Paper No. 12518, August, 2006.
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