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**WOMEN AND
CHILDREN FIRST**

**new directions in anti-
immigrant politics**

On November 1994 California voters passed Proposition 187, which, if implemented, will deny public school education, health care, and other public benefits to undocumented immigrants and their children. I believe that the rhetoric animating support for this proposition reflects a distinctive shift from anti-immigrant hysteria of recent decades, approximated perhaps only by the allegations targeting Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the Great Depression. Unlike the xenophobia of recent decades, the current rhetoric focuses on public resource usage and targets immigrant women, relying on both racist and misogynist imagery.

This current wave of xenophobia is fostered by multiple trends: historically constructed and politically deployed racism, the contemporary national fervor against public welfare, and the fiscal crises facing state and local governments in California. But looking at recent shifts in xenophobic narratives—in particular the new emphasis on women and tax-supported public resources—suggests that 187 can be read as a reaction to changing patterns of Mexican immigration to California. The second half of the 20th century has witnessed a transformation from a predominantly sojourner or cyclical pattern of Mexican migration to the widespread establishment of Mexican immigrant

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families and communities throughout California. As increasingly well-established Mexican immigrant communities have proliferated throughout the state, media-orchestrated portrayals of the “Mexicanization” or “Latinization” of California have helped fuel and sustain hostile reactions to this permanent settlement. I argue that contemporary xenophobia targets women and children because they are central to making settlement happen. Viewed in this manner, the 187 campaign is less about “illegal immigration” and more about rejecting Mexican—and more generally Latino—immigrants and their US-born family members as permanent members of US society.

I begin by examining the narrative devices that framed and fueled the 187 campaign. This detour illuminates some of the similarities that the current wave of anti-immigrant politics shares with the expulsion campaigns directed at Mexicans in the early 1930s. Next, I contrast sojourner and settler patterns of Mexican immigration and examine coercive systems of labor and their implications for family organization. Under slavery and systems of contract labor in the US, family life was in effect, legislatively outlawed. In my view, contemporary xenophobic rhetoric is animated in part by the assumption that Mexican immigrant work life should be severed from family and community life.

ANTI-IMMIGRANT NARRATIVES

Anti-immigrant anxieties are constructed at multiple levels, but they are primarily provoked by changes in immigration patterns and by the way these changes are perceived. In a media-driven society, anti-immigrant expressions are conveyed through the images and “stories” that saturate experience and funnel perceptions of everyday life. In some cases, these stories may in fact become “more real” than either experience or documentary evidence, allowing people to reinterpret their own lived experience in ways that are framed by the dominant narratives. These narratives, however, do not appear out of thin air. In an admittedly distorted fashion, they reflect contemporary political and economic reconfigurations.

Historically, xenophobic narrative in the United States has revolved around three claims. Though the three claims or stories are typically

used in tandem, within particular anti-immigrant campaigns, one of these narratives usually rises to the foreground. The stories are constantly rewritten, and they contain elements of good and bad. The assignment of positive and negative attributes—drawn from heroic imagery of European immigrants of the past as well as the “social problem” imagery of third-world immigrants of the present—lends these stories a veneer of veracity and plausibility. This pastiche also allows for the submergence of racialized texts. Before examining the principal narrative devices used in the 187 campaign in California, I will retell these generic stories.¹

The economic story goes like this: immigrants are impoverished in their poor, preindustrial, backwards countries, where they are oppressed and exploited by a small, merciless elite. The poor, however, are hungry and willing to work hard, and so they come to the land of opportunity—the United States—to work long hours at back-breaking jobs, forfeiting comforts to better their lives. The problematic in this story line emerges when the immigrant workers take the jobs that “rightfully” belong to US citizens and when their willingness to work for low pay depresses the wages of US-citizen workers. Unfair economic competition is the central motif, with immigrant workers raising unemployment rates and dragging standards down for everyone.

In the cultural differences story, immigrants again originate in poor, backwards countries, usually rural areas. Here the focus is on the cultural traditions, foreign languages, religious beliefs and practices, and, perhaps, distinctive racial features and skin colors. In this assimilationist dream gone awry, the melting pot turns sour when these newcomers don’t learn English, neglect to pick up the new society’s ways, or simply fail to blend. When they remain distinctive and unassimilable, they threaten to tear apart the whole.

Finally, in the story of government resource drain, immigrants once again hail from impoverished places. They come to the US planning to make a better life for themselves, but they are ill-equipped to do so. Lacking discipline, moral values, proper education, and perhaps literacy skills, their only alternative is to make do with what the sys-

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tem offers. And it offers them plenty. The women bear many children, secure in the knowledge that their obstetrical care will be covered and that their children will get free vaccinations and go to good schools with hot breakfasts and no tuition fee. They do not pay taxes. Their children clog the school system but eventually drop out. Their daughters get pregnant, and their sons fill the jails. Notice that it is not merely generic immigrants, but immigrant women—racialized and gendered—who, together with their children, drain the government coffers fed by US-citizen taxpayers.

These are caricature-like renditions, but such xenophobic claims succeed in galvanizing support precisely because of their simplicity. The three narratives feature different story lines, but they share a common and clear-cut villain. The demonization and removal of this villain promises unequivocal resolution. The narrative of anti-immigrant rhetoric has changed dramatically in the last decade. As recently as the early 1980s, the principal claim fueling immigration restriction was based on the allegation that undocumented immigrants steal jobs from US citizens and depress wages. These allegations of job competition intensified during the recession of the early 1980s, when plant closures, unemployment, and the declining number of manufacturing jobs was foremost in the public's eye. From the late 1970s, when employer sanction measures were first proposed, until passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986, the stories of job displacement and diminishing wages fueled anti-immigrant sentiment and restrictionist legislation. During the recession of the early 1980s, politicians and newspaper editorials commonly scapegoated immigrants for causing a lagging economy. Anti-immigrant groups such as the Federation of Americans for Immigration Reform and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), never neutral voices in these national discussions, fueled the fires. One of the INS's more memorable efforts occurred when then western regional director David Ilchert orchestrated "Operation Jobs," a series of workplace raids followed by sensationalistic press conferences announcing the number of jobs—and the corresponding hourly rates—opened due to the deportations.

During this era, restrictionist lobby groups achieved national

prominence, and their leaders warned that new immigrants and refugees were causing a hodgepodge of social problems, including high taxes, crime, and even California's notorious traffic jams and air pollution. Arguments based on cultural difference and public resource drainage were also vocalized, but they did not predominate. Of the two, the "cultural differences" story, with its focus on literacy and linguistic abilities, succeeded more in mobilizing anti-immigrant sentiment. The well-funded national organization, "US English," campaigned against the implementation of bilingual education programs and election ballots. Mimicking the allegations voiced by their predecessors about Southern and Eastern European immigrants in the early 20th century, these immigration restrictionists argued that the new immigrants from Asia and Latin America were after all "too different," that they were ultimately unassimilable. Continuing immigration signaled, as Senator Alan K. Simpson, a major proponent of restrictionist legislation, put it, the cultural and linguistic "Quebec-ization" of the United States. These narratives, principally the economic and cultural stories, peaked in November 1986, when IRCA was signed by the President and when California voters made English the official language in their state.

By the early 1990s, with the 187 campaign, the dominant narrative shifted to public resource depletion, muffling rather than silencing the claims about jobs, language, or culture. Replacing the hardworking but impoverished immigrant workers and the culturally and linguistically "different" newcomers as the protagonists in this scenario were poor, pregnant immigrant women and their children. In this scenario, poor immigrant women are drawn to the US to give birth in publicly financed county hospitals, allowing their children to be born as US citizens and subsequent recipients of taxpayer-supported medical care, public assistance, and education. Immigrants and their children constitute a growing underclass, draining education and medical resources in the United States. As Harold Ezell, the former INS commissioner and coauthor of 187 put it in his Jesse Jackson-inspired parlance, "How many illegals can we educate, medicate, compensate, and incarcerate before California goes bankrupt?"²

The campaign's focus on welfare dependency and the targeting of women and children says less about immigrant usage of public assistance than it does about the anxieties arising from popular recognition of the growing Latino immigrant population in California. Latino settlements are inescapably etched throughout California and visible to the casual observer. In Los Angeles, one of the most widely listened to radio stations draws on a primarily Mexican immigrant audience and plays the newly popular banda music, a Mexican "cowboy" style that dates back to 19th-century German polka influences in the state of Sinaloa. The expansion of Spanish-language marketing, mass media, and (bilingual) education and the reapportionment of voting districts, all testify to the flourishing Latino immigrant communities, many of which are primarily Mexican.

The contemporary xenophobic narrative departs from recent 20th-century anti-immigrant narrative, approaching arguments not heard so vociferously since the Great Depression, when the public resources claims added to the economic claims a rationale for deportation. A brief review here identifies points of similarity with the current campaign.

PARALLELS WITH THE 1920S AND 1930S

The Great Depression prompted the expulsion of half a million people to Mexico, a group that included Mexican undocumented immigrants, legal permanent residents, and US citizens of Mexican descent.³ Anti-immigrant-citizens groups, allegations about Mexicans' use of public relief, and the active intervention of social workers and relief agencies played important parts in this euphemistically titled "repatriation."

Beginning in 1931, local government and relief agencies threatened to cut Mexican families' public relief and sometimes paid for the families' return transportation to Mexico. Like the 187 campaign, these efforts were concentrated in Southern California. In Los Angeles, local welfare agencies aggressively promoted the repatriation of men, women, and children.⁴ Thousands of Mexican families with their accumulated possessions loaded automobiles and boarded trains bound for the border.

While deportation was not formally organized, both state and non-state entities worked toward its implementation. Camille Guerin-Gonzalez recounts how the director of the Los Angeles Citizens' Committee on Coordination of Unemployment Relief worked to organize the removal of Mexicans from California during the early 1930s.⁵ This citizens' group implemented raids with police and federal immigration agents, and they also worked toward expulsion with social workers and public relief agencies. For example, working with the Los Angeles Department of Public Charities the group tried to persuade those legal Mexican immigrants and US citizens of Mexican heritage receiving public assistance to repatriate. (Repatriation would be a misnomer for the removal of those US-born citizens who had never been in Mexico.) The department of charities deployed social workers to urge families to leave voluntarily, and they also threatened Mexican families receiving public aid with deportation. According to Guerin-Gonzalez, their efforts particularly targeted settled immigrants and Mexican Americans.⁶ The deportees, reflecting the increase in family migration during the 1920s, included substantial numbers of women and children. In fact, Carrerras reports that between 1931 and 1933, two-thirds of the deportees were women.⁷ So successful was the campaign that by 1940, the Mexican population in the United States had declined to about half of what it had been in 1930.⁸

What is interesting about that 1930s case is that the expulsion campaign followed a period in which a significant component of Mexican migration consisted of Mexican families settling in the US. In the 1920s, family immigration made up a larger portion of Mexican immigration than it had in prior decades. The economic disruption and violence of the Mexican revolution (1910–1919), and of the Cristero Rebellion in the central western area of Mexico (1926–1929), prompted the migration of people with a strong motivation to remain in the US. During this period the booming US economy provided both urban and rural jobs, and Mexican families settled into the growing barrios of Los Angeles, El Paso, and San Antonio. These urban-based, segregated settlement communities served as labor-distribution

centers for Mexican workers who were recruited for agricultural work and for jobs in growing urban centers.⁹

There are at least four points of congruity between the present and the events of the Great Depression. First, the 1930s expulsion program came on heels of 1920s, a period of Mexican migration characterized by increased permanent settlements of families. Second, the “draining public resources” narrative was effectively used to rationalize expulsion, with social workers and relief agencies taking an active role in enforcement, targeting women and families. Third, the activism of civilian anti-immigrant groups, not just government agents, played a key role in the campaign. Last, the 1930s repatriation occurred during a period of national economic reorganization, just as contemporary events correspond to capitalist realignments at a global level.

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BACK TO THE FUTURE: TRYING TO UNDO THE SETTLEMENT THAT WOMEN CONSTRUCT

In the early 1990s, proponents of immigration restriction successfully switched the anti-immigrant narrative from the “job displacement” and “linguistic and cultural deficiency” arguments to the “draining public resources” argument. What explains the rather abrupt switch in xenophobic rhetoric? On the one hand, the switch reflects exhaustion and the ineffectiveness of the old anti-immigrant narratives. By the early 1990s, California voters readily acknowledged that most jobs held by Mexican immigrants—in the lower end of garment manufacturing, food processing, construction, services, and agriculture—were not desirable jobs. Politicians recognized that the job displacement platform could no longer assure re-election. Similarly, the issues of cultural and linguistic homogeneity, as much as they had inspired patriotism and righteous exclusionist sentiment, were not salient enough to animate restrictionist drives or expulsion (or perhaps these arguments appeared to be too blatantly racist). Viewed from the context of national politics, 187 can be seen as part of a more general racialized attack on the welfare system, where poor women of color are demonized. For these various reasons, the contemporary rationale

behind immigration restriction is no longer jobs and language but the resources that it takes to sustain everyday family life.

The switch in rhetoric reflects more than expedient ploys by political consultants and desperate politicians. It reflects, I believe, a profound historical moment and a muted acknowledgment that there has been a transformation from a predominantly sojourner or temporary pattern of Mexican undocumented migration to a pattern that is reflected in the widespread establishment of Mexican immigrant families and permanent settlement communities throughout California. As Latino immigrant neighborhoods multiplied and expanded beyond rural areas and urban enclaves, growing in even suburban locales, local city councils, business leaders, and the media registered their anxieties with the 187 campaign.

Certainly Mexican immigrant settlement is not a new occurrence. As many as 80,000 to 100,000 Mexicans were well established in the Mexican territory conquered and claimed by the United States in 1848. But Mexican workers who migrated north for work in the late 19th century and later in the first half of the 20th century often did not settle down permanently. The prevailing "ebb and flow" or "revolving door" pattern of labor migration was calibrated by seasonal labor demands, economic recessions, and mass deportations.¹⁰ Although some employers encouraged the immigration of Mexican women and entire families in order to stabilize and expand an available, exploitable work force, many other employers, assisted at times by government-sponsored "bracero programs," recruited only men for an elastic, temporary labor supply, a reserve army of labor that could be discarded when redundant. Employers did not absolutely command the movement of Mexican workers, but employers' needs constructed a particular structure of opportunities that shaped migration.

The end of the contract-labor program in 1964 heralded a new era of growing legal and undocumented Mexican immigration, characterized by the establishment of permanent settlement communities in geographically dispersed areas, and more diversified uses of Mexican labor.¹¹ By the 1970s, both undocumented and legal Mexican immigrants had established a significant number of permanent settlement

communities in the United States, and these have been referred to as “settling-out” processes, as “daughter communities,” and by the unfortunate, but perhaps illustrative, term “sediment” communities.¹² Women and their families played a key part in building these communities. Research conducted during the 1970s and 1980s recorded a significant presence of women in the population of Mexican undocumented immigrants.¹³ While Mexican women participate in seasonal or sojourner undocumented immigration, they concentrate in the settler portion of the undocumented population, where they are evenly represented with men.¹⁴

Since the late 1960s, increasing numbers of Mexican undocumented immigrant men, women, and children have challenged a historical pattern of sojourner migration, and have found themselves, through their daily activities, increasingly committed to building family and community life in the US. Contemporary nativism exhibited in the 187 campaign mobilized support not against immigrant workers or illegal immigration but against the permanent integration of Mexican immigrants into US society. Here, it is worthwhile to analytically contrast sojourner and settler patterns.

Marxist-informed studies of sojourner migration have noted that this pattern is characterized by the physical separation of employment and family home residence as well as by the separation of the costs of maintaining and reproducing labor.¹⁵ These arrangements allow for the maximum exploitation of immigrant workers, who receive the resources necessary for their daily maintenance in the country of destination, but the costs of sustaining and bringing up new generations of workers (or reproduction costs) are borne in their country of origin.

Settlement, as defined by the unification in the new society of family residence and employment, and of the maintenance and reproduction of labor, reverses this arrangement, since it hinges on the presence of immigrant women and entire families. In settlement, the children of immigrant workers—the next generation of workers—are now raised in the US. The resources for daily sustenance derive from the US, and immigrant families discover that they must purchase

these materials necessary to sustain daily family maintenance and reproduction in an economy with higher prices than the one from which they came.

It is important to bring women to the foreground of the settlement discussion by examining how they facilitate—on a daily basis—the joining of labor reproduction and maintenance. Although some scholarship has highlighted the major contributions that women make to urban settlements in Latin American cities, women have an understated presence in the literature on Mexican immigration and settlement. Putting women and their activities at the center of analysis highlights their contributions in three arenas that are key to settlement: creating and helping to sustain permanent, year-round employment; building community life; and provisioning resources for daily family maintenance and reproduction.¹⁶ Below, I draw on research that I conducted in a northern California Mexican immigrant barrio to suggest women's participation in constructing settlement. Because of the focus of this essay, I devote most of the following discussion to the provisioning of resources and the use of public assistance.

First, metropolitan and urban areas are conducive to settlement, because they offer a diverse array of relatively stable, nonseasonal job opportunities, especially for immigrant women.¹⁷ Immigrant women contribute to settlement through their own employment as well as through their physical presence, which allows immigrant men to work at stable jobs without interruptions caused by visits to see their families in Mexico.

Second, women build community through their interaction with one another, and indirectly through the activities of their families, which spawns a multiplicity of ties to other families, friends, and institutions. These strong community ties both emerge from and foster family settlement, since individuals who regularly interact with organizations and other individuals in the US are more likely to remain for an extended period of time. Women are also central to establishing family connections with secondary associations and organizations. Many long-term-resident, undocumented immigrants are directly involved with some formal community or volunteer organization,

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usually ones associated with schools and churches, or self-help groups.

Third, the provisioning of resources necessary to sustain daily life also plays an important role in settlement. Undocumented immigrant families with young children face particularly high living costs, since mothers and their infants require pre- and postnatal care, and children need medical attention, child care, and schooling.¹⁸ The initial stages of settlement require substantial investment, since renting a place and acquiring a minimal amount of furniture, clothing, and utensils are expensive projects.¹⁹ The burden of supporting non-income-earning dependents and unexpected breaks in employment can quickly lead to poverty.

To cope with these circumstances undocumented immigrant families combine strategies. They try to cover expenses by employing as many wage earners as possible, by sharing residences with other families, or by taking in boarders and lodgers who sleep in living rooms and garages. Individuals and families share and borrow resources with close friends, relatives, or *comadres* and *compadres* (cogodparents) in their social network, and they may rely on older women kin for relatively inexpensive child care.

Immigrants share resources, but they live in a consumer-oriented, capitalist market economy. The basic package of necessities—housing, clothing, medical attention, transportation, and household goods—are available primarily on a cash basis. Reciprocity among immigrant kin and friends may stretch scarce resources, but it does not produce needed resources. These must be purchased in a capitalist economy. Due to undocumented immigrant workers' low wages, the high cost of living in the US, and the burden of supporting non-income-earning dependents, family settlement sometimes requires reliance on institutional forms of public and private resources. I have grouped these resources into three categories: credit and installment purchases, assistance from private charities, and public assistance. Through my research I found, as have other researchers, that it is primarily women who become adept at seeking out and utilizing these

resources in the US, and I argue that this is one of the ways that women advance settlement.²⁰

Immigrants are considerably less likely than the native born to receive public assistance. This is especially true of undocumented immigrants, who are excluded as beneficiaries from most programs and who fear apprehension and deportation.²¹ Until passage of proposition 187, undocumented immigrants were technically eligible to receive restricted Medi-Cal coverage for emergency and pregnancy services, and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) services. Under the WIC program, some undocumented immigrant women have received supplemental food and nutrition counseling for their families as well as health-care referrals while pregnant, postpartum, or breast-feeding. Some undocumented immigrant parents who were themselves ineligible for public assistance, lawfully solicited assistance for their US-born children to receive Aid to Families with Dependant Children (AFDC), food stamps, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).²² Massey and his collaborators have shown that Mexican immigrants' public-service utilization generally increases with years of migrant experience, but their study did not reveal the gendered nature of this use.²³

As I assisted Latino immigrants through the amnesty-legalization procedure in the late 1980s, various individuals "confessed" to me that they had at one time—and, almost always, temporarily—received public assistance. Many of them used it as a last resort, and yet they spoke of receiving public benefits with shame and stigma. In almost all instances, these resources were used by women and children. Families with infants and small children are most likely to be in need of assistance, and families with US-citizen children are eligible for some public programs. Because of the sensitive nature of public benefits usage, I did not systematically collect information on the use of public assistance, but I did learn of past instances of the utilization of public resources by families headed by undocumented immigrant parents, usually women. One woman, for example, had accepted AFDC for her young infant during a time when she was not receiving

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money from her husband and when she herself was unable to work due to illness immediately after the birth of her child.

That undocumented immigrants sometimes utilize public assistance first came to my attention during the early months of 1987 when I worked in the San Francisco Bay Area with a grassroots, neighborhood-based group that organized a public informational forum on IRCA and the amnesty-eligibility provisions. After a basic presentation, we divided the 350+ people in attendance into different elementary school classrooms where attorneys addressed special eligibility problems encountered by agricultural workers, by those persons with criminal records, and by prior recipients of public-cash assistance. This last group risked being denied legalization, as immigration adjudicators might determine they would be likely to become a "public charge." The session for past recipients of public assistance was attended by about 30 women, most of whom came with young children. Not one man was in attendance. These are uncomfortable truths but ones that deserve acknowledgment. I believe they also deserve wide broadcast in a new narrative of immigrant rights.

The 187 campaign targets the use of public resources by Latina immigrant women and children, but the implications of the proposition go further, I believe, than expulsion of well-established Mexican and Latino families and communities. Ultimately, the proposition promises to reinstate a more coercive system of labor, one that rests on a more restrictive family life for Mexican and Latino immigrant workers.²⁴ There is certainly a strong historical legacy of US state intervention to maintain limited family life for workers of African, Asian, and Mexican heritage. As Bonnie Thornton Dill observes in her historical overview, "race has been a fundamental criterion determining the kind of work people do . . . and [the] social support provided for their families."²⁵ And in an essay on family, feminism and race, Maxine Baca Zinn notes that in the United States, "groups subordinated in the racial hierarchy are often deprived of access to social institutions that offer supports for family life."²⁶ These analyses, and a brief historical digression, provide important points of departure for understanding the implications of the new xenophobia.

Unlike European immigrants, most people of color in the US were historically incorporated into the nation through coercive systems of labor. These systems—principally slavery and contract labor—were organized in ways that maximized economic productivity. Maximizing labor productivity meant that few supports were made available for sustaining family life. In some cases family life was legislatively denied.

Under the brutality of plantation slavery, African slaves were encouraged to form families as long as they stayed under the control and surveillance of the master. Slave women were regarded as breeders of future slave workers, so they were encouraged to form families. These families, however, faced disruption due to sale or death, and marriages among slaves were not legally recognized. Sexual violence perpetuated by the slave owners on African American slave women went unpunished; parents struggled to see their babies survive childhood (and when those children did survive, they were prohibited from inheriting the personal belongings of their parents).

Both Chinese and Japanese men were initially brought to work in western agriculture as contracted laborers, and exclusion laws were deliberately set in place to restrict the migration of women and entire families. Although male Chinese workers began coming to the US during the mid-19th century for work, it was more than a century before the second generation formed. Although many of these Chinese men in fact hoped to earn and save enough money to return home to China, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and antimiscegenation laws effectively prevented them from having the right to form families in the US. For years, the only Chinese women allowed to enter the US were the wives of wealthy merchants, and prostitutes, who the dominant society counted on to keep order in the Chinese “bachelor” communities. Writing about the Chinese case, Nakano Glenn notes that the profitability of coercive systems of labor rests, in part, on the separation of family life from work life: “The split household form makes possible maximum exploitation of the workers. . . . The labor of prime-age male workers can be bought relatively cheaply, since the cost of reproduction and family maintenance is

borne partially by unpaid subsistence work of women and old people in the home village.”²⁷

This analysis has tremendous relevance for understanding proposition 187. Although the Mexican presence in California precedes the establishment of today’s US-Mexico border, one need only step back a few decades to appreciate the significance of proposition 187. For Mexican workers in the US, the Bracero Program, a contract labor system in effect from 1942 until 1964, institutionalized both sojourner migration and the denial of family life. During those two decades, nearly five million labor contracts were issued to Mexican agricultural workers (most of them men), while many other Mexican men without contracts found seasonal work in the fields. These work stints required long family separations, ranging from months to years to even decades, interspersed with brief visits. Eventually, these men used their developing social contacts to seek jobs in the growing cities and suburbs of postwar California. They were subsequently joined in commercial and residential areas by Mexican women, who also found jobs in diverse economic niches. Today, Mexican women and men are rejecting the long-distance, long-term separation of work life from family and community life. In this process, it is primarily women’s daily activities that are making this more seamless life possible.

The proponents of 187 seem to be operating on the belief that this pattern can and should be reversed. This is like wanting a labor force without human beings. Today, many undocumented immigrant workers and their families have developed strong personal, social, and economic ties in the US. These families are firmly integrated and rooted here. When they’re not working, they go to PTA meetings, root for their kids’ sports teams, get together with extended family, and participate in various church and civic organizations. Moreover, the California economy is not just dependent on the labor of one sex—as it was during the tenure of temporary contract-labor programs—but rather, California appears to be about equally dependent on the labor of Mexican and other Latina immigrant women as it is on men. The remuneration of this labor remains substandard, especially

for the purpose of sustaining family life, and this is why public supports are necessary.

While the outcome of 187 remains gridlocked in the courts, the facility with which it passed in the California ballots has rejuvenated anti-immigrant politics at a national level. Proposition 187's passage prompted national proposals to deny public benefits to legal permanent residents and to strike out the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.²⁸ Proponents of these measures argue that the 14th Amendment, initially introduced to reverse the Dred Scott decision and to guarantee citizenship to the children of slaves, now serves as a magnet for "illegals" to come give birth in the US. Ironically, drawing from my research, activist work, and job experiences, I can think of only one Mexican immigrant woman who told me she was satisfied with her childbirth experience in the US. Mexican immigrant women give birth in the US, because this is where they work and live. However, this is beside the point, as the proposals against the 14th Amendment are less about addressing the motivating factors behind migration and more about enforcing coercive labor that disenfranchises immigrant workers and their family members. Like proposition 187, the proposals to deny public benefits to already legalized immigrants or to deny birth-right citizenship—*jus solis*—to the US-born children of undocumented immigrant workers are fundamentally about further circumscribing as "outsiders" those who are of Latin American, Caribbean, or Asian heritage.

Nations often change the way they define who belongs, but programmatic efforts to exclude membership may lead to countercurrents. Latino immigrant workers in California continue to fuel the ranks of militant trade unions. In Los Angeles, the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union Local 11 is well-known for its creative actions, and Justice for Janitors, a component of the Service Employees International Local 399, claims 8,000 members and recently won a major victory with janitorial contractors.²⁹ Latinos were already the fastest growing group of voters in California, but the anti-immigrant bashers have apparently helped to fuel the ranks of future Latino voters, as legal immigrants rush to become naturalized US citizens.³⁰

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And the backers of 187 have also unwittingly inspired a new corps of progressive, activist, Latino college and high school students.

Thwarting future anti-immigrant assaults and discrimination requires new political narratives and leadership to bring together fragmented activists into broad-based coalitions. The immigrant rights movement, rejuvenated by protest against the Simpson-Rodino bills in the 1980s, is today sustained by the efforts of a committed, hardworking core of legal-service providers, labor organizers, and church and community groups. The obstacles to organizing an effective proactive movement are daunting and too numerous to list here, but one important, missing link that has not been introduced into the debate is the moral issue of mandating the transnational separation of work and family life. We need new immigrant rights narratives that acknowledge and embrace some of the “uncomfortable truths” about undocumented-immigrant usage of public school education and public resources, that stake a claim to these health and educational resources, and that advocate for the right to other very basic human entitlements, such as the right to live with one’s family and community. We also need analysis that counters not only the racist but also the misogynist imagery used in the contemporary anti-immigrant campaign. Passage of proposition 187 codifies an attack on Mexican and other immigrant families, but these people aren’t going home. California is home, and you can’t sunder these roots.

NOTES

I am grateful to Michael Messer for tolerating our daily discussions on the topic of this paper, and I thank Edward Park for inspiring the title. This paper was initially prepared for the conference “Immigration and Ethnic Communities: A Focus on Latinos,” held at the Julian Samora Research Institute at Michigan State University, April 28, 1995. A shorter version will appear in the conference proceedings.

- 1 My conceptualization of xenophobic claims as a series of “stories” is inspired by a talk delivered by Judith Stacey at the Department of Sociology, USC, on March 9, 1995, where she interpreted the family values debate as a series of projected fables. See her paper “Virtual Post-Familism: Social Science and the Campaign for Family Values,” in *New Locations*, ed. George Marcus (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, forthcoming).

- 2 Harold Ezell, "Enough Is More than Enough: We Can't Afford Illegal Immigration," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 23, 1994, p. M5.
- 3 Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929–1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974), p. 126.
- 4 Mexicans did not respond passively to these attacks. Mexican communities organized mutual-aid societies that provided assistance and that protested the massive raids and the boycotts against hiring Mexicans. Mexican government officials, under the leadership of President Lazaro Cardenas (1934–1940), welcomed the *repatriados* by granting land and tools to help them reestablish themselves. Still, in establishing themselves in Mexico, the *repatriados* encountered prejudice and financial and emotional difficulties. See Francisco Balderrama, *In Defense of La Raza: The Los Angeles Mexican Consulate and the Mexican Community, 1929–1936* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982); George C. Kiser and Martha Woody Kiser, ed., *Mexican Workers in the United States* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976); and Hoffman.
- 5 Camille Guerin-Gonzalez, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900–1939* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994).
- 6 In his book, *Becoming Mexican American* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), George Sanchez offers a divergent or qualified view of the *repatriados* departing from Los Angeles. He claims that "the single male migrants to the city were among the first to leave, since they had fewer familial obligations and generally had not invested in real estate. . . . Those that remained in the city in 1933 tended to be members of a family unit, to be property owners, and to be residents in the city for at least a decade." (p. 221) Sanchez states that well-established families were among the most anchored of Mexicans in Los Angeles, but this does not necessarily contradict the conclusion that entire families and women were well-represented among the *repatriados*. On this point see Mercedes Carrerras, *Los Mexicanos que devolvio a ala crisis, 1929–1932* (Mexico City: Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, 1974); Hoffman; and Guerin-Gonzalez, p. 83.
- 7 Carrerras.
- 8 Rosalinda M. Gonzalez, "Chicanas and Mexican Immigrant Families, 1920–1940," in *Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement 1920–1940*, ed. Lois Scharf and Joan M. Jensen (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1983), pp. 59-83.
- 9 Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983).
- 10 Jorge Bustamante, *Espaldas mojadas: Materia prima para le expansion del capital norteamericano, Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios Sociologicos, no. 9* (Mexico City: Colegio de Mexico, 1975); Manuel Garcia y Griego, "The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers to the United States, 1942–64: Antecedents, Operation, and Legacy," in *The Border That Joins: Mexican Migrants and US Responsibility*, ed.

- Peter G. Brown and Henry Shue (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1983), pp. 49–98; and Alejandro Portes and Robert L. Bach, *Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
- 11 Between 1960 and 1980, over 1 million Mexicans legally immigrated to the US, exceeding earlier numbers. The biggest increments, however, were shown in records of apprehensions of the undocumented. During the 1960s the INS recorded 1 million, and in the 1970s over 7 million, arrests of undocumented Mexican immigrants (see *1980 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* [Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1983]). INS figures for apprehensions and deportations do not precisely enumerate undocumented persons, as the figures signify events, not persons. By 1986, when the Immigration Reform and Control Act made legalization available for a segment of the population, demographers estimated that there were approximately 3.1 million undocumented Mexican immigrants in the US. For these figures see Jeffrey S. Passel and Karen A. Woodrow, "Change in the Undocumented Alien Population in the United States, 1979–83," *International Migration Review* 21 (1987): pp. 304–323.
 - 12 Harley L. Browning and Nestor Rodriguez, "The Migration of Mexican Indocumentados as a Settlement Process: Implications for Work," in *Hispanics in the US Economy*, ed. G.J. Borjas and M. Tienda (New York: Institute for Research on Poverty Monograph Series, Academic Press, 1985), pp. 277–297; Wayne Cornelius, "From Sojourners to Settlers: The Changing Profile of Mexican Immigration to the United States," in *US-Mexico Relations: Labor Market Interdependence*, ed. J.A. Bustamante, C.W. Reynolds, and R.A. Hinojosa Ojeda (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992); Douglas Massey, Rafael Alarcon, Jorge Durand, and Hector Gonzalez, *Return to Aztlan: The Social Process of International Migration from Western Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); and Portes and Bach.
 - 13 See, for example, Gilberto Cardenas and Estevan T. Flores, *The Migration and Settlement of Undocumented Women* (Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas Press, 1986); Julia E. Curry-Rodriguez, "Labor Migration and Familial Responsibilities: Experiences of Mexican Women," in *Mexicanas at Work in the United States*, ed. Margarita B. Melville (Houston, TX: Mexican American Studies Monograph No. 5., University of Houston, 1988); Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Rita James Simon and Margo Corona DeLey, "Undocumented Mexican Women: Their Work and Personal Experiences," in *International Migration: The Female Experience*, ed. Rita James Simon and Caroline B. Brettell (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1986), pp. 113–132.
 - 14 On sojourner migration see Sylvia Guendelman and Auristela Perez-Itriago, "Double Lives: The Changing Role of Women in Seasonal Migration," *Women's Studies* 13 (1987): pp. 249–271; Sherrie A. Koussodji and Susan I. Ranney, "The Labor

- Market Experience of Female Migrants: The Case of Temporary Mexican Migration to the US," *International Migration Review* 18 (1984): pp. 1120–1143; and Adela de la Torre, "Hard Choices and Changing Roles among Mexican Migrant Campesinas," in *Building with Our Hands: New Directions in Chicana Studies*, ed. Adela de la Torre and Beatriz M. Pesquera (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 168–180. On women's concentration among settlers see Cardenas and Flores; and Jeffrey S. Passel, "Undocumented Immigration," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (1986): p. 487.
- 15 Michael Burawoy, "The Functions and Reproduction of Migrant Labor: Comparative Material from Southern Africa and the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 81 (1976): pp. 1050–1087; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, Warbride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).
 - 16 Some of these ideas and portions of this article are taken from my *Gendered Transitions*; and "Beyond 'The Longer They Stay' (and Say They Will Stay): Women and Mexican Immigrant Settlement," *Qualitative Sociology* 18 (Jan. 1995): pp. 21–43.
 - 17 Browning and Rodriguez; and Massey.
 - 18 Browning and Rodriguez.
 - 19 Leo Chavez, "Settlers and Sojourners: The Case of Mexicans in California," *Human Organization* 47 (1988): pp. 95–108.
 - 20 A. Chavira, "Tienes Que Ser Valiente: Mexican Migrants in a Midwestern Farm Labor Camp," in *Mexicanas at Work in the United States*, ed. M. B. Melville (Houston, TX: Mexican American Studies Monograph No. 5., University of Houston, 1988).
 - 21 F. Blau, "The Use of Transfer Payments by Immigrants," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 37 (1984): pp. 222–239; Marta Tienda and Leif Jensen, "Immigration and Social Program Participation: Dispelling the Myth of Dependency," *Social Science Research* 15 (1985): pp. 372–400; and Leif Jensen, "Patterns of Immigration and Public Assistance Utilization, 1970–1980," *International Migration Review* 22 (1988): pp. 51–83.
 - 22 National Immigration Law Center, *Guide to Alien Eligibility for Federal Programs*, 2d ed. (Los Angeles: National Immigration Law Center, 1993).
 - 23 Massey et al.
 - 24 In an analysis of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act's public charge exclusions and five-year ban on social services and public benefits, Grace Chang argues that these provisions were formulated to keep Latina immigrant women available for employment in subordinate jobs, principally as nannies and domestic employees (see Grace Chang, "Undocumented Latinas: Welfare Burdens or Beasts of Burden?" *Socialist Review* 23, no. 3 [1994]: pp. 151–185). While this analysis is relevant to the 187 campaign, I believe that the primary impulse toward coercive work hinges on the denial of family life for Mexican and other Latino

- immigrant workers. In fact, as Chang points out, this is exactly what live-in domestic employment requires.
- 25 B.T. Dill, "Our Mothers' Grief: Racial-Ethnic Women and the Maintenance of Families," *Journal of Family History* 13 (1988): pp. 415–431.
 - 26 Maxine Baca Zinn, "Family, Feminism, and Race in America," *Gender and Society* 4 (1990): pp. 68–82.
 - 27 Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Split Household, Small Producer, and Dual Earner: An Analysis of Chinese-American Family Strategies," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 45 (1983): pp. 35–46.
 - 28 Anti-immigrant campaigns do not always succeed in producing their desired effect. Anti-immigrant hysteria and national proposals to restrict the legal rights of permanent legal residents fueled a mad rush to naturalization, especially among Mexicans who are traditionally recalcitrant to naturalize. In the wake of 187's passage, citizenship applications rose throughout the US but most acutely in Los Angeles. During April 1995, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that INS offices in Los Angeles were "receiving about 2,500 citizenship applications daily, a tenfold increase from the rate just 18 months ago" (see Patrick J. McDonnell, "Applications for Citizenship Soar in L.A.," *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 10, 1995, pp. A1, A14). According to one commentator, some people were "being scared into becoming a US citizen" (see George Ramos, "The Fright Factor as an Incentive to Seek Citizenship," *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 10, 1995, p. B3).
 - 29 Eric Mann, "Janitors Win a Measure of Justice," *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 11, 1995, p. B7.
 - 30 Harry Pachon, "A Flirtation with the GOP Turns Cold," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 6, 1994, p. M5.