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ABSTRACT

Passed in November 1994, California's Proposition 187 was intended to deny public school education and health care to undocumented immigrants and their children. The rhetoric of current anti-immigrant hysteria has shifted from that of recent decades and relies on both racist and sexist imagery. This narrative shift, with its emphasis on women and public resources, can be seen as a reaction to the transformation of Mexican migration from a predominantly sojourner pattern to the widespread establishment of Mexican immigrant families and communities throughout California. 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 Latino immigrants and their U.S.-born family members as permanent members of U.S. society. This paper examines the narrative devices that framed and fueled the anti-immigrant 187 campaign and draws some comparisons with expulsion campaigns of the early 1930s. Three types of anti-immigrant narratives focus on job competition, cultural differences, and the drain on government resources. The paper then contrasts sojourner and settler patterns of Mexican immigration and examines coercive systems of labor and their implications for family life. Slavery and past U.S. systems of foreign contract labor, in effect, outlawed family life. It is suggested that contemporary xenophobic rhetoric assumes that Latino immigrant work life should be severed from family and community life. Contains 50 references. (Author/SV)

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Unpacking 187: Targeting Mejicanas

by: Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo

From *Immigration and Ethnic Communities: A Focus on Latinos*

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Unpacking 187: Targeting Mejicanas

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo

It is an unfortunate, but nevertheless historical truism that economic downturns spark nativism and anti-immigrant campaigns. But California's Proposition 187, which is intended to deny public school education and health care to undocumented immigrants and their children, appears to be more than just a replay of the past. An examination of the language used by contemporary proponents of 187, and an analysis of recent Mexican immigration patterns lead me to argue two points. First, the rhetoric animating the current wave of anti-immigrant hysteria reflects a distinctive shift in emphasis from what we have seen in recent decades, approximated perhaps only by that aimed at Mexicans and Mexican-Americans during the Great Depression. Unlike the xenophobia of recent decades, the current rhetoric relies on both racist and sexist imagery.

Second, this narrative shift — and the emphasis on women and public resources — can be seen as a reaction to the transformation of Mexican migration from a predominantly sojourner or temporary pattern, to the widespread establishment of Mexican immigrant families and communities throughout California. Contemporary xenophobia targets women and children because it is they who are central to making settlement happen. Viewed in this manner, the 187 campaign is less about illegal immigration and more about rejecting Latino immigrants and their U.S.-born family members as permanent members of U.S. society.

I begin by examining the narrative devices that framed and fueled the anti-immigrant 187 campaign, and I draw some comparisons with the expulsion campaigns of the early 1930s. Next, I look at patterns in Mexican immigration to the United States, contrasting sojourner and settler migration patterns, and examining coercive systems of labor and their implications for family organization. Under slavery, and systems of contract labor in the United States, family life was in effect, legislatively outlawed. I suggest that contemporary xenophobic rhetoric is animated, in part, by the assumption that Latino immigrant work life should be severed from family and community life.

ANTI-IMMIGRANT NARRATIVES

Language is a powerful political tool, organizing thought, emotions and actions. The postmodern turn in the social sciences has put the spot light on forms of language, representation, and symbols, entertaining the notion that multiple subjectivities and fragmented readings result from any given text, and suggesting, in some cases, that "the text" is the reality.

While I agree that verbal or representational constructs do not directly correspond to political or economic realities, I maintain a modernist's skepticism about the disjuncture between the two realms. I suggest that the forms and assumptions exhibited in anti-immigrant narrative reflect racialized anxieties prompted by current immigration patterns. In our media-driven society, these images and "stories" saturate experience, funneling public perception so that the stories often become more real than either experience or statistical documentation. People reinterpret their experiences and any other evidence into the framework of the dominant narratives. These narratives, however, do not appear out of thin air. They reflect, in an admittedly distorted fashion, contemporary political and economic reconfigurations.

Historically, xenophobic narrative in the United States has revolved around three claims — Economic, Cultural Differences, and Government Resources Drain.[1] While the three claims or stories are typically used in tandem, in any particular anti-immigrant campaign, usually one rises to the foreground. (See the next page for a summary of these "stories.")

These are caricature-like renditions, but 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.

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[1] My conceptualization of xenophobic claims as a series of "stories" is inspired by a talk delivered by Judith Stacey at the University of Southern California on March 9, 1995. Stacey views the national family values debate as a series of projected fables (Stacey forthcoming).

Anti-Immigrant Narratives

Job Competition

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

Cultural Differences

Immigrants again originate in poor, backward countries, usually rural areas. With them they bring their cultural traditions, their cuisine, their foreign language, their different religious beliefs and practices, and perhaps, their distinctive racial features and colors. When they blend into the mainstream, their cultural traditions and practices contribute "spice" to one huge caldron. The flavor, however, sours when they don't learn English and fail to pick up their new society's ways. When they remain distinctive and unassimilable, they threaten to tear apart the whole.

The Government Resources Drain

Immigrants once again hail from impoverished places. They come to the United States 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 system 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 don't pay taxes. Their youth drop out of school, their daughters getting pregnant and their sons getting into gangs and filling the jails. Here, immigrants and their children drain the government coffers fed by U.S. citizen taxpayers.

The anti-immigrant rhetoric has changed dramatically in the last decade. As recently as the early 1980s, the principal claim fueling immigration restriction was that undocumented immigrants steal jobs from U.S. citizens and depress wages. From the late 1970s, when employer sanctions 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. Especially during the recession of the early 1980s, politicians and newspaper editorials commonly scapegoated immigrants for causing lagging economic conditions. Anti-immigrant groups such as the Federation of Americans for Immigration Reform, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, never a neutral voice in these national discussions, fueled the fires. One of the INS's more memorable efforts was when then western regional director David Ilchert orchestrated "Operation Jobs," a series of work place raids followed by sensationalistic press conferences announcing the number of jobs — and the corresponding hourly rates — opened by deportations.

During this era, restrictionist lobby groups achieved national prominence, as 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. While the job competition line dominated, the "cultural differences" story, with its focus on literacy and linguistic abilities also mobilized anti-immigrant sentiment. Witness the campaign of the well-funded national organization, U.S. English, against the implementation of bilingual education programs and election ballots.

Mimicking the allegations voiced by their predecessors about immigrants from southern and Eastern Europe in the early 20th century, these restrictionists argued that the new immigrants from Asia and Latin America were after all "too different" and ultimately unassimilable.[2] Continuing immigration signaled, as Senator Alan K. Simpson, a major proponent of restrictionist legislation, put it, the cultural and linguistic "Quebecization" of the United States.

The prevalence of the economic and cultural stories peaked in November 1986, when IRCA was passed and when California voted to make English the official language of the 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 or language and culture. Replacing the hardworking, but impoverished immigrant workers and the culturally and linguistically "different" newcomers as the protagonists in this scenario are poor, pregnant immigrant women who, with their children, come to the United States to give birth in publicly-financed county hospitals, allowing their newborns to become U.S. citizens, and all their children to receive public assistance, medical care, and public school education. These new immigrants and their children constitute a rapidly expanding underclass draining education and medical resources in the United States. As Harold Ezell, the former INS commissioner and co-author of 187, put it in his Jess Jackson-inspired parlance, "How many illegals can we educate, medicate, compensate, and incarcerate before California goes bankrupt?"

The new campaign's focus on welfare dependency and the targeting of women and children reflects less about immigrants' actual use of public assistance, I argue, and more about the public's recognition and anxiety about the rapidly increasing Latino immigrant population in California. Latino settlement outcomes are inescapably etched throughout California, and visible to even casual observers. In Los Angeles, the most widely listened-to radio station aimed at a primarily Mexican immigrant audience, plays the newly popular *banda* music.[3] The expansion of Spanish-language marketing, mass media, and bilingual education, and the reapportionment of voting districts all testify to the flourishing Latino, mostly Mexican, communities.

PARALLELS WITH THE 1920s AND 1930s

The contemporary xenophobic narrative departs from earlier 20th century anti-immigrant narratives, approaching arguments not heard so vociferously since the Great Depression, when the public resources claims, added to the the economic claims, offered the rationale for deportation.

The Great Depression prompted the expulsion to Mexico of as many as half a million people, a group that included Mexican undocumented immigrants, legal permanent residents, and U.S. citizens of Mexican descent (Hoffman 1974, p. 126). Anti-immigrant citizens groups, allegations about Mexicans' use of public relief, and the active intervention of social workers and relief agencies played an important part in this mass deportation and "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 (Kiser and Kiser 1979, Hoffman 1974).[4] Thousands of Mexican families with their accumulated possessions loaded automobiles or boarded trains bound for the border.

Guerin-Gonzalez (1994) recounts how the director of the Los Angeles Citizens' Committee on Coordination of Unemployment Relief worked to organize the removal of Mexicans from

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[2] In 1988, for example, an internal memo circulated by John Tanton, then chair of U.S. English, surfaced in the press. It warned of the undesirable traits among Latino immigrants, such as "'the tradition of the *mordida* (bribe),' 'low educability,' Catholicism, which could 'pitch out the separation of church and state,' and high birthrates." After Tanton's financial contributions to a eugenics foundation were discovered, he resigned from U.S. English (Draper and Jimenez 1992, p. 93).

[3] *Banda* is a Mexican "cowboy" style of music dating back to 19th Century German polka influences in the state of Sinaloa.

[4] Mexicans did not respond passively to these attacks. Mexican communities organized mutual-aid societies provided assistance and protested the massive raids and the boycotts against hiring Mexicans. And 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 (Balderrama 1982). Still, in establishing themselves in Mexico, the *repatriados* encountered prejudice, and financial and emotional difficulties (Sanchez 1993).

California during the early 1930s. This citizens group was involved in implementing raids with police and federal immigration agents, but it also coordinated efforts with social workers and public relief agencies. For example, working with the Los Angeles Department of Public Charities, the group persuaded legal Mexican immigrants and U.S. citizens of Mexican heritage who received public assistance to repatriate voluntarily or be deported. According to Guerin-Gonzalez (p. 83), these efforts targeted in particular, settled immigrants and Mexican-Americans.[5] The deportees, reflecting the increase in family migration during the 1920s, included substantial numbers of women and children. In fact, Carrerras (1974) reports that between 1931 and 1933, two-thirds of the deportees were women. 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 (Gonzalez 1983).

The 1930s expulsion campaign followed a period when families made up a much larger portion of Mexican immigration than ever before. The economic disruption and violence of the Mexican revolution (1910-19), and of the Cristero Rebellion in the central western area of Mexico (1926-29), prompted the migration of people with strong motivation to remain in the United States. During the 1920s, the booming U.S. 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 (Romo 1983).

There are at least four points of congruity between the present and the events of the Great Depression:

- The 1930s expulsion program came on heels of a period of Mexican migration characterized by increasing permanent settlement of families.
- 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.
- The activism of civilian anti-immigrant groups, not just government agents, played a key role in the campaign.
- The 1930s repatriation occurred during a period of national economic reorganization, just as contemporary events correspond to capitalist realignments at a global level.

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 "draining public resources." Perhaps the sudden switch reflects exhaustion and ineffectiveness of the old anti-immigrant narratives. By the early 1990s, California voters readily acknowledged that most new immigrant jobs — in the lower end of garment manufacturing, food processing, construction, services and agriculture — were not really very 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, especially the language-cultural one, appeared too overtly 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.

So, for various reasons, the stated rationale behind immigration restriction is no longer jobs and language, but the resources that it takes to sustain everyday family life. And the rhetorical shift 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 widespread establishment of Latino immigrant families and permanent settlement communities throughout California. As Latino immigrant neighborhoods multiplied and expanded beyond rural areas and urban enclaves, growing even in suburban locales, local city councils, business leaders, and the media registered their anxieties with the 187 campaign.

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[5] Sanchez (1993) offers a divergent or qualified view of the *repatriados* departing Los Angeles. He claims that (p. 221): "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." Sanchez states that well-established families were among the most anchored of Mexicans in Los Angeles, but this does not necessarily contradict the conclusion (Carrerras 1974, Hoffman 1976, Guerin-Gonzalez 1994) that entire families and women were well-represented among the repatriados.

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 set down permanent roots. The prevailing "ebb and flow" or "revolving door" pattern of labor migration was calibrated by seasonal labor demands, economic recessions and mass deportations (Bustamante 1975, Garcia y Griego 1983, Portes and Bach 1985, Cockcroft 1986). 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.

By the 1970s, both undocumented and legal Mexican immigrants had established a significant number of permanent settlement communities in the United States (Browning and Rodriguez 1985). These have been referred to as "settling-out" processes (Cornelius 1992), as "daughter communities" (Massey et al. 1987), and by the unfortunate, but perhaps illustrative, term sediment communities (Portes and Bach 1985). Women and families played a key part in building these communities (Browning and Rodriguez 1985). Research conducted during the 1970s and 1980s recorded a significant presence of women in the population of Mexican undocumented immigrants.[6] While Mexican women also participate in seasonal or sojourner undocumented immigration (Guendelman and Perez-Itriaga 1987, Koussodji and Ranney 1984, de la Torre 1993), they concentrate in the settler portion of the undocumented population, where they are evenly represented with men (Cardenas and Flores 1986, Passel 1986).

Since the late 1960s, increasing numbers of Mexican undocumented immigrant men, women and children have challenged the historical pattern of sojourner migration, and have found themselves, through their daily activities, increasingly committed to building family and community life in the United States. Contemporary nativism, exhibited in the 187 campaign, mobilized support not so much against immigrant workers or illegal immigration, as against the permanent integration of Mexican immigrants into U.S. society.

SOJOURNER AND SETTLER PATTERNS CONTRASTED

Marxist-informed studies have noted that sojourner migration 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 (Burawoy 1976, Glenn 1983, 1986). These separations allow for the maximum exploitation of immigrant workers, who receive resources necessary for their daily maintenance in the country of destination, while 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 raised in the United States. Immigrant families soon discover that they must purchase resources necessary to sustain daily family life and reproduction at considerably higher prices than those in the economy from which they came.

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[6] See, for example, Cardenas and Flores (1986), Curry-Rodriguez (1988), Fernandez-Kelly and Garcia (1990), Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), Solorzano-Torres (1987), Simon and DeLey (1986), and Villar (1990).

TARGETING MEJICANAS

Although scholarship highlights the major contributions that women make to urban settlements in Latin American cities (Logan 1990), 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: (1) creating and helping to sustain permanent, year-round employment, (2) building community life, and (3) provisioning resources for daily family maintenance and reproduction. Below, I draw on research that I conducted in a northern California Mexican immigrant barrio to suggest women's participation in constructing settlement.[7] Because of the focus of this paper, I emphasize their provisioning of resources and use of public assistance.

First, metropolitan and urban areas are conducive to settlement because they offer a diverse array of relatively stable, non-seasonal job opportunities for immigrant women (Browning and Rodriguez 1985, Massey et al. 1987). So, besides immigrant women's physical presence that allows their men to work at stable jobs without the interruptions of family visits to Mexico, they contribute importantly to settlement by their own employment.

Second, women build community through their interaction with one another, and, indirectly, through the activities of their families, thus spawning a multiplicity of ties to other families, friends, and institutions. These strong community ties both emerge from and foster family settlement. Those who regularly interact with organizations and other people are much more likely to remain in the United States. 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 organizations, usually ones associated with schools, churches, and 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 post-natal care, and children need medical attention, child care, and schooling (Browning and Rodriguez 1985). The initial stages of settlement require substantial investment; renting a place, and getting together a minimal amount of furniture, clothing and utensils are expensive projects (Chavez 1988, 1991; Villar 1990). 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 resources with close friends, relatives, or *comadres* and *compadres* (co-godparents) 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, household goods — are available primarily on a cash basis. Reciprocity among immigrant kin and friends may stretch scarce resources, but it does *not* produce them. They must be purchased in a capitalist economy.

Due to undocumented immigrant workers' low wages, the high cost of living in the United States, and the burden of supporting non-income earning dependents, family settlement sometimes requires reliance on institutional forms of public and private resources, including credit and installment purchases, assistance from private charities, and public assistance. Through my research I found, as have other researchers (Chavira 1988, O'Conner 1990), that it is primarily women who become adept at utilizing and seeking out these resources in the United States, and I argue that this is one of the ways that women advance settlement.

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 (Blau 1984, Tienda and Jensen 1985, Jensen 1988). 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 WIC, some undocumented immigrant women have received supplemental food and nutrition counseling for their families, as well as referrals to health care while pregnant, postpartum, or breast-feeding. Some undocumented immigrant parents who were themselves ineligible for public assistance, lawfully solicited assistance for their U.S.-born children to receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children, food stamps, and Social Security Insurance (National Immigrant Law Center 1993).[8]

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[7] Some of these ideas and portions of this article are taken from Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994, 1995).

PROPOSITION 187: THE DESIRE FOR A LABOR FORCE WITHOUT HUMAN BEINGS

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 restricted family life for Latino immigrant workers.

In an analysis of IRCA's public charge exclusions and five-year ban on social services and public benefits, Chang (1994) argues that these provisions were formulated to keep immigrant women available for employment in subordinate jobs. While this thrust may also lie behind the 187 campaign, I believe that the impulse of the proposition goes much further than this: Coercive work hinges on the denial of family life for immigrant workers. There is certainly a strong historical legacy of U.S. intervention to maintain limited family life for workers of African, Asian, and Mexican heritage. As Dill (1994, p. 166) states in her historical overview, "race has been a fundamental criterion determining the kind of work people do... and social support provided for their families." And in an essay on family, feminism and race, Zinn (1990, p. 74) 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." These analyses, and a brief historical digression, provide an important point of departure for understanding the implications of the new xenophobia.

As I assisted Latino immigrants through the amnesty-legalization procedure in the late 1980s, various persons "confessed" to me that they had at one time — and, almost always, temporarily — received public assistance. In almost all instances, it was for women and children. Families with infants and small children are most likely to be in need of assistance, and families with U.S. citizen children are eligible for some public programs. Because of the sensitive nature of public benefits usage, I did not systematically collect information, but I did learn of past instances of use of public assistance 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 money from her husband, and when she herself was unable to work due to illness immediately after the birth of her child.

Unlike European immigrants, most people of color in the United States 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. And maximizing labor productivity meant that few supports were made available for sustaining family life. In some cases, family life was legislatively denied.

African Americans

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 (Dill 1994). Slave women, regarded as breeders of future slave workers, were encouraged to form families. These families, however, faced disruption due to sale or death, while marriages among slaves were not legally recognized. Sexual violence perpetuated by the masters on African American slave women went unpunished, and parents struggled to see their babies survive childhood. (When those children did survive, they were prohibited from inheriting the personal belongings of their parents.)

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[8] Massey and his collaborators (1987) showed that Mexican immigrants' public service utilization generally increases with more years of migrant experience, but they did not reveal the gendered nature of this use.

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 group that organized a public informational forum on IRCA and the amnesty eligibility provisions. After a basic presentation, we divided the 350+ attendees into three elementary school classrooms where attorneys addressed special eligibility problems encountered by (1) agricultural workers, (2) persons with criminal records, and (3) prior recipients of public cash assistance. This third 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 uncomfortable truths about poverty and gender deserve a wide broadcast, for they are at the heart of a new narrative about immigrant rights.

Asians

Both Chinese and Japanese men were initially brought to work in western agriculture as contracted laborers. Exclusion laws were deliberately set in place to restrict the migration of women and entire families. Although male Chinese workers began coming to the United States during the mid-1800s for work, it was more than a century before the second generation formed (Dill 1994). The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and anti-miscegenation laws effectively prevented them from having the right to form families in the United States. For years, the only Chinese women allowed to enter the country were the wives of wealthy merchants or prostitutes whom the dominant society counted on to keep order in the Chinese "bachelor" communities (Chan 1991). Writing about the Chinese case, Glenn (1983, pgs. 38-39) 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."

This history of coercive labor and family-denial has tremendous relevance for understanding Proposition 1987. Although the Mexican presence in California long precedes the establishment of today's U.S.-Mexico border, one need only step back a few decades to appreciate the significance of the sojourner system in California and other states. For Mexican workers in the United States, 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, and even decades, interspersed with brief visits (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

Eventually, these men used their developing social contacts to seek jobs in the growing cities and suburbs of post-war 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, and, in this process, it is primarily the 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. But today, many undocumented immigrant workers and their families have developed strong personal, social, and economic ties in the United States. 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 — rather, it appears to be about as equally dependent on the labor of Latina immigrant women as it is on men. But 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 grid-locked in the courts, the facility with which it passed in the California ballots has rejuvenated anti-immigrant politics at a national level. Looming on the horizon are proposals to deny public benefits to legal permanent residents, and to strike out the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.[9] 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 United States. However, 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 U.S.-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 counter currents. 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 (Mann 1995). Latinos were already the fastest growing group of voters in California (Pachon 1994), but the immigrant bashers have apparently helped to fuel the ranks of future Latino voters, as legal immigrants rush to naturalize (McDonnell 1995). And the backers of 187 have also unwittingly inspired a new corps of progressive, activist, Latino college and high school students.

To thwart future anti-immigrant assaults and discrimination, we need new political narratives and leadership that 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. But it's been working on the defensive.

The obstacles to organizing an effective pro-active 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, and that advocate for the right to some 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 these roots can't be sundered.

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[9] 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 are fueling a mad rush to naturalization, especially among Mexicans who are traditionally recalcitrant to naturalize. Citizenship applications are rising throughout the nation, but most acutely in Los Angeles. During April 1995, the *Los Angeles Times* reports that INS offices in Los Angeles were "receiving about 2,500 citizenship applications daily, a tenfold increase from the rate just 18 months ago" (McDonnell,1995). According to one commentator, some people are "being scared into becoming a U.S. citizen" (Ramos, 1995).

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