

**Carlos Ulises  
Decena and  
Margaret Gray**

“You need to think about the point of view of someone who leaves home to go several thousand miles to find a working-class job, knowing that when you cross the border you leave your rights behind. You will have found a place to work, but you are not able to vote, not able to organize, and, very literally, not able to hang out on the street. At home, you get the signal you are needed here, but when you get here you are also not wanted.” This is how filmmaker Alex Rivera, in an interview in this issue, describes the paradox of contemporary Latino/a labor migration. As long as immigrant workers stay behind the scenes, their brawn and skills are highly appreciated. However, their presence on street corners, in schools, parks, and stores has become highly contentious for urbanites as well as for suburban and exurban populations who believed they had left behind tensions over race, ethnicity, and class when they moved out of the metropolis.

Looking at turn-of-the-century U.S. social and economic transformations through immigration, as we do in this special issue, demands a rethinking of some well-established explanatory frameworks. Arguments developed in the 1990s about economic restructuring posit that the shifts from manufacturing to finance and specialized services in cities like New York have transformed them into command points of the global economy.<sup>1</sup> These metropolitan centers display increased economic polarization between a higher class of knowledge and professional service workers and a low-skill service sector staffed by minorities and immigrants who cater to the lifestyle needs of the former. A focus on the full scope of restructuring in New York State suggests a need to expand the urban focus of the scholarship on neoliberal change to suburban and rural locations.

By linking this expanded scale of economic restructuring with an analysis of changing immigrant power relations, social locations, and resources, this special issue takes a complex look at populations that are often denied heterogeneity in the public mind. The essays here focus on the diversity of Latino/a immigrants’ experiences through cultural, familial, economic, and political practices. Furthermore, the authors challenge the centrality of cities in studies of migration and socioeconomic change

through essays on immigrants in urban, suburban, and rural locations.<sup>2</sup> Taken as a whole, the issue maps out how new immigrants, their advocates, public officials, as well as old destination community members (including “old” Latinos/as—Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Mexicans) respond to the daily existence of this new “border” in their northeastern backyards.

New immigrants’ lives are shaped by economic and government policies that have contributed to the establishment of an international division of labor *within* the United States. Federal border policies—especially in their maintenance of ambiguities in immigrant legal status—serve the interests of capital by creating and reproducing a disposable, cheap labor force.<sup>3</sup> Before the passage of NAFTA (North America Free Trade Agreement), the U.S. and Mexican governments promoted the agreement as a remedy for Mexico-U.S. undocumented immigration. It was expected that NAFTA would create jobs that would keep Mexicans home. However, in the decade after NAFTA was signed, Mexico-U.S. undocumented immigration doubled, and millions of Mexican peasants were displaced to urban areas in Mexico. Demetrios Papademetriou of the Migration Policy Institute argues that the likely factors for the increase include the U.S. economic boom of the 1990s, structural adjustment policies in Mexico, a demographic increase in Mexico, and historically strong migration networks.<sup>4</sup> As Raymond Mohl explains in his examination of the U.S. South, these shifts undermined existing relations of production and, in turn, reshaped regional labor markets.<sup>5</sup>

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) also spurred immigration through granting resident status to several million undocumented persons. The new residents were able to secure better jobs in the formal economy and bring their families to the United States, while several million undocumented workers replaced them in the “gray” labor market. The IRCA was also designed to deter further immigration by setting penalties for employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers. Latino/a immigration was transformed from a regional to a national phenomenon.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the points of destination shifted from urban centers to suburban and rural locations in the United States, where new demands for labor emerged. In 1996, one of the most damaging pieces of legislation for immigrants, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), was passed. The IIRIRA increased deportable offenses and removed judicial review for charged immigrants. It also streamlined the process for immigration hearings—this meant asylum was granted quicker, but applicants had less time to prepare their cases. While failing to curb rates of immigration, these policies have contributed to the creation of an unprotected class of workers.

In rural areas and cities, the undocumented can easily disappear—in rural areas, due to their isolation and in the latter, because of cities’ multiethnic nature and population density. In suburban, mostly white communities, these workers are very visible, yet that visibility is often accompanied by residents’ fear of difference and refusal to accept demographic change. Attention to this friction, in turn, tends to obscure the ways that new immigrants have difficulty adjusting as well. Suburbanites’ reactions to immigration along with the growing fortification (and in some parts of the country, “gating”) of the suburbs need to be understood, as Kristen Maher suggests, primarily within the historical evolution of suburbs as solutions to the ills associated with urban centers. However, Maher also diagnoses the transformation of the household division of labor into a “household service economy,” where the domestic needs once fulfilled by women and children have become part of the work filled by the available pool of local workers, many of them immigrants.<sup>7</sup>

Domestic labor, including cleaning, child care, lawn care, landscaping, cooking, and small home repairs, is no longer the duty of middle-class parents and homeowners. The middle-class, suburban household has been restructured as more women work full time and as youth, who previously took on domestic chores, focus on scholarly achievement, sports, and internships. Overworked and overcommitted, suburbanites look to hire support to mitigate the effects of late capitalism. While the economic boom of the 1990s drove much of the need for house cleaners, restaurant workers, and other service workers, the demand for low-wage and largely immigrant workers is now part of a middle-class lifestyle. What has faded is the canonical picture of Cold War–era suburban homogeneity, sustained by the women and children who performed domestic labor.

In general, Latino/a immigrants arriving in New York State are not settling in the manicured subdivisions of suburbia, but rather in working-class towns and villages. Their neighbors, by and large, are not of the class that hires service workers. These towns are seeing a native discomfort with immigrant presence, which is described in immigrant advocate James E. Claffey’s analysis of the tensions between Latino male workers and locals in Farmingville, Long Island. The presence of day laborers in suburban locations provokes tensions precisely because male workers cannot be invisible if they are to find work and survive. For these immigrants, labor and daily life are not easy to separate into public and private spheres. Anti-immigrant responses often fail to account for the interdependencies of workers, employers, and consumers. Instead, as Claffey shows, backlash relies on the rhetoric of “invasion” to mobilize and spread panic among community members and immigrants alike and, in some cases, to exacerbate tensions in ways that generate violent incidents.

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Moving from the suburban to the rural, Pilar Parra and Max Pfeffer reveal that the “Latinization of farmworkers” overlaps with the tendency of many of these workers to settle in towns and villages near where they work. Rural upstate communities have experienced their own restructuring as industry and out-migration have depressed local economies. Longtime residents are now experiencing mixed reactions to the establishment of Latinos/as in downtown areas. The trend of recent rural migrants to settle (as opposed to migrating back and forth between sending and receiving communities) suggests that their needs are changing: along with accommodating more families that reunite, there are health, language, and education needs. Interactions with former farmworkers, many of whom have also settled in rural areas and who are usually African American and Mexican, offer opportunities for alliances and coalitions. Furthermore, the new immigrant experience in rural New York can be much more challenging than in other places. As Melanie Nicholson describes, life and work in sparsely populated towns with little public transportation can be lonely and isolating. Unlike their urban and suburban counterparts, rural immigrants may not have the same access to peer networks, community service organizations, advocacy groups, or even options for group religious practice.

Discussions of East Coast immigration have traditionally centered on New York City and other urban centers while neglecting rural and suburban areas. While host to a trickle of Mexican and Central American immigrants for decades, areas outside of New York City have recently begun facing immigrant issues common to traditional receiving regions—expanding laws for or against immigrants, community anti-immigrant sentiment, and immigrant community formation. Indeed, there are many areas in the state where immigration is a phenomenon of only the last decade. Recent works such as Corey Dolgon’s *The End of the Hamptons* demonstrate that Latino/a immigrants are key players in local dramas that exemplify ongoing struggles throughout the country.<sup>8</sup> This special issue adds to this discussion of new Latinos/as by extending our analysis beyond urban areas and elite enclaves, such as the Hamptons, to look at immigrant daily struggles throughout the state.

Typically, regional studies are defined by the homogeneity of internal characteristics and are positioned for comparisons with other regions. In contrast, the contributors to this issue emphasize heterogeneity within the New York State region. In examining and anticipating the engagement of new immigrants within different communities, contributors address questions about how immigrants view their own experiences—of gender, legal status, community-building, work—as part of immigration and settlement in New York as a whole.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, while our focus is on New

York, the scenarios described in these pages are national in scope, as similar patterns of migration, settlement, and contention are occurring around the country.

That new Latinos/as are changing New York State is evidenced not just by official census statistics, but also by informal indicators such as the growing presence (including in small, formerly white rural towns) of Mexican grocery stores and Latino/a enrollment in schools. In many ways, New York City is no longer the state's dominant site of immigration. As immigration to New York from Mexico and Central America outpaces immigration from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, the term Latino/a takes on new meanings, and border politics, nativism, and economic restructuring converge on a local level with national implications. The border is no longer located outside the northeast United States. The growth of Latino/a immigration throughout the United States challenges us to face the fact that the border is, literally, next door.

We propose three ways to conceptualize the border next door, which correspond to scholarly work and to the themes addressed in the essays that follow. First, in many New York communities, our Latin American neighbors are increasingly becoming our Latino/a next-door neighbors. Second, for immigrants, the distance between here and there is mediated by technological advances in communication, transportation, personal financial transactions, and maturing transnational networks. Finally, for immigrants—particularly the undocumented—everyday transactions expose their vulnerability, as employers, local police, medical providers, and even community college representatives stand in for INS agents in the matter of checking for one's legal status.

Given the current adverse political climate for immigrants, we feel that the phrase “the border next door” is appropriate because it evokes a range of meanings. These include surveillance and militarization, hostility and violence, clandestinity and invisibility, and individual and family sacrifice. At the same time, the phrase also references the formation of transnational communities, racial and ethnic diversity, and the exchange of culture and ideas. In a Foucauldian sense, the border, like Nicholas DeGenova's understanding of “illegality,” is a “spatialized condition” and a flexible site between nation-state and migrant.<sup>10</sup> It is played out through daily exchanges in places as far away from the Mexico-U.S. border as eastern Long Island, where it can be difficult for an immigrant to secure a bank account, drivers' license, or phone line, but not a job.

The metaphor of the border, as Chicana activist, artist, and critic Gloria Anzaldúa reminds us in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, always requires negotiating the uncomfortable proximity of self and other.<sup>11</sup> The border next door highlights those proximities and discom-

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forts—for example, in the ways that migration and settlement challenge received wisdom about what it means to be a woman and what it means to be a man. The first three essays bring attention to how gender and sexuality intersect with larger structural dynamics to shape immigrant relationships with each other and with U.S. residents—as individuals and as groups. The authors, who focus as much on men as on women, expose the blurred borders between public and private and masculine and feminine in personal, economic, and casual exchanges. Their analyses underscore the varied consequences of migration and settlement.

Melanie Nicholson, for example, examines the irony of transnational mothers' position as caregivers to the U.S. children of their employers. This is part of the chain of transnational interdependence whereby immigrant women delegate the labor of caring for their own children, in their sending communities, to their parents or hired caregivers. Carlos Decena, Michele Shedlin, and Angela Martínez look at how men and women construct gender in relation to ethnic/racial and national lines. Earning their own income may signal the “empowerment” of immigrant women, but Decena, Shedlin, and Martínez remind us that taking this idea at face value obscures the ways in which relations of gender and sexuality have been and continue to be contested in immigrant communities. Carolyn Pinedo Turnovsky writes about the street corner's function as a social space for immigrant men. By investigating spaces where men can interact with other men, share in resources, and look for work, Turnovsky delineates the perils of thinking about street corners as strictly economic spaces. It is because these corners give immigrant men a sense of community, she suggests, that we must pay more attention to how they connect to one another as well as their employers.

While many of these essays are in conversation with transnational studies, the authors have varying ideas of what “transnational” means. Their individual engagements with this concept demonstrate how fluid the border is and how it affects the lives of new immigrants in New York. For Melanie Nicholson, for instance, motherhood is analyzed through the benefits of transnational resources—income in the United States and extended families offering child care in the sending country—as well as the challenges and pain transnational mothers face despite the ease of communication. Nicholson challenges the tendency in some transnational scholarship to address these developments in a celebratory fashion while accounting for the specific social location of women in New York economies and the kind of transnational monetary power that they wield. For others, transnationalism represents the field of political possibility. Alyshia Gálvez suggests that the juxtaposition of transnational religious and secular discourses can result in the mobilization of Mexican immi-

grants through strategies attentive to the political potential of the religious figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe. She shows that a symbol strongly tied to national belonging in Mexico can acquire new and powerful meanings, as legacies of Latin American liberation theology and its political critiques cross the border to anchor claims for the rights and humanity of immigrants.

Furthermore, filmmaker Alex Rivera argues, in his interview with Decena and Gray, that unlike formulations of the transnational that center on nostalgia around the sending country as an ethnic origin-story, scholars need to rethink transnationalism as a way of connecting the present with the future by highlighting the way that immigrants see their own realities. Decena, Shedlin, and Martínez call for studies of gender and sexuality in immigrant communities to be transnational *and* comparative if they are to challenge stereotypes about Latino/a masculinities and femininities. They argue that Latino/a narratives need to be scrutinized in ways attentive to transnational and local dynamics among different ethnic and racial groups.

The ethnographic studies in these pages—focused mostly on Central Americans and Mexicans—show that host communities and the newcomers are finding the adjustment to increased immigration difficult, painful, and slow. As the essays suggest, community development and integration, coupled with economic restructuring, demand a rethinking of immigrant incorporation that is focused on the heterogeneity of new Latino/a populations. Moreover, by underlining the tensions and the ways in which new and old immigrant groups construct one another, the contributors offer a complex picture of the relations among groups traditionally categorized as Latino.

Our collection also adds a diversity of perspectives from authors working with immigrant communities in different capacities and with diverse target audiences. Some of our authors have been involved in promoting an understanding of the needs of immigrants (Claffey; Parra and Pfeffer) and at the frontlines of community struggles to appease existing tensions (Claffey). Others have been establishing local responses for the incorporation of Latino/a immigrants, particularly by stimulating student participation with new immigrants (Nicholson; Gray). We also bring the knowledge and experience of advocacy work for undocumented workers (Gray) and expertise in applied public health (Decena, Shedlin, and Martínez). Filmmaker Alex Rivera uses visual media technologies and testimony to produce work that challenges progressive intellectuals and activists to put transnational social fields at the center of political agendas with immigrants. We believe that these and other complementary perspectives are needed not only to understand the heterogeneity of immigrant

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experiences, but also to galvanize the diverse audiences necessary for the development of a progressive agenda on immigration.

Melanie Nicholson examines transnational motherhood through ethnographic research in the Hudson Valley. She argues that women separated from their children are not performing normative understandings of motherhood, but they are fulfilling their parental obligations and being “good mothers” through characteristic displays of sacrifice—in the most specific sense, by securing economic benefits. She connects Latina immigrant mothering strategies with those of other poor women of color in the United States. Nicholson also exposes the economic reality of immigration from the perspective of leaving home and adjusting to the harsh realities of low-wage work—U.S. jobs are a fundamental avenue for fulfilling immigrant women’s economic obligations of parenthood. The border that separates women from their children results in lonely, isolated, and overworked women without a sense of community, while their children thrive. However, with inexpensive phone cards, these mothers engage in offshore disciplining and decision making. Nicholson pushes us to blur the boundaries between public and private and work and home to see the challenges and resources available to transnational mothers.

Carlos Decena, Michele G. Shedlin, and Angela Martínez highlight the ways in which masculinities and femininities emerge in relation to each other in the construction of immigrant identities in New York. Moving away from narratives of “liberated” women and “passive” men, they illustrate the intersection of legal status, class, motherhood, and relationships with other ethnic groups that shape gender articulations. While new immigrants benefit from the decline of community moral surveillance, they experience a vast increase in local, state, and national surveillance. The resulting fear intersects with gender, as legal status acts as a trump factor instilling fear in new immigrants in unspoken, implicit, and direct ways that prey on their vulnerabilities—fear of job loss and, increasingly, of detention and deportation. This not only makes men and women docile employees, for the most part, but it also increases their reluctance to report crime and seek medical help—particularly in the case of women who are victims of domestic violence. The authors make recommendations not only for how scholars may address these concerns, but also for service providers.

Carolyn Pinedo Turnovsky, in her ethnography of day laborers, revisits the street corner—a site central to much scholarship on immigration and settlement of earlier moments of U.S. history. She examines immigrant community development, identification, emotional support, and economic and social opportunities. Day laborers do not find their opportunities in



the same places as incorporated citizens. From the outsider perspective, the street corner could easily be construed in a simplistic or instrumentalist manner—a site for unproductive loitering and finding work. However, Turnovsky exposes the social practices and meanings of this site along with day laborers' need for “membership.” Her investigation of their loneliness and the social functions of the site begs a rethinking of what incorporation means. Her essay suggests that part of what makes the street corner attractive is precisely the informality of the relations that it spawns and that “formalizing” such spaces can be detrimental. She challenges us to understand the value of informal spaces for the men who use them as well as to reevaluate the limits between formal and informal social spaces. On the corner, employment, legal status, class, gender, community, membership, and survival strategies are analyzed as acting on men's identity development. Turnovsky's essay also cautions that solutions such as formal shape-up sites may overlook these men's priorities.

James E. Claffey, a program officer at the Long Island Community Foundation, offers a history and analysis of the tensions around immigration in Farmingville, Long Island. Work and labor characterize many of the daily issues that Latino/a immigrants face, including those of autonomy, power, surveillance, legal status, identity, class, public versus private experiences, and the promise and disappointment of the U.S. legal system. Almost all of these issues have collided in Farmingville. Claffey explains the Farmingville scenarios—including the brutal beating of two day laborers—not as isolated incidents but as manifestations of ongoing community struggles. His social justice perspective offers a sense of what it means to advocate for immigrants given these conditions. Contextualizing his essay in immigration, economic restructuring, community-immigrant interactions, and government response, Claffey exposes the story of immigrant backlash and the development of mediating organizations and coalitions on both sides of the issues. In the current political climate when immigrants and their advocates are taking defensive positions over rights negotiations, it is difficult to imagine successful immigrant community development and integration. Yet the subtext shows that, in fact, the coordinated response to immigrant concerns has spurred a network focused on immigrant organizing and empowerment strategies.

Pilar Parra and Max Pfeffer, through a comprehensive study in five communities, explain the challenges and constraints faced by immigrant farmworkers when they settle in rural New York. Residents of rural towns, who are unaccustomed to immigrant or even minority communities, are recently experiencing dramatic changes in their towns. The authors examine community response and immigrant integration through analyses of how towns and immigrants are affected by class and educational

differences, language barriers, legal status, and access to services. The changes in demographics in these towns are largely due to the shift of agricultural workers from migrant to settled. This essay is in conversation not only with academics and service providers, but also with members of rural towns, to offer a better understanding of these newcomers. Parra and Pfeffer offer insights into immigrant strategies for civic, economic, and social incorporation—from opening a bank account to purchasing a home—and show that connections between immigrants and settled community members are vital for immigrant integration. Moreover, immigrant families display better integration than single immigrants. This essay sets up the groundwork for the successful development of mixed communities and for the integration of new immigrants.

Alyshia Gálvez examines the utility of advocacy on behalf of immigrants hinged on two unlikely bedfellows: the Virgin of Guadalupe and New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer. Through the dual prisms of religious humanitarianism and labor law, she examines how these two discourses are not necessarily in opposition to each other. Rather, their juxtaposition in this essay signals their potential convergence for productive organizing. Gálvez examines how workers demand increased regulation of their labor protections. Advocacy organizations, taking the lead from Attorney General Spitzer, are breaking new ground with immigrants by pressing legal claims for rights based on New York and federal labor law. The author also shows how immigrants, who often rely on religious traditions to find solace in the United States, find comfort and an advocate in the Virgin of Guadalupe, as her divine power takes on new meanings through its articulation in the rhetoric of church-based immigrant groups. In this way, transnational religious beliefs cross and blur the border while influencing immigrant community formation and action. As in years past, religion is a great organizer, but its potential to empower immigrants depends on the ability of those working on their behalf to discern its potential allegiances with other social spheres, such as law.

Alex Rivera, in an interview with Decena and Gray, reflects on his documentary film *The Sixth Section*, about the mechanics and contradictions of a Newburgh, New York–based hometown association. Focused on how members of Grupo Unión fund and implement projects in their small town of Boquerón, Mexico, Rivera provokes progressives to take more seriously transnational mobilizations. Grupo Unión’s actions are about immigrant power—to help those left behind, to develop the spaces they define as home (in the United States and in Mexico), to pressure the Mexican government into action, and to establish new U.S.-based communities that respond to their daily needs. The pervasiveness—particularly in organizing efforts by second-generation activists—of the framing of home

countries as “in the past” and the United States as “in the future” tends to ignore the meanings people give to sending capital to their home cities and/or villages. Rivera argues that organizing and acting transnationally emerges from the need to keep ongoing relationships alive. Acting transnationally, as Rivera suggests, hometown associations are not only about sending money “home” but also about accruing transnational power — new immigrants exercise power where they can.

## Notes

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1. Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) and *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991). Also relevant in this discussion is John Mollenkopf and Manuel Castells, eds., *Dual City: Restructuring New York* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1991).

2. Scholars have certainly been addressing nonurban areas of Latino/a immigration. For example, see Sarah Mahler, *American Dreaming: Immigrant Life on the Margins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Arthur D. Murphy, Colleen Blanchard, and Jennifer A. Hill, eds., *Latino Workers in the Contemporary South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press and Southern Anthropological Society, 2001); Ann V. Millard and Jorge Chapa, *Apple Pie and Enchiladas: Latino Newcomers in the Rural Midwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); Víctor Zúñiga and Rubén Hernández-León, eds., *New Destinations: Mexican Immigration in the United States* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005); Jennifer Gordon, *Suburban Sweatshops: The Fight for Immigrant Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

3. Nicholas P. DeGenova, “Migrant ‘Illegality’ and Deportability in Everyday Life,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 419–47.

4. Demetrios Papademetriou, “The Shifting Expectations of Free Trade and Migration,” in *NAFTA’s Promise and Reality: Lessons from Mexico for the Hemisphere* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003): 39–59.

5. Raymond A. Mohl, “Globalization, Latinization, and the Nuevo New South,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 22 (2003): 31–66.

6. Douglas Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Migration in an Era of Economic Integration* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002).

7. Kristen Hill Maher, “Workers and Strangers: The Household Service Economy and the Landscape of Suburban Fear,” *Urban Affairs Review* 38 (2003): 751–86.

8. See Corey Dolgon, *The End of the Hamptons: Scenes from the Class Struggle in America’s Paradise* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

9. Important works in this literature include Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila, eds., *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) and Gabriel Haslip-Viera and Sherrie Bayer, eds., *Latinos in New York: Communities in Transition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996).

10. DeGenova, “Migrant ‘Illegality’ and Deportability in Everyday Life,” 439.

11. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1999).