MIGRATION AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Bipluralism and the Western Democratic State

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Abstract

The dawn of the twenty-first century confronts Western democracies with a racialized class problem. The globalization of capitalism—mass geographic movement of peoples, capital, and markets on scales unprecedented since the Atlantic slave trade—has brought poor migrants into affluent nations. Migrants' descendants are replicating conditions associated with poor Blacks. Affluent Western democracies are hurtling toward biplural stratification defined by a multiracial underclass. Racialized class stratification stems from economic policies. Capitalist democracies' edifice of social policies—sanctioning expectations of rising prosperity, welfare "safety nets" for minimal consumption, low-wage migration policies—erroneously assumed that jobs and wages would continuously grow to absorb expanding populations. Overuse of low-wage migration policies commodified work relations in low-skilled jobs. Acculturated to demand affluent living standards and egalitarian human relations, educationally deprived descendants of migrants find commodified work regimens repellent. Despite large populations of jobless natives, some maintain that affluent democracies need more migrants to do the jobs that natives won't do. But jobless youth are alienated and prone to agency, as riots in England, the United States, and, more recently, France and other areas of Europe suggest. To avert the solidification of biplural societies, social policy must slow rates of migration from low living-standard economies, expand minimum wages and income transfers to working-citizen households, and provide documented immigrants clear avenues to citizenship. This agenda is more likely to succeed in the United States, where minority voting strength is gathering considerable momentum.

Keywords: Migration, Immigration, Labor Commodification, Stratification, Race, Class, Western Democracy

INTRODUCTION

During 2006, Professional Grounds, Inc., a landscaping and grounds maintenance company located in Springfield, Virginia, a Washington, D.C., suburb, ran a help-

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wanted ad for landscaper and grounds keeper jobs. The starting wage during 2006 was $7.74 per hour. The company has placed a similar ad for many years, expecting no one in the local labor market to respond. Professional Grounds is seldom disappointed; most years it receives zero responses, and a high response rate may mean as few as three inquiries. The company would likely be very disappointed if it actually received many responses to its job advertisement. By law, it would be required to offer jobs to able-bodied U.S. citizens.

Professional Grounds recruits its actual labor force of twenty-three "guest-workers" from Mexico and Central America through the United States Department of Labor's H2A Program. The H2A guest worker program allows domestic employers who cannot hire enough workers in their local labor market at "prevailing wages" to import foreign migrant[1] workers on temporary work visas. Similar to most other employers recruiting labor through the H2A Program, Professional Grounds' annual help-wanted ad is unlikely to be a serious job offer; the advertisement in a local newspaper, followed by an inadequate response from local workers, is required by the Department of Labor (DOL) as evidence that there is indeed too little local labor to supply the company's needs. Strictly speaking, the H2A program is not supposed to displace domestic laborers from jobs. However, this would seem to be a convenient fiction. The key words in the DOL regulations are *prevailing wages*. The wages advertised are those that a firm expects to pay guest workers. The low wages offered underpin the prevailing ideology captured by the well-worn phrase "Immigrants fill the jobs native workers won't do."

Bill Trimmer, President of Professional Grounds, buys into the ideology wholeheartedly. Asked if "native-born Americans" would apply for "doubled wages," he responds, "I don't think it's a wage situation. It's the type of work and the nature of the work. It's hard, backbreaking work." Trimmer's additional comments about the jobless native workers who do not respond to his ad further illuminated America's ideology of unwanted jobs: "I think we're a more affluent society now. They expect more. Everybody expects more." He added, "I have contracts, and they want an affordable price, too" (Kalita and Williams, 2006, p. A1).

What we shall term the *ideology of unwanted jobs* is a fulcrum for contemporary race and class relations in advanced industrial Western democracies. On this fulcrum turn many of the issues determining the nature of social stratification within such societies' bottom strata. One of these issues is the cleavage in contemporary class interests implicit in Trimmer's reference to his need to keep prices low. Benefits flowing from the services of migrant workers to owners of capital and middle-class consumers pit the interests of affluent classes against the economic interests of less-educated natives. To retain benefits—including a host of services, from house cleaning, car washing, and the construction trades, to restaurant foods and farm products—without justifying them on so crass a foundation as profit and low prices, affluent Westerners believe less-educated native-born populations have internalized a distorted work ethic.

One man's attribution of a poor work ethic can be explained by the object of derision as a principled refusal to submit to exploitation. This conflict of *Weltanschauungen* tears at the fabric of collective identity and communication in advanced capitalist democracies. The tear is all the more dangerous and difficult to repair when the population pitted against the economic interests of much of society disproportionately comprises ethnic minorities. For, in the absence of a collective identity and communication between groups, arrival at consensual policies and social healing are far more difficult.

This most fundamental of questions: *Who are the men and women languishing at the bottom of the social stratum and how do they earn their living?* says much about the

nature of a society. In the United States, these men and women disproportionately represent distinct populations of minorities who do work shunned by the majority; or else they avoid such work by engaging in stigmatized activities, such as crime and welfare. Despite progress against a legacy of racial division, today, as in the past, lines of social stratification sharply punctuated along hues of skin color clearly remain. The issue resonates in the United States in terms of a long and checkered history concerning the place of peoples of color in a society that, for all its recent reticence, is hurtling full speed toward a bipluralist society of *haves* and *have-nots*; more than ever, the *have-nots* are becoming a multiracial underclass. Contemporary migration looms large in the unfolding of this trajectory, because contemporary migration is forcefully revising the texture of U.S. pluralism.

During the past half century, the globalization of world capitalism—mass geographic movement of peoples, capital, and markets on a scale unprecedented since the peak of the Atlantic slave trade—has wrought effects that blatantly challenge the terms in which Americans discuss race and class. The ethnic and racial landscape of the United States has become so complex that one who speaks today only in terms of Blacks and Whites risks irrelevancy. Moreover, in the twenty-first century, among advanced Western democracies, the United States is no longer alone in confronting a racialized class problem. Estimates place the number of noncitizens residing in the European Community countries at over 25 million (Eurostat 2006). Many migrants and descendants of migrants residing in Western Europe are from Islamic cultures in North Africa and Turkey. Their numbers are spread over the continent: something like 5 million (primarily North African Arabs) live in France, 3 million (mostly Turks) in Germany, 1.7 million in Britain, and 900,000 in Holland.

Western Europe and the United States have something else in common: the ideology of unwanted jobs. Despite a large population of unassimilated and less-educated jobless youth, the European Commission says that Europe needs more guest workers to do the jobs Europeans won't do. The jobless youth are bitter and often prone to agency, as illustrated by the past riots of a multiplicity of young people of color in England and more recent riots by North African Muslims in France, as well as rising violence and crime in other areas of Europe. We might well ask: *What is going on?* Can the United States and Europe learn anything from one another about the origins of these problems and their likely effects on democracy and pluralism in Western societies?

DEMOCRACY AND THE POVERTY DILEMMA

It is a commonplace that a society's distributive rules work to the benefit of its most privileged members. Slaves, serfs, outcasts, and the lowest classes, in general, are often alienated from the institutions and ideologies supporting their subordinate status. Throughout history, most governments have eschewed the unanimous endorsement of a social compact in favor of the more humble (and practical) objective of social stability. To achieve this goal, ruling elites merely required social conformity from the poor, not the commitment of their minds and hearts. To their credit, since approximately the mid-twentieth century, industrialized Western democracies have aspired to the Socratic proposition that a just society earns its members' voluntary consent to its laws and rules by imputing to citizens rights and obligations conceived in accordance with its social structure and distributive rules (Plato [1969], pp. 91–95).

Western democracies quickly learned that voluntary participation poses a central dilemma to social stability. Democracies stress the importance of individual freedoms and educational opportunities. The publicly provided resources deemed nec-

essary to approach those goals have raised the poorest classes to levels of knowledge and worldly sophistication unparalleled in history. Why should the people of these lowest strata, who receive the least benefits from the distributive rules of the social order, embrace those rules and voluntarily consent to social obligations? An implicit social compact requires fluid lines of upward mobility, giving young people self-enforcing incentives to conform to behavioral norms of public sobriety, industriousness, and communal notions of personal responsibility.

To address this problem, Western democracies turned to three solutions: (1) strong cultural sanctioning of economic growth to support rising expectations of ever-increasing personal prosperity, (2) the welfare state's provision of a "safety net" to ensure minimal levels of material well-being, and (3) low-wage migration policies designed to meet employers' demand for low-cost workers in the least desirable jobs. The edifice of social policy rested on the assumption that the continuing growth of new jobs at rising wages would absorb the expanding populations.

During roughly the last quarter of the twentieth century, an unexpected slowdown in economic growth, followed by an acceleration of technological innovation, the worldwide migration of labor, and rising international competition, sharply reduced the wages of less-skilled workers in advanced economies. With the social compact broken, diminished expectations of opportunity accentuated working-class people's awareness of social inequality. Heightened awareness of inequality created social crises of great severity. Underlying these state crises are conditions of social anomie characterized by large numbers of young people actively rejecting traditional social norms toward work, family, and community. Immensely better educated and more sophisticated than their counterparts in previous generations, the least advantaged working classes increasingly refuse to accept low-wage, dead-end careers. Rising crime and fiscal strains on the welfare state are the bitter fruits of these conditions. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, a profusion of antisocial behaviors have threatened established norms of conduct and social stability in the world's affluent societies. Such behaviors are grounded in poor people's rejection of the legitimacy of the functional roles assigned to them in postindustrial societies.

Flight from recognized norms of social conduct and a rejection of civil and religious authority on the scale observed is indicative of nihilism—understood here as aimless existence predicated on the belief that one's life is meaningless and that social values rest on unjust foundations. Nihilism in contemporary, advanced capitalist nations is a product of deindustrialization and the resultant rootlessness inhering in social structures unable to provide emerging generations with the institutional foundations needed to realize the aspirations sanctioned by the broader society.

Foremost among the broken institutional structures have been inadequate educational systems, which prepare working-class children for blue-collar jobs that no longer exist. In most wealthy Western nations, shrinkage of their respective economy's industrial base after 1973 caused a shortage of stable well-paying jobs for men and women without college degrees. In Great Britain, for example, by the late 1970s, diminished expectations about job prospects were pervasive among the young. "Anxiety about employment prospects" was a major feature of the way adolescents viewed their future; the resultant loss of direction among many English youths manifested itself in psychological states of pessimism, inactivity, and feelings of inadequacy (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 1982; Kitwood 1980). In 1982, the British punk rock group The Clash, referring to British deindustrialization but speaking to millions of youth aware of drastically declining working-class job prospects in Western economies, restated the situation in forceful, nonsocial scientific terms: "This is your paradise. There ain't no need for ya."

The Clash spoke to a generation of alienated and disillusioned youth. Their political and social criticism resonated well with the feelings of young working-class men and women who during the decade of the seventies had experienced the collapse of their aspirations for prosperous working-class careers. A decade later, the American gangsta rap group Above the Law (1994), spoke to another generation of alienated and disillusioned youth. Rapping in a hardcore urban style, Above the Law's free use of slang (metaphor, simile, and synecdoche) renders the meaning of its lyrics less accessible to most English speakers, but the group's message was similar to that of The Clash; both indicted the deterioration in the quality of jobs available to working-class youth. "If you're workin' from 9 to 5 on the old plantation, in this U.S. nation, that's Uncle Sam's curse." Above the Law's political and social criticism resonated well with young men and women surviving the hellish zones of urban decay created in the wake of a quarter century of economic decline. The adoption of countercultural lifestyles by millions of disaffected youth throughout Western industrialized nations emerged as one of the more significant social consequences of global economic change. Along with sharply declining earnings and rising and persistent joblessness among the less skilled, there have been large increases in poverty, decreases in marriage rates, increases in out-of-wedlock birthrates, and increasing rates of criminal and terrorist activity (Bean 1994; Maddison 1987).

These conditions exist, in some form or another, in most of the West's advanced economies. In North America and Western Europe, the lower ranks of the working classes disproportionately comprise second-generation progeny of low-socioeconomic status (SES) ethnic-minority migrants. Generally, these second generations are stigmatized and unassimilated in their home nations. For decades, they received nearly exclusive attention in the cities of the United States, where the descendants of Black migrants from the rural South were housed a nation apart in the poorest neighborhoods of cities. There, the most serious departure from behavioral norms has been widespread rejection of the common expectation that nonelderly, able-bodied men and women work for a living. This expectation, considered by many to be an obligatory condition of public respect, underpins people's belief that the nonworking chronically poor are qualitatively very different from the poor working migrants who now fill low-skilled jobs. Optimists foresee the long-term consequences of contemporary migration in terms of an overwhelming proportion of migrants' descendants excelling in school and experiencing upward social mobility. Failing that, optimists hope that the second generation will retain their parents' orientation toward low-wage work.

The southern migrant grandparents of the current Black urban poor were also hardworking members of the working poor. That uncomfortable fact is but one clue that the optimists grossly underestimate the deleterious effects of a class-biased social structure on underprivileged children. The interaction of second-rate schooling and low-wage labor policies socializes such children to replicate the social conditions of the inner-city African American poor. A significant proportion, possibly a majority of the immediate descendants of contemporary less-educated migrants into Western democracies, will experience long-term urban poverty. They will also exhibit high rates of chronic joblessness, out-of-wedlock births, and incarceration.

THE DESCENT TOWARD BIPLURALISM

Poor migrants, often only a generation or less removed from agrarian social roots, bring to urban centers two crucial values. First, their strong work ethic, ingrained

during a materially harsh socialization, has prepared them to do relatively well in more affluent economies paying wages well above those previously experienced. Second, and just as important, is their ambivalence toward schooling. This ambivalence rests on the purely instrumental valuation of schooling as a means of enhancing earning capacity. This instrumental view of schooling is accompanied by an indifference sometimes bordering on hostility toward formal education, perceived to have no obvious connection to the world of work.

Both of these value orientations are reinforced by conditions existing in the host region. Migrants valuing wage and employment opportunities in the host country—relative to the vastly inferior conditions they left—seize the host area's menial low-wage jobs with alacrity. In turn, lacking the language skills needed to interpret the complex templates of urban bureaucracies, less-educated migrant parents shun schools whose middle-class officials patronize them, instilling them with feelings of inferiority. Segregated into ethnic enclaves of residence and employment, migrants do not develop the social capital needed to guide children along paths of upward mobility in deindustrialized economies. The lack of two forms of social capital thus proves fatal. Confined to low-skill, low-pay employment, migrants' strong and well-connected job networks are also quite thin and cannot aid second-generation children in finding more remunerative employment. Simultaneously, the state fails to provide saleable industrial training. The state also fails to restructure schools adequately through compensatory financing and away from instruction methods designed for middle-class family norms. These factors combine with parents' low educational attainment and ambivalence toward formal schooling to undermine children's chances to attain the quantity and quality of education needed to escape low-wage employment tracks.

Even so, the second generation's educational preparation far surpasses that of their parents. In particular, the schools, media, and popular culture ensure that ideas of democracy and equality of treatment and opportunity become internalized among a second generation that recognizes that their society's practices fall far short of their principles. Their socialization to the host nation's standards of living and internalization of democratic ideas of equality incline second generations to reject parents' attitudes toward hard menial work for low pay. Nor does the second generation accept employers' decisions that they are fit only for such jobs. Poorly educated by contemporary standards and unwilling to accept the social identities defined by menial occupations and poverty ascribed to their parents, these people become alienated from the only economic functions for which the market system finds them suitable. Languishing in a quasi state of citizenship, postmigrant generations become a social problem.

The millions of migrants and their descendants living in Western Europe have grown out of the few hundred thousand who arrived in France and Germany as guest workers during the 1950s and 1960s. The original cohorts were primarily young men with minimal levels of education. European guest workers, similar to U.S. H2A workers, and unlike regular immigrants, were admitted through special job programs with little or no prospect of becoming citizens or permanent residents. Short-term programs prohibited workers from bringing their families, but when European migrant visas were lengthened to several years, families were allowed to enter with the workers. Current U.S. H2A visas are generally limited to a work season, and families do not enter. During the initial postwar decades, most European governments made no attempt to integrate guest workers into society; although they eventually were entitled to social benefits, citizenship was denied. The children of migrants were allowed to attend schools, but there was little effort to address their special needs (Rist 1979). Much like the minority populations of color in the United States,

European migrant minority populations resided in communities separated from natives and began constructing parallel societies.

Similar to the United States, Western Europe enjoyed a golden age of economic growth and prosperity for more than a quarter century following World War II. Countries such as France, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden welcomed migrants as guest workers. The golden age ended during the 1970s, but the numbers of migrants continued to rise, even after an appreciable slowdown in income growth and good jobs. Many of the new arrivals came without visas or were able to submerge themselves within the large ethnic enclaves once their visas had expired. It should go without saying that many migrants and their children have advanced and prospered in the new countries, both as entrepreneurs and through education. Nevertheless, the children and grandchildren of the original migrants are often blamed for much of the social distress that places increasing strain on the beleaguered welfare state (Castles 1986; Maddison 1987).

The symptoms are all too familiar to observers of the social scene throughout the United States over the past several decades. Explosive growth in the number and size of urban poverty areas is commonplace. France's original immigrants often moved into suburbs such as Savigny-sur-Orge and Raincy near Paris. The housing in these areas is substandard by French standards and descendants of North African and Arab migrants continually complain that they face racism and discrimination, including frequent identity checks and charges of police harassment. A 2005 audit study testing whether minorities faced job discrimination found that applicants with a recognizable French name were six times more likely to receive a job interview than were applicants with a foreign-sounding name (Castles 1985; Leiken 2005; Melvin 2005). High European unemployment rates are even higher in such areas, tipping over 40% in some suburbs. Such pathological joblessness has the usual consequences, as Nadim, a thirty-nine-year-old sign painter of Pakistani descent working in Paris, explains: "Most of the young generation doesn't have jobs. . . They are standing around here. They have drugs. When they are not busy, the devil is always there" (Melvin 2005, p. 1).

Poverty areas are dotted with poorly performing schools populated by young ethnic-minority children whose legal status is frequently ambiguous. Sometimes they are entitled to social services such as health care, even if not considered citizens. Neukölln, a borough of Berlin and one of Germany's largest minority areas, reportedly spends 60% of its budget on welfare payments. Some 70% of the children in the district do not complete high school. At Rütli, a vocational high school in Neukölln with a student body that is made up of 80% migrants or children of migrants, no student from the 2005 graduating class moved on to vocational training or found an apprenticeship, which are the usual methods of getting well-paying, blue-collar jobs in Germany (Nickerson 2006).

These brief descriptions of poverty and despair in European minority areas could have been accounts of conditions among second- and later-generation children of Asian migrants to places such as Camden, New Jersey; Racine, Wisconsin; Lowell, Massachusetts; or New Orleans, Louisiana. They just as closely describe conditions among second- and later-generation Latinos in many U.S. cities such as Alexandria, Virginia. Alexandria is a city resting on the banks of the Potomac just across from Washington, D.C. Located about ten minutes by car from Springfield, Virginia, it is the nearest moderate-sized city situated in the local labor market of Professional Grounds. The company (described above) imports guest workers from Mexico and El Salvador into Springfield because it cannot find local workers willing to work at its "prevailing wage," despite the fact that its local area is teeming with large numbers of recent Latino migrants and their children.

Alienated from both the worldview of parents still immersed in a foreign culture and a "home" country that often looks upon them as outsiders and intruders, second-generation, low-skill migrant populations often find themselves rootless. In a globalizing world of diverse cultures, millions of youth nonetheless experience similar social structures. Increasingly, the worldview of alienated youth bereft of social moorings in structurally similar, industrially advanced Western democracies converge toward the nihilistic hopelessness of malcontented, poorly educated, resentful young people who are alienated from social institutions that devalue their worth.

INTERNAL LOGIC OF LABOR COMMODIFICATION VIA LOW-SKILL MIGRATION

The widespread refusal of malcontented youth to engage with the labor market is heavily structured by deterioration in low-wage working conditions. Such deterioration has been engineered by employer-lobbied state policies aimed at disciplining low-skill labor into pliant production inputs. Western industrial democracies foster this objective through low-skill migration policies, the effects of which commodify labor-management relations in less-skilled labor markets. Commodification of labor-management relations is to be understood in a Weberian (1978) sense to constitute employment relations founded completely upon rationalization—objective rules promoting efficiency (e.g., least-cost principles and rigid hierarchies of authority). To the extent that the employer is able to unilaterally impose such rationalization of the employment relation on employees lacking both basic civil rights and the mediating influence of collective bargaining, the employment relation is stripped of essential features of human social relations and becomes commodified.

The intent to commodify the employment relationship through recruitment of migrant workers is clear from the German Federal Republic's Foreigners Law of 1965:

> Foreigners enjoy all basic rights, except the basic rights of freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of movement and free choice of occupation, place of work and education, and protection from extradition abroad (Castles 1985, p. 522).

Two decades after this act, the German state still officially regarded ethnic minorities as temporary residents with second-class rights. However, despite the intent to commodify the work relationship between migrant and employer by stripping workers of their means to resist management demands, over time, migrant political resistance altered the situation. Illegal migration, violation of visa permits, and political action, including protest, ensured that the reality of minorities' civil status would lead Germany to recognize that many, if not most, had become immigrants and were no longer temporary migrants. As the Swiss writer Max Frisch summed up the ongoing situation throughout Western Europe, "We wanted workers, we got people" (Castles 1985, p. 526; Nickerson 2006).

The original German guest worker program represents a particularly explicit intent to mollify employers' demands for cheap, docile labor. Although less transparent, much contemporary recruitment of migrant workers (such as the U.S. H2A program) can have similar effects. When less-educated migrant workers lacking the important legal protections of citizenship arrive under guest worker programs that tie them to a single employer, their freedom is constrained. Similarly, lax enforcement of undocumented migration creates large numbers of undocumented workers who fear detection from

authorities and are ripe for exploitation. Such conditions provide employers with foreign workers willing to work at far lower compensation and under conditions unacceptable to native workers of comparable education and skill.

The U.S. meat-packing industry is a salient example of the commodification of labor-management relations through unregulated, large-scale migration of less-educated workers. A dirty, physically demanding, and often dangerous occupation, meat-packing jobs attract only the least educated members of the workforce. Today, foreign migrants dominate the workforce, and the undocumented are a significant factor. The Immigration and Naturalization Service estimates that, during the late 1990s, undocumented workers comprised 25% of the labor in meat-packing plants in Iowa and Nebraska. Migrant labor has also come to dominate the poultry industry in the southern states. For example, about three-fourths of the workers in the poultry plants located in northwest Arkansas are Latino migrants. The vast majority of the remaining workers are from Southeast Asia and the Marshall Islands. Until the 1980s, the meat-packing workforce was mainly native. Changes in labor organization and compensation during the past quarter century illustrate the effects of the industry's transition to migrant labor from less affluent economies.

During the seventies and early eighties, nearly one-half (46%) of the industry's workers were unionized and paid a wage premium. During 1982, the base wage rate of the largest union was $10.69 per hour ($22.33 per hour in terms of 2006 inflation-adjusted prices). But during the 1980s the mass migration of workers from Southeast Asia, Mexico, and Central America allowed firms to demand workers to accept wage cuts. The decade was characterized with extremely turbulent employer-union relations, as manifested by strikes and corporate attacks on unions. During the period from 1983 to 1986, there were 158 work stoppages, involving some 40,000 workers in cattle and hog plants. By 1987, the union percentage of the work force had been cut to 21%, and wages were down to the $8 to $9 range in both union and nonunion plants. A sharp decrease in workers' health and safety accompanied the collapse of the unions. The meat-packing industry already had the highest rates of occupational injuries and illness of all U.S. industries, but on-the-job illness and injury rates peaked in 1991 at 45.5 per 100 workers. Jobs in the industry deteriorated so badly that only the steady influx of cheap migrant labor compensated firms for extraordinarily high turnover rates, reaching as high as 100% annually at some plants (MacDonald et al., 1999, pp. 15–16). Such turnover rates suggest that working conditions were intolerable even for migrants.

Socialized to aspire to affluent living standards and egalitarian relations, second generations refuse to work under these commodified conditions. Their refusal ultimately causes low-skill migration policies to fail. Those native-born who fail to attain education or training that would equip them for higher-status jobs are left only with similar work options to those of their migrant parents. This means that the second generation must compete with newly arriving migrants! Each new migrant cohort which finds the wages and working conditions of the host nation preferable to the conditions they left behind displaces the children of previous cohorts. Popular culture tends to valorize the migrants and vilify the native-born for not sharing the migrants' "work ethic." Given the vested interests of the middle class in cheap labor, popular culture also ignores the growing number of migrant progeny, who, by refusing to compete with new migrants, show that the "work ethic" is not due to some inherent cultural or ethnic trait.

The logic of this process is that employers seeking ever higher profits become like the proverbial dog chasing its tail. The high profits based on low wages and commodified conditions of work can only be maintained by a constant flow of freshly

arriving migrants willing to work under conditions better than those available at home but considered oppressive by anyone acculturated to the host region. Thus, in the United States, for example, low-wage service and agricultural employers for the past sixty years have continued to pass the baton of praise to successive streams of ethnic or racial migrant groups. Southern African Americans outperformed northern-born Blacks; when southern rural migration dried up in 1970, Blacks began losing jobs to Puerto Ricans from the Islands, who later passed the baton to South East Asians, who in turn were losing to Mexican and Central American migrants as the twentieth century neared its end.

SEEKING A BALANCE THROUGH TIGHTER LABOR MARKETS

The unchecked and unregulated flow of low-skill migrants prevents tight labor markets. Tight labor markets, by which is meant market conditions where joblessness is low and laborers have many employers from which to choose, empower workers. Under tight labor market conditions, employees are able to resist being treated as if they were undifferentiated production inputs devoid of consciousness, and thereby rendered commodities to whom employers can virtually dictate conditions of work in a unilateral fashion. In the absence of migration, employers must offer better compensation and working conditions to attract native workers. By increasing the supply of less-educated workers, migration policies reduce employers' need to improve the wages, benefits, and overall working conditions available to the lowest-skilled blue-collar and service-sector workers.

Low-wage labor conditions, unbecoming of an affluent democratic society, exist because, in the present climate of migrant bashing, no one cares that employers are able to run roughshod over illegal workers. There is no support for social and political action to protect illegal workers. But this is shortsighted; ultimately, if working conditions are allowed to deteriorate to levels where migrants are exploited, then all labor for which the migrants compete becomes exploited as well. This is true even if natives' exploitation manifests itself in the form of joblessness and poverty. The terms of the debate must be changed so as to generate a desire to protect the integrity of the nation's low-wage labor markets and the citizens working in them from conditions inconsistent with the standards of living and values of justice characteristic of affluent, representative democracies.

POLICY DIRECTIONS

It is crucial that democratic states adopt social policies that will protect the rights and living standards of their low-wage workers. Such policies need not require draconian migration polices that ban immigrants. In fact, the worldwide globalization of markets ensures such migration will continue. However, migration must be better regulated to ensure numbers consistent with work conditions appropriate to the living standards in the host countries. Wages consistent with standards of decency for the least remunerated workers will need to be supported by a program of explicit policies and reforms:

- Minimum wage laws must cover all workers.
- Earnings should be enhanced by expanding the current Earned Income Tax Credit system to all citizen households working full-time.

- Documented immigrant workers must be guaranteed reasonable paths to citizenship.
- Low-wage markets must be protected through stronger enforcement of laws against undocumented migration.
- To ensure that labor conditions remain consistent with social values in an affluent democratic society, there will have to be sanctions against employers who hire undocumented workers.

There are costs to instituting these policies. If employment conditions and compensation are increased enough to attract citizen workers, employers' profits will fall, and prices of some services and products will rise. This will necessarily generate strong opposition to these policies from obvious political constituencies. The simple fact that high migration of poor, low-skilled workers into more affluent geographic regions raises the profits of employers of less-educated workers explains why employers continue to clamor for more migrants and guest workers (whether documented or not). Insofar as middle-class households employ such labor to clean houses, to do landscape and repair work, and because they (the middle classes) consume products and services for lower prices as a result of cheap labor, a wide spectrum of middle-class and affluent citizens gain economically from migration. Other interest groups demand an end to all immigration, claiming that migrants are devastating the employment prospects of young, less-educated native workers and depriving poor, unassimilated minorities of the opportunity to work themselves into the lower middle class.

A significant percentage of citizens demanding an end to migration are conservatives who simply fear the social and cultural change that population movements are reaping (Doherty 2006). From their perspective, cultural conservatives are correct. International migration's long-term effects will alter domestic politics and social policy in significant ways. The major question is: Will the current unchecked migration be slowed by cultural conservatives seeking ethnic purity, or by more moderate political coalitions seeking to balance the competing demands of different interest groups?

While both Europe and the United States tread dangerously upon what may become irreversible paths to bipluralist societies, hope remains. The politics of social stratification and its relationship to ethnic/racial diversity are likely to be worked out differently on the two continents because of the major difference in their respective scales of population diversity. Major minority groups already constitute nearly one-third of the U.S. population, while Western Europe is nowhere near that point. More than in Europe, minorities in the United States will assume an increasingly important role in determining the direction of future policy toward problems of stratification and race. Politically, minorities in the United States are already capable of effecting considerable influence. That influence need not require some sort of grand coalition. As Democrats, Republicans, and independents, minorities need only to provide a moderating force on issues related to race relations and social stratification. Due to both international migration and domestic migration of natives, the Republican Party's "southern strategy," now in its fourth decade, is already breathing its final gasps before death. The so-called "red states" are likely to remain Republican, but the economic and population growth that they are enjoying will soon prevent the election of hard-right conservatives with negative attitudes toward even the most moderate social policies aimed at redistribution and increasing opportunities for the poor. The long-term consequences of migration will exert a moderating influence on regional political differences.

The majority of White Americans have historically held superficial beliefs about chronic academic failure and social stratification. Much of this attitude has been

underpinned by attributions of African American pathology (Sears et al., 2000). African Americans have had to confront these beliefs with relatively weak political capital. In just the past few years, the tenor of the debate has changed, as significant proportions of relatively recent Latino and Asian migrants are clearly joining poor Blacks in the bottom strata of the social order. Ironically, with the rising ethnic diversity of inequality, what are in effect two nations—both multiracial, but the lower stratum disproportionately minority—cannot help but have important influences on political institutions. Belief systems based on a once clearly observable Black/White divide are becoming empirically empty. A far more diverse population of middle-class and elite Americans observing their complex society will be forced to consider the effects of social policies in constructing racialized class barriers to socioeconomic success.

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NOTE

1. A brief note on nomenclature: I use the term *immigrant* to refer to legally documented international migrants granted formal civil rights recognized in law. The term *migrant* refers to domestic and international migrants. The distinction I make in the two international cases is that migrants are undocumented or, as in the case of guest workers, may be documented but are denied legal rights explicitly given to immigrants.

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