

# **“New Realities, Challenges and Opportunities: Immigration from Mexico to the United States.”**

Remarks by Luis Ernesto Derbez-Bautista  
at the School of Law of the University of Colorado  
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## **Introduction**

*“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness. It was the epoch of belief; it was the epoch of incredulity....”*

It seems almost like Charles Dickens was writing about the initial years of the 21st Century. The events of September 11, 2001, shocked us all, and left many of us, including me, unable to comprehend the magnitude of what had happened and the implications the events would have for our lives. Most of us were ready to despair after knowing, through the initial news, the impact that those terrorist attacks had in such an emblematic symbol for the world, but at the end of that day we learnt that along with the evil things that man had done, there were lessons of heroism and acts of selflessness which demonstrated the nobility of the human spirit even under those tragic circumstances. Ten years later, we are still searching for a way to respond in an appropriate manner to that fateful day.

As if the consequences of that horrific event were not enough, in 2009 a world-wide financial crisis hit the American economy with such force that its consequences are still being felt today. As the 2012 Election Day approaches, many Americans wonder what the future of their country will be, whether they will be able to find meaningful jobs again, and what the conditions of their retirement days will look like.

Ten years after that fateful date, fear of life and fear of unemployment mark the environment under which discussions of legalizing millions of immigrants take place in the USA.<sup>1</sup>

Two examples illustrate what I mean. First, at a recent speech in New York University, Secretary Napolitano’s remarks were as follow:

*“as we move forward over the coming months to commemorate what happened on 9/11 and share again the remarkable stories of the men and women who perished in the attacks here and at the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania. As we detail the progress*

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<sup>1</sup> At 9.1 percent, the unemployment rate is the highest it has been since 1982. Recently, [the Census Bureau announced that real median household income fell to \\$49,445 in 2010](#), the lowest number since 1997 after adjusting for inflation. Earlier this month, [Gallup found that 18.5 percent of the total workforce remains underemployed](#), meaning they're unemployed or working part-time but they want to work full-time.

*the country has indeed made over the past years. We have to also recommit ourselves to the notion that unfortunately the world that we inhabit is a world, an environment where terrorists exist and where they continue to focus upon the West and on the United States".<sup>2</sup>*

Second, a recent article published by Steven A. Camarota, Director of Research at the Center for Immigration Studies, a self-defined Low-immigration/Pro-Immigrant Think-Thank located in Washington, D.C. affirms that:<sup>3</sup>

*"In his May 10th speech in El Paso, President Obama outlined his vision for reforming the nation's immigration system. He argued that because the border is more secure, it is now time to legalize illegal immigrants and to increase the number of legal immigrants allowed into the country in the future. The president's speech seems to assume that jobs are plentiful. But all the available evidence indicates this is not the case, particularly for the young and less-educated, who are the most likely to compete with illegal immigrants. Prior research indicates that illegal immigrant workers are overwhelming those with relatively little education. While it would be a mistake to think that every job taken by an immigrant is a job lost by a native, it would also be a mistake to imagine that allowing illegal immigrants to stay permanently in their jobs and increasing immigration further has no impact on labor market outcomes for U.S.-born workers."*

Both statements reflect the environment under which the current debate on immigration policy is taking place in the US. Not a good environment for a rational discussion on such an important topic for both your country and mine. And yet, a rational debate is what is needed if we wish to define a legal reform that will ultimately guarantee for both the undocumented immigrants and your nation a fair, orderly, but more importantly, secure solution to the current situation.

Yes, these are difficult and challenging times—the worst of times—but they are also times full of promise and new possibilities—working together we can make them the best of times. Times that will provide us with the opportunity to have a hand in remaking and reshaping the world; times that will provide us an opportunity to share in the creation of a better world; times that might help us improve not just our national condition but the human condition of the world. As 2011 comes to its end, it is giving us the chance to make a difference, to lighten burdens, to stay engaged, to fix what is broken, and to create what is needed.

I hope my ensuing remarks will help all of us here present in looking for such times.

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<sup>2</sup> Remarks by Secretary Napolitano at the NYU School of Law and the Brennan Center for Justice, "Strength, Security, and Shared Responsibility: Preventing Terrorist Attacks a Decade after 9/11" Release Date: June 7, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Steven A. Camarota. A Need for More Immigrant Workers? Unemployment and Underemployment in the First Quarter of 2011. Memorandums. CIS, June 2011. Accessed through <http://www.cis.org/no-need-for-more-immigrant-workers-q1-2011>.

### **Where it all started?**

The wars of 1845 and 1848 resulted in Mexico ceding roughly two-fifths of its original territory to the United States.<sup>4</sup> Families and communities that had for generations been part of my country suddenly found themselves in the United States. Were they illegal or undocumented workers?

World War II precipitated severe farm labor shortages, as native-born men joined or were drafted into the armed forces or streamed into cities to work in factories mobilized for the war effort. In response to pressure from farm growers, the U.S. government in 1942 instituted the large-scale importation of temporary agricultural workers from Mexico, which became known as the *bracero* program, and eventually brought a total of five million Mexican field workers into your country. Although immigration from Mexico was not subject to numerical restrictions at this time, the legal immigration process was cumbersome and costly (especially for poor, less-educated migrants), and undocumented immigration from Mexico rose at the same time the *bracero* program was in operation. Were they illegal or undocumented workers?

Whatever they were, pressed by anti-immigrant forces the US federal government launched in 1954 “Operation Wetback,” rounding up and deporting about one million Mexican immigrants, as well as some legal immigrants and U.S. citizens of Mexican descent.

The unexpected result of such anti-immigration policies was the opposite of what they sought to achieve. Thousands of Mexican workers who had used the “revolving-door” strategy of coming into your country to work in the harvesting season, started to stay for longer periods of time under the assumption that the revolving door was closing on them. The scheme which had allowed them to work in the US and return to Mexico to visit their families on a regular basis abruptly ended. As family separation became regular for longer periods, pressures built to reintegrate the family unity. Many undocumented Mexican workers started to bring their families along because they feared long term separation and a final break-down of their families.

Such was the start of the current situation.

Studies by Colegio de la Frontera Norte, a Mexican Think-Thank established in Tijuana, Mexico allow us to understand the pressures and changing pattern of the immigration process from Mexico into the US. An example of this is given by a recently published paper<sup>5</sup> in which an accurate picture of this process is presented by evaluating the changes in

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<sup>4</sup> The 1845 annexation of Texas and the 1848 war combined resulted in that loss of territory for Mexico.

<sup>5</sup> María Dolores París Bombo, *Youth Identities and the Migratory Culture among Triqui and Mixtec Boys and Girls*, Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Migraciones Internacionales, Vol. 5, Num 4, Julio-Diciembre de 2010.

immigration patterns of the *Triqui* and *Mixteco* communities of Northern Oaxaca, a State in the South of my country.

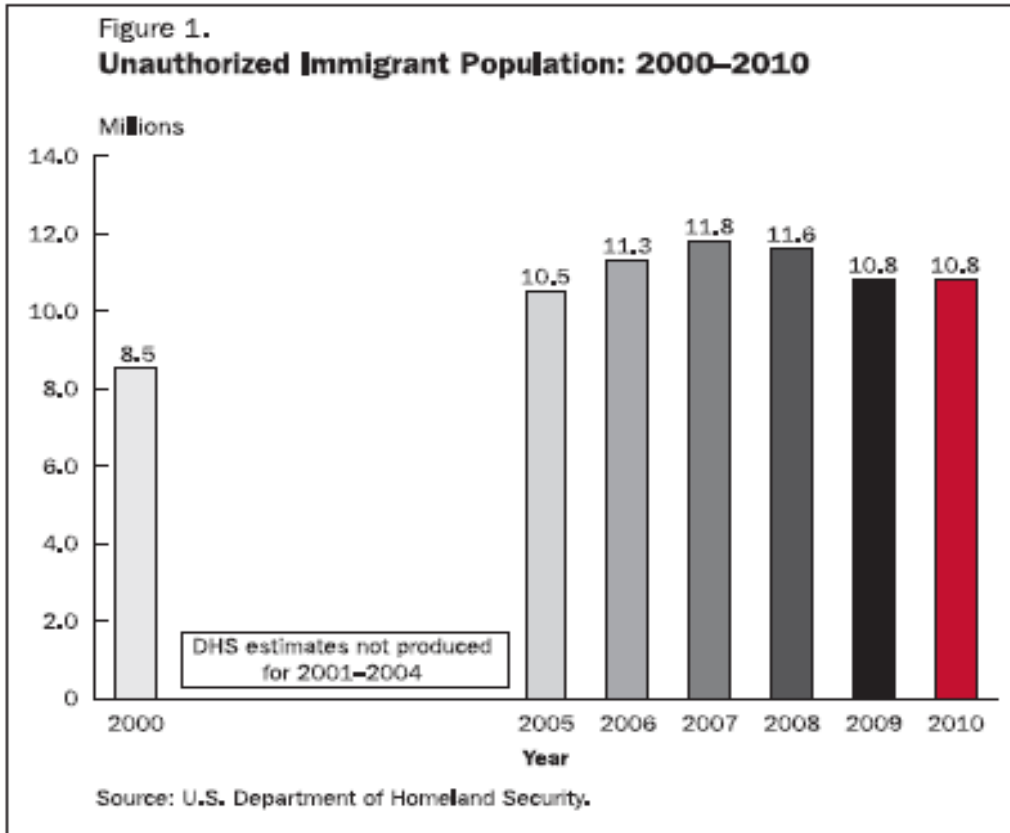
Initially *Mixteco* immigrants came to the Northern Mexican state of Sinaloa to work in farms of that region. Thus the initial migration pattern of those communities was from Southern to Northern Mexico as work became available for them in the Sinaloa farms. However, during the *bracero* years some workers started crossing the border to work in California farms during the harvest season. Their families, though, remained settled in Mexico as they felt more comfortable staying there. As the “revolving-door” policy ended, many of those families moved to California. As a result of the immigration laws passed in the US during the past 30 years, you can now find *Mixteco* families settled in the state of Oregon and even in the state of Washington.

President Reagan’s immigration reform, The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), attempted to address rising levels of undocumented immigration with both carrot and stick. However, other than creating the H-2A visa category for temporary, seasonal agricultural workers, IRCA did not raise limits on legal immigration to match the growing demand for immigrant labor in the United States. Despite its good intentions, the way the law was defined set the basis for the culture of simulation and repression which prevails to this day. On the one hand, IRCA allowed most undocumented immigrants living at the time in the United States to apply for legal status, but on the other hand it created sanctions against employers who “*knowingly*” hired undocumented immigrants, and increased funding for border enforcement. It sounds familiar, doesn’t it?

The Immigration Act of 1990 did raise the annual cap on immigration: to 700,000 per year from FY 1992 through 1994, and 675,000 per year thereafter, with 480,000 allocated for family-sponsored immigrants, 140,000 for employment-based and 55,000 for “diversity immigrants.” The law also revised the political and ideological grounds for exclusion and deportation and authorized the Attorney General to grant “temporary protected status” to undocumented immigrants from countries afflicted by natural disasters or armed conflicts. In addition, the law created the H-1B visa category for highly skilled temporary workers (capped at 65,000 per year) and the H-2B visa category for seasonal non-agricultural workers (capped at 66,000 per year).

The changes brought about by all these immigration reforms created the conditions for the largest wave of immigration in the US since the 1920s. But the conditions under which this immigration took place changed dramatically the status of those who immigrated in the past twenty years. For the first time in your history, illegal immigrants outnumbered legal ones,

peaking at an estimated 11.8 million in 2007; a number that appears to have remained constant according to a recent US Department of Homeland Security report.<sup>6</sup>



As the second decade of the 21st century begins, the United States remains as collectively conflicted as ever when it comes to the issue of immigration. The U.S. government has spent tens of billions of dollars since the mid-1980s trying to stamp out undocumented immigration through law-enforcement measures, yet undocumented men, women, and children now number around 11 million—almost one-third of the 37.5 million foreign-born individuals living in the country. Legislative attempts to reform comprehensively the U.S. immigration system by bringing it in line with the economic and social realities that continue to fuel undocumented immigration failed in 2006 and 2007. As a result, many state and local governments are implementing or considering proposals to turn police officers into de facto immigration agents and to “crack down” on undocumented immigrants and those who provide them with jobs or housing. In short, the United States is still wrestling with its own historical identity as a nation of immigrants.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Hofer et al, Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2010. Office of Immigration Statistics.

### Place of Birth of the Foreign-Born Civilian Labor Force by Educational Attainment: 2007

(For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/acs/www/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/))

Educational attainment	Place of birth									
	Total	Africa	Asia	Europe	Latin America					Other regions <sup>1</sup>
					Total	Carib-bean	Central America		South America	
							Mexico	Other		
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>26.1</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>56.2</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>31.9</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>2.5</b>
Less than high school diploma .....	100.0	1.3	9.4	3.5	85.2	6.0	61.9	13.4	3.8	0.6
High school graduate or GED .....	100.0	3.5	18.4	10.7	65.5	11.6	36.1	8.9	8.9	1.9
Some college, no degree .....	100.0	6.0	25.6	13.8	50.8	12.2	21.6	7.2	9.7	3.8
Associate's degree .....	100.0	6.2	30.7	16.3	42.9	14.4	13.5	5.8	9.2	3.9
Bachelor's degree .....	100.0	6.0	47.7	14.8	27.7	8.1	7.4	3.7	8.4	3.8
Master's degree .....	100.0	5.7	51.7	21.0	17.5	5.7	3.5	1.9	6.4	4.0
Professional degree .....	100.0	6.7	46.1	16.9	24.9	7.7	6.1	2.0	9.1	5.4
Doctoral degree .....	100.0	6.9	55.2	23.8	9.3	2.4	2.0	0.9	4.0	4.7
High school graduate or more .....	100.0	5.2	32.7	14.3	44.6	10.2	19.8	6.0	8.6	3.2
Bachelor's degree or more .....	100.0	6.0	49.2	17.3	23.5	7.1	5.9	2.9	7.6	4.1

<sup>1</sup> Includes Northern America and Oceania.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007.

Today a struggle between State and Federal Governments as it had not been seen since the early days of your nation is being waged. A battle where political considerations are the main drive of the immigration debate making the solution to the immigration problem harder than it should otherwise be.

Efforts made by the Fox Administration to help State and City governments in America identify Mexican undocumented workers through the use of a Consular Matriculation Card issued by the Mexican Government are being reversed. More than 800 police agencies, 70 banking institutions and 13 State Governments had agreed to accept such Consular Cards as valid identification documents, strengthening the security situation of many US cities as a result. Throughout the United States such a process was helping to identify non-terrorist citizens making cities safer for American citizens and undocumented Mexican workers. It helped banks in checking that transfers were not money laundering operations, and undocumented workers in protecting their money. All of that progress is being reverted by ill defined immigration policies whose better examples are Arizona's SB1070 and Alabama's HB56 laws.

### **What's new in Alabama's HB56?**

What is widely considered the toughest anti-immigration law in America went into effect in Alabama this past week, a crackdown so severe that an article in a national US paper described it as the Arizona law on steroids. The law, which was approved by the state legislature and is widely backed by voters, allows police to check for papers and detain undocumented residents without bail. It also mandates that public schools share with authorities the citizenship status of all newly enrolled students. Many of us are amazed that such a law could be enacted in these days, but anti-immigrant sentiments in the USA are not a new thing to be so worried about.

Indeed, during the latter part of the nineteenth century when the high volume and changing national origins of the then immigrants took place, anti-immigration sentiments arose in large part of the nation's population. Fearful of becoming a minority in their own country, anti-immigrants proposed among other things a law requiring a literacy test for those wishing to immigrate into the US; such a law was approved in 1917. Backers of the law were unpleasantly surprised when after World War I the volume of immigration from Eastern Europe resumed its former level in spite of the literacy test.

Anti-immigrants turned to explicitly limiting the number of arrivals. The Quota Act of 1921 and the National Origins Act of 1924 laid the framework for a fundamental change in US immigration policy. National quotas and the requirement that visas be obtained from an American consulate abroad before immigrating were established; both conditions remain as of today. Yet total immigration to the United States remained fairly high until the Great Depression because neither the 1921 nor the 1924 law restricted immigration from the Western Hemisphere. Despite all the anti-immigration movement between 1870 and 1930, more than 30 million immigrants arrived, including nearly 9 million who came during the first decade of the 20th century alone. It was not until the 1929-1933 economic depression that the rate of immigration fell to lower levels.<sup>7</sup>

According to the decennial census, the foreign-born share of the U.S. population reached historic highs of 14.8 percent in 1890 and 14.7 percent in 1910. By way of contrast, foreign-born persons comprised only 12.5 percent of the population in 2010. More important yet for our current discussion, the share of the foreign born labor force in the total US labor force is at a low 15.6% compared with the peak of 20.5% reached in 1910 (Figure 1 below).

So what is new in the Arizona and Alabama laws? Amazing as it may sound, what is new in the Arizona and Alabama laws is the impact on national citizens who searching to reduce their productions costs engage wittingly or *unwittingly* undocumented workers to till their farms, or work in their factories. Though it may be thought that I exaggerate in my comment, such scenario does fall within the purview of Alabama's HB 56. The law is alarmingly tough, eclipsing Arizona's SB 1070 by several measures—including, among other punishments, incarceration and fines for anyone who knowingly employs, harbors, or transports illegal immigrants. Giving an undocumented immigrant a ride to work, offering them shelter, offering them sacrament: all of these acts are, with just the slightest interpretation, criminalized in the bill.

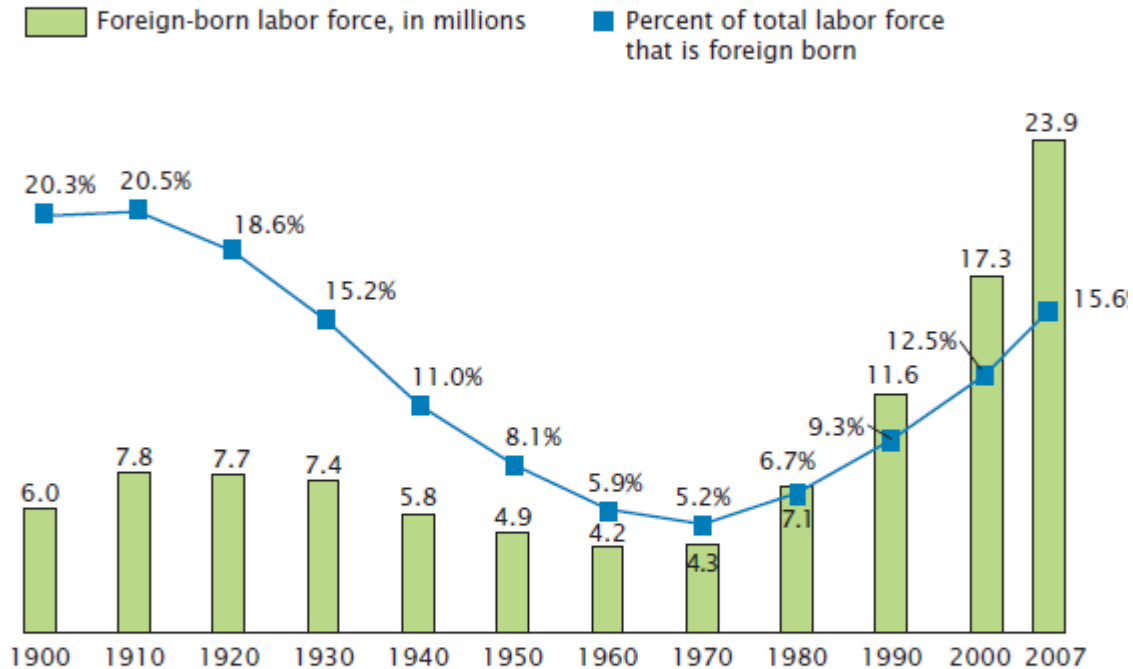
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<sup>7</sup> A similar effect was caused by the recent 2009-2010 recession.

Figure 1.

### Number and Percent Foreign Born in the Labor Force in the United States: 1900 to 2007

(For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/acs/www/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/))



Notes: 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930: "Labor force" included those 10 years and over employed in gainful occupations.  
 1940, 1950, 1960: "Labor force" included those 14 years and over employed or seeking employment.  
 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, 2007: "Labor force" included those 16 years and over employed or seeking employment.  
 Tabulations of foreign born in 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950, and 1960 included only Whites. In all other years, figures for the foreign-born population included all races.  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Censuses, 1900 to 2000, and the American Community Survey, 2007.

A recent interview in a major US paper exemplifies the damage that Alabama's HB56 will cause in the state of Georgia. It recounts the story of a farmer named Smith who grows sweet potatoes and greens in addition to raising pullets for Tyson, Ingham, and other poultry giants. In the interview Mr. Smith aired his grievances over HB 56, making it clear that his farm was at risk. He did not mince words about the circumstances:

*"Majority of people that works for me with the kind of jobs I got, they're illegal. There ain't no use in beating around the bush saying they ain't or whatnot. That's just the way it is. Fake papers, no papers, tax-filing mysteries I've worried about all this stuff and done it for years, and I just go to where I throwed my hands up and said, to hell with it. I'll just work 'em, pay 'em, and forget about it."*



As the newspaper states, agriculture is a grueling, billion-dollar industry in Alabama. Wages range from the \$7.25-an-hour state minimum wage to about \$14 an hour, and while anti-immigration arguments hang on the idea that if illegal workers were barred from these jobs Americans would be enticed onto these fields and into these chicken houses, Georgia's farmers have experienced the lack of workers when undocumented ones are amiss.

As Mr. Smith put it "*most of the non-Latinos that he has hired over the years last maybe a couple of hours at most before they quit.*" But the argument has long been one of reform versus enforcement, and in the case of HB 56, enforcement is written to the extreme. "*All of us would like to see an immigration law we can deal with,*" Smith said. He mentioned fee-based work permits, background checks, and tracking numbers, some of which had been included in the Immigration Bill proposed by Senators Kennedy and McCain which was approved by the Senate in May 2006 – that offered a path to citizenship and created a guest worker program - but was essentially rejected by the House of Representatives later that same year.

By 2005, frustration was growing over illegal immigration, particularly among voters in states like Arizona and Georgia that had seen a surge in newcomers. In December 2005, the House passed a bill, championed by conservative Republicans, which focused on law enforcement and border security, making it a federal felony to live illegally in the United States and mandating hundreds of miles of fence built along the Mexican border. As 2011 goes by, legislative leaders in at least half a dozen states have said they will propose bills similar to Arizona and Alabama's laws, and have announced measures to limit access to public colleges and other benefits for illegal immigrants and to punish employers who hire them. And at least five states have agreed on an unusual coordinated effort to cancel automatic United States citizenship for children born in this country to illegal immigrant parents.

The Greek philosopher Epictetus said, "What concerns me is not the way things are, but rather the way people think things are." He was right to be concerned. By October of 2006 your Congress, reflecting the changing mood in the country, passed a bill ordering the construction by the end of 2008 of about 700 miles of border fences. By 2011 the way people think things are produced Arizona's SB1070 and Alabama's HB56.

### **We cannot accept any more foreign workers!**

Last April I was invited by Notre Dame's Institute for Advanced Study to participate in a meeting exploring the *Dimensions of Goodness*. Professor Mary Ellen O'Connell<sup>8</sup> of Notre Dame University presented a paper called *How can international law limit the use of*

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<sup>8</sup> Professor O'Connell is the Robert and Marion Short Professor of Law and Research Professor of International Dispute Resolution at Notre Dame's School of Law.

*violence?* Thanks to her presentation I was able to understand two crucial facts of your country's life that are currently interacting in America's debate about immigration. The first one is the diverging roles played by State and Federal Governments in defining many legal issues your nation confronts. The second one is the constant struggle between applications of the rule of law and the rule of force to handle security issues your nation confronts.

Listening to her, I understood many of the conversations I had with officials of your government when I acted as Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Mexico. While she talked of Iraq, I thought of the US/Mexico border. While she talked about the many occasions when the United States used force to defend its interests around the world, I thought of Arizona's patrolling of the border with increased use of force. While she talked of your Founding Fathers, I thought of those American born children with undocumented parents. While she talked of the existing tensions between State and Federal solutions along your history, I thought of Arizona's SB1070.

Use of force or use of law to deal with illegal immigrants? Amnesty or deportation? State or Federal decision? These are the questions that must be answered today.

Again, they are not easy to answer under the current economic situation of the United States. With job creation "lower than expected" month after month and with over 50 million Americans of working age without jobs, one would think a top priority would be immigration reform that benefits American workers. Sadly, this is not necessarily the best solution for your country. During the age of industrialization, immigrants were an "engine of labor power" that enabled the nation's industrialization and the building of cities as we know them. Today's economic comparison to industrialization is globalization.

As was mentioned before, most undocumented immigrants work in activities not taken by US nationals. Thus, they have consistently increased the percentage of the population that works in other better paying activities, a factor that raised the average standard of living in your country. While the belief is that they place a strain on government services in the area they settle in - such as the school or health systems<sup>9</sup> - they do pay taxes: income taxes are deducted from their salaries by the firms where they work, sales taxes are paid on their purchases of goods, payments to the Social Security System are withheld even though they will never accrue the benefits from the system, and they pay property taxes through their rent or purchase of houses.

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<sup>9</sup> See the graph in next page resulting from a study of Hispanic and Asian children crowding the School Systems in many counties of the United States.

## United States

Fueled by the latest wave of immigration, enrollment of Hispanic and Asian students in American schools has increased by more than 5 million since the 1990s. The increases are occurring not just in long-time immigration hotbeds, but in places as far flung as [Sevier County, Arkansas](#) to [Colfax County, Nebraska](#), to [Marion County, Oregon](#).

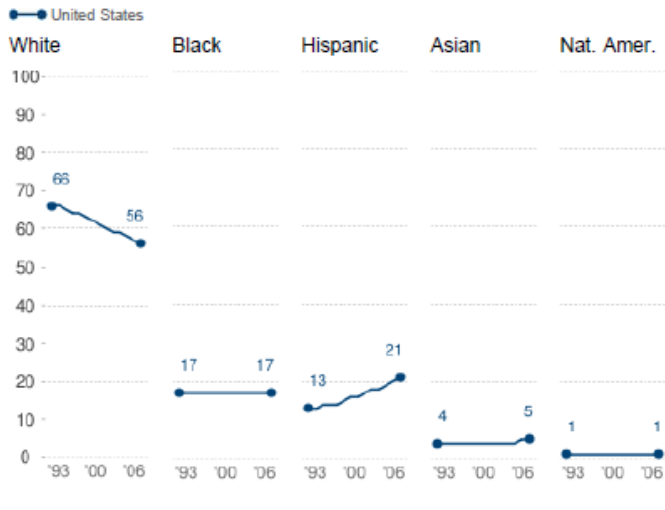
Students, in 2006	48,504,876
White	27,394,435 <b>56%</b>
Black	8,288,264 <b>17%</b>
Hispanic	9,950,245 <b>21%</b>
Asian	2,282,149 <b>5%</b>
Native American	589,783 <b>1%</b>

### Diversity Index

The percent chance that two students selected at random would be members of a different ethnic group. Higher numbers indicate a more diverse student body.

In 2006	<b>61%</b>
In 1993	<b>52%</b>

### Student Demographics



### Most-Diverse States

1. **Nevada**
2. **Florida**
3. **California**
4. **New York**
5. **Texas**

### Most-Diverse Districts

1. **Tukwila School District 406** (Washington)
2. **Natomas Unified** (California)
3. **Alameda County Office Of Education** (California)
4. **Sacramento City Unified** (California)
5. **John Swett Unified** (California)

Despite all the economic benefits that undocumented workers bring to your nation, the national debate has understandably focused up to this point on the most visible and most highly charged issue—ending illegal immigration. But your economy has benefitted enormously from being able to tap the international pool of human capital coming in the form of undocumented workers and limitations on your ability as a nation to continue doing so are ultimately self-defeating. As exemplified by Georgia’s Mr. Smith, farms and companies will lose out to their international competitors making them less profitable, less productive, and less able to grow; or they will move their operations abroad with all the attendant negative economic consequences. And the federal treasury will lose tens of billions of dollars in tax and social security revenues by restricting the opportunities for those workers to remain in the United States.

The end goal must be a system that inherently prefers the hiring of U.S. workers, but streamlines access to needed foreign workers and treats all workers employed in the United States on a level plane. Reforms that enhance legal immigration channels for low-skill immigrants must be complemented with reforms to ensure that immigration does not promote an unfair competition system in the United States labor market.

## **Conclusion**

Migration is a clear sign of our times. In ways never seen before, nations and cultures all over the planet today are shifting: getting to know each other, getting closer to each other, and mutually enriching each other. The criticism against immigrants to the United States at the turn of the century was similar to what we hear today – they don't speak English, they live by themselves, they contribute to high crime rates, they're different. These criticisms were and remain impacting, tending to socially unite citizens of many parts of the United States against immigrant communities and transforming today's fight over immigration in a contentious battle with the power to derail the agendas of politicians who waded into the issue.

Stories are powerful. True or false, they have an effect. If it is allowed, the terrorist and unemployment stories will dominate the immigration debate. What will ensue will be an ill-informed public debate as the dominant story, and the advocates of a better solution will only be able to respond defensively.

On the terrorist question let's recall that not a single undocumented Mexican or Latin American worker has thus far been found responsible of either abiding or supporting terrorist networks operating in US soil or abroad. Furthermore, as Secretary Napolitano remarked:

*“One of the most striking evolutions we have seen recently – and indeed we've seen this accelerate even during my two and a half years as the Secretary – is that plots to attack the United States increasingly involve U.S. persons, United States persons, American citizens.”<sup>10</sup>*

Hence, the terrorist argument is not one that should apply as crucial in the debate about immigration reform in the United States.

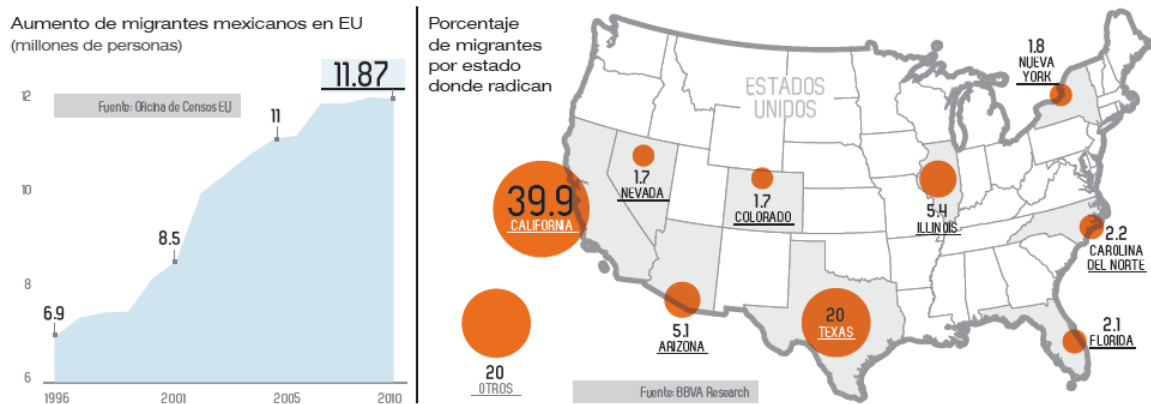
On the unemployment question, the argument that deporting illegal immigrants will have positive economic results is not a new concept, but it is the wrong one. Let's not forget all the benefits that undocumented workers and their families have brought to your country over the past 30 years, years during which the U.S. has gone through a rapid expansion of globalization, and has enjoyed many more cycles of economic booms than of recessions. Time after time, stories of immigrants helping decayed communities flourish back after their arrival testifies to the fact that their presence is positive rather than negative.

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<sup>10</sup> Remarks by Secretary Napolitano at the NYU School of Law and the Brennan Center for Justice, "Strength, Security, and Shared Responsibility: Preventing Terrorist Attacks a Decade after 9/11" Release Date: June 7, 2011.

To provide you with an example let me refer my experience when meeting the then Governor Tom Vilsack, during his period at the helm of the State of Iowa. Governor Vilsack explained to me the benefits derived from the arrival of immigrants in small towns to work at the packing meat factories which before their arrival had lost competitiveness and were near closing. According to our conversation, the benefits included the renewal of school and health services which had been closed, the reopening of small restaurants, shops and entertainment centers which mostly benefited their original owners, all of them native born Iowans. We never discussed their legal status, but it was clear to both of us that these immigrants had created positive effects for both the towns they settled in and the State of Iowa.

There are now nearly four million children born in the United States who have undocumented immigrant parents. As you can see in the graph below, Mexican communities are already present in many regions of the United States. In the current debates around immigration reform, policymakers often view immigrants as an economic or labor market problem to be solved, but the issue has a very real human dimension. Immigrant parents without legal status are raising their citizen children under stressful work and financial conditions, with the constant threat of discovery and deportation that may narrow social contacts and limit participation in public programs that might benefit their children. And yet despite such odds they renew many US communities which otherwise would have decayed and died. We must tell these stories and make them become part of your national consciousness.



There is no doubt in my mind that you and I share the same vision of progress for our nations, based on common values: the strengthening of democracy; the protection of human rights; the search for fair, sustained, and sustainable development; the keeping of international peace and security, and our determined support for our citizens. To me, the debate about immigration reform says that the things that divide us – like nationalities – are much less important than the things we have in common. It doesn't ask us to deny or even

hide our differences. It allows for situations where those differences are beautifully and subtly brought forward. It says we're all different, but we're all in this together.

I urge you to take on the rational debate. Stories are how we define ourselves and how we construct our identities. Stories link people from different parts of the world together. Stories can change the world. I hope many of you will share your stories with me, so that I may continue to tell a better immigration story myself.

Thank you for your attention.