

Fall 1994

## Democracy and Demography

Carol Greenhouse  
*Indiana University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ijgls>



Part of the [International Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Greenhouse, Carol (1994) "Democracy and Demography," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ijgls/vol2/iss1/3>

This Symposium is brought to you for free and open access by the Law School Journals at Digital Repository @ Maurer Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* by an authorized editor of Digital Repository @ Maurer Law. For more information, please contact [rvaughan@indiana.edu](mailto:rvaughan@indiana.edu).



**JEROME HALL LAW LIBRARY**

INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
Maurer School of Law  
Bloomington

# Democracy and Demography

CAROL J. GREENHOUSE\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

As Jeffrey Passel has indicated, immigration raises *cultural* issues in addition to legal ones.<sup>1</sup> I want to pursue that suggestion from vantage points provided by recent ethnographic research on the “new immigration.”<sup>2</sup> In these comments, I explore three broad areas in which the ethnographic research suggests some of the more pressing cultural issues might lie. Although I will be primarily discussing the United States, some of these issues also arise in Europe and perhaps in other, intraregional migrations. Indeed, one would expect that the contemporary U.S. experience with immigration is comparable *in cultural terms* to that of other nations, particularly insofar as immigration arises from the globalization of markets and politics and as the altered demographics of diversity challenge everyday assumptions about meanings of the nation-state.<sup>3</sup>

This brief commentary will focus on three points of intersection between Passel’s discussion and recent ethnographic literature on the United States: (1) a perceived tension between the limits of the nation-state and current “press” of diversity; (2) the corollary relationship between assimilation of immigrants and ethnic solidarity, or resistance to assimilation; and (3) the changing nature of cultural politics, which rests in part on misperceptions of immigrants as competing, perhaps unfairly, for opportunities and services.

---

\* Professor, Anthropology, Indiana University, Bloomington.

1. Jeffrey S. Passel & Michael Fix, *U.S. Immigration in a Global Context: Past, Present and Future*, 2 *IND. J. GLOBAL LEGAL STUD.* 5 (1994).

2. See Roger Sanjek, *Urban Anthropology in the 1980's: A World View*, 19 *ANN. REV. ANTHROPOLOGY* 151-186 (1990) (reviewing recent ethnographic literature on immigration).

3. Moreover, issues of how citizens’ participation, mobility and so forth are affected by globalization are not limited solely to new arrivals. See JANET M. FITCHEN, *ENDANGERED SPACES, ENDURING PLACES: CHANGE, IDENTITY, AND SURVIVAL IN RURAL AMERICA* (1991).

## II. DIVERSITY AND THE NATION-STATE

The idea of the nation as an “imagined community,”<sup>4</sup> as the social counterpart to a natural affinity,<sup>5</sup> or as the political counterpart to cultural consensus, ethnicity, or even kinship,<sup>6</sup> are recent formulations of State nationalism with long roots in western classical political traditions. The very idea of social science rests in part on a presumed equation between natural (i.e., cultural) and political forms; this mirroring is the essence of what Bruno Latour has recently called “the modern constitution”<sup>7</sup> (i.e., modernity itself).

Propositions such as these make the census central to the social technologies of both democracy and difference in the United States.<sup>8</sup> It is therefore useful to frame discussion of Passel’s paper with some consideration of the tensions intrinsic to democracy itself, to the extent that these have been explored ethnographically. These are, first, the rather generic equality inscribed in theoretical notions of citizenship and, second, the irreducible differences of world view, history, experience, and life chances that actually shape the lives of immigrants (old and new) in the contemporary cultural landscape.<sup>9</sup>

To put this another way, and to acknowledge Alexis de Tocqueville,<sup>10</sup> U.S. traditions of self-government are predicated on the belief in a relatively homogeneous society, reserving the celebration of heterogeneity to commercial exchanges in the free market. The idea that institutions of government exist to decide value or moral questions is antithetical to many ordinary citizens, the so-called “native born.” It specifically conflicts with their somewhat diffuse but nonetheless strong self-identification, via

---

4. BENEDICT ANDERSON, *THE IMAGINED COMMUNITY* (2nd ed. 1991).

5. MICHAEL HERZFELD, *ANTHROPOLOGY THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS: CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE MARGINS OF EUROPE* (1987).

6. WALKER CONNOR, *ETHNONATIONALISM: THE QUEST FOR UNDERSTANDING* (1994); ERNST GELLNER, *NATIONS AND NATIONALISM* (1983).

7. BRUNO LATOUR, *WE HAVE NEVER BEEN MODERN* 13-15 (1993).

8. *See generally* Dvora Yanow, *American Ethnogenesis: Policy Discourse and the Social Construction of Racial Categories*, in *Democracy and Difference: Law, Politics and Ethnography as Cultural Practice in the United States and Spain* (D. Greenwood & C. Greenhouse eds., 1993) (unpublished manuscript, on file with author).

9. For an elaboration of this tension as intrinsic to democracy, see CHARLES TAYLOR, *MULTICULTURALISM AND THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION* (1992).

10. ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE, *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA* (1945).

“common sense,” with “law” and “the country.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, the new demographics that Passel describes press U.S. citizens to be more explicit than they have been before as to the very nature of the nation-state and their identifications with it. From certain quarters, it raises the anxiety that “too much” diversity is intrinsically disruptive to the State, as if homogeneity were the prerequisite of a civil society.<sup>12</sup>

The social and cultural tensions arising from individuals’ and groups’ simultaneous demands for acknowledgment as both equal and different is by no means new, nor is it limited to the immigration context. Still, in the United States and Europe, these cultural tensions are manifest in strikingly new ways since the 1980s.<sup>13</sup> The reason for this is that the rise of “the global city,” new global patterns of immigration and capital flow, and new north-south relations over markets and the environment were all new developments in the 1980s,<sup>14</sup> as are the geopolitical realignments corresponding to the breakup of post-war and post-colonial States and the former Soviet bloc.

### III. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASSIMILATION AND ETHNIC SOLIDARITY

In the United States, the domestic impact of these global developments is found not only in the rise of immigration from “the global society” (which is everywhere and nowhere) and a dramatically altered demographics of “diversity,” as Passel has described,<sup>15</sup> but also in new patterns of social transformation. On this theme, I would summarize a shelf of recent ethnographic literature on immigrant experiences in the United States with the general observation that, viewed from the ground up, “globalization” does not mean homogenization, but quite the opposite. It means an *intensification* of differences conceived in racial, ethnic, and class terms.

---

11. CAROL GREENHOUSE ET AL., *LAW AND COMMUNITY IN THREE AMERICAN TOWNS* (1994).

12. Carol Greenhouse, *Figuring the Future: Local and Global After Los Angeles* (unpublished manuscript, on file with author).

13. For European perspectives, see ETIENNE BALIBAR AND IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN, *RACE, NATION, CLASS: AMBIGUOUS IDENTITIES* (1991); JULIA KRISTEVA, *ÉTRANGERS À NOUS-MÊMES* (1988).

14. See generally DAVID GOODMAN AND MICHAEL REDCLIFT, *REFASHIONING NATURE: FOOD, ECOLOGY AND CULTURE* 255-56 (1991); SASKIA SASSEN, *THE MOBILITY OF LABOR AND CAPITAL* (1988); SASKIA SASSEN, *THE GLOBAL CITY* 189-91 (1991).

15. Passel & Fix, *supra* note 1.

Globalization can also be seen to have a gendered inflection at the local level. The typical new immigrant is female,<sup>16</sup> in part because the preferred worker in “offshore” industries is female. In the United States, immigrant labor markets appear to be somewhat segregated by both gender and ethnicity.<sup>17</sup> Again, this is not a new development, since in older immigrant groups, men and women have had somewhat different patterns of upward mobility in different ethnic groups.<sup>18</sup> European immigrant women moved from home workshops to manufacturing, and then from blue collar to office work, but “women’s work” among the new immigrants appears to be in the lowest wage service jobs, or as employees in small family-owned businesses in ethnic enclaves.<sup>19</sup>

Again, viewed from below, the social processes associated with “globalization” appear to heighten the significance of difference in daily life, as cultural heterogeneity intensifies in a context where rights and access to resources are intertwined with identity politics.<sup>20</sup> Read cumulatively, U.S. ethnography shows the impact of globalization in the following ways: increasingly polarized labor markets associated with the new global service sector, increasing competition among ethnic groups for jobs at the bottom of the wage scale, the rise of violence (including violence associated with racial hatreds), the intensification of political and cultural debates over the nature and limits of the welfare State, and other fundamental aspects of service delivery. The gulf between “haves” and “have-nots” has widened, with a corresponding collapse of traditional means of upward mobility, which, for immigrants, has traditionally been through the manufacturing sector.

---

16. SASSEN, *THE MOBILITY OF LABOR AND CAPITAL*, *supra* note 14.

17. *Id.*

18. *See, e.g.*, MIRIAM COHEN, *FROM WORKSHOP TO OFFICE* 197 (1993) (discussing two generations of Italian women in New York); LOUISE LAMPHERE, *FROM WORKING DAUGHTERS TO WORKING MOTHERS: IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN A NEW ENGLAND INDUSTRIAL COMMUNITY* 288 (1987) (discussing working mothers and daughters in the Portuguese immigrant community in New Bedford, Massachusetts); JUNE C. NASH, *FROM TANK TOWN TO HIGH TECH* 275, 283-84 (1989) (comparing the working experience of men and women across generations).

19. SASSEN, *THE MOBILITY OF LABOR AND CAPITAL*, *supra* note 14; HSIANG-SHUI CHEN, *CHINATOWN NO MORE: TAIWAN IMMIGRANTS IN CONTEMPORARY NEW YORK* 91, 105 (1992); SYLVIA YANAGISAKO, *TRANSFORMING THE PAST: TRADITION AND KINSHIP AMONG JAPANESE AMERICANS* 4-5 (1985).

20. *See generally* IRIS MARION YOUNG, *JUSTICE AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE* 183-91 (1990).

While recent ethnography confirms that new immigrants do not tend to displace “native born” from employment, the ethnography also shows that this is in part due to a system of customary discriminations and exclusions that shapes immigrants’ opportunities.<sup>21</sup> Peshkin’s study of multiethnic “Riverview” (a pseudonym for a California town near Los Angeles) shows that immigrants learn very quickly not only to identify themselves as ethnics, but also to learn the ladder of ethnic and racial discriminations that makes them better off than some, and worse off than others.<sup>22</sup> Ethnic enclaves provide a base for small businesses among new immigrants who remain excluded in practice from other contexts of entrepreneurship.<sup>23</sup> At the lower end of the wage scale, immigrants compete effectively with native-born minorities by accepting lower wages and demanding fewer benefits.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, if “race,” “class,” and “ethnicity” have become synonyms in the public discourse over the last decade, this merging only reflects the contemporary demographics of urban life. Major new ethnic groups in the United States are people of color, conducting their lives in ways that are highly determined by race and ethnicity, even as they “assimilate” to the U.S. middle class. Indeed, as Passel has indicated, many of the new immigrants arrive in the United States *already* middle class, in part due to their professional status in their home countries, or to their accumulations of capital there, often through enterprises associated with foreign investment abroad.<sup>25</sup> The military, political, and economic crises that drive the present generation of immigrants from their homes form the particularly distinctive history of these groups, many of which were long familiar with western and U.S. business and society from their pre-immigration experience.<sup>26</sup> Recent ethnography among Vietnamese refugees is particularly compelling on this point.<sup>27</sup>

---

21. See YANAGISAKO, *supra* note 19, at 45; see also CHEN, *supra* note 19, at 248-53.

22. See ALAN PESHKIN, THE COLOR OF STRANGERS, THE COLOR OF FRIENDS: THE PLAY OF ETHNICITY IN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY 242-43 (1991); see also NASH, *supra* note 18, at 19.

23. See CHEN, *supra* note 19, at 104-05; MICHAEL S. LAGUERRE, AMERICAN ODYSSEY: HAITIANS IN NEW YORK CITY (1984).

24. LOUISE LAMPHERE, STRUCTURING DIVERSITY: ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE NEW IMMIGRATION (1992).

25. See generally SASSEN, THE MOBILITY OF LABOR AND CAPITAL, *supra* note 14, at 62-79.

26. *Id.* at 9.

27. See, e.g., JAMES M. FREEMAN, HEARTS OF SORROW: VIETNAMESE-AMERICAN LIVES (1989); PAUL JAMES RUTLEDGE, THE VIETNAMESE EXPERIENCE (1992).

## IV. THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF POSTMODERNITY

These social and cultural developments also have a political face. Citizenship, after all, is a key element not only in the symbolic transformation of “aliens” into Americans, but also in opening access to services at the municipal, state, and federal levels. The tendency to view urban unrest as a “natural” outcome of ethnic mixing,<sup>28</sup> urban secession movements, and “SLAPPs”<sup>29</sup> (strategic lawsuits against public participation) are signs that traditional institutions of governance are not keeping pace with the increasing need for political forums.<sup>30</sup>

On a larger scale, federal, state, and local elections in the United States have become contests between civil rights and economic growth. Among other things, these contests have been cultural contests between conceptions of society itself or, more accurately, *among* strategies for maintaining the cultural legitimacy of the very notion of the *nation*-state with respect to increasingly diverse constituencies of citizens and would-be citizens.<sup>31</sup> This is a highly dynamic environment, and, as Passel also notes, public rhetoric does not always match the statistics. For example, it is easy to imagine imminent demographics in which there is no racial majority; however, “the majority” seems likely to remain an important legal fiction as the conceptual fulcrum of equality.<sup>32</sup>

28. See generally READING RODNEY KING/READING URBAN UPRISING (Robert Gooding-Williams ed., 1993); DAVID RIEFF, GOING TO MIAMI: EXILES, TOURISTS, AND REFUGEES IN THE NEW AMERICA 175-78 (1987); DAVID RIEFF, LOS ANGELES: CAPITAL OF THE THIRD WORLD (1991).

29. See generally Penelope Canan et al., *The Chilling Effect of SLAPPS: Legal Risk and Attitudes Toward Political Involvement*, 6 RES. PUB. PSYCHOL. 347, 364 (1993); Penelope Canan et al., *Using Law Ideologically: The Conflict Between Economic and Political Liberty*, 8 J.L. & POL. 539 (1992); Penelope Canan & George W. Pring, *Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation*, 35 SOC. PROBS. 506 (1988).

30. See PESHKIN, *supra* note 22, for a positive example of a local community’s political innovations in response to new forms of diversity.

31. See SUSAN B. COUTIN, THE CULTURE OF PROTEST (1993) (discussing ethnographic studies of such conflicts at the local level); JULIA KRISTEVA, NATIONS WITHOUT NATIONALISM (Leon S. Roudiez trans., 1993).

32. See generally MARTHA MINOW, MAKING ALL THE DIFFERENCE: INCLUSION, EXCLUSION, AND AMERICAN LAW (1990).

The demographics of “race” are vulnerable not only to increased immigration (i.e., new categories), but also other types of change. See JAMES W. LOEWEN, THE MISSISSIPPI CHINESE (1988) (discussing the details of the successful efforts of Chinese immigrants to the Mississippi delta region to improve their social status by engaging in activities symbolically associated with whites, and abandoning activities symbolically associated with blacks. Lowen’s study thus underscores the extent to which racial categories are neither comprehensive nor “fixed” by nature, in spite of powerful cultural claims to the contrary. So-called “intermarriage” also complicates the demographics of race over time).

Overall, the present climate is one of paradox. At precisely the historical moment when anthropology has begun seriously to abandon the concept of race, the cultural politics associated with the new immigration and its impact on the U.S. demographics of diversity has reinserted "race" into the public discourse in new and commanding ways.<sup>33</sup> Recent developments in Europe indicate related, even parallel, issues there.<sup>34</sup>

In the United States, a long ethnographic tradition in sociology and anthropology has lent its tools to the "American dream," in the sense that assimilation and upward mobility, the key elements of what Chock calls "the ethnic success story," provide the dominant motifs and organizational principle of at least three generations of ethnography.<sup>35</sup> Given that "ethnic success" is contingent on enclave solidarity, and continuing upward mobility is in doubt, this ethnographic tradition has an increasingly fictional, or at best wistful, character. To put this another way, the developments sketched above have broad significance for the ways they challenge deeply-held notions, by both the public and social scientists, about the nature of the U.S. immigration experience and the "American dream."

While most immigrants do reach the middle class before or after their arrival in the United States, the stereotypical ethnic success story is not an accurate portrayal of what awaits today's immigrants. The understandings of immigrants and racial and ethnic experiences, which were appropriate to a period when both the legal and material bases of incorporation into U.S. society were expanding, require adjustment now that rights are contracting and manufacturing is not part of the economic profile of the "global city."<sup>36</sup> In effect, ethnography was positioned by anthropologists as a counter-discourse to negative ethnic stereotypes; however, their efforts to

---

33. See MICHAEL OMI AND HAROLD WINANT, *RACIAL FORMATION IN THE UNITED STATES* (1994) (commenting on the current politics of race in U.S. national politics); Peter Wade, 'Race,' *Nature and Culture*, 28 MAN 17, 20-30 (1993) (noting the current anthropology of "race"); see also JOHN & JEAN COMAROFF, *ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION* (1992); HERZFELD, *supra* note 5.

34. See PAUL GILROY, *THE BLACK ATLANTIC* (1993) (discussing the cultural politics of Great Britain); Robert M. Hayden, *Constitutional Nationalism in the Formerly Yugoslav Republics*, 51 SLAVIC REV. 654 (1992) (discussing Yugoslavia); PAUL HOCKENOS, *FREE TO HATE* (1993) (discussing eastern Europe). See generally *THE VIOLENCE WITHIN* (Kay B. Warren ed., 1993) (noting the effects of violence).

35. Phyllis P. Chock, *Porous Borders: Discourses on Difference in Congressional Hearings on Immigration, in Democracy and Difference: Law, Politics and Ethnography as Cultural Practice in the United States and Spain* (D. Greenwood & C. Greenhouse eds., 1993) (unpublished manuscript, on file with author).

36. SASSEN, *THE GLOBAL CITY*, *supra* note 14, at 323.

replace those negative stereotypes consisted primarily of showing immigrants to be “like” the equally stereotypical “good citizen,”<sup>37</sup> individualistic yet family oriented, entrepreneurial yet generous, ethnic yet assimilated. This will not be enough in the future if anthropology is to keep pace with the increasing demand for new and more inclusive forums for social participation.

In search of new approaches, it is helpful to consider that aspects of contemporary U.S. society offer striking parallels to the negotiations of identity elsewhere, as explored by analysts of colonial and post-colonial experiences abroad.<sup>38</sup> While the U.S. picture presents some particularities, the United States is in other respects a post-colonial society in the dual sense of its own history as a settler nation and also of current immigrations from post-colonial contexts. Thus, one would expect that current research and reflection on human rights, popular culture and expressivity, and social innovation and mobilization (e.g., in politics and markets) would be as relevant in U.S. settings as they are in the other contexts where ethnographers work. Perhaps these will be directions for future ethnographic work in the ever-new multiculturalism of the United States.

Anthropology has traditionally been associated with, and has bravely claimed, the global reality of cultural difference as its particular province.<sup>39</sup> Its next most pressing agenda will undoubtedly include the question of how the “global cultural flows” and “ethnoscapes”<sup>40</sup> come to the ground in urban ethnic and multiethnic neighborhoods, councils, and markets in the United States and around the world. As the warning flares from eastern Europe and elsewhere remind us, the nation-states of the future will be made or unmade in those settings. Fortunately, from the anthropological point of view, human beings everywhere have an innate capacity to comprehend

---

37. Bonnie Urciuoli, *Containing Diversity: Good Citizenship as the Basis for the Acceptable Enactment of Difference in the U.S.*, in *Democracy and Difference: Law, Politics and Ethnography as Cultural Practice in the United States and Spain* (D. Greenwood & C. Greenhouse eds., 1993) (unpublished manuscript, on file with author).

38. See, e.g., HOMI K. BHABHA, *THE LOCATION OF CULTURE* (1994); PARTHA CHATTERJEE, *THE NATION AND ITS FRAGMENTS* (1993); JEAN COMAROFF & JOHN COMAROFF, *OF REVELATION AND REVOLUTION* (1991).

39. *Democracy and Difference: Law, Politics and Ethnography as Cultural Practice in the United States and Spain* (D. Greenwood & C. Greenhouse eds., 1993) (unpublished manuscript, on file with author); LATOUR, *supra* note 7, at 7.

40. Arjun Appadurai, *Disjunction and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*, 2 *PUB. CULTURE* 1, 6 (1990).

complexity, accumulate and combine multiple repertoires of cultural expertise, innovate for the sake of survival, and create new myths. These must count among the assets in a future that is inevitably unclear.

