

# Theater of the Absurd

## *An academic conference on immigration reveals a bias toward Third World additions*

Reportage by Joseph Fallon

The Massachusetts Historical Society, a prestigious organization founded in 1791, hosted an academic conference (May 18-20) entitled “Immigrant Massachusetts: 1840-2000.” Among the schools represented at this event were: Boston College, Boston University, Brandeis, Brown, Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Northeastern, Notre Dame, Tufts, University of Connecticut, University of Massachusetts, University of Pittsburgh, University of Texas, and Wellesley. The speakers included Jonathan Chu, Howard Chudacoff, Michael Dukakis, Lawrence Fuchs, Nathan Glazer, Michael Jones-Correa, Thomas O'Connor, and Reed Ueda.

Fourteen papers were presented. They were critiqued by fellow academics and then commented on by the audience during “questions and answers.” Some sessions — such as “Strike” which dealt with the 1912 strike by unskilled, immigrant mill workers, mostly Italians and East Europeans, in Lawrence, Massachusetts; and “Transplanting Faiths” which focused on religious identity and religious conversion among immigrants between 1890-1940 — did limit themselves to historical events in Massachusetts.

However, in the opening lecture on Thursday evening by Professor Thomas O'Connor, professor emeritus at Boston College, and in the Friday sessions on “Coming to Massachusetts” and “Becoming American or Creating Communities,” the focus, directly or indirectly, was on *current* immigration. These papers and the subsequent discussions revealed an aggressive pro-Third World immigration bias on the part of the speakers and

the audience. Variations on the myth that the United States is “a nation of immigrants” and “a proposition country,” coupled with an endless repetition of the mantra “inclusion, openness, and pluralism” replaced any examination of the facts.

The issue of immigration driving U.S. population growth to half a billion or more in the next fifty years, and the social, financial — and especially the environmental — impact of such growth, were completely ignored by everyone on both sides of the podium. While writers favoring current immigration, such as Noel Ignatiev, were cited with approval, writers on immigration reform, such as Peter Brimelow, George Borjas and Lawrence Auster were not mentioned. Numerous opinion polls showing most Americans want immigration reduced were completely ignored.

In his opening lecture, Professor O'Connor raised the question of whether today's immigrants should even assimilate anymore, whether assimilation was, in fact, “coercion” by the dominant society. He suggested “becoming” American, as historically understood, imposed a “penalty” on immigrants. They had been “forced” to lose their language, religion, and culture. The professor later went on to express how Boston was enriched by the cultural celebrations of Irish and Italians without explaining the contradiction. How can descendants of immigrants who have “lost” their culture be able to celebrate that culture?

Professor O'Connor's lecture introduced what was to become one of the common themes in the papers and discussions, particularly those on Friday, namely: any shortcoming of today's immigrants is the fault of the dominant society of the United States.

Five speakers stand out — Professors Cintron, Chu, Ueda, Dukakis, and Fuchs. Friday morning's theme was “Coming to Massachusetts.” In her paper “Jobs and Opportunity among Recent Hispanic Immigrants in Lowell,” Professor Aixa Cintron of Massachusetts Institute of Technology took this allegation about

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responsibility to the extreme. While admitting many Hispanic immigrants are unskilled, she maintained the fault for their condition is with the United States because it has a “skill-biased” economy. Notice she did not say a “skill-based” economy, but a “skill-biased” economy. The implication was that the U.S. should not only import a Third World population, but a Third World economy to go with it.

The purpose of Cintron’s paper was to present oral histories testifying to the economic oppression suffered by Puerto Rican and Dominican immigrants who had migrated from New York City or Boston to Lowell, Massachusetts. But in describing this economic oppression, which consisted of what she said was the lack of an economic “safety net” for unskilled Hispanic immigrants, the professor neglected to mention federal and state welfare programs or the high welfare dependency rate of Hispanics.

It was later revealed during a question from the audience that for her “study” Professor Cintron had interviewed, principally if not exclusively, Hispanic immigrants in homeless shelters and at substance abuse clinics.

The section of the conference on “Becoming American or Creating Communities” was held in the afternoon and was moderated by former Massachusetts Governor, and 1988 Democratic presidential candidate, Michael Dukakis, now a professor at Northeastern University. In this session Professor Jonathan Chu presented his paper on “George Frisbie Hoar: Chinese Exclusion and the Political Reconstruction of Race.” While ostensibly a historical examination into the failed attempt by U.S. Senator Hoar to defeat the Chinese Exclusion Act, the paper served as a vehicle for Professor Chu to attack pre-1965 U.S. immigration policies.

In “Citizenship, Civic Identity, and Civic Tradition” Professor Reed Ueda examined the changes in Massachusetts politics over the century which transformed the state from a leader of immigration restriction to a leader of open immigration. Like Professor Chu, Professor Ueda used his paper to attack pre-1965 immigration policies as “racist” and

“exclusionist.”

As moderator, Professor Dukakis claimed the change from an “anti-immigrant” Congress in 1985 to an immigrant-friendly Congress in 1997 was due to politicians recognizing the growing size and political power of the Hispanic population. This, he declared, proved the American political system was self-correcting.

The former governor ignored the extensive cases of illegal naturalization and voter fraud, the most infamous being President Clinton's 1996 “Citizenship USA” under which thousands of aliens were illegally naturalized. He similarly ignored how special interest money is used to lobby (some might say, “bribe”) both Republicans and Democrats to enact legislation to grant additional amnesties, lower the standards for naturalization, increase H-1B visas for foreign computer programmers, and increase the number of agricultural “guest” workers.

Then there was the great misrepresentation. Professors Chu, Ueda, and Dukakis always referred to current immigration policy as the result of post-World War II legislation. The 1965 Immigration Act was never mentioned, which meant they did not have to address the broken promises of its sponsors who had assured the public this law would not increase annual immigration levels, would not redirect immigration away from Europe, and would not lower admission standards.

Professor O'Connor's opening lecture best projected the tenor of the conference. He recounted the Census Bureau projections that the European-American majority population will be reduced to a demographic minority after 2050. This anti-democratic transformation can be described as a demographic coup d'etat. But Professor O'Connor only referred to it as a demographic change — a change, he asserted, that will have a tremendous impact on “the study of immigration.” To the professor, the impact is not on the United States, not on the European American majority population, not on the continued viability of democratic government, not on the continuation of Western Civilization upon which this country was founded — but on “the study” of immigration. •