

THE CRIMINALIZATION OF IMMIGRANTS IN THE USA: FROM ECONOMIC MIGRANTS TO INSTIGATORS OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES.

Emmanuel Ngor NDIAYE

Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, Sénégal

emmangor54@gmail.com

Résumé

La présente étude examine les questions liées à l'immigration et à la criminalité aux États-Unis. En effet, comme l'histoire nous enseigne, l'Amérique est une nation d'immigrants grâce à la diversité de sa population. Cet aspect multiculturel n'est que le résultat de l'immigration que le pays a connue depuis l'arrivée des premiers colons. Néanmoins, bien qu'elle soit une société multiculturelle, l'Amérique est une nation blanche anglo-saxonne, ce qui justifie la suprématie des Blancs, en particulier ceux qui sont originaires du Nord-Ouest de l'Europe et qui ont une culture anglophone. Sans aucun doute, c'est la suprématie de la population blanche sur les minorités qui engendre les tensions entre les différentes communautés. En d'autres termes, même si l'Amérique est une nation d'immigrants, il faut admettre que les minorités ne sont pas considérées comme de véritables américains et cette question est ce qui favorise les problèmes tels que l'inégalité des classes, la discrimination, le racisme et entre autres la criminalisation des immigrants. Comme d'autres groupes minoritaires, les immigrants sont aujourd'hui victimes de préjugés qui font d'eux des criminels ou des instigateurs de différentes formes de violence dans les quartiers les plus défavorisés.

Mots clés : *chômage, criminalisation, groupes minoritaires, immigrants, réfugiés.*

Abstract

The present study examines issues linked to immigration and crime in the United States. In fact, as history suggests, America is a nation of immigrants thanks to the diversity of its population. This multicultural aspect of the American population is nothing but the result of the immigration that the country has known since the arrival of the first settlers. Nevertheless, despite being a multicultural society, America is a White Anglo-Saxon nation and this justifies the supremacy of White people, in particular those who are from Northwestern Europe and who have an English-oriented culture. Without any doubt, it is the supremacy of the white population over minorities that engender tensions between the different communities. In other words, even though America is a nation of immigrants, it should be admitted that minorities are not considered as true Americans and this question is what promotes issues including class inequality, discrimination, racism, and among others the criminalization of immigrants. Similar to other minority groups, immigrants are today victims of prejudices which make them criminals or instigators of different forms of violence in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Key words: *criminalization, immigrants, minority groups, refugees, unemployment.*

Introduction

The debate over crime and immigration in America is a topical issue which, for many years, has been among the most pressing issues of the U.S. Government's political agenda. Referred to as a nation of immigrants, the United States is undeniably the largest immigration country that receives annually different migrants from all over the world. To this regard, while some of the latter are economic migrants inspired by the myth of American material success by meritocracy, others, identified as refugees or asylum seekers, are instead political migrants who originate from poverty or war-affected countries. Such pull and push factors are generally what fuel the migration to America perceived by the rest of the world as the land of the free where oppressed and poverty-stricken people are welcomed, an idea which Emma Lazarus, in "The New Colossus", summarizes as follows,

[...] Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe
free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!
(Lazarus, 1883)

As noted in Lazarus' poem "The New Colossus" inscribed on the plaque of the Statue of Liberty, a symbol of freedom and as a welcome to immigrants, America opens its doors to people who are looking for a place where they can express their desire, pursue their dreams without being subjected to any arbitrary political system. In fact, it is in such a context that it has become a nation of immigrants thanks to the ideologies on which it was founded and that represent important pull factors for the different types of immigrants who are, either legally or illegally, admitted each year. Owing to the different channels through which people enter into the USA, the discourse about American immigration has become a complex issue to the point of raising different points of view both within and outside the country. Thus, though America is, as history suggests, known as a nation of immigrants, it is worth noting that such an ideology is today called into question simply due to the various arguments that are advanced with regard to the immigrant population.

Starting earlier before the arrival of the Pilgrims Fathers, American immigration has been marked by different waves of immigrants who were either economic or political migrants. In both contexts, one notices that whatever the conditions under which people migrate, they do this in the hope of finding better living conditions or new opportunities for success and as such the choice of the destination country is essential in the process. To this point, the United States has long been a preferred destination country because of the various pull factors that are economic, social, ideological, cultural, and political etc. Former U.S. president Woodrow Wilson, for instance, once argued that: “America lives in the heart of everyman everywhere who wishes to find a region where he will be free to work out his destiny as he chooses”. (Oskar, 2008). What should be retained from this statement is the ideology of the Promised Land which is, among other incentives, projected throughout the world. However, thanks to its status as a nation of immigrants, America has over its history received and keeps on welcoming individuals of different origins. In more recent years, even though people are still motivated by American democratic values such as Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of happiness as illustrated in the Declaration of Independence, we should bear in mind that they are very often associated with stereotypes according to which they are the instigators of crime or other forms of violence in the country. Such arguments can be read in *The Oxford Handbooks of Ethnicity, Crime, and Immigration* (2014) where Michael Tonry writes, “During periods of high-volume migration and social turbulence, resident populations typically attribute crime problems and disorder to immigrants”. (Tonry, p.1). This reflection has undeniably given birth to different attitudes toward the U.S. foreign born population characterized by minorities. From a socio-economic point of view, minorities are marginalized and as a consequence they are geographically and disproportionately present in areas where crime and violence, as shown by many studies, are widely spread and recurrent.

In another sense, owing to their marginalization, they reside in areas where poverty and the lack of access to public services result in the involvement in criminal activities which some experts of crime studies consider as hate crime. To put it differently, hate crime shows at which point people involved in criminal activities are culturally, socially, economically, and politically excluded in that they hate those who are in a dominant or privileged position. Michael Tonry, for instance, further

argues that: "...members of dominant groups also attribute crime problems and disorder to long-standing oppressed ethnic minorities". (Tonry, p.1). Building upon the example of the United States, oppressed-ethnic minorities are those who belong to communities including African Americans, indigenous populations, Mexicans, Chinese and others who are, in other terms, referred to as Hyphenated-Americans, a term that racially differentiates them from the dominant white population. Among other issues, the racial domination between the white population and the rest of the minority communities is too often the source of the tensions that exist between the two or even between minorities themselves.

To bring to light this perspective, this study aims first at investigating how as a nation of immigrants, America opens its doors to immigrants hence the ideology of the welcome mat which reflects the openness and humanitarian response toward immigrants. Secondly, our analysis will focus on the marginalization of minorities which, with no doubt, exacerbates the problem of class inequality. In the third and final section, it is of considerable importance to see how the discourse about crime and immigration has created the new concept of crimmigration and also raised different points of view and attitudes toward the immigrant population.

1. The United States as a nation of immigrants and the ideology of the welcome mat

From a historical perspective, the United States is a nation of immigrants that has long welcomed immigrants from very diverse origins and for various motives. Earlier before the Pilgrim Fathers, for example, Asian nomads whose descendants are known as Indians and Eskimos traveled from northeastern Asia to the Western Hemisphere. In like manner, people from different parts of Europe migrated to America for several reasons that could be economic, social, or political among others. At the socio-economic level, one can mention the case of Irish immigration which, owing to the great Potato famine and the English rule over Ireland, knew a tremendous wave to America. When it comes to other immigrants from Europe, their migration was motivated by the search for a place where both religion and materialism could coexist as was the case with the English settlers. By contrast with the above-mentioned groups, Africans were involuntarily brought to America where they

served as slaves in the agriculture which represented the backbone of the American economy.

In recent years, American immigration is marked by different categories of immigrants among whom some are documented immigrants while others are undocumented in addition to refugees and asylum seekers who make an increasing portion of the U.S. population. The arrival of the last groups has incited public indignation and worries since along with being undocumented they are unskilled and more likely to experience unemployment hence the resort to other activities that are considered illegal by the U.S. laws. In a study, “Who Policies Immigration?” Amada Armenta observes that, “Early lawmakers worried that admitting the “wrong” kind of immigrants would burden public resources and increase crime”. (Armenta, p.15).

When making a comparison between old and new immigrants from Europe, Irving L. Gordon, in *American Studies: A Conceptual Approach* (1984), suggests that:

The new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were difficult to remold into the American “image”. They had little education. They settled in large cities, creating ethnic enclaves, where they resisted assimilation into the dominant American culture. Their ghetto areas became breeding places of disease and crime. The new immigrants, some people argued, were physically and mentally inferior to the old immigrants. (Gordon, pp. 19-20)

Gordon’s description of old and new immigrants from Europe substantiates ideas related to the current debate over immigration. To this regard, even if diverse and strict immigration policies have been adopted to reduce the growing number of immigrants by promoting skilled immigration with a merit-based system, it is quite obvious that the United States is still perceived as a haven for the downtrodden and oppressed people throughout the world. On account of this humanitarian response which consists in welcoming oppressed people, it is stated that America opens its doors to criminals, terrorists and other foreign menaces as Michelle Maklin points it out in her book *Invasion: How America Still Welcomes Terrorists, Criminals and Other Foreign Menaces to Our Shores* (2002).

Similar to Maklin's analysis regarding the humanitarian response of America toward immigrants, many American citizens think that America spreads its welcome mat which literally means that everybody is admitted in the country simply because they pretend to be refugees or asylum seekers who are oppressed in their home countries. As a consequence, those people who are accepted because of humanitarian motives are considered by anti-immigrant advocates as economic migrants who flee the extreme poverty that exists in their countries. Nevertheless, others are admitted by their merit or skills but still represent a threat to the national security as was the case with the hijackers who—on September 11, 2001—invaded America. In the words of Maklin, although those hijackers benefited from the welcome mat of the United States, they unfortunately ended up becoming enemies of the country that welcomed and trained them. She concludes that,

The nineteen hijackers who invaded America on September 11, 2001, couldn't have done it without help from the United States government. We unlocked our doors, spread out the welcome mat, and allowed these foreign visitors to plot death and destruction in the comfort of our home. And they could do it again in a heartbeat. The United States Congress, pressured by ethnicity lobbyists, corporations, the travel industry, and open-borders activists, aided the September 11 terrorists by losing track of foreign students and visitors overstaying their visas. To this day, no such tracking systems have been implemented. Federal lawmakers also created visa programs and airline-sponsored regulations that aided the terrorists' travel. Those programs remain in place today. (Maklin, p. ix)

Just like most authors who have expressed the worries created by the diversity of the foreign-born population in the United States, Michelle Maklin presents the issue by focusing her analysis on the 9/11 attacks. Many attacks and crimes, according to Maklin and a large number of the public opinion, are perpetrated by individuals who have benefited from the aid of the American government through training programs that allowed them to study or work in the United States. That is what happened with the September 11 terrorist attacks which— according to the U.S. government intelligence agencies, among which the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Central Intelligence Agency

(CIA)—were committed by individuals who have been trained in American universities. In other words, Mohamed Atta—one of the hijackers of the American Airlines Flight 11 which crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center—was trained at Huffman Aviation School at Venice, Florida. In a section “Changes in U.S. Attitudes toward Refugees, Asylum Claimants, and Illegal Migrants” of their book *Threatened Peoples, Threatened Borders: Migration and U.S. Foreign Policy* (1984), Michael S. Teitelbaum and Myron Weiner examined how the United States received political dissidents from communist countries. As they point out,

...Refugees from Communist countries were welcome, since their flight demonstrated the lack of legitimacy of Communist regimes. Under this policy, the United States readily admitted individuals from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Cuba, Russia, and the countries of Eastern Europe, and, moreover, pressed Communist countries to permit freedom of exit. (Teitelbaum and Weiner, p. 16)

Considering the above excerpt, we should bear in mind that America itself has, in the past, contributed to increasing the influx of immigrants through policies that focused on providing assistance to refugees and asylum claimants from Communist countries. Nonetheless, in recent years, there is no doubt that the debate over the arrival of these types of migrants has taken another orientation and that is, indeed, what the authors of *Threatened Peoples, Threatened Borders: Migration and U.S. Foreign Policy* explain in the following terms:

Asylum claimants, refugees, and illegal migrants can impose unacceptably high costs upon the United States itself... Beyond the issue of employment, American fears of a large influx of asylum claimants, refugees, and illegal migrants have deeper roots in the structure of the welfare state, the distribution of financial resources among local, state, and national governments; uncertainties over the prospects for immigrant integration; and a concern over the loss of governmental capacity to orderly manage the flows. (Teitelbaum and Weiner, p. 17)

On account of the large number of refugees, asylum claimants, and illegal migrants, the American government finds it difficult to control them and provide assistance or even employment to those people. The latter, after escaping from the predicaments they went through in their respective countries, hope to grasp the opportunities that America—the land of the free and abundance—offers. Nevertheless, whatever the hope they may have, it is worth noting that some of them or even the overwhelming majority will face other socio-economic, cultural, and political obstacles that hinder their integration into the American society. In this sense, owing to their status, illegal migrants are more likely to belong to minority communities that, in addition to the marginalization they undergo, are also victims of class inequality.

2. Minorities and the issue of class inequality

By contrast to any other country, the United States is a country where the problem of minorities occupies a central position in the public debate. However, due to the presence of many ethnic groups with very diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and practices, America is perceived as a multicultural society that identifies itself as one nation hence the motto *E Pluribus Unum* which stands for “One out of many”. Thus, irrespective of the concept *E Pluribus Unum* that seeks to unify while respecting diversity, it is worth underlining that the issue of minorities and the problem of class inequality are realities and topical issues in America. As a result of this inequality, minority communities feel marginalized in different sectors of activities. According to some analysts of crime studies, it is because of this marginalization along with the poverty which some of those communities face that individual residing in those neighborhoods are involved in criminal activities to provide for their needs.

In the same vein, the difficulty of having access to facilities and services is evidently what motivates marginalized people to misbehave or revenge against the system that disfavors them for the benefit of others, in particular the upper class. On the geographical front, the marginalization of minorities is reflected by their presence in places where the standard of living is low, an idea which St. John De Crèvecoeur expressed in the past to call into question the disparities engendered by class inequality. As he writes,

He who would wish to see America in its proper light, and have a true idea of its feeble beginnings and barbarous rudiments, must visit our extended line of frontiers where the last settlers dwell, and where he may see the first labors settlement, the mode of cleaning the earth, in all their different appearances; where men are wholly left dependent on their native tempers and on the spur of uncertain industry, which often fails when not sanctified by the efficacy of a few moral rules. There, remote from the power of example and check of shame, many families exhibit the most hideous parts of our society. (Nina Baym et al., p.313)

Here, De Crèvecoeur lays emphasis on the dark side of American society in which some people are left aside. Accordingly, based on arguments from public opinion, it is those people left aside who perpetrate violence in areas where poverty gains ground. In more recent years, the same problem is noticed since because of class inequality, many people, among whom immigrants, reside in areas where they are vulnerable and may not have any chance to fulfil their dreams in such socio-economic conditions. It is in this context that one should understand Neeraz Kaushal who, in “Crime, Immigration, and Terrorism”, suggests that: “the neglect and marginalization of minority neighborhoods, including ethnic enclaves, make them breeding grounds for violence, crime and terrorism” (Kaushal, p.156).

Admittedly, as Kaushal points out, the neglect and marginalization of minority communities’ results in different forms of violence and criminal acts. Compared to the dominant population or upper class that, very often, resides in a healthier and more secured environment, minorities are, on the one hand, victims of high youth unemployment and of an education gap on the other hand. Regarding immigrants, in particular low skilled or undocumented immigrants, they seek refuge in communities where the standard of living is low to avoid higher living cost or running the risk of arrestation and deportation. For such a reason, they become part of the marginalized minorities and, prior to that, their entrance in the United States raises anti-immigrant arguments and prejudices which Amada Armenta expresses in these words,

Although the United States prides itself on being a “nation of immigrants,” concerns about “undesirable” newcomers—

convicts, the poor, the infirm, and those from groups considered to be “racially inferior”—have been features of American immigration policy from its inception (Armenta, p.15).

In most specific cases, minorities, among whom illegal immigrants, are considered as perpetrators of crime and violence simply because of their concentration in neighborhoods where there is a high rate of violence. Indeed, as we have noted throughout this study, the high rate of violence is caused by the high youth unemployment and other socio-economic factors that do not contribute to the integration of the latter communities. To illustrate the problem of the high rate of violence in disadvantaged neighborhoods, we can refer to *The Color of Justice: Race, Ethnicity, and Crime in America* (2016) where Samuel Walker et al. examine the victimization of young African-American girls who—because of gender issues and their belonging to a minority group—suffer from the hostility of their environment. Quoting Miller’s *Getting Played: African American Girls, Urban Inequality, and Gendered Violence*, they write:

Miller focused on young girls’ victimization experiences in their neighborhoods, their schools, and their relationships. Noting that most of the youth interviewed for their study lived in extremely disadvantaged neighborhoods in which drug dealing, street gangs, and violence were common place, Miller demonstrated that young girls faced particular risks in these male-dominated neighborhoods. (Walker et al., p.468)

Building upon the above excerpt, we should admit that inhabitants in neighborhoods with high crime rate are vulnerable to these practices even if they are not among the instigators of the latter. To some extent, on account of the criminal acts committed in disadvantaged areas, people residing there are stereotyped as criminals as is the case with some immigrants who cannot afford paying high rent in places where the cost of living is very expensive for them. Furthermore, central to the study of crime and minorities is the problem of gang violence. As defined by US Legal, “Gang violence means criminal and non-political acts of violence committed by a group of people who regularly engage in criminal activity against innocent people. The term may also refer to physical hostile interactions between two or more gangs”. (US Legal).

Over its history, America has known different cases of violence committed by individuals who may be either gang members or not. More

particularly, members of a gang movement have in common some beliefs or ideologies that consist in committing gang-related violence or crime. Still, in the context of the United States, the problem of gang-related violence has long been associated with individuals belonging to minority communities. To this point, we may refer to migrants from Central American countries including Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras also known as the Northern Triangle along with Mexico. Many immigrants from those countries have, for a long time, been associated with gangsters on account of the presence of gangs and the practice of criminal activities in that region of Central America. The Mara Salvatrucha or MS-13 is, for example, a gang movement that was born in Central America and was, over time, expanded to the United States where its members, most of the time originating from Central America, have committed recurrent criminal acts since its inception.

Although there are various gangs in the United States, some of them including the MS-13 and the Barrio 18 remain the most violent and notorious because of their scope either within or outside the country. To this perspective, Thomas Bruneau et al. argue that,

Although Southern California's Latino gangs are not the oldest street gangs in the United States, they are among the most emulated and fastest-growing. The members of the first Latino street gangs in California, which formed more than a hundred years ago, were of Mexican descent... This chapter begins with a look at the origins and evolution of the most notorious "Sureño" street gangs of Southern California, Mara Salvatrucha (from which the term *mara* became generalized) and the 18th Street Gang (also known as Calle Dieciocho, Barrio 18, or Calle 18). (Bruneau et al., pp. 23-24)

Clearly, as a transnational organized crime, research has shown that the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) originated decades ago among Salvadoran immigrants in Los Angeles and has ever since established a criminal network throughout the United States. In one article "Gangs, Terrorists, and Trade" published in *Foreign Policy In Focus*, Adam Elkus provides a detailed explanation of the Mara Salvatrucha by showing how it took its roots in Central America but more importantly how it has been spread in North America. As he points it out: "MS-13 is the product of the vicious Central American civil wars of the 1980s. Thousands fled north, many of them veterans of both sides. Unable to find work because of a

lack of education, some of these refugees decided to leverage their combat skills to survive, forming Mara Salvatrucha”. (Elkus, 2007)

In most cases, gang members are said to be either former illegal immigrants or refugees among whom some are admitted in the United States because of the humanitarian response that America provides to people who seek refuge or who are victims of oppression. Others are, instead, involved in criminal activities like drug trafficking, money laundering, the theft of intellectual property among other forms of illegal activities. Based on these arguments, the debate over crime and immigration—although it has raised many concerns in the past decades—is nowadays a hot issue that has given rise to the new concept of crimmigration and new attitudes toward immigrants.

3. Crimmigration and new attitudes toward immigrants

The concept of crimmigration, encompassing both the word crime and immigration, is a term which is used to describe the connection between immigration and crime or the influence of the former on the latter. In more specific terms, Juliet Stumpf defines crimmigration as being “*essentially the convergence of immigration and criminal law*” (Stumpf, p. 199). To better examine the term crimmigration, it seems, therefore, interesting to draw evidences from studies conducted on the issue. When reading *Governing Immigration through Crime: A Reader* (2013), written by Julie A. Dowling and Jonathan Xavier Inda, we understand how the term crimmigration has come into existence. Without any doubt, as we have already explained it literally, crimmigration can be considered as being the link between crime and immigration.

In political terms, it should be observed that the immigration debate is mostly centered on the problem of illegal immigration. In like manner, due to this socio-economic and political phenomenon, the discourse over crime and immigration is in most part associated with illegal immigration. Dowling and Inda, in their introduction, make it clear that, “Many terms can be used to describe those who enter or reside in the United States without official authorization”. (Dowling and Inda, p. 1). On the basis of their arguments, it is essential to highlight that the term crimmigration is commonly used in public discourses to draw a link between immigration and criminality. However, given that crime implies the involvement in or practice of illegal activities, we can admit that undocumented immigrants are the ones who are associated with

criminality or simply criminalized. Nonetheless, even though there are crime cases that are committed by immigrants, it is important to highlight those criminal activities may be committed by the foreign-born or native population as well. In her chapter “We Need to Protect our Borders to Prevent Criminals and Terrorists from Entering the Country”, taken from *They Take Our Jobs! And 20 Other Myths about Immigration*, Aviva Chomsky observes that:

The potential that a citizen will commit a crime or even a terrorist act is just as real as the potential that an immigrant will. No country has a monopoly on violent lawbreakers, and in no country are they nonexistent. The rule of law, and the lawful prosecution of those who commit crimes, makes a lot more sense than closing borders as a way to reduce criminality. Terrorist acts in the United States have been committed by citizens and by immigrants, and for causes related to domestic as well as international issues. (Chomsky, pp. 180-181)

Though many immigrants are considered as criminals, it should be recognized that, as Chomsky makes it clear, they are not the only instigators of criminal acts in most U.S. cities. However, what should be drawn from their criminalization is that this rhetoric is based on assumptions that reflect the attitudes that people have toward the immigrant population. From another angle, the criminalization of immigrants mirrors how the U.S. criminal justice has influenced the immigration law. In other words, owing to the growing number of immigrants including both documented and undocumented ones, there is no doubt that the criminal justice system is centered on the immigration problem with a punitive approach to those deemed undocumented.

What is more, it is essential to remind that crimes committed by immigrants have contributed into influencing the relationship between the criminal and immigration law even though they should operate in different matters. Based on their inter-connexion, Juliet Stumpf concludes that, “*The division between criminal law and immigration law has grown indistinct such that the two are merely nominally separate*” (Stumpf, 2006).

Stumpf, through this assertion, tries to shed light on the role that the criminal law plays in the immigration activity. Among other things, the large number of immigrants has led to the passage of new policies that criminalize immigrants, in particular undocumented ones who are most

of the time from Mexico and Central American countries. Not surprisingly, just like many other people, migrants from Mexico and Central America consider the United States as an El Dorado where there are possible opportunities for success. Consequently, given that the United States and Mexico are bordering countries, it is quite obvious that migrants find it easy to take illegal channels to get into America by crossing borders, which gives birth to the expression border crossers.

In the past, American immigration policies consisted in restricting the number of immigrants from some countries as was the case in 1882 with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act prohibiting the immigration of Chinese workers. However, in more recent years, the debate has taken another angle to the point of criminalizing either directly or indirectly all those people who are deemed undocumented. In *Immigration and Crime: Race, Ethnicity, and Violence* (2006), Ramiro Martinez Jr. and Abel Valenzuela Jr., in the introduction of their first chapter “Coming to America: The Impact of the New Immigration on Crime”, present the issue by recalling how it dates back to the past:

Debates on the topic date back more than a hundred years; some early twentieth-century writers alleged that immigrant groups were biologically deficient compared with nonimmigrants. Thus crime and disorder were among several harmful outcomes that could be expected as long as “inferior” immigrants were allowed to enter the country. Reactions to the alleged link between immigration and crime were soon reflected in immigration policy. In fact, the growing fear of immigrants and crime helped facilitate the passage of the Emergency Immigration Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924, which substantially reduced the number of immigrants admitted to the United States. (Ramiro Martinez Jr. and Abel Valenzuela Jr., pp. 3-4)

While some Acts—among which the Emergency Immigration Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924 just to name but a few—consisted in restricting the admission number of immigrants, today there are policies that ban the admission of some nationals whose countries are accused of sending criminals to the United States. To illustrate, as we already mentioned with the case of individuals involved in gangs, it is stated that the latter are affiliated to gangs that have networks in their

home countries and that is what enables them to migrate to America where they join the same gangs in which they operated at home.

As a case in point, one can consider the Mafia which is a criminal activity that is generally associated with Russian immigrants who are very notorious with this activity by contrast to other immigrant groups. One important contribution to the literature of the Russian mafia in the United States is the study of James O. Fincknauer and Elin J. Waring entitled *Russian Mafia in America: Immigration, Culture, and Crime* (1998). In this study, the authors address issues related to immigration, crime, culture, and corruption that happen both in the USA and Russia while providing evidences that show how immigration can have an impact on crime. To begin, they outline the fact that different waves of Russian immigrants have left Russia for America; but despite the different waves characterized by old and new immigrants, they share a common language and the same cultural ties that shape their thinking and behaviours. They argue that:

To truly understand the Russians who have come to America—old and new, criminal and not, honest and not—we are compelled to look at who they are and where they come from. Their roots are in czarist Russia, the Russia of the former Soviet Union, and the Russia of today. The most important lessons that immigrants learned were about survival under the novel and difficult conditions that marked Soviet life. For all Russians, being especially adaptive and innovative often meant putting aside morality and legality, and this outlook—characterized by rationalization, hypocrisy, and a double standard of morality—to varying degrees shapes the thinking and behaviour of almost all Soviet Russians who have come to America. (James O. Fincknauer and Elin J. Waring, p. 3)

In addition to describing old and new generations of Russian immigrants in the United States, the above quotation highlights how these generations resemble to each other owing to the cultural ties which they reflect through their behaviours and attitudes. The conclusion that can be drawn from this resemblance is that they share the same cultural beliefs and as pointed out by Fincknauer and Waring, for Russians, being adaptive and innovative means putting aside morality and legality. In fact, like many other immigrant groups involved in criminal activities, the presence of Russian immigrants in the mafia has cultural and economic

motives given that they are from a country where the mafia and corruption are well-known and widespread criminal activities. Through the mafia, for example, people are involved in criminal activities or in an industry that consists in producing, promoting and selling private protection even if it is true that such an activity is prohibited by law.

Conclusion

Throughout its history, the United States, unlike any other country, has been known for welcoming people from all over the world. However, this openness—toward other nations—has made it a nation of immigrants that provides humanitarian response to the different waves of immigrants in search for a place where they can pursue their dreams or seek refuge. Nonetheless, irrespective of the diversity of its population, it seems interesting to remind that America is historically perceived as a White Anglo-Saxon country with an English-oriented culture. In fact, without any doubt, this perception of America as a White Anglo-Saxon country is very telling in that it has a great influence on all aspects of social, economic, cultural, and political life etc.

Starting from this analysis, it should be mentioned that despite being called a nation of immigrants, all immigrants do not have the same treatment and this can be illustrated by the arguments and attitudes toward them. To some respect, the arguments and attitudes toward immigrants are what shape the immigration debate which, for several years, has taken another orientation to the point of being associated with crime. Thus, just like many other issues, the debate over crime and immigration remains a constant issue that is central to a growing body of research. While some people contend that immigration has a great impact on crime, others therefore suggest that immigrants have nothing to do with the crime or violence that happen in some U.S. cities.

The conclusion that can be drawn from both sides is that, on the one hand, immigration can have an influence on crime in the sense that immigrants lack resources and opportunities and as a result this incites them to be committed to criminal activities. On the other hand, one can analyze the discourse from an anti-immigrant perspective and this merely consists in discrediting immigrants by blaming them of being the instigators of the various criminal activities. As mentioned in previous analysis, the discourse over crime and immigration is in most part linked

to diverse assumptions that can have social, cultural, economic, and political orientations.

Bibliography

- Baym Nina et al., ed.** (1995), *The Norton Anthology of American Literature: Shorter Fourth Edition*, New York, Norton and Company.
- Bruneau Thomas** (2011), *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, Austin, University of Texas Press.
- Bucerius Sandra M. and Tonry Michael** (2014), *The Oxford Handbooks of Ethnicity, Crime, and Immigration*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- Chomsky Aviva** (2007), “We Need to Protect our Borders to Prevent Criminals and Terrorists from Entering the Country”, in *They Take Our Jobs!: And 20 Other Myths about Immigration*, Boston, Beacon Press.
- Dowling Julie A. and Inda Jonathan Xavier** (2013), *Governing Immigration through Crime: A Reader*, Stanford, Stanford University Press.
- Dublin Thomas** (1993), *Immigrant Voices: New Lives in America 1773-1986*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press.
- Fincknauer James O. et Waring Elin J.** (1998), *Russian Mafia in America: Immigration, Culture, and Crime*, Boston, Northeastern University Press.
- Gordon Irving L.** (1984), *American Studies: A Conceptual Approach*, New York: Amsco School Publications, Inc.
- Lester Joan S.** (1994), *The Future of the White Men and Other Diversity Dilemmas*, Berkeley, CA, Conari Press.
- Maklin Michelle** (2002), *Invasion: How America Still Welcomes Terrorists, Criminals and Other Foreign Menaces to Our Shores*: Washington D.C., Regnery Publishing, Inc.
- Martinez Jr. Ramiro and Valenzuela Jr. Abel, ed.** (2006), *Immigration and Crime: Race, Ethnicity, and Violence*, New York, New York University Press.
- Stumpf Juliet** (2006) “The Crimmigration Crisis: Immigrants, Crime, and Sovereign Power” *American University Law Review* 56(2): 367–419.
- Teitelbaum Michael S. and Weiner Myron** (1995), *Threatened Peoples, Threatened Borders: Migration and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York, The American Assembly.

Walker, Samuel et al. (2016), *The Color of Justice: Race, Ethnicity, and Crime in America*, Six Edition, Boston, MA, Cengage Learning.

Webography

Armenta Amada, “Who Polices Immigration?”, *University Of California Press*, 2017, in <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1W8h204.6>. 8 Feb. 2021.

Elkus Adam, “Gangs, Terrorists, and Trade” *Foreign Policy In Focus*, April 12, 2007, in https://fpif.org/gangs_terrorists_and_trade/, 12 Feb. 2021.

Kaushal Neeraz (2019), “Crime, Terrorism, and Immigration”, Columbia University Press, 2019, in <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/kaus18144.10>. 08 Feb. 2021.

Lazarus Emma, “The New Colossus”, in <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/46550>. 18 Jan. 2021.

Martinez Ramiro and Lee Matthew T., “On Immigration and Crime”, *National Criminal Justice Reference Service*, Volume 1, pp. 485-524, in https://www.ncjrs.gov/criminal_justice2000/vol_1/02j.pdf, 16 Feb. 2021.

Oskar, “America the Promised Land”, *Delta Winds: A Magazine of Student Essays*, A publication of San Joaquin Delta College 2008, America the Promised Land, in <http://www.deltacollege.edu/org/deltawinds/DWOonline08/americaatheapromisedland.html>. 1 Dec. 2020.

US Legal, <https://www.definitions.uslegal.com/g/gang-violence/>. 11 Feb. 2021.