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A Sense of Place: The Politics of Immigration and the Symbolic Construction of Identity in Southern California and the New York Metropolitan Area

Kevin Keogan[1]

American immigration has long been characterized by spatial concentration within major urban areas. Los Angeles and New York City are two of the most important immigrant meccas today. Recent studies of immigrant adaptation within these cities have emphasized material factors at the expense of cultural considerations. This paper adopts a comparative perspective to demonstrate extreme differences in the symbolic construction of identity vis-a-vis immigrants in these two urban areas. Using The Los Angeles Times *and* The New York Times *as indicators of elite cultural orientations, a content analysis is performed. The results demonstrate the social construction of an exclusive "threat" narrative in Southern California, and an inclusive "immigrant as victim" narrative in the New York metropolitan area. I argue that this extreme variation in cultural orientations must be understood as the result of divergent material* and *symbolic contexts. In order to demonstrate the importance of cultural factors, this paper focuses on symbolic differences between these areas and the influence these differences have on the political process of inclusion/exclusion.*

INTRODUCTION

New York City and Los Angeles have gained attention in the comparative literature on immigrant adaptation because, among other things, they offer contrasting cases of urban immigrant politics. Despite recognition

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that these political contexts are the result of both material and symbolic differences in development (Hirschman *et al.*, 1999:271–273), comparative analyses have focused almost exclusively on material explanations, while neglecting important cultural factors. I argue that a more thorough understanding of contemporary immigrant adaptation necessitates an integrated approach that takes into account differences in the historical evolution of *both* material *and* symbolic conditions in these, and other, urban areas.

Recent comparative studies have looked at contemporary immigrants' social adaptation within heavily impacted U.S. areas (DeWind and Kasinitz, 1997; Espenshade, 1997; Mollenkopf, 1999; Waldinger, 1996). Among the factors put forth to explain subnational variation in public attitudes and immigrant adaptation are the fiscal impacts of immigrants on the local economy (e.g., Clark and Zimmermann, 1997); the national origins of immigrants and the human capital they possess (e.g., Espenshade, 1997:1–31); and racial/ethnic demographics and established political practices (Mollenkopf, 1999; Waldinger, 1996). Implicit in all these analyses are different degrees of material determinism. Demographic, political–economic, or other material factors are seen as having a rather direct effect on public opinion and politics. While material factors are crucial for understanding the process of immigrant adaptation, these studies have not sufficiently considered the cultural realm and the role it plays in the structuring of social interaction (e.g., Alexander, 1992; Cerulo, 1995; Jacobs, 1996; Kane, 1991, 1997; Lamont and Fournier, 1992; Mohr and Duquenne, 1997; Sewell, 1992; Somers, 1995; Swidler, 1986).

In the past and present, political campaigns have gained support by focusing on the "problem" of immigration. Recent arrivals from abroad are particularly vulnerable to antiimmigrant politics because they have yet to become well-incorporated into American social institutions. Presently, this is especially the case for illegal immigrants who have become the most excluded segment of the foreign-born population (Espenshade and Huber, 1999:366). But despite the vulnerable social position of illegal immigrants, they do not *necessarily* become a target for exclusionary politics. Rather, there is always the potential for resistance from both those targeted for exclusion, as well as other social factions that have sympathies toward potential "victims" of such policies. These sympathies often manifest themselves as a *cultural* identification with those targeted, based on a social perception of commonality. Following from this, I contend that a benevolent political orientation toward immigrants at the local level—and especially illegal immigrants—is best understood as the result of favorable material *and* cultural conditions (Espenshade, 1995:202–203). In more general terms, this

paper advocates a view of the political process as based upon *both* material *and* symbolic logics of inclusion/exclusion.

With this in mind, the following section puts forth an historical analysis of immigrant identity formation in New York and Los Angeles. This is meant as a very broad analysis of major material and cultural factors that have influenced the formation of distinct visions of immigrants in each urban arena. This historical analysis relies on a foundation set by contemporary social historians and summarized in the "new political culture project" as advanced by Somers (1995:127). This approach insists, "first, that historical actors' practices, activities, and political ideas must be viewed as symbolic systems with their own histories and logics; and, second, that these symbolic logics themselves are modalities of politics and power as much as they are cultural expressions."

The divergent symbolic contexts that have formed in the areas under study are the result of immigrant groups' struggles over *both* material resources *and* cultural representation. Indicators of these symbolic contexts are the *cultural representation* of immigrants through time (e.g., history) and space (e.g., landscape). However, local historical narratives and spatial symbols of immigration are not mere indicators of cultural attitudes. I argue that *symbolic contexts significantly influence immigrant politics by providing cultural resources for the construction of collective identity.* I attempt to demonstrate the importance of the cultural realm by highlighting how immigrant-identity politics are *accomplished* through the use of established narratives and cultural images of immigrants, narratives and images that are embedded in these distinct urban landscapes. In order to do so, the content analysis relies upon the *analytical* separation of the cultural and material realms—an established practice in cultural studies (e.g., Kane, 1991, 1997; Somers, 1995:130). Such an approach is justified because it enables us to better appreciate the role of cultural factors in local politics without claiming *absolute* or *empirical* autonomy. Also, this approach avoids another theoretical pitfall—the conflation of the material and cultural realms (Archer, 1988).

THE SOCIOHISTORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF LOCAL SYMBOLIC CONTEXTS

Current symbolic contexts and identity formations must be understood as the result of an ongoing historical process. In order to better comprehend the sociohistorical construction of immigrant identity over time, let us look at the main contemporary immigrant-ethnic groups in each area. Table I provides 1990 census data for the top 10 ethnic groups for the

Table I. The Top Ten Ethnic Groups[a] in the New York and Los Angeles Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (PMSA), 1990[b] (in thousands, except percentages)

Ethnic group	Number	%
New York, NY PMSA[c]		
Total specified nationalities	6364	100.0
Italian	996	15.7
Puerto Rican	898	14.1
Irish	553	8.7
West Indian (non-Hispanic)[d]	403	6.3
German	389	6.1
Dominican	343	5.4
Russian	290	4.6
Polish	259	4.1
Chinese	249	3.9
U.S./American	193	3.0
Total for top 10	4573	71.9
Los Angeles, CA PMSA		
Total specified nationalities	7374	100.0
Mexican	2520	34.2
German	692	9.4
English	465	6.3
Irish	370	5.0
Salvadoran	253	3.4
Chinese	248	3.4
Italian	236	3.2
Filipino	223	3.0
U.S./American	168	2.3
Russian	151	2.0
Total for top 10	5326	72.2

[a] Ranked according to specified nationalities.
[b] U.S. Bureau of the Census (1990).
[c] Percentage of all specified nationalities for PMSAs.
[d] It is not clear why the census bureau created this pan-national category while all other nationalities were reported separately.

New York City and Los Angeles areas. While these data must be interpreted with caution[2] they nevertheless point to important similarities and differences in terms of ethnic identity. For instance, the top 10 accounts for about the same amount—72%—of all specified nationalities in both contexts, and both have five European-origin groups in the top 10, sharing four in common: Italian, Irish, German, and Russian. Both metropolises also have the "U.S./American" category near the bottom of the list, accounting for only between 2 and 3% of all specified nationalities. The remaining four groups in each Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (PMSA) are from Latin America/Caribbean and Asia, with one in common—China.

[2] A main problem is that since the census bureau reports ethnicity in terms of "specified nationalities," some important ethnic groups are not included (e.g., Jews).

These similarities aside, there are significant differences between the two areas. Perhaps most striking is the very large proportion of the total accounted for by Mexicans in the Los Angeles context (34%), and the relative lack of a large non-European immigrant-ethnic group in the New York City area. Mexicans are more than three times the number for the next highest ethnic group in Los Angeles, and near half the total for the top 10. In the New York City area, Puerto Ricans are the largest non-European ethnic group with about 14% of the total. The total for non-European ethnics in the New York City area is about 30%, as compared to 44% in the Los Angeles PMSA. The absence of a major, non-European immigrant-ethnic group in New York City is even clearer when we consider that Puerto Ricans are not an official immigrant group, and the "West Indian" group is composed of multiple nationalities. Therefore, the largest non-European immigrant-ethnic group in terms of a specific nationality is Dominican, with only about 5% of the total. Moreover, the Dominicans are roughly one-third the size of the largest European immigrant-ethnic group in New York City (the Italians at roughly 16%) and smaller than the second and third largest European-ethnic groups (Irish and Germans).

The total for European-origin ethnics in the New York PMSA is about 39%, as compared to just 26% in Los Angeles. Thus, the relative predominance of Mexican ethnics in Los Angeles is the result of both the concentration of Mexican immigrants in the Southwest United States, as well as fewer European immigrant-ethnics in the area. However, the lower proportion of European-origin ethnics in the Los Angeles area is not simply a result of fewer people of European ancestry. As Table II indicates, even among individuals who are aware of their specific European ancestry, those in the Los Angeles area are considerably less likely to claim such an ethnic identity than those in New York (roughly 68% vs. 79%). The difference is also significant for prominent national-origin groups. For example, of those claiming Italian ancestry in the New York PMSA, 88% identify as ethnic Italians; the comparable rate in Los Angeles is 77%. Even more striking is the difference in the rate of Irish ethnic identification between the PMSAs: 73% in New York vs. just 57% in Los Angeles.

I want to draw two main conclusions from this analysis: (1) Mexicans have obtained *the* predominant demographic position among *all* immigrant-ethnics in the Los Angeles context and (2) New York's immigrant-ethnic population is much more diverse in terms of national origin, with European ethnic identities more salient than in Los Angeles. These current differences in ethnic group formation must be understood in relation to specific material struggles and immigrant-identity politics over time, in each urban context.

Historically, New York City was center stage for European immigrant groups' struggle for material success upon arrival in this country. The "rags

Table II. The Top Five European Ethnic Groups[a] as a Percentage of Ancestry[b], New York and Los Angeles PMSA, 1990[c] (in thousands, except percentages)

National origin	Number ethnic	Total ancestry	% ethnic
New York, NY PMSA			
Italian	996	1127	88.4
Irish	553	757	73.1
German	389	550	70.7
Russian	290	368	78.8
Polish	259	367	70.6
Total	2487	3169	78.5
Los Angeles, CA PMSA			
German	692	937	73.9
English	465	710	65.5
Irish	370	648	57.1
Italian	236	308	76.6
Russian	151	196	77.0
Total	1914	2799	68.4

[a] Based on specified nationalities.
[b] Total of first and second ancestry reported.
[c] U.S. Bureau of the Census (1990).

to riches" success story is a familiar historical narrative for the Irish, Italians, Jews, and other European immigrants. But material success did not result in complete ethnic assimilation (Glazer and Moynihan, 1963). Rather, in the process of their material ascension, a significant proportion of New Yorkers have affirmed their ethnic roots, celebrating their collective struggles in a very idealized manner. Although no longer the dominant sending region for immigration to the United States, Europeans continue to constitute a significant portion of the first generation in the New York City area. The relatively strong and constant flow of first generation European immigrants to the New York region (Rumbaut, 1995) has facilitated the reproduction of an inclusive immigrant identity, as other immigrant groups—mainly from Latin America/ Caribbean and Asia—have been gradually added to the foreign born mix over the past few decades. These demographic conditions have helped to perpetuate a dominant "immigrant as us" identity in the New York City area. Although there are New Yorkers that would rather highlight the differences between past and present flows of immigrants, New York's economic and political institutions have evidenced a relatively inclusive orientation toward contemporary immigrants (Mollenkopf, 1999; Waldinger, 1996).

On the other hand, Southern California's current political climate is far more exclusionary toward the foreign born population, continuing a rather strong tradition of nativism. The history of discrimination toward the Mexican-origin population in the Southwest United States is particularly well documented (e.g., Acuna, 1972; Barrera, 1979; Griswold del Castillo,

1984; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Moreover, there is evidence that for the many residents of California with European ancestry, immigrant origins have not been central to their social identity. Because most residents of California arrived from points east, often after years of acculturation, their immigrantness was less pronounced.

Recent scholarship has noted the temporal separation of contemporary Americans from their specific immigrant origins (e.g., Alba, 1990; Portes and Rumbaut, 1999). However, social memory of group origins can be encouraged through popular, place-specific historical accounts and other forms of commemoration. As Olick and Levy (1997) have argued, collective memory is an important element of political culture, and involves an "... ongoing process of negotiation through time." Commemoration can both *pro*scribe and *pre*scribe collective behavior in the present. If contemporary immigrants are roughly equated with those of the past, then remembering the suffering "our" ancestors endured as a result of nativism both discourages such present behavior, and encourages a more welcoming attitude. But there is also an important *spatial* dimension to ethnic identity formation (Lieberson and Waters, 1988). For example, Schwartz (1996:909–910) claims that collective memory must be understood within a specific symbolic context, and that place naming and monument making are important aspects of more general efforts to link social memory to broadly based networks of power and interest. Collective memory can be triggered by events and symbolic landmarks that act as an "orienting symbol—a map that gets us through these predicaments by relating where we are with where we've been . . . We cannot be oriented by a past in which we fail to see ourselves."

European ethnic groups in the New York City area (e.g., Italians, Irish, Jews) have had a significant impact on the culture and traditions of New York City, and they have done so with a continued sense of their immigrant origins. Moreover, they have come to understand their particular ethnic histories in terms of a common, proimmigrant narrative, and this symbolic past is commemorated through prominent landmarks such as Ellis Island and The Statue of Liberty, as well as through a variety of ethnic neighborhoods, parades, and festivals. Although European immigrants are a main focus of New York's many immigrant-ethnic celebrations, non-European immigrant groups are also included in the ethnic scheme. In fact, as the content analysis will demonstrate, the symbolic association between past and present immigrants can be facilitated through prominent immigrant landmarks.

Conversely, the European-origin residents of Southern California are far less likely to identify as immigrants. Because their material successes have not been commemorated as a collective immigrant-ethnic struggle, the

native Anglo population there is less likely to understand the past in terms of an "immigrant as us" narrative. The massive relocation of European-origin people from points East to the West coast was not experienced as immigration to a foreign land, but rather as migration within the same nation. For instance, many migrants to Southern California from other areas of the country self-identified along state lines (e.g., as fellow Iowans), which led to the formation of many so-called "state societies." McWilliams (1946:166) went so far as to claim that "there is no more significant Southern California institution than the state society" (see also Fogelson, 1967:196–198). People migrating to Southern California from other areas of the United States were physically separated from established immigrant-ethnic communities back East. Although many ties were likely transplanted to the new region, the ethnic flavor of residential patterns and associations became less robust. As a result, later generations were less likely to be reminded of their specific immigrant origins.

In comparison to the New York City context, Southern California is relatively void of positive spatial symbols of immigrants, and the role immigrants played in the construction of the region goes largely unrecognized (Hayden, 1995; Mitchell, 1996; Rodriguez, 1997). The lack of a strong tradition of immigrant identity in Southern California has been further undermined during the 1990s due to an economic recession and a sharp increase in the number of Mexican and other non-European immigrants. Under these circumstances, the contemporary meaning of the term "immigrant" takes on much more negative connotations among the Anglo population of Southern California.

Although a particular symbolic context may influence meaning construction, what results from this process is contingent upon both material and cultural conditions (Kane, 1997). However, symbolic contexts and social identity are often rooted at the local level and must be built up over many years; therefore, these cultural formations may become quite resistant to change. In summary, I argue that Southern California and the New York metropolitan area have developed distinct and divergent collective interpretations of immigrants. In the New York area, immigrants are understood in terms of an immigrant origin mythology, represented through salient landmarks and immigrant-ethnic celebrations that embody a specific, positive narrative of immigrants and their historic place in the community. The Los Angeles metropolitan area is relatively void of popular, positive symbols of immigrants. The European-origin population in Southern California has a much weaker immigrant identity due to its temporal and spatial distance from the immigrant experience. Under these circumstances, I argue, immigrants in Southern California are significantly more susceptible to exclusionary politics, especially during periods of economic insecurity.

I now turn to a more general review of the literature on immigrants and cultural studies in order to gain a broader theoretical perspective on the matter.

IMMIGRANT POLITICS AND THE SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

Many Americans harbor mixed emotions when confronted with debates about immigration. One popular sentiment is that a large number of immigrants can create a heavy burden on the more established residents of an area. At the same time, many Americans can identify with contemporary immigrants, provided there is an awareness of common social origins. Therefore, I theorize that an exclusive orientation toward immigrants would be most strongly evidenced when an area's residents perceive (1) material conditions as unfavorable and (2) contemporary immigrants as significantly different from the European-origin population. Conversely, an inclusive orientation would be most likely when (1) material conditions are seen as relatively favorable and (2) there is a strong self-identification with contemporary immigrants. Specifically, we are interested in attitudes toward the most controversial category of the foreign-born population—illegal immigrants. In the absence of significant proimmigrant politics, we would expect an ambivalent attitude toward illegal immigrants, at best. I contend that an inclusive political orientation toward illegal immigrants could only be accomplished at the local level under favorable material and cultural conditions.

Southern California was in the midst of major economic restructuring, and experienced a gauntlet of natural and social disasters during the 1990s (Davis, 1998). These material conditions, in conjunction with the relative absence of a positive social identification with immigrants, have resulted in an exclusionary political orientation in Southern California. As compared to Southern California, economic conditions in the New York metropolitan area were rather favorable during the 1990s. Moreover, New York City has developed a distinctly positive symbolic context vis-a-vis immigrants. These more favorable material and cultural conditions have facilitated an inclusive political orientation toward New York's foreign-born population. But how do symbolic contexts influence immigrant politics in the present? In my attempt at answering this question, I will now survey some of the more important literature on ethnic-identity politics, discourse theory, and symbols, and the role they play in the political process.

A promising approach in the field of immigration has been the social construction of narratives and identity vis-à-vis immigrants (e.g., Alba, 1990;

Brubaker, 1992; Finzsch and Schirmer, 1998; Fitzgerald, 1996; Hargreaves, 1995; Kurthen, 1995; Perea, 1997; Waters, 1990). Ethnic identity continues to be important for many Americans, although in different ways. For instance, Alba (1990:3) has argued that "[a] new ethnic group is forming—one based on ancestry from *anywhere* on the European continent." This emergent identity is seen largely as a result of an economic and social convergence among what were once distinct immigrant-ethnic groups. However, for European-origin individuals, ethnicity has become a *voluntary* form of self-identification (Alba, 1990:20). Furthermore, it should be stressed that if a specifically European (or "white") identity is adopted, then non-Europeans become a potential out-group. This is one of the conflicts inherent in ethnic-identity relations.

Of course, there is nothing natural about social distinctions among immigrant ethnics. What Waters (1990:155–156) refers to as "symbolic ethnicity" *may* be based on widely perceived commonalities. Americans of European ancestry can see newer immigrants, predominantly from Asia and Latin America, as similar to them in that they are fellow immigrants, or they can see more recent immigrants as distinctly different from the earlier waves from Europe. In an ideal-typical manner, recent immigrants can either be lumped together as part of a supraethnic "nation of immigrants" identity, or there can be a splitting process through which at least some of today's immigrants are perceived as an out-group (see Zerubavel, 1996, for a discussion of "lumping and splitting" as a classificatory process).

Fitzgerald (1996:229–230) has argued that immigration plays a paradoxical role in the shaping of collective identity in the United States. He points out that while Americans continuously affirm their identity through a "nation of immigrants" narrative, antiimmigrant politics often contradict this collective identification. More broadly, social theorists argue that discourse plays a key role in identity politics. For example, Alexander (1992:299) has argued that

> discursive identity is contested. Political fights are, in part, about how to distribute actors across the structure of discourse, for there is no determined relation between any event or group and either side of the cultural schema . . . In periods of tension and crisis, political struggle becomes a matter of how far and to whom the discourses of liberty and repression apply [and] just how popular narratives of good and evil are applied.

Thus, for immigrants, the politics of inclusion/exclusion involve a process through which they are located within either an inclusive or exclusive discourse. Historically, certain national origins and races were actively excluded from entry into the United States. However, since 1965, immigration reforms have prohibited the overt exclusion of immigrant groups based on national origin or race/ethnicity. As a result, a new discourse of inclusion/exclusion

has developed in the contemporary period, and may be summarized as follows:

Social rank	Category	Cultural perception	Federal policy
High status (+)	Refugee	Victim	Inclusionary
Neutral status	Immigrant	Newcomer	Ambivalence
Low status (−)	Illegal immigrant	Deviant	Exclusionary

These categories have become a main basis for federal immigration policy, providing a widely accepted and legitimate means for sorting the foreign-born seeking permanent residency. However, as Somers (1995:136) has convincingly stated in her argument for a more reflexive and relational sociology,

> concepts cannot be defined on their own as single ontological entities; rather, the meaning of one concept can be deciphered only in terms of its "place" in relation to other concepts in its web ... social practices and political ideas must be recognized as historical and cultural objects in and of themselves, rather than as reflections of external social phenomena.

Therefore, a critical analysis of accepted social concepts and categories is necessary to guard against essentialism and to highlight problems inherent in any system of classification, especially when the categories designate social status.

In an annual review of the literature on refugees and immigrants, Hein (1993:43) looked at the debate around " ... whether refugees are fundamentally distinct from immigrants or whether the category is a social construction masking similarities with immigrants." While he finds support for both a "realist" and "nominalist" perspective, politics are seen as a crucial factor in determining refugee status. For instance, refugee cases are still often decided on the basis of an immigrant's national origin. Individuals from certain countries have been essentially guaranteed refugee status due to U.S. international relations (e.g., Cubans during the Cold War), regardless of their actual reasons for leaving. On the other hand, individuals from other countries with valid fears of politically motivated violence (e.g., Haitians) are much *less* likely to be given refugee status (Zucker and Zucker, 1996).

In terms of illegal immigrants, there is also a bias of classification toward certain national origins. For example, immigrants from Mexico are those most closely associated with this concept. Although Mexico is widely recognized as the main source country for undocumented immigration, a considerable number of immigrants from countries such as Canada, Poland, Italy, and Ireland have been officially classified as illegal aliens (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996:12). However, immigrants from these Western countries are much less likely to be suspected of being illegal, and their statistical

inclusion in this *category* is not likely to have an effect on their *status situation*.[3] Our collective focus on illegal immigrants crossing at the U.S.–Mexico border directs attention away from both legal immigrants from Mexico, as well as illegal immigrants from other countries (Johnson, 1997; Rodriguez, 1997). Hill (1985:225) in a study conducted for the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) defines illegal immigrants in a very broad sense to include

> those who enter without inspection or with falsified documents, those who enter legally but overstay their visa period, those who enter legally but violate their terms of entry (for instance by taking employment) and those who enter as permanent residents but break the law in such a way as to become deportable.

While any definition is open to debate, this official one seems at odds with a popular conception of illegal immigrants. For example, in *United States Immigration: A Reference Handbook* (Miller and Miller, 1996:296) illegal immigration is defined as "Entry into the United States *without a visa* by someone who is not a citizen" (italics mine). This definition excludes roughly half of all illegal aliens who enter the country with proper documentation and then overstay their visas or otherwise violate their terms of entry (Clark and Zimmermann, 1997:67).

An important focus in the study of collective identity formation is the role which symbols play in this process (Cerulo, 1995; Spillman, 1994; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz, 1991). As Cerulo (1995) demonstrates, cultural objects such as flags "crystalize" identity by informing citizens of who they are. In order to accomplish crystallization, political leaders use symbols to gain support for their campaigns and to rejuvenate the collective body for future challenges. Highly symbolic cultural objects focus the collective, reenforce bonds between people, and help to delineate social boundaries. Much of the work on this subject has looked at this process as it operates at the national scale. While the nation may be the scale at which immigration issues are ultimately decided and enforced, distinct local discourses on immigrants, and their place in society, inform federal policies. As Alba (1990:31) points out in terms of his own research, "there is value in studying ethnic identity in a specific setting because ethnicity is, in important aspects, a localized phenomenon, dependent on context; this property is lost in national studies."

Specifically, we are interested in the different ways that time and space are "marked" in terms of immigration, in each geographic context. Extending Durkheim's concept of the sacred, and linguistic analyses of contrasts, Brekhus (1996, 1998) has conceptualized the *socially marked* as "extremes that stand out as either remarkably 'above' or remarkably 'below' the norm"

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[3]Weber (1978:932) defines a status situation as "every typical component of the life of men that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of *honor*."

(Brekhus, 1998:35). Attributes of social markedness include a general emphasis on the distinctiveness of, and differences between, the marked and the unmarked. Of particular relevance for the present study, "the marked receives disproportionate attention relative to its size or frequency" (1998:36). Markedness can be evidenced in various dimensions of life, including our experience of time and space. Certain segments of time (e.g., important dates, salient events) and space (e.g., places of worship, landmarks) are more salient in our collective experience than other "ordinary" times and spaces. But this marking of time and space varies according to context, and may even result in a "reversal" of markedness, "across cultures, across time and space and even within a given culture" (1998:37).

The focus of this paper is on illegal immigrants as the most negatively marked category of foreign-born people. A disproportional amount of attention to this specific category can foster or reenforce a negative identification with immigrants in general. However, what we are most interested in are the symbolic associations and discursive links made between illegal immigrants and the wider urban environment. Stressing the relational basis of purposive action, Emirbayer and Mische (1998:972–973) contend that "agency [is] always agency toward something, by means of which actors enter into relationship with surrounding persons, places, meanings, and events." Agents must contend with both material and cultural forces that shape local political practices. Although some have argued that it is the material differences between Los Angeles and New York that are most important in this regard (e.g., Mollenkopf, 1999; Waldinger, 1996), these differences are "no doubt due to local interest group politics as well as to the differences in political cultures (Hirschman *et al.*, 1999:271). Although illegal immigrants are currently the most negatively marked federal category of immigrants, how they are interpreted depends, in part, on how they are related to other meaningful times, people, places, and events. The remainder of this paper will attempt to demonstrate how the politics of immigration are influenced by the symbolic resources available in each urban context.

DATA/METHODS

This paper relies upon content analysis, an established method for the identification and delineation of cultural attitudes (Gamson *et al.*, 1992; Weber, 1990). However, the texts analyzed should be similar enough to ensure that the comparison is valid. The two newspapers chosen for the present study, *The New York Times* (NYT) and *The Los Angeles Times* (LAT), are remarkably similar in terms of their target audience, journalistic prestige, regional circulation, and publication format. In fact, LAT has used NYT as the

standard for its own pursuit of prestige among the nation's daily newspapers (Berges, 1984:235–236; Hart, 1981:367).

LAT competes for journalistic prestige by targeting an audience of better educated men and women with above average purchasing power (Berges, 1984:119). As their web site puts it (www.latimes.com/home/aboutlat/facts), "Times readers are upscale, affluent, educated professionals and homeowners." A quick comparison of the two dailies shows a virtually identical format regarding the summary of news, division of coverage on local/national/international events, writing style, vocabulary, etc. Finally, the circulation of the two newspapers is quite comparable. As of 10/22/97, LAT had a daily circulation of 1.1 million and a Sunday circulation of about 1.4 million (www.latimes.com). NYT reported a circulation of 1.1 million on weekdays and 1.6 million on Sundays as of 9/30/97 (www.nytco.com).

The marketing of LAT and NYT to an affluent, more educated readership puts them in a position to influence debates on salient issues, being the paper of choice for intellectuals, politicians, and other powerful members of civil society. Both also consider their reporting as superior to other daily newspapers that employ "sensationalism" to sell copy. Whatever the reality, the East and West coast versions of *The Times* actively project an objective approach to the reporting of news. Moreover, both periodicals are seen as the most legitimate print-media source for the reporting of daily events. Therefore, I believe these newspapers are indicative of an elite discourse in each geographic arena.

A content analysis of NYT and LAT is conducted using the *OVID Newspaper Abstracts, 1989–1997*. The year 1989 was the earliest included in the database, and 1997 was the last year for which a complete set of abstracts was available for both papers during the research phase of this project. This database "provides cover to cover indexing with concise and informative abstracts of articles appearing in over twenty-five newspapers." It should be noted that the unit of analysis is the newspaper *abstract*, rather than the article itself. These abstracts provide a consistent format for the summary of each article's main content, which in turn provides a clear sense of the newspaper's general focus in the reporting of current events.

Of course, there are limits to the study design. Perhaps most important is the fact that data are collected on just one text in each area, and only over a rather short time span of 9 years. There are other daily newspapers, especially in the New York City area, that could be analyzed for narrative identity construction vis-a-vis recent immigrants. Thus, as opposed to NYT, which is much more highbrow and international in its approach, other local dailies might afford a more working-class look at issues. However, since we are interested in a comparison of elite narratives of immigration in each area, NYT and LAT are most appropriate sources. Another limit to the study is

the unit of analysis—the article abstract. Since this involves a summation of each article's content, specific discursive practices may be lost in the process. However, I believe that the merits of the database, specific texts, and unit of analysis selected for this study far outweigh any and all of the aforementioned limits.

The study of how salient events are narrated through mass media accounts is becoming an established method for discourse analysis (e.g., Dobkin, 1992; Jacobs, 1996; Stallings, 1990; Wagner-Pacifici, 1994). In order to compare and contrast the elaboration of specific narratives through NYT and LAT reports, I will first identify the most highly marked period(s) of time for the reporting of illegal immigration events in the two papers. As the issue is pushed to center stage by salient events, an immigrant discourse will become articulated, revealing dominant attitudes toward the foreign-born, in each locale. As Gamson *et al.* (1992:385) note in their review of the literature on media discourse analysis, narratives are like stories that "frame events as they occur over time."

While salient events mark time, we also want to investigate *spatial* markedness. Cultural objects, or what have been referred to as "significance embodied in form" (Griswold, 1987, cited in Berezin, 1997:372) are becoming an important focus in the study of political culture and social identity (Cerulo, 1997:396). More specifically, the analysis of urban landscapes has recently provided useful insights into the cultural and material character of cities (Hayden, 1995; King, 1996; Mitchell, 1996; Sassen, 1996; Zukin, 1991, 1995). But which social objects within an urban landscape are most appropriate for the present analysis? *The Random House College Dictionary* (1984:753) defines "landmark" as "**1.** a prominent or conspicuous object on land that serves as a guide." Immigrant landmarks, defined in this manner, are those prominent cultural sites that serve as a guide for our understanding of immigration issues. By looking at the most politically salient immigrant landmark in each context, we will better understand how social space becomes charged (positively or negatively) in relation to illegal immigration and the wider immigration discourse. These salient immigrant landmarks will indicate the cognitive mapping of immigrants and their "place" in the collectively imagined community.

The most salient illegal immigration events for each area were chosen by locating those time periods (i.e., years) with a significantly above average (defined here as more than one standard deviation above the mean) number of articles dealing with this issue, in each newspaper. All the article abstracts within the illegal immigrant category for the appropriate years were then reviewed to locate the main narrative themes in relation to current events. The most salient immigrant landmark for each area was selected on the basis of my extensive review of abstracts for the two newspapers, using two basic

Table III. Summary of Article Abstracts on Immigration, Illegal Immigration, and Refugees in *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times*, 1989–97

Total articles	NY Times (449,051)	LA Times (297,643)
Immigration articles	2465 (0.55%)[a]	2396 (0.8%)[a]
Immigration–Local Focus[b]	354 (14.4%)	788 (32.9%)
Illegal Immigration[c]	437 (17.7%)	772 (32.2%)
Illegal Immigration–Local Focus[b]	63 (14.4%)	388 (50.3%)
Refugees articles	2340 (0.52%)	1121 (0.38%)
Refugees–Local Focus[b]	38 (1.6%)	55 (4.9%)

[a] All percentages are calculated from the next higher, more inclusive category.
[b] This subcategory includes articles with a statewide focus (i.e., within New York or California, respectively).
[c] This subcategory includes all immigration articles with the word "illegal" appearing in the title or abstract.

criteria: (1) the site had to have particular importance for the people of the geographic area and (2) the symbol should be the *physical site* of political debate over the issue of immigration. Using these methods, I was able to identify highly salient times and spaces within which a local discourse on immigration was being socially constructed and elaborated, in each geographic arena.

RESULTS

A general, numerical summary of the content analysis for the two newspapers is presented in Table III. The main purpose of this table is to demonstrate that illegal immigration is a far more salient *local* issue for LAT than for NYT. First, illegal immigration articles as a percentage of all immigration articles show a major discrepancy—17.7% for NYT vs. 32.2% for LAT. Moreover, if we look specifically at the articles with a local geographic focus, this difference in attention is even more pronounced: 14.4% for NYT articles compared to 50.3% for LAT articles. Thus, the data indicate a much more emphatic focus on illegal immigration as a local theme in LAT reports.

Of course, it could be argued that these differences in attention are due to the actual number and type of foreign-born persons in the two geographic areas. While it is true that California has become the predominant state for immigrant settlement, the difference is not so drastic when the foreign-born population is viewed as a percentage of the entire state population (see Table IV). The difference in the foreign-born population is even less pronounced in terms of the New York and Los Angeles PMSAs.[4] Furthermore, the proportion seems to be creeping toward equilibrium: the 1997 estimates

[4] Unfortunately, there are no available estimates for illegal immigrants at the metropolitan level, to the best of my knowledge. Therefore, I have also kept the state level as the lowest (i.e., "local") level of analysis for newspaper articles.

Table IV. Foreign-Born Population of the United States, California, and New York State, 1990 and 1995, and New York, NY, and Los Angeles, CA PMSA, 1990 and 1997 (in thousands, except percentages)

	Population	Foreign-born	% foreign-born
1990[a]			
United States	248,718	19,767	7.9
California	29,760	6,459	21.7
New York State	17,990	2,852	15.9
Los Angeles, PMSA	8,863	2,895	32.7
New York, PMSA	8,547	2,286	26.7
1995[b]			
United States	262,755	23,733	9.0
California	31,589	7,839	24.8
New York State	18,136	3,427	18.9
1997[c]			
United States	266,727	26,845	10.1
Los Angeles, CA PMSA	9,546	3,526	36.9
New York, NY PMSA	8,806	2,901	32.9

[a] U.S. Bureau of the Census (1990).
[b] U.S. Bureau of the Census (1996:28, 30).
[c] U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Current Population Survey, 1997.* Reported in Rumbaut (1998).

show the percentage of foreign-born in the New York metropolitan area as about nine-tenths that in Los Angeles (about 33% vs. 37%).

In keeping with the theoretical argument, let us now look at the available statistics on the illegal immigrant population in each area. Illegal immigrants as a percentage of both the total state population and total immigrant population are presented in Table V. The estimates for illegal immigrants in California as a percentage of the total state population is a little less than twice that of New York state (5.6% vs. 2.9%). Likewise, Table III indicates the number of illegal immigration articles in the LAT as a percentage of all immigration articles is slightly less than twice that of comparable NYT articles (32.2% vs. 17.7%). However, the best comparison for the present study would be the category "Illegal Immigrants as Percentage of Immigrant Population" from Table V, with the Table III category "Illegal Immigration" articles with a statewide or "Local Focus" as a percentage of all "Immigration" articles with the same geographic focus, for the two newspapers. According to Table III the NYT "Illegal Immigration–Local Focus" category is 17.8% of the "Immigration–Local Focus" category (63/354, percent not shown in table). According to the estimates in Table V, illegal immigrants are 15.2% of the total immigrant population in New York State. Table III also indicates that the LAT "Illegal Immigration–Local Focus" category is 49.2% of the "Immigration–Local Focus" category (388/788, percent not shown), while Table V estimates that illegal immigrants are 22.7% of the total immigrant population in California. Therefore, while the NYT's focus on illegal immigrants as a local issue is slightly above the corresponding

Table V. Estimates of Illegal Immigrants in the United States, California, and New York State and as a Percentage of Total State Population and Total Immigrant Population, 1995

Area	1994 census mean estimate[a]	1996 INS estimate[a]	1995 estimate[b]	Illegal immigrants as percentage of total population, 1995[c]	Illegal immigrants as percentage of immigrant population, 1995[c]
United States	3,750,000	5,000,000	4,375,000	1.7	18.4
California	1,552,500	2,000,000	1,776,250	5.6	22.7
New York State	500,500	540,000	520,250	2.9	15.2

[a]U.S. Bureau of the Census (1997:12).
[b]The 1995 estimates are calculated as an average (mean) of the 1994 Census estimate and the 1996 Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) estimate.
[c]See Table IV for figures on total population and total immigrant (i.e., "Foreign-Born") population for the United States, California, and New York State, 1995.

state population estimates for this category of the foreign-born (17.8% vs. 15.2%), the comparable statistics for the LAT are much more disproportionate (49.2% vs. 22.7%). In other words, *although illegal immigrants were estimated to be less than one-fourth of all immigrants in California, LAT illegal immigration articles with a statewide focus were almost one-half of all immigration articles with such a geographic focus.*

These numbers indicate that there was a disproportionally high focus on the illegal immigrant population in California through LAT reports (1989–97). It should also be remembered that there are important differences in the concentration of particular immigrant-ethnic groups in each area (see Tables I and II). For instance, Mexican immigrants are highly concentrated in Southwestern cities such as Los Angeles, and are the immigrant group most closely associated with the illegal immigrant label. But abstract numerical analysis tells us little about the particular narratives used in news reports on this issue. As noted earlier in the literature review, people who believe there are many illegal immigrants are more likely to have negative views on immigration in general. However, the particular narrative adopted in relation to this category of people can influence public opinion, despite the pejorative label. In other words, we are here concerned not only with the quantity of articles on illegal immigration, but also the *quality* of such articles. Table VI provides the means and standard deviations for the distribution of articles on illegal immigration as a local issue, 1989–97. Using this data to calculate those years as significantly above average in terms of the number of illegal immigration articles, we get the years 1993 and 1997 for NYT and

Table VI. Annual Distribution of Illegal Immigration Article Abstracts With a Local Focus[a], in *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times*, 1989–97

Year	NY Times	LA Times
1989	3	13
1990	1	13
1991	8	8
1992	5	15
1993	13[b]	50
1994	7	168[b]
1995	4	42
1996	8	42
1997	14[b]	37
Total	63	388
Mean articles/year	7	43.11
Standard deviation	4.359	49.398

[a]"Local Focus" means within New York State for *NY Times* articles, and within California for *LA Times* articles.
[b]More than one standard deviation above the mean articles/year.

the year 1994 for LAT. That gives us roughly 43% of the total articles in this category, for both newspapers (NYT 27/63; LAT 168/388).

The "Threat" of Illegal Immigration in Southern California

The most salient illegal immigration news story in Southern California was Proposition 187.[5] This statewide proposition, passed in November 1994, called for the denial of education, welfare, and all but emergency medical services to undocumented immigrants, including children. The political debate that led up to the passage of this legislation gives us an informative look at how illegal immigrants were portrayed through the local media. Various issues came to the fore in this debate; I will now attempt to categorize and relate the major themes that emerged through LAT reports.

On the broadest level, illegal immigrants were seen as a threat to the present and future stability of the area. This argument was pursued in a number of related ways, perhaps the most prominent was in terms of the burden that illegal immigrants put on the local social environment. Both advocates and opponents of the legislation engaged in a cost/benefit debate on the economic effects of illegal immigrants within the state. Proposition 187 was dubbed the "Save Our State" (SOS) initiative by its advocates. This language is revealing: first of all, it implies that the state is in some sort of crisis, thus the need to send out an "SOS" to warn the community of the danger illegal immigrants pose, and from which citizens most be "saved." The "Our" implies that "they"—illegal immigrants—are not part of the community, and are thus eligible for exclusion.

LAT editorials were clearly against the legislation, arguing that it was "politically and morally wrong" (11/2/97:B6). Specifically, the deputy editor of the LAT came out personally against both the measure and the newspaper's endorsement of Pete Wilson, the incumbent governor, because Wilson was seen as using the issue for political gain (10/31/94:B7). An earlier editorial claimed that "illegal immigration is not only a negative force" and due to "the law of unintended consequences" the initiative will result in additional costs for California taxpayers (10/2/94:M2). Interestingly, the rather weak argument for the positive contributions that undocumented immigrants make to the area is backed-up with the threat of an additional fiscal burden.

Important social institutions came out against the measure, but it was unclear whether they were doing so due to collective self-interest, or for normative reasons. Within important social institutions such as public education,

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[5] A LAT article (11/10/94:A1, 21) showing statewide voting patterns indicated that there was widespread support for the measure in Southern California, with 56% of Los Angeles area voters approving the proposition, compared to just about 40% approval in the San Francisco area (Alameda County).

health care, and the church we can see clear moral *and* practical (i.e., material) reasons to come out against Proposition 187. On the one hand, all of these occupations have an established humanitarian ethic for the servicing of those in need without regard to their social background: Teachers should attempt to educate all children; doctors must honor their oath to treat all sick individuals, etc. But the argument that it is in their personal interest to do so was also emphasized in LAT reports. For instance, officials from the Los Angeles Unified School District predicted that 10,000 teachers could lose their jobs and some schools close if Proposition 187 was passed by voters and enforced (10/22/94:B3). Furthermore, on a practical level, many professionals simply refused to engage in the "policing" of the immigrant population. This objection came from educators who refused to comply with the measure's call for the reporting of suspected illegal immigrants in schools (11/2/94:B1). Catholic archbishop of Los Angeles, Roger Mahony, made the most explicit moral argument against the measure. He claimed that the legislation would cause more harm than good, especially for "innocent" children who should be sheltered from the effects of such politics (10/25/94:B7).

Aside from the humanitarian focus and a potential alliance among liberal professionals, the clergy, and civil rights advocates, the debate over Proposition 187 was often portrayed as having widespread support among the citizenry. A front-page article (9/25/94:A1) entitled "Prop. 187's Support Shows No Boundaries," claimed that "unusual" support for the measure was evident among large numbers of liberal, Latino, and Democratic voters. On the other end of the political spectrum, there were some "surprising" voices of dissent. For instance, conservative Republicans Jack Kemp and William Bennett were congratulated by the editorial staff of LAT for coming out against the measure (10/21/94:B6). This was seen as especially courageous in light of the "hostile audience" Kemp faced while speaking at the Richard Nixon Library in Yorba Linda, California (10/20/94:A3). Other journalists also commented on the lack of tolerance at public forums created for discussion of the measure (10/10/94:B3).

Although certain members of the "Hispanic" or "Latino" category actively attempted to dissolve the stereotypical conception of them as a cohesive ethnic group (9/23/94:B7), others reaffirmed their bonds along ethnic/ racial lines. The ethnic solidarity theme was displayed most vividly in the coverage of "the largest demonstration in recent Los Angeles history" in which "enthusiastic organizers and participants ... expressed hope about a new political activism among Latinos" (10/18/94:B1). Other news stories also noted the effect Proposition 187 had in terms of creating political activism (11/4/94:B1; 12/9/94:A3; 12/11/94:B1). Ironically, some commentators observed that the large political demonstration *against* Proposition 187 bolstered support *for* the measure. Protestors were seen by many as

subversive in their support of illegal immigrants. For instance, one article (10/17/94:A1, 19) reported, "Several Latino activists privately expressed fears that a sea of brown faces marching through Downtown Los Angeles would only antagonize many voters." Symbolic politics and the delineation of cultural boundaries were quite evident during this demonstration. For example, some news reports claimed that the carrying of Mexican flags (usually without an American counterpart) by the protesters helped to clarify the need for passage of Proposition 187 on the part of undecided voters (11/10/94:B1).

As the election drew closer, the debate became so polarized that some state politicians were given attention simply for remaining neutral on the issue (11/3/94:A3; 11/8/94:A3). When the measure was finally voted on and its advocates claimed victory in the political debate, the legality of various aspects of the legislation was immediately challenged in the courts. Even the city of Los Angeles joined the legal challenges to block imposition of the measure (11/18/94:A1). But the political fight did not end at the state or local level—there was a widening of the debate to the national and international level. Less than 2 weeks after passage of Proposition 187 in California, Governor Wilson proposed that the federal government adopt a national version of the measure (11/19/94:A1). At the international scale, President Salinas of Mexico spoke out strongly against the legislation, claiming it "tramples and ignores" basic human rights (11/10/94:A28).

The U.S.–Mexico Border was the most politically charged immigrant landmark in Southern California during this period. As a precursor to Proposition 187, there was a public display of unusual attention to the border starting in the early 1990s, and coming to a peak in 1994. The "Light-Up-the-Border" campaign (9/18/92:B6; 6/23/90:A26; 5/26/90:A1) was an early and vivid attempt at drawing attention to illegal immigration from Mexico. This campaign involved a regular gathering of local residents along the border where undocumented immigrants cross into the United States. Arriving around dusk, the demonstrators would point their car headlights at the border and illuminated the migrants' attempts at crossing the national boundary. While some participants may have believed they were significantly reducing international migratory flows, the activity was more symbolic than practical. The idea was to, quite literally, shed light on "the problem" of illegal immigration from Mexico to the United States. Concerned area residents were attempting to draw attention to an issue that they felt was not being given sufficient attention by influential members of the community (e.g., politicians and the news media).

Much of the public debate centered on the danger illegal immigrants posed once they entered the country (7/27/94:A3; 3/12/94:A28; 6/3/92:A23; 5/20/92:A3). It was also reported that a border crackdown in Texas led to

a drop in crime rates there (7/27/94:A3). The salience of the U.S.–Mexico Border as a local political symbol peaked during 1994. During this election year, all the candidates for California Governor and the U.S. Senate made a pilgrimage to the landmark in order to "take a stand on illegal immigration" (9/16/94:A21). As the crusade against illegal immigrants gained momentum, proposals for physical deterrents at the border became more radical. For instance, incumbent U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer called for the deployment of the National Guard at the boundary in order to deter the "threat" that "illegals" posed (7/30/93:A3). A militaristic attitude was also reflected in the language used: "Operation Gatekeeper" was the code name for one plan to deter undocumented border crossers (10/5/94:B6). Kathleen Brown, the only major candidate for state office who went to the border to criticize the use of illegal immigrants as scapegoats (10/26/94:A3), lost her bid for governor, although she was predicted to win the office just a few months before the election.

Illegal Immigrants as "Victims" in the New York City Context

On June 6, 1993, a large vessel ("The Golden Venture") carrying a concealed cargo of almost 300 illegal immigrants from China ran aground off the New York City coast. At least nine deaths by drowning resulted. This was the most salient illegal immigration event in the New York City area during the 1989–97 time period. Therefore, it is a revealing case to compare with Proposition 187 in California. However, it was not the most sensational news story related to illegal immigrants during this time period.

Just a few months earlier, the bombing of The World Trade Center in Manhattan's financial center was initially linked to an illegal immigrant and another suspect who was mistakenly given permission to enter the country (3/7/93:A39; 3/12/93:A1). Amazingly, these were the only two NYT article abstracts that dealt with this event in terms of illegal immigration during 1993, although there were 282 NYT articles on the bombing during that year. Eight months later, a NYT article (10/18/93:B4) reported the results of a New York City survey that found "most residents think there are too many immigrants in town and that illegal immigrants pose a serious threat of terrorism." Even though NYT reports avoided making a persistent and direct link between illegal immigrants and the bombing, area residents made the association. Politicians and journalists could have used this event to focus on the "threat" that illegal immigrants posed to the area, but this was *not* a salient theme in *The New York Times'* coverage.

The majority of articles on the issue of illegal immigration during 1993 (8/13) were concerned with issues surrounding the Golden Venture episode. The term "illegal immigrant" was never used in the *title* of articles dealing

with the Golden Venture and its aftermath, and it is quite obvious from the reports that the criminal focus was shifted away from the immigrants themselves, to their smugglers. In fact, half of the articles (4/8) dealt directly with the apprehension and prosecution of those connected with the smuggling of immigrants from China.

One journalist, A. M. Rosenthal, wrote an article entitled "Give them a parade," (6/8/93:A25) claiming that the illegal immigrants "should be treated with courtesy, dignity and respect." In general, public attention was drawn away from the immigrants as deviants and instead they were portrayed as victims of a very profitable smuggling trade. Although most of the illegal immigrants aboard the Golden Venture were detained by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), a few were released to relatives in the New York City area. It was also reported that the INS would consider releasing others on a case-by-case basis (6/11/93:B1).

The coverage of illegal immigration again peaked in 1997, although no single event gained a majority of attention. The event that received the most attention (4/14 articles) was the "chilling story of exploitation" (7/22/97:A1) in which 57 deaf immigrants from Mexico were kept in "virtual slavery in two cramped houses... victims of the evils that can be inflicted on illegal immigrants who live in constant fear of discovery and deportation" (7/22/97:A18). Another two articles focused attention on the issue of illegal immigrants and other poor immigrants living in overcrowded conditions and those who profit from a "strong market for hovels" (7/23/97:B1; 7/29/97:A1).

Virtually all of the 14 NYT illegal immigration articles during 1997 adopted an "immigrant as victim" narrative, reporting on the struggles of illegal immigrants in a generally sympathetic manner, or focusing on those profiting in their dealings with this "vulnerable" population. Aside from the six articles dealing with the plight of the deaf Mexicans and other immigrants living in overcrowded conditions, another three articles reported that "fear and misinformation" caused a surge in the number of illegal immigrants trying to marry legal residents in order to avoid deportation or the loss of social services. One such article (3/23/97:A39) focused on illegal immigrants who became victims of fraud at the hands of "unscrupulous operators," and "self-described immigration experts who promise miracles but rarely deliver more than bills and disappointment." Two more articles dealt with the vulnerability of illegal immigrants as a result of changes in federal policy on the provision of social services. One of these articles (12/29/97:B1) looked at those illegal immigrants with AIDS and other illnesses, who will lose Medicaid benefits, and possibly be deported, as a result of "sweeping changes to federal immigration and welfare laws." The other article (7/19/97:A21) reported that a Federal judge denied an "executive order" by New York City Mayor, Rudy Giuliani. The Mayor's order had prevented city employees from reporting

suspected illegal immigrants who seek social services. Giuliani claimed that the reporting of illegal immigrants would create "chaos in New York City" because these residents might not send their children to school, report crimes, or seek treatment for contagious diseases, for fear of being deported. The article notes that Giuliani has made the executive order a "staple of his regular speeches in praise of immigration."

Nearly 4 years after the Golden Venture episode, a front-page article announced that "Chinese Immigrants from Stranded Ship Are to Be Released" (2/15/97:A1). Two days later, another article, entitled "Joy and Fear as Refugees Look to Freedom" (2/17/97:A30), reported that the remaining 53 Golden Venture "refugees" would be released from INS detention while their petitions for asylum are reviewed. Although the immigrants are also referred to as "illegal immigrants" in both stories, it appears that they are likely to be granted asylum, and remain in the country as permanent, lawful residents.

Mayor Giuliani used Ellis Island as the political stage for his attempts at defending the rights of immigrants. He insists that Ellis Island "belongs" to New York (4/14/97:A16), and has used this salient immigrant landmark as the site for speeches "to lobby Congress and the nation about immigration's benefits" (1/10/97:B3; 8/12/97:B3). Not only politicians, but various immigrant groups use the island as the backdrop for the telling of their own ethnic histories (9/16/96:B1; 9/11/97:B3). Historically, of course, Ellis Island's main function was to keep undesirable immigrants out of the country, much as the U.S.–Mexico Border does today. It was the filter through which immigration officials sorted-out immigrants in terms of physical, mental, and political fitness for U.S. residency. However, the contemporary social space that the island occupies has been transformed into a celebration of the contributions that immigrants have made to the nation.

Because of the positive value that is associated with this immigrant landmark, attempts have been made to appropriate its social worth (4/14/97:A16). Although some have attempted to reduce this issue to an economic battle over the present and future revenue the island generates from tourism (12/31/95:A27), it is the positive symbolism associated with the site that makes it such a popular destination. The island is often represented as a sacred shrine that must be preserved from potential denigration due to misuse (4/3/97:A20). Even something as seemingly benign as building a foot bridge from Liberty State Park in New Jersey to Ellis Island has caused controversy (5/8/95:B5). While New Jersey politicians argued that a foot bridge would increase public access to the historic site (3/2/95:A22), a NYT editorial claimed that such access would "obliterate the essential experience of setting foot on land from a boat, as the immigrants did" (4/19/95:A22). In a similar vein, a much earlier article criticized the practice of restricting tourist

access on the island as going against an ideal—the full use of the island for a "celebration and ratification of the immigrant experience" (3/14/89:A35). It is clear from the debates centered on Ellis Island that this salient symbol facilitates the perpetuation of a mythical local history and positive collective identity vis-a-vis immigrants.

DISCUSSION

This study provides evidence of divergent cultural orientations toward immigrants in Southern California and the New York metropolitan area. Previous comparative research on urban immigrant adaptation has emphasized material factors, while neglecting the role the cultural realm plays in public attitude formation. In order to address this materialist bent, the main focus of this study was on symbolic contexts and their influence on urban immigrant politics. The similar characteristics of the newspapers chosen provided a sound data set for a comparative content analysis of elite narratives of immigrants (1989–97). In particular, we analyzed the narratives developed in relation to illegal immigrants, the most negatively marked category of foreign-born persons in the United States. Illegal immigration has proven to be a controversial public issue, and illegal immigrants have become a frequent target for exclusionary social policies (Espenshade, 1995; Espenshade and Huber, 1999).

News reports in LAT had a disproportional emphasis on illegal immigration, framing the issue predominantly in terms of a present–future "threat" narrative. Illegal immigrants' negative social status was further reenforced through a sharp focus on the U.S.–Mexico Border, a deviant symbol of immigration. In contrast, New York Times' articles had a much more proportional focus on the illegal immigrant population in the state, casting them in a more sympathetic, "victim" narrative. A positive symbolic association between present and past immigrants was encouraged in the New York City area through the use of Ellis Island as a staging ground for proimmigrant politics. New York's central place in the social reproduction and elaboration of the "nation of immigrants" origin myth provided firm symbolic ground for such cultural politics. Conversely, the local history and landscape of Southern California is relatively void of positive symbolic content in relation to immigrants. As material conditions in Southern California produced fertile ground for antiimmigrant politics, proimmigrant groups lacked sufficient symbolic resources for the mobilization of a successful discursive defense of illegal immigrants.

I argue that these extreme differences in attitudes toward immigrants in general, and illegal immigrants in particular, were due to the coincidence of place-specific material and cultural factors. I contend that an exclusionary

orientation toward immigrants is most likely when an area's residents perceive (1) material conditions as unfavorable and (2) contemporary immigrants as significantly different from the European-origin population. Conversely, an inclusive orientation would be most likely when (1) material conditions are seen as relatively favorable and (2) there is a strong social identification with contemporary immigrants. Los Angeles was in the midst of a major economic recession during much of the 1990s, while New York's economy was relatively stable during this same period. Moreover, although both cities currently have a comparable percentage of foreign-born persons, there are crucial differences in the historical development of cultural meaning in relation to immigrant-ethnics in each locale. Currently, no national-origin group dominates the immigrant ranks in New York City, and European immigrant-ethnic groups have affirmed their place in the cultural heritage of the metropolis. On the other hand, Southern California's Anglo population has a rather weak identification with its own immigrant origins. Moreover, although Mexicans have gained numerical dominance among all immigrant-ethnic groups in Southern California, they are still underrepresented within the area's economic, political, and cultural institutions.

In summary, I contend that it was the coincidence of various material (e.g., economic, demographic) conditions *in conjunction with* the historical development of symbolic contexts that explain these extreme differences in political practices. Favorable material and cultural conditions facilitated proimmigrant identity politics in the New York City context. Influential members within New York's social institutions (e.g., the media, politics) accomplished this through positive associations between contemporary immigrants and a glorified immigrant past. This facilitated a legitimate and effective discursive defense of illegal immigrants. Therefore, this study suggests that the social status accorded foreign-born persons at the federal level may be either reenforced or renegotiated at the more local level through a process of symbolic association and narrative identity-politics. In turn, these more local interpretations influence federal immigration policy.

There are many limits to this study, as well as great potential for future research of this kind. In keeping with my focus throughout this paper, I should first acknowledge that this study is extremely limited in time and space. Since I argue that local symbolic contexts are developed over time in relation to collective struggles, a more thorough historical analysis is needed. Furthermore, since my claim is that collective perceptions of time and space become marked in relation to immigrants, other local texts and the wider cultural landscapes must be analyzed for content in this regard. Perhaps the most crucial point for future study is the complex relationship between material and cultural factors influencing the politics of immigration. Although I argue that it was the convergence of place-specific material and cultural

conditions that brought about divergent political practices in New York and Los Angeles, further theoretical specification and refinement is needed.

Southern California and the New York City area were intentionally chosen because they provide a stark contrast on the issue of urban immigrant politics. If these two urban areas are the most divergent cases within the national context, then other American cities should fall somewhere between these ideal-typical extremes. More case studies are needed in order to gain a fuller sense of contemporary immigrant politics. We must acknowledge the complexity of the political process, and recognize the many material and cultural factors that significantly influence the process of social inclusion/exclusion. There are many other metropolitan areas within the United States that are currently engaged in identity politics in relation to a large foreign-born population (e.g., Miami, Chicago, Houston, etc.). An integrated theoretical approach to the study of these urban contexts should significantly advance our understanding of immigrant adaptation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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