CHAPTER 1

Defining Immigrants

INTRODUCTION

Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history.

Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (1951)

Although this now famous quote—and Handlin's mythical portrayal of the immigrant past—is subject to debate, the following statement is less likely to be contested: The future of America's largest cities is tightly bound to the experience of today's immigrants. US immigration is reaching historic proportions. As of the 2000 census, the foreign-born accounted for about 11 percent of the total US population, or about 31 million people. Around the turn of the previous century the total number of immigrants was much smaller, but the proportion foreign-born was higher, reaching nearly 15 percent. However, in America's largest cities this proportion has always been much higher, and today is no exception.

For example, the 2000 census identified 5.5 million foreign-born residents in just four cities—New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston. Together, these four cities accounted for about 18 percent of all US immigrants, while the total populations in these cities accounted for 5.9 percent of all US residents (Malone et al. 2003: 9-10). New York City has the largest urban concentration of immigrants with close to 3 million foreign-born persons, accounting for about 36 percent of the city's population. While the city of Los Angeles is host to about 1.5 million foreign-born persons—about 41 percent of its total

population—Los Angeles County parallels New York City with close to 3 and ½ million immigrants, or about 36 percent of that geographic area's residents. Taken together, New York City and Los Angeles County account for about 1/5 of all contemporary immigrants. To a great degree, how these urban cores define the new immigration will shape the national debate for the foreseeable future. This is not only because these metropolitan areas are the two most powerful immigrant magnets, but also due to their role as the most important outlets for the mass media on the opposing coasts of the nation.

Of course, when we talk of the immigrant future we must also take into account subsequent generations. When the children of immigrants are factored into today's "immigrant stock" many of America's big cities become dominated by the immigrant familial experience. As Rumbaut (1999, 2001, 2005) has so cogently reminded us, it will be the second generation that defines the legacy of contemporary immigration. You simply cannot speak of current social conditions in urban areas such as New York and Los Angeles without reference to immigration.

This work developed from my understanding of the immigrant experience as a dialectical process—between the immigrants becoming acculturated to American society on the one hand, and Americans' ongoing understanding of these newcomers, on the other. This book is focused on the later aspect of this process. Although an account of the unfolding on both sides of this relationship would be ideal, the complexity of such a study was prohibitive. The manner in which Americans define contemporary immigrants will have a profound influence on how the new first and second generations become American. The following statement regarding the national impact of this process can only be followed by exclamation points if referring to immigrant cites such as NY and LA:

> The new immigration to the United States . . . has been changing fundamentally the racial and ethnic composition and stratification of the American population as well as the social meanings of race and ethnicity and of American identity. In the process, in familiar as well as surprising ways, the immigrant and their children are themselves being transformed into the newest Americans (Rumbaut and Portes 2001: 1).

But how best study the American urban experience with contemporary immigration? I wanted to understand how important

institutions and individuals of influence defined the current wave of immigrants. I decided that mass media accounts were a crucial piece to this puzzle. Thus, I undertook a survey of the two most respected mass media texts in each locale—The New York and Los Angeles Times. At the same time, I knew that there were important differences between these cities regarding the historical experience with immigration. Building upon comparative studies of national differences in defining boundaries between immigrants and citizens (e.g., Brubaker 1992) and contemporary cultural studies of American attitudes towards immigration (e.g., Chavez 2001, Perea 1997), I felt that a comparison of the cultural history of immigration in these two cities was essential.

By the mid 1990s it was quite obvious that these two cities had developed distinct cultural orientations toward their large foreign-born populations. This work is an attempt at understanding why these divergent cultural contexts emerged. However, my analysis departs from other recent comparisons of these two cities by stressing the symbolic structures that inform the current immigration discourse. Surprisingly, while the cultural study of texts is an increasingly prominent and important area within the social sciences, comparative analyses of these two cities have not looked at the development of narratives in relation to immigrants. This work attempts to address this present gap in scholarship, thereby demonstrating the importance of the cultural realm in defining contemporary debates over and around immigration.

The Importance of Cultural Contexts

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 that these political contexts are the result of both material and symbolic differences in development (Hirschman, Kasinitz, and DeWind 1999:271-73), comparative analyses have focused almost exclusively on material explanations, while neglecting important cultural factors.

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); 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; Campbell 2002; Cerulo 1995; Jacobs 1996; Kane 1991, 1997; Lamont and Fournier 1992; Mohr and Duquenne 1997; Sewell 1992; Somers 1995; Steensland 2006; 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 anti-immigrant 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 excludable 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. 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 1995:202-03). In more general terms, this work advocates a view of the political process as based upon both material and symbolic logics of inclusion/exclusion.

With this in mind, this work starts with an historical analysis of immigrant adaptation and identity formation in New York and Los Angeles (chapters 2-3). This is meant as a very broad analysis of major material and cultural factors that have influenced the formation of distinct orientations toward 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 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. Rather, 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

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 they are cast in a positive light. Specifically, we are interested in attitudes toward the most controversial category of the foreign-born population--illegal immigrants. In the absence of significant pro-immigrant politics, we would expect an ambivalent attitude toward illegal immigrants, at best. An inclusive political orientation toward illegal immigrants could only be accomplished at the local level under favorable cultural conditions.

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, 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 (1990:155-56) 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 have immigrant origins, 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 supra-ethnic "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 (1996:229-30) has argued that immigration plays a paradoxical role in the shaping of collective identity in the U.S. He points out that while Americans continuously affirm their identity through a "nation of immigrants" narrative, anti-immigrant 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.

Narrative analysis has become a leading method for uncovering discursive formations (Franzosi 1998; Kane 1997; Lehtonen 2000; White 1999, 1987; Zerubavel 2003). Narratives structure our understanding of events by following familiar rhetorical patterns in the development of stories, thereby giving form to their content. Narratives

are also arranged in relation to time and space. For example, narratives have settings—specific times and places where stories unfold, and narration entails "an arranging of spatial and temporal material in chains of cause and effect. These chains have their beginnings, middles and ends" (Lehtonen 2000: 80). In terms of current events, the mass media play a crucial role in the selection and promotion of specific types of narratives. Moreover, because journalists aspire to the principle of objectivity, the narrative character of news reports is often masked.

But what influences the selection of specific types of narratives? This is an especially important question since this study relies primarily on the analysis of one mass media text from each urban area. It could be argued that differences in the narration of immigration are due to the editorial or political bias of the specific newspapers chosen for the study. Thus, I strive to locate these specific texts within the wider social contexts that inform them. My argument is that contemporary news stories are informed by locally rooted narrative-identity relations, discursive structures that have evolved and congealed over time. I demonstrate this through an historical-comparative analysis of the concept "immigrant" within each urban context. Through a content analysis of specific "local" texts on immigration (chapter 3) we gain a sense of how immigrants have come to be understood through the time and space of each area. This provides us with an intertextual, and contextual understanding of the issue (Lehtonen 2000). In both New York City and Los Angeles, the term "immigrant" has become a powerful symbol, but the local meanings associated with this concept are highly inconsistent, and often contradictory.

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, re-enforce 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 narratives of 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 places are "marked" in terms of immigration, within 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" (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" (ibid:37).

The main focus of this work 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 re-enforce a negative identification with immigrants (Keogan 2002). 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 (1998:972-3) 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 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 within the specific locales where they cluster. As Abbott (2001: 232) contends: "Our only certainty is that something like local temporal order exists. That is, that within one interaction (within one locality) there are relations of relative time. Everything else is built up from this local temporality of interaction."

Policing Boundaries, Post 1965

Immigration will be a subject of debate for as long as the nation-state survives as a source of collective identity and distributor of resources. Immigration, by definition, entails the crossing of international boundaries. But it is much more than that. There are many boundaries—both symbolic and material—through which the foreign-born are sorted and positioned within the social system. All immigrants are, to some degree, outsiders. They come from another country, often speak a distinct language (or speak with an accent) and follow traditional customs. These cultural traits mark them as different, as not quite American. If we pick-up on these cultural markers, we invariably attempt to use them to place people into our pre-established cognitive schema. Sometimes we identify other social markers to inform this socio-mental process, and the more familiar we are with a particular immigrant-ethnic group, the easier the task. When we're not sure, we feel compelled to test our presuppositions: Where are you from? This is a loaded question—the assumption is that they are not from here, i.e. not fully "American." If they are from a place that we have little preconceived notions about, we then attempt to position them in relation to a "similar" immigrant-ethnic group. This may be based on various criteria, but ethnic/racial and geographic logics are most common (e.g., Asian, Hispanic, etc.).

Local narrative-identity relations are influenced by federal level policies. Historically, certain national origins 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 cultural schema of inclusion/exclusion has developed in the contemporary period, and may be summarized as follows:

Category	Cultural Perception	Federal Policy
Refugee	Victim	Inclusionary
Immigrant	Newcomer	Ambivalent
Illegal Immigrant	Deviant	Exclusionary

These categorical distinctions among the foreign-born have become a main basis for federal immigration policy, providing a widely accepted and legitimate means for the ranking and sorting of non-natives. 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 such 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 (US 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 a major influence on their status situation. Our collective focus on illegal immigrants crossing at the US-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 popular images 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". 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).

The cognitive frameworks we utilize can be quite extensive and complex, or quite simple. Invariably though, during our daily interactions, we sort people into distinct groupings. The simplest of our categorical distinctions are dichotomous and usually based on limited information. For example: man/women, white/non-white, rich/poor, American/foreign. Most people have a more sophisticated approach to their grouping, but further information is needed in order to elaborate beyond simple dichotomies. Language is the essential element to this socio-mental process. It is through linguistic sorting and contrasts that we learn how to order our social world. This is a central aspect of socialization and therefore can take many forms, depending on the particular cultural logics being passed-on from one generation to the next.

For instance, we teach children, implicitly or explicitly, to give order to their living spaces by naming things and putting these objects in their "proper" place. In so doing, we make categorical distinctions among objects and create boundaries between them and "other" things

they are not. Some things are similar enough that they can be lumped together, while others, it is explained, are different and should be split-off into a separate category/space (Zerubavel 1996). When something is put in the "wrong" place, or the job is not satisfactory, we further explain the necessity of categorical distinctions and emphasize the utility of boundaries for creating order. This process of inclusion/exclusion is a cultural universal that applies not only to cultural objects, but human relations as well.

However, how we relate social objects and sort them into their proper places varies. Of course, we would expect such differences when speaking of distant cultures. But our inability to figure out the logics of order in an unfamiliar supermarket or even a family member's house attests to the flexibility in these relational logics. We may have a sense that we are "on the right track" to find something, but often times our hopes are dashed when we realize that the thing we are looking for is not where we thought it should be (i.e., next to other things that our particular socio-mental framework has linked with the object we are searching for). However, there are also limits to this socio-mental flexibility because cultural norms establish that some things simply belong together, and others do not. For instance, we would think someone strange if they insisted that the salt and pepper be kept in separate places. Perhaps more to the point, a person would surely provoke outrage or disgust if they claimed that eating utensils be stored in the bathroom (although it is somehow acceptable to leave toothbrushes in close proximity to the toilet!).

Giving order to our daily lives depends on an elaborate symbolic system based on distinctions. Mary Douglas has referred to symbolic pollution or "dirt" simply as "matter out of place" (1990: 155). People can be a source of symbolic pollution if they linger too long in a "place" they do not "belong," or if they appear as a threat or burden to the established order of things:

> A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement creates danger for someone (ibid: 159).

Historically, immigrants have been portrayed as dangerous precisely because they crossed an international boundary and congregated in sufficient number to invoke images of ethnic/racial pollution. The

threat associated with this pollution was heightened if the group was relatively unknown to the established residents of an area, or had a past experience through which the symbolic boundaries between "us" and "them" were already well established. To guard themselves against this perceived menace, the more established residents of an area cultivated boundaries between themselves and these "foreign" groups.

History has also shown that these boundaries were negotiable, at least for some groups, over time. First generation immigrants were relatively stuck in their liminal position, unable to gain full acceptance in the wider society, thus seeking refuge in their co-ethnic communities. But acculturation and intergenerational social mobility was possible for subsequent generations and, eventually, previously "dangerous" groups migrated across socioeconomic and cultural boundaries to become fully "American." As more and more groups successfully underwent this highly symbolic journey, the distinction between these immigrant-ethnics and Americans became somewhat blurred. As more groups made this transition, the immigrant became a symbol of something positive, even sacred. Previously excluded groups confirmed the myth of American society as exceptional in its ability to advance the worthy through the socio-economic order. This symbolism was especially important to American identity during the twentieth century when the US needed cultural myths to legitimize its ascendancy in the international system, and solidify its identity as a superior nation.

Of course, immigrants can still be seen as a threat or burden to American society. Symbolically though, immigrants are not understood simply as "dirt," they do, in fact, have a positive place in American mythology and national identity (Fitzgerald 1996). As Bonnie Honig (2001) has eloquently argued, immigration is an important topic for discussion, a focal point for debate over the role that newcomers can play in the national body. She explains foreignness as both a potential threat by representing what "we" are not, but also as a source of necessary qualities, sometimes providing "agents of (re)founding." Immigrants often become a focal point in the cultural politics of national identity, portrayed either as a sacred source of new membership or as a potential threat to the collective body through symbolic pollution.

The current debate is influenced by origin stories and the politics of the past. As Honig argues, the "politics of (re)founding":

involves the plural efforts by postfounding generations to (re)define their collective identity by retelling their origin stories or by inventing new ones. For those whose origin stories feature a foreign-founder, the politics of refounding often involve a contest to erase that figure from memory or to position him as either foreign to or founder of the nation." (p. 32).

Honig reviews American democratic theory literature and demonstrates that foreignness is often seen as a foundation or source of renewal. The myth of an immigrant America sees the foreigner as a "supplement to the nation", or as an agent that may "rescue the regime from corruption and return it to its first principles." Honig charts these "first principles" within four domains: 1. capitalist (economic); 2. communal (co-ethnic networks); 3 familial (patriarchy); 4. liberal (democratic politics). The capitalist version of the myth views immigrants as an embodiment of the meritocratic system where hard work and perseverance are rewarded with upward mobility. The communitarian immigrant helps revive weak community ties. The familial immigrants are portrayed as "saviors of traditional patriarchal family arrangements." In the liberal-democratic version, immigrants rejuvenate the regime through their explicit consent to the polity through citizenship ceremonies, where they confirm the worthiness of the regime and provide "living proof" of the liberal democratic principles. In all four versions of the myth, foreignness is used for a "national project" of rejuvenation by "shoring up the popular exceptionalist belief that America is a distinctively consent-based regime." We can see a similar cultural logic in the case of refugees from Communist countries during the Cold War. It was an affirmation of American righteousness if these immigrants "fled" from their country-of-origin in favor of living here. There was important ideological ground gained by America defining itself as a place of "refuge" for these "victims" of Communism.

Honig describes a stereotypical "supercitizen immigrant" as the object of "outright adoration . . . and identification. He is the screen onto which we project our idealized selves." This stereotype is "still very much alive as a political-cultural resource today" (p. 77-78). Thus the term "immigrant" has many connotations, both positive and negative, and therefore defies easy, simple classification. This is why "immigrants" as a very broad category occupy such an ambiguous place in the American social psyche. We need more information on a particular immigrant or group of immigrants before we can decide

whether they present a potential threat or promise. This is why discourse plays a crucial role—it helps to accord immigrants their place in relation to the rest of "US". We all posses the ability to fit individual immigrants that we come into contact with into our cognitive schema, but these socio-mental frameworks are informed by wider social contexts.

Individuals may develop a particular immigrant-ethnic identity that affirms the place "their" ancestors hold in the history of the nation. And we may come to see this particular immigrant-ethnic narrative as part of a wider pattern that includes other groups as well. But many do not have a strong sense of their immigrant-ethnic identity, and some groups are more likely to reject the "nation of immigrants" narrative because it ignores their own historical experience (e.g., African Americans and Native Americans). Moreover, although established historical narratives are a cultural resource that may be used to understand the present, whether they are or not depends on current cultural-identity politics. As we shall see in the following chapter, the immigrant experience has not been uniform throughout the nation. Particular national-origin and ethnic groups have clustered in specific places, and some cities have a significant historical experience with immigration, while others do not. This makes a huge difference in the current debate as heavily impacted localities struggle to assign contemporary immigrants their appropriate "place" within the social order.

Because immigration policy is primarily the jurisdiction of the federal government, national policy plays a crucial role in this process. It is at this level that official decisions are made regarding distinctions among immigrants, as well as the attribution of rights and access to resources. However, in the wake of the civil rights movement it was no longer acceptable to have a policy that discriminated against specific ethnic/racial origins. Therefore, the 1965 reforms, in theory, gave equal access to all national-origin groups. But racial/ethnic distinctions continued to exist in American society. For instance, the dual influence of longstanding patterns of involuntary residential segregation (based on income and racial/ethnic markers) and 1st generation immigrants' desire to live within co-ethnic communities helped to establish clear geographical boundaries among the various immigrant-ethnic groups entering American society. But residential separation did not guarantee socio-economic exclusion from the mainstream, and the playing field was somewhat leveled by the reforms of the civil rights era.

Refugees and illegal immigrants are distinguished from the general immigrant population. Individuals lumped into these "special" categories are doubly marked in terms of what they are not: they are neither "Americans" nor "immigrants" in the traditional sense. Moreover, they are most often understood as occupying distant positions within our cognitive schema. This is due to the categorical positioning of refugees above, and illegal aliens below, immigrants. Thus, "immigrants" provide a sort of buffer zone between refugees and illegal immigrants, masking the similarities between these groups. This perception fosters the related idea that these categories are well-defined and that individuals and groups are easily sorted into their appropriate place. However, as we shall see, there are many instances that challenge this assumption, even calling into question the legitimacy of such distinctions.

Illegal immigrants serve an important function in the American immigration discourse. Their lowly position and illegitimacy allows for the cathartic venting of xenophobic emotions without violating what Brubaker (1995) has referred to as "the boundaries of legitimate discussion." But is it inevitable that illegal immigrants—or some "other" foreign group—become the target of anti-immigrant rhetoric and social exclusion? As previously discussed, this would depend on how these immigrants were defined in relation to the wider social context. Individuals lumped into the "illegal immigrant" category are clearly defined as excludable by the federal government. However, the existence of this category does not guarantee that policies of social exclusion will be actively pursued, either at the national or local levels. Because there are no clear social markers that identify immigrants as legal or illegal, our awareness of their presence is not automatic. We would have to be made conscious of their presence, as well as both the extent and quality of their influence. Furthermore, in order for social exclusion to be legitimate, there would have to be a clear marking of the boundary between these and other immigrants. Otherwise, the boundary between these categories could be easily blurred to the point of non-recognition.

Theorizing the Transition from Symbolic to Social Boundaries

In their review of the literature on boundaries in the social sciences, Lamont and Molnar (2002) make a useful analytical distinction between symbolic and social boundaries. Symbolic boundaries are conceptual or categorical distinctions used to place objects, people, etc, into a system of classification, whereas social boundaries "are

objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources" (168). As such, symbolic boundaries have obvious import to processes of cognitive distinction and identity politics, while social boundaries are more directly related to actual policies of inclusion/exclusion. Of course, when symbolic boundaries are widely agreed upon, it makes the transition to the social realm less problematic. But symbolic boundaries do not always translate into clear social boundaries: "At the causal level, symbolic boundaries can be thought of as a necessary but insufficient condition for the existence of social boundaries" (Lamont and Molnar 2002: 169). The current literature on boundaries and public policy underlines the important but often unspecified relationship between symbolic distinctions (e.g., among categories of people) and social policies that materialize those distinctions through material practices.

In Campbell's (2002) review of the growing literature that links ideas and public policy, he distinguishes between various ideational structures that may influence public policy decisions. Cognitive paradigms and normative frameworks are described as "taken-for-granted" patterns of thinking about the social world and they are described as being in the "background" of policy debates. They structure political debates by limiting the "range of alternatives" political elites are likely to perceive as "useful" or "acceptable and legitimate" (ibid: 22-23). In addition to cognitive frameworks, there are ideational structures that have a more direct influence on public policy.

Specifically, "frames" are seen as being in the foreground of public policy debates: "political elites strategically craft frames and use them to legitimize their policies to the public and each other" (ibid: 26-27). Framing has been described as "an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction" (Benford and Snow 2000:614). An essential part of this process are the "core framing tasks" which entail identifying a problem in need of change, the attribution of blame, the articulation of alternative arrangements, and an urge to action (ibid.; see also Gamson 1992). In terms of the politics of inclusion/exclusion, the mass media, along with their audience, play an essential role in the discursive development of collective action frames (Gamson et al. 1992). Political elites and other interested agents attempt to utilize the mass media in their attempts at bridging the gap between symbolic and social boundaries.

The concept "frame" or "framing" has been defined as: "an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out

there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one's present or past environments" (Snow and Benford 1992: 137). A frame sets something of from the rest of its environment by giving an object "its place in space . . . . A frame thus gives structure to both an object itself and to the way the object is perceived." (Ensink and Sauer 2003: 2;). Van Leeuwen (2003) expands on this idea by analyzing the different ways that framing occurs in composition (words, images, etc). For example, the "foregrounding" of certain elements of a composition gives them a higher degree of informational value, while "salience" refers to the way elements in a particular space "are made to attract the reader's or viewer's attention to different degrees" (ibid: 27).

However, Campbell (2002) faults frame analysis, as well as the rest of the literature that looks at the relationship between ideas and public policy, for not specifying the causal link between ideas and policies. Campbell suggests that a comparative perspective and an exploration of how frames are aligned to fit with background structures such as cognitive paradigms as ways to further specify this link. Progress toward linking the realm of ideas and politics has also been made by identifying and delineating "causal mechanisms" such as "epistemic communities," and "pre-existent discursive structures" (ibid: 29-33). Streensland (2006) has recently argued that "cultural categories of worth" play an important part in the development of social welfare policies, and outlines schematic, discursive, and institutional mechanisms through which they are developed in relation to elite policy formation. This works adopts a similar approach toward the politics of immigration.

In order to delineate the structure of the immigration discourse in the locales under study, I look at the conceptual frameworks and narratives that have developed in relation to the contemporary foreign-born population. During periods of high immigration, anti-immigrant rhetoric has always been present on some level of American politics. Large numbers make arguments regarding the threat or burden often associated with immigration more plausible, especially at times of widespread economic insecurity. Based on their negative social status, it is likely that illegal immigrants would be the principal focus of anti-immigrant politics. Although prejudice, cultural ignorance and a general fear of the "other" still fuels nativism (Perea 1997), contemporary anti-immigrant politics may be legitimately couched in the language of legality.

A sharp increase in unemployment rates and a large foreign-born population are classic predictors of anti-immigrant politics. Although always present on some level of public discussion, anti-immigrant rhetoric is most influential when expressed through mainstream channels of the mass media. Following from this, I expect a positive correlation between unemployment rates and newspaper reports on illegal immigration in areas with a large foreign-born population. Because New York City and Los Angeles have become hosts to the largest concentration of immigrants in the United States, they are an obvious choice for this study. I perform a content analysis of The New York Times and The Los Angeles Times in order to compare and contrast the discursive framing of illegal immigrants in these two settings.

During the mid 1970s both papers adopted a similar "threat" or "burden" narrative in relation to illegal immigrants. My analysis demonstrates a sharp divergence between the two newspapers starting around 1980, with almost contradictory frames by the mid-1990s. In order to understand this divergence, I explore how immigrants have been understood in the two contexts. Few would argue that these cities have similar histories. More specifically, the two cities have very different historical experiences with immigration. These histories are the result of both real events and social developments, and the imaginative, narrative linking of these events and developments through time. To understand the divergent contexts that developed in these two places, I explore the material and symbolic role that immigrants played in each area's social development.

Plan of the Book

The following chapter (chapter 2) focuses on the material events and processes that characterize immigrants and their social adaptation within each urban area. We will look at the percent foreign-born in each area over the past century, as well as the socio-economic record for each city's main immigrant-ethnic groups. We will also discuss patterns of immigrant-ethnic identity formation toward the end of the twentieth century. Ethnic identity formation will then be further explored in chapter 3.

Chapter 3 focuses on the more elastic aspect of historical accounts as they relate to each area's socio-historical formation of immigrant-ethnic identity. Following from the previous chapter's discussion on the

more factual aspects of the immigrant past in New York City and Los Angeles, we delve into the more creative side of historical acounts—the emplotment of immigrants through each areas time-space. We will look at how immigrants are framed through textual representations of each city's past, and analyze how each area's landscape is marked in relation to this history. The upshot of chapters 2 and 3 is that the material and cultural relations that have made New York City the symbolic center for the commemoration of the "Nation of Immigrants" origin-myth have been largely absent in Southern California. As compared to New York, Southern California has had a much more tragic experience with immigration. The history and cultural landscape of Southern California gives little reminder of the positive contributions immigrants made to the development of the area. In the contemporary period it is the "otherness" represented by the historical experience of Mexican immigrants and the symbolic salience of the geographical boundary between the US and Mexico that has come to define the immigrant experience there (Chavez 2001).

The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 is widely perceived as the most important immigration legislation since the 1965 reforms. The negotiation of the symbolic and social boundaries around illegal immigrants, 1972-1986, will be the focus of chapter 4. Media attention and policy debate over "the problem" of illegal immigration—and how to deal with it—was evident since at least the early 1970s. Moreover, the mass deportations of the 1930s and "Operation Wetback" in 1954 bore witness to a much more direct policy of exclusion toward illegal immigrants. Twenty years later in 1974, it was still possible for then US Attorney General Saxbe to suggest the physical expulsion of a million illegal immigrants. As we now know, this sort of policy path was rejected in favor of a more moderate approach. Although the intent of the law was to curb illegal immigration, one of its most important political legacies was the large-scale amnesty for many illegal immigrants. IRCA also led immigration policy down a path toward internal exclusion—an attempt was made to exclude illegal immigrant residents from the formal economy through employer sanctions, thereby implicitly accepting their presence. Finally, this period saw the idea of mass deportations loses legitimacy as a policy option—at least as long as illegal immigrants are perceived as "otherwise" law abiding residents. In order to more fully understand this shift in public policy we need to analyze how illegal immigrants were rhetorically framed during these years.

Chapter 5 will then bring the comparison of these two social contexts into the 1990s, an important decade for local and federal legislation on illegal immigrants (as well as legal immigrants that might be considered a "burden" to the US). It is during the mid 1990s that the divergence between the New York City area and Southern California comes to the fore. A national debate regarding illegal immigration and the appropraite measures to address the issue was set in motion by California's Proposition 187. This measure proposed the exclusion of illegal immigrants from social services such as medical care and public education. A content analysis of New York Times' and Los Angeles Times' articles during this period demonstrates a very different definition of the situation in these two areas. LAT reports were much more likely to cast illegal immigrants as a "threat" or "burden" as compared to NYT reports.

Chapter 6 delves into portrayals of the immigrant future of each area. Although much has been written regarding the influence history has on our understanding of the "present," much less scholarly attention has been dedicated to how salient elements of the past and present are projected into the future to create social imaginaries (Keogan 2006). The future is a temporal realm that is often occupied in political debates over contentious issues, and contending parties utilize established narratives of the past and present to make their rhetorical case for the future seem plausible. Moreover, how the future is discursively defined can have a tremendous impact on "present" policy debates. Because the future is so indeterminate, the discursive flexibility available in this realm makes it an attractive political space. But if the rhetorical imaginary mapped unto future is to be credible, there must be some resemblence to the past-present situation.

Chapter 7 concludes with a summary of the work, as well as a discussion regarding the politics of American immigration. First we review the comparative findings in relation to these two immigrant meccas. How are the boundaries between and among immigrants negotiated in these two social contexts? Do the symbolic boundaries established at the federal level tend to be reenforced or blurred at the local level? The work concludes with a discussion of possible avenues for future study of this issue.