CHEERS TO 25 YEARS

IM Section’s

Silver Jubilee, 1994-2019
25 YEARS LATER: A LOOK BACK, A CHALLENGE AHEAD

The International Migration Section, conceived in January 1993 in San Diego, was formally established 25 years ago, in August 1994, at the ASA annual meetings in Los Angeles. It was the 35th Section of the American Sociological Association [it only took us 90 years since the birth of the ASA in 1905!], and it has grown to become one of the most vibrant intellectual communities in the Association. (Indeed, our growth has persisted despite major drops in ASA membership since 2007.) The first issue of WORLD ON THE MOVE appeared in Spring 1995—it’s opening article, “Birth of a Section,” told the story of its formation and significance for the study of contemporary forms of global migrations [it’s on the IM website (as are all WOM issues), at: https://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/savvy/sectionintermig/documents/womspring95.pdf].

The California roots of our Section were fitting: by 1990 a third of the total number of immigrants in the U.S. had settled in that state, with Los Angeles as the world’s premier destination. But when our Section was formed none of us could have grasped that we were coming out of what was arguably the most inclusionary era in U.S. immigration and refugee resettlement history, extending from ca. 1965 to 1990, nor that we were entering an era of a Great Expulsion that—from Prop 187 in 1994 and the militarization of the border, to the draconian 1996 laws, the post-9/11 moral panic (which saw the creation of ICE and CBP), the systematic state persecution, detention and deportation of millions of undocumented immigrants in old and “new destinations,” and its climax in Trumpism—will rank among the most horrid in this country’s history.

In the years between 9/11 and Trump’s “American Carnage” inaugural, 5 million people were deported, breaking up millions of families left in the US. By the arrival of Trump, Tijuana (on the other side of the border from San Diego), used as the main dumping ground for millions of deportees by the US government and more recently as a major point of entry for thousands of asylum seekers, had become a “City of Exiles.” Since then, ICE has been greenlighted; “zero tolerance” policies have wreaked havoc and wanton cruelty at the border (and in the interior, as in last week’s ICE raids in Mississippi), with children taken away by the state, torn apart from their parents and put in cages and concentration camps, asylum blocked and denied, and all the rest of that abominable moral catastrophe... and the bully has abused his pulpit to demonize immigrants as an infestation of invaders and to incite white supremacist domestic terrorism, leading this past week to the carnage in El Paso, which a local writer called the biggest massacre of Latinos in American history. Demagogues reap what they sew.

As immigration scholars we have a special obligation to record that story unsparingly and in full depth and breadth. As we meet here today to rightly celebrate the silver jubilee of our Section, we should pause too to reflect on what the next quarter century may bring, and what our critical role in it should be.

Rubén G. Rumbaut, Founding Chair, International Migration Section, ASA
Distinguished Professor of Sociology, University of California, Irvine
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“WORLD ON THE MOVE”
SECTION NEWSLETTER

PREMIER ISSUE: Spring 1995 (PDF)

INAUGURAL ARTICLE: “BIRTH OF A SECTION” (pp. 2-3)

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- Spring 1995 (PDF, 120K)
- Fall 1995 (PDF, 87K)
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- Spring 2019
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WORLD ON THE MOVE
Newsletter of the Section on International Migration

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Immigrant Washington by Robert Manning

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BIOS FOR SECTION ELECTION

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NICHD Research on U.S. Immigration Program

Immigration Listserver

SSRC International Migration Programs

National Academy of Sciences Programs

Department of Labor Programs

ASA Session on Ethnic Communities

ASA Sessions on New Immigrant Communities

NEW PUBLICATIONS ON IMMIGRATION

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BIRTH OF A SECTION:
COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR

Rubén G. Rumbaut
Michigan State University

It seems only fitting, in retrospect, that our section should have been born along the Immigrant Sunbelt of America. It was conceived in San Diego in January 1993, developed in Miami later that year, and born in Los Angeles in 1994. The organizational meeting that established the Section on International Migration at the 1994 ASA annual meetings in Los Angeles was the culmination of a yearlong planning process led by a steering committee of a dozen colleagues who met to this end at the 1993 ASA meetings in Miami, and of a formal petition signed shortly thereafter by 150 ASA members from universities across the country. Los Angeles, today the largest and most diverse immigrant metropolis in the world, could not have been a more appropriate site for this birthing.

By early 1995, dues-paid membership in our section surpassed 200, nearly a tenth of whom reside in other countries (to put this in context, see the accompanying table listing the changing membership totals of all ASA sections over the past decade). That officially established us as the ASA’s newest section and ensured that we will have a full program of papers and roundtables to celebrate our first birthday at the 1995 meetings in the nation’s capital (a listing of all sessions and papers is also included in this first issue of our newsletter). But why this section? And why now?

The study of immigration has been a core area of concern for American sociology since its inception. Just as immigration has been a central theme of U.S. history, it too played a major role in the founding of the discipline in the early part of this century—above all in Chicago, whose dramatic growth and transformation at that time paralleled in many respects that of Los Angeles today. In particular, as George Ritzer reminded us in his engaging Sociological Beginnings (1994), W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki’s path breaking work, The Polish Peasant in Europe and America (1918-20), was instrumental in the development of sociology in the U.S.: it not only contributed a distinctive methodology and set the standard for theoretically-driven, large-scale empirical research, but its focus on the immigrant experience in America during a period in which massive immigration was transforming America itself solidified the status of sociology as a social science and as a distinct discipline. (Our section’s principal prize has been named after those two pioneering scholars; it will be awarded annually beginning in 1996.)

As we near the end of the century, immigration has reemerged not only as a sociopolitical issue of extraordinary national and global import, but its complex and multifaceted study again constitutes one of the most vital and challenging areas of contemporary sociological theory and research. Indeed, international migration is one of the most important and powerful forces reshaping human societies, not only in the United States but around the world. That has become all the more evident in the post-WWII era, as the size and scale of contemporary flows continue to grow and diversify at accelerating rates. It is also evident that, while “immigration is the sincerest form of flattery,” as a recent national news magazine put it memorably, today in the U.S. (and in other receiving nation-states) it is nonetheless open season on immigrants, from Proposition 187 in California to the Contract With America on Capitol Hill. The topic has become politically explosive, magnifying willy-nilly the social consequences of our work and our responsibility to the truth and to the commons that goes with it.

The field encompasses a wide range of forms of transnational population movements, coerced and uncoerced, from legal and illegal types of labor migrations, contract labor and “guest-worker” programs, to network-driven “chain migration” linking entire communities across national borders and “brain drain” flows of highly-skilled professionals from developing countries, to politically displaced asylum seekers and massive refugee movements in Asia, Africa Europe and the Americas.

It encompasses as well the proliferation of Diasporas and ethnicities formed worldwide through these mass dispersions, and a variety of modes of exit, reception and incorporation of different types of immigrants in different political, economic, social and cultural contexts. Given current global patterns and trends, international

A substantial and growing proportion of American-trained sociologists are immigrants themselves, from every part of the world. Remarkably, in fact, as Robert J. Stevenson reported recently in Footnotes (December 1993, “Where Do Sociologists Come From?”), of the 449 doctoral degrees in sociology produced in 1989-90 in the U.S., one third (31 percent) were granted to students who did their undergraduate work in non-U.S. universities.

migration—and the many critical issues associated with it for both sending and receiving societies—will become even more prominent in the future, and more consequential both for social policy and social science. To grasp these processes involves crossing all sorts of borders and bridges, intellectually and otherwise. Herein lies the challenge, and the promise, of our section.

Concomitant with the rapid rise of immigration to the U.S. over the past quarter century and with the burgeoning of
interest in the topic among sociologists, the area has developed a body of coherent theory and data that unite researchers in a common effort and scholarly dialogue—but one which, until now, had not been given full or adequate voice within the ASA. Sections serve vital functions to the ASA and the profession, and the lack of a section specifically focused on international migration issues has scattered the work of interested scholars over several sections, none of which hold immigration as central. The situation tended to discourage comparative approaches and to limit research papers delivered at ASA annual meetings to those that “fit” an existing institutional niche. We even know of colleagues who as graduate students in major universities were not allowed to pursue immigration as an area for their qualifying exams because it was not soon as a field in its own right.

Our section aims to remedy such problems by (1) legitimizing the field as a distinct area of study; (2) stimulating the creativity, vitality, a and eclecticism of the field; (3) providing a forum for systematic scholarly exchanges that will focus on and reward the development of original theory and research on international migration (through this newsletter, our annual programs, the annual “Thomas and Znaniecki” prize for distinguished scholarship in the immigration field, and section awards for student research and career contributions); and (4) helping to ensure the integration of international migration theory and research, rather than its current fragmentation, within the profession. The effort should enrich the discipline as a whole—and, in the process, contribute more light than heat to the public debate on the causes and consequences of a world on the move.

The 1995 ASA annual meeting marks the first ever for the Section on International Migration. We have produced two exceptionally strong regular paper sessions, organized by Richard Alba and Ivan Light, plus refereed round tables that reflect both the broad scope of the field and the climate surrounding the debate (if not furor) over immigration issues today. All told, about three dozen papers written by five dozen authors and co-authors will be presented next August in Washington, D.C., under the umbrella of our section, helping to define the intellectual contours of the field. We look forward to seeing you there, and to making ASA history together.