

# Session 11

## Immigration Debates in the US





# Analytical Challenges

1. Histories of migrant-receiving countries: representative?
2. 3% of the world's population: immigrants
3. One in every 122 people: refugees
4. "11 million people residing unlawfully in the US" = 3% of the population.
5. UNHCR: Lebanon (232 out of every 1,000 inhabitants), Jordan, Nauru, Chad, Djibouti, South Sudan, Turkey.
6. NATO regime change wars: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya
7. the world's poorest and neediest people are moving?





# Periphery as Precursor

1. **Guyana:** Forbes Burnham, People's National Congress (PNC)
2. **Trinidad & Tobago:** Eric Williams, People's National Movement (PNM)
3. **Uganda**
4. **Fiji**
5. **Lebanon**
6. **Libya**
7. **South Africa**









# Partisanship and Political Opportunism: Security and Open Borders

- ◎ xenophobia & xenophilia
- ◎ anti-immigrationism & pro-immigrationism

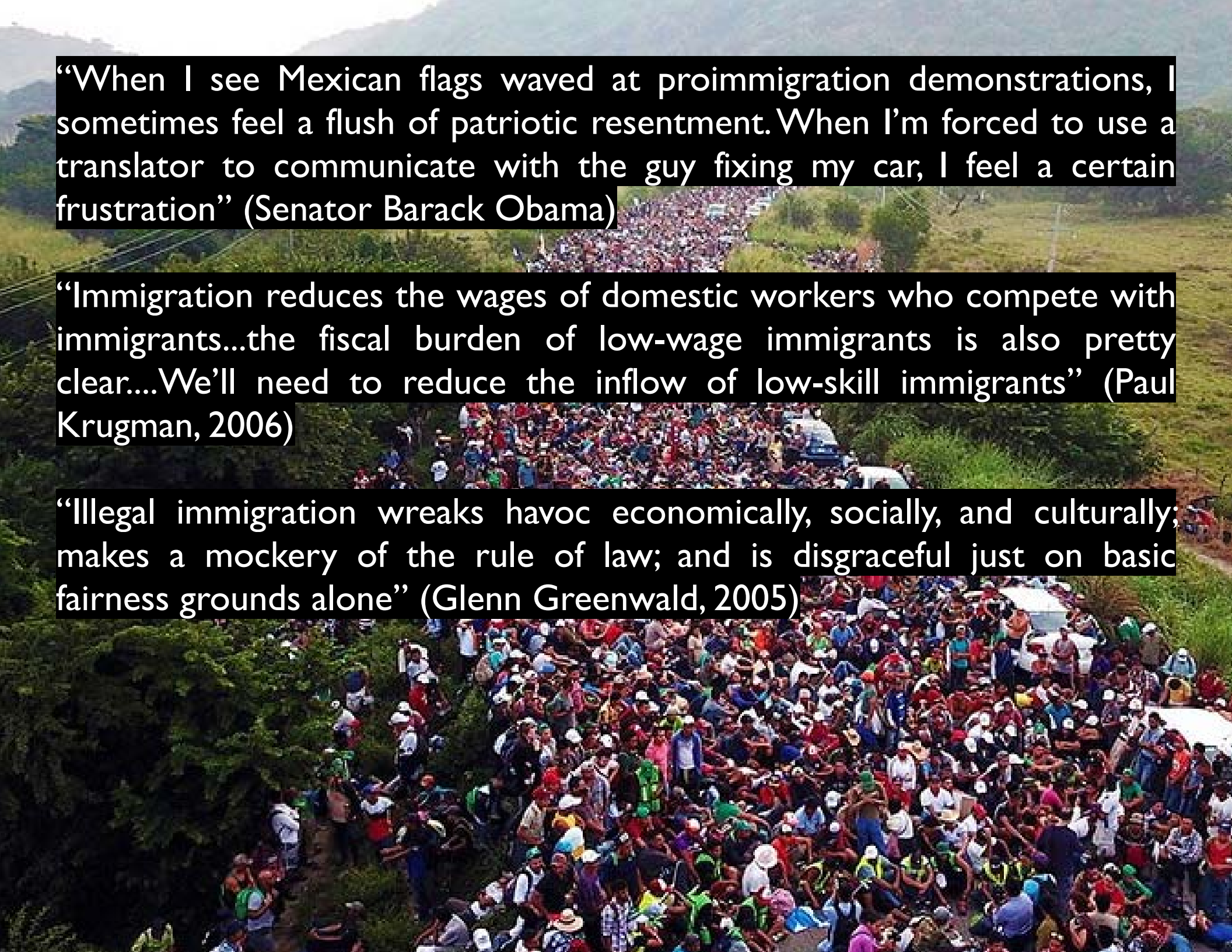




“When I see Mexican flags waved at proimmigration demonstrations, I sometimes feel a flush of patriotic resentment. When I’m forced to use a translator to communicate with the guy fixing my car, I feel a certain frustration” (Senator Barack Obama)

“Immigration reduces the wages of domestic workers who compete with immigrants...the fiscal burden of low-wage immigrants is also pretty clear...We’ll need to reduce the inflow of low-skill immigrants” (Paul Krugman, 2006)

“Illegal immigration wrecks havoc economically, socially, and culturally; makes a mockery of the rule of law; and is disgraceful just on basic fairness grounds alone” (Glenn Greenwald, 2005)



On “sharply raising the level of immigration we permit, even up to a level of open borders”:

“That’s a Koch brothers proposal...right-wing people in this country would love...an open-border policy. Bring in all kinds of people, work for \$2 or \$3 an hour, that would be great for them. I don’t believe in that. I think we have to raise wages in this country” (Bernie Sanders, 2015).



“If poverty is increasing and if wages are going down, I don’t know why we need millions of people to be coming into this country as guest workers who will work for lower wages than American workers and drive wages down, even lower than they are right now”. (Bernie Sanders)

<https://youtu.be/38M9vfg4TPE>



## Naomi Klein:

- ◎ “rooted people” are “the biggest threat” to neoliberal capitalism because they have “roots and stories,” so the global capitalists prefer to “hire mobile people”
- ◎ the neoliberal “economic model creates armies of surplus labour,” and migrant labourers are useful in “keeping wages very, very low”

◎ the rebuilding of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina—“a migrant workforce” was used

<https://youtu.be/2a2W2EXYQWQ?t=250>

<https://youtu.be/XGs05WkL64U?t=29>

<https://youtu.be/XGs05WkL64U?t=59>

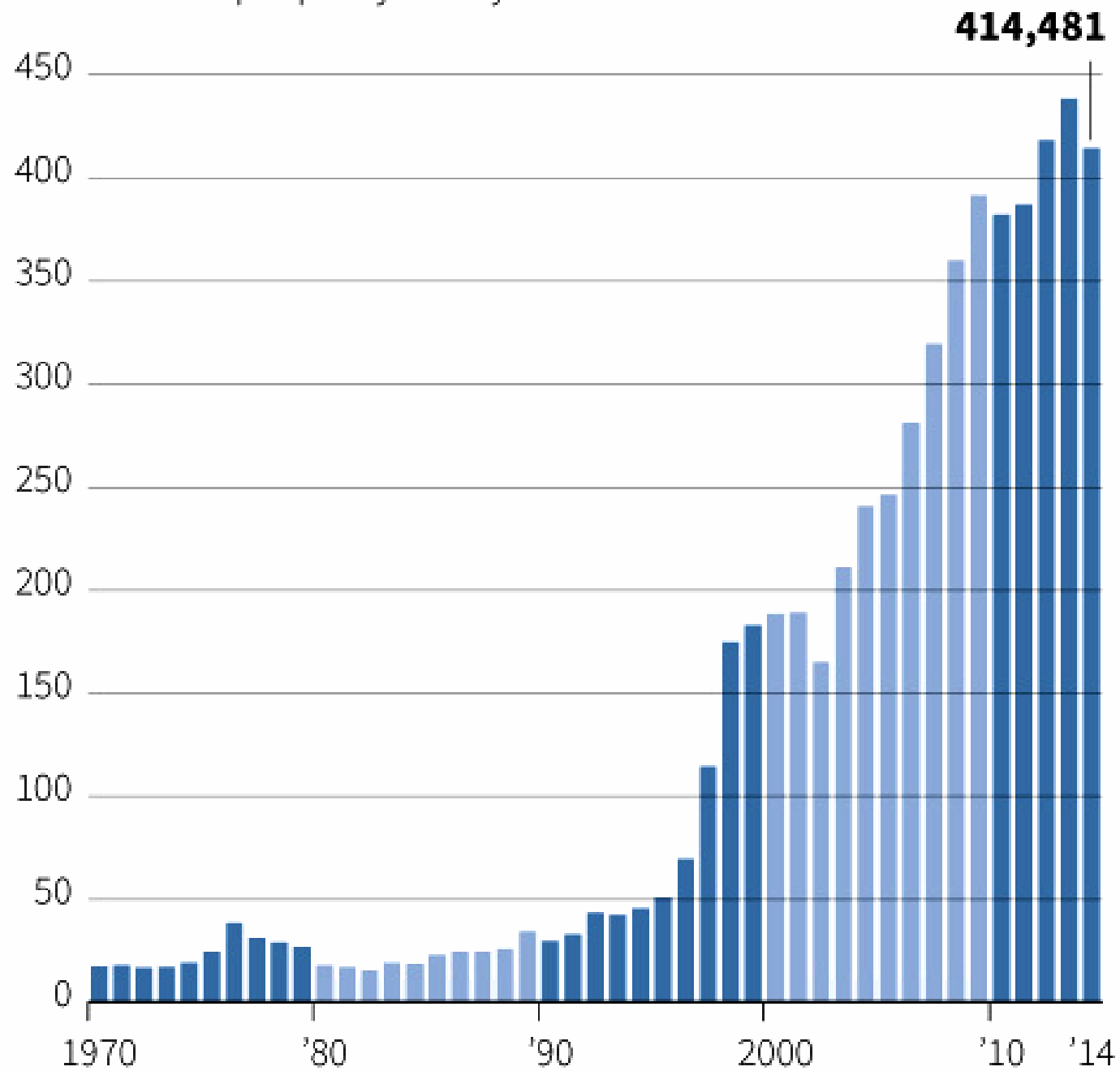


- ◎ Labelling: “undocumented” migrant and “illegal” immigrant.
- ◎ **Historical amnesia:**
  - President Bill Clinton (Democrat): Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, 1996
  - George W. Bush: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), supported by Democrats
  - California, Proposition 187
  - President Barack Obama (Democrat): “Since coming to office in 2009, Obama’s government...deported more than 2.5 million people”—more than the sum of all 19 presidents who governed the United States from 1892–2000



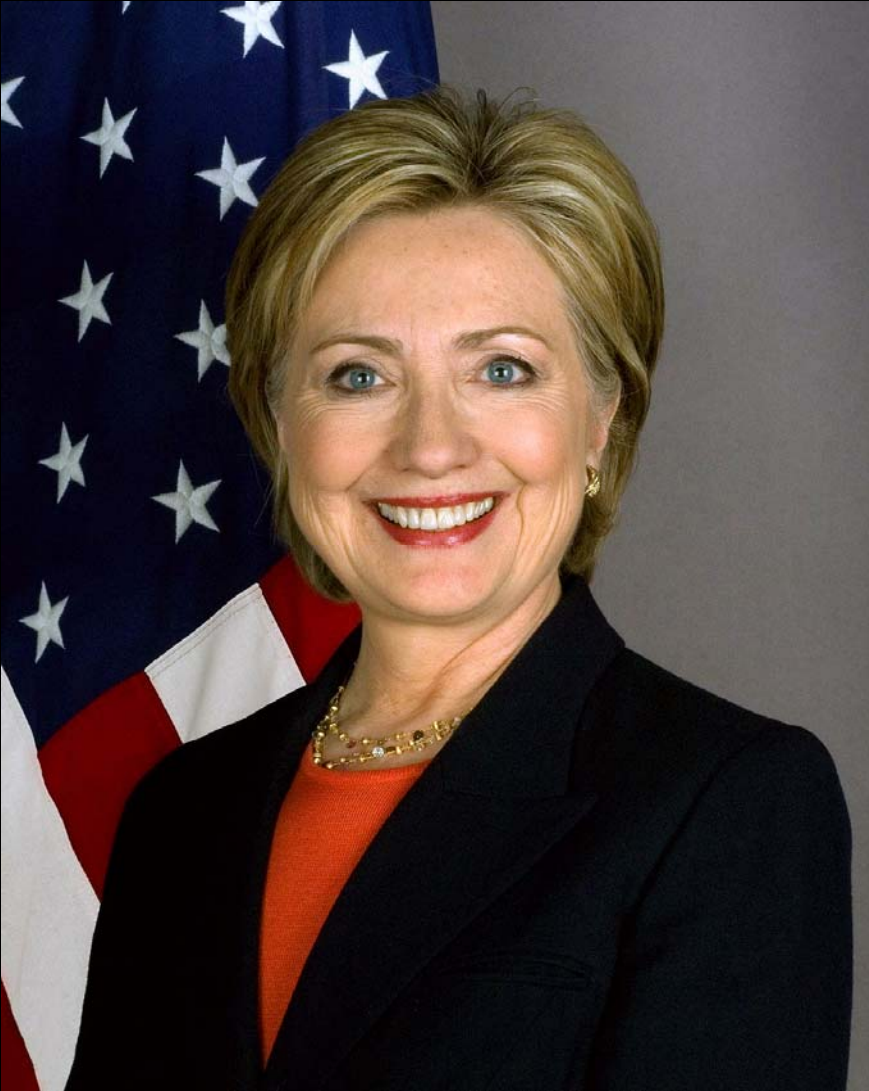
# TOTAL DEPORTATIONS

Thousands of people by fiscal year



Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security





Hillary Clinton:

“We have to send a clear message, just because your child gets across the border, that doesn’t mean the child gets to stay. So, we don’t want to send a message that is contrary to our laws or will encourage more children to make that dangerous journey” (2014).





U.S. Army Spc. Michael J. Westall uses a motorized boom lift to get into position to weld the reinforcement of the primary steel border fence along the United States-Mexico border on June 7, 2007. Task Force Diamondback's mission is to erect and reinforce segments of border fence and the construction of obstacles to help secure the Southwest United States-Mexico border. DoD photo by Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp, U.S. Air Force. (Released)





Arizona (March 14, 2009) Seabees assigned to Naval Mobile Construction Battalions construct a 1,500 foot-long concrete-lined drainage ditch and a 10 foot-high wall to increase security along the U.S. and Mexico border in Douglas, Ariz. (U.S. Navy photo by Steelworker 1st Class Matthew Tyson/Released)



- ◎ 2008, platform of the Democratic Party vs. 2016: vanishing of “illegal” migrants
- ◎ Corporate lobbies: defending H-1B visa program to import workers
- ◎ 2010, Michael Bloomberg, Mayor of New York City + Boeing, Disney, Hewlett-Packard, News Corporation: ***New American Economy*** lobby
- ◎ 2013, Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg and Microsoft’s Bill Gates: ***FWD.us***
- ◎ Charles and David Koch: open borders policy



# History Becomes Folklore: Florida after the Cuban Boatlift of 1980

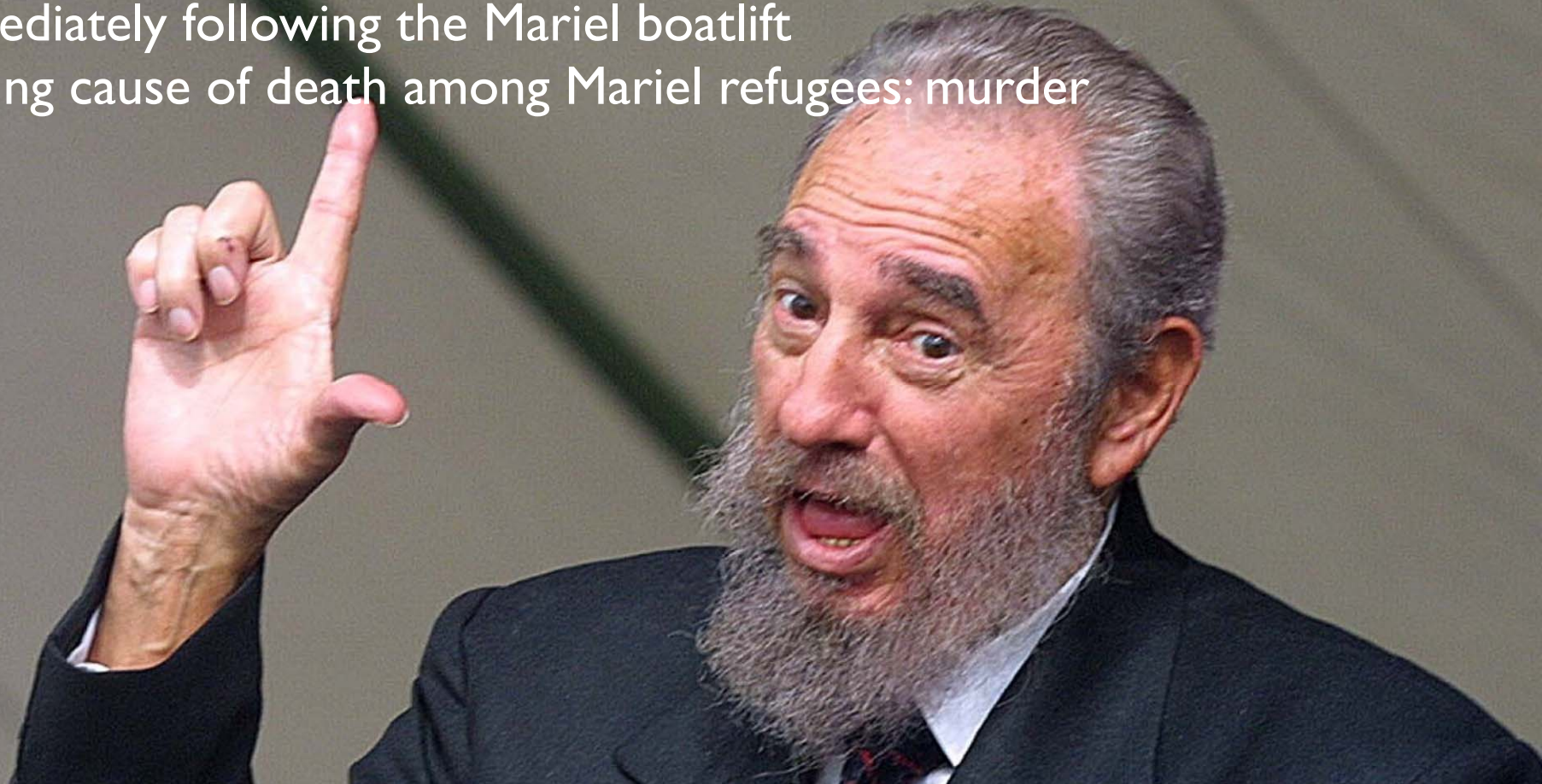
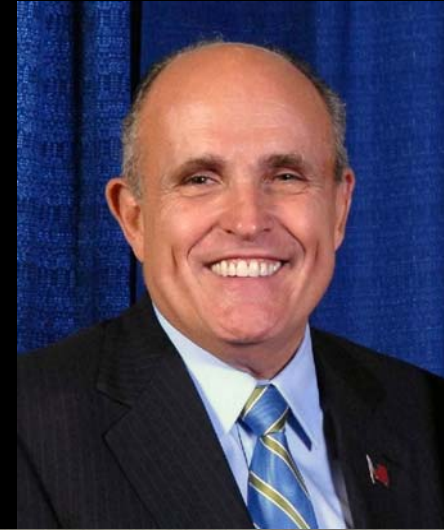
## Cuba or Puerto Rico?

- ◎ 1966 “Cuban Adjustment” Act + 1995 treaty with Cuba: legal permanent resident status, path to citizenship to all Cubans
- ◎ four times as much migration from Puerto Rico as from Cuba (Puerto Rico has only one-third the population of Cuba)



# The Mariel Boatlift and its Consequences

- ◎ Mariel boatlift of 1980
- ◎ Fidel Castro: “I have flushed the toilets of Cuba on the United States”.
- ◎ Rudy Giuliani: “There are, among those people [the Cubans], murderers, rapists, child molesters, dangerous individuals”.
- ◎ Miami’s crime rate soared by 89% in the months immediately following the Mariel boatlift
- ◎ leading cause of death among Mariel refugees: murder





© “Stand Your Ground” law



# Carter 'opens arms' for refugees

WASHINGTON (UPI) - The U.S. state department yesterday shelved its rules on fining boat owners for bringing Cubans to Florida without proper papers, as President Jimmy Carter said the United States would "provide an open heart and open arms" for the refugees in the massive Cuban "sealift."

Carter, in a speech to the League of Women Voters, said the refugees "will be received as expeditiously as we can, as safely as possible and processed in accordance with the law."

However, with official hopes of orderly regulation and careful screening swept away by the seaborne avalanche of Cuban boat people, the

administration in effect quietly shelved most routine immigration procedures for the present.

And as 2,000 more Cubans poured into Florida in sealift boats yesterday, Governor Bob Graham asked Carter for help to "avert impending disaster."

The federal-state refugee processing operation was on the verge of collapse and there appeared to be no end in sight to the flood of Cubans seeking freedom.

By last evening, another 2,129 refugees had reached Key West bringing the total number of refugees during the two-week sealift operation to 15,175.

Graham sent an urgent letter to Carter appealing for immediate help and criticizing the government for being "sluggish" in assuming responsibility for handling nearly 7,500 refugees brought across the Florida Straits to freedom in the past three days.

Earlier, Carter said the U.S. is doing its best to help some 400 Cubans who took refuge from a club-wielding mob in a U.S. diplomatic office in Havana. The United States has rejected a Cuban proposal to let the women and children emigrate if the men surrender to Cuban authorities.

"There are almost 400 of those who have been issued visas by our country

who are hiding from mob violence instigated by Castro himself and we're trying to get those freed by Castro to come on into our country," Carter said. "These are primarily former political prisoners."

The president added, "We are the most generous nation on earth in receiving refugees and I feel very deeply that this commitment should be maintained."

"We'll continue to provide an open heart and open arms to refugees seeking freedom from Communist domination and from the economic deprivation brought about primarily by Fidel Castro and his government."

He said he had organized a special

inter-agency group in the White House to work on the problem.

The state department confirmed the United States has dropped the practice of fining boat owners \$1,000 for every undocumented alien they bring directly to the country.

"In all candor, the policy is now being honored in the breach," said a state department official.

While the United States has an immigration quota of 19,500 Cubans for 1980, the sea-lifted emigres will not be counted against that quota because most will be considered as political refugees who would qualify for political asylum.





“The State of Florida has no navy, no air force, no immigration service, no customs unit, no radar, no CIA, no foreign service to deal with foreign countries. The State has no way to prevent such new arrivals, nor a way of returning them from whence they came”.

“Jimmy Carter has six more weeks to serve as president. He has been big on ‘human rights’. To protect the human rights of the people in Miami, he still has time to arrange an exodus, back to Cuba, for these undesirable Cubans. Airlift them to our naval base in Guantanamo, open the gate, and let these Cubans be returned to their sender”.

“Why should one community in the entire country pay for the Federal government’s error in judgment?”





# Costs and Benefits

## Wages

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine:

“Groups comparable to...immigrants in terms of their skill may experience a wage reduction as a result of immigration-induced increases in labor supply”.

“Deindustrialization has...produced rising inequality because it has entailed the movement of a portion of the labor force from the industrial sector, typified internally by higher average wages and a comparatively flat distribution of income, to the service sector, typified internally by lower average wages and a higher level of inequality” (Arthur S. Alderson and François Nielsen, “Globalization and the Great U-Turn: Income Inequality Trends in 16 OECD Countries,” p. 1251)

George Borjas: half of the decline in the relative wage of school dropouts that took place between 1980 and 1995 can be attributed to immigration (Alderson & Neilsen, p. 1256).

De-unionization

## **The Welfare State**

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine: “immigrant-headed families with children are 15% points more likely to rely on food assistance, and 12 points more likely to rely on Medicaid, than other families with children”.



## **Inequality: Globalization (1870–1913)**

“Both historical periods were characterized by expanding inter- national trade, convergence between poor and rich nations, and large population movements leading to inequality outcomes that differed by type of country: in the relatively rich, people-importing nations of the time, including Argentina, Australia, Canada, and the United States, immigration caused inequality to increase; in the poor, people-exporting nations, which included at that time both Southern European (Italy, Spain, Portugal) and Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark), emigration produced a decline in inequality. Thus, when we observe an inequality upswing in some of the rich, people-importing countries in recent decades, it is not unreasonable to suppose that immigration may be a contributing factor” (Alderson & Neilsen, p. 1256)

“While many observers are struck by the unique features of the contemporary period, it is certainly not the first time in world history that the globalization of the economic sphere has affected inequality within societies. It has been argued, for example, that the 1870–1913 period was in many ways similar to the contemporary period...Then, too, globalization in the form of growing international trade and mass-migration from Europe to the New World caused inequality to rise in the rich, people-importing countries of the New World and fall in the (at the time) poor, people-exporting countries of Southern Europe and Scandinavia” (p. 1288)



# Questioning Immigrationism

Anthony Browne:

“First, that mass immigration is a normal part of human life; second, that it cannot be controlled; third, that almost all immigration is beneficial to the host society; and fourth, that immigration is a right not a privilege and that the host society has no right to choose who can live amongst it”.

“The active promotion of mass immigration does nothing to stem its causes. On the contrary, by fuelling the brain drain from the developing to the developed world, it increases the former’s dependency on the latter. It intensifies a world of flux, divided families, splintered communities, cultural alienation and ethnic resentments—a world where those who can, live in the west, while those who cannot live in the rest”.

# Political Costs: Social Isolation, Nativism

Robert D. Putnam, *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*: diversity → increased distrust, social withdrawal

Ralph Linton:



“in societies which have a well developed class organization, nativistic tendencies will be strongest in those classes or individuals who occupy a favored position and who feel this position threatened by culture change” (Linton, 1943, p. 239).

“Rational revivalistic nativistic movements are, almost without exception, associated with frustrating situations and are primarily attempts to compensate for the frustrations of the society’s members. The elements revived become symbols of a period when the society was free or, in retrospect, happy or great”. (Linton, 1943, p. 233)



“Rational perpetuative nativistic movements, on the other hand, find their main function in the maintenance of social solidarity. The elements selected for perpetuation become symbols of the society’s existence as a unique entity. They provide the society’s members with a fund of common knowledge and experience which is exclusively their own and which sets them off from the members of other societies”. (Linton, 1943, p. 233)

# Blowback

→ The demographic consequences of NATO's regime change wars

## Capitalism and Immigration

—“illegalization”: (a) unregulated by the state; (b) unrestricted in volume; and, (c) workers cannot avail themselves of rights under labour laws.

—the globalization of the sweatshop model? Outsourcing and onshoring

1. capitalism reworks human geographies: accumulation by dispossession, → displacement
2. Immigration can and has been used to break the monopoly power of labour
3. US: while foreign-born workers make up only 15% of all workers, they gain 31% of new jobs.
4. How to create an industrial reserve army? a) automation; b) outsourcing; 3) increased immigration.



5. Richard Wolff: “the combination of computerization, exported jobs, women surging into the labor market, and a new wave of immigration...this time mainly from Latin America, especially Mexico and Central America....Capitalists from Main Street to Wall Street quickly realized that employers could slow or stop wage increases, given that supply now exceeded demand in the labor market”
6. If workers all have less money, how do you sustain demand?

### **Impacts on sending nations:**

- spatial fix: displacing unemployed workers from authoritarian systems = safety valve releasing potentially explosive dangers at home
- brain drain