



Center for Immigration Studies

Immigration and The New York Times

By William McGowan on January 25, 2011

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This *Backgrounder* is adapted from *Gray Lady Down: What the Decline and Fall of The New York Times Means for America* (Encounter Books, 2010).

Instead of functioning as an impartial referee in the national conversation about controversial issues, the *New York Times* has become a cheerleader, an advocate, even a combatant, some critics have argued. Rather than maintain professional detachment and objectivity, the paper has embraced activism. Rather than foster true intellectual and ideological diversity, the paper has become the victim of an insular group-think, turning into a tattered symbol of liberal orthodoxy that is increasingly out of touch. And rather than let the chips fall where they may no matter who is embarrassed or shamed by their reporting, the paper's news sections have been shaded by fear of offending certain groups and favoritism toward certain causes. Stories that should be done in a timely and responsible manner are often not done at all, or they are done years after news pegs for them have come and gone. Although the paper can be scrupulous about factual corrections, it has shown limited inclination or ability to come to terms with larger mistakes of meaning or interpretation, especially when doing so might transgress a liberal party line or expose its biases.

One of the areas where these trends are most apparent is in the coverage of immigration. The narrative about "a nation of immigrants" is a powerful American ideal, and so there's always been a certain measure of romanticism in reporting on immigrants. But the *Times'* willingness to recast the narrative as "a nation of victims" is so striking that it seems a calculated act of journalistic aggression. The paper has either ignored, miscovered, or muted the less appealing realities of immigration — especially those involving the illegal immigration that has threatened to swamp the southwestern part of the country in recent decades.

First there are the blatant sins of omission: fully newsworthy stories that are salient to various facets of the immigration debate, but don't get reported at all. They are airbrushed out of the record, *Pravda*-like.

- In Denver in 2007, a Mexican illegal alien dragged a woman to death after beating her. The man had been arrested before, but was released after one night even though he had a crudely forged ID card, which was returned to him. The story got no coverage by the *Times*.
- In Tennessee in 2007, an illegal alien committed vehicular manslaughter, killing a husband and wife, Sean and Donna Wilson. It was found that the perpetrator had 14 prior arrests but had done no jail time. Local commentators, such as the syndicated radio talk show host Phil Valentine, voiced the possibility that politicians, judges, and prosecutors — all Democrats — were going easy on such offenders to court the Latino vote. Again, no coverage in the *Times*.
- In New York, as around the country, illegals are overrepresented in hit-and-run accidents — as perpetrators, not victims. But instead of exploring this trend, the *Times* chooses to emphasize the more multiculturally correct side of the coin: stories where illegal immigrants are *victims* of vehicular accidents, such as the 2008 case of an immigrant hit by a car on Long Island because the street he was walking on did not have a sidewalk and he was too poor to own a car or even a bicycle.
- In New Haven, Conn., in March 2009, an illegal Mexican busboy asked a 25-year-old waitress, with whom he had worked for a year, for a ride home. The man punched the woman in the face, knocking her out of the car. He proceeded to smash her cell phone, beat her, and rape her. Then he drove to a more secluded location, where he raped and beat her again, this time trying to kill her by hitting her with tree branches and trying to gouge out her eyes. The victim played dead, and later crawled to a nearby house for help. Despite the heinousness of the crime, the *Times* chose not to cover it, even though it routinely covers other developments in New Haven, including the controversies over granting identity cards to illegal immigrants, and the immigrant community's fears over federal raids on illegal immigrants with outstanding arrest warrants.
- The *Times* did a piece on how happy immigrant parents were with ethnically themed public charter schools, dismissing concerns about assimilation by quoting ethnic studies professors saying that these parents were being "as American as apple pie." Meanwhile, the paper has ignored the workings of a Muslim charter school outside Minneapolis where public monies are being spent to advance an Islamist agenda. Although the ACLU was looking into the school to determine whether it violated the Constitution's establishment clause, and anti-jihadi watchdog groups were calling for the school's deaccreditation, the *Times* didn't go near it.

- In 2009, responding to an online discussion among Muslim students at MIT about the Islamic position on death for apostasy, Harvard's Muslim chaplain Taha Abdul-Basser told the students that "there is great wisdom (*hikma*) associated with the established and preserved position (capital punishment) and so, even if it makes some uncomfortable in the face of the hegemonic modern human rights discourse, one should not dismiss it out of hand." Concerned Harvard alumni, both Muslim and non-Muslim, wrote the school to complain, some calling for Abdul-Basser's removal. This is exactly the sort of story the *Times* would have jumped at if ethnic sensitivities were not involved. But the *Times* ignored it.
- In mid 2010, a 21-year-old Indian girl filed suit for "slavery and peonage" against an Indian government official posted to the United Nations who, ironically, was known as a champion of women's rights. Brought into the United States illegally as a minor in 2007 by the diplomat and her husband, who had lied to immigration authorities, the girl charged that she was forced to work 16 hours a day, seven days a week; that she slept on the floor of the Indian mission to the U.N. and was often starved; that she received little of the pittance she was promised, and was told that if she attempted to leave, "the police would beat and arrest her" and send her back to India as "cargo." MSNBC, the *Boston Globe*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Fresno Bee*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Post* all ran the story. But despite the obvious news angle of a supposed women's rights crusader being sued for "slavery and peonage," as well as a foreign diplomat lying to U.S. authorities, the *Times* did not do the story.
- In early November 2009, a member of the ruthless Salvadoran gang MS-13, who was a legal immigrant from El Salvador, confessed to authorities that he had been hired by a gang leader in his home country to arrange the assassination of a ranking Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent who had led a crackdown on the gang's New York operations. The plot's revelation led to a "blitz" of arrests, as the *New York Daily News* put it, involving hundreds of federal agents. The attempt to murder the ICE agent came as Central American criminal violence, particularly the intimidation of law enforcement and criminal justice officials, had begun seeping into the United States, which certainly made the assassination plot newsworthy, as did the cross-border nature of the attempted hit, the forceful federal response to it, and the local New York angle. Yet the *Times* did not report on it.

In addition to such conspicuous silences, the paper's immigration reporting is marked by sins of commission too — by underreported and ideologically one-sided stories where significant information and salient facts have been avoided, deflected and euphemized to the point where the missing information causes the reader to lose the essence of what the story is really about and what has really taken place.

- In what many considered a Muslim "honor killing" in Buffalo, New York, a prominent Pakistani-born Muslim executive for a television network — established to fight stereotypes about Islam — stabbed and beheaded his wife in 2009 after she had served him with divorce papers and obtained a restraining order to keep him away from their house and children, following a long pattern of abuse and violence. Despite the heinous details and the culturally inflammatory nature of the crime, which cut to the issue of Muslim compatibility with American norms, it took a week for the *Times* to get on the story. When it did, the Web report described the decapitation euphemistically. *Times* reports also carried copious denials that the murder was an "honor killing" from Muslim advocacy groups.
- The *Times* gave incomplete information on a 2006 story from Maywood, Calif., where an American flag was stomped on by illegal aliens demanding amnesty, and a Mexican flag was hoisted in its place. In addition to minimizing the number of Mexican and Central American flags at the protest, the *Times* scrubbed some of the rhetoric at this demonstration and others, such as comments by groups like La Raza that Mexicans are involved in the *Reconquista* of lands stolen by gringos long ago.
- The *Times* has given short shrift to the way towns and cities with high densities of illegal immigrants have undermined immigration laws. Many have enacted so-called "sanctuary laws" making it illegal for local officials, including police, to report illegal aliens to federal authorities unless they have committed major crimes. Maywood, where the U.S. flag was stomped, has gone even further. As Heather MacDonald explained in *City Journal*, it "abolished its drunk-driving checkpoints, because they were nabbing too many illegal aliens. Next, this 96 percent Latino city, almost half of whose adult population lacks a ninth-grade education, disbanded its police traffic division entirely, so that illegals wouldn't need to worry about having their cars towed for being unlicensed. ... At a March 2006 city council meeting in Maywood, a resident suggested that a councilmember was using English as a sign of disrespect." The *Times* ignored these developments.
- The *Times* did report on a caste-based killing in Chicago, where in 2008 an Indian immigrant set fire to his pregnant daughter's apartment over a "cultural slight." The fire killed four people — the daughter, her husband, and their three-year-old child. The *Times* noted that the father was angry that his daughter married without permission and that the husband was of a lower caste. But it gave no sense of the presence of caste-related violence and resentment in the United States, as represented by the many high-caste wealthy Indian couples who bring over lower-caste girls as servants but wind up sexually exploiting and physically abusing them. Most of these cases have gone unreported. When the *Times* has reported on caste, it says — against all evidence to the contrary — that the tradition is "withering."
- In January 2008, when a Mexican American U.S. Marine was shot by cops in the largely Mexican immigrant town of Ceres, Calif., after shooting one policeman and wounding another, the *Times* reported that he was under stress because of an order to return to Iraq for another tour and was not in one of the gangs that dominate the town. The account was threaded with quotes from friends saying that the Marine was "a good Mexican boy" and that he "died like a real Mexican, standing up." Soon

afterward, Michelle Malkin reported that in fact he did have gang associations, showing pictures of him with gang paraphernalia, and that he was high on coke. Malkin also reported that he was not being redeployed to Iraq and had never served there — confabulated assertions in the *Times* report.

- In December 2007, a woman was savagely raped in a Queens park by four Mexican illegals. Once arrested, they were found to have long rap sheets and a long record of missed court appearances, which made them deportable. The *Times* did not report their illegal status, referring to them merely as “homeless men.” Nor did it connect the dots back to New York City’s sanctuary policies, which protected three of the four from deportation for offenses such as assault, attempted robbery, criminal trespass, illegal gun possession, and drug offenses. Around this time, however, the *Times* hailed Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s reversal of a proposal that city workers check identities of illegals, declaring that doing so would “deny privacy rights for immigrants” and that “at the end of the day mandatory status disclosure would hurt everyone’s public safety” by “chilling illegals from coming forward to report crime and abuse.”
- The *Times* has given protective coverage to intolerant acts by immigrant Muslims. A case in point was the threats by fellow Muslims against an imam in Brooklyn because of the relatively liberal views he expressed to Andrea Elliott for her three-part series, “An Imam in America.” Elliott did not report these threats — which encouraged the imam to relocate to New Jersey — until nearly a year after he started receiving them. Her series was largely positive, despite many negative things that were associated with this particular imam and his Brooklyn congregation.

The *Times*’ journalistic lapses, failures and blunders on the immigration issue do not stem from deadline pressure, a lack of newsroom resources and personnel, or carelessness. Rather, they stem from a slavish devotion to the ideology of diversity, along with wishful thinking, naiveté, double standards, social distance, elite guilt, intellectual dishonesty, historical shallowness, and old-fashioned partisanship.

The paper’s reluctance to face the realities of illegal immigration squarely is reflected in its queasy coverage of alien criminality, as well as the different attitudes, values, and customs that some immigrant groups bring as baggage, and the implications these differences carry for the American tradition of assimilation. The relativism that the *Times* brings to its reporting on these subjects, as well as the issue of dual citizenship and divided loyalty, suggests an attempt to undermine the ideal of assimilation as a “dated, even racist concept.”

Two things appear to be driving immigration reporting. The first is a failure of confidence in America and its history — a “punitive liberalism,” as James Piereson has called it, or “penitential narcissism” in Oriana Fallaci’s phrase. The second driver is an intellectual and journalistic framework that romanticizes “the Other” and shrugs off the question of a Latinization or Islamization of American culture as if it were meaningless. Like other liberal institutions, the *Times* puts the “human rights” of illegal immigrants ahead of the collective right of ordinary American citizens to decide who should be allowed to immigrate and who should not — thereby essentially voiding one of the most fundamental aspects any country’s sovereignty.

At the *Times*, pressure has steadily increased to erase the distinction between “legal” and “illegal” immigration. As Randal Archibold wrote in April 2006, there is “the awkward question of who is legal and how much it should matter.” Officially, the paper’s style guide says a distinction should be made, but the newsroom reflects a calculated confusion. Sometimes headlines will use the word “migrant;” the text of reports may use “undocumented worker,” “undocumented migrant,” or “immigrants who are undocumented.” The *Times* rarely uses the term “illegal alien.” A 2004 story headlined “160 Migrants Seized at Upscale Arizona Home” was obviously about illegal immigrants being smuggled into the country, but the headline refused to say so.

One editorial writer, Lawrence Downes, gave an explanation for the evasive vocabulary when he wrote that “America has a big problem with illegal immigration, but a big part of it stems from the word ‘illegal.’ It pollutes the debate. It blocks solutions. Used dispassionately and technically, there is nothing wrong with it. Used as an irreducible modifier for a large and largely decent group of people, it is badly damaging. And as a code word for racial and ethnic hatred, it is detestable.” Many readers thought this was moral preening on Downes’ part — and offensive to boot. Wrote one:

“I am repeatedly frustrated by the implication by Lawrence Downes and others that by default those who oppose illegal immigration are promoting (or at the very least laying the ground for) a racist agenda. The word ‘illegal’ is not a dirty word. It is to the point and honest, as it spells out the obvious difference in this case between those who are here lawfully and those who are not. To suggest that it is a ‘code word for racial and ethnic hatred’ is disingenuous at best and only adds fuel to the fire. It has been used over and over in an attempt to stifle honest discussion on this topic as well as on a range of others.”

The *Times* also shows its bias in the numbers it chooses to report. In a mid-2009 panel discussion, Jeffrey Passel of the Pew Research Center estimated that nearly one million illegal immigrants enter America annually, but the *Times* has used the figure of 400,000 — which is the net increase in the total illegal population, as opposed to the annual number of new arrivals, but the paper doesn’t acknowledge the discrepancy, much less explain it.

While minimizing the numbers of illegal immigrants, the *Times* plays down the social costs they impose as well. According to William Bratton, former police chief of Los Angeles, gang violence is “the emerging monster of crime in America.” At least 90 percent of all the outstanding homicide warrants in Los Angeles are for illegal immigrant criminals, most of them gangbangers. Because of their social marginality, immigrant children are particularly likely to be seduced by the gang culture. But the *New York Times* has often reported on gangs as if they were created by the United States itself, and as if deporting alleged gang members were a human rights

abuse. Pieces such as Ginger Thompson's September 2004 report called "Tattooed Warriors: Shuttling Between Nations, Latino Gangs Confound the Law" rarely involve interviews with victims of immigrant gang crime, and seldom reveal that expelling gang members helps reduce crime in Los Angeles and other cities.

Illegal Mexican immigrants are heavily involved in the production and distribution of methamphetamine. But in a February 2002 Web report by Timothy Egan, headlined "Meth Building Its Hell's Kitchen in Rural America," the role of illegals is not mentioned. A report on California's "Emerald Triangle," consisting of Humboldt, Trinity, and Mendocino counties, mentioned only "Mexican nationals."

One of the strangest treatments of the illegal immigrant gang/drug nexus came from Tim Golden in a 2002 piece headlined "Mexican Drug Dealers Turning U.S. Towns into Major Depots," which focused on small towns in Georgia where thousands of "Mexican immigrants" have flocked to the mills. "The same pipeline of immigration and trade has been exploited by Mexican drug dealers," Golden reported, adding that they have emerged as major wholesalers throughout the country. He noted that the number of Mexicans in federal prison on drug charges doubled from 1994 to 2000, but did not say what percentage of them were illegal.

There are many other types of crime where the perpetrators' status goes unreported. In 2003, for example, a Long Island commuter was stabbed in front of his house after walking home from the railroad station. When five illegal immigrants were arraigned five months later, Patrick Healy made no mention of their status in the *Times*, though he did report that police believed "some of the defendants were gang members." In fact, they were MS-13. Healy quoted a sister of one of the men giving the oldest cliché in criminal justice, "He must have been with the wrong people at the wrong time," but failed to note something that the *New York Post* reported: the defendants were laughing while being booked.

The *Times* showed its protective instincts toward illegals in its coverage of a 2005 murder case in New City, a Rockland County suburb of New York. Douglas Herrera, a 39-year-old Guatemalan who had overstayed a six-month visa issued in 2001, was left to clean up after a landscaping job. He beat, raped and strangled the woman of the house, then stole her husband's clothes and her cell phone, using it to call her friends and relatives to taunt them and boast about the rape. The story was certainly newsworthy. The perpetrator was using a fake name with fake documents, at a time when New York's governor, Eliot Spitzer, had proposed giving driver's licenses to illegals, and when identity theft was very much on the media's radar screen. The case also put a spotlight on the sanctuary policies that had prevented the police from detaining the man in previous traffic violations and had allowed him to remain free after being charged in 2002 with misdemeanor assault on his girlfriend and never showing up for court — a deportable offense given his status.

The *Times*, however, shunted the story into the Metro section and omitted the perpetrator's illegal status, even though it was in the AP "brief" that the paper used on one day. (When I called the *Times* to ask about this, I could not get a straight answer.) And instead of using the case as a peg for a wider examination of illegal alien crime in suburbs, or answering the question of how someone using a fake name can get released from jail, it produced a smarmy report focused on how other Latino landscapers feared a backlash that would make it harder for them to get work. Critics charged that if the races were reversed and some "nativist" had done this to an immigrant, the *Times* would have been all over the story. Their criticism gained some traction from the fact that the story of an African immigrant teenage girl who was wrongly detained on suspicion of terrorism and then released was featured on the front page at the same time the gardener's misdeeds were buried inside.

In 2005, an actress in Greenwich Village was killed by an illegal construction worker after complaining about the noise coming from the apartment below hers. The worker strangled her, then hung her on a shower curtain rod to make it look like a suicide, which investigators saw through quickly. The status of the suspect was reported from day one by the New York tabloids, but the *Times* took a few days to get around to it.

So-called "sanctuary laws," which essentially bar local law enforcement officials from inquiring into immigration status, have caused legal and judicial chaos in cities like New York, New Haven, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Yet a database search turns up only one piece by the *Times* that candidly discussed how these laws obstruct the fight against crime. An April 2005 report by Charlie LeDuff, "Police Say Immigrant Policy Is Hindrance," gave a good account of frustration among Los Angeles police over not being able to pick up known illegal criminals who had snuck back into the country until they were caught for a felony. But LeDuff also gave a lot of space to those wringing their hands about ethnic profiling. He missed or ignored the substantial penalties that police officers face if they do inquire into a criminal suspect's immigration status. He also did not mention the history of the sanctuary law, known in Los Angeles as Special Order 40, and how in the late 1990s there was an effort to roll it back, but the ethnic lobby put such intense pressure on politicians that it became even more sacrosanct.

Sanctuary policies were a heated issue during the 2008 Republican presidential primaries, but according to the *Times* columnist Gail Collins, "sanctuary city" was just "a right-wing buzzword aimed at freaking out red state voters." With remarkable glibness, Collins joked:

"By the way, doesn't the term 'sanctuary city' sound sort of nice, actually? Remember all those sci-fi movies where the heroes were stuck in a terrible world where everybody but them was a mutant or a pod person or a hologram and their only hope was to reach a legendary and possibly mythical refuge? Next time you hear a politician ranting about a 'sanctuary city,' say: 'Wasn't that where Keanu Reeves was trying to get in The Matrix?'"

The *Times* has low-balled other issues involved in illegal immigration, such as the diseases that are brought across the border, like tuberculosis. The housing that illegals live in is often overcrowded and dangerous, which is partly the fault of unscrupulous landlords, often immigrants themselves. In early 2009, overcrowding led to the deaths of four New York City firemen, trapped in a burning apartment that had been illegally subdivided. "Partitioned Apartments Are Risky but Common in New York," read the anodyne February 2002 headline over a blasé report by Manny Fernandez. Even on the issue of illegal sidewalk sales of counterfeit goods, the paper is in denial. One 2006 piece on counterfeiting in the garment district by Nicholas Confessore, a cub reporter, said the vendors were African Americans, though almost any New Yorker could tell you that the majority of vendors selling knock-offs are African illegals.

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Births to foreign-born women in the United States are at their highest rate ever, nearly one in four. As the *Christian Science Monitor* has written, some experts worry that the traditional rapid assimilation of immigrants may be breaking down, with potentially troublesome consequences. Muslim immigration has brought its own set of concerns for assimilation to American norms. Based on a study of immigrants from the Middle East, Steven Camarota, from the Center for Immigration Studies in Washington, told the *Monitor* he estimates that there are some 600,000 children of Muslim immigrants in the United States. “These facts, set in the context of new twists in Islamic terrorism, are raising questions about how well the children of Muslim immigrants are being assimilated,” the *Monitor* declared, “feeding a growing sense of concern among Americans about immigration, and about Muslim immigrants in particular.”

But the *Times* tends to see assimilation as something that steals cultural identity and leaves immigrants floating randomly in the melting pot. An editorial about the surging Latino population says, with apparent satisfaction, that changes in communications and business “guarantee that assimilation won’t replace heritage.” A review by Michiko Kakutani of a book about assimilation, among other topics, by the late Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington was condescendingly headlined “An American Identity Crisis for Norman Rockwell’s America.”

The rejection of assimilation comes down to earth in reporting on the customs and values, attitudes and practices of various immigrant communities. While celebrating cultural difference, the *Times* does not scrutinize the implications of those differences for immigrants or for Americans generally. Avid Books, one of the op-ed page’s two house conservatives, has written about “cultural geography,” a term used by sociologists to explain “why some groups’ values make them embrace technology and prosper and others don’t,” which, Brooks adds, is “a line of inquiry” that P.C. piety makes it “impolite to pursue.” It is certainly a line of inquiry that has been rigorously ignored by his own paper. If immigrants leave home with problematic cultural baggage, the *Times* believes it is dropped on the tarmac when they land on U.S. soil or left behind when they scoot across the Mexico border. Ironically, the paper tacitly endorses problematic customs and attitudes that Third World progressives are trying to fight in their countries.

Many Indian immigrants to America see no problem with bringing their discriminatory and un-American caste system along with them. Indians may be a model minority for their above-average incomes and levels of education, but their impaired sense of social equality and their ethnocentric exclusivity are problems that they should not import into their new country. You won’t hear any concerns about it in the *Times*, however. In a 2004 piece about caste, Joseph Berger wrote that the practice may have “stowed away” to America, but quickly concluded that it survived here mainly as a form of “tribal bonding,” with Indians finding kindred spirits among people who grew up with the same foods and cultural signals. “Just as descendants of the Pilgrims use the Mayflower Society as a social outlet to mingle with people of congenial backgrounds, a few castes have formed societies like the Brahmin Samaj of North America.”

Yet the article contradicts itself. While Berger contends that caste is “withering,” he found plenty of examples where it has a “stubborn resilience”: bias in business dealings, discrimination in hiring, obstruction of “love marriages,” and disownments. One business owner from the untouchable caste said, “Our friends who came here from India from the upper classes, they’re supposed to leave this kind of thing behind, but unfortunately they brought it with them.” Yet this man told Berger that he was active in his Dalit (untouchable) group and would prefer that his son marry a Dalit.

While ethnic intermarriage has been the most dynamic engine of social integration that America has known, arranged or assisted marriages lead Indians to have the lowest rate of intermarriage of any group in the United States, perpetuating ethnocentrism and a separatist outlook. The *Times* has reported this phenomenon nonjudgmentally, even positively. The “Vows” column in the Sunday *Times* regularly honors various South Asian or Middle Eastern immigrants or ethnics for finding their soul mate within their same group — Muslim, Sikh, Christian Arab.

Even voodoo gets good ink now. “Americans are hungry for spiritual fulfillment and voodoo offers a direct experience of the sacred that appeals to more and more people,” Steven Kinzer wrote in a 2003 piece. Timeswoman Neela Banderjee wrote positively in 2009 about a Christian African congregation, part of the Pentecostal “Spiritual Warfare” movement, that comes together at midnight to fight the devil, literally punching, kicking, and slashing at him. “Some situations you need to address at night, because in the ministry of spiritual warfare, demons, the spirits bewitching people, choose this time to work,” said Nicole Sangamay, who came from Congo in 1998 to study and is a co-pastor of the ministry. “And we pick this time to pray to nullify what they are doing.” It’s hard to imagine Banderjee giving a group of white American Pentecostals the same slack if they held similarly wacky beliefs.

Another dimension of the assimilation issue that the *Times* has handled badly is a set of indicators that portend the creation of a permanent Latino underclass. Latinos have the highest dropout rate in America, the lowest rate of college-going and the lowest rate of GED attainment. They have high unemployment, high levels of crime and incarceration, and high levels of obesity. Latinos also have a high reliance on social services, which actually increases over the years, contrary to other immigrants’ historical experience. Illegitimacy has soared as well: half of all new babies in the United States are Hispanic, and half of these have unmarried mothers.

In his 1998 book, *Strangers Among Us*, the former *Times* reporter Roberto Suro said it was possible that the “great wave” of Latino immigrants would achieve upward mobility and fully integrate into American society. “It seems equally likely,” he continued, “that Latino immigration could become a powerful demographic engine of social fragmentation, discord, and even violence.” Yet the *Times* is timid about getting its hands around this story. Jason DeParle only scratched the surface of the problem with his April 2009 report headlined “Struggling to Rise in Suburbs Where Failing Means Fitting In,” which examined the culture of Latino low achievement and self-sabotage.

The paper’s indifference, if not hostility, to assimilation shows also in the near-total neglect of the issues raised by dual citizenship. At least 93 countries now allow their émigrés to keep their citizenship even as they become American citizens, and the list keeps growing. Dual citizenship has implications for cultural cohesion and for “the basic cultural, psychological, institutional, and political organizations that have been the foundation of the country’s republican democracy for last 200 years,” argues Stanley Renshon of the City University of New York. Might too much diversity lead to “a fragmented, and thus dysfunctional, national identity?” he asks.

This is a question that the *Times* has never seriously examined. Reporting on the Dominican immigrants in America who are now allowed to vote in their native country's elections, it describes them as being "closer to home than ever," whatever that means. The *Times* has reported on how African immigrants might say they will stay two years but "Africa will always be home," and how Mexicans living in the United States want to be buried in their "homeland." A story in June 2010 by Kirk Semple described a Mexican immigrant as "Running for Mayor, Back Home in Mexico" after almost two decades living in the United States without naturalizing; he had slipped over the border illegally in 1992. And the *Times* has featured statements like this one from Mario Obledo, a co-founder of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund: "California is going to become a Hispanic state. Anyone who doesn't like it should leave."

Furthering the deconstruction of American citizenship, the *Times* has reported favorably on noncitizen suffrage. In August 2004, Rachel Swarns wrote a piece called "Immigrants Raise Call for Rights to Be Voters," examining efforts nationwide to expand the franchise to people who are residents but not citizens. Although Swarns did quote one critic, Rep. Tom Tancredo (R-Colo.), the story was mostly a platform for supporters of noncitizen voting. One New York academic was quoted as saying, "A lot of communities are not represented by [political] representatives who reflect the diversity in their communities and are responsive to their needs."

A *New York Times* editorial from 1982, "Immigration and Purity," articulated a realist view of the subject, saying: "Unlimited immigration was a need, and a glory, of the undeveloped American past. Yet no one believes America can still support it. We must choose how many people to admit, and which ones. That can be done only if we can control the borders." By 2004, when a new push began for tough, enforcement-driven immigration reform, the *Times* had changed its perspective markedly.

When the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006 was introduced in Congress, the *Times* showed its bias by failing to report the bill's various "hidden bombs," as one critic called them. For example, it would have replaced the entire immigration bench with activists, since it required that lawyers proposed for immigration judgeships have at least five years practicing immigration law and that existing judges give up lifetime spots on the bench after seven years. The bill had an amendment called the "DREAM Act," which would, among other things, have allowed illegals to attend college at in-state tuition rates, while U.S. citizens from out of state have to pay full freight. The bill also called for a massive granting of legal status, leading to citizenship, but did not give U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services the budget or infrastructure to handle its new responsibilities — which many saw as simply implementing "amnesty" for up to 12 million illegal immigrants. The bill was premised on the idea that the documents that illegals would be filing to prove residency would be authentic, an unrealistic expectation given the easy availability of counterfeit Social Security cards, counterfeit visas, bank statements, tax returns, and other fraudulent forms of documentation. Supporters of the bill said that no illegal would be allowed to cut in line ahead of someone patiently waiting in another country for approval to immigrate. Yet they did not specify if illegals who applied for what was nebulously called a "path to citizenship" would have to go home first or could remain here while they were being processed, which was essentially the same thing as cutting the line.

While hesitant to discuss these issues, the *Times* charged into the fray against those calling for felony penalties for facilitating illegal immigration. One editorial claimed, falsely and sensationally, that such penalties could lead to jail for church groups running soup kitchens, or neighbors taking an illegal to a hospital or a pharmacy.

Opponents of the bill flooded Capitol Hill with so many telephone calls, faxes, and e-mails that the Senate switchboard had to be shut down. On this, at least, the *Times* headline writers were honest. "The Grassroots Roared and an Immigration Plan Fell," read one headline. But some of the columnists almost choked on sour grapes. Timothy Egan, a former reporter turned website columnist, blamed conservative radio and television talk show hosts like Rush Limbaugh and Bill O'Reilly. "Pragmatism is being drowned out by bullies with electronic bullhorns, who've got their [Republican] party leaders running scared." Egan said.

The bitterness continued in *Times* analyses where opposition to the liberal view was equated with rank nativism. David Leonhardt, a business columnist, wrote that the backlash "had a familiar feel to it." He went on to associate the tidal wave of illegals entering the United States over the previous two decades with other great eras of immigration into the country — in the 1850s, 1880s, and early 1900s. He noted that they too caused a hysterical reaction, the most famous being the rise of the Know-Nothing movement. History looked as if it would repeat itself, suggested Leonhardt — ignoring the fact that this latest group of immigrants, unlike the previous generations, did not come legally through Ellis Island.

The editorial rhetoric from the *Times* got increasingly nasty. Although the editorial page called for civil discourse, it hardly practiced what it preached, instead issuing juvenile insults far more frequently than dependable insights. Even as it denounced the "demagoguery" of the opposition, it practiced its own form. Conservatives who were concerned about enforcement first were said to hold a view of immigration reform that was equivalent to "pest control." Editorialists illogically likened opposing amnesty to favoring segregation. Other editorials indulged in victimology that sounded like self-parody: Hispanics are the new gays; Hispanics are the new Willy Horton; sending them home is immoral and a human rights violation. One editorial, "Ain't That America," said:

"Think of America's greatest historical shames. Most have involved the singling out of groups of people for abuse. Name a distinguishing feature — skin color, religion, nationality, language — and it's likely that people here have suffered unjustly for it, either through the freelance hatred of citizens or as a matter of official government policy."

An especially rich target was the Minutemen, a group of unarmed volunteers patrolling the southern border with the aim of providing information to the Border Patrol on the movements of illegals trying to sneak into the country. The reporter James McKinley called them "self-proclaimed patriots" whose planned "vigilante watch" along the border was "alarming." Sarah Vowell called them "a nutty experiment" that sprang from America's "violent nativity," further maligning them as "grown men playing army on the Mexican border" because they had nothing better to do. One *Times* story characterized the Minutemen as "anti-immigration," which the paper later had to retract, admitting that they are only against *illegal* immigration.

The Minutemen founder Jim Gilchrist was trying to speak at Columbia University in October 2006 when campus radicals stormed the stage. A melee ensued, as security had to whisk Gilchrist off-stage, ending the event. The *Times* reported some of what happened but omitted some incriminating details, such as students shaking their fists and chanting “*Si se pudo, si se pudo,*” Spanish for “Yes we could!” Others unrolled a banner that read “No one is ever illegal,” in Arabic as well as English. But these bits of color were left to other news organizations to report.

Triumphalist hurrahs infused the *Times*’ coverage of the large-scale protests by illegal immigrants demanding amnesty in the spring of 2006. Few photographs showed the seas of Mexican flags, and the demonstrators’ claims that borders are unnecessary because we’re all “one big American landmass” didn’t find their way into print.

Meanwhile, the *Times* condemned almost any effort at border enforcement or interior immigration control. Raids on overcrowded immigrant housing on Long Island — such as the modest-sized residence where 64 men lived — were denounced, and the targets were quoted as declaring that they were being treated worse than dogs. These raids were painted in totally racial terms and likened to the segregation formerly practiced against blacks. “It’s like we’re going backwards,” one activist told the *Times*.

Unsurprisingly, the paper was apoplectic over Arizona’s plans to arrest and deport illegal immigrants in April 2010. The new law, SB 1070, was passed in response to drug violence spreading across the border from Mexico, compounding the criminality already associated with rampant immigrant smuggling. The most contested provision entailed permitting local police to arrest and hold people for federal immigration authorities if there was “a reasonable suspicion” they were illegal, after encountering them in the course of traffic stops, domestic violence, and other routine law enforcement actions.

When the Arizona law was signed, Randal Archibold gave plenty of room in his report for opponents to condemn it as “a recipe for racial and ethnic profiling,” and as “an open invitation for harassment and discrimination against Hispanics regardless of their citizenship status.” Archibold quoted Cardinal Roger Mahoney of Los Angeles saying that demanding residency documents was equivalent to “Nazism.” He said the bill’s author, state senator Russell Pearce, was regarded as a “politically incorrect embarrassment by more moderate members of his party.”

It was in editorial and op-ed commentary that the *Times* really foamed at the mouth, however. An editorial headlined “Arizona Goes Over the Edge” called the bill “harsh and mean-spirited,” and predicted, “If you are brown-skinned and leave home without your wallet, you are in trouble.” Timothy Egan referred to Arizona as “a lunatic magnet” and said the “crackpot” law was the work of “crackpots who dominate Republican politics, who in turn cannot get elected without the backing of crackpot media.” The former Supreme Court reporter Linda Greenhouse, now a Web columnist and a resident scholar at Yale, went over the edge in a post headlined “Breathing While Undocumented.” Greenhouse said she was glad she had already seen the Grand Canyon because “I’m not going back to Arizona as long as it remains a police state,” and added: “Wasn’t the system of internal passports one of the most distasteful features of life in the Soviet Union and apartheid-era South Africa?”

The very idea of border enforcement and requiring a legal process for immigration has been met by journalistic contempt. Many reports in a myopic and maudlin vein have been the work of Nina Bernstein, whom one former *Times* employee called “nothing more than an advocate” for open borders. A search of her stories on the *Times* website over the last few years reveals an anthology of charges that immigrants are being abused or victimized in some way.

Bernstein’s specialty is stories where immigrant families are split apart because one of the parents got caught up in a raid or a fraud, or where immigrants had spent a substantial length of time in the United States and become integrated into their communities, but were deported for various technicalities. One piece tells of a woman separated from her child, whom she can only visit through the border fence. The teary money quote: “It’s like visiting in prison. It’s heartbreaking. It’s sad because there’s a fence when we know we are all supposed to be together.” A story in February 2010, “A Fatal Ending for a Family Forced Apart by Immigration Law,” told of a 32-year-old father of three and husband of an American citizen who was sent back to his native Ecuador, which he had left when he was 17. The man was picked up in an immigration raid and took “voluntary departure” instead of being deported, which boosted his chances of getting back in. But the couple’s application for a marriage visa was rejected, and the man committed suicide in Ecuador.

Bernstein also filed a story decrying a perfectly legal program that Immigration and Customs Enforcement had set up at the Rikers Island jail complex in New York to identify undocumented foreign criminals. In a city with a “don’t ask, don’t tell approach to immigration,” the program “may come as a surprise to many,” she wrote. Using immigration advocates as her predominant sources, Bernstein allowed them to depict the program as a “warning” of what the rest of the country could expect. The process of deporting criminal aliens once their sentences were up, according to immigrant rights groups, was “leaving the deportees’ families abandoned in New York and dependent on our city’s strained social service system.” True, the process of dealing with 12 million people who broke the law to get here is going to involve some pain. But constantly harping on that does not encourage compassion.

One reason why the *Times*’ immigration reporting sounds so off is the success of lobbying groups such as the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. There’s also anxiety about “feeding a backlash” against poor Third Worlders. But scorn for patriotism — not nationalism or jingoism, but patriotism — is certainly a factor too, along with an agenda to deconstruct the idea of citizenship. At the *Times*, cosmopolitan post-nationalism trumps the traditional notion of American community, and “the cult of ethnicity” that Arthur Schlesinger warned about in *The Disuniting of America* has overshadowed the commonweal. The diversity to which the *Times* is so committed has had mixed blessings for the United States, which the paper has not bothered to investigate. As the Harvard social scientist Robert Putnam found, places with the most ethnic and racial diversity are also places with low civic engagement and social trust. Community life withers and people tend to “hunker down” in order to escape the friction that develops in excessively diverse places. Yet the *Times* promotes “diversity” as an aggressive creed, one whose spirit was captured by the columnist Charles Blow in a taunt at the Tea Partiers: “You may want your country back, but you can’t have it. ... Welcome to America: The Remix.”

Topics: The New York Times (NYT) and Immigration
Report