Crossing Borders, Changing Places: Immigrant America in a World on the Move

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The world is increasingly on the move. In 2013, the United Nations reported that there were 236 million international migrants worldwide, most of whom were born in the global South and migrated to the global North, reflecting widening global inequalities and intractable conflicts. These self-selected border crossers represent 3% of humanity; the other 97% are stayers, living in the countries where they were born. Their “changing places” are sites not only of cultural and demographic transformations, but also of social and political collisions that elicit predictable nativist responses. More immigrants — a fifth of the world’s total — go to the United States than to any other country. This essay will focus on the story of “Immigrant America” over the past half century—from its historic nadir in 1970 to its resurgence as a Nation of Immigrants and to Deportation Nation. The subtitle is a double entendre, referring at once to the country and to our book Immigrant America—new editions of which have been published in each of the past four decades (the newest comes out this summer) as we seek continuously to grapple with and to represent a vertiginously changing world and this “permanently unfinished” moving target of a society.
place. Time runs differently here: The plumber you scheduled for Tuesday may not show up for a month, and you'll be the uptight one for asking why.