

## CELEBRATING THE ENDURING CONTRIBUTION OF *BIRDS OF PASSAGE*

This cluster of reviews is based on a lively symposium on Michael J. Piore's groundbreaking book, *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies*. The symposium took place at the annual meeting of the Labor Employment Relations Association, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on May 26, 2015.

Note that *Birds of Passage* was first published in 1979 by Cambridge University Press. It is still available from Cambridge in a digitally printed version. 240 pp. ISBN 978-0521280587, \$44.99 (Paperback).

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Written in 1979, *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies* offered a powerful and fresh way of understanding labor migration and the role of immigrant workers in the U.S. labor market that dramatically broke with traditional neoclassical thinking. Dominant theory up to that point had focused on push factors, arguing that labor migration stemmed simply from geographic differences in the supply and demand of labor and placed agency in the hands of migrants who made the decision individually to maximize their utility by moving from low wage to high wage countries. In stark contrast, *Birds of Passage* focused on pull factors, utilizing dual labor market theory to argue that migration was fundamentally demand driven. By Piore's reckoning, labor migration was the consequence of the chronic and unavoidable need of advanced industrial societies for workers who were willing to labor for low wages with great instability, little chance for advancement, and often under difficult conditions. These insights and the conceptual framework Piore offered in the book are still relevant for understanding and analyzing labor migration and the policy dilemmas it poses today.

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*Birds of Passage's* powerful analysis of the relationship of immigrant workers to labor markets strongly influenced the work each of us has done on U.S. immigrants and their efforts to organize. What was, and remains, so inspiring about *Birds of Passage* is its breadth and originality. The book's argument is predicated on a forthright rejection of what previously had been the dominant explanation for migration. As Piore writes in the introduction:

The argument . . . derives from a perspective upon the nature of economic activity that is fundamentally different from that of conventional economic analysis. Because it is so different, it leads not only to an alternative view of the phenomenon of migration . . . but also . . . a range of issues apparently removed from migration, such as the minimum wage, unemployment, and ultimately the very nature of industrial society.

Conventional theory treats the market for labor like the market for a shirt or any other commodity. . . . One can better understand migration by ignoring income differentials [between countries] and recognizing instead that people are rooted in a social context in ways that other commodities are not.

Unlike neoclassical economists, who focused on the individual migrant in the context of the labor market, Piore puts structural and institutional forces at center stage. In that respect, he is a sociologist's economist. His alternative approach drew on dual labor market theory. "Migrant workers," he wrote, "are but one part of a broader class of industrial labor [who] view their attachment to the job, and often to the labor market, as temporary and define themselves in terms of some other activities from which they derive their personal and social identity. The other major groups are youth . . . housewives, and peasant workers." Although the equation of immigrants with these other groups, especially "housewives," seems a bit quaint today, this shift in paradigm nevertheless yielded a wealth of important insights.

One hallmark of *Birds of Passage* (as in all of Piore's work) is his strong commitment to empirical research—in this case his extensive fieldwork interviewing employers. That work contributed to one of the book's most important insights, namely, that migration is essentially demand-driven, rooted in the search by employers for greater labor market flexibility—a claim that was dramatically confirmed in 2008 when unauthorized immigration to the United States virtually stopped dead in the wake of the Great Recession.

Piore observed that acute motivational problems regularly arise at the bottom of the labor market, where job status is low and opportunities for upward economic mobility are restricted. Migrant workers offer a ready solution to this problem, precisely because their social status does not inhere in the job (as noted above). So long as they do not strive to move up in the labor market, migrants can complement rather than substitute for natives employed in the primary sector; indeed, the presence of migrants facilitates native workers' ability to maintain good jobs.

Piore also suggested that migrant workers were good for labor unions because they restored some of the labor market flexibility that union organization tended to remove. Their complementarity to native workers in the primary sector also facilitated organized labor's ability to maintain good jobs, so long as immigrant workers did not try to move up. Piore further speculated that short-term migrants paying into pension plans and social security would subsidize older and more stable workers; this, too, has been borne out by recent events. The U.S. Social Security Administration estimates that unauthorized workers contribute \$13 billion per year to the Social Security Trust Fund ([https://www.socialsecurity.gov/oact/NOTES/pdf\\_notes/note151.pdf](https://www.socialsecurity.gov/oact/NOTES/pdf_notes/note151.pdf) and <http://americasvoice.org/blog/so-much-for-being-moochers-undocumented-immigrants-have-paid-100-billion-into-social-security-fund-over-past-decade/>).

*Birds of Passage* anticipated by many years an argument often credited to Massey, Durand, and Malone in speculating that "it is quite possible that increased difficulty in crossing the border will simply cause those migrants who are successful to stay longer and in this way increase the rate of permanent settlement" (p. 181). That, as Massey et al. have documented, is exactly what happened after the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986 with its dramatic tightening of border enforcement. Indeed, the ensuing falloff in circular migration, combined with the fact that in the post-IRCA era few undocumented migrants have been able to regularize their status, explains why millions of immigrants from Mexico and Central America have become trapped in long-term undocumented status—aggravating precisely the problem IRCA was meant to address.

With ramped-up border enforcement, along with comparative under-development at home, large numbers of immigrant workers have given up on the idea of returning home. From the broader literature as well as our own research, we know that many of those who originally intended to stay for only a few years ended up remaining for decades, and bringing their families or forming new ones north of the border—in other words, settling permanently in the United States. Despite the ever-present tension between sojourning and settling, many immigrants have turned out to be not birds of passage but instead crows, ravens, doves, and black-birds—non-migratory birds all.

On this topic, *Birds of Passage* prefigured some of the insights in rich literature on second-generation immigrants that has proliferated in recent years. Piore predicted that the second generation—unlike their parents—would not be content to remain in the lowest-status jobs. Instead, he argued, the children of migrants who settled in destination countries would develop wage expectations and status aspirations similar to those of natives. In addition, he suggested they would eventually begin to compete with natives in the labor market. Because he worried that the channels of upward mobility available to the second generation would be limited, Piore was sympathetic to proposals to restrict first-generation migration—even as he fretted, again correctly, that such restrictions might backfire and hurt migrant workers rather than their employers.

Another strength of *Birds of Passage* is its cosmopolitanism. Seemingly without effort, Piore invokes a range of historical and cross-national comparisons in his narrative. For example, he noted that the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to the industrial North (as well as that of rural whites and Puerto Ricans) during a period of U.S. immigration restriction has many parallels to both the later low-wage migration from Mexico and the late-nineteenth-century movement of Eastern and Southern Europeans across the Atlantic. Building on that comparison, he goes on to link the Roosevelt electoral coalition and the industrial union movement of the 1930s, built by second-generation European immigrants to the civil rights movement of the 1960s, built by second-generation blacks of the Great Migration. In our view, today's immigrant rights movement is a third case of this phenomenon.

Although the American labor movement has become deeply involved in the immigrant rights movement, many unionists strongly object to some of its tropes, such as the frequent statement that immigrants "are doing the work no one else wants to do." To the person on the street, this may seem to be a simple truth and to some in the business community it is a handy heuristic as well. From labor's perspective, however, that statement is a justification for immigration based on willingness to be exploited, to do "bad jobs," and to do them without demanding something better. It further implies that immigrants, especially the unauthorized, are destined to be permanently confined to bad jobs.

Yet there is nothing inherent in a job that makes it "good" or "bad"—all jobs can become good jobs if the workers who do them have the power to bargain. Conversely, good jobs can devolve into bad jobs, as has often occurred in the United States in the years since *Birds of Passage* appeared in 1979. Indeed, the primary labor market has imploded in those years with deindustrialization, de-unionization, and deregulation—developments that Piore did not foresee. One of us has documented the dynamics these processes unleashed in the Los Angeles labor market in recent decades. As industrial restructuring and union decline led to sharp deterioration in wages and working conditions in sectors such as trucking, construction, and building maintenance, U.S.-born workers began to exit such sectors, and then employers turned to immigrant workers to replace them. In Los Angeles, as well as in many other locations, the growth of low-wage immigrant employment was a consequence, not a cause, of declining job quality.

But those same immigrant workers soon began to organize to upgrade their pay and conditions. U.S. labor history is replete with examples of low-status, poorly paid workers—garbage collectors, longshoremen, hospital orderlies, highway laborers, to name but a few—who have elevated their conditions through organization. Immigrant workers, past and present, are often hired in the worst jobs because they lack legal status and/or English language skills, but many have been able to improve their labor market status through collective action. The engagement of immigrant workers in the Justice for Janitors movement, homecare and construction worker organizing, worker centers and immigrant rights campaigns is the latest iteration of this longstanding historical pattern. Whereas Piore worried that the incorporation of migrant workers as equal partners with natives would be antagonistic to the needs of the native workforce, instead immigrant unionism has been so energetic that many labor organizers have come to see immigrant workers as among their most promising recruits, with the potential to rejuvenate labor movement institutions more generally. Indeed, recent organizing in the worker center and immigrant rights movements underscores the continuing centrality of worker agency. Structural and institutional forces notwithstanding, workers do make individual choices about migrating, about moving between jobs, and about organizing.

Collective action has also emerged from the second generation, among those whose own blocked mobility due to lack of legal status is an artifact not of labor market problems but of misguided policy and political dysfunction. This dilemma has shaped the Dreamers' movement, whose powerful storytelling and direct actions enabled them to win an executive order providing "deferred action" and temporary legal status to hundreds of thousands of young people.

*Birds of Passage*, then, has stood the test of time remarkably well, illuminating the dynamics underlying many developments that took place long after it was published.

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**Controversy and Methodology: *Birds of Passage* Then and Now**

Michael Piore, in his book *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies*, lays out a theory of labor migration and of the integration of migrants into industrial workforces that balances on the tension between the general and the specific. Since its publication in 1979, his treatise has been called “unorthodox,” “a conceptual breakthrough,” and a “provocative addition,” even by some of its harshest critics. Cited close to 2,000 times in academic publications, and referenced more frequently than can be counted once it filtered into public discourse, Piore’s book informed the work of fully two generations of migration scholars and policymakers. Piore created an image of migration that was so arresting that even those who were not convinced by it, even some who considered it deeply troubling, found it mesmerizing. And yet, despite the broad embrace of Piore’s framework, aspects of it remain as controversial today as when *Birds of Passage* was first published. The question is *why*?

At the root of the controversy that characterized the book’s initial reception was Piore’s central project: He set out to demonstrate that neat supply and demand curves for labor do not drive migration. Translated into “push” and “pull” factors, those economic functions dominated contemporary thinking about labor migration, and in many important respects, they still do. In its purest articulation, the notion is that migrants are “pushed” out of their countries of origin by the low or nonexistent remuneration for their labor in their home country, and are “pulled” across national borders to labor markets where they can earn higher wages. The simple elegance of the “push-pull” model is seductive: It remains the foundational paradigm that underpins most scholarly analyses of migration, and it informs political rhetoric across the spectrum as well as the policy intervention this rhetoric justifies.

Piore argued that this model is also wrong. He maintained that the economic assumptions did not have the requisite explanatory power to explain migration dynamics. “Conventional theory treats the market for labor like the market for a shirt or any other commodity that is bought and sold freely and regularly. But,” Piore goes on to caution, “the phenomenon of migration cannot be understood by treating workers like shirts; . . . the critical factors governing the migration process are the social forces that differentiate the market for men from the market for shirts, and it is those social forces that the analytical apparatus must bring to the fore.”

As a corrective to the push-pull model, Piore looked at the meaning that migrants attach to migration and to the jobs they take. He painted a social portrait of the dynamic, one that began with the migrants who accepted insecure, low-status jobs—the dirty, dangerous, and demeaning jobs that have become a trope in migration scholarship—and stretched through their assimilation into the host society and into the next generation, with their children establishing lives and entering the workforce. He explained that migrants took jobs refused by autochthonous workers because they were target earners, and they viewed themselves as transient and their work as instrumental. Their status as outsiders allowed them to divorce their employment from its social significance: Migrants used their communities of origin as the main reference for their identity, at least initially, and consequently, whatever stigma was attached to their jobs in the host country was essentially irrelevant. Piore also noted that as migrants stayed for extended periods, and as they forged social ties and community in receiving countries, the locus of their social identity shifted from the home they remembered to the place where they worked and lived. This process of social acculturation intensified with migrants’ children, who did not view the jobs their parents had held as viable—in part because the quality of the jobs was poor, but more important, because of the negative social connotation attached to those jobs within their communities, even in cases when those communities were essentially ethnic enclaves. And as long-term immigrants and their children resisted taking these jobs, employers reached out to new communities to recruit labor, setting the process of migration in motion once again.

Piore’s sketch is now taken for granted as the archetypal migration trajectory, and his account of the way in which migrants interpret their jobs has influenced a wide swath of sociological literature on immigrant labor market participation and social integration. But the last phase of Piore’s narrative—the observation that employers proactively seek out new migrants to fill jobs that long-term migrants and their children are not willing to hold—has been left

off. Up until that final insight, Piore's account can be reconciled with the push-pull model, and the elements of his narrative that can be squared most easily with the standard economic view of migration have seen the widest adoption. Migrants may, as Piore argues, vest their jobs with meaning that makes the exploitation and dishonor attached to their employment more bearable, and they may use social registers, anchored in far-away communities of origin, to assign value to their income. These additions, however, do not counter the claim that dismal prospects "push" migrants out of their home communities, and that wages higher than can be earned locally "pull" people across the border. Indeed, Piore's concern with the ways that migrants interpret their employment fits comfortably with the focus on migrants that is at the heart of the push-pull model. Migrants are the main agents of migration, and Piore's addition can be pared to his insight that migrants interpret the actions that they take. His treatise is, in fact, often diminished in this way.

Even though Piore was careful to consider migrants' experience in a holistic and empathetic way, migrants were emphatically not at the core of his theory. The view articulated in *Birds of Passage* is that migration is driven by the structure of economic production in the receiving countries, and the main actors in his account are employers who draw migrants across the border to fill jobs that locals are loathe to take. Piore specified that those jobs—unskilled, low-paying, arduous, connoting inferior social status, and carrying few opportunities for advancement to better quality employment—were essential to the structure of production. They made up a secondary labor market, one that complemented and supported a primary labor market in which jobs were stable, well-paid, protected by labor laws and unions, and held opportunities for advancement. While firms drew on a primary labor market to cover the core of their production, they used the secondary labor market to expand production in moments of high demand and then shed those workers when demand for their products fell. Firms used migrants as an invaluable buffer against economic volatility.

Piore noted that despite the political rhetoric about uncontrolled migration, employers often confronted labor shortages for jobs in the secondary labor market, and strained to find workers willing to accept employment offered on such poor terms. As a result, employers, or governments that acted on their behalf, actively recruited labor to fill those slots, most often from underdeveloped areas across a national border. What Piore contended was that migration was primarily set in motion by the actions of employers who draw immigrants into secondary labor markets, and not by migrants. Their role may be difficult to discern once a migration dynamic picked up steam, but the needs of businesses in industrial societies were its genesis.

With its focus on the organization of production in industrial societies, Piore's theory still lobbies a radical critique at nativist representations of migration. Instead of the image of hordes pressing at the gates, deployed by nativist politicians today more regularly than at any time in the past two decades but no less cynically, Piore's account suggests that migrants are not shoving their way into the labor market, displacing autochthonous workers from their jobs in some high-stakes economic game of musical chairs. Instead, they are being invited into the labor market, recruited, directly and indirectly, by employers. Then and now, migrants occupy a specific tranche of the labor market in which they perform a role vital to economic production in contemporary industrial and post-industrial societies. That function may have changed over time. Firms today may rely less on migrants as a way to cope with volatility and more as a way to hold down labor costs and to reduce working conditions in jobs once firmly ensconced in the primary labor market. This shift does not in any meaningful way call Piore's assertion into question: The role of migrants in an economy is not determined by migrants themselves, but rather, by the firms and by the institutions that govern them.

If Piore's account has been so widely embraced, why has the role of employers in fostering migration receded from view? Why has the reliance of industries across the economy on migrant labor received so little attention as the driver of migration? Why does the debate in mainstream economic and sociological scholarship stubbornly stop at the question of whether or not migration harms native workers? Why do discussions about migration slip so easily into the grooves of "push" and "pull," and why does the focus fall so readily on migrants as authors of migration? Relatedly, perhaps, why has the image of hordes at the gate remained so persistent, and, even more disquietingly, so compelling?

Part of the problem surely has to do with political opportunism. It is easier to blame migrant outsiders for structural changes in the economy that may be difficult to identify but are nevertheless causing economic pain, and easier still, and more politically profitable perhaps, to blame some nebulous and shadowy horde. But another contributing factor may be the methodological shift in academic studies of migration away from the kind of detailed and

process-focused study of the ways that industries operate, and more specifically, the way they use both native and migrant workers. With several notable exceptions, the trend has been either to engage in broad labor market analyses that consider the economics of migration or to delve instead into explorations of the ways that migrants interpret their work, their belonging, and their political participation in both countries of origin and reception. While these analyses have contributed enormously to our understanding of labor market trends and of migrant identities, the deliberate combination of economic and social investigations, as Piore did in his study, has fallen out of favor and has sometimes been dismissed as old-fashioned or lacking in methodological rigor.

Piore drew on the relationship between the economic and the social for his investigative strategy and used the social experience of migrants as a window onto the economic systems in which they participated. After having worked as an aide to the government of Puerto Rico, Piore returned to Boston in the early 1970s. "When I came back, I noticed Puerto Ricans all over the place, and I had never really been conscious of that before," recalled Piore. "I didn't know whether I was observing a new Puerto Rican migration to the city, or whether I noticed Puerto Ricans more because of a heightened sensitivity or nostalgia I still had for the island. I was very curious. I wanted to know where they were working, and whether they had been working there before." He began interviewing workers and employers in factories throughout the region, and what he discovered surprised him.

He found that the Puerto Rican migrants were new to Boston, and rather than being an overflow of Puerto Ricans from New York, the new arrivals had come directly from rural communities in the island's center. "They had a distinctive accent that I recognized, they talked like Jibaros [residents in Puerto Rico's mountainous heartland]. They *were* Jibaros actually. . . . How did they get to Boston? Why Boston?" Piore was puzzled by the kinds of industrial jobs the new migrants held given their low levels of education. "They were barely literate even in Spanish. Why would industrial factories rely so heavily on workers that couldn't really read?" Even more astonishing to Piore was that employers had gone out of their way to recruit them from their communities of origin. As previous migrants to Boston climbed the job ladder at factories and as they or their children entered core manufacturing jobs, employers reported that they began looking for alternative sources of labor to replace them. "In one factory, I talked to the first Puerto Rican they had hired. When I asked about other Puerto Ricans working in Boston when he first arrived, he said, 'well, there was Juan and Jose. . . .' And that was it! There was no one else—he knew them all by name. I'll never forget that moment. . . . It turns out that these guys were floating around as crews on boats and a few of them stayed in Boston after landing, and then took jobs in local factories." Once employers hired the first Puerto Rican immigrant, they paid their airfare and dispatched them back to their communities of origin to recruit additional workers. "They sent them back to their hometowns, and when these guys landed, they asked: is there anybody who would like to work in Boston. It dawned on me then that this was demand-generated migration: these people hadn't been looking to migrate, hadn't really even considered it a possibility until they were recruited. But that's a story that gets lost once the recruitment initiated by employers becomes a self-generating stream [of migration]."

In expanding this insight in *Birds of Passage*, Piore explicitly and purposefully brought together employer recruitment and migrant interpretation, the economic and the social perspectives that informed his analysis, presenting them, as he himself underscored, "as parts of a single, unified argument," one that "cannot be *arbitrarily* broken into a series of components." As we reflect on the foundational contribution that *Birds of Passage* has made to the study of migration, and as we contemplate the ways in which it has influenced both research and policy, we might also consider reviving more forcefully the combined research strategy Piore adopted. This would require a more concerted inquiry into how migrants' myriad social interpretations, cultural production, and political activism support their participation in the economy, as well as a more deliberate and detailed exploration of the role that migrants play in specific industries. What are the specific pathways through which they have been integrated into their industries, the specific ways in which they support production, and the specific contributions they make to the performance of firms and enterprises. Most important, though, it would require a more resolute examination of the role that employers play, and of the ways they promote migration, use migrant workers, and increasingly, rely on the vulnerable legal status of migrant workers (and the state's hard-hearted policing and deportation of them) to keep wages low and worker organizing muted. Retrieving the pieces of Piore's argument

that have been discarded would allow us to finally put aside facile push-pull arguments that have constricted the study of migration to a focus on migrants and have cordoned off a more critical analysis of the economic actors and institutional structures that shape migration. More important, it would allow us to shift public debates—and their academic equivalents—about whether governments should build walls, gates, and otherwise set up additional controls to more helpful, and more politically powerful, conversations about the function that migrants play in receiving economies and why.

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I encountered *Birds of Passage* the year before it appeared in print when I was enrolled in a course that Michael Piore taught with Suzanne Berger, his colleague in political science. Sometime during that semester I purchased an issue of a now defunct journal to read an article written by a close friend. As it happened, that same issue contained an article by Professor Piore summarizing the argument soon to appear in *Birds of Passage*. With the arrogance that only a first-year graduate student possessed, I marched into Piore's office to tell him that, based on a prior experience, I was convinced that a crucial part of his argument was plain wrong. Whereas just about anyone else would have thrown me out of his office, Piore instead responded by asking me whether I wanted a summer job. Thirty-seven years later, here I am, still attacking some version of the same old problem. By contrast, Piore revolutionized migration studies with a single, pathbreaking book and then quickly went on to bigger, better things.

But so much about me; what can we say about the impact and legacy of this book? Timing is everything, and the timing of *Birds of Passage* was certainly impeccable. In the late 1970s, the so-called new immigration was barely 10 years old. Its traces were visible in New York, Los Angeles, Miami, maybe Chicago, but just about nowhere else. The energy crisis of the mid-1970s had brought postwar guest-worker migration to western Europe to a crashing halt. As a scholarly field, migration was somewhere on the far periphery, for the most part made up of books that had long been gathering dust.

But Piore somehow saw what was imperceptible to almost all: The very nature of what we then thought of as industrial societies made the recourse to migrant labor inevitable, and the obstacles to development produced the labor force ideally suited to industrial economies' needs. While capital and labor would both seek to shelter themselves from the flux and variability of market economies, not all could; moreover, those who succeeded typically shifted the burden of instability to someone else, sourcing out instead of scaling up. More often than not, that someone else was a migrant, a someone particularly well-suited to absorb instability as orientations and attachments were located not where the jobs were found but rather in the places where the migrants' families lived. As long as the migrants' planned to return home, or perhaps as long as they thought they would return home, or perhaps as long as they evaluated conditions "here" in light of standards "there," they would accept their confinement to the unstable portion of demand.

In a sense, this thumbnail summary of *Birds of Passage* shows it to be a product of its time. The types of migration it described faithfully reflected a still incipient movement, one very much characterized by circular, recurrent migrations, especially in the U.S.-Mexico corridor. The economic structure that had produced the segmentation between primary and secondary sectors was already fatally though invisibly undermined, about to founder under the onslaught of deindustrialization, an unprecedented wave of technological change, and the collapse of the postwar capital-labor compact.

Though ours is now an economy in which everyone yearns for the stability found in the primary sector of yore, and a society in which even the most hidebound Republicans—on a good day, that is—realize that large-scale immigration is here to stay, the insights found in *Birds of Passage* remain no less valuable, even though events have taken a different course than Piore anticipated decades ago.

*Birds of Passage* emphasized the transitional nature of the migratory process: While the initial migrant cohorts may engage in incessant back and forth movement, with families and

core social commitments left behind, that pattern proves hard to sustain. Over time, the migrants put down roots; working where both wages and cost of living are high, they have less to send home; as their sojourns lengthen, families are either imported from the place of origin or made in the place of destination. Yet as long as the dream of return lingers, and a dual frame of reference persists—evaluating conditions here in light of standards there—the match between the migrants' expectations and their jobs' compensations could be sustained. Indeed, it was precisely this scenario on which Douglas Massey et al.'s 1987 book *Return to Aztlan* relied, showing just how the trajectory followed by Mexican immigrants conformed to the model traced in *Birds of Passage*.

But that book also told us that all would change with the second generation. Unlike their parents, the children raised or born in the society of destination no longer looked across borders. Although sharing the expectations of the people around them, those aspirations would be harder to achieve. The second generation would both inherit the parents' disadvantages and enter the labor market under the shadow of the stigma associated with the jobs of the immigrant generation. While institutions could open opportunities for them, the immigrant generation's exclusion meant that the political influence needed to change institutional responses would emerge only after the second generation had come of age. *Birds of Passage* worried about the consequences of that mismatch between expectations and reality, contending that the entry of the second generation would shift the relationship between natives and foreign-origin workers from one of complementarity to one of competition. I read those passages with a different eye, however, finding there a prediction of second-generation revolt.

I'll return in a moment to the question of whether teacher or student is right; first I'd like to dwell on an important, but I think unappreciated, aspect of this part of the book's argument. Piore emphasizes the distinction between settlement and assimilation. The first stems from the development of the immigrant community; as it stabilizes, migrants and especially their children develop the same desire for job stability and economic progress shared by natives. In other words, convergence between the second generation and the natives is endogenous to the process of settlement itself. By contrast, *Birds of Passage* describes assimilation as a process of borrowing, with the migrants and their descendants absorbing the attitudes and values of the mainstream through contact.

Whether the distinction between settlement and assimilation is quite as great as *Birds of Passage* insists—and, in fact, a close reading of the text suggests that the author was not quite sure himself—the view that changes in attitudes and expectations are endogenous to the migration process is essential, with an import that scholars of migration have yet to fully appreciate. Whereas assimilation as absorption of values and attitudes tends to focus on the particularities of the receiving society in question, settlement tells us why a disjuncture between second-generation expectations and realities appears everywhere that migrations of the *Birds of Passage* type have occurred. Clearly, it is not simply a matter of aspirations naturally arising from the embedding of immigrant communities and the ensuing search for stability and mobility. No less important is the reorientation from “there” to “here,” from society of origin to society of destination, as the second generation wants nothing less than the good life as promised by the society around them. That the second generation expects to be treated like every other citizen, but instead finds themselves under the shadow cast by their parents' foreign origin, adds to their discontent.

As we contemplate the political landscape produced by the mass migrations of the past several decades, evidence of the scenario envisioned in *Birds of the Passage* abounds, though not quite in the form sketched out there. As settlement has transformed the immigrant, and not just the second generation, it has changed the politics of worker organization, much as *Birds of Passage* predicted. We see this in the convergence of the immigrant rights and labor movements, as described by Ruth Milkman in her books on first Los Angeles and more recently New York, and the advent of new forms of worker organizations, such as the workers' centers analyzed by Janice Fine and Jennifer Gordon.

But to my eyes, the most striking instance of settlement's transformative impact is provided by the Dreamers, in ways that illustrate not only the most profound insights of *Birds of Passage* but also some of its limitations. In a sense, the Dreamers provide the incarnation of second-generation revolt, claiming to embody the American dream, the realization of which is also what they seek.

The source of the Dreamers' difficulty, however, doesn't quite fit into the framework of *Birds of Passage*. There, the migrants' utility stemmed from a continuing social identity

removed and distinct from the context in which they worked. In that respect, a migrant was a migrant, whether originating within the borders of the state or beyond. Moreover, a migrant was not that different from other workers whose social identity derived from sources other than the job, whether peasants or youth.

But the Dreamers demonstrate that long-distance migrations aren't all of a type. Because migration control is a constitutive aspect of a world of nation-states, international migrants begin as both social *and* political outsiders, viewed and treated like strangers but also deprived of the full set of rights enjoyed by citizens. Because states seek to sift and select among those migrants they accept, they also stratify, creating formal differences among the different types of non-citizens themselves, some of whom enjoy a fuller set of entitlements than others. And because states can't exclude with the effectiveness that the citizenry seems to desire, unwanted people inevitably leak across boundaries, which is why migration control always produces undocumented migration.

So the Dreamers' problems do not quite stem from the difficulties anticipated by *Birds of Passage*, as they are rooted not so much in the organization of the labor market as in the politics of migration control. Moreover, in asserting their embodiment of the American dream, the Dreamers also convey a message that claims a greater priority: In presenting themselves as de facto if not de jure Americans, they put themselves first in line before the immigrants who still bear the traces of their foreign origins and strangeness—in other words, their parents. And, of course, the broader immigrant rights movement similarly claims that residence provides the justification for full rights, and quite rightly so, though it is likely that rights expansion for the immigrants presently living in the United States will come at the expense of options for access for those not yet lucky enough to cross into the promised land.

This observation brings me to a last point. Central to the entire argument of *Birds of the Passage* is the contention that “people are rooted in context in ways that other commodities are not.” Piore recognizes there can be some similarities between people and shirts, but he nonetheless maintains that “the critical factors governing the migration process are the social forces differentiating the market for workers from the market for shirts” (p. 8).

I certainly agree, but the movement of shirts and the movement of migrants across borders differ in ways not captured in these statements. It is precisely because international migrants are not shirts that their foreign social identity matters to the people among whom they come to live. It is precisely because the migrants are not shirts that, under the right conditions, they can insist on being treated like people, rather than commodities. It is precisely because the migrants are not shirts that they and their descendants possess the potential for transforming the societies where they settle. And it is precisely because the international migrations of people can yield changes far deeper than the movement of shirts, that the people of the countries of immigration—or at least some of those people—want to keep the walls high and the doors closed.

Of course, criticism is the highest form of praise and in any case, this particular criticism takes the form of quibbling over relatively modest details. While two chapters of *Birds of Passage* have long been required reading in my graduate course on migration, it has been many years since I read the entire book from cover to finish; having done so in preparation for this session, I now fully understand why *Birds of Passage* proved to be no bird of passage. Thirty-six years after its publication, this rich, deeply insightful, provocative book remains a foundational, still essential work in migration studies. Based on my rereading, I predict that this foundational status is one that it will hold for the next 36 years and probably longer.