Convicted and Condemned makes a valuable contribution to the literature on the carceral state, and I hope to see more ethnographic work like it. It provides a richer understanding of the lives of people dealing with criminal convictions, and it generates policy proposals and hypotheses that should inform both policymaking and future research.


doi:10.1017/rep.2018.18

Michael Rich,
Emory University

Immigration has been a core issue in the partisan polarization currently paralyzing national policymaking and was a central issue in the 2016 presidential election, with Donald Trump taking a strong anti-immigration position. President Trump moved quickly to fulfill his “America First” campaign promise, including the issuance of travel ban restrictions, continuing to advocate for the construction of a wall along the border with Mexico, and in September 2017, announcing he would end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program in 6 months unless Congress enacted a replacement. Thus, rather than resolve the immigration deadlock, the 2016 presidential election intensified the positions on both sides of the debate.

Over the past decade, as national consensus on immigration appeared well beyond reach, state and local governments have become more prominent actors, with some, such as Arizona, adopting anti-immigration policies and others such as California and Connecticut passing a variety of pro-integration initiatives. With a nod to former House Speaker Tip O’Neill’s observation that “all politics is local,” two of the nation’s foremost scholars on racial and ethnic politics in urban and metropolitan communities have convened a superb group of coauthors to examine the determinants of contemporary immigration integration in seven metropolitan regions. The key question driving Unsettled Americans is why does
receptivity toward immigrants differ so much within and across metropolitan regions?

The seven cases chosen for analysis represent a range of metropolitan areas that have served as traditional immigrant destinations (New York, Chicago, Los Angeles) or newer immigrant gateways (Charlotte, Phoenix, and San Jose). The seventh case, the “Inland Empire” (Riverside and San Bernardino counties), which is adjacent to metro Los Angeles, is considered an “adjoining gateway,” as it has experienced “spillover” immigration (and policy and political conflicts) from the LA region, though it shares many of the features of the newer emerging immigrant destinations.

The share of the foreign-born population in 2012 in the case study metros ranges from a low of 10% in Charlotte and 14% in Phoenix to more than 30% in Los Angeles and San Jose. Regarding the nativity of immigrants who entered in 2000 or later, the largest immigrant group was Mexican in five regions (Los Angeles, Riverside-San Bernardino, Chicago, Charlotte, and Phoenix), all other Latinos in New York, and Asian Indian in San Jose. In all of the metros, there was substantial decentralization of the immigrant population between 1980 and 2012, which the included maps illustrate very nicely.

All of the cases are well-written, clearly presented, and accessible to a broad audience of practitioners, scholars, and students. Comparisons across the cases are strengthened by a shared analytic and research framework. All of the contributors explore how local jurisdictions in the region have responded politically to the challenge of integrating new immigrants, drawing on local demographic, economic, political, civic, and organizational dynamics as possible explanatory factors.

Variations in immigrant reception across the seven regions ranged from warm and welcoming to hostile. Welcoming regions included established immigrant gateways (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago) as well as newly emergent gateways (San Jose). Welcoming responses included initiatives such as multilingual access to public services, municipal ID cards, the creation of offices of immigrant rights, and designation as sanctuary cities (counties) that limit their cooperation with federal immigration enforcement officers, among others. Santa Clara County (San Jose) adopted a comprehensive health insurance program for all children, regardless of immigration status. Hostile receptions, on the other hand, were generally found in regions (or areas within regions) where immigration was a new phenomenon and frequently framed in racist terms by conservative politicians. For example, Maricopa County (Phoenix) became
one of the first local jurisdictions in the country to participate in the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement training program and the county’s sheriff, Joseph Arpaio, frequently deployed his deputies in public safety raids in Latino neighborhoods where numerous suspected unauthorized immigrants were arrested and turned over to ICE officials for deportation. In Suffolk County (New York), county executive Steve Levy frequently referred to immigrants and their supporters as “communist,” “anarchist,” and “lunatic fringe,” the police generally failed to respond to attacks on immigrants, and the county board of supervisors introduced several ordinances that fed on anti-immigration sentiment.

While Mollenkopf and Pastor note several conditions associated with the various immigrant reception outcomes, three warranted emphasis—social–structural (the fit between the immigrant community and the local demographic and economic context), political dynamics (share of the electorate, immigrant-origin elected officials), and institutional legacy (agencies and organizations with the capacity to support immigrant integration). While each region tended to follow a somewhat unique pathway to a warm and welcoming reception to immigrants (or lack thereof), Mollenkopf and Pastor conclude that the ability to construct majority political coalitions responsive to immigrant needs was the single most important factor.

Regardless of what happens with national immigration policy, it is likely that state, metropolitan, and local actors will play prominent roles in determining how local communities respond to the challenge of immigrant integration. Unsettled Americans provides an exemplary contribution for understanding how and why local communities respond to immigration that should guide future research. Given the great diversity in governing institutions and political cultures manifest in the American federal system, future studies will be needed to expand the scope of the analysis covered in Unsettled Americans, particularly in regard to different types of metro areas (size, region, characteristics of immigrant communities) and a deeper look at city–suburban dynamics as well as regional strategies. In addition, a closer look at the causal mechanisms that yield the various immigration integration outcomes and the generalization of those pathways to and across different settings, populations, initiatives, and outcomes are important areas for further research. In sum, Unsettled Americans is a terrific study that advances our knowledge of how and why place matters that should be required reading for anyone interested in understanding how local communities can best respond to the challenge of immigrant integration.