

## Immigration, Mainstream Media, and the 2008 Election

By Stephen Steinlight

### Historic Moment?

Two political narratives – one, at least, of indisputable importance to America’s future – have been unfolding simultaneously for months to an unusually rapt national audience and the quickening attention of millions more: the exceptionally swift takeoff of the 2008 presidential race and the furious populist revolt against Bush-Kennedy “comprehensive immigration reform.” Jockeying among states for the national spotlight and outsize influence on the nominating process will produce the earliest primaries in U.S. history, wherever and in whatever order they occur. Nearly 50 televised debates, candidate forums, and Q&A’s have taken place thus far for an election still nearly a year away, with more scheduled almost weekly, and the primaries will pick up the pace. Many potential voters appear moderately engaged rather than already over-saturated, and early indications suggest greater interest than in 2004. The biggest audience thus far for the current series of debates was 3.1 million viewers for the Republican debate in Durham, N.H., on Fox News on September 5; at the identical point in the campaign of 2004, the largest was an estimated 1.8 million for a Democratic debate on CNN.

Meanwhile, the populist revolt against the political and financial elite’s immigration policy has succeeded beyond all expectations. On June 28 it played the pivotal role in defeating cloture on S.1639, the most recent of several incarnations of stillborn “comprehensive immigration reform,” denying President Bush the domestic policy legacy in which he has invested most heavily over two terms. Furthermore, the revolt shows no signs of abating but continues gathering strength, sensing its historic moment may have arrived. It is battling every attempt to re-introduce legislation in Congress under any guise that would promote amnesty for illegal aliens or otherwise regularize their status. While failing to help pass Sen. Vitter’s (R-LA) proposed legislation (Amendment #3277) to the Appropriations Bill (H.R. 3093) that would have cut federal funds to support COPS (Community Oriented Policing Services) in “sanctuary cities,” it twice succeeded in blocking what appeared, at first glance, the most innocuous of stealth amnesties, the DREAM Act, first voted down and stripped from a defense and labor appropriation, then voted down once more when re-introduced by Majority Leader Sen. Reid as a free-standing bill, S.2205.

Defeating the DREAM Act was a major victory. Two days before the vote, the Center for Immigration Studies released research by Steven Camarota revealing how sweeping and profligate this supposedly “narrowly tailored” bill was. The bill’s boosters in Congress and the media asserted “only” 60,000 illegal alien “children” under the age of 17 would benefit. The report demonstrated that the bill was stealth legislation on the grand scale, potentially covering as many as 800,000 illegal aliens who’ve been in the United States long enough to qualify for a program that would put them on a path to citizenship. In addition, the bill did not clarify whether amnesty – *de facto* or *de jure* – would be awarded to the 900,000 parents of these “children,” nor their minor siblings, numbering some 500,000. Further, the DREAM Act would have permitted other illegal aliens in the age group 18-29 (“children”?) to be amnestied if they claimed to have arrived in the United States prior to turning 16, a group totaling approximately 1.3 million. Thus legislation whose stated purpose was legalizing some 60,000 – bad enough in principle – providing them in-state college tuition and other education and government benefits not available to legal immigrants or citizens, would have set in motion a process for amnestying 2.1 million, not counting 1.4 million parents and siblings who also would likely have been legalized.

The defeated bill might have amnestied 3.5 million illegal aliens – substantially more than the estimated 2.7 million legalized under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) during the Reagan presidency,



legislation that prompted a huge increase in illegal immigration and laid the foundations for the present crisis. Had S. 2205 become law, it might have resuscitated efforts to amnesty the entire illegal population.

More than the derailment of S.1639, the defeat of the DREAM Act, given its “feel-good” hype, may come to be seen as presaging an historic pendulum swing with regard to the direction of immigration legislation over the next few, critical years. The bipartisan offensive launched by the president and congressional supporters on behalf of a massive increase in immigration and amnesty for all 12 million illegal aliens in the United States has been stalemated. With another key battle lost, the stealth strategy thwarted and unmasked, its initiative gone and morale low, supporters will increasingly find themselves on the defensive, fighting counter-attacks by members of Congress introducing legislation to reduce the illegal population through attrition.

One such counter-attack was launched in early November by Rep. Heath Shuler (D-NC), whose SAVE Act (Secure America with Verification and Enforcement Act, H.R. 4088), an immigration control bill with no amnesty provision, would strengthen border security and workplace enforcement. Within a week, it received far more co-sponsors than is typical for newly proposed legislation, and inaugural support was solidly bipartisan, including 44 Democratic co-sponsors and 46 Republicans, with backers comprising a leadership group: 17 are Democratic Chairs of House Committees and 22 ranking Republican members. It is also diverse in geographical representation and in another key respect: breaking with the Black Congressional Caucus, a firm supporter of “comprehensive immigration reform,” are Rep. Davis (D-AL) and Rep. Bishop (D-GA). The makeup of the group suggests its sponsors recognize support is good politics: 52% are first-term Democrats who defeated Republicans, and 42.5% are freshman Democrats and 41.6% freshman Republicans. A parallel measure has since been introduced in the Senate, the SAVE Act (S. 2368) by Sen. Mark Pryor (D-AR) and Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-LA).

The war over immigration policy will go on, but with a difference: momentum has swung to the side long perceived incapable of stopping the Establishment juggernaut. Even leading sponsors of “comprehensive immigration reform” acknowledge it. Assistant Democratic Majority Leader Dick Durbin of Illinois, one of its strongest proponents, concedes the defeat of the DREAM Act makes movement on any immigration-related legislation extremely difficult. He stated, “They’ll all be hard, every one of them.” Echoing those sentiments is his ally Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ). “I think the

DREAM Act is a litmus test. If we can’t do this for children...then I doubt we can do anything else.”

Shifting momentum was reflected in another victory against amnesty legislation within a week of the DREAM Act’s demise. Bombarded by calls and faxes from angry constituents, Senate colleagues persuaded Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) that her AgJOBS amendment to the Farm Bill Extension Act of 2007 was DOA. She withdrew it on November 6. The bill would have amnestied some 1.5 million illegal aliens and, counting their spouses and children, perhaps as many as 3 million. Explaining her decision to withdraw the bill, Feinstein cited the defeat of S.1639 and DREAM Act, noting Congress is not willing to pass anything seen as amnesty.

Beyond the Beltway and across America, many states and hundreds of counties and municipalities are passing ordinances to enforce immigration law, deny public benefits to illegal aliens, discourage their settlement and/or promote their exit. In the first half of 2007, 1404 such resolutions were proposed, with 184 becoming law in 43 states. This is more than twice the number of all such proposed regulations enacted in 2006.

Having imploded *de facto* years ago, America’s immigration system has now imploded *de jure*. In the wake of S.1639’s defeat, immigration policy has devolved upon states and localities, creating a hodgepodge of enactments from state to state, county to county, municipality to municipality. Reminiscent of the political disorder of the 300 German states of the Holy Roman Empire rather than of American governance, this is not a species of the New Federalism: it is anarchy.

The success of the grassroots rebellion is manifest in its having made opposition to “comprehensive immigration reform” tantamount to an article of faith for Republican primary candidates. To be acceptable to the GOP, each must pledge fealty to this position – even if that requires public confession of past error and affirmation of conversion. Whether the rhetoric translates into a key plank in the eventual nominee’s campaign is the \$64,000 question.

## The Teller and the Tale

The narratives about the election of 2008 and the rebellion against Establishment immigration policy are intertwined: their nexus will become increasingly palpable in the months ahead. Strange as it will therefore strike politically savvy Americans, a confluence that could significantly influence or prove decisive in the campaign will likely become known largely despite mainstream media rather than because of it – the exception being

the rigged but ultimately uncontrollable debates among primary candidates. If this seems professionally unaccountable, a dereliction of the role of the press in a democracy, or just extremely curious that mainstream media appears determined to pass up what may be the scoop of the 2008 election, there's a reason if no rational justification. The explanation has nothing to do with a journalistic assessment of newsworthiness and everything to do with what the elite that controls the nation's traditional sources of news and opinion deems ideologically *outré*.

Mainstream media is profoundly anxious about and hostile towards the possibility of confluence. It tells the American people – when covering the issue is unavoidable – that opposition to “comprehensive immigration reform” is, at least, parochially wrongheaded, and, at worst, racist and xenophobic. The grassroots' revolt against the elite's immigration policy is as welcome in its election coverage as was Banquo's ghost at Macbeth's banquet. Like Banquo's bloody, guilt- and terror-inducing apparition, it may also be a premonition of regime change feared and loathed by the political and financial elite and their media flacks.

## Media Blackout

One way to try defusing this obstreperous movement is starving it of coverage, and there seems to be an implicit understanding in the mainstream print media and the TV networks to do just that. So monolithic is the worldview of the mainstream media one need not posit a conspiracy to end up with what amounts to objective collusion.

Whenever possible, its strategy of choice is omission; it is exceedingly difficult for media consumers to question what is absent. This approach isn't new: it also characterized mainstream media treatment of immigration policy throughout the legislative battles over various incarnations of “comprehensive immigration reform.” No newspaper of record ever published a feature detailing the full provisions of the legislation, an astounding lacuna considering it is one of the most potentially transformational in the nation's history. Nor did any TV network or radio station, not even PBS's NewsHour or National Public Radio, devote an extended segment of news analysis or special coverage to educate the public regarding it. The same applies to the debates among the primary contenders with only three exceptions: the St. Petersburg, Fla., debate, the CNN-YouTube Forum for the Republican candidates, and the NPR/Iowa Public Radio Debate for the Democratic candidates (the latter an event with a

miniscule audience). Apart from three out of nearly 50, there have been no macro questions about immigration policy.

Mainstream media's coverage of the immigration wars relies on journalistic synecdoche, a duplicitous strategy that makes a part equivalent to a whole, then utilizes that part – the issue of amnesty – as a weapon of mass distraction. The explanation is simple. Supporters of “comprehensive immigration reform” hoped they had a winner in amnesty, basing their argument solely on pity; it failed miserably. What most Americans know about the legislation – amnesty for millions of aliens that have broken numerous laws, refused to play by the rules, unlawfully receive public benefits, and demand to be rewarded for it – they abominate. Supporters of “comprehensive immigration reform” probably felt they had no tactical alternative. If the American people knew more – the bill would double legal immigration when only 2% surveyed believe immigration is too low – they'd be even more outraged. Thus, to protect “comprehensive immigration reform” from being challenged by the American people, mainstream media has concealed the truth.

Two examples of dozens of news stories in which immigration is present only as a felt absence come from the *Washington Post*. They're ideal examples because immigration is ignored in pieces that purportedly cover the waterfront in terms of leading issues. One front-page story “Clinton Widens Lead in Poll,” (October 3, 2007, p. A1, Jon Cohen, Anne E. Kornblut) draws on survey findings from a *Washington Post*-ABC News poll to report a growing majority of Democrats view Sen. Clinton as the most trustworthy and electable leader with regard to the war in Iraq and healthcare. Conspicuous by its absence is any mention of immigration – despite the fact that numerous polls place immigration either before or just after healthcare as the issue of greatest concern to Americans, and the one they consistently assert is the U.S. government's worst failure other than the war in Iraq. In multiple surveys it invariably makes the top three, and in recent polls it is number one.

The same censorship is displayed in “Weary, Wary Lawmakers See Compromise as a Way Forward” (October 30, Jonathan Weisman, A4) that reports the growing willingness of congressional Democrats to work with Republicans to advance key issues out of conviction and because of the dismal ratings Congress receives from the American people. Its focus, however, is limited to the war in Iraq, the President's warrantless wiretapping program and health care. Once again, like a conjuror, the journalist makes immigration disappear. The omission cannot be justified on the grounds no bipartisan efforts

are taking place with regard to immigration. Notably absent is discussion of Rep. Shuler's aforementioned bipartisan enforcement bill. This story is excluded because the *Post* opposes the legislation's goals.

This strategy of reticence or evasion is predicated on a misconception by mainstream media that its coverage has been an enabler of or outlet for this movement. The truth is otherwise: alternative media – talk radio, the web, and blogosphere – have fired, fueled, and reported the uprising. Mainstream media cannot control or compete with these rivals, which have come to command far larger audiences over the past few years. Hence the ongoing flap over the “Fairness Doctrine,” an attempt to silence talk radio that helped defeat “comprehensive immigration reform” once more. Talk radio more than evened the odds in an historically lopsided battle in which the pro-open borders elite – a club comprised of corporate interests primarily in agribusiness, construction, and the service sector; ethnic lobbying groups; liberal clerics from all religious backgrounds and the Roman Catholic Church especially; and their media allies – held all the cards. Mainstream media's bemoaning the absence of “fairness” is risible not only because of its wall-to-wall solidarity on immigration, but its reflexive, unbalanced endorsement of left-of-center views.

Though mainstream media's tactics have succeeded in the short run in limiting what Americans know about immigration policy – though not in shaping their attitudes – it is impossible they will prove sustainable in the long run. Mainstream media couldn't completely ignore the opposition that derailed S.1639, and that story ran only several weeks and was front-page news and grist for editorials for perhaps ten days. How will it keep immigration politics altogether out of the news for over a year? It would require month after month of dumb luck to pull this off – without a single big news story connected to immigration riveting enough to escape being shunted to the metropolitan or regional news desks – and the Fates love chastising the hubris of the powerful.

Major fissures have already opened in the wall of separation in coverage of the upcoming primaries. A November 14 piece in the *New York Times* citing a *New York Times*-CBS News survey of likely voters in the Iowa and New Hampshire primaries (“Polls Find Voters Weighing Issues vs. Electability,” Adam Nagourney) reports immigration is listed *before* Iraq as one of the two issues candidates are most questioned about. Republicans surveyed rank immigration as important as the war in Iraq, with polls showing 86% of likely Republican voters describe immigration as “very serious”

or “somewhat serious.” Trying to salvage something from the unwelcome data, the *Times* cites the “wide disparity” between Democrats and Republicans on immigration's salience, but with 59% of Democrats feeling the same way there's no credible way to minimize this issue. The article also refuses to point out the obvious: in American politics 59% is a huge majority: a candidate receiving that percentage of the vote wins by a landslide. *Now* what do we make of that mountain of “findings” from *New York Times*-CBS News, *Washington Post*-ABC News and other pollsters that consistently report only 30% of the most conservative Republicans focus on immigration? Indeed, the strategy of having tried to hide the issue may come home to haunt the elite. Having the American public's education regarding immigration policy parallel the campaign, with its understanding reaching its apogee at the time of the 2008 elections, may represent the worst of all possible worlds from the elite's standpoint.

This first major breach initiated a new paradigm in coverage of immigration politics in newspapers of record such as the *New York Times*: simultaneous publication of news and analysis with an appearance of greater balance, though stories remain skewed in favor of “comprehensive immigration reform,” while editorials are even more shrill in their support of the policy, ranting against alleged xenophobic opponents and weak-kneed Democrats.

Exhibiting more relative “balance” is part of the lead story in the “Week in Review” section of Sunday, November 18, “Walking a Tightrope on Immigration” by Michael Luo. It acknowledges the great salience of the issue and describes growing concern over immigration by worried Democrats (Sen. Clinton's and John Edward's final rejection of driver's licenses for illegal aliens, Gov. Spitzer's surrender as well as angst about the impact of immigration on the election by various Democratic strategists.) It discusses the logic of Republicans being “tough” on the issue and – for the first time in all of its coverage – the *Times* acknowledges the derailing of S.1639 was not the work of a small group of rightwing extremists but the product of “grassroots outrage.”

However, the *Times* cannot stop itself from trumpeting a standard refrain of its immigration coverage, no matter how preposterous: those that alienate Hispanic voters will likely pay a heavy price now and later. The story even has a second headline on the inside pages to make this point ex cathedra: “An Election Issue That May Bite Back.”

Superfluously clarifying its true allegiance, the *Times* published a blistering editorial on immigration on November 23, “The Immigration Wilderness” whose rhetoric is among the harshest and hyperbolic ever. In

language reminiscent of fire and brimstone Puritan pulpit oratory, it damns the defeat of S.1639, the DREAM Act, and opposition to driver's licenses for illegal aliens as having taken the nation and "steamrolled into the Valley of Death." It reviles Rep. Tancredo – who upon announcing his retirement from Congress remarked he was ready to depart having accomplished his mission of promoting the movement against "comprehensive immigration reform" – as a "weary gunslinger covered in blood and dust." Nor does it spare the Democrats who have been "cowed into mumbling or silent avoidance" and attacks Rep. Rahm Emanuel's expression of concern that Democrats are ignoring the feelings of the American people as a "profile in squeamishness." America is in a "wilderness of anger," one into which the likes of Tancredo have led it. Defying history, the editorial boosts amnesty and sees no contradiction between such advocacy and calling for no further illegal immigration.

It then trots out the Big Lie. It cites some 24 push polls – such as the one the *Times* shamelessly published as front-page news two days running – which skew responses to argue most Americans support a path to citizenship for illegal aliens. Its most strident vituperation is directed at the solution honest survey research shows most Americans favor: incremental removal of the illegal population through attrition. Attrition is characterized as "tightening the screws on an informal apartheid system" that promotes bias crimes against Hispanics and stirs up unnamed "hate groups." What initially appeared a shift to more responsible journalism ends in the rhetoric of social Armageddon.

The most unguarded spot for the Fates to penetrate the wall of silence is the debates for primary candidates. Mainstream media polices the boundaries by selecting and carefully scripting questions but responses remain unpredictable. Control is then exercised only after the fact by cutting off discussion, but the damage is already done and the censorship transparent. This has famously happened when the opening was no wider than a crevice.

The risks attendant upon such hubris surfaced dramatically when immigration was grudgingly permitted entry into the Democratic candidate's debate at Drexel University on October 30, in a single question about a tertiary issue, Gov. Spitzer's plan to give illegal aliens driver's licenses. It became the occasion for a rare public display of anxiety by Democrats, with Sen. Dodd stating, "The idea that we're going to extend this privilege here of a driver's license, I think, is troublesome, and the American people are reacting to it."

Similar discomfort prompted Sen. Clinton's memorably appalling rejoinders: her blatant shift of

position within two minutes, one changed the next day into yet another equivocation before finally coming out some days later against giving illegal aliens driver's licenses. This display of casuistry heightened existing concerns about her integrity.

It also propelled immigration onto the front page of the *New York Times* in a story "In Debate, Immigration is Fodder for Clinton Rivals" (Marc Santora, 11/1/07) and onto the pages of the *Washington Post* in a major story on immigration politics on November 2 ("Issue of Illegal Immigrants Is Quandary for Democrats") which carried the refreshingly honest subtitle "Many Voters Want a Tougher Stand Than the Candidates Offer," (Perry Baca, Jr. and Anne E. Kornblut, A4).

The *Times* provided its first reasonably cogent treatment of the hazards of staking out positions on immigration given the need to please rival constituencies. The *Washington Post's* piece is almost freakish for its candor and coverage of immigration as a campaign issue. Though it disseminated the most potent form of Establishment disinformation on immigration policy – repeating the canard that most Americans support a "pathway to citizenship" for the estimated 12 million illegal aliens – it underscores, if inadequately, how serious a problem immigration represents for the Democratic Party. If it cited honest survey research, it would be reporting not anxiety among Democrats but something bordering on panic.

The story quotes Democratic strategist Mark Mellman stating, "Democrats don't reflect the emotional tone and intensity of the debate," and Clinton strategist Mark Penn noting that immigration is emerging as a "wedge issue for Republicans," adding they will likely focus on national security implications. The piece cites a CNN poll of October that reveals 76% of Americans surveyed oppose giving driver's licenses to illegal aliens and findings by Democratic Party pollster Stan Greenberg's and James Carville's advisory group that Americans want border and workplace enforcement and two-thirds oppose driver's licenses for illegal aliens.

The story discusses the Democrats' dilemma of trying to satisfy two rival core constituencies: Hispanics and African Americans, suggesting this is one reason the party is so reticent about addressing immigration. Though briefly discussed, it marks an unusual break with the Establishment practice of embargoing discussion of conflict between groups "of color." The issue re-surfaced during the Brown & Black Forum in Des Moines, Iowa, when a late arriving, snow-covered, out-of-breath and foot-in-mouth Sen. Biden tried ingratiating himself by suggesting the notion immigration is a zero-sum game between Hispanics and African Americans is a typical

White Man's ploy to divide and conquer. This racial demagoguery earned him no applause.

A piece in *US News & World Report* ("The Dems Immigration Dilemma," Gloria Borger, Nov. 10, 2007) sees the Drexel debate as a turning point. Until then, Borger argues, Democrats had a "free ride" on the issue, enjoying the spectacle of Republicans battling Republicans over immigration. That was true "until the wheels came off" at Drexel as a result of Sen. Clinton's panicky reversals. She focuses on the special salience immigration has with independents who are concerned with the connection between broken immigration and national security. Borger writes the Democrats now have a big problem: they can no longer avoid the issue and must come up with policy on the run.

### Prescribed Journalism

When omission is not viable, mainstream media coverage of immigration is so formulaic it resembles a caricature literary genre, and an inflexible one at that, replete with such de rigueur conventions as recurring plots, stock characters, euphemized standard usage, repeating motifs, core imagery and metaphors, a consistent worldview, intrusive moral commentary by an omniscient narrator in the persons of the "objective reporter" or the editor, recognizable villains and heroes, and heavy-handed political didacticism.

Such routinization manifests strong commitment to the point of view conveyed and, equally, anxiety the message will not get across coupled with a low assessment of the intelligence of the audience.

Foremost among the conventions is disinformation about public attitudes towards immigration policy, especially amnesty, manifested in the sponsorship, dissemination, or referencing of polls whose skewed findings endorse a mindset that privately understands itself as multicultural, post-American, or "left-liberal" but presents itself publicly neutrally and normatively as "generous" or "authentically American." Data that come to alternative conclusions are simply ignored.

Other standard conventions are sanctimonious editorial indictments of most Americans as bigoted Know-Nothings; peripheralizing opponents of "comprehensive immigration reform" as an extremist minority; tear-jerking pathos in "human interest stories" about the sorrows of illegal aliens apprehended by law enforcement or separated (even if by their own initiative) from their families, and heroic efforts of illegal immigrants to assimilate in the teeth of local nativism

and the racist, xenophobic enactments of wicked, small-minded municipal officials.

A feature common to the "human-interest" stories is locating point of view predominantly or exclusively in illegal aliens, permitting them to speak for themselves to engender greater reader identification with them as opposed to those perceived as acting against their wants and needs, whose views are summarized – and distanced – by the reporter.

Genuinely tragic stories of those attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border illegally dying in the Sonora Desert are also routine: these are exploited to argue the protection of American borders and sovereignty is barbarous because it causes these deaths, that the United States has moral agency but not the individuals who made a horrifically ill-considered choice to enter the country illegally by that dangerous route, often risking the lives of their children in what amounts to child abuse.

Increasingly widespread is the "gotcha" motif designed to frighten communities from seeking to enforce immigration law by arguing they will pay an economic as well as moral price, including loss of cheap labor, retail sales and rents, plus the cost of lawsuits brought by the ACLU and the legal arms of ethnic advocacy organizations. The message to communities is to follow "rational self-interest" and re-think their strategies: after all, how important is upholding the rule of law? One example is a front-page story in the *New York Times* ("Towns Rethink Laws Against Illegal Immigrants," Belson and Capuzzo, 9/26/07). The title suggests it is tracking an ascending trend, but only three localities are cited: that justifies the plural "towns" but misleads with regard to the pattern's prevalence.

The impulse to keep states and localities in line with these horror stories is so strong it assumes disproportionate importance in articles supposedly tackling larger themes. Thus in the *Washington Post's* "States Immigrant Policies Diverge" (Anthony Faiola, 10/15/2007, A1) which discusses the growing patchwork of state laws and policies governing the treatment of the illegal population across the country in the absence of Federal law, an inordinate amount of space is devoted to Oklahoma's efforts to enforce immigration law and the problems it is allegedly causing the state's building trade.

Turning news stories into propaganda results in shoddy journalism, evidenced by the inaccurate reporting of the revolt by county clerks in New York State against Gov. Spitzer's driver's license plan. The *Post* states "a handful of country clerks have rebelled." In fact,

the New York State Association of County Clerks by majority vote decided to boycott Spitzer's measure. This single reporting error also mischaracterizes the broader situation in New York state. The revolt against Spitzer widened and gained momentum at the highest levels, with the County Clerks Association being joined by the New York State's Sheriff's Association and finally the State Senate, which passed Resolution S.6484 mandating that any one receiving a New York driver's license must show proof of legal residence in the United States. The margin was 39-19. In the face of mounting opposition the governor abandoned his initial plan, earning him rare ire in a *New York Times* editorial. He initially opted for a three-tiered bureaucratic nightmare concocted in collaboration with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and then dropped altogether his plans to give driver's licenses to the illegal population.

Perhaps the most aggressive and unctuous articulation of the "gotcha" motif is the *Washington Post* editorial "The Price of Intolerance" (October 8, 2007, A16) that describes a resolution (since approved) being weighed by the Board of Supervisors in Prince William County, Va., in response to the influx of illegal aliens. The *Post* pontificates that, if enacted, these regulations would be "among the most pernicious, unenforceable and legally dubious crackdowns on illegal immigrants," and then mixes economic self-interest with the moralistic appeal, adding: "Doing so won't only inflame xenophobia but will cost taxpayers millions." No figures are provided for the enormous drain on public coffers caused by the exponentially growing illegal population.

One of the hoariest of conventional motifs is about America's harvest "rotting on the vine." Like other such fear-mongering narratives it is fictive. Recent stories focused on California's pear harvest, and repeat inaccurate assertions that 70% of agricultural workers are illegal aliens; the number is believed to be closer to 50%.

Most revealing are the "explanations" about what endangers the harvest. Contrary to the open borders line, threats do not come from restrictive immigration, hostility to agribusiness (a more powerful lobby would be hard to find), or unresponsiveness by the Agriculture Department. A generous program is in place – the H-2A visa – guaranteeing an adequate workforce. Agribusiness can import as many seasonal workers as necessary. Ritual complaints are made about too much red tape, but the bottom-line is greed: using the programs means paying foreign workers prevailing wage and underwriting their travel. Many employers prefer finding illegal aliens willing to work for next to nothing. This approach is

cheaper and exploitative but also potentially risky. Agribusinessmen whose avarice and lawless behavior endanger the harvest are in no position to take umbrage at current policies.

Associating itself with these smarmy claims is the *Washington Post*, whose editorial "Rot in the Fields" (12/3/07) employs myths of labor shortages and repeats the lie that "cumbersome" visa programs account for the alleged fact that only 2% of agribusinesses utilize them while making no reference to greed and exploitation. The *Post* argues America's harvest can only be secured by amnestying some 800,000 "undocumented" workers through the AgJobs bill. The editorial is a bait-and-switch argument for amnesty while countenancing inexcusable labor practices.

### Attempted Bifurcation and Its Undoing: The TV Debates for Primary Contenders

Mainstream media's evasive treatment of immigration and strategy of bifurcation have been most prominently displayed during the debates among the primary contenders when Establishment fears about the potential for confluence run highest. Which questions the network's anchor/moderators pose and avoid tell all. The same is true of follow-up; when anchors ask narrow gauge questions on immigration and candidates make broader responses the anchors do not pursue the issue.

Until the CNN-YouTube forum in St. Petersburg, Fla., for Republican candidates on November 28 when immigration policy finally assumed its rightful place – first item on the agenda – not a single question in the previous 50 or so debates and forums for either party addressed the subject on a macro level. The Democrats were finally confronted with macro questions regarding immigration policy during the NPR/Iowa Public Radio Debate on December 3.

Mainstream media's strategy of evasion was enforced during the CNN/YouTube Q&A for the Democratic primary contenders on July 23. For this experimental Q&A format, producers solicited thousands of homemade-videotaped questions from ordinary Americans, airing dozens. Amid a multiplicity including such trivia as "Who was your favorite teacher?" just one touched on immigration peripherally. Since, as noted, public opinion surveys show most Americans identify immigration as one of the three most important issues facing the nation, this avoidance was conscious. There was time to ask about favorite teachers; surely there was time for one question directly addressing immigration.

## Center for Immigration Studies

The query related to immigration was whether “undocumented workers” should be beneficiaries of universal healthcare. Only two candidates responded, both in the affirmative, but with a terse tight-lipped circumspection exceedingly rare for these habitually loquacious egotists whose bloviations invariably exceed allotted time. Not on this occasion. Each quickly spirited away the underlying issue while putting up a smokescreen of irrelevant bromides. Sounding most like a Victorian-era sanitary reformer, Sen. Biden brusquely opined that coverage was necessary to avoid spreading contagious diseases among the general population, while Gov. Richardson offered a homily about not making distinctions between the mighty and humble, pretending social class or economic condition were at issue – not legal status. Neither deviated from the Party Line: every Democratic contender supports “comprehensive immigration reform.” That was to be expected. What was surprising was how clearly discomfited they were by the question: in the course of answering, each appeared as if he were handling a sea urchin.

At such moments when thoroughly coached and scripted politicians are visibly uncomfortable and struggling to avoid answering a question, a good journalist bores in. These are the rare unguarded instances when something approaching a genuine expression of political insecurity – or reality – is surfacing. Why didn’t the producers direct Anderson Cooper to follow up on these evasive answers? Why didn’t they direct him to ask all the candidates their views on “comprehensive immigration reform?”

The same failure recurred when illegal immigration arose more explicitly in the MSNBC forum for Democratic candidates at Dartmouth College on September 26, moderated by Tim Russert. This lost opportunity was particularly disappointing because the tone of the questioning was refreshing. In an interrogatory unusual for its lack of fulsome deference and no-nonsense attempt to elicit straightforward “yes” and “no” responses, Allison King of New England Cable News asked the candidates whether they would enforce federal immigration law and outlaw “sanctuary cities,” many of which exist in New England.

After some equivocating, all the candidates responded they would not, agreeing that “sanctuary cities” are an appropriate response to the failure of “comprehensive immigration reform.” Half cited what they considered especially egregious examples of treatment of illegal aliens by ICE, local police, and municipal authorities, and all committed themselves to pass “comprehensive immigration reform” if elected. Several tripped over each other making encomiums

to America as a “nation of immigrants,” avoiding the distinction between legal and illegal immigrants and thus presumably infuriating most Americans for whom a bright line exists between the two. Finally, Rep. Kucinich summoned all to embrace a universal ethic transcending allegiance to the laws of the United States, concluding by quoting Emma Lazarus to justify a categorical imperative to accept all those that wish to reside in America as an eternal moral obligation. This remarkable proposition elicited not a single dissent.

Of greater interest than the candidates’ studied earnestness and hackneyed mantras was the apparent lack of enthusiasm for their uniform position among the members of the strongly partisan audience. There was no applause for any of the candidate’s pronouncements regarding “sanctuary cities.”

Once again the moderators failed to seize the moment and pose the most politically charged question: How do the candidates’ respond to data showing their views regarding the issue are at odds with those of the majority of Americans? A public opinion poll conducted by Rasmussen Reports between August 18-19 of 800 likely voters reveals 58% of those surveyed are so angry about “sanctuary cities” they believe all federal funds should be withheld from them, with only 39% supporting continuation of federal aid. The moderators, veteran newsmen, must be aware of the data and the chasm between the electorate and the candidates, but an implicit protocol appears in place not to question them about that gulf, a lost opportunity for what might have been a revealing exchange on how the candidates understand the compact between national leadership and the people as well as immigration.

The NBC News debate among the Democratic candidates held on October 30 at Drexel University in Philadelphia, moderated by Tim Russert and Brian Williams, also very nearly succeeded in spiriting away immigration as a major issue. Divided into 21 segments ranging from Iran, Iraq, Energy, and Electability – all the way to Rep. Kucinich’s UFO Sightings and Experiences with Extra-Terrestrials – there was none titled Immigration Policy. The closest the two-hour forum came to addressing the issue was a brief discussion of Gov. Spitzer’s plan to give illegal aliens driver’s licenses, a subplot in the epic that is immigration policy.

The question was posed to Sen. Clinton. Her answer, or rather answers, constituted the most blatant flip-flops of not just the evening but the whole of the primary campaign thus far, though it opened a door to a potentially meaningful discussion of immigration policy. The moderators, however, closed it as quickly as possible.



Sen. Clinton reversed her position within the space of two minutes, flatly denying she'd done so, validating the charge made by several of her rivals that she speaks out of both sides of her mouth. Indeed, much of the debate amounted to a sustained attack on her credibility by the other candidates and the moderators. If she set out to prove their point she couldn't have done better. Indeed, the day after the debate she reversed herself yet again, and then yet again.

Her initial response was affirming a statement she made to the editorial board of a Nashua, N.H., newspaper that Spitzer's decision "makes a lot of sense." However, when Sen. Dodd of Connecticut surprisingly broke ranks and said he thought it was a bad idea because a driver's license is "a privilege, not a right" and added the proposed system was a "bureaucratic nightmare" she unceremoniously dropped that position. Then, with no sign of embarrassment, she offered a transparently dishonest "clarification:" "I just want to add I did not say it should be done, but I certainly recognize why Governor Spitzer is trying to do it." An exasperated Dodd then responded, "Wait a minute. No. No. No. You said yes." To which Sen. Clinton replied, "No I didn't, Chris."

Though two pieces by Clinton flack in the *New York Times* the day afterwards gently referred to this astounding display as "verbal twists and turns" (Marc Santora, "In Debate, Immigration is Fodder for Campaign Rivals") and spoke of her "muddled and hesitant position" (Adam Nagourney, "A Day After, Clinton Endorses Spitzer's License Effort") what she was doing was ineptly lying. Later, when pressed by Tim Russert to provide a "yes" or "no" answer whether she supports Spitzer's plan she accused Russert of "playing gotcha."

Even for sophisticated voters that understand "waffling" is often an unappealing if necessary concomitant of having to play to two audiences at the same time – primary voters and voters in the general election – her ease with prevaricating was unnerving, especially when the performance was telescoped within so small a space of time.

She then articulated the standard Democratic rationale for defending violations of the rule of law by illegal aliens. In the wake of the failure of "comprehensive immigration reform" – which she blamed foremost on hapless President Bush, who had done everything in his power to pass what he hoped would prove his domestic policy "legacy," and secondarily on "us" – such accommodations need to be made to regularize the lives of the illegal population until such time as "comprehensive immigration reform" becomes law. In

a previous Democratic debate, Sen. Dodd offered the same specious defense of "sanctuary cities."

Had the moderators wished to explore immigration policy instead of trivializing it by focusing on a sub-particle of the whole, they had an excellent opening in Sen. Dodd's unanticipated flirtation with a more populist – and popular – position with regard to illegal immigrants. He cited a litany of immigration-related problems, including the need to secure America's borders and do something about the job magnet ("deal with the attraction that draws people here").

This was an interesting, arresting development. A senator known for his strong support of "comprehensive immigration reform" was using the high visibility of a televised debate to publicly articulate concerns about immigration. They merited follow-up. But follow-up might have led into dangerous territory, and there was none.

Similarly, Sen. Clinton's rhetorical question in reply to Dodd's pressing her about giving illegal aliens driver's license: "What are we going to do with all these illegal immigrants?" was the perfect opportunity for a journalist to engage the candidates about one of the most important issues of our time. But that has been prohibited up to now during these media spectacles. The debate at Drexel University told us, as did the YouTube forum, how viscerally uncomfortable the issue makes Democrats; when broached, even fleetingly, things get quickly out of hand.

Finally, just like the CNN-YouTube Q&A and the Democratic debate at Dartmouth College, the moderators gave the Democratic candidates a pass by not asking the toughest questions on the politics of the issue: why are Democrats embracing a position solid survey research shows is anathema to the American people? In New York, where the scheme was proposed, a poll conducted by the *New York Post* revealed that 72% of New Yorkers oppose it. In a Fox-*Washington Times* national poll, 77% of Americans surveyed oppose giving illegal aliens driver's licenses, with 68% of Democrats joining the majority.

The media's prohibition on providing platforms for dissenters from Establishment immigration policy is so strong that even at the debate among the Republican candidates on October 21 in Orlando, shown on Fox TV and hosted by Brit Hume, not a single question on immigration was posed by the several journalists who bombarded the candidates with ones about seemingly everything else. Considering virtually all the Republican candidates have made opposition to "comprehensive immigration reform" a plank in their campaigns, this failure lent a surrealistic air to the proceeding. The sole

reference to immigration was a cheap shot leveled by one of the journalists at Rep. Tancredo, long the champion of those opposed to “comprehensive immigration reform.” In a discussion of health care, Wendell Goler, the Fox News’ White House correspondent, noted in passing a study by the RAND Corporation that alleges illegal aliens have only a minor impact on rising health care costs. The comment was superfluous to the question asked, and Tancredo didn’t bother responding to it.

Throughout the debate, the candidates challenged each other on the sincerity of their credentials as genuine conservatives, using opposition to “comprehensive immigration reform” as a talisman. But use of the term “immigration” was confined to the candidates: the journalists avoided it like the plague. Giving the Democratic candidates an automatic pass on the subject is bad enough; ignoring the issue when speaking with their Republican rivals suggests one has entered political Wonderland.

Perhaps coming to their senses and realizing that prohibiting Republicans from speaking about the centerpiece of several of their platforms was destroying even a threadbare semblance of journalistic credibility, the CNN-YouTube forum in St. Petersburg for the Republicans on November 28 opened with immigration. The Establishment’s worst fears were immediately realized. What followed for a solid 30 minutes, a quarter of the entire forum, was a vehement assault on illegal immigration, amnesty, “sanctuary cities,” and “comprehensive immigration reform” and calls for strict border control, protection of American sovereignty, and attrition through immigration law enforcement as the right way respond to the illegal population. All the candidates, save McCain, promised not to grant amnesty to illegal aliens. There was minor disagreement on secondary issues, such as whether the children of illegal aliens should be eligible for college scholarships, but the only truly dissenting voice was that of Sen. McCain, whose appeal not to “demagogue” the issue was met with a chorus of boos and catcalls.

If some Democratic strategists, pollsters, and members of Congress are beginning to go public with their anxiety about immigration as a losing issue for the party and the unqualified embrace of “comprehensive immigration reform” by all their candidates, the NPR/Iowa Public Radio Debate offered cold comfort. All adhered to the same position and none of the candidates troubled themselves to identify with and show some sympathy for the concerns of millions of Americans about mass immigration.

NPR journalists were persistent in their questioning, futilely seeking clarifications on obfuscatory responses and challenging blatant inconsistencies in the Democrats’ positions – some stark enough to suggest policy schizophrenia. With NPR’s Steve Inskeep taking the lead, they frequently called the candidates on their “facts,” misuse of data and rank illogic, but the candidates’ unanimity on the subject, including a shared sense they hold the moral high ground, plus smug complacency in their ignorance made the thick wall of evasion hard to crack.

While excoriating unnamed “fear and hatemongers” for demagoguing the issue – Democrats can not discuss immigration for more than one minute without attacking “demagogues” – they spent plenty of time doing some nasty demagoguing of their own, not to mention question evasion, preferring to demonize their opponents and exhibit “compassion” than address the tough real-world choices the issue raises.

Inconsistencies and displays of ignorance were rampant and astonishing. Sen. Biden “corrected” the journalists’ “error” about the demography of illegal aliens, asserting the majority was European, not Hispanic, a point Sen. Dodd lamely confirmed. NPR’s reporters tried to clear this up by citing data from the Pew Hispanic Center, but no one wished to be confused by the facts.

The candidates also repeatedly described the “jury out” on the settled opinion of experts on the economic impact of immigration. Trying to evade answering whether cheap immigrant labor lowers wages, they obfuscated or belittled the impact. “I think what studies show is there are lots of things driving down wages in the United States of America,” former Sen. Edwards said, sententiously adding that research (none identified) is inconclusive. Sen. Obama was only slightly less disingenuous, pointing out there were “circumstances where, in fact, illegals are driving down wages,” without mentioning the scale of the “circumstances.” One wished to hear the Democratic candidates, self-proclaimed defenders of the American middle class, and especially the class warrior Sen. Edwards, respond to data that show the wages of such skilled “middle class” workers as plumbers, carpenters, masons, electricians, etc. have been steadily falling as a result of hiring illegal and impoverished immigrants.

The candidates promised to “get tough” on the hiring of illegal aliens, emphasizing employer sanctions and the federal E-Verify program (which enables employers to confirm that new hires are eligible to work), but while noting illegal aliens should not be working they

simultaneously pledged to use federal regulatory agencies to improve their working conditions. Like the rest, Sen. Dodd advocates amnesty for illegals and a “a path to citizenship” but then cited the thousands crowding U.S. embassies seeking to enter the United States the “right way,” suggesting the united emphasis on amnesty was sending the wrong message. One wondered whether this was an auditory hallucination.

Equally inconsistent was the almost unanimous response to the interesting opening question: why shouldn't American citizens report the presence of illegal aliens when they are expected to report other crimes? Candidate after candidate decried turning America into a society of fear and suspicion by expecting citizens to “turn in” people suspected of being here illegally, and then, in the next breath, argued no one should knowingly hire an illegal alien. Here Sen. Dodd registered the only dissent: he stated those knowingly hiring illegal aliens should face civil and/or criminal penalties.

Standard non-factual “evidence” was ubiquitous: former Sen. Gravel declared we have a labor shortage – that's the whole problem – and a mountain is being made out of a molehill by “crazies and nativists.” Refuting the canonic *New York Times*' recent surveys showing huge majorities of Americans oppose their favored policy, all fell back on the argument that opposition to “comprehensive immigration reform” is a “wedge issue” manipulated by a small minority of “extreme conservatives” to stoke “fear and hatred.”

Where NPR's journalists faltered was letting the candidates off the hook, as has happened in every previous debate, by not forcing them to respond to the solid data about public attitudes on immigration as well as overwhelming findings on the impact of immigration on the wages and working conditions of Americans from such authoritative sources as the National Research Council, the National Bureau of Economic Research, the studies of Professor George Borjas of Harvard's Kennedy School, the Center for Immigration Studies, and the Pew Hispanic Center, among others. Responses that can be judged objectively correct or incorrect were left as simple differences of opinion.

The nadir of NPR's debate came when Sen. Clinton, in her closing remarks, provided a dishonest, morally disgusting depiction of what opponents of “comprehensive immigration reform” allegedly seek. Employing nightmare imagery suggestive of Dante's *Inferno* or the Holocaust, she described 200,000 buses in a 1,700 mile-convoy overseen by tens of thousands of armed federal agents (at a cost of \$200 billion) hauling illegal aliens to the border. She rhapsodized about the horror this Gestapo-like imaginary would cause the

American people and the damage it would inflict on America's soul, her voice filled with fake indignation at the fantastic, grotesquely manipulative chimera she had created. She knows the fiercest opponents of “comprehensive immigration reform” would never seek or countenance such an enormity. She knows her opponents seek the incremental attrition of the illegal population through border security and the internal enforcement of the rule of law – self-deportation – a far cry from the fascist solution she imputed to them. Not a single one of her fellow candidates and none of NPR's journalists challenged the intemperate nature or rationality of this loathsome attack.

No matter how evasive or out of touch the Democratic candidates appeared during the NPR/Iowa Public Radio debate, every public exploration of immigration leads to further coverage and increases its salience, as was evident in a story in the next day's *New York Times* whose title says everything: “Immigration, a Relentless Issue, Confronts the Democrats in an Iowa Debate” (Adam Nagourney, 12/05/07, p. A22). Several of the article's characterizations of the debate and the larger issue show mainstream media's prohibitions may not last forever. The opening sentence reads, “If there is one issue that has challenged presidential candidates of both parties in Iowa this year, it is immigration.” Describing the difficulty the candidates had in responding to Inskeep's question about what American citizens should do in the face of the wholesale violation of the rule of law, Nagourney writes, “the question, posed in various forms during a two-hour debate over National Public Radio, had the candidates struggling anew with a topic looming large both in the Iowa caucuses next month and in the general election.”

### Idle Threats

Permeating mainstream coverage of immigration – the Drexel, St. Petersburg, and NPR/Iowa Public radio debates and follow-up press excepted – is a deliberate effort to neuter the issue by de-politicizing it, with one exception: wildly hyperbolic predictions of the role Hispanics will play in the 2008 election, a mainstay of coverage especially in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times* and also in a multitude of TV reports about candidates “courting the important Hispanic vote.”

Apart from jeremiads about Hispanic revenge in the voting booth (genre pieces are Michael Gerson's “Division: The GOP's Ruinous Immigration Stance,” *Washington Post*, 9/19/07, and Michael Luo's “An Election Issue That Might Bite Back,” *New York Times*,

11/18/07), coverage of the election and the immigration wars are so compartmentalized they might be occurring on different planets. Only a dogged, myopic political correctness explains making a Hispanic revenge scenario the sole exception. Hispanics may be a political factor by mid-century, but not before. Predictions of Hispanic payback constitute an empty threat in a country in which their share of the 2008 electorate, according to Census Bureau estimates, will likely approximate 6.8-7.8%, compared to 12.3% African American and 73% non-Hispanic white.

Almost half of the Hispanic population of the United States is concentrated in two states, Texas and California, neither a swing state. Hispanics comprise 5% or more of the population in only 15 more: in a critical swing state like Ohio less than 1%. Nationwide, 62% of Hispanics cannot vote because they're non-citizens or underage. Only 38% of Mexicans, the largest Hispanic ethnic slice by far, has naturalized.

The immigration debate may energize more Hispanic citizens (as well as non-citizens with forged drivers licenses as ID) to vote, but it will do the same for a much larger number of voters opposed to mass immigration who will overwhelm an invigorated but tiny minority. Hispanic voter turnout is notoriously low, even in presidential elections. In 2004, only 47% of those Hispanics eligible to vote did – the smallest percentage of any ethnic/racial/cultural group in America. Non-Hispanic white preponderance is such that it requires a 10.9% shift in the Hispanic vote to equal a 1% shift in the white vote.

Despite Republican fantasies about socially conservative Hispanics becoming Republicans because of “culture wars” issues, the trend has been strongly in the opposite direction. Hispanics have been registering Democratic over Republican by a margin of 3-1, as much as 4-1 when they locate in Democratic bastions; the surrounding political environment plays a significant role in orienting newcomers politically. George W. Bush's strenuous outreach to Hispanics earned him no more than 40% of their votes in 2004, the same Reagan received in 1980, and few Republican candidates have fared that well.

This is hardly surprising. Given the choice between a party that shares their purported “values” or one that favors amnesty for illegal aliens and access to public entitlements regardless of legal status, it is a forgone conclusion a significant majority of Hispanics will support Democrats.

The GOP can't and shouldn't compete on these terms. Ethnic pandering might earn a few stray Hispanic

votes but at the cost of alienating the infinitely more important vote of non-Latino whites, African Americans who may express their anger over immigration in the polling booth and, we shall see, a significant segment of American Hispanics.

### Idle Threats II: The Mythic Hispanic Monolith

Had a majority of Republicans acquiesced in passing “comprehensive immigration reform” the GOP would have collaborated in creating a political superpower out of a demographic that tracks strongly Democratic. This would have constituted political suicide. Why would any politically literate Republican support legislation guaranteeing a permanent Democratic majority?

Moreover, Hispanic attitudes towards amnesty and increased legal immigration do not resemble the monolithic caricatures rampant in condescending, data-averse mainstream media reporting. Support for higher immigration among Hispanics is grossly exaggerated, and its nuances go unreported. A strong majority of Hispanic American citizens and legal residents are anguished about the impact of an endless stream of impoverished immigrants on their own tenuous grip on the bottom rungs of the socio-economic ladder.

Unsupported assertions about monolithic Hispanic attitudes were ubiquitous in mainstream news stories and commentary in the wake of S.1639's defeat. It was easy to find Hispanics working for open-borders organizations, ethnic identity groups, or serving as local municipal officials or on the Hill to say the “right thing,” and the media relied on them exclusively. It served as a bullhorn for the views it endorsed.

Mainstream media's misrepresentation of attitudes within the Hispanic community is principally caused by taking at face value assertions by leftwing and/or ethnic-nationalist Hispanic leadership cadres that they are the community's authentic voice. Organizations like the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), etc. have a persistent voice in the media and the funding to make themselves a presence on Capitol Hill (they receive significant support from left-of-center foundations like the Ford Foundation). But they, like other ethnic leadership cadres, are often out of sync with the broader sentiments within their communities. The mainstream media, however, largely shares their politics and elitism and finds it ideologically comfortable and journalistically

easier to accept their views as gospel than to examine the data and present the more ambiguous picture that would necessitate.

Hispanic communal attitudes are complex, indeed. A majority claims to support “comprehensive immigration reform,” but it’s a bare majority, and if the data is deconstructed the majority vanishes. Most important, Hispanic claims of support or, more precisely, what exactly Hispanics claim to support, are problematic. There isn’t a straight correlation between polling data and alleged Hispanic attitudes towards “comprehensive immigration reform.”

Embargoed in mainstream media are data that would reveal the fictive nature of its official immigration narrative – according to polling by Zogby in May 2006, some 43% of Hispanics find the current level of immigration “too high,” another 43% as “about right.” Not even one percent said the number was “too low.” “Comprehensive immigration reform” would increase immigration – as noted, despite the Establishment’s distracting the public with the issue of amnesty, the core proposal is a dramatic increase in legal immigration. Thus the truth is that a gigantic majority of Hispanics – 86% – actually opposes the policy’s main provision.

This incongruence has several sources. Hispanics are likely registering group solidarity rather than assessing or affirming a given policy. A strong assertion of solidarity is predictable because Hispanics feel beleaguered due to the furor over immigration, legal and illegal, and fears of “profiling” because of the large illegal population. In addition, given the paucity of information available to the public about “comprehensive immigration reform” it is only amnesty that receives their majority support, not the full package. This is a significant political point, and a counter-intuitive one. Why hasn’t a single media outlet reported it?

Polling data also show 77% of Hispanics believe the United States should not admit additional unskilled workers – another view totally incompatible with “comprehensive immigration reform,” and a finding that would amaze many supporters of mass immigration. But mainstream media censors these data as well because they also don’t jibe with the preferred narrative.

These views very likely reflect: (1) resentment by American citizens of Hispanic background or Hispanic legal residents who feel stigmatized by the hostility engendered by the presence of the large illegal population; and (2) the anxiety of those that recognize competition for unskilled jobs and affordable housing comes from people most like themselves – other recent immigrants and the native poor.

Alleged Hispanic endorsement of “comprehensive immigration reform,” which translates into support for one element only of a far more ambitious, multifaceted policy, is reminiscent of a *New Yorker* magazine cartoon in which a migration of lemmings is about to plunge to their deaths over a waterfall. One sees what’s ahead and shouts, “No one told me this was part of the deal!” By focusing on one component of the bill while ignoring others directly opposed to the survival interests of the Hispanic community, the mainstream media reveals itself as no friend of Hispanics.

The soft racist predilection to oversimplify Hispanic attitudes is exemplified in mainstream coverage of Florida, the only swing state with a big electoral vote and significant Hispanic population. While numerous (some 19.5%), Hispanic Floridians are not a voting bloc, and media-speak about the “important Hispanic vote in this swing state” is misleading. There is “no Hispanic vote.” The largest cohort is Cuban, some 36%, and reliably Republican, immigration policy notwithstanding. The Puerto Rican community is second, some 32%, and solidly Democratic. The remaining 21%, a mixture of Central Americans and South Americans, are conflicted in their attitudes, and their immigration status combined with the low voter turnout minimize their political clout. Further reducing Hispanic impact, some 15.7% of Floridians are African Americans and fully 61% are non-Hispanic white.

### Immigration/Election Confluence

Despite concerted effort to insulate campaign coverage from immigration, there has been considerable interpenetration, and not only in polling showing the issue’s high salience with the public or in rare moments during the debates. Two days before the collapse of the comprehensive bill in the Senate, opponents counted just 36 certain votes. 48 hours later, 53 Senators voted against it: all who joined the majority face re-election in 2008. With phone lines to the Senate crashing under the weight of calls from tens of thousands of constituents enraged about what they perceived as their representatives’ apparent passivity in the face of the despised bill, most Senators got the message and joined the peasant revolt to save their necks.

Editorial commentary in the nation’s “newspapers of record” could not accept the political reality Senators understand best. The media decried the Senate’s “surrender” to a “well-organized extremist minority” rather than face a simple fact no politician can afford to ignore: the bill’s staggeringly unpopularity with the American people.

The nexus also played the decisive role in destroying the campaign of the heir-apparent to the Republican nomination, Sen. McCain, whose self-inflicted fatal wound was high-profile support for “comprehensive immigration reform.” After briefly temporizing in the face of strong public opposition, he reaffirmed uncompromising support for S.1639 and mocked opposition to the bill by rivals Giuliani and Romney, at once embracing the despised legislation and exhibiting his Achilles heel, his choleric temperament. After teetering on the brink of bankruptcy his campaign is struggling to make a comeback, but only the implosion of at least three stronger, better-financed campaigns would enable his to recover.

The mainstream media attributes McCain’s collapse to unwavering support for the President’s Iraq policy. This kills two of its favorite game birds with one stone: Bush Iraq policy and immigration’s salience. But support for the war still commands the allegiance of a very respectable share of the Republican base. Moreover, polling by the *New York Times* indicates most Americans place their trust in the military’s assessment of the situation in Iraq, not that of the candidates or political party spokespersons, and McCain maintains the same position as Gen. Petraeus. McCain destroyed himself over immigration. Mainstream media’s refusal to accept this underscores the impossibility of doing responsible political journalism while refusing to give immigration the weight it deserves.

The Democratic primary received most early media attention, and where the candidates all agree on a policy it’s arguable there’s no story. Yet that’s a shortsighted conclusion. Is it not newsworthy that every Democratic candidate’s position on immigration is anathema to the great majority of the electorate, including most Democrats? Shouldn’t the candidates be questioned about their concerns about that gulf? The mainstream press has largely given the Democrats a pass on the issue, indulging their favorite party in the delusion it will be able to ignore the issue. But the Democrats’ media flacks are acting like Judas goats leading the flock to slaughter. At some critical juncture, the Democratic nominee will have to defend amnestying millions of illegal aliens and supporting the exponential increase in immigration face to face with her or his Republican rival. When the moment arrives – and it almost certainly will – the result could be catastrophic.

One leading Democratic lawmaker hears the approaching thunder and is prepared to go public concerning it. That was the subject of a rare departure from standard coverage of immigration in the *Washington Post* on October 23. In “GOP Finds Hot Button in

Illegal Immigration,” Jonathan Weisman covers an off-year race in a congressional district in Massachusetts where the widow of ex-Sen. Tsongas scored a much narrower victory than anticipated against a political novice, Jim Ogonowski. The 51-46 margin was not impressive in a solidly Democratic district in the most reliably Democratic state in the nation. The *Post*’s writer called the margin a “shocker.”

Ogonowski campaigned on illegal immigration, and Niki Tsongas’ support for driver’s licenses for illegal aliens, announced two days before the election, cost her; had the election lasted a week longer it might have cost her the seat. That a prominent Democrat, Rep. Rahm Emanuel, Chair of the House Democratic Caucus and a key architect of the Democrat’s recapture of the House, is worried that the Tsongas/Ogonowski race is a harbinger. Responding to the election he said the following about immigration: “The issue has real implications for the country. It captures all the American people’s anger and frustration not only with immigration but with the economy. It’s self-evident. It’s a big problem. For the American people, and therefore for all of us, it’s emerged as the third rail of American politics. And anyone who doesn’t realize that isn’t with the American people.” The story suggests the price the Democratic Party may face for selling out its traditional base in the white and black working class in favor of Hispanics in such states as Kansas, Indiana, North Carolina, and New Hampshire; it nearly paid the price in Massachusetts.

Anxiety about not “being with the American people” is also reflected in Rep. Shuler’s SAVE Act and its co-sponsorship by a fair number of Democrats, in a few comments made by Sen. Dodd in the debates indicating his underlying unhappiness with the party’s stand on immigration, and in concerns reported in the *Times* and *Washington Post* expressed by Democratic House members in more conservative states who are worried that the “too liberal” positions of some of the candidates, immigration included, may cost them their incumbencies. These first awakenings have yet to be widely shared, at least in public, and while it appears most Democrats are trying to persuade themselves the issue doesn’t count, the same is decidedly not true of the Republicans.

Immigration is at the boiling point in the GOP, as it is among rank-and-file Democrats and Independents. Yet even a fundamental reshuffling of the deck among candidates for the Republican nomination reflecting that (McCain’s implosion) and the fact that Giuliani, Thompson, Romney, and now Huckabee are competing for the nomination principally by seeking to define themselves as toughest on border security

and illegal immigration has had little impact on media coverage other than during the St. Petersburg debate. The media makes an obligatory reference to the issue as an artifact of the rivalry among the candidates, and then, quickly and discreetly, drops it and moves on to something else.

It seemed a reasonable expectation that Thompson's entry into the race might affect the media's disinclination to make immigration a significant component of its election coverage. After all, he advocates the toughest set of positions on immigration of any candidate: no amnesty, completing the already-approved fencing along the U.S./Mexican border, ending chain immigration, cutting off federal aid to "sanctuary cities," making E-Verify mandatory for all businesses, ending the visa lottery, tracking the entry and exist of all legal visa holders – all in the service of dealing with illegal aliens through a policy of attrition. Except for the CNN-YouTube debate in St. Petersburg, when freedom of expression is most difficult to deny, the media has sidelined these positions and concentrated, instead, on the rocky start of his campaign when he appeared distracted and rusty and lacking "fire in the belly." It has also focused on his young attractive wife and support for the Second Amendment as indications of his backward provincial populist vulgarity.

### Provincial Treatment Or Internal Exile

Mainstream media does not embargo coverage of immigration entirely. That's simply impossible given the number of immigration-related stories. Whenever possible, however, it is covered as local news, disconnected from national politics or even politics per se. The eventual undoing of this approach is the daily proliferation of these stories across the country as many states as well as a literally hundreds of counties and municipalities try to fill the void left by federal malfeasance and the legal limbo in which the failure to pass national immigration legislation has stranded them, forcing them to pass local ordinances dealing with immigration. Though there are corners of America where these dramas do not play out, immigration is increasingly becoming an issue in every region, and these stories most often reflect a national climate of rising fury regarding illegal immigration.

Coverage is wildly imbalanced and, as we have seen, is conveyed via hidebound conventions that contribute to a standard local narrative: the trials and tribulations of illegal immigrants, treated with treacherous sympathy, while efforts made to enforce immigration

law are subjected to sneering hostility. Those seeking to uphold the law are typically vilified as enemies of the American Dream.

The most extreme articulation of this genre – the shrieking purple prose suggests borderline hysteria – is the *New York Times* editorial of July 28 titled "Humanity v. Hazleton." One would have thought the little town in Pennsylvania were involved in the Final Solution. We have dozens of negatively slanted stories in print and on TV about regulations against illegal aliens and their employers in Arizona backed by a Democratic governor; the legal battles over municipal ordinances to combat illegal immigration in Hazleton; Prince William and Loudon counties in Virginia, Frederick County, Md.; Carpentersville, Ill.; or the far more sympathetically covered approach of New Haven, Conn., a "sanctuary city" which has granted illegal aliens municipal ID cards to allow them to open bank accounts and regularize their de facto status in a variety of ways. San Francisco's decision to follow New Haven's example led to huzzahs from the mainstream media.

Predictably, mainstream media jumped on two unfolding stories in New York State, ones with large implications for how municipalities, counties, and states will choose to handle the presence of the large, growing illegal population. The media is staunchly opposed to the regulations gaining ground across the country (or enforcement of existing laws that might impact the illegal population, from housing codes to trespassing), and it therefore endorsed the decision of Gov. Spitzer to grant illegal aliens driver's licenses, a policy opposed by all but eight states, and directed withering editorial fire against his opponents. It finally turned on the governor himself when he dropped the plan in the face of popular opposition.

A similar battle – with mainstream media cheerleading on one side – is taking place in Suffolk County, Long Island, New York, home to the nation's second largest concentration of illegal Central Americans. The media has inveighed against the enforcement measures taken by County Executive Steve Levy against them. In spite of being tarred by mainstream media with the usual epithets, Levy's popularity with his constituents is "sky-high" according to the *New York Times*.

### A Case in Point

A complete compendium of media conventions for editorializing about illegal immigration under the guise of writing news appears in a front page story in the *Washington Post*, "Latinos Unite Across Classes on Curbs Against Immigration" (October 9, 2007, p. A1, Pamela

Constable) which reports Hispanic opposition across the socio-economic spectrum to efforts by officials in Prince William County, Va., to pass enactments against illegal aliens. The “news story” would be an ideal artifact for a time capsule of politically correct artifacts, circa 2007. Most noticeable is the absence of hard data; readers are never confused by facts. The impressionistic piece sweepingly oversimplifies Hispanic attitudes, draws large generalizations from tiny samples of opinion, fails to determine whether attitudes are genuinely representative, and uncritically repeats allegations of racism and xenophobia. At no point does the article present the views of ordinary non-Hispanics.

While reporting scabrous allegations without fact-checking, the piece employs another standard device to engender sympathy for illegal aliens in “human interest” stories. It locates point of view exclusively in them, ceding them all the direct quotation in the narrative as they passionately relate their travails and allege pervasive bigotry. No member of the group supporting the resolution addresses us directly; the reporter relates their denials of bigotry. We are told, “Sponsors and advocates of the resolution say it is neither anti-Latino nor anti-immigrant.” Such observations permit the reporter to claim balance, but conferring first-person voice on one side and denying it to the other makes for loaded advocacy journalism. Readers identify far more readily with individuals whose feelings come to us directly than with those whose views are reported second-hand.

In fiction, writers use this device to manipulate readers into identifying with the mistaken impressions of a character within whom point of view is located, a literary convention known as “hostile irony.” (The classic example is the reader’s identifying with the initial mistaken impressions Elizabeth Bennett forms of Darcy in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*.) Not surprisingly, the final word in the *Post*’s docudrama is given to an illegal alien – presented as a model citizen – who feels he must move his family due to the racist climate: “If they don’t like us, why don’t they just say so? I love my home, but I don’t want to live in a place where I am hated.” The piece, a not overly subtle “*J’accuse*,” builds to the climactic word: “hated.”

The enactments passed in Prince William County set off a frenetic competition among the nation’s liberal newspapers, each vying to outdo the other in voicing moral indignation. True to form, while excoriating the hard-hearted xenophobic county officials the protocol about quarantining the story is maintained: it is treated as a local matter and is tied neither to the larger national trend of communities passing similar ordinances nor to its potential broader political ramifications. The *Los*

*Angeles Times*’ story “Ban Could Deny Illegal Immigrants Services” (Claudia Lower, 7/14/07) – as well as dozens more – is essentially indistinguishable from that in the *Washington Post*.

This is narrative of some sort, but decidedly not news. These are morality plays about the glories of immigration, regardless of scale or legality, the evil and pointlessness of opposing it – it is judged an unstoppable natural phenomenon – or even viewing it skeptically. These are hagiographies of sainted illegal aliens which take a worshipful attitude towards appeasing mass violation of the rule of law and sacralize multiculturalism as the redemptive solution.

### “Never Trust the Teller, Trust the Tale”

Despite mainstream media’s efforts to bludgeon reader response to these exempla and get the last sermonic word, D.H. Lawrence’s famous dictum about the classic realist novel, with its convention of the intrusive narrator telling readers how to judge the characters and think about the issues the books raise, holds equally true with regard to mainstream media coverage of immigration; D.H. Lawrence wrote: “Never trust the teller, trust the tale.” Regardless of spin, readers see through the official overview and come to their own conclusions: they are furious about the laissez-faire attitude towards American sovereignty and the presence of millions of illegal aliens and demand an end to anarchy through the enforcement of law.

The undiminished capacity to think critically is reflected in the fate of the proposed resolutions in Prince William County. Act I in the real-life drama ended in the wee hours of October 16 following 12 hours of public hearings with 400 individuals offering opinions in a packed hearing room holding some 1,200. At 2:30 a.m. the Prince William Board of Supervisors voted in favor of the resolution. It directed local police to enforce immigration law and deny some public services to illegal aliens, among them drug counseling, some elderly services and business licenses. Unlike California’s Proposition 187, the resolution does not deny public education to illegal-alien children.

The real-life conclusion is notable for several reasons. Despite being vilified in the national and local press for inhumanity and xenophobia, the Board of Supervisors passed the measure, signaling their unwillingness to kowtow to political correctness and media-induced hysteria while upholding their responsibility to represent majority opinion in the



county. In addition, on closer inspection, what has been portrayed as villainous and decried as extreme appears eminently moderate. The media's forecast of a fascist coup in Prince William County has proven premature.

The resolution directs all 500 local police to undergo training in immigration law to see laws are applied fairly and then cooperate with federal immigration officials by checking the immigration status of persons accused of committing crimes if the arresting officer has reason to believe the suspect is an illegal alien. No major police "sweeps" of neighborhoods with high immigrant populations are planned, nor are police setting up roadblocks for spot checks of potential illegal aliens; these fear-mongering allegations made by opponents of the resolution received wide media dissemination. The author of the resolution, Supervisor Martin Nohe, spoke out strongly against racial profiling which, he argued, would create a climate of hostility and fear.

The clearest evidence Americans are placing their trust in the tale and not the teller is reflected in an opinion poll by the *Washington Post* whose findings were disclosed in its edition of October 24, 2007. The newspaper was hoist on its own petard. Having publishing slanted story after slanted story on the battle over the enactments regarding illegal aliens in several Maryland and Virginia counties and a stream of shrill editorials indicting the legislation and local citizenry, a survey of voters in Virginia shows that anger about illegal immigration has propelled immigration policy to the political forefront, with likely voters in the *Washington Post's* most proximate media market, Northern Virginia, registering these sentiments most strongly.

Seventy-five percent of likely voters indicate a candidate's stand on immigration will strongly influence how they vote, with the majority saying that immigration was "extremely important" or "very important" as an issue. (Just a year ago, the issue made it no higher than 7 on a list of 10 choices of top issues.) 70% believe the federal government has failed in its responsibility to control America's borders or apply immigration law, and 61% indicate illegal immigration is a serious problem where they live. Six in ten respond they will support candidates who can be counted upon to take tough measures against illegal immigration. In Northern Virginia, some 77% regard immigration as a serious issue, with over 30% responding that it is one of the top two issues in the area.

Though the article quotes Frank Sharry, Executive Director of the National Immigration Forum, the nation's most vociferous open borders group, as saying Republicans are focusing on illegal immigration

to divert the public's attention from President Bush's sagging approval ratings, a local Republican leader, Corey A. Stewart, Chairman of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors, responded it would make little sense to push an issue without authentic local salience. In the front-page news story that accompanied the findings ("Poll Shows VA Focused on Illegal Immigrants," *Washington Post*, October 24, 2007, Anita Kumar and Jon Cohen, A1) Stewart states, "If you're hyping a non-issue, you wouldn't get these kind of results." More interesting is what Frank Sharry chooses *not* to say: the approval ratings of the Democratic-led Congress are even lower than the president's, and President Bush was the strongest booster of the immigration policy for which no group in the United States lobbied harder than the National Immigration Forum under Frank Sharry's leadership.

The ultimate vindication of the enforcement-focused stance taken by Corey Stewart on immigration – denying public benefits to illegal aliens was the core of his campaign message – was his re-election victory in Prince William County on November 6 which withstood an anti-Bush rising Democratic tide in Virginia: the conclusion of Act II. Another winning candidate that focused on immigration in Virginia was Democrat Gerald Connolly, County Board of Supervisors Chair in Fairfax County, who made a campaign issue out of enforcing housing laws routinely violated in immigrant-heavy neighborhoods. Taking an enforcement only-approach to immigration was a bipartisan winning formula. The *Washington Post* hailed Connolly's victory as a rejection of nativism because he ran against an advocate of even tougher policies, but that surely provided only cold comfort; he would likely have lost had he not embraced immigration enforcement policies. The *Post* subsequently ran a story on November 12 curiously insisting the anti-illegal immigrant message had not been a winner, which only emphasized the capacity of mainstream media to deceive itself.

In the coverage of the ordinances dealing with illegal immigrants in Prince William County, an especially intemperate example of a bad general pattern, the exasperation of overwhelmed elected officials trying to cope with the financial pressures and administrative burdens of addressing the sudden arrival of thousands of immigrants, many illegal; and the fear, bewilderment, and shock of long-time residents in the face of the overnight loss of knowable community are almost invariably excoriated as racism or demagogic hatred rather than natural responses to be thoughtfully and sympathetically analyzed. It's well to remember the

politics and sociology of ethnic/racial succession have never played out in America without conflict, and we're talking of relationships between *Americans*.

### Privileged Insulation

Members of the media elite that castigates the “backward,” “xenophobic” attitudes of local communities on the cutting edge of social transformation so vast it amounts to a population-transfer do so far removed from the anguish and confusion on the front lines. It is protected from social upheaval by history's most reliable safe-conduct pass: socio-economic privilege. The elite's embrace of illegal aliens provides them an additional credential for their politically correct resumes and also enhances their lifestyle. Now even upper-middle-class Americans can afford servants for the first time since the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; and many that defend open borders employ illegal aliens as nannies, cooks, handymen, builders, groundskeepers, baby sitters for elderly infirm relatives, or have their nails or laundry done for next to nothing by poor Hispanic or Asian women.

Where is an historically or sociologically literate recognition in mainstream journalism – one would expect to encounter it at least in an occasional op-ed – that ethnic succession, always laden with *sturm und drang*, is incomparably more wrenching when it's experienced as a foreign invasion, and the ascendant demographic is comprised largely of a culturally monolithic group of non-English speakers who have no legal right to be here? Rather than writing scathing editorials and op-ed attacks on those that must manage and live in towns and cities across America with the consequences of federal ineptitude and congressional cowardice, why not praise local leadership and ordinary citizens for the remarkable fact that there has been virtually no violence against illegal immigrants or threats of vigilantism?

The “rivers of blood” which Enoch Powell, English Conservative politician and leading anti-immigration activist, forecast would run in the streets of Great Britain as a result of massive immigration in his famous 1968 speech have yet to constitute so much as a trickle in America. Despite ceaseless efforts by left/liberal organizations to vilify the Minutemen as a group of racist storm troopers, only the terminally politically correct could buy such an outlandish characterization. These citizen volunteers, additional eyes and ears for the indefensibly undermanned U.S. Border Patrol, do not carry weapons, and have never engaged in violence.

Where notable violence has occurred as a byproduct of contemporary immigration is in America's inner cities, primarily on the West Coast. Murders

committed by members of rival Hispanic and African-American gangs have become commonplace in the multiplying turf wars of the last few years, not to mention the “payback killings” of innocent young people, as in the notorious case earlier this year of the young black teenage girl slain by Hispanic gang members in Los Angeles for being black in the “wrong place.” The horrific execution-style murders of three outstanding young black people, individual success stories against the odds in blighted Newark, has shaken that city to its foundations. The murders were carried out by Hispanic gang members whose leader is a Peruvian illegal alien with possible ties to MS-13, the notorious El Salvadoran gang linked to multiple murders.

The upsurge of this intergroup violence creates a genuine quandary for mainstream media. Horrific violence is its red meat, the blood sport that's the visual feast especially in the “Eyewitness TV” formats that constitutes the 6 p.m. local news across America. A thirty-minute chronicle of mayhem and tragedy designed to elicit feelings of pity, revulsion, safe distance, luck, and condescension from an audience turned into voyeurs, local evening news is little more than coverage of one gruesome crime after another, punctuated with weather updates, traffic reports and celebrity gossip delivered by news readers from model agencies, not journalism schools. The more these stories focus on crimes committed by illegal aliens the more the mainstream media becomes an unwitting accomplice to the grassroots movement against Establishment immigration policy.

Though traditionally the crime rate is lower in immigrant communities than among natives, the number of serious crimes committed against American citizens by illegal immigrants is not insignificant. The strong gang culture that is a fact of life in the Hispanic underclass contributes to a higher crime rate among Hispanics than any other immigrant group. Crimes committed by illegal aliens are especially tragic and infuriating to the public because none of the perpetrators – whether murderers or drunk drivers – should be here in the first place. In the contest between the media's implicit and explicit support for open-borders immigration and its hunger for ratings and the revenue they represent – it is probably best to follow the money, and for that reason – if for any – we may see some shift in the nature of coverage.

### The Biggest Big Lie

The foremost reason or, rather, rationale, for immigration's essential invisibility in the mainstream media as a campaign issue – despite its loud, obstreperous presence among ordinary Americans, in Senate debate,

in battles concerning local governance, on talk radio, across the internet, in almost every warm-up routine on the “Tonight Show,” and throughout popular culture across the nation – is the Establishment’s media’s role in producing and relying on politically manipulated opinion polling. Mainstream media is deeply engaged in highly problematic “research” whose purpose is to spirit immigration away as an issue, reducing it to an historical footnote. There’s something terribly wrong with what passes as “data” in the mainstream media. Worst of all, the problem is not the product of honest statistical error: it’s the result of conscious skewing or, for want of a better term, chicanery. How else explain the surrealistic incongruence of “findings” claiming majority support for the principal components of “comprehensive immigration reform” – at least those of which the public is aware – and the Jacquerie that prompted the debacle suffered by S.1639 on the Senate floor? If everyone’s so content why are the American people burning with anger? How else account for the tremendous gulf separating their findings from those of a host of highly reputable pollsters?

If legalizing some 12 million illegal aliens enjoys such widespread popularity, why did a majority of Senators – people with very high aptitudes for counting votes and protecting their incumbencies, if nothing else – jump like rats from the sinking ship of “comprehensive immigration reform” rather than risk losing their re-election campaigns? Desperate to rescue his foundering domestic policy “legacy,” the President gave it all away by speaking out of both sides of his mouth, talking of the public’s “demand” for the bill and calling on Senators to “show courage” by voting with him. What courage must be summoned to pass popular legislation?

Even polls which otherwise seriously misrepresent public opinion about the immigration debate – amnesty above all – get part of the story right. Thus, one sponsored by the *Washington Post*/ABC News conducted between April 12-15, more than two months before the issue reached a periodic boiling point in the run up to the defeat of S.1639, demonstrates the importance the public attaches to the issue and its profound dissatisfaction over how it’s being handled. Fully 64% disapproved of the government’s handling of immigration, only 33% approved. This is the highest level of disapproval for any policy other than the war in Iraq. In the same vein, fully 80% of respondents faulted the government for failing to curtail illegal immigration.

Still, like so many other misleading surveys, the poll errs grievously by reporting majority public support for amnesty. Is it any coincidence such findings have appeared with greatest frequency in and have been lifted

liberally by many other newspapers from the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, two of the strongest boosters of “comprehensive immigration reform” that have made a fine art of push-polling?

Considering the public’s faith in and capacity to be swayed by opinion polls – despite their denials, people believe in numbers and their bandwagon appeal can turn the statistics into self-fulfilling prophecies – anyone familiar with the immigration debate recognizes that possessing what appears to be the best data on public opinion is potentially decisive, inevitably engendering a temptation to play fast and loose with survey research.

Journalistic standards across the board have reached all-time lows in reporting the immigration debate, but it’s still easy to identify what constitutes rock bottom: the *New York Times* devoting column 1 page 1 on May 24 and column 2 page 1 on May 25 to a purported news story (“Majority Favor Changing Immigration Law, Poll Says”) showcasing its own poll on immigration. Not merely opinion, but opinion manipulated and purchased by the *Times* was front-page “news.” The motive was also transparent: the *Times* was seeking to create the chimera of popular support to keep politicians afraid of voter anger on the side of S.1639.

Understanding how the *New York Times*/CBS poll was rigged to produce the results its sponsors bought is critically important; it explains what delegitimizes the findings and those of similar surveys with the same built-in mechanism intended to produce identical false outcomes. The basis of the swindle is a faulty dilemma. In polling Americans about what to do about the illegal population, the survey limits choices given the respondents to two *almost* equally unappealing alternatives, “pushing” them to select what is carefully worded to appear the lesser of two evils. These are the choices: amnestying 12 million people or deporting them wholesale. While blanket amnesty infuriates Americans because it rewards people that don’t play by the rules and show contempt for the rule of law, mass deportation evokes frightening images of jack-booted SWAT teams engaged in a mass roundup, loading the illegal population, Gestapo fashion, onto boxcars. Respondents are unhappy with the first but horrified by the specter of the second. Further, wholesale amnesty is not merely euphemized but is more than validated by phrasing that creates an aura of humaneness and of civic virtue as the recipients of amnesty will now be permitted to come “out of the shadows” and “earn” a “path to citizenship.”

More scrupulous surveys, like that of Rasmussen, Zogby, and Gallup offer a third alternative the great majority selects. When given this additional option,

overwhelming majorities select it rather than amnesty or mass deportation. They choose the incremental attrition of the illegal population through enhanced border security and vigorous internal enforcement of immigration law. Attrition includes: secure documentation, tough employer sanctions, raids on worksites employing large numbers of illegal workers, permitting local police forces to enforce immigration law, outlawing “sanctuary cities,” imprisoning border crossers, etc. This choice trumps any variant of amnesty on survey after survey.

This policy is increasingly being implemented by federal authorities, suggesting that in the political climate following the defeat of S.1639 these agencies feel they possess a political mandate to move in this direction. What looks to be a genuinely serious effort to emphasize immigration law enforcement is now taking two principal forms. These include an energetic campaign to notify all medium to large employers whenever an employee’s Social Security number does not match federal records. Previously such “no-match” letters could be ignored without consequence and employees using false identification were kept on the books. Failure to comply may now lead to large fines and even criminal penalties. At the moment, however, this strategy has been suspended by the intervention of a federal court. The second effort, still on the drawing board, will require any company doing business with the federal government participate in the E-Verify system to ascertain the work-eligibility of all new hires. Cynics suggest that these efforts may be a smokescreen by the White House to claim it is indeed forcing the law before seeking to resuscitate the bill. That remains to be seen.

Finally, a Gallup Poll taken in June awakened a number of Senators supporting S.1639 like an ice-cold shower at 4:30 a.m. Of those Americans closely following the immigration debate – and the numbers of these politically active sorts are increasing exponentially – opposition to “comprehensive immigration reform” registers 61%; only 17% of those that know anything about it support it. The polling data is solid that greater knowledge feeds greater opposition, and as the campaign progresses it is likely that any American planning to vote will be educated about this issue as never before.

A year from now it’s almost inconceivable Democrats will be able to whistle past the immigration graveyard unless their Republican opponents are dim-witted enough not to make the issue a centerpiece of their campaign. Given the vicissitudes of politics, however, forcing Democrats to face up to the issue can’t be left to Republicans. Unless the movement opposed to amnesty and increased immigration exposes the falsity of surveys that report most Americans support

a “path to earned citizenship” the battle will be lost. Supporters of “comprehensive immigration reform” regard these findings as their ace in the hole. In an op-ed on immigration by Morton Kondrake in *Roll Call*, “Despite Danger, GOP Tees Up Immigration as Wedge Issue in 2008,” he argues it’s a loser for the GOP to use immigration as a wedge issue because “58%...support allowing illegal immigrants to earn their way to legal status.” The Big Lie has succeeded too often in the past for anyone to pretend it does not represent a political danger.

### Will 2008 Be Different?

Despite determined Establishment efforts to thwart its emergence as an issue, there’s a strong possibility immigration will become a leading one, perhaps the leading one, in 2008 as recent public opinion polls in Iowa and elsewhere suggest. It will be objected immigration has previously registered high salience but opinion polls have not translated into a significant, let alone decisive, political factor.

A leading culprit has been mainstream media that used to have a monopoly on treating this issue, but it controls a reduced share of the media market and exerts less influence over the socio-political attitudes of Americans than just four years ago. It will not be able to play the lead role in a self-fulfilling prophecy again: alternative media has permitted the expression and strengthened the impact of hitherto censored populist opinion. In the 2004 election, as now, mainstream media ignored or derided immigration as an issue and condemned those that took it seriously as members of a closet minority of haters. Talk radio and blogs have removed that stigma.

An isolated event in the 2004 campaign revealed the dishonesty of the mainstream’s strategy. In the Presidential debate aired on CNN on October 14, the moderator, veteran correspondent Bob Schieffer, asked President Bush and Sen. Kerry how each would handle immigration policy. Schieffer also revealed the inaccuracy of viewing critics of immigration policy as a fringe group. He introduced the question with this observation: “I got more e-mail this week on this question than any other question. And it is about immigration.”

The issue couldn’t emerge in 2004 because there was no difference between the candidates regarding it. They scored points against each other while debating, but nothing rose above the level of a difference without a distinction. Both supported “comprehensive immigration reform,” the only variation was President Bush’s greater support for guest worker programs. Sen.

Kerry, who used most of his allotted time embroidering his response to a previous question, briefly attacked the President for not implementing “comprehensive immigration reform” fast enough. That was the extent of his criticism. Thanks to Bob Schieffer the issue that dare not speak its name was finally broached, but both candidates upheld the prevailing bipartisan orthodoxy.

It’s unlikely we’ll be hearing from tweedledum and tweedledee when the issue is raised in 2008. It is not premature to announce the demise of bipartisanship with regard to immigration policy at the level of the presidential candidates. The frontrunners for the GOP nomination all opposed S.1639 as well as the policy it embodies. As noted, each is trying to position himself as toughest on the issue. Romney threw the first punch, chiding Giuliani for maintaining New York City’s status as a “sanctuary city” when he was mayor and a leading advocate of immigrant rights. One of Giuliani’s greatest challenges is proving his conversion to enforcement-only is authentic. Giuliani responded with a *tu quoque* defense, claiming that illegal immigration rose sharply in Massachusetts when Romney was governor. One of the *Washington Post*’s political bloggers, Chris Cillizza, in a piece titled “Giuliani Pushes Back on Immigration Issue” (8/15/07) mentions that Giuliani will be foregrounding his tough policies on immigration when he goes to South Carolina, will link the issue of illegal immigration to national security and is appointing a high-powered “Immigration Advisory Board” comprised largely of individuals with border enforcement credentials to underscore the seriousness of his response to the immigration crisis. During the Republican Debate in Orlando on October 21, Thompson entered the melee, piling on by attacking Giuliani for making New York a “Sanctuary City.” When Thompson was in the Senate he only received a grade of C- from a group opposed to “comprehensive immigration reform,” but he has now adopted the toughest set of policy positions of the leading candidates. Finally, the newly emergent player, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, has also put forth a tough immigration plan ostensibly rejecting amnesty, largely borrowed (with credit) from a piece written for *National Review* by Center for Immigration Studies Executive Director Mark Krikorian.

Opponents of “comprehensive immigration reform” now have all the frontrunner candidates, one the likely nominee, who appear committed to the issue and recognize its power to invigorate the Republican base and attract voters across the spectrum, especially independents. Even Democratic strategists recognize its potential as a powerful “wedge issue.” The Republican opponent of “comprehensive immigration reform”

will also have at least one strong ally in the mainstream media: Lou Dobbs of CNN has made the issue a personal crusade, and brings his great personal popularity and authority as a CNN anchor to the issue.

The proposition that immigration will be a key issue rests on solid ground. The same data that show the issue’s high salience also show strong majorities from virtually every demographic surveyed oppose amnesty, any increase in immigration (this includes Hispanics), and favor attrition of the illegal population through strict border control and vigorous internal law enforcement. The adherence of a huge majority of Americans to these positions is noteworthy not only because every mainstream source of news and opinion takes the opposite view but also because the American public maintains this view in the face of disapproval from a host of influential national institutions, including the governing bodies of many religious organizations, the human relations and human rights community, what’s left of the Civil Rights community, essentially the whole of the “chattering classes,” virtually the entire academic world, not to mention every candidate in the Democratic Party.

2008 is also very different because a well-organized, exponentially growing, passionate nationwide grassroots movement against Bush-Kennedy immigration policy not only exists but has already tasted victory in major legislative battles in Congress and in states, counties, and municipalities across America: it senses it could determine the outcome of the presidential election. It is exercising huge influence on the nominating process in the Republican Party and is causing consternation among a growing number of congressional Democrats, many of whom will likely break with the party’s leadership over this issue.

Nor is it inconceivable the eventual Democratic nominee will abandon the party’s current position and follow Bill Clinton’s strategy on welfare: his 180-degree shift in favor of welfare reform deprived Republicans of one of their most potent weapons against the Democrats. Adumbrations of this possibility are discernible in Sen. Clinton’s incipient triangulation on the issue. After her embarrassing twists and turns she finally came out against driver’s licenses for illegal aliens, for which she was booed at the Brown & Black Forum in Des Moines. At the Heartland Democratic Forum in Des Moines, she was booed once more for being the one frontrunner that refused to pledge herself to introduce legislation to amnesty all illegal aliens within the first 100 days of her administration. She did not disown her past support for “comprehensive immigration reform,” still calling it a priority, but her unwillingness to make this commitment

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speaks louder than repetitions of past positions. This may be a sign of Clintonesque savvy. Perhaps she will go to the mountain in the midst of the campaign and come down having heard the voice of God commanding her to listen to the American people.

It will be objected that with other issues – “electability,” the war in Iraq, health care – that dominate the same news sources that censor immigration it will make it impossible for the issue to emerge and affect the election’s outcome. This analysis is mistaken.

With Iraq receding as an issue and health care complex and likely incomprehensible, immigration receives an enormous boost. The public has been immersed in it for well over a year, with a significant percentage of Americans being familiar with at least several of its leading components. Passions run deep with regard to it. Despite predictable efforts by the Democrats to downplay what is understood to be a losing issue for

them, and even with the connivance of mainstream mass media to keep it on the periphery, the issue will defy all efforts to be silenced.

Even in the unlikely event the G.O.P. fails to give the issue top billing, it could still prove decisive. For that to happen the one thing needful is the intervention of a *deus ex machina* in the form of just one question about immigration by one moderator at one presidential debate. Asking that question may require a journalist with the courage to replicate the role of the renegade news anchor Peter Finch played in the movie *Network*, one who indulges in outbursts of truth telling, or a professional entrepreneur who wishes to make history. One question will suffice – it could be about illegal immigration, increasing or decreasing immigration, or how to be restore American sovereignty – to determine who will be the next president.



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## Immigration, Mainstream Media, and the 2008 Election

By Stephen Steinlight

Two political narratives – one, at least, of indisputable importance to America’s future – have been unfolding simultaneously for months to an unusually rapid national audience and the quickening attention of millions more: the exceptionally swift takeoff of the 2008 presidential race and the furious populist revolt against Bush-Kennedy “comprehensive immigration reform.” Jockeying among states for the national spotlight and outside influence on the nominating process will produce the earliest primaries in U.S. history, wherever and in whatever order they occur. Nearly 50 televised debates, candidate forums, and Q&A’s have taken place thus far for an election still nearly a year away, with more scheduled almost weekly, and the primaries will pick up the pace. Many potential voters appear moderately engaged rather than already over-saturated, and early indications suggest greater interest than in 2004. The biggest audience thus far for the current series of debates was 3.1 million viewers for the Republican debate in Durham, N.H., on Fox News on September 5; at the identical point in the campaign of 2004, the largest was an estimated 1.8 million for a Democratic debate on CNN.

Center for Immigration Studies  
1522 K Street, NW, Suite 820  
Washington, DC 20005-1202  
(202) 466-8185  
center@cis.org  
www.cis.org



Center for Immigration Studies  
1522 K Street, NW, Suite 820  
Washington, DC 20005-1202  
(202) 466-8185 • (202) 466-8076  
center@cis.org • www.cis.org

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