

While politicians and multinational corporations extol the virtues of NAFTA and "free trade" (in goods, not flesh), the ominous curtain is already up in a six-mile section at the border crossing at Mexicali; two miles are being erected but are not yet finished at Naco; and at Nogales, sixty miles south of Tucson, the steel wall has been all rubber-stamped and awaits construction likely to begin in March. Like the pathetic multimillion-dollar "antidrug" border surveillance balloons that were continually deflated by high winds and made only a couple of meager interceptions before they blew away, the fence along the border is a theatrical prop, a bit of pork for contractors. Border entrepreneurs have already used blowtorches to cut passageways through the fence to collect "tolls," and are doing a brisk business. Back in Washington, the I.N.S. announces a \$300 million computer contract to modernize its record-keeping and Congress passes a crime bill that shunts \$255 million to the I.N.S. for 1995, \$181 million earmarked for border control, which is to include 700 new partners for the men who stopped Gus and me in our travels, and the history professor, and my friend's father, and as many as they could from South Tucson.

It is no use; borders haven't worked, and they won't work, not now, as the indigenous people of the Americas reassert their kinship and solidarity with one another. A mass migration is already under way; its roots are not simply economic. The Uto-Aztecan languages are spoken as far north as Taos Pueblo near the Colorado border, all the way south to Mexico City. Before the arrival of the Europeans, the indigenous communities throughout this region not only conducted commerce, the people shared cosmologies, and oral narratives about the Maize Mother, the Twin Brothers and their Grandmother, Spider Woman, as well as Quetzalcoatl the benevolent snake. The great human migration within the Americas cannot be stopped; human beings are natural forces of the Earth, just as rivers and winds are natural forces.

Deep down the issue is simple: The so-called "Indian Wars" from the days of Sitting Bull and Red Cloud have never really ended in the Americas. The Indian people of southern Mexico, of Guatemala and those left in El Salvador, too, are still fighting for their lives and for their land against the "cavalry" patrols sent out by the governments of those lands. The Americas are Indian country, and the "Indian problem" is not about to go away.

One evening at sundown, we were stopped in traffic at a railroad crossing in downtown Tucson while a freight train passed us, slowly gaining speed as it headed north to Phoenix. In the twilight I saw the most amazing sight: Dozens of human beings, mostly young men, were riding the train; everywhere, on flat cars, inside open boxcars, perched on top of boxcars, hanging off ladders on tank cars and between boxcars. I couldn't count fast enough, but I saw fifty or sixty people headed north. They were dark young men, Indian and mestizo; they were smiling and a few of them waved at us in our cars. I was reminded of the ancient story of Aztlán, told by the Aztecs but known in other Uto-Aztecan communities as well. Aztlán is the beautiful land to the north, the origin place of the Aztec people. I don't remember how or why the people left Aztlán to journey farther south, but the old story says that one day, they will return. □

■ 'SAVE OUR STATE' INITIATIVE

Bashing Illegals In California

ELIZABETH KADETSKY

Parrish Goodman had just saved a burdened shopper the trouble of returning her grocery cart and was back at the expense of sidewalk outside Ralph's supermarket in West Los Angeles competing with the whoosh of the electric doors. Goodman greeted all who passed in such a friendly way that they tended to thank him for his cryptic, millionth-generation photocopies that were equal parts longhand and typewriter script. "You'll be voting on this in November," he'd say, winking, all courtesy and ambiguity.

Goodman was campaigning for Proposition 187, the grandiosely titled "Save Our State" ballot initiative that, if passed this November and validated by the courts over the next several years, will use strict verification requirements to prevent California's estimated 1.7 million undocumented immigrants from partaking of every form of public welfare including non-emergency medical care, prenatal clinics and public schools. The measure would require employees at public health facilities, welfare offices, police departments and schools to demand proof of legal residency and to report those who can't produce it to the Immigration and Naturalization Service; it also calls for stiff penalties for creating or using false documents. While conceding that the measure actually does nothing to deter immigration at its source—at the border and with the employers who encourage workers to cross it—advocates say S.O.S. responds to California's economic downturn by making life so difficult for the undocumented that they will either go home or never show up to begin with.

The opposition runs the gamut from those who dispute the premise that immigrants contribute to hard times to those who argue that the initiative scapegoats children, lets employers off the hook, inefficiently enlists public employees to do the work of the I.N.S. and violates several federal mandates as well as a Supreme Court decision granting all children the right to free education. That several of the state's major newspapers and a cross section of city governments, school districts, health associations and law-enforcement officials have opposed Save Our State as racist, xenophobic, ineffectual, costly—and just meanspirited—would seem enough to disqualify the avuncular Goodman from its sponsor's ranks.

But Goodman is not alone among Californians, who have responded to the plummeting indicators in almost every measure of quality of life by turning their bitter gaze toward the nation's undocumented immigrants, 43 percent of whom land

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in California. It's no news that California—strapped by the country's second-weakest economy, four years of budget shortfalls, the most crowded classrooms in the nation and pockets of the worst smog and traffic—is no longer the “golden door” the Grateful Dead still sometimes sing about.

Discontent at the condition of the Golden State has exploded in the faces of immigrants, particularly those from Latin America. The American Friends Service Committee border monitoring project investigates two or three incidents of anti-immigrant violence per month. This atmosphere of panic owes its fire to a network of several dozen mostly new grass-roots organizations whose work, fanned by the goading rhetoric of politicians like incumbent Governor Pete Wilson, has culminated with S.O.S. The authors of S.O.S. have so successfully tapped into a popular sentiment and movement that the group's P.O. box collects as many as 1,000 pieces of mail a day. S.O.S. has had no trouble recruiting volunteers, and those volunteers had an equally easy ride gathering 400,000 of the signatures needed to qualify the initiative for the ballot.

A grass-roots mobilization of this scale stands out sharply against, say, that of Philip Morris, which paid a famously uninformed army of signature-gatherers \$1.7 million to qualify its smoking initiative for this year's California ballot. In an election in which gubernatorial candidates are expected to spend \$25 million each, S.O.S. had raised only \$336,000 by June 30, less than any other initiative campaign on the ballot. Nearly a quarter of the S.O.S. total was in contributions smaller than \$100.

Also unlike the corporate maneuverers behind the bulk of the season's initiatives, S.O.S.'s core supporters are a ragtag movement replete with registered Greens, Democrats, Perotists, distributors of New Age healing products and leaders of the Republican Party. The participants have little in common, but their rhetoric of invasion—a kaffeeklatsch in the Southern California town of Bellflower calls itself *We Stand Ready*—and the virulence of their wrath. One S.O.S. organizer, Bette Hammond, drove me through her town's immigrant quarter ranting about an imagined “stench of urine” and pointing to clusters of streetside day laborers who, she asserted, surely defecated in the nearby bushes. “Impacted, impacted, impacted,” Hammond spit out as she glanced toward apartment complexes in various states of disrepair. “They come here, they have their babies, and after that they become citizens and

all those children use those social services.” Barbara Kiley, a Prop 187 backer who is also mayor of the Orange County town of Yorba Linda, described such children to one reporter as “those little fuckers.”

More established right-wing figures have shown up to exploit such sentiments and give mileage to the initiative. In a previously unreported link to the Christian right, Rob Hurtt, a millionaire state senator from Santa Ana, has backed S.O.S. with a \$15,000 loan through his business, Container Supply Corporation. Hurtt, who is among S.O.S.'s top six contributors, is also one of four deep pockets behind Allied Business PAC, a funding juggernaut that pumped \$3 million into the state's 1992 elections and placed fifteen right-wing Christians in the state legislature.

Richard Mountjoy, a finger-jabbing right-wing Republican state assemblyman from east L.A. County, took up the anti-immigrant torch when, he told me, he foresaw “a heated campaign” for re-election in 1992. He has since become the movement's most tenacious government spokesman, introducing ten mostly unsuccessful bills in the state legislature that foreshadowed Prop 187 (one would make it a felony to use a false ID). This year Mountjoy one-upped even Prop 187 with a pending bill that would disqualify native-born children of undocumented mothers from their Fourteenth Amendment right to U.S. citizenship. A self-proclaimed “expert” on immigration, Mountjoy told me he wanted a crackdown on illegal immigration from countries other than Mexico, such as Puerto Rico, where, unbeknownst to the assemblyman, everyone is a U.S. citizen. Mountjoy, who has contributed \$43,000 to S.O.S., has cynically blamed immigrants for the state's budget crisis after having built his own career campaigning for Proposition 13, the 1978 antitax initiative that is now acknowledged by experts on all sides as the *actual* cause of that crisis. Other top backers include Don Rogers, a state senator from outside Palm Springs who kicked in \$20,000 and is perhaps best known for his association with the white supremacist Christian Identity movement.

Mountjoy and Rogers are not alone in lending the movement for S.O.S. a racist patina. The measure is backed by the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), an outgrowth of the environmentally leaning Zero Population Growth that has received at least \$800,000 from the Pioneer Fund, a notorious right-wing philanthropy that sponsors studies on topics like race and I.Q.

While endorsing the measure, FAIR spokesman Ira Mehlman now distances his group from the S.O.S. organization. Harold Ezell, an S.O.S. co-author, corroborates Mehlman's ambivalence by bitterly noting that FAIR “never gave a dime” to S.O.S. But FAIR's direct link to S.O.S. comes in the person of Alan Nelson, a former I.N.S. director with a WASP-ish telegenic presence who wrote Mountjoy's bills along with other anti-immigrant legislation while working for FAIR in the state capital last year. When FAIR chose not to renew Nelson's contract this May, Nelson cannibalized those bills to create S.O.S. “We want to demagnetize the draw for illegal aliens,” Nelson told me icily in his office last year.

Nelson and Ezell have since disassociated themselves from

The Nation.

WASHINGTON INTERN

The Nation is looking for an intern for its Washington office for the fall term, from now until December 16. Please send a résumé, cover letter, two letters of reference and two writing samples to David Corn, *The Nation*, 110 Maryland Ave., N.E., Suite 308, Washington, DC 20002. For more information call (202) 546-2239.

S.O.S.'s kooky day-to-day custodians, but they continue to campaign for the measure and have co-founded an organization that plans to export Proposition 187 to other states. For their part, both were key figures in the Reagan Administration I.N.S.—Nelson was its director and Ezell was Western Regional Chief—at the time of two scathing General Accounting Office reports and a Justice Department investigation that criticized the agency for political favoritism in admitting immigrants, overhiring of Border Patrol guards and disorganization.

Ezell now runs a consulting firm that among other things arranges relocations to Southern California for Korean and Taiwanese garment manufacturers—an industry chronically dependent on undocumented labor.

If S.O.S.'s visible advocates personify either fringe populism or cynical manipulation of public sentiment for political gain, their movement has crossed over to the mainstream. Sixty-two percent of Californians supported S.O.S. in a September *Los Angeles Times* poll; however, voters' visceral reaction fades when asked in other polls about the particulars of the proposition, such as yanking children from public schools or denying medical care, which are opposed by 54 percent and 74 percent, respectively. Still, the initiative is expected to pass.

S.O.S. support is concentrated in areas least affected by the recession or immigration.

Despite the verbiage about immigrants' economic impact, polls show supporters span the political and economic spectrums and are not more likely to have been adversely affected by the recession. Most of S.O.S.'s support, as well as its most vocal advocates, are actually concentrated in areas least affected by the recession or by the state's shifting multicultural composition.

S.O.S. is most popular in Orange County, the sterile mid-zone of low-slung shopping malls between border San Diego and multicultural Los Angeles. It's the region that brought us Richard Nixon, Disneyland and S.O.S.'s ten authors. Here, only 7 percent live in poverty, as opposed to 17.5 percent in Los Angeles.

Bette Hammond lives in San Rafael, where she moved from a Boston suburb in 1981, bought a motorcycle and planned "to get the freedom that one hears about from California." For her the dream is this Marin County enclave that is 84 percent white, enjoys the well-above-average median family income of \$54,000, the well-below-average unemployment rate of 6 percent—and probably has more hot tubs per capita than any place in the world.

These demographics suggest that Ron Prince, the vampirishly charming chairman of the Save Our State Committee, was disingenuous in recommending as a representative volunteer Parrish Goodman, who is African-American. Goodman likewise planned to illustrate "how the African-American

community is organizing around S.O.S."—though he was unable to conjure up one other African-American S.O.S. volunteer besides himself. In fact, anti-immigrant sentiment is concentrated among whites: 59 percent of white people in California believe that children of undocumented immigrants should be turned away from the schools. This contrasts with 41 percent of African-Americans and Asians, and 22 percent of Latinos, according to a Field Institute poll.

A former Black Panther who hails from New York City and is now a union computer technician for the telephone company, Goodman nevertheless exploits black/Latino tensions by harping on a "fight over jobs" in the ethnically volatile African-American and Latino South Central district. Cruising down Venice Boulevard in his white Camaro, Goodman speed-surfed the AM talk-radio channels as his placid surface cracked into little slivers of invective: "These people want you to be like them, poor and mumbling in half-Spanish and half-English." Then Goodman, who came to California in 1980 in search of a "change of attitude," turned calm, almost wistful. "I thought California was supposed to be palm trees and beautiful girls on the beach. Instead we got a gang war. You almost have an enemy presence in your midst."

The backers of S.O.S. believe there is an enemy presence everywhere. Ron Prince speaks of "threats" with the hushed paranoia of a man under siege. He will not divulge the whereabouts of the group's headquarters in Tustin, a sleepy town in Orange County; when asked about the secrecy, Bill Dasher, the one volunteer who works with Prince in their Tustin office, cited "security" problems that had already forced the group to change headquarters.

Prince's mostly bogus claims of harassment include the charge that the Santa Ana Post Office withheld mail for several weeks, accounting for a precipitate decline in the arrival of signed petitions and revealing the hand of an evil "alien" within the Postal Service. The Santa Ana Post Office's Terri Bouffiou responded that an investigation into Prince's charges turned up nothing. The allegation, she added, was "absurd."

Prince is loath to reveal anything about himself other than that he is an accountant and comes from a once-prominent French-American Los Angeles family, but even that admission offers a significant and unreported glimpse into one of the group's many contradictions. Prince, who refers to himself as "about as American as you can get," is in fact the proud descendant of Jean Louis Vignes, who is best remembered in California history for having spurned the Spanish aristocracy by marrying a Mexican-born Indian. This means that Prince's own heritage marks him as an original mestizo harking from the California that was part of Mexico until 1848—the historic link between Mexico and California being one that many see as justification enough for the current movement of Mexicans into the state.

This is an interesting twist because S.O.S. advocates like to interpret the former Mexican ascendance in the Southwest as proof that the Mexican-American War is still going on. Goodman believes all immigrants from Mexico are knowing participants in a "conspiracy" to "take over all this territory that

was theirs back in the 1800s." He makes his point by absurdly displaying literature from U.S. (i.e., not Mexican) groups like MEChA, a Chicano student organization, and the newly re-born Chicano nationalist Brown Berets, who do sometimes argue that the real "illegal aliens" invaded Aztlán—the Aztec equivalent of Israel—with Christopher Columbus.

As the rhetoric flies, California does wrestle with the confounding fact that immigrants strain a social and physical infrastructure already burdened by slow economic expansion and a growing population. None of the dozens of wildly contradictory studies circulating among participants in the immigration debate can adequately estimate the real numbers and costs of undocumented immigrants in California, but several concur that while low-wage immigrants contribute to and are even crucial to the state's long-term economic vitality, those immigrants are a short-term burden on state and city governments that cannot, as one study from the RAND Corporation puts it, "borrow against their future." The most resonant of several studies, by Los Angeles County, reported that immigrants (legal and illegal) and their children cost the county \$954 million a year in public services but give back far more, \$4.3 billion—albeit in taxes paid to the federal government. That discrepancy has led to bipartisan railing against federal mandates—the same mandates that S.O.S. violates—that require states to provide social services without the federal dollars to pay for them. In any case, while S.O.S. ostensibly un- does that burden to the state, the state's legislative analysis has calculated that the measure would actually cost billions in the long run.

Even the cost-benefit equation, however, fails to address the fact that immigration from Mexico is a logical outgrowth of the economic interdependency of Mexico and the United States. State Assembly Speaker Willie Brown did, however, call for seizing the assets of employers such as hoteliers who are found to depend on underpaid and poorly treated undocumented immigrants. This proposal elicited an amusing silence from Republican fist-thumpers like Governor Wilson, who have done everything in their power to see that employer-sanction provisions in the 1986 Immigration Reform and

Control Act remain unenforced. After eight years, Los Angeles saw the first major criminal employer sanction doled out this fall.

That a poorly conceived initiative sponsored by fringe activists with a persecution complex will probably win the support of a majority of voters in November points to the willingness of politicians to play the immigration card in a volatile social climate. Viewers watch Pete Wilson television ads that show pandemonium, in wobbly black and white, at the Tijuana/San Diego border checkpoint. It's an image of some fifty people running through the customs gates; it was filmed not during the course of regular affairs but during a one-day border rush that was, for complicated reasons, essentially engineered by the Border Patrol.

Democrats have in general failed at providing leadership to sway the public from its xenophobic frenzy. Senator Barbara Boxer has grandstanded with an illegal proposal to use federal drug interdiction money to dispatch the National Guard to the border—whose militarization has already led to vastly increased human rights violations. Gubernatorial candidate Kathleen Brown and Senator Dianne Feinstein have concurred on calls for a "beefed up" Border Patrol and a \$1 border crossing toll—and Feinstein has even indicated she may support S.O.S.

Traditional immigrant advocacy groups have for their part been cowed by the shrillness of the anti-immigrant rhetoric, and groups like the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund have joined the better-funded of the state's two anti-initiative committees. But Taxpayers Against Proposition 187, an effort of the Republican-leaning P.R. firm Woodward & McDowell, has spent so much energy nodding its head about the presumed "problem" of illegal immigration that individuals like Maria Eraña from the American Friends Service Committee in San Diego have been left with the feeling that "even if Proposition 187 is defeated, the use of these kinds of arguments will be detrimental to all of us afterwards." Eraña and several Latino groups have bristled at Taxpayers' tactics and formed their own Californians Against Proposition 187.



"Everyone is so concerned about keeping the confidence of white people," Eraña added. "They're giving in to all this propaganda. They're concerned that if they take a stand that questions the immigration policies they will be flooded by opposition. If they defend illegal immigrants they will be considered traitors and sellouts." □

■ WAKE OF THE GOLDEN VENTURE

China's Human Traffickers

PETER KWONG

Mr. Zheng from Wenzhou, China, may be unlucky to have been one of the passengers on the ill-fated Golden Venture, which rammed the shore of Queens more than a year ago. He is, however, the envy of his fellow inmates at the Metropolitan Detention Center in lower Manhattan, because his wife comes to see him *every day* during visiting hours. There is a story of bitter irony. Mrs. Zheng, who came to America illegally three years ago, understood right away that it was not what it was cracked up to be, considering the harsh working conditions, low wages and unbearable pressure of paying off a \$30,000 debt to her "snakehead" (human smuggler) within three years. She advised her husband to hold off on his plans to come. Unfortunately, Zheng took that to mean that she had found someone else, so he decided to leave their 4-year-old daughter with his parents and started his own journey to the States—first by bus to the China-Burma border, then on foot through the jungle to Thailand. Mrs. Zheng found this out only when he cabled from Bangkok asking for \$1,700 to pay for the cost of continuing the journey. The snakehead had promised passage by plane to New York; Zheng ended up boarding a ship that took him to Singapore, then to Mauritius in the Indian Ocean and finally to Kenya. There, he waited for six months before embarking on the Golden Venture with nearly 300 other Chinese immigrants. The rest is history.

Mrs. Zheng, an ever-devoted wife, has retained a lawyer, and has been assiduously lobbying human rights and church groups to fight for her husband's release. It has not been easy. She does not speak English and works eleven hours a day as a seamstress in a Chinese-owned garment factory on Seventh Avenue, then travels back to her Queens apartment, which she shares with five other "snake people," undocumented workers from Wenzhou. After dinner, she spends two more hours at her sewing machine assembling pieces she has taken home from the factory. With all the unanticipated expenses involving her husband, she has yet to pay off half her own "transportation fee," as she puts it. Somewhat bitterly, she asks: "Hundreds of illegals are still coming from China every week.

Peter Kwong, director of the Asian American Studies Program at Hunter College, is also a professor at the City University of New York Graduate Center.

So why is my husband still in jail? We are, after all, law-abiding and decent people." She urged me and two other American journalists to visit Wenzhou and see for ourselves.

The Zheng family lives on the rural outskirts of Wenzhou, which is in Zhejiang Province, more than 200 miles south of Shanghai. Its inhabitants are known for their seafaring heritage as well as their entrepreneurship. In recent years, fueled by investments from the overseas Chinese in Taiwan and Hong Kong, Wenzhou has become part of the booming economy of southern China that has captured so much attention abroad. Wenzhou claims to be the button-manufacturing center of the world. It is also the second-largest source of illegal emigration from China after Fuzhou, which lies to its south.

Once in Wenzhou, we took a ferry, a bus and a pedicab to get to the Zhengs'. After viewing the videotape we had shot of Mr. Zheng in his yellow prison garb, his mother wept. "He has aged so much—all skin and bones. I can't believe that's him. We always thought America was a humane country. How can you lock him up like this for so long like an animal?"

We explained to the grieving family that the Clinton Administration is caught in a public relations dilemma. It cannot release the Golden Venture inmates lest it encourage more illegals, invoking the specter of the "yellow peril" from anti-immigrant groups. Conversely, it faces reproach from humanitarian groups and those critical of the Chinese government's record on human rights, including conservative right-to-life organizations who denounce China's "one child" policy (the basis for the inmates' plea for political asylum). We suggested that their son might soon be released, or at least returned to China, after public attention drifts away from the issue.

Mother Zheng leapt up in alarm at the last suggestion: "No! No! They cannot send him back! That would be the death of this family. I'll commit suicide." Her daughter revealed that they had already borrowed money at a high interest rate for Zheng's journey, expecting to be paid back as soon as he started working in America. Now that he is in prison, they have to keep borrowing just to pay off the interest. If he were sent back to China, the family would have no way of coming up with that large a sum, not to mention the fines and imprisonment the Chinese authorities might impose on him.

The Zhengs are not the only family in this dire predicament. As news of our presence spread, other families who had relatives on the Golden Venture began to appear. Of the 276 Golden Venture inmates, forty are from the Wenzhou area (the rest are from Fuzhou) and twenty-five are from Zheng's village and neighboring Jiudu Island. Surprisingly, almost all of the few thousand residents of the region are Christians. We were told that the local congregation had a sixty-year history, predating the Communist revolution. On our first evening there, a Sunday, the minister invited us to attend a special prayer service for the Golden Venture prisoners. Of the 300 who attended, seventy-five were relatives; the congregation's sobs and anguished prayers made it clear that this community has suffered a major calamity.

They have no contact with American authorities, and the