

# Alien Nightmares

*Immigrants take a hit in the Inquirer*

by Shekhar Deshpande

In September, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* ran a major investigative report titled "America: Who Stole the Dream?"

The series is a far reaching and comprehensive analysis of the current American economic system, written mostly from the populist point of view for immediate consumption.

The authors analyzed the employment market for the average American as the distribution of wealth among America's rich, poor and in-between citizens. Since it is publicized as a major event for the popular consciousness and also through a certain celebratory admiration by its readers on the streets, the series will remain, for a while anyway, a prominent influence on interpreting the woes of ordinary Americans.

Since most Americans understand their collective plight through their own jobs, two reports in the series are of particular interest to us: "Part One: How U. S. Policies Are Costing American Jobs" (Sept. 8) and "Part Six: Shortcut to U. S. Jobs (Sept. 15). Not surprisingly immigrants make the lead in both stories.

There is sound argument to be made about the substantiveness of the whole report and its economic analysis. But the most urgent perspective that the report begs is that it simplifies the grave problem of the U.S. economy for the easy digestion of its readers. Then, the reductive and ethnocentric bias of the whole series makes sound economic analysis, if it were that, less palatable.

As the two journalists say, the report was based in part on thousands of interviews across America. Given the systemic propensity to see everything



through the eyes of individuals, the stark facts are structured around specific modes of sufferings. If the rich are gotten richer and the poor poorer (are you surprised?), the middle class, in the old sense of the term, is disappearing. The overall effect, though, has been a successful bifurcation of social policy.

The economic moves in this country have been charted by the very rich and their corporations and the U.S. government, through its politicians and petty operatives.

The middle class wields enough power to offer swing votes every four years, but it is incapable of doing anything else. And, systematically, as well as ideologically, the middle class, whether it has shrunk or swollen, has experienced a comparable upgrading of its living standards on a global scale.

As a result, Donald L. Bartlett and James B. Steele, the journalist-authors of the report, take on the U. S. Government policies in Washington, D. C. and ignore the corporate control of the U.S. economy, which is not only skillfully independent, but which has been and which is poised to take over the individual lives in a troubled world of economic policy.

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The arguments that Jesse Jackson has been making for years, and Ralph Nader is at it again this year, is that we are governed by the principles of fragmentary control. The systemic injustices of the situation require a full attention to the U. S. corporate greed and the complicity of government policy. Reminding readers that their own jobs are taken away because of government policy only leaves room for the complicity of those who control to go unchecked.

The second report in question has to do with the way in which immigrants take away from Americans. Elsewhere in the series, they have also provided an explanation of how "foreign" labor working for U.S. companies and capital abroad is stealing jobs from Americans. In either case, the villains are "foreigners," whether they came here or not.

Since immigration policies of 1990 make it easier for employers to hire immigrants (the idea was to discourage illegal immigrants), the report says that legal immigrants have been taking jobs away from Americans. They single out the procedural proviso in the immigration application to the IRS that no American is found for the job that the immigrant is applying for.

The number of legal immigrants allowed since 1990 (six million), say the journalists, exceeds the number of jobless in 46 states. In other words, if the U.S. had not brought in the immigrants, for whatever reason, the U.S. citizens would have their jobs today.

The economic role played by the immigrants in this economy has always been reduced to such simplifications. Some immigrants contribute to this by arguing their personal worth to the system and their own contributions to it. The fallacy and the pretentiousness of this position is insidious at best. How is it that the system invites immigrants to kill jobs for its own people? Is this a mere bureaucratic error, or a plot in favor of immigrants? Can the U.S. government be so callous and unpatriotic to use the damn foreigners against its own citizens?

Of course, we can make an argument that immigrants offer skilled and readymade labor, for which an entirely different system is supported heavily by the taxpayers of another country. But that is still diverting attention from a much more fundamental issue. The real villain in this process is the capital. It is the accumulation of wealth in this country that commands the transportation of labor across borders.

If Americans see their jobs taken away by foreigners (and without further surprise, they imply the "browns" — European immigrants are not the problem), it is because the capital that they collectively own commands the import of labor and in essence that contributes to their collective (not individual) standard of living.

This may be a cynically unpleasant view to digest, but whether American jobs are going abroad or they are slipping domestically, Americans are benefiting collectively.

Unless we see it as a systemic problem, screaming and baiting against aliens may win journalistic dreamers a Pulitzer Prize, but it will not contribute to the nation's collective well-being.

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*"Here comes, 'you're all a bunch of animals'."*