

Migration In Contentious Political Times



Program Schedule: Friday, Sept. 18 | Atkinson Hall

Welcome and Introductions	8:45 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.
Keynote Lecture	9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.
Research Presentations	10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
Break	11:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.
Research Presentations	11:15 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Lunch + Poster Session	12:00 p.m – 1:00 p.m
Panel: Borders, Polarization, and Belonging	1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Research Presentations	2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Break	3:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Panel: A Way Forward: Methodological & Theoretical Perspectives for Studying Migration	3:30 p.m – 4:30 p.m.
Closing Remarks	4:30 p.m.

Migrations Program

Einaudi Center for International Studies



Welcome and Introductions

8:45 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.

Katie Fiorella, Faculty Director, Migrations Program; Associate Professor
Department of Public and Ecosystem Health

Adolfho Romero, Doctoral Student, Department of Global Development

Keynote Lecture

9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

"Seeing The Americas Whole": Richard Rodriguez's Thesis on Migrants and Migration in the Era of American Carnage

Paul Ortiz, Professor of Labor History, School of Industrial and Labor Relations

Author Richard Rodriguez observed at a White House conference in 1994 that, "The peasants of Puerto Rico and Mexico were the first people who saw the hemisphere whole." Rodriguez's thesis was at once controversial and quickly forgotten. Typically, "migrants" have been valued or known for their labor or for the ways they have been exploited. In contrast, Rodriguez, a Mexican-American author, argued that migrants because of their (our) experiences and insights have been the key discoverers of the Americas. Rodriguez's provocative thesis animates this keynote which will explore the topic of migration through the lens of testimonios and the writings of novelists including Carlos Fuentes, Edwige Danticat, Julissa Arce and others to explore topics such as assimilation, the current conjuncture of anti-immigrant politics, and the future of the labor movement.

Paul Ortiz is Professor of Labor History at Cornell University and Director of Graduate Studies for Cornell's Latina/o Studies Program. He joined Cornell in 2024 after serving as Director of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program and as a professor of history at the University of Florida. A PEN-award winning writer and a leading historian of labor, race, and social movements, Ortiz is the author/co-author of influential books including *Emancipation Betrayed* and *An African American and Latinx History of the United States* (recognized by *Fortune* as one of the "10 books on American history that actually reflect the United States"). He is currently writing *A Social Movement History of the United States* for Beacon Press. Paul is co-writing a book with Ibram Kendi and six other senior scholars in African American, Latinx, Asian American, Jewish American, Arab American, Indigenous, and White American history titled *Created (Un) Equal*. The book is based on documents in the National Archives that date from the late colonial period to contemporary US history. Ortiz is writing the chapter on Latinx history. Originally designed to be a multicultural and multi-lingual museum exhibit in Washington DC, the project was canceled by the National Archives before the 2024 Presidential Election. *Created (Un) Equal* will be published by Penguin Random House in 2027.

Session 1: Research Presentations

10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Moderated by Adwoa Tiwaa Ofori Atakorah

Kyunghee Kang, *Doctoral Student, Department of Global Development*

“Environmental Displacement and Protection Crisis in the Humanitarian Development Nexus”

Sudeep Sarkar, *MPS Student, School of Industrial and Labor Relations*

“Displacement as a Weapon: War Crimes and Forced Migration from WW2 to Ukraine”

Min Htut, *MPS/MS Student, Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management*

“The Economics of Despair: Conflicts, Environmental Shocks, and the Supply of Trafficked Labour in Post-Coup Myanmar”

Break

11:00 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.

Session 2: Research Presentations

11:15 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Moderated by Zhixia Carrie Mo

Henry Lyu Cheng, *Doctoral Student, Department of History*

“She Was Never “Liu Lijun”: Racialized Alienage and the Denial of Political Agency”

Saida Hodžić, *Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology and Feminist, Gender & Sexuality Studies*; with **Sophia Spillane**, undergraduate student, English Department, and **Darius Tyler**, undergraduate student, Government and Philosophy Departments.
“Critical/Creative Epistemologies of Temporary Status and of Mapping Refugee and Migrant Deaths”

Lunch and Poster Session

12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Poster Presenters: Undergraduate Students **Sophia Spillane**, **Darius Tyler**, **Lorenzo Morales-DuBois**, **Shaoshao Tang**

Panel 1: Borders, Polarization, and Belonging

1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Moderated by Vicente Mata, Jr.

This panel examines the multifaceted processes of human migration as shaped by state power, polarized public sentiment, and evolving local and federal policies. Panelists will draw on their own research to enrich the conversation around this critical area of study.

Shannon Gleeson is the Edmund Ezra Day Professor at Cornell's School of Industrial and Labor Relations and the Brooks School of Public Policy. Her work examines immigrant rights, labor standards enforcement, and civil society - with recent books including *Legalized Inequalities* (Russell Sage Foundation Press, 2025), *Advancing Immigrant Rights in Houston* (Temple University Press, 2024), and *Scaling Migrant Worker Rights* (University of California Press, 2023).

Jaclyn Kelley-Widmer is a Clinical Professor of Law at Cornell Law School, where she joined the faculty in 2017 and founded and directs Cornell's first 1L clinic, the Immigration Law & Advocacy Clinic (ILAC). She teaches immigration law and related clinical and migration-focused courses, and she directs Path2Papers (P2P), a pro bono effort launched in 2024 to help Dreamers pursue work visas and other pathways to lawful permanent residency. Her practice and scholarship center immigration law across asylum, DACA, naturalization, visas, detention advocacy, and administrative law — often bridging clinical pedagogy with rigorous research.

Session 3: Research Presentations

2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Josefina Rodriguez Pletikotic, *Doctoral Student, Department of Global Development*
"Social Reproduction, Labor Migration, and Transformations in Usibamba's Communal Life (Peru-USA)"

Yinka Adetu, *Doctoral Student, Department of Literatures in English*
"Child Mobility, Trauma, and Postcolonial Identify-Formation in African Travel Narratives"

Miranda Castro, *Doctoral Student, Department of Literatures in English*
"Translating Indigenous and Migrant Relational Geographies in Cristina Rivera Garza's *Autobiography of Cotton*."

Break
3:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

**Panel 2: A Way Forward: Methodological and
Theoretical Perspectives for Studying Migration**
3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Moderated by Adolfo Romero

This panel brings together scholars and practitioners who study and support migration work from distinct vantage points to explore what it means to practice migration – across scholarship, clinical work, and community engagement. Panelists will draw on their own work to reflect on what this practice demands, what sustains it in this moment, and where they see the field moving forward.

Patricia Campos-Medina is a researcher, RTE Faculty, and labor educator focused on the intersection of race, immigration status, and workers' rights. She serves as a Senior Extension Associate Faculty and Executive Director of Cornell ILR's Worker Institute, leading research, policy innovation, and training to advance worker justice and collective bargaining. A political scientist and policy expert, her work also covers women's and voting rights, immigrant worker justice, and U.S. trade relations, and she holds a PhD from Rutgers and a BS and MPA from Cornell.

Bryan L. Sykes is a Professor of Public Policy and Sociology, whose work develops demographic, statistical, and mixed methods to study changing patterns of inequality. His research spans population processes, mass incarceration, global population health, and law & society questions, and it appears across science, social science, and medical journals. He is collaborating on multiple projects — including a \$1.61M randomized field experiment in California counties on court-order compliance and work on how incarceration reshapes demographic outcomes — and he serves as an Associate Editor for Science Advances. His recent work seeks to estimate historical and contemporary cross-national asylum grant rates using multiple methods and data sources.

Closing Remarks
4:30 p.m.

Vicente C. Mata, Jr., *Doctoral Student, Brooks School of Public Policy*

***The Migrations Program** thanks 2025-26 graduate fellows **Vicente Mata, Jr.** and **Adolfo Romero** for their vision in organizing this conference!