

SEATTLE UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC SALONS 2008–2009  
ENGAGING WORLDS, CROSSING BORDERS

The history of the world is the history of the movement of people—from the Rift Valley in Africa to Mesopotamia and then Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Australia. Although the number and origins of immigrants, and their reasons for crossing borders, have varied considerably over time and around the world, the concerns of people about immigrants—fears of cultural and racial inferiority, religious beliefs, and economic instability—remain the same everywhere.

To bring the topic closer to home, why is immigration such a sensitive topic in the United States, a place often called “a nation of immigrants”? Has immigration always been such a sensitive issue here? Historians who study immigration say no, pointing out that immigration was largely a states’ rights issue until the mid-nineteenth century. At that time, racialized hostility to workers from China prompted new definitions of citizenship and the federal government enacted the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. It was only in the 1950s and 1960s that the term “illegal immigrant” came to be attached to Mexican workers at the very moment when the United States was actively encouraging guest workers to come from Mexico.

The Academic Salons in 2008–2009 will open a conversation on what it mean to live in a world where people are constantly crossing borders—physically, geographically, intellectually, culturally, linguistically, and politically. The Salons will engage the entire campus—students, faculty, and staff—in broad-ranging discussions that take up issues such as citizenship, law, language, economics and business, health, history, culture, and religion. We will consider the following questions: Why are people everywhere so deeply concerned about other people today who cross international borders in search of a better life? Do people have a right to move from place to place? What exactly is a migrant? An immigrant? A refugee? What are their legal rights as they cross borders? How does this affect economic policy? Health care? Education? Political citizenship? Law and religion?

To open the conversation, students and faculty will be reading and discussing a vivid portrait of immigrant America, *Crossing into America*. This anthology, edited by Louis G. Mendoza and S. Shankar, brings together stories and memoirs of writers born in the Dominican Republic, Ireland, Mexico, Kashmir, the Philippines, South Africa, South Korea, and Romania, as well as poignant reflections on the immigrant experience by the children of immigrants, including Julia Alvarez, Tara Bahrapour, Frank Chin, Sandra Cisneros, Jamaica Kincaid, Maxine Hong Kingston, Chang-Rae Lee, Li-Young Lee, and Frank McCourt. This book follows these newest arrivals—from their home countries through their engagement with America—and also includes an accessible history of immigration policy, cartoons, and newspaper stories, and a section of conversations with activists, journalists, and scholars working in the front lines of our immigration battles.