



## TRANSCRIPT

### *Key Conversations with Phi Beta Kappa*

#### **Princeton's Doug Massey Unpacks U.S. Migration and Housing Segregation**

The multidisciplinary scholar's wide-ranging interests led him to demography and population research early on. He speaks with Fred about what people generally misunderstand about immigration into the U.S., how border enforcement has backfired, and why racial segregation and housing discrimination persist around the country.

Fred Lawrence:

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Hello and welcome to Key Conversations with Phi Beta Kappa. I'm Fred Lawrence, Secretary and CEO of the Phi Beta Kappa Society.

Since 2018, we've welcomed leading thinkers, visionaries and artists to our podcast. These individuals have shaped our collective understanding of some of today's most pressing and consequential matters, in addition to sharing stories with us about their scholarly and personal journeys.

Many of our guests are Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholars who travel the country to our Phi Beta Kappa chapters, where they spend two days on campus and present free public lectures. We invite you to attend. For more information about Visiting Scholars' lectures, please visit [pbk.org](http://pbk.org).

Today, it's my pleasure to welcome Dr. Douglas S. Massey, the Henry G. Bryant Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs at The Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, where he also serves as Director of the Office of Population Research. His research focuses on international migration, race and housing, discrimination, education, urban poverty stratification, Latin America, especially Mexico. He has extensively published about Mexican immigration and co-authored the first analysis of minority achievement in selective colleges and universities and their social determinants.

Welcome, Dr. Massey.

Dr. Douglas Massey: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

Lawrence:

Good to have you with us. Your research interests cover a wide range and topic after topic that seems ripped right from the headlines, and I want to get to all of that, but I do want to start first with your story growing up in Olympia, Washington, and how did it lead to becoming the scholar that you've become?

Massey:

Olympia was kind of a microcosm of America at the time. I was growing up in the '50s and '60s, and it was the time of the baby boom, all the schools were overcrowded. Olympia was a small town and only had one high school, but it was a very white town, and very limited beyond European-origin people. There were a few Latinos, a few Asians, and a few Polynesian Island people. This is the West Coast. The first Black family moved into Olympia, Washington, when I was about 14 years old, and it was very much a bubble and very much a racially isolated community.

This being the '60s, it was a time of ferment. In my 12th grade civics course, we read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and that was very influential to me, because I knew about the bad people, and the bad sheriffs, and the dogs, and the water hoses in the South, but Malcolm X grew up in the North.

Lawrence:

And he's telling you stories of what's taking place in Boston, the cradle of liberty, and it's a real eye-opening story, isn't it?

Massey:

It is. It was for me. So, I was kind of active in the countercultures. I remember very clearly my high school graduation was June of 1970.

Lawrence:

That sounds like Cambodia Spring and that's the moratorium. That's gonna be Kent State and Jackson State, isn't it?

Massey:

Yes, it is. And the class speaker mentioned all those things in her talk, and at one point told the assembled parents and guests at the graduation that Olympia, Washington, is a white racist ghetto, whereupon-

Lawrence: How'd that go down?

Massey:

Half the audience booed and told her to go to Russia. The other half clapped and said, "Go on! Tell them the truth!" And that kind of encapsulated the times.

Lawrence:

So, from Olympia, you made it about 150 miles up the I-5 to Western Washington in Bellingham, Washington, not all that far from the Canadian border, right?

Massey:

It's about 15 miles from the Canadian border, about 20 miles from Vancouver, and the drinking age in British Columbia was 19, so from college we'd drive up to British Columbia to have a good time.

Lawrence:

And your studies were quite broad in a way. Sociology, anthropology, psychology, Spanish. In retrospect, it all seems to add up to the path that you're going to wind up taking, but did it feel that way at the time? How did you put your college program together with all of that collection of fields of study?

Massey:

No, it wasn't part of a plan. It was entirely fortuitous that later it worked out that all those things fell into place and worked for what I ended up doing in my career, but at the time I was just indecisive and searching for something that really resonated with me, and then late in my career,

I think junior year I discovered demography, which is the study of human populations. Psychology is very rigorous, with a lot of mathematics and statistics, but it's also relevant. It's birth, death, migration, marriage, fundamental things about human existence, and they can make progress, because they agree on methods and try to formulate theories, and over time reach understandings and it's not all relative. So, I decided I wanted to be a demographer and ended up at Princeton University, which was home to the Office of Population Research.

Lawrence: And ultimately wind up back at Princeton.

Massey:

Yeah. I ended up being Director of the Office of Population Research, where I was originally a graduate student. By the time I came back, both the Sociology Department and the Office of Population Research pretty much turned over, so there weren't any people left from when I was a student.

Lawrence:

So, let's dive into a couple of your areas, which as I said are so current in so many of the issues, and one, an obvious place to start is on the American-Mexican border and the work that you've done there. You have offered the provocative thesis that border enforcement by this country has actually backfired, that is to say not only wasn't productive, it was actually counterproductive with the increased resources on the Mexican border. Why would it be counterproductive?

Massey:

Well, historically migration between Mexico and the United States was heavily circular. So, migration from Mexico really starts in earnest in 1907 with a gentlemen's agreement with Japan, where the U.S. wanted to ban Japanese from entering the United States, but Japan was a rising power and they didn't want to suffer the ignominious destiny of being banned from the U.S., so they agreed like gentlemen that if we would agree not to ban them, they would agree to keep their people home and not let them immigrate to the U.S.

And that cut off labor into the Western states, particularly California and the farm sector, and that was the beginning of serious recruitment of Mexican workers. First by the private sector, and then when the U.S. got involved in the First World War, the public sector. The federal government set up a guest worker program. A lot of this movement was circular. Back and forth, back and forth, with people migrating for work and then coming back, but that all came to a grinding halt in 1929, when the stock market crashed and the Depression hit, and between 1929 and 1934, about 400,000 Mexicans were deported from the United States, including many U.S.-born citizen kids. They'd all been there legally, but they were just rounded up and put in cattle cars and brought to the border and dumped across.

Lawrence:

So, these are not even what today we would call Dreamers. These were actually children who were born in the continental United States.

Massey:

They were born in the continental United States and their parents were there legally, because there was no prohibition on the entry of Mexicans to the United States.

Lawrence: And being born in the United States, they then became U.S. citizens.

Massey: U.S. Citizens.

Lawrence: And nonetheless, they were deported.

Massey:

They were deported along with their parents and that unfortunately is still happening today. During the Depression there was no migration, and the Mexican population was cut in half, and then it's not... It's only after the Second World War that migration resumes and Okies that had been migrating ala John Steinbeck for agricultural jobs in California were now working in unionized jobs in the aero and defense industries in California, and they needed workers in the farm fields. Growers prevailed upon the government to set up a temporary worker program known as the Bracero Program.

Millions of Mexicans got contacts with people in the United States, employers in the United States, and learned how to come and go across the border. And then in the 1960s, Congress moved towards the... It was in the middle of the Civil Rights Era, and so they came to see the Bracero Program as an exploitative labor program on par with Southern sharecropping, and they tried to ratchet it down. In 1965, they passed amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act in April, but earlier in January of that year, they had unilaterally terminated the Bracero Program.

Most people think that the 1965 amendments caused Latin American migration to the United States, but it's actually the opposite. Prior to 1965, there were no numerical limits on immigration from any Western Hemisphere country to the United States. So, there were about 50,000 permanent residents coming in from Mexico in the late '50s and about 450,000 guest workers, and suddenly after the '65 amendments took effect in '68, quotas were put on, and in

1976, country quotas were put on, and Mexico went from about half a million people coming in and almost all circulating back and forth, to by the late 1970s, 20,000 visas allocated to Mexico and no guest worker program.

Lawrence:

So, we tend to think of the 1965 law as being an opening of the gates, but in fact at the Mexico border, you're telling us it actually worked quite the other way around.

Massey:

It closed the gates and by 1965, this flow of migrants into the country was very well established and it was serving an economic purpose, and so, when opportunities for legal entry constricted, the flows didn't stop. Some of the legalized migrants kept going, and most of the ones who had come as Braceros but couldn't legalize, they entered as undocumented migrants, and that's the beginning of undocumented migration, which rises from '65 and peaks about 1978, '79.

Lawrence: And that's going to be the seeds of the problems that we're talking about to this very day.

Massey:

That's the seeds of the problem, but like the Bracero Program, the undocumented migration up through 1985 was overwhelmingly seasonal and circular. Over that period from '65 to '85, 85% of undocumented entries were offset by departures in any given year, so the net inflow was small. Then the undocumented population rose from about zero in 1965 up to around three million in 1985. This was the origin of the demonization of Latin American immigrants. Since they were "illegal" migrants, they were by definition criminals and lawbreakers, and began this long growth of the Latino threat narrative in American media.

Lawrence:

Right. Let's bring us up to the current moment and the current moment in a sense is the last few years of heightened focus on the Mexican-American border, which has been highly politicized. It obviously was a major issue in the 2016 presidential campaign with then candidate Trump's famous declaration about "build the wall." Let's do this in pieces. First, the enhanced enforcement at the border goes back before 2016, but you say that actually backfired as a policy. Why was that?

Massey:

Well, when we get to 1985, illegal migration had become a political issue. Politicians were finding it useful as a mobilizing force for their conservative bases, and entrepreneurs within the immigration bureaucracy were looking for ways to get attention and money and power. All this came together with a new focus on border enforcement as a strategy to control the so-called illegal migration that was perceived as out of control.

It was not out of control. It was very regulated. And so, beginning in 1986 with the Immigration Reform and Control Act, we began what proved to be a multi decade militarization of the border. As the Border Patrol goes from a budget of about \$200 million a year up to about \$4 billion a year, the Border Patrol officers go from about 2,000 to about 25,000, and this mass militarization of the border didn't deter people from coming in, because there were still jobs, and they had contacts, and connections, and family members. But what it did was deter them from going back once they crossed the border, because the militarization dramatically increased the dangers of border crossing, because the militarization occurred first in the busiest crossing sectors, which were El Paso and San Diego, and they channeled the flows away from these urban areas and out into the Sonoran Desert, which was much more dangerous.

And what it did was turned what had been a circular flow of male workers going to three states into a permanent population of families living in 50 states. It pushed the migration flows decisively away from California and into the rest of the country during the boom of the 1990s, when jobs were opening up everywhere. And so, suddenly Mexican and Central American migration became a national phenomenon rather than a three-state phenomenon. That only fanned the nativist fuels, because they were going in places where there hadn't been any immigrants before, particularly in the South.

Lawrence: Right.

Massey:

So, basically the massive intervention at the border had no effect on the rate of in-migration, but dramatically reduced the rate of out-migration. Net migration equals in-migration minus out-migration, so we're spending \$3 to \$4 billion a year in order to increase the net inflow of undocumented migrants and accelerate the undocumented population growth by about 82%.

Lawrence: Was any of this observed at the time? Was this part of the discussion?

Massey:

I documented it in real time and started showing people in public media and in testimony before Congress that the militarization of the border was backfiring and it was deterring people from

returning rather than coming. But that fell on deaf ears. For politicians inside the Beltway, it was much more convenient to have the Latino threat out there as a mobilizing device, and they didn't want to hear about the dysfunctional outcomes that stemmed from the militarization of the border. It was actually increasing the number of undocumented residents. What's happened along the border now is what used to be a huge inflow of male workers from Mexico coming in to take jobs on an annual basis, that was tamped down and turned into a permanent population, and then the inflow ended because Mexico became an aging country with low fertility rates. Mexican migration stopped and it's been replaced by a much smaller inflow of Central Americans, who are not men, not males, not workers, but families. Women and children coming as refugees and asylum seekers seeking to escape horrendous conditions in places like El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, and even to a certain extent Nicaragua, that are a direct result of our intervention in the 1980s.

So, basically we intervened in the 1980s, permanently degraded their economies and set off cycles of violence from which they're now trying to escape, and they come to the United States to seek refuge, and we won't honor any of our obligations to take these people in. Unlike what we did in the seventies and early eighties with the so-called boat people from Indochina. We messed up in Indochina, we assumed we had a moral obligation to take these people. We took in 1.3 million people, processed them, they were integrated into American society. But we're not doing the same with Central Americans coming in, even though it's a much smaller inflow and the countries of origin are much smaller than Southeast Asia.

Lawrence:

So, what might have even been a selfless gesture, where just fulfilling an obligation actually turned out to be a pretty good deal for the United States.

Massey: Well, immigrants usually turn out to be a pretty good deal if you give them half a chance.

Lawrence: Well, you and I are both descendants of such people.

Massey: Everybody is.

Lawrence:

Listen, before we leave the Mexican border, I want to shift the topic. You've written about the fascinating story of the votive paintings of Mexican immigrants along the border. Tell us a little bit about this incredibly evocative story of culture coming out of a period of strain, and stress, and difficulty.

Massey:

I studied Spanish from an early age, and so when I started working in Mexico, I made it my business to learn everything I could about Mexican culture and society, the Mexican economy, and its history, and so I acquired a real appreciation for Mexican popular art. I learned a lot from my Mexican colleague, Jorge Durán, who's at the University of Guadalajara. We decided one day to take a trip up to a town called San Juan de los Lagos, where there was a church with a Virgin replica, an image of the Virgin, that inspired great faith of Catholics in that area.

There's a strong tradition in Mexico of votive pilgrimages, where you make a trip to thank the Virgin for a favor or a miracle that's been received, and if you go to these places, you'll find that anything that happens to a human being ends up on the walls. I broke my arm and thanks to the Virgin, it was able to heal. Anything that happens ends up on the walls. The classic manifestation of these things are votive paintings, painted on pieces of tin, that depict the scene where the miracle occurred, the miraculous appearance of the Virgin, and the text explaining what happened and giving the thanks.

We were up there looking at these things and suddenly we discovered that a number of them dealt with migration to the United States.

Lawrence: Makes sense.

Massey:

Migration to the United States was part and parcel of life in this part of Mexico starting in the early 1900s, and so Jorge and I were driving back and we decided, "Well, let's make an effort to collect these things and see what we can learn about the human side of Mexican migration." Not just the numbers, not just our portrayal as two PhDs of what they're experiencing, but in their own words, with their own pictures, with their own ideas of what it was all about. So we assembled a collection of about 60 of these retablos going through antique dealers, folk art stores, various sources on both sides of the border, and we did a content analysis of the texts, an artistic analysis of the art portrayed in them, and published a book called *Miracles on the Border*.

The first exhibition of our retablo collection was at the Diego Rivera Museum in Mexico City in 1989, and since then it's traveled all over the world, and most recently was shown at the Princeton University Art Museum, and Jorge and I were so satisfied with the job they did in putting on the collection that we donated the collection to the Princeton University Art Museum.

Lawrence:

So, let's now look in the context of the United States. You've also done some pathbreaking work on race, and housing, and racial segregation, and what the causes are. Are we more or less segregated in our housing today than we were, say 20, 25 years ago?

Massey:

Well, it's a mixed bag. In terms of African Americans, there's been a bifurcated trend, where large urban African communities, the large ghettos that were created in the 20th century have remained, and levels of segregation have not declined. In fact, segregation levels remain remarkably high and satisfy the criteria for what Nancy Denton and I called hyper segregation, an intense pattern of segregation across multiple geographic dimensions simultaneously. So places like Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, Baltimore, New York, Newark, St. Louis, these places are just as segregated as they've always been.

There's been a remarkable move towards integration in places with small Black populations, especially if they're college towns or if they have military bases. Military is the most successfully integrated of all institutions in the United States. The bases themselves, of course, are integrated, and off-base housing seems to be influenced by that fact as well. Segregation is perpetuated by continued discrimination and prejudice, which is less visible than it was before but still exists, and a big driver of segregation in the post-Civil Rights Era had been the rise of restrictive density zoning, particularly in suburban areas, which drive up the cost of housing and becomes a causal factor in producing both class and racial segregation, and so racial segregation has moderated to some extent, but for African Americans in large cities, it has not. For Latinos, segregation levels have kind of held steady at a relatively high level. Not as high as Blacks, but neighborhood isolation has increased as the neighborhoods that do exist have filled up with immigrants, many of whom are undocumented, and undocumented status is a real detriment to integration.

Lawrence:

So, the income distribution gap has dramatically increased since the 1980s to a point now it's more like the 1920s, and certainly the pre-New Deal period, and then income correlates with race. But is resulting racial discrimination then the effect of that, or is the racial discrimination also playing a causal role?

Massey:

Racial discrimination is also playing a causal role. If you break down African Americans by income and look at how segregation fares when you move from the lowest to the highest income categories, you see prior to 1980, there was no decline whatsoever. In 1990, we start to see a small decline, but then that decline doesn't continue into the future, and most recent data show that the most affluent African Americans are more segregated than the poorest Latinos, and more segregated than any Asians, and so segregation just doesn't disappear when you control for income. It stays pretty high.

As a result, middle class African Americans and even professional class African Americans live in much poorer neighborhoods than whites, or Latinos, or Asians of the same income.

Lawrence:

So if you were called into a meeting with the appropriate cabinet secretary or maybe the Oval Office itself and you had a couple of minutes to set out your program to try to right this, where would we begin?

Massey:

Well, first would be enforcing the Civil Rights legislation we've got. As it was originally written, most of the enforcement provisions were taken out as a part of a compromise to get the law passed, particularly the Fair Housing Act. Congress did pass amendments in 1988 to improve a bit the enforcement, but we've never really enforced those laws, and they were dramatically violated during the housing boom of the 2000s, leading up to the bust of 2000, 2008, when minorities were systematically targeted for predatory lending. So I would enforce Civil Rights laws and that requires some legislation to do it right.

Lawrence:

Doug, thanks so much for coming in today. It was a pleasure being with you and I'm grateful for your service as a Visiting Scholar at Phi Beta Kappa. Look forward to continuing the conversation.

Massey: Fred, it's been a great pleasure talking to you. I look forward to interacting again sometime.

Lawrence:

This podcast is produced by L-W-C. Cedric Wilson is lead producer. Paulina Velasco is managing producer. This episode was mixed by Kojin Tashiro. Hadley Kelly is the Phi Beta Kappa producer on the show. Our theme song is Back to Back by Yan Perchuk. To learn more about the work of the Phi Beta Kappa Society and our Visiting Scholar program, please visit [pbk.org](http://pbk.org). Thanks for listening. I'm Fred Lawrence. Until next time.

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