Geoff Wodtke: Hello and welcome to the Inequality Podcast. I'm Geoff Wodtke. Today we're joined by my colleague and also friend, René Flores, Associate Professor of Sociology here at the University of Chicago. René studies international migration, race and ethnicity and social stratification. And his work explores how social boundaries form around immigrants and racial minorities, the cognitive processes that sustain these boundaries and how they contribute to the reproduction of inequality.

So his research has appeared in the American Journal of Sociology, American Sociological Review, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, among many other academic outlets. It's also been featured in major news organizations, including New York Times, Washington Post, NPR and on and on. So I feel very lucky to have snagged him for my own humble experiment in podcasting here. And the issues he studies are just incredibly timely and central to understanding contemporary patterns of inequality and social mobility in the US. So René, it's a real pleasure to have you. Thanks so much for joining us.

René Flores: Thank you, Jeff. The pleasure is mine. I'm a big fan of the Inequality Podcast. So it's definitely quite an honor to be here with you guys today.

Geoff: In the wake of the recent Supreme Court ruling that effectively authorized immigration officers to rely solely or at least largely on factors like ethnicity and occupation when deciding whom to stop or investigate, it kind of seems like the law is now catching up to rather than restraining some of the stereotypes that shape public judgments about who looks illegal, looks like an illegal immigrant. And this moment that we're living in right now raises some broader questions about how legal status is perceived, how these perceptions align with reality and how they may shape different forms of inequality. And your work examines precisely how suspicions of illegality arise in everyday life often directed at people who are legal residents or even US citizens. So to start us off, I wanted to ask, you know, what do we know about the basis on which people's legal status gets questioned? And how did you go about, you know, studying this issue scientifically?

René: So you are right that currently the use of stereotypes such as your race, your national origin, the language that you speak, or even when the place where you're standing–it could be a Home Depot–the legality of using these markers to detain someone as suspects of being undocumented, it's a little bit shaky. There was a recent Supreme Court decision that essentially authorized the use of these markers, of cultural markers, racial markers, class markers for immigration officers to detain people and ask them about their documentation status. That ruling was in the emergency docket, so it's not clear how the Supreme Court will rule at the end.

So far, lower courts have challenged this idea that you can use these markers because, you know, they essentially violate the rights of individuals of equal treatment, it's a form of discrimination. But the way we, the way me and my collaborator, Ariel Azar who is at the University of Washington in St. Louis, the way we started to think about this a few years ago was that we started to observe different posters and pamphlets in public spaces saying, "Have you seen an illegal person? Call this number." And there was information for ICE. So they were asking you to report people that you thought were illegal or undocumented.

We began thinking, okay, but how do people know when someone is undocumented? Because we know that documentation status is actually pretty hard to assert. And even when you have the documents of someone, immigration system is very complex. Most people are in liminal legal statuses. This is not a dichotomous, yes or no situation where you're undocumented or not. But many folks have some kind of legal connection to the system. They, you know, they have requested asylum. They have requested some kind of protection or they were initially, you know, visitors coming in on a visa, but they overstayed. So there's a lot of complexity there. Even when you actually have people's documents and it can take days or weeks to ascertain somebody's documentation status. But these phone calls that people were making were made without looking at people's paperwork. Somebody's passport, somebody's ID, somebody's a history of application to the immigration system. So on what basis were they making these judgment calls?

We knew from the ethnographic literature that there were certain markers that were triggering these suspicions. You know, for example, that there are some ethnographers that were documenting how some gardeners, they knew that if you look like a gardener, you would be suspected and you would be stopped by an immigration enforcement officer. So upon living and their work side, they would switch their clothing to not look as a gardener. Or there were also reports that some folks were, they didn't want to drive an older looking car. They wanted to drive a newer car because they thought that they would diminish any suspicions of illegality. So there were all these markers, but the issue that we were confronting is that it's not clear what was it that was driving these suspicions. Was it class? Was it the fact that you're a gardener? Was it, you know, the your occupation? Was it your ethic background? Was it the fact your language skills, your cultural traits?

So we decided that we wanted to have an experimental setup so that we could actually test out all these different markers that have been documented and try to see which ones were more important. We wanted to see if, you know, what were the most important triggers of illegality? And we basically launched this National Representative Survey that represents the US population. And we had this experimental design where we show people different profiles of individuals. And we were able to randomly assign them to, you know, different

traits, national origin, class background, criminal history age. And basically what we found was that the most people think that undocumented immigrants are just newly arrived in the US. They don't speak any English. You know, they have very little education, that they are, they mostly come from Latin America, they mostly–but also Syria. And by the way, Syria is really interesting because, because we know that at that point, Syrians were almost by definition documented because there were asylum seekers at that point. So this, this already tells you how there's a difference between the perception of illegality and the reality of illegality. That these, these two things are actually not overlapping. So, so yeah, we found that Latin Americans were the most suspected, along with Somalians, along with along with Syrians. At the bottom, the least suspected nationalities were Italian, were Canadians, were, were, were other European groups. And also Asian groups, Koreans and Chinese. They were, they were not very suspected, even when you counted for, for other factors.

One of the, the interesting things is that this is not necessarily reflecting the reality of the undocumented population. The undocumented population is actually very diverse in terms of class background, in terms of ethnic origin. There's many undocumented folks that are managers, that are working in professional occupations. And most of them have been in the US for a long time– 20, 30 years, they have families, they're pretty settled. They do not fit the profile of somebody who just crossed the border. Even though that's in public mind, that's what they're thinking.

Geoff: So, like the profile of the like illegal immigrant, so to speak, in the minds of survey respondents often departed quite a bit from reality in terms of like the demographics of the actual like undocumented population in the US.

René: Absolutely. I mean, some of the, some of the traits were more or less accurate in that Mexicans, for example, for a long time, they've made a substantial portion of undocumented population. Although their share has been declining, Mexicans are no longer the majority. The undocumented population has become more and more diverse. But there were other traits that were pretty off relative to the reality of the undocumented population. Most undocumented have been in the US for 20 to 30 years, many of them have jobs that are not so precarious. Many of them, most of them speak English. So, so there's definitely many points where there was a lot of discrepancies here. And I think the biggest one that we found was–and this one was pretty surprising to us–was criminal background.

Geoff: So, having a criminal background was one of the traits that you presented to respondents in the experiment and then varied randomly?

René: Exactly. So, we had different types of crimes. Some of them could be well, not actually crimes, more like infractions such as, you know, running a red light or not paying

your parking tickets. But there were others that were more serious, such as, you know, criminal actions, like violent actions such as murder. We hadn't thought about including those originally because we know from, from the literature, we know from maybe then that undocumented immigrants commit a lot fewer crimes than natives. So, we know that we know that's the fact. But we decided to include it at the very end. It was literally the last thing that we threw the experiment just because we thought it would be interesting to see what happens. And it turns out that that was the strongest signal in our experiment. Essentially, that had the biggest effects in predicting when somebody would suspect somebody had been undocumented. Especially infractions, white collar crimes, they did not affect illegality suspicions. But it was about violent crimes. It was about drugs, mugging, murder, sexual crimes. Those had a very strong effect in making somebody think that this was an undocumented person. The most heinous, the most violent crimes on the land turned out to be the biggest predictors, which again, this is not the reality because we know that undocumented immigrants commit a lot fewer crimes than natives.

Nonetheless, in the minds of many people, criminality and immigration have fused. And I think this is probably connected to the rhetoric of immigration that when you turn on the TV, when you read a newspaper, there's a lot of discussion about immigration in the context of crime. Describing immigrants as drug dealers, as gang members, cartel members. And I think over time, that starts to create a cognitive connection in the minds of a lot of folks, even if that's not the reality of immigration.

Geoff: Yeah, well clearly, I mean, because in your experiment, you know, you vary a trait that from like a purely sort of like statistical decision, theoretic framework should maybe weakly predict classification as, as native or documented. But in fact, works in the exact opposite direction and like a very strong fashion. So the fusion of criminality and immigration seems like pretty well established at this point.

René: Exactly. That's very well documented.

Geoff: Another sort of interesting dimension of the experiment you guys did is you asked people both to like sort of judge their legal status. But then you also asked them when they would actually call law enforcement to investigate someone's immigration status. You mentioned the pamphlets, that like motivated the study, right? Like there's the question of well, who do they actually see as worthy of suspicion? And then there's like the behavioral question is like when do they follow through and make that phone call? So what did you guys find there?

René: So we went through multiple contexts that essentially asking respondents, "okay, if you were to see this person in this specific context, such as, you know, applying for a job at

your workplace or looking for an apartment to rent in your block or maybe standing outside of a Home Depot, would you notify the authorities? Would you call ICE on this person? And we found that the context definitely matters when people see this individuals. And we found that applying for a job at your workplace, that triggered the biggest response in terms of notifying or wanting to notify immigration authorities, along with looking for an apartment on your block. Those two were at the top with the strongest effects. The one with the lowest effects was when we described the individual as looking for a job outside of Home Depot. Which is really interesting. And I think our theory behind this is that those two places, you can explain them as well, it could be job competition, right? They're applying for a job in your company. And I think that's probably part of it. Another part is that those two sites represent the places with the closest proximity to you, right? Essentially it's about someone becoming your core worker or someone becoming your neighbor. And I feel like that triggers this apprehension, particularly if many folks have come to believe that undocumented immigrants are committing crimes. That's essentially in their minds, that's like asking them, could you call the authorities if you see a murderer or a rapist trying to move into your neighbor or trying to apply for a job?

So I feel like these associations that people are making in their minds are probably having a number of consequences. This is why I think like debating Immigration is really hard right now because in the minds of many people, when you talk about immigrants, they're thinking about criminals. So it becomes really, really hard to move beyond that.

Geoff: Did you find any differences in sort of the traits that moved people's suspicions of illegality or their sort of willingness to call the immigration authorities by different kind of demographic traits of the respondents? Like were there some groups that were more likely to respond one way or another? We're living in pretty polarized political times. I'm guessing that you looked at differences in response patterns between like say, Republicans and Democrats or liberals or conservatives. Did you find any differences there?

René: Absolutely. We looked at some interactions by partisanship. And what we found was that essentially Republicans are more suspicious of everyone. So their baseline of suspicion is higher across the board. They suspect most profiles have been undocumented relative to Democrats. But for the most part, there were a lot of similarities. They also suspect that the Latin Americans the most. So there were some similarities. There was one key difference that I thought was really interesting. One of the cues that we included in the experiment was receiving government benefits. Essentially receiving welfare, social security. We know that receiving government benefits is a marker of legality. You have to be a permanent resident. You have to be a citizen in order to receive such benefits. So we know that that should be a signal of not being undocumented.

That turns out to be the case among Democrats. When you tell Democrats that a person is receiving social security, then they suspect this person less of being undocumented. But the opposite is true for Republicans. Republican respondents, they see somebody getting welfare and they tend to suspect the person more of being illegal, of being undocumented, which doesn't really jive with reality as I mentioned. But I feel like this probably reflects how there's all this political rhetoric, particularly in the right linking undocumented immigrants to abuses of the welfare system. Linking undocumented folks to fraudulent abuses of welfare, of social services. So I feel like in their minds, there's a connection there that has been made where all of a sudden that becomes a signal of being undocumented.

Geoff: So I mean, you guys write pretty elegantly in this paper–

René: Extremely so.

Geoff: –About what you guys call social illegality, which is basically people that might be documented or have legal status, but that nevertheless have a set of traits that arouses considerable suspicion about their legal status among members of the general public. And so for the past several months here in Chicago, we've seen a huge surge in immigration enforcement throughout the city, you know, with caravans of armed immigration agents patrolling the streets, detaining large numbers of people. And I wanted to ask about, you know, whether you see any of the findings from your research kind of reflected in some of these enforcement operations? You know, as someone that knows your work and is a resident of the city, I can tell you like it's hard not to think about a lot of what you wrote in your discussion section of that paper, like every time I see a local news report lately. But I wanted to give you a chance to say something about that in comment on it.

René: I mean, when we wrote this paper, you know, in 2017, 2018, we were thinking about some of the likely consequences of these illegality suspicions. Where about your everyday life–we're probably about, say, you're in a classroom and you have your teachers there. If the teacher thinks that you are undocumented, we thought that this could affect how the teacher would treat you, right? Should I invest a lot of resources? Should I invest a lot of attention on someone that I think may not be able to take advantage of that? So it's not really about having ill will towards undocumented folks. Just the fact that you may suspect someone who've been undocumented may shift how you interact with them. Or also could be a landlord, you know, landlord getting a number of applications. One of them fits the profile and you say, well, I don't really know about this person. I mean, I don't know if they're legal here. I don't want to get in trouble.

So little decisions like that we thought that could affect the lives of many people of, you know, if they're suspected of being socially illegal. And what we mean by socially legalities,

you are judged to be illegal, not on the basis of your actual documents, but just on the basis of social stereotypes. You were, you were essentially categorized as undocumented, which could trigger a number of negative consequences. Nonetheless, as you, as you bring up the consequences of socially legality could go beyond that, right? It could make the difference between being detained going to the Home Depot or not. This actually happened to make to my contractor here in the city of Chicago. He was born in Chicago. Obviously is uh, was born a US citizen. And ICE picked him up in the Home Depot. He was detained. They took him to the parking lot and they didn't let him go until his wife drove by it with his passport. And he told me, hey, this was just racial profiling. That's what does what it is. You know, the fact that he fits the profile physically by the way he talks as well.

So I feel like socially legality has become a lot more consequential because it's a difference between you being able to live your life freely or you being detained, arrested and taken in for days. Actually, some of his some of his workers who happened to be also legal in the US, where were detained and spent several days in a detention center. Because right now they have taken so many people in and they have so, so few resources that they're not able to actually process everyone and disentangle whose documented or who's not. So we think that the risks and the consequences of social illegality are increasingly important. They're more and more negative for many people who just happen to feed the profile.

Geoff: You know, at the Stone Center, we study a lot of like social mobility, upward mobility and also like income and wealth inequality. And I know this goes a little bit beyond kind of like the empirical scope of your research in this area. But you know, I'm curious about how, you know, both the experience of social illegality for people who who are subject to that suspicion and also the consequence, some of the consequences of it that we've been talking about, you know, might potentially help to explain, you know, some of the more like persistent, you know, socioeconomic inequalities or penalties that we see incurred by certain like national origin groups in this country.

René: Yeah, I mean, I think that's a fundamental question because I feel like experiences of social inequality could have a number of consequences, some of them psychological. They could be injuries to the self. If you find yourself feeling suspected, if you find yourself feeling harassed, if you find yourself being questioned, you know, if you go to the store and you're looking around, if you know, when you're driving, just a feeling that they could come to you and detain you, that could affect you in very, very deep ways. I can also imagine ways in which it could affect the aspirations of students, right? That, you know, if you feel like, well, I don't really, I don't really belong, I'm going to be harassed. Why should I even go to that specific setting? Why should I even apply to that? I mean, this has to be studied in more specifically. And we thought that this paper could, could inaugurate that kind of

research. Essentially, the idea would be that net of your actual documentation status is there an extra negative effect from this stereotyping or of illegality? Could that be part of the negative coefficients that we see when we look at our regression table and we see that some groups have lower levels of social mobility or SCS attainment? Could that be part of that? I think that that's a, that's an open question. But I do feel like part of the mechanisms is this psychological pathway where negative stereotypes about who you are, about whether or not your family belongs here may affect your sense of what is possible, your sense of what kinds of jobs, occupations or educational profiles, actually could fit somebody like you.

Geoff: We've been talking a lot about how Americans judge, you know, who looks illegal or suspicions of illegality. You know, some of your more recent work shows that kind of some, I think similar underlying cognitive dynamics extend kind of beyond judgments of a legality to their sort of images of immigrants as a whole, right? A lot of your work kind of focuses on how, right? Like people rely on like mental shortcuts or these like pictures in the head of different groups, right? This could refer to like the size of the immigrant population. Do people have a sense for how many immigrants are actually in the US where they come from, what their lives look like? When Americans imagine, you know, the immigrants living in the United States today, I mean, is there anything like a consensus image? You know, when you ask them, who are the immigrants, you know, what do people think?

René: This is part of another research project that I did with Ariel Azar, who's now working in the private sector. But this is the origin of the idea. The survey company Gallup has been collecting public opinion data about immigration since the 1960s. So we have a lot of comparative data about immigration attitudes for 60, 70 years, which is pretty rare. It's very rare. I mean, they've been asking the same question across all these years. And they basically ask about how do people feel about immigrants, people that come from other countries to live in the US? Should we increase those flows, reduce them, or keep them the same? They've been asking that question for all this time. This question is typically used by a lot of immigration scholars to try to understand how people feel about immigrants.

The thing about this question is that if you have been living in the 1960s, you may have a very different response to that question than if you were living in 2025. Because who immigrants are maybe different. As we know, since 1965, there's been a diversification of immigration flows because of changes to the immigration legal system. We have a lot more immigrants coming from places outside of Europe. Many of them coming from Latin America, coming from Asia. Who immigrants are today is very different to who immigrants were in the 1960s. So we decided, essentially in this study to try to understand, okay, when people think about immigrants, quote unquote, who do they have in mind? And we find that

there's no consensus. We find that different people have different ideas about who immigrants are. And the most common idea–and this one is held by about 38%–is essentially an undocumented Latino male who just crossed the border speaks no English. It's probably a garden there has some kind of informal low job, uh low occupation like that comes from Latin America. It's undocumented, is low educated. This is the immigrant that is often talked about when you turn on Fox News, right? When you listen to essentially conservative media, this is the immigrant that they have in mind.

But we also find that not all Americans think about that picture in their minds when they think about immigrants. There's actually about 17-20% of folks who think about high status immigrant. This is a highly educated person. This person is documented. This person is legal. And it's working in a tech company, it's working for a university. We also find that specific people are more likely to think about these–we call them archetypes–about these immigrant archetypes. So for example, white people who live in rural areas in the south, they're more likely to think about these undocumented Latino male as represented immigrants. Whereas people in the Midwest, college educated women are more likely to think about the high status legal immigration person as representing most immigrants. But we also found that it was not just about ethnicity because there's another common archetype that some people think about when they imagine immigration.

About 15% of Americans, they think about a documented, illegal, Latina. This is a woman that comes from Latin America has a humble job, but it's working really hard to take care of their kids. And this person has education. Whether this matter, well, we also looked at whether or not having these archetypes in your mind predict how you feel about immigration, whether you support different immigration policies. And we found that these archetypes are the strongest predictors of immigration attitudes. So those who think about the undocumented Latin0 male as represented most immigrants, they have the most restrictive views about immigration policies. They're the folks who have the most negative views who want to restrict immigration, who don't want to provide benefits to immigrants. Whereas those individuals who think about the advantage documented high status immigrant, they have a lot more positive immigration views.

Geoff: This kind of goes back to, I mean, something you just said briefly in passing about how it's hard to talk about immigration and immigration policy now. And it seems like part of that could be that when you wander up to anyone on the street and bring up the topic of immigrants or immigration, like the chances are good that you could have be talking with someone who has an entirely different like mental image of what the immigrant population looks like than you do or anyone else.

René: Absolutely. You're basically talking about a different subject altogether because the picture in your mind may be very different than the person that's in front of you. And that, this prevents any kind of agreement, let alone understanding. That's one of the complications.

Geoff: And so you mentioned this question included on polls by the Gallup organization. And so what are some of the usual things that Gallup uses to predict support for higher versus lower volume immigration? So like education, region of the country age.

René: We find that one of the strongest predictors is education. So more educated Americans tend to be more positive about immigrants. And there's a whole debate about what explains that. Some people think that it's about not feeling in competition with immigrants. That if you have college education, you feel that you're vaccinated against competition from immigrants. Whereas if you have just a high school diploma, you might feel like you're actually competing with them for jobs which then colors how you view them. Other folks that argue, well, the education effect could be a matter of you've been exposed to more information. You may have a more cosmopolitan view of the world. You may actually enjoy difference. You may have traveled a lot. So there's a cultural socialization pathway. But yeah, education is one of the biggest predictors. We found that these archetypes are as important as education when we try to predict immigration views.

Geoff: You have another study on the 2016 presidential election where you tried to actually like estimate like the causal impact of Donald Trump's announcement speech where he labeled Mexican immigrants rapists and criminals and he's repeated this rhetoric basically ever since. You tried to estimate the impact of this kind of political rhetoric on public views. That's a difficult question to answer. You use some pretty creative data and methods. Could you tell us a little bit about how you study that and then about what you learned about the power of this kind of elite messaging and shaping perceptions of immigrants?

René: Trying to understand whether political rhetoric affects how people feel about immigrants is a very important question. But it's also very hard to ascertain. And part of it is because if you think about politicians in a rally and they're talking about immigration, are they affecting how people feel about immigrants or are politicians taking cues from the audience to know what they're supposed to say? So it's not really clear which direction the causal arrow is pointing. And so we've had that issue for a long time because you can't really randomize what politicians say. That would be pretty neat. But the interesting thing is back in 2015 when Trump ran for the first time, I found an opportunity to test this idea.

At that point, Republicans had this agreement not to talk about immigration because they thought that affected them in the prior election, you know, Romney having some critical

about immigration. And they thought that that had cost him votes. So they said we're not going to touch immigration. You shouldn't have mentioned that topic at all. All of a sudden, Trump came in as a dark horse. And when he came down, those golden escalators in the Trump tower where he first announced he was going to run and there were all these paid actors with their signs. He just went off on immigration. That became his big cry to rally his troops. And as you mentioned, he said, oh, these immigrants, they're rapists, they're criminals. Using very, very harsh language.

And I remember looking at that, I was actually at the YMCA in Ann Arbor. I was going to post a fellowship at the University of Michigan and they were playing this message in all these screens. And I just thought this is a really cool opportunity to test this idea because you can think of this as a random shock. This person is just literally dropping this message. The message is being broadcast across the radio stations and TV stations. And people are being exposed to a politician making this very harsh statement about, about immigrants. So I was able to–I started to look around and I found that Gallup had actually been on the field conducting a survey. And they have been asking people about immigration. How do they feel about immigration, did they want to increase it or decrease it? And crucially, they have asked this question a few days before Trump's speech and a few days after. So I was able to essentially have an experimental, a quasi-experimental design comparing folks that were interviewed before Trump's speech, that became my control group. With those that were interviewed after, that became my likely treated group. Folks that were probably exposed to the rhetoric. And I found that it did have a negative effect.

Folks that were likely exposed to Trump's rhetoric have more negative views about immigration. But the interesting thing is that they this effect only lasted a few days. You know, it actually ended up dissipating after some time. And it was mostly concentrated among groups that already have a restrictionist tendency. And these are Republicans. These are lower educated respondents. So the way I interpreted that was that this rhetoric is not necessarily changing the mind of people. But it's just extending permission for individuals to express how they actually feel. And then I did these follow-up experiments. And I found that that the effect doesn't last too long, just a few days. And I think part of this, part of the reason for this temporality is that life is very complex. We have a lot of inputs all the time. We're exposed to many different messages. So a message that you received at some point may have been consequential. But then you move on because there's other things happening in your life. You're exposed to more information.

The thing about Trump is that he's constantly sending the same message. So it's not allowing people to go back down to their baseline. You know, he's actually very cognizant of that. There's an interview where he talked about how when he's given a speech or he's at a

rally at a stadium. And he feels that people are starting to look at their watches or looking at the exit sign. He goes again. He's like, who's going to pay for the wall? Mexico. And you know, he tries to rally the troops that way. In a way, he's like shocking people with this anti-immigrant message again, which again, doesn't allow people to go back to their regular baseline is keeping everybody in a continuous state of shock or being stimulated by these anti-immigrant messages.

Geoff: So I mean, given the high stakes and the consequences of everything we've been talking about, which, include now a heightened risk of potentially wrongful detention, deportation, I wanted to end by asking about what can be done in this situation. Do your findings or other research on inner group attitudes suggest ways to reduce perceptions, mistaken perceptions of social illegality, reduce its harms, or to maybe bring like Americans immigrant archetypes kind of more in line with reality about the immigrant population? I mean, I'm basically asking, right like, are there ways that, you know, we can make sure that stereotypes don't completely substitute for evidence, which is one that applies, I think, to a lot of different questions and is a vexing one, but here I and now I think is like, especially relevant.

René: I feel like there's some evidence of what may work. For example, there's some, some research that shows that if you provide individuals with factual information, it may do something, it may actually affect a little bit their attitudes, not a huge effect, but it does something, just exposing them to the reality of immigration. There's also evidence from this colleague of mine in political science, Alex Gustav, that he showed in respondents in an experiment how complex the immigration system is. Many folks assume that people are undocumented because they don't want to do the paperwork, because they literally don't want to do the line at the immigration office and they don't want to pay the fees. In reality, things are a lot more complex than that. There's no process that people can go through to become regularized. So when he described to respondents how difficult every step was and how challenging it was, people did express more positive views about immigration.

There's also a line of research that looks at deep interpersonal dialogue, essentially the perspective-taking approach that when you have folks from stigmatized groups such as immigrants or transgender folks, when they have deep personal conversations with somebody else and they, they don't judge them, they don't criticize them, but they say, listen, I am an immigrant and these are my experiences, you know, I've been harassed, I've been detained, and this is how those experiences mainly feel. Just that very deep, very personal, nonjudgmental exchange, it's shown that it can have long lasting effects in terms of how people feel about these groups and the effect is really durable. The downside with that, of course, is that most people don't have those kinds of conversations, right? They're

very specific, they're also very micro-intervention, and we live in a system that is very macro-disabate, is really extensive, it involves many different people.

I personally feel that as long as you have 13, 14, 15 million people that are undocumented, as long as you don't have some kind of comprehensive immigration reform, all these stereotypes will continue to exist because there's a reality that they can attach themselves to. There's a sense in which there's actually a lot of folks who don't have full paper work, and I feel like that's a structural issue that you that you cannot solve by having these macro interventions, because that's really the fundamental structure that you're dealing with.

Geoff: Well, there's few people doing social science research that's more kind of immediately relevant and important than you are. The discussion, as I mentioned earlier, the discussion section of your paper, "Who are the illegals?" I think it's one of the most kind of prescient, looking back in time, of almost any I've ever read, and the concept of social illegality is one that is weighing on me a lot lately. It's been really interesting and helpful to hear you talk through these things, and I really appreciate you coming on the podcast.

René: Thank you, Jeff. It was a pleasure to be with you.

Geoff: The Inequality Podcast is a production of the Stone Center for Research on Wealth Inequality and Mobility at the University of Chicago. I want to end the podcast by giving thanks to the people who really make it happen. First, I want to thank our Producer and engineer, Shane McKeon. Second, I'd like to thank our Assistant Director, Nina Gray, for production oversight and doing so much to bring the podcast to life. And lastly, our Executive Director, Grace Kolovo, for her support, not just for the podcast, but for every activity at the Stone Center. You can get in touch with us at stonecenter@uchicago.edu

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