

## **Exhibition Statement**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has been declared the “century of the migrant” because the number of international migrants have exceeded 240 million for the first time in history. The scholars whose work is represented in this exhibition study the movement of populations across borders by addressing themes such as freedom, mobility, alienation, displacement and citizenship. Immigration is one of the most important issues currently facing our local, national and global communities. KU students, staff and faculty are joining the dialogue as evidenced from the KU Common Book this year *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* by Haitian American writer Edwidge Danticat who came to the United States as a child at the age of 12. Moreover, the KU Common Work of Art features the famous New Orleanian “Voodoo Queen” legend Marie Laveau by Haitian-American artist Ulrick Jean-Pierre who is also based in New Orleans. The painting is part of an exhibit at the Spencer Museum of Art titled “The Ties that Bind: Haiti, the United States and the Work of Ulrick Jean-Pierre in Comparative Perspective.” These works provide important opportunities for all of us to have rich, engaging and necessary conversations around the theme of immigration and identity.

The work represented in this exhibit is asking important questions such as: Which types of immigrants are welcome to the United States and why? What are the different types of immigration (voluntary, reluctant, documented, undocumented)? Do all immigrants have the same level of access to the local economy, job market, social services and path to citizenship? How do communities include or exclude immigrants through urban planning, access to transportation, education, housing and employment? How do immigrant communities interact with non-immigrant communities and vice-versa? How do immigrants find survival

strategies and maintain social network in their home country while trying to integrate in the host country? How do first, second and third generation immigrants negotiate their identities?

In spite of the fact that Europeans came to the United States occupied the Native American's land, the U.S. has been viewed by many people around the world as a welcoming oasis for those looking for freedom (religious, political, economic, social) and better opportunities. However, the latest attacks on immigration have shown that racism, sexism and classism are directly related to how immigrants are labeled and treated. Many of us scholars who spend our lives probing these complex issues know that many immigrants are first and foremost thought of as the Other because there is a perception that they threaten both society and individual privilege. The fear of the immigrant is connected to the changing demographics of the United States because they will eventually challenge the very meaning of terms such as "minority" and "majority". Whether or not people want to accept it, the reality is that the United States is on its way to becoming a more multiracial, multi-ethnic, in sum a *mestizo* society.

As we view the work of these artists, scholars and practitioners, let us have the courage to engage in real conversations about immigration. Let us have honest and open dialogues about what it means to be an immigrant because if we think about the United States' history and very foundation we would be more conscious of the fact that many of us here in this space are immigrants. The challenge is to figure out how to co-exist while mutually respecting one another in our various diversities and differences in the many Americas that the United States has created and not

being afraid to name the daily privileges that we gain as a result of the fact that we live in “the century of the migrant”.

Cécile Accilien, PhD

Associate Professor and Chair  
Department of African and African American Studies  
Director, Institute of Haitian Studies  
Associate Director for Latin American and Caribbean Studies