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Sarah Heavren
Providence College

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Sarah Heavren
Dr. Orquiza
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Immigration in the 1990s and the Imagery of Bruce Springsteen's *The Ghost of Tom Joad*

Abstract

Immigration is a heavily discussed political issue today, but it has roots in preceding decades as well as in American migration patterns. In the 1990s, Bruce Springsteen released his album *The Ghost of Tom Joad* to comment on the contemporary immigration issues by connecting the plight of the modern immigrants to the struggles of the Depression-era migrants. The album balances direct references to Mexican immigrants and U.S. Border Patrol officers with the ghosts of the past, particularly John Steinbeck's character Tom Joad. To provide context to support the connection that Springsteen drew between current immigration issues and the westward migration during the Great Depression, I sought scholarly articles through JSTOR that discuss the roots of and influences on the immigration issue in the 1990s; Springsteen's motivation for his unique take on the idea of the American West, which was growing popular in the music industry; the relevance of the character of Tom Joad in American culture; and the specific connections that Springsteen made between Tom Joad and Mexican migrants on the album.

Using Todd M. Kerstetter's article "Rock Music in the New West 1980-2010" published in the *Western Historical Quarterly* to explain the significance and uniqueness of Springsteen's western muse. Kerstetter notes that Springsteen gives the West a new identity by associating it with the past: the Mexican immigrants are the modern version of the Depression-era migrants. Springsteen's song "The Ghost of Tom Joad" most accurately depicts his comparison. However, it is necessary to know the cultural significance of Tom Joad as a character. Bryant Simon and William Deverell's article "Come Back, Tom Joad: Thoughts on a California Dreamer,"

published in *California History*, explains that Steinbeck's character was the voice for the voiceless because his story exposed the harsh living conditions that many migrants faced during the Great Depression. By invoking the ghost of Tom Joad in the album's namesake song, Springsteen showed that the social injustices of the past were haunting the present. Springsteen further linked the past and the present by telling the story of the sacrifices that two Mexican brothers made to have a chance at the American Dream. "Sinaloa Cowboys" is a tale of desperation and tragedy that acts as a window into the common experience of many Mexican migrants. Peter Andreas's article "The Making of Amerexico: (Mis)Handling Illegal Immigration" in the *World Policy Journal* provided the context for the *bracero* program established in the 1940s that aggravated and led to a prolonged immigration problem even after the program ended. To show that the immigration issue affected more than just the Mexican immigrants, Springsteen wrote a song from the perspective of a U.S. Border Patrol officer. In "The Line," Springsteen narrated the moral conflict between doing one's job and speaking against injustice. However, Springsteen had more motivation for telling the tale of a Border Patrol officer—he was responding to the Immigration Reform and Control Act that increased the number of Border Patrol officers in attempt to quell illegal immigration from Mexico. Andreas and Barry R. Chiswick elaborate on the political and social ramifications of the IRCA. Chiswick's article "Illegal Immigration and Immigration Control" published in *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* offers insight on the relationship between employers looking for cheap labor and the immigration issue.

To explore the effects of the IRCA on Mexican immigrants who were already living in the United States, I referenced two articles retrieved from the *Los Angeles Sentinel* database. One titled "City Nixes Illegal Alien Initiative" discusses the Los Angeles's City Council's

decision to not pass California state legislature's motion to block immigrants from access to public schools and hospitals. Another article discusses the passing of Proposition 187, which denied Mexican immigrants from all social services except healthcare. The two newspaper articles, both published in 1994, show that Springsteen's social commentary was not only relevant to the Mexican migrants trying to cross the border but also to those who had already settled in America. Through scholarly articles explaining the causes and contemporary status of the immigration issue, Springsteen's poetic analogy of Depression-era migrants to Mexican immigrants on *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, and legislative activity regarding the rights of immigrants, I explain the parallels between the social injustices of the Depression-era migrants and the exclusion that Mexican immigrants endured that Springsteen interwove in his music.

As of the early 1990s, there were about three million illegal immigrants in the United States. The border that separates the United States from Mexico, sprawling nearly two thousand miles across several states, attracted the most immigrants. There have been mixed feelings about the immigration issue, with some supporting the idea of a “fortress America,” which prioritizes protecting its borders to keep unwanted people and drugs out of the country, and others recognizing the need for understanding the plight of the immigrants.¹ Synthesizing the influences of the past plights of migrants during the Depression era with what he was witnessing with the present labor and immigration issues, Bruce Springsteen articulated immigrants’ deprivation of the American Dream.² Springsteen released *The Ghost of Tom Joad* in 1995 to remind Americans that the Mexican migrants were human beings who had their own versions of the American Dream. Through his songs “The Ghost of Tom Joad,” “Sinaloa Cowboys,” and “The Line,” he connected the employment uncertainties, financial hardships, and social tensions that the Depression-era migrants faced to the exploitive labor, social exclusion, and ethnic profiling that the Mexican Americans were experiencing.

While settled in the West, Springsteen noted a different reality than the widespread, romanticized version of western culture. Diverting from the ideas of the West as a land of opportunity and progress, Springsteen focused on presenting the de-romanticized reality and ethnic tensions between Americans and Mexican migrants that defined the region. Through his albums *Nebraska* (1982) and *The Ghost of Tom Joad* (1995), he took a snapshot of the modern western identity. On *Nebraska*, moved by real stories such as the Charlie Starkweather murders in Nebraska in the late 1950s, Springsteen wrote with a simple yet harshly realistic tone, using

¹ Peter Andreas, “The Making of Amerexico: (Mis)Handling Illegal Immigration,” *World Policy Journal* 11, no. 2 (1994): 45.

² Paul D. Fischer, “The Ghost and Mr. Springsteen,” ed. Bruce Springsteen, *The Journal of American Folklore* 110, no. 436 (1997): 189, <https://doi.org/10.2307/541815>.

“open spaces to depict crisis and isolation.”³ He wove the theme of isolation into his songs, showing separation from society, the government, and other aspects of American culture. Although Springsteen drew inspiration from historical events, he highlighted a connection between the unsettlement of the past and the unsettlement of the present. He carried over the theme of finding the past relevant to and telling of the present in *The Ghost of Tom Joad*. Instead of drawing from the typical western images of prosperity that Americans idealized over the centuries, Springsteen chose to focus on the hardships of the common people of the West. In doing so, he emphasized the ethnic tensions between Americans and Mexicans, an issue which had been coming to the forefront in recent decades. Springsteen concentrated on the ways in which the West influenced the perspectives of the working class and how the experience of the American West affected the lives of ordinary people.⁴

Although Springsteen followed the western trend in music, his focus differentiated him from the rest of the music industry. The 1960s saw a shift in the common depiction of the West, with elements of popular culture painting the new image. In describing the nature of the West during the second half of the twentieth century, Todd M. Kerstetter writes, “Images of the West as a magnet for musical migrants and immigrants, a center of music industry production, and the birthplace of influential new styles, demonstrate the region’s significance as a popular culture producer and tastemaker.”⁵ The previous identity of the West stemmed from romanticized depictions created by non-westerners trying to tap into the western lifestyle, as seen in songs such as “Rawhide.” The debut of numerous bands, such as Van Halen, derived from a “familiar westward migration theme that demonstrate[d] ongoing continuity in national and international

³ Todd M. Kerstetter, “Rock Music and the New West, 1980–2010,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2012): 60, <https://doi.org/10.2307/westhistquar.43.1.0053>.

⁴ Kerstetter, 60.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

demographic shifts.”⁶ However, Springsteen exposed the negative side of the “ongoing continuity” of the plight of immigrants. In “The Ghost of Tom Joad,” he blended the images of the Depression-era migrants with the Mexican migrants “walking ’long the railroad tracks” and the “families sleeping in the cars in the Southwest” who were waiting for “when the last shall be first and the first shall be last.”⁷ The poverty, homelessness, and unemployment that migrants faced had not improved over the span of more than half a century. Springsteen linked the past and the present to realistically depict the continuity of the harshness of migration.

To present the de-romanticized depiction of a western migrant, Springsteen turned to Tom Joad, a fictional character created by John Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath*, whose legacy influenced the lives of average, working-class people. To understand why Tom Joad became relevant in the 1990s during the immigration crisis, it is important to understand the circumstances that shaped Tom Joad as a character and fed his popularity as a folk icon. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Tom Joad impacted the way America considered the labor structure, pushing the country to realize that it needed to make labor reforms. Some, particularly the California growers, protested the content of *The Grapes of Wrath* and the realities of poverty and unemployment that the Joads painted. In particular, California’s Associated Growers and others invested in politics wanted to deny the adversities that many people faced as a consequence of the Great Depression.⁸ Through Tom Joad, Steinbeck exposed underlying issues that exploitive employers manipulated and misrepresented, a task that Springsteen hoped to follow by resurrecting the character’s ghost.

⁶ Kerstetter, 58.

⁷ Bruce Springsteen, *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, Song, *The Ghost of Tom Joad* (Los Angeles, California: Columbia Records, 1995).

⁸ Bryant Simon and William Deverell, “Come Back, Tom Joad: Thoughts on a California Dreamer,” *California History* 79, no. 4 (2000): 182, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25463704>.

Springsteen described the presence of the ghosts of the Depression era migrants in the 1990s immigration crisis through the album's namesake song. Springsteen blurred the lines between past and present to emphasize that the American people have learned little from the mistreatment of Depression era migrants. The American migrants of the past and the Mexican migrants of the present had "no home, no job, no peace, no rest." Springsteen made his most explicit social statement on the album when, speaking as Tom Joad, he said, "Wherever somebody's fighting for a place to stand / Or a decent job or a helping hand / Wherever somebody's struggling to be free / Look in their eyes, Ma, and you'll see me."⁹ Tom Joad took a stand for those in deprived of justice, opportunity, and freedom. By expressing the need to reassert such American characteristics, Springsteen alluded to a variety of social issues, from unemployment to the denial of social and public services. The United States was barring the Mexican immigrants from the American Dream in the same way that it had previously barred migrants during the Depression era.

Springsteen based some of his songs on actual people and events, as he did in "Sinaloa Cowboys," to emphasize the themes of reality and ethnic tensions. He narrated the struggle of two brothers who made it to America, which they viewed as a promised land of opportunity. After the brothers found only mediocre work in agriculture, members of a local drug cartel approached them, offering them jobs as methamphetamine cooks.¹⁰ Springsteen told the historically-rooted but frequently overlooked story to draw attention to the desperation that many Mexican migrants felt while trying to get decent jobs. The brothers had little choice but to sacrifice pride in their work for pay out of desperation to pursue their dream of a fresh start.

⁹ Springsteen, *The Ghost of Tom Joad*.

¹⁰ Bruce Springsteen, *Sinaloa Cowboys*, Song, *The Ghost of Tom Joad* (Los Angeles, California: Columbia Records, 1995).

Tragically, one of the brother died in an explosion in their lab, which Springsteen retold to present the raw emotions and harsh realities that migrants faced. Springsteen made a statement about not only the plight that immigrants endured, but also that risky price that they had to pay for the American experience.¹¹

The employment situation that the brothers in “Sinaloa Cowboys” faced had roots in the United States’ labor system that extended farther back than the 1990s. Many employers took advantage of desperate Mexican immigrants willing to do strenuous labor for low wages. The *bracero* program that ran from 1942 to 1964 established temporary agricultural employment opportunities for workers from Mexico. However, due to the popularity of the program, there were more immigrants than jobs, and instead of returning to Mexico, the excess migrants stayed in the United States as illegal immigrants. Although the *bracero* program ended in 1964, migrants continued to arrive in the United States looking for work, and employers continued to take advantage of the cheap labor, establishing migration trends from Mexico.¹² The United States had created a legacy of unfair opportunities that incited many Mexicans to leave the worse conditions they faced at home.

In addition to sharing the voices of the migrants, Springsteen narrated a song from the perspective of a Border Patrol officer to offer a human representation of the job. In “The Line,” Springsteen illustrated a personal story that expressed the human consequences of the legal and political decisions that politicians and authorities were making. He responded to the increased size of the Border Patrol that occurred in the 1990s through the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) under the Clinton administration.¹³ Springsteen told the story of Carl, a war veteran

¹¹ Kerstetter, 61.

¹² Andreas, “The Making of Amerexico,” 48.

¹³ Andreas, 49.

who “went to work for the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] on the line / With the California Border Patrol.” Springsteen alluded to the smuggling industry that developed in Mexico to help people evade the Border Patrol.¹⁴ According to the Border Patrol, “Drug runners, farmers with their families, / Young women with little children by their sides / Come night we’d wait out in the canyons / And try to keep ’em from crossin’ the line.”¹⁵ Springsteen painted a vivid representation of the people that Border Patrol officer like Carl would see crossing the border, appealing to the fact that many come from similar walks of life as the working-class American. He depicted humble farmers who brought their families and the desperate young women trying to give their children a promising future. Springsteen made the immigrants relatable by portraying the role that sustaining family plays in motivating immigrants to risk crossing the border.

The situation that the migrants in “The Line” faced was a direct consequents of the United States’ efforts to bar immigrants from opportunities and prevented them from entering the country. In 1986, Congress passed the IRCA, which affected employment regulations and declared that workers who could prove that they were residents in the United States prior to 1982 would be considered legal workers.¹⁶ As Barry R. Chiswick argues, “The primary purpose of the IRCA [was] to remove illegal immigrants from the U.S. labor market.”¹⁷ The policy had two important parts that attempted to address the issue of the number of illegal immigrants in the work force. One involved “granting legal status or amnesty for certain illegal aliens” while the other involved “imposing penalties, referred to as employer sanctions, against employers who

¹⁴ Ibid., 50.

¹⁵ Springsteen, *The Line*.

¹⁶ Andreas, 48.

¹⁷ Barry R. Chiswick, “Illegal Immigration and Immigration Control,” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 2, no. 3 (1988): 101.

‘knowingly’ hire illegal aliens.’¹⁸ The threat of punishment intended to deter employers from hiring illegal aliens. However, the government did not strictly enforce the act, so employers continued hiring illegal immigrants with little fear of repercussions. Additionally, as the United States’ economy grew, illegal immigrants found jobs in other industries besides agriculture, leading them to spread to urban areas.¹⁹ There was much debate and disagreement over trying to pass the IRCA in Congress because of concern over available farm labor because many employers exploited illegal immigrants by giving them low-skill agricultural jobs.²⁰ Despite the government’s efforts against immigration, domestic agriculture interests further aggravated the conflict.

The challenges that the immigrants that Springsteen described in “The Line” did not end at the border. There were political and legal debates over the rights immigrants could exercise, especially if the immigrants entered illegally. *The Los Angeles Sentinel* reported in July 1994 that the Los Angeles City Council rejected a state legislation that would deny illegal immigrants from public schools and hospitals. Refusing to pass the legislation was a response to the “Save Our State” cause, which attempted to blame illegal immigrants for the state’s problems. The initiative was especially relevant in Los Angeles because, “according to the U.S. Census Bureau, California [was] home to the largest population of both legal and illegal immigrants.”²¹ In December of the same year, there was a national legislation proposed to address the same issues of granting or denying social and public services to illegal immigrants. *The Los Angeles Sentinel* reported on the reactions to Proposition 187, stating, “The proposition, approved recently by voters, denies public education, social services and all but emergency health care to illegal

¹⁸ Chiswick, 101.

¹⁹ Andreas, 50.

²⁰ Chiswick, 101–2.

²¹ “City Nixes Illegal Alien Initiative,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 28, 1994.

immigrants.” As a consequence of the proposition, the number of Hispanics seeking healthcare dropped by 75 percent, which placed other citizens at risk because of the potential for contagious diseases, such as typhoid and tuberculosis, to spread.²² The legislation expressed the United States’ unwillingness to welcome immigrants and extend the proper resources that should be entitled to them.

There is value in considering that “it is this tragic and complicated figure, not Henry Ford, Abraham Lincoln, or some Horatio Alger hero, who [was] Bruce Springsteen’s quintessential American figure.”²³ The power that backed the social statements that Springsteen made on the album took root in the complexity and simplicity, the relatability and the isolation, the modern and historic character of Tom Joad.²⁴ By summoning the ghost of Tom Joad instead of the character himself, Springsteen illustrated that the social situation in the 1990s surrounding the illegal immigrants was a ghost of the Depression era: many of the underlying issues were remnants of the past. From the limited employment opportunities that the brothers in “Sinaloa Cowboys” faced to the immigrants’ desperation for a new beginning in “The Line,” there were many similarities between the hardships of Mexican migrants and those of the Depression-era migrants. The ghosts of unsolved problems and unheard voices still remained.²⁵ As Springsteen showed through *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, it was necessary to realistically expose uncomfortable realities to prevent such grievances from haunting the future.

²² “Prop. 187 Scaring Immigrants, Critics Warn of Health Crisis,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, December 15, 1994, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²³ Simon and Deverell, 187.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

Annotated Bibliography

Andreas, Peter. "The Making of Amerexico: (Mis)Handling Illegal Immigration." *World Policy Journal* 11, no. 2 (1994): 45–56.

Andreas provides context for the situations about which Springsteen writes. He emphasizes the idea of "fortress America," which is an America where the borders are strict and guarded to prevent unwanted people and substances from entering. In analyzing the immigration issues as far back as the 1940s, Andreas highlights important failings on America's part that have only worsened the illegal immigration. For example, Andreas goes into an extensive explanation of the negative consequences of the United States' economic involvement in Mexico, drawing more people closer to the border through funding industries. Andreas explains that the present circumstances are a consequence of the past, which is why it is important to understand the United States' policies and relations with Mexico that had contributed to the gradual yet persistent conflict of illegal immigration. Through exploring previous policies, such as the *bracero* program, Andreas highlights the conditions under which many Mexicans came to the United States. Andreas writes from the perspective that the immigrants are not at fault, but are instead victims of unfortunate circumstances.

Chiswick, Barry R. "Illegal Immigration and Immigration Control." *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 2, no. 3 (1988): 101–15.

Chiswick's article provides important information on the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) that passed in 1986. He discusses the ways in which the act attempts to address the issue of illegal immigration in the United States. The IRCA gave some illegal immigrants legal status or amnesty and created employer sanctions, which would punish employers who purposely hired illegal aliens. The goals of the IRCA are important to consider when exploring the immigration issue along the Mexican border because many illegal immigrants entered the United States with the intention of finding work, particularly in agricultural businesses. Because many food growers were looking for cheap labor, they would hire illegal immigrants. Consequently, United States employers were feeding the issue of illegal immigration, saving money by taking advantage of the illegal immigrants' desperation for income. Chiswick's focus on the IRCA expresses that there were both domestic and foreign components to addressing the immigration issue.

"City Nixes Illegal Alien Initiative." *Los Angeles Sentinel*. July 28, 1994.

The article explains that the Los Angeles City Council disapproved of a state-issued initiative to deny immigrants from access to public schools and hospitals. The council members viewed the state's proposal as a means of assigning blame to the immigrants for the state's social and economic problems. Instead, the council members were more concerned with providing education and appropriate medical services for the sake of society as a whole. The article expresses that there were discrepancies over addressing the immigration issue and that some thought the solution was to deny the Mexican immigrants access to American rights.

Fischer, Paul D. "The Ghost and Mr. Springsteen." Edited by Bruce Springsteen. *The Journal of American Folklore* 110, no. 436 (1997): 208–11. <https://doi.org/10.2307/541815>.

Fischer raises the important point that Springsteen emphasizes lyrics on *The Ghost of Tom Joad* so that Americans can "hear the stories of a marginalized few" (p.208). In discussing

the nature of the album, Fischer describes Springsteen's tone as being concerned with the "darker conflicts" and "embarrassing inequalities" in America at the time (p.208). In doing so, he makes the point that Springsteen uses *The Ghost of Tom Joad* to make statements about aspects of American society that are hidden under the surface because, in actuality, they contradict the most basic ideals for which America stands: liberty and equality for all. Fischer also considers the impact that John Steinbeck and Woody Guthrie had on Springsteen's composition, particularly the song "The Ghost of Tom Joad." Fischer's reflection illustrates the relevant connection that Springsteen draws between the Dust Bowl and the 1990s, and it also emphasizes why Springsteen chooses to invoke the character of Tom Joad.

Kerstetter, Todd M. "Rock Music and the New West, 1980–2010." *Western Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2012): 53–71. <https://doi.org/10.2307/westhistquar.43.1.0053>.

Kerstetter not only provides context for Springsteen's *The Ghost of Tom Joad* by showing that Springsteen was part of a larger trend focusing on the West and western identity, but he also provides context for *The Ghost of Tom Joad* within Springsteen's own career. Prior to *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, which was released in 1995, Springsteen released *Nebraska* in 1982, which focused on many of the same themes as other contemporary artists trying to redefine and realistically explore western identity. In *Nebraska*, Springsteen develops the themes of isolation, reality and continuity. The context that Kerstetter provides for *The Ghost of Tom Joad* by explaining the significance of *Nebraska* is helpful because Kerstetter shows that Springsteen carries over the same themes of isolation, reality, and continuity in *The Ghost of Tom Joad*. However, instead of exploring the identity of the West as a whole, Springsteen focuses on the lives of average, working-class people, placing a special emphasis on Mexican immigrants. Kerstetter provides valuable context about the important themes in the music industry as well as the important themes in Springsteen's own music to understand the inspiration for *The Ghost of Tom Joad*.

"Prop. 187 Scaring Immigrants, Critics Warn of Health Crisis." *Los Angeles Sentinel*. December 15, 1994. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

The newspaper article explains that voters had just passed a proposition that denies social services and public education to immigrants, granting them access only to emergency healthcare services. While those who voted for the proposition were expressing their disdain for the immigrants, healthcare providers were growing concerned that diseases would spread if the immigrants could not receive proper medical care. The voters' stubbornness was potentially creating a greater social issue than the one already at hand. The article reflects that many people in California were divided over the issue of immigration and that it spread to many spheres of life.

Simon, Bryant, and William Deverell. "Come Back, Tom Joad: Thoughts on a California Dreamer." *California History* 79, no. 4 (2000): 180–91. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25463704>.

An important distinction that Simon and Deverell make is that Springsteen invokes the ghost of Tom Joad instead of the man himself. In doing so, Simon and Deverell emphasize that Springsteen is looking to the past to explain the ways in which its shadows darken the current social situation. Springsteen recognizes that much has changed since the Dust Bowl era, but he also recognizes the presence of its lingering effects, and he thinks it is necessary to face these

ghosts that still haunt society. Tracing the importance of Tom Joad in American history and understanding the figure that he has become is important to understanding Springsteen's *The Ghost of Tom Joad* because it explains how Springsteen connects the history of the American West and the hopes of the Depression-era migrants to the hopes and struggles of the new migrants. In a way, Springsteen reinterprets the Mexican migrants, who fight for a better chance of life against those who only care about personal gain, to be the new Tom Joad.

Springsteen, Bruce. *Sinaloa Cowboys*. Song. *The Ghost of Tom Joad*. Los Angeles, California: Columbia Records, 1995.

In "Sinaloa Cowboys," Springsteen tells his rendition of the true story of two Mexican brothers who dared to cross the Mexican-American border in search of a new start to build a better life. Desperation led the brothers to accept jobs with a methacholine producer. Springsteen exposes the plight of the immigrants by showing that the brothers had to compromise their morals to earn some money to get by. He highlights the dangers and sacrifices that many immigrants had to make for a chance to achieve the American Dream. Springsteen highlights the emotional strain of these trying circumstances when he reveals that one of the brothers died in an accident at the methacholine lab. Springsteen uses the brothers' story to paint Mexican immigrants as victims of exclusion from opportunities in America instead of as instigators of America's demise.

———. *The Ghost of Tom Joad*. Song. *The Ghost of Tom Joad*. Los Angeles, California: Columbia Records, 1995.

In "The Ghost of Tom Joad," Springsteen alludes to the Mexican immigrants and connects them to John Steinbeck's *Tom Joad*. He blurs the lines between the past and present by using language that is reminiscent of the struggles of the migrants during the Great Depression to explain the plight of the Mexican immigrants. Springsteen brings up social injustices and economic oppression by alluding to homelessness and prejudice. By invoking the ghost of Tom Joad, he shows that there is little difference between the Depression-era migrants and the Mexican immigrants despite a difference of several decades and of ethnicity.

———. *The Line*. Song. *The Ghost of Tom Joad*. Los Angeles, California: Columbia Records, 1995.

Springsteen wrote "The Line" from the perspective of a veteran who starts working for the INS as a Border Patrol officer. His partner's family is from Mexico, so "the job was different for him." The narrator describes doing his job preventing people from crossing the border. However, he starts to realize how desperate the immigrants are and that they come from all walks of life. He meets a woman who had been caught trying to cross the border, and he decides to help her, her small child, and brother attempt to cross the border again. However, the patrol officer gets caught trying to help the immigrants by his partner, who makes no comment. Springsteen's story expresses the moral conflict between doing one's job and doing what is just. He leaves the question of whether the officer was right for compromising his job to aid the immigrants and whether his partner was right for letting them go without repercussions even though both instances were illegal. Springsteen shows that the immigration crisis is a moral as well as political, social, and economic issue.

